

Ecological Protests and the Emergence of Environmental Movements in China: A Theoretical Analysis

Jean Yen-chun Lin

Ph.D. Student, Department of Sociology
The University of Chicago

Abstract

This paper seeks to explain, via the theories carved out by Beck and Touraine, the current environmental protests in China surrounding issues such as hydropower dam construction, specifically the Three Gorges Dams. China, being an authoritarian regime, is rather different from the democratic societies of France and Germany, but the modernization of the Chinese state and the ongoing changes in China's state-society relations have made it possible for comparisons to be drawn. In addition, although China has not by definition, reached the 'post-industrial' stage of economic development, Touraine's and Beck's theories provide a framework for analyzing China's current situation and the possibility of its civil society's current ecological protests and struggles to escalate into social movements. Whether the emergence of environmental movements is possible in China has been the focus of much current research, but much analysis has focused on the political aspects of the Chinese state. Beck and Touraine's theories provide an alternative sociological framework to better understand the current environmental protests in China and why large-scaled environmental movements have not yet emerged.

Key words : Three Gorges Dam, Environmental Protection, non-governmental organizations, state-society relations, modernization

Introduction

In an era of rapid economic, social, and scientific development, democratic and authoritarian states alike have aggressively pushed for modernization in their countries, investing in the building of large infrastructural projects such as hydropower projects and nuclear-energy stations, but at the same time neglecting the negative effects, or risks that have been brought about by modernization. In Ulrich Beck's *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (1992) and also in his following publications *Ecological Enlightenment* (1995) and *Ecological Politics in an Age of Risk* (1995), Beck posits that there is another "darker dimension" to such developments and especially in the "constitutive role assigned to science and knowledge".¹ For Beck, scientific and industrial developments bring about a set of risks and hazards which we have not previously experienced and argues that these new risks and hazards cross national boundaries and "cannot be delimited spatially, temporally, or socially"², and unlike in an earlier modernity, no one can take personal responsibility or be held responsible for the hazards of the "risk society".³

Alain Touraine, in *Anti-Nuclear Protest* (1983) and *The Voice and the Eye* (1981) explores also the post-industrial society but furthermore seeks to identify how social movements arise from the social struggles of today. He postulates that a social movement is successful when the actors involved in struggles are able to identify the stakes over which the conflict is being fought, not just plainly opposing issues such as nuclear power or hydropower dams, but being able to reshape the wider structure of power, and whether the opponent is identifiable, as a specific social class or institution not in broad terms as the society or the state, and lastly, whether it is an issue concerning the whole of society and not just restricted to certain groups.

This paper seeks to explain, via the theories carved out by Beck and Touraine, the current environmental protests in China surrounding issues such as hydropower dam construction, specifically the Three Gorges Dams. I recognize that China, being an authoritarian regime, is rather different from the democratic societies of France and Germany, but the modernization of the Chinese state and the ongoing changes in China's state-society

¹ Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (New York: SAGE Publications, 1992). p.2

² Ulrich Beck *Ecological Politics in an Age of Risk* (London: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), p.1

³ Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, p.33.

relations have made it possible for comparisons to be drawn. In addition, although China has not by definition, reached the 'post-industrial' stage of economic development, Touraine's and Beck's theories provide a framework for analyzing China's current situation and the possibility of its civil society's current ecological protests and struggles to escalate into social movements. Whether the emergence of environmental movements is possible in China has been the focus of much current research, but much analysis has focused on the political aspects of the Chinese state. Beck and Touraine's theories provide an alternative sociological framework to better understand the current environmental protests in China and why large-scaled environmental movements have not yet emerged.

Beck: Risk Society and Ecological Issues

Previously in his book *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* and in the following book *Ecological Enlightenment*, Beck elucidates his concept of a new modernity, one in which new technologies and the risks brought about are creating a completely new and advanced era of modernity, different from the classical industrial society.⁴ Beck first provides explanations for the transformation of the society commencing from the pre-modern societies, to the simple modern, and finally the reflexive modern societies and postulates that in the reflexive stage of development is coextensive with the risk society.⁵ In this section, I will first elaborate on Beck's concept of modernity and 'risk society', particularly his claim that that above has caused a breakup of social classes and brought about individualization in the society.⁶ I will then analyze Beck's argument on the importance of ecological issues in the risk society and his concept of political reflexivity, a new type of mobilization countering threats in the new era.⁷

On Modernity and the Risk Society

In *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, Beck first describes traditional, or pre-modern, societies, when traditional institutions (such as the church) and structures shaped people's lives and when people regarded themselves as a part of a bigger entity, the "we",

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.9.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.3.

⁶ Ulrich Beck, *Ecological Enlightenment: Essays on the Politics of the Risk Society* (New York: Humanities Press New Jersey, 1995).

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.30.

rather than individually as the “I”. This concept gradually shifted from structured forms of life as the provider of meaning to that of the individual as an agent who chose to give loyalty to structures and institutions and people are freed from their immersion in traditional group determinations. But lastly, in the stage of reflexive modernity, the identity of the people shifted once more, this time to the self as the primary agent of meaning.⁸ In the third stage, Beck asserts that we are facing a new type of modernity typified by reflexivity. He elucidates that early modernity is very much coextensive with industrial society and the new reflexive modernity with the risk society.

For Beck, industrial society and risk society are distinct social formations and that the cardinal principle of industrial society is the distribution of goods while for the risk society, it is the distribution of dangers and threats. As mentioned above, industrial society is structured through social classes while the risk society is individualized⁹. Beck’s basic thesis is that we are sliding into a new society, not a changed society, not a “postindustrial” (au contraire to the term used by Alain Touraine) or “late capitalist” society, but, rather, a novel social structure for which we have as yet no concept.¹⁰ The risk society is the form that the new modernity takes. However, as Lash and Wynne point out in the introduction to *Risk Society*, Beck maintains that the “risk society, is still, and at the same time, an industrial society” (just not the “classical industrial society”) and “it is because industry, in conjunction with science, is involved in the creation of the risk society’s risks”.¹¹ Risks are also the result of decisions that focus on techno-economic advantages and accept threats as simply the dark side of progress. “Risks presume industrial, techno-economic, decisions and considerations of utility”, “originate in peacetime in the centers of rationality and prosperity”, and are different from non-politically charged pre-industrial threats.¹² For Beck, the risk society dissolves some of the conditions of the industrial society (the class structure, the belief in progress and scientific control, and many of the local dynamics of regulation of the work force - in other words, the model of the factory), but at the same time, the risk society is also a form of industrial society (although not the classical form), but an industrial society when some of its dynamics 'get out

⁸ Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, pp.153-154.

