

Citizen Environmental Activism in China: Legitimacy, Alliances, and Rights-based Discourses

Setsuko Matsuzawa

Abstract: While China's environmental problems have been well publicized to a global audience, its citizens' environmental activism is lesser known. This paper assesses the major environmental activism that Chinese environmental non-governmental organizations and Chinese citizens have engaged in since the mid-1990s to date, focusing in particular on the unique nature of such activism in an authoritarian context. I argue that environmental activism in China has garnered legitimacy and provided citizens with opportunities to become agents of social change. Chinese citizens have become adept: at taking advantage of the state's wish to enforce environmental regulations at the local level; developing alliances with Chinese officials as well as with, in some cases, transnational actors; and using communicative technology to demonstrate and to organize their environmental discontent. Chinese environmental activism has also helped environmentally affected victims to learn of, and to exercise, their rights as citizens.

Keywords environmental activism; anti-dam activism; rights-based discourses; state-society relations; authoritarian states; China

INTRODUCTION

China's unprecedented economic growth since the 1978 economic reforms has incurred significant current and future environmental costs to the nation. While China's environmental problems have been well publicized to a global audience, its citizen environmental activism is lesser known. The purpose of this paper is to assess the key environmental activism that Chinese environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and Chinese citizens have engaged in since the mid-1990s to date, focusing in particular on the current condition of state-society relations in an authoritarian context.

The "greening" of the state¹ and the visibility of serious environmental problems have provided, since the mid-1990s, justifications for environmental groups that are more or less autonomous from the state to emerge. Despite a popular perception, the Chinese state is not monolithic. Different functional agencies of the state have different views of environmental protection and citizen environmental activism. For example, the Ministry of Environmental Protection hopes that these environmental groups can contribute to environmental protection, especially at the local level where environmental measures have largely been compromised in favor of economic development. On the other hand, the Ministry of Civil Affairs has established a regulatory framework to control and monitor citizen activism. This paper will shed light on the ways in which citizens have carved out their social space by engaging in environmental activism and address the extent to which environmental activism has provided citizens with more opportunities to exercise their rights. In China, activism has worked in neither a top-down nor bottom-up manner, but rather between the two.² Activists appeal to a vertical authority (the central government) and/or network horizontally with global actors and with kindred groups.³

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In the sections below, I first discuss collective action and environmental management and policy in order to provide some context for contemporary environmental activism in China. Secondly, I introduce the concept of “negotiating the state”⁴ as a point of departure and discuss how recent scholarship departs from this to focus more on grassroots NGOs. Thirdly, I assess the major environmental activism that Chinese environmental NGOs and Chinese citizens have engaged in since the mid-1990s to date.

CONTEXTUALIZING CONTEMPORARY ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM IN CHINA

COLLECTIVE ACTION IN CHINA

As in any authoritarian setting, China presents significant structural obstacles to activism. In the post-Tiananmen era (1989 onward), China’s party-state has implemented a tight regulatory framework to keep the nation’s social organizations fragmented and highly localized.⁵ The communist regime has been successful in co-opting or controlling most social elites⁶—the intelligentsia, professionals, and private entrepreneurs—who might otherwise present a counterforce to the regime.

Although no serious challenges have been posed to the regime, China’s social instabilities have become significant. China’s institutional mechanism for absorbing social discontent and serious grievances is the New Regulation on Letters and Visits, which replaced an older precedent in 2005. It allows citizens to express their grievances by writing a letter to, and/or visiting, the Letters and Visits Office and/or members of the People’s Congress, among others. The majority of the letters earn no response, and people increasingly resort to collective protests and riots.⁷ According to *China Environment Statistical Report*, environmental protection bureaus (EPBs) received over 600,000 letters of complaint in 2004.⁸ In addition, EPBs receive numerous complaints via hotlines.

