

NATIONAL CHENGCHI UNIVERSITY  
MASTER THESIS

China's Environmental Journalism:  
Media's Role in the Anti-Nujiang  
Campaign



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## ABSTRACT

Media in China are generally categorized as the extensions of propaganda machine for the central government, because despite media commercialization, China maintains heavy-handed censorship at the whim of political will. However, there are still instances in which journalists are active participants of social movements in China. One recent case in particular is the “Battle to Protect the Nu River,” in which China’s environmental NGOs, scholars, and media formed joint coalition to fight off the Nu River Project, and stop efforts to build hydropower plants on Nujiang. This paper uses John Kingdon’s Multiple Streams Model to map out the ways in which the Policy Entrepreneurs – environmental journalists – capitalized on tools of the press to influence public opinion and decision-makers in the government, systematically brought the anti-NRP campaign up to the policy agenda, and eventually swayed the outcome of the national policy. Since the beginning of the proposal to build a cascade of 13 dams on the World Heritage site of Nujiang in 2003, Chinese premier Wen Jiabao personally intervened, and twice ordered suspension of the project. Therefore, while the final outcome of the anti-NRP campaign is still pending, at least China’s environmental journalists have successfully prolonged the usual nine-year hiatus on a project that was slated for three consecutive Five-Year Plans.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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## **List of Graphics**

### **Pictures**

|  |    |
|--|----|
| 1. Jingji Magazine Cover Story 2004/05/20    | 2  |
| 2. Zhao, Yongxin. People's Daily 2003/9/11   | 60 |
| 3. Zhao, Yongxin. People's Daily 2003/9/19   | 61 |
| 4. Zhang, Kejia. China Daily Youth 2003/8/19 | 64 |
| 5. Zhang, Kejia. China Daily Youth 2003/9/5  | 75 |

### **Figures**

|   |    |
|---|----|
| 1. Anti-NRP Campaign's Agenda Setting Process     | 26 |
| 2. Newspaper Layout Placement with Most Attention | 76 |

### **Map**

|                                      |    |
|--------------------------------------|----|
| 1. Proposed Nujiang Hydropower Plans | 29 |
|--------------------------------------|----|



## TABLE OF CONTENT

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| <i>Acknowledgement</i>  | <i>iii</i> |
| <i>List of Graphics</i>   | <i>iv</i>  |
| <b>CHAPTER I - Introduction</b>                                   |            |
| Introduction  | 1          |
| Motivation of Study   | 3          |
| Background and Context  | 5          |
| China's Contentious Journalists                                   | 8          |
| Research Questions  | 10         |
| Research Scope  | 11         |
| Research Methods  | 12         |
| Organization of Thesis  | 12         |
| <b>CHAPTER II – Historical Context and Theoretical Background</b> |            |
| Environmental Journalism at its Best                              | 14         |
| Literature Review   | 18         |
| Theoretical Framework   | 25         |
| <b>CHAPTER III – Case Study: The Anti-NRP Campaign</b>            |            |
| Nujiang Hydropower Project  | 28         |
| Problem Stream  | 32         |
| Political Stream  | 41         |
| Policy Stream   | 46         |
| Summary   | 51         |
| <b>CHAPTER IV – Environmental Journalists</b>                     |            |
| Policy Entrepreneurs  | 53         |
| Advocacy Journalism? Activist Journalism?                         | 56         |
| Profiles of the Policy Entrepreneurs                              | 58         |
| Power of Placement: Location, Location, Location                  | 74         |
| Summary   | 76         |
| <b>CHAPTER V – Moments of Triumph</b>                             |            |
| Policy Window   | 78         |
| Policy Outcome  | 85         |
| <b>CHAPTER VI - Conclusion</b>                                    |            |
| Conclusion  | 89         |
| <i>Appendix I – Chronology of Events</i>                          | <i>98</i>  |
| <i>Bibliography</i>   | <i>105</i> |

## Chapter I - Introduction

“Information disclosure is a powerful to achieve environmental protection. Please show more interest in the protection of water resources and write stories on this issue.” – Ma Jun, founding director of Institute of Public and Environmental Affairs.<sup>1</sup>

May 2004, the cover of China’s *Jingji (Economy) Magazine* featured four towering figures, with the camera angle capturing them from below, and their heads slightly hilted upward, as if looking off to the distant future.<sup>2</sup> (See Picture 1) Instead of famous investors or entrepreneurs, who were the usual faces that frequently grace the front of this financial-themed periodical, this time, the spotlight shone on the unassuming leaders of China’s environmental movement. Underneath the “eyes on the prize” portraits, two lines of bright yellow words read: “THE SOCIAL FORCES BEHIND THE SUSPENSION OF NUJIANG CONSTRUCTION PLANS.” In accordance with the “China Agenda 21” white paper that outlines plans of sustainable development,<sup>3</sup> in 2003 Yunnan provincial government wanted to begin building hydropower plants on the Nujiang, also known as the Nu River Project (NRP). What seemed like a sure deal then spiraled out of control, eventually putting the project on a 9-year hiatus. “This is the first time ever to have occurred in China,” editor of the magazine wrote, “that voices and activities of civil groups greatly influenced central government’s policy.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Yoshioka, Keiko. “Asahi news: media at the front line of environmental protection battle,” *Asahi News*. 20 December 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Cao, Haidong and Zhang, Peng. “The Social Forces Behind the Suspension of Nujiang Construction Plans” (*Nujiang daba turan gezhi muhou de minjian liliang*), *Economy (Jingji)*, 20 May 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Yang, Guobin. “Global Environmentalism Hits China,” *Yale Global Online Magazine*, 4 February 2004.

<sup>4</sup> *Jingji*, 20 May 2004.

PICTURE 1 - JINGJI MAGAZINE COVER STORY 204/5/20 \*2  
"SOCIAL FORCES BEHIND SUSPENSION OF NUJIANG CONSTRUCTION"



Just what kind of social forces are powerful enough to influence the immutable Chinese Communist Party (CCP)? Moreover, what kind of social forces were able to make an estimated ¥34 billion RMB (approx. US\$5.4 billion) worth of annual revenues from the Nujiang hydropower production plans come to a standstill? How did the campaign to stop the NRP succeed where others failed? The answers lie behind the curtains of the pen fight that became known in the media as the “Battle to Protect the Nu River” (*Nujiang Bao Wei Zhan*). However, in the Chinese authoritarian regime where freedom of the press is still only a phenomenon, how did environmental journalists champion the cause through the fortress of CCP’s propaganda machine? What kind of uphill battle did they have to engage to in order to bring home the victory?

As part of the famous Three Parallel Rivers, that include Jinsha, Lancang, and Nu rivers, the *Nujiang* (meaning the Angry River in Chinese) is over 2,000 kilometers long, one of the longest rivers in China. For economic and clean energy development purposes, the Chinese government and hydropower companies have been trying dam this river since 1970s. However, as a result of

the difficult terrain, coupled with active campaigning by environmental non-government organizations (ENGOS), scholars, and environmental journalists, plans to build dams on the Nu River have been stalled until very recently. Efforts both to push for and against the Nu River Project (NRP) have been effectively carried out horizontally and vertically, from grassroots organizing to petitioning the Zhongnanhai. In fact, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao not only once, but twice suspended construction on the NRP, due to growing popular outcry and international concern on the project.

#### Motivation of Study

As in the ancient days, when the protection of a river often meant the last defense of a kingdom under siege, the battle to save the Nujiang was in many ways, a last line of defense to a pristine ecological reservation and forced migration of 500,000 villagers.<sup>5</sup> The warriors, environmental non-profit organizations (ENGOS) and State Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA),<sup>6</sup> took on enemies many times stronger than themselves, the well-oiled machines of former state-owned enterprise, hydropower company Huadian and Yunnan provincial government.

The David vs. Goliath plot earned the campaign to stop damming the Nujiang, a glorious title: the most controversial yet most successful case of environmental activism in China. So much so that Yu Xiaogang – leader of Yunnan-based ENGO

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<sup>5</sup> International Rivers Network. "China's Nu River: Dam Projects Threaten Magnificent World Heritage Site," IRN.ORG.

<sup>6</sup> China's national governing body for environmental protection. It was later elevated to ministerial status on 15 March 2008, and became the Ministry of Environmental Protection. However, throughout most NRP campaign, it was operating as SEPA, and this paper will refer to the said agency as such.



Green Watershed – refers to the year 2003 (the year the campaign began) as “Year One” of China’s environmental activism.<sup>7</sup> Though in reality, China’s environmental activism started nearly 30 years prior to the campaign, Nujiang activists’ breakthrough, like all tide-turning, world-shaking advances, was the result of collaboration across the social spectrum.

In fact, at the height of the campaign, 56 NGOs<sup>8</sup> signed an open letter to support SEPA’s move to implement environmental regulations laws, while as many as 60 media outlets joined the Green Reporters Salon,<sup>9</sup> which is an organized workshop that educates environmentally friendly reporters on issues pertaining to their interest. According to one rough estimate, the number of reports covering the Nujiang controversy in national-level news media between August 2003 to September 2004 alone, was well above one hundred.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the number of groups of NGOs and media outlets working hard to fend off the proposition to build dams on one of the two last free-flowing rivers in China, their victory came as surprising to the general public, as it was shocking to the very people responsible for this change. *Jingji* magazine detailed the moment when Wang Yongchen, the leader of the campaign, burst into tears of joy, when she learned over the phone, that Chinese premier Wen Jiabao himself ordered suspension on the construction.

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<sup>7</sup> Author’s interview with Yu Xiaogang.

<sup>8</sup> Lu, Yiyi. “Environmental Civil Society and Governance in China,” *Catham House*, August 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Tong, Zhifeng. (2009) “The Mechanism of Mobilization and the Development of the Natural Protection Campaign with the Fight against Dam Construction in Nujiang as an Example,” *Open Times*, 9, pg. 122.

<sup>10</sup> Xue, Ye and Wang, Yongchen. (2006) “Highly Controversial Hydropower Development in Western China,” in Liang Congjie and Yang Dongping (Ed.) *2005: Crisis and Breakthrough of China’s Environment*. Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press.

Throughout the fascinating story of the campaign to save China's "last virgin river," which became a catch phrase used by environmentalists,<sup>11</sup> newspapers, magazines, radio programs, and television programs were unequivocally the primary battlegrounds on which the pro- and anti-dam sides dueled out their differences. In fact, researcher Andrew Mertha goes as far as to say, that, "media coverage was critical; in its absence, it is likely that the NRP would have gone ahead as planned with relatively muted opposition, if any."<sup>12</sup>

### Background and Context

In order to fully understand the magnitude of the success of anti-NRP campaign, one must understand the political and social context of that specific period.

#### *Political*

China in the year 2003 had just transferred the central party leadership from Jiang Zemin to Hu Jintao. 2003 was the third year into the execution the 10<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan, which contained one of the central policy directives, the Great Western Development Plan. It included an emphasis to develop water resources in the southwestern provinces for power generation, as a way to solve the electricity shortage crisis of power-hungry economic centers like Beijing, Shanghai and Guangdong, while elevating the economically backward western

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<sup>11</sup> Wang, Foquan. (2003) "Will China Still Have Virgin Rivers?" (*Zhongguo hai hui you chun jiang ma*) *Green Life*, 10.

<sup>12</sup> Mertha, Andrew C. (2008) *China's Water Warriors: Citizen Action and Policy Change*. New York: Cornell University Press. Pg.145.

provinces out of poverty.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, as the world's fastest growing economy, China became increasingly under criticism for carbon emission, therefore the 10<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan also implicitly stated that China must explore sustainable methods of energy generation.<sup>14</sup>

### *Hydropower Policy*

Of course, China's policy to develop hydropower began much earlier than the Great Western Development Policy. China first began to build dams as part of a national campaign under the Great Leap Forward.<sup>15</sup> In 2000, Wen Jiabao boasted to the Congress of the International Commission on Large Dams, that China came out on top, as having the highest number of large dams in the world.<sup>16</sup> According to Chinese National Committee on Large Dams, by the year 2009 China has more than "80,000 large and small scale reservoirs in China, in which 5,340 dams completed or under construction are higher than 30m."<sup>17</sup> By 2011, dams of all sizes in China are numbering at over 85,000, of which the large dams exceed 25,000.<sup>18</sup>

This number includes the largest of its kind in the world - Three Gorges Project (TGP). Under Deng Xiaoping's directive, TGP set out to be constructed despite

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<sup>13</sup> National Development and Reform Commission. (2005) "10<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan on National Economic and Social Development," (*Guomin jingji he shehui fazhan di shige wunian jihua*).

<sup>14</sup> Magee, Darrin. (2006) "Powershed Politics: Yunnan Hydropower under Great Western Development," *China Quarterly*, 185, pp.23-41.

<sup>15</sup> Shui, Fui. (1997) "A Profile of Dams in China," in J. Thibodeau, Q. Dai, P.B. Williams (Ed.) *The River Dragon Has Come: Three Gorges Dam and the Fate of China's Yangtze River and its People*, New York: M.E. Sharpe.

<sup>16</sup> People's Daily. "China Tops World in Number of Large Dams," *People's Daily Online*, 19 September 2000.

<sup>17</sup> Chinese National Committee on Large Dams. (2009) "Current Activities - Dam Construction in China 2009," 18 May 2009.

<sup>18</sup> Chellaney, Brahma. (2011) "China's dam frenzy: China remains the world's biggest dam builder at home and abroad," *India Today*, 16 December 2011.

opposition from experts, who warned of technical problems such as sedimentation and shipping.<sup>19</sup> However, throughout the planning process, a well-known, well-connected journalist Dai Qing successfully rallied scholars and delegate to the 1992 National People's Congress, even at one point distributing her self-published book *Yangtze! Yangtze!* in an effort to inform the delegates of the potential hazards of the TGP.

Unfortunately, the political atmosphere in the post-Tiananmen Square crackdown became intolerable of any deviation from the decided Party policy. Proponents of the TGP capitalized on this political opportunity to label anyone who held reservations about the hydropower project as advocates of "bourgeois liberalization."<sup>20</sup> In October, *Yangtze! Yangtze!* was officially banned, and its editor Dai Qing was imprisoned.<sup>21</sup>

### *Social*

Despite Chinese central government's effort to crack down on dissent, in the ten-year span between the years 1993 to 2003, incidents of social unrest in China increased from 8,700 to 58,000.<sup>22</sup> Meaning that even counting only the reported incidents, the number of social unrest grew six times. Researcher Albert Kiedel attributed the mass unrest to China's transitioning economic model, that despite the country as a whole exhibited impressive GDP growth rates, many rural peasants and workers did not see the economic benefits trickle down. In fact,

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<sup>19</sup> He, Shi and Si, Ji. (1989) "The Comeback of the Three Gorges Dam (1989-1993)," in Dai Qing (Ed.) *Yangtze! Yangtze!*

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Williams, Philip. "Great Wall Across the Yangtze: Controversy," *Public Broadcasting Service*

<sup>22</sup> Keidel, Albert. (2005) *The Economic Basis for Social Unrest in China*. Presented at the George Washington University's *Third European-American Dialogue on China*: May 26-27, 2005.

Kiedel found many of the grievances to have economic basis: from low and unpaid wages, to layoff and unpaid back wage, to loss of worker benefits, fighting for union representation, official corruption, and the list went on. Interestingly, environmental degradation, access to water, and forced migration were also listed as reasons inciting public unrest.<sup>23</sup> Yet the unrest does not end with the peasants and workers.

### China's Contentious Journalists

Media in China are generally categorized as the mouthpiece for the Chinese government, because China is still an authoritarian regime and exercises heavy-handed censorship. The French-based non-governmental organization Reporters Without Borders' 2010 Press Freedom Index ranked China at #171, out of 178 countries;<sup>24</sup> while the D.C.-based international non-governmental organization Freedom House's 2009 Freedom of the Press index ranked China at #181, out of 196 countries.<sup>25</sup>

Both international organizations found China's press freedom to be close to the bottom of all countries surveyed. The life of a reporter in China seems even bleaker when Chinese journalist, He Qinglian described Chinese journalists as "dancing in shackles."<sup>26</sup> Despite the general repressive media atmosphere in China, however, there are still instances in which journalists are active participants of social movements in China. In addition to the ENGOs teaming up

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Reporters without Borders. (2011) "Press Freedom Index 2010."

<sup>25</sup> Freedom House. (2011) "Freedom of the Press Index."

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Shirk, Susan. (2011) "Changing Media, Changing China," in S. Shirk. (Ed.) *Changing Media, Changing China*. New York: Oxford University.

with green reporters for environmental activism, there have been other instances in which reporters stood up for the 1980s pro-democracy movement, as well as protesting against censorship in the 21<sup>st</sup> century China.

### *China Daily during Tiananmen Square*

During the 1989 democracy movement, journalists at the state press *China Daily* went against the official stance and sided with the students, with wide coverage of the protests in detailed pieces strategically placed in the front-and-center layout of the newspaper.<sup>27</sup> At the height of journalists' support of the democracy movement, staff from the state newspaper even marched alongside the students under the banner of *China Daily*, a photograph of which subsequently appeared in the newspaper on May 18, 1989.<sup>28</sup> After the tanks rolled into Tiananmen Square, CCP's Propaganda Department swiftly replaced the two top editors,<sup>29</sup> and *China Daily* returned to daily state-sanctioned functions. Yet those audacious though brief days of journalists risking their jobs and pension for what they believed in, will forever go down in history as what Liu Binyan refers to as the only days of press freedom in China.<sup>30</sup>

### *Beijing News Strike*

*Beijing News* (新京報), a top-selling tabloid in Beijing known for its explosive stories on official corruption and misconduct, came under fire in December 2005,

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<sup>27</sup> Tan, Frank. (1990) "The People's Daily: Politics and Popular Will – Journalistic Defiance in China During the Spring of 1989," *Pacific Affairs*, 63:2, pp. 151-169.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 156-7.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

when its editor Yang Bin and his two deputies were removed.<sup>31</sup> Replacement of editors for political purposes is not uncommon in China, but for the first time, it was met by a work strike. About 100 workers at *Beijing News*, which is a quarter of its 400 editorial staff walked out following the removal of their senior editor Mr. Yang, and workers circulated a petition to denounce his firing.<sup>32</sup> In response, the newspaper reportedly threatened dismissal of anyone who participated, and the strike was subsequently reduced to several dozen participants, yet the paper output also shrank from its usual 80 pages to 32 pages the following day.<sup>33</sup>

### Research Questions

Given the bleak outcome of the anti-TGP campaign and others, how did the anti-NRP environmental activists succeed where others failed? What strategies did they develop to their advantage? To find out these answers would undoubtedly help to advance future environmental protection campaigns, if not also contribute to the greater democratization movement in China. This paper intends to highlight media's role in the Nujiang controversy, and explore how key leaders capitalized on their double-identity as active reporters, to dissuade the public and government officials from granting permission to dam the Nujiang.

China National Radio (CNR) reporter Wang Yongchen, who doubles as the director of ENGO Green Earth Volunteers (GEV), and *China Youth Daily* (CYD) senior reporter Zhang Kejia championed the anti-NRP cause through their

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<sup>31</sup> Lague, David. (2005) "In Rare Move, Journalists Strike Paper in Beijing," *International Herald Tribune*, 31 December 2005.

<sup>32</sup> Gill, Chris. (2005) "Beijing's paper's staff strike after editor's removal," *The Guardian*, 31 December 2005.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

respective places of employment. In addition, Wang organized other journalists into series of workshops called the Green Reporters Salon, while Zhang launched a whole section of online newspaper, the Green Net, getting more media-savvy youth involved. Then there is Zhao Yongxin, an environmental reporter for the Chinese Communist Party's propaganda machine – *People's Daily*. Though a member of ENGO Friends of Nature (FoN), Zhao is not involved in environmental activism to the same degree as Wang or Zhang, but he was among the first to cover the NRP story, also the journalist who exposed the illegal construction at Beijing's Old Summer Palace, the Yuanmingyuan Park.

It is people like them, reporters who despite working for state-controlled media, still had the courage to openly take a stand, to oppose the central government's policy to tap all water resources in China, that prompted the massive wave of media campaign against damming the Nujiang. Therefore, the basis of my hypothesis comes from the human factor: the environmental journalists, without whose active participation, China's ENGOs would never have advanced that far.

### Research Scope

In the interest of maintaining focus on the topic, I will limit the study scope to print media, particularly state-controlled newspapers and commercial magazines. Though for the purpose of presenting a complete story, I will mention television and radio programs in passing.



## Research Methods

For starters, I combed through published books, journal articles, and academic papers by other scholars and students who have already studied the topic of Nuijiang controversy, to get a sense of the chronological occurrence of the events. Then I researched on the Internet, the Chinese National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) database, and National Chengchi University's (NCCU) Institute of International Relations' (IIR) library newspaper archive, for digital and print copies of news report entries, as well as magazine articles written by and about the subject environmental journalists. In addition to existing literature, when Dr. Yu Xiaogang of Green Watershed attended NCCU's Public Administrations Academic Seminar on 31 March 2012, I was fortunate enough to be granted a face-to-face interview with him. My interview with Zhang Kejia was conducted via email correspondence.

