

The Forming Mechanism of the China's Environmental Movement from the Perspective of Risk Society -----A Comparative Study between These Two Cases

Hubiao Zhang

Department of sociology Hohai University
1 Xikang Road, Nanjing, Jiangsu, China
e-mail :xtzhh@aliyun.com

Abstract—Environmental crisis is a problem of modernity in certain phase (stage) of modernization. Risk society theory becomes a new dimensionality for modern society to survey social development on the perspective of modernity. The thesis opens out the practical logic of environment movement through the comparison of two cases in China, which includes the different discourse and action logic of different actors. In the end, the essay reflects China' environmental movement in the scope of risk society theory.

Keywords-environmental crisis; environmental movement in China; risk societ

I. INTRODUCTION

The shaping of social theory is intertwined with "modern phenomenon" and "modernity" (Liu Xiaofeng, 1998). The "diagnose" to the consequence of modernity has become the important issue of contemporary social theory. Beck, a famous German sociologist, has brought forward "risk society" theory on the perspective of the reflections of modernity (environmental crisis, for example).

The "SARS" event happening at the turn of spring and summer in 2003 has been regarded as the sign of China stepping into risk society. Afterwards some Chinese scholars have already used risk society theory to concern about Chinese realities: some scholars advocate that the new modernity is substituted for the old one, and we should thoroughly reflect and again adjust the pattern of development and control in China (Zheng Hangsheng, Hong Dayong, 2003), some scholars contemplate the significance of the risk society theory for knowing the Chinese social development stage' changes from "China's experience" (Li Peilin, 2004).

China is entering "environmental risk society", and China's modern environmental risk has already had some new characteristics: the structural contamination brought about by industrialization (especially heavy chemical industry) and urbanization, globalization trend, compression and high risk and so on. Modern environment risk is challenging to the original fundamental system of industry society. The original environmental improvement mechanism has already had no way to face the challenge in risk society, which is confronted

with a new kind of transformation, and it also indicates in a sense that it is changing from simple modernization (industry society) to reflexive modernization (risk society). The recessive side effect that industrial society produces becomes the global eco-crisis focal point, which seemingly has already been not that problem in our circumambient world ---so-called "environmental problem", but a deeply system crisis of industry society itself. The systematic consequence is able to appear in the concept of risk society. So long as the development is observed in the concept of industry society, the counteraction effect of destroying systematic is unable to be found when the counteraction is evidently responsible and is able to secretly scheme against. But its systematic consequence is able to appear in the concept and visual field of risk society, they may make our cognition arrive at a kind of the new necessity of self-owned reflexivity and self-determination (Beck, 1997). Therefore, we want to know about the impact of risk society to China through China's environmental movement, revealing the significance of risk society theory to China's social practice.

This research adopts the case comparative analysis method. Both of the cases are X river cadmium pollution event and Xiamen PX event. I myself mainly investigated X river cadmium pollution event in July and August, 2006, supplementing a lot of new data afterwards. Xiamen PX event' data originated from network, newspapers and periodicals etc. The thesis reveals the practical logic of risk society in China in two cases' study.

II. THE INTRODUCTION AND COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE TWO CASES

A. The Introduction of the Two Cases: X River Cadmium Event and Xiamen PX Event

1) *X river cadmium event*: X river basin lies in Middle China, and the two sides of X river basin mainly have three old industrial bases which were built in the 50s of the last century. The source of Cadmium pollution in X river basin mainly included two aspects: 1) there are some historic problems left over by those old industrial bases; 2) there are also some

problems brought about by the current non-ferrous metal price rising suddenly and sharply. After several representatives of people congress discovered the X river cadmium pollution, it was put on the agenda of governance. The process of its treatment was also the interactive relationship between different subjects. Every interest-group expressed his position to X river pollution event in the group by which it stands. Several people's representatives pushed forward X river cadmium problem step by step, such as discovering problem, collecting evidences, communicating with governments and building environment protection association and so on. The main tactics that the representatives make use of is "both the carrot and the stick". At the same time, the C municipal government and G provincial government and their relevance branches have also made some responses to X river cadmium pollution event, but the way, content and degree of different government subjects responses were different. In the interactive process between governments and representatives, *the crux of the matter* has got lifted: 1) the problem was changed from simply controlling Cadmium pollution problem to the combination of controlling pollution and opening up the second water source, even resolving it by legislation and the change of economic growth mode, 2) the scope of its participation was changed from the attention of several representatives only to the participation of the municipal environmental protection association.