Globalization processes have created more opportunities for domestic activists to externalize their claims and thus potentially create a Transnational Advocacy Network (TAN).⁹ By sharing values and common discourse, and by exchanging information and resources, NGO actors—international and local NGOs—as well as intergovernmental organizations and (sometimes) governments together constitute a TAN. For example, China’s hosting of the 2008 Beijing Olympics gave opportunities to both domestic and foreign activists to engage in an “Olympic boycott movement” to protest China’s human rights record.¹⁰

The availability of communicative technology¹¹ in China has promoted new forms of citizen activism and it is rapidly changing the activism landscape. Yang argues that the Internet has revolutionized how citizens organize and engage in activism in China.¹² Examples include two protests against chemical plants: a Xiamen walk in 2007 with ten thousand participants and Dalian protests in 2011 with twelve thousand participants, the largest of such forms of activism.¹³ Citizens joined the events after they learned of the chemical plants via text messages¹⁴ or social networking sites.¹⁵

ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT AND POLICY IN CHINA

Fiscal decentralization, beginning with the 1978 economic reforms, has made local governments directly responsible for implementing environmental protection measures. Yet China’s administrative structure, known among scholars as “fragmented authoritarianism,”¹⁶ has made policy implementation difficult and lengthy. Under this structure, different functional bureaucracies at all levels engage in policy bargaining that is further complicated by the bureaucratic ranking system. Fragmented authoritarianism corrects a common misperception of China in which the state is presumed to implement its policies single-hand-

edly. Environmental policy implementation suffered from the low bureaucratic rank of the national environmental agency¹⁷ until it was elevated to ministerial status—and renamed the State Environmental Protection Administration (SEPA)¹⁸—in 1998.¹⁹ Local EPBs must negotiate with other, often higher ranking, functional agencies of the local government.²⁰ Therefore, successful environmental protection at the local level is often tied to the degree of environmental concern within local governments.

The central government has taken a series of notable steps toward the improvement of environmental protection. Between 1991 and 2003, the SEPA increased the quantity and quality of its staff.²¹ Local leaders are no longer only judged by their economic performance alone, but also by their environmental performance, based, for example, on water and air quality.²² Despite China's environmental reforms at the national level, however, some scholars have cautiously noted the weak implementation capacities of local governments.²³

“NEGOTIATING THE STATE” AND GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATIONS

While the state intends to use registration to control social organizations, Tony Saich has argued that registered social organizations benefit from their relationship with the state by gaining legitimacy and protection from their (state) sponsor agency. Saich calls this state-society relation “negotiating the state.” The state negotiates with social organizations because social organizations can benefit the state by stepping in to assist the state in policy implementation (e.g., welfare provision) and by offering employment for retired government officials.²⁴

Saich's insights on social organizations in China focus on state-society relations when the state first implemented the regulatory framework in the 1990s. Since then, social organizations—with exceptions, such as political or religious organizations²⁵—have been rooted in society regardless of their registration status, and have significantly affected state-society dynamics. Saich's concept still provides a useful framework for understanding China's social organizations, in particular government organized NGOs (GONGOs). Yet it does not address the different ways in which other types of social organizations engage with the state. Recent scholarship fills the gap by focusing on grassroots NGOs²⁶ or popular NGOs²⁷ and unregistered organizations.²⁸

Anthony Spire explored why illegal grassroots organizations in China survive. He argued that they can continue to operate as long as they act as social service providers and do not turn themselves into a threat by criticizing or challenging governments. Fragmented authoritarianism helps illegal grassroots organizations to develop symbiotic relationships with particular government officials. To the extent that these organizations are useful for officials in achieving good political performance, their existence is legitimized in the eyes of the officials. Spire calls this relationship “contingent symbiosis.”²⁹

Hildebrandt studied the reasons why unregistered social organizations seem to be unconcerned about legitimating their status via registration. His survey of social organizations across China, in issue areas such as environmental protection, HIV/AIDS prevention, and gay and lesbian rights, found that more than half were not registered. Registered social organizations were likely to be older, larger, or closer to Beijing, and they were over-represented in environmental protection. He also found that social organizations forego registration if local governments do not mind, or prefer them to be unregistered. From the local government perspective, unregistered organizations are easier to control because they depend more on local governments' patronage to survive. In issue areas such as HIV/AIDS prevention and gay and lesbian rights, local governments can control social organizations via the allocation of foreign funding that is typically channeled through local governments.