## Organization of Thesis

Chapter One outlines the research motivation and scope, plus a brief background on past instances in which Chinese journalists cross the line of state censorship. In Chapter Two, I shall re-visit published books, scholarly journals, and academic papers that present various insights into the phenomenon of environmental journalism in China. I will also introduce the paper's theoretical framework, Multiple Streams Model. In Chapter Three, I will provide the background of NRP, then set the stage for the problem stream, which is where the proponents and opponents stand on the issue; the political stream will explain the political atmosphere of the country at the time; then the policy stream is where I lay out the tools with which the environmental journalists and SEPA used to build up the

crescendo of anti-NRP campaign's triumph. Chapter Four will feature the profiles of policy entrepreneurs, the game-changers in the story, and look at how they put their weapons to use. Chapter Five provides a view into the policy windows, and how those opportunities develop into the policy output. In Chapter Six, I will conclude my findings. The appendix of the paper is a timeline of memorable events; this additional piece is an effort to build a more complete picture of the anti-Nujiang campaign.



## Chapter II – Historical Context and Theoretical Background

“Non-government does not equal anti-government. To be non-governmental is to keep an independent voice. For one thing, to be the assistant of the government and for another thing to be the watchdog of the government.” – Liao Xiaoyi,<sup>1</sup> founder of Global Village of Beijing.

### Environmental Journalism at its Best

China’s environmental journalism did not spontaneously burst onto the scene in 2003 with the anti-NRP campaign. Below are three cases that offer glimpses of how China’s ENGOs skillfully teamed up with environmental journalists to amazing results. Though these campaigns are smaller in scale, but arguably just as memorable, and definitely equally as important in the history of China’s path toward establishing a genuine, independent environmental movement.

#### *Tibetan Antelope*

As the first social group to register as China’s environmental non-government organization in 1994, Friends of Nature’s (FoN) founder and president Liang Congjie risked his own life to save Tibetan antelopes from poachers, because his outcry for the endangered animals brought onto himself death threats from the poachers.<sup>2</sup> The near-extinct Tibetan antelopes, only found on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, are targeted for their hides that are turned into expensive shahtoosh shawls.<sup>3</sup> For a shawl that costs up to US\$40,000 each, approximately 20,000

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<sup>1</sup> Yi, Yi. “Growing from Grassroots: Environmental NGOs are having a growing impact on development,” *Beijing Review*, 7 April 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Poole, Teresa. “China’s ‘friends of nature’ join the Tibetan antelope on the list of endangered species,” *The Independent*, 22 November 1998.

<sup>3</sup> Lowe, Justin. (1998) “Global fashion threatens rare Tibetan antelope,” *Earth Island Journal*, Fall 1998.

Tibetan antelopes were killed every year.<sup>4</sup> That's when Liang Congjie's Friends of Nature decided to step in.

On the international front, Liang targeted the consumers. Since Britain was one of the biggest buyer countries of the shahtoosh shawls, Liang began by writing to then British Prime Minister Tony Blair, during the latter's visit to Beijing. In responses, Blair personally met Liang and promised to put a stop to the illegal trade.<sup>5</sup> While in the domestic arena, FoN introduced a local armed anti-poaching team, the Wild Yak Brigade, to Beijing's journalists, who wrote a series of sympathetic articles on the plight of the Tibetan antelopes and drew nation-wide attention to the cause.<sup>6</sup> Thanks to their conservation efforts, the number of Tibetan antelopes tripled from less than 20,000 in 1998 to 60,000 in 2008.<sup>7</sup>

### *Yangliuhu Dam*

Before the momentous victory over the NRP, there was Yangliuhu Dam. Early 2003, Sichuan Province's Dujiangyan Bureau of Administration proposed to build a dam that measures 1,200 meters wide, 23 meters high, as part of the larger Zipingpu hydropower project. The problem was that the proposed site would only be 1,300 meters away from the Yuzui (fish mouth) part of China's historical Dujiangyan Irrigation System, which means it would threaten the more than 2,200 year-old World Heritage Site.<sup>8</sup> Many officials within the Dujiangyan government contested the plan, though the project got the go-ahead from SEPA.

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<sup>4</sup> China Tibet Information Center. "Appeal for Rescuing Tibetan Antelopes."

<sup>5</sup> Bao, Jiannu. "Bloody Shawls Exterminating Chiru," *China Daily*, 14 January 1999.

<sup>6</sup> Sun, Yanfei and Zhao, Dingxin. (2008) "Environmental Campaigns," in Kevin J. O'Brien (Ed.) *Popular Protest in China*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge. pp. 144-162.

<sup>7</sup> Lu, An. "Endangered Tibetan antelope triple since 1998 in China," *Xinhua*, 22 April 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Han, Ling. "New dam faces opposition," *China Central Television*, 8 April 2003.

As it so happened, when the provincial government was about launch the project in June 2003, Wang Yongchen and Zhang Kejia were attending a conference in Sichuan. A municipal official approached Wang and Zhang, pled with them to expose the story.<sup>9</sup>

Upon her return, Zhang Kejia published, “The United Nations Worries the New Dam Constructed Near Dujiangyan Will Destroy the World Heritage Site’s Original Appearance” on July 9, 2003.<sup>10</sup> Wang Yongchen also featured the Yangliuhu story at China National Radio’s program “News Background.” Then *Southern Weekend* picked up from there, with two stories of their own: “Dam Only 1310m from Dujiangyan” on July 31<sup>st</sup>, and “Water Enclosure: Disputes Over Intensive Construction of Hydropower” on August 14<sup>th</sup>. Moreover, *Southern Weekend* followed the issue with a front-page coverage and series called “Renzonghai Shocked by Hydroelectricity.”<sup>11</sup> All in all, there were over 180 domestic and international media reports on this issue, invoking great public pressure on the provincial government. On August 29, 2003, Sichuan’s provincial government unanimously decided to terminate the project, for good.<sup>12</sup>

### *Yuanmingyuan Park*

The controversy around Beijing’s 18<sup>th</sup> century historical site, Yuanmingyuan Park, also known as the Old Summer Palace, began with a tip-off from a

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<sup>9</sup> Mertha, 2008: 100-1.

<sup>10</sup> Zhang, Kejia. “The United Nations Worries the New Dam Constructed Near Dujiangyan Will Destroy the World Heritage Site’s Original Appearance,” (*Shijie Yichan Dujiangyan Yaojian Xinba, Lienheguo Guanyuan Guanzhu*) *China Youth Daily*, 9 July 2003

<sup>11</sup> Yan, Yan. “China’s Media Power Evidenced in ‘Anti-Dam’ Movement,” *Science News*, 22 October 2009.

<sup>12</sup> Zhang, Wei. (2007a) “Green News and the Rise of Chinese Environmental Journalists,” (*Luse Xinwen Yu Zhongguo Huanjing Jizhequn Zhi Jueqi*) *The Journalist Monthly*.

professor. In March 2005, Professor Zhang Zhengchun chanced upon the park, and found workers busy laying down waterproof sheets on the bottom of the lake at the park. He posted a letter on the Internet, and called *People's Daily* reporter Zhao Yongxin. At that point, the project to cover the bottom of Yuanmingyuan's lake was already approved and was part of the Beijing Olympics' plan to conserve water. Proponents of the project claimed that by waterproofing the lakebed, it would prevent the water from seeping into the ground, thereby saving water. Opponents of the project, though, thought it would destroy the ecology of the lake.<sup>13</sup>

After seeing the site for himself, Zhao Yongxin first wrote an internal reference report on 26 March, then exposed the construction project in *People's Daily* on March 28, whereas other reporters who had also interviewed Professor Zhang waited.<sup>14</sup> Zhao's report ignited a media storm around the project, and SEPA soon organized a public hearing on the case; this became the first-ever public hearing in the history of PRC for an environmental issue.<sup>15</sup> Zhao did not stop there, he continued to follow up on the issue, even prompting *People's Daily* website to do an online survey on the issue, and showed over 92% of those polled were against the case.<sup>16</sup>

In the end, an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) conducted by Tsinghua University recommended the waterproofing of lakebed be modified, though not

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<sup>13</sup> Li, Fei. "Yuanmingyuan lake bed project questioned," *China Daily*, 30 March 2005.

<sup>14</sup> Zhang, Zhengchun. "Congratulations to the results of Green China Person of the Year Awards," (*Zhuhe Luse Zhongguo Niandu Renwu Pingxuan Jiexiao*) *Tianya Forum*, 29 November 2005.

<sup>15</sup> Ma, Ji et al. (2009) "On sealing a lakebed: mass media and environmental democratization in China," *Environmental Science & Policy* 12, pg. 74.

<sup>16</sup> Li, Fei, *China Daily*, 30 March 2005.

removed. Yet the silver lining, researchers noted, was not necessary the outcome of the waterproof sheets; rather, it was the fact that Chinese government was willing to allow public hearing on an environmental-related project that had already been approved, and that the EIA report was published for all to see.<sup>17</sup> What's more, the journalist who first wrote about the story was awarded 2005 Green China "Person of the Year" for his contribution to environmental reporting.<sup>18</sup>

### Literature Review

#### *Match made in Heaven: Partnership between ENGOs and Media*

The collaborative relationship between ENGOs and media is said to be as perfect as "match made in heaven."<sup>19</sup> In China, commercialized media must cater to the readers' preferences, and reporters are finding that environment-related news are often well-received.<sup>20</sup> In general, any social movement needs the media, for better visibility, validation to the members, legitimacy to the issue at hand, and most of all, to balance the inequality of power dynamic between movement and the authorities.<sup>21</sup>

Former reporter for *China Environmental News* and environmental activist, Wen Bo saw the "Greening of Chinese Media" as partially government-driven. "Due to China's large population and limited government resources," Wen wrote, "the

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<sup>17</sup> Ma et al., 2009: 75.

<sup>18</sup> Ministry of Environmental Protection of the People's Republic of China. (Updated 2010) "People's Daily Reporter Zhao Yongxin," (*Renmin Ribao Jizhe Zhao Yongxin*).

<sup>19</sup> Wang, Hsinhsien. (2007) "Embeddedness or Autonomy? Environmental NGOs in Transforming China: The Perspective of Bureaucracy Competition Model," Paper presented at Public Administration and Civil Society Development Academic Seminar, 12 June 2007, Taipei, Taiwan.

<sup>20</sup> Author's interview with Yu Xiaogang.

<sup>21</sup> Wolfsfeld, Gadi. (1997) *Media and political conflict: News from the Middle East*. New York: University of Cambridge. Pg. 77.

government relies on mass media to publicize its environmental protection campaigns.”<sup>22</sup> He then went on to cite how SEPA sponsors television and radio programs on environmental protection education. The interesting part about his argument arrives at the chain-effect of citizen motivation. Since Chinese government grants media the freedom to report on environmental issues, ENGOs are happy because they want to raise publicity for their cause and their organization. The ENGOs in turn, through the media coverage, encourage ordinary citizens to get involved in environmental protection issues.<sup>23</sup>

Similarly, in her insightful analysis on China’s environmental crisis, Economy concluded that, as Chinese authorities delegate environmental protection responsibilities to lower-level and local officials, they need the media and ENGOs to help:

By promoting the growth of environmental NGOs and media coverage of environmental issues, the Chinese leadership hopes to fill the gap between its desire to improve the country’s environment and its capacity to do so.<sup>24</sup>

While this seems rather irresponsible of the authorities, to simply walk away from, and turn their back on the duties at hand, Economy sees it differently. She believes that this is essentially, an authoritarian government’s way at liberalization, because it allows greater freedom for the civil society to engage and manage their affairs.

It is under these circumstances that journalists and ENGOs are forming a mutual benefiting rapport. Guobing Yang (2005) notes the close relationship between journalists and environmentalists grew out of a shared characteristic

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<sup>22</sup> Wen, Bo. (1998) “Greening the Chinese Media,” *China Environmental Series*, Issue 2. pg. 42

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Economy, Elizabeth. (2004) *The River Runs Black*. New York: Cornell University. pg. 130



of being “sandwiched” between the state’s political authority and the market’s economic constraint.<sup>25</sup> According to Yang, journalists find reporting on environmental issues as a win-win choice that is political safe while advancing both the newspaper’s status and readership: “Media reports about environmental problems can be critical – and thus assert some degree of media autonomy – without directly challenging state legitimacy.”<sup>26</sup>

Zhan Jiang (2011) sees the competitive media industry as the driving force behind reports on environmental protection, because they are perceived as “news-worthy.”<sup>27</sup> The growing commercialized media industry also allows more press freedom when the state exercises media crackdown, in the sense that private media entities are less expected to follow the state’s censorship rules.<sup>28</sup>

Zeng Fanxu (2009) proposed that the rise of Chinese environmental media has begun to form what he calls “Media-Oriented Civil Society.” Applying the state-society framework to the recent surge of media-ENGO alliance, Zeng points out the media’s partnership with social groups, is effectively strengthening China’s civil society. After “inputting” public concern, Chinese environmental media then pursues the following strategies to exert pressure on the government: active reporting, journalists assuming the spotlight, and mobilizing international media and organizations. According to Zeng, as long as journalists can evoke “media

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<sup>25</sup> Yang, Guobin. (2005) “Environmental NGOs and Institutional Dynamics in China,” *China Quarterly*, 181, pg.46-66.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Zhan, Jiang. (2011) “Environmental Journalism in China,” in S. Shirk. (Ed.) *Changing Media, Changing China*. New York: Oxford University Press. pg.118

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 125.

resonance,” then opportunities and platforms are created, on which the public can then engage the government, even participate on the decision-making process of setting the policy agenda.<sup>29</sup>

Though in order to affect policy, some think, would be impossible without the support from at least some portion of the government. Wang Hsinhsien (2007) attributes the success of China’s ENGOs to SEPA’s willingness to collaborate with them. Wang quotes Tsinghua University’s NGO Research Center’s director Wang Ming:

The biggest lesson from the preliminary success of “Battle to Protect Nujiang” is that civil organization found a partnership from inside the government, and it would be impossible to imagine affecting government policy without the support from inside the government.<sup>30</sup>

Indeed, in a structurally top-down authoritarian regime, it can be difficult to imagine the civil society having any meaningful input into the national agenda without at least some support from a branch of government. Many scholars have thus analyzed this issue from the perspective of state versus society.

*Media in China: Third Estate, still under One State*

Anti-NRP campaign’s success has drawn the interest of many scholars and students, where the point of intrigue is often focused at the heart of China’s political structure. Some see the growth of environmental activism as the representative rise of civil society, and deem it a likely step toward future democratization in China.<sup>31</sup> The most employed theoretical basis upon which anti-NRP studies are analyzed is that of state-society relations, where China’s

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<sup>29</sup> Zeng, Fanxu. (2009) “The Rising of Media-Oriented Civil Society in China: How Grassroot Voices Influence Policy Agenda” *Communication Research*, 100: pp.187-200.

<sup>30</sup> Wang, H. 2007: 18.

<sup>31</sup> Johnson, Thomas. (2010) “Environmentalism and NIMBYism in China: promoting a rules-based approach to public participation,” *Environmental Politics*, 19:3, pp. 430-448. *Economy*, 2004.

post-totalitarian regime is paired against that of slowly developing civil society.<sup>32</sup>

Indeed, in a country where the ruling party is still upheld above the constitution, and the national military is sworn to protect the Communist Party, rather than the state, it is easy to see matters in a state-society dichotomy. So much so that even when scholars employ other theories such as the political opportunity model,<sup>33</sup> or the Multiple Stream Policy framework,<sup>34</sup> the layout is still drawn as a power struggle between the CCP-controlled state and the people, or the civil society.

*Thriving between the Cracks of Concrete: Power of ENGOS*

Yanfei Sun and Dingxin Zhao (2008) point out that change in China's state-society relations is the reason why anti-NRP campaign succeeded while anti-TGP campaign did not.<sup>35</sup> The political atmosphere of the early 1990s when the anti-TGP campaign reached its peak, it coincided with the aftermath of the 1989 Democracy Movement, when leaders of CCP could not allow another wave of political dissent to emerge.

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<sup>32</sup> Yang, 2005. Zeng, 2009. Johnson 2010. Stalley, Philip and Yang, Dongning. (2006) An Emerging Environmental Movement in China? *China Quarterly*, 186: pp. 333-356. Büsgen, Michael. (2006) "NGOs and the Search for Chinese Civil Society Environmental Non-Governmental Organizations in the Nujiang Campaign," Working Paper Series, Institute of Social Studies, The Netherlands.

<sup>33</sup> Chan, Kin-man and Zhou, Yan. (2007) *Political Opportunity and Anti-dam Construction Movement in China*. Paper presented at the National Central University of Taiwan's International Conference on Non-Profit Sector in Asia-Pacific Region: 16-17 November 2007.

<sup>34</sup> Kingdon, John W. (1984) *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.

<sup>35</sup> Sun and Zhao, 2008: 161.

As China relaxed its rule on civil society in the mid-1990s, Chen Jie (2010) saw that accompanying the rise of NGOs in China, there was gradual increase of International NGOs (INGOs) as well. The number of INGOs grew from 11 in 1994 to 68 in 2005, about half of such are located in Yunnan, and out of 126 Chinese NGOs surveyed in 2004, 71% admit to having contact with INGOs.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, Chen argues that an example of INGOs' "facilitation of Chinese NGOs' domestic impact" can be evidenced, when global anti-dam group International Rivers Network (IRN) became a direct funder of the primary anti-NRP ENGOs Green Watershed (GW), Green Earth Volunteers (GEV), and Global Village of Beijing (GVB).<sup>37</sup> Most importantly, INGOs provided the necessary personal connections that put Chinese NGOs in touch with Western media, and help present their issues to the international stage.

Peter Ho and Richard Edmonds (2008) credit anti-NRP activists' success to their framing of the issue in legal terms, especially because the activists were careful to avoid political connotations. According to Ho and Edmonds, activists' efforts in working with the rules provided by the state is a manifestation of "embedded activism," or working within the framework of CCP's state system, as opposed to working to dismantle the state system. By Ho and Edmonds' account, anti-NRP activists' use of values and even personnel within the state against their pro-NRP opponents "is a resourceful and negotiated strategy...to

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<sup>36</sup> Chen, Jie. (2010) "Transnational Environmental Movement: impacts on the green civil society in China," *Journal of Contemporary China*, 19:65, pp. 503-523.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 514.

gain maximum political and social influence, at least in name, by professing to uphold the principles of Chinese Communist Party and state.”<sup>38</sup>

Ho and Edmonds call this strategy “limiting while enabling.”<sup>39</sup> They even go as far as comparing Deng Xiaoping’s 1978 Open Door Policy to embedded activism: since the China’s leaders opted the incremental strategy with which to execute Economic Reforms: “In this light, we might view embedded environmentalism as a transient phase which is itself changing through time, a transitional feature of a burgeoning civil society in a semi-authoritarian context.”<sup>40</sup>

In the same vein, Thomas Johnson’s (2010) calls activists’ strategy to cooperate with the state as “rules-based activism,” echoing anti-NRP activists’ success lies in playing inside the system. In particular, Johnson argues that the Chinese state’s introduction of environmental protection laws, such as the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and the Administrative Licensing Law (ALL), allowed activists to engage in public policy through legal framework. According to Johnson, activists framed their issue “in legal terms by advocating formal public participation in the decision-making process according to the rules,”<sup>41</sup> made “adherence to participatory rules their bottom line.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Ho, Peter and Edmonds, Richard Louis. (2008). “Perspectives of time and change: rethinking green environmental activism in China,” in Ho and Edmonds. (Ed.) *China’s Embedded Activism: Opportunities and constraints of a social movement*. New York: Routledge. pg. 220.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 222.

<sup>41</sup> Johnson, 2010: 437.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 442.

Andrew Mertha (2008) claims that environmental activists' framing of the issue was key to mobilization,<sup>43</sup> which turned out to be extremely effective in initiating new activists in the sense of not "preaching to the choir." Sun and Zhao also attribute issue-framing as the critical factor in swaying the campaign's momentum. In particular, they use the tug-of-war between pro-dam and anti-dam activists' ability to issue-framing to prove that, "...it is the power to frame and the framing of the issue that matters."<sup>44</sup>

### Theoretical Framework

#### Multiple Streams Model

In the study of how a policy gets onto the agenda of decision-makers in the United States government, John Kingdon (1984) argues that an issue has the best chance of being selected onto policy agenda, when the Policy Entrepreneur can bring, or "couple" together all the streams: problem, political, and policy, at an opportune time in which the policy window is open. This is where "an opportunity for advocates of proposals to push their pet solutions, or to push attention to their special problems."<sup>45</sup> In addition, Kingdon suggests that those most likely to have an impact on policy agenda are the "visible participants,"<sup>46</sup> meaning those in the government's as the president, or elected officials, have the most power in the decision-making process.

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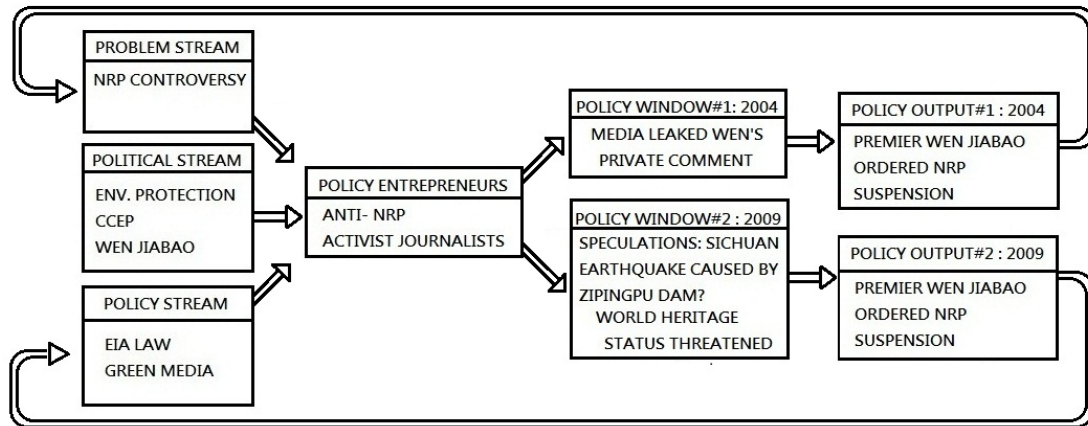
<sup>43</sup> Mertha, 2008: 14.