⁹ Beck’s concept of individualization will be further elaborated in the following section.

¹⁰ Ulrich Beck, *Ecological Enlightenment: Essays on the Politics of the Risk Society*, p.41.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.3.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.20 and p. 126.

of control' and precisely generate the risks that Beck studies. So, the industrial society is the condition of possibility of the risk society - because it is precisely what is being transformed.

Although risks are socially constructed, Beck claims that conventional literature on risk is characterized by technical thinking and that the public critique of modernity has largely been “snagged on the issues in the area between science and technology”.¹³ Considering this focus on technology and nature, Beck maintains, it is not surprising that the public is scarcely aware that modernization is a social and cultural process.¹⁴ Beck provides a definition for modernization:

The term “modernization” has become established for this complex process in which one social form, industrial society, pushed another, feudal agrarian society, off the stage of world history. Modernization includes the surge of technological rationalization and the change in labor and organization, but it comprises much more than that: the transformation of social character and expected life paths, of lifestyles and forms of love, of power and influence structures, of political forms of repression and participation, of concepts of reality and epistemological norms.¹⁵

Beck argues, just as modernization dissolved the structure of feudal society and produced the industrial society, modernization today is dissolving industrial society and new modernity is coming into being.¹⁶ Modernization bursts the categories and the paths of industrial society that it itself created and it overruns and breaks up everything it has created itself. Beck makes an excellent point in questioning why modernization proceeds in and not against the social forms and paths in which it originated and how one could simply assume that where everything changes remain unchanged.¹⁷ It is also “a paradox of modernity that it created a social system that assigns a central position to technology, and that thereby conceals its own sociality behind the façade and the fascination of technological processes.”¹⁸

Risk societies, from above, refer to an epoch in which the dark sides of progress increasingly come to dominate social debate. A critical point in Beck’s argument is that the

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.38.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.39.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.40.

¹⁶ Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, p.10.

¹⁷ Ulrich Beck, *Ecological Enlightenment: Essays on the Politics of the Risk Society*, p.48.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.39.

analysis of hazards is not the main concern, but instead, the ability to analyze the new opportunities for arranging society such as the breakup of social classes that arise under the pressure of technological threats of risk society.¹⁹ The aforementioned concepts of individualization and the breakup of social classes will be further elaborated in the following section.

Individualism and the Breakup of Class Society

In the age of modernity and risk societies, Beck points out that class society is gradually being replaced, and that all social groups are equally threatened due to the prevalent global hazards. He postulates that the “dynamics of modernity break up or recast the social forms of industrial society”, such as the dilution of social classes, where status is no longer the primary focus.²⁰ To Beck, modernization is not merely structural change, but more importantly, a changing relationship between social structures and social agents. Reiterating his argument, Beck posits that when modernization reaches a certain level, agents tend to become more individualized. As modernization progressively releases people from structural constraints, they reflexively construct their own biographies, for modernization to advance, these agents must actively shape the modernization process.²¹

People are no longer crowded together and fused into socially and politically active ‘classes’, by the pressure of poverty and tangibly experienced workplace alienation in rapidly growing cities bursting at the seams. (...)against a background of the social and political protections and rights that have been fought for and won, people are removed from class connections and socio-moral milieus and more and more must rely on themselves to make a living and defend their rights. Cushioned by the welfare state, the modernization process, which once favored and brought about the formation of classes has become an individualization of class cultures.²²

In risk societies, technological threats endanger the entire population and the global endangerment is replacing class society as an organizing principle. In earlier class-based societies, it was the proletariat that was victimized through the uneven distribution of wealth

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.2.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.49.

²¹ Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, p.2.

²² Ulrich Beck, *Ecological Enlightenment: Essays on the Politics of the Risk Society*, p.41.

and goods, but today the emerging global risk society, ecological issues threaten equally all groups of the society.²³

However, Beck's assertion of the breakup of class society is somewhat problematic. In actuality, some environmental risks do not affect everyone equally. Environmental hazards and threats, as can be seen latter part of the paper in the example of the Three Gorges Dam, present the greatest threat to the poor²⁴. However, Beck is correct in that the risk society does "produce new antagonisms of interests and a new community of the endangered".²⁵

In addition, Beck argues that in the new modernity, social mobility and educational opportunities proliferate and "force people to stand on their own and conceive of themselves as the agents of their own labor market and personal fate".²⁶

Ecological Issues and Political Reflexivity

In risk societies, ecological issues have become especially prominent with dangers which pose threats upon the populous. Beck postulates that the transformation of the unseen and "dark" side effects of industrial production is not a mere environmental problem but a "flagrant institutional crisis of industrial society, with considerable political content".²⁷ These threats, he points out, "are produced industrially, externalized economically, individualized juridically, legitimized scientifically, and minimized politically".²⁸

Another assumption that Beck makes is that ecological protests do not emerge from those who are most threatened. Beck asserts that the "people most severely affected are often precisely the ones who deny the threat most vehemently, and they must deny in order to keep on living" and that "the spark of protest does not ignite among the most threatened, for whom poverty has joined filth, noise, and risk in an iron alliance of threat."²⁹ (3) In addition, Beck postulates that ecological protest begins in the majority middle—radicalized middle classes, who have worked hard for prosperity and whose "norms of health and safety have been

²³ The original *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (German version) came out in 1986, the year of the Chernobyl nuclear explosion, an ecological disaster that affected the poor and leadership alike.

²⁴ Though parts of the middle class in China protested against the construction of the Three Gorges Dams, they did not do so because they were directly affected, or even threatened in any way. This will be elaborated later on in the paper.

²⁵ Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, p.47.