His study highlights that social organizations in China are controlled one way or another regardless of their registration status. Thus, legitimacy through registration and grants from foreign sources may not be of concern to an organization as long as it has access to local government funding.³⁰

Instead of the civil society framework, Keech-Marx took a social movements approach to understanding why popular grassroots women's organizations in China are able to engage in critical public debate on social issues.³¹ She employed framing theory to examine their activism on anti-domestic violence. She found that women's organizations frame their activism in ways that resonate with official discourses, legitimizing themselves and their activism, allowing themselves to negotiate with the state more effectively. The same framing analysis has been applied in other authoritarian contexts. For example, Noonan in her study on women's activism in authoritarian Chile argued that activists successfully used discourse that was parallel to state discourse, and that the framings created opportunities for protest.³²

In the field of environmental advocacy in China, the more or less autonomous Chinese environmental NGOs that have emerged since the mid-1990s have obtained legitimacy from some Chinese policy elites and western donors, steadily extending their constituencies among citizens. In recent years, environmental NGOs and citizens have been negotiating with the state to carve out more space for themselves in the policy-making process and to bring their environmental concerns into public debates. In my own study of an anti-dam activism case, environmental NGOs navigated different framings of hegemonic discourses, including universalist principles, Chinese official discourses, and international discourses (e.g., participatory politics, World Commissions on Dams guidelines).³³

CONTEMPORARY ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM IN CHINA

Data for this paper are drawn from six one- to three-hour interviews with two environmental activists and two staff members of international NGOs. All interviewees were involved in the major environmental campaigns discussed below. I also interviewed an official from a provincial civil affairs office. The interviews were conducted in July and August 2001, August and September 2003, and November 2004. In a few cases, follow-up email exchanges were made. Data are also drawn from the organizational materials of these Chinese environmental NGOs and international NGOs. Relevant literature has also been consulted in order to supplement my data.

I argue that although citizen activism in China is subjected to more stringent constraints than is found in democratic settings, environmental activism in China has garnered legitimacy and provided citizens with opportunities to become agents of social change. Chinese citizens have become adept: at taking advantage of the state's wish to enforce environmental regulations at the local level; developing alliances with Chinese officials as well as with, in some cases, transnational actors; using communicative technology to organize their environmental discontent; and exercising their rights as citizens.

GAINING LEGITIMACY

China's major environmental NGOs enjoyed state patronage when they first emerged in the mid-1990s. Registration is one way for social organizations to legitimize their existence and their issue areas in the eyes of the state. (I use the term "legitimacy" to mean recognition or acceptance of social organizations and their activism by a state or an authoritative entity, such as the international community.) Following advice from Chinese central government officials, Liang Congjie, the founder of China's first individually organized environmental NGO, the Friends of Nature (FON), registered his organization as an NGO

in 1994. The Chinese leadership had seemingly come to realize that allowing more autonomous environmental NGOs, as opposed to only GONGOs, would help to improve China's international image.³⁴ It wanted to demonstrate to the world a sensitivity to international norms.³⁵ Global Village Beijing (GVB), which registered as a business in 1996, was able to broadcast its environmental education program with China Central TV (CCTV), the major state station. These environmental NGOs attracted international attention, and they received international awards that gave them further legitimacy domestically.

Legitimacy accrued to the state too. The emergence of environmental NGOs as poster children for the Chinese state granted the state more legitimacy within the international community. For example, leaders of both FON and GVB were enlisted to serve on the Beijing Olympics organizing committee, presumably for the state to show its commitment to the environment to the international Olympic committee.³⁶

DEVELOPING ALLIANCES

Through regulations, the party-state has effectively discouraged the formation of national-level independent NGOs in order to ensure for mass organizations a monopoly of nationwide representation.³⁷ Mass organizations, state apparatus, represent certain social groups (women, workers, youth, etc.) and their interests. They assist the state in transmitting and implementing certain policies (e.g., family planning).

I argue that, notwithstanding limitations imposed by the state, NGOs have led two major environmental campaigns—the protection of the snub-nosed monkey in 1995 and Nu River anti-dam activism in the 2000s—which demonstrate that environmental NGOs have been extending their networks, in the latter case, even beyond the national border. These networks have also been extended not only to key policy and political elites at the central government, but also to environmentally conscious citizens and marginalized populations.

