

# International Linkage and China's Environmental Policies

SZU-CHIEN HSU

*This paper discusses two topics. First, how should we evaluate the impact of international linkages on China's environmental policies? Second, how can international linkages best influence China's environmental policies? Regarding the first, this paper begins by reflecting on the contending interpretations of the effectiveness of the impact of international linkages on China's environmental policies. The paper then raises the concept of "soft epistemic learning" and suggests that the concept can best characterize this impact. Regarding the second topic, this paper has two arguments. First, this paper argues that international linkages can better influence China's domestic rather than international environmental policies. The second argument is that international linkages can better influence the results of environmental protection and policy implementation in China at the subnational rather than national level.*

**KEYWORDS:** PRC; environmental protection; environmental policy; international linkage

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Given the globalization process, the more a nation becomes integrated into the world political economy, the more susceptible are its domestic and foreign policies to international impact. China is no exception. As part of Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms, the open-door strategy has allowed the international community to wield tremendous impact on China's do-

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**Dr. Szu-chien Hsu** (徐斯儉) is an Assistant Research Fellow of the Institute of International Relations at National Chengchi University. His areas of research include PRC current politics and cross-Straits relations.

mestic political institutions and economic policies.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, however, China is also well known for being stubborn in certain policy areas, such as human rights, in the face of continuous and strong international pressure. If these two images represent the two extremes to which the outside world can influence China's policymaking, where does environmental policy stand? How do we evaluate the impact of international linkages on China's environmental policies? What strategies should international actors adopt to maximize their linkages to China's environmental issues? These are the major issues addressed by this paper. In responding to these questions, this paper strives for two goals. The first is to raise some reflections on how to observe and perceive the impacts of international linkages on China's environmental policies. Based on this reflection, this paper proposes a concept of "soft epistemic learning" for defining the nature of this impact. The second purpose of this paper is to explore how the interplay between international and domestic actors provides obstacles as well as opportunities for international linkages to influence China's environmental policies, and accordingly, how international linkages can best influence China's environmental policies.

This paper will first introduce some important methodological concepts relevant to the discussion, especially the use of "epistemic community" and "epistemic learning" in constructive theory in international relations and then use this discussion to introduce a simple analytical framework.

Following the theoretical section is an introduction of some background information on China's general environmental problems, Beijing's perceptions of the country's own environmental policies, and changes in these environmental policies in the 1990s. This paper points out that previous studies have shown that there have been some major transformations in the overall strategy of China's environmental policy in the 1990s. The question then is to uncover whether this change is due to the impact of international linkages.

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<sup>1</sup>Susan Shirk, "Internationalization and China's Economic Reforms," in *Internationalization and Domestic Politics*, ed. Robert O. Keohane and Helen V. Milner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 186-206.

This paper then examines the existing studies on the impact of international linkages on China's environmental policies, and classifies their arguments into three categories of impact: weak or no impact, positive impact, and conditional impact. After reviewing the perspectives raised by the existing studies, the paper raises its own interpretations of the impact of international linkages and the policy change.

The author argues that there are three major arguments regarding how international linkages impact China's environmental policies. First, this paper proposes an analytical concept "soft epistemic learning" to describe the nature of China's change in its environmental policies under the impact of international linkages through "epistemic community." Second, this paper argues that the impact of international linkages are felt more strongly on China's domestic environmental policies than on its environmental foreign policies. Third, this paper argues that international linkages can influence the results of environmental protection and policy implementation at the subnational rather than national level. With these three observations, this paper in general agrees with the argument of conditional impact that international linkages have on China's environmental policies.

The paper then turns to probing how the interplay between domestic and international actors provides obstacles as well as opportunities for international linkages to influence China's environmental policies. The paper opens up the argument regarding the national/subnational distinction, and examines three ways of interplay between domestic and international actors on China's environmental policies. All three arguments are tied into another analytical concept raised by political scientists studying Chinese politics: "fragmented authoritarianism." The first aspect of this concept has to do with the central government's weakening implementation capability over local governments. The second aspect regards the competing interests of ministries and their potential rent-seeking behavior. The third is a result of the first two, that is, the potential of foreign actors to change Chinese domestic policy coalitions along the lines of the "second image reversed" tradition.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Peter Gourevitch, "The Second Image Reversed: The International Sources of Domestic Politics," *International Organization* 32 (1978): 881-912.

According to the analytical concept of "soft epistemic learning," this paper manifests the nature of the impact of international linkages on China's environmental policies. An important argument is that a realist "power struggle" perspective does not explain whether China will comply with international norms. Rather, the outside world should strengthen international linkages with China at various levels, especially the subnational, and focus on first changing the PRC's domestic policies. Moreover, norm formation is a social activity, which requires consensus building and interest accommodation. An incremental approach is more likely to induce China to move toward "hard epistemic learning" in the long run.

### **Methodological Notes and an Analytical Framework**

#### *Constructivist Theoretical Approach*

In the study of international relations, the theory of neoliberalist institutionalism deals with the interaction between international organizations and nation-states. This theory explains not only why and how international organizations, or international regimes in a broader sense, are formed, but also how these international organizations and regimes, once established, influence the domestic politics of nation-states. A plethora of literature exists that discusses why states are willing to cooperate to create international regimes based on rational choices. However, this neoinstitutionalism has been criticized, for unclear is why states accept certain norms even when the norms violate their rational interest-maximizing calculations. Moreover, neoinstitutionalism and neorealism are criticized for methodological individualism by bracketing the formation of national interest and identity, believing their formation has nothing to do with their interaction with the international system.<sup>3</sup> Based on sociological insights, however, constructivism argues that the implicit norms and interests of each nation-state are not necessarily endogenous, but are also the results of state inter-

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<sup>3</sup>Jeffrey T. Checkel, "The Constructivist Turn in International Relations Theory," *World Politics* 50 (1998): 324-48.

action both with other states and with the system as a whole. The theory therefore creates theoretical accounts to explain the mechanism with which internalized norms and interests of the nation-state are affected by, and also affect, the international community. One critical intervening variable in this explanatory link is the "epistemic community," which carries information as well as knowledge that influences individual states. Individual states, through their interaction with the epistemic community, go through "epistemic learning" and gradually transform their values and interests, which eventually leads to change in their policies.

### *Epistemic Community*

A major analytical challenge is to identify whether there is an epistemic community and how such a community functions to influence the policies in the process of the interaction between domestic institutions and international actors. What is more interesting in the constructivist analysis is that this epistemic community is not confined within national borders. The fact that this epistemic community crosses national boundaries makes the domestic institutions able to change their "realistic" perspective of national interests, and to form cross-national consensus of policy change at the global level.<sup>4</sup> The term "epistemic community" is meant to refer to a concrete collection of individuals who share the same worldview (or episteme) especially in regard to four particular aspects: causal or analytical beliefs, principled or normative beliefs, consensual knowledge base, and a common policy enterprise or common interests.<sup>5</sup>

The epistemic community is argued to be important because of the uncertainty and complexity in the nature of the policymaking. Facing uncertainty and complexity during the decisionmaking process, the bureaucracy has to rely on specialists. The decisionmakers also have to consult the epistemic community for the following reasons: (1) to elucidate the cause-and-effect relationships and provide advice about the likely results of various courses of action; (2) to shed light on the nature of the complex

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<sup>4</sup>Peter Haas, "Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination," *International Organization* 46 (1992): 1-35.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 27.

interlinkages between issues and on the chain of events that might proceed either from failure to take action or from instituting a particular policy; (3) to help define the self-interests of a state or factions within it; and (4) to help formulate policies. Whether or to what extent the epistemic community can influence policies depends on the reasons for which the opinions of the epistemic community are sought. The less politically motivated the case, the greater role the epistemic community plays in the various stages of the policymaking process.<sup>6</sup>

### *An Analytical Framework*

There is an implicit analytical framework in this paper, which is constituted by the following components: the independent variables, the dependent variable, and the causal mechanism between them.

The independent variables are international linkages, that is, various linkages between the domestic actors (including governmental bureaucracies and the domestic nongovernmental organizations [NGOs]) and international actors (including other nation-states, international NGOs, international governmental organizations [IGOs], and foreign private companies). The dependent variable is China's environmental policies. Important to note, however, is that there is a major distinction usually not well identified by relevant studies: the difference between China's domestic environmental policies and its environmental foreign policies. Also important to note is that to change one is quite different from changing the other. These different efforts may also have separate effects on improving China's general environmental situation.

