

NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF ENVIRONMENTAL
PROBLEMS IN CHINA: AN ANALYSIS OF THREE
CHINESE NEWSPAPERS

By

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

Few modern societies are left untouched by a variety of environmental problems, such as acid rain, air pollution, global warming, hazardous waste, ozone depletion, smog, water pollution, overpopulation, and rainforest destruction. These problems all have numerous effects on human health and well-being. As a rapidly developing country, China is facing severe environmental problems. Since opening to the Western World in 1979, China has experienced great economic development. On the one hand, economic growth has increased incomes, improved health indicators, and reduced overall poverty levels. On the other hand, economic growth has produced negative impacts on the environment. Various environmental problems are arising during stages of development from basic needs to relative well-being in China. As a developing country with a large population of 1.3 billion, China is facing serious environmental problems, especially air pollution in Beijing, sandstorms in north China, urban water pollution, and disappearance of species diversity, which are brought by industrialization. These problems damage human health, life quality and ultimately the economy.

Because of their potential consequences, environmental problems are receiving

growing attention from the public and the government in China, and are gradually changing the public and the government's view of "environmental protection." China used to neglect environmental cost when considering its economic development, because the government did not regard the environment as valuable in itself. But since environmental deterioration impeded economy from continuous development, the government gradually switched its environmental policy from "treatment after deterioration" to "protection before deterioration." However, because environmental protection is a long-term project, requiring effort from all sectors of society, it is not easy to change environmental conditions quickly, especially in an economically developing country. As a result, while China's environmental protection receives increasing emphasis, its general environmental condition is on the stage of "partial improvement, but comprehensively degrading" (Zheng 2007: 3).

The Purpose

Although overall environmental concern is rising in China, not all environmental threats are drawing public attention. Some environmental issues have attracted public attention for a long time, while others still fail to receive much if any attention. What makes an environmental condition become an environmental problem and receive public attention is not only the condition itself, but also external factors, among which mass media is a significant one. During the past ten years, a growing number of reports on environmental problems and issues have appeared in China's mass media. The frequencies of environmental coverage have been increasing across different types of

media. However, these different media report environmental issues in differing ways. For example, some newspapers use more space to report environmental problems, while others prefer to use shocking pictures beside the articles.

Media coverage of environmental problems influences the public's environmental consciousness directly and can motivate societies to take actions to remedy them. So by affecting environmental news selection and framing to some degree, political parties can use the media as a tool to sway public opinion on environmental issues. In China, there is only one major political Party (Chinese Communist Party), to which all media must belong. However, not all media have the same degree of Party affiliation. Some newspapers, for example, act as propaganda arms of the Chinese Communist Party and thus are called Party newspapers, while non-Party newspapers do not have such close relationships with the Party and thus exercise a bit more freedom, even though they are also subject to censorship by the Chinese Communist Party. Because the goals and functions of the Party newspapers and non-Party newspapers are not same, differences in environmental coverage are also expected to exist between them.

Therefore, examination of the environmental coverage on Party newspapers and non-Party newspapers in China has two purposes: First, to have a general idea of how China's media coverage of environmental problems has changed during recent years; second, to contribute to an understanding of the Chinese Communist Party's attitude towards environmental issues, by studying how the Party wants the public to think about current environmental issues. Because similar studies are very rare in China, this study will be a significant contribution to the social construction of environmental problems.

Statement of Problem

My study explores two questions. First, is there any difference in environmental coverage between Party newspapers and non-Party newspapers, and if so, in what ways? Second, is there any difference in environmental coverage between the national Party newspaper and a local Party newspapers, and if so, in what ways? Through content analysis, this study compares environmental coverage on *People's Daily* (a national Party newspaper), *Beijing Daily* (a local Party newspaper) and *Beijing Youth Daily* (a local non-Party newspaper). I will compare the total amount of environmental coverage across the three papers, as well as the “tone” of their coverage (as explained in the methodology section).

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Media's Role as Agenda-setting

The use of controlled selection and presentation of information is considered as an effective technique of social manipulation (Mueller 1970), so the press is often used as a propaganda tool for political parties or organizations (Riegel 1935).

It is hard for reports to be fully objective or balanced toward all information, though “objectivity” and “balance” are the rules in news reporting (Andsager 2000). Such unfairness toward information is reflected by the media's role in agenda-setting. Media place certain issues or problems foremost in the minds of people simply by making them salient in news broadcasts and publications (Mazur 1998). Cohen (1963) says, "The press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about." In other words, the mass media provide selective factual information, constrain the public's view of reality, and give prominence to some issues instead of others (Schiff 1996). Numerous researchers have observed that issues, for which individuals have little personal knowledge and for which they rely on the media as the primary source of information, demonstrate a strong agenda-setting effect (Ader 1995).

Mass media set the agenda through media framing, a concept proposed by media sociologists in the late 1970s. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, or moral evaluation for the item described (Entman 1993). It operates by “biasing the cognitive processing of information by individuals” (Hallahan 1999: 208), so media frames are organizing devices that help journalists and the public make sense of issues and thus inject them with meaning, while generating bias at the same time (Hannigan 1995).

Media framing essentially involves two aspects: news selection and news description (Earl, Martin, McCarthy, and Soule 2004; Mueller 1970). First, since a large number of potential issues compete with each other for highly limited attention (Carmines and Stimson 1993), not all the news will be considered as newsworthy, and the sample of issues appearing in newspapers is not representative. