

*When Authoritarianism Responds: Conditional Government Responsiveness in China's Environmental Conflicts**

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Abstract

Nongovernmental stakeholders are sometimes able to change policy outcomes under certain conditions in environmental conflicts in China, a circumstance contradictory to the theory of the policy process in authoritarian regimes that we describe as conditional government responsiveness. By applying qualitative comparative analysis (QCA), this article suggests stakeholders can use the same mechanisms to signal their preferences as in democracy. Nevertheless, as government accountability is upward under China's regional decentralized authoritarian (RDA) regime, policy change as a kind of government responsiveness is conditional, which distinguishes China from a democracy or a typical politically closed authoritarian state.

The theory of political survival suggests that the fundamental reason authoritarian regimes tend to respond less to social preferences in

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comparison to democracies is because political leaders in the former rely only on a small group of elites to remain in power, while in the latter a ruling party should receive support from no less than half of the voters. The policy process in authoritarian regimes is thus more exclusive than in democratic settings.¹ From this point of view, China appears to be a puzzle. On the one hand, corresponding with Nathan's argument, "overly centralized policy making" is an institutional defect in authoritarianism;² China's policy process in general remains a game of elites. On the other hand, government responsiveness in China is substantial; the performance is impressive even when compared with some democracies.³ China's government responsiveness is best described as a conditional responsiveness, standing between the circumstances outlined in the literatures in authoritarian and democratic regimes.

The dominant paradigm in China's policy process, known as fragmented authoritarianism (FA), cannot well explain the phenomenon of conditional government responsiveness, while the efforts to adapt recent changes in China's policy process suffer shortcomings in methodology. The purposes of this article are both explanatory and exploratory. First, conditional government responsiveness is considered as an outcome jointly determined by a set of conditions in qualitative comparative analysis (QCA)—this methodology would help us understand why two very similar environmental conflicts would have different policy outcomes, a question not well addressed in previous studies. The second purpose is to understand the uniqueness of China's policy process by comparing the mechanisms we found in QCA with those derived from the democratic system as a benchmark.

In summary, at least in the environmental conflict cases examined in this article, we found the mechanisms by which stakeholders influence government decisions are identical to those used in democratic regimes. However, these mechanisms are not institutionalized, generating two features distinguishing China's policy-making process from that in democracy. First, when stakeholders decide to take action to defend their interests, each environmental conflict is unique because there is no standard procedure in political participation for them to follow. Second, only those stakeholders in environmental conflicts who can signal their preferences strongly enough to trigger a "fire alarm" (e.g., launch a large-scale environmental protest) are effective. Then, a concern about regime instability prompts the local government to address social discontent. Below, we first briefly review previous studies on China's policy process.

We then discuss the research design, paying specific attention to the appropriateness of QCA. Finally, we compare the idea of conditional government responsiveness derived from the case of China with policy change in democracy, before reaching the conclusion.

1. Policy Making in China and Conditional Government Responsiveness

The understanding of China's policy process after the market reform is largely based on the FA model developed by Lieberthal and Oksenberg, constructed of three closely related components:⁴ (1) a fragmented structure of authority, (2) consensus building, and (3) a diffuse policy process. For the FA model, the policy process since the Deng era is no longer determined by the will of a few top party leaders; rather, the central power structure has become fragmented. Because bureaucracies from various disciplines now have a say, policy must be made based on multi-party negotiations to balance the conflicts from contradictory opinions and interests. The process is known as consensus building and is usually very time-consuming. Although the FA model recognized China as deviating from the "one man rule," the policy process continues to be considered an elite game in which ordinary people carry no weight.⁵ This assumption nevertheless contradicts empirical evidence, as an increasing number of cases (especially in environmental conflicts) are observed in which nongovernmental stakeholders can challenge government decisions under certain circumstances. The FA model leaves no room for conditional government responsiveness.

Two efforts have been made to adapt to recent changes in China's policy making process. The first stream of studies focuses on actors outside the government. Students of Chinese politics are interested in who they are and why their opinions matter in government decisions. For example, Zhu's studies on think tanks greatly pushed forward understandings on how expert involvement takes place in China,⁶ while Zhang made a relatively conservative judgment on nongovernmental organizations' (NGOs) capability in policy advocacy and suggested China would continuously follow the corporatist model instead of the pluralist model.⁷ Regarding to the realm of environmental policy, Mertha, in his detailed case study of the Nu River (怒江) Dam projects, showed that the FA model was updated to a 2.0 version by introducing the concept of policy entrepreneur from the mainstream public policy literature, and he further

argued that “the rules of the policy-making process are still captured by the fragmented authoritarianism framework, but the process has become increasingly pluralized.”⁸ Teets’s recent study explained how environmental NGOs used the policy network in policy advocacy.⁹ Although lacking means such as election or a standard public participation procedure allowing people to show their preferences, any NGOs that intend to obtain legal status in China must have a supervisory agency, which is usually the public sector. The original intention of such regulation was to control NGOs’ autonomy, but this institutional setting generated some unintended consequences: it opened the door for NGOs to reach the government. NGOs were then able to transfer their ideas and knowledge to their supervisory agencies and further to other policy makers through the agencies’ personal connection networks. Moreover, if policy makers need these ideas and knowledge, or if they match the policy makers’ preferences, policy changes can be induced. Protest appears as an alternative mechanism. As observed by Cai, the local government would make a concession, such as setting aside a controversial government policy when the number of protesters is sufficiently large.¹⁰ Yang even claimed that environmental protest has a greater chance of achieving a protest outcome in comparison to other issues.¹¹ Although findings are inspiring, most studies in this stream draw conclusions from a single positive case, or multiple cases are applied but the analysis is not based on configurational thinking, which according to Ragin can be described as “combinations of causes dovetails with a focus on ‘how’ things happen,” an epistemology derived from INUS theory.¹² They are unable to explain cases sharing similar features with the positive case but with a negative outcome. For example, why do two cases both involve social protest but have different policy outcomes? The above scenario is not an assumption, but a situation frequently observed in reality.