In regard to identifying the causal mechanism, which is a main focus of this paper, there are also some significant distinctions to make. First, at the level of interaction, China may be influenced either by the normative power of the international community or by material incentives. Second, and still at the level of interaction, we must distinguish between the different paces at which international linkages can change China's environmental policies. Change can be identified in black-and-white terms, or can be per-

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 29-30.

ceived in increments. With the former approach, the influence is argued to be lacking if the formal policy is the same, while with the latter, the impact can be said to exist as long as we have a framework to observe the mechanism of its function. A similar distinction is whether the impact on the policies is deterministic or conditional. A deterministic approach tends to attribute the lack of change totally to the lack of effect of the independent variables, while the conditional approach tends to treat the independent variables as conditional parameters for the dependent variable. Third, at the level of agent (the nation-state), China may change because of its own rational choice, as based on selfish calculation of the changing environmental parameters. China may also change because of "epistemic learning," that is, the change of its "principled beliefs" (such as values, ideology, and norms) and the change of its "causal beliefs" (such as the causal relations among certain external factors or the causal effects of its own behavior).

### **China's Environmental Problems, Perceptions of Its Own Policies, and Policy Changes in the 1990s**

#### *China's Environmental Problems*

China's environmental situation has been described as facing a crisis.<sup>7</sup> China is reported to have accounted for 11 percent of carbon dioxide emission in 1992 (almost equivalent to that of Japan and next only to the United States), with emissions expected to grow to 43 percent of the world total (surpassing that of the United States by the year 2020).<sup>8</sup> Of the twenty most

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<sup>7</sup>Vaclav Smil, *China's Environmental Crisis: An Inquiry into the Limits of National Development* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1993).

<sup>8</sup>See Richard N. Cooper, *Environment and Resource Policies for the World Economy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1994), 44; Elizabeth Economy, "Chinese Policy-Making and Global Climate Change: Two-Front Diplomacy and the International Community," in *The Internationalization of Environmental Protection*, ed. Miranda A. Schreurs and Elizabeth C. Economy (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 22. According to Porter and Brown, emissions will reach 40 percent of the world total by the year 2050. See Gareth Porter and Janet Welsh Brown, *Global Environmental Politics* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1996), 150.

polluted cities in the world, ten are in China.<sup>9</sup> The natural environment for China has been inferior in comparison with the global average. For example, China accounts for 22 percent of the global population, but has only 7 percent of the world's arable land. China's average arable land per capita is 28 percent, forest and wild land acreage 15 percent, and water resource only 33.3 percent of the global average standard. China, moreover, is still suffering from extremely serious problems of water loss and soil erosion.<sup>10</sup> Professor Lester Brown's book *Who Will Feed China?* spurred intensive debate and discussion among the international community regarding China's potential to pose a threat to regional and global stability as its population grows and arable land decreases.<sup>11</sup> According to a World Bank report, environmental pollution in China has brought economic losses up to 8 percent of the PRC's gross domestic product (GDP).<sup>12</sup>

As China has been speeding up its rate of economic growth over the past two decades, the pollution created by the industrialization push has already overloaded the environment and is causing greater tension. In addition, China will find slowing the increasing pollution rate to be difficult because of the country's economic structure and historical legacies.<sup>13</sup> Chinese scholars and officials also recognize this situation. For example, famous pro-environmental Chinese scholar Hu Angang (胡安鋼) has pointed out that China's eco-environment is generally worsening under a basic appraisal, and that the capability for environmental control lags far behind the speed of ecological destruction.<sup>14</sup> In his speech at a birth control and en-

<sup>9</sup>See "Environment in China," *China News Analysis* (Taipei), no. 1618 (September 15, 1998): 2.

<sup>10</sup>The World Bank, *Bishui lantian: Zhanwang ershiyi shijide Zhongguo huanjing* (Clear water, blue skies: China's environment in the twenty-first century) (Beijing: Zhongguo caijing chubanshe, 1997), 6.

<sup>11</sup>Lester R. Brown, *Who Will Feed China? Wake-Up Call for a Small Planet* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1995).

<sup>12</sup>The World Bank, *Bishui lantian*, 21.

<sup>13</sup>The structural limitations include still-widespread poverty, coal being the major source of power, relatively lower standards of science and technology, and huge population. See Qu Geping and Li Jinchang, *Zhongguo renkou yu huanjing* (China's population and environment) (Beijing: Zhongguo huanjing kexue chubanshe, 1992), 43-47.

<sup>14</sup>Hu Angang, "China's Environmental Issues," in *China as a Great Power: Myths, Realities*,



vironmental protection working conference on March 8, 1997, Li Peng (李鹏) also admitted: "In general, as the environmental consciousness of our people and our capability to protect the environment are still weak, the quality of our environment is still worsening."<sup>15</sup>

### *China's Perceptions of Its Own Environmental Policies*

The Chinese government has its own perception of both global and domestic environmental problems. Beijing's environmental policies are based on these perceptions. Therefore, if their perceptions on environmental issues have not changed, the Chinese environmental policies are not likely to change. From the constructivist perspective, therefore, pivotal is to see whether China's perceptions have changed in the process of its interaction with the international community.

At the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992, PRC Premier Li Peng gave a speech stating the following five principles:

1. Environment and development should be integrated but environmental protection should not be achieved at the expense of the economy. Environmental protection can only be successful when development has been attained.
2. From a historical perspective, the developed countries are responsible for global environmental degradation and the current problems with greenhouse gas emission. We [China] should not talk about responsibility.
3. Developed countries should provide resources for implementation of agreements or declarations signed. This financial resource should not be considered as assistance, but as the responsibility of the developed states. China believes that this assistance should be viewed as compensation.

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*and Challenges in the Asia-Pacific Region*, ed. Stuart Harris and Gary Klintworth (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 329.

<sup>15</sup>Li Peng, *Lun huanjing baohu* (On environmental protection) (Beijing: Zhongguo huanjing kexue chubanshe, 1997), 173.

4. The developed countries should find suitable mechanisms to develop sustainable programs. In order to accommodate national intellectual property rights, the governments of the developed countries should buy the technology from companies to sell to developing states at less than international market prices.
5. The sovereignty of natural resource rights must be respected. No country can interfere with the decisions of another with regard to the use of its natural resources.<sup>16</sup>

These five principles best manifest the important components of China's position on global environmental politics and its relationship with the international community on environmental issues. In short, these components are: (1) the sovereignty priority, realized in principle 5; (2) the right to economic development, realized in principles 3, 4, and 5; (3) the South/North unequal relations originated from the history and the injustice implied in this relation, which can be observed in principles 2, 3, and 4; and (4) the integration of environmental protection and economic development, basically represented by principle 1.

In the "National Report on Sustainable Development" released in June 1997, the Chinese government again expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of efforts by the developed countries in assisting the developing countries as stipulated by the UNCED decision. The Chinese government was dissatisfied with the developed countries in four main areas: financial assistance, technological transfer, environment-related trade issues, and the need for different pollution standards. The report pointed out specifically that the "Agenda 21" concluded at the UNCED has emphasized again the promise made by the developed countries to provide 0.7 percent of their gross national product (GNP) as official funds to assist the sustainable development of the developing countries. The report continued to argue that not only have the developed countries not fulfilled this promise, but also that the average "official-donated assistance" (ODA) by developed countries has decreased (e.g., from 0.35 percent of GNP in 1991 to 0.29 percent

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<sup>16</sup>Economy, "Chinese Policy-Making and Global Climate Change," 32.

in 1995). The document singled out five developed countries that have reached the 0.7 percent promise: Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden, and the Netherlands. The report praised these five countries for their decency, and scolded other developed countries for their failures.<sup>17</sup>

In terms of technology transfer, China blamed the developed countries for not being willing to transfer their technology under the excuse of protecting "intellectual property rights." Similarly, on the area of environment-related trade issues, China expressed dissatisfaction with what is proposed by some developed countries as the "environmental clause" or "social clause" which imposes new burdens on developing countries. China considered this trend to be against the Rio Declaration. Lastly, on the issue of need for different pollution standards, China complained that certain developed countries attempted to impose a set of stricter standards of pollution control onto the developing countries which is equivalent to interfering in the domestic politics of the latter.<sup>18</sup>

#### *Environmental Policy Changes in the 1990s: Sustainable Development*

In August 1992, after the UNCED, the Chinese government decided to adopt "sustainable development" as its strategy to protect the environment while encouraging development. This was accomplished by putting forward ten major measures.

In March 1994 the Chinese government approved and promulgated China's "Agenda 21: White Paper on China's Population, Environment, and Development in the Twenty-first Century." This policy document has put forward an overall strategy to cope simultaneously with the issues of population growth control, environmental protection, and economic and social development.<sup>19</sup> The White Paper is not only a response to the call of

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<sup>17</sup>State Council, "National Report on Sustainable Development of the People's Republic of China" (in Chinese, 1997), chap. 5, sections 1 and 3. Full text available at <<http://www.acca21.edu.cn>>.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., section 1.

<sup>19</sup>Information Office of the State Council, "Environmental Protection in China" (1996), section 1. Full text available at <<http://www.china.org.cn/WhitePapers/EnvironmentalE.html>>.

Agenda 21 concluded at the UNCED in 1992, but is also a coordination of China's national interests and development goals.