²⁶ Ulrich Beck, *Ecological Enlightenment: Essays on the Politics of the Risk Society*, p.41.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.2

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.127 and p.140.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.3.

nurtured through participation in affluence, property and education”.³⁰ According to Beck, it is a “rule of thumb in sociology that alarm bells go off in the political system when the social middle suffers”.³¹

In the new ecological conflict in risk society, what is at stake is “negative”—such as losses, devastation, and threats, whereas in industrial society, conflicts were “positive” and concerned profits, prosperity, and goods. Beck uses the phrase of Claus Offe and calls the new ecological conflicts a “negative-sum game of collective self-damage”.³² Another essential difference from the old industrial conflict is that in the new ecological conflict, individuals or tiny groups can be influential and act with “considerable” effect. Beck also argues that “faced with the looming industrial catastrophe, nation-states become islands of helplessness, while opportunities arise for an almost individualistic ‘judo politics’, which turns the consequences of industrial dominance”.³³ Social differentiations between nation-states are no longer of primary importance due to the power of threat. Beck elucidates that these new risks and hazards cross national boundaries and “cannot be delimited spatially, temporally, or socially”, and unlike in an earlier modernity, no one can take personal responsibility or be held responsible for the hazards of the risk society.³⁴

However, Beck argues that many ecological threats (ie, nuclear radiation) are invisible and hard to identify in everyday life, and Beck suggests that devastation and protests are symbolically mediated. “Since many threats lack any sensory character, the only way that culturally blinded daily life and become ‘sighted’ is through culturally meaningful and publicly exhibited images and symbols”.³⁵ Protests are not spurred directly by damages but by “cultural norms” and “cultural willingness” to perceive these damages as acceptable or not.³⁶

Due to the breakup of class society, there is no “ecological proletariat”, as Beck posits. But a new counterforce, or mobilization to action has emerged—the “political reflexivity” of threat. The people realize that the government, or “guardians of rationality and order” legalize

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.5 and p.124.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.5.

³² *Ibid.*, p.3.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.11.

³⁴ Ulrich Beck, *Ecological Politics in an Age of Risk*, p.1.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.3 and p.125.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.124.

threats, and therefore “all hell breaks loose politically”.³⁷ Beck argues that the environmental movement is successful due to the use, whether intentional or unintentional, of this political reflexivity. Political reflexivity doesn’t favor ecological oppositional action in particular, but it effectively “irritates” institutions by overturning business plans or industrial authority, destabilizing certainties, short-circuiting separate spheres of action, and re-linking old antagonisms.³⁸ This new form of activism leads to the emergence of a new field of what Beck calls ‘subpolitics’ which refers to the activities of groups and agencies operating outside the formal mechanisms of politics, such as ecological groups. Responsibility for risk management can no longer be merely the responsibility of politicians or scientists; other groups of citizens need to be brought in. However, groups and movements that develop in the arena of subpolitics, however, can have a big influence on orthodox political mechanisms.

Touraine: The Emergence of Social Movements in the Post-Industrial Society

In both *The Voice and the Eye: An Analysis of Social Movements* and later in *Anti-Nuclear Protest: The Opposition to Nuclear Energy in France*, Touraine sets out to describe the emergence of social movements in the post-industrial “programmed society”, where the “central investments are now made at the level of production management and not at that of work organization” as before in the industrial society.³⁹ In this section, I will first analyze Touraine’s notion of struggles and movements in this programmed society, followed by his definition of a social movements, indicators for the emergence of social movements and lastly, which of these indicators account for the emergence of a successful movement.

Struggles and Movements in the Programmed Society

Contrary to Beck’s terminology of a new reflexive risk society, Touraine refers to the current society as the post-industrial programmed society. Touraine characterizes the post-industrial society as a society where “what is crucial is no longer the struggle between capital and labor in the factory but that between the different kinds of apparatus and uses”.⁴⁰

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.3.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.12.

³⁹ Alain Touraine, *The Voice and the Eye: An Analysis of Social Movements* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p.6.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.6-7.

In other words, it is now the struggle between a centralized, technology-dominated state and the people fighting to exercise a degree of self-management in the different spheres of the programmed society. Touraine posits that the continuing influence of the working class movement leads post-industrial struggles to be viewed as a more fundamental type of action the struggle as means of production (energy production) rather than direct opposition to the centralizing state, student protests or the women's liberation movement.⁴¹ However, in the programmed society, the central social conflict has changed.

In a society where the largest investments no longer serve to transform the organization of labor, as in industrial society, but to create new products, and new sources of economic power through the control of complex systems of communication, then the central social conflict has shifted. Central conflict used to be opposing manager and worker, subjected to the rationalizing process of the workplace but now it is opposing the people and apparatuses which have acquired the power to impose patterns of behavior upon the people according to their own interests.⁴²

In Touraine's empirical study of the anti-nuclear protest in France, he postulates that other struggles "merge to a greater or lesser extent with an appeal to modernity and a call for the destruction of outmoded forms of social organization and archaic customs". However, in the anti-nuclear struggle he asserts that the opposite is true, "The dominant image of modernity is challenged, our whole future is cast into the crucible of debate, our economic organization, our way of working and living, are called into question".⁴³ According to Touraine, the new social movements that will arise in the post-industrial era will be in opposition to technocratic power and the anti-nuclear struggle in particular will be the leading figure in new social movements.⁴⁴

Touraine posits that those who are against the nuclear industry are motivated firstly by the fear of catastrophe, but that they also fight against it by proposing an "alternative model of development", and sometimes even "denounce the false modernization of the nuclear industry in the name of a more profound modernization which would create the social and cultural

⁴¹ Alain Touraine, *Anti-Nuclear Protest: The Opposition to Nuclear Energy in France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p.3.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.4.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.3.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.3-4.

conditions needed to go from a society which is a heavy consumer of energy to a more sober society which would be a heavier consumer of information”.⁴⁵

The above is the purpose of struggles, mostly beginning as a defensive move, but gradually transferred into opposition against the technocratic government or central state. Touraine maintains that the movement to protect nature from destruction with the struggle to overthrow the technocratic government and the fight to establish a more modern type of development, provides the definition for new social movements.⁴⁶ However, as Touraine and co-authors of the book continued their research on the anti-nuclear protests, they found that the anti-nuclear protest and ecological movements had in fact subsided, due their inability to fulfill the conditions for the emergence of a successful social movement, which will be elaborated later.