The campaign for the protection of the snub-nosed monkey—one of China's most endangered species—in 1995 was China's first NGO-led environmental campaign against a local county government, Deqin county, in Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (a Tibetan minority prefecture), Yunnan province. Xi Zhinong, a photographer in Yunnan's Forestry Department, learned in 1995 that the Deqin county government had sold loggers the right to clear-cut a 200-square-kilometer swath of primeval forest. This was the habitat of at least 200 snub-nosed monkeys, or a little less than one fifth of the total remaining population. Xi lobbied in vain the vice director of Yunnan's Forestry Department to intervene with the county government's plans.³⁸

Xi consulted with Tang Xiayang, a well-respected environmental author and the founder of Green Camp, an environmental group. At Tang's suggestion, Xi contacted Liang Congjie, the founder of FON, in Beijing. Liang suggested that Xi write a letter to Song Jian, China's Minister for Science and Technology, and publicize the plight of the monkeys via the media by supplying his photos of the monkeys.³⁹ FON also joined the campaign. FON could mobilize students nationally because some members of student environmental groups are also individual members of FON. Two hundred students from the Beijing Forestry College turned out for a candlelight vigil for the monkeys in Yunnan.⁴⁰ This suggests that Chinese social organizations have been, since their early days, capable of developing national links (e.g., via student members) even though the state discourages national-level organizations.

Song Jian ordered the Ministry of Forestry in Beijing to investigate the problem and to stop the clear-cutting. As a result, a logging ban was enforced in Yunnan in 1996. Xi's initial activism catalyzed environmentalists, environmental NGOs, and the media. Xi stated that the campaign may not have succeeded without Liang's personal connections with Song at

the central government.⁴¹

I argue that this campaign expresses a vertical dynamic, i.e., activists made a claim by appealing to the vertical authority (the central government).⁴² O'Brien and Li observed that rural protesters in China often resort to the vertical authority in order to hold local governments accountable.⁴³

The Yunnan provincial government obviously did not appreciate Xi's activism. Xi's victory cost him his job with the Yunnan Forestry Department, and Green Plateau, an NGO established by Xi and his wife in Yunnan in 2000, ceased to exist in 2002.⁴⁴

The Nu River anti-dam activism emerged after the Yunnan Provincial Government and the Huadian Group, a state-owned electric enterprise, signed the dam construction agreement on the Nujiang (Nu River) hydropower dam project on March 14, 2003. Eight of the thirteen dams were to be built across the middle reaches of Nujiang in the Nujiang Lisu Autonomous Prefecture (Lisu minority prefecture)⁴⁵ in Yunnan. If built, the Nu River dams could have significant impacts upon the area's ecological and cultural diversity.⁴⁶ The planned construction site encompasses one of the world's ecological hotspots, a UNESCO World Heritage natural site, "Three Parallel Rivers of Yunnan Protected Areas,"⁴⁷ and ethnic minority populations. According to the initial 2003 plan, fifty thousand people were slated to be displaced and relocated because of the dams.⁴⁸

In August 2003, the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) of the central government approved the dam construction and intended to present the plan to the state council for final approval and then begin construction in September 2003.⁴⁹ Given the impetus of China's Western Development Policy since 1999, the proposed construction of the Nu River dams was expected to move ahead swiftly, or at least that was what many within the Nujiang prefecture government believed. Yet in February 2004, due to an outcry from environmental groups and scholars, Premier Wen Jiabao temporarily suspended the dam construction plan. The project is still pending. The China Daily reported in May 10, 2011 that the Huadian group intends to build the dam by 2015.

The emergence of Nu River anti-dam activism showed that some environmental NGOs are willing to advocate on politically sensitive issues, not simply more benign issues such as environmental education, recycling, animal protection, or tree planting. Dams remain one of the most sensitive environmental issues in China⁵⁰ because China is eager to increase electricity from renewable energy sources by tripling its hydropower capacity by 2020.⁵¹ This anti-dam campaign also exhibited increasing networking between journalists, NGOs, governments, international NGOs, and dam-affected people in both China and other countries. I argue that this type of networking expresses a horizontal dynamic, i.e., activists capitalized on the commonalities of their claims and agendas with global actors and with kindred groups in other localities, domestic and foreign.⁵²

The SEPA showed its clear position against the Nu River dam project. Its willingness to ally with environmental NGOs heightened after the 2003 enactment of China's Environmental Impact Assessment Law, which appointed the SEPA as the gatekeeper of major public and private development projects. The law requires the SEPA to review and (dis)approve environmental impact assessment (EIA) reports on these projects. Hence, it bestows the SEPA with the power to halt projects.