2) *Xiamen PX event*: Xiamen city, an eastern coastal area in China, is also one of China's SEZ set up in the 80s of last century at the beginning of China's reform and opening-up. The Xiamen PX project will be invested for 10.8 billion Yuan by Tenglong Aromatic PX (Xiamen) Co. Ltd, generating the revenues of 80 billion Yuan a year. And its procedure was complete and legal. However, because the distance between the location where the factory intended to be set up and the centre of Xiamen city or the Gulangyu island only is only 7 km. Under the opposition of scientists, Political Consultative Committee Members and citizens, Xiamen municipal government decided to relocate it ultimately.

In Xiamen PX event, the argument between public opinion and GDP could be divided into three stages. In the first stage, though some scientists, such as academician zhao yufen, have brought forward some questions on the selected location of PX project, the Xiamen municipal government still pushed forward the Xiamen PX project by force, and at the same time also adopted a lot of measures to suppress the opposing voices. But with the more and more opposing voices rising from the Xiamen citizens and even the parade through street, it began to go into the second stage. In order to stable social situation, the government began to announce postponing the PX project. In the third stage, Xiamen municipal government again organized some experts to carry out the total planning environment assessment in Haicang, Xiamen. And in the public participation of environmental assessment, Xiamen citizens also resolved the problem in a reasonable way by adopting a tolerant and restrained attitude.

B. *The Comparative Analysis of the Two Cases*

The two cases in this thesis put the problem of environmental pollution itself and its potential impact on the important agenda of local government, and to some extent they are also successfully solved. However, the differences of their discourses, mobilization mechanisms and governments' responses' strategies of the two cases are very significant.

Discourse is the important means that environmental actors construct legitimacy and fight for their rights. China's current environmental movement is not "large-scale resistance to discourse and ideology" (Zhao Dingxin, 2006), but mainly the right to live closely bound up with people's living. In the above two cases, their main discourses include science discourse and policy discourse, and so on. Science discourse mainly refers to effectively master pollution claims. In the X river cadmium pollution Event, several people's representatives not only mastered lots of evidences on the X river pollution, but also questioned and explored the drinking water standard. On this base, they put forward some suggestions on revising the drinking water standard to the NPC. However, in the Xiamen PX event, Academician zhao yufen, Professor Yuan Dongxing and other representatives of public opinion had completely different attitudes on potential pollution and the PX project site from Xiamen municipal government. Policy discourse is related to china's macro-policy. At present, the scientific concept of development, socialist harmonious society and the people's livelihood issues have become the current Chinese government's idea, which are regarded as the powerful weapons by environmental protesters. The goal of these discourses which several representatives made use of is that it made local governments attach importance to the serious environment pollution problem and effectively protect the safety of drinking water. However, Xiamen citizens advocated these slogans, such as "people livelihood, democracy, civil rights and harmony" and "resisting the PX, securitizing public health, protecting the environment in Xiamen", and so on. Through these discourses environmental citizenship regarded as a kind of fundamental human right was put forward.

In addition to discourses, actors' main strategies are embodied in their mobilization mechanism, which includes formal and informal forms. The following are the comparative analysis between the two cases. The mobilization mechanism in X river cadmium embodied a kind of elites' logic. They made full use of formal and informal channels so that the X river cadmium pollution' control was put on the agenda of local governments. On one hand, they earnestly performed people's representative duties for controlling X river cadmium pollution, such as participating in the supervision to "one government, court and procuratorate", submitting some motions to people's congresses. On the other hand, they also made full use of their own social relations to seek the settlement of the issue. While the Xiamen PX event' reflected a "civil-society" mobilization mechanism, also highlighting some characteristics of new social movement. The main features include: Firstly, because it can't solve the issue in Xiamen PX event to make use of formal channels, there are several large-scale boycotts. Before Xiamen citizens paraded