Definition of a Movement and Indicators for Movement Emergence

Situated in the above programmed society, Touraine defines a social movement as the actor in the class war for control of “historicity”—those models and behavior from which a society produces its customs and practices. He posits that there is only one social movement for each class in each type of society with the in industrial society movement being that of the working-class. But the task, to Touraine, to identify what is to take its place in the post-industrial programmed society.⁴⁷ He first differentiates carefully between what constitutes a struggle and what can be defined as a social movement. In both books, Touraine postulates that social movements are distinguishable primarily on the basis of their anti-institutional orientation. He views a social movement as unique, anti-institutional, spontaneous (not in a negative way), rational, and moral. Asides from the anti-institutional character, these movements also have a distinctive group identity.⁴⁸ Whereas he posits that a struggle is any type of conflict. “It may represent a social movement, or it may simply reflect institutional pressures or social and economic demands”. Touraine recognizes anti-nuclear protests as struggles, but whether they embody a new social movement or whether they are situated in another level of social life needs to be further analyzed.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.4-5.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.5.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.4.

⁴⁸ see Touraine Alain, *Anti-Nuclear Protest: The Opposition to Nuclear Energy in France* ; and Alain Touraine, *The Voice and the Eye: An Analysis of Social Movements*.

For Touraine, the next step in identifying a social movement would be to learn to name the actors, the adversary, and the stakes of the new conflicts.⁴⁹ In the post-industrial era, the actors of a struggle have become harder to define. Can the fear of catastrophe, something that now concerns not a particular social group or actor but the whole of humanity, be replaced by a call to the defense of a clearly-defined actor as actors such as the working classes in industrial society, or even specific people or nations? If Beck were making the argument, actors would not be easily identifiable in a large ecological movement which affects all of humanity.⁵⁰ However, for Touraine, the identification of an actor is crucial in the formation of a social movement and in order to sustain a successful movement, as we will see later.

Another point Touraine makes is “whether the system being opposed, sometimes called industrial society or even modernity and which is in reality always identified with the state, can be replaced by the definition of a specific adversary. Can the dominated classes name those who control historicity and equate it with their own interests? Can they successfully point to a ruling class?” Therefore, the definition of an adversary is another indicator for the emergence of a social movement. The last indicator Touraine offers is whether stakes of the struggle is recognizable, that is “to go from the declaration of its own specific objectives to the discovery of the stake common to both antagonists and which both were trying to control in order to give it opposite social directions.”⁵¹

The following sub-section analyzes the three indicators and how the fulfillment of the three would bring about a successful movement.

Identity, Opposition, and Totality⁵²

To reiterate, Touraine postulates that if the actors in struggles are able to identify the stakes over which the conflict is being fought, not just plainly opposing nuclear power or hydropower dams, but being able to reshape the wider structure of power, and whether the opponent is identifiable, as a specific social class or institution not in broad terms as the society or the state. However, whether the two above indicators can be transformed into

⁴⁹ Alain Touraine, *The Voice and the Eye: An Analysis of Social Movements*, p.10.

⁵⁰ see Ulrich Beck, *Ecological Politics in an Age of Risk* and Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*.

⁵¹ Alain Touraine, *Anti-Nuclear Protest: The Opposition to Nuclear Energy in France*, p.176.

⁵² The Identity (I), Opposition (O), and Totality (T) formula can be seen in Alain Touraine, *The Voice and the Eye: An Analysis of Social Movements*, p.81.

effective collective action largely depends on a third indicator—whether movement participants can jointly create a group identity.⁵³

For Touraine, a social movement represents a particular form of struggle, and a struggle cannot be recognized as such unless it matches up to four principle conditions. First of all, it must be “waged in the name of a committed population”. Second, “these struggles must be organized and should not exist purely at the level of opinion, for an organization must exist in order for conflict to take shape and for the movement to attain a certain integration”. Thirdly, “it must fight against an adversary, which may be represented by a social group even if, as often occurs, it is defined in more abstract terms, as capitalism or the state”. Last of all, “the conflict with the adversary should not be specific; it should be a social problem concerning the whole of society: it is this that separates an action struggle from a pressure group whose objectives are more restricted”.⁵⁴

For the anti-nuclear movement in France specifically, it was the definition of the adversary that was worked out most clearly, according to Touraine. “The members of the group tended at the beginning to denounce either the authoritarian state or the capitalism of the large monopolistic firms, with the trade unionists tending naturally to the second, and the ecologists to the first. But they both succeeded in going beyond their ideology and naming their adversary in a new way, as the technocratic power created by capitalism but now capable of surviving it”.⁵⁵ Identity, opposition, and totality compose Touraine’s formula for a social movement to fully realize its potential or more specifically, the three dimensions of social movements in general. Identity (I), being the definition which the social movement actor gives itself; Opposition (O), the definition of its adversary; and Totality (T) the stakes over which the movement and its adversary are in conflict.⁵⁶

Touraine asserts that “when the movement acts effectively, according to the I-O-T formula, its capacity for historical action is extremely strong; if, on the other hand, the three components are separated, this capacity is weakened”.⁵⁷ Touraine posits that the ecological movement in France failed because it was unable to elevate its definition of the stakes to the

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp.80-84.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.85.

⁵⁵ Alain Touraine, *Anti-Nuclear Protest: The Opposition to Nuclear Energy in France*, p.176.

⁵⁶ John A. Hannigan, “Alain Touraine, Manuel Castells and Social Movement Theory: A Critical Appraisal,” *Sociological Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No.4, 1985, p.445.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.84.

societal level and because of the opposition to the dominant class.⁵⁸ The working-class movement lasted because what it fought was not industrialization but industrial relations in the factories. The anti-nuclear movement, on the other hand, only has a future if it directs its forces against a ruling class or the technocratic government and attacks it from various domains of social life. Otherwise, the struggles cannot reach the level of a social movement.