In October 2003, the SEPA organized China's first "Green Forum," a public relations event in which Green Earth Volunteers in Beijing, an environmental NGO, participated and collected signatures from participants, including Chinese celebrities, on a petition for the protection of the Nu River.⁵³

Green Earth Volunteers and Green Watershed—the key Chinese environmental NGOs

in Nu River anti-dam activism—and journalist groups jointly conducted a “study tour”⁵⁴ along the Nu River and later held a photo exhibition in Kunming as well as at the United Nations Environment Program’s Fifth Global Civil Society Forum held in Jeju, South Korea in March 2004.⁵⁵ The NGOs successfully developed alliances beyond the national border. For example, in November 2003 they traveled to Thailand to attend the Second International Meeting of Dam-Affected People and Their Allies, where they worked successfully to have the international meeting issue a joint statement opposing the Nu River dam project.⁵⁶

Green Watershed, in particular, collaborated with International Rivers, a Berkeley-based international NGO, over the Nu River campaign. The pair exchanged and disseminated information in the form of publications and translations,⁵⁷ but the most successful example of their collaboration was the Beijing Declaration on Hydropower and Sustainable Development, the product of the UN Symposium on Hydropower and Sustainable Development, held in Beijing from October 27-29, 2004. Representatives from Green Watershed, International Rivers, and Oxfam America sat at the same round table with two UN representatives, two World Bank representatives, and three Chinese government officials from the NDRC, and suggested a revision to a draft. The Green Watershed representative believed that because of their input, the final draft of the declaration addressed sustainable development in hydropower development. He pointed out that none of the opening speeches at the symposium referenced NGOs, the people, or social impact assessments, but that fully one-third of the closing speeches did.⁵⁸ The Yunnan provincial government retaliated in early January by confiscating the passports of Green Watershed’s staff, preventing the NGO from using international venues to extend its alliances.

DEVELOPING RIGHTS-BASED ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM

Nu River activism not only expressed a horizontal dynamic of networking among relevant actors, but also brought rights-based discourse to dam-affected people. For prior to NGO Nu River activism, there is no indication that any of the dam-affected people either perceived injustice or made claims based on their rights. Rights-based framings resonate well with the state official rhetoric, “the creation of a legally governed nation (*fazhi guojia jianshe*).”

The dam-affected villagers were invited to participate in workshops organized by Green Watershed and funded by transnational activists. The workshop experience helped dam-affected people to acquire new knowledge of international resettlement policies and their own rights as defined in Chinese policies.⁵⁹ The new knowledge was intended to help villagers begin to perceive injustice more clearly and to demand the entitled treatment stipulated in state policies.⁶⁰ The process of feeling injustice and empowerment is what McAdam calls “cognitive liberation.”⁶¹

Cognitive liberation may have encouraged some villagers to use a rights-based discourse.⁶² For example, some dam-affected villagers who participated in the above-mentioned UN Symposium on Hydropower and Sustainable Development, along with NGOs, submitted a symposium paper entitled “Comments on the Four Rights of Immigrants Affected by Dam Construction”⁶³ and another paper entitled “The Relationship between Dam Construction and the Rights of Original Inhabitants to Participation.”⁶⁴ Both papers emphasized the rights of dam-affected people, including the “four rights” that were delineated by the Central Party Committee in China.⁶⁵

Other rights-based approaches to environmental activism were observed in the 2000s. The emergence of online-led citizen mass protests suggests a willingness on the part of Chinese citizens to exercise their perceived rights to assemble and protest. In June 2007, the

central government enacted the Recommendation about Further Strengthening Petition Work in the New Period. Local officials are now evaluated in part on how well they can reduce the number of citizen petitions that are sent to the center. This may provide local officials more incentive to respond to citizen demands at the local level, while it may give citizens more leverage to exercise their perceived rights. Alternatively, this may lead local governments to suppress citizens' attempts to express demands.

Environmental public interest litigation has also entered into China's academic and popular discourses. As witnessed in the civil rights movement in the United States, courts can be an active agent for social change. However, the lack of an independent judiciary in China makes it difficult for Chinese courts to function as such agents.

Although Chinese citizens may appeal to administrative mechanisms, such as letters and visits, to enforce environmental laws and regulations, some now want the courts to protect their rights. According to a 2008 Xinhua news article, there were 4,453 pollution compensation cases⁶⁶ in 2004. There are no official government statistics on civil environmental lawsuits.⁶⁷

Since 2001, the Beijing-based Center for Legal Assistance to Pollution Victims (CLAPV), an environmental NGO, has been providing pollution victims free legal consultations and assisting them in bringing civil environmental lawsuits. Pollution victims tend to be rural citizens who are often unaware of their rights and do not know how to use the court system.⁶⁸ The NGO also provides lawyers and judges with a free week of training on environmental litigation in exchange for at least one pro bono environmental case in the future. However, environmental litigation is still new to the Chinese legal profession,⁶⁹ and some lawyers may be reluctant to oppose powerful polluters fearing they may become a target of intimidation and harassment.⁷⁰

CONCLUSION

This paper examined key examples of contemporary environmental activism that Chinese environmental NGOs and Chinese citizens have engaged in since the mid-1990s to date in order to assess the legitimacy of environmental activism and organizations, alliance-making, and the development of rights-based environmental discourses and activism in China.

Chinese environmental activism was initially led by domestic NGOs whose leaders had political connections, an entrepreneurial mindset, and the cultural capital to negotiate with the state and donors. Such leaders include FON's Liang Conjie and GVB's Liao Xiaoyi. Their NGOs engaged in areas of activism that did not conflict with the interests of the central government.⁷¹ As their number, size, and years of experience have increased in certain issue areas, citizen environmental groups in China have gained legitimacy from Chinese policy and political elites and western donors. Evidence of this includes their over-representation among registered NGOs. Newer environmental NGOs have shifted their focus to more politically sensitive issues, such as anti-dam campaigns and advocacy for pollution victims. They have also begun forming alliances more horizontally by capitalizing on the commonalities of their claims, as observed in the case of Nu River anti-dam activism. By so doing, activists have begun reaching out to often marginalized populations in China, especially dam-affected people and pollution victims, to help them to understand and exercise their rights.

The forms of environmental activism have also become diversified. Notable examples include online-led mass protests and civil environmental litigation. As online activism easily mobilizes citizens, sometimes on a great scale, it may significantly affect state-society

relations in the future, at least within cities.

What do the recent developments in environmental activism tell us about the status of state-society relations in China? As Mertha argues, there is evidence for the emergence of political pluralism in China and the state's willingness to let citizens influence policy decision-making at the local level.⁷² This sometimes invites resistance and retaliation from local governments. One thing seems sure: environmental activism has helped citizens to make claims based on their rights and offered them a means to public participation under the authoritarian context.

NOTES

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33. Setsuko Matsuzawa, "Horizontal Dynamics in Transnational Activism: The Case of Nu River Anti-dam Activism in China."
34. Elizabeth Economy, "Environmental Enforcement in China," 113.
35. Alastair Iain Johnston, "China and International Environmental Institutions: A Decision Rule Analysis," in *Energizing China: Reconciling Environmental Protection and Economic Growth*, ed. Michael B. McElroy, Chris P. Nielsen, and Peter Lydon (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 555-600.
36. Yet after China made a successful bid, the state decided to use paid international consultants rather than domestic environmental NGOs. See Timothy Hildebrandt and Jennifer L. Turner, "Green Activism?: Reassessing the Role of Environmental NGOs in China," 102.
37. Tony Saich, "Negotiating the State: The Development of Social Organizations in China."
38. Trish Saywell, "Green Focus: A Government Photographer Comes to the Rescue of Yunnan's Endangered Snub-nosed Monkey," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, January 29, 1998.
39. Interview, Xi Zhinong, July 2001.
40. I must point out that ground travel from Beijing to Yunnan and then to Deqin county was not an easy matter due to bad infrastructure at that time. Therefore, this event demonstrates a significant degree of student commitment and ability.
41. Interview, Xi Zhinong, July 2001.
42. Setsuko Matsuzawa, "Horizontal Dynamics in Transnational Activism: The Case of Nu River Anti-dam Activism in China."
43. Kevin J. O'Brien and Lianjiang Li, *Rightful Resistance in Rural China*.
44. Xi expressed financial insecurities in a 2001 interview. Interview, Xi Zhinong, August 2001. Today, international donors fund projects, but not "core," i.e., organizational maintenance costs (e.g., salaries, overhead). See Timothy Hildebrandt and Jennifer L. Turner, "Green Activism?: Reassessing the Role of Environmental NGOs in China," in *State and Society Responses to Social Welfare Needs in China: Serving the People*, ed. Jonathan Schwartz and Shawn Shieh (New York: Routledge, 2009), 100. This policy affects the survival of many NGOs.
45. The Lisu ethnic minority is one of China's officially recognized 55 ethnic minority groups. They live in Nu River Lisu Autonomous Prefecture in Yunnan, one of China's poorest minority autonomous areas.
46. Darrin Magee, "Powershed Politics: Yunnan Hydropower under Great Western Development," *The China Quarterly* 185 (2006): 23-41.
47. For more information, see "Three Parallel rivers of Yunnan Protected Areas," World Heritage, UNESCO, <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1083>.
48. Jim Yardley, "Vast Dam Proposal is a Test for China," *The New York Times*, December 23, 2005.
49. Jim Yardley, "Vast Dam Proposal is a Test for China."
50. Junhui Li, "Position of Chinese Newspapers in Framing of Environmental Issues" (master's thesis, Wagenin-gen University, 2005).
51. Jennifer L. Turner, "China's Energy Consumption and Opportunities for U.S.-China Cooperation to Address the Effects of China's Energy Use," Testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, June 14, 2007.

