

**Conflicts between Economic Development and Environmental Protection**  
**-Case Studies on Urban Environmental Protests in China**

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## Introduction

In the past three decades, because of China's policy of Reforming and Opening up, China's economy has developed rapidly. Although political reform staggers, Chinese citizens have had more platforms to use to voice their opinions.<sup>1</sup> In the past several years, as Chinese people have lived better lives and started to care about health and the environment they live in more than before, environmental protection has become an important public topic in China.

Chinese citizens first voice their opinions and interests on environmental issues through governmental and legal procedures. Since the 1990s, ordinary people have organized non-violent resistance against the government for injustice, including environmental issues, in governmental and legal procedures.<sup>2</sup> From 2006 to 2010, Chinese citizens wrote more than 700,000 letters on environmental problems through the formal governmental complaint system.<sup>3</sup> In 2011, Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP) received 104 documents expressing opinions on environmental issues, 38% more than 2009 and the most in history.<sup>4</sup>

When dissatisfaction with environmental issues cannot be resolved through governmental and legal procedures, Chinese people organize protests. Environmental protests in China have increased by about 29% every year since 1996, while judicial procedure has only solved less than 1% of the problems.<sup>5</sup> In 2010, 420 emergency environmental events occurred.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Minxin Pei, "Rights and Resistance: The Changing Contexts of the Dissident Movement," in *Chinese Society* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2000), 23.

<sup>2</sup> Pei, *Chinese Society*, 28-31.

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Economy, "China's New Governing Style: Crisis Management." *The Atlantic*. N.p., n.d. Web. 21 May 2013. <[www.theatlantic.com/china/archive/2013/05/chinas-new-governing-style-crisis-management/276034/](http://www.theatlantic.com/china/archive/2013/05/chinas-new-governing-style-crisis-management/276034/)>.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> "环境维权引发中国动荡." Chinadialogue. <http://www.chinadialogue.net/article/show/single/ch/5561-China-s-new-middle-class-environmental-protests> (accessed April 29, 2013).

<sup>6</sup> *China Statistical Yearbook on Environment, 2011 / compiled by National Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Environmental Protection*. Beijing: China Statistics Press, 2011.

Environmental protests accounted for 8.9% of all large-scale protests in 2012 and these protests attract the public's attention.<sup>7</sup>

Environmental protest in urban areas shows the conflict between economics and environment behind the developing economy in China. In the past several decades, China has developed its economy through industrialization. Because cities are centers of the booming economy, large numbers of people have migrated from rural areas to cities. As people have lived better lives, they feel dissatisfied about industrial development as it evokes conflicts of interests. Construction of industrial projects may require some people to sacrifice their health and the environment they live in. Both of current residents and industrial project developers have lost profits because the Chinese government continually plans new construction. Thus, people organize urban environmental protests in different cities. These protests have affected governance in developed urban areas.<sup>8</sup> All levels of governments in China have used several methods to control protests. They cover up, suppress and coerce the public's collective actions, and control online information.<sup>9</sup> However, the governments can hardly repress environmental protests because of the legitimacy of complaints which lead to protest.<sup>10</sup> These environmental protests in the interest of communities advocate for the public good.

This paper aims at using case studies to explore the increasing influence of environmental protests in urban China. It first analyzes the reasons behind the rising number of environmental protests and their influence on society. Although Chinese citizens lack political platforms to voice their opinions on environmental issues, they organize environmental protests as they feel

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<sup>7</sup> "近年来我国环境群体性事件高发." Sina.com.cn. <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2012-10-27/021925449284.shtml> (accessed May 6, 2013).

<sup>8</sup> Katherine Zhao, "Boundary-Spanning Contention: The Panyu Anti-Pollution Protest in Guangdong, China," in *Stanford Journal of East Asian Affairs* 11, no. 1 (2011): 17-25.

<sup>9</sup> Dongping Yang, "Reflections on Environmental Mass Incidents in China," in *The China Environment Yearbook*. Leiden: Brill Academic Pub., 2009. 235-248.

<sup>10</sup> Patrick Walter, "Text Messaging: is a Popular Method of Environmental Protest in China," in *Chemistry and Industry* 11 (2007): 5.

dissatisfied about the governmental procedures on environmental issues and as they have got access to spreading information and gathering the masses more easily than before. More environmental protests with large numbers of participants have occurred in recent years. The paper then identifies some characteristics of the 2007 Anti-PX movement in Xiamen, which have continued in the three recent urban environmental protests in 2012 in Shifang in Sichuan Province, Ningbo in Zhejiang Province, and Qidong in Jiangsu Province. These protests have all evoked much attention in Chinese society. They show as Chinese citizens have had more environmental awareness, they distrust governments, believe in rumors, and organize environmental protests through social media.