<sup>44</sup> Sun and Zhao, 2008: 161.

<sup>45</sup> Kingdon, 1984: 173.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 72.

FIGURE 1 - ANTI-NRP CAMPAIGN'S AGENDA SETTING PROCESS ACCORDING TO MULTIPLE STREAMS MODEL



SOURCE: Adapted from Zahariadis (2007).

Figure 1 demonstrates the process through which the environmental activists were able to influence policy agenda. I use Kingdon's Multiple Streams Model to show how the environmental journalists influence central government's policy plan. In the case of anti-NRP campaign, the problem stream is the controversy over building dams on the Nujiang. The political stream is an atmosphere where the central government has formally recognized environmental protection as one of the nation's top priorities, launched the China Century Environmental Protection (CCEP) campaign to help educate the public on the issue, and Premier Wen Jiabao is a geologist who understands the technical problems with building large hydropower plants on unstable land. The policy stream consists of the Environmental Impact Assessment Law and environmental-oriented media.

The policy entrepreneurs – anti-NRP activist journalists – combined all of these streams, when the opportunities of policy windows are open. The first time in 2004, when media leaked a private comment Premier Wen Jiabao wrote for the NDRC report, turning an internal suggestion for further research into a public stance, an order to halt the NRP. The second time in 2009, after the May 2008

Sichuan Earthquake took away nearly 70,000 lives<sup>47</sup> in the nation's biggest earth-shattering tragedy. After initial reports on the devastation and death toll of the earthquake trailed off, researchers began to wonder, just what caused the magnitude-7.9 quake. Seismologist speculated that 5.5 km from the epicenter,<sup>48</sup> the nearby large hydropower plant Zipingpu was perhaps to blame, because the reservoir, containing hundreds of million tons of water, was putting too much stress on the fault. However, during both times of the policy windows, alternative solutions had not reached consensus, so even though the national sentiment was strong enough to at least force suspension on the construction, the process return to step one, hence the arrows from Policy Output go back to the three streams. Interestingly, while Kingdon stresses that the inclusion of alternative solution is a prerequisite of a successful policy proposal, he also admits that, "mass media, elections, parties, campaigns, and changes in mass public opinion or national mood were all found to affect the agenda more than the alternatives."<sup>49</sup> As is evidenced in the anti-NRP campaign, this is at least true during the Hu-Wen administration.

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<sup>47</sup> Associated Press. "Devastating Sichuan earthquake may have been caused by dam," 6 February 2009.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Kingdon, 1984: 73.



### Chapter III – Case Study: The Anti-NRP Campaign

“Those who call us anti-dam are not really listening to our opinions...What we want is public participation and for the Environmental Impact Assessment reports to be made public.” – Wang Yongchen,<sup>1</sup> CNR reporter and GEV founder.

#### Nujiang Hydropower Project

In 1994, China published the “China Agenda 21” white paper, which outlined the country’s strategic policies on sustainable development.<sup>2</sup> China’s water resources primarily concentrate in the southwestern region, thus the Great Western Development Plan (2000) included hydropower electricity as part of the strategic policy. Eventually, China plans to fully cultivate its water-rich areas, so that 15% of its total renewable energy production will come from hydropower.<sup>3</sup>

Preliminary surveys to build dams on the Nu River began in the 1970s, and more thorough research was done in the 1980s, which became part of the “Nu River development plan of 1989.”<sup>4</sup> Findings from the 1989 research were then incorporated into the 1991 “China Hydropower Photo and Figures Collection” report. This Hydroelectricity Bureau of the Department of Energy report called for six hydropower stations in the Nu River valley with a total capacity of 10,900,000 megawatts or 10 percent of China’s entire hydropower.<sup>5</sup> Eight years later, the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC)

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<sup>1</sup> Zhang, Ke. “Wang Yongchen: we are not anti-dam,” (*Women bushi fanba renshi*) *Diyi Caijing Daily*, 8 January 2008, pg. A06.

<sup>2</sup> Yang, Guobin and Calhoun, Craig. (2008) “Media, civil society, and the rise of a green public sphere in China,” in Ho and Edmonds (Ed.) *China’s Embedded Activism: Opportunities and constraints of a social movement*. New York: Routledge.

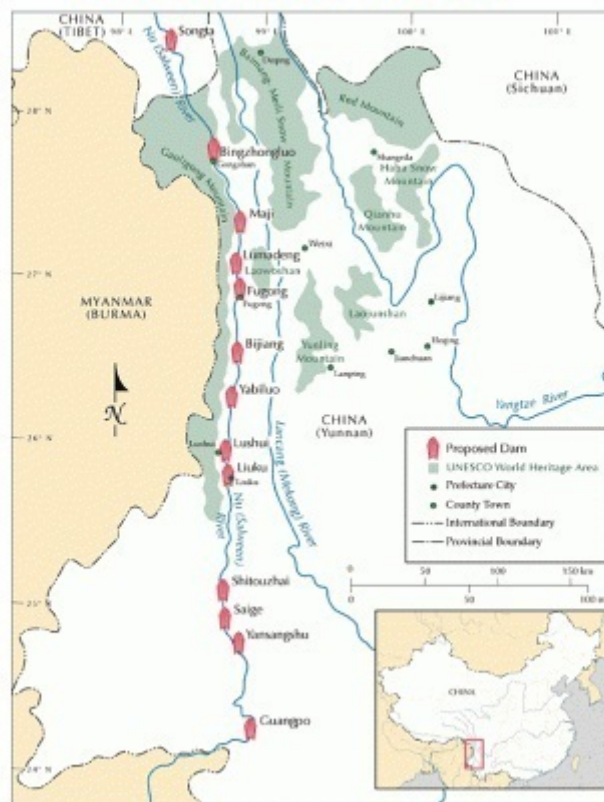
<sup>3</sup> Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China. *China’s Energy Conditions and Policies*. 26 December 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Brown, Philip H. and Xu, Yilin. (2010) “Hydropower Development and Resettlement Policy on China’s Nu River,” *Journal of Contemporary China*, 19:66, pp. 777-797.

<sup>5</sup> Mertha, 2008: 116-7.

decided to adopt the Nu River Project (NRP) for energy production purposes, and asked the Water Resources Hydropower Planning Institute to organize a bidding contest. Eventually they decided on two planning units, the Beijing Survey and Design Institute and the Huadong Survey and Design Institute, to plan out the NRP. Their final design called for two reservoirs and thirteen dams.<sup>6</sup> (See Map 1)

**MAP 1 - PROPOSED NUJIANG HYDROPOWER PLANS  
2 RESERVOIRS AND 13 DAMS**



**SOURCE: International Rivers Network**

On 14 March 2003, the hydropower investor, Huadian, signed an intent agreement to jointly develop hydroelectric power with the Yunnan provincial government, with Liuku as the first construction site. Three months later,

<sup>6</sup> Brown and Xu, 2010: 783.

Huadian and Yunnan provincial government formed the Yunnan Huadian Nujiang Hydroelectricity Development Corporation to carry out the task.<sup>7</sup>

Almost at the same time as the hydroelectricity deal was being negotiated, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) approved the Three Parallel Rivers as a World Natural Heritage Site on 3 July. Two weeks later, the Yunnan Huadian Corporation announced that the construction of the first site, Liuku, would begin on 20 September, and the dam was scheduled to be operational in 2007.<sup>8</sup> With the support of the ethnic minority's Lisu leaders, the "Report on Nujiang middle and lower stream hydroelectricity construction plan" was sent to Nujiang Lisu Autonomous Prefecture of Yunnan Province, then to the NDRC in August for review. The NDRC swiftly approved the NRP upon receipt of the proposal, and held environmental impact assessment meetings on the issue.

During the August NDRC meeting, a SEPA official Mu GuangFeng refused to endorse the NRP due to lack of impact assessment. Mu phoned environmental journalist Wang Yongchen during a break at this meeting, asking for contact info of experts who might be able to provide useful information on. Wang became interested in the NRP, and gave Mu the number of a Yunnan-based scholar researcher He Daming. As the head of the Asian International Rivers Center at

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 784.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

Yunnan University, born and raised in Yunnan, He is said to be the most knowledgeable person on Nujiang in the entire China.<sup>9</sup>

This would be the beginning of a collaborative relationship between SEPA officials and environmental activists. During the subsequent assessment meetings on NRP, environmental journalists helped arrange the attendance of anti-dam experts, meanwhile the media-battle ensued from mid-2003 onward. Environmental journalists initiated a three-pronged approach that targeted the bureaucratic process of EIA procedures, lent focus on the affected residents in the Nujiang local region, and emphasized the importance of preserving both the pristine nature of Nujiang and its World Heritage status; all the while, heightening the media exposure on the issue, charging the army of Green Reports Salon journalists to write up on environmental protection stories. During one of the Green Reporters Salon sessions, former journalist-turned-NGO-leader Ma Jun reportedly told the audience: "Information disclosure is a powerful way to achieve environmental protection," and directly asked his fellow reporters to write on the issue.<sup>10</sup>

Environmental journalists' media campaign successfully attracted public interest and invoked public discussion on the NRP, thereby culminating to the famous February 2004 decision in which premier Wen Jiabao himself showed hesitation on the NRP, prompting a general praise of the anti-NRP campaign as the most successful case of China's environmental activism. Yet six months

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<sup>9</sup> Mertha, 2008: 119.

<sup>10</sup> Asahi News, 2006/12/20.

later, preliminary construction on the first NRP site already began, and by the end the year, the EIA report had advanced to the next level. The following years featured constant advances and setbacks on both sides, with the final decision on NRP dangling in the air, though proponents of the NRP were clearly gaining the upper hand, as plans to develop China's southwestern water resources were again written into the 11<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan.

Until the tragic 2008 Sichuan earthquake, in whose aftermath experts began questioning the relationship between large hydroelectricity plants and unusual seismic activities. Given the grieving national mood over the earthquake deaths and various renowned geologists' public stance against building large dams on active fault lines without further scientific inquiries, May 2009 saw a repeat order to halt the NRP construction. The state of political stalemate of the NRP has continued to this day, and as of March 2012, the official statement on the NRP maintains that without further scientific research, there will be no formal hydropower construction on the Nujiang.

### Problem Stream

Kingdon (1984) differentiates between "problem" and "condition;" whereas a condition is in the realm of bad weather or poverty, a "condition" becomes a "problem" when one decides to do something about it.<sup>11</sup> The same logic applies in the controversy over damming the Nujiang, after all, hydroelectricity development is nothing new to the southwestern part of China, and it is part of the CCP's nationwide policy plan. In the section below, I will show how

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<sup>11</sup> Kingdon, 1984: 115.

proponents and opponents of the NRP present their arguments, making a public policy into a public debate that spiraled into a “problem” for the central government.

### **Argument I: Environmental Protection**

#### *Opponents: Ecological diversity*

Dubbed “Grand Canyon of the Orient,”<sup>12</sup> Nujiang is where 173 mammal species, 417 species of birds, 59 reptile, 36 kinds of amphibians, 76 fresh water fishes, 31 species of butterflies and insects called home.<sup>13</sup> In fact, 6,000 plant species can be found in the Three Parallel Rivers region, where it supports 50% of animal species in China, and 25% of animal species in the world.<sup>14</sup> In addition, there are more than 10 unique fish species in the Nujiang, as well as wild grass species that can only be found in the lower reaches of the Nujiang.<sup>15</sup>

#### *Proponents: Protect Environment from the Villagers*

“Local people always used timber to make fire,” said Jie Yi, Nujiang prefecture’s Party Secretary. “If we replace timber with electricity, then we have avoid cutting down more than 400,000 cubic meters of trees each year.”<sup>16</sup> Chinese Academy of Science (CAS) scholar He Zhuoxiu claimed that during a tour to the region in April 2005, he saw “up to 1,500 meter high of the mountains were bare,” because

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<sup>12</sup> Watts, Jonathan. “China’s big hydro wins permission for 21.3GW dam in world heritage site,” *The Guardian*, 1 February 2011.

<sup>13</sup> Wang, Yongchen. (2005) “Nujiang: rushing freely in the valley,” (Nujiang: *zai xiagu zhong ziyou liutang*) *China Nature*, 3. pp. 41-43.

<sup>14</sup> International Rivers Network, 2006.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Tang, Jianguang. (2004) “Who shall decide the fate of Nujiang?” (*Shei lai jue ding Nujiang mingyun?*) *China News Weekly*, 18, pp. 16-38.

the local villagers were cutting down trees to make fire.<sup>17</sup> “In fact, only by developing the Nujiang would we have money to implement Ecological Relocation,” said Warton Economic Institute’s director Shen Hanyao. “So as to prevent the vegetation from being damaged by the local villagers’ survival needs.”<sup>18</sup>

## **Argument II: World Heritage Site**

### *Opponents: World Heritage Site as Prestige Recognition*

Described on the UNESCO website as “epicenter of Chinese biodiversity... one of the richest temperate regions of the world in terms of biodiversity.”<sup>19</sup> Opponents of the NRP used the prestigious recognition from the international organization to argue that, it is the interest of China as a nation to preserve the natural environment, and keep the title of World Heritage site. Senior reporter for the *China Youth Daily* wrote an entry entitled: “World Heritage Three Parallel Rivers under Threat: Hydroelectricity Development Destroys Ecological Environment” in July 2006, detailing how the region was listed as “World Heritage in Danger” for three consecutive years since winning the status in 2003.<sup>20</sup> *Macao Daily* also published an editorial, calling on Chinese government to better protect its World Heritage sites.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Sun, Rongfei and Ye, Jing. “Ban on Nujiang Hydroelectricity Gradually Lifted,” (*Nujiang shuidian jianbei jiejin*) *Diyi Caijing Daily*, 3 June 2005, page-A06.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> UNESCO World Heritage Centre. (Updated 2010) “Three Parallel Rivers of Yunnan Protected Areas.”

<sup>20</sup> Zhang, Kejia. “Three Parallel Rivers Regions Listed in the ‘Key Observation and Protection Program’ of the World Heritage List: Hydropower Development Endangers the Environment,” *China Daily Youth*, 17 July 2006.

<sup>21</sup> China Review News. “Macao Daily: China should improve protection over World Heritage,” (*Aomen Ribao: Zhongguo Ying Jiaqiang Shijie Yichan Baohu*) 30 June 2006.

*Proponents: Below 2,000 meter Not Included in Protected Area*

Just when every domestic and international media headline screamed “World Heritage site to be destroyed!” proponents of the NRP trumped everyone with a crazy wild card, and it turned out to be pre-meditated, too. The Yunnan office in charge of World Heritage Site Protection claimed, despite Nujiang belonging to the Three Parallel Rivers, hydroelectric development would not harm the protected area. By their account, the portions of Nujiang under protection are above 2000 meters, and the tallest of the planned dams would not even come close. Moreover, this is something they had already considered back in 2002, when they filed the application for World Heritage Status.<sup>22</sup> Then in 2005, the local government announced plans to redraw the boundaries of the protected area; UNESCO monitor team believed the purpose of rezoning was to accommodate existing mining operations within the World Heritage Site.<sup>23</sup>

**Argument III: Hydropower**

*Opponents: Preserve Natural Flow; Big dams are passé*

Nujiang, in Chinese means the “Angry River.” The river got its name from the loud noise it makes as the river runs, especially in the summer. However, the construction of the dam would stop the natural flow of the Nujiang, essentially stopping the rapid flow, turning a lively, fierce river that has existed since the ancient times, into a pool of dead water. Leader of the survey team at the Songta dam site told filmmakers of the documentary *Silent Nu River*:

You will never see the Nujiang again. I don't think the Nu will flow rapidly after the completion of the cascade 13 dams. As a matter of fact, the Nu will be turned into a lake.

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<sup>22</sup> Yan, Xueshi. (2004) “Who aroused the waves of Nujiang,” *Western Forum*, 3, pp. 30-34.

<sup>23</sup> Lopoukhine, Nikita and Jayakumar, Ramasamy. (2006) “Report of a Joint Reactive Monitoring Mission to the Three Parallel Rivers of Yunnan Protected Areas, China,” *UNESCO*.



Only a lake, so you won't see the Nu as it used to be. (The rapids will be gone?) Gone.<sup>24</sup>

Opponents of NRP highlighted that the era of large dams has come to an end, at least for major western countries. *Forestry Economy* reporter quoted the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to say, "Americans' era of hydropower dams is over."<sup>25</sup> According to the magazine, the U.S. has retired more than 500 dams by 2004, most of them due to concerns over conservation of water and fish resources. In Norway, where 99% of their power generation comes from hydroelectricity, has now banned the building of dams. In addition to European countries such as France, Sweden, and Latvia enacting laws to ban the construction of dams on major rivers. Even developing countries in Africa and Thailand have either canceled plans to build hydropower plants, or make changes to how they handle the dams.<sup>26</sup>

*Proponents: Underdeveloped Water Resources are Wasteful*

One of the arguments used to justify the development of Nujiang was essentially, if we did not cultivate the rivers for their capacity to generate power, then it would be a shameful waste. Theoretically, China's vast rivers altogether contain 676 GW of potential generation capacity, out of which the exploitable potential is 378 GW.<sup>27</sup> "Our country's water resources are abundant, ranked number one in the world," boasted NDRC's Vice Chairman Zhang Guobao. "But currently we have only cultivated about 20% of that, comprising only 24% of the country's

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<sup>24</sup> Hu, Jie. (2006) *Silent Nu River*. (DVD) Hong Kong: Visible Record Limited.

<sup>25</sup> Sun, Danping. (2004) "Is the dam construction in the sunrise or at the sunset?" *Forestry Economy*, 1, pp. 22-26.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Lako, P. et al. (2003) "Hydropower Development with a Focus on Asia and Western Europe," study for ECN Policy Studies and Verbundplan.

total power generation.”<sup>28</sup> Compared to the United States, where the exploitation of hydropower reached 80%; while Brazil and Norway already tapped over 90% of their hydropower capacity, China only under 25% of cultivation does seem comparatively lower.

Indeed, pro-dam officials lamented the under-achievement. In an interview with *People's Daily*, China Electricity Council Vice President Sun Yucai reasoned from an even broader scheme of things. From perspective of strategic resource development, Sun argued, as long as China possesses the God-given advantage of hydropower, not realizing its potential would be a terrible waste. “...We cannot starve ourselves, just because we were worry that we might choke,” Sun used an old Chinese saying (*yin ye fei shi*) to arrive at his point. “Giving up on hydropower development would mean, regrettably letting the rapid rivers flow away under your nose.”<sup>29</sup>

#### **Argument IV: Human Factor**

##### *Opponents: Dam Migrants Worse Off*

About 50,000 villagers in the region would have to relocate in order to make way for the planned dams. Leader of the Yunnan-based grassroots NGO, Green Watershed (GW), Yu Xiaogang said that, instead of informing the villagers exactly what would happen to them after the move, the local government turned to slogan-propaganda. “The day of hydroelectricity is the day of happiness” (*Fa dian*

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<sup>28</sup> Ma, Hongtao. “The Fight over Damming the Nujiang,” (*Nujiang jianba zhi zheng*), *Jingjibanxiaoshi*, 29 December 2003.

<sup>29</sup> Ruan, Yongping and Wu, Jiang. “What is the future of China’s Hydroelectricity” (*Zhongguo shuidian he qu he cong*) *People's Daily*, 1 November 2004, pg. 15.

*zhi ri jiu shi xing fu zhi ri*).<sup>30</sup> So Yu decided to take a group of Xiaoshaba villagers from Nujiang to visit the Manwan area, to see for themselves the reality of displaced people from the Manwan and Xiaowan hydropower stations. From 25-28 May 2004 Yu toured the Lancang river with the Nujiang villagers, and filmed the interviews he conducted on site.<sup>31</sup>

What the Nujiang villagers saw, stunned them. Before their eyes was a 78 year-old elderly woman picking through trash, next to her was a 26 year-old mother, carrying a two year-old child on her back. “We can earn 10 to 20 cents each day picking through trash,” the elderly woman told the Nujiang villagers. “If we’re lucky, maybe even one to two yuan.” The young mother wasn’t so resigned to life; she burst into tears as she spoke. “No land, no job,” she said, “if I don’t pick through trash and sell the recycling, we would have no way to live.”<sup>32</sup> Migrants complained that there was no adequate compensation for the relocation. The numbers would even more telling. Before their villagers were flooded, villagers of Manwan were making decent income. In fact, they made 11.2% more than the province’s average, and 63.5% more than the average of the dam region. Yet after their hometown was flooded in 1997, their income dropped drastically, down to less than 50% of the area average.<sup>33</sup>

“Of course the power company will be the biggest recipient of benefits in the construction of hydroelectricity plants,” Yunnan-based Professor He Daming said.

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<sup>30</sup> Author’s interview with Yu Xiaogang.

<sup>31</sup> Mertha, 2008: 128-130.

