

Nature, Environment and Culture in East Asia

The Challenge of Climate Change

Edited by

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CHINESE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS:
CIVIL SOCIETY DISCOURSES ON CLIMATE CHANGE
AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Nora Sausmikat

Abstract

Environmental protection had already been an issue for the Chinese government during the 1970s, but it was not until 2008 that China managed to establish its own Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP) by upgrading the former State Environmental Protection Administration (SEPA). Non-governmental forces for environmental protection had developed over the last 20 years from single-issue groups into a diversified and cross-disciplinary movement. Infrastructure projects had been the engines of both the state's and the NGOs' environmental activities—although with very different motives. In 1982, the first environmental protection bureau had been established by the Ministry of Urban and Rural Construction. Although the first environmental NGO (ENGO) active in China had been the WWF—invited by the government in 1979 to work on a panda conservation program—the first Chinese environmental protection activities began with protests against the Three Gorges Dam at the end of the 1980s. Similarly to other countries in the West, energy-infrastructure issues and the general question on the development model had therefore become closely related to the development of civil society and activities in league with environmental protection.

During the last 20 years, the protagonists like the topics, the strategies as well as the function of environmental groups (or ENGOs) had undergone vast changes. Internationalisation and professionalisation had also played their parts in influencing the working style of those involved with NGOs. While many articles focused on the specific relationship of the NGOs with governmental agencies, this paper will reconstruct the discourses and strategies of environmentalists during the last 20 years.

1. *Introduction*

Environmental protection is not only concerned with the protection of the environment, but helps to raise the level of civilisation of mankind and helps to create a better social life for everybody in society. The improvement of the relationship between the people will follow the improvement of the relationship between man and nature and become pure and noble.¹

¹ Cf. Feng Yongfeng 冯永锋, *Wei minjian huanjing liliang nahan* 为民间环境力量呐喊 [A Call to Arms for Non-Governmental Environmental Forces] (Beijing: Zhishi chubanshe, 2010), 34. Author's translation.

This quote from the outspoken environmental journalist Feng Yongfeng is introducing a part in his book “A Call to Arms for Non-Governmental Forces”² where he starts to question the power relationship between state, industry and non-governmental forces. By evaluating the function of the government in supporting the development of environmental NGOs in China (and even declare their ‘services’ as belonging to governmental public purchase) he calls for a change in the relationship between government, industry and NGOs. Also Hong Dayong³ states and proves that the Chinese environmental movement is a ‘top-down’ led movement with ENGOs serving as ‘governmental helpers’ or partners.⁴

Whereas Feng and Hong no longer question the ‘service function’ of ENGOs in China, foreign research is still stuck in this dispute/controversy. Since the very beginning of research on Chinese non-governmental organisations, the intimate relationship between non-governmental forces and the government is the most discussed topic in academia. Publications on the Chinese environmental movement are overwhelming in number, and most of the research papers focus on the degree of independence of NGOs from the state/party system.⁵ Nevertheless, most scholars agree that the Chinese ‘unofficial’ (*minjian*) actions cannot be described within the nor-

² The literal translation of the title reads “A Cry on the Non-Governmental Forces for Environmental Protection (*Wei minjinan huanbao liliang nahan*)”—translated into “A Call to Arms for Non-Governmental Environmental Forces” in the review on the book by Wang Shengnan, a journalist who writes for the bilingual online magazine of the British NGO “ChinaDialogue”, published June 7, 2011, accessed June 7, 2011. See: <http://www.chinadialogue.net/article/show/single/en/4337-books-a-piercing-cry>.

³ Cf. Hong Dayong 洪大用 et al., *Zhongguo minjian huanbao liliang de chengzhang*, 中国民间环保力量的成长 [The Growing Non-Governmental Forces for Environmental Protection in China] (Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2007), published by Green Leaves/ChinaDialogue, October 10, 2008 accessed March 16, 2011. <http://www.chinadialogue.net/books/2508-Books-a-gradual-green-awakening-/ch>.

⁴ Cf. Wu, Jian, “A Gradual Green Awakening,” review of “Zhongguo minjian huanbao,” by Hong Dayong 洪大用, (Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2007), published by Green Leaves/ChinaDialogue, October 24, 2008, accessed March 16, 2011. <http://www.chinadialogue.net/article/show/single/en/2508-Books-a-gradual-green-awakening->.

⁵ Cf. Yang, Guobin, “Environmental NGOs and Institutional Dynamics in China,” *The China Quarterly* 181 (2005): 46–66; and Yang, Guobin, “Civic Environmentalism,” in *Reclaiming Chinese Society. The New Social Activism*, ed. Hsing You-Tian and Ching Kwan-Lee, 119–139 (London: Routledge, 2010). Cf. also Alpermann, Björn, “State and Society in China’s Environmental Politics,” in *China’s Environmental Crisis. Domestic and Global Political Impacts and Responses*, ed. Joel Jay Kassiola and Guo Sujian, 123–152 (New York: Palgrave, 2010); Buesgen, Michael, *NGOs and the Search for Chinese Civil Society. Environmental Non-Governmental Organisations in the Nuijiang Campaign*, Working Paper series No. 422 (Den Haag: Institute for Social Studies, 2006); Ma, Qiusha, *Non-Governmental Organizations in Contemporary China. Paving the Way to Civil Society?* (London/New York: Palgrave, 2006); as well as Ho, Peter, and Richard Louis Edmonds, “Perspectives of Time and Change:

mative parameters of the West's conceptions of NGOs and are better described as 'embedded activism',⁶ a hybrid 'semi-civil society'⁷ or 'constructive interaction' between the state and civil society.⁸ Also, as Eva Pils clearly pointed out,⁹ most attempts to integrate the concept of civil society into a non-democratic, post-authoritarian context like China ends up in providing conceptual frameworks of corporatism and fragmented authoritarianism. Liberal values such as freedom of speech, freedom of association and the right to political participation are still core elements for the development of a civil society. Ho's notion of 'embedded activism' only tries to define the difficult role environmental or other citizens group have to play in China: Some try to establish symbiotic relationships with the state and therefore fulfil the role of an ally in fighting for the implementation of state regulations (for example, lobbying against local state actors and polluting factories).¹⁰ Ma Jun, head of the famous Institute of Public and Environmental Affairs (IPE), very clearly admits: "We are working very closely with the government, we republish their documents and help the government to find the locations of the polluters."¹¹ Also, as described by Salmenkari¹² the state often uses social organisations to achieve better policy results and therefore the state takes a more mediating role in indirectly providing social or material goods.¹³ Just recently, Wang Yang, the Party chief of Guangzhou, announced new and more liberal regulations for NGOs to register—but it was made clear that "[m]ultiple organisations are allowed in six categories namely charity, culture, education, sports, public hygiene and environment to promote competition and better service provision." On 16 May 2012, the Federation of Social Service Organizations for Guangdong Workers (FSSOGW) was officially established in Guangzhou city of Guangdong province. Led by the Guangdong Provincial Federation of Trade Unions (GDFTU), the FSSOGW is a federation of civil labour organisations under the umbrella of the official trade union. The trend is very clear: The traditional mass organisation will be renamed in NGOs with

Rethinking Embedded Environmental Activism in China," *China Information* 21.2 (2008): 331–344.

⁶ Cf. Ho, and Edmonds, "Perspectives of Time and Change."

⁷ Cf. He, Baogang, *The Democratization of China* (London: Routledge, 1996), 7–14.

⁸ Cf. Ma, Non-Governmental Organizations, 208.

⁹ Cf. Pils, Eva, "Introduction—Discussing 'Civil Society' and 'Liberal Communities' in China," *China Perspectives* 3 (2012): 2–7.

¹⁰ Cf. Alpermann, "State and Society," 125.

¹¹ Personal information by Ma Jun, September 25, 2012, Beijing.

¹² Salmenkari, Taru, "Searching for a Chinese Civil Society Model," *China Information* 12.3 (2008): 413.

¹³ Cf. Alpermann, "State and Society," 125.

the new task in providing social services and helping to shape social administration reforms. This means that the state is developing in a new form of regulatory state in providing new frameworks for organising interest. This mean also that organisations fully independent from the state or organisations that only operate through foreign middlemen or charities and do not cooperate with state agencies are clearly ‘outside the system’ and therefore face difficulties. In the continuum between ‘state-’ or ‘society-centred’ (meaning NGOs speaking for government or society) civil society analysis, nearly all agree that the activities of ENGOs and media created a ‘green public sphere’ and played a crucial role in promoting participation and information.

Instead of repeating the detailed analysis of the degree of Chinese civil society being embedded in the party-state, this paper aims to contextualise the environmental movement and the different ideas, strategies, and original motives behind environmental issues. This paper also aims to reconstruct the environmental discourses led by civil society representatives within the context of the general debate on participation and political reform. In doing so, this paper provides a general overview on the developmental phases of the environmental movement.

This article mainly profited from four years of work for dialogue programmes with Chinese NGOs,¹⁴ but also makes use of my research on the sent-down educated youth¹⁵ and political reform discourses in China.¹⁶

¹⁴ These dialogues have been organised in the framework of the EU-China Civil Society Forum, a forum co-organised by German Asia Foundation and financed by the European Commission. In August 2011, 70 environmentalists met in South China to discuss effective public participatory policies to jointly fight severe pollution by industry. See: http://www.eu-china.net/english/Resources/EU-China-Civil-Society-Dialogue-on-Participatory-Public-Policy_2011_Documentation-Dialog.html.