### **Key Reasons for the Increasing Influence of Environmental Protests**

China's economic development has brought large social changes in various ways. I will analyze the reasons why Chinese citizens organize the urban environmental protests and how people spread information. Chinese citizens have cared about environmental issues more than before. As Chinese people have more wealth, they desire better life qualities. Because industrial projects in urban areas may threaten citizens' health and the environment they live in, and health is people's direct interest, people agree on health issues easily and organize environmental protests.

Mobilization of environmental protest becomes easier. Although China's political system does not provide people with platforms to voice their opinions efficiently, people themselves organize environmental protests because they feel dissatisfied about governmental regulations. Ordinary people have organizational resources to organize protests. Some scholars think because Chinese citizens lack environmental awareness and Chinese society lacks a

political mechanism to organize collective actions, there is little chance that Chinese citizens can organize effective environmental protests.<sup>11</sup> Even with increasing environmental awareness, Chinese people lack motivation to start protests.<sup>12</sup> Although scholars often state that Chinese society lacks mobilization of the public to organize collective actions, the number of environmental protests has increased with the rising mobilization in the past several years.<sup>13</sup> Scholars' argument that Chinese people cannot organize protests results from research which presumes that Environmental Non-governmental Organizations (ENGOS) are an important force in managing environmental movements in China. In fact, ENGOS do not necessarily get involved into environmental protests.<sup>14</sup>

In the past decades, ENGOS have played an important role in environmental protection in China. Since China's economic reforms in 1978, the Chinese government has given Chinese citizens more autonomy, and the number of social organizations has risen. Since the 1990s, ENGOS have played an important role in environmental justice such as criticizing the construction of the Three Gorges Dam.<sup>15</sup> Scholars have analyzed rising numbers of ENGOS in China. Some view the appearance of ENGOS as evidence of the changes of Chinese society, but collective actions for environmental issues do not necessarily need the mobilization of ENGOS. In fact, some ENGOS intentionally avoid participating in collective actions for the sake of the organizations' development. Because governments have paid more attention to environmental concerns, ENGOS fewer take anti-government stances and governments see them as not hostile

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<sup>11</sup> Yanqi Tong, "Environmental Movements in Transitional Societies: A Comparative Study of Taiwan and China," *Comparative Politics* 37 (2005): 167-188.

<sup>12</sup> Johann L. Thibaut, "An Environmental Civil Society in China? Bridging Theoretical Gaps through a Case Study of Environmental Protest," in *International Quarterly for Asian Studies* 42 (2011): 135-163.

<sup>13</sup> Qiang Wang, "China's Environmental Civilian Activism," in *Science* 328, no. 5980 (2010): 824-824.

<sup>14</sup> Phillip Stalley and Dongning Yang, "An Emerging Environmental Movement in China?" in *The China Quarterly* 186 (2006): 333-356.

<sup>15</sup> Teh-chang Lin and Jean Yen-chun Lin, "The Environmental Civil Society and The Transformation Of State-Society Relations In China: Building a Tri-level Analytical Framework," (*Pacific Focus* 22, no. 2 (2007): 113-140.

and support them.<sup>16</sup> The development of ENGOs encourages Chinese citizens to participate in environmental issues but ENGOs do not lead the past environmental protests.

ENGOs have indeed brought changes on environmental issues in China, but ordinary people themselves can petition for their rights. Because of ineffective enforcement of environmental regulations and opaque government information,<sup>17</sup> when economic development projects may bring ordinary people negative effects on their interests and they do not have platforms to express public opinion, they are eager to express their opinions and go to the street.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, because the public does not view environmental problems as part of politics, protesting against environmental problems does not challenge political authority.

Environmental protests organized by the public make the Chinese government become aware of its responsibility on the rising number of these protests. The Minister of MEP, Zhou Shengxian, stated at the press conference of 18<sup>th</sup> CPC National Congress in November 2012 that economic development inevitably led to an increasing number of environmental protests. He said protests occurred due to problems with Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) regulations, local governments' administrative ability, and improper legislation on industrial projects.<sup>19</sup> Even though the Chinese government has realized its problems, it is not easy to solve these problems. The problems he referred show that implementation of environmental laws lags behind and Chinese people distrust local governments.