This is perceived by some scholar as a "strategic change" both to deal with the tension between environmental protection and economic development as well as to respond to international pressure.<sup>20</sup> The "sustainable development strategy" is different from the old environmental protection strategy in several ways in that this new approach coordinates both economic development and environmental protection. The main emphasis of the traditional method was how to prevent and resolve pollution problems caused by economic development. This implied that economic development comes before environmental protection. The new approach emphasized not only economic development but also parallel social development as well. The strategy also promises to make extensive use of science and technology in order to attain "quality" development.<sup>21</sup> This "strategic change" is witnessed in many official speeches. For example, in his speech at the aforementioned conference on birth control and environmental protection in 1997, Li Peng said: "We can never go back to the previous way of 'polluting first and controlling later'; we can never sacrifice the environment for short-term development."<sup>22</sup>

In 1996, the protection of the environment became national policy and the Fourth Session of the Eighth National People's Congress endorsed the notion of "sustainable development." Both Jiang Zemin (江泽民) and Li Peng were unprecedentedly present together at the State Council's Fourth Conference on the Environment, which showed the emphasis the CCP leadership put on this issue.<sup>23</sup> In parallel with the guideline of "sustainable development," the Chinese government incorporated this goal into its new five-year economic plan. In the "Outline of the Ninth Five-Year Plan (1996-2000) for National Economic and Social Development and

<sup>20</sup>Chen Chang-chin, "Beijing's Environmental Protection Strategy," *Issue & Studies* 33, no. 7 (July 1997): 77-92.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.; Qu Geping, *Zhongguode huanjing yu fazhan* (China's environment and development) (Beijing: Zhongguo huanjing kexue chubanshe, 1992), 198-99.

<sup>22</sup>See note 15 above.

<sup>23</sup>"Environment in China," 3.

the Long-Term Targets Through the Year 2010," "sustainable development" was adopted as an important strategy for modernization, and the Chinese government settled on concrete control standards for the various pollutants.<sup>24</sup> This outline sets an ambitious target for containing pollution at the present level or with increases well below the planned growth of the economy. This is the first time that China's five-year economic plan included a plan for environmental protection.<sup>25</sup> In addition, the government administration responsible for environmental policy, the State Administration of Environmental Protection (SAEP), was elevated to the ministerial level to better compete with other ministries that may have conflicting interests.

### **Competing Images of the Impacts of International Linkages on China's Environmental Policies**

The previous section introduced the changes in China's environmental strategy during the 1990s. However, are these strategic changes significant for China's environmental protection as perceived by the rest of the world? Is such change a result of the impact of China's linkages with the international community on environmental issues? This section will thus investigate China's international linkages regarding environmental protection, and explore differing opinions on whether they impact China's environmental policies.

#### *China's Environmental Policies and Their International Linkages*

There have been both positive and negative images constructed by students of both China's international relations and environmental policies concerning whether international linkages have made a significant impact on China's environmental policies. However, no matter which image

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<sup>24</sup>See note 19 above.

<sup>25</sup>*China Economic Review*, December 1, 1997, available at <<http://www.ihe.org/press.html>>.

seems the stronger argument, one must remember that international linkages have appeared since China first began to confront environmental issues. Like other developing countries, the Chinese government believed that the national interest demanded the pursuit of environmental protection after the Stockholm Conference of 1972, the first world environmental conference. This was the first time the major Western countries presented environmental issues at a global forum. China adopted a disruptive and unconstructive stance, but when PRC representatives went back home, they began to make necessary policy changes.<sup>26</sup>

Since the late 1970s, China has signed or participated in many multi-lateral international agreements or pacts regarding global environmental protection (see table 1). A few of the most important ones include the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer, the Montreal Protocol on Substances That Deplete the Ozone Layer, the Basel Convention on Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal, the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and the Tokyo Protocol. China has been a member state of the UN Environmental Program (UNEP) Governing Council, and has participated in about half of the above-mentioned agreements in the 1990s. China has also been active in the environmental protection programs and activities launched by UN organizations including the UNEP's "Global Environment Monitoring System," "International Registry of Potentially Toxic Chemicals," and "International Environmental Information System." Similar cooperative relationships have also been cultivated between China and the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, and other international organizations.<sup>27</sup> Beijing is also receiving financial aid and low-interest loans from these organizations to improve China's environment.<sup>28</sup> To raise a few examples, the World Bank has

<sup>26</sup>Royal Institute of International Affairs (RIIA), *The Greening of Machiavelli: The Evolution of International Environmental Politics* (London: Earthscan, 1994), 69; Marian A.L. Miller, *The Third World in Global Environmental Politics* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1995), 44; Economy, "Chinese Policy-Making and Global Climate Change," 22.

<sup>27</sup>Information Office of the State Council, "Environmental Protection in China," section 7.

<sup>28</sup>For examples of the international organizations, see <<http://www.nepa.unep.net/wjb/txt/>>.

**Table 1**  
**Multilateral Pacts and Agreements That China Has Signed or Participated in**

Multilateral Regime	Date Entered into Force
London Convention	Passed 1972
International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea	Jan. 5, 1974
International Convention on Civil Liability for Oil Pollution Damage	April 29, 1980
International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling	Sept. 24, 1980
Protocol to the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling	Sept. 24, 1980
Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora	April 8, 1981
The Antarctic Treaty	June 8, 1983
International Convention Relating to Intervention on the High Seas in Cases of Oil Pollution from Ships as Modified by the Protocol of 1978	Oct. 2, 1983
Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and Other Matter	Nov. 14, 1985
Amendments to Annexes to the Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and Other Matter Concerning Incineration at Sea	Nov. 14, 1985
Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage	March 12, 1986
International Tropical Timber Agreement	July 2, 1986
Protocol to the International Convention on Civil Liability for Oil Pollution Damage	Nov. 28, 1986
Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer	Sept. 22, 1988
Montreal Protocol on Substances That Deplete the Ozone Layer	Jan. 1, 1989
Convention on the Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resource Activities	June 2, 1988
Agreed Measures for the Conservation of Antarctic Fauna and Flora	May 24, 1990
International Convention Relating to Intervention on the High Seas in Cases of Oil Pollution Casualties	May 24, 1990
Protocol Relating to Intervention on the High Seas in Cases of Pollution by Substances Other Than Oil	May 24, 1990

**Table 1 (Continued)**

Multilateral Regime	Date Entered into Force
Agreement for the Establishment of the Network of Aquaculture Centers in Asia and the Pacific	Jan. 10, 1990
Plant Protection Agreement for the Asia and Pacific Region	June 6, 1990
Protocol on Substances That Deplete the Ozone Layer	Sept. 12, 1991
Protocol to the Antarctic Treaty on Environmental Protection	Oct. 4, 1991
Basel Convention on Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal	May 5, 1992
Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat	July 31, 1992
Amendment to the Montreal Protocol on Substances That Deplete the Ozone Layer	Aug. 10, 1992
Convention Establishing a Marine Scientific Organization for the North Pacific Region (PICES)	Oct. 22, 1991
Convention on Biological Diversity	Dec. 29, 1993
Framework Convention on Climate Change	March 21, 1994
United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea	Sept. 7, 1996
Tokyo Protocol	Passed Dec. 1997
Rotterdam Convention	Passed Sept. 1998

**Sources:** See <<http://sedac.ciesin.org/prod/charlotte>>; and <<http://www.nepa.unep.net/gh/txt/gh3/html>>.

donated funds to assist the Chinese bureaucracy in working out four major environmental state reports, while the Asian Development Bank has provided additional aid to assist another two. These projects are illustrated in table 2. The World Bank and the Asian Development Bank have also provided funds to assist China in conducting research to improve environmental protection laws and regulations and to train bureaucrats.<sup>29</sup> Judging from all these multilateral linkages, we can say that China has become more

<sup>29</sup>There are at least thirty-nine such programs sponsored by World Bank funds, and another seven sponsored by the Asian Development Bank. See <<http://www.nepa.unep.net/wjb/txt/wj24.html>>.



Table 2

Major State Environmental Strategic Reports, Plans, or Action Programs Accepting Funds Donated by International Financial Organizations

Strategic Reports, Plans, or Action Programs	Donating Organizations	Major Contents	State Bureaucracy in Charge
China's Environmental Strategic Report	World Bank	A policy regarding environmental protection strategies	SAEP, SPC
China's Environmental Programs	World Bank	A ten-year national environmental protection action programs with subprograms on individual issue domain	State Council
Studies of China's Urban Environment Administration	World Bank	Strategies to construct urban infrastructure for wastewater discharge and garbage pollution control	SAEP, MOC
"Clear Water, Blue Skies: China's Environment in 2020"	World Bank	Strategies and measures to raise life quality for Chinese people based on analysis of various environmental issues	SAEP, SPC
Plans to Improve Urban Environment	Asian Development Bank	Plans to improve the environment of major cities based on nationwide studies of fifty-three cities	SAEP
Demonstration Study of Environmental Planning for Medium-Sized Cities	Asian Development Bank	To establish models of environmental planning for sustainable development for various types of medium-sized cities	SAEP

Acronyms—SAEP: State Administration of Environmental Protection; SPC: State Planning Commission; MOC: Ministry of Construction.