¹⁵ Cf. Sausmikat, Nora, “Can Western Academics Penetrate the Scars of Chinese History? Western Zhiqing Research. Collection of Biographies from Female zhiqing in China,” *China Studies* 55 (1996): 111–124. Cf. also Sausmikat, Nora, “Roundtable zur Kulturrevolution,” *Berliner China-Hefte* 13 (1997): 113–114. Cf. also Sausmikat, Nora, “Female Autobiographies from the Cultural Revolution: Returned *xiangiang* Educated Women in the 1990s,” in *Internal and International Migration: Chinese Perspectives*, ed. Frank Pieke, and Hein Mallee (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1998), 297–314. Cf. also Sausmikat, Nora, *Kulturrevolution, Diskurs und Erinnerung. Eine Analyse lebensgeschichtlicher Erzählungen chinesischer Frauen* (Frankfurt/New York: Peter Lang Verlag, 2000). Cf. Also Sausmikat, Nora, “Resisting Current Stereotypes: Private Narrative Strategies in the Autobiographies of Former Rusticated Women,” in *China’s Great Cultural Revolution. Master Narratives and Post-Mao Counternarratives*, ed. Woei Lien Chong (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 255–284.

¹⁶ Cf. Sausmikat, Nora, “Concepts of Generations, Legitimacy and Political Ideas in China,” *Asian Survey* 34.2 (2003): 352–384; Sausmikat, Nora, Claudia Derichs, and Thomas Heberer, ed., *Ideen, Diskurse, politischer Wandel—Intellektuelle Ideengeber in der Politikgestaltung—China, Japan, Malaysia*, Mitteilungen des Instituts für Asienkunde 379 (Hamburg:

2. *A Short Introduction to Chinese Civil Society Discourse*

Research on Chinese civil society in international China-studies was very much influenced both by focusing on transitional states and democratisation,¹⁷ and especially by the transition in Eastern Europe. In 1994, the United Nations changed their concept of 'human security' and introduced it to international discussion. This concept moved away from traditional potential for threats resulting from military conflict, towards security threats through social disparities, poverty, environmental pollution, and violation of human rights, financial instability, and missing access to political institutions for the population. Simultaneously, 'civil society', as a stabilising factor, gained interest due to these changes in Eastern Europe.

The evaluation of the success of stabilisation or consolidation parameters does rely heavily on how we define these parameters. Therefore, the exchange of experiences between Hungary, Romania and China became one of the hot topics of Chinese political think tanks during the last 15 years.¹⁸ Back in 1998, the Institute for the Study of Development (Sussex), together with the Ford Foundation, started the 'Civil Society and Governance Programme', whose aim was to analyse the function, character, and influence of civil society in 22 different countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and the USA.

Institut für Asienkunde, 2004). Cf. also Sausmikat, Nora, "More Legitimacy for One-Party Rule? The CCP's Ideological Adjustment and Intra-Party Reforms," *ASIEN* 99 (2006): 70–91. Cf. also Sausmikat, Nora, "China: Intellektuelle und der Staat—ein leidvolles Verhältnis. Neue Diskursstrategien zur Demokratisierung," *Kommune. Forum für Politik, Ökonomie, Kultur* 10.1 (2001): 45–50, 67–71. Cf. also Sausmikat, Nora, and Thomas Heberer, "Xifang gongmin shehui guan shi he zhongguo ma? 西方公民社会观适合中国吗? [Is the Western Concept of Civil Society Fitting China?]," *Nankai Xuebao* 南开学报 [Nankai Study Times] 2 (2005): 64–71.

¹⁷ Cf. He, Baogang, *The Democratic Implications of a Civil Society in China* (London: MacMillan Press, 1997); Ogen, Suzanne, *Inklings of Democracy in China* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2002); Goldman, Merle, *Sowing the Seeds of Democracy in China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994); Zhao, Suisheng, ed., *China and Democracy. Reconsidering the Prospects for A Democratic China* (London, New York: Routledge, 2000); and Tong, Yanqi, *Transitions from State Socialism. Economic and Political Change in Hungary and China* (New York, Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997).

¹⁸ Several party and non-state think tanks organised workshops and published internal papers on these issues. Some of these think tanks were visited and several other intellectuals involved in the political reform discussion were interviewed by the author. Cf. Sausmikat, Derichs, and Heberer, ed., *Ideen, Diskurse, politischer Wandel*; and Sausmikat, Nora, "The Impact of Discourses, Institutional Affiliation and Networks among New and Old Elites for Political Reform in the P.R. of China," in *The Power of Ideas—Intellectual Input and Political Change in East and Southeast Asia*, ed. Thomas Heberer, and Claudia Derichs (Kopenhagen: NIAS Press, 2006), 276–299.

The well-known contemporary intellectuals Yu Keping, Liu Junning, and Sun Liping were among the Chinese researchers. Yu focused on village committees, rural youth leagues and village militias as examples for 'rural civic organisation'. Sun Liping analysed the history of one of the first NGO projects—the 'Project Hope' (which gained an unfortunate amount of public attention because of corruption), and Liu Junning examined the relationship between the government and the newly established chamber of commerce as a rising civil society in a newly established market society. These examples show clearly the different understanding of the term civil society and NGO from a Western perspective at the early stage of Chinese civil society research.

3. *Social History's Definition of Civil Society*

After the end of the Cold War, civil society research boomed and the search for the roots of the term began. The reading of Ernest Gellner's "Conditions of Liberty"¹⁹ by Michael Ignatieff²⁰ put a clear emphasis on the liberal philosophers and a regulatory state for establishing a civil society. Additionally, Shinichi Shigetomi did not mention either Habermas or Gramsci, the protagonists of the understanding of civil society as the contested space between state and society, when discussing the role of NGOs in Asian societies as possible future 'leading agents of civil society'.²¹ In his view, these agents were mainly concerned with the distribution of resources and therefore can be defined as social organisations in the third sector.²² Similar, Chinese approaches prefer to refer to traditional social organisations as a 'nucleus' of the current non-profit sector.

Therefore, this term started to develop independently and became de-contextualised. The 'public sphere' claimed by Jürgen Habermas²³ to be a pre-condition for a 'civil society' became less important for Chinese and Japanese theorists. The filling-the-gap function of civil society by

¹⁹ Cf. Gellner, Ernest, *Conditions of Liberty, Civil Society and its Rivals* (London: Penguin, 1994).

²⁰ Cf. Ignatieff, Michael, "On Civil Society. Why Eastern Europe's Revolutions Could Succeed," review of "Conditions of Liberty, Civil Society and its Rivals," by Ernest Gellner, *Foreign Affairs* 74.2 (1995): 128–136.

²¹ Cf. Shigetomi, Shinichi, ed., *The State and NGOs: Perspective from Asia* (Singapore: Singapore Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2002), 1.

²² *Ibid.*, 3.

²³ Cf. Habermas, Jürgen, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1962), esp. 86ff.

substituting reduced state welfare services, in effect, forced Chinese mainland scientists to begin to speak of 'old' and 'new' paradigms: The 'old' focused on the confrontational approach of both state and society, whereas the 'new' aligned itself with cooperative partnership relations. Subsequently, Yu Keping defines the basis of civil society as social management.

Naturally, there are always many different ways to interpret history. When Jonathan Unger wrote his article "The Making of New Classes in the Countryside",²⁴ he described a phenomenon that preoccupied many whose eyes had been fixed on China at that time: the diversification of social interest groups. In his new book on Chinese associations he highlighted the fact that "the government initiated the campaign [in 2005]²⁵ to counter the possibility of a 'colour revolution' in China similar to those that had recently overthrown authoritarian governments in Serbia, Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan."²⁶ In the older studies of He Baogang²⁷ and Suzan Ogden²⁸ on civil society and democracy in China, both reject to transfer experiences made during the democratic transitions in Eastern Europe and the Tiananmen demonstrations of 1989, and questioned definitions (democracy as a social construct) and prospects for democracy. Ogden speaks of an ethnocentric Western definition of democracy.²⁹ Again, US-China specialists were intensely focused on post-communist studies and hopes for similar changes in China.³⁰ The Chinese civil society is characterised by describing the change from a totalitarian state-society relationship to a pluralistic and diversified society, which does not necessarily oppose the state, but manages to establish autonomous spaces and structures for opportunity.³¹ He Baogang systematised the different adaptations of 'civil society models' (Gramscian, Kantian, Habermasian, Communitarian, Rousseauvian models) by different China specialists.³² In the end, he votes

²⁴ Unger, Jonathan, "Rich Man, Poor Man": The Making of New Classes in the Countryside," in *China's Quiet Revolution*, ed. David Goodman and Beverly Hooper, 43–63 (London: Routledge, 1994).

²⁵ A campaign to investigate associations that received foreign money.

²⁶ Cf. Unger, Jonathan, ed., *Associations and the Chinese State, Contested spaces* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2008), 11.

²⁷ Cf. He, Baogang, *The Democratic Implications of a Civil Society in China* (London: MacMillan Press, 1997), 4.

²⁸ Cf. Ogden, *Inklings of Democracy*, 15–16.

²⁹ Loc. cit., 16.

³⁰ Cf. Goldman, *Sowing the Seeds*, 13–14.

³¹ Cf. Zhao, *China and Democracy*, 9, and Ding, Ding, *Politische Opposition in China seit 1989* (Frankfurt a.M., Berlin: Peter Lang, 2000), 132.

³² Cf. He, *The Democratic Implications*, 5.

for a 'semi-civil society', which is characterised by political control and class nature of the interest groups emerging during the reform process.

In his famous anthology *Democracy is a Good Thing*, Yu Keping highlights at least ten different forms of extra-legal civil organisations:

Although the CCP and the Chinese government have tried to increase the independence of CSOs [Civil Society Organisations] and have repeatedly issued documents stating that officials in party and government departments may not hold leading positions in civic organisations [...], government dominance of civic organisations remains a prominent feature of China's civil society. [...] Compared with their counterparts in Western countries, China's civic organisations [...] are not entirely independent nor voluntary [...].³³

Therefore, the future of civic movements and organisations will rely on effective measures to ensure independence, self-administration, and autonomy. The following question, however, remains crucial: Are Chinese CSOs only the service providers of the third sector, helping the state to solve environmental and social problems, or can they also fulfil, to a certain extent, the role of a critical control instance and force for transformation?