The second stream of studies considered the same question in a different manner: they regarded the government, not outside actors, as the main reason for policy change. In general, this stream of studies described the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as consultative authoritarianism and argued that, as Chinese society diversifies, the party knows it needs to adapt to such changes with a more open policy-making process. Various experiments in public opinion input, such as public hearings, participatory budgeting, and even popular elections of village leaders at the local level, have been made in the past decade: “They represent different ways of channeling public opinion and political

energy into the political decision-making process without abandoning the principle of the CCP's monopoly on political power."¹³ Empirical evidence suggests that "give people a voice" can improve satisfaction with the regime and feelings of government responsiveness, although limited to less educated and politically excluded citizens.¹⁴ But these public opinion input mechanisms do not receive institutionalization, which deviates them from normal practice in local policy making, as seen in many environmental conflicts in China. A more common case is the government making decisions secretly but quickly receiving pushback from stakeholders because of a fear of health hazards in the form of protests after exposure by the media;¹⁵ and in some cases, the policy outcome was changed. The idea of consultative authoritarianism is not helpful in explaining why environmental conflicts succeed or fail to induce policy change because conceptually they are two different types of policy making.

Previous studies of China's policy process have suggested that a different interpretation on policy change should be applied according to China's authoritarian settings. Policy change happens when the status quo of a policy subsystem is broken; the policy subsystem will be stable again when a new power equilibrium is reached between different stakeholders.¹⁶ The magnitude of policy change according to Baumgartner and Jones is a process of "punctuated equilibrium."¹⁷ As "a key characteristic of democracy is the continued responsiveness of the government to the preferences of the people,"¹⁸ policy change has a close relationship with government responsiveness in democracy. On one hand, stakeholders can show their preferences in institutional channels (e.g., voting, deliberation, and demonstration); on the other hand, any ruling parties will likely lose reelection if they continuously turn a blind eye to public opinion.¹⁹ We can observe that local governments sometimes need to make compromises when social grievances are high in environmental conflicts in order to protect regime legitimacy. Authoritarian settings institutionally prevent nongovernmental stakeholders from shaping the rules of the game in policy making. Policy change thus means something different in China; it is not law-based competition open to all stakeholders to achieve a new power equilibrium but closer to what Heilmann and Perry described as government strategic adaptation to overcoming difficulties in the status quo;²⁰ we conceptualize this type of policy change as conditional government responsiveness that is sensitive to social preferences, but responsiveness is not rule bound and subject to

discretion in this article. In short, conditional government responsiveness depends on two interrelated processes. First, market reform opens the space for different social sectors in China to voice their preferences despite institutional constraints. And if the signals are strong enough, local government would notice even institutional participation is absent in the policy process. The QCA method used in this article helps us to find out under which set of conditions conditional government responsiveness is more likely to happen. The second process is a temporal response from local government as described in studies of contentious politics in China—it needs to decide whether concessions should be made in environmental conflicts.

2. Research Design

The analysis is based on 25 environmental conflicts occurring between 2003 and 2015 in China collected from media reports. We focus on policy changes in environmental conflicts they represent a relatively transparent policy realm in comparison with others (e.g., foreign policy or economic policy). As environmental protests and policy advocacy have been ongoing in recent years, we have a better opportunity to observe the interaction between the local government and nongovernmental actors in environmental conflicts. The number of environmental conflicts is certainly much greater than those contained in our dataset. Nevertheless, most cases in media reports lack detail and contain only location and time. We can hardly know the outcome, let alone trace the whole process to understand how the incidents began and ended. After careful examination, we maintained the 25 cases with detailed information that include some well-known environmental conflicts such as Nu River (怒江) and the Anti-P-Xylene (PX) Protest in Xiamen (廈門) as well as cases with similar features but different outcomes. Because QCA follows the same logic as in the most similar design in causal inference,²¹ even if the cases in our dataset are not representative, they are especially suitable for answering the research questions raised in the introduction. In summary, 14 of 25 cases are caused by resistance to either a PX chemical plant or a waste incineration plant. They refer to the two most common types of environmental conflicts in China, and nongovernmental stakeholders succeeded in changing government decisions in 16 of the 25 cases.

Table 1: Case Summary

Case	Outcome	Type
Qidong (啓東)	Success	Other
Jiangmen (江門)	Success	Other
Ningbo (寧波)	Success	PX
Panyu (番禺)	Success	WI
Hangzhou (杭州)	Success	WI
Jinshan (金山)	Success	PX
Shifang (什坊)	Success	Other
Binhai (濱海)	Success	Other
Xiamen (廈門)	Success	PX
Nu River (怒江)	Success	Other
Liulitun (六里屯)	Success	WI
Asuwei (阿蘇衛)	Success	WI
Nangong (南宮)	Success	WI
Qinhuangdao (秦皇島)	Success	WI
Xiaonanhai (小南海)	Success	Other
Pingjiang (彭州)	Success	Other
Shangrao (上饒)	Fail	Other
LCD (深圳LCD)	Fail	Other
Dalin (大連)	Fail	PX
Anning (安寧)	Fail	PX
Maoming (茂名)	Fail	PX
Putian (莆田)	Fail	Other
Heyuan (河源)	Fail	Other
Pengzhou (平江)	Fail	PX
Bolu (博羅)	Fail	WI

Note: “PX” refers to a p-Xylene chemical plant. “WI” refers to a waste incineration plant. Cases are named for the locations where the environmental conflicts occur—except for Asuwei, Liulitun, Nangong, Jinshan, Binhai, LCD, and Xiaonanhai, which are named for the program there. “Other” in project type includes nuclear power, thermal power, hydropower, etc.

Source: Author.

The technique we used for the analysis is QCA, whose methodological foundation in casual inference is based on INUS theory. In INUS theory, if a condition is among those causing an outcome, it is known as

an INUS condition which is “an insufficient but necessary part of a condition which is itself unnecessary but sufficient for an outcome.”²² A widely used example to illustrate the above idea is the relationship between a short circuit and a fire. Suppose a short circuit was found as the cause of a fire. Can we say the short circuit is a necessary condition or sufficient condition for the fire? The answer is no because a short circuit can be replaced by other sources such as a gas leak. Even if a short circuit occurs, a fire would not break out if sprinklers were present or if flammable material were not in the area. A short circuit therefore is neither a necessary condition nor a sufficient condition but an indispensable part of the cause. The goal of QCA is “to identify such causal paths, that is, groupings of conditions or events that are difference makers to an outcome.”²³

QCA is appropriate for the purposes of this article for two reasons. First, our cases form a small-*N* dataset. Regression is unsuitable because case numbers are below the normal threshold (more than 30 observations) found in quantitative analysis, which would likely cause biases in the estimation. Moreover, a qualitative method has advantages in identifying the mechanism behind a social phenomenon in comparison with quantitative method.²⁴ Second, as the mechanism by which nongovernmental stakeholders can change policy outcome in China remains no consensus, it is arbitrary to claim that the happening of conditional government responsiveness is determined by a single factor or a single mechanism. QCA is a suitable method for revealing alternative mechanisms.

