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Silencing the Smog

An analysis of evolving forms of pollution protesting, repression and the emergence of rights consciousness in China's war on pollution

Author: James Eckford

Supervisors: Ákos Kopper and Orsolya Salat

Abstract

Environmental consciousness and its manifestation through protests is on a continued rise in China. Throughout the countryside and the cities, pollution has become a major source of contention and unrest. The thesis will consider the duality of the Communist Party's actions in introducing democratic elements in the war on pollution whilst simultaneously stifling public discussion of air pollution. The Party has signalled that its war on pollution is to be fought only from the top-down, the thesis will argue that the banning of the documentary *Under the Dome,* the street protests in Chengdu in December 2016 and its subsequent repression represent the tension inherent in China's current transformation. Using social movement theory, the thesis will analyse the evolution in mobilisation strategies and actions of protest that have accompanied the rise in environmental consciousness showing that the 'floodgates' are open for collective grassroots action against pollution. The thesis will argue that despite the small size of the Chengdu protests, their occurrence is symptomatic of a growing rights consciousness that is accompanying the dramatic rise of environmental contention. Thus, demonstrating that ordinary people are more willing to engage in contentious politics in inventive ways than before to defend their right to clean air.

Acknowledgments

I would first like to extend my deepest gratitude to my supervisors Orsolya Salat and Ákos Kopper for their patience, wisdom and academic insight, without which this thesis surely could not have come to fruition. The interactions, discussions and friendships formed during my time in Venice and Budapest have had an undoubtable influence on my academic growth, interests and passions, therefore I also extend profound gratitude to all my colleagues and friends in the programme. This thesis is the result of months of research, dedication and academic growth, without the support of my family, partner and friends this would not have been possible.

The very inspiration for this thesis comes from three years of living and working in Beijing, of everyday waking up and checking the air quality and coughing on the thick haze whenever I forgot my pollution mask. I am fortunate enough with my privilege to have had the opportunity to witness first-hand many of the developments described in this piece of work. Including the 'APEC blue' and 'Parade blue', the 'airpocalypse' that would descend on the Chinese capital every winter and the first issuance of a 'red alert' smog warning. Seeing these events unfold and witnessing the number of Beijing citizens deciding to put on a mask slowly increase over the course of three years, served as the impetus for my curiosity towards the perception of human rights in China and eventually to this research.

"I feel that while the government has forbidden people from defending their right to breathe, they have used a blindfold to cover the people's eyes so they will not see the pollution problem"

- Wang Liming, AKA Rebel Pepper, political cartoonist

APEC   Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation

AQI   Air Quality Index

CCP   Chinese Communist Party

CPPCC   Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference

CCTV   China Central Television

CHRD   Chinese Human Rights Defenders

EPA   Environmental Protection Agency

EPB   Environmental Protection Bureau

MEP   Ministry of Environmental Protection

NPC   National People's Congress

RMB   Renminbi – China's currency

PM 2.5   Particulate Matter less than 2.5 micrometres in diameter

PX   Paraxylene

Weibo   微博 – Chinese microblogging website

Weixin   微信 – Chinese instant-messaging app

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1. Introduction

1.1.   Background

While issues such as Tibet, freedom of speech, religious and minority persecution and the internet gain the most traction in the West[1]., within China, the environment is fast becoming an issue of contention, albeit on a local level. Since the mid-1990's environment-related protests have experienced a 30% annual increase and have drawn the largest crowds since Tiananmen Square[2].

Scholars mostly agree that from the earliest environmental-related protests in the 1990's, demonstrations have been driven by the 'Not in My Backyard' phenomenon characterised by their localised grievances and demand for monetary compensation[3]. This is described as 'victim-hood driven resistance' that is borne out of failing to achieve a court settlement or frustration with the petition system[4]. These rural protests against factories depend largely on framing, if the environmental threat is framed as immediate and dangerous to both the villagers and their descendants they are more likely to resort to protest. Rural protests are also complicated by economic dependency on the factories or plants themselves as a source of employment.

Large scale urban protesting however marks a departure from the victim-centric discontent in rural China, with the anti-PX demonstration in Xiamen in 2007 representing a watershed moment. Pressure from the elites above set the process in motion, university professors, delegates and the media communicated the dangers of the petro-chemical plant. This official advocacy gave way to large-scale peaceful protest, tens of thousands of citizens took to the streets, organised through social media as a "collective stroll" to avoid a provocative tone.

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[1] Caroline Fleay, "Transnational Activism, Amnesty International and human rights in China: the implications of consistent civil and political rights framing," *The International Journal of Human Rights,* Vol.16, No.5, (2012) pp.923-925

[2] Yang Zhong & Wonjae Hwang, "Pollution, Institutions and Street Protests in Urban China," *Journal of Contemporary China,* Vol.25, No.98, (2016) p.218

[3] See Xia Youzhi, "China's 'nimby' movement inspires spirit of protest", *China Dialogue,* June 26, 2014, https://www.chinadialogue.net/blog/7094-China-s-nimby-movement-inspires-spirit-of-protest/en & Wu Qiang, "What Do Lu Yuyu's Statistics of Protest Tell Us About the Chinese Society Today", *China Change,* July 6, 2016, https://chinachange.org/2016/07/06/the-man-who-keeps-tally-of-protests-in-china/

[4] Christopher Steinhardt & Fengshi Wu, "In the Name of the Public: Environmental Protest and the Changing Landscape of Popular Contention in China," *The China Journal,* No.75, (2015) p.64

Steinhardt and Wu describe Xiamen as a transformative event, which set a precedent, demonstrating what a peaceful protest could look like, providing a model for mutual reinforcement between the elites and masses that can pressure the local government to back down[5]. The event also gave way to success in preventing the building of petro-chemical plants in Dalian, Shifang, Ningbo, Kunming and other second tier cities.

The significance of these protests has sparked academic debate about the rise of rights consciousness in China, some see such protests as a continuation of Chinese citizens keeping their local governments in line, whilst others argue that contentious politics are on the rise. Elizabeth Economy, at the Congressional-Executive Commission on China roundtable, described the environment as the 'wedge' issue, that can push for greater democratic governance, protection of civil liberties and transparency through the need for an opening up of civil society space[6].

The debate about Chinese rights consciousness goes back to the late Qing dynasty and has evolved somewhat dialectically since the Qing and Republican experiments with giving and taking civil rights. The Communist Party's complete eradication of any remnant of political rights set the way for the emphasis on subsistence rights that was enshrined in the 1991 White Paper on Human Rights. Subsistence rights found agreement with Confucian ideals and the developing world's focus on development and growth at the expense of civil liberties.

Civil and political rights are argued to not be of great concern to a population infantilised by a paternalistic government and more concerned with economic security and the efficiency of government services than demanding rights[7]. However, crackdowns on calls for clean air are increasingly placing greater value on political rights in the fight against smog.

The Chengdu protests in December 2016, I will argue, mark the next stage of evolution for China's burgeoning environmental movement. The protests were significant not only in that they were spontaneous but also because unlike other urban

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[5] Ibid, p.69

[6] Clearing the Air: The Human Rights and Legal Dimensions of China's Environmental Dilemma: Roundtable before the Congressional-Executive Commission on China, *108th Congress*. (2003) Testimony of Elizabeth Economy), p.44

[7] Anthony Saich, "The Quality of Governance in China: The Citizen's view", *HKS Faculty Research Working Paper Series RWP12-51*, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard, 2012, p.3

environmental protests they were not targeting a specific polluter or the local government but the smog itself. Tsinghua professor Wu Qiang, writes that the small-scale protests in China will serve as a "modicum" of China's pollution politics and will test the very existence of a civil society and the political significance of China's middle class. More importantly Wu recognises the significant difference between the anti-PX protests and Chengdu, in that the "most aggrieved are not rights defenders" and that even a small symbolic action such as wearing a mask can have a homogenising effect that speaks to the indiscriminate nature of the smog[8]. The banning and subsequent politicisation of such a daily act has a transformative value that turns the general population into potential dissidents. From banning the very avoidance of inhaling dangerous particles, restricting discussion of the air's toxicity, to the active repression against even the smallest incidences of mobilisation and symbolic acts will politicise and enrage even the most apolitical members of the middle class.

The actions of the Government reveal that it will tolerate environmental protests if they are framed in a certain way and if there is mutual reinforcement from local elites and NGO's that are endorsed by Beijing. However, the censoring of *Under the Dome* and the blocking of the word 'smog' from social media and online searches during spontaneous protests, indicates that Beijing is afraid of the environmental movement based on grassroots collective action. A nationally co-ordinated movement could only happen if the links are drawn between the government's preference for growth over the environmental well-being, PM 2.5 and serious health effects and lack of judicial independence. The political and apolitical have become tightly bound by Beijing's paranoia and there is increasing awareness that linkages are appearing between civil and political rights and the right to a clean environment[9].

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[8] Wu, Qiang, "Choking on smog, China's city dwellers emerge in protest", *China Change,* December 14, 2016, https://chinachange.org/2016/12/14/choking-on-smog-middle-class-protests-emerge/
[9] Anna Brettell, *The Politics of Public Participation and the Emergence of Environmental Proto-movements in China* (College Park; University of Maryland, 2003), pp..418-9 & Clearing the Air: The Human Rights and Legal Dimensions of China's Environmental Dilemma: Roundtable before the Congressional-Executive Commission on China, *108th Congress.* (2003) Testimony of Brian Rohan & Chang Ping, "Smog as a Political Analogy", *China Change,* March 4, 2015, https://chinachange.org/2015/03/04/smog-as-a-political-analogy/

1.2.   Research Question

To what extent do the evolving forms and frames of pollution protesting and mobilisation as seen in Chengdu 2016, demonstrate a continued evolution of rights consciousness in China?

1.3.   Methodology

The thesis will begin with a literature review of Asian values and human rights, this is a necessary pre-cursor to a discussion on the potentiality of rights consciousness in relation to protesting since the discussion of rights in China is often stumped by differing conceptions of the meaning of rights in the West and East. The thesis will use Liangjiang Li's synthesis of rules and rights consciousness and Lorentzen and Scoggins' framework of rising rights consciousness to establish the link between evolving environmental protests and rights consciousness. Using the three-pronged analysis of framing, mobilisation and political opportunity the thesis will then use research completed on urban protesting to consider the growing governmental tolerance for large-scale urban protesting as well as increasing political opportunities.

The materials used will comprise of previous research on rural protesting in Huaxi and Dachuan. The purpose of analysing these specific protests is to understand the unique framing and mobilising strategies that make rural protesting distinct from urban protesting, namely the use of different mobilisation resources and the factor of economic dependency which inhibits pollution protesting in small communities. Common trends which appear in both rural and urban protesting will be emphasised for their value in tracking the commonalities in grievances which mobilise people, the research points to accountability and transparency as factors which are deeply tied to pollution-related grievances. The urban anti-PX protests in Xiamen and its legacy will be analysed for their transformative value, the innovation and development of mobilising networks, the use of "collective strolls", digital communication and mutual advocacy of local elites

The thesis will then assess the impact of the documentary *Under the Dome* and analyse its value as a mobilising resource, previous research only considers the documentary from a media perspective. Following from this the Chengdu protests,

and the symbolic framing by the protesters as well as the reaction by the local government will be analysed using the aforementioned social movement theories. The materials used will be digital media reports from outside of China since the stories were subjected to censorship within the mainland. The thesis will posit the Chengdu protests as a bottom-up organic mobilisation that did not require the knowledge or expertise of environmental activists nor did it enlist the aid of elites for policy advocacy. Since the protests have yet to be discussed in academic literature there will be a heavy reliance on news sources and commentators, though original analysis using a synthesis of social movement theory and rights consciousness will also be employed.

The new Environmental Law and its promises of greater public participation will then be placed in the context of environmental contention. The analysis will focus on the tension and duality of the CCP's actions of democratising environmental governance within an authoritarian structure. Since environmental NGO's, activism and litigation are themselves significant topics and deserving of much more detailed discussion, a delimitation of this thesis will be the lack of scope given to this area.

2. Literature Review
2.1.   Asian Values and Human Rights

The need for addressing the discourse on Asian values and human rights is precisely to de-bunk the concept that human rights is fundamentally incompatible in Chinese society due to a perceived innate cultural characteristic. This section also serves as a literary review to authors who have challenged the notions of human rights and cultural relativism

To attribute Asian values wholly to Lee Kuan Yew's rhetoric would be as misguided as it would be to take the Chinese Communist Party's rejection of 'Western values'[10] at face value and assume that cultural relativism renders the debate on human rights in China moot. Firstly, one must appreciate not only the vastness and diversity of Asia

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[10]Nectar Gan "China's Xi Jinping warns Communist Party schools against 2Western Capitalist' values", *South China Morning Post,* May 1, 2016, http://www.scmp.com/news/china/policies-politics/article/1940396/chinas-president-xi-jinping-warns-communist-party

but also look to the Sino-centrism of the Western conceived "East Asia". As Jenco notes, this emerging regional identity was a response to the Japanese and Western imperialism as well as an Eastern answer to the regionalism of the Western powers[11]. The Sinologist Theodore de Bary also points to the role of historical development in constructing the idea of a singular, uniform "Asian civilisation", remarking that Asian civilisations did not resort to a communal continental identity. De Bary goes onto explain the context for why Singapore and Lee Kuan Yew became the 'voice' Asian values stating that due to its very diversity a Pan-Asian identity suited the needs of state-building[12].

The way in which Confucianism has been condemned and re-appropriated by successive governments since the fall of the Qing dynasty reveals the precariousness, superficiality and cynicism of state ideology. The modernisation and industrialisation in Japan precipitated a 're-centering'[13] of East Asia to Tokyo. Within China itself it caused a self-reflection that concluded that Confucianism and feudal traditions were to blame for China's inability to match Japan's level of strength and prosperity. Thinkers in the late Qing era were convinced that democracy and the extending of rights to citizens was key in producing a strong state. They believed that involving the people in the political process and giving them influence over how it is governed, as Western countries had, would have the effect of instilling loyalty to the nation. It was this very lack of loyalty, they argued, that was responsible for China's weakness in the face of foreign aggression[14]. This thinking naturally shows a gross misunderstanding of the purpose of rights, seeing them as a means to the end of strengthening the nation is wholly counter-intuitive to the core principles of human rights. The dialectical relationship with rights and Confucianism did however lead to the first mention of a 'rights consciousness' by Liang Qichao, who, despite his admiration of how far westerners would go to right a wrong, was still thinking in terms of the betterment of the state[15].

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[11] Leigh Jenco, "Revisiting Asian Values," *Journal of the History of Ideas,* Vol. 74, No.2 (April 2013), pp. 237-258
[12] Theodore de Bary, *Asian Values and Human Rights* (Cambridge; Harvard University Press, 1998), pp.3-4
[13] Jenco, "Revisiting Asian Values", p.240
[14] Robert Weatherley, "Defending the Nation: The Role of Nationalism in Chinese Thinking on Human Rights, *Democratization,* 15:2, 2008, pp.342-362
[15] *Ibid*, p.347

The opportunity to put the theory into practice with the Republican era was however short-lived and had the effect of proving to future generations and governments that civil rights and democracy only served to weaken the state. The misplaced faith and preconceived notion that democracy was the answer to China's national weakness combined with the factionalism and corruption of Republican China, led not simply to a firm rejection of democratic principles but a temporary acceptance of authoritarianism which could at least protect China from foreign aggression. Weatherely cites late Qing thinkers Liang Qichao, Yan Fu and Kang Youwei who supported the curtailing of freedoms in preference for a powerful state and witnessing the fracturing of the state it was concluded that it was precisely the spread of libertarianism that made China weak[16].

Such an analysis naturally resonates with Confucian ideals of a benevolent leader who knows best and every citizen following their duty for the improvement of society as a whole. What is ironic about such a conclusion is that the traditional 'Asian' criticism of civil and political rights being meaningless if the citizens do not even have enough to eat is precisely what voided those rights and failed to produce a strong state. To think that suddenly granting such rights to such a large population, most of which was rural and illiterate would cure the ills of a rapidly declining power demonstrates a lack of understanding of the other factors at play, namely poverty and illiteracy. Not to mention that China was attempting to emulate western and modernised nations, none of which wholly embraced the liberal ideals they so passionately espoused.

This supports the idea of human rights being the result of social construction and evolving in response the historical context and changing power dynamics of a society. The late Qing thinkers were indeed correct that China was not ready for rights consciousness, because it is not something that can be encouraged form the top down, its very definition implies that it must be bottom up. The incongruence of economic development and centralised despotic rule leading to demands for greater political inclusion is a pattern visible throughout the European nations.

What those thinkers failed to take into account was that Japan's immense strength and military build-up following the Meiji restoration had nothing to do with a democratic awakening. The nationalism in Japan was fuelled by a realisation that the imperialism

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[16] *Ibid*, p.348

of the western powers had to be met by strength in Asia in order to be effectively resisted. Japan had previously suffered humiliation by the US when Mathew Perry forced the country open, it had learned its lesson. Unfortunately for China that lesson came too late and after much bloodshed.

This brief historical analysis is to give some context to the perceived Chinese hostility to human rights, the conception, discourse and narratives have developed almost completely in response to western influence. Just as with Marxism, China tried to jump forward to democracy and rights directly from feudalism, skipping industrialisation. Today, the ways in which China experimented with rights at the beginning of the 20th century are not referenced in contemporary human rights discourse criticising China, what is cited heavily is 'Chinese exceptionalism'.

China may have taken the step to integrate itself into the international community by publishing its 1991 white paper on human rights, but it has done so whilst rejecting the pressure from western countries and so has reverted to the defence of Asian values. Again, this position is largely a result of historical events and development as is evidenced by the chief narrative for interpreting how China fits into the international sphere is defensive nationalism, relying heavily on sovereignty as a justification for resisting criticism of its human rights record. Furthermore, studies show that there is overwhelming trust and satisfaction with the central government across the urban and rural spectrum, with satisfaction decreasing correlatively with each decreasing level of government[17]

2.2.   Rights vs Rules Consciousness

Following on from Chinese experiences with rights and the CCP's current stance, it is paramount to consider the Euro-centric human rights language that is used to analyse the rise of contentious politics in China. Elizabeth Perry traces a version of rights talk in China back to Confucius and Mencius, who wrote that each social status came with a duty to the collective and as such, the Emperor and the state's legitimacy rested upon their ability to provide welfare and a minimum standard of living[18]. One of the

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[17] Saich, 2012, pp.7-8

[18] Elizabeth J. Perry, 'Chinese Conceptions of "Rights": From Mencius to Mao-and Now', *Perspectives on Politics,* March 2008, Vol. 6/No.1, p.38

fundamental notions in Confucianism is the concept of duty, which is one of defining features of modern Chinese society and is often seen as in natural opposition to a 'right'. Lu and Koehn point to the overlapping meanings of 'duty' and 'responsibility' in ancient societies such as China and Greece, noting that the modern understanding of 'responsibility' has come to mean the responsibility where one should abide by an agreement or contract[19]. Interestingly Lu and Koehn extend this interpretation for almost all social interactions in modern society, describing them as an "interlocking network of general responsibilities"[20].