4. *Evolution of Environmentalism in China*

In the 1980s, the Chinese government began to introduce environmental laws and welcoming assistance from international NGOs, as well as from bilateral and multilateral aid agencies. Since the 1990s, China's environmental legislation has quickly moved from a focus on command and control regulation to a more progressive public participation and market incentive laws. These changes on the institutional level paved the way for new and informally discussed political ideas, as well as an environmental awareness to be developed in new social agencies.

The impulse to press for new space for political participation can therefore not be seen as isolated from prior processes of informal organisations in the 1980s. The approach of 'political biographies' in social movement research,³⁴ especially concerning the transformation of societies, seems to also be a suitable approach when viewing the Chinese case. As it shall be shown in this article, biographical learning processes, new informal

³³ Cf. Yu, Keping, *Democracy Is A Good Thing. Essays on Politics, Society and Culture in Contemporary China* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2008), 73.

³⁴ Cf. Miethe, Ingrid, and Silke Roth, *Politische Biografien und sozialer Wandel* (Gießen: Psychosozial Verlag, 2000).

'alliances'³⁵ and globalisation played equal parts in creating a mixture of the most important forces behind Chinese environmental activism. It had not been until relatively late that environmental issues had become a concern of non-governmental activists. When Chinese non-governmental forces pressed for participation, other issues—small political think tanks, women's organisations, as well as the very first sprouts of worker-representation organisations—had been among the first to evolve. Environmental protection started to become a topic of the Chinese citizen's self-organisation in the early 1990s. Based on the historical legacy, which I would like to call the 'stage of preparation', it had undergone roughly four phases:

- initial phase: 1986–1992;
- interim phase: 1993–2000/03;
- advocacy phase: 2003–present day;
- political interaction phase: 2005–present day.

I shall discuss these phases from the perspective of the individual social agent by simultaneously highlighting the interaction with the international community. In the concluding section, several major differences and similarities between the developments of the Chinese and the US or European environmental movements, respectively, shall be identified.

4.1. *Stage of Preparation: Origins of Environmental Discourses*

Whereas the roots of environmentalism can be traced back to ancient philosophers and a great respect for nature, which has been deeply rooted in tradition,³⁶ the most recent movements must be seen as being rooted in the complex legacy of the Mao era. As Judith Shapiro precisely described in her book *Mao's War Against Nature*, this legacy is comprised of certain value systems and an indifference towards the public good. Other factors have meant great disdain for scientific knowledge, as well as a corrupted human-to-nature relationship, including the inhumane treating of animals.³⁷ This hindered the raising of awareness amongst the common people

³⁵ Informal alliances can be based on epistemic communities, self-help communities as well as new middleclass lifestyle-oriented alliances.

³⁶ Cf. Heiner Roetz' article in this volume.

³⁷ When I first travelled through China back in 1984, I unwillingly became witness of a one hour torturing of a dog in front of my noodle sipping fellow bus passengers. Only ten years later, the first Chinese environmental NGO was founded and today numerous "animal protection" centres were established. See also Yang, Guobin, "Civic Environmentalism," 131–132.

and politicians who, again, impeded progress for environmentally aware policy-makers trying to effect policy changes.³⁸

In 1979, even before the lawsuit began for the 'Gang of Four', the first foreign environmental NGO had been invited to participate in a governmental programme to protect the Giant Panda. At that time, the State Council Environmental Protection Bureau headed by the officials like Li Chaobo or Qu Geping were responsible for the first political approach to environmental policies and hosted that delegation. Environmental management only began to be seen by them as a national priority after 1972, when they participated in the UN conference on human environment in Stockholm, Sweden. After that, the state council immediately held a nationwide conference to address China's environmental problems. In 1973, the first environmental standard on the discharge of industrial waste waters was issued and in 1974, the Environmental Protection Leading Group was established. In September 1979, China's first basic law on environmental protection was adopted.³⁹ As the very first director of the State Bureau of Environmental Protection, which was founded in 1982 by the Ministry of Urban and Rural Construction, Qu Geping tried to integrate environmental protection into the development plans of China. While the very first initiatives on environmental protection still were carried out under the educational habitus of the Cultural Revolution (like the first environmental protection strategy of 1973/1974 aiming to control the 'three wastes'—gas, water, and industrial residue) we can state that environmental protection for a long time had not really aimed for the protection of the environment or the animals but of industry, resources and human health. Nature conservation was a way to avoid conflicts with the polluting industry. On the second national conference on environmental protection in 1983 the main discourse focussed on the necessity to simultaneously plan environmental protection and economic construction.

The 1980s slowly adopted a change in nature reservations as a result of a long and complex process of awareness, which inherits at least three different developments:

- the new function of 'nature';
- the learning process of the 'returned sent-down youth';⁴⁰

³⁸ Cf. Shapiro, Judith, *Mao's War Against Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 214–215.

³⁹ Wang, Yongchen, *Green Action in China* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2006), 9–12.

⁴⁰ During the Cultural Revolution's mass campaign 'Up-to-the-mountains, down-to-the-villages' (*shangshan xiaxiang*), one tenth of the urban youth were sent 'down' to the

– the reflection on modernisation of the 1980s and 1990s.

Discourses on the environment predominantly began with the new function of nature—even as early as the Cultural Revolution. During that time, ‘nature’ became an object that needed conquering—that is to say, it needed to be dammed, fertilised and reclaimed. Nature, however, also became the only escape from political suppression. Farmers as well as sent-down youth experienced the destruction of nature during the 1960s and 1970s. They witnessed vast devastation of virgin forests, the disappearance of wild animals, and the exploitation of natural resources. Especially in relation to current arguments about the human factor of climate change, China, in this respect, seems to demonstrate like no other country, the disastrous effects of human-induced environmental degradation.

But ‘nature’ also became a political propaganda tool for nationalistic concepts. For many who suffered political oppression, nature symbolised the only non-political space for retreat and mental resort for humanity, which resulted in both a mystification and romanticism in the scarce literature of the 1980s. Nature was described as ‘virgin’, ‘without guilt’, ‘pure’ and paradoxically ‘human’ (because of its ‘emptiness’ without human beings). Memories of former sent-down youth are filled with descriptions of the ‘inner monologues’ when sitting at the lakeside and throwing their ‘memory’ stones into the water.⁴¹

In terms of both literature and propaganda of the 1980s and 1990s, the natural environment in the countryside became a projection screen for *nationalistic and moral concepts*. In Ye Xin’s movie “Ridden by Guilt”,⁴² the city had become the morally derogated counterpart of the pure countryside. Nature and rural society are very often described in romantic visions of rural citizens as being more ‘rooted’ than urbanities.

In the discourses of the 1990s, this generation of sent-down youth, many of whom became environmental activists later on, was often portrayed as patriotic development aid volunteers who had advanced to become mediators between two worlds. The topics of these discourses were basic

remote areas to receive ‘re-education’ by the peasants. For more information, see e.g. Sausmikat, Nora, *Nichtstaatliche Frauenforschung in China* (Münster: Lit-Verlag, 2000). The cohort born between 1948 and 1952 were called *laosanjie*—the ‘old three classes’. Today, they occupy a certain generation of former Red Guards from various factions, which propagated during the 1990s as the new ‘backbone of the state’. Many famous writers, intellectuals, and also current politicians belong to this generation.

⁴¹ Cf. Sausmikat, *Nichtstaatliche Frauenforschung*, 253.

⁴² Cf. the film based on the book with the same title: Ye Xin 叶辛, *Niezhai 孽债* [Ridden by Guilt] (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1995).

questions of moral integrity as a copy of the peasant's stereotyped honesty and steadiness. Friends of Nature (FON) president Yang Dongping himself reflected on his own Red Guard's past and described the value change of the Cultural Revolution generation in his book on public intellectuals "From Red to Green (*Cong hong dao lü*)".⁴³ He cherished the physical education during the time of the 'collective self',⁴⁴ which he sees as the reason for his current good health. He also criticised fanaticism and brutality, and characterised his generation as having a specific understanding of China's countryside, an intimate relationship to nature, and popular culture.⁴⁵ In fact, he belonged to the high cadres children of the 'Five Red Classes' (*hongwulei*)—a privileged position. He was able to depart from the countryside during the recruitment of the 'workers, peasants, soldiers'-student recruitment (*gongnongbing*) in 1972.

The first sprouts of an environmental movement in China were therefore embedded in a political environment where the historical legacy of environmental sins of the Mao era had already been deeply rooted in the consciousness of large parts of Chinese society. Shapiro cited extensively the reflections of returned youth and continues: "If the educated youth have not healed from their experiences on the frontier, neither has the natural world recovered from their incursions".⁴⁶

Simultaneously, political processes fostered a fruitful environment for the development of environmentalism: A fierce high-level struggle for the right development model after the crackdown of the student protest movement, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the general critical reflection on modernisation processes respectively. As early as the 1980s, salons and informal discussion groups had materialised, which, in a way, reflected the official struggle about which developmental path would be most 'right'.⁴⁷

⁴³ Cf. Yang Dongping 杨东平, "Cong hong dao lü 从红到绿 [From Red to Green]," *Yang Dongpings Autobiography in Four Parts*, Online Version, April 13, 2006, accessed April 5, 2011. http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_492471c8010002x2.html.

⁴⁴ Cf. Yang, "Cong hong dao lü," 6.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁴⁶ Cf. Shapiro, *Mao's War*, 189.

