Editorial

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In his 2006 book on environmental politics in Taiwan and China, Robert P. Weller contends that traditional Chinese culture does not contain the idea of Nature as an external object that stands against human intention. The Confucian ideal of anthropocosmic harmony and Buddhist doctrines of karma and reincarnation do not impose a rigid separation between human beings and their surroundings. The emergence of popular awareness of environmental degradation and anti-pollution protests, in Taiwan in the 1980s and China in the 1990s, was thus no less than a rude awakening in which these two societies finally "discovered" a new concept of nature. (1)

Discovery can be traumatic, especially when newly gained knowledge exposes one's ignorance. Ideally, awareness of the negative consequences of the headlong pursuit of industrial development and economic wealth should be accompanied by a concomitant institutional reform that reprioritises environmental concerns through strengthened administration, greater legal regulation, and educational efforts to change popular attitudes. These things are always easier said than done, however. The chief difficulty in translating the theory of environmental protection into practice consists of the fact that powerful interests, be they state officials or business owners, are so embedded in the existing economic structure that even an ameliorative attempt to modify their profit-making behaviours is bound to encounter backlash. The growing popularity of the notion of "environmental justice" indicates that ecological destruction tends to disproportionately affect underprivileged sectors; yet when facing the dismal prospect of livelihood expropriation or lethal pollution, the disadvantaged are capable of mobilising unusual patterns of rebellion to safeguard their endangered ways of life. The social clashes between these two forces as well as their political ramifications comprise the theme of this special issue.

An *Economist* article in August 2013 warned that China is approaching an "environmental turning-point": either China mobilises to address its urban smog and water shortages as seriously as the United States and Japan did in the 1970s, or it comes to accept the poisoned and polluted character of its hard-won economic progress. (2) Given its thematic importance, it is no surprise that research on China's environmental future has attracted special-issue attention in China-focused academic journals such as *Journal of Contemporary China* (3) and *China Quarterly*. (4) The articles in this issue share the same intellectual concern; by focusing on popular responses to pollution and their social and political ramifications, the articles provide a glimpse of a dynamic that has the potential to reshape the basic contours of Taiwanese and Chinese societies.

Taiwan's development since the beginning of the twentieth century has followed a different path from that of China. During the colonial period (1895-1945), the Japanese built infrastructural facilities, an administrative framework, and public hygiene at a time when China was still torn by incessant turmoil between warlords. When the Chinese heartland was ravaged by the Second World War, Taiwan underwent a rapid process of industrialisation that laid the foundation for a post-war economic take-off. After a chaotic and traumatic interregnum, the Kuomintang government began to liberalise the statist economy and encourage export in 1960, whereas the Chinese Communists embarked on economic reform in 1978 after the disastrous Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Mounting popular protests forced the Kuomintang government to lift martial law in 1987, while China's pro-democracy movement was ruthlessly crushed in the tragic Tiananmen massacre of 1989.

Taiwan's environmental movement was cast in the crucible of political transition in the mid-1980s. The emergence of grassroots anti-pollution protests made public the hitherto suppressed discontent under authoritarianism and hastened the loosening of political control. Later on, riding the wave of democratisation, environmentalism became a potent force as officials were obliged to beef up governmental efforts in environmental protection and the opposition parties were willing to adopt pro-environment campaign platforms. Two power turnovers over the past three decades resulted in Taiwan being alternately ruled by different ideologies. Nevertheless, environmentalism remained robust and vibrant and continued to challenge the government's pro-business orientation. (5)

In this issue, we have chosen to put the Taiwanese case into perspective with a current affairs piece that sheds light on the environmental movement in China. China's environmentalism appeared to have emerged on the eve of the twenty-first century. Citizens mobilised to protest the installation of harmful facilities in the coastal cities of Dalian, Xiamen, and Guangzhou, and their successful campaigns raised an expectation of middle-class activism. In the south-western province of Yunnan, a hydropower project prompted a concerted effort among conservationists whose activism aroused greater attention than the Three Gorge Dam debate in the early 1990s. In the resource-rich hinterlands of Inner Mongolia and Xinjiang, the fast-growing extractive economy threatened the livelihood of villagers and ethnic minorities who felt compelled to engage in violent behaviour for self-protection. In short, environmental problems and the ensuing social conflicts have questioned the manageability of an authoritarian capitalism – a situation very similar to Taiwan in the mid-1980s. Will popular demand for a safer environment coalesce into a political force that challenges communist domination? Are Chinese environmental activists the vanguards of a nascent civil society capable of carving out an autonomous space? And

1. Robert P. Weller, *Discovering Nature: Globalization and Environmental Culture in China and Taiwan*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006.
2. "The East is Grey," *The Economist*, 10 August 2013, www.economist.com/news/briefing/21583245-china-worlds-worst-polluter-largest-investor-green-energy-its-rise-will-have (accessed on 27 August 2014).
3. *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 19, No. 63 (2010).
4. *China Quarterly*, Vol. 214 (2013).
5. For the development of Taiwan's environmentalism, see Chun-Chieh Chi, "Growth with Pollution: Unsustainable Development in Taiwan and its Consequence," *Studies in Comparative International Development*, Vol. 29, No. 2 1994, pp. 23-47; Ming-sho Ho and Feng-san, "Control by Containment: Politics of Institutionalizing Pollution Disputes in Taiwan," *Environment and Planning (A)*, Vol. 40, No. 10, 2008, p. 2402-2418; Ming-sho Ho, "Environmental Movement in Democratizing Taiwan (1980-2004): A Political Opportunity Structure Perspective," in *East Asian Social Movements*, Jeffrey Broadbent and Vickie Brockman (eds), New York, Springer, 2011, pp. 283-314; Michael Hsin-huang Hsiao, "Environmental Movements in Taiwan," in *Asia's Environmental Movements*, Yok-Shiu Lee and Alvin So (ed.), New York, M. E. Sharpe, 1999, pp. 31-54; Paul Jobin, "Hazards and Protest in the 'Green Silicon Island': The Struggle for Visibility of Industrial Hazards in Contemporary Taiwan," *China Perspectives*, No. 2010/3, pp. 46-62.

most importantly of all, will these visible demonstrations of popular discontent lead to a better style of governance that can secure sustainability for the Chinese people?