China's environmental legislation has developed in the past several decades. China has had environmental legislation since the 1979 Environmental Protection Law. In the 1980s, more

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<sup>16</sup> Steve Hess, "Environmental Protest and the Greening of the State: A Comparison of Pre-Transition Poland and Contemporary China," in *Problems of Post-Communism* 58, no. 2 (2011): 45-57.

<sup>17</sup> Dongping Yang, "Reflections on Environmental Mass Incidents in China." in *The China Environment Yearbook*,. Leiden: Brill Academic Pub., 2009. 235-248.

<sup>18</sup> Steve Hess, "Environmental Protest and the Greening of the State: A Comparison of Pre-Transition Poland and Contemporary China," *Problems of Post-Communism* 58, no. 2 (2011): 45-57.

<sup>19</sup> "环保部回应宁波PX事件：将采取4措施防群体事件." 腾讯新闻. [news.qq.com/a/20121113/000038.htm](http://news.qq.com/a/20121113/000038.htm) (accessed May 5, 2013).

than twenty environmental laws were written and carried out. China's legal system encourages public participation in environmental protection. In the 1990s, environmental legislation in China began to specify regulations on different subfields to foster the new national governmental slogan, Sustainable Development.<sup>20</sup> MEP released laws to improve governmental procedures on environment such as *Measures for the Disclosure of Environmental Information (for Trial Implementation)* and *Provisional Measures of for Public Participation in Environmental Impact Assessment* in the 2000s.<sup>21</sup>

Although China's environmental legislation progresses, its enforcement lags behind. China's environmental legislative implementation does not satisfy Chinese citizens' increasing demands for a better environment. Different branches of the Chinese government have unclear responsibilities and different interests. Provincial and county level Environmental Protections Bureaus (EPBs) are in charge of enforcement. These local environmental protection agencies respond to both the local governments and MEP.<sup>22</sup> MEP does not fund EPBs and EPBs depend on local governments for personnel and funds, so profits of local governments can affect the decisions made by EPBs.<sup>23</sup> Local economic development is an important factor to evaluating the achievement of local governments.<sup>24</sup> Local governments' concern about local economic development becomes an obstacle for legislation enforcement. In this way, EPBs have little authority and autonomy to enforce laws.

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<sup>20</sup> "论当代中国环境法的发展特点和趋势 ( 1 ) ." 环境生态网. N.p., n.d. Web. 7 May 2013.

<[www.eedu.org.cn/Article/es/envir/em/200404](http://www.eedu.org.cn/Article/es/envir/em/200404)

<sup>21</sup> Kezhu Xu, Wanzhong Song, and Fen Zhu, "Progress and Problems in China's Construction of an Environmental Legal System" in *the China Environment Yearbook*. (Leiden: Brill Academic Pub., 2009), 195-210.

<sup>22</sup> Richard L. Edmonds, "The Organization of Environmental Protection in China, " in *Managing the Chinese Environment*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 33-63.

<sup>23</sup> Roberts marks, *China: its Environment and History*, (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012), 3-10.

<sup>24</sup> Kezhu Xu, Wanzhong Song, and Fen Zhu, "Progress and Problems in China's Construction of an Environmental Legal System" in *the China Environment Yearbook*. (Leiden: Brill Academic Pub., 2009), 195-210.

China's Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) procedure also needs improvement. According to laws, industrial projects should pass EIA before construction starts. EIA focuses on eradicating pollution and encourages the public's participation through general plans nationwide and locally. In 2003, China issued the *Environmental Impact Assessment Law of the People's Republic of China*. Enforcement of the laws started in 2005 and the complementary *Strategic EIA Regulations* were released in 2007.<sup>25</sup> However, the laws have not been implemented smoothly. The vague criteria of the EIA, limited funding of environmental authorities, conflict of interest resulting from the same people playing roles as project designers and decision-makers, and interests of local governments, all lead to the ineffective implementation.<sup>26</sup>

From the above, although China does not lack environmental laws, it lacks mechanisms to enforce the laws effectively. Chinese citizens have few means to voice their opinions on environmental issues. In cities, people's dissatisfaction on plans of industrial projects remains. Because industrial projects are located in specific areas, Chinese citizens distrust and blame on local governments.

Urban environmental protests regarding specific local issues rise locally. As Chinese citizens become aware of the possible negative effects on their health, environment, property values, and political rights brought by the proposed local industrial projects, they criticize local governments. Although what they are worried about is a national problem because China plans industrial projects throughout the country, they can petition to local governments directly regarding their rights. People ask the governments to close and relocate the polluting firms

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<sup>25</sup> "中华人民共和国环境影响评价法." *新华网*. N.p., n.d. Web. 22 May 2013. <[http://news.xinhuanet.com/zhengfu/2002-10/29/content\\_611415.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/zhengfu/2002-10/29/content_611415.htm)>.