⁴⁷ For a detailed discussion, see e.g.: Jin, Guantao, and Chen Fong-Ching, *From Youthful Manuscripts to River Elegy. The Chinese Popular Cultural Movement and Political Transformation 1979–1989* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1997); Schubert, Gunter, *Chinas Kampfum die Nation. Dimensionen nationalistischen Denkens in der VR China, Taiwan und Hongkong an der Jahrtausendwende*, Mitteilungen des Instituts für Asienkunde No. 357 (Hamburg: Institut für Asienkunde, 2003); Sausmikat, Derichs, and Heberer, *Ideen, Diskurse, politischer Wandel*; and Baum, Richard, "The Road to Tiananmen: Chinese Politics in the 1980s," in *The Politics of China 1949–1989*, ed. Roderique MacFarquhar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 340–372.

Without delving too deeply into detail here, the change from the more radical discussions amongst Chinese intellectuals around the topics of the May 4th Movement on enlightenment, humanism, and on sciences, to the 1990's more rational, cautious and sober rejections of radicalism, resulted in a powerful re-traditionalisation of both Chinese society and culture. This turn had been accompanied by the final breakthrough of post-modern and postcolonial thought,⁴⁸ which later formed the basis for environmental debates led from a distinctive leftist and/or nationalistic angle.

4.2. *Initial Phase Discourses*

The 1980s and the discussions at the Academy of Chinese Culture can be seen as a pioneer stage for preparing the first '*minjian* channel'—here used to express the 'unofficial' character—for overseas scholars "to contact mainland intellectuals and provide help for revitalising traditional Chinese culture."⁴⁹ The call for cultural renewal and spiritual rebirth at that time did not anticipate the strong nationalistic turnaround of the late 1990s and 2000s. It was mainly a call for a spiritual opening up, a critique of old, static hierarchical orders, while simultaneously advocating a return to 'traditional resources'.⁵⁰ A strong connection to official media supported these groups during this initial phase.

Therefore, the very first environmental organisation 'Friends of Nature' had been born out of such a discussion group, which used to meet in the Beijing Linglong Park. The organisation consisted of a sole female, Liang Xiaoyan (born 1957), as well as 60-year-old history professor Liang Congjie (born 1932, and passed away quite recently in 2010), well-known writer Wang Lixiong (who had been put under house arrest several times for his Xinjiang and Tibet writings, also husband of Tsering Woesser, a well-known Tibetan writer who especially became active after the turmoil 2008 in Tibet), as well as professor of education Yang Dongping (born 1949)—the last of the three high profile founding members is still with FON as their president. When they had decided to register officially as an environmental educational group, they were forced to struggle within the extremely hostile atmosphere of the first half of the 1990s. Both the collapse of the

⁴⁸ Schubert describes the process as follows: "Postmodernism' offered itself as 'theory amplifier' for an already existing anti-Western motivated cultural nationalism." Cf. Schubert, *Chinas Kampf*, 206.

⁴⁹ Cf. Jin, and Chen, *From Youthful Manuscripts*, 204.

⁵⁰ Here, Tu Weiming and Gan Yan are named as representing these two trends. Cf. also Jin, and Chen, *From Youthful Manuscripts*, 275.

Soviet Union and the ‘colour revolutions’ fostered an atmosphere of mistrust and anxiety in the Chinese administration towards social organisations (*shehui tuanti*). Liang Congjie—a member of the political elite (member of the Chinese Political Consultative Conference)—had to wait for one year to finally receive an answer from the National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA) that they had rejected a request to be the sponsor of FON. Finally, Liang convinced the ‘Academy of Chinese Culture’ to establish an ‘Academy for Green Culture’, under which FON finally managed to register.

Liang was a history professor—his grandfather Liang Qichao, a reformer under the Qing court, and his father Liang Sicheng, an architect who fought against Mao’s plan to destroy the old city walls of Beijing. Liang Congjie is said to have had close ties with the ‘environmental *enfant terrible*’ Dai Qing, who, as a journalist, back in 1988, founded the Anti-Three-Gorges-Dam coalition in Beijing.⁵¹ In 1989, she published her widely known book *Yangtze, Yangtze*.⁵² (originally in Chinese), which warned of the potential environmental and social risks of the world’s largest dam project. Encouraged by the dynamics at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of 1990s, environmentalists rapidly began to organise themselves. 1989 put a halt on informal discussion salons, but with the downsizing of the central government during the first half of the 1990s, local non-governmental forces regained strength. When Global Village founder Liao Xiaoyi returned from the US, she brought back with her the idea of the citizen’s movement for environmental protection, focusing on district work, sustainable consumption and waste reduction.⁵³ The second UN environmental conference in Rio, 1992, supplied important impulses for China’s development—but concerted actions, however, did not begin until the years just before the enactment of the Environmental Impact Assessment Law at the turn of the century.

We can therefore conclude that, in stark contrast to the US, yet very similar to the German process, the first sprouts of environmental activism began from the side of a small professional and intellectual elite. The ideas

⁵¹ Cf. Larson, Christina, and Congjie Liang, “The Godfather of China’s Green Movement,” *The Atlantic*, October, 30, 2010, accessed April 13, 2011. <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2010/10/liang-congjie-the-godfather-of-chinas-green-movement/65442/>.

⁵² Dai, Qing, *Yangtze, Yangtze!*, trans. Nancy Liu et al., ed. Patricia Adams, and John Thibodeau (London: Earthscan, 1994).

⁵³ Cf. Sternfeld, Eva, “‘Zarte Pflanze’ Umweltschutz und Bürgerbeteiligung in China,” *Das neue China* 2 (2007): 10.

discussed in these informal circles were the basis, which served to form the very first initiatives. Compared to the German case, these processes were very similar. In Germany, critical reflections on the growth model had been transported to Germany by participants of the Biosphere Conference of 1968 in Paris. In China, the discussions about anti-dam activities and the Academy for Green Culture were also very critical in reflecting on the economic growth model. Although Yang Goubin speaks in his fabulous new article of “major social movements of this period”, which consisted of informal networks with ‘no political legitimacy’,⁵⁴ it seems a bit overzealous to call these discussion groups a ‘movement’. The initial phase had moreover been characterised by a close circle of intellectuals discussing environmental protection as part of a broader social, economic, cultural, and political concept.

In an interview, the chief editor of *China Development Brief*, Fu Tao, summarised this phase as follows:

I personally feel initially the environmental movement in China was kicked off by elite intellectuals without institutional support. After some years when it comes to the anti-dam campaigns on Nu River and other rivers, there appears to be some more interactions between NGOs and SEPA,⁵⁵ and more kinds of support from officials in the system.⁵⁶

4.3. *Interim Phase: 1992–2003: Political Factions Begin to Build Up*

After the crackdown of the student movement and the decision to continue the path of reform, environmentalism seemed to be the most difficult area for lobbying interests. Despite the evaluation of the US embassy, which declared that the Chinese government maintains a very positive attitude towards environmental organisations;⁵⁷ the latter have mostly been restricted to pure service and educational work. At that time, journalists found themselves unable to truly unmask environmental scandals through the media. The so-called ‘greening’ of the media relied primarily upon reports from the Friends of Nature (*Ziran zhiyou*) and other well-known

⁵⁴ Cf. Yang, “Civic Environmentalism,” 125.

⁵⁵ SEPA is the State Environmental Protection Agency, which was upgraded to ministry level in 1998, and became the Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP) in 2008.

⁵⁶ Cf. Sausmikat, Nora, Unpublished Interview with Fu Tao, Editor of *China Development Brief* (Beijing, May 15, 2011).

⁵⁷ Cf. US-Embassy China, “Chinese NGOs—Carving a Niche without Constraints,” US-Embassy report, January, 2003, accessed July 12, 2004. <http://www.usembassy-china.org.cn/sandt/ptr/ngos-prt.htm>.

NGOs.⁵⁸ Additionally, lawyers found it fruitless to attempt to bring environmental criminals to justice. Jim Harkness, the then-head of the WWF China, had remarked in an interview⁵⁹ that there were a lot of single initiatives, and that the interest in environmental activism is especially strong amongst the young, urban, relatively well-educated middle class. But there is no comparable environmental movement, as we have witnessed in Japan, during the 1970s or in Europe. Also, as in other developing countries, initiatives for environmental protection mostly contradict governmental initiatives for poverty reduction (dam construction, mining).

The dominant environmental discourses of this phase can be described by ‘inductive strategies’—developing basic questions out of single issues. In 1997, after a nearly ten-year moratorium, the debate on a specific ‘Chinese form’ of civil society regained strong momentum. Cultural relativist arguments had been rejected—especially by protagonists of the normative ideas of civil society—and it had been highlighted that civil society implicates the protection of freedom of speech and access to information by law, as well as an independent system of justice.⁶⁰ Others voted for the priority of stability and a gradual process, which should first focus on ‘mutual support between state and society’.⁶¹

Generally speaking, the very first actions and campaigns of the first half of the 1990s had mainly focused on environmental education and wildlife conservation (i.e. the protection of rare species like the black neck crane, golden monkey, and Tibetan antelope). It had not been the government, but the people, who had been target groups for environmental education.

At the very beginning there was no social concern for these things. So, when some of the elite and environmental activists started to organise, they first had to care for environmental education. At that time, environmental education was not a very sensitive topic [...] Therefore, facing all the environmental problems the government needed especially NGOs for awareness raising.⁶²

Ma Qiusha wrote in his comprehensive work on NGOs in China:

[...], the major contribution of grassroots ENGOs to China’s environmental future is not their hands-on, problem-solving programs; rather, the signifi-

⁵⁸ Cf. Yang, “Environmental NGOs,” 55.

⁵⁹ Cf. Young, Nick, “Interview,” 3.