Since duties and responsibility requires the following and observance of rules, there must be an over-arching rule by which the head of state follows. In ancient China, this is the Mandate of Heaven (*tianming* 天命), which Elizabeth Perry describes as being ancient China's way of rationalising rebellion and the removal of certain leaders[21]. For Mencius, to keep the Mandate of Heaven there is an obligation and duty of the state to provide a decent well-being. As Perry notes, this was not expressed in the language of rights, however, he did establish a link between state legitimacy and well-being, with this link there is thus the allowance of claim-making by Chinese citizens[22]. This excavating of Chinese philosophy to identify notions of rights or claims-making is what Peter Uvin describes as the empiricist approach for reconciling human rights and cultural relativism. This approach entails much work in demonstrating that old norms and concepts can be fitted into the modern, liberal, secular language of rights. Uvin notes the that criticism of this approach almost completely negates its position, writing that groups that grant certain rights to themselves are doing it for the justification not that they deserve those rights on the basis of their humanity but rather on their belonging to a group. This negation is paramount, Uvin argues, because it is the very basis of the human rights concept[23].

There is therefore a danger in analysing Mencian thought, searching for 'rights' parallels. This is precisely why Elizabeth Perry warns not to interpret Chinese rebellion or protest as a manifestation of rights consciousness but instead the continual enforcement by the people of rules set by the state for the lower level

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[19] Xiaohe Lu & Daryl Koehn, 'On Responsibility in China', *Journal of Business Ethics,* (2015) 127; 608
[20] *Ibid,* pp.609
[21] Perry (2008), p.39
[22] *Ibid,* pp.38
[23] Peter Uvin, *Human Rights and Development* (CT; Kamarian Press, 2004) pp.26

officials to follow; what Perry calls 'rules consciousness'[24]. Perry references the 19th century sinologist Thomas Meadows, in highlighting the importance of the 'right to rebel' in guaranteeing stability, which is in opposition to western rebellions because they do not seek to subvert and revolt but rather to maintain the system[25].

In deciding whether any protest or incidence of mobilisation we witness in China is an example of rights consciousness or rules consciousness it is necessary first to analyse whether these two meanings are genuinely different. In seeking this aim, we can take the philosophical approach, which according to Uvin states that our innate human nature will inevitably lead to both human rights and development[26]. This approach is naturally attractive as it attempts to go beyond cultural relativism to find what is common at the most fundamental level of human society. In the language of human rights, this typically leads us to the concept of human dignity[27].

Irene Bloom, in searching for elements of equality and inner humanness, points to the Analects 17:2, in which can be found an egalitarian phrase stating that despite doing things differently in practice, our inner nature is close (*xingxiang ye jin, xixiang yuanye* 性相近也，习相远也)[28]. This inner humanness could be said to further the inclusivity of human rights than western thought did with the American and French revolutions which considered the ability to become a citizen as a pre-condition to being able to claim rights. This could satisfy the requirements for a philosophical point of departure for determining whether Confucian concepts should be described as rules or rights consciousness. Of course, history does not show that Chinese emperors nor governments enacted such idealistic declarations, the same could be said for the West, however. As Lynn Hunt points out, the framers of the French and American declarations had no intention of true universalism and inclusivity, despite it being that

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[24] Perry (2008), p.45
[25] *Ibid,* pp.45
[26] Uvin, (2004), pp.27
[27] See Oscar Schachter, "Human Dignity as a Normative Concept", *American Journal of International Law,* Vol.77, Issue 4, 1983, pp.848-854 & Jurgen Habermas, "The Concept of Human Dignity and the Realistic Utopia of Human Rights", *Metaphilosophy,* Vol.41, Issue.4, 2010, pp.464-480 & Jack Donnelly, "Human Rights and Human Dignity: An Analytic Critique of Non-Western Conceptions of Human Rights", *American Political Science Review,* Vol.76, Issue 2, 1982, pp.303-316 & Christopher McCrudden, "Human Dignity and Judicial Interpretation of Human Rights", *European Journal of International Law,* Vol.19, No.4, 2008.
[28] Irene Bloom, "Mencian Confucianism and Human Rights," in *Confucianism and Human Rights,* ed. W.M Theodore de Bary and Tu Weiming (New York; Columbia University Press, 1998), p.102

point in history when the 'crystallisation' of human rights, based on western philosophy, occurred[29].

The development of history however, is not crucial to the philosophical approach, the aim is merely to identify common fundamental concepts about human morality. While liberal and Confucian conceptions of the state are vastly different, this difference can be articulated through the binary relationship between Isaiah Berlin's two concepts of freedom[30]. Chinese society does not view the state as an adversarial authority nor does it view the individual as an abstract being that has no metaphysical ties to society, the concept of negative freedom and restricting the government's actions to protect citizens simply does not apply. In the Chinese conception of society, the individual is defined by their place in society.

As Chung-Ying Cheng notes, a human person's vey basis for their definition as an individual comes from their ability to develop relationships with those around them, the duty to be virtuous comes from an injunction to develop oneself in relation to social integration. From this Cheng argues that virtue could be interpreted as a right just as much a duty, insofar as there is a recipient as well a duty-holder, there is no reason why the recipient could not be said to be holding a right[31]. The implication of this philosophical excavating is that a rights-consciousness drawn from Confucian language is not impossible to imagine, in addition the dichotomy of rights versus rules consciousness need not be binary but complimentary.

The previously mentioned 'Mandate of Heaven' is another fundamental concept in Chinese philosophy that can easily be placed alongside western liberal thought. The Mandate places a duty upon the state to provide for the well-being of the people, as previously mentioned the ability of the state to provide is linked directly to its legitimacy. This obligation makes the state a duty-bearer, by extension does this not make the people rights-holders?

The Mandate goes beyond the Emperor himself, there is an almost divine-like duty of the people to rebel and replace a failed leader, not too far from the proclamation of

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[29] Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights,* (New York; W.W Norton & Co.), pp.19-20
[30] Isaiah Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty,* (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1969)
[31] Chung-Ying Cheng, "Transforming Confucian Virtues into Human Rights", in *Confucianism and Human Rights,* eds. W.M Theodore de Bary and Tu Weiming (New York, Columbia University Press, 1998), pp.145-6

Thomas Jefferson that rebellion is not only a good thing but necessary[32]. The Mandate can also easily be compared to the Lockean understanding of state legitimacy where the government carried the obligation to preserve basic rights. Though these rights were negative and concerned the government refraining from action, if we take the point of departure to be what is the benchmark of legitimacy for a state authority in relation to its population, there is a commonality in terms of state duty. Even refraining from action in the name of negative liberty still requires action, for example the central government is responsible for ensuring that its agents do not torture citizens – there is still an active role for the state.

This is where we can draw similarities between rule and rights consciousness and refute Elizabeth Perry's claim that they are mutually exclusive and separate in their definition. Liangjiang Li uses the example of the Anyuan retirees protesting over their pensions, while Perry argues it is a case which clearly demonstrates that Chinese citizens protest in order to force their local government to abide by the rules set by the central government, Li counters that their claims go beyond rules consciousness. While both Li and Perry agree that rules consciousness is a force for preserving stability rather than subverting state power, Li points to the retirees demonstrating in the street without permission from the Public Security Bureau, arguing that in doing so, they transcended rules consciousness. Li further articulates that the demonstrators discourse, in claiming that the Communist Party was no longer a party of the workers, can be interpreted to show that they directly challenged the very legitimacy of the ruling elite by demanding that the Party abide by its own principles[33].

This type of claiming by the workers was targeting not just the legitimacy of the Party but also its commitment to its very own ideological basis. They did not reference a specific article in the constitution but instead appealed to the very purpose of the Chinese state, a claim that would fit the requirements of the right to rebel and question's the Communist Party's 'Mandate of Heaven'. This all can be compared to the concept of 'natural law', there is no need, as Li argues, for the lack of institutionalised rights to block Chinese citizens from asserting rights or recognising

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[32] Darren Staloff. *Hamilton, Adams, Jefferson: The Politics of Enlightenment and the American Founding*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2005. See pp. 305-9 on "'A Little Rebellion Now and Then is a Good Thing': Revolutionary Activism."
[33] Liangjiang Li, "Rights Consciousness and Rules Consciousness in Contemporary China". *The China Journal,* No.64 (July 2010), pp. 49-51

the need for rights[34]. In order to enforce a rule, one must have the right to demand the authority to enforce the rule, this can be applied to the environmental protests that this thesis will focus on. Demanding that the government enforce the very rules that it supposedly bounds itself by requires the right to even make such a demand, that right is under threat with the lack of judicial independence, restrictions on the freedom of information, assembly and the press.

Yu Jianrong strengthens the argument that Chinese citizens, farmers in particular, have directly 'accessed' rights consciousness in questioning the legitimacy of the Party by referencing concepts such as popular sovereignty, direct elections, transparency and accountability[35].

The use of farmers and workers for demonstrating rights consciousness is significant, the focus on subsistence rights is not simply Party rhetoric, workers' strikes and protests have perhaps received the most academic attention out of all of China's contentious politics[36]. This is also due to the fact that workers' protests and strikes are one of the main sources for protest across China, alongside is environmental issues, lands and seizures and corruption[37]. The relevance and importance of rights consciousness to this thesis can be reiterated; in order to enforce the government to abide by the very rules concerning air quality citizens must invoke their rights to demand action. Negative liberty and positive liberty are very much intertwined with the relationship between rules and rights consciousness; the government must *refrain* from closing down public spaces, censoring discussion about the smog, interfering in legal cases concerning air pollution to allow the citizens to demand government *action.*

Li makes a significant point in his conclusion stating that rules and rights consciousness are not mutually exclusive and that the state's authoritarian power structure and repression of the manifestation of rules consciousness will most likely enhance rights consciousness[38]. Contentious politics in China is an overly complex issue, as O'Brien and Stern point out, social movement theory has only touched

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[34]*Ibid,* pp. 53-4

[35] Yu Jianrong 于建嵘, *Dangdai Zhongguo nongmin de weiquan kangzheng* 当代中国农民的维权抗争, (Zhongguo wenhua chu ban she 中国文化出版社, 2007), pp. 496-7, 487

[36] Kevin J. O'Brien, eds. *Popular Protest in China,* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press 2008)

[37] https://chinachange.org/2016/07/06/the-man-who-keeps-tally-of-protests-in-china/

[38] Li (2010), pp.65

lightly upon China and only China experts can appreciate the rich diversity implicit in a topic such as contention, with variations drawn along the region, the grievance, the social group and the level of government involved[39].

Concerning air pollution, not only is the issue indiscriminate and nationally widespread, it is exceedingly difficult to invoke the law as a pollution victim, this means that those citizens demanding clean air are going beyond rules consciousness and demanding the right to a clean environment, which inherently requires institutional and structural changes to the Chinese government and the levels of participation open to the population.

3. Social Movement Theory
3.1.　　Framing

The study of frames in social movement theory is the study of how activists interpret their grievance and use this interpretation to turn a social issue into a mobilising device. Snow and Benford underscore the importance of framing in the mobilisation process by referring to them as an embellishment or highlighting of a social injustice which may have been previously tolerable or accepted but is recast as unjust or immoral[40]. The study of frames involves analysing the intersection of culture and mobilisation, since culture gives meaning to society and constructs our interpretation of the surrounding world, there is an inherent link between cultural meaning and the formation of a movement. However, Tarrow notes that movements do not directly source cultural symbols as that would inhibit challenging the status quo which typically employs traditional cultural symbols, instead of direct adaptation there is a need to align frames to a grievance [41].Gamson warns that drawing everyday people to everyday injustices is not an easy task due to their private and varied interpretations,

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[39] Kevin J. O'Brien & Rachel E. Stern, "Introduction" in *Popular Protest in China,* Kevin J. O'Brien ed. (Cambridge, Harvard University Press 2008)

[40] David E. Snow & Robert Benford, "Master Frames and Cycles of Protest", in *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory,* Aldon Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller, eds. (New Haven, Yale University Press 1992), pp.137

[41] Sydney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics 2nd*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 110

with this, Gamson argues that for the "collective adoption" of frames of injustice they must be shared in a "public way"[42].

William Hurst argues that while scholarly research has moved away from a structuralist approach in terms of analysing the mobilising mechanism of framing towards a more contructionist approach that recognises greater agency, Hurst claims that the perceptions of individuals and their motivations is "powerfully conditioned by the structural setting they live in"[43]. One could argue that this is particularly true for an authoritarian state such as the PRC, where Tarrow talks about shifting people out of their complacency into action in a contentious context[44], Chan and Ngai argue that social movements in China cannot mobilise by targeting the central government; there simply can be no direct targeting of the Party's legitimacy or ideology as there would be swift and merciless repression in response[45]. This relates back to the previous chapter's discussion of rights and rules consciousness and the argument that Chinese citizens mobilise merely to enforce the central governments rules on the local government. O'Brien and Li help to counter this argument with their observance of the villagers' belief that they stood a better chance of getting justice if they put forward their grievance to the central leaders rather than local leaders[46]. This suggests that challenging the governance of the local authority's is not necessarily the result of a lack of rights consciousness but merely the only avenue of contentious political engagement available in such a strict authoritarian regime.

It is also important to note that such mobilisation is well established in China with the *xinfang* petitioning system, whereby the central government is directly appealed to in the name of a local grievance. More significantly, as Sidney Tarrow argues, while there is not much room for optimism that such contention will lead to the changes that

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[42] William Gamson, "The Social Psychology of Social Action," in *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, Aldon D. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller, eds. (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1992(, pp.73
[43] William Hurst, "Mass Frames and Worker Protest" in *Popular Protest in China,* Kevin J. O'Brien ed. (Cambridge, Harvard University Press 2008)
[44] Tarrow, 1998, pp.112
[45] Chris King-ChiChan & Pun Ngai, "The Making of a New Working Class?" A Study of Collective Actions of Migrant Workers in South China. *The China Quarterly,* No.198, 2009, pp.289
[46] Kevin J. O'Brien & Liangjiang Li, *Rightful Resistance in Rural China* (West Nyack, NY, Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp.

petitions did in 19th century Britain, it is such small incremental changes that can bring about regime change[47].

There is, therefore, a clear relationship between the role of framing and apparent lack of invocation of rights – which typically not only challenge the central government but their very mode of governance. The invocation of a natural right challenges the constitution of a state and therefore the very foundations of a government's legitimacy. Zuo and Benford write, in relation to framing, that even the 1989 pro-democracy movement was careful and framed their protests in terms of corruption within the leadership rather than questioning the Party's legitimacy[48]. With this strategical framing, not only can the movement avoid immediate repression (though not in the case of the pro-democracy movement) but they can also co-opt the central government as an ally, as it is in their interests to punish (or at least appear to) local leaders' abuse of power for personal gain[49]. Xiaoying Qi notes that in other areas of contention, mobilising agents do not generally employ framing strategies that challenge central government policy. Looking to the migrant workers, who, rather than take issue with the restructuring of state-owned enterprises target the lower-levels deals between managers and local officials[50].

The role of framing is essentially the method of interpretation of a social injustice, identifying who is to blame for this injustice. This is done by "drawing on inherited collective identities" and "defining the enemies by their real or imagine attributes and evils"[51]. One could ponder about why movements do not recognise the larger structural policies or the central government as being this enemy, why they focus on the symptoms of those policies that breed corruption between the state-owned companies and local leaders. Why never address the structure that give way to their injustices?

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[47] Sydney Tarrow, "Prologue" in *Popular Protest in China,* Kevin J. O'Brien ed. (Cambridge, Harvard University Press 2008), pp. 10

[48] Jiping Zuo & Robert Benford, "Mobilisation process and the 1989 Chinese Democracy movement", *The Sociological Quarterly,* Vol.36, No.1, 1995, pp.142

[49] Yongshun Cai, *Collective Resistance in China.* (Stanford, Stanford University Press 2010), pp.71

[50] Qi Xiaoying, "Social Movements in China: Augmenting Mainstream Theory with Guanxi", *Sociology,* Vol.51, No.1, 2017, p.8

[51] Russell Hardin, *One for All: The Logic of Group Conflict.* (Princeton, Princeton University Press 1995), quoted in Sydney Tarrow , *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics 2nd*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp.22

William Hurst's analysis of the framing of worker's protests can be perhaps provide some answers, Hurst looks to regional political economy to explain why, despite why laid-off workers across China do not generate collective actions frames nation-wide that speak to their social class. Hurst points out very importantly that workers are bound to their regional political economy and they all experience the manifestations of central planning vastly differently, what stands out above all is the effectiveness of frames which resonate with the lived experience[52].

This is where Hurst employs the term "mass frame", defining it as a framing mechanism which exists in an authoritarian context and is shaped by "loosely organised individuals" which manifest not as "deliberate efforts to interpret" but pre-existing interpretations for those who are not "inclined or permitted to engage in open collective efforts[53].

This frame of analysis has much potential to be employed in discerning the framing of environmental contention, air pollution may seem to be a phenomenon which would affect the Chinese population without discrimination but as even the successful anti-PX campaigns show, industrial polluting sites will simply be moved to a poorer region. In addition, research has established that factors such as economic dependency, information dissemination, health effects, and knowledge of pollution are key in determining whether contentious mobilisation will occur in a badly polluted area[54]. The changes in framing that occur post-*Under the Dome* in the Chengdu protest will be a main point of analysis, where before anti-PX protests not only found in success in collective action but avoiding repression due to their localised frames of injustice, the frames employed by the Chengdu protesters directly targets a nation-wide phenomenon thereby having potentiality for collective action across different cities.

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[52] William Hurst (2008),pp.78-83

[53] *Ibid,* pp.84

[54] See Benjamin van Rooij, "The People vs. Pollution: understanding citizen action against pollution in China", *Journal of Contemporary China*, 19:63 (2010), 55-77 & Yanhua Deng & Guobin Yang, "Pollution and Protest in China: Environmental Mobilisation in Context", *The China Quarterly,* Vol.214, June 2013, pp.321-336 & Kenneth A. Gould, "The Sweet smell of money: economic dependency and local environmental political mobilisation", *Society and Natural Resources,* Vol.4, No.2, 1991, pp.133-150

3.2. Mobilisation

Possibly the biggest challenge facing any burgeoning social movement in China, or perhaps even preventing the phenomenon being granted 'social movement' status is mobilising under the authoritarian government system. Phillip Stalley and Dongning Yang argue that despite growing environmentalism in China there is no social movement, in that there is an absence of sustained contentious action as well as a lack of organisations or individuals who provide a role in linking the scattered and spontaneous protests that can be categorised as contentious[55]. Similarly, Tarrow underlines the importance of leadership and organisation in transforming contention into a coherent movement, whether it be through formal leadership or a leader emerging out of the experience of struggle[56]. However, Elizabeth Perry writes that established theories of mobilisation and its negative relationship with strong states do not fit the Chinese experience, where the regime can instead have a pro-active role[57]. Xi Chen describes the *xinfang* petition system as an example of "institutional conversion" whereby state institutions, rather than inhibiting collective action can actually be used to channel and facilitate it[58].

This is but one of the aspects of resource mobilisation that must be considered in the unique Chinese context, the others are the internet and the role of *guanxi*. For the latter, we can turn again to Xiaoying Qi's augmentation of the cultural trait with traditional mobilisation theory, this is necessary because unlike in most states where mobilisation has been extensively studied, it is illegal in China to engage in collective action through a civic organisation. The example of workers unions, for example demonstrates that civic organisations exist primarily for state control rather than a channel for expressing concerns or grievances[59].

Any student of Chinese society, politics or business will be very much aware of the importance of *guanxi*, it is chiefly characterised by a horizontal form of exchange of

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[55] Phillip Stalley & Dongning Yang, "An Emerging Environmental Movement in China?", *The China Quarterly,* Vol.186, 2006, pp.335
[56] Tarrow, 1998, pp.123
[57] Elizabeth J. Perry, *Challenging the Mandate of Heaven: Social Protest and State Power in China* (Armonk, N.Y: Sharpe, 2002), pp.xxi
[58] Xi Chen, "Collective Petitioning and Institutional Conversion", in *Popular Protest in China,* Kevin J. O'Brien ed. (Cambridge, Harvard University Press 2008)
[59] Xiaoying Qi, 2017, pp.6

power, most often political and economic that circumvents formal bureaucratic power structures. Creating *guanxi* networks involves the long-term cultivation of personal relationships with the aim of acquiring access to that which is either not formally permitted or is simply otherwise unavailable without the connection. The lack of formal networks for the organisation of collective action therefore makes *guanxi* all the more important for mobilisation as it provides an alternative informal network. Qi notes how activists utilise *guanxi* networks in gaining access to journalists, local officials in order to not only voice their grievances but also to reduce the likelihood of repression[60].

While *guanxi* may aid in facilitating mobilisation it is also an important factor in cultivating the ubiquity of corruption in Chinese society and government and by extension plays a part in creating disenfranchisement and frustration with the power structure that leads to rights violations. Lai notes that the result of this discontent is usually the cause of contentious collective action and the violent disruption of public order[61].

Steinhardt and Wu analyse four dimensions that characterise popular contention since note the early 1990's, the first is 'narrow protest constituencies. Most protests were small and 'cellular', these were rural protests where collective action was facilitated by social ties in villages, factories, residential compounds, in cases such as these demonstrate what Edwards and McCarthy refer to as 'cultural resources', a resource which they claim is widely available and does not necessitate tactical knowledge of mobilising a movement[62]. In this case the mobilising network through the cultural ties of *guanxi* outweighed the significance of the mobilising grievance itself, as Steinhardt and Wu note, groups with similar grievances rarely linked up across social or geographical boundaries[63].

The exclusivity of protests links to the second dimension of popular protests; exclusive mobilising grievances. The factors that pushed citizens to mobilise and the

[60] *Ibid,* pp.5

[61] Hongyi Lai, "Uneven opening of China's society, economy and politics: Pro-Growth authoritarian governance and protests in China", *Journal of Contemporary China,* Vol.18, No.67, 2010), pp.827-830

[62] Bob Edwards and John D. McCarthy, "Resources and Social Movement Mobilisation" in *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements,* eds. David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule & Hanspeter Kreisi (Malden; Blackwell Publishing, 2007, 2nd ed), pp.126

[63] Steinhard & Wu; 2015, pp.64

aims they sought were strictly limited to relieving their immediate predicament, such as compensation or the relocating of a polluting plant. The exclusivity of the claims and the social networks further limits public awareness of such issues as well as limits the capacity for further contention. The third dimension thus relates to awareness and the scope and timing of claims, the claims only concern policy implementation rather than policy making[64]. This relates back to the relationship between rules and rights consciousness discussed in the literature review, as Liangjiang Li importantly notes, rather than viewing their relationship as dichotomous they should be viewed within a dialectical process. The two can exist within the mind of an individual, if their efforts to invoke central laws or even non-existing laws are impinged, such individuals may develop a distrust of the central authorities[65].

If the distinction between rules and rights consciousness is the target of the protests, then the fourth dimension can perhaps answer the question of how to reconcile the chasm between grievances against policy implementation and policy planning. Stienhardt and Wu's final dimension is the separation of policy advocacy and protest, which they claim in the cases of the urban anti-PX campaigns began to disappear[66].

The internet plays an undeniably important role as an informal network, particularly in urban areas. The internet's role in the facilitation of collective action, according to Huang and Yip, manifests in four ways; the internet as an information-disclosure platform; a discussion platform; a mobilisation structure and a coordinator of external allies[67]. The capacity for the internet as a channel of mobilisation is all the greater as the number of netizens who become more adept and savvy at subverting state control, the internet can therefore be classified as one of Edwards and McCarthy's typologies of social movement resources, namely human resources as this category includes skills and experience[68].

Its most significant aspect in relation to contention is, according to Guobin Yang, is the use of language and symbolism which have always played important roles in

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[64] Kevin O'Brien & Liangjiang Li, *Rightful Resistance in Rural China,* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 122
[65] Li; 2010, pp.65-6
[66] Steinhardt & Wu; 2015, pp. 64-6
[67] Ronggui Huang & Ngai-ming Yip, "Internet Activism in Urban China: A case Study of Protests in Xiamen and Panyu", *Journal of Comparative Asian Development,* Vol. 11, No.2 (December 2012), pp.201
[68] Edwards & McCarthy,

protest movements[69]. In China, 'netizens' have come up with creative and unique ways to subvert the government censors, utilising homophones in the Chinese language to criticise government policy or even the censorship itself[70]. The term "collective stroll" was used in each incidence of anti-PX mobilisation, as was the use and speed of SMS messaging in city networks to outpace censors, these forms of mobilisation were also used in Chengdu, though notably with much less success.

While collective petitioning and the use of social media are important resources for mobilisation, as Edwards and McCarthy note the simple availability of resources is not sufficient for collective action, what is needed to convert these resources into mobilisation is coordination and strategy[71].

3.3.   Political Opportunity

The challenge of applying theories of mobilisation in China is the strength of the repressive state, when mobilisation is possible it is either because of the co-operation of elites through the use of *guanxi* networks or greater tolerance by the central government for street protests which erupt out of frustration for local corruption. David Meyer argues that understanding an activists' agency requires understanding the political context, this could not be more important in China if one desires to understand how the Communist Party has managed to avoid any large-scale contention since 1989[72]. Political opportunity structures can be used to analyse a wide breadth of social movement activities, be they protests or mobilisation via organisations. In relation to China, these theories do not fit so neatly as NGO's do not act contentiously, therefore the visible organised environmental movement may not even be described as a movement within in the theoretical confines of social movement theory. The sparseness and spontaneity of environmental protests also presents an analytical challenge as there is no cross-city co-ordination, though the

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[69] Guobin Yang, "Contention in Cyberspace", in *Popular Protest in China,* Kevin J. O'Brien ed. (Cambridge, Harvard University Press 2008), pp. 129

[71] Edwards & McCarthy; 2007, pp.116

[72] David Meyer, "Protest and Political Opportunities", *Annual Review of Sociology,* Vol. 30, 2004, pp.128

increasing frequency can provide some evidence that a form of rights consciousness is growing in place of coordinated contention.

 This highlights the importance of placing great emphasis on political opportunity in this thesis, since the greatest focus of Beijing's effort is to ensure that political opportunity remains closed to inhibit any attempt for movements to 'link-up' across provinces. The challenge facing Beijing is not necessarily mobilisation but the playing of 'fast and loose' with opening and closing political opportunity at certain junctures. Arguably the environment is an issue which has the greatest chance of widening political opportunity, other issues of contention such as labour rights and corruption, have indeed been behind many of the 'mass incidents' since the 1990's but the environment has an undeniable visibility as well as international attention. Xie and Heijden, in their study on environmental movements and political opportunities, attempt to adapt traditional political opportunity structure to the authoritarian Chinese context, whose style of governance is closed but most importantly lacks an independent judiciary. Xie and Heijden stress the dilemma the Communist Party faces in dealing with social movements, either preserving the authoritarian model, which in the face of environmental challenges could backfire or loosening the strict control to allow the civil sector to flourish which could open up political opportunity and also thus threaten the party's control[73].

One of the crucial findings in Xie and Heijden's study is the decentralisation of the of the Chinese government, popularly thought to be highly centralised with Beijing in total control, the transition to a market economy has allowed for greater provincial autonomy, though chiefly in terms of tax revenue and spending[74]. The significance of this in relation to environmental protection is that more room is given to NGO's to focus on environmental governance, as the state has receded significantly in its responsibilities with the growth of the market and with little interest in environmental protection coming from provincial authorities, the number of Environmental NGO's grew from 2768 in 2005 to 3539 in 2008[75]. Despite this rapidly increasing number, the eNGO's aretaking up the role of environmental governance, essentially filling in

[73] Lei Xie & Hein-Anton Van Der Heijden, "Environmental Movements and Political Opportunities: The Case of China". *Social Movement Studies,* Vol.9, No.1, 2010, pp.55-6
[74] *Ibid,* pp.55
[75] Xueyong Zhan & Shui-Yan Tang, "Political Opportunities, Resource Constraints and Policy Advocacy of Environmental NGO's in China

the gaps that the state is unable to fill. However, Xie and Heijden argue that this illustrates the weak political output structure that has emerged since the 1990's, in conjunction with a loosening of the media, they argue that the channels and points of access for environmental movements has increased[76].

The main focus of political opportunity for this thesis will be protests rather than NGO's however, as the central question is concerned with the applicability of rights consciousness it is necessary to analyse the factors that encourage or discourage people to go out in protest. If we separate the organised mobilisation of environmental NGO's from the mobilisation of street protesters we can better understand the lack heterogeneity in the Chinese state apparatus. While there is certainly linkage in terms of public awareness of environmental issues, public protests are naturally more likely to receive repression than an NGO, Gamson writes that movements that make fundamental demands are more likely to be repressed[77]. While many of the rural and urban environmental protests that have met violence or repression were certainly not making fundamental claims, they did perhaps threaten the legitimacy of local elites. This brings us back to the underlying linkages between local corruption and environmental degradation.

The increasing frequency of environmental related protests seen with the backdrop of political opportunity would suggest that a cost/benefit analysis can be of use, Tarrow writes that this can go either way, those with nothing to lose can be the most likely to protest as they face the least cost, however those with the most to lose can also be the most likely to protest as they face a greater threat from inaction. In terms of environmental protests, rural citizens stand to lose the most as they tend to face much greater degradation than urban residents if they fail to act, though conversely urban residents face a much greater chance of being arrested or met with violence for mobilising within a city.

 The success of the anti-PX protests suggests that there is a greater tolerance for street protests, meaning the perceived cost for urban protesters has decreased, the dramatic increase in environmental NGO's as well as Li Ke Qiang's declaration of a "War on Pollution" and the government's overall public commitment to fighting pollution has

[76] Xie & Heijden, 2010, pp.63-4
[77] William Gamson, *The Strategy of Social Protest.* 2nd ed. (Balmont, CA; Wadsworth, 1990), Ch.4

great signalling potential. Tarrow cites the importance of influential allies that extend sympathy for a movement, especially within non-democratic systems where internal resources are scarce[78].

 One of the central points of analysis in this thesis will be the effects of the contradictory stances of the central and provincial governments in their approach to environmental protest and to what extent this contradiction is in itself a form of political opportunity. The paradoxical position of the Chinese government seems to suggest that while it supports the desire for clean air and for polluters to be held accountable it wants protesters to refrain from focusing on the smog itself, as evidence by the banning of the documentary '*Under the Dome'* and repression faced by artists donning masks in Chengdu. This reveals that the widening of political opportunity and the desire for a larger role of civil society in environmental governance is out of step with the authoritarian desire to control public discourse and draw attention away from the state's desire for continued economic growth at the expense of the environment.

4. Environmental Protests Pre-2016
4.1.   Rural Protests

In the battle for clean air and environment Chinese villagers are on the frontline for politically contentious action as well as being the first and most numerous victims. Owing to the exploitation of China's vast countryside for propelling China's economic boom and sustaining the surge in population in the post-World War Two era. The environmental cost to China's economic miracle is gargantuan, one-fifth of China's arable farmland is polluted[79], the Huai river in 2001 was filled with 144 million cubic metres of polluted water, desertification has doubled since the 1970's and water shortage by 2020 will exceed 50 million cubic metres[80]. Two thirds of more

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[78] Tarrow, 1998, pp.79-80
[79] Christina Larson, "China's Pollution Revolution". *Washington Monthly.* January 7th 2008. http://www.alternet.org/story/72995/china%27s_pollution_revolution
[80] Elizabeth Economy, *The River Runs Black.* (Ithaca; Cornell University Press, 2004), pp.8, 71

than 300 Chinese cities fail to meet standards set by the WHO, while in 2001 16 Chinese cities held the top places in the world for the most polluted air[81].

In rural areas, environmental issues now rank as the second major source of complaints, Chinese official sources cite "environmental mass incidents", which Yu Xiao argues glosses over the wide variety of actions involved in environmental contention[82]. Indeed, Guobin Yang, Yanhua Deng and Jun Jing found in their studies of protests in Huaxi and Dachuan villages that locals would pursue institutional avenues first before resorting contentious action, with the villagers usually seeking either compensation for damages suffered, administrative action to be taken against the polluting enterprise or the relocation of the enterprise[83].

Firstly, to consider the political opportunity that has opened and thus allowed environmental protest to take place Jun Jing points to the correlation between the passing of environmental regulations, the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency, introduction of heavy penalties for violators and the increasing number of protests, as well as greater tolerance of, in the period between 1979 and 1989[84]. However political opportunity does not necessarily lead to mobilisation, nor even necessarily a grievance claim, this is particularly true when rural citizens accept pollution and environmental degradation as part of the price for economic growth.

In Deng and Yang's study of protests in Huaxi village, they found that while the citizens had fought against chemical pollution, they tolerated pollution from a waste treatment plant that had infected the local water supply and damaged the health of the locals. The chemical plant that had been relocated only employed 20 locals out of its 1,000 employees, whilst almost every household in the adjacent village of Minghuan was involved in the business of plastic recycling[85].

The factor of economic dependency is clear and supports the case for claiming that incidences of protest in China are more a case of nimbyism rather than genuine

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[81] *Ibid,*pp. 72
[82] Yu Xiao, "Pollution as Smokescreen: Pollution-induced contention in Liushuwan Village of Zhejiang Province". *Young Scholar Workshop 2013 selected collections.* EOPS No.0030
[83] See Jun Jing, "Environmental Protests in Rural China" in *Chinese Society: Change, Conflict and Resistance,* eds. Elizabeth J. Perry & Mark Seldon, (London; Routledge, 2000) and Yanhua Deng & Guobin Yang, "Pollution and Protest in China: Environmental Mobilisation in Context", *The China Quarterly,* Vol. 214, 2013, pp.327
[84] Jun Jing, 2000, pp.210
[85] Deng & Yang, 2013, pp. 331-2

environmental concern or seeking to right an injustice. It also runs contrary to Tarrow's logic of cost-benefit analysis that supports the idea of those with more to lose are more likely to act, since in this case, inaction, while dangerous to their health will ensure economic survival and stability. It is necessary to add however that Chinese cultural interactions with contentious politics should not be easily dismissed as purely a case of nimbyism when one takes into account the awareness of the villagers of the adverse health effects.

Deng and Yang instead cite the importance of community values as they found that the villagers in Huaxi made a clear distinction between 'inside' and 'outside' polluters, the villagers stated that they did not take action against 'inside' polluters because they did not want to damage relations within the neighbourhood[86]. This suggests that rather displaying nimbyism which is characterised by self-interest, the influence and role of *guanxi* plays a vital part in understanding the complex nature of Chinese society.

The framing of the Huaxi protests is what Deng and Yang found to be significant however, they discovered that while the political opportunity widened institutionally with the passing of the Environmental Impact Assessment Law in 2002 as an effort thereby providing legitimacy, it was the framing strategy of the villagers that determined the success of the resistance.

This top-down support for mobilisation can be categorised by Edwards and McCarthy as a 'moral resource'[87] in that the villagers were supported on two counts of central government regulations. While this may help explain the legitimacy of the 'piggyback claims', what aided the mobilisation process was the actions of the local authority. Exaggerated reassurances of the safety of the plant by local officials pushed the villagers to engage in unlawful tactics, such as kidnapping a local Party Secretary and destroying property.

What significance this case represents for the link between mobilisation and rights consciousness is that villagers knowingly went beyond the boundaries of merely enforcing the rules by breaking the law in their initial protest. The appeal of 'moral resource' by citing land regulations was merely strategic and does not accurately

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[86] *Ibid.,* pp. 333
[87] Edwards & McCarthy, 2007, pp.125

reflect the true grievances of the villagers, it merely demonstrates the limited political opportunity that environmental regulation allows due to its complexity. As Deng and Yang conclude in their study, the implications are that environmental protest inherently concerns other areas such as rural-urban imbalances, accountable governance and socio-economic inequality – all of which necessitate structural reform[88].

Baogang He, in a study on social protests in rural China notes that the most important issues that mobilise rural citizens are the misappropriation of land, corruption, misuse of public funds and collection of illegal fees. Baogang He's research on rural protests for democratisation at the township level supports the claim that villagers desire a system of governance whereby their interests are represented rather than that of Party cadres[89].

Jun Jing's research in Dachuan demonstrates the importance of cultural resources in mobilisation as well as the strength of collective identity in framing. The contention in Dacuan had begun in 1981 when a fertilizer factory was built nearby and its waste emptied out in to the Yellow River which provided not only drinking water but also irrigation for the village. Breaking down the analysis into the three areas of social movement theory we can identify the typology which characterises the nature of mobilisation in a rural Chinese context. Previous protest had established an obligation of the fertiliser factory to provide clean water however legal avenues were closed due to closed ties between the enterprise and the provincial government. Here we can say the political opportunity was widened, the grievance not only had a precedent but extended to the issue of judicial independence thus providing extra legitimacy to the protests, though the contention was not framed in terms of corrupt officials.

The framing drew upon Chinese cultural values, namely kinship and lineage. Over 85% of the villager's surnames were *Kong,* a prestigious name in China due to its connection to Confucius (Kongzi 孔子). Therefore, a healthy and strong lineage was of paramount importance to the villagers, which was under threat by the only source

[88] *Ibid,* pp.335
[89] Baogang He, "Social Protests, Village Democracy and State Building in China: How Do Rural Social Protests Promote Village Democracy?" in Kuah-Pearce, Khun Eng (Ed.); Guiheux, Gilles (Ed.) *Social Movements in China and Hong Kong: the expansion of protest space.* (Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2009) pp.39-40

of clean drinking water being contaminated. Within the grievance claims we can also identify an appeal to human dignity, the villages Party cadres demanded the factory owners either provide safe drinking water to the whole village or that each family member of the factory owners drink form the contaminated water. This framing strategy draws upon a call for respect for human dignity in that the villagers were asking for no more rights than those of the factory owners. An important point made in Jun Jing's analysis is that rural environmental protests are not seeking to protect the environment for the sake of environmentalism but for social justice and the protection of what constitutes a community's livelihood and well-being.

The mobilising process and framing found within rural protesting is contingent upon family ties, collective identity, within close-knit communities and threats to livelihood and are inhibited by economic dependency. Steinhardt and Wu found similar characteristics in their analysis of contentious politics since the 1990's identifying four commonalities. The first being that most protests were small and based on close social ties, the second was that mobilising factors were based on immediate or monetary interests. Anna Lora-Wainwright's research into pollution-based civic activism in rural China paints a bleak picture of the future of sustained collective action, with the desire to mobilise for a cleaner environment marked heavily by variables of economic dependency and social cohesion[90].

 The third is that the aim of the protestors is almost always retrospective justice, with a weak ability to advocate for greater public awareness. The fourth factor is the separation of protest and pubic advocacy, with contentious action only being undertaken by those immediately affected and NGO's engaging in non-political campaigns[91].

It easy to connect these factors together and identify what is preventing contentious action from developing into claims that transcend rules consciousness. While the Huaxi case demonstrated the strategical choice taken upon by the villagers both cases demonstrate the importance of collective identity in fermenting mobilisation. For both communities' the cultural value of protecting one's family and lineage proved to be

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[90] Anna Lora Wainwright, "Social and Environmental Injustice in Rural China", *Oxpol; The Oxford University Politics Blog.* June 12, 2013. Accessed at https://blog.politics.ox.ac.uk/small-details-make-for-big-injustices-re-education-through-labour-and-administrative-litigation/
[91] Steinhard & Wu, 2015, pp.64

the major factor, the degradation of the environment through the actions of the factory owners was the threat, not the mobilising grievance in and of itself.

From this, Anna Lora-Wainwright's and Yu Xiao's studies of economic survival trumping environmental threats to health we can surmise that the cultural values of family and lineage form the concept of dignity for rural Chinese citizens. This is in line with the discussion in the literature review concerning Asian values and human rights, transposing the concept of human rights into a Chinese context does not necessitate the extraditing of Chinese values of collectivity, whilst limiting the definition of dignity and respect for rights to the individual. As D. W. Y. Kwok notes, the individual within Confucianism is socially constructed by the network of interpersonal relationships and nowhere in the Chinese tradition has there been a belief or practice which has outweighed the value of human dignity and moral behaviour[92].

4.2.   Urban Protests – Xiamen Anti-PX Campaign

Having discussed rural protests and identified strong social bonds, collective identity and cultural values as being prominent factors in mobilisation, this chapter will analyse the research conducted in urban settings to identify what mobilisation resources are present in the context of large populations, social stratification and weaker collective identities.

The anti-PX protests are tremendously significant in the history of modern Chinese contention in that not since the democracy movement or the persecution of the Falun Gong has a singular issue produced collective action in various locations across China at different points in time. It is claimed by Steinhardt and Wu that Xiamen represents a transformative event in terms of repertoire of action, noting the unprecedented presence of elitist activism in mobilising popular support[93].

The contention in Xiamen was initiated from above by a local professor who happened to be a delegate to the CPCC. The professor had the support of 105 other

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[92] D. W. Y. Kwok, "On the Rites and Rights of Being Human" in Wm. Theodore de Bary & Tu Weiming (eds.) *Confucianism and Human Rights,* (New York; Columbia University Press, 1998), pp.84-5
[93] Steinhardt & Wu, 2015, p.69

delegates, one of which was the deputy governor of Fujian Province, in opposing the site of the PX plant. This elite support can be read as both an element of political opportunity and an example of resource mobilisation, just as in the Dachuan case a member of the local elite is responsible for the dissemination of information about the grievance.

Though China is not renowned for having an open political structure nor do people have any say in the decision-making process, it is its very absence that is the chief mobilising grievance. The Fujian EPB and state EPA had both demanded for an 'adjustment' of the plans for the siting of the PX plant, however the National Development and Reform Commission had ignored these demands and gone ahead with the construction plans[94]. This small bureaucratic disagreement represents a breakage within the Chinese power structure, it is such breakages that widen political opportunity.

 Tarrow makes reference to divided elites and influential allies in discussing political opportunity, stating that division between elites encourages those with a lack of resources to take the risk of collective action. Similarly, with the concept of influential allies the risk of collective action is reduced by the legitimising influence of the sympathetic ally[95].

The delegate's actions had precisely this effect, though prominent media coverage did not occur immediately due to the local government's censorship efforts to suppress information dissemination through local mass media. Huang and Yip in their study of internet activism in the Xiamen case found that the subversion of state censorship was performed by several actors. Discussions on the local forum *Xiamen Small Fish Net* covered not only the project but also discussed the censorship itself and voted overwhelmingly against the project. Dissemination was also carried out on the messaging platform QQ, as well as, and most importantly, calls for "collective strolls", despite government attempts, SMS messages were also used for calling for mass demonstrations[96]. Relating back to Edwards and McCarthy's typology of social movement resources, mobile communication in the Xiamen case demonstrates an aggregated material resource. Instant messaging apps served as a resource held by

[94] *Ibid*, p.66
[95] Tarrow, 1998, pp.79
[96] Huang & Yip, 2011, pp.209-10

individuals which was utilised as collective resource that required little expertise or monetary resources[97].

The significance of SMS messaging in the Xiamen case was researched in great detail by Jun Liu, who found that one particular text message exclaiming the dangers of the PX plant spread rapidly amongst the population of Xiamen such to the extent that citizens would greet one another by asking if they too had received the message[98]. One of the key grievances expressed in the public discourse concerned the lack of transparency and the anger at the lack of public consultation[99]. Ensuing lack of trust and counter-productive online censorship[100] culminated in calls though SMS messages for a collective peaceful stroll.

Such an unauthorised mass demonstration is not a choice of repertoire to be used lightly in China and could easily be met with harsh repression. However, several factors can be said to have influenced the central government's decision to side with the protestors against the city government. Firstly, the grievance claim being initially put forward by a local elite and member of the CPPCC had the effect of legitimising the grievance. Secondly, the legal framework meant that local government had indeed failed to deliver on an obligation set by the central government's rules. Thirdly the mobilising structures of the internet and instant messaging meant that information could easily be disseminated to the city's population. Subversion of government censors was made easier and most importantly collective action was facilitated at a rapid pace that allowed for the citizens to gather for a non-violent demonstration.

The strategic framing of the mass demonstration as "collective strolling" (*jiti sanbu* 集体散步)* was not just a way of avoiding repression but also a repertoire of action that could create solidarity and strength in numbers. The size of a demonstration can also give an indication to the regime of how many people support their cause[101]. Even with the absence of a democratic system, the logic of using "collective strolling" as a

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[97] Edwards & MCarthy, 2007, pp.128-131
[98] Jun Liu, "Mobile Communication, Popular Protests and Citizenship in China", *Modern Asian Studies,* Vol.47, No.3, 2013, pp.1005
[99] Public Consultation in the matters of industrial project planning that could harm the public was a legal requirement set by the State Council and State Environmental Protection Administration.
[100] The local government blocked sensitive words, banned publications which portrayed negative summaries of the project while local press praised the plant as a 'great project'
[101] James DeNardo, *Power in Numbers: The Political Strategy of Protest and Rebellion.* (Princeton; Princeton University Press, 1985), pp.36

strategy of protest is inherently a democratic one and acts as a visual display of the lack of input the public has in decision-making processes.

Steinhardt and Wu also found in their research interviewing participants in the demonstration that the protests were not only framed in terms of the threat to health and environment but also discontent with the local government's prioritising GDP growth over public welfare[102]. This is a significant point and one that can be analysed using Lorentzen and Scoggins' hypothesis of rising rights consciousness, one of which is a change in values[103]. They point to the almost complete lack of environmental protest before the 1980's and the drastic increase in the 2000's as demonstrative of a change in values whereby Chinese citizens previously accepted environmental degradation and poor health as a necessary sacrifice for the good of the nation. The argument is made that the increasing willingness to publicly protest reflects a growth in psychological benefit which makes the potential cost (repression, arrest, police violence) bearable, in this instance they emphasise the anti-PX protests were not just motivated by the material benefit of the plant's construction being blocked but the sense of justice being served in resisting the local government and protecting their interests[104]. This analysis is supported in the Xiamen case by the citizens going forward with the protest on June 1st even after the local government promised to suspend the plant's construction, according to Huang and Yip this was indicative of a desire to demonstrate the power of ordinary citizens[105].

In Zhong and Hwang's in-depth quantitative study on the motivations of urban residents to take to the streets in protest, they found that it was not the pollution itself that affected people's willingness to participate but rather their trust in the government[106]. These findings strengthen the notion that protests in China are moving away from nimby self-interested grievances and that institutional factors such as lack of transparency and accountability are of genuine concern to citizens to the point where they are willing to engage in contentious politics and face the risk of repression.

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[102] Steinhardt & Wu, 2015, pp.68
[103] Lorentzen & Scoggins, 2015, p.2015
[104] *Ibid.*, pp.642-3
[105] Huang & Yip, 2012, pp.210
[106] Zhong & Hwang, 2016, pp.231-2

This willingness to support a 'post-materialist' cause gives greater support to the idea of a rising rights consciousness, as Minxin Pei writes, a greater awareness of rights is correlative to a fall in public tolerance of the practices of the regime[107]. Whilst in the past, industrial plants that caused environmental degradation would solicit no protest[108], whereas in post-reform China a greater propensity has been shown for citizens to have their voices heard.

With Zhong and Hwang's findings we can conclude that in the case of pollution that practice is the lack of transparency, a defining trait of China's authoritarian institutions. Liangjiang Li's conception of rights consciousness also requires a transcending of rules consciousness by breaking the law through action[109]. The citizens of Xiamen did just this by gathering in the streets again despite the local government officially classifying the action as illegal and arresting several participants[110].

4.3. The legacy of Xiamen
– Political Opportunity and New Repertoires of Action

In terms of breaking the trend of 'nimby' protests, the success of the Xiamen protests can be seen most clearly in the anti-PX protests that occurred across the country in other large urban areas[111]. While there is no formal linkage between the protests, the knowledge and outrage about Petrochemical plants has become widespread. Commentators note that Petrochemical plants indeed conform to international safety standards and only China experiences large-scale opposition to their presence. It is

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[107] Minxin Pei, "Rights and resistance: the changing context of the dissident movement", in Elizabeth Perry and Mark Selden (eds.), *Chinese Society: Change, Conflict and Resistance,* 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2010), p.32

[108] Lorentzen & Scoggins refer to the construction of the largest steel mill in Sichuan that caused environmental degradation, but in 1965 when it was built there was no evidence of resistance. See Lorentzen & Scoggins, 2015, pp.642-3

[109] Li, 2010, p.58

[110] Huang & Yip, 2012, p.211

[111] Chengdu in 2008, Dalian in 2011, Ningbo and Shifang in 2012, Jiangmen in 2013, Maoming in 2014 and Heyuan and Jinshan in 2015.

argued therefore that it is not necessarily the pollution that is the mobilising grievance but rather the general lack of trust in government authorities[112].

The space for environmental NGO's has opened and the central government has acknowledged the need for greater public participation in environmental protection, according to Thompson there is an emerging legal framework that sets out provisions which gives citizens the right to information and consultation in the planning of industrial projects[113]. While the legal framework provided legitimacy to the protests, their legitimation was greatly aided by top-down advocacy which directly called for mobilisation.

While the presence of this legal framework would suggest that anti-PX protests are following Elizebeth Perry's rules consciousness in that citizens are demanding no more from their local government's than what has been promised at the state level. However, Lorentzen and Scoggins argue that the principal difference between a rights-conscious society and a non-rights-conscious society is the mutually self-fulfilling expectations of each other's behaviour, meaning it is not a question of changing values or government policy but rather the level of risk and the likelihood of whether others will join[114].

Lorentzen and Scoggins propose three channels through which individuals can collectively act with greater certainty of large participation, two of those, organisations and a free press, are not applicable to China, while the third channel to forming shared expectations is through unofficial person-to-person communication. This however can only explain the success of mobilisation within Xiamen itself. The following PX protests in Chengdu were not the result of instant messaging between friends but the media exposure of the event. The central government's public

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[112] See Tang Hao, "Xiamen PX: a turning point?", *China Dialogue,* January 16, 2008, https://www.chinadialogue.net/article/1626-Xiamen-PX-a-turning-point, Zhao Chu, "Anti-PX protest: The war between the Government and the People", *China Change,* June 18, 2013, https://www.chinadialogue.net/article/1626-Xiamen-PX-a-turning-point, Vivienne Zhang, "No more toxic than caffeine? The long history of anti-paraxylene protests, *Hong Kong Free Press,* July 1, 2015 https://www.hongkongfp.com/2015/07/01/px-an-explosive-word-in-china-the-long-history-of-anti-paraxylene-protests/ and Samantha Hoffman and Jonathan Sullivan, "Environmental Protests Expose Weaknesses in China's Leadership, *Forbes,* June 22, 2015, https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesasia/2015/06/22/environmental-protests-expose-weakness-in-chinas-leadership/#1da327723241
[113] Thomas Johnson, "Environmentalism and NIMBYism in China: Promoting a rules-based approach to public participation", *Environmental Politics,* Vol.19 No.3, pp.433-4
[114] Lorentz & Scoggins, 2015, pp.650-1

admonishing of local officials in the People's Daily meant that the success of the Xiamen people not only had national coverage but also tacit approval from Beijing[115].

The legitimacy of the Xiamen protests was therefore two-fold, the spread of anti-PX protests that followed were built upon this legitimacy. Anti-PX as a mobilising grievance, has a symbolic value, it functions as a marker of a lack of transparency and low-level of trust in governance and safety rather than a direct danger to health. The Xiamen plant had been relocated to the poorer town of Zhangzhou where it subsequently exploded. The day after the People's Daily testified to its safety, only confirmed to the Chinese population that their lack of trust was well-placed[116].

Gamson's analysis of movements as carriers of symbolic interests can be applied here despite the anti-PX protests not being a traditional, cohesive movement. Gamson writes that various actors may share a general frame amongst other competing frames[117]. This is certainly true in this case as the citizens are reacting to their particular local governments, however the 'imagined community' is developed across provincial borders in their strive for greater influence in decision-making, even without the network of a formal organisation or mobilising structure.

The new repertoire of action, the euphemistic, spontaneous, low-cost and subversive "collective strolling" become an effective method of mobilisation, with its success depending on the political opportunity of the city in question. Chengdu was the next city to host the silent and peaceful collective strolling to protest the planned construction of a petrochemical plant in Pengzhou, 18 miles from the city centre. The protest followed a similar pattern to Xiamen, a member of the 'elite' with expert knowledge on environmental issues sent out a text message calling on Chengdu's citizens to "Protect Chengdu" and "Restore the clear water and green mountains of Sichuan"[118]. This framing is important for facilitating collective identity based on

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[115] Jun, 2013, p.1008

[116] Li Jing, "Zhangzhou chemical plant blast highlights safety fears", *South China Morning Post,* 31st July 2013, http://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1293070/paraxylene-plant-expodes-zhangzhou

[117] William A. Gamson, "Bystanders, Public Opinion, and the Media", in David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule & Hanspeter Kriesi (eds.) *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements,* (Malden; Blackwell Publishing, 2007, 2nd ed) p. 247

[118] Edward Wong, "In China City, Protesters See Pollution Risk of New Plant", *New York Times,* May 6th 2008, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/06/world/asia/06china.html?mcubz=0

civic pride, just as in Xiamen, citizens were encouraged to engage in illegal action for a greater purpose.

The nature of collective identity in urban centres is vastly different to rural settings, where close social relationships and *guanxi* play a vital role in organisation and mobilisation and mobilising grievances depend greatly on framing, collective identity and economic dependency. Urban protesters need only a collective identity based upon their city and the collective threat faced by a polluting agent, this means that the mobilising structures for cities are extremely fluid and flexible.

The repertoire of action; a peaceful stroll, does not require the mobilisation of limited resources such as money, skill or expertise. Organisers of the Chengdu protests admitted to being directly inspired by the success of Xiamen[119], the unprecedented nature of the Xiamen protests mean that effective censorship of the event was inhibited, with even official mouthpieces of the Communist Party siding with the protesters. The most significant resource for mobilisation in the string of anti-PX protests could therefore be said to be moral, according to David Snow, a moral resource can include legitimacy and sympathetic support. Such moral resource in a strictly controlled media environment must come from above, in China's case this means official media.

Firstly, information regarding the event needs to be disseminated via channels that ordinary citizens access, and not subversive blogs or censored social media posts. Secondly the government's tarring of the Falun Gong displays the power of the official media in whipping up support or condemnation from the wider public. An article from Xinhua news agency openly praised the efforts of the Xiamen people in advancing the very social structure of China and allowing for public opinion to have an influence on policy-making[120]. The environmental element no doubt added an element of moral support since the motives of the protest were to protect their health against the interests of growth-obsessed local officials.

[119] *Ibid*

[120] Xiao Shu, "Hope that Xiamen PX Event Will Become National Milestone", *Xinhuanet,* December 1st 2014,
http://baike.baidu.com/item/%E5%8E%A6%E9%97%A8PX%E9%A1%B9%E7%9B%AE%E4%BA%8B%E4%BB%B6/5814508?fr=aladdin

According to Lynch, the use of telecommunications and blogging in China is allowing for the development of loosely-connected social systems to emerge across the country that do not need a leader or organisational network to mobilise[121]. Similarly, while the anti-PX protests are not mobilised by a national organisation and so cannot be labelled as a traditional social movement, Jun Liu points to research on digital media and political contention which suggests that protests can provide a 'blueprint' as well provide legitimacy to future protests[122]. Guobin Yang, through research on digital activism on China warns not to overlook the influence and 'imprint' of early protests on later contention that together can have a cumulative effect on a 'gradual revolution'[123]. This form of analysis is particularly relevant to the Chinese context, where environmental NGO's are unwilling to act contentiously and follow a rules-based framework for non-political reform[124]. While typically social movement theory would posit that advocacy for reform at the institutional level is necessary for the definition of a genuine political movement. Sun, Huang and Yip argue that the narrow definition of contention runs the risk of over-looking linkages between local and national NGO's and protests that are beginning to form, particularly in the context of anti-PX protests[125].

Jun Liu's study of anti-PX protests across six different cities between 2007 and 2014 analyses digital media as a learned repertoire of contention and fundamental mechanism for mobilisation. In terms of how citizens were mobilised into actually taking to the street, Liu found that the mobilising text messages were diffused amongst personal and social networks, therefore despite the widespread diffusion, there was always an element of trust as the message spread throughout each city. Liu argues that this augmentation of pre-existing social relations into digitally-facilitated mobilisation had a significant influence on the people's attitude and decision to act[126].