It is tempting to extrapolate the future evolution of China's environmentalism on the earlier Taiwanese trajectory. Indeed some China observers speculated a scenario of China's future democratisation on the basis of Taiwan's path. [6] Nevertheless, the sheer complexity and the size of China's environmental issues frustrate such facile prediction. First, deprived of an international connection, Taiwan's environmentalism was largely a domestic product, whereas China's environmental NGOs have received international attention and support ever since their founding in the early 1990s. Moreover, once China became the world's number one greenhouse gas emitter in 2006, its environmental policy-making had to take international pressure into consideration. Secondly, although the Chinese Communist Party has attempted to maintain tight political control, it has had to tolerate an inevitable degree of fragmentation in governance due to the country's vast size and huge population. As has been observed, environmental NGOs have managed to exert their influence by taking advantage of the incoherence and even the contradictions among different official agencies, further blurring the distinction between the state and civil society. [7] Thus, it is less likely for China's environmental movement to play the unambiguous role of a democracy-making force as it did in Czechoslovakia, [8] Poland, [9] and South Korea [10] as well as in Taiwan. [11]

Therefore, before embarking on a "huge comparison" in the style of the late Charles Tilly, it is better to start with in-depth cases. This special feature brings together two research articles and one current affairs article that examine grassroots responses to industrial pollution. Compared with other environmental issues, such as climate change and ecological conservation, pollution appears more explosive and easily politicised as it involves a conflictual entanglement among businesses, victims, and officials. Hua-mei Chiu's article analyses the evolution of protests against high-tech industry pollution in Taiwan. The microelectronics industry was often hailed as one of Taiwan's economic success stories in industrial upgrading, while its environmental toll was largely ignored. Chiu describes how activists applied the frame of environmental justice to their campaigns against the further expansion of science industry parks as they began to encroach upon farmland and water resources. While the microelectronic industry's environmental impacts were hidden by its beguiling "smokestack-less" image, the petrochemical industry remained one of the classical high-polluting industries par excellence due to its intensive demand for water, energy, and land as well as its emission of greenhouse gases and air-and-water-borne pollutants.

The other two articles deal with the social consequences of petrochemical development. Ming-sho Ho's paper offers a historical survey of Taiwan's protests against naphtha crackers – a key upstream operation in the petrochemical industry from their emergence in the mid-1990s up to the present. Three decades of anti-petrochemical protests witnessed the transition from one-party authoritarianism to democracy, hence the environmental movement's assumption of diverse contours at different stages. It is observed that environmental NGOs became increasingly resourceful and autonomous just as popular awareness of environmental quality was on the rise.

The co-authored piece by Kingsyhon Lee and Ming-sho Ho in the current affairs section pays particular attention to protests in spring 2014 in Maoming, Guangdong Province. The violent protests as well as the coercive crackdown by local authorities cast a shadow over optimistic expectations that a string of successful anti-PX (paraxylene) movements in Xiamen, Dalian, and Ningbo might have ushered in a mature form of environmentalism. This article argues that local conditions such as the weakness of the independent middle class in a less developed town, pre-existing petroleum production, and lack of media attention due to the city's remoteness made Maoming more of an anomaly than part of a regular pattern. Nevertheless, the movement's unfortunate denouement hints at the necessary resources and conditions for genuine environmentalism to flourish in the context of contemporary China.

6. For example, see Dorothy Solinger, "The Nexus of Democratization: *Guanxi* and Governance in Taiwan and the PRC," Paper for the Center for the Study of Democracy, University of California Irvine, 2006.
7. Anthony Spires, "Contingent Symbiosis and Civil Society in an Authoritarian State: Understanding the Survival of China's Grassroots NGOs," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 117, No. 1, pp. 1-45; Yanfei Sun and Dingxin Zhao, "Environmental Campaigns," in *Popular Protest in China*, Kevin J. O'Brien (ed.), Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2008, pp. 144-162.
8. Thomas E. Shriver and Alison E. Adams, "Cycles of Repression and Tactical Innovation: The Evolution of Environmental Dissidence in Communist Czechoslovakia," *Sociological Quarterly*, Vol. 51, 2010, pp. 329-354.
9. Barbara Hick, *Environmental Politics in Poland: A Social Movement Between Regime and Opposition*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1996.
10. Norman Eder, *Poisoned Prosperity: Development, Modernization, and the Environment in South Korea*, New York, M. E. Sharpe, 1996.
11. Michael Hsin-huang Hsiao and Ming-sho Ho, "Civil Society and Democracy-Making in Taiwan: Reexamining the Link," in *East Asia's New Democracies: Deepening, Reversal, and Non-liberal Alternatives*, Yin-wah Chu and Siu-lun Wong (eds), London, Routledge, 2010, pp. 43-64.