⁶⁰ A very detailed discussion on the literature of the civil society discourse before 1997 can be found in He, *The Democratization*, 175–187, 200–204.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁶² Cf. Sausmikat, Unpublished Interview with Fu Tao.

cance of these organisations is their vision, strategy and method of educating the public about China's environmental problems and mobilizing them to act, both individually and collectively.⁶³

The main target group had been the rural population. As described by Melinda Herrold-Menzies in her case study on Caohai Lake in Guizhou province, the establishment of nature reserves caused the criminalisation of fishers who lost their income sources.⁶⁴ The collaboration with the US-American International Crane Foundation (ICF) during the early 1990s could not solve the antagonism between local officials, farmers or fishermen, but enforced resistance.

Nature conservation and the protection of specific species developed over the years into topics, which overlap with different administrations (agricultural ministry, provincial and county governments, state ethnic affairs commission etc.), as well as different advocacy initiatives. As will be discussed in detail in the next section, these initiatives could only develop under the protective umbrella of a pro-civil society administration in the environmental administration. During this interim period the main contradicting forces in environmental protection discourse started to manifest themselves along the lines of the new left, liberal and moderate reformer protagonists.⁶⁵

The most significant event of the 1990s was the UN women's conference in 1995, after which the concept of NGOs became popular and numerous non-profit organisations in all thematic areas were established. After 1995, the incorporation of NGO activities by the government had been shown by the massive establishment of government-organised NGOs (GO-NGOs). The two-track system of allowing foreign donors to support organisations while placing governmental officials in leading positions of top-down established organisations secured a non-challenging development for the government. Therefore, the major characteristic of this period was the struggle with organisational issues and the development of hybrid forms of organisation, registered and non-registered.

⁶³ Cf. Ma, *Non-Governmental Organizations*, 117.

⁶⁴ Cf. Herrold-Menzies, Melinda, "Peasant Resistance against Nature Reserves," in *Reclaiming Chinese Society. The New Social Activism*, ed. You-Tian Hsing and Ching Kwan-Lee (London: Routledge, 2010), 83, 98.

⁶⁵ For a detailed discussion of the different factions among the intellectuals, see Schubert, *Chinas Kampf*; Sausmikat, Derichs, and Heberer, *Ideen, Diskurse, politischer Wandel*; and Leonard, Mark, *Was denkt China?* (München: DTV, 2009).

The second most significant and perhaps striking development had been the growing power of investigative journalism. TV and print media began to play important roles in environmental policy shifts. Good examples include the television channel *Focus* (*Jiaodian fangtan*), the *Oriental Horizon* (*Dongfang shikong*) as well as the then very influential *Southern Weekend* (*Nanfang zhoumo*), which managed to push the reform of an agrarian tax in 2000.⁶⁶ Corruption and the abuse of power, however, had been reported. The case of Wu Deming and the Yangzi flood of 1998 is a great example of the new power of media. Wu used television channels like the *Oriental Horizon* to report on illegal logging in the mountainous areas of Sichuan. After reporting, he had received anonymous death threats—too many people lived from illegal logging and his reporting threatened their livelihoods.⁶⁷ Shortly after his reporting, the Yangzi flooded—at which point, the government took notice of Wu Deming's reports. In the end, plans for regional development had been drafted especially for mountain forests and their residents.

As has already been described by many others, most of the current environmental activists have had backgrounds in various forms of media, which proved to be “invaluable in raising the profile of environmental issues within the Chinese government and throughout the country”.⁶⁸ Yang Guobin speaks of ‘social capital’ gained by the mass media as a major source.⁶⁹ The environmental movement had therefore been marked by dominant leading figures in the movement, who began using public media as their voice to the people. Friends of Nature president Yang Dongping, for example, started his own TV talk show *To Speak Honestly* (*Shihua shishuo*) in 1996, which became one of the most popular television

⁶⁶ For a detailed description of the case of Li Changping, former cadre in Hubei, who reported to premier Zhu Rongji on the irregularities in the countryside in Hubei, see Li, Changping, “Die wahren Gründe für die Armut der Bauern,” in *Wie China debattiert—Neue Essays und Bilder aus China*, ed. Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung (Berlin: Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, 2009), 109–112.

⁶⁷ Not only the peasants, but also large companies profited from illegal logging. From 1997 to 2005, the EU and US import of Chinese wood products increased between 700 to 900 per cent. China is the ‘wood workshop’ of the world. China’s own resources are scarce today—they import wood from countries with especially weak governments and illegal logging activities: Russia, Malaysia, Indonesia, Burma and Papua New Guinea. See West, Anders, “Viel Holz—China und der Weltmarkt für Waldprodukte,” *Südostasien* 4 (2006): 18–21.

⁶⁸ Cf. Economy, Elizabeth, “China’s Environmental Movement,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, February 7, 2005. Accessed June 6, 2010. <http://www.cfr.org/china/chinas-environmental-movement/p7770>.

⁶⁹ Cf. Yang, “Civic Environmentalism,” 125.

programmes at that time.⁷⁰ Since 1993, the other founder of FON, Liang Xiaoyan, co-edited her own magazine *Orient (Dongfang)*, which had been the informal voice of Chinese intellectuals at that time. Anti-dam activist Dai Qing had also been a well-known journalist. Mostly, correspondents for official newspapers, whose task was to report from remote regions, were the first to become sensitised to environmental issues. The severe water pollution in rivers and the spread of cancer along the Huai and the Hengshi Rivers became widely known as a result of broad media coverage.⁷¹ The vice director of SEPA, Pan Yue, is known for his professional use of media when announcing a breakthrough in policy implementation.

4.4. *Advocacy Phase: From Campaign to Protests*

The beginning of the new century had been marked by a growth of discourse communities, or ‘cross-linked thinking’, as one of the most active environmentalists, Barry Commoner, described it for the West during the 1970s.⁷² Much like other social movements in other countries, there had been two simultaneous processes that influenced each other: the broadening of topics including single-issue activities (dam, water and air pollution, chemical and industrial waste, nature conservation, traffic, animal rights) as well as broader general topics (consumer education and rights, local governance, citizens’ rights, new lifestyles). With the professionalisation of the 1990s, this new era could rely on a newly educated eco-elite. The most powerful process was the institutionalisation of eco-topics in politics.

The enactment of the Environmental Impact Assessment Law (EIAL) in 2003 had clearly been a landmark concerning a shift in organisation and discourse. It especially marks a change in the concept of environmental protection. Now, the focus of the initial phase—nature conservation—had broadened somewhat and included basic human rights as well as elements such as participation, governance, and the new role of public media and NGOs. The EIAL defined public participation as part of the assessment process.⁷³ The years right before (2000–2003) as well as those following the

⁷⁰ Cf. Li, Cheng, *China's Leaders: The New Generation* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), 191.

⁷¹ Cf. Yang, Fang, Yang Chuanming, and Fang Qianhua, “A Village of Death and its Hopes for the Future,” in *Human Rights Forum (HRF)* 1 (2006): 25–29. Cf. also Cao, Baoyin, *Stories of Environmental NGOs* (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010), 22, and Gilbert, Sarah-Skye, “Victory: A Grassroot NGO Empowers a ‘Cancer Village’ to Take Action,” in *Global Concerns—Global Cooperation*, ed. Nora Sausmikat (Essen: Klartext, 2010), 42.

⁷² Cf. Radkau, Joachim, *Die Ära der Ökologie* (München: C.H. Beck, 2011), 168–173.

⁷³ Cf. Cao, *Stories*, 44.

enactment can be seen as a ‘preparation’ for political change. SEPA found it problematic that the newly announced EIAL had not gained much attention (not to say ignored) by most local governments and companies. In that respect, public campaigns and concerted protest action occurred just in the right time.

NGOs began to build alliances and jointly fought not only against pollution, but also against large infrastructural projects like dams. The effect of the Chinese anti-dam movement is even comparable, perhaps, with the pushing-effect of the anti-nuclear-power movement in Europe. The most well known case is the ‘Nujiang Campaign’ (2003–2005),⁷⁴ where a coalition composed mainly of Beijing and Yunnan NGOs, journalists, and scientists, joined forces to oppose a cascade of 13 dams on the Nujiang/Salween River. Immediately after the enactment of the EIAL, a young group of activists launched a protest against the plan to construct a hydropower plant at Lake Miga Tso, in Ganze, Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan Province. In the same year, SEPA had organised a conference in Beijing on the impact of hydropower projects, which included various media and NGOs. Some of the first NGOs were also able to attend international conferences of the UN and international networks. In 2004, nine NGOs founded the ‘China Rivers’ website, and several NGOs assisted concerned farmers living in the dam-project area to attend the official conference on hydroelectric development. Finally, these actions, in conjunction with wide media coverage on the dam, topic triggered a public debate. The charismatic vice minister of SEPA, Pan Yue, managed to enforce and implement the new law in a hitherto unknown manner: From 2005 onwards, his administration stopped 30 illegal power projects, implemented the supervision of enterprises found in close proximity to rivers in nine provinces, the examination of 127 chemical plants, and began to examine some other ten unauthorised engineering projects.⁷⁵ The announcement that SEPA would halt any further progress of the planned dams caused an enthusiastic response on the side of the NGOs. 56 NGOs issued a letter of support for SEPA.⁷⁶

Looking back, Fu Tao describes the process that led to the EIAL and following laws as a chain reaction “between social forces in- and outside

⁷⁴ Cf. Buesgen, *NGOs and the Search*.

⁷⁵ Cf. Wang, Yongchen, *Green Action in China* (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2006), 42.