The feminist movement provides an example of the negative consequences of a lack of I-O-T integration, according to Touraine. The feminist movement claims that their main objective is to “rediscover an identity which might be defined by a difference rather than by a relation or by a conflict.”⁵⁹ More radical feminist activists have become “detached from any social basis,” focusing instead on the “affirmation of identity” while more moderate activists in the movement who fight for specific goals are also limited because they are seeking institutional concessions rather than defining their adversary and stakes more completely.⁶⁰ Touraine maintains that “those who put forward claims for the equality of rights, opportunities or remuneration for a category considered as under-privileged or as the victim of discrimination go no further than this level of protest, not even when they are defending their cause with the utmost vehemence”. For him, “no social movement can be solidly formed if its claims are not built upon a wide base to which it accords great autonomy while at the same time endeavoring to rise to a higher level of opposition.”⁶¹

The Push for Modernization and the Rising Ecological Problems in China

The concept of a new modernity forwarded by both Beck and Touraine, whether a reflexive modern risk society or a post-industrial programmed society, while applicable to developed and democratic states such as Germany and the US, developing countries such as China that have not yet reached the so-called “new modernity” or “post-industrial” era in state development cannot be effectively applied. However, the theories of Beck and Touraine can serve as indicators in analyzing the current development of these countries and as a prediction of what is to come and what is to be expected. China, since its economic reforms in 1978, has

⁵⁸ Alain Touraine, *Anti-Nuclear Protest: The Opposition to Nuclear Energy in France*, pp.176-177.

⁵⁹ Alain Touraine, *The Voice and the Eye: An Analysis of Social Movements*, p.221.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.87.

rapidly modernized causing environmental problems and in addition, huge investments in infrastructure have also brought about negative ecological impacts. It is in many ways parallel to Beck's description of a risk society, and with rising consciousness of ecological threats in the country, parts of the populous have begun, to an extent, to mobilize and counter the new threats posed upon the society. But whether contentions and this mobilization can be further elevated to a social movement still remains to be seen. With Touraine's identity-opposition-totality formula, I will analyze the possibility of the emergence of environmental movements in China, but in addition take into account the particular political opportunity structure of the country, an element which both authors have overlooked.

Aforementioned, Beck asserts that in the risk society, class society will no longer be as evident since ecological dangers threaten the whole population, and not only certain classes in the society. However, in China, the construction of the Three Gorges Dams for example, has displaced 1.3 million people, all of which are poor peasants. Protests are largely launched by civil society organizations composed of middle-class educated parts of the population, those who are not directly affected by dam construction, but they are unable to mobilize the directly-influenced peasant population due to the restrictive political opportunity structures of the country. The inability to mobilize people across classes has caused class divisions in the country to remain as distinct as ever, unlike Beck's hypothesis. Although China is not yet in the post-industrial era, as Touraine calls it, current political obstacles indicate that the breakup of class society in the post-industrial future still remains unlikely.⁶² With the same logic, political obstacles also indicate that Touraine's argument where new social movements in the post-industrial era will be in opposition to the technocratic government is highly unlikely. Touraine's I-O-T formula however, provides a useful framework to analyze why environmental movements in China have not yet fully emerged.

Since the start of economic reforms in 1978, China has been rapidly developing due to its open door policy and market economy. Before the reforms, the Chinese state was considered an ideology-based totalitarian regime wielding power over society.⁶³ The society on the other hand, had very limited space to develop and was severely suppressed by the state.

⁶² Beck posits that risk society is at the same time an industrial society because it is industry and science that create the risk society's risks, as mentioned previously in the paper, while Touraine situates the programmed society in the post-industrial era.

⁶³ See Dingxin Zhao, *The Power of Tiananmen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

Subsequent to the reforms, the state has transformed itself into a performance-based authoritarian regime as a result of market-oriented reform, permitting the expansion of civil society and the establishment of autonomous civic organizations, commonly recognized as non-governmental organizations. In order to keep up with the rapidly growing economy, the Chinese government desired to make huge investments in infrastructure, such as dams and other large hydropower projects, and therefore approved of projects such as the Three Gorges Dams.⁶⁴ Although this massive dam will provide China with 18,000 megawatts of energy, more than 10 percent of China's total electricity needs, opponents have criticized that it should not be a symbol of national development, for the negative environmental impacts of the dam will outweigh the advantages it brings to development.

The population problem is the first obstacle that the Chinese reform policy met, and with that ecological dilemmas such as pollution arise as well. Problems such as environmental degradation and rapid depletion of natural resources have greatly hindered China's development and the government recognizes that it cannot effectively solve these problems due to limited state capacity. Due to rapid modernization and economic development, degradation of the environment has become "increasingly severe" and the high-growth, resource-intensive development strategy China has pursued further causes environmental problems.⁶⁵ Water and air pollution remain two of the dangers that could, as Beck posits, potentially affect the whole population. For example, in July 2004, an environmental disaster occurred on the Huai river, one of China's seven big rivers because too much water had been taken from the river system, reducing its ability to clean itself and that numerous factories dump untreated waste directly into the water, devastating fish and wildlife along the 133 kilometer river. In terms of air pollution, the World Bank reported that China has 16 of the world's 20 most polluted cities due to mushrooming energy needs that are supplied by coal-fired power stations. Estimates suggest that 300,000 people a year die prematurely from respiratory diseases.⁶⁶

As China pursues modernization, it is gradually becoming what Beck calls a risk society, with the distribution of dangers and threats, and where the dark sides of progress and

⁶⁴ Sukhan Jackson and Andrian C. Sleight, "The Political Economy and Socio-Economic Impact of China's Three Gorges Dam," *Asian Studies Review*, Vol.25, No.1, 2001, p.57.

⁶⁵ Abigail R. Jahiel, "The Organization of Environmental Protection in China," *The China Quarterly*, No. 156, *Special Issue: China's Environment*, 1998, p.757.

⁶⁶ "China's Environment: A Great Wall of Waste," *The Economist*, August 19, 2004.

development have increasingly come to dominate social debate.⁶⁷ These effects have caught the attention of even the authoritarian government causing it to be more liable in arousing public participation in environmental protection, while individuals with a high level of environmental awareness have begun to voluntarily protect the environment, bringing about the emergence of environmental NGOs, dissent, and protests in China.⁶⁸

Political Reflexivity: Dissent from the People

To more effectively address the issue of political reflexivity and more fully understand the reason for dissent, it is necessary to first provide the background of the construction of the Three Gorges Dam, the largest hydropower project in China. The Three Gorges Dam project was first proposed in 1919 but its actual realization began only in the 1980s and early 1990s.⁶⁹ Before 1949, China had only constructed less than twenty-three large-scale dams and reservoirs, but in the recent fifty years, over 20,000 leviathan dams have appeared, allowing China to become the country with the most dams worldwide.⁷⁰ The 1950s was a period in which China was actively involved in dam-building. The people's communes, the Great Leap Forward, and dam construction fulfilled the government's goal to be self-reliant, by utilizing the country's own laborers and resources, after China-Soviet relations fissured. The Communist Party promoted dam construction as part of national campaigns, equating the blocking of river flow with developing the country and mobilized the people to support the projects.⁷¹ Under the guideline of self-reliance, central and local leaders often quickly agreed to dam project proposals that had not been carefully planned to alleviate problems such as irrigation. From the 1950s to 1970s, Mao's push for economic growth had induced the building of over 600 dams per year in China.⁷² The massive dam building program in the 1950s to 1970s was disastrous in some areas where dams collapsed, killing tens of thousands of people or displacing them from their homes.

