

Social Change in East Asia

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# Civil Society and Environmental Groups in the PRC

# Civil Society Groups Must Register

- “Almost all citizens groups cultivate ties with top leaders and agencies as a form of protection and assurance of a green light for their activities.”
  - Guanxi? Cultivating obligation, indebtedness and reciprocity to get things done
- Civil Affairs Bureau 民政部
  - Authorizes groups who sometimes call it their “mother-in-law” (consultative authoritarianism)
  - Supervises their ideology, finances, personnel, research, contacts with foreigners, and donations from foreigners
- Possible activities
  - Information politics (nature films, for example)
  - Accountability politics (monitor compliance to national laws and international treaties)
  - Symbolic politics

# Friends of Nature

- Organized by Liang Congjie grandson of Liang Qichao
  - An early environmentalist group organized in 1993
  - First campaign to save the Tibetan antelope (famous for its belly fur used to weave *shahtoosh* (king of wool)
  - Wool was smuggled to Kashmir for weaving, so a safe target
  - Resulted in forming a nationwide organization with project participation
  - Has a translation program (globalization)
- Other organizations now exist that make films to highlight the plight of endangered animals and environments

# Journalists and Filmmakers

- Role
  - Advocates for the “little people” by providing a conduit for information from the grass roots to top leaders who might be able to take action
  - Founded on Chinese tradition of appealing to the sense of justice of higher authorities (remonstrance 忠告)
    - Liu Binyan *A Higher Kind of Loyalty* 第二種忠誠—a person seeks a personal audience with a powerful authority or journalist
  - Rather than filing suit (which is possible) people often first go to someone in power higher up, or a journalist

# Journalists and Filmmakers

- Examples

- *Southern Weekend* (南方週末) -- less courageous since 2013
- *Guangming Daily* (光明日報) --published articles about the ecological damage of dams on the Nu River
- Survey research—on electronic waste, for example
- Investigative journalism on air pollution *Under the Dome*, or the SARS epidemic



# Other Examples of Environmental Activism in the PRC

- “Naming and Shaming”
  - doing undercover investigations of manufacturers for multinationals that are then “shamed” into cleaning up their Chinese factories
- Celebrity Activism
  - Alibaba’s Jack Ma releasing water quality kits, or use Jackie Chan for publicity
- Transparency politics
  - Because organizing political groups to pressure the government is not possible, NGO’s organize official data to make it accessible to the public—has been used to publicize air pollution, for example

# Other Examples (continued)

- Supply Chain Analysis
  - ENGO's analyze the total supply chain of international products and then make the end marketer responsible for mitigating the pollution (a form of naming and shaming)
- Litigation to force enterprises and local governments to comply with environmental law
  - N.B.—in China (and East Asia in general), the practice is to write laws very generally and leave the details of enforcement to the local authorities, so this method is not always easy
- GONGOs—Government Organized NGOs
  - All China Environment Federation (under State Environmental Protection Administration)
- International NGOs
  - World Wide Fund for Nature works on Panda preservation
  - Nature Conservancy, Natural Resources Defense Council