Source: See <<http://www.nepa.unep.net/wjb/txt/wj23.html>>.

and more willing to participate in international regimes regarding environmental protection.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to multilateral relationships, China has also developed bilateral cooperative relationships with other countries on environmental protection. China has signed bilateral agreements or memorandums with at least twenty-two countries in the world. The longest bilateral cooperative partner with China on environmental issues is the United States.<sup>31</sup> There are also many international NGOs cooperating with Chinese governmental bureaus at various levels or with Chinese environmental institutions or NGOs. In order to promote further international cooperation in the environment and development fields through nongovernmental channels, China also set up in April 1992 a semiofficial NGO, the China Council for International Cooperation on Environment and Development (CCICED).<sup>32</sup> The CCICED is composed of Chinese and foreign environmental specialists and Chinese officials, and is organized to identify problems, analyze causes, and assess policies and programs.<sup>33</sup> The CCICED is composed of fifty-four council members, with twenty Chinese governmental officials, seven Chinese scholars or specialists, and another twenty-seven foreign members from twenty countries or international organizations. Vice-Premier Wen Jiabao (溫家寶) chairs the council.<sup>34</sup>

In December 1998, the second meeting of the second phase of CCICED was held in Beijing. At the close of the meeting, Chinese and

<sup>30</sup>Lester Ross reaches the same observation. See Lester Ross, "China: Environmental Protection, Domestic Policy Trends, Patterns of Participation in Regimes, and Compliance with International Norms," *The China Quarterly*, no. 156 (December 1998): 816.

<sup>31</sup>The twenty-two countries are: the United States, the Netherlands, Mongolia, Japan, Canada, North Korea, India, South Korea, Russia, Germany, Australia, Ukraine, Finland, Norway, Denmark, Tajikistan, Pakistan, Poland, France, Romania, Uzbekistan, and the United Kingdom (in the order the signature time of agreements or memorandums). See <<http://www.nepa.unep.net/gh/txt/gh7.html>>.

<sup>32</sup>There are other government-organized environmental NGOs, including the China Environmental Protection Foundation, the China Society of Environmental Science, the State Natural Sciences Foundation, and the Heilongjiang Provincial Territory Society. See Elizabeth Knap, "Environmental NGOs in China: An Overview," China Environment Series 1, Environmental Change and Security Project (Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 1997), 4-5, available at <<http://ecsp.si.edu/ecspublib.nsf>>.

<sup>33</sup>For details, see <<http://www.harbour.sfu.ca/dlam/>>.

<sup>34</sup>For details, see <<http://www.harbour.sfu.ca/dlam/members.html>>.

foreign environmental authorities and academicians made a series of recommendations on environmental issues for the Chinese government. As CCICED was intentionally created by the Chinese government as a communication channel with the international community and thus the best case as an epistemic community, interesting will be to observe in the future whether and to what extent these recommendations are taken into consideration by the Chinese government.<sup>35</sup>

Although there are many multilayered international linkages to China's environmental policies, a tough issue remains to be debated: How should we evaluate the impact of these international linkages on China's environmental policies? At least three images can be identified from the existing studies on this issue. They are illustrated below.

### *Three Images*

In recent years, more and more international linkages have affected China in regard to environmental issues. An unprecedented level of expanding financial resources is either being allocated or invested on environmental protection in China by foreign governments, IGOs, or private companies. Therefore, the international community has become more and more interested in learning whether or how international linkages influence China's environmental policies.

*Weak or no impact:* The first image of the impact of international linkages is that there is either weak or basically no impact on China's environmental policies. This view was most conspicuous around the time during which the UN Conference on Global Climate Change was held in Kyoto in 1997. Some Western media argued that China would refuse to cut down its carbon dioxide emission on the grounds that China has the right to use the natural resources within its sovereign territory.<sup>36</sup> China was described as strongly resisting the imposition of any binding or even voluntary obligations on developing countries made during the Kyoto conference regarding

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<sup>35</sup>For a full account of the recommendations reached at this meeting, see <<http://www.chinadaily.net/cndy/history/d2-lzhu.k19.html>>.

<sup>36</sup>*The Irish Times*, December 2, 1997, available at <<http://www.ihe.org/press.html>>.

emission of greenhouse gases.<sup>37</sup>

There are also similar views concerning the impact of international linkages on China's environmental policies in general. For example, Elizabeth Economy found that the international community almost played no real role in China's domestic decisionmaking process on environmental issues.<sup>38</sup> She also held that the international community had only marginal influence over the actual negotiation stance that China adopted in bargaining over international environmental issues.<sup>39</sup>

Wendy Frieman also holds a relatively skeptical opinion with regard to the value of international pressure on China's environmental policies. She observed that "[t]he growth in international concern about environment problems has placed some pressure on the Chinese," but she also contended that "it is difficult to tell whether or not their recent interest in the subject is a result of that pressure."<sup>40</sup>

In short, what was perceived as unchanged were the principles stated in the previous section regarding China's perception of its own interests: sovereignty, the right to economic development, and the South/North perspective. These principles have been asserted time and time in such official documents as "China's Twenty-first Century Agenda," "Environmental Protection in China," and "National Report on Sustainable Development of the PRC."<sup>41</sup>

*Positive impact:* The second image regarding the impact of international linkages on China's environmental policies is a positive one. Samuel Kim has studied the general trend of the impact of the international com-

<sup>37</sup>Ross, "China: Environmental Protection," 818; "Environment in China," 4.

<sup>38</sup>Economy, "Chinese Policy-Making and Global Climate Change," 39.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 23.

<sup>40</sup>Wendy Frieman, "International Science and Technology and Chinese Foreign Policy," in *Chinese Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice*, ed. Thomas W. Robinson and David Shambaugh (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 191.

<sup>41</sup>See the following State Council documents: *Zhongguo ershiyi shiji yicheng: Zhongguo ershiyi shiji renkou huanjing yu fazhan baipishu* (China's twenty-first century agenda: White paper on China's population, environment, and development in the twenty-first century) (Beijing: Zhongguo huanjing kexue chubanshe, 1994), 9-10; "Environmental Protection in China," section 7; and "National Report on Sustainable Development of the People's Republic of China," chap. 1.

munity on China's foreign policy in the 1980s and 1990s. To begin with, he raised a peculiar observation of China's foreign policy: "Chinese foreign policy is seen here as the outcome of an ongoing interplay between decision makers' perceptions of needs, interests, and beliefs and their perceptions of and responses to international pressures."<sup>42</sup> Accordingly, he observed that the "external influences become part of the conceptual, definitional, policy-making, and institution-building processes of Chinese foreign policy making."<sup>43</sup> Scholars studying Chinese environmental policies echo this view. Economy and Schreurs argue that international organizations and bilateral aid programs are empowering environmental protection advocates, although China is a state that is till heavily focused on rapid economic development.<sup>44</sup> In the international community, others also argue that China should not be treated as "a simple nay-sayer or violator of its international obligations. Rather, [the country] has embarked on a long-term course to formulate and implement increasingly stringent environmental policies."<sup>45</sup>

If we follow constructivist theory, important is then to see whether the epistemic community influences China's environmental policies. Many studies show that the epistemic community (usually including international members, such as CCICED) has an obvious impact on China's environmental policies. For example, even Elizabeth Economy, who argued that the overall international impact on China's environmental policymaking is marginal as described previously, agreed that "[t]he impact of the epistemic community on global climate change on Chinese thinking and policies was substantial."<sup>46</sup> She based her observation on a case study of how the international community changed China's response to global climate change.

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<sup>42</sup>Samuel S. Kim, "China and the World in Theory and Practice," in *China and the World: Chinese Foreign Relations in the Post-Cold War Era*, ed. Samuel S. Kim (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1994), 30.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>44</sup>Elizabeth Economy and Miranda A. Schreurs, "Domestic and International Linkages in Environmental Politics," in Schreurs and Economy, *The Internationalization of Environmental Protection*, 11.

<sup>45</sup>Ross, "China: Environmental Protection," 830.

<sup>46</sup>Economy, "Chinese Policy-Making and Global Climate Change," 38.

First, the Chinese energy researchers absorbed new knowledge of energy efficiency and energy reorientation from the West. Then these researchers, based on their new understanding of how CO<sub>2</sub> emissions would change global warming, utilized this knowledge to link the Chinese domestic agenda with an international agenda.<sup>47</sup> In the same volume, Economy and Schreurs, after comparing China with other countries, concluded that a country like China where scientific research on environmental problems is still nascent, the international epistemic communities have the ability to play a particularly important role. For example, Economy raised the case of how the scientific community of the United States initiated the Chinese research process by contacting energy specialists in China, bringing them to the United States for training and supporting their efforts to gain international funding to estimate levels of Chinese CO<sub>2</sub> production.<sup>48</sup> Economy thus came to the general conclusion that the international community "influenced the tenor of the debate by helping to widen the range of issues considered and to assist China in undertaking concrete measures to respond to climate change."<sup>49</sup> However, also worth noting is that this impact of international linkages is exerted directly on the scientific aspect, or the causal epistemic aspect, of the policy debate, rather than directly on the decision-making process.