<sup>32</sup> Yin, Hongwei. (2004) “Social forces take on dam construction on the Nujiang,” (*Minjian liliang duijue Nujiang jianba*) *China Society Periodical*, 8, pp. 34-36.

<sup>33</sup> Li, Ziliang. (2004) “Nujiang Face-off” (*Nujiang zheng ba*) *Outlook Weekly*, 49, pp. 24-31.

“Local government will likely get out of poverty too, but it would be hard to know whether this money will be spent on the average folks.”<sup>34</sup> He’s candid analysis of the trickle-down economic theory is a slap in the face for those who champion economic development as the only way out of poverty for Nujiang’s residents, but what stings the most is probably this following analogy. “Blindly go into development is like killing the hen to get at the eggs.”<sup>35</sup>

In 2006, the first site of the NRP, Liuku, began to evacuate migrants for the preparation of preliminary construction. The local leaders claimed that all of the 134 households, totaling 537 migrants had voluntarily agreed to relocate. However, when reporter went to the town to verify the facts, he found that the migrants were unhappy about the compensation. Compared to an annual income of ¥4-500 on a single mango tree, the migrants were paid a once-compensation of ¥200. “If they can’t take care of a few hundred migrants,” CAS researcher Lee Yuchuang asked. “How can we expect them to adequately relocate tens of thousands of migrants?”<sup>36</sup>

*Proponents: Economic Benefits as Means of Poverty Alleviation*

Out of Nujiang’s total hydroelectric capacity of 42 GW, the plan to build a cascade of 13 dams on the river would produce a total installed capacity of 21.3 GW, exceeding that of the TGP (which has installed capacity of 18 GW), and

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<sup>34</sup> He, Daming. (2004) “The Pros and Cons of Building the Dam,” *National Park of China*, 6, pp. 26-27.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Li, Yuchen. “Chiang Kaoming: Nujiang hydroelectricity development should consider both sides,” (*Chiang Kaoming: Nujiang shuidian keifa heide quanheng libi*) *Beijing News*, 2 March 2008.

would meet 10% of China's total energy needs.<sup>37</sup> What does that translate to cold hard cash? China's state newspaper *Legality Daily* tallied the numbers: the estimated annual production value would reach ¥34 billion (approx. US\$5.4 billion), of which the central government would get ¥8 billion in taxes, while local government's tax revenues would increase by ¥2.7 billion. Nujiang prefecture alone could receive an additional ¥1 billion in taxes, compared that to the entire prefecture's 2002 GDP of ¥1.4 billion.<sup>38</sup> Now, that's a big chunk of change, and very enticing to anyone who comes across it, but just to put the money matters in better perspective: Nujiang prefecture is one of the poorest places in Yunnan province, with 220,000 people living below the poverty line, the situation is even bad in comparison to all of China.

"All that talk about protecting animals and plants," scoffed CAS scholar He Zhuoxiu. "What about the humans? You can't disregard the people."<sup>39</sup> Proponents of the NRP argue that in order to lift the mostly ethnic minorities living there out of poverty, development was the only way. The problem was though, due to the impossible terrain of steep mountains, the region was almost inaccessible. Local government explained that the lack of infrastructure was the main reason behind the economic backwardness of Nujiang prefecture. Zhao Zenzhong, an official from the Nujiang Prefecture Planning Committee told Beijing News reporter, "Nujiang became a prefecture 50 years ago, and in all of this time, the central government had only invested ¥930 million." Zhao

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<sup>37</sup> Young, Tom. "Official confirms government has revived plans for Nujiang River hydroelectric plant," *Green Business*, 1 February 2011.

<sup>38</sup> *Legality Daily*. "Environmental Impact Assessment Law: How much money is lost from halting the Nujiang construction," (*Huanping Fa: Nujiang tingong sunshi duoshao qian*) 31 January 2005.

<sup>39</sup> Yan, Xueshi. (2004) *Western Forum*.

complained, “What does that mean really? That means in all this time, they’ve only built one road.”<sup>40</sup> To the local officials, no infrastructure meant no tourism, although they badly needed both.

Another reason behind Nujiang prefecture’s high poverty rate was the lack of industries. Since about 58.3% of the total area in Nujiang region is considered natural reservation, protected by the central government. In the 1990s, local officials wanted to use logging to kick start its economy, but a logging ban was enacted in 1998,<sup>41</sup> so all the abundant forestry and mineral resources were strictly hands-off, to developers or local residents alike. According to *Beijing Review*,<sup>42</sup> the average farmer in China earned about ¥2,622 in 2003, but in Nujiang prefecture, that number was less than half, at only ¥935, and half of the farmers had trouble feeding their families.<sup>43</sup> As can be imagined, if the residents weren’t bringing in much income, then the local government would have little from which to tax. In 2002, the prefecture government collected ¥1 billion in revenues, but their expenses exceeded ¥7 billion; their self-sustainability was a pathetic 14%.<sup>44</sup>

### Political Stream

Kingdon describes political stream as a combination of “swings of national mood, election results, changes of administration, changes of ideological or partisan

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<sup>40</sup> Beijing News. “Nujiang to build 13 dams, plan met by strong opposition from experts,” (*Nujiang jian shangma shisan ji shuiba, zao huanbao zhuanjia qiangle fandai*) 25 November 2003.

<sup>41</sup> Mertha, 2008: 123.

<sup>42</sup> Beijing Review. “Rural and Urban China: Worlds Apart,” 26 February 2004.

<sup>43</sup> Beijing News, 25 November 2003.

<sup>44</sup> Legality Daily, 31 January 2005.

distribution in Congress, and interest group pressure campaigns.”<sup>45</sup> In other words, the primary actors in this stream are the people in power, such as officials or presidents, who act against the backdrop of the current dominating socio-political atmosphere. In the anti-NRP campaign, the primary actors, who have direct impact over the outcome of the controversy, are Premier Wen Jiabao and the vice minister of SEPA, Pan Yue.

Interestingly, Wen’s background in geology and Pan’s experience in journalism became integral to how they understood and worked with the anti-NRP campaign. On the other hand, the political atmosphere, or conditions at the time provided Wen and Pan with the opportunity to call for suspension of the construction, and collaborate with the ENGOs, respectively. If these circumstances did not exist, China’s environmental activism would have faced even harsher of an uphill battle.

#### *Top Leader’s Geology Background*

Like his previous two generations’ technocrat predecessors, China’s Premier Wen Jiabao is well trained in the fields of science and engineering. After graduating from the Beijing Institute of Geology with postgraduate studies in structural geology, Wen Jiabao’s first post in the government was Gansu Province’s geology bureau, where he worked his way up to the position of deputy director, and then went to head the Policy and Regulation Research Section at Beijing’s Ministry of Geology.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Kingdon, 1984: 170.

<sup>46</sup> US-China Business Council. “Wen Jiabao Biography.”

Given his extensive education and experience in geology, Wen is said to have his reservations about large dams. After Wen issued a statement admitting the inadequacies of the TGP in March 2011, Wall Street Journal interviewed senior journalist, and anti-TGP activist Dai Qing, who said:

Both Wen and Zhu (Rongji) have made remarks about disliking this project, but because of their position, both had no choice but to support it. Now that the problems can no longer be covered up, I think Wen is seizing the opportunity to bring them more into public view.<sup>47</sup>

Problems with the TGP are much similar to the concerns of the NRP, among them ecological damage, relocation of villagers, and potential geological risks. After the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, the chief engineer of Sichuan Geology and Mineral Bureau Fan Xiao suggested the possibility that the culprit of the deadly earthquake may have been the nearby dam.<sup>48</sup> (More in Chapter V) It is likely that Wen's insistence on scientific development<sup>49</sup> contributed to his decision to twice suspend the NRP. After all, Wen did say: "I have deep conviction and my own judgment of things, and I am not afraid of shouldering responsibility."<sup>50</sup>

#### *SEPA Official's Media Background*

Pan Yue's role in the anti-NRP campaign primarily focused on providing the legal framework with which opponents of the dam could use to press for administrative oversight of the proposed plans. Moreover, Pan aggressively implemented the Environmental Impact Assessment laws to pressure construction companies into compliance with procedures of environmental assessment, often ordering suspension on the construction projects before the

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<sup>47</sup> Yang, Jie. "Critics Hail Admission of Chinese Dam Flaws," *Wall Street Journal*, 20 May 2011.

<sup>48</sup> Moore, Malcolm. "Chinese earthquake may have been man-made, say scientists," *The Telegraph*, 2 February 2009.

<sup>49</sup> People's Daily. "Premier Wen highlights scientific development concept," 22 February 2012.

<sup>50</sup> BBC News. "Profile: Wen Jiabao," 5 December 2003.



agency gave its approval. (See Chapter III, *EIA Law*) Pan's collaboration with anti-dam activists was the main force behind the strategic delaying of the NRP with bureaucratic red-tape, while the legal framework of EIA laws offered a platform for ENGOs to further scrutinize any development project that had the potential of harming the environment.

Named "Person of the Year 2007"<sup>51</sup> by British political magazine *New Statesman*, described by Bloomberg's *Businessweek* as "a courageous voice,"<sup>52</sup> Pan Yue is an ambitious, outspoken political reformer. Pan joined SEPA as vice minister in March 2003, after nearly a decade of taking on powerful construction companies and local governments with his Environmental Impact Assessment storms, without as much as blinking an eye, somehow Pan Yue always managed to get away relatively unscathed. This led some to say that Pan's political life can be used as the barometer with which to gauge the political atmosphere in China.<sup>53</sup> Others attribute Pan's ability to weather any political storm to two reasons: 1) Pan's boss, "SEPA director Zhou Shengxian, appears to be every bit as much as an activist as his deputy"; and 2) Pan's father-in-law is Liu Huaqing, a general serving on the Central Military Commission and member of Politburo, both are the top organization in China's central government.<sup>54</sup>

Despite having "friends in high places," Pan's unrelenting courage to withstand pressure and speak the truth, most likely came from his conviction as an

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<sup>51</sup> Byrnes, Sholto. "Person of the year: The man making China green," *New Statesman*, 18 December 2006.

<sup>52</sup> Roberts, Dexter. "A Courageous Voice for a Greener China," *Bloomberg Businessweek*, 11 July 2005.

<sup>53</sup> Sun and Zhao, 2008: 157.

<sup>54</sup> Mertha, 2008: 8, 20.

environmentalist and his training as a journalist. According to *China's Top Level Thinkers* (2008) after serving in the People's Liberation Army, Pan Yue first took a journalist internship at *Workers' Daily*, then as a file clerk at *Economic Daily News*, later becoming a reporter for *China Environmental News*. It was there that Pan penned a 10,000-word investigative report, exposing Yunnan provincial government's complacency over local developers' practice of illegal dumping, burning and clear-cutting forest. Unfortunately at the time, the local government responded by accusing him of untruthful reporting, and Pan had to resign.<sup>55</sup> However, this "mishap" landed him a deputy editor in chief position at *China Youth Daily*. From there, Pan went on to serve as the deputy director of State Council's Office of Restructuring the Economy, before assuming his current post at SEPA.<sup>56</sup>

#### *Beginning of Environment Protection in China*

The beginning of China's environmental movement actually came under the directive of the State Council, after delegates returned from 1972 United Nations Conference on Human Environment in Stockholm.<sup>57</sup> Then in June 1973, delegates shared what they learned at China's first-ever National Conference on Environmental Protection.<sup>58</sup> From there on, environmental protection offices were established in all branches of Chinese government. From central to provincial, environmental protection was now formally on the CCP's agenda.

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<sup>55</sup> Xi, Yin. (2008) *Zhongguo Gaoceng Wendan*. Hangzhou: Zhejiang People's Publishing House.

<sup>56</sup> Ministry of Environmental Protection, People's Republic of China. "Vice-minister, Mr. Pan Yue." Last updated 20 June 2007.

<sup>57</sup> Cai, Shouqiu and Voigts, Mark. (1993) "The Development of China's Environmental Diplomacy," *Pacific Rim Law & Policy Association*, 3, Spec. Ed. pp. 17-42.

<sup>58</sup> *Economy*, 2004: 95.

China's first environmental protection themed magazine was launched in 1973, and simply called *Environmental Protection*.<sup>59</sup> Little more than a decade later, *China Environment News* became CCP's official environmental newspaper.<sup>60</sup> Then in 1986, China Forum of Environmental Journalists (CFEJ) became the formal association responsible for, among other things, the "information dissemination tasks for State Environmental Protection Agency" and awarding outstanding environmental protection reporting.<sup>61</sup> In 1993, China's National People's Congress Environment and Resources Protection Committee organized 14 other agencies and launched the China Century Environmental Protection (CCEP) campaign.<sup>62</sup> Since then, environmental reporting mushroomed in China.

### Policy Stream

Kingdon's idea of policy stream is a process in which solutions or alternatives are tossed around by researchers or specialists.<sup>63</sup> In the case of NRP, this process is not so much of a brainstorm or debate between the viability of options; rather, it is the act and the pursuit of applying existing tools to search for alternative solutions. This section explains how the tools with which NRP opponents engage the fight emerged. From inside the government, SEPA bureaucrats extend the legal framework of evaluating the viability of a construction into a practical method of interference with environmentally unfriendly projects. While on the outside of government, media took years to

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<sup>59</sup> Zhongguo Huanjing Chuban Wang. "Overview of 'Environmental Protection,'" (*Huanjin Baohu Jieshao*) <http://www.cesp.com.cn/qk/qklist.asp?id=16> Accessed 2012/4/10.

<sup>60</sup> Council of China Environmental News. "Zhenghe chuangxin meiti quanmian fuwu huanbao shiye," [http://www.cenews.com.cn/lsh/lshhk/201003/t20100316\\_631983.html](http://www.cenews.com.cn/lsh/lshhk/201003/t20100316_631983.html) Accessed 2012/4/10.

<sup>61</sup> China Forum of Environmental Journalists. (Updated 2008) "Zhongguo huanjing xinwen gongzuozhe xiehui jianjie," cfej.net, <http://www.cfej.net/?list-82.html> Accessed 2012/4/10.

<sup>62</sup> Chen, Tao. "Zhongguo huanbao Shijixing jianjie," Xinhua, 12 May 2006.

<sup>63</sup> Kingdon, 1984: 122.

nurture the atmosphere of environmental journalism, as well as an environmentally conscious public.

### *Environmental Impact Assessment Law*

The Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) was introduced in 2002, but it was not formally enacted until December 2003. The EIA Law essentially requires all public construction work to pass environmental impact assessment before it receives permission to begin construction, so while this piece of law does not prevent construction, it can stall and slow down the progress of the project. Theoretically speaking, if the project in question fails to pass environmental impact assessment, then it could never begin construction.

The Administrative Licensing Law (ALL) is a supplementary legislation that further allows citizens to apply for public hearing, on those construction projects and EIA reports. However, these laws have vague wordings that can be interpreted differently, by different officials, and were lacking in “teeth” Therefore, in 2004, the State Council released an outline, that mandated government officials to seek public opinion on construction projects, and ensure that the public has the right to know. In addition, on 1 July, SEPA launched the “Interim Measures for Administrative License Public Hearing system in Environmental Protection,” (ALL Measures) which legalized public participation, legal demand for public involvement in environmental protection related projects.<sup>64</sup> SEPA used this program to invite citizen inquiries into projects that have questionable environmental impact. The ALL Measures

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<sup>64</sup> Chan and Zhou, 2007: 11.

is essentially a new tool SEPA created for the environmental activists, because it listed specific provisions for public hearings concerning EIA reports and licensing of projects, to ensure the implementation of the laws.

Wielding these newly passed laws, SEPA vice minister Pan Yue stirred up so-called “environmental protection storms” by ordering 30 large construction projects to be halted, for not filing the EIA report.<sup>65</sup> SEPA then proceeded to impose a ¥200,000 (approx. US\$31,000) fine for each project.<sup>66</sup> “Environmental Impact Assessment is not a rubber stamp,” Pan was resolute at the press conference that announced the news. “We must insist on stopping any behavior that violates the EIA law.”<sup>67</sup> The fact that these 30 large construction projects spanned 13 provinces and had a combined value of ¥118 billion (approx. US\$13.7 billion) raised more than some eyebrows, because it was the first time since the law passed in December 2003, that SEPA actually put the law to use.<sup>68</sup>

More importantly, since the targeted projects belonged to powerful companies, SEPA’s action was described as daring to “touch the tiger’s behind,”<sup>69</sup> meaning it was a genuine, courageous attempt to curb constructions that threaten the environment. For a government bureau that was often deemed as “toothless,” this bold move had a lot of bite. On 21 January, more than 20 mainstream newspapers such as *Beijing News* and *Beijing Youth Daily* began publishing a joint

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<sup>65</sup> Zhao, Yongxin. “Huanping fengbao heyineng ruanzhulu,” *People’s Daily*. 4 February 2005.

<sup>66</sup> Liu, Di. “Environmental Impact Assessment Storm: a ‘game’ that should not be terminated,” *Friends of Nature*, 28 February 2005.

<sup>67</sup> Deng, Jing. “Behind the scene of the environmental new forces,” (*Huanbao xin liliang dengchang de taiqian muhou*) *Southern Weekend*, 28 January 2005.

<sup>68</sup> Jian, Yang. (2005) “Understanding China’s environmental protection storm,” *New Zealand International Review*, May-June.

<sup>69</sup> CCTV. “China’s Environmental Protection and the World: Interview with Qu Geping,” 7 March 2005.

statement, signed by 56 ENGOs, in support of SEPA; for which Pan Yue showed his appreciation by referring to the ENGOs as his “allied forces.”<sup>70</sup> What’s more, that was only the first round.

The second wave came less than 10 days later, blacklisting 46 thermal power plants that were unequipped with desulfurization.<sup>71</sup> SEPA struck again in January 2007, targeting 82 projects in steel, electricity and gold-refinery industries, whose total investment exceeded ¥112 billion (approx. US\$17 billion).<sup>72</sup> Pan would continue to hold these legal big-guns to the major construction projects; however, since the 2008 global financial crisis, Pan seemed to have lost his limelight to the urgency of economic growth, and “environmental storms” have since faded along with his voice.<sup>73</sup>

### *Green Media*

The collaboration between China’s media and environmental activism is not by mere chance, though it has come along way. In 1993, China’s National People’s Congress Environment and Resources Protection Committee organized 14 other agencies and launched the China Century Environmental Protection (CCEP) campaign.<sup>74</sup> Since then, environmental reporting mushroomed in China.

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<sup>70</sup> Xu, Xiaoying. (2005) “Alliance between Chinese NGOs and government,” (*Zhongguo NGO yu zhengfu de jiemeng*) *Business Watch Magazine*, 6, pp. 62-65.

<sup>71</sup> Xinhua. “China blacklists 46 thermal power plants for threatening environment,” 25 January 2005.

<sup>72</sup> Zhao, Michael. “Pan Yue Launches 3<sup>rd</sup> Green Storm, Job Still Tough-Sina,” *China Digital Times*, 15 January 2007.

<sup>73</sup> Watts, Jonathan. “China’s green champion sidelined,” *The Guardian*, 12 March 2009.

<sup>74</sup> Xinhua, 12 May 2006.

A report that surveyed 75 newspapers in China found that in a matter of six years, the total number of news pertaining to environment protection grew exponentially. From 136 articles in 1995, to 251 in 1996, to 22,066 in 1997,<sup>75</sup> then to 47,273 articles in 1999. 47,273 articles represented 1.85% of overall news coverage in the year 1999, compared to 0.46% of overall news coverage in 1995.<sup>76</sup> Fast forward to the year 2005, there were 51,000 reports on environmental conflicts in all of China.<sup>77</sup> However, the sheer number does not mean quality. In 1997, of all the environmental reports in China's newspapers, only 12.7% were critical; the rest were simply descriptions of government-staged events like tree-planting ceremonies or re-publication of government-issued reports.<sup>78</sup>

Parallel to the newspaper media campaign, was a series of television programming on CCTV. Global Village of Beijing's founder Liao Xiaoyi produced and hosted a weekly, 10-minute show "Time for Environment" on CCTV for five consecutive years, with a total of more than 300 episodes.<sup>79</sup> At the same time, GVB launched a regular radio program "Environmental 30 Minutes" on China National Radio.<sup>80</sup> In addition to TV and radio, Liao has produced, out of pocket, several documentaries, including "Daughters of the Earth." Elizabeth Economy

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<sup>75</sup> Zhang, Wei: 2007a.

<sup>76</sup> Friends of Nature. (2000) "Friends of Nature Again Publishes Report: Dramatic Increase in Nation's Newspaper Environmental Consciousness," (*Ziran zhiyou zaici gongbu diaosha jieguo biao ming woguo baozhi de huanjing yishi dafudu tigao*).

<sup>77</sup> Zhan, 2011: 121.

<sup>78</sup> Cited by Stalley and Yang, 2006: 353. (*Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan huanjing yu fazhan yanjiu zhongxin* (Chinese Academy of Social Science Environment and Development Research Center), *Zhongguo huanjing yu fazhan, di er juan* (China Environment and Development Review, 1.) Beijing: Social Sciences Publishing House, 1999), p. 339.)

<sup>79</sup> Zhang, Li. "Daughter of the Earth: Liao Xiaoyi," (*Diqiu Nuer Liao Xiaoyi*) *China Environmental News*, 13 February 2008.

<sup>80</sup> Global Village Environmental Cultural Institute of Beijing. (Updated 1998) "Beijing Global Village," <http://www.ifce.org/gvb/introduction.html> Accessed on 2012/4/11.

(2004) credits Liao's work for the heightened environmental consciousness in ordinary Chinese people, citing a 2001 survey that showed 79% of Chinese interviewees said their source of environmental protection issues came from television and radio.<sup>81</sup> On 1 March 2004, CCTV aired their popular show, "News Investigation" (*Xinwen Diaocha*) on the topic of NRP, the host took an obvious anti-dam stance in saying:

Where I'm standing now, in a few years might be underwater. The water will not only take away the scenery of the shores, it will also obliterate the local ethnic cultures. But will building hydropower station really lift these people out of poverty?<sup>82</sup>

Instead of promulgating the national policy of hydropower development, per the state-owned TV's mission, the host openly disclosed a view that is contrary to the development-centric national agenda. Without an atmosphere that embraces environmental protection, this display of courage could not happen. Sure enough, when China's State Propaganda Department banned all negative reporting on hydropower development, CCTV aired a five-episode special programming "Nujiang Stories" (*Nujiang Gushi*) that had a clear pro-dam undertone.<sup>83</sup>

### Summary

China's policy of hydroelectricity development has been part of the central government's Five-Year plans since the turn of the century, yet it has failed to convince the Chinese public that the so-called clean hydroelectricity is for the good of the people. For a country that is built on propaganda, that is a sizable failure. While some may attribute this failure to the ancient proverb, "Three

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<sup>81</sup> Economy, 2004: 163.

<sup>82</sup> Guo, Xiaoping. (2007) "An Analysis on the Risk of Communication and the Democracy of Decision-making on Nujiang Dam," *Journal of International Communication*, February. pp.26-29.

<sup>83</sup> Ding, Yuanfang. "The real Nu River story," (*Bei niuqu de Nujiang gushi*) *China Dialogue*, 12 February 2009.



Monks, No Water,” (*Sange Heshang Mei Shui He*) meaning that having too many people involved actually jeopardizes the job at hand. Some would say that this is a healthy development for China’s growing civil society. The next chapter will examine the people responsible for turning the NRP, a simple plan to develop hydroelectricity, into one of the most controversial topics in the history of China’s energy policy.



## Chapter IV - Environmental Journalists

“I am not objective because I’m not an object, I am subjective because I am a subject.” José Bergamín, Journalist.<sup>1</sup>

### Policy Entrepreneurs

Kingdon identifies a policy entrepreneur’s characteristic to be someone who has “willingness to invest their resources – time, energy, reputation, and sometimes money – in the hope of a future return.”<sup>2</sup> Although Kingdon’s study finds that media are not as influential in the circle of agenda setters as previously thought, because media reports typically only last a short time, or their content is “old news” to those who have power over the decision.<sup>3</sup> However, Kingdon points out individuals of the policy community tend to use the newspaper to bring attention to each other. Most notable of Kingdon’s examples is one high-level official who used the *Washington Post* as the platform through which to get their issue of concern to the White House.<sup>4</sup> Another way media can influence policy is through magnifying an existing movement, though Kingdon thinks media can only “help shape an issue and help structure it, but they (media) can’t create an issue.”<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, in the case of anti-NRP campaign, several individuals of the media are in fact the policy entrepreneurs who proved to have the willingness to spend their time and energy, gamble their reputation, even money into an issue that they hoped to affect impact. Moreover, in this instance, these individuals used the media in ways that defy the traditional notion of “short attention span” of

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Dagon, Alfonso Gumucio. (2009) “Playing with fire: power, participation, and communication for development”, *Development in Practice*, 19: 4, pp. 453-465.

<sup>2</sup> Kingdon, 1984: 129.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 61-62.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

media coverage; meaning the reports persisted for years and the environmental journalists were often the first to break the news. An investigative reporter for the *Southern Weekend* refers to the anti-NRP campaign as a “NGO and media-sponsored campaign,” calling it “the first milestone in China’s environmental movement.”<sup>6</sup>

Researcher Tong Zhifeng (2009) sums up the level of involvement and contribution of the environmental journalists in the following passage:

Since some of China’s environmental NGOs were established by people in the media, thereafter ENGOS have maintained a close relationship with the media, and many of the ENGOS contained members of the press; all of the above contribute to the formation of a network between China’s ENGOS and media – we call this network the NGO-Media Network. This network is instrumental in keeping many of the Chinese media outlets up to date with the issues ENGOS care about; thereby objectively helping to advance China’s environmental activism, which is also the key to Nujiang campaign’s temporary success.<sup>7</sup>

The tactical alliance between ENGOS and media had some calling it the “NGO-ization of media”<sup>8</sup> Researchers at Southwest University concludes that the role of China’s ENGOS has gradually transformed from that of “environmental guardian” and “representative of public interest,” to the more recent participant in government environment policy and important watchdog of environmental society.<sup>9</sup>

The reason behind their role advancement, Catham House’s senior research fellow Lu Yiyi quotes a colleague of the environmental journalist: “They are not

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<sup>6</sup> Asia Society Northern California. “Interview with Liu Jianqiang: Environmental Journalism and Censorship in China,” 14 January 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Tong, 2009: 121.

<sup>8</sup> Southern Weekend. “Wang Yongchen: media is under NGO-ization,” (*Wang Yongchen: Meiti zheng bei NGO hua*). Lu, 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Guo, Xiaoqin and Ou, Shiyang. (2010) “Role of China’s Environmental NGO: Problems and Solution,” *Xuehui*, 7.

content to be story-tellers. They want to become story-makers themselves.”<sup>10</sup> Becoming the story-maker means that the journalist becomes part of the story, which would signify a conflict of interest, from the perspective of journalistic objectivity. Professor of journalism and senior journalist Zhang Wei is critical of a reporter mixing his/her opinion with news; especially when the report is also a member of an environmental group.<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, and perhaps telling of just how controversial the idea of activist journalism is, the same Professor Zhang Wei refers to Wang Yongchen and Zhang Kejia, in a separate article, as “defenders of Nujiang and Dujianyan.”<sup>12</sup>

American senior journalist Robert Niles defends advocacy journalism as a necessity to the profession: “When ‘objective’ journalism decays into a cowardly neutrality between truth and lies, we need advocacy journalism to lift our profession – and the community leaders we cover – back to credibility.”<sup>13</sup> The two-time Pulitzer-winning *New York Times* columnist and human rights activist Nicholas D. Kristof explained the difficulty in maintaining journalistic objectivity to an internet blogger:

One of the perils of activism is that you become so much a part of a cause that you lose your objectivity. There can be a tendency to start speaking for a cause rather than for yourself. I try to navigate this terrain, but frankly there are a lot of blurry lines. Especially when I was writing a lot about Darfur, I sometimes worried about where I was in a relationship to that line... On the other hand, when it feels like there are an awful lot of lives at stake, it’s hard not to want to do everything you can to save those lives.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Lu, 2005: 2.

<sup>11</sup> Zhang Wei. (2007b) “Advocacy in Environmental Reporting and its Conflict with Objectivity,” *Journal of International Communication*, 10. pp.19-23.

<sup>12</sup> Zhang, 2007a.

<sup>13</sup> Niles, Robert. “Why we need advocacy journalism,” *Online Journalism Review*, 20 December 2011.

<sup>14</sup> Luhmann, Erin. “Advocacy vs. Activism in Journalism,” *The Global Pulse*, 2 February 2012.

So, the finesse of keeping the perfect balance between journalistic integrity and wanting to have an impact in the world as an activist is unquestionably difficult, even for seasoned journalists. Although the focus of this paper is not to dwell on the journalistic morality, I hope by prefacing the following section on the profiled environmental journalists, with a brief discussion on journalistic objectivity, we could then move on from there, and concentrate on the center piece of the story. Before we could do that, I need to give a short definition on advocacy/activist journalism, or civic journalism as it was first called.

#### Advocacy Journalism? Activist Journalism?

Civic Journalism is the idea that journalists should be actively involved in the community they serve. It first came from U.S. media critic Jay Rosen.<sup>15</sup> Civic Journalism as a concept grew out of the concern of a drastic decline in newspaper sales in the 1980s and 1990s in the United States. Rosen saw that the decline of newspaper sales meant people were not interested in reading newspapers, because the stories were not addressing people's problems and concerns. In response, Rosen advocated "community connectedness," a program through which journalists not only report on the topics that directly relate to the readers, but also get involved in those issues, such as participating in community affairs, become activists, and help solve social problems.

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<sup>15</sup> Skogseth, E.G. (2005) "Indymedia – Journalistic Anarchy on the WWW," Master Thesis, University of Bergen, 2005. pg. 28.

According to the *Handbook for Citizen Journalists*<sup>16</sup> the definition of Advocacy Journalism “adopts a viewpoint for the sake of advocating on behalf of a social, political, business or religious purpose.” The founding editor of *Street Spirit*, the San Francisco newspaper for the homeless, Terry Messman defined those who practice Justice Journalism as “agents of social change.”<sup>17</sup> Author of *No Logo*, the award-winning Canadian journalist Naomi Klein described her self-perception as: “I usually define myself as an activist journalist, by which I mean a journalist who is embedded in movements for social change.”<sup>18</sup>

Much in the same vein, Wang Yongchen and Zhang Kejia’s work as active reporters who merged their news media profession with environmental activism, shared the same features as Civic Journalism. After Premier Wen Jiabao ordered the suspension on NRP in 2004, Wang reflected on her activist/journalist role in the involvement:

The special situations and development stage of China require journalists to be more than disseminators of information. In reporting incidents concerning conflicts between economic incentives and environmental protections, society needs a concerned, even “biased,” voice.<sup>19</sup>

Different from Wang’s idea that journalists are compelled to become activists, Zhang Kejia puts the emphasis on the value of the story. At a 2006 seminar on the topic of how ENGOS develop working relationships with the media, Zhang clarified that environmental journalists will print just about anything ENGOS hand to them, simply for a good cause:

Media in general, are not there to profile the good Samaritans or good deeds carried out by ENGOS; instead, media are the channels through which to focus on

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<sup>16</sup> jdriscoll. “The Handbook for Citizen Journalists: Catching the Journalistic Attitude,” *MIT Center for Civic Media*, 11 March 2010.

<sup>17</sup> Messman, Terry. “Justice Journalism: Journalist as Agent of Social Change,” *Media Alliance*.

<sup>18</sup> Cited by Foster, Mark. “Advocacy Journalism.” <http://www.markfoster.net/sociosphere/aj.html> Accessed on 2012/4/9.

<sup>19</sup> Beijing Review, 7 April 2004.

important news and accidents...Whatever we report, we will consider whether the story has journalistic value. Moreover, when we (media) feature NGOs, we're not focusing on what the NGO's doing or how well it is doing; we are instead focusing on the event itself, on how the NGO's event will impact China's development.<sup>20</sup>

Zhang's reserved attitude on the collaboration between ENGOs and media echoes her personal style. Unlike other environmental journalists, Zhang likes to keep a low profile,<sup>21</sup> rarely granting interviews with other media. Similarly, *People's Daily* reporter Zhao Yongxin suddenly became the reported, when he was awarded Green China "Person of the Year 2005," but instead of boasting his achievements, Zhao tried to turn down the interview: "actually, there's nothing to be reported about me personally."<sup>22</sup>

### Profiles of the Policy Entrepreneurs

#### *Zhao Yongxin*

"From someone who did not know the meaning of the term 'environmentalism', to becoming a devoted environmentalist reporter..."<sup>23</sup> Zhao Yongxin wrote in the first post of his own column "Safeguarding our Home" (*Shouwang Jiayuan*) on *People's Daily* online website. Being the first reporter to break the exclusive news on Yuanmingyuan Park (see Chapter II), having received the "2005 Green China Person of the Year" and "2002 Earth Award," Zhao Yongxin is one of the most well known green journalists of his time. Although Zhao only began reporting on environmental issues in 1998,<sup>24</sup> due to his position at *People's Daily* – Chinese

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<sup>20</sup>EEDU.ORG.CN. (Updated 2007) "Workshop for environmental NGOs collaboration with media," (*Huanbao minjian zuzhi ruhe yu meiti fazhan hezhu*) 2006 Chinese Environmental NGOs Sustainable Development Annual Conference (*Zhonghua huanbao minjian zuzhi kechixu fazhan nianhui*).

<sup>21</sup>Author's Email correspondence with Zhang Kejia.

<sup>22</sup> Wang, Jing. "Zhao Yongxin: display the environmentalist power to influence public opinion," (*Zhao Yongxin: zhanshi huanbao yulun weili*) *Diyi Caijing Daily*, 29 November 2005.

<sup>23</sup> Zhao, Yongxin. "Author bio," *People's Daily online column Shouwang Jiayuan*.

<sup>24</sup> *People's Daily*. (Updated 2008) "Zhao Yongxin's report collection" (*Zhao Yongxin baodaoji*). <http://scitech.people.com.cn/BIG5/45465/110388/index.html> Accessed on 2011/10/17.

Communist Party's official newspaper – his pen wielded much more power than others. *People's Daily* boasts itself to be classified by the UNESCO as one of the ten most authoritative newspapers in the world, and its mission includes propagandizing CCO's ideological stance such as “advocating the Party's belief [and] guiding public opinion.”<sup>25</sup> In addition to having his writing be seen by nationwide readers, *People's Daily* is a reading staple for all CCP members, including high-level officials.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, journalists for the Party newspaper can write “internal reference” (*nei-can*) reports that go directly to the desks of high-level officials.<sup>27</sup>

Zhao has written many such internal reference reports addressing serious environmental pollution problems; more importantly, his reports were noted by the intended high-level officials, subsequently the problems were duly resolved. On a webpage dedicated to Zhao's accomplishments (that qualified him for the Person of the Year award), China's Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP) listed Zhao's reports that got the attention of those in power. Among them were: internal reference report in 2000 that exposed questionable construction procedure in Beijing that contaminated drinking water with cement; then Premier Zhu Rongji read the report and signed off on a ban on the cementation of water channels.<sup>28</sup> Another was in 2004, when Zhao's internal reference report,

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<sup>25</sup> People's Daily Online. (2011) “About Us”

<http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/102840/7560415.html> Accessed on 2012/5/1.

<sup>26</sup> Luo, Kunjin and Ding, Yi. (2011) “*Huanjing fengxian yiti de meiti kuangjia*,” *Press Circles*, 8, pp.23-25, 72.

<sup>27</sup> Lu, 2005: 2.

<sup>28</sup> Ministry of Environmental Protection, People's Republic of China. (2005) “People's Daily Reporter Zhao Yongxin,” *2005 Green China Person of the Year*.

[http://big5.mep.gov.cn/gate/big5/www.cgpn.cn/ztbd/shbz/ndrw/2005/201004/t20100428\\_188857.htm](http://big5.mep.gov.cn/gate/big5/www.cgpn.cn/ztbd/shbz/ndrw/2005/201004/t20100428_188857.htm) Accessed on 2011/10/17.



calling for energy efficient buildings, got then Vice-Premier Zeng Peiyan's notice, and an order was issued to the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development to expedite plans for implementing energy-efficient buildings.<sup>29</sup>

PICTURE 2 - ZHAO, YONGXIN. PEOPLE'S DAILY 2003/9/11  
"SAVE A PRISTINE RIVER FOR THE CHILDREN"



Zhao Yongxin's mighty pen that reached the height of Zhongnanhai proved to be equally effective in the anti-NRP campaign. On 11 September 2003, Zhao Yongxin's post, "Save a Pristine River for the Children" appeared on page-11 of *People's Daily*.<sup>30</sup> (Picture 2) In this article, Zhao provided a comprehensive argument to match his pleading title. First, Zhao described the vast sample of biodiversity in the region, quoting Yunnan-based, anti-dam professor He Daming to say: "(biodiversity of the Nujiang region) is the precious treasure of our country, even of the whole mankind."<sup>31</sup> Then Zhao lists reasons such as: Nujiang belonging to part of the World Heritage site, warning of irreversible damage, the need to preserve the culture of the ethnic tribes who live in the region, geological and technical problems of dam-building, a sense of national responsibility to

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Zhao, Yongxin. "Save a Pristine River for the Children" (*Wei Zisun Baoliu Yitiaog Shengtai Jiang*) *People's Daily*, 11 September 2003, pg-11.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

protect one of the last free-flowing rivers in China, and finally, refuting the logic that hydroelectricity is the only way out of poverty for the people of Nujiang.

PICTURE 3 - ZHAO, YONGXIN. PEOPLE'S DAILY 2003/9/19  
"FORGET-NOT ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION  
WHILE DEVELOPING HYDROELECTRICITY"



A week later, Zhao Yongxin followed up with another entry, "Forget-Not Environmental Protection while Developing Hydroelectricity" which appeared on page-14 of the paper.<sup>32</sup> (Picture 3) In this article, Zhao presented detailed number of the region's hydropower plants already under construction or are planned in 2003. From Chia-ling Jiang's cascade of 17 dams, to the six-dam project on Min Jiang, then to Dadu He's another cascade of 17 dams, and eight dams in the mid-section of Jinsha Jiang alone, as well as five dams planned for Yalong Jiang. All of these dams, Zhao warned, were threatening the ecological heritage of the region; then he called for the implementation of the then recently passed EIA law, to evaluate whether these large constructions would have negative impact on the environment. Throughout the struggle to fight off damming the Nujiang, Zhao Yongxin would continue to stress the importance of environmental protection amidst the country's fervent stride toward

<sup>32</sup> Zhao, Yongxin. "Forget-Not Environmental Protection while Developing Hydroelectricity" (*Shuidian Kaifa Mowang Huanjing Baohu*) *People's Daily*, 19 September 2003, pg-14.

hydroelectricity development. Upon examination of his writings, it is easy to see the signature of Zhao's careful choice of wording.

From historical cultural heritage to real-life economic interests... In this fierce exchange of diverging opinions, we witnessed the local government's varied positions on listening to opposing ideas, scholars and experts not afraid to stand up for what is right, and the vast public passion for the environment.<sup>33</sup>

His articles exude a sense of benevolent, sagacious thinking that reminds one of ancient-time philosopher who knew what was best for the country, yet was careful not to anger the emperor with insolent attitude. Zhao usually treaded a fine line between criticizing rushed development at the expense of destroying pristine rivers, while applauding the country for having the civility to embrace differences in opinion. His careful choice of words that form inoffensive recommendations while pointing out the false of existing policies for improvement, without compromising the spirit of the policy. Compared to other environmental journalists, Zhao's style is like pushing within a well-guarded parameter. If one thinks this was required of him, at his place of work; then one should only look at Zhang Kejia, whose articles for *China Youth Daily* were never shy from direct challenges against the hydropower policies.

### *Zhang Kejia*

Like the people of her generation, Zhang Kejia spent her youth, during the Cultural Revolution, in a farming village of Inner Mongolia, as part of the "up to the mountains, down to the villages" (*Shang Shan Xia Xiang*) movement.<sup>34</sup> Then in 1978, Zhang joined *China Youth Daily*, worked her way up from editor to

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<sup>33</sup> Zhao, Yongxin. "Let there be more harmony between people and nature," (*Rang ren yu ziran geng hexie*) *People's Daily*, 22 December 2003, pg-11.

<sup>34</sup> Friends of the Earth. "Zhang Kejia," *China's Environmental Celebrity Vitae*.  
[http://www.foe.org.hk/welcome/gettc.asp?id\\_path=1,%2011,%20215,%20594,%20618](http://www.foe.org.hk/welcome/gettc.asp?id_path=1,%2011,%20215,%20594,%20618)  
Accessed on 2012/4/3.

deputy director of the science page, then to deputy director of news center.<sup>35</sup> As CCP's official newspaper that aims to recruit new blood for the Party, *China Youth Daily's* mission is to "advocate new thoughts and concepts that conform to socialist market economy,"<sup>36</sup> which is to say, the paper strives to attract young readers into the Party ideology with the reformist agenda. Among Zhang's outstanding accomplishments was China's first "Survey Report on Public Environmental Consciousness in China" in 1992, as well as receiving "Best Organization Award" from CCEP, for three consecutive years. Although like Zhao Yongxin, Zhang Kejia only began reporting on environmental issues in 1998, but by November 1999, she became a passionate full-time environmental journalist and launched a whole section of the newspaper – Green Page – and an Internet version – Green Net – dedicated to environmental news.<sup>37</sup>

The next year, Zhang and co-workers established an ENGO, the Green Island, whose primary activities including annual field surveys to wetlands around China, and organizing educational forums for college students. "In China, street activities such as pasting leaflets on the walls or other places are limited," Zhang explained to Japanese reporter about the ENGO-media alliance in China.<sup>38</sup> "Therefore, it is important for NGOs to cooperate with the media." Indeed, nobody understands the importance of combining the strength of media with the well intentions of ENGOs better than Zhang Kejia. After local newspaper *Yunnan Daily* printed the announcement of the Huadian's plan to build 13 dams on the

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> China Youth Online (Last updated 2004) "Brief Introduction of China Youth Daily" <http://www.cyol.net/home/english/intro/daily.htm> Accessed on 2012/5/1.

<sup>37</sup> Yang and Calhoun, 2007: 228.

<sup>38</sup> Asahi News, 2006/12/20.

Nujiang in July 2003,<sup>39</sup> Zhang soon began filling page-two of the *China Youth Daily*, with a pronounced anti-dam vernacular. From excerpts of Zhang's most prominent anti-NRP articles that featured graphic description of dam-construction's potential environmental damage, to easily impressionable analogies that use simple math to explain investment concepts and "us versus them" dichotomy of the pro-dam and anti-dam sides, it is evident that she applied well-selected tricks of media reporting in her anti-dam themed articles.

**"Nujiang Hydropower Plans Met with Opposition," 2003/8/19.**

**PICTURE 4 - ZHANG, KEJIA. CHINA DAILY YOUTH 2003/8/19  
"NUJIANG HYDROPOWER PLANS MET WITH OPPOSITION"**



Sedimentation caused by serious soil erosion has resulted in annual loss of 100 million cubic meters of dam capacity in Yunnan province, which means every year approximately one large dam would go out of order. When people fully understand this, how will they see the dams on Nujiang?<sup>40</sup>

**"Cascade of 13 Dams to be Built on the Last Pristine River," 2003/9/5.**

An expert pointed out...on the world's treasure that contains many unsolved mysteries, if we were to perform "surgery" – building 13 dams – our loss would be destructive. According to (Professor) He Daming, Nujiang's development plans

<sup>39</sup> Luo and Ding, 2011.

<sup>40</sup> Zhang, Kejia. "Nujiang Hydropower Plans Met with Opposition," (*Nujiang shuiba jihua zaoyu fandui sheng*) *China Youth Daily*, 19 August 2003, pg-2.

must take into consideration of the cost on the environment. That way, you will discover that after investing ten dollars, you could only get back a few cents.<sup>41</sup> Zhang chooses to quote a very graphic description, since “surgery” usually connotes cutting open the human body, to convey the horrendous image of environmental devastation. The technique of painting an image with words is quite typical of print journalism. Then Zhang uses small-number analogy that simplifies a complicated huge investment problem into something anyone can understand: if your investment is 10 dollars and return of investment is a mere hundredth of one percent, then the investment may not be worth it; especially after taking into consideration the environmental sacrifice it would have to make. This is another journalistic trick; actually, using simple numbers that make big impressions on the reader, to make your case seem convincing.

There is a clear shift in the Zhang’s anti-NRP writings from 2003 to 2004. In 2003, Zhang was still just presenting the potential hazardous effects of damming the river, but in 2004, her entries began refuting the pro-dam side’s claims, almost one by one, showing that her opponents were wrong.

### **“How to maintain a balance between the escalated development on Nujiang and environmental protection?” 2004/1/5.**

Dam-builders proposed a so-called ‘Elevation-Control Plan’, whereas the area under 2000 meters would be free from development, and the tallest of the dams would only be at 1995 meters. However experts think that as natural heritage, the Three Parallel Rivers should be preserved in the entirety. Nujiang’s plants and animals do not only exist in a vertical fashion; they exist throughout the valley. ‘Elevation-Control’ is like cutting the World Heritage in half, protecting the upper half, and destroying the lower half.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Zhang, Kejia. “Cascade of 13 Dams to be Built on the Last Pristine River,” (*Zuihou de shengtai heliu shang yao xiu shisan dao ba*) *China Youth Daily*, 5 September 2003, pg-2.

<sup>42</sup> Zhang, Kejia. “How to maintain a balance between the escalated development on Nujiang and environmental protection?” (*Nujiang jianba zhi zheng shengji dakeifa yu shengtai baohu ruhe bingxing*) *China Youth Daily*, 5 January 2004, pg-2.

Here Zhang refutes a claim by the proponents of the dam, an argument that damming the river would not affect the World Heritage site, because the protected area is supposedly restricted at above 2000 meters. In her rebuttal to the hydropower-enthusiasts, Zhang purposely names the pro-dam side “dam-builders,” while reserving the term “experts” for opponents of the NRP. It is very interesting to see how she uses this tactic to sway the readers’ opinion, to show that those against the dam are less knowledgeable on the issue.

### **“Can Building Hydroelectricity Plants Really Bring Wealth?” 2004/6/10.**

In Manguang village, the village director Lee Wencheng calls himself ‘Beggar Director’. He told the villagers from Nujiang, before the power plant, the villagers did not have to worry about food. Now there is no land, and there are no jobs. The power plant hires 30 to 40 temporary workers, but only three to five of them are from the local village. Although the compensation for the land was paid at the estimation of five years of harvest, but the compensation was taken by the Office of Migrants to do business. After the business went bust, there was not much left for the villagers. So now even the village officials often have to pick through garbage and wild vegetables.<sup>43</sup>

In this short piece, Zhang reports on Green Watershed leader, Yu Xiaogang’s arranged trip that took Nujiang villagers to visit the migrants who had to relocate to make way for the Manwan Dam in 1997. This is another rebuttal against the local government’s claim that the only way out of poverty for the Nujiang villagers is through building hydropower plants on the river. Zhang quotes the Manwan village official to paint a picture of dam migrants, who, even with compensation from the government, were left mired in destitution, with no means of basic survival. By showing the stark poverty of previous migrants, Zhang refutes the pro-dam’s claim for poverty-alleviation.

Wang Yongchen and Zhang Kejia have been named ‘defenders of the Nujiang and Dujiangyan.’ They use the media, collaborate with ENGOs, and capitalize on the

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<sup>43</sup> Zhang, Kejia. “Can Building Hydroelectricity Plants Really Bring Wealth?” (*Xiu dianzhan zhende nan fanshen zhifu ma*) *China Youth Daily*, 10 June 2004, pg-2.

strength of international organizations, to bring China's environmental news into the global field of vision.<sup>44</sup>

Zhang Kejia's articles in the *China Youth Daily* were not only being consumed by regular readers, they were also being used as tools for organizing local villagers against proposed hydropower plants. For another highly controversial hydropower project at the Tiger-Leaping Gorge, a local activist Xiao Liangzhong spoke in front a crowd of his villagers, citing one of Zhang's articles, which reported that of the 16 million forced migrants in China, 10 million of them had been worst off since the relocation.<sup>45</sup>

In the limelight of anti-NRP campaign, Zhang Kejia's name is often associated with that of Wang Yongchen. The two women have joined forces in many occasions; beginning with the Green Reporters Salon, a monthly gathering where experts give educational workshops and reporters discuss media tactics. While the Green Reporters Salon originated with Wang in 2000, when the two combined forces in 2002, the Salon expanded not only in size, but from Beijing outward, spread to 12 other cities.<sup>46</sup> They also jointly set up the China River Network in June 2004, which acts as a further step to form a coalition of ENGOs to coordinate the anti-dam campaign.

### *Wang Yongchen*

Kingdon lists three qualities of a successful policy entrepreneur, and Wang fits the descriptions perfectly. The first qualification is having a "claim to a hearing," meaning that the person has either "expertise, ability to speak for others," or

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<sup>44</sup> Zhang, W: 2007a.

<sup>45</sup> *Waking the Green Tiger*. Dir. Gary Marcuse. Face to Face Media, 2011.

<sup>46</sup> Tong, 2009.



“authoritative decision-making position.”<sup>47</sup> Working for China’s biggest national radio station in terms of scale and audience size, China National Radio journalist essentially has the entire country as her audience. Second qualification is having “political connections or negotiating skill.”<sup>48</sup> Not only is Wang well connected in the realm of Beijing bureaucracy through her work, her close environmentalist friend Liang Congjie was highly respected in Beijing’s powerful elites, and a member of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), who could introduce proposals into the annual conference. The third qualification calls for tenacity and persistence, and Kingdon quotes an interviewee’s description of a successful policy entrepreneur to illustrate the point: “He could talk a dog off a meat wagon.”<sup>49</sup>

It just so happens that Wang Yongchen shares that incredible ability to talk anybody into letting her have her way. According to senior journalist and now professor of communication Zeng Fanxu, for a group of rural children traveling to Beijing for an environmental education forum, Wang persuaded Kentucky Fried Chicken to sponsor free lunch, museums and zoos to sponsor free admission tickets. She also convinced the Beijing Birds Garden to let volunteers provide guided-tours, and Beijing Ming Tomb Forest Farm to let citizens of Beijing adopt and plant trees there.<sup>50</sup> Wang is very impressive when it comes to the art of persuasion, after all, she does have a leg up as someone who talks for a living, working as a reporter for China National Radio.

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<sup>47</sup> Kingdon, 1984: 189.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 190.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Zeng, Fanxu. “Two Female Journalists and Their NGOs,” Southern People Weekly, 25 August 2004.

"I am often regarded as a woman who is building a grand environment-protection project," Wang said to a member of International Rivers Network. "But I think I am part of nature. And I am only doing what everyone should be doing."<sup>51</sup> From organizing media campaign to leading field-study trips, while managing to keep a job as a radio station reporter and writing for newspapers and magazines, to say that Wang Yongchen is an *active*-ist is an understatement. Fellow anti-Nujiang campaigner Shen Xiaohui, of the State Forestry Bureau, told the *Economic* reporter: "Wang Yongchen possesses a certain strength, though I can't quite put my finger on it."<sup>52</sup>

In 1988, Wang's programs "Save the Maples in Xiangshan" and "Clean Lake Kunming," were among the first radio shows in China to feature environmental issues.<sup>53</sup> From there on, Wang began regularly airing shows that had environmental protection themes. In 1994, her program "This is also a Hope Project," told the story of a farming village's elementary school children saving wild birds. After the story aired, more than 300 schools in China made alliances with the farming village elementary school, and for which Wang received a Prize for Chinese Environmental News.<sup>54</sup>

In 1996, Wang Yongchen founded the ENGO, Green Earth Volunteers (GEV) as the basis of her environmental work, while continuing to raise environmental

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<sup>51</sup> Yan, Katy. (2010) "Wang Yonchen: A Warrior for China's Free Flowing Rivers," *International Rivers Network*.

<sup>52</sup> Jingji, 20 May 2004.

<sup>53</sup> Zhang W.: 2007a.

<sup>54</sup> World-wide Asian-Eurasian Human Rights Forum. (2008) "Yongchen Wang – China," *World People's Blog*, <http://word.world-citizenship.org/wp-archive/1927> Accessed on 2012/4/15.

consciousness through her radio programs. Her 1997 program “Yangtze River is Turning White” was particularly powerful. It featured the problem of plastic pollution caused by passengers riding on the Yangtze, who, after finished eating their disposable lunch boxes, thoughtlessly used the river as their trash bin. This program caught the attention of the Ministry of Transport and Environmental Protection, and an order to ban the use of plastic food containers on the Yangtze was quickly issued.<sup>55</sup> In 1999, her two regular programs “Environmental Hotline” and “Animals World” initiated discussions such as the garbage treatment in Beijing, as well as measures against desertification.<sup>56</sup>

In the anti-Nujiang campaign, Wang Yongchen is seen as the primary leader, at least for the Beijing camp, organizing the media.<sup>57</sup> At the initial NDRC meeting on 16 August 2003, to audit the NRP project, it was Wang Yongchen who gave the desperate SEPA official the critical name of Nujiang expert, He Daming.<sup>58</sup> Wang’s tip got Professor He to attend the 3 September 2003, SEPA-organized seminar on the environmental protection issues on the NRP. At this meeting, He Daming’s fierce debate against the NRP, as well as an overwhelming majority of attendees’ anti-dam attitude, contributed to what was later called, “the firing of first shot of the Battle to Protect Nujiang.”<sup>59</sup>

On 25 October 2003, at the second meeting of the China Environmental and Cultural Promotion Society, Wang Yongchen put her broad “connections” from

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Yang and Calhoun, 2008: 83.

<sup>58</sup> Jingji, 20 May 2004.

<sup>59</sup> Outlook Weekly, Vol. 49.

being a reporter, to good use. Armed with a sheet of paper and a pencil, Wang rallied and gathered 62 signatures across the fields of science, arts, and journalism...all renowned figures, on a joint petition against the NRP. This petition was later re-printed in many media outlets, multiplying the celebrity effect in the public realm.<sup>60</sup> The following month, the ENGOs phone-bombed the representatives from the United States, and eventually successfully pushed for an NRP discussion at the Third Meeting of China and the United States Environment Forum in Beijing.<sup>61</sup>

At the end of November, activists from GEV, FoN, GW and others, attended the second International Meeting of Dam-Affected People and Their Allies in Thailand. At the request of the Chinese delegates, more than 60 countries at the conference issued joint statement against the NRP and sent it to UNESCO, who replied that it is paying close attention to the NRP.<sup>62</sup> As people living downstream from the Nujiang and would also be affected by the dam construction, more than 80 NGOs in Thailand then sent a letter to the Chinese ambassador in Thailand, urging reconsideration on NRP.<sup>63</sup> Then from 8-9 January 2004, Chinese Academy of Social Science (CASS) and four other research institutes, as well as NGOs, including FoN and GW, held a forum in Beijing on economic, social, and ecological impact of the NRP. After the meeting, they submitted results from the forum to the highest-level officials for their reference.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Mertha, 2008: 119.

<sup>61</sup> Jingji, 20 May 2004.

<sup>62</sup> Sun and Zhao: 153.

<sup>63</sup> Xie, Lei. (2009) *Environmental Activism in China*. London; New York: Routledge. pg. 104.

<sup>64</sup> Li, Ke. (2004) "Nu River under Hydroelectric Development," *Forestry Economy*, 19, pp. 34-38.

In an effort to counter NRP proponents' accusation, that Beijing's ENGOs did not really understand the realities of Nujiang prefecture, and were only doing activist work from the "ivory tower" in Beijing. Wang Yongchen led 20 journalists, activists, and scholars on a tour of the Nujiang region from 16-24 February. It is said that Wang dipped into her savings to finance this trip.<sup>65</sup> It was in the middle of this trip, on 18 February 2004, that Wang Yongchen received the historical phone-call that informed her of Premier Wen Jiabao's decision to halt construction on Nujiang. The good news not only brought Wang tears of joy, but it also brought a sigh of relief to the participants of the tour. The logic goes, having the support of Premier Wen meant that they could once again conduct interviews without having to look over their shoulders, for fear of getting kicked out of the area by local officials.<sup>66</sup>

Upon return, Wang and GEV put on various photo exhibitions of Nujiang in Beijing, along with a website version.<sup>67</sup> In March, GEV took the photo exhibit to UNEP 5<sup>th</sup> Global Civil Society Forum (GCSF) in Jeju, South Korea to mobilize international support. Ever since this trip, Wang would begin a habit of making field survey trips down to the river every year, and she would often bring along fellow journalists. On one of those trips, Wang even had reporters from American magazine *Times* and French newspaper *Le Monde* on her team.<sup>68</sup> From late 2005 to early 2006, Wang's group GEV conducted field survey in the Nujiang

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<sup>65</sup> Mertha, 2008: 125.

<sup>66</sup> Jingji, 20 May 2004.

<sup>67</sup> Xie, 2009: 103.

<sup>68</sup> Ai, Jie. (2005) *The Research of the social capital of the environmental NGOs in the social events – A case study for GEV*. Master Thesis, Renmin University of China.

area, and produced the documentary *Silent Nujiang* by Hong Kong director Hu Jie. GEV interviewed one hundred local villagers and published a research “Report on Nujiang Migrants Study,” in which GEV proved that local villagers were not adequately informed on the NRP or the resettlement plans.<sup>69</sup>

Since 18 February 2004, Premier Wen asked for more thorough scientific research on the NRP, a joint-commission between NDRC and SEPA was to conduct on-site research and produce an EIA report. However, in violation of the ALL Measures that was supposed to allow public knowledge of environmental protection projects, this report was never made public. So in August 2005, 62 NGOs, along with more than 300 state-level researchers, scientists, and environmentalist celebrities signed a joint petition to demand the publication of the EIA report.<sup>70</sup> This tactical alliance again received wide media attention, thereby prolonging the public’s interest on the issue of Nujiang, which by then had dragged on for more than two years.

Perhaps it’s a habit from doing radio shows where the journalist relies on descriptive words to paint a picture in the mind of the listener, Wang Yongchen’s writings on the Nujiang region read like picturesque landscapes. Under Wang’s pen, far away Nujiang comes to life:

In addition to the spectacular Three Parallel Rivers, the grandiose snow tops and glacier, the steep valleys and rapids, the broad views of high peaks and pastures, crystal clear mountain lakes, beautiful Danxia landform, magnificent granite, amazing karst peaks, along with the variety of vegetation and animals all present the unique natural beauty of Nujiang.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Chan and Zhou, 2007: 13.

<sup>70</sup> Tong, 2009: 121.

<sup>71</sup> Wang, Yongchen. (2005) “Nujiang, free-flowing in the valley,” *China Nature*, Vol. 3, pp. 41-43.

Supplementing her expressive brushstrokes are the ability to bring these remote natural beauties down to earth, down to the personal level with the reader, and make a meaning connection. In the closing of her article, Wang wrote of the end of her field trip: “we felt a slight sadness upon leaving, because we don’t know when the next visit would be; moreover, we don’t know if the next time we come, Nujiang’s color would remain that of vibrant teal greens?”<sup>72</sup> If journalism was about straight facts, then Wang’s environmental reporting would be anything but; indeed, Wang cleverly evokes the sentiments and emotional attachment to the subject as she applies the tools of prose-writing to her pieces advocating the preservation of Nujiang. However, any good writing would not be appreciated and reach its intended effect if it was never published; more importantly, the amount of impact could potentially be drastically different, depending on where it is published.

#### Power of Placement: Location, Location, Location

Zhang Kejia’s articles regularly featured prominently on the upper portion of the second page of the newspaper.<sup>73</sup> (Picture 5) In most newspapers, page-two is usually reserved for important political news, but for *China Youth Daily*, the spot was reserved for Zhang’s articles on environmental issues. This uncommon arrangement is no accident; it was something Zhang had asked for.<sup>74</sup> Compared to Zhao Yongxin’s articles in *People’s Daily*, where usually appeared in page-11 or page 14, placement in page-two signified that *China Youth Daily* put environmental issues, particularly Zhang Kejia’s writing on top priority.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Zhang, Kejia. “Cascade of 13 Dams to be Built on the Last Pristine River,” (*Zuihou de shengtai heliu shang yao xiu shisan dao ba*) *China Youth Daily*, 5 September 2003, pg-2.

<sup>74</sup> Author’s Email correspondence with Zhang Kejia.

PICTURE 5 - ZHANG, KEJIA. CHINA DAILY YOUTH 2003/9/5  
"CASCADE OF 13 DAMS TO BE BUILT ON THE LAST PRISTINE RIVER"



Regardless of the page number, both Zhang and Zhao's articles were always located on the upper-half of the newspaper. Swedish researchers found that articles that are placed on the upper-portion of the newspaper get most of the readers' attention.<sup>75</sup> (Figure 2) Compared to other parts of the newspaper content, both upper-right and upper-left side of the newspaper articles received 30% of "dwell time" out of the entire full-page of news, while directly below, another news item received only 15% dwell time.<sup>76</sup> It is worthwhile to note that both *People's Daily* and *China Youth Daily* use the western style of opening on the left-hand side, so the Swedish study on readers' visual behavior would apply under the circumstances.

<sup>75</sup> Wartenberg, Constanze and Holmqvist, Kenneth. (2005) "Daily newspaper layout – designers' predictions of readers' visual behavior – a case study," *Lund University Cognitive Studies*, 126, pp. 1-11.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.



FIGURE 2 - ANALYSIS OF READER-ATTENTION BY NEWSPAPER LAYOUT PLACEMENT



SOURCE: Wartenberg and Holmqvist (2005)

### Summary

The reason behind environmental journalists' success can be easily attributed to one thing: power of China's media lies in the ability to formulate public opinion. In their cover story, *Jingji* had this grandiose praise of the February 2004 success: "On the Nujiang issue, pure social groups questioned and eventually changed the government's policy; this is a leap, a milestone in the advance developmental process of Chinese society."<sup>77</sup> Although Wen Jiabao's February 2004 order to halt construction on the NRP was really a temporary suspension on the project, it nevertheless became widely recognized as a major success to China's environmental movement, prompting many to call the year of the struggle – 2003 – as "Year One" of China's environmental movement.<sup>78</sup> One way to understand the significance of the media-ignited storm is through the eyes of the very people who were supposed to benefit from the hydropower plants. "With all these reporters coming, one wave after another," a Nujiang prefecture's

<sup>77</sup> *Jingji*, 20 May 2004.

<sup>78</sup> Author's interview with Yu Xiaogang.

propaganda official complained to the reporter. “Now I get a headache whenever anyone mentions Nujiang hydroelectricity.”<sup>79</sup>

According to Tsinghua University’s NGO Research Center, journalists and students consist of the primary membership in many ENGOs. A 2005 survey found that 90 out of 300 active members, approximately 30% of GEV are in fact journalists.<sup>80</sup> Friends of Nature conducted an internal research in June 2006, and found that out of the 1,986 individual members, 135, or 7% are journalists; the following year, FoN again polled their 2,350 members, and found 154, or 7% are members of the press.<sup>81</sup> With a concentrated population of media within ENGOs, and environmental journalists receiving government-level awards left and right,<sup>82</sup> it is no wonder that there is a rise in environmental reporting in China. Moreover, most journalists go into the field with an ideal of making an impact in society, and in times of relaxed censorship, media seems to be the best channel through which to affect change. “In China, the best way to influence the public is through public opinion,” said environmental journalist Zhao Ang, who is also a GEV member.<sup>83</sup> “And in China, news media are the leaders of public opinion.”<sup>84</sup> The next chapter will take a closer look at how these tenacious reporters pull together at the moment of truth; I will show how all the preparation work of writing articles, giving speeches, making field-surveys, and gathering petition signatures come together to affect the policy makers in the most critical moment.

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<sup>79</sup> Jingji, 20 May 2004.

<sup>80</sup> Ai, 2005.

<sup>81</sup> Tong, 2009.

<sup>82</sup> Shunde Environmental Science Association. (2006) “Past Recipient List of Earth Award,” *Shunde People’s Government of Foshan* <http://hjcx.shunde.gov.cn/forum/posts.php?ForumsID=14&ThreadsID=322> Accessed on 2012/4/16.

<sup>83</sup> Ai, 2005.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter V – Moments of Triumph

“Chance favors only the prepared mind.” – Louis Pasteur, Chemist and Microbiologist.<sup>1</sup>

### Policy Window

Kingdon’s idea of the “policy window” resonates with an inspirational pep-talk from Oprah, like when she said: “Luck is a matter of preparation meeting opportunity.”<sup>2</sup> If a policy entrepreneur wants to push through a policy onto the agenda, he/she must be prepared to give the final shove when the right window of opportunity comes along. Kingdon uses the analogy of a rocket launch needing to catch the precise moment in which the target planets align. If the window of opportunity is lost, the astronauts would have to sit and wait for another such rare window. The same goes for policy entrepreneurs, though in his description of the waiting period, they seem a lot like cunning trap-setters, lying in wait for their prey:

The policy window is an opportunity for advocates of proposals to push their pet solutions, or to push attention to their special problems. ...advocates lie in wait in and around government with their solutions at hand, waiting for problems to float by to which they can attach their solutions, waiting for a development in the political stream they can use to their advantage.<sup>3</sup>

During an opening of a policy window, the policy entrepreneur must be able to “couple” the problem, political, and policy streams together, and turn them into a coherent proposal to a problem on the national agenda. Kingdon notes that it is important that all three streams are joined together at the same time, because if an alternative solution is missing, then the proposal would not be accepted before the fleeting window closes.

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<sup>1</sup> BookBrowse. “Popular quotes: The meaning and history behind ‘Chance favors the prepared mind.’”

<sup>2</sup> Finest Quotes. “Preparation quotes.”

<sup>3</sup> Kingdon, 1984: 173.

*Policy Window#1: 2004*

On 2 April 2004, Hong Kong-based newspaper *Ming Pao* published an article with the headline “ON ORDER BY WEN JIABAO: NUJIANG DAM CONSTRUCTION HALTED.”<sup>4</sup> In this report, *Ming Pao* quoted a source in Beijing to announce that NDRC’s “Development Plans on Nujiang’s Cascade of 13 Dams” had been rejected by Wen Jiabao, and the plan had been put on hold. However, the news of Wen’s decision to halt the NRP actually came out on 18 February 2004. Filmmaker Gary Marcuse captured the moment in which Wang Yongchen got the news from her friend in the SEPA. (See chapter IV) At the time, it was only news for those inside the ENGO community. So somewhere between February and April, somebody from Beijing told *Ming Pao* reporter the story, and two months after the fact, *Ming Pao* “broke” the “news” on the suspension over NRP construction.

What exactly happened here? Back in February 2004, on the NDRC proposal for hydroelectricity development, Wen Jiabao wrote:

Large-scale hydroelectric power projects like this that cause great concern in society and involve different opinions from environmental protection circles should be carefully discussed and decided on scientifically.<sup>5</sup>

This was supposed to be a private comment from Wen Jiabao to the NDRC, intended for the consumption of internal government officials only. According to researchers Chan Kinman and Zhou Yan, even coming from the Premier himself, this comment could have been “objected by different government branches and eventually buried in pile of files within the bureaucracy.”<sup>6</sup> In other words, if someone inside the government had not leaked the information to the media, thereby cementing the view in the public’s mind, that Premier Wen showed

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<sup>4</sup> Central News Agency. “On order by Wen Jiabao: Nujiang dam construction halted,” 2 April 2004.

<sup>5</sup> Ni, Yanshuo. “Nujiang Hydro Project On Hold,” *Beijing Review*, 19 April 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Chan and Zhou, 2007: 21.

reservation, even opposition to the NRP, then, this comment from Wen could have easily become a “suggestion,” as opposed to a “directive.” In this way, the policy entrepreneurs seized the opportunity to enlarge Wen’s private attitude toward the NRP. Environmental activists turned Wen’s internal comment into a public stance, thereby making it an irrevocable command, at least temporarily. Since in China, as the saying goes: the emperor has no playful words (*jun wu xi yan*), meaning a country’s leader cannot afford to joke around with matters of the national affairs.

This instance demonstrates how policy entrepreneurs tied up the loose ends from all three streams, when a policy window presented itself. In fact, seizing any opportunity to publish stories of value is something of a practical norm in China. Since Chinese journalists understand that the political atmosphere, or “political weather,” could change any time; therefore they have learned that it is critical to capitalize on any available occasion to spread important information to the public.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, as a result of the media’s seizure of a rare chance to magnify government’s internal difference of opinion, Wen’s private comment “accidentally” became a shift in central government’s policy. Even when the order did not bring a clear-cut cancellation to the project, it at least delayed the project and denied the proponents of the legitimacy of construction. Moreover, it should be noted that by September 2003, China’s Propaganda Department had placed a media ban on coverage of all hydropower construction; even Wang Yongchen’s article for the *Southern Weekend* was edited to leave out anything on the hydropower plants, and news-oriented the article was moved to a less

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<sup>7</sup> Author’s Email correspondence with Zhang Kejia.

important geography section of the paper.<sup>8</sup> According to filmmaker Gary Marcuse, it was Wen's intervention that prompted national media coverage to take keen interest in the issue, thereby opening the dialogue around the debate between proponents and opponents of damming the Nujiang.<sup>9</sup>

### *Policy Window#2: 2009*

In 2009, the window opened again after a change in the political stream,<sup>10</sup> that is, a new problem arose for the national leaders when an unexpected disaster struck. When the magnitude-7.9 earthquake struck Sichuan in May 2008 that claimed close to 70,000 lives and left more than 5 million homeless, the second policy window represented itself. After the initial shock and sorrow for the quake victims gave way to investigation on the causes of the high death toll, seismic activity reports began to emerge. On the same day as the earthquake, a blogger, with a civil-engineering background, insinuated that TGP could be the possible cause of the deadly earthquake:

Theoretically, after a large reservoir is filled up with water, it would increase pressure onto portions of the earth crust. Couple that factor with the pressure from large-area of water seeping into the earth, it is possible to trigger an earthquake."<sup>11</sup>

Five days later, professor Liao Yongyan, of the college of fisheries at Guangdong Ocean University, posted an entry on his science blog, entitled "Did TGP have an affect on Sichuan earthquake?" Professor Liao explained that while the TGP is

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<sup>8</sup> *Waking the Green Tiger*.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>10</sup> Kingdon, 1984: 176.

<sup>11</sup> Xiong, Wanli. (2008) "Wenchuan earthquake and TGP," *Xiong Wanli's Timeline*, 12 May 2008, <http://www.l99.com/150759/blog/view/16011> Accessed 2012/4/17.

located too far away from the epicenter Wenchuan, the much closer, and recently complete Zipingpu dam had more suspicion.<sup>12</sup>

From Chinese domestic Internet forums to international newspapers, heated debate over whether the unusually strong earthquake was caused by human error, spread like wildfire. Western media outlets such as the British newspaper *Telegraph*,<sup>13</sup> American news agency *Associate Press*,<sup>14</sup> American newspaper *New York Times*,<sup>15</sup> and *Wall Street Journal*,<sup>16</sup> as well as American magazine *New Yorker*,<sup>17</sup> all covered the issue. Western media quoted Fan Xiao, the chief engineer of Sichuan Geology, and Lei Xinglin, of the China Earthquake Administration, to point out strong possibilities that the earthquake was triggered by the 320 million tons of water held in Zipingpu's reservoir. Meanwhile, China's official newspaper *Xinhua*<sup>18</sup> cited unnamed CAS member and Ji Shaocheng, a professor of geology in Canada, to refute the linkage between reservoirs and earthquakes.

Regardless of whether reservoirs could really trigger or escalate potential earthquakes, all the media buzz pointing at Chinese authorities' insisting on

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<sup>12</sup> Liao, Yongyan (2008) "Did TGP have effect on Wenchuan earthquake?" *Sciencenet*, 17 May 2008  
<http://blog.sciencenet.cn/home.php?mod=space&uid=3534&do=blog&id=25610> Accessed 2012/4/17.

<sup>13</sup> Moore, Malcolm. "Chinese earthquake may have been man-made, say scientists," *The Telegraph*, 2 February 2009.

<sup>14</sup> Zhang, Chichi. "Scientists say dam may have triggered China Quake," *Associated Press*, 5 January 2009.

<sup>15</sup> La Franiere, Sharon. "Possible Link Between Dam and China Quake," *New York Times*, 6 February 2009.

<sup>16</sup> Oster, Shai and Naik, Gautam. "Scientists Link China's Dam to Earthquake, Renewing Debate," *Wall Street Journal*, 6 February 2009.

<sup>17</sup> Osnos, Evan. "Letter from China: Early Warning," *New Yorker*, 6 February 2009.

<sup>18</sup> Wang, Cong. "'God's damnation' or China's dam - scientific debate on reservoir-quake link," *Xinhua*, 20 February 2009.

building dams at the expense of risking people's lives did not sit well with China's leadership. On 21 May 2009, Hong Kong-based newspaper *South China Morning Post's* published an article reminiscent of the one in April 2004. The headline read: "WEN JIABAO HALTED YUNNAN DAM ITEM," and announced that Wen had given orders the previous month to stop construction on the Nujiang.<sup>19</sup> Specifically addressing the Liuku hydropower station, which is the first site of the NRP to begin construction, Wen Jiabao reported said that given the project's "far-reaching impact," all of the relevant agencies must "widely heed opinions, expound on [the plan] thoroughly and make prudent decisions."<sup>20</sup>

Reading between the lines, it is not difficult to detect a relationship between the "far-reaching impact" comment by Wen, to the debate that reservoirs sitting on fault lines could potentially trigger earthquakes. Although there is no evidence suggesting any of the policy entrepreneurs, such as Wang and Zhang, had any involvement, or even orchestrated the media bomb that became the earthquake-reservoir mushroom cloud, media undeniably played a decisive role that led up to Wen Jiabao's decision. On the other hand, despite Yu Xiaogang's claim that given the emphasis on social stability, domestic pressure on China's authorities would work better than pressure coming from abroad; at least in the case of anti-NRP campaign, international organizations may have also contributed to the culmination that brought Wen to make the executive order to halt construction on the Nujiang.

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<sup>19</sup> South China Morning Post. "Wen Jiabao Halted Yunnan Dam Item," 21 May 2009.

<sup>20</sup> South China Morning Post. "Wen calls halt to Yunnan dam plan Premier orders further environmental checks," 21 May 2009.



*Unbearable Weight of Lightness: International Pressure*

International Rivers Network issued an open letter to Chinese President Hu Jintao during the Two Conferences in 2004, asking the Chinese authorities to cease all construction work within the World Heritage protected area.<sup>21</sup> Under the premises of Nujiang being an international river, and damming on the river could have adverse effects for downstream countries, the letter was signed by 76 organizations in 33 countries, pleading for consultation with the neighboring countries before construction, as well as for the publication of detailed plans on the construction.

Then in April 2006, UN World Heritage Conference sent a team of two on a monitoring mission to investigate the Nujiang area. Upon learning of their arrival, ENGOs sent the UN experts their own information, which the experts found drastically differed from those provided by local government's and what they found on site. Report from monitoring mission stated clearly, "there is much evidence of hydro development exploratory activities along the Nujiang River,"<sup>22</sup> and "existing mining operations within some of the inscribed properties also suggest the possibility of listing the property on the List of World Heritage in Danger."<sup>23</sup> Given the evidence of hydropower plant construction, mining, and Chinese government's proposal to re-zone the original Three Parallel Rivers area, the UNESCO mission team then recommended that China be requested to submit a comprehensive report to the World Heritage Conference by 1 February 2007,

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<sup>21</sup> Shen, Doris. (2004) "Nu Hujintao Letter," *International Rivers Network*, 4 March 2004  
[http://www.internationalrivers.org/files/nu\\_hujintao\\_letter.pdf](http://www.internationalrivers.org/files/nu_hujintao_letter.pdf) Accessed on 2010/5/10.

<sup>22</sup> Lopoukhine and Ramasamy, 2006: 10.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

so as to avoid the institution's reconsideration of the applicability of World Heritage Status.

In other words, the UNESCO mission team issued a warning to China, that violations such as dam-construction and mining within the protected areas could jeopardize Three Parallel Rivers' World Heritage Status; which would undoubtedly embarrass China in the international stage. Three months later, the UN World Heritage Conference concluded that the "Three Parallel Rivers world natural heritage is still under acute threat such as hydroelectricity and mining industry."<sup>24</sup> Pressure from the high prestige international organization was effective. The Yunnan provincial government was criticized by the central government in response, while China's Ministry of Construction made a public statement, promising, "China is a responsible country which will not recklessly destroy natural environment for the sake of short-term economic benefits."<sup>25</sup> To keep the pressure mounting, World Wildlife Fund (WWF) listed Nujiang as number one, of the top ten rivers at risk in 2007, citing the primary threat as the construction of dams.<sup>26</sup>

### Policy Outcome

The two policy windows produced the same result; both times Premier Wen Jiabao put a temporary halt on the NRP construction project, pending more scientific assessment. The importance of role that Wen Jiabao played in the anti-

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<sup>24</sup> Chan and Zhou, 2007: 14.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>26</sup> World Wildlife Fund. (2007) "World's Top 10 Rivers at Risk," WWF, 20 May 2007 [http://wwf.panda.org/what\\_we\\_do/how\\_we\\_work/policy/wwf\\_europe\\_environment/initiatives/freshwater/publications/?108620/Worlds-Top-10-Rivers-at-Risk](http://wwf.panda.org/what_we_do/how_we_work/policy/wwf_europe_environment/initiatives/freshwater/publications/?108620/Worlds-Top-10-Rivers-at-Risk) Accessed on 2012/4/15.

NRP is twofold. First, per Kingdon's argument, that the most powerful player in agenda setting is the president; in this case, Wen is *the* face of representative on China's domestic policies, so even though China now no longer practices the strongman leadership where one person makes all the calls, Wen still has considerable power within China's Politburo, the highest political body in the country. Wen's educational and political background in geology no doubt added to his supposed private reservation against building dams on areas of land so near the fault line. More over, the tragedy of Sichuan earthquake is unquestionably one of the nation's worst disasters in recent history; it would be unimaginable should a similar one were to strike the Nujiang area, due to the potential risks of large reservoirs triggering another massive earthquake. In fact, ever since the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, China's central government refrained from approving large hydropower projects for an entire year.<sup>27</sup>

However, despite the moratorium on construction, between February 2004 and April 2009, reporters from different news outlets repeatedly found evidence of construction.<sup>28</sup> On the one hand, local government officials reiterated that the project had not received formal approval from the central government; yet on the other, preparatory construction such as road-paving, relocation of migrants were already underway. This display of discrepancy between local and central government was understood in the context that, since hydropower plants are an inevitable, eventual reality, there is no harm in getting a head start. Of course, a

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<sup>27</sup> Xu, Donghuan. "Ecologists dread new dam boom," *Global Times*, 10 February 2011.

<sup>28</sup> Yin, Hongwei. (2004) "Nujiang construction began for the third time," *Nan Feng Chuang*, 22, pp. 57-58, 59. Lu, Bin. "Power Plants Secretly Began Construction, Nujiang Again under Threat," *Nanfang Daily*, 17 March 2008. Cao, Haidong and Tang, Yonglin. "MEP Battled Hydropower Giants for Five Years," *Southern Weekend*, 18 June 2009.

moratorium does not carry the same weight as outright reversal or termination of the project, but local ENGOs have their own counter strategy.

Green Watershed leader Yu Xiaogang developed a tactic of combining field-study and media. On the one hand, Yu's GW teams and fellow NGOs took the Nu villagers on fieldtrip to visit and document the impoverished lives of Manwan dam's migrants. The NGOs would then show the film to other affected Nu villagers, and ask them to decide their fate for themselves. After witnessing the powerful portrait of previous dam migrants picking through garbage as their only means of survival after relocation, many of the Nu villagers wept sympathetically, and overwhelmingly decided against making way for the proposed dams.<sup>29</sup> In another front of media-campaign tactic, GW teams would survey the proposed plant sites every year, document their findings, and tip off reporters during the media-concentrated time like the Two Conferences, to pressure the local government officials on their stance, thereby re-focus media attention on the issue.<sup>30</sup> Using the media lens to keep pressure on government officials is a way in which the activists keep those in power, as well as the public informed on the important issue. An example of this is at this year's CPPCC, Yunnan provincial party secretary Qin Guangrong publicly stated that there are currently no plans to develop hydroelectricity on the Nujiang.<sup>31</sup> Often times, the act of keeping the local government in check would force the process of policy-making back to the beginning, to the three streams.

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<sup>29</sup> *Waking the Green Tiger*.

<sup>30</sup> Author's interview with Yu Xiaogang.

<sup>31</sup> Li, Fang. "Representative Qin Guangrong: currently Nujiang is not developing any hydroelectric project," *China Economic Net*, 10 March 2012.

Another policy outcome is the change in the proposal of hydropower plants on the Nujiang. In 2003, the original NDRC proposal called for two reservoirs and a cascade of 13 dams on the Nujiang to be built. In January 2006, the plan had been revised: the number of dams was cut down to four.<sup>32</sup> News of this revised plan was leaked to Hong Kong-based *Wen Wei Po*, which stated in the article that the reduced plan could only be a preliminary plan to expedite the construction on less-controversial sites, though as aforementioned, local government's official stance is that there will be no hydropower construction until formal approval by the central government. From 2003 to today, after nine long years of debate and assessment, the NRP is still stuck in the process of policy-formation. As long as the media spotlight continues to shine on the issue, the NRP will likely remain indecisive, at least until a change of administration is due in 2013, where a shift in political stream could bring new possibilities for either side of the campaign.

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<sup>32</sup> Yardley, Jim. "China Proposes Fewer Dams in Power Project to Aid Environment," *New York Times*, 12 January 2006.

## Chapter VI – Conclusion

While rebellious journalists were not unheard of under China's censorship-plagued media atmosphere, environmental journalists in the anti-NRP campaign elevated their involvement from reporters to activists, and became journalists with clearly defined goals to influence public policy. What's more, the environmental journalists used media at their disposal to successfully generate a media storm that challenged a national policy directive, rallying enough popular outcry against hasty development at the expense of human and natural sacrifice, eventually forcing the central government to put the NRP on indefinite suspension. This display of unusual civil groups forcing the state to re-evaluate national policy is demonstrative of an ever-changing dynamics between China's state and society.

The success of anti-NRP campaign partially depended on the political atmosphere in which the Chinese central government championed the rise of environmental journalism, but the critical factor was the key environmental journalists' tenacity to keep the media spotlight on the anti-NRP issue for nearly a decade. While news reporting in general tends to have very short attention span, with each story's allotted media spotlight usually lasting between a day to a month, the fact that nine years after the initial media coverage, environmental journalists are still holding onto the fight is the primary cause of the campaign's longevity.

By turning their place of employment, the state-controlled news outlets, into channels through which to amplify cries for environmental protection, policy entrepreneurs provided legitimacy to their argument, since whatever they wrote was stamp approved by state propaganda machine that is the news outlet itself. They also stimulated other reporters working for market-driven news outlets to push the envelope even further, by showing that there is little political risk involved in taking the side against local government's interest. In the grander scheme of things, they helped to create an overall sense of China's strengthening civil society, in the form of the media actively participating, even aiming to influence public policy. In the end, I found that not only were the environmentalist journalists acutely aware that their tool of trade was their best weapon, and wielded their pen consciously for the cause, but their ENGOs counterparts also saw the power of media as their best allies.

Indeed, another factor of campaign's success is alliance formation among the different groups. The level of cooperation between NGOs and SEPA, media and activists, as well as Chinese and international agencies, demonstrated in the anti-NRP campaign was one of the most well organized cross-sectional coordination in the history of China's environmental activism. From mid-2003 onward, environmental journalists collaborated with SEPA and partnered with Yunnan's local NGOs on a three-pronged attack on the NRP. On the bureaucratic front, environmental journalists helped to arrange anti-dam scholars and experts to attend important environmental impact assessment meetings, and used their Green Reporters Salon network to cover these events in the mainstream and local media. On the local front, environmental

journalists worked with Yunnan-based anti-dam activists to get media coverage on the plight and voices of Nujiang residents, as well as the destitute reality of previous dam-migrants. On the nationalist front, environmental journalists played up the emphasis of Nujiang as one of the last un-perturbed “garden of Eden” in China and as part of the World Heritage Site; environmental journalists essentially equated any threat to that pristine region and world-acclaimed status with the loss of previous natural reserve and “face” for China as a nation. Indeed, environmental journalists found convincing tactical angles that attacked from all three levels, local, state, and international, to accomplish their goal.

As a veteran environmental activist who received the Goldman Environmental Prize in 2006<sup>1</sup> and the Ramon Magsaysay Award in 2009<sup>2</sup> for his work in environmental protection, Yu Xiaogang’s regularly grants interviews with domestic and international reporters to advance his agenda. One of such interviews came in a critical moment for the anti-NRP campaign. CCTV’s news program *Newsprobe* (*Xinwen Diaocha*) interviewed Yu Xiaogang and Nujiang prefecture pro-NRP officials in December 2003.<sup>3</sup> On the show, the local officials could not answer even the most basic questions regarding the Liuku construction. After this broadcast, the prefecture-level people’s congresses and political consultative conference meetings dropped the NRP from the meeting

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<sup>1</sup> Goldman Prize. (2006) “Prize Recipient Yu Xiaogang, 2006 Asia,” *The Goldman Environmental Prize*. <http://www.goldmanprize.org/2006/asia> Accessed on 2012/4/30.