Finally, we provide different QCA results even though our dataset more or less overlaps with cases used in some previous studies that also applied QCA to study policy change in environmental conflicts; we either include an extra mechanism or have a different understanding of the meaning of policy change. For example, a shortcoming in the recent research of Li et al. is that they regarded protest as the only mechanism for triggering policy change in environmental conflicts, but this consideration is incomplete because empirical cases have illustrated the importance of policy entrepreneurs.²⁵ By contrast, Tang includes both protest and policy advocacy as mechanisms, but here policy change has a different meaning and is not equal to a change in a government decision on a specific project (which is the common practice in coding positive outcome in environmental conflicts) but refers to a long-term and institutionalized adjustment in the policy process.²⁶ A protest or policy advocacy can fail to stop an environmental pollution project but can still

successfully induce institutional change. This differentiation in outcomes is somewhat problematic. Because in China the local government has discretion in law implementation, an existing institution does not imply a credible commitment. For example, theoretically, public participation is necessary before launching a project, according to the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) law.²⁷ In her study, Tang argued that a case drawn from Shanghai in 2007 generated a policy change in local “Opinion on EIA Public Participation (Trial) and three other notices concerning EIA management.”²⁸ Ironically, in the Jinshan (金山) case also drawn from Shanghai in 2015 in our dataset, public participation was offered only after an anti-PX protest broke out.²⁹ We chose to follow the common practice in most of the existing literature regarding if the government revises its decision on a specific project as observing conditional government responsiveness happened, rather than focus on long-term institutional development to avoid generating unreliable interpretation.

3. Defining the Outcome and Conditions in Environmental Conflicts

The first step in QCA is to set up a truth table. A truth table is a description of the combinations of conditions, known as configurations. The number of configurations is the number of conditions considered, with 2 as the base. The rule for determining the number of conditions is the same as in a normal case study: increase the power of explanation as much as possible while maintaining a succinct explanation. To maintain a parsimonious and easily interpretable configuration, we include only four conditions (the scale of the social protest, the involvement of policy advocacy, the local economic condition, and the location of the environmental conflict) in the analysis in this article, so theoretically we have 2^4 configurations. The reasons for the selection are outlined before moving to the calibration in coding.³⁰

Because social protest and policy advocacy are the two essential mechanisms triggering policy change in China, they must be included. Previous studies also have included the form of protest (e.g., whether it involves violence). We do not because violence in environmental protests is uncommon; the power of a protest is likely determined not by the extent of violence but by the number of participants.³¹ Project stage and the position of the central government are two conditions commonly added to the analysis. We agree with previous studies that these conditions place constraints on a response from the local government. But they can be

replaced by alternative conditions measuring the same content with less ambiguity. Project stage intends to measure the cost for a local government if the project is cancelled or suspended. When the project is in an earlier stage, the cost is less. However, not all projects are profitable, nor can they generate substantial tax revenue. A waste incineration plant, for example, is closer to a public good. The local government is more likely to make a decision based on an evaluation of the whole local economic condition rather than on a single project. The position of the central government, on the other hand, is measured by whether party-affiliated national media such as *People's Daily*, China Central Television, and Xinhua News Agency posted a position from central-level bureaucracies, which is a proxy for government accountability under the cadre evaluation system. As an essential function of media in China is to act as a fire alarm, a message from party-affiliated national media therefore means the central government has noticed the incident; this situation would generate pressure on the local government to take action to settle the conflict quickly.³² Nevertheless, only a very few high-profile cases receive reports from central-level media. In most circumstances, the center's position cannot provide a reference point. Pressure more frequently comes from the upper-level government, not the center, if an environmental conflict gains attention. The location where the environmental conflict happened thus is a better alternative.

Table 2: Summary of Condition Calibration

	Indicator	Case	Score
Outcome	Project cancellation, relocation or delay	Qidong (啓東), Jiangmen (江門), Ningbo (寧波), Panyu (番禺), Hangzhou (杭州), Jinshan (金山), Shifang (什坊), Binhai (濱海), Xiamen (廈門), Nu River (怒江), Liulitun (六里屯), Asuwei (阿蘇衛), Nangong (南宮), Qinhuangdao (秦皇島), Xiaonanhai (小南海), Pingjiang (彭州)	1
	Project moving forward	Dalin (大連), Anning (安寧), Maoming (茂名), Putian (莆田), Heyuan (河源), Pengzhou (平江), Bolu (博羅), Shangrao (上饒), LCD (深圳LCD)	0
Scale of protest	500 or above participants	Dalin (大連), Qidong (啓東), Jiangmen (江門), Anning (安寧), Maoming (茂名), Ningbo (寧波), Putian (莆田), Heyuan (河源), Panyu (番禺), Hangzhou (杭州), Jinshan (金山), Shifang (什坊), Xiamen (廈門), Bolu (博羅), Pingjiang (彭州), Shangrao (上饒)	1
	No protest or protest below 500 participants	Binhai (濱海), Pengzhou (平江), Nu River (怒江), Liulitun (六里屯), Asuwei (阿蘇衛), Nangong (南宮), Qinhuangdao (秦皇島), Xiaonanhai (小南海), LCD (深圳LCD)	0