⁷⁶ Cf. Cao, *Stories*, 24–26.

the system, media, scientists and governmental officials”.⁷⁷ This chain reaction especially had been caused by the desperate situation of central environmental protection policies. The main conflict ran between local governments, which had striven for economic development and investment into weak regions, citizens who had been poisoned, and the central government, which had difficulties in implementing environmental regulations and laws. Similar to other political battlefields, the alliance between the central government and the NGOs had become closer as local conflicts tightened. Conflicts in the countryside, especially, rose during those years. The expert on rural protests, Yu Jianrong, described this change as “today the local elite is not anymore mediating between the state and the peasants but the state has to mediate between the local elite and the peasants.”⁷⁸

From 2005–2011, there have been numerous cases of conflicts between locals and the central government involving NGOs and environmental activists. Their campaigns and actions were mainly in the fields of protest against environmental damage through industrial production, water and air pollution.

One example of activists struggling between local-central power shifts is in the case of Wu Lihong (born 1967), a factory salesman-turned-environmentalist. He has been fighting against the pollution problem in Lake Tai since 1991. During Wu Lihong’s campaign, some 200 chemical factories had been penalised for having caused pollution. In 2005, the National People’s Congress awarded him as an ‘Environmental Warrior’. Yet, the local factories and authorities saw him as their enemy. The police summoned, detained and interrogated him on and off.⁷⁹ Factory owners intimidated him with the words “we would create your car accident”;⁸⁰ some physically attacked him when he collected evidence near the factories, and as a result, local residents kept their distance from him, as he might cost them their jobs at the chemical factories. In 2006, four cities around the lake had won the label ‘eco city’. On the 13th of April 2007, just before he planned to send all of his collected materials to the central institutions, police raided his home, arrested him, and later charged him with ‘black-mailing in the name of environmentalism’ and ‘fraud’. Ironically enough, the outbreak of the Lake Tai blue-green algae bloom began in late May,

⁷⁷ Sausmikat, Unpublished Interview.

⁷⁸ Cf. Yu, Jianrong, “Let the Farmers Speak.”

⁷⁹ For details of Wu’s case, see: Kahn, Joseph, “In China, a Lake’s Champion Imperils Himself,” *Asia Times Online*, October 14, 2007, accessed May 4, 2011. http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/14/world/asia/14china.html?_r=2&hp&oref=slogin.

⁸⁰ Loc. cit.

calling national attention to the seriousness of the pollution from chemical factories in the area. Shortly thereafter, the algae bloom caused sudden severe water shortages for millions of residents.⁸¹ Despite these obvious facts, Wu Lihong was 'convicted' for his 'crime' and sentenced to a three-year imprisonment. After his release in 2010, he began to tackle basic problem of rights and justice.

Another typical example of activists struggling between local-central power shifts is the success story of Green Anhui (*Anhui liūman jiangwei*), a local NGO formed in 2003 out of 17 student organisations.⁸² Green Anhui is a multi-office, multi-branch organisation that has won many national and international prizes. Although they continue to be active in many different fields, their water pollution prevention programme became a most important activity. Their concrete work is based on the investigation of water quality and information gathering in the health situations of residents. After a sudden rise in cancer deaths and a massive fish death along the tributaries of the Huai River, they took action in 2006. The wastewater discharge by nearby chemical plants was illegal and had been documented by the volunteers of Green Anhui. Although they had turned their evidence over to the local Environmental Policy Bureau (EPB), this office had not been able to fight the resistance of the factory owners. Finally, Green Anhui used the public media to fight the factories and their owners. The local EPB's solution was to force the three polluting factories to pay fines (which, for the victims, were insufficient). The central MEP finally proved to be more effective—on 20 December 2008, the factories closed down and moved to an industrial site far away from residential areas.

Also in 2006, Guangdong's most famous cancer village, Shangba at the Hengshi River, inspired a joint effort by universities, individual activists and governmental officials. The Agricultural University and the Guangdong Soil Research Centre had succeeded in proving the direct relationship between the opening of private mines, heavy metal contamination—lead, manganese, iron—and the on-going cancer deaths. Lin Chuxia, of the Agricultural University, and his team, proposed better, more independent monitoring and the turning of Shangba into a place of production for organic fuels (based on plants which can survive in heavily toxic soil and also aid in the extraction of toxins). The provincial government had been

⁸¹ Cf. Zhang, Ke, "Blue-Green Algae Bloom in Taihu Lake: Reflections on Pollution and Development," in *The China Environmental Yearbook. Crisis and Opportunities*, ed. Yang Dongping, vol. 3 (Leiden: Brill/Beijing: Social Science Academic Press, 2009), 39–52.

⁸² Cf. Gilbert, "Victory: A Grassroot NGO," 42–50.

interested in the project, but the cancer death rates did not appear in the 2008 Third National Review Report of Sample Survey for Death Causes, issued by the Ministry of Health. In October 2008, a Chinese think tank finally proposed in a policy paper to upgrade the cooperation between the MEP and the Ministry of Health into a new system under the leadership of the state council and with broad participation of other ministries, in order to establish a government-led management system for environmental health, with public participation.⁸³

The cooperation with the central government to fight local grievances became the success story of many environmental protests mostly organised by ENGOs. Friends of the Earth (FON) director, Wang Yongchen, said that 2007 was the year of 'public participation' for citizens: A chemical factory in Xiamen had been moved to another location, the construction of the German-imported Transrapid line between Shanghai and Hangzhou had been halted, and plans for an incineration plant in Beijing had been postponed.⁸⁴

4.5. *From 'Closed Discourses on Reform' to 'Open Social Discourses'*

A new pluralism of both discourses and methods and the emergence of new networks amongst new and old agents of environmental activism caused a shift from 'closed discourses on reform' to 'open social discourses'.

This multi-layered process combines three factors: a shift of the *institutional setting*, the *agents* and the *discourse*.

The *institutional setting* determines not only the access to 'persons in power,' but also the access to resources like media, internal policy information or conferences and meetings. The quality of the interplay between discourses and policy is dependent on the support of state (or the party) institutions or the political elite. The 'greening of the state'⁸⁵ also resulted in establishing a 'third force' outside of the government to handle social problems. Therefore, the support of the vice-director of SEPA, Pan Yue, and leaders of environmental NGOs was crucial for further protest

⁸³ See the following report on environmental health in the Pearl-River-Delta: China-Dialogue, "Report on Environmental Health in the Pearl-River-Delta," accessed August 12, 2011, 16–19. http://www.eu-china.net/web/cms/upload/pdf/materialien/11-06-09_2011_06_09_chinadialogue_environmental_health.pdf.

⁸⁴ Cf. Sausmikat, Nora, *Unpublished Interview with Wang Yongchen*. Beijing, May 16, 2011.

⁸⁵ This notion of Peter Ho is taken up by Yang Guobin who describes in detail the changing regulative framework for environmental NGOs: cf. Yang, "Environmental NGOs," 54.

movements and NGO activities. Unfortunately, his power declined after an environmental scandal. The explosion of a chemical plant at the Northeast Chinese-Russian border river-region Songhua in 2005 caused severe health risks for millions of people on both sites of the rivers. 100 tonnes of cancer-causing benzene had been released into the river. Pan Yue's 'protecting' hand—the SEPA director Xie Zhenhua—took full responsibility for the 10-day-silence of local environmental offices and left the SEPA [(today he is vice director of the powerful NDRC (National Development and Reform Commission))].⁸⁶ One consequence of this event was the implementation of regular weekly publication of the pollution data of the Chinese water systems. Shortly thereafter, Pan Yue's influence, and therefore the protective umbrella for the ENGOs, weakened.

Nevertheless, sizable NGOs like FON had managed to publish an annual 'Green Book' on the environment since 2006, which is used as consulting paper for the government. Also, in 2007, the Chinese government issued the first official document on the environment and health (National Environment and Health Action Plan, 2007–2015). One year later, China introduced its first transparency legislation, the right to access environmental information. In the same year—in March 2008—China installed its first 'Environmental Ministry' (the former environmental office—SEPA—became Ministry of Environmental Protection).

It is plain to see that in this field, ENGOs and the related ministry in the central government share very similar interests. The pressure is high: Capital investment in environmental protection measures amounts to just of 1.8 percent of the GDP, whereas damage caused by environmental pollution is much higher. In 2006, the Chinese State Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) first used the Green GDP approach in its official report. According to this report, the environmental pollution would cause a reduction of three percent of the predicted 2004 GDP. This news led to the ban of the term of Green GDP by SEPA. Instead, the Chinese Academy of Environmental Planning published annual reports which used this approach. In its latest report, the costs for environmental pollution for the year 2009 were projected at 1.4 Billion Yuan, which would mean 3.8 percent of the GDP.⁸⁷ Since 2007, climate protection programmes, environmental compliance for air and water pollution, strict guidelines for the mining

⁸⁶ Cf. Sternfeld, Eva, und Tanja Plötz, "Ein Paradigmenwechsel bahnt sich an, die Umweltbehörde SEPA nimmt Fahrt auf," *Magazin der Heinrich Böll Stiftung* 2 (2007): 31.

⁸⁷ Schröder, Patrick, "Auf der Suche nach dem rechten Maß," in *Südlink Magazin*, forthcoming 2012.

sector, and plans for increasing energy efficacy are high on the agenda of the government. Since 2008, companies listed on the stock exchange are obliged to regularly publish environmental reports. The raw materials initiative, with high taxes on raw materials, as well as the internalisation of environmental costs, not only serves environmental protection, but also puts pressure on companies to restructure along more sustainable lines.