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[121] Daniel C. Lynch, "The Nature and Consequences of China's Unique Pattern of Telecommunications Development", in Jinquan Li (ed) *Power, Money and Media: Communication Patterns and Bureaucratic Control in Cultural China,* (Boston; Northwestern University Press, 2000), pp.182-3
[122] Jun Liu, "Digital Media, Cycle of Contention and Sustainability of Environmental Activism: The case of Anti-PX Protests in China", *Mass Communication and society,* Vol.19, No.5,2016, p.607
[123] Guobin Yang, "Technology and its Contents", *Journal of Asian Studies,* Vol.70, No.4, pp.1044-5
[124] Thomas Johnson, "Environmentalism and NIMBYism in China: promoting a rules-based approach to public participation", *Environmental Politics,* Vol.19, No.3, 2010, p.432
[125] Xiaoyi Sun, Ronggui Huang & Ngai-Ming Yip, "Dynamic Political Opportunities and Environmental Forces Linking up: A Case Study of Anti-PX Contention in Kunming", *Journal of Contemporary China,* Vol.26, No.106, p.537
[126] Jun Liu, 2016, pp.613-4

5. Smog and the next cycle of contention

5.1.   Under the Dome

While the anti-protests were, in actuality, protests against lack of transparency in decision-making and popular condemnation of local government's choosing GDP growth over the health of its citizens, air quality in general is pervasive and visceral throughout the country. Urban ambient air pollution in China is responsible for the loss of more than 25 million disability-adjusted life-years each year[127], while the economic cost of air pollution in China 2005 was estimated to be $112 billion and 5% of the country's GDP[128]. A study in 2015 found that out of 190 monitored cities in China, only 25 of them met national air quality standards[129]. Smog affects almost half a billion of China's population and is responsible for about a third of deaths[130], though the long-term health effects are difficult to attribute to smog since it is still relatively recent and studies concerning the links between health and air pollution have been conducted in much-less polluted environments such as Los Angeles[131].

Where the siting of PX plants was at the discretion of local governments, the over-reliance on out-dated energy resources and heavy industry is directly connected to central planning. The central government has made its awareness of the issue as well as its earnest intentions to combat air pollution well-known. In 2013 the Environment Minister admitted that the pollution emission "far exceeded" the environment's capacity[132]. In 2014 Li Keqiang "declared war" on pollution with the main focus being on reducing fine particulate matter known as PM 2.5 and PM 10, which are able

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[127] N. Guillerm & G. Cesari, "Fighting ambient air pollution and its impact on health: from human rights to the right to a clean environment", *International Journal of Tuberculosis and Lung Disease,* Vol.19, No.8, p.890

[128] Chuanwang sun, Xiang Yuan & Xin Yao, "Social acceptance towards the air pollution in China: Evidence from public's willingness to pay for smog mitigation", *Energy Policy,* Vol.92, 2016, pp.313-4

[129] Yan-Lin Zhang & Fang Cao, "Fine particulate matter in China at city level", *Scientific Reports,* Vol.5, 2015, https://www.nature.com/articles/srep14884

[130] Alice Yan, "Smog linked to third of deaths in China, study finds", *South China Morning Post,* December 22 2016, http://www.scmp.com/news/china/society/article/2056553/smog-linked-third-deaths-china-more-deadly-smoking-study-finds

[131] Devon Haynie, "The Clear Thing about China's Smog", *US News,* January 13, 2017, https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/articles/2017-01-13/the-health-effects-of-beijings-smog

[132] Edward Wong, "Life in a Toxic Country", *The New York Times,* 3rd August 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/04/sunday-review/life-in-a-toxic-country.html

to make their way into the blood stream[133]. Even before Li Keqiang's declaration, the government had launched a five-year Air Pollution Action Plan in 2013, which has already found some success; many cities met the 2017 target in 2015[134]. The central government also took the momentous decision to move away from GDP growth as a measure of success, however this reform was only aimed at smaller cities, rather than larger ones were strong links exist between government and industry[135].

An article in *China Dialogue* warns that government efforts at reducing air pollution still relies heavily on emergency procedures which produce only short-term relief from heavy smog and account for 20% of the improvements measured in Beijing's PM 2.5 levels[136]. These short-term measures are part of the red-alert system introduced in Beijing, where greater international and domestic pressure exists to combat the smog. Northern China usually suffers the worst 'air pollution events' due to meteorological factors causing dense smog to rest over the Beijing-Tianjin-Hubei region for days at a time. The red alert system is undoubtedly a political decision to stem pressure and public criticism, though the government must bear both political and economic costs for several days closure of industries and private vehicles, the RAND corporation estimates that 6.5% of the GDP is lost each year to pollution-related costs[137].

Such short-term solutions are clearly not sustainable, though it does signify that the government is aware of the issue and at least wants to appear that it is gradually placing the environment and well-being above the economy. However, the political structure of China, as was the issue with the PX plants, is a significant challenge in transitioning the economy away from coal which still provides 70% of the country's energy[138]. As Elizabeth Economy notes, the devolving of authority for much decision-

[133] Ben Blanchard & David Stanway, China to 'declare war' on pollution, premier says", *Reuters,* March 4, 2014, http://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-parliament-pollution-idUSBREA2405W20140305
[134] Zhang Chun, "Can China meet its 2017 air quality targets?", *China Dialogue,* January 25 2017, https://www.chinadialogue.net/article/show/single/en/9574-Can-China-meet-its-2-17-air-quality-goals-
[135] Gabriel Wildau, "Small Chinese cities steer away from GDP as measure of success", *Financial Times,* August 13, 2014, https://www.ft.com/content/a0288bd4-22b0-11e4-8dae-00144feabdc0
[136] Zhang Chun, 2017
[137] Keith Crane & Zhimin Mao, "Costs of selected policies to address air pollution in China", *RAND Corporation*, 2015
[138] Mathew Carney, "China's air pollution crisis shows no sign of ending as national fails to lower coal use", *abcnet,* January 10, 2017, http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-01-08/chinese-air-pollution-crisis-caused-by-ongoing-coal-use/8168702

making and environmental protection to the local level results in a lack of consistency throughout the country[139]. There is a substantial challenge in shifting the basis of the economy where so many cities have made their fortune, for example, Hubei, the industrial source of Beijing's smog is heavily reliant on coal for employment. This reliance is reflected by the commissioning of 200 coal-fire plants to be built in the next decades, despite the government having pledged $489 billion to renewable energy[140].

As analysed in the previous chapter, it was precisely such factors that led to contention and popular protests, the obsession with growth and poor implementation of environmental governance led to calls for reform from the bottom, though, like the mobilising grievances, those protests were localised. Where text messages calling for action spread rapidly throughout urban centres and the repertoires of protest became engrained throughout various provinces between 2007 and 2014 with varying levels of success, smog politics was ignited by another form of digital media; the documentary *Under the Dome.*

The lack of research concerning smog and the lack of monitoring before the US embassy started tracking PM 2.5 levels in Beijing in 2008 could possibly explain why the documentary *Under the Dome* became a viral hit in China. It was the first time that most Chinese citizens were given such extensive information on the exact health risks of the air pollution. CCTV journalist Chai Jing released the multimedia documentary *Under the Dome* online on February 28th, 2015, it received 117 million views and 280 million posts in just 24 hours[141].

Chai Jing had sought permission from both the NPC and the government office in charge of drafting China's energy laws which gave her the go ahead, with only one edit made for passing censors; a collaborator had advised her to cut a section which questioned China's development model[142]. The documentary's aim was not solely to explain what constitutes PM 2.5, its origins and health effects, Chai Jing also sought

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[139] Elizabeth Economy, 2004, p.116
[140] Chris Nielsen, Mun Ho, "The Real Reasons China is Struggling to Control its Pollution Problems", *Fortune,* January 10, 2017, http://fortune.com/2017/01/10/china-red-alert-pollution-pm2-5/
[141] Shuqin Cui, "Chai Jing's *Under the Dome;* A multimedia documentary in the digital age, *Journal of Chinese Cinemas,* Vol.11, No.1, 2017 p.30
[142] Celia Hatton, "Under the Dome: The smog film taking China by storm", *BBC News,* March 2 2015, http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-china-blog-31689232

to explain why seemingly nothing was being done to combat the smog despite its enormous public health risk.

One section of the documentary investigates the application of environmental laws, in particular a law concerning the prevention of atmospheric pollution through monitoring the emissions of motor vehicles. Chai Jing finds that not only has this law never actually been applied since it was passed in 2002, nor did any of the relative departments know which was responsible, an interview with the director of the MEP vehicular pollution research institute revealed that the law was passed with the intention of not providing the MEP with any real powers[143]. The lack of efficacy endowed to environmental protection authorities is further divulged when Chai Jing finds out that the 90% of members as well as the head of the fuel standards committee are individuals from the petrochemical industry, an official from Sinopec (China's national petroleum company) admits that deeper government reform is needed[144].

While Chai Jing may have edited out the section openly questioning China's development model, the vast majority of her findings make clear allusions to the model of governance and path of development being unsustainable and directly responsible for the astounding ineptitude of China's environmental protection agencies. Chai Jing succeeded in making a thoroughly-well researched documentary which provided a much need clear and articulate explanation of the dangers of PM 2.5 and the toxicity of China's air, doubtless the permission to show the film was attempt by the government to live up to its own promise of greater transparency[145].

After reaching over 200 million views within a week however, the documentary was banned. This particular case of censorship typifies the lack of clarity of what constitutes contention in China, the documentary had not only sought permission form the highest levels of authority, it had not called for a revolution nor even an organised social movement, but merely enforcement.

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[143] Linghein He, *Chai Jing's Review: Under the Dome – investigating China's smog 柴静雾霾调查：穹顶之下 (full translation)* (June 27, 2017) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T6X2uwlQGQM
[144] *Ibid*
[145] Christopher Beam, "China tries a new tactic to combat pollution: transparency", *The New Yorker,* February 6, 2015, http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/china-tries-new-tactic-combat-pollution-transparency

This necessitates an analysis of rights consciousness; Chai Jing seems to epitomise Elizabeth Perry's rules consciousness citizen in that the purpose throughout the presentation is to arm Chinese citizens with information and knowledge that is publicly available and is pleading each individual to enforce the law rather than calling for popular protest and demanding reform. However, the banning of the documentary confers upon it a contentious quality, even more so with its release coinciding with the meeting of the NPC. In Chai Jing's presentation, the structures that force local officials into skirting regulations are revealed, they are merely attempting to preserve economic viability within a system where the rules are beyond their decision-making. The film established a narrative where the blame rested with those in Beijing, if citizens were to direct their anger anywhere it would not be their local government's office. Where Elizabeth Perry states that localised protests have a stabilising value[146], the CCP did not recognise this in having over 200 million citizens receive Chai Jing's mobilising call.

A Harvard study[147] researching the methods and motives of Chinese censorship sheds much light on why the government would ban *Under the Dome* despite having given permission for its airing. The authors distinguish between two theories of censorship, one is state critique theory, which asserts that the Chinese government seeks to stifle dissent and encourage the flow of information and discussion to be favourable to the CCP. The second theory is collective action potential which proposes that censorship targets media which has the potential to stimulate either collective expression or action, in this case whether or not there is critique of the state is irrelevant[148]. The article makes references to both Lorentzen and Perry in discussing why Chinese government censorship fits into the second theory, arguing that by allowing a certain degree of criticism on social media the CCP is not only able to gauge public's perspective on key issues and thus learn how to satisfy dissatisfaction but also allows the public to 'vent' about certain issues and report instances of local corruption or poor governance[149].

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[146] Elizabeth Perry, "A New Rights Consciousness?", *Journal of Democracy,* Vol.20, No.3, 2009, p.20
[147] Gary King, Jennifer Pan & Margaret E. Roberts, "How Censorship in China Allows Government Criticism but Silences Collective Expression", *American Political Science Review,* Vol. 107, No.2, 2013, pp.1-18
[148] *Ibid.*, p.2
[149] *Ibid,* pp.14-15

Under the Dome was allowed to be put online most likely for this reason and was eventually taken down because of its collective action potential. Through its censoring the CCP has revealed its goals in terms of environmental governance; it seeks to allow open criticism of poor environmental law enforcement even at the national level but will not tolerate a grassroots movement and people-focused enforcement. Chai Jing's mobilising call was for nothing more than for people to call a number, that of the EPA to report only what individuals themselves witness. One would assume the regime would welcome such pro-activity and stronger enforcement of the law as it would fit under China's model of 'bargained authoritarianism' where a softer approach is taken and rights are granted to entice citizens to make narrower claims that do not threaten the regime[150]. Such actions and claims that Chai Jing encourages citizens to make would otherwise be wholly apolitical such as calling for cleaner fuel, higher standards for vehicular exhausts or the separation of environmental protection from the petrochemical industry.

The study reveals why such seemingly harmless calls for apolitical and arguably pro-regime mobilisation would be censored by the government. The fact that it took almost a week for the documentary to be removed also suggests that the content was not the issue so much as the sheer number of views the video received. However, one could also posit that the criticism of the state played a part too, in that Chai Jing made clear links between the inefficacy of environmental governance and China's economic and political structure, with interviewed officials agreeing that the state monopoly will not allow for greater innovation and thus greater reliance on other sources of energy[151]. Within such criticism one can find very subtle calls for democratic reform, referring to the centralised planning mixed with decentralised enforcement as producing bad governance, Chai Jing thus may not overtly call for a democratic form of politics, but clearly endorses the adoption of democratic elements such as transparency, accountability and rule of law. The comparisons made with Los Angeles and London and the praising of their methods in combating pollution due to

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[150]Lorentzen & Scoggins, 2015, p.647

[151] Linghein He, *Chai Jing's Review: Under the Dome – investigating China's smog 柴静雾霾调查：穹顶之下 (full translation)* (June 27, 2017) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T6X2uwlQGQM

their strict enforcement and commitment to the rule of law makes this all the clearer[152].

Considering the value of *Under the dome* in relation to an emerging rights consciousness, the response of the government is paramount. The banning of the documentary makes it a contentious item, according to the Harvard study it is the potential for mobilisation that qualifies it as contentious. Referring back to Li's point that repression can enhance rights consciousness[153], Jennifer Earl also refers to research, though mainly concerning state violence, which suggests that repression of mobilisation can in fact enhanced mobilisation[154].

The government censorship, however has not backfired in any significant way so far, as discussion on *weibo* concerning the documentary was silenced and there has not been any mass mobilisation since its airing. This may make a comparison with the anonymous text messages that mobilised protesters in each anti-PX protest seem counter-intuitive but while the results are widely different, the content of each digital media item are relatively similar and deserve a comparative analysis.

As was the case in many of the anti-PX protests, mobilisation was the result of top-down encouragement as local party officials, journalists, academics were the first to encourage public participation in preventing the construction of a PX plant. In the case of *Under the Dome,* there is an equally authoritative source as Chai Jing is a CCTV reporter. A key difference is of course that with each case of anti-PX contention the mobilising structures are strictly local, each protest learned from the other; the visibility of each increased the public's awareness of the dangers of PX plants and encouraged distrust of local government's safety assurances. In each case the key grievance was lack of public participation in the decision-making process and digital media served as a key resource in translating that grievance into mobilisation.

Under the Dome on the other hand had a national platform and considering China's vast size and differences in regional politics and identities, the documentary, even without censorship, stood little chance of galvanising discontent into action. This is due to several factors. Firstly, as previously mentioned, Chai Jing merely calls for

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[153] Li, 2010, p.65
[154] Jennifer Earl, "Introduction: Repression and the Social Control of Protest", *Mobilisation: An International Journal,* Vol.11, No.2, 2006, p.138

grassroots environmental activism, whilst pointing out the flaws in China's development model. Secondly, as with all popular protest in China, mobilisation is based on social bonds and local networks. Though the PX protests demonstrated that popular protest could be orchestrated on a city-wide level with only digital media providing a network, in those cases there was a clear grievance claim, target and goal. In *Under the Dome,* Chai Jing offers forward a seemingly innocent question of "where does the smog come from?", that leads down a path of governmental infighting, incompetence and corruption, all stemming from the model of development and the existence of State-owned companies.

The true contentious significance of *Under the Dome* is better analysed within the framework of Tarrow's cycles of contention. This includes a "rapid pace" of innovation in the forms of contention, as we analysed in the new repertoires of digital mobilisation and street demonstrations in the anti-PX protests[155], the creation of new collective action frames and sequences of "intensified information flow"[156]. This is where we can identify the role of *Under the Dome.* Since it has a clear discursive function, as della Porta and Diani note, the mass media has an important role in spreading the message of a social movement, therefore control of the media is an "essential factor" for mobilisation[157]. The temporary ceding of this control is what allowed for Chai Jing's message to get through to the masses. Though it was not the result of a specific social movement but rather the dissatisfaction of one individual (that nonetheless strongly resonated throughout Chinese society), it did create a new frame of contention that placed environmental grievances squarely on the central government. According to King-wa Fu, *weibo* posts concerning the documentary began to be censored and blocked when they criticised the government by recognising the link between growth-centred policy and environmental degradation[158].

The significance here is the ascension of the assignment of blame, previously the anti-PX protests framed their grievances against the local government and blamed them for prioritising the economy over the well-being of the people. Thus, the deep distrust

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[155] See p.39

[156] Tarrow, 1998, p.142

[157] Della Port & Diani, 2006, p.220

[158] Georgia McCafferty, "China is letting people talk about a popular pollution documentary – unless they blame the government", *Quartz,* March 5, 2015, https://qz.com/356479/china-is-letting-people-talk-about-a-popular-pollution-documentary-unless-they-blame-the-government/

in local governments made any attempts to persuade citizens that the levels of pollution were acceptable, futile. Using Lorentzen and Scoggins' framework of identifying rising rights consciousness to compare the claims and discourse made by anti-PX protesters on the one hand and *weibo* posts after the uploading of the documentary on the other we can find that the two conditions of changing values and changing policy are present in both[159].

The difference is that the central government is facing the blame for preferring GDP growth over citizen well-being, one of the most popular comments on *weibo* was "*I don't need China to be number one. Can we slow down our economic development and really deal with pollution?*"[160]. The success of linking smog to central government policies and structure should not be underestimated. Tarrow, in discussing framing, points to Snow's typology of the so-called frame alignment process. The first of which is frame bridging, however Snow's discussion of this process places framing as a pro-active technique for recruitment within social movement organisations[161]. To demonstrate the success of Chai Jing's framing and its effect on spontaneous pollution protests, the standard model of analysis must be extricated to fit China's repressive state structure.

The first stage of the frame alignment process is the linking of two previously unconnected frames, in this case those two frames are the smog and growth-centred policy making at the national level. As Snow argues this linkage is accomplished through information dissemination and the mass media[162]. While Snow outlines this process as being facilitated through micromobilisation, in other words actively recruiting members to join a social movement organisation[163], this was not Chai Jing's intention however. The mobilisation she openly called for was indeed on a microlevel but merely for enforcing environmental regulations. Therefore, in the case of *Under the Dome*, micromobilisation and frame bridging should be disaggregated.

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[159] Lorentzen & Scoggins, 2015, pp. 641-44
[160] Yiqin Fu, "China's National Conversation on Pollution Has Finally Begun", *Foreign Policy,* March 2, 2015, http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/03/02/chinas-national-conversation-on-pollution-has-finally-begun-chai-jing-documentary/
[161] David A. Snow; E. Burke Rochford, Jr; Steven K. Worden; Robert D. Benford, "Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilisation and Movement Participation", *American Sociological Review,* Vol. 51, No.4, 1986, p.467
[162] *Ibid.,* pp.467-8
[163] *Ibid.,* p.468

As previously mentioned neither elements could be considered contentious in and of themselves. Approval was given the authorities, the contention was not the content but its popularity and therefore capacity for grassroots collective action, despite Chai Jing having explicitly called for such action in the documentary.

Frame amplification is the next stage of frame alignment; this refers to the 'clarification and invigoration' of a frame that relates to a particular issue or set of events[164]. Chai Jing achieves this when she points out that in the mid-2000's she considered smog to be just fog and also when she refutes the belief that many Chinese parents hold; that their children would simply adapt to the smog. Chai Jing's scientific explanation of the effects of PM 2.5 on the body is accentuated by the use of Chinese cultural values, utilised as 'scripts' that inspire the audience, drawing on their intrinsic values[165]. In China, familial bonds are the most important in society and as discussed previously[166], lineage and ancestry hold great value. It is here that Chai Jing used value amplification by emphasising that even moderately high levels of PM 2.5 (between 100-200 AQI) affect children and the elderly more seriously than the adult population[167].

Chai Jing succeeds especially in her emotionally impactful approach. in discussing PM 2.5 effects on children's health, she refers to her own daughter and her inability to let her go outside and simply breathe the air. Such a strategy goes beyond cultural value amplification and as Tarrow, describes, taps into emotional energy whilst also employing an 'injustice frame'[168]. Similarly, Doug McAdam argues that in order for collective action to take place there must a collective frame of injustice[169]. Chai Jing certainly achieved this by creating a point of reference that hundreds of millions of Chinese urbanites experience every day; the injustice of living under a blanket of smog created by an economic model, the injustice of sacrificing their child's health and enjoyment for the benefit of GDP growth. The injustice of not having access to accurate air quality readings nor having any role in decision-making regarding

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[164] *Ibid.,* p.469

[165] Dingxin Zhao, "Theorising the Role of Culture in Social Movements: Illustrated by Protests and Contentions in Modern China", *Social Movement Studies,* Vol.9, No.1, 2010, p.36

[166] See chapter on rural protests

[167] For Air Quality Levels see http://aqicn.org/city/beijing/

[168] Tarrow, 1998, p.111

[169] Doug McAdam, *Political Processes and the Development of Black Insurgency 1930-1970,* (Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 1982), p.51

polluting enterprises whilst the government props up "zombie corporations"[170] ensuring a continued reliance on coal.

Contrary to the findings of the Harvard study on censorship, King-wa Fu argues that targeting of the central government, particularly due to the timing of the Nation People's Congress meeting a week after the uploading of the documentary, is the primary reason for the controlling the discussion[171]. The government censorships directive itself stresses the importance of creating a "favourable atmosphere" of online public opinion during the National People's Congress[172]. While it is indeed difficult to assess the exact number of *weibo* posts that directly linked environmental degradation with growth-centred policies, we can at least conclude that discourse has shifted from placing the responsibility upon local governments to blaming the central government and China's governance structure. This is a small but significant step that again must be seen within the framework of 'cycles of contention' as there is a shift in collective action frames which expands the collectivity of grievances beyond the provincial level. The next chapter will look at the episodes of protest that took place in the context of this new frame and analyse their potentiality for a new cycle of protest.

5.2.   Xi'an Protest

Though Chai Jing did not call for contentious collective action, her documentary quickly inspired at least one protest that was immediately shut down. Two environmental activists protested with a dozen other citizens in Xi'an, less than two weeks after the airing of the documentary. According to the South China Morning Post, the protest was likely initiated by an anonymous message which was circulated online a week before, calling for citizens to gather in major city squares to protest

[170] See Gwynn Guilfod, "Zombies once destroyed Japan's economy – now they're infecting China's", *Quartz,* April 29, 2014, https://qz.com/198458/zombies-once-destroyed-japans-economy-now-theyre-infecting-chinas/
[171] McCafferty, 2015.
[172] See Anna Henochowitz, "Minitrue: Clamping Down on "Under the Dome", *China Digital Times,* March 3, 2015, http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2015/03/minitrue-clamping-dome/ For leaked sources of government media directives from Beijing and Shanghai municipal governments

chronic pollution[173]. It is reasonable to assume that the message was itself in response to the documentary which clearly laid out the connections between PM 2.5 and serious diseases, as of the slogans held by the protesters read "Smog causes cancer and harms everyone". Another slogan read "Controlling pollution is the Government's responsibility, whilst holding these slogans the protesters wore face-masks[174]. See appendix figure 1.

In analysing this small instance of protest, we must breakdown its components and first analyse the mobilising strategy. Although the anonymous message spread across the country, as far we can surmise from foreign media reports, it only managed to mobilise a very small group of activists in just one city. Referring back to previous chapters and the successful mobilisation campaigns of the anti-PX movement, we can identify at least one shared characteristic; the anonymous digital message. From the abject failure of the anonymous message to mobilise citizens in 2015 it is tempting to discount the value of digital communication in the role of mobilisation, though the issue of targeting is significant here.

If its role is reduced to a supplementary resource tool, then by default, the roles of the elites, official media pressure and policy advocacy are integral to ensuring successful large-scale mobilisation without repression. With their legitimising affect the cost of collective action is significantly lowered, however we should also consider the target of these protests since the anti-PX campaigns were specifically framing their lack of involvement in the decision-making process and by extension the close ties between the Paraxylene industry and local officials as the grievance claim.

In terms of moral resource, this is a clear case of 'rightful resistance', whereby the vertical power structure of Chinese governance creates not only a political opportunity but the grievance itself[175]. Where locals would mobilise at the call of a Party cadre with a genuine concern for public health, the Xi'an protest was an attempt

[173] Verna Yu, "Two held for pollution protest released, activists say", *South China Morning Post,* March 10, 2015, http://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1734396/two-held-pollution-protest-released-activists-say?edition=international

[174] Tom Philips, "China arrests anti-smog campaigners", *The Telegraph,* March 9, 2015, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/11458961/China-arrests-anti-smog-campaigners.html

[175] Kevin O'Brien, "Rightful Resistance Revisited", *Journal of Peasant Studies,* Vol.40, No.6, 2013, p.6

at mobilisation drawing upon the new information and knowledge disseminated in *Under the Dome*. The key difference is the lack of strong social bonds and collective identity; while the majority of the anti-PX protests referred to civic identity and pride in mobilising citizens to protect their city, the Xi'an slogan is too diffuse and lacks specificity in its claim.

The tactical choice of protest action; a public gathering in a square with slogans, mobilised by an anonymous digital message is clearly a repertoire learned from the experience of the anti-PX protests. As Taylor and Van Dyke note, much of the theory on the concept of repertoires asserts that they are formed through prior experience[176]. Tilly's conception of contentious performances can also be applied here, through which we can view Xi'an as an episode of contention, which posits contentious events as complex episodes within streams of contention[177]. An adavantage of this analysis is that analysing contentious performances allows one to study forms of contention that do not necessarily fit into the definition of a social movement

Della Porta and Diani's analysis of collective identity as a tactical repertoire itself can shed light on why a few dozen protesters gathering in a single city was the only incidence of mobilisation following the documentary. Della Porta and Diani argue that identity outlines the boundaries of the conflict, collective action cannot occur without an articulated and specified "we" that is designated by common traits and solidarity. Equally important is the need for a "them" as an actor for which the participants are claiming their grievance against[178]. While the only "we" alluded to was 'everyone', revealing the lack of any substantial collective bond, the "them" is referred to in the slogan "Controlling the pollution is the government's responsibility" (*zhili wumai zhengfu youze* 治理雾霾政府有责)。

On the surface, there is little contentious about this statement. However, the fact that such a fundamental claim was seen as having *had* to be made could be what constitutes its contentious character, it functions as a demand rather than a factual statement of what is true in reality. Together with the slogan "pollution causes cancer and harms everyone", they collectively lay out the grievance claim as being explicitly

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[176] Verta Taylor & Nella Van Dyke, "Tactical Repertoires of Social Movements",
[177] Sidney Tarrow, "Charles Tilly and the Practice of Contentious Politics", *Social Movement Studies,* Vol.7, No.3, 2008, pp.235-6
[178] Della Porta & Diani, 2007, p.94

fundamental. The lack of involvement of NGO's or mutual policy advocacy perhaps points to the lack of clarity in exactly what collective action frame is being developed. Framing is the result of a shared understanding of a situation that needs to be changed, requires identification of who is to blame, the assertion of a possible alternative or solution and urge others to act[179]. Chai Jing had fulfilled these criteria; though she did not call for contentious action, the contentious element was added *ex post facto* as the government feared its potential for collective action.

The sole protest in Xi'an in any case should not be seen as the full potential of grassroots action called for by Chai Jing however since framing concerns perceptions, online discourse mentioned in the previous sub-chapter must also be taken into account.

While news articles and commentators' speculations published in early March 2015 saw the documentary as opening up a national dialogue[180], it is extremely hard to gauge the level of discussion in the face of censorship. Most likely due to the political sensitivity there has been no study conducted on public opinion on smog, GDP growth and central government responsibility in the aftermath of *Under the Dome.*

5.3 Chengdu Protests

In response to week-long high levels of PM 2.5 in Chengdu, a city which previously had been relatively clean, a social media campaign began after a netizen posted online a message exclaiming "*I love Chengdu, please let me breathe*", (*Wo ai chengdu, qing rang wo huxi 我爱成都，请让我呼吸)。*

The slogan became viral with many citizens posting pictures of themselves wearing a mask and a sign bearing the slogan with the heavy smog clearly visible behind them (See appendix figure 2). While the slogan appears to be a relatively apolitical in and

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[179] Robert D. Benford & David A. Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment", *Annual Review of Sociology,* Vol. 26, 2000, p.615
[180] See also Christina Larson, "China Hails, Then Bans a Documentary", *Bloomberg,* March 12, 2015, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-03-12/china-hails-then-bans-antipollution-film-under-the-dome and C. Custer, "Wechat, Weibo ordered to crack down on viral pollution film 'Under the Dome', but discussion continues", *techinasia,* March 5, 2015, https://www.techinasia.com/wechat-weibo-ordered-crack-viral-pollution-film-under-dome-discussion-continues

of itself, according to Radio Free Asia, the original post also called on Chengdu citizens to gather in Tianfu square, Chengdu's main commercial area, for a "collective stroll"[181]. Immediately we can identify two elements of protest repertoire familiar with pollution protesters, the digital dissemination of a mobilising call and the framing of mobilisation using the peaceful term "collective stroll". However, in contrast to the anti-PX protests, the aim of the "collective stroll" was not clear. The PX protesters had been informed through media channels of the dangers of a prospective plant and through a cocktail of distrust for local officials and encouragement and support from above, had a clear grievance claim and a proposal.

Conversely the Chengdu netizens calling for a collective stroll did so in a distinctively artistic approach and could be said to be more focused on raising awareness of the high levels of smog in a city previously unaccustomed to persistently dangerous levels. In terms of a grievance claim, the netizens merely demanded that the government "control" the smog, see appendix figure 3.

In the aim of understanding the distinctiveness of this protest, we must first analyse the political opportunity, what conditions allowed for a protest against the smog, despite it being an integral day-to-day component of dozens of Chinese cities' existence? Kevin O'Brien notes that political opportunity in China differs massively by social group, issue and region[182], arguably smog is the one issue that affects a sizeable majority of Chinese citizens without discrimination. PX plants were planned in certain cities, and when cancelled due to protest were often simply relocated to more impoverished areas.

Smog however has a dangerously universal element to it, disaggregating this contention in terms of social group does point towards a middle-class propensity for collective action when their health is threatened. As we found in the chapter on rural protests, economic dependency was a tremendously important factor when it came to the mobilisation of rural citizens against a polluting agent. One of the most significant elements of the political opportunity in the Chengdu protest is the authorities' sensitivity to planned collective action, a key difference that must be noted in this

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[181] Qiao Long, 桥龙 "90 hou faqi guanzhu wumai huodong, chengdu tejing jiebei fang daguimo kangyi" 90 后发起关注雾霾活动，成都特警戒备防大规模抗议, *ziyouyazhoudiantai,自由电台* December 9, 2016, http://www.rfa.org/mandarin/yataibaodao/huanjing/ql2-12092016102539.html

[182] O'brien & E. Stern, 2008, p.24

case is that the anti-PX protests, collective action was a strategy employed in the interest of environmental advocacy. Whereas anti-PX campaigns were initiated from the top-down with a local environmental bureau as not only an ally but the initiator, the local media and in some cases the national media ensured enough exposure for moral resource to play a role in mobilisation and prevent repression. Xie and Van Der Heijden point out that the divisions within the Chinese state structure, in regard to environmental contention, especially environmental protection agencies, provide not just openings but can provide the challengers to power both legitimacy and protection[183].

The role of political opportunity in the Chengdu protest is therefore distinct from previous environmental protests, there were no signals from above, no openings or opportunities within the cracks of Chengdu or Sichuan government structure. Previous research on political opportunity and environmental mobilisation has focused on environmental movements, as such the research on pollution protests in an urban setting is primarily the anti-PX campaigns, in the chapter analysing anti-PX protests we found that there was often a linking up of NGO's, elite policy advocacy that utilised popular discontent to draw attention to their cause. In the case of Chengdu, we witnessed the extraction of protest repertoires such as 'collective strolls' and use of digital communication and social media for exclusive use from everyday citizens, rather than government officials, journalists or environmental activists.

 According to Radio Free Asia, it was a high school student who posted on *weibo* calling for a collective stroll in Tianfu Square[184], though it is difficult to verify the source of the original *weibo* post, the local police did respond by closing off the square. In identifying the interplay between political opportunity and mobilising structure we can find that even meteorological and geographical factors come into play. Two years before *Under the Dome* swept through China raising the populations awareness of precisely what they were breathing, the word "airpocalypse" entered into common usage when the Air Quality Index reading of Pm 2.5 in February 2013,

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[183] Xie & Van Der Heijden, 2010, p.57

[184] Qiao Long, 桥龙 "90 hou faqi guanzhu wumai huodong, chengdu tejing jiebei fang daguimo kangyi" 90 后发起关注雾霾活动，成都特警戒备防大规模抗议, *ziyouyazhoudiantai, 自由电台* December 9, 2016, http://www.rfa.org/mandarin/yataibaodao/huanjing/ql2-12092016102539.html

Beijing, reached a record-breaking 755[185], whilst the World Health Organisation recommends 25 as safe within a 24-hour period[186].

Such severe pollution episodes are due to the weather and geographical layout of the region, in Chengdu's case the city lies in a basin where the smog worsens significantly during winter periods due to cold heavy air trapping the pollutants[187]. We can surmise that smog protests are a new phenomenon that have emerged due a convergence of past experiences of successful mobilisation against specific polluting agents and the framing of *Under the Dome*, that not only vastly increased the knowledge and awareness of smog but also extended the responsibility beyond corrupt and growth-obsessed local officials to China's economic and development policies.

Tsinghua professor Wu Qiang made a particularly significant point in his analysis of the Chengdu protests. Writing that the successful anti-PX campaigns in Xiamen and elsewhere were the result of localised environmental activists' engagement with the wider public, the use top-down mobilising structure, whereas smog has a unifying element[188]. Qiang argues that smog transforms city inhabitants into collective victims and that any protest, even a small digitised symbolic act of defiance such as the aforementioned slogan (*Chengdu I love you, please let me breathe)* has a "homogenising character" that due to the digital virality of *weibo* and *wechat* spreads throughout China's web quicker than authorities can censor them[189].

Having considered the similarities in repertoires of action found in Chengdu and the context and conditions that manifested calls for collective action, it is now important to consider the development of a new repertoire that taps into the framing of the smog as both an injustice frame and a common relatable experience throughout Chinese society.

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[185] Jonathan Kaiman, "Chinese struggle through 'airpocalypse' smog", *the guardian,* February 16, 2013, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/feb/16/chinese-struggle-through-airpocalypse-smog

[186] World Health Organisation, *WHO Air quality guidelines for particulate matter, ozone, nitrogen dioxide and sulfur dioxide, Global update 2005, summary of risk assessment* (WHO; Geneva, 2006)

[187] David Wogan, "Haze in the Sichuan Basin, as seen from space", *Scientific American,* January 27, 2014, https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/plugged-in/haze-in-the-sichuan-basin-as-seen-from-space/

[188] Wu Qiang, "Choking on smog, China's city dwellers emerge in protest", *China Change,* December 14, 2016, https://chinachange.org/2016/12/14/choking-on-smog-middle-class-protests-emerge/

[189] *Ibid*

5.3.1.   The mask as a Symbol of Dissent

The role of cultural and social ties in framing had been discussed in the chapter on rural pollution protests as well as the emphasis on civic pride and duty in the Xiamen protests. Within the social media campaign and the protesters in Tianfu Square we can find that similar elements were used for the framing of the protests, in particular the pollution mask. The mask had slowly increased in usage for anti-PX protests, used as early as 2008 when Chengdu citizens first protested the building of a PX plant in Pengzhou, utilising the same repertoires such as 'collective strolling' and text messages to mobilise[190].

As can be seen in appendix figure. 4 the protesters are wearing plain masks, as far as can be told through news reports this is first time urban pollution protesters have utilised the mask as a symbol, thus adding to the repertoire of pollution protesting. Five years later two more anti-PX protests took place, one again in Chengdu as the plant went ahead and the other in Kunming during May 4th, 2013. The symbolism of the date itself requires some attention as May 4th is the anniversary of a student uprising against the government for their weakness in capitulating to western powers in the signing of the Treaty of Versailles. Today it has strong political connotations of nationalism and a resurgence after China's 'century of humiliation'[191]. While the legacy may elicit feelings of nationalism and the beginning of a 'new China' the choice of protesting on this day suggests that its symbolic inheritance is more aligned with its value as a remembrance of social unrest and a fight against perceived injustices. What is noteworthy is that the protests used the purposefully non-confrontational strategies of past anti-PX protests such as the "collective stroll" and framing in terms of protecting Chengdu rather than challenging authority, however the choice of date, whether intentional or not, evokes a sense of contention and threat of possible unrest.

The strategy of using the mask as a symbol of dissent evolved in both Kunming and Chengdu, for the latter however, protest was prevented by the local authorities, in this

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[190] Edward Wong, "In China city, Protesters see Pollution Risk of New Plant", *New York Times,* May 6, 2008,
http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/06/world/asia/06china.html?_r=2&ref=world&oref=slogin&oref=slogin
[191] Ankit Panda, "The Legacy of China's May Fourth Movement", *The Diplomat,* May 5, 2015,
http://thediplomat.com/2015/05/the-legacy-of-chinas-may-fourth-movement/

case the police went to great effort to prevent mobilisation, employing soft persuasive strategies to discourage participants in the days leading up to the protest. The hierarchical power structure of Chinese society was used to the government's advantage as managers in work units across the city were warned that the protest was off-limits, information networks and social media were also targeted[192]. Activists were contacted, detained or interrogated by police, while sensitive terms were blocked on the internet, students were forced to remain at school over the weekend. Police efforts to identify emerging activists and potential protestors extended even to asking drugstores to report people who purchased a large amount of pollution masks or photocopied phrases such as "environmental protection", "petro project" or "personal health"[193].

The protest in Kunming however was not prevented, though authorities had deterred residents in the Anning township where the PX plant was planned to be constructed from being involved in any kind of demonstration. The protest, like previous anti-PX movements had mobilised using social media to raise awareness of the lack of citizen involvement in the decision-making process and called for a collective stroll on May 4th. Just as in Chengdu the authorities utilised vertical authority and power structures in Kunming to attempt to dissuade citizens from participating as well as censoring social media posts related to the collective stroll and the PX plant. However, unlike Chengdu, the repression only served to confirm the citizens distrust in the government and caused a second protest on May 16th[194].

The usage of the mask as a protest symbol evolved in Kunming with protesters printing out the words 'Kunming' (昆明) and 'PX' crossed out (see appendix figure 5), firmly established the masks role in contentious pollution politics. The mask became distinctly ubiquitous in the lead up to the gathering in Tianfu square in Chengdu in December, before the police had a chance to cordon off the square, face masks had been placed on statues as can be seen in appendix figure 6.

Following the online social media campaign featuring netizens wearing masks and online calls for a 'stoll' in Tianfu Square, that the police, in a similar fashion to three

[192] Didi Tang, "China city quashes protest against petro plant", *Associated Press*
[193] Hai Nan & Xin Lin, "Chengdu Activists Held Ahead of Chemical Plant Protest", *Radio Free Asia,* May 3, 2013
[194] Xiaoyi Sun, Ronggui Huang & Ngai-Ming Yip, 2017, pp.541-2

years previously used pro-active preventative measures. According to Radio Free Asia the local security bureau had warned teachers not to allow students to wear pollution masks in the classroom[195]. The police had also asked local business to report anyone buying bulk orders of face masks, while teachers were reported to have been called into 'emergency meeting' where they were told not 'believe' nor 'spread rumours', not to wear masks in front of the students, nor to even install air purifiers[196].

In preventing physical collective action, the police closed off Tianfu square over the weekend, while the measures had prevented any large scale collective action, a group of artists staged a sit-in on the edges of the square, beyond the police cordon, wearing masks. According to one report, the artists had applied for a permit but had been denied, the same source, described the sit-in as 'ad-hoc'[197]. Another source told the BBC that the protest by the artists was planned over *weixin[198]* with very little notice, the BBC also reported that deleted chatter appearing on *Free Weibo* centred around the censorship itself with users complaining about the lack of news attention the smog was getting. Users also commented directly on the advantage of social media via social media itself, claiming that once a topic becomes 'hot' enough the authorities will be unbale to censor all the related posts[199].

In analysing this weekend's events, it is necessary to examine separately the actions of the protesters and the responses of the local security bureau whilst also recognising the dialectical relationship. As previously mentioned the mask had grown in its symbolic significance since the Kunming protests and with its role in the Chengdu protests can be said to be firmly consolidated as a repertoire of contentious action. The appropriation of the mask for online activism demonstrates the creativity of Chinese netizens that Guobin Yang cites when he discusses the typology of online activism. Arguing that netizens tend to stay within the legal bounds which allows them greater political legitimacy, while their creativity and innovation allows them to

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[195] Xin Lin, "China Cracks Down on Chengdu Smog Protests, Detains Activists, Muzzles Media", *Radio Free Asia,* December 13, 2016, http://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/muzzles-12132016132603.html?searchterm:utf8:ustring=chengdu+smog+protest

[196] Xin Lin 忻霖, "wumai sinve chengdu buxu xuesheng daikouzhao, gaoya weiwen yanking wangluo xiaoxi" 雾霾肆虐成都不许学生戴口罩，高压维稳严控网络消息，*ziyou yazhou diantai 自由亚洲电台*, December 13, 2016

[197] Lin Qiqing, "All Quiet in Chengdu After Artist's Pollution Protest", *Sixth Tone,* December 12, 2016

[198] Also known in English as "Wechat", Chinese social media instant messaging app

[199] BBC Trending, "The messages getting lost in the Chinese smog" *BBC News,* December 16, 2016, http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-38321951

avoid keyword filtering, censoring and site blocking[200]. The online photo campaign indeed displays such creativity, the slogan "*Chengdu I love you, please let me breathe*" can in no way be classified as contentious, its invocation of civic pride was a similar strategy of framing and mobilisation used in previous anti-PX protests where citizens were called to protect their 'beautiful' cities. However, the slogan begs the city to let its citizens breathe, this marks an evolution in framing strategy, with the focus less on protecting the city's beauty but rather its citizens' health and well-being. The lasting effect of *Under the Dome* is clear, the smog is not just unsightly but it is deadly, while the number of Chinese who have seen the documentary between February 2015 and December 2016 is unknown, it can be reasonably assumed that its banning only increased its popularity.

There is also the question of the intention of the online activists, a separate online campaign started by a photographer called 'one person, one photo' called on citizens to send pictures of themselves wearing masks with the smog behind them. Classifying such action as mobilisation may seem to be elongating the definition of mobilisation or collective action beyond meaning, however, as mentioned, Chinese netizens creativity is aimed at circumventing censorship, such online activism can be said to be testing the boundaries of acceptability. Nicole Doerr and Simon Teune argue for greater analysis of visual codes within social movement theory, they emphasise the role of art in social movements framing and mobilisation which can inform analysists in understanding the roles symbols play in framing and mobilisation strategies[201].

As a mobilising resource, such online campaigns have tremendous value as the risk to participants is significantly lower than a physical demonstration, even with China's digital repression the subject of a photo is near impossible to identify due to the face mask. As a framing mechanism, the mask resonates with the injustice frame previously mentioned in the analysis of *Under the Dome.* The very wearing of the mask as a daily fact of existence is presented as an injustice, since the mask is the only thing protecting the individual from the deadly air-borne particulates. The mask is able to encapsulate the grievance claim perfectly and succinctly, it has become an integral resource, frame and physical instrument for collective action, its ubiquity in

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[200] Guobin Yang, "Online Activism", *Journal of Democracy,* Vol.20, No.3, 2009, p.35
[201] Nicole Doerr & Simon Teune, "Visual Codes in Movement. When Protest Imagery Hits the Establishment", *European Protest Movements,* 2008, p.158

China is its greatest strength. It extends in its familiarity beyond any specific social group. Police and guards are paradoxically victims and perpetrators by wearing the masks whilst standing guard, their wearing of the mask reflecting that they equally suffer from breathing the same air, whilst their presence exists as a deterring agent against demonstrations. Doerr and Teune note that the analysis of images in social movements and the value of visual codes have in establishing a connection between activists and their attachment to a movement[202].

The participation of the artists and their subsequent arrest highlights the flexibility of the mask as a simple tool for breathing and a symbol for discontent and collective action, both Wu Qiang and political cartoonist Badiucao likened the wearing of the face mask to the color revolutions of Europe[203]. The contribution of artists extended beyond the sit-in, the aforementioned action of putting masks on statues was mirrored in Xi'an by students putting face masks on hundreds of lion statues, a familiar Chinese cultural symbol[204]. It is notable that this story was published by both the People's and Global Times rather than censored since it coincided with the Chengdu protest.

Just as with the anti-PX protests, civil collective identity specific to their city was invoked through the use of an internet meme featuring a giant panda, home to Sichuan and symbol of the province, wearing a mask with the aforementioned slogan adorned across the mask, as seen in appendix figure 7.

Simon Tuene notes that the role of art in protests movements has a pronounced effect in restricted political systems, since artists' practices can be 'interwoven' with the processes of framing and resource mobilisation[205]. As mentioned above, Chinese netizens have become proficient in avoiding censors and especially innovative in creating resonant frames, the mask finds itself as a persistent referent object in the discourse of defiance owing to its universalist nature in the Chinese public space. It

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[202] *Ibid.,* p.159

[203] Wu Qiang, "Choking on smog, China's urban dwellers emerge in protest" & Sophie Beach, "Drawing the News; Let Me Breathe!", *China Digital Times,* December 13, 2016, http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2016/12/drawing-news-let-breathe/

[204] See Zhang Yuan, "Mask-Clad Iron Statues", *People's Online Daily,* December 14, 2016, http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/1214/c90000-9154900.html

[205] Simon Teune, "Art and the Re-invention of Political Protest", Paper Presented at *3rd ECPR Conference, Budapest, September 2005,* ECPR, https://protestkuriosa.files.wordpress.com/2008/05/teune_re-invention-of-protest.pdf

lies at the intersection of two issues, freedom of expression and information and pollution, with the central government openly declaring its support in combating the latter whilst continuing to repress the other, as the Chengdu repression highlighted, the mask is consolidating its place as a visual code for the untenable and paradoxical stance of Chinese authorities towards the grassroots actions of the masses. Two Chinese political cartoonists capture the essence of the mask as a dissident symbol in reaction to the Chengdu protests.

China Digital Times also quotes Wang Liming also known as Rebel Pepper as saying in relation to the cartoon (see appendix figure 8);

"I feel that while the government has forbidden people from defending their right to breathe, they have used a blindfold to cover the people's eyes so they will not see the pollution problem."[206]

Political cartoonist Badiucao also uploaded a cartoon named "Face Mask Revolution" evoking a similar sentiment, see appendix figure 9.

The dialectical relationship between the repressive actions of the local security bureau and the forms of action chosen by citizens and artists alike have transformed the mask into more than a symbol of the 'right to breathe' but also a symbol of free expression. This relates to political opportunity, Wu Qiang states that the closing and cordoning off of Tianfu square in response to a small-scale protest action reveals the deep anxiety and paranoia of the local authorities[207], when compared to the large-scale anti-PX protests in other cities, the response appears unusually heavy-handed. The targeting of masks and orders for students not to wear them confirms its power as a visual code of protest. When viewed in the context of political opportunity in relation to previous pollution protesting and the growing space for environmental NGO's which has played a part in the growing repertoires of protest and mobilisation structures for environmental protestors, demonstrates that the government will only tolerate contentious environmental action in a certain form.

5.3.2. Censorship Directives and Repression

Reports from the *China Digital Times* and *Radio Free Asia* of covert suppression of smog-related discourse further highlights this point, *China Digital Times* published a leaked censorship directive from the Sichuan Propaganda Department in which media

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[206] Sophie Beach, "Drawing the News; Let Me Breathe!"
[207] Wu Qiang, "Choking on smog, China's urban dwellers emerge in protest"

agencies were asked not publish titles that would lead to a negative reaction, not to use independent sources and for new media to refrain from attaching pictures[208]. While such directives in China are far from unusual[209], *Radio Free Asia* cites direct sources from *weixin* conversations that claim a photographer and his assistant were taken away for organising a "one person, one photo" campaign featuring Chengdu citizens wearing a mask in front of the smog. The other source claims that hospitals held emergency meetings where government officials instructed doctors not to blame respiratory diseases on the smog[210]. While it is difficult to verify the credibility of such sources, which have been made anonymous in the reports, when placed together with the aforementioned media directives, orders sent to schools and social media posts censored, along with the nature of and strategy of Chinese government censorship it is reasonable to assume that such orders were indeed made.

Due to China's effective control and censorship of the media and social communication, there is no coherent organised movement, such episodes of contention have no linkage to the burgeoning civil society and expanding space for environmental NGO's. The extreme paranoid displayed by the Chengdu authorities in their preventative methods is a microcosm of the paradoxical stance that the authorities have towards smog as a political issue, while Party-controlled media will openly criticise the inability to reduce air pollution, popular discontent in reaction to heavy pollution episodes is as contentious as any demonstration.

Such an episode of contention as in Chengdu highlights the strength of this unique brand of grassroots mobilisation, there need not necessarily be formal organised linkages between protesters in different cities, the occurrence of an 'airpocalypse' functions as both a mobilising structure and grievance claim. The issuance of a 'red alert' and the subsequent closing down of factories and restrictions on vehicles is the government's only tool in immediately alleviating episodes of heavy smog, provided

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[208] Josh Rudolph, "Minitrue: Notice on Chengdu Environmental Coverage", *China Digital Times,* December 12, 2016, http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2016/12/minitrue-urgent-notice-chengdu-environmental-coverage

[209] For a list of leaked propaganda media directives collected by China Digital Times see http://chinadigitaltimes.net/china/directives-from-the-ministry-of-truth/

[210] Xin Lin 忻霖, "chengdu wumai? Sheyingshi buzhunpai wumaizhaopian, yishengbuzhunwumaizhibing" 成都无霾？摄影师不准拍雾霾照片，医生不准雾霾致病, *ziyou yazhoudiantai 自由亚洲电台，* December 16, 2016, http://www.rfa.org/mandarin/yataibaodao/huanjing/xl1-12162016101424.html?searchterm:utf8:ustring=%E6%88%90%E9%83%BD

there is wind to blow any smog trapped by meteorological conditions. The authorities are at the mercy of natural occurrences, and as Wu Qiang notes, cities in basins like Chengdu are more likely to spend longer periods trapped under blankets of PM 2.5[211].

In terms of censorship and repression, the Chengdu security bureau's action fit into what Jennifer Earl terms as covert repression, as in the agents of repression intend for their actions to be unknown to the wider public[212], since the actions used are to suppress discourse and censorship it can be reasonably surmised that media directives are not meant to be known to the general population. The contrast between the tolerance for organised large-scale demonstrations and intolerance for very small-scale sporadic protests, inverts the 'threat' model of repression, where the larger the threat to political elites, the greater amount of repression[213]. However, Earl points to scholars such as Gamson who argues that repression can be dangerous for power-holders and should only target movements likely to collapse, whereas if repression fails, the power-holders are open to ridicule[214]. One can easily spot the problems applying this to the Chengdu protest, with the extent of media censorship it is extremely difficult to gauge the wider publics' reaction to any contention, dissent expressed, or their reaction to the censorship itself. For those who are aware however, such repression, if adopted by other cities, could very easily create a backlash and only push activists to more innovative tactics and consolidate the mask as a symbol of dissent.

Earl discusses political opportunity and Tarrow's cycles of contention to further dissect typologies of repression, arguing that repression varies across a cycle of protest with the highest levels occurring toward the end of the cycle[215]. This analysis can indeed be applied when separating anti-PX protests and smog protests into two cycles of contention, the last two large-scale anti-PX protests in Maoming and Shanghai, 2014 and 2015 respectively, were both met with police repression. Kingshyon Lee and Ming-sho Ho attribute the bloody confrontation in Maoming to its lack of development, while its citizens displayed similar environmental consciousness

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[211] Wu Qiang, 2016.
[212] Jennifer Earl, "Tanks, Tear Gas, and Taxes: Toward a Theory of Movement Repression", *Sociology Theory,* Vol. 21, Vol.1, 2003, p.48
[213] *Ibid.,* p.52
[214] *Ibid.,* p.52
[215] *Ibid.,* p.54

and a willingness to engage in contentious acts in claiming rights, they lacked the mobilisation resources that citizens in large cities such as Xiamen and Kunming had and used to prevent repression. Lee and Ho conclude that for such movements to be replicated in smaller, poorer cities and therefore across the nation, will be a long-term project[216].

The police repression met in Shanghai has yet to be analysed in detail or with the lens of political opportunity, however Liu Qin notes that Shanghai's protest set itself apart by continuing to draw tens of thousands even after the government pledged to stop its environmental assessment. The street demonstrations continued for six days with a reported total number of 50,000 protesters before the government announced a complete end to the Petrochemical project, but not before there was a violent crackdown by police[217].

The fact that in China's most cosmopolitan city a protest may last ten days and attract tens of thousands before police action or government capitulation but in another city eight people are arrested for sitting down wearing masks, demonstrates the complexity of protest and contention in China and the "unpredictable shift's" in local and central government responses[218]. As discussed in the chapters on anti-PX protests and rural protests a certain level of dissent can be beneficial for the Chinese central government in bringing provincial governments within the law, particularly in the area of environmental governance. However, the extreme anxiety, paranoia and intolerance of the smallest and non-confrontational protest aimed at a common enemy of both the people and the authorities alike points to what the government deems as acceptable forms and targets of protest. The key difference is the locality of the grievance, the chief claim lying underneath anti-PX contention was the lack of transparency and decision-making in *local* planning, tied to this was local government's preference of sustained GDP growth over people's welfare.

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[216] Kingshyon Lee & Ming-Sho Ho, "The Maoming Anti-PX Protest of 2014: An environmental movement in contemporary China", *China Perspectives*, No.3, 2014, p.39

[217] Liu Qin, "Shanghai residents throng streets in 'unprecedented' anti-PX protest", *China Dialogue,* July 2, 2015, https://www.chinadialogue.net/article/show/single/en/8009-Shanghai-residents-throng-streets-in-unprecedented-anti-PX-protest & Oiwan Lam, "China unleashes police, internet censors on anti-PX Plant Protesters in Shanghai", *advox,* July 1, 2015, https://advox.globalvoices.org/2015/07/01/china-unleashes-police-internet-censors-on-anti-px-plant-protesters-in-shanghai/

[218] Patricia Thornton, "Framing Dissent in Contemporary China: Irony, Ambiguity and Metonymy", *The China Quarterly,* Vol.171, 2002, p.662

Relating the repression to rights consciousness we can turn to Lorentzen and Scoggins' framework of rising rights consciousness. In their analysis, they admit that the sources of rights consciousness can 'spill-over' and interact in various ways, arguing that while a government policy which grants rights in one area may be the original instigator of rights-conscious behaviour, it has the potential to raise the 'psychological value' ordinary Chinese place on other rights[219]. This is precisely the path that protests such as Chengdu could take in terms of rights consciousness. While the government is slowly recognising and granting environmental rights; it is attempting to do this within an authoritarian structure. Protesting indeed has a unique place in Chinese politics and has value to the central government in bringing light to illegal practices by local and provincial governments. However, the banning of *Under the Dome* demonstrates that the desire to restrict discussion of the smog extends beyond local authorities, both Beijing and Chengdu see a destabilising element to the collective action that smog can inspire.

5.4.   No power to the people: Top-Down Reform

Commentators and scholars agree that increased public participation is the only way China will overcome its environmental challenges, democratic elements such as judicial independence, transparency and accountability are absolute necessities in enforcing environmental protection[220]. The new Environmental Protection law passed in 2014 after three years of drafting and consideration, the input of public discourse in the process was ground-breaking and gave way for greater influence of the MEP[221].