<sup>26</sup> Jianrong Qie, "Challenges for Strategic Environmental Impact Assessments," in *the China Environment Yearbook* (Leiden: Brill Academic Pub., 2009), 223-234.

instead of compromising and accepting economic compensation.<sup>27</sup> However, relocating these firms does not save environmental costs and may raise new protests from the city the firm is moved to.

Chinese citizens have had various means to spread information and gather the masses easily. Media represent the voice of the Chinese government. Since China's economic reforms three decades ago, increasing numbers of commercial media have shown up in accordance with China's opening economic market. Market forces have made media a platform of public opinion. The appearance of commercial media enables individuals to coordinate collective action and increases governments' responsiveness.<sup>28</sup> In the 1990s, media, especially printed media, paid attention to Three Gorges construction and played an important role in postponing the project.<sup>29</sup> The case of the 2007 Xiamen Anti-PX movement in the next part of the paper shows that traditional media facilitate environmental protest.

Although traditional forms of media help organize environmental protests, the influence of these media is not as large as social media. In the past several years, the appearance of social media has allowed Chinese citizens to express their political opinions more easily. Katherine Zhao's analysis of the Anti-pollution protest in Panyu explains the wide use of social media in environmental protests in China. According to Zhao, social class and social status allow protesters to access to modern technology and forms of information. As technology develops, Internet and mobile phones allow people to know more and disseminate information. Because of easier access to media nowadays, increasing numbers of middle-class people participate in

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<sup>27</sup>, Xufeng Zhu, "Rebuilding Government Credibility in Chinese Environmental resident Activism." *Environmental Science and Technology* 46 (2012): 1303-1304.

<sup>28</sup> Susan L. Shirk, "The Echo Chamber of Nationalism," in *China: Fragile Superpower* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 85-104.

<sup>29</sup> Minxin Pei, "Chapter 5: The Self-Liberalization of China's Mass Media ." In *From Reform to Revolution: the Demise of Communism in China and the Soviet Union* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), 150-178.

environmental protests.<sup>30</sup> These middle-class people have social and political resources to back their opinions, so they often petition for their interests on street.<sup>31</sup> Typical social movement participants, students and working-class people in cities also participate in the protests. The development of the Internet and cell phones helps spread information and raise people's consciousness.<sup>32</sup> With the autonomy brought by technology, protesters decrease the government's control over their actions.<sup>33</sup> Since 2009, Sina's Weibo has played an important role in spreading information and organizing environmental protest. Sina's Weibo is similar to Twitter but is in Chinese. More than 300 million users post on Sina's Weibo every day.<sup>34</sup> The Chinese government has also started to use Sina's Weibo to announce its governmental decisions shown in the three environmental protests in 2012.

Although traditional and social media spread information, they are both controlled by governments. Because governments cover up information, citizens listen to rumors. From Dingxin Zhao's analysis on the 1989 Tiananmen Movement, rumors spread public opinion when governments control media, and media leads public opinion if news coverage reports positively about the movement.<sup>35</sup> The recent environmental protests show Chinese citizens listen to rumors because the Chinese government conceals information. As the Chinese government has covered up some information of industrial projects, nearby residents worry about potential negative influences of these projects. Chinese citizens have worried about potential harm brought by

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<sup>30</sup> Qiang Wang, "China's Environmental Civilian Activism," in *Science* 328, no. 5980 (2010): 824-824.

<sup>31</sup> Cai, Yongshun. "China's Moderate Middle Class: The Case Of Homeowners' Resistance." *Asian Survey* 45, no. 5 (2005): 777-799.

<sup>32</sup> Patrick Walter, "Text Messaging: is a Popular Method of Environmental Protest in China" in *Chemistry and Industry* 11 (2007): 5.

<sup>33</sup> Katherine Zhao, "Boundary-Spanning Contention: The Panyu Anti-Pollution Protest in Guangdong, China," in *Stanford Journal of East Asian Affairs* 11, no. 1 (2011): 17-25.

<sup>34</sup> "People power a sign of times in China's internet age - CNN.com." CNN.com - Breaking News, U.S., World, Weather, Entertainment & Video News. <http://www.cnn.com/2012/07/06/world/asia/china-shifang-protest-florcruz> (accessed May 6, 2013).