⁶⁷ Ulrich Beck, *Ecological Enlightenment: Essays on the Politics of the Risk Society*.

⁶⁸ Ming Wang, "Past Development of NGOs and Their Current Status in China," *China's NGO Research 2001, UNCRD Research Report*, No. 43, 2001, pp.214-215.

⁶⁹ see Qing Dai, *Yangtze! Yangtze!* (London: Earthscan Publications Ltd, 1994).

⁷⁰ Shui Fu, "A Profile of Dams in China," in Dai Qing ed., *The River Dragon Has Come!: The Three Gorges Dam and the Fate of China's Yangtze River and Its People* (London: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), pp.18-22.

⁷¹ International Rivers Network, "IRN's China Campaigns," *International Rivers Network*, 2004, at <http://www.irn.org/programs/china>.

⁷² John G. Gurley, *China's Economy and the Maoist Strategy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1976).

Mao re-raised the idea of a dam at the Three Gorges on the Yangtze River shortly before the Great Leap Forward. During this period, concerns were raised regarding the threats that Three Gorges dams may pose to the environment. Chou Enlai, the premier of PRC, also expressed concern with the issue but the dam-construction trend was unstoppable. In 1980, the project became a topic of heated debate after Deng Xiaoping inspected the area. The project became an important component of an ambitious modernization plan at the Twelfth CCP Congress.⁷³ By 1986, under domestic and international pressure, both the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and the State Council recommended that the project be postponed. In April 1989, the central government also announced that construction would not begin in the next five years. However, after Tiananmen Square incident in 1989, the State Council in 1992 immediately decided to go ahead with the project. The National People's Congress approved the project in the same year.⁷⁴ Subsequently, in the end of 1992, 179 farmers were arrested in their protest to the project. The actual construction began in 1994 with its completion scheduled in 2009.

This massive dam will provide China with 18,000 megawatts of energy, more than 10 percent of China's totally electricity needs. It will stand 600 feet tall and create a reservoir more than 360 miles long and 175 meters deep. In a two-stage process, the dam will provide electricity to a region in the immediate vicinity of the dam. By the year 2010, the government plans to transmit power as far north as Beijing and as far south as Hong Kong⁷⁵.

Two of the most controversial issues within the Three Gorges project are resettlement and environmental problems. Some scholars have said that by making ecological surveys uncoordinated and confused, vaguely defining the aim of reports, dam supporters ensured that dam builders were not challenged. In addition, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) pushed for the construction of the dam by "playing upon traditional, and well-founded, fears of Yangtze [river] flooding and by offering locals [seemingly] generous resettlement

⁷³ Lijian Hong, "Sichuan: Disadvantage and Mismanagement in the Heavenly Kingdom," in David S.G. Goodman, ed., *China's Provinces in Reform: Class, Community and Political Culture* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp.213-214.

⁷⁴ Peter Bosshard, "Human Rights Abuses in China and the Responsibility of Western Governments," *International Rivers Network/Friends of Earth International* at <http://www.irm.org/programs/threeg/index.php?id=030331.unchrpres.html>

⁷⁵ Elizabeth C. Economy, *The River Runs Black: The Environmental Challenge to China's Future* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), p.205.

packages”.⁷⁶ The issues were not so simple. Reservoir resettlement involving such a large number of people, 1.2 million, is unprecedented and the Chinese government struggles with funds and policies in relocation.⁷⁷ These resettlers suffer from unemployment, the lack of education, social marginalization and the funds being used to relocate them are mismanaged and corrupted by local officials. The migrants have lost their land and livestock and received no sufficient compensation. Such a large population indicates that the environmental capacity will not be able to sustain the relocatees. Farmland is scarce and unquestionably not enough to be distributed, and the former jobs of migrants are no longer existent.⁷⁸

With the lack of environmental evaluations before dam construction, problematic relocation plans, local corruption of relocation compensation money, and social problems such as unemployment and marginalization that have arisen, directly-affected peasants and middle-class participants of civil society organizations alike have begun to “strike back”, though with limited results due to the authoritarian nature of the Chinese government. Political reflexivity, the new type of mobilization countering threats, as Beck suggests, has begun to emerge in China. The people have realized that the government, or “guardians of rationality and order” legalize threats and this type of reflexivity, according to Beck, are used by environmental movements to gain success.⁷⁹ However, due to the particular nature of the political regime in China, such reflexivity, though existent, is largely limited due to government suppression of protests or any sort of anti-government or anti-institutional mobilization.

Civil society organizations such as environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs), composed of middle-class participants, are not directly influenced by the threat but are at the forefront of the strengthening civil society in China addressing a broad range of concerns from dam construction, to tree planting, to energy conservation. With rising environmental awareness of the populus, these NGOs have been attempting to mobilize peasants, as in the case of the Three Gorges Dam, but due to government restrictions on

⁷⁶ James Beattie, “Dam Building, Dissent, and Development: the Emergence of the Three Gorges Project”, *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2002, p.139.

⁷⁷ Gorild Heggelund, *Environment and Resettlement Politics in China: The Three Gorges Project* (New York: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2004), p.1.

⁷⁸ see Gorild Heggelund, *Environment and Resettlement Politics in China: The Three Gorges Project* and also see Qing Dai, *The River Dragon Has Come!: The Three Gorges Dam and the Fate of China's Yangtze River and Its People* (New York: M.E. Sharpe Inc., 1998).

⁷⁹ Ulrich Beck, *Ecological Enlightenment: Essays on the Politics of the Risk Society*.

NGOs such as strict registration procedures and careful monitoring, these organizations have yet to effectively use the existent but weak political reflexivity of the people to further dissent into larger movements.

Farmers vs. Civil Society Organizations: Dissolving of Class Society?