<sup>2</sup> Magsaysay Awardees Resources Center. (2009) “Citation of Yu Xiaogang as Magsaysay Awardee for 2009,” *Magsaysay Awardees Digital Collection, Item #500*.

<http://www.rmaf.org.ph/madc/items/show/500> Accessed on 2012/4/30.

<sup>3</sup> Zeng, 2009: 196.



agenda.<sup>4</sup> In September 2004, Yu's interviewed with the *Southern Weekend* spun the NRP debate into another direction: villagers' rights: Yu promulgated Green Watershed's workshops that provided local Nujiang residents with the NRP related information, and empowering them to make their own informed decisions.<sup>5</sup>

Deftly using his elevated social status from the international awards to augment his sphere of influence in the media and to legitimize his work, Yu Xiaogang likened Green Watershed's media strategy to super dominoes effect. "We want the effect of the second falling domino to be twice as powerful as the first," said Yu. "So if I have ten dominoes, each falling domino's effects would grow exponentially; and we achieve that result through the media's ability to amplify our issues."<sup>6</sup> In other words, by applying media's power, an issue that occurred in obscure Chinese rural village could receive national, even international attention, subsequently generating discussion, and most importantly, pressure on the government to respond accordingly.<sup>7</sup>

The efficacy of Yu's clever stratagem is based on his consideration of the interconnectedness of socio-political power dynamics in China. Therefore, it is equally important to note that China's environmental journalists did not act in a vacuum. The political context in which the work of environmental journalists could be realized cannot be understated. The state's push for environmental

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<sup>4</sup> Mertha, 2008: 117-119.

<sup>5</sup> Liu, Jianqiang. "Advancing the Rationalization of Migrants Rights," (*Rang yimin weiquan gengjia lixing*) *Southern Weekend*, 29 September 2004

<sup>6</sup> Author's interview with Yu Xiaogang.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

consciousness set off with the Chinese Century Environmental Protection campaign (CCEP) in 1993, providing a supportive atmosphere for environmental journalists to publicize the importance of environmental protection. Moreover, having an active partnership with the government bureau State Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA), also helped to further boost the environmental journalists' dexterity and dominance over the campaign.

Former head of SEPA Qu Geping, who is known as the godfather of China's environmental activism, strategically brought in mass media as a means to keep local officials in check on environmental protection enforcement. "When officials were criticized by their superiors, they don't really care," Qu observed the difficulty in enforcing policy mandates by the central government. "But if they're criticized in the media, they will take action straight away, because people have seen them on the television news."<sup>8</sup> Therefore, by calculating the Chinese sentimentality into the formula, meaning seeing the effectiveness of shaming the local officials into accountability, SEPA was able to launch the beginning of environmental journalism. In a way, the environmental journalists could not have printed their anti-dam stories or radio programs without the consent of the state media outlets at which they were employed.

However, after CCP's Propaganda Department again issued a crackdown on all anti-dam coverage in 2005, some environmental journalists simply turned to other channels for information dissemination. One of the younger generations

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<sup>8</sup> *Waking the Green Tiger*.

of environmental journalists, Liu Jianqiang, confessed that he received orders to stop writing stories on hydropower issues, even though at the time he worked for the market-oriented newspaper *Southern Weekend*. After Liu's front-page story on the Tiger-Leaping Gorge dam that led to the cancellation of the project, his editor told him, point-blank, to stop writing on those "sensitive" stories anymore; and when Liu defied the direct order and continued to cover similar issues, he was fired from his job.<sup>9</sup> Although to the newspaper's credit, Liu was later reinstated back to his position when that editor left the post, and Liu has persisted with covering hydropower-related news stories even after leaving the *Southern Weekend* and becoming a writer for the web-based news outlet *China Dialogue*.

Of course, the anti-NRP campaign encountered bumps on the road. Proponents of NRP had their own set of media-savvy experts who launched attacks on the environmental journalists. Dam proponents found partnership with two famous pro-dam scholars, He Zuoxin and Fang Zhouzi. A physicist and member of Chinese Academy of Science, He Zuoxiu is known for his stance against paranormal claims and unscientific thinking. A biochemist with a doctorate from Michigan State, Fang Zhouzi is the founder and leader of California-based Xinyusi website. Fang made his reputation exposing plagiarism and corruption of Chinese academia, and he is known for criticizing Christianity and Falun Gong on his website.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Sun and Zhao, 2008: 154.

In January 2005, He Zuoxin's interview in the *Huanqiu (Globe)* magazine in which He criticized the view that humans should revere nature, sparked a debate on human-nature relationship. Wang Yongchen responded with her article "Revering Nature Is Not Anti-Science." No less than 31 articles were posted in the next three months on this debate.<sup>11</sup> From 3-7 April, proponents of NRP arranged 12-member visit to Nujiang, including He Zuoxin and Fang Zhouzi. While Zhang Boting, the vice secretary-general of the Chinese Society for Hydroelectric Engineering, accused opponents of NRP of impeding China's development and opportunity to alleviate poverty for local people.<sup>12</sup> In May, CCP's Propaganda Department ordered the media to stop publishing any negative reports on dam-construction, effectively censoring the media and ending anti-dam opposition's media campaign against the NRP.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, He Zuoxin and another CAS member petitioned top leaders Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao, to resume the NRP.<sup>14</sup> Yet in spite of the constant tug-of-war, and the pro-dam side having the advantage of support from local government and powerful hydropower company, the environmental journalists persevered through each assailment; it is their tenacity and resilience that helped them weather each storm. More importantly, the environmental journalists have inspired other campaigns and younger generation of activist journalists.

In addition to the aforementioned Yuanmingyuan Park case in 2005, the "26-degree Campaign" that canvassed businesses and hotels in Beijing to set the

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>13</sup> Chan and Zhou, 2007: 19. Yardley, Jim. "Seeking a Public Voice on China's 'Angry River,'" *New York Times*, 26 December 2005.

<sup>14</sup> Sun and Zhao, 2008: 155.

air-conditioning at 26-Celsius, became national news item, including special programming on CCTV and more than 20 mainstream media outlets in China.<sup>15</sup> The heightened media focus of the issue prompted China's State Council to formally pass the requirement of businesses setting air-conditioning during summertime at 26-Celsius or above, into law.<sup>16</sup> More recently, a young journalist Feng Jie of the *Southern Weekend* received the China Environmental Press Award for her exposé and four additional in-depth, follow-up coverage on the Bohai oil spill.<sup>17</sup>

#### *Eyes on the Prize: Future of Anti-NRP Campaign*

Now that China has entered its 12<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan, which has specifically called the construction of large-scale hydropower plants in Southwest of China,<sup>18</sup> for a total increase of 120 GW of hydroelectricity,<sup>19</sup> meaning the equivalent of nearly seven more large dams like the TGP. It is still unclear whether Nu River Project will be executed in the hands of the upcoming Xi-Li administration, but the NGOs are prepared to fight on.

Yu Xiaogang said that Green Watershed would like to take advantage of the June 2012 G20 Summit in Mexico, where the Mexican President is scheduled to make a speech on green growth. GW aims to push for discussions on the possibility of breaking the monopoly of China's hydropower companies. One

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<sup>15</sup> Lin, Yuanyuan and Cao, Qian. (2008) "Environmental NGO: Discovery and Interaction with Mainstream Media," (*Huanbao NGO: Tansuo yu zhuliu meiti hudong*) *Media Observer*, 9, pp. 39-40.

<sup>16</sup> Li, Li. "Green Heroes," *Beijing Review*, 12 January 2007.

<sup>17</sup> Liu, Yuan. "The 'Golden Era' of China's Environmental Journalists," *China Dialogue*, 12 April 2012.

<sup>18</sup> KPMG China. "China's 12<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan: Energy," KPMG Advisory, April 2011. Pg. 2.

<sup>19</sup> Casey, J. et al. "Backgrounder: China's 12<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan," US-China Economic & Security Review Commission, 24 June 2011. Pg. 11.

way to stop the building of large hydropower plants, said Yu, is to break the pattern of water rights monopoly. The introduction of small and medium-sized companies into the hydroelectricity development would increase the chances for medium-sized dams to replace large ones, which would have less dire adverse impact on the environment. Meanwhile, environmental journalist Zhang Kejia has now joined INGO Nature Conservancy<sup>20</sup> as the media coordinator. She is currently working on the campaign to stop the Little Nanhai Sea Hydropower Plant on the Yangtze River.

The original proposal of the NRP had planned to begin construction in September 2003 and the dams would become operational by 2007; however, thanks to the environmental journalists who kept the debate over the NRP under national limelight, the on-going NRP discussion has lasted more than nine years, and seems likely to outlive the Hu-Wen Administration. The overall process and outcome of the anti-NRP campaign is not only a demonstration of China's advancing environmental protection awareness, but more about China's civil prowess, specifically about China's move toward democratization.

As in environmental journalist Liu Jianqiang's words:

Now people are making an effort to protect their homeland. 30 years ago this would have been impossible. Back then the government would not have tolerated [protest against government directive]. Now the government's attitude towards people's rights is changing. This is encouraging.<sup>21</sup>

For future studies, I think it would be worthwhile to see to a final decision on the NRP, as well as to examine how and what lessons learned from the anti-NRP campaign help to contribute to the development of China's growing civil society.

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.tnc.org.cn/>

<sup>21</sup> *Waking the Green Tiger*.

## APPENDIX I Chronology of Events

- 1970s** Preliminary survey on Nujiang for hydropower plants began.
- 1980s** More thorough research was done in the 1980s, part of the of the “Nu River development plan of 1989,” which then in turn became the:
- 1991** “China Hydropower Photo and Figures Collection” report by the Hydroelectricity Bureau of the Department of Energy, calling for six hydropower stations in the Nu River valley with a total capacity of 10,900,000 megawatts, or 10 percent of China’s entire hydropower capacity.
- March 1994** China published the “China Agenda 21” white paper, laid out the official strategies for “sustainable development.”
- 1999** National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) decided to adopt the NRP for energy production purposes, and asked the Water Resources Hydropower Planning Institute to organize a bidding contest and decided on two planning units, the Beijing Survey and Design Institute and the Huadong Survey and Design Institute, to plan out the NRP. Their final design called for two reservoirs and thirteen dams.
- March 2003** 3/14 Huaneng Power International Inc. and Yunnan provincial government signed an intent agreement to jointly develop hydroelectric power in Yunnan, with Liuku as the first construction site.
- June 2003** 6/14 Yunnan Huadian Nujiang Hydroelectricity Development Corporation formed.
- Yunnan-based scholar He Daming held two meetings in Kunming, discussed issues regarding ecological impact from dam construction.
- July 2003** 7/3 UNESCO designated the Three Parallel Rivers as a World Natural Heritage Site.
- 7/18 First construction project on Liuku announced, construction to begin on 20 September 2003 and to be operational in 2007.
- August 2003** Proposal to build 2 reservoirs and 13 cascade dams sent to Nujiang Lisu Autonomous Prefecture of Yunnan Province and to National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) for review.

8/12-14, NDRC approved the NRP.

8/16 NDRC held meeting on the NRP proposal. SEPA official Mu Guangfeng refused to endorse the project due to the lack of impact assessment. Ma phoned China National Radio (CNR) environmental journalist Wang Yongchen during a break at this meeting, asking for contact info of experts

**September 2003** 9/1 Environmental Impact Assessment Law enacted, effective December 1<sup>st</sup>.

9/3 SEPA sponsored a private symposium (characterized as “internal discussion”) in Beijing, where 70 experts, 10 journalists attended. He Daming, professor of Asian International Rivers Center of Yunnan University, presented “Nu River Valley Hydropower Development and Ecological Environmental Protection Issue Expert Forum.” This event later became known as the “Firing of First Shot in the Battle to Protect the Nujiang.”

9/29 Yunnan provincial Environmental Protection Agency organized meeting of local experts, who expressed support for the NRP.

**October 2003** Yunnan contracted Beijing Survey and Designed Institute to issue an estimation of potential profits from the NRP: annual production value of ¥34 billion RMB, of which the central government would receive ¥8 billion in taxes, while local government’s tax revenues would increase by ¥2.7 billion, and Nujiang prefecture alone could receive an additional ¥1 billion in taxes. These numbers became the central talk point for proponents of the NRP.

10/1 Yu Xiaogang and Green Watershed began his own survey of the Nu River valley.

10/10 Yunnan provincial Environmental Protection Agency organized a second meeting of local experts, who all expressed support for the NRP.

10/14-19 SEPA sponsored another forum, experts from Beijing opposed while experts from Yunnan supported the NRP. The debate became confrontational and personal during the meeting.

10/20-21 Fourth experts meeting in Kunming was held to discuss the NRP. Local experts all supported the project; scholars from Beijing – Qinghua University and the Chinese



Academy of the Social Sciences – were critical of the project. Though there were differences in opinion, a consensus was reached on the urgent need to alleviate poverty for the local residents.

10/22-29 Xie Yi (Chairman of the Nujiang CPC committee) and Ou Zhiming (Governor of Nujiang Prefecture) went to Beijing to meet with officials from NDRC, SEPA, Ministry of Water Resources, Water Resources Planning Academy, Ministry of Transportation, and State Ethical Affairs Commission for their support of the NPR.

10/25 At the second meeting of the China Environmental and Cultural Promotion Society, Green Earth Volunteers (GEV) gathered 62 signatures across science, arts, journalism, and grassroots environmental protection fields, for a petition against the NRP, which was widely reported by the media.

**November 2003** Wang Yongchen's GEV and others successfully pushed for a NRP discussion at the Third Meeting of China and the United States Environment Forum in Beijing.

Activists from Green Earth Volunteers (GEV), Friends of Nature (FoN), Green Island, and Green Watershed (GW) went to Thailand to take part in the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Meeting of Dam-Affected People and Their Allies. At this event, more than 60 countries at the conference issued joint statement against the NRP (at the request of the Chinese ENGOS) and sent it to UNESCO, who replied that it's paying close attention to the NRP. In addition, more than 80 NGOs in Thailand sent a letter to the Chinese ambassador in Thailand on NRP

11/12 SEPA's team of six arrived in Nujiang for Environmental Impact Assessment, for the third time.

11/17 Tian Xia Xi Education Institute held a forum to educate the public on NRP.

**December 2003** Chongqing City NGO collected 15,000 signatures, petitioning against NRP.

**January 2004** 1/5 NRP passed the central government's Environmental Impact Assessment.

1/8-9 Five research and NGOs, including FoN and GW held forum in Beijing on economic, social, and ecological impact of NRP

**February 2004** 2/16-24 Opponents of NRP (20 journalists, activists, scholars) toured the Nujiang region.

2/18 Wang Yongchen received news via phone call, that Premier Wen Jiabao ordered suspension of the NRP.

**March 2004** 3/21-31 GEV put on a photo exhibition “Our Attachment to the Nujiang River” in Beijing, as well as a website version in both Mandarin Chinese and English. The ENGOs then took the photo exhibit to UNEP 5<sup>th</sup> Global Civil Society Forum (GCSF) in Jeju, South Korea to mobilize international support.

ENGOs submitted two reports to the NPC and CPPCC during the Two Conferences, calling for the protection of rivers and end of hydroelectricity development at the expense of environmental devastation.

International Rivers Network sent a joint petition letter, signed by 76 organizations in 33 countries, to Hu Jintao, pleading with China’s leadership to consult with neighboring countries before constructing dams on the Nujiang.

**April 2004** 4/2 *Ming Pao* leaked Premier Wen Jiabao’s internal comment on the suspension of NRP. Wen reportedly wrote: “Large hydroelectric dam plans like this that have aroused a high level of societal concern and disagreement from the environmental protection side should be carefully reviewed and decided upon scientifically.”

**June 2004** China River Network set up after a journalists’ salon, to coordinate anti-dam campaign: [www.chinarivers.ngo.cn](http://www.chinarivers.ngo.cn) Office at FoN, financed by 8 ENGOs

**August 2004** Construction on Liuku dam began.

8/10 SEPA launched the “Interim Measures for Administrative License Public Hearing system in Environmental Protection” which legalized public participation, legal demand for public involvement in environmental protection related projects.

**October 2004** International symposium sponsored by UN Development Program, World Bank, and NDRC spoke in favor of dam construction.

Protest of 90,000 peasants in Sichuan clashed with police over resettlement issues – insufficient compensation for displacement. Martial law imposed to restore order.

- November 2004** 11/13 Pro-dam failed at the NDRC-directed “Inspection Meeting on Planning and Assessment of Nujiang Area” due to SEPA’s insistence on environmental concerns. However, it is understood that after a revised version of the EIA report is submitted, NDRC would formally give it the green light.
- January 2005** He Zuoxin’s interview in the *Huanqiu (Globe)* magazine in which He criticized the view that humans should revere nature, sparked a debate on human-nature relationship. Wang Yongchen responded with her article “Revering Nature Is Not Anti-Science.” No less than 31 articles were posted in the next 3 months on this debate.
- April 2005** 4/3-7 proponents of NRP arranged 12-member visit to Nujiang, including He Zuoxin and Fang Zhouzi. This is the beginning of coalition between Yunnan provincial government, hydropower interest, and influential scholars.
- May 2005** CCP’s Propaganda Department ordered media not to have any negative reports on dam-construction.
- He Zuoxin and another CAS member petitioned Hu & Wen to resume the NRP.
- July 2005** Wen Jiabao went on a study trip to Yunnan and ordered to speed up researches and to present conclusions as soon as possible.
- August 2005** 62 NGOs and 300 state-level researchers, scientists, and environmentalist celebrities petitioned the central government to disclose NRP impact assessment report to the public before making a final decision, calling for democratic decision-making on hydropower development.
- November 2005** SEPA invited public to comment on “Measures of Facilitating Public Participation in Environmental Impact Assessment.”

China Society for Hydropower Engineering’s Deputy Secretary General Zhang Boting told media, that the EIA report had been approved by SEPA, and was on its way to State Council. The revised proposal was now four dams instead of 13; though it was not a reduction of plans, rather, it was a by-degree proposal as a way to “get the foot in the door.”

Late 2005 to early 2006, GEV conducted field survey in the Nujiang region, subsequently published research “Report on Nujiang Migrants Study,” which proved that local villagers weren’t adequately informed on the NRP or the resettlement plans. GEV also produced documentary *Silent Nujiang*.

- January 2006** NDRC proposed a revised plan that reduced the number of hydropower plants to four, instead of the original 13.
- March 2006** 3/18 “Interim Measure of Public Participation in Environmental Impact Assessment” became effective. ENGOs issued legal request to SEPA, demanding EIA information on NRP.
- 3/30 SEPA replied that it would comply according to the “Interim Measures.”
- April 2006** UN World Heritage Conference sent experts to investigate the Nuijiang area. ENGOs sent the experts their own information, which the experts found drastically differed from those provided by local government’s and what they found on-site.
- June 2006** 6/5 SEPA Director announced there will be “big adjustments” to NRP, though without further explanations.
- 6/21 Environmentalists sued SEPA to pressure the publication of adjusted NRP plans.
- July 2006** UN World Heritage Conference concluded that the “Three Parallel Rivers world natural heritage is still under acute threat such as hydroelectricity and mining industry.” Yunnan was criticized by the central government in response, while China’s Ministry of Construction made a public statement, promising that “China is a responsible country which will not recklessly destroy natural environment for the sake of short-term economic benefits.”
- March 2007** WWF listed Nuijiang as number one of the world’s top ten rivers at risk, and identified dam-construction as its primary threat.
- February 2008** 2/14 According to *Nan Fang Du Shi Bao*, first site of NRP – Liuku – already began construction on the dam embankment.
- March 2008** Wang Jirong, a member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) and former deputy minister of the State Environmental Protection Administration (SEPA), submitted a report during the Two Conferences, calling to end construction in Liuku for the protection of World Heritage site.
- April 2009** Premier Wen Jiabao issued NRP suspension.

- May 2009** 5/21 *South China Morning Post* published an article announcing Premier Wen Jiabao had ordered the NRP be suspended a second time.
- September 2010** Nujiang Prefecture official proposed to make Nujiang's hydroelectricity development a top priority for the 12<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan.
- November 2010** 11/30 Deputy General Secretary of the China Electricity Council, Ouyang Changyu, announced the completion of "Electricity Industry Planning and Research Report for the 12<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan," and upon approval from the central government agencies, China would begin development Nujiang and five other locations in Yunnan as the basis of hydroelectricity development.
- January 2011** 1/30 Shi Lishan, the deputy director of new energy at the National Energy Administration claimed NRP would definitely go ahead in the 12<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan.
- February 2011** After a field survey to the Nujiang region, two senior researchers (both in their late 70s) Sun Wenpeng, of Institute for Geological Research in Beijing, and Xu Daoyi, of Geological Institute under the Chinese Seismological Bureau, submitted report to central government, suggesting that the Nujiang fault is still very active, therefore advise against building large hydropower dams on the fragile geological environment.
- March 2012** 3/10 At the CPPCC, Yunnan provincial party secretary QinGuangrong publicly stated that there are currently no plan to develop hydroelectricity on the Nujiang.

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