<sup>35</sup> Dingxin Zhao, "State and Movement Communication" in *The power of Tiananmen: State-Society Relations and the 1989 Beijing student movement*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001). 298.

Chemical PX (p-Xylene) because they do not trust the Chinese government. Protesters in different cities believe PX may bring harm to their health. In fact, PX has low toxicity like petrol gas. It is widely used to produce chemical and medical products, and the production of it is important for China's economic development nowadays. Because PX produces PTA and in 2002, the state started to encourage the production of Pure Terephthalic Acid (PTA), the market demand for PX has increased since then.<sup>36</sup> Nowadays, China is the world's largest PX producer and consumer, producing half and consuming one third of the whole amount in the world. Since 2010, demand for PX has outrivald supply for it in China's domestic market. Compared to refinery programs, PX programs do not require much technology and yet profit. In the past decade, the Chinese government has planned to construct many PX projects, most of which are owned by the state. Because the Chinese government does not publish environmental issues to the public and state-owned enterprises occupy the PX industry, Chinese citizens do not trust the Chinese government and protest against PX projects as they worry about potential harm PX may bring. Until 2009, three nation-owned oil companies, Sinopec, China National Petrol Corporation, and China National Offshore Oil Corporation, produced more than seventy percent of PX in China. Only three foreign invested or domestic private enterprises exist in PX industry, and two of the three confronted Chinese citizens' environmental protests in the last several years.<sup>37</sup> Chinese citizens have worried about their health and viewed industrial development as a threat more than before.

### **The 2007 Anti-PX movement in Xiamen**

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<sup>36</sup> "PX 的发展现状及趋势分析." reportrc. <http://www.reportrc.com/baogao/nyenyan/79801.html> (accessed May 30, 2013).

<sup>37</sup> "中国 PX 出路." Caixin.com. <http://magazine.caixin.com/2011-10-21/100316343.html> (accessed May 6, 2013).

In the past several years, scholars have paid attention to the Anti-PX projects such as the one in Xiamen in 2007 which scholars viewed as the largest social protest in China since 1989. Since the 2007 Xiamen Anti-PX movement succeeded, environmental protests against industrial projects have taken place in different urban areas in China. Chinese citizens were inspired to go on the street and announce their rights to the Chinese government. In this study, I use the 2007 Anti-PX movement in Xiamen as an example to analyze the three large-scale urban environmental protests in China in 2012.

### *Spreading Information*

News report played an important role in the 2007 Anti-PX movement in Xiamen. In March 2007 in Beijing, Zhao Yufen, a professor at Xiamen University and member of the Chinese Academy of Science, after having failed to lobby provincial and city-level governments, handed in a proposal to relocate Xiamen Haicang PX Project for the sake of 100,000 nearby citizens in the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPCC). While local media's reports only took the stance of the Xiamen government's legitimacy to construct the project, national media such as the party-based newspaper *China Youth Daily*, and market-oriented paper *China Business* and *Southern Metropolitan News* reported the proposal and the project.<sup>38</sup> National media's report on the project and the public's reactions made the government rethink the project.

Ordinary people helped spread information. They used technology as they worried about the widely informed rumor of the potential harm brought by the Chemical p-Xylene (PX).

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<sup>38</sup> Angela Rose Romano, "Inspiring Public Participation Environmental Journalism in China." in *International Journalism and Democracy: Civic Engagement Models from around the World* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 30.

Xiamen residents disseminated information through cell phone messages and Internet forums.<sup>39</sup> They were concerned that the potential PX-Program would bring them negative effect on their health and the environment they lived in. China's economic development needs PX plants but because governments do not show information to the public, Chinese citizens worry about negative effect.<sup>40</sup> Because PX-Program in Xiamen was planned to build in an area where residents lived and the government did not directly explain the effect of PX to the public, people believed in the rumor that PX was toxic.<sup>41</sup>

### *Governmental Implementation Problem*

The Xiamen Anti-PX movement was a Not-in-My-Back-Yard movement (NIMBY) organized by citizens for local interests. Research on the Xiamen Anti-PX movement often views it as successful, but in fact although the movement stopped the chemical project in Xiamen, the project was relocated and harmed another area. It was a game of interests in which some groups of people sacrificed their interests while others benefited.<sup>42</sup> In response to Xiamen citizens' protests, the PX-Program which had been planned in Xiamen was relocated to Zhangzhou, a small city next to Xiamen. The PX-Program in Zhangzhou was stopped in January, 2013, and restarted in April, 2013 after passing its EIA.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> "新媒体在地方治理中的作用." *Renmin*. N.p., n.d. Web. 27 May 2013.

