

SUMMARY OF DOCTORAL THESIS

The Implications of Societal Forces in China's Political Decision-Making (2002-2012):

- Institutional Transformation, Behavioral Change and Policy Adjustment -

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MIAO JI

Chief Advisor: Prof. Amako Satoshi

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Ever since the Reform and the Opening-up, China has undergone fundamental transformations with its decision-making discourse, structure and process. One of the major changes is the increasing involvement of societal forces. Growing international scrutiny, changed identity, legitimacy and tasks of the China Communist Party, the burgeoning middle class and their growing political consciousness constitute the three reasons for growing role of societal forces in China's political decision-making.

Institution, government behavior and policy are three criterions to evaluate a political process. This research examines how societal forces interact with the government during six major incidents and evaluate their institutional, behavioral and policy implications. The study is based on the author's close documentary studies, participatory observations, and in-depth interviews on six public incidents between 2002 and 2012: the Sun Zhigang case (2003); the Bobai County family planning protests (2007); the Xiamen PX protest (2007); the Qian Yunhui case (2010); the Wukan land protest (2011); and the Dalian PX protest (2011).

The author examines the components of societal forces that are potentially reshaping the decision-making process. Findings are that mass media and public opinion, social activists, professionals, and scholars had emerged as the most influential societal forces. NGOs have a minor and insignificant role. Among these societal forces, media and public opinion proved to be vital: before media released the incidents, early involvement by stakeholders was hardly fruitful. In the three successful cases (the Sun Zhigang's case, the Xiamen PX protest and Wukan land protest), media involved intensively. Dalian PX protest was successful at first because of media disclosure. Bobai family planning protest failed partially because of lack of media exposure, including new media. New Media, such as blogs, BBS, Internet-based communities, messages played a crucial role in the Xiamen PX protest and the Wukan land protest, while in early case of Sun Zhigang, traditional media played a key role.

The role of professionals is important. In Sun Zhigang's case, the autopsy result served as the initial evidence for societal involvement; autopsy report of Qian Yunhui's death and technical report of the truck failed to provide major evidence, partially because the agency was designated by police and therefore was not convincing. In environmental issues, professional Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), proved important as in the case of Xiamen and Dalian PX protest. Given that the mistrust between the government and society remain very strong, professionals may provide reliable evidence based on which the society and the government could negotiate for a compromise.

The role of social activists was clear and indispensable for their organizational and coordination role. However, their role was insignificant compared with other societal forces. The role of scholars was very special. Scholars played a leading role in the Sun Zhigang's case and Xiamen PX incident; they were deeply involved in the Qian Yunhui case but failed to bring positive result because of the very sensitive nature of the issue; role of scholars was basically absent in the Bobai case and Wukan land protest, though they pushed for the adjustment or abolishment of the family planning and land policy. Scholars' participation may not bring immediate

results, but often lead to long term and significant institutional changes, as in the Sun Zhigang case. The Xiamen PX incident also indicated that within-regime or official scholars might bring better result.

Different from western societies where civil society organizations serve as major agent between government and individuals, NGOs were almost absent in four of the cases but played a visible yet insignificant role in the Wukan land protest and the Qian Yunhui case. In the Qian Yunhui case, scholars, lawyers and social activists formed investigation teams that were actually NGOs, but failed to make a difference.

The research did not find direct relationship between the scale and effect of the societal involvement, though one can assume that the larger the scale, the greater the pressure upon government and the better result will be achieved. The writer also assumes that societal involvement would be more effective in low politics areas such as economic or environmental sector, but the study does not indicate such a consistent relationship.

In terms of rationality, societal involvement in the Sun Zhigang case, the Xiamen and Dalian PX protests, and the Qian Yunhui case were rational, with two of them successful and two others unsuccessful. Societal involvement in Bobai family planning protest was violent and irrational while rational with antagonism in the Wukan land protest, indicating that there was no lineal relationship between rationality and effect. However, the Xiamen PX incident proved that rational and constructive engagement was most effective. The Wukan land protest revealed that controllable confrontation was sometimes tolerated under condition of protracted, large-scale resistance of societal forces.

The pattern of interaction also matters. The author assumes centralized involvement may bring better result by creating stronger pressure for the government. Except the Qian Yunhui and Sun Zhigang case where societal forces involved the government in a fragmented (Sun Zhigang case) and divided manner (Qian Yunhui case), societal involvement in other four cases seemed quite coordinated and well organized.

The study proved the importance of level of leadership intervention. In all successful cases, the intervention of leadership from higher-level government proved to be vital. Unlike in two out of three unsuccessful cases, namely, the Bobai County family planning protest and Qian Yunhui case, decisions were mainly made by county level government without real intervention of higher-level government.

As a major finding, the emerging interest groups are potentially the greatest barriers for societal involvement. Societal involvement was more fruitful when the interest groups were less powerful (the Wukan case, Sun Zhigang case), and less fruitful or unsuccessful when interest groups were more powerful (the Yueqing Power Plant in Qian Yunhui Case and the Fujia Dahua Group in Dalian PX Protest). Societal involvement was more successful when the interest groups were foreign (Xiamen PX, Wukan) or private investments (Wukan); meanwhile societal involvement was less successful or unsuccessful when the interest groups involved large state-owned cooperation (Yue Qing Power Plant in Qian Yunhui Case) or larger cooperation with strong governmental or official background (Fujia Dahua PX program in Dalian PX protest).