	Indicator	Case	Score
Involvement of policy advocacy	Environmental NGO, scholar, lawyer or other professional involved in policy advocacy	Anning (安寧), Binhai (濱海), Xiamen (廈門), Nu River (怒江), Liulitun (六里屯), Nangong (南宮), Qinhuangdao (秦皇島), Xiaonanhai (小南海)	1
	No policy advocacy	Dalin (大連), Qidong (啓東), Jiangmen (江門), Anning (安寧), Maoming (茂名), Ningbo (寧波), Putian (莆田), Heyuan (河源), Panyu (番禺), Hangzhou (杭州), Jinshan (金山), Shifang (什坊), Pengzhou (平江), Asuwei (阿蘇衛), Bolu (博羅), Pingjiang (彭州), Shangrao (上饒), LCD (深圳LCD)	0
Location where the environmental conflicts occurred	Prefecture or above	Dalin (大連), Jiangmen (江門), Anning (安寧), Maoming (茂名), Ningbo (寧波), Heyuan (河源), Panyu (番禺), Hangzhou (杭州), Jinshan (金山), Binhai (濱海), Xiamen (廈門), Nu River (怒江), Pengzhou (平江), Asuwei (阿蘇衛), Nangong (南宮), Qinhuangdao (秦皇島), Xiaonanhai (小南海), Bolu (博羅), LCD (深圳LCD)	1
	County or below	Qidong (啓東), Putian (莆田), Shifang (什坊), Pingjiang (彭州), Shangrao (上饒)	0
Local economic condition	Slower than the provincial (national) five-year average economic growth	Jiangmen (江門), Panyu (番禺), Jinshan (金山), Shifang (什坊), Pengzhou (平江), Asuwei (阿蘇衛), Nangong (南宮), Qinhuangdao (秦皇島), Xiaonanhai (小南海)	1
	Faster than the provincial (national) five-year average economic growth	Dalin (大連), Qidong (啓東), Anning (安寧), Maoming (茂名), Ningbo (寧波), Putian (莆田), Heyuan (河源), Hangzhou (杭州), Binhai (濱海), Xiamen (廈門), Nu River (怒江), Liulitun (六里屯), Bolu (博羅), Pingjiang (彭州), Shangrao (上饒), LCD (深圳LCD)	0

Source: Author.

Table 3: QCA Truth Table

Outcome	PROF	PROT	ECO	ADMIN	Case
1	0	1	1	1	Jiangmen (江門), Panyu (番禺), Jinshan (金山)
1	0	1	0	0	Qidong (啓東), Pingjiang (彭州)
1	0	1	0	1	Ningbo (寧波), Hangzhou (杭州)
1	0	1	1	0	Shifang (什坊)
1	1	0	0	1	Binhai (濱海), Nu River (怒江), Liulitun (六里屯)
1	1	1	0	1	Xiamen (廈門)
1	0	0	1	1	Asuwei (阿蘇衛)
1	1	0	1	1	Nangong (南宮), Qinhuangdao (秦皇島), Xiaonanhai (小南海)
0	0	1	0	1	Dalin (大連), Maoming (茂名), Heyuan (河源), Bolu (博羅)
0	1	1	0	1	Anning (安寧)
0	0	0	1	1	Pengzhou (平江)
0	0	1	0	0	Putian (莆田), Shangrao (上饒)
0	0	0	0	1	LCD (深圳LCD)

Source: Author.

a. Outcome: Conditional Government Responsiveness

We score projects as 1 if any cancellation, relocation, or delay is caused by environmental conflicts, and 0 if the project follows its original plan. Theoretically, the authoritarian setting allows the local government to make decisions in a despotic manner without listening to public opinion. The above circumstances can be considered the policy outcome is changed because the government's agenda is more or less influenced by other actors.

b. Condition 1: Involvement of Policy Advocacy (PROF)

Autonomous NGOs not only are the foundation of a civil society but also frequently act as policy entrepreneurs in democracies.³³ NGOs can serve the same function in China, although they suffer from various constraints. For example, several cases in our dataset involve a social organization called Friends of Nature, which was the first environmental NGO in China. Because its first president, Liang Congjie, was a member of the National Political Consultative Conference (NPCC), it has a unique connection to the state, allowing it to become an active and influential policy entrepreneur. Policy advocacy can also come from professionals, such as scholars, lawyers, or members of the People's Congress / Political Consultative Conference, at various administrative levels. The scientific knowledge and professional training they have enable them to redefine the understanding of a particular policy issue and further change policy outcomes by influencing public opinion.³⁴ The condition scores 1 if any environmental NGOs or professionals who express a different opinion with the local government are involved, 0 otherwise.

c. Condition 2: The Scale of Protest (PROT)

Shi once concluded "participation in China differs from that in many other societies in the stage of the decision-making process at which people assert their influence. While people in most other societies seek to influence government policy formation, people in urban China concentrate on influencing the way government policy is implemented."³⁵ In the case of an environmental conflict, protest then becomes a kind of ex-post remedy for an undesirable policy driven by the strong concern that personal health may be harmed by an ongoing industrial project. Studies in contentious politics in China agree that the leverage of protest depends

on the number of participants. We score 1 if a protest has 500 or more participants, as this number is the threshold set by the Ministry of Public Security in defining a “large scale mass incident.”³⁶ When a protest is larger, it generates more pressure, and the government is more likely to make a concession.

d. Condition 3: Location of the Environmental Conflict (Admin)

Location matters because it influences the likelihood of the incident catching the media’s attention. The administrative level in China is a proxy referring to the relative importance of a city. The media have more interest in an environmental conflict in a prefecture-level city or above than in a county-level city, leading municipal-level local officials to be more likely to suffer pressure in environmental conflicts, forcing them to respond to public discontent. For example, the case of the Asuwei (阿蘇衛) waste incineration plant is a well-known environmental conflict occurring in Beijing in 2009. Objections mainly came from residents who lived around the project, and they launched a demonstration. However, the protest was small and peaceful, with approximately 100 participants. Such a small-scale protest nevertheless caught the media’s attention and later received a response from the Beijing government promptly, finally delaying the project for more than three years. We score 1 if the environmental conflict occurred at the municipal level or above, 0 otherwise.³⁷

e. Condition 4: Local Economic Condition (ECO)

The local economic condition is measured by 5-year average local economic growth to balance the economic cycle with the 5-year average provincial economic growth as a benchmark.³⁸ It scores 1 in cases in which local economic growth is slower than provincial growth, and faster cases are scored as 0.

4. QCA Minimization

An analysis of necessity would be involved before minimization. The purpose of a necessity analysis is to make sure the necessary conditions are included in the configuration. Table 4 suggests none of the conditions are necessary, with a consistency of 1. The consistencies in the scale of

protest and policy advocacy are 0.56 and 0.5, respectively. This result means neither of the above conditions can trigger conditional government responsiveness alone. However, only one positive cases in the dataset does not involve any large-scale social protest or policy advocacy, so the above two conditions are actually INUS conditions.