<<http://media.people.com.cn/GB/22114/121441>.

<sup>40</sup> "厦门PX项目落户漳州后再被叫停." 凤凰网.

[http://news.ifeng.com/gundong/detail\\_2013\\_01/26/21615985\\_0.shtml](http://news.ifeng.com/gundong/detail_2013_01/26/21615985_0.shtml) (accessed May 5, 2013).

<sup>41</sup> "百亿化工项目引发剧毒传闻." *Southern.cn*. N.p., n.d. Web. 28 May 2013.

<<http://www.southcn.com/weekend/commend>.

<sup>42</sup> "中国PX出路." *Caixin.com*. <http://magazine.caixin.com/2011-10-21/100316343.html> (accessed May 6, 2013).

<sup>43</sup> "福建漳州PX项目环评放行 曾被环保部叫停." 凤凰网.

[news.ifeng.com/shendu/21sjjbd/detail\\_2013\\_04/04/23861854\\_0.shtml?\\_from\\_ralated](http://news.ifeng.com/shendu/21sjjbd/detail_2013_04/04/23861854_0.shtml?_from_ralated) (accessed May 5, 2013).

The 2007 Xiamen Anti-PX movement also showed the problems with implementation of environmental laws.<sup>44</sup> In 2006, the Xiamen Municipal Government planned to build Haicang PX-Program with investment of 1.08 billion RMB by a Taiwanese company.<sup>45</sup> On May 30 2007, the Xiamen Government suspended the project under the pressure of the public because media had reported the project after CPCC in March. On June 1, thousands of local residents protested against the PX-Program on street. The project had passed a strategic EIA in 2005, which meant that the project would not harm environment. Later, however, MEP found the Haicang industrial Zone would be located in the area of Haicang new residential town and might negatively affect residents there, so MEP asked the Xiamen Government to restart a strategic EIA. In December 2007 when the Xiamen Government carried out the new strategic EIA in two public hearings 99 citizen representatives attended, and 85% of them voted against the project.<sup>46</sup> The Xiamen Anti-PX movement showed that the governmental responsibility on environment was not clear. The local government and MEP had different considerations and did not check balance with each other. Local residents blamed on the Xiamen government. The local government planed the PX-Program for local profits and did not view environmental protection as priority. Because EPB in Xiamen depended on the local government, EPB did not have much power on deciding industrial projects. EIA became a governmental procedure which did not work well.

### **Protest in Shifang, Sichuan in 2012**

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<sup>44</sup> Jianrong Qie, "Challenges for Strategic Environmental Impact Assessments," in *the China Environment Yearbook* (Leiden: Brill Academic Pub., 2009), 223-234.

<sup>45</sup> "超过 90%的厦门市民代表反对海沧 PX 项目." *新华网*. N.p., n.d. Web. 5 May 2013. <[http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2007-12/14/content\\_7246179.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2007-12/14/content_7246179.htm)>.

<sup>46</sup> Dongping Yang, "Challenges for Strategic Environmental Impact Assessments," in *The China Environment Yearbook*. Leiden: Brill Academic Pub., 2009. 223-234.

The environmental protest in Shifang showed governmental implementation problems. On July 1 and 2 2012, in the city of Shifang, Sichuan Province, citizens organized mass protests fighting against a \$1.64 billion copper alloy plant invested by Shanghai-listed Sichuan Hongda Company. The plant was planned to become one of the world's largest molybdenum and copper production factory as part of the reconstruction programs after the 2008 massive earthquake in Sichuan. Although the plant was had passed EIA, the local government did not publish EIA to the public. Even though the plant had met environmental criteria set by the China's Government, people protested as the local government did not consult with them about the construction. Conflicts of interests made the government hard to calm the protesters down. According to one MEP document, the Shifang Government required the total amount of pollution discharged into sea was to remain constant, so the construction of the copper alloy plant required shut-downs of some local enterprises. During the protests, both protestors and police officers were injured.<sup>47</sup> Under the pressure from the public, at the afternoon of July 3, the city government announced the termination of the project.<sup>48</sup>

As traditional media reported the government's announcement, social media such as Sina's Weibo mobilized protestors. Sina's Weibo made the protest in Shifang known nationwide. Around 5.25 million posts on Sina's Weibo included "Shifang" from July 1 to 4, while only 300 posts did so last year.<sup>49</sup> Although some posts were deleted because of their politically sensitive content, Sina's Weibo propagated information in the protest.

