In the Name of the Public
New Environmental Protests in China

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The landscape of contention in China

**Figure 1: “Mass incidents” and protest participation in China, 1993–2010**

Note: “Official” refers to figures published in Chinese public security publications; “estimates” refers to numbers circulated in the Chinese media and collected by the author (left axis). “Survey data” refers to the percentage of respondents who participated in protests over the “three years” preceding the survey. Data stems from the China surveys of the Asian Barometer (2002, 2008) and the Chinese General Social Survey (2010). Sample sizes were 3,183, 4,780, and 10,192 respectively.
Popular contention in China

Popular protest has been accelerating since early 1990s.

Who protests?

- Farmers and workers
- Later, demobilized soldiers, pensioners, taxi drivers, homeowners, students, teachers, government officials …

Features

- Policy victimhood driven and post de facto
- Pursuit of material and exclusive compensation
- Isolated, narrowly defined problem/location/population/narratives
A new wave of environmental protest

Since mid-2000s, protests target major development projects, concerned with residential environment. Largely urban, often very large scale.
The Waves

Anti-waste treatment facilities
Beijing Liulitun, Asuwei 2006; Beijing Gao’antun 2008; Shanghai Caoluozhen 2008; Guangzhou Panyu 2009; Dongguan 2010; Huiyang 2013….

Anti-PX, chemicals, toxics
Xiamen 2007; Zhangzhou 2008; Dalian 2011; Ningbo 2012; Kunming 2013; Maoming 2014; Shanghai 2015

Anti-development in general
Shanghai 2008; Chengdu 2008; Nanjing 2011; Haimen 2012; Shifang 2012; Qidong 2012; Jiangmen 2013; Heyuan 2015…..
Four cases and four features

- Protest constituency
- Mobilizing grievances
- Sequence of events
- NGO/policy advocacy linkage

Who, For what, How, So What
2006 The Anti-PX Protests in Xiamen

He Lifeng 何立峰

Zhao Yufen 赵玉芬

Lian Yue 连岳
A Transformative Event: The Anti-PX Protests in Xiamen
From Pollution to a Common Heritage: The Tree-Saving Campaign in Nanjing
请重视历史给我们留下的，经济发展真的高于一切吗？Please respect what history preserved for us. Does economic development really have to override everything else?

没有了古树，算什么古都？Without the ancient trees, what is left of the ancient city?

你不是一棵梧桐树，你和我们一样，是个南京人。You are not simply a phoenix tree, you are like me, you are a Nanjinger.

法桐对我们而言不止是树～～她们滋养着一代代南京人的成长，她们在我们心里早已凝结为一种割舍不了的情结！！！To us the phoenix trees are not simply trees; they have nourished one generation after another from Nanjing, and as a whole they cannot be taken from our hearts. Nanjing residents take action! Let our voices be heard!
2009 From Protest to the Birth of a New NGO: Anti-Incinerator Activism in Panyu
2012 NGOs at the Frontline: the Anti-PX Movement in Kunming
## What is NEW?

Table 1: A comparison of the earlier repertoire of contention and new innovations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Main repertoire since the 1990s</th>
<th>The new repertoire since the mid-2000s</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Protest constituencies</td>
<td>Narrow, closely-knit communities of “victims”</td>
<td>Broad “imagined communities” of cities or regions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mobilizing grievances</td>
<td>Exclusive (private)</td>
<td>Non-exclusive (public)</td>
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<td>Sequence of resistance</td>
<td>Ex post facto</td>
<td>Preventive</td>
</tr>
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<td>Protest and policy advocacy</td>
<td>Hardly any linkages</td>
<td>Mutual reinforcement; sometimes sustained advocacy with NGO participation</td>
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Concluding thoughts

- Emerging linkages between the NGO community and mass mobilization
- Finally, an environmental movement?
- Beyond the environment: social activism and mass protests for public goods?
For Further Details


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