The final step of QCA is minimization, a procedure in which interpretation of the truth table is simplified through a “pairwise comparison of configurations from the truth table that agree on the outcome and differ in only one of the causal conditions.”³⁹ The fs/QCA software provides three procedural solutions in minimization: parsimonious, intermediate, and conservative. The difference among the three solutions is whether to use the logical remainder, which is theoretically existing configurations not reflected in the empirical dataset. The parsimonious solution provides the simplest model by using all logical reminders but may provide an unrealistic result, while the intermediate solution is traditionally recommended as it allows the researcher to selectively use logical reminders with theoretical knowledge as the benchmark.⁴⁰ Here we follow the practice applied in previous studies of using conservative solution involving no logical reminders because “the intermediate solution makes the distinction between theory and the empirical analysis unclear” (the intermediate solution is provided for reference in Appendix A).⁴¹

The conservative solution in Table 5 has two paths, which means two configurations can trigger policy change. These configurations explain approximately 70 percent (11 of 16) of the positive cases, as suggested by the solution coverage (0.68).

Table 4: Necessary Condition Analysis on Policy Change in Environmental Conflicts

Conditions	Consistency	Coverage
PROF	0.5	0.88
~PROF	0.5	0.5
PROT	0.56	0.56
~PROT	0.43	0.77
ECO	0.5	0.88
~ECO	0.5	0.5
ADMIN	0.81	0.68
~ADMIN	0.18	0.5

Source: Author.

Table 5: Conservative Solution on Policy Change in Environmental Conflicts

Solution	PROF*~PROT*ADMIN	~PROF*PROT*ECO
Case	Binhai (濱海), Nu River (怒江), Liulitun (六里屯), Asuwei (阿蘇衛), Nangong (南宮), Qinhuangdao (秦皇島), Xiaonohai	Jiangmen (江門), Panyu (番禺), Jinshan (金山), Shifang (什坊)
Raw coverage	0.43	0.25
Unique coverage	0.43	0.25
Solution coverage	0.68	
Solution consistency	1	

Source: Author.

a. Path 1: PROF*~PROT*ADMIN

Because environmental conflicts seldom involve protest and policy advocacy at the same time as shown in Table 3, Path 1 can be simplified as policy change occurring when an environmental conflict occurs at least at the prefecture-level with the presence of policy advocacy. A classic case of this path is Nu River (怒江) in 2003, which has already been widely studied. The Nu River (怒江) is one of two undammed rivers in China located in the Yunnan province. In 1999, the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) launched its proposal of the Nu River (怒江) Dam project based on its assessment of the energy situation in China. The design from the Water Resources Hydropower Planning (安寧) Institute was for two reservoirs and thirteen dams. The proposal was approved by the NDRC on 14 August 2003, just two weeks before the EIA was enacted on 1 September. Opposition to the dam project first came from He Daming, a river expert at Yunnan University, when he attended an internal discussion, the “Nu River (怒江) Valley Hydropower Development and Ecological Environmental Protection Issue Expert Forum,” organized by the State Environmental Protection Administration (SPEA) in Beijing in early September.⁴² However, the dam project did not attract widespread public attention and support until the second meeting of the China Environment and Culture Promotion Society on 25 October, when an environmental NGO called Green Earth Volunteers submitted a petition signed by 62 scientists, artists, journalists, and environmentalists. The SPEA also has an interest of its own in the dam project. According to Mertha, Mu Guangfeng, vice director of the Environmental Impact Assessment Office and director of SPEA’s Supervision Department, was

not satisfied with the speedy approval of the dam project from the NDRC, which was obviously a strategy to avoid EIA regulation.⁴³ Mu's opposition further triggered potential countervails within the bureaucratic system (e.g., members of the National People's Congress). As the result, former premier Wen Jiabao, in a statement issued on 18 February 2004 on the dam project, wrote that "such a large hydropower station project that draws high social attention and has environmental controversy should be cautiously studied and scientifically decided." The dam project was suspended.

b. Path 2: ~PROF*PROT*ECO

For the same reason described previously, Path 2 can be simplified as policy change occurs with the presence of 500 or more participants in a social protest and a below provincial (national) average local economic condition. The path is easy to interpret. Because social stability maintenance and economic development are two priority items in the cadre evaluation system in China, large-scale protest is always forceful.⁴⁴ An even worse circumstance is a large-scale protest accompanied with lagging local economic growth as this combination would likely significantly decrease the chance of promotion for a local official. As a result, the cases in Path 2 tend to receive prompt concession from the local government. For example, in the case of Jiangmen (江門), a relatively less developed municipal-level city in the Pearl River Delta, the environmental conflict originated from a gazette posting on the local government website on 3 June 2013. According to the gazette, residents could express their opinions about a planned nuclear material factory (previously unknown by the public) located in Heshan (a county-level city in Jiangmen) within 10 days. The nontransparent policy-making process, combined with anxiety about the facility's safety, triggered nearly 1,000 residents protesting on 12 June outside the municipal government building to reflect their dissatisfaction with the government's decision.⁴⁵ As a response to the protest, the Jiangmen (江門) government announced the same day that public consultation would be extended to 23 June. However, local residents were not appeased and intended to organize another protest the following day. On the morning of 13 June, before the protest began, the vice mayor suddenly came to the gathering place and declared a revocation of the project.⁴⁶

c. Further Interpretations of the QCA Results

The two paths above are helpful in remedying some shortcomings found in previous studies that do not apply configurational thinking in analysis that restricts their explanatory power on circumstances where two similar cases with different outcomes. Regarding to our dataset, for example, the cases of Jiangmen (江門) and Pengzhou (平江) both involved protest at the prefecture level, so why did the former succeed and the latter fail? The QCA results indicate the answer is because the protest scale in Pengzhou (平江) was not sufficiently forceful (fewer than 500 participants). However, as Table 4 illustrated, large-scale protest alone is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition in policy change. The case of Bolu (博羅), for example, did not receive a government concession, even though a large-scale protest was involved. If, in comparison with the case of Jiangmen (江門), the main difference is Bolu's (博羅) relatively good local economic condition, the latter fails to satisfy the configuration outlined in Path 1. These findings repeatedly demonstrate that no single cause on conditional government responsiveness; and configurational thinking enjoys extra advantages in revealing the set of conditions behind. Nevertheless, the two paths we found cannot explain all cases in the dataset. The cases of Xiamen (廈門) and Anning (安寧) are similar in the presence of policy advocacy, large-scale protest, and local economic condition, but policy outcome changed only in the former case. This divergent outcome must be generated by conditions not included in the configuration. For example, if the project investor involved a state-owned enterprise (SOE), the local government would find it more difficult to make any revisions without compromise with such powerful interest group.⁴⁷ As alternative conditions always exist, a trade-off must be made. We want the configurations to have more explanatory power but to remain as simple as possible, as described previously. Perhaps more importantly, we want to discuss the logic behind conditional government responsiveness in China triggering policy change based on the QCA results. For this purpose, we think our QCA results are suitable.