## **Protest in Qidong, Jiangsu in 2012**

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<sup>47</sup> "BBC News - China factory construction halted amid violent protests." BBC - Homepage. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-18684895> (accessed May 6, 2013).

<sup>48</sup> "什邡事件全解构." *Sina.com.cn*. N.p., n.d. Web. 4 May 2013. <<http://news.sina.com.cn/z/sfsj/>>.

<sup>49</sup> Qian Gang, "China's malformed media sphere - China Media Project." China Media Project. <http://cmp.hku.hk/2012/07/11/25293/> (accessed May 6, 2013).

The Qidong Protest in 2012 also showed the local government did not implement regulations well. At the morning of July 28, 2012, thousands of Qidong citizens in Jiangsu Province protested on the street against the plan of constructing a 100-kilometer-long wastewater pipeline. The pipeline was planned to belong to Wangzi paper manufacturing plant invested by a Japanese company. Protestors argued that wastewater would go into the sea and harm the local fishing industry which depended on the seawater. They were angry about the government's plan to construct the plant without consulting them. Occurring less than one month after the protest in Shifang, where protesters and police officers had violent conflicts, the NIMBY protest in Qidong was quite peaceful.<sup>50</sup>

Sina's Weibo also propagated the information of the protest. Ordinary people uploaded images and commented about the protest on Sina's Weibo.<sup>51</sup> Unlike that of Shifang, the city government understood the importance of social media so it utilized Sina's Weibo in the protest. At noon of July 28 2012, the city government announced the project would be permanently abandoned through its official Sina's Weibo account instantly after the protest.<sup>52</sup> After Qidong citizens protested, the local government also sent phone messages to people asking them not to take part in the protest.<sup>53</sup>

### **Protest in Ningbo, Zhejiang in 2012**

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<sup>50</sup> "After Qidong Protests, China Cancels Waste Project - NYTimes.com." The New York Times - Breaking News, World News & Multimedia. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/29/world/asia/after-protests-in-qidong-china-plans-for-water-discharge-plant-are-abandoned.html> (accessed May 6, 2013).

<sup>51</sup> "Chinese City Halts Waste Project After Thousands Protest - Bloomberg." Bloomberg - Business, Financial & Economic News, Stock Quotes. <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-07-29/chinese-city-halts-plant-s-waste-project-after-thousands-protest.html> (accessed May 6, 2013).

<sup>52</sup> "江苏启东逾千人冲进市政府抗议." BBC. [http://www.bbc.co.uk/zhongwen/simp/chinese\\_news/2012/07/120728\\_china\\_jiangsu\\_qidong.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/zhongwen/simp/chinese_news/2012/07/120728_china_jiangsu_qidong.shtml) (accessed May 6, 2013).

<sup>53</sup> "After Qidong Protests, China Cancels Waste Project - NYTimes.com." The New York Times - Breaking News, World News & Multimedia. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/29/world/asia/after-protests-in-qidong-china-plans-for-water-discharge-plant-are-abandoned.html> (accessed May 6, 2013).

Five years after the Anti-PX movement in Xiamen, Chinese citizens still worried about the negative impact of PX and organized environmental protest. The protest in Ningbo, similar to other protests, showed local residents' dissatisfaction on the implementation of the government and concern on their health. The City of Ningbo in Zhejiang Province planned to construct a PX-Program with an investment from Sinopec around 56 billion RMB. On October 27, 2012, over one thousand citizens went onto street as they concerned about the industrial project would bring them harm. At last, the protestors were suppressed by police.<sup>54</sup>

The Chinese government had realized the importance of calming protesters down by using social media and modifying regulations. Similar to the Qidong Government, on October 28, the Ningbo Government announced through its Sina's Weibo that it would stop the PX-program.<sup>55</sup> On October 29, Provincial Environmental Protection Agency issued *Regulations of Environmental Public Participation on Constructions* hoping to regulate public participation on environmental issues and reduce environmental protests.<sup>56</sup>

## Prospects and Conclusion

Although the above three large-scale protests in 2012 have difference from one another, they all succeed in postponing and relocating industrial projects. These protests express the citizens' dissatisfaction about potential harm of industrial projects on environmental and health like the 2007 Xiamen Anti-PX movement. In 2013, environmental protests continue in urban China. In May 2013, thousands of citizens in Kunming and Pengzhou in the Southwestern China

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<sup>54</sup> "Protests against Expansion of China Chemical Plant Turn Violent - NYTimes.com." The New York Times - Breaking News, World News & Multimedia. [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/28/world/asia/protests-against-expansion-of-china-chemical-plant-turn-violent.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/28/world/asia/protests-against-expansion-of-china-chemical-plant-turn-violent.html?_r=1) & (accessed May 5, 2013).