through street, Academician Zhao Yufen in Xiamen University questioned about the location of PX project, such as giving letters to Fujian provincial government and Xiamen municipal government, making a motion to CPPCC. and so on, which have not contributed to the change of its attitude. However, under the strong oppression of public opinion, Xiamen municipal government has to change its attitude. Secondly, the mass media, in particular new media, played an important influence in Xiamen PX event. Because of the strict restrictions, the medias which are controlled by Xiamen municipal government didn't report on the matter. However, those medias include new ones (for example, mobile phones, internet) and others, which Xiamen municipal couldn't completely control, led the citizens to widely discuss the pollution and its potential effect. In this campaign, mass media not only played the role of initiating and organizing this movement, but also made it beyond the specific objects of this movement: constructing a kind of new, rich content collective identity in environmental movement, which embodied the historic role in new social movement—productivity has changed people's culture value, to achieve a "self-green" (Sun Wei, 2007). Thirdly, Xiamen citizens connected with each other through the "flat" social network, not strictly formal organization, and even not a clear organization, institution or leader as its initiator or organizer. Fourthly, it followed with the strategy of resistance which was to combine reason with unreason. Under the transition system in China, the legitimate struggle only tracking from the system can't touch on the fundamental system. Therefore, Xiamen citizens paraded through street, but they also maintained their reason in this process, such as no damage to public property, no rubbish to be left over. This action strategy didn't over-intensify contradictions, and eventually promoted the settlement of the issue.

Government's response strategy. In the comparative analysis of the two cases, it may reflect the different governance model in two local governments. The local government in X river cadmium event mainly adopted by the internal adjustment to deal with the crisis, while Xiamen municipal government in the PX event dealt with it through public participation in decision-making, reflecting the trend of the transformation of the public governance.

III. CHINA'S ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT ON THE PERSPECTIVE OF RISK SOCIETY

The two cases were compared on the frontal chapters. On the basis of this, we will further research on the reasons of their differences on the perspective of risk society. The hypothesis of "risk society" declared the advent of a new era, a new social operational mechanism, and a new social order (Cheng Boqing, 2007). In other words, there is a different logic between industry society and risk society. Beck holds that the presupposition of modernity itself is inherently reflexive: On one hand, it provides the power for the development of modernization; On the other hand, it also makes simple modernization self-deconstruction, changing from industry society to risk society. Risk society theory reflects a series of essential systems in industry society on the

perspective of modernity, not just regarding it as anomie in industry society. Therefore, modern environmental movement not only deal with the side effects of industry society, but also further should be regarded as social practice of reflection to a series of essential systems in industry society. Because of the sophisticated social practice, there are some different characteristics about risk society in different country or area, therefore China's environmental movement emerged with its diversity and complexity. China's environmental movement is very different from western one, moreover, there are a lot of differences in different regions in China. In this paper, China's environmental movement is understood in the context of risk society. Firstly, we must reflect its social backgrounds; Secondly, we reflect the social construction of China's environmental movement in the perspective of risk society theory.

A. *The Social Background of China's Environmental Movement*

Environmental crisis is a problem of modernity in certain phase of modernization. Environmental issue as western political one has been for a very long time, but it was not until the 1960s or 1970s that it was regarded as a total environmental crisis of western society. Modern environmental crisis prompted some western countries for strategic transformation of environment and development. The US restructured its strategy in the 1960s, German in the 1970s. This means adjusting the original relationship between environment and economy, politics and society, therefore environmental problem as a kind of modernity was placed in the core of social developmental strategy. Western environmental movement was a part of this transformation, or it also appeared in the process of transition from industry society to risk society. And it happened in western social background, such as with a completed industrialization, a sound system of democracy and so on.

Environmental issue is a kind of modernity in the context of globalization. China's environmental problems have both this context and its own unique. Chinese government is transforming its environmental and developmental strategy. It, so to speak, is transforming from industry society to risk society in China. On one hand, China's environmental crisis is also a kind of modernity that happens in certain stage of modernization, and China's environmental movement was obviously impacted by modern western environmental movement. On the other hand, China's environmental problems have its own particularity.