5. Robustness Check

The dataset used in this article covers a relative long time span. One may ask whether the succession of leadership post challenges on our findings because leadership replacement in China usually accompanies with

ideology change or policy focuses on the government agenda. To address this concern, we use the 10 environmental conflicts happened in the Hu-Wen era as subset in robustness check. As seen in Appendix B, within all the three paths solved by QCA, the first path (PROF*~PROT*ADMIN) is the same as Path 1 in Table 5. The path now explains more cases according to the raw coverage (0.71). The third path (~PROF*PROT*ECO*ADMIN) also very close to the Path 2 found in the full sample with ADMIN as an extra condition because this path merely explains one case (Panyu (番禺)). Only “PROF*~ECO*ADMIN” is a new path, but the conditions and the cases it explain remain highly overlap with the first path. As the solution coverage is 1, the four conditions we considered here have an even better explanatory power in the subset than in the full sample. In general, policy advocacy is a more common mechanism in inducing conditional government responsiveness in the Hu-Wen era. It is also worth noticing the influence from the location where the environmental conflicts take place as all the three paths found in the subset share the condition ADMIN. Environmental conflicts at the prefecture level or above are more likely to catch media attention as mentioned before; but an even more important reason why it matters to conditional government responsiveness is that local officials above certain administrative levels likely have different incentives compared with lower level officials. Recent findings from Landry et al. suggested economic performance plays a greater role in promotion in the country level than the prefecture or provincial level.⁴⁸ Higher-level local officials have more concern about environmental issues thus not only because for them economic development now has less weight, but also because policy advocacy is likely more active in bigger cities as seen in the cases from Asuwei (阿蘇衛), Xiamen (廈門), and Liulitun (六里屯), where the middle class live and are reportedly highly concerned about the potential health hazards from PX facilities and waste incineration plant.⁴⁹ The effect on the location of government response to environmental conflict currently receives little concern, but more attention should be given in further studies as it may bring new understanding on environmental conflicts in China. We also do not find evidence that the conditions and mechanisms in triggering conditional government responsiveness have substantial differences due to leader succession. The reason behind this is because the CCP has had a relatively constant environmental policy agenda in the past decades (e.g., mitigating environmental conflicts through improving environmental management).⁵⁰ The same circumstances nevertheless may not hold in

other policy realms; for example, China's foreign policy was found to become more assertive in the Xi era.⁵¹

6. Policy Change in China from a Comparative Perspective

To what extent do the above findings and the idea of conditional government responsiveness contribute to our understanding in China's policy process and policy change in general? Comparatively, Path 1 in Table 5 is in alignment with punctuated-equilibrium (PE) theory. In PE theory, policy change is a battle over policy image. Policy image is "a mixture of empirical information and emotive appeals," which can be interpreted by different people in different ways.⁵² When a policy subsystem is dominated by a single policy image, usually accepted and maintained by the existing power structure, it tends to be stable. In contrast, nonincremental policy change is possible if the policy subsystem is challenged by a new policy image because the challenge is likely to bring new stakeholders into the policy process, breaking the existing power balance within the policy subsystem. A new policy image is especially powerful if it is advocated by professionals such as scholars, lawyers, or environmental NGOs because the knowledge they have increases the reliability of the information they provide.⁵³ We observe this phenomenon in examples like the Nu River (怒江). Environmental NGOs and scholars first set up an "environmental protection" policy image, differentiated from the local government's "economic growth" discourse, and quickly propelled the policy debate between the two policy coalitions into the national spotlight. This new policy image further involved other stakeholders in the bureaucratic system, such as the SEPA, who hold a different policy position than the NDRC. As a result, the policy process could not move forward because a consensus was not reached under strong opposition from inside and outside, as anticipated by the FA model.

In Path 2, protest as a public opinion input mechanism is also widely realized in the existing literatures. According to Rochon and Mazmanian, the consequences of protest in the policy process can be recognized in two dimensions. The first is whether policy change happened in the direction enabling the protest groups to receive new advantages. The second is whether the policy process becomes more inclusive: protest groups, whose interests were previously excluded, are now institutionally represented in the policy process. From this point of view, even if a

one-shot protest fails to achieve any policy change, the democratic settings will gradually absorb such grievances by setting “up mechanisms to review grievances and to appeal decisions that have already been made.”⁵⁴ This institutionalization of interest representation is crucial for democracy in achieving political stability by dissolving further protest through decreasing the cost of political participation.

From the above points of views, the uniqueness of China’s policy process does not lie in the mechanisms triggering policy change. Stakeholders in China can use policy advocacy or protest to signal preferences, like their peers in democracies. Nevertheless, the above mechanisms are not institutionalized. Policy change as a government response is conditional in procedure because public opinion input in policy making does not guarantee a credible institutional procedure. Instead, it depends on one-shot and temporary strategic interactions between the local government and stakeholders for each environmental conflict. The outcome in an environmental conflict is also conditional. China, as Xu described, is an RDA regime.⁵⁵ Local government officials are given despotic power in decision making in a given region and are held accountable to the upper-level government rather than to their constituency. This situation explains why local economic conditions and the location of the environmental conflict make a difference in how local officials respond to environmental conflicts because these conditions shape the cost-benefit calculations for different responses. The RDA system also explains why policy change is more likely to occur under strong policy advocacy and large-scale protest. According to the QCA results, they are the indispensable “short cut.” Social preferences amplified by these mechanisms are more likely to attract attention from the upper-level government and provide the necessary information for them to evaluate the performance of a cadre. This situation generates pressure for the local government because it is afraid of sanctions from above if social grievances continuously grow, so it makes concessions.

In summary, the combination of a RDA system and similar mechanisms with democracy in signaling social preferences in China’s policy process seems to generate a somewhat ambiguous consequence. On the one hand, policy making under authoritarian settings continuously prevents nongovernmental stakeholders from being the actors who can institutionally push a policy subsystem away from its status quo. This is why China has suffered a relatively severe information problem in comparison with some mature democracies, such as the United Kingdom,

Germany, and Denmark, in regard to institutional defects in public opinion input.⁵⁶ On the other hand, being bound by the obligations of performance legitimacy, the CCP is sensitive to social preferences,⁵⁷ leaving some leverage for nongovernmental actors in policy making, even if temporary and noninstitutionalized.

7. Conclusion

This article makes two contributions to the understanding of the recent changes in China's policy process. First, it addresses the shortcomings of the methodology in the existing literature by applying QCA. Our findings are also distinguished from some previous studies that also used the same method to study policy change in China, either in coding or in the conditions analyzed. In summary, our QCA results suggest neither policy advocacy nor a large-scale protest alone is a necessary condition but an indispensable mechanism by which stakeholders can challenge the policy image monopolized by the local government. However, whether the policy outcome was changed or not also depended on local economic conditions or on the administrative level to which stakeholders in the environmental conflict appealed. While the above two mechanisms in policy change in China are not entirely new, the configurational thinking derived from QCA used in this article is helpful in explaining why even environmental conflicts that share similar features can have different policy outcomes, a question that has not been sufficient answered.

The above findings further relate to the second contribution of this article: how to interpret the reason for a policy change under China's authoritarian institutional settings. We propose the concept of conditional government responsiveness to conceptualize our findings. As we demonstrate, differences in the policy process between China and democracy are not built into the mechanisms for stakeholders to show social preferences but are part of the rules of the game. Unlike in democratic settings, in which institutionalized public opinion input is warranted and government accountability is downward, the input of social preferences in an environmental conflict depends on strategic interactions between stakeholders and the local government. Because accountability is upward under the RDA system, environmental conflicts in which stakeholders can exert pressure on local officials from above are more likely to receive government concession. As a result, if only regarding government responsiveness, China is neither aligned with democracy nor a typical

politically closed authoritarian regime system but falls somewhere in between. We do not deny that China's policy process, in general, remains exclusive in nature, but a discussion of conditional government responsiveness would be helpful both in understanding the uniqueness of the case of China and pushing forward the understanding of the policy process in the so-called durable authoritarian regime.

Finally, although unlike regression analysis QCA does not automatically extrapolate the results for the whole population but enjoys its best explanatory power when applied to our dataset or environmental conflicts sharing similar features, we expect the mechanism outlined in this article is also applicable to other policy realms.⁵⁸ In other words, though conditions may not be the same in different policy realms, the logic of conditional government responsiveness should be general under the RDA system.

Appendices

Appendix A: Intermediate Solution on Policy Change in Environmental Conflicts

Solution	PROF*~PROT*ADMIN	PROT*ECO
Case	Binhai (濱海), Nu River (怒江), Liulitun (六里屯), Asuwei (阿蘇衛), Nangong (南宮), Qinhuangdao (秦皇島), Xiaonohai	Jiangmen (江門), Panyu (番禺), Jinshan (金山), Shifang (什坊)
Raw coverage	0.43	0.25
Unique coverage	0.43	0.25
Solution coverage	0.68	
Solution consistency	1	

Source: Author.

Appendix B: Conservative Solution on Policy Change in Environmental Conflicts (Before 2012)

Solution	PROF*~PROT*ADMIN	PROF*~ECO*ADMIN	~PROF*PROT*ECO*ADMIN
Case	Nu River (怒江), Liulitun (六里屯), Asuwei (阿蘇衛), Qinhuangdao (秦皇島), Xiaonohai	Xiamen (廈門), Nu River (怒江), Liulitun (六里屯)	Panyu (番禺)

Raw coverage	0.71	0.43	0.14
Unique coverage	0.42	0.14	0.14
Solution coverage	1		
Solution consistency	1		

Source: Author.

Appendix C: Brief Case Descriptions

1. Qidong (啓東)

In July 2012, thousands of citizens in Qidong, a county-level city in Jiangsu province, protested in front of the Qidong government building in order to stop a pipeline project funded by a Japanese company (Oji Paper) that would produce water pollution in the neighboring sea. The Qidong government finally decided to cancel the project on 28 July.

2. Jiangmen (江門)

In July 2013, the municipal-level government at Jiangmen, Guangdong province, posted a document on the internet. According to the document, a nuclear plant funded by an SOE is planned on the government agenda and citizens had 10 days to give opinion. Fearing the potential health hazard, thousands citizens protested on the street on 12 July, which directly forced Jiangmen to suspend the project that same day.

3. Ningbo (寧波)

On 22 October 2012 around 200 villagers collectively objected to a PX chemical plant project. The protest scale increased to over 1,000 on 26 and 27 October. Ningbo decided to suspend the project on 28 October.

4. Panyu (番禺)

The Guangzhou government first planned the Panyu (which is a district at Guangzhou) waste incineration plant at February 2009. However, widespread discontent from residents nearby appeared only when the location was announced at September. Objections from

residents later persisted several months in various forms including a large-scale demonstration and homemade environmental assessment report. Because of these severe objections from the society, the project was stagnant for more than one year. In April 2011, Guangzhou announced the project would be relocated to another site.

5. Hangzhou (杭州)

In March 2014, the Hangzhou government posted a planned waste incineration plant project located at the Yuhang district on the government website. Because the project information was vague, villagers who lived around the construction site did not notice the project unit one month later. But after they found out that no environmental assessment, which is required by law, was conducted, over 10,000 villagers were mobilized to occupy the construction site in early May. A clash between villagers and police, with many people injured, happened on 10 May. The Hangzhou government promised the next day that the project would not continue without public participation.

6. Jinshan (金山)

The Jinshan district was a chemical industrial area in Shanghai. In June 2015, a rumor began to spread among residents living in the district that a new PX chemical plant project was going to launch. As the environmental pollution was severe in the district, residents strongly resisted the project through a protest, which began at the end of June and persisted a week with thousands of participants. The Shanghai government quickly suspended the project in early July.

7. Shifang (什坊)

In early July 2012, thousands of citizens protested in front of the government building against a copper plant located in Shifang, a county-level city in Sichuan province. Although police stood by, protesters destroyed the government building. The Shifang government thus was forced to stop the project on 3 July 2012.

8. Binhai (濱海)

In March 2015, Peng Yina, a Guangdong province People's Political Consultative Conference member, posted a Weibo message that the National Energy Board had already approved a thermal power plant

in eastern Shenzhen. The message was quickly noticed by the Shenzhen local People's Congress members. On 28 June, more than 80 members submitted a collective suggestion, requiring suspension of the project. Several months later, the Shenzhen government declared in a media interview the project would be relocated.