52. Setsuko Matsuzawa, "Horizontal Dynamics in Transnational Activism: The Case of Nu River Anti-dam Activism in China."
53. Jim Yardley, "Vast Dam Proposal is a Test for China."
54. For a detailed discussion on the study tours, see Andrew C. Mertha, *China's Water Warriors: Citizen Action and Policy Change*.
55. Guobin Yang and Craig Calhoun, "Media, Civil Society, and the Rise of a Green Public Sphere in China," *China Information* 21 no. 2 (2007): 211-36.
56. Yanfei Sun and Dingxin Zhao, "Environmental Campaign," in *Popular Protest in China*, ed. Kevin O'Brien (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 144-62.
57. Interview, international NGO staff member. November 2004.
58. Interview, Green Watershed representative. November 2004.
59. Interview, international NGO representative. August 2004.
60. Interview, Green Watershed representative. August 2004.
61. Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999).
62. I am not claiming that cognitive liberation has spurred rights-based activism. As Thaxton (2008) points out, understating injustice may be a historical process and may not be automatically translated into activism in rural China. See Ralph A. Thaxton, *Catastrophe and Contention in Rural China: Mao's Great Leap Famine and the Origins of Righteous Resistance in Da Fo Village* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
63. Quanyao Ge, "The Relationship between Dam Construction and the Rights of Original Inhabitants to Participation," paper submitted at the UN Symposium on Hydropower and Sustainable Development, Beijing, October 27-29, 2004.
64. Yinsheng Zi, Shiguo Qi, Rujun Luo, and Meijun Su, "Comments on the Four Rights of Immigrants Affected by Dam Construction," paper submitted at the U.N. Symposium on Hydropower and Sustainable Development, Beijing, October 27-29, 2004.
65. Setsuko Matsuzawa, "Horizontal Dynamics in Transnational Activism: The Case of Nu River Anti-dam Activism in China."
66. The Xinhua News article does not specify whether these cases are civil or criminal. See http://news.xinhuanet.com/misc/2008-03/08/content_7746377.htm.
67. Rachel E. Stern, "From Dispute to Decision: Suing Polluters in China," *The China Quarterly* 206 (2011): 294-312.
68. Timothy Hildebrandt and Jennifer L. Turner, "Green Activism?: Reassessing the Role of Environmental NGOs in China," 96.
69. Rachel E. Stern, "On the Frontlines: Making Decisions in Chinese Civil Environmental Lawsuits," *Law and Policy* 32 no. 1 (2010): 79-103.
70. Human Rights Watch reports such incidents. See Human Rights Watch, *Walking on Thin Ice: Control, Intimidation and Harassment of Lawyers in China* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2008).
71. Robert P. Weller, *Alternate Civilities: Democracy and Culture in China and Taiwan* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1999).
72. Andrew C. Mertha, *China's Water Warriors: Citizen Action and Policy Change*.