From a more general perspective, Samuel Kim also emphasizes the importance of the epistemic impact that international actors may have on China's overall policymaking. He contends that "the key managers of world capitalism, especially the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, have entered Chinese domestic politics. Their material and normative power and influence have been wired into [China's] conceptual, definitional, policy-making, and institution-building processes, supporting and reinforcing certain reform tendencies while opposing and discouraging others."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

<sup>48</sup>Economy and Schreurs, "Domestic and International Linkages," 12.

<sup>49</sup>Economy, "Chinese Policy-Making and Global Climate Change," 23.

<sup>50</sup>Kim, "China and the World in Theory and Practice," 31.

Even NGOs may have nonnegligible impacts. A group of American specialists at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars working on environmental issues in U.S.-China relations contended that NGOs can influence the international financial inflow into China's environmental construction. NGOs are significant because of three factors: (1) their control of the flow of international funds is tremendous; (2) the change of policies and the development-minded Zhu Rongji (朱鎔基) government have provided a good opportunity to integrate the environment into economic decisions, and thus allow NGOs to influence China's environmental policies when introducing investments at the same time; and (3) the existence of CCICED has provided a great channel for track II diplomacy.<sup>51</sup>

A case of the influence of NGOs can be seen from a study conducted by Lester Ross. After observing the process of the establishment of the standard-setting process such as the ISO 14000 series in China, Ross concluded that "maintaining and expanding scientific and technical exchanges would help to influence Chinese policy-making further in accordance with the norms and practices of international environmental regimes, while minimizing conflict with ideological and nationalistic barriers."<sup>52</sup>

*Conditional impact:* The third image of the impact that international linkages have on China's environmental policies is a mixed one, or to be more precise that international linkages have had only a "conditional impact" on China's environmental policies. The "conditional impact" arguments can be separated into four categories—the "neofunctionalism" argument, represented by Samuel Kim; the "economic or development priority" argument; the "domestic priority" argument; and the "no constraining condition" argument. These four categories of argument are explained below.

1. *Neofunctionalism:* According to Samuel Kim, China's mentality behind its active and sometimes aggressive participation in the international community in the late 1980s and 1990s can be explained via "neo-

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<sup>51</sup>Working Group on Environment in U.S.-China Relations, "Financing Environmental Protection in China: The Role of Foundations and NGOs," China Environment Series 2, Environmental Change and Security Project (Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 1998), available at <<http://ecsp.si.edu/ecsp/lib.nsf>>.

<sup>52</sup>Ross, "China: Environmental Protection," 831.

functionalism." The core of the argument is that the reason why China has become more responsive to international pressure and more active in the international community is not because the Chinese state has suddenly converted its basic principles. Rather, a thrust of state building or state enhancement has driven the Chinese state to adopt a short-term functionalist approach. Kim further argued that China's "principled stand" during the 1987 Montreal Protocol was a good example: without the promise of big cash incentives and greater "flexibility" on the use and production of chlorofluorocarbons from the developed countries, China would not have signed the Protocol.<sup>53</sup>

This line of argument insists that the impact of international linkages should not be treated as "determinants" of China's stance on its environmental policies, but rather as "*parameters*" under which the state defines or redefines its own interests and chooses strategies and policies. Neofunctionalism would argue that China has not suddenly (or even gradually) converted its belief in tandem with the world mainstream. What has caused China to change (if it even has) is that China has discovered that the international community (including international organizations) "can be transformed into positive enabling and empowering *instruments* in the service of Chinese *national interests*."<sup>54</sup> Kim suggests that "the external system factors are best thought of as defining the context for state action as well as offering incentives for one set of policies as opposed to another."<sup>55</sup> In short, the external system factors are parameters. To be more direct, neofunctionalism implies that the Chinese state is actually "tacitly adapting to" rather than "really learning" the external norms. Actually, as observed from a comparative perspective, developing countries may have the same mentality in coping with the global environmental issues: such countries "believe" pursuing environmental protection to be in their own "national interests."<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>Samuel S. Kim, "International Organizational Behavior," in Robinson and Shambaugh, *Chinese Foreign Policy*, 429.

<sup>54</sup>Kim, "China and the World in Theory and Practice," 32. Emphases added.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup>RIIA, *The Greening of Machiavelli*, 69.



2. *Economic priority*: The second conditional impact argument regards economic conditions. This view holds that being constrained by poor economic conditions, China is willing to conform to international norms only when its right to pursue economic development is not limited, or even better when its overall economic situation is improved. One scholar suggests that those foreign sponsors with funds or technologies that can create more local jobs or bring in more economic opportunities will in general be more successful than those projects that require immediate investment by the Chinese side or that might reduce local employment.<sup>57</sup>

The members of the Woodrow Wilson Center working group also came up with some very similar suggestions. According to one of their research reports, "the progress on environmental issues [in China] will be achieved only after basic needs are met and the general public becomes knowledgeable about environment issues."<sup>58</sup>

3. *Domestic priority*: The third conditional impact argument regards "domestic priority." According to this view, the Chinese government is much more concerned about domestic rather than global environmental issues. Therefore, Beijing is always more willing to accept a project that can directly benefit China's domestic environmental protection or help solve its domestic environmental problems over one that tends to sacrifice domestic interests to fulfill a global environmental goal. For example, the Woodrow Wilson Center working group suggested that "ignoring [Chinese] local problems at the expense of global ones would be a lasting mistake for the United States; the U.S. government and NGOs should therefore concentrate on local environmental problems which have secondary global impacts."<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>Kenneth Lieberthal, "China's Governing System and Its Impact on Environmental Policy Implementation," China Environment Series 1, Environmental Change and Security Project (Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 1997), 6, available at <<http://ecsp.si.edu/ecsp/lib.nsf>>.

<sup>58</sup>Working Group on Environment in U.S.-China Relations, "Bilateral Relations on the Environment" (June 4, 1997), China Environment Series 1, Environmental Change and Security Project (Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 1997), available at <<http://ecsp.si.edu/ecsp/lib.nsf>>.

<sup>59</sup>Working Group on Environment in U.S.-China Relations, "The Environment in U.S.-China Relations: Themes and Ideas from Working Group Discussion on Energy Issues," China

Another version of the domestic priority argument is somewhat different, discussing the foreign impact on China's policy in general. This view argues that unless relevant domestic political or policy interests (rather than general economic interests) are taken care of, international influence is unlikely to bring about change. These political or policy interests are most likely the Chinese governmental bureaucrats themselves. For example, Lester Ross made the following observation:

International influence is likely to be greatest when it meshes with established domestic political interests on such issues as foreign trade or when China is heavily dependent on foreign suppliers and customers, as in the case of nuclear materials. . . . International influence is weakest when there is no resonance from a strong domestic political interest, as in the case of human rights, where Amnesty International's criticisms have been dismissed.<sup>60</sup>

On the issue of environmental protection, Economy and Schreurs have also raised similar arguments. They assert that China's willingness to sign the Montreal Protocol on Stratospheric Ozone Depletion hinged directly on the establishment of a fund to subsidize the development of CFC substitutes. In other words, if the interests of certain powerful sub-state actors are not satisfied, those established interests may not cooperate, so that policy would not tend to change.<sup>61</sup>

4. *No constraining condition*: The last conditional impact is the argument of "no constraining condition." This argument stresses that China will not comply with any international norm or regime that imposes constraints on China. This condition usually takes the form of constraining China's right to make use of, or get free access to, the resources within its sovereign boundaries, or takes a form which constrains China's right to develop its economy.<sup>62</sup>

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Environment Series 1, Environmental Change and Security Project (Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 1997), available at <<http://ecsp.si.edu/ecsplib.nsf>>.

<sup>60</sup>Lester Ross, *Environmental Policy in China* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), 206-7.

<sup>61</sup>Economy and Schreurs, "Domestic and International Linkages," 13.

<sup>62</sup>Ross, "China: Environmental Protection," 814-15.

## **Interpretations of the Impact of International Linkages and Policy Changes**

### *Epistemic Learning vs. Rational Adaptation*

Based on material interest, the PRC government promulgated the "Priority Program Items of China's Twenty-first Century Agenda" at the First High-Level International Roundtable Conference on Agenda 21 sponsored by the United Nations in July 1994 in order to attract foreign investment. A revised version was publicized again at the Second High-Level International Roundtable Conference on Agenda 21 two years later in Beijing.