The *agents* involved in environmental activities shifted from first generation activists (like the intellectuals organised in FON, or the US-trained founder of Global Village Beijing, Liao Xiaoyi), to the second and third generation of activists, which include small grass-roots organisations, scientists, politicians, teachers, young student associations, bloggers, and investigative journalists. One example of former politicians becoming deeply involved in the activities of NGOs is Li Changping, a former party secretary in Hubei, who witnessed the exploitation of peasants as well as environmental pollution by big mining companies. In 2002, he published his report *I Told the Truth to the Premier* (*Wo xiang zongli shuo zhenhua*),⁸⁸ which afforded him international notoriety. He describes the “true reasons of poverty”, addressing corruption, the unfair distribution of resources and health policies. In 2003, he became a consultant for the international NGO ‘Oxfam’ (mainly engaging for poverty alleviation), and published books in close cooperation with the powerful planning institution National Reform and Development Commission (NDRC). Young students and activists alike applied a new repertoire of actions very common in global environmental movements (media campaigns, using social networks for campaigning, organising photographic exhibitions on environmental topics, organise online or salon discussions).⁸⁹ Increasing numbers are able to participate in international NGO, UN or world conference events, and are skilled in areas necessary to apply for funding, and cooperating internationally.⁹⁰

The *discourse* was determined by national disasters or catastrophes like the pollution of Lake Tai, and quickly broadened and overlapped with other reforms or human rights discourses. They now include:

⁸⁸ Li Changping 李昌平, *Wo xiang zongli shuo zhenhua* 我向总理说真话 [I Told the Truth to the Premier] (Beijing: Guangmin Ribao Chubanshe, 2002).

⁸⁹ Cf. Yang, “Civic Environmentalism,” 123–124.

⁹⁰ For reports on how some of the grass-roots participants experienced their exchange trips see Ang, Heidele, and Wong, *I Could Feel Climate Change*.

- basic questions of law implementation, good governance and political reforms;
- basic questions of ethic values vanishing during modernisation processes;
- basic questions on internationalisation;
- basic questions of environmental justice.

In fact, the discourse on good governance spans over a wide variety of sub-topics including most of the other mentioned topics. It addresses the interdependence between ‘responsibility for the environment’ and ownership,⁹¹ the discussion of single political measures such as the introduction of the Green GDP (a discussion which had been pushed by SEPA, but after 2007, had been put on hold), Green Credit policies to implement sustainable economic policies, or different levels of participation and transparency. Several of these issues have been already tackled above.

Here, I would like to highlight only a few discourse strategies applied by different NGO activists:

The fiercest argument is concerned with the economic growth model. Here, different ‘factions’ apply different strategies:

(a) New Left: Intellectuals and activists (who could be classified as sympathising with the New Left), argue within the framework of capitalism critique with nationalistic undertones. Marketisation, consumerism, and commoditisation are seen as products of the growth model, which not only prevails in Western capitalism, but also in planned economies.⁹² Their fundamental critique can be seen as part of a larger discussion on the need to readjust the development path of China. In this respect, the New Left and the reception of the Frankfurtian School are of special interest. With the increasing social crisis and environmental scandals as a result of the dynamic of the market reforms, a new intellectual trend has developed, which can rightfully be called ‘critics of modernisation’. Wang Meng, former Minister of Culture, summarised their characteristics as follows: critique on transnational capitalism with a focus on justice, critique on the ‘Eurocentrism’ and acceptance of Western ideology during the May 4th move-

⁹¹ Cf. Li, Changping, “Die wahren Gründe.” Cf. also: Cheng, Shulin, Chen Bingyang, and Wang Huihui, “Guangdong-Guanxi Green Camp Report on the 2008 Pearl River Comprehensive Survey,” in *Global Concerns—Global Cooperation. How European and Chinese NGOs Can Learn from Each Other*, ed. Nora Sausmikat (Essen: Klartext, 2010), 68–69.

⁹² Cf. Han, Shaogong et al., “Why We Must Talk about the Environment?” in *China Reflected*, ed. Arena/Asian Exchange, vol. 18.2/19.1 (Hongkong: Clear-cut Publishing, 2003), 40.

ment, revitalisation of the traditional elements of culture, and critique on both the commercialisation of culture and life.⁹³ Sources of this thinking are all rooted in the Frankfurtian School, especially the critique on capitalism by Adorno and Habermas.⁹⁴

(b) New Lifestyle and ethics: Triggered by disasters like Lake Taihu or the Melamine milk scandal (although no environmental scandal), a wide debate had begun on the ethics of economics. In his new book, professor Chen Ajiang from Hohai University speaks of a “great leap forward style of modernisation” causing “cultural anxiety”.⁹⁵ He states that the loss of orientation, basic value system, and the widespread conflicts over norms are all results of the quick process of modernisation. Liao Xiaoyi, director of Global Village, votes for a ‘green life’, which should be rooted in a critique on resource consumption and “the establishment of a value system that combines democracy, science, and harmony [with nature.]”⁹⁶ It would go too in-depth to discuss all of the facets of this discourse, which also has a stabilising effect. It resembles similar discourses led during the first half of the 1990s, when family values and Confucianism were propagated to stabilise society. The new consumer rights and organic green food movement, on the other hand, are also parts of a greater trend against unsustainable consumerism and for a ‘new lifestyle’. Another mentor of consumer-related NGOs is Prof. Wen Tiejun. He organised the conference “Food and Sustainable Agriculture” (Beijing, March 2010).⁹⁷ At this conference, many health, organic green food, as well as consumer oriented NGOs met and participated in debates on the critical reflection of industrial agriculture and environmental pollution. Many consumer campaigns in urban centres of China attempt to reconnect people with nature, organise rural trips, and establish consumer-producer-cooperatives.

⁹³ Cf. Wang, Meng, “Diverging Cultural Values in Contemporary China,” Transnational China Project (paper presented at Rice University, Houston/Texas, March 11, 1998), accessed May 5, 2010. <http://www.ruf.rice.edu/~tnchina/commentary/wango398.html>.

⁹⁴ Cf. Wang Yang 王阳, “Falankefu xuepai lilun zai zhongguo de yunyong 法兰克福学派理论在中国的运用 [The Use of the Theory of the Frankfurtian School in China],” *Shehui kexue luntan* 社会科学论坛 [Social Science Forum] 5 (2005): 153–156.

⁹⁵ Cf. Liu, Lican, “Society and Environment,” review of *The Secondary Anxiety—A Social Interpretation of Pollution in the Taihu Basin*, by Chen Ajiang (Beijing: China Social Science Press, 2009), Green Leaves/ChinaDialogue, 2011, accessed 6 June, 2011. <http://www.china-dialogue.net/article/show/single/en/4092-Books-society-and-the-environment>.

⁹⁶ Cf. Cao, *Stories* 2010, 18.

⁹⁷ See the following conference report: An, Xin, “Can Organic Agriculture Feed China? Report on the International Workshop on Food and Sustainable Agriculture,” May 14, 2010. Accessed February 23, 2011. http://www.eu-china.net/web/cms/upload/pdf/materialien/eu-china_2010_hintergrund_05.pdf.

Also fighting for new ‘morals’ inside the Chinese society is Feng Yongfeng, a former journalist of *Tibet Daily* (*Xizang ribao*), who, today, works for *Guangming Daily* (*Guangming ribao*). Feng—one of the outspoken activists in the field of environmental journalism—founded the Green Beagle organisation, which promotes nature conservation and educational campaigns like the ‘Love-the-nature’ movement. In his latest book,⁹⁸ he calls for a more radical position of the citizens and the environmental movement, especially concerning their critique on the continued growth model.

(c) Another more radical critique can be found on the internet, especially in blog discussions. Here, critiques are mainly directed against the failure of the government—especially the MEP. They criticise, for example, the modelling of ‘environmental heroes’ like Zhang Zhengxiang, who dedicated his life to fighting illegal logging as well as to the protection of the Dianchi Lake in Yunnan. One blogger writes:

Just to protect the Dianchi Lake it needed 30 years of hard work. How many polluted lakes and rivers does China have? How many Zhang Zhengxiangs are needed, and how many times 30 years of work are necessary?⁹⁹

Another one pinpoints the original responsibility of the MEP when he writes:

The MEP acts up with its own attainments. [...] and still environmental conditions do not change at the Dianchi Lake. Instead, an old man needs to resist these interest groups who want to destroy the lake. He suffers big debts, his family broke up, and he was even harassed by these interest groups. [He is] an old man who does not benefit from his activities and does not get any loan out of that. [...] Still in the 21st century, we rely on a guardian of the Dianchi-Lake to protect the environment and become unskilled workers of the MEP.¹⁰⁰

In these discourses, basic questions of governance are discussed. Similar to other community or group actions on other issues like problems of social justice, environmental problems were linked to basic questions of governance and the legal system (see Figure 1). Complaints about the

⁹⁸ Cf. Feng, *Wei minjian huanjing lilian*.

⁹⁹ The Chinese original text can be found at: <http://tieba.baidu.com/?kz=711410610>, translated at: <http://www.stimmen-aus-china.de/2011/05/09/chinesischer-umweltschuetzer-zhang-zhengxiang-verrueckter-im-alleingang-oder-einsamer-held>. Cf. Niklas, Lisa, “Chinesischer Umweltschützer Zhang Zhengxiang. Ein Verrückter im Alleingang oder einsamer Held?” in “Stimmen aus China,” *Blog der Asienstiftung Essen*. May 9, 2011.

¹⁰⁰ The Chinese original text appears in: Niklas, “Chinesischer Umweltschützer.”

discrepancies between propaganda and reality, between laws and their implementation, between missing knowledge amongst victims of dangerous infrastructure projects and the weak information policy of the government are all addressed very directly. Within the large framework of the 'Protecting-Our-Right' movement (*weiquan yundong*), these protests highlight the deep mistrust towards governmental officials. Therefore, concern with single issues had become integrated in an overall concern for social injustices and fundamental participation structures. These activists will not remain the sole service providers, but active citizens shaping and participating in policies. The main obstacles today are the lack of coordination between academics, NGOs, media, and policies/institutional analysis.