First, China modernization process is been in a special historic social development stage. It is in a period of rapid social transformation in China. As a latecomer to catch up with modernized country, China's economic and social development is constrained by not only resources and environment but also time. In the possibly shortest time it must complete the process of social change which the developed country finished in a fairly long historical period (Jing Tiankui, 1999). Under the background of "time-space compression", in such a short time China is confronted with not only many problems which developed country encountered for

several centuries in the modernization, but also some problems which the inner-generated modernized country didn't counter. At present China's modernization is in the middle stage, therefore whether the concept of sustainable development or scientific development, their core is "development". However, the arrival of environmental risk society is a very real problem which can't be avoided in China. How to properly deal with the relation between economic development and environmental protection is, in essence, how to properly deal with the relationship between modernization and modernity, which is also a problem in China at present.

For this reason Chinese government put forward the goal of building a environment-friendly and resource-efficiency society. and the changing strategy of environment and development has taken place in China. In order to achieve this goal, Chinese government also approved Wuhan City Circle and Changsha-zhuzhou-xiangtan city circle as experimental zones for comprehensive supporting reform on building a environment-friendly and resource-efficiency society to increasingly break through acute conflicts between economic-social development and resource-environment development. It is a long and difficult process to put strategy into practice, therefore we have to be profoundly aware of some factors affecting the relationship between economic development and environment protection in China, especially the economic factors. 1) the local economic-development condition impacts the relationship between environment and economy. Because of the different modernization level in different regions, they carry out their environmental-protection roads which are in accordance with the speed and mode of economic development. 2) the relationship between environment and economy is closely related with some main economic factors, such as industrial structure. Difficult industrial structure certainly leads to different environmental problems which need to carry out different environmental-protection roads. At present China is transforming economic-growth mode through adjusting industrial structure to resolve China's environmental problem. The difference in two cases above is closely related with their economic-development level and industrial structure. X river basin is located in middle China, a developing area, and its pollution is mostly left over from these old heavy industry bases. Therefore local government only adjusts their industrial structure to solve their environmental problems.

Second, China is experiencing the political-system transformation. Under the political system on which power is highly concentrated, there are all kinds of fractures. For example, because of the differences of the scope of power and interests, there are many conflicts and "cracks" in the whole administrative system, which includes the Contradictions between higher and lower level, department and department, region and region and, department and region (Ying Xing, 2001), and there is the fuzzy border between state and society. Some western theory holds, China's political system is fractured, but not entirely so. In the process of this political-system transition, governments in different areas or different level show a different way of fractures. The political structure not only limits it to a certain extent, but also provides a certain amount of living space for the emergence of

environmental movement. Though the political system limited its development in X river cadmium pollution event, the crack or gap between the systems also win the limited space for it within the existing system. However, In Xiamen PX event the crack or gap between the systems wins greater space, breaking through some systematic obstacles. Constraints and opportunities can only be shown in the concrete social practice.

Third, China's social structure is divided, and the interest subject is increasingly diversified. China's economic-system transformation is almost at the same time with the transformation of the social structure. The adjustment of social structure and interest pattern are also embodied in the relationship between environmental protection and economic development. Its performance on environmental issues is the division of the two interest groups. On one hand, it appears that the interest group gains their interest at the cost of environment, especially the collusion of "special interest" group and local protectionism. On the other hand, the group of protecting environment is awakening that, for example, non-government environmental protection groups are mushrooming here and there. At present the complexity of social structure and interest pattern is embodied in the concrete social practice. In X river cadmium pollution event, in addition to several people's representatives, general citizens don't express great concerns. However, In Xiamen PX event, there is a relatively wide range of citizens' participation, such as parading through streets, taking an active part in the EIA, etc. The different social structure divisions in two areas result in the significantly different interest structures and citizen consciousness, therefore there are some differences in two areas' environmental movements.

There are some differences in modernization condition, social structure and citizen consciousness between the two cases, which directly lead to the different constructing strategies.

B. The Social Construction of China's Environmental Movement in Risk Society

Beck holds that the core of political system in simple modernization is parliamentary democracy, while sub-politics is such a political power, a kind of "bottom-up" politics, and that it become the platform of reflecting risk society. "New social movement" is a expressive form of sub-politics in risk society. On the basis of this, Beck further proposed "eco-enlightenment movement of reflecting industry society" and the establishment of ecological democracy in the end.