In analyzing the behavior of China's change in environmental policies during the 1990s, this paper proposes the concept of "soft epistemic learning" as an analytical tool. This concept can be juxtaposed with another concept—that of "hard epistemic learning." In the earlier analytical framework section, this paper discussed the significance of "epistemic community" in explaining the exact mechanisms of how international linkages may cause a transformational effect on state behavior. Jeffrey Checkel has argued that the constructivists have created their theory against the materialism and the methodological individualism that the mainstream international relations (IR) theorists assume.<sup>63</sup> Constructivist theory thus emphasizes that the environment in which actors take action is social as well as material, or subjectively constructed as well as objectively determined. Furthermore, the constructivists tend to emphasize the former, so as to argue that interaction with other states and the world also constructs the "national interests" of a state.

Similarly, those IR constructivist scholars with the "epistemic community" as their analytical focus bring to our attention the theoretical explanatory power of the concept by opposing the concept against "rationality." Epistemic learning becomes most significant when rationality is bounded: "If rationality is bounded, epistemic communities may be respon-

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<sup>63</sup>Checkel, "The Constructivist Turn in International Relations Theory," 325-26.

sible for circumscribing the boundaries and delimiting the options."<sup>64</sup>

However, this line of argument, as criticized by some scholars, lacks a consistent theory of the agent (the state). That is, in the context discussed above, constructivism lacks a theory to delineate the boundary between rationality and episteme, or to explain the mechanism rationality and episteme function together when they are intertwined. The following discussion is a primitive effort to respond to this line of criticism, using an analysis of China's environmental politics as a case study.

The term "soft epistemic learning" refers to a process through which the actor goes through epistemic learning of "causal beliefs," but incorporates these beliefs into his rational calculation and then restructures his interest matrix and behavior accordingly. In other words, "soft epistemic learning" does not have to assume that the actor has to change his "principled beliefs" or value system. In the case of China's environmental policy, the policymakers do not have to change their principled belief system that environmental protection is such a high level value that the state sovereignty and the right to economic development should be sacrificed or downplayed. The effects of environmental pollution on the health of the Chinese people and the impeding effects on economic development are all part of the Chinese government's perception of national interests. Totally rational therefore is for the Chinese government to curb the tendency of environmental pollution, and to bring the goal of environmental protection and economic development in tandem.

In contrast, "hard epistemic learning" refers to another process in which the actor, under the influence of the epistemic community, moves to espouse a set of new "principled beliefs" or values/norms, even at the cost of material interests perceived by the original value system. A theory of "hard epistemic learning" at the level of agent would constitute the center of a constructivist "theory."

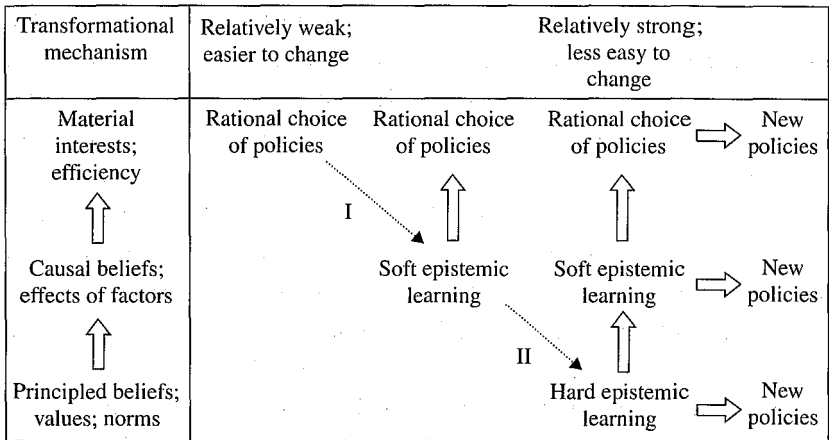
To push the argument one step further, "soft epistemic learning" is one step in the transitional process from pure rational choice to "hard epi-

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<sup>64</sup>Haas, "Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination," 15-16.

stemic learning." The relationship between "rational choice," "soft epistemic learning," and "hard epistemic learning" is as follows. Once having made some change in his principled values through "hard epistemic learning," an actor has already gone through "soft epistemic learning" and has also undergone "rational choice" decisionmaking. If an actor has made some change through "soft epistemic learning," that is, by changing his causal beliefs among factors of the effects of certain factor, he will transform his "rational choice" of actions or policies accordingly, but will not necessarily transform his principled beliefs. Possible also is that an actor only makes some adjustment by making a new choice of action or policy due to his own rational choice of the effectiveness of the means—as based on a change of the pay-off matrix, for example. This kind of change would neither transform the actor's causal or principled beliefs. This is the transformational relationship between "rational choice," "soft epistemic learning," and "hard epistemic learning."

Except for the transformational relationship, there is also a learning relationship among these three approaches. There are two stages of the epistemological learning process. The first stage is to move from the "rational choice" consideration to "soft epistemic learning" (hereafter "learning phase I"). The second stage is to move from "soft epistemic learning" to "hard epistemic learning" (hereafter "epistemic phase II"). While information is what determines one's rational choice, knowledge is what allows one to move beyond rational choice and begin soft learning. This is call "learning phase I." The mechanism behind "learning phase II" is constructive interaction, which requires mutual adjustment during the interaction between different parties of actors in a certain event. The construction of norms at "learning phase II" is only possible when an actor is convinced of the causality among the relevant factors and effects of factors in "learning phase I." In other words, if an actor cannot be convinced of certain causal beliefs, he would not step into "learning phase II" to espouse or internalize the "values" or "norms" entailed by the exact "causal beliefs." Moreover, a certain "principled belief" is based on a set of "causal beliefs"; unless an actor has not only learned but also believed in all the "causal beliefs" connected with that "principled belief," he would not then step into "learning phase II." Constructivist IR theorists, however, also contend that new

**Chart 1****The Transformational Relationship and Learning Phases among "Rational Choice," "Soft Epistemic Learning," and "Hard Epistemic Learning"**

⇒ Direction of transformational relationship

.....> Direction of epistemological learning

causal beliefs may broaden an actor's vision of reality, which in turn would lead the actor toward espousing new norms.<sup>65</sup> Chart 1 summarizes the transformational relationship and the two learning phases connecting "rational choice," "soft epistemic learning," and "hard epistemic learning."

The case of Chinese environmental policies suggests that the Chinese state has only gone through "learning phase I" to the point of "soft epistemic learning"; that is, there has been a change of some causal beliefs. In short, Beijing now believes that the former "development first, environmental protection second" idea does not work, and is not beneficial to China's national interest either. Based on the technological knowledge Beijing learned from the international epistemic community and the knowledge that environmental protection had become a global norm, China then embarked on changing its strategy to accommodate the originally conflicting goals: economic development and environmental protection. China

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 27.

thus made some adjustments due to its "soft epistemic learning" and some other adjustments due to "rational calculation." Based on this argument, this paper agrees with the opinion of "conditional impact" argument raised by Kim, Economy, Ross, and others regarding China's environmental policies.

However, this paper does not agree with the contention that China's change of position is merely a change of rational choice.<sup>66</sup> To explain the change of China's environmental policies as simply being based on selfish calculation is to degrade the causal mechanism of "soft epistemic learning" to the level of "rational choice." In other words, as an explanation the former is too thin. This paper does not agree either with the "weak" or "negative" image of the impact of international linkages on China's environmental policies. The "weak" image of the impact that international linkages have on China's environmental policies neglects "soft epistemic learning" and its effects. Adopting the perspective of "weak" image also tends to neglect the potential of the actor to move toward "hard epistemic learning" entailed by "soft epistemic learning."

As in any constructivist study, the study of China's environmental policies also confronts the following question: What evidence would avail us to argue that China has stepped into "learning phase II" toward "hard epistemic learning" to change its old values and to espouse new norms? While unable to answer this question, this paper at least confirms that there has been some kind of "soft epistemic learning" in the Chinese government's environmental policies in the 1990s. In-depth interviews with policymakers or key epistemic community members in China would be required to learn to what extent the "principled beliefs" have been espoused in the policy community. However, at least there has been plenty of evidence to show that the nationalism or statism in the neofunctionalism mentality still has a stronghold within the Chinese government. Nationalism is still strong even among Chinese environmental specialists. One researcher

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<sup>66</sup>Chen Chang-chin argues, for example, that China's new stance on environmental diplomacy in the 1990s was based on "selfish motives," i.e., to "solve its own economic development and environmental protection problems." See Chen Chang-chin, "Beijing's Environmental Diplomacy," *Issue & Studies* 33, no. 10 (October 1997): 69, 85.

at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences expressed his strong belief in nationalism when encountering the globalism implied by environmentalism by saying that "some Western scholars and environmental protection activists even challenge the very spirit of the definition of 'sovereignty' and maintain that the notion is out of date and even becomes an obstacle to the world in solving global environmental problems. I can hardly agree with this idea."<sup>67</sup>

These views may not represent a general mentality among Chinese environmental scientists or specialists. If they do, however, much time would be required for the Chinese epistemic community to experience "hard epistemic learning." This may not happen at all in the near future.