<sup>55</sup> 南方周末 - 宁波发布：坚决不上 PX 项目." *南方周末*. N.p., n.d. Web. 6 May 2013. <<http://www.infzm.com/content/82440>>.

<sup>56</sup> "南方周末 - 启东事件后，江苏官员首谈环评工作得失环评听证，要强制，更要审核." *南方周末*. N.p., n.d. Web. 6 May 2013. <<http://www.infzm.com/content/83317>>.

protested against plans of local industrial projects.<sup>57 58</sup> Governments have reacted to these protests through media stating that opinions from the public are important and these industrial projects are suspended, even though the public does not know whether these industrial projects have actually been stopped or the governments' kind attitudes will not turn into actions.<sup>59 60</sup>

The increasing number of urban environmental protests and their expanding influence in China show the conflicts between economic development and environmental protection. Under industrialization, the Chinese government views economic development and environmental protection as antipodes like other countries across the globe developing economies based on industrialization. The construction of industrial projects has made Chinese people who have had better lives in the past decades worry about their health and the environment they live in. As China's economic development slows down, political reform is needed for the Chinese government to reduce environmental protest. The Chinese government's reactions to environmental protest can calm protesters down in the short term, but the government fails to adjust to Chinese citizens' increasing demands for voicing their opinions. Citizens distrust the Chinese government and believe that if they do not protest, no problem will be solved; if they protest, problems will be solved.<sup>61</sup> Although environmental protest will help the Chinese government become more transparent, it will hardly threaten the authority of the Chinese government because environmental protest shows local people's concerns on industrial projects.

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<sup>57</sup> Elizabeth Economy, "China's New Governing Style: Crisis Management," in *The Atlantic*. N.p., n.d. Web. 21 May 2013. <[www.theatlantic.com/china/archive/2013/05/chinas-new-governing-style-crisis-management/276034/](http://www.theatlantic.com/china/archive/2013/05/chinas-new-governing-style-crisis-management/276034/)>.

<sup>58</sup> "Unable to walk the walk, Chengdu residents talk the talk | South China Morning Post." *Home | South China Morning Post*. N.p., n.d. Web. 22 May 2013. <<http://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1229971/unable-walk-walk-chengdu-residents-talk-talk>>.

<sup>59</sup> "昆明PX项目“广大群众反对就不上。” *BBC*. N.p., n.d. Web. 22 May 2013. <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/zhongwen/simp/china/>>.

<sup>60</sup> "成都官方:彭州石化暂不投产 将邀公众参与验收." *Sina News*. N.p., n.d. Web. 22 May 2013. <<http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2013-04-29/045926983777.shtml>>.

<sup>61</sup> "南方周末 - “开窗”：求解环境群体性事件." 南方周末. <http://www.infzm.com/content/83316> (accessed May 6, 2013).

The Chinese government has started to seek for new means to react to the increasing number of environmental protests. MEP planned to modify the regulations of EIA in 2013.<sup>62</sup> The Chinese government has also realized the importance to change economic development view. In 2012, the 18<sup>th</sup> CPC National Congress stressed on constructing an ecological civilization as a national policy.<sup>63</sup> ENGOs may abandon their passive roles on organizing environmental protests in China and help reduce conflict between the Chinese government and protesters.<sup>64</sup> Even though the Chinese government has reacted to protests transforming from crisis management to changing political regulations to reduce citizens' anger,<sup>65</sup> Chinese citizens need time to trust the government. Moreover, the real change requires change of China's larger political system under global capitalism.

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<sup>62</sup> "环保部将下放环评审批权限 简化程序提高效率." 中纤网.  
[www.ccfci.net/ccfei/ArticleDetail.aspx?articleid=685299](http://www.ccfci.net/ccfei/ArticleDetail.aspx?articleid=685299) (accessed May 20, 2013).

<sup>63</sup> "深入十八大：把生态文明建设放在突出地位." *CPC News*. N.p., n.d. Web. 22 May 2013.  
<<http://theory.people.com.cn/n/2013/0320/c40531-20849095.html>>.

<sup>64</sup> Elizabeth Economy, "China's New Governing Style: Crisis Management." *The Atlantic*. N.p., n.d. Web. 21 May 2013. <[www.theatlantic.com/china/archive/2013/05/chinas-new-governing-style-crisis-management/276034/](http://www.theatlantic.com/china/archive/2013/05/chinas-new-governing-style-crisis-management/276034/)>.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

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