As Beck postulates, ecological protests do not emerge from those who are most threatened—people who are most severely affected are the ones who deny the threat most vehemently, and they must be in denial in order to keep on living.⁸⁰ When applied to China, Beck's statement is in many ways correct. Although the peasants relocated because of the Three Gorges Dam construction cannot deny nor do they actively deny threats such as dam collapsing or other ecological problems, they are not the ones who can effectively launch a protest due to the suppression of both local and central governments and also because of the lack of guidance from the middle-class.⁸¹ Instead, environmental activists in civil society organizations, mainly of the educated middle-class, though not directly affected by dam construction, were the ones actively organizing protests.

As Beck suggests, ecological protest begins in the majority middle—radicalized middle classes, who have worked hard for prosperity and whose “norms of health and safety have been nurtured through participation in affluence, property and education”.⁸² The statement is partially true. For these middle-class NGO participants, broader environmental issues such as air and water pollution and energy conservation may be of concern because they are directly threatened by these problems. However, when hydropower dams, unrelated to the middle-class protestors, become an issue of protest, there must be another element worthy of

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.3 and p.124.

⁸¹ The government's strict control over the peasants can be historically traced. In rural areas, the establishment of the collective people's communes from 1958 to 1985 allowed the Chinese Communist Party to exercise a strict political, economic and social control on the peasants. Politically, the party cadres, or representatives of the government, heavily relied on ideology to mobilize the peasants in their daily cultivation and infrastructure construction. The introduction of household registration, traveling permission, and food rations had not only geographically bounded the farmers to their communities, but also further constrained them from free movement between villages or between villages and the cities. From the state's point of view, the farmers were directly fixed to their land and dominated by party cadres and local governmental officials. The government, using these commune units as political and economic devices, caused these units to become isolated communities where peasants were geographically bounded and limited in their mobility.

⁸² Ulrich Beck, *Ecological Enlightenment: Essays on the Politics of the Risk Society*, pp.5 and p.124.

analysis. Beck mentions this element briefly but does not provide enough examples to demonstrate the factor. For Beck, Protests are not spurred directly by damages but by “cultural norms” and “cultural willingness” to perceive these damages as acceptable or not.⁸³ These norms, I argue, are not only narrowly defined domestic “cultural norms”, but also “international norms”, or “environmental norms” prevalent in the international society not yet existent in an authoritarian China. These NGOs in China are motivated by international environmental norms, especially through collaboration with international NGOs or forming an advocacy network which creates, implements, strengthen, and monitors international norms.⁸⁴

Also mentioned before, Beck postulates that modernity breaks up the social forms of the classical industrial society, such as the dilution of social classes, where status is no longer the primary focus.⁸⁵ However, the class division of society is still very much evident in China with the growing rich-poor gap and inequalities. And in actuality, some environmental occurrences do not affect everyone equally and the social differentiation of environmental risks is largely neglected. As the example of the Three Gorges Dam construction indicates, environmental hazards and threats such as dam accidents present the greatest threat to the poor peasants who have been dislocated to surrounding areas.

Beck suggests that another essential difference from the classical industrial conflict is that in the new ecological conflict, individuals or tiny groups can be influential and act with “considerable” effect. This is true for most NGOs or activist groups in the West but the political regime of China effectively controls the formation of civic groups, monitors NGO activity, and keeps a careful eye on group gatherings. Although domestic NGOs in China, in collaborating with international NGOs have been proven successful in curbing smaller hydropower projects in China such as the Nu River and Tiger Leaping Gorge, they have still not managed to mobilize peasants and thus the environmental protests remain small protests, and not large-scale movements.⁸⁶ The farmers, on the other hand, stay silent, at most

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.124.

⁸⁴ Sanjeev Khagram, James V. Riker and Kathryn Sikkink, “From Santiago to Seattle: Transnational Advocacy Groups and Restructuring World Politics,” in Sanjeev Khagram, James V. Riker, and Kathryn Sikkink, eds., *Restructuring World Politics: Transnational Social Movements, Networks, and Norms* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2002), p.4.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p.49.

⁸⁶ see Phillip Stalley and Dongning Yang, “An Emerging Environmental Movement in China?”, *The China Quarterly*, 2006, pp.333-356.

passively protesting, but face local crackdowns if protests escalate. The fundamental question should be why these protests have not been able to be elevated into social movements. There is obviously contention, there is collective action in the form of protests, and it cannot be only due to the authoritarian political regime since other non-democracies have had environmental movements. In the next section, I will attempt to explain why movements have not emerged in China in accordance with Touraine's Identity-Opposition-Totality formula and address additional elements that I have observed in my research.

Emergence of Movements?

For Touraine, a social movement is “the combination of a principle of identity, a principle of opposition, and a principle of totality”.⁸⁷ According to Touraine's interpretation, if the actors involved in the dam struggles in China are able to identify the stakes over which the conflict is being fought, not just plainly opposing hydropower dams, but being able to reshape the wider structure of power, identify the adversary, preferably as a specific social class or institution rather than in abstract terms as the society or the state, and give the group an identity, a movement would emerge.⁸⁸ Civic groups in China have held organized protests, targeted clear issues, identified their adversary—the authoritarian government, and the issues have everything to do with the society at large. Why has a full-scale environmental movement not emerged in China? Why have these struggles remained struggles?

If we start first with the analysis of identity, it is important to first note the existing relationship between NGOs and the Chinese government, followed by the relationship between the people and these organizations. Functionally speaking, the Chinese state is dependent on NGOs because they provide services and solve problems that limited state capacity cannot deal with. At the same time, NGOs have become less threatening to the state, and the state has also begun to learn how to deal with NGOs. However, NGOs are not completely independent; the government and NGOs reside in a state of complex interdependency. Civic organizations suffer from an inherent shortage in the organizational scale and activity ability. Essential factors such as legislation framework, social support, culture background and economic base are relatively weak and insufficient. For some NGOs, the organizational structure is immature, for others, most of the staff is from the government

⁸⁷ Alain Touraine, *The Voice and the Eye: An Analysis of Social Movements*, p.81.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.80-84.

and their management shares the basic features found in government administration departments.