### *Foreign Policy vs. Domestic Policy*

This paper argues that when discussing the impact that international linkages have on China's environmental policies, one must distinguish between domestic environmental policies and environmental foreign policies. For example, what Elizabeth Economy argued as marginal was China's stance on international negotiations on environmental issues. What has been changed in the 1990s may not be China's stance on global environmental problems, such as the sovereignty principle, the South/North perspective, or the economic priority, but rather China's domestic environmental policies given the development of a new strategy. This change is a result of China's interaction, via international organizations, with the international community on this issue. What the developed countries expect China to change on the global environmental problems is "learning phase II," i.e., "hard epistemic learning," such as to put environmentalism as a value in front of nationalism and economic development. However, many changes in China's domestic environmental policies only require China's "soft epistemic learning," which is exactly what international linkages can influence most effectively. To expect China to have "hard epistemic learning" by providing "knowledge" through international linkages is a mis-

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<sup>67</sup>*China Daily* (Beijing), February 13, 1999, available at <<http://www.chinadaily.net/cndy/history/d4-1gree.b13.html>>.



taken expectation. To dismiss the effect of "knowledge" on China's "soft epistemic learning" as no impact is also a misperception. If we confuse these two levels of causality, we are bound to come up with confusing conclusions.

A second point is that the fact that the Chinese government made strategic adjustments of its environmental policies in the 1990s should not be totally attributed to the pressure or influence from the international community. Such change has also been due to China's perception that environmental problems have been so serious that they threaten China's domestic national interests, such as natural disasters, economic losses, and risks to citizen livelihood.<sup>68</sup>

### **Interplay between Domestic and International Actors on China's Environmental Policies**

#### *National vs. Subnational Level*

The third interpretation of the impact of international linkages on China's environmental policies approaches the issue from the national vs. subnational level. Based on works reviewed earlier in this paper, one strong argument is that international linkages can better influence China's environmental policies at the subnational level rather than at the national level.

In essence, given the Chinese political structure formulated in the process of economic development—fragmented authoritarianism, there are some intrinsic and structural constraints on the implementation capability of the Chinese government to carry out its environmental policies. From another perspective, the domestic structural constraints perceived by the Chinese central government also constitute a rationale to limit its promise to embrace certain international environmental norms. This is because the government knows well that embracing such norms can be well beyond its capability. These perceived structural constraints hence also prevent China

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<sup>68</sup>"Environment in China," 1.

from moving toward "hard epistemic learning."

The concept of "fragmented authoritarianism" was developed by political scientists to describe the bureaucratic system in the Deng era. This concept argues that "authority below the very peak of the Chinese political system is fragmented and disjointed. Fragmentation is structurally based and has been enhanced by reform policies regarding procedures."<sup>69</sup> Here the emphasis is on the "fragmented" side of the model. The political system, according to this model, has bureaucratic interests intersecting horizontally and vertically, and thus each subnational bureaucratic unit tries to maximize its own interests during the policy process. This creates a constant need for "bargaining" among bureaucracies and an overall coordination for policymaking.<sup>70</sup> Under this structure, the first priority of many subnational units is not to carry out national policy, but rather to protect and expand the vested interests they acquired and developed in the process of economic reform. The following discussion focuses on three effects of this structure on China's environmental policies.

First, in terms of implementing national policy, the central government is weak vis-à-vis the local governments, the latter being always perfunctory when the national policy contradicts their local interests under "fragmented authoritarianism." This applies also to environmental policies, which could have a more serious outcome given that the nature of environmental policies is to create public goods and to prevent public bads from growing.

The second result is that horizontally speaking, various bureaucratic systems led by various ministries have competing interests in policymaking and implementation. Forming consensus among these actors and overcoming overall environmental problems is therefore difficult without strong leadership. Implementation can also be problematic when each

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<sup>69</sup>Kenneth Lieberthal, "Introduction: The Fragmented Authoritarianism Model and Its Limitations," in *Bureaucracy, Politics, and Decision-Making in Post-Mao China*, ed. Kenneth Lieberthal and David M. Lampton (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 8.

<sup>70</sup>David M. Lampton, "A Plum for a Peach: Bargaining, Interest, and Bureaucratic Politics in China," *ibid.*, 33-58; David Bachman, "Domestic Sources of Chinese Foreign Policy," in Kim, *China and the World*, 42-59.

minister competes for his or her own bureaucratic interests, thus offsetting the collective effect of the policy.

The third aspect is a "second image reversed" argument.<sup>71</sup> This view emphasizes that under the previous two structural constraints on the central government, international actors can play a positive role in the long run to foster a pro-environmental policy coalition among the Chinese fragmented bureaucracies through their assistance in providing funds or technologies.

### *Fragmented Authoritarianism I*

This refers to the weak central state vs. the stronger but perfunctory local state, i.e., the problem of weak enforcement of laws. Under the "fragmented authoritarianism" model attributed to the Chinese government in the post-Mao era, the power of the central government has become relatively weak. This loss of power is due to the fact that in Deng's reform era the local governments have expanded their fiscal and economic interests in the process of reform, and also because the central government has become more and more reliant on local governments for the funds needed to support various projects. The local governments have gained a certain degree of economic autonomy, and use this autonomy to resist whatever policy contradicts with their local interests. Therefore, the central state constantly confronts difficulties in carrying out its policies in the localities to the full extent. Scholars studying China's environmental policies have noted that the most serious problem the Chinese government faces is not the lack of legal framework or policies, but rather effective and consistent implementation.<sup>72</sup>

This situation is exacerbated by two other facts. The first is that under fiscal pressure, there is a tendency for local governments to become entrepreneurial (the tendency toward "local state corporatism").<sup>73</sup> The "corporatist local governments" tend to establish their own enterprises in order to create fiscal sources from industrialization. The second fact is that the en-

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<sup>71</sup>See note 2 above.

<sup>72</sup>Ross, "China: Environmental Protection," 827.

<sup>73</sup>Jean C. Oi, "Fiscal Reform and the Economic Foundations of Local State Corporatism in China," *World Politics* 45 (1992): 99-126.

terprises created by these local governments tend to be as, or even more, polluted as the large, state-owned enterprises. The local governments find shutting down local enterprises extremely difficult as to do so will instantly hurt their own finances. This leads to widespread pollution in the localities, especially in the rural areas. A good example is a case that occurred in Zhejiang Province in March 1992. The local township pharmaceuticals plant was only fined US\$740 for dumping toxic waste, an act which in six months had inflicted losses worth US\$180,000 on local seafood breeders. Eventually the breeders stormed and sabotaged the factory in June 1992 to stop the factory from continuing to pour out the untreated waste.<sup>74</sup>

This situation helped to bring about a government campaign in 1996 which resulted in the closure of sixty thousand township and village enterprises. The actual result of the campaign was that local governments treat their own enterprises better than foreign factories, and the levies local governments imposed on their own enterprises are treated as licenses to pollute.<sup>75</sup> If the central government cannot effectively prevent the local governments from continuing to create pollution, the central government will eventually need to spend more money to solve the pollution problems.

International linkages hence can play an important role in strengthening the "capability" of the central state to implement environmental policies. Cooperation with the central government is obviously not enough to change China's environmental protection. Foreign assistance can help local governments to place more priority on environmental issues.<sup>76</sup> Therefore, for foreign actors to assist the central government in building projects at the local level is not only important in order to more effectively protect China's environment, but also in order to expand the central government's ability to bypass the local governments to directly solve environmental problems.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup>Sandy Hendry, "Environment: China—Policy Reform When It Suits," *Far Eastern Economic Review* (Hong Kong), October 29, 1992, 42.

<sup>75</sup>*China Economic Review*, December 2, 1997, available at <<http://www.ihe.org/press.html>>.

<sup>76</sup>Lieberthal, "China's Governing System" (cited in note 57 above).

<sup>77</sup>Charles Victor Barber, Jeffery Boutwell, and Elizabeth Economy, "The Findings of the Environmental Scarcities, State Capacity, and Civil Violence Project: China, Indonesia, and

### *Fragmented Authoritarianism II*

As pointed out by political scientists studying the Chinese bureaucratic system, there exists a process of continuous "bargaining" among the bureaucracies under "fragmented authoritarianism."<sup>78</sup> There is thus always an incentive for the bureaucracy to pursue its own organizational interest, and to seek rent from public resources (such as foreign funds to assist environmental protection) when possible. Two implications stem from this tendency. One is that since there are various organizational interests, there also tend to be factions. One must therefore distinguish the potential policy coalitions among ministries of environmental issues. One can observe this kind of implicit political map when there are different perceptions or interpretations of a policy issue among ministries. For example, SAEP and the State Meteorological Bureau (SMB) have different opinions on global warming. The former supported the view that there exists a causal relationship between CO<sub>2</sub> and overall global warming, while the latter disagreed.<sup>79</sup>

The second implication is that many ministries are using the opportunity of more positive environmental policy to set up projects to attract foreign funds not only for promoting environmental protection but also for promoting their own organizational interests. In part because of this phenomenon, many NGOs hesitate to participate in big governmental projects such as Agenda 21. NGOs prefer to focus on smaller projects at the local level or work through nongovernmental cooperative relations when seeking to start new projects.<sup>80</sup>

### *The "Second Image Reversed" Argument*

According to the two implications of "fragmented authoritarianism" noted above, one can clearly see that foreign actors play an important role. Foreign actors must be very careful to choose their Chinese cooperative

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India" (May 2, 1997), China Environment Series 1, Environmental Change and Security Project (Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 1997), available at <<http://ecsp.si.edu/ecsp/lib.nsf>>.