9. Xiamen (廈門)

The incident originated from a collective suggestion from 105 members of the National People's Political Consultative Conference at its annual meeting in March 2007. As the suggestion quickly came under national media spotlight, Xiamen suddenly realized a chemical plant would be constructed in their backyard. At the end of May, a cell phone message began to spread in the city; it called for an anti-PX demonstration on the first of June. That day thousands of residents took to the streets, and the demonstration forced Xiamen to declare that a new environmental assessment would be conducted to decide the outcome of the project. Half a year later, at the end of 2007, Xiamen announced that the project would be relocated to Zhangzhou (漳州), an inland city in Fujian province.

10. Nu River (怒江)

In August 2003, the NDRC approved the Nu River hydroelectric power station project. The project quickly raised worries among scholars and environmental NGOs for the potential to jeopardize the river ecosystem. As a result, a half-year policy debate started between the two policy coalitions with different positions in economic development and environmental protection. The debate finally ended when former prime minister Wen Jiabao declared that more scientific assessments of the project would be conducted in February 2014.

11. Liulitun (六里屯)

Liulitun originally had a landfill dating to the 1990s. Because the landfill had reached its capacity in the early 2000s, a waste incineration plant was needed as a supporting facility. Residents who lived nearby had long complained about the smell from the landfill, and now they came to worry that the planned waste incineration plant would generate new health hazards. The project was stagnant for 4 years under severe objections from residents and other stakeholders. In 2011, the Beijing government announced the project's cancellation

because a new waste incineration plant with an even higher capacity was planned at another site.

12. Asuwei (阿蘇衛)

Xiaotangshan is a middle-class residential area in Beijing. In July 2009, some residents discovered a waste incineration plant named Asuwei was planned in their backyard. When some residents later found that an exhibition related to environmental protection would be held at the Agricultural Exhibition Center in September, they decided to launch a demonstration. Roughly 100 residents participated but were quickly arrested by police; nevertheless the demonstration caught the attention of the Beijing government. Although some residents retreated from further appeals because they were afraid of repression, the rest of them later submitted a homemade policy suggestion to the government under the leadership of resident Huang Xiaoshan. Soon Huang received an invitation from the government to participate in a government study group in Japan and Macau. The original intention was that Huang would be willing to persuade other residents gathering with the government. However, Huang became a steady opponent after the trip. A direct outcome was that the project was set aside for more than three years and restarted only in 2015.

13. Nangong (南宮)

Nangong, similar to the Liulitun and Asuwei cases, is one of the planned waste incineration plant projects listed on the Beijing government agenda. According to the original plan, all these waste incineration plant projects would be built before 2015. But unlike Liulitun and Asuwei, Nangong received direct objections from environmental NGOs. The objections, however, only delayed the construction progress. The project was put into use in October 2017.

14. Qinhuangdao (秦皇島)

Qinhuangdao is a waste incineration plant project located in Funing, a county-level city under Qinhuangdao, Hebei province. Worrying about health hazards stemming from the project, villagers who lived around the location first applied for administrative reconsideration from the Ministry of Environment in August 2010. The ministry upheld the original government decision. Villagers decided to file

administrative litigation and won the lawsuit. The project could not push forward without a resubmission of the environmental assessment.

15. Xiaonohai

The Xiaonohai hydropower project can be traced back to 1997, but it was quickly halted due to lack of funding the next year. The project restarted in 2006 as the biggest hydropower plant ever in Chongqing. The project received severe objections from environmental NGOs; and similar to the case of Nu River, a long-term policy debate started between the two parties with different positions. The project remains suspended according to the latest report.

16. Pingjiang (彭州)

In July 2014, four thermal power plants were planned at Pingjiang, a county-level city in Hunan province. The project was reported to generate considerable economic benefits to the local populace. However, it was unwelcomed by local residents due to environmental pollution concerns. On 18–21 September, around 20,000 residents took to the streets to protest the project. The protest caused a suspension of the project, and the country party secretary was laid off the same month.

17. Shangrao (上饒)

In November 2015, 10,000 villagers from a township known as Raobu took to the streets to force the local government to shut down the polluted chemical plants at a nearby industrial park. However, the protesters failed to achieve any government concessions.

18. LCD (深圳LCD)

In January 2013, several hundred residents demonstrated on Kehua Street in Nanshan district at Shenzhen to highlight environmental pollution from a liquid crystal display (LCD) factory located in a nearby industrial park. However, the protesters did not achieve any government concessions.

19. Dalin (大連)

In August 2008, a storm damaged the dyke around an operational PX plant in Dalin. Out of fears of toxic leakage, more than 10,000

residents protested to require a plant relocation in the next few days. Although the party secretary promised a relocation, he didn't give a specific timetable. It is reported that the PX plant indeed never halted operations even after the protest.

20. Anning (安寧)

In February 2013, a PX plant project located in Anning, a county-level city in Yunnan province, was reported to receive approval from the NRDC. In May the project caused two large-scale anti-PX protests involving more than 1,000 local residents. However, the protesters did not achieve any government concessions, nor was the project suspended when environmental NGOs later became involved in the opposition.

21. Maoming (茂名)

A PX plant at Maoming, a municipal-level city in Guangdong province, received approval from the NDRC in April 2014. But it was reported that the local government had already invited experts to promote the project one month before. The promotion however failed to mitigate residents' resistance. Similar to most previous cases in other Chinese cities, anti-PX protests happened later, at the end of March. But the local government did not offer a compromise.

22. Putian (莆田)

In December 2014, it was reported that thousands of villagers from Donghai township, subordinated in Putian city in Fujian province, assembled in the highway and protested in front of the township government building. They demanded a halt to the construction of a chemical plant due to environmental pollution. But the protest didn't change the government decision.

23. Heyuan (河源)

In April 2015, 2,000 residents from Heyuan city in Guangdong province assembled in front of the municipal government building. The assembly was triggered by a rumor that the government intended to enlarge the capacity of an existing thermal power plant; the plant was claimed to cause the rapidly increasing air pollution in the previous few years. No further news reports suggested that the Heyuan government had changed its original plan.

24. Pengzhou (平江)

Pengzhou is a county-level city in Sichuan province. Because Pengzhou was closed to Chengdu, around 200 Chengdu residents protested in the city center on 4 May 2008, denouncing pollution from a Petro China petrochemical project. The protest was soon crushed by police. As the Wenchuan earthquake happened one week later, the project later became a means of recovery for the Pengzhou economy.

25. Bolu (博羅)

It was reported that thousands of villagers demonstrated in front of the Huizhou municipal government on 13 September 2014, trying to stop the operation of a waste incineration plant. Protesters were repressed by the local government.

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