On the other hand, NGOs rely on the state since a large part of the staff may be re-employed governmental officials, or even party cells. They are dependent on the laws passed by the state because it concerns the long-term development of these organizations. The state, as mentioned before, need NGOs to provide services and the government does not suppress them as long as they do not oppose governmental policies or come into conflict with the government. Since the 1990s, independently-established NGOs started to mushroom. Many of these, autonomous from the government, start out as radical organizations, but as time goes by, they become more moderate and less anti-government. The conventional explanation is that these NGOs will be suppressed by the government if their radical gestures commence to challenge state power. Another consideration is that these organizations themselves do not want to be banned or else they would not be able to pursue their goals, and after frequent interaction with the government, both sides gain more understanding of each other, such as the other party's behavior pattern and position. Consequently, NGOs start feeling sympathetic towards the state and its policies, therefore tuning down their radicalness, yet not giving in completely to the government⁸⁹. As long as these NGOs are moderate in pursuing their goals and not challenging the state, the government allows them to function fairly freely. As Elisabeth Knup notes: "many newly established social organizations have achieved a relatively high degree of autonomy, as long as the organization's activities support the overall goals and policies of the state"⁹⁰.

As we infer from above, the government and civic groups are highly interdependent of each other, but due to this interdependency, people are wary of these organizations because they understand that ultimately there is a greater power above NGOs—the central government. With no support from the public in general, these NGOs find it extremely difficult to mobilize people and without participants in collective protests, a group identity cannot easily be formed. Data of potential participants are largely lacking, but a research done recently on university students in Beijing found that there is little likelihood of environmentalism among students in

⁸⁹ Personal communication with Professor Dingxin Zhao, March 8, 2005

⁹⁰ Elisabeth Knup, "Environmental NGOs in China: An Overview," *China Environment Series*, Vol.1, 1997, pp.9-15; see also Peter Ho, "Greening Without Conflict? Environmentalism, NGOs and Civil Society in China," *Development and Change*, Vol..32, 2001, p.915.

transforming into an independent grassroots movement.⁹¹ With no broad public support of support from key segments of the population, protest groups are not likely to be formed or to succeed, and without the ability to mobilize the public, the notion of a protest “group” is obscured and thus a group identity cannot be formed.⁹²

The second indicator for the emergence of a social movement according to Touraine is the definition of the adversary or the opposition. The protest group must fight against an adversary, which may be represented by a social group or more abstractly as the state. However, in China, although protecting the environment was a salient issue for university students, there is minimal evidence that these concerns will transform into pressure on the government.⁹³ This not only applies to the students surveyed in the research, because the public in China has been supportive of economic development and had faith in the capacity of economic growth and the authoritarian leaders to solve problems.⁹⁴ With support for the government’s development policies, it is difficult for the public to generate pressure on the government or even view the government as opposition.

Civic groups cannot mobilize enough people precisely because the public does not contend a technocratic government, and therefore the emergence of an environmental movement is difficult at the moment. When environmental protests do sporadically appear, the protestors are not necessarily targeting the state, but instead local governments who are corrupted or even local businesses who might be causing pollution. However, if the protests escalate, the local governments launch crackdowns to curb social unrest. Under these circumstances, it is difficult for the protests in China to have a clearly defined adversary, only abstractly denouncing the local governments.

Last of all, according to Touraine, the conflict with the adversary should be a social problem concerning the whole of society, but due to the authoritarian state’s endeavors to manipulate social organizations, laying down strict registration rules in 1998 that include regulations such prohibiting similar organizations to be co-established at the same

⁹¹ Phillip Stalley and Dongning Yang, “An Emerging Environmental Movement in China?” *The China Quarterly*, Vol.186, June 2006, p.333. The article focused on university students of Beijing because university students have had a long history of shaping Chinese politics and within the China studies literature, there is a significant body of work exploring the political role of students.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p.340.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p.345.

⁹⁴ “Why Hasn’t Economic Development Brought Democracy to China?” *East-West Center*, July 24, 2006, http://www.eastwestcenter.org/events-en-detail.asp?news_ID=341

administrative level and that social organizations must register with the appropriate civil affairs department from the county-level upwards, it has limited the potential for the spread of grass-roots organizations that could develop national (vertical) or horizontal representation.⁹⁵ Therefore, it is difficult for an entire social class to support a specific environmental movement, even if it is a problem such a pollution that may influence the whole of society. As for anti-dam protests such as those of the Three Gorges Dam, people who are not directly influenced or not forced to migrate because of its construction will not view it as a source of concern. As Touraine suggests, no social movement can be solidly formed if “its claims are not built upon a wide base to which it accords great autonomy while at the same time endeavoring to rise to a higher level of opposition”.⁹⁶

Conclusion

Evidently there has been an ongoing change in the nature of state-society relations in China for the past two decades; it is a process that cannot be obscured, in which the state and the society are incessantly shaping and reshaping their relations. As the state pushes for rapid modernization, it is gradually becoming a risk society, where the dark sides of progress and development have increasingly come to dominate social debate.⁹⁷ These effects have caught the attention of even the authoritarian government causing it to be more liable in arousing public participation in environmental protection, while individuals with a high level of environmental awareness have begun to voluntarily protect the environment, bringing about the emergence of environmental NGOs, dissent, and protests in China.⁹⁸

However, these protests have not escalated into social movements because of political constraints in China, which obstructed protest groups from forming a collective identity, defining an adversary, and allowing some environmental issues such as the influence of the Three Gorges Dam project to be of greater social concern. Before, when it comes to China studies much of the analysis of why movements have failed to emerge in China was based on political causal mechanisms and sociological reasons have been neglected. Thus, through the application of Beck and Touraine’s theories, I have attempted to offer a more in-depth

⁹⁵ see Wang, Ming, “Past Development of NGOs and Their Current Status in China,” *China’s NGO Research 2001, UNCRD Research Report no.43*.

⁹⁶ Alain Touraine, *The Voice and the Eye: An Analysis of Social Movements*, p.87.

⁹⁷ see Ulrich Beck, *Ecological Enlightenment: Essays on the Politics of the Risk Society*.

⁹⁸ Ming Wang, “Past Development of NGOs and Their Current Status in China,” pp.214-215.

analysis of why environmental movements have not occurred in China. Although the concrete influence social group protests is still yet to be seen the paper still provides a new perspective and new elements to the traditional analysis of protests and the possibility of movement emergence in China. The fact that China is industrializing in a world full of post-industrial societies and its consequences should also be further examined in future research.

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