<sup>78</sup>Lampton, "A Plum for a Peach," 33-58.

<sup>79</sup>Economy, "Chinese Policy-Making and Global Climate Change," 26-27.

<sup>80</sup>See note 51 above.

partners in order to best promote environmentalist values and consolidate the pro-environmental policy line in the long run. There is also room for these outsiders to carefully coordinate their assistance so that a policy coalition can be cultivated in the long run. In short, the "second image reversed" argument holds that international influence can help to develop a social or political base upon which certain policy coalitions can form.<sup>81</sup> That international linkages influence Chinese domestic politics and help form policy coalitions has been supported by the findings of many studies of Chinese bureaucratic politics, such as concepts of "reversed co-optation"<sup>82</sup> and "management by exception" (or delegation by consensus).<sup>83</sup>

"Reverse co-optation" refers to a process of decisionmaking in which the central leader is "captured by the bureaucracies he is supposed to supervise," or the process in which "the party leader sent to manage a bureaucratic organ tend[s] to adopt the organizational interests of that organ as their own, and to represent those interests in party policy-making councils."<sup>84</sup> Thus, if foreign actors can form a strong pro-environmental policy coalition within the Chinese government, the opinion and perception of this bureaucratic coalition is very likely to become the opinion and perception of the party leadership.

The concept of "management by exception" embodies a similar effect. "Management by exception" refers to a rule of management according to which

at each level of the organizational hierarchy, agency representatives make decisions by a rule of consensus. If the bureaucrats cannot reach consensus, then the decision is referred to the higher levels, and if the higher levels cannot agree, then either nothing happens or the ultimate principal, the Communist Party, intervenes to impose a solution.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> See note 2 above.

<sup>82</sup> Lowell Dittmer, *China's Continuous Revolution* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), 37; David Bachman, *Bureaucracy, Economy, and Leadership in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 25.

<sup>83</sup> Susan Shirk, "The Chinese Political System and the Political Strategy of Economic Reform," in Lieberthal and Lampton, *Bureaucracy, Politics, and Decision-Making*, 68-76; Susan Shirk, *The Political Logic of Economic Reform in China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 116-28.

<sup>84</sup> Bachman, *Bureaucracy, Economy, and Leadership in China*, 25.

<sup>85</sup> Shirk, "The Chinese Political System," 68.

According to this rule, if there is a strong pro-environmental policy coalition under the influence of foreign actors, the consensus reached by the coalition will very likely become the national policy. Moreover, if there are two competing policy coalitions vying to control a certain environmental policy, strengthening the pro-international norm coalition would at least increase the chance that their perspective would not be easily sacrificed. For example, Elizabeth Economy pointed out one case where environmental policy debate among the ministries became political; the originally influential SAEP and SMB became marginal and yielded to the coalition of traditionally powerful ministries such as the State [Development] Planning Commission and Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>86</sup> In this case, the international linkages strengthening SAEP and SMB proved pivotal.

### **Conclusion: Policy Implications and Some Theoretical Reflections**

#### *Conditional Impact on China's "Soft Epistemic Learning"*

This paper disagrees with the opinion that China's strategic shift of environmental policies in the 1990s is merely a rational adjustment based on selfish calculation to the change in the international community. It does not agree either with another opinion that there has been weak or basically no impact on China's environmental policies from international linkages. In general, this paper holds that international linkages have had positive impact on China's environmental policies. The impact is mainly on China's "soft epistemic learning," i.e., the learning of causal beliefs so as to change a country's perception of interests and to undertake rational policy choices accordingly. This paper asserts that this impact is not deterministic and has incremental effects. If international actors continue to strengthen their linkages with Chinese domestic partners, there is a potential to form a policy coalition, which may even, in the long run, nudge China into the process

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<sup>86</sup>Economy, "Chinese Policy-Making and Global Climate Change," 30-31.

of "hard epistemic learning."

### *Dialectic "National Interest"*

There are at least three sets of values included in China's environmental policies: nation-statism (emphasizing sovereignty), economic development, and environmental protection. "Soft epistemic learning" has changed China's perception of the order of these interests: from "*nation-statism > economic development > environmental protection*" (the nation-statism is more important than economic development which in turn is more important than environmental protection) to "*nation-statism > environmental protection ≥ economic development*" (the nation-statism is more important than environmental protection, and environmental protection is at least as important as, if not more important than, economic development). Whether China will proceed from "soft epistemic learning" to "hard epistemic learning" so that the order would eventually become "*nation-statism ≥ environmental protection ≥ economic development*," or even "*environmental protection ≥ nation-statism > economic development*" is doubtful in the near future. According to the constructivist theory, this is only possible when China learns through interaction with the international community that some other sovereign nation-states (especially those major developed states) have sacrificed their national interests for the idea of global environmental protection. Moreover, this phenomenon has to in turn successfully affect China's perception of the nature of global environmental politics (especially the anarchic aspect of the power relationships among nation-states and the South/North relations). Therefore, one should not reasonably expect China to change its national interest perceptions on global environmental issues when the major developed countries have not changed theirs.

### *China's Compliance with International Norms*

The process to move from "soft epistemic learning" to "hard epistemic learning" is a long and difficult one. This is so not only because converting beliefs is difficult, but also because this change requires comprehensive "soft epistemic learning"—to learn causal beliefs as preconditions, and this conversion should not contradict with an actor's imminent material



interests. Actually, for one or more actors to change the imminent material interests structure of another is not easy. This usually requires other actors to either sacrifice or readjust their own material interests as well. For one actor to make some change in its "principled beliefs" (such as to comply with some new norms) requires action from other actors. A norm cannot be established unless accepted by most members in a community; for all members to accept the norm requires constructive efforts from all parties. As argued by constructivists, norm formation is a social process that needs to be constructed rather than a determined structural result. This is an intersubjective interactive process in which identities and interests are endogenous, rather than a rationalist interactive mechanism.<sup>87</sup> A norm is a "collective identity," to use Alexander Wendt's term.<sup>88</sup> An actor cannot comply with a norm unless the norm becomes the actor's identity. Unless the actor can adjust his interests and values in tandem with this identity, the "hard epistemic learning" process can never be realized. In the case of transforming China's environmental policies, the other foreign actors (nation-states, IGOs, NGOs, and private enterprises) should all acknowledge that the effort to make China comply with global environmental norms should not be a power game. To temporarily bend another's will with force is not "hard epistemic learning," nor is it even "soft learning," and is thus doomed to fail in the long run.

### *Policy Recommendations*

This paper thus leads to the following policy recommendations for all international actors seeking to influence China's environmental policies:

1. Piecemeal incrementalism is better than a one-shot approach. This policy recommendation is based on the argument that the impact of international linkages is greater when an incremental approach rather than a black-and-white one is adopted. This is not to say that outsiders should give up when there is a good opportunity to persuade China to make a clear

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<sup>87</sup>Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics," *International Organization* 46 (1992): 394.

<sup>88</sup>Alexander Wendt, "Collective Identity Formation and the International State," *American Political Science Review* 88, no. 2 (1994): 384-96.

and concrete change in policy, but that for such a moment to come, taking piecemeal policies or actions to exert incremental influence is necessary.

2. Domestic policies are easier to change than foreign policies. By the same token, this argument does not preclude any effort to push China to move toward international cooperation in regard to its environmental foreign policies. The essence of this argument is that any major effort to change China's environmental foreign policies can easily be seen by China as a power game that may hurt the PRC's relative gains, and may end up not improving China's environment at all. Instead, if the purpose of changing China's environmental foreign policy is eventually to improve the global environment, changing China's domestic environmental policy is a more effective step toward that end.

3. Influence at the subnational level is more effective than at the national level. This argument bears a logic similar to the previous two. Such help at the local level also helps the Chinese government to escape from a vicious cycle of "the more the localities create pollution, the more money the center spends to clean it up, and the weaker the capacity of the state in general to solve the environmental problem."

4. Helping to first satisfy China's needs will make the Chinese better appreciate the value of and more willing to adopt such norms. If the environmental problem is global, the solution must be so too.