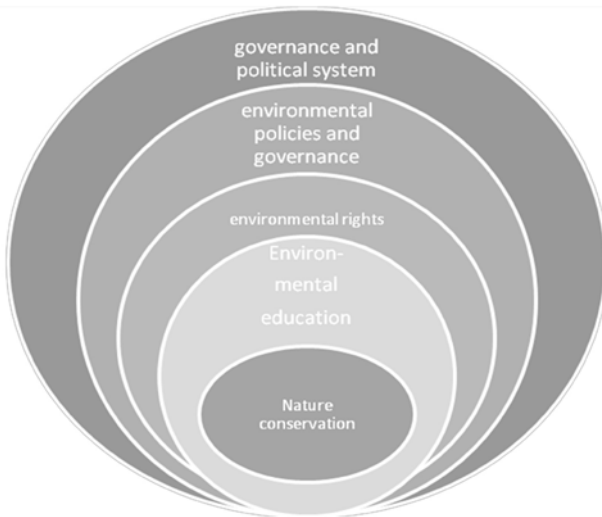


Figure 1. Genesis of Environmental Movement with Main Foci

4.6. *Political Interaction Phase: Climate Negotiations*

The climate change topic is a very young topic for the Chinese civil society—there are only a handful of organisations solely occupying themselves with it. Even as early as 2000, some wrote articles on nuclear power (like Wen Bo or Wei Dalian), while others integrated the topic of energy saving into their work, like the famous '26 degree air conditioning action'.¹⁰¹ The

¹⁰¹ Cf. Fu, "China: Coping with Water Crisis," 18. Cf. also Ang, Heidel, and Wong, *I Could Feel Climate Change*, 3.

general problem with the climate change issue is its abstract nature. With the release of the 'National Plan on Combating Climate Change' in 2007, Chinese environmental NGOs began to address this topic (as well as the waste topic in general) en masse, and most recently, the topic of nuclear waste. Many integrated climate protection as part of their programmes. Two examples are the activities by the Chinese Youth Climate Action Network (established in 2007), and the China Mangrove Conservation Network.¹⁰² On the NGO side, Liu Jianqiang (now working as deputy editor of ChinaDialogue), was one of the first who wrote on this topic in 2005. Reflecting on Copenhagen, 2010, he highlighted:

I am convinced that not for long China will not be able to use 'the right for development' and 'justice' as an excuse for the postponing of its responsibility in international talks. The problems of environmental pollution [...] have made climate change an inevitable topic.¹⁰³

The Chinese NGO climate debates are two-fold in their target group: one is the global society active in international climate negotiations; the other is directed at the internal-Chinese debates. As an international voice of the Chinese NGOs in climate talks, they established the Chinese Climate Action Network (CCAN), which is a coalition of Chinese and international NGOs. Simultaneously, a purely Chinese consortium of CCAN exists. Since Copenhagen, the 'international' CCAN has published position papers for the Climate Conference. In these papers, mainly achievements of the NGOs and the government are highlighted, and technology-transfer from West to East is requested. Consequently, many NGOs have a strong technically oriented approach to cooperation with foreign NGOs, especially concerning green technologies for a low-carbon-economy or consumer campaigns for sustainable lifestyles. Compared to European NGOs, macro-economic topics are not at the forefront in climate related action of Chinese NGOs.

Nuclear power, as a topic of discussion among ENGOS, gained importance during the catastrophe of Fukushima on 11 March 2011. The Chinese government managed (during their simultaneously-run discussion on the 12th Five-Year-Plan) to push through the decision to quadruple the capacities for nuclear power. The Chinese government announced a moratorium

¹⁰² Both examples are described in detail in Sausmikat, *Global Concerns—Global Cooperation*.

¹⁰³ Cf. Liu, Jianqiang, "Climate Change and China's Right to Development," in *I Could Feel Climate Change*. *Climate Change and China: Civil Society Perspectives*, ed. Chin By Ang, Klaus Heide, and Staphany Wong, 3–5 (Essen/Heidelberg/Vienna: Werkstatt Ökonomie, 2010), 3.

soon thereafter on the plan and suspended the approval of new nuclear projects;¹⁰⁴ however, China is unlikely to abandon its nuclear strategy simply to fulfil the promises made for climate protection. Nuclear power now provides only two per cent of the country's electricity, and is predicted to rise up to five per cent.

NGOs will find themselves in a curious place in all of this—internationalisation plays a very crucial role. Since there have been no public debates on nuclear energy, and there is a lack of information concerning the risks of that technology, many NGOs see their first task in the 'atomic alphabetisation', like Hong Kong's 'Civil Exchange' NGO. Organised journalists, exchange salons, awareness-raising events and press talks aim to inform the populace about China's nuclear strategy and the potential risks therein.¹⁰⁵ "Given the increased interaction between Chinese civil society groups and their international counterparts, Chinese groups are likely to carefully watch nuclear development in China."¹⁰⁶

Simultaneously, the debate on nuclear power fuels into the general debate on the hydropower electricity. Although many dam constructions could be halted, hydropower gained importance after Fukushima.¹⁰⁷ The two geologists Xu Daoyi and Sun Wenpeng are highlighting that the planned construction of the cascade of dams at Nu River (see above, 2004 stopped by public protest, recently revived) are facing structural fault at risk of earthquakes. Sun explains: "Japan lies on one side of the fault, while the Nu River runs through the fault itself."¹⁰⁸ These scientists argue against the Chinese version of Green Energy. The movement for Renewables in China will have to face many more obstacles than in Europe—since both hydropower as well as nuclear power count as Green Energy.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Frogatt, Antony, "What Next for Chinese Nuclear?" in *China's Nuclear Future*, ed. ChinaDialogue, 2011, 3, accessed July 3, 2011. http://www.eu-china.net/web/cms/upload/pdf/materialien/2011_27_04-China_s_nuclear_future_English.pdf.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Wen, Bo, "Die Atomkrise in Japan löst in China Bedenken gegen die Atomkraft aus," *Forum Umwelt und Entwicklung* 2 (2011): 17.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Wen, Bo, "Japan's Nuclear Crisis Sparks Concerns Over Nuclear Power in China," *Nautilus Online Magazine*, June 2, 2011. Accessed June 7, 2011. http://www.nautilus.org/publications/essays/napsnet/forum/npower_in_china_WenBO.

¹⁰⁷ Loc. cit.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Liu, "Society," 11.

5. Conclusion

The evolution of the Chinese environmental movement shows very different features when compared to the developments in Europe or the US. Although now would not be the best time to elaborate on what Joachim Radkau describes in his 780 pages dealing with the comparison between US and European environmental movements, I still would like to use his insights—although in a simplified manner—to compare the Chinese developments. Whereas the risk of nuclear technology and international events like Earth Day 1970 marked the beginning of the US' 'ecological revolution', the development in China started in a closed discourse amongst a small intellectual elite.

In the United States, it had been politicians who sponsored, for example, the largest demonstration in the US history, the Earth Day demonstration, and supported the establishment of the National Resource Defence Council (NRDC), which in turn, together with the support of the Ford Foundation, led to the professionalisation of an environmental elite.

In Germany, professionalisation came later—the movement was marked by the spill over effect of media reports on environmental movements in the US, Sweden and other countries. The onset had been marked by protest movements, which had been anchored in the overall protest movements during the student movements of the 1970s. But during this early phase, Neo-Marxist activists even argued in favour of nuclear energy because it showed the 'scientification of productive forces'.¹⁰⁹ With the US-American Earth Day 1970 and the Stockholm environmental summit 1972, an environmental and Leftist protest movement began to merge. Protest against nuclear energy became the topic of the most aggressive protest demonstrations. Activists started with a fundamental macro-economic critique pointing to the constraints of the growth model and challenging traditional modernisation paradigms. Since 1970–1972, all kinds of environmental initiatives had been established—in 1972, the first German umbrella organisation for environmental organisations had been established (Bundesverband Bürgerinitiativen Umweltschutz—BBU). But only the later movement against dying forests at the beginning of the 1980s transformed the environmental discourses into a 'people's movement'. Without the citizen's movement, the environmental movement would

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Radkau, Joachim, "Mythos German Angst. Zum neuesten Aufguss einer alten Denunziation der Umweltbewegung," *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik* 5 (2001): 73–82; and Radkau, *Die Ära*, 226–229.

have been a passing phenomenon. But sympathising politicians were very clear about the fact that they needed the citizen's movement to support their policies.

Compared to the development in China, the roots of the movement can undoubtedly be located within the professionalised elite, found nestled under a protective umbrella from the political elite. Although China had its 'Earth Day China Action' it seems to only refer to the events 30 years prior in the US.¹¹⁰ Despite this landmark Earth Day event, the Chinese development strongly resembles the development in the US concerning the strong influence of the political elite on citizens' actions.

But the specific 'environmental awareness' necessary for a broader movement came only with the massive environmental catastrophes followed by protests and the joint resistance movement during the anti-dam-actions. Here, we can see many parallels to the European developments.

During the last ten years, the environmental discourse unfurled into a wide range of topics and very quickly left the narrow framework of single-issue movements as well as the restricted realm of being organised. The fusion of information networks created internationally a solid foundation for new interest organisations. In the case of nuclear power, we shall most likely witness the strength of informing, and thereby empowering the people. Feng Yongfeng's 'call to arms' also signals a fundamental shift in the strategy of environmental activism in China. Both NGOs and individual activists, organising through internet and media, are now necessary watchdogs in enforcing environmental policies. Additionally, with the massive re-traditionalising of Chinese politics and society, when traditional concepts like 'Heaven (or nature) and mankind in unity' (*tian ren he yi*) are already written even into the new political announcements of the Communist Party, the hope for a fusion of modernisation and environmentalism seems to be possible.

¹¹⁰ In 2000, this had been jointly announced by several NGOs like Global Village, CANGO and WWF. This is, however, not widely known. Personal information by Wen Bo, July 2011.