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[219] Lorentzen & Scoggins, 2015, p.652

[220] See Pan Yue, "The environment needs public participation", *China Dialogue,* December 5, 2016, https://www.chinadialogue.net/article/show/single/en/604-The-environment-needs-public-participation & Junjie Ge, Jun Bi & Shi Wang, "Public Participation in China's Environmental Protection", in *Building Effective Governance for Water Environment Conservation in China – A Social Experiment in Community Roundtable Meetings in the Tai Lake Basin,* eds. Jun Bi & Kenji Otsuka, (Institute of Developing Economies Japan External Trade Organisation, No.153, March 2009) pp.5-8 & Bruce Gilley, "Authoritarian environmentalism and China's response to climate change", *Environmental Politics,* Vol 21, No. 2, 2012, pp.287-307 & Anna Brettell, *The Politics of Public Participation and the Emergence of Environmental Proto-movements in China* (College Park; University of Maryland, 2003), pp.386-88

[221] Jost Wubbeke, "The three year battle for China's new environmental law", *China Dialogue,* April 25, 2014, https://www.chinadialogue.net/article/show/single/en/6938-The-three-year-battle-for-China-s-new-environmental-law

One of the most significant victories in the new law is the provision for public-interest litigation, which allows for NGO's registered with the Civil Affairs Bureau to file lawsuits. Though in the space of one-year, courts only accepted 93 cases filed by 11 NGO's. One of the main challenges that NGO's have faced is high costs for plaintiffs which are to be borne by the NGO's themselves, since most environmental NGO's have tight budgets there are very few that can pursue cases[222]. Bo Zhang and Cong Cao identify implementation and accountability as major problems for the new law, pointing to the overlapping nature of China's environmental governance, whereby numerous agencies responsible for the management of environmental and natural resources could challenge the law. In relation to public participation, Zhang and Cao argue that by restricting the right to file lawsuits, the right to obtain environmental information and the right to participate in governance to certain NGO's that have state approval, the government is effectively ruling out the public's right to an environment fit for life[223].

There are however ground-breaking successes in the law, namely in terms of the penalties against polluters and the power of local environmental protection bureaus which are now allowed to seize property and arrest those who fabricate discharge statistics fail to perform environmental impact assessments[224]. The law features an unprecedented rhetorical shift, placing environmental protection ahead of economic development[225]. Improvements in information disclosure also prove to be a major part of the reform, with all levels of government, state-owned companies and central government department being held accountable for releasing information, where previously it had only been voluntary. Once an enterprise is listed as a "key polluting

[222] Yu Zhuang, "Environmental Public Interest Litigation (EPIL) in China – Background and Overview", *comparative jurist,* December 5, 2016, https://comparativejurist.org/2016/12/05/environmental-public-interest-litigation-epil-in-china-background-and-overview/
[223] Bo Zhang & Cong Cao, "Policy: Four gaps in China's new environmental law", *Nature,* Vol.517, Issue.7535, 2015, http://www.nature.com/news/policy-four-gaps-in-china-s-new-environmental-law-1.16736
[224] Michael W. Vella & Lilian He, "China Begins Enforcing Newly Amended Environmental Protection Law", *Jones Day,* January 21, 2016, http://www.jonesday.com/china-begins-enforcing-newly-amended-environmental-protection-law-01-21-2016/
[225] Liu Qin, "China's revised environmental protection law "better than expected", *China Dialogue,* April 23, 2014, https://www.chinadialogue.net/blog/6935-China-s-revised-environmental-protection-law-better-than-expected-/en

enterprise" by a local EPB, it has 90 days to release its discharge information, plans for pollution prevention and environmental impact assessments[226].

Over a year after the law came into force, public interest litigation steadily increased. Though with only 700 NGO's approved to pursue cases the number was far fewer than the real violations occurring in China. Cases that had been brought forward against major polluting enterprises such as the Zhenhua group which incurred damages of more than 20 million RMB in the country's first successful public interest case[227].

Notably with the enactment of the new law, the MEP also began releasing real-time air-quality data for 338 prefectural cities in accordance with new air quality standards. This reflects a significant set forward, since previously the only reliable source for measuring air-quality accurately had been the US Embassy in Beijing, which the Chinese government had criticised as "interfering in internal affairs, claiming that the US government had no right to disclose such information to the Chinese public[228]. Similarly, before the new law, pollution data had been classified as a state secret[229] when a five-year study on China's soil's findings was kept from public view.

The interplay between public image and air quality continues to manifest in negative ways for public health however with the temporary smog-alleviation measures used during red alerts causing a drastic deterioration in air quality after the measures have been lifted. South China Morning Post reported that a study showed that once temporary restrictions on factories are lifted, they would drastically increase their production immediately afterwards to make up for the loss during the red alert[230]. The

[226] Zhu Yan, Benjamin Eckersley, "China's Environmental Protection Law: A Review", *Asia Global Institute: University of Hong Kong,* March 20, 2015, http://www.asiaglobalinstitute.hku.hk/en/chinas-environmental-protection-law-review/

[227] Dmitri de Boer & Douglas Whitehead, "Opinion: The future of public interest litigation in China", *China Dialogue,* November 8, 2016, https://www.chinadialogue.net/article/show/single/en/9356-Opinion-The-future-of-public-interest-litigation-in-China

[228] Ben Blanchard, "China says only it has right to monitor air pollution", *Reuters,* June 5, 2012, http://www.reuters.com/article/uk-china-environment-idUSLNE85400D20120605

[229] Li Jing, "Report on mainland China's soil pollution a 'state secret'", *South China Morning Post,* Febraury 26, 2013, http://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1158602/report-mainland-soil-pollution-state-secret

[230] Li Jing, "How China's quick blue-sky fixes makes pollution worse", *South China Morning Post,* December 9, 2016, http://www.scmp.com/news/china/policies-politics/article/2053023/how-chinas-quick-blue-sky-fixes-make-pollution-worse

political value of the temporary measures is obvious, before the implementation of red alerts, as well as after, their use has coincided with major political events such as the APEC meeting in 2014 and the military parade commemorating 70 years since the victory against Japan in 2015. This connection has not been lost on citizens who termed the short-lived periods of blue sky "APEC Blue" and "Parade Blue"[231], fully aware how and why the air quality suddenly improved.

Despite the may positive steps in the law, the opening up of public litigation to state-approved NGO's and promises for greater transparency do not go far enough and further highlight the central government's attempt to democratise environmental governance without any spill-over. For example, the revised law on Air Pollution which was passed in 2015 following the Environmental Law failed to grant a right to clean air as well provide a system for public litigation focused on air pollution, however under the Environmental Law, one fifth of Friends of the Earth cases have targeted fixed-source pollution, namely automobile emitters[232]. Further demonstrating that the war on pollution is to be conducted only from above, censorship directives were sent out when five lawyers sued the governments of Beijing, Tianjin and Hubei for failing to control pollution[233]. The issuing of such media directives, discussed in the last chapter, is not new, but when placed in the context of the new Environmental Law, raises questions about how the government intends to continue fighting pollution with ground-breaking legislation whilst simultaneously restricting the discussion of pollution. Commenting on the aforementioned classifying of soil pollution as state secrets, Orville Schell notes that the duality of such behaviour is indicative China's divided self, where there exists an impulse to not release any

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[231] Charles Liu, ""Parade Blue Joins "APEC Blue" as Distant Memories as Nasty Air Returns to Beijing", *the nanfang,* May 12, 2016, https://thenanfang.com/beijing-air-quality-quickly-deteriorates-september-3-parade/

[232] Liu Qin, "China's new Air Pollution Law omits key measures in war on smog", *China Dialogue,* September 4, 2015 & Dmitri de Boer & Douglas Whitehead, "Opinion: The future of public interest litigation in China", *China Dialogue,* November 8, 2016

[233] Benjamin Haas, "'We had to sue': the five lawyers taking on China's authorities over smog", *the guardian,* February 13, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2017/feb/13/chinese-lawyers-suing-government-air-pollution

information which reflects negatively on the state coupled with a genuine concerted effort to improve the environment[234].

The Human Rights organisation CHRD reported on the continuing hostility to civil society from Xi Jinping and noted that environmental NGO's were not exempt from the clampdown. The organisation reported on small scale NGO's which do not satisfy the legal requirements under the 2014 law. In one case, a Chongqing-based activist was questioned by police and told his organisation's demands for cleaner air, food and water constituted illegal activities[235]. Another case reported by Radio Free Asia, a prominent environmental activist was jailed for 'revealing state secrets', echoing the claims made by the MEP in 2013 concerning the report on soil pollution[236]. The activist Liu Shu, runs an NGO in Changsha which seeks compensation for pollution victims and while her arrest is most likely a case of political revenge by local authorities it exemplifies the dangers that smaller-level NGO's and environmental activists face.

It is not just local governments that are resorting to illegal measures to divert attention away from pollution, Beijing reclassified smog as a 'meteorological disaster' rather than man-made, while the reason the smog lingers is indeed owed to complex weather systems, the directive prohibits the publishing reports on meteorological disasters[237]. Meanwhile a software engineer who developed a smartphone application which monitors ambient air pollution with AQI readings had been told in by his local Environmental Protection Bureau to limit the maximum AQI at 500[238].

What these incidences represent together with the Chengdu protest, is a desire to take back control of the narrative and limit the democratising effects of giving greater

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[234]Elizabeth Economy, Orville Schell, Donald Clarke, Susan Shirk, Isabel Hilton, "How Long Can China Keep Pollution Data a State Secret?", *China File,* February 27, 2013, http://www.chinafile.com/conversation/how-long-can-china-keep-pollution-data-state-secret
[235] Network of Chinese Human Rights Defenders, "Earth Day: China Must Protect Human Rights to Effectively Protect the Environment", *Chinese Human Rights Defenders,* April 20, 2017, https://www.nchrd.org/2017/04/earth-day-china-must-protect-human-rights-to-effectively-protect-the-environment/
[236] Yang Fan, "China jails Environmental Activist for 'revealing state secrets'", *Radio Free Asia,* December 11, 2016, http://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/activist-10112016122729.html
[237] Didi Kirsten Tatlow, "Don't call it 'smog' in Beijing, Call it a 'Meteorological Disaster'", *New York Times,* December 15, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/15/world/asia/beijing-smog-pollution.html?_r=1
[238] Wang Lianzhang, "Government Orders Chinese Air Quality App to Limit Readings", *Sixth Tone,* January 11, 2017, http://www.sixthtone.com/news/1796/government-orders-chinese-air-quality-app-to-limit-readings

power to civil society. While significant steps have been made displaying a shift in rhetoric that the government have placed environmental protection ahead of economic growth, there are no signs that the obsession with social stability at the cost of freedom of expression, assembly or even judicial independence, has subsided. What the environmental legislation will contribute to rights consciousness can be found within one of Lorentzen and Scoggin's sources of increased rights consciousness; changing policies[239]. While this would mean that the change in an individuals' willingness to make a claim is due to a 'changed estimate' that the probability of success is much greater, however, as mentioned above, claims had been made by environmental activists before 2015 and many experts had called for such legal reform in environmental governance.

Setsuko Matsuzawa notes that environmental activism in China has emerged in between top-bottom and bottom-up, with activists appealing both horizontally and vertically[240]. Matsuwaza importantly notes that due to China's 'fragmented authoritarianism' civil society organisations have themselves emerged in a bottom-up way, 'carving out' their own space and bringing forward their concerns using framing which resonates with official discourses[241]. This echoes the framework laid out by Lorentzen and Scoggins, in which they find that one of the major sources of rights consciousness is 'shared expectations', where they argue that rights consciousness arises when individuals are willing to make certain challenges or claims because they know others will support them, they elaborate on this by claiming that one of the ways citizens do this is by forming organisations, such as NGO's[242].

6. Conclusion

This thesis has sought to demonstrate that the environment and pollution are the few areas of policy and daily lived experiences that inspire Chinese people across the rural and urban divide and across provinces to stand up and fight to protect their communities' health and well-being. Environmental consciousness and rights

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[239] Lorentzen & Scoggins, 2015, p.644
[240] Satsuko Matsuwaza, "Citizen Environmental Activism in China: Legitimacy, Alliances and Rights-Based Discourses", *Asia Network Exchange,* Vol.19, No.2, 2012, p.81
[241] *Ibid.,* p.84
[242] Lorentzen & Scoggins, 2015, p.651

consciousness are deeply intertwined, though in China environmental laws are written to restrict the actions of industry and not to protect the right to breathe clean air or live in a clean environment, people of a community need not have a legal background to be aware that there is an injustice.

Some elements of pollution however are much more noticeable than others, toxic water, food and industrial waste as well as their inflictions on the body are easy to recognise, whilst the obvious effects of smog and PM 2.5 are a short-term cough or sore throat. Its characterisation as a deadly substance which is responsible for a third of all deaths in China is not something that can be known to the wider public without freedom of information. In a country of 1.3 billion people where the government's top priority above all is social stability, for a paranoid authoritarian political class there cannot be total freedom of information.

This thesis has shown that the Chengdu protests in December 2016 sits at the crossroads of a rapidly changing China, at the confluence of intersecting rights. They represent a microcosm of the emerging tension resulting from the Communist Party's desire to combat pollution with effective rule of law whilst maintaining its authoritarian power structure. Environmental activism is separated in to the approved, non-contentious, and patient advocacy of registered civil society organisations, who, through the new environmental law, have been given unprecedented rights to pursue public-interest cases, whilst the people cannot even discuss the very toxic particles openly even when it is all they can see. The innovation in protesting in the anti-PX protests, the use of civic pride and collective identity, social media, ironic slogans and symbols has progressed and spread throughout China's cities. The digitisation of Chinese society has made distance irrelevant. Technological savvy has allowed netizens to navigate the government's firewall, protesters can draw upon each other's experiences without having to organise formally across cities. This allows for a modular movement, where in each instance of contention, participants fight the local injustices using learnt repertoires.

The debate about rights consciousness in China is complicated by the hierarchical structure of its government. Instances of protest are often better identified as rules consciousness, whereby the people appeal to the central rule-making authority to force their local governments to conform to the rules. The Communist Party has made

clear its intentions to clean up China, the new Environmental Law is ground-breaking in its ceding of power to civil society, however the Party wants environmental activism to go no further than state-approved NGO's, above all not the people. The anti-PX protests demonstrated to Beijing that the people have utility in forcing local governments to follow their regulations, but they also demonstrated to the people themselves that they have a place in decision-making and a right to information. Their success consolidated the power of collective action, the spread of environmental consciousness and established new repertoires of contentious action.

The drama of *Under the Dome* and the emergence of smog protesting has highlighted the Communist Party's reluctance to truly grant the right to information to its citizens, preferring to restrict knowledge and discussion about smog in the interest of social stability. While such a strategy is not new for the Communist Party, Chinese citizens are seeing the absurdity of a battle against pollution where the enemy cannot even be named, this is visible not just in Chengdu, but every ironic smog-related post that gets deleted on *weibo* or *weixin* and to everyone who saw Chai Jing's ground-breaking documentary. Owing to the tension arising from Beijing's attempt to balance environmental democratic governance within an authoritarian power structure, the people have moulded a symbol of discontent; the face mask, not just to display their lack of a right to clean air but their lack of a right to information and the lack of a right to express discontent about the toxic air they collectively breathe.

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Appendix

Figure 1. Protesters outside mall in Xi'an, March 8, 2015. Photo source: Li Yan, "Jinji guanzhu: yinju paifan "wumai", xi'an liangren bei zhuabuhou 紧急关注：因举牌反"雾霾"，西安两人被抓捕后 [Urgent attention: Due to holding up anti-smog placards, two people taken away in Xi'an] weiquanwang 维权网, March 8, 2015 http://wqw2010.blogspot.hu/2015/03/blog-post_59.html

Figure 2. An unidentified netizen posting a picture online as part of the social media campaign "Chengdu I love you, please let me breathe". Photo source, Xiao Tian 小田，Chengdu wu kouzhao? 成都无口罩? [Chengdu has no masks?] ziyouweibo 自由微博，December 12, 2016
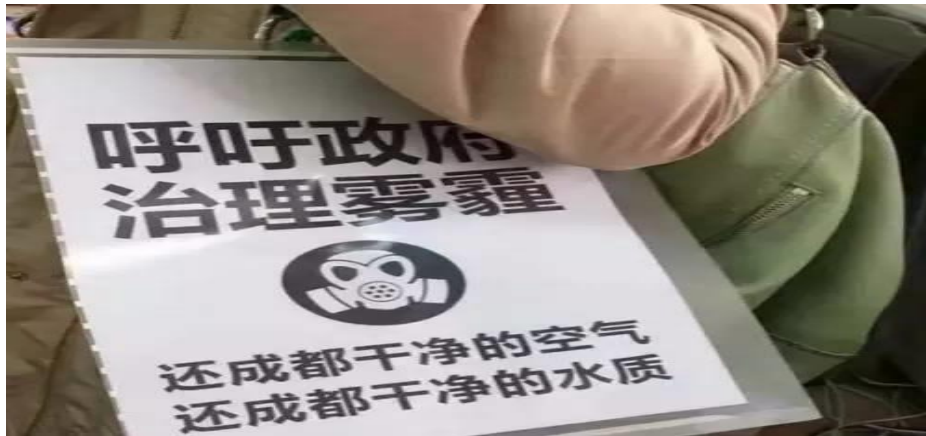*https://freewechat.com/a/MzAwMDc5MDUxNA==/2651120266/1*

Figure 3."Call on government to take care of smog" "Chengdu must clean air" "Chengdu must clean water" Photo source, Xiao Tian 小田，Chengdu wu kouzhao? 成都无口罩? [Chengdu has no masks?] ziyouweibo 自由微博，December 12, 2016 https://freewechat.com/a/MzAwMDc5MDUxNA==/2651120266/1

Figure 4 Chengdu citizens walk peacefully thorugh the city wearing masks to protest the PX plant in neighbouring Pengzhou. Edward Wong, "In China City, Protesters See Pollution Risk of New Plant", New York Times, May 6th 2008, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/06/world/asia/06china.html?mcubz=0

Figure 5 Protester dons a mask with the words 'Kunming' and 'PX' crossed out. Yang Fan 杨帆，Ziyou yazhou diantai 自由亚洲电台，"Kunming kouzhao dayin shiming yifangminzhong kangyi, guanfang chengjiang zhenggairengzao minzhong zhiyi 昆明口罩打印实名以防民众官方称将整改仍遭民众质疑", *Radio Free Asia, May 23, 2013. http://www.rfa.org/mandarin/yataibaodao/huanjing/yf2-05292013103128.html*

Figure 6 Pollution masks placed on statues as part of sporadic smog protests in Chengdu. Xin Lin, "China Cracks down on smog protests, detains activists, muzzles media", Radio Free Asia, December 9, 2016, http://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/muzzles-12132016132603.html

Figure 7 Internet meme on weibo during the two weeks of severe smog in Chengdu, December 2016. Unknown weibo user. Sophie Beach, "Drawing the News: Let me Breathe!", China Digital Times, December 13, 2016 http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2016/12/drawing-news-let-breathe/

Figure 8 Cartoon by online political cartoonist and dissident Rebel Pepper. Sophie Beach, "Drawing the News: Let me Breathe!", China Digital Times December 13, 2016 http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2016/12/drawing-news-let-breathe/

Figure 9 "Face Mask Revolution" 口罩革命 kouzhao geming，by Badiucao. Sophie Beach, "Drawing the News: Let me Breathe!", China Digital Times, December 13, 2016 http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2016/12/drawing-news-let-breathe/