Faced with challenges in risk society, China's public participation in environmental protection has changed significantly since the 1990s. And at the beginning of this century it was further increased. China's environmental movement become social practice of public reflecting in risk society. As China's lacks of systematic environment which is in accordance with western social movement in the strict sense, there is the small number of collection actions lingering at the margins of Law for the expression of mass interest (Ying Xing, 2007). Overall, non-governmental

environmental-protection association is a kind of the main type of China's environmental movement(Hong Dadong,2007). In the cadmium pollution event, in order to achieve legitimacy, the discourse and action logic are consistent with the existing political system, different level governments and related departments make some responses to this issue. However, Xiamen citizens in PX event made clever use of some technologies and strategies to force the existing political system to admit its legitimacy, which isn't a mainstream but a new trend. In addition to the social background in China, we have to analyze it from the concrete social practice.

The analysis of contemporary China's environmental movement, not only needs to pay attention to macro-social background, such as political opportunity structure and so on , but also particularly concerns actors'strategy and technology. Social structure restraints social action to a certain, but the restraint isn't decisive. Social structure is reproduced by social actors through the use of strategic social action, and social action will be counterproductive to social structure, even making social structure in transition. We would also like to capture the substantive changes of real life in our society through the practice process of social transformation (Sun Liping,2002) .In the X river cadmium event, we can clearly see the constraint of social structure on the roles of social action .Several people's representatives carried out their actions with the existing political system. But social action has also counter-effect on social structure. They made X river cadmium event put on the important agenda of the local governments through the elites' logic which made full use of formal and informal strategies. However, in the Xiamen PX event, there is more obvious counter-effect. Through the use of some actions' strategy Xiamen citizens forced Xiamen municipal government to change its attitude in the PX event, achieving the trend of local governance mode' transformation, but the counter-effect is still limited. The legitimacy achieved in PX event is only reflected in this event, rather than win the legitimacy of system level. Only Xiamen municipal government has made some changes on this issue, which the central government don't support its legitimate in macro level. In a word, only we understand the social interaction between social structure and social action through concrete social practice can we truly understand the complexity and diversity of China's environmental movement.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The project is sponsored by National Funds of Social Science for younger(10CSH010) and the Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities of China in Hohai University(2012B09314).

REFERENCES

- [1] Cheng Boqing,2007, Social Problems in Risk Society, Journal of Nanjing University,No.2
- [2] Hong Dayong,2007,The Growing nongovernmental forces for environmental protection in China,Beijing, Chinese Renming University Press
- [3] Li Peilin,2004, The Foundation of"China' Experience"of Scientific Development View,Social Sciences in China,No. 6
- [4] Liu Xiaofeng,1998.Preface to Social Theory of Modernity, Shanghai: SDX Joint Publishing Company
- [5] Sun Liping,2002, Sociology of Practice and the Analysis of Market Transition process, Social Sciences in China, No.5
- [6] Jing Tiankui,1999, Time-space Structure of Chinese Social Development, Sociological Research,No.6
- [7] Sun Wei, 2007, Who are We? The Function of the Mass Media in Establishing Group Identification in the New Social Movement——A Case Study Citing the Media Reports on the PX Project in Xia Men, Journalistic University,No3
- [8] Xiao Ying, 2007, The Risk Society and Beyond, In Social Theory,NO.3,Su Guoxun, ed, Beijing; Social Science Academic Press
- [9] Ying Xing,2001,A petition Story about DAHE immigrant ----From "Asking for a Statement"to "Balancing Relation",Beijing : SDX Joint Publishing Company
- [10] ----,2007,Grassroots Mobilization and the Mechanism of Interest Expression of Peasants Group: A comparative study of four cases,Sociological study,No. 2
- [11] Wang Junmin,2008,Reflection of China' Modernization and Sociology under the Bbackground of Risk Society, In Social Theory.No.4 Su Guoxun,ed, Beijing : Social Science Academic Press
- [12] Zhao Dingxin,2006,Social and Political Movement, Beijing : Social Science Academic Press
- [13] Zheng Hangsheng , Hong Dayong,2003,"SARS"event and social transformation in China, population research,No.4
- [14] Beck, U., 1992, Risk Society, London:Sage.
- [15] ———, 1997, The Reinvention of Politics, Cambridge:Polity press.
- [16] ———, 1999, World Risk Society, Cambridge:Polity press.
- [17] Giddens,A.1990.The Consequences of Modernity.California::Stanford University Press
- [18] ———, 1991.Modernity and Self-Identity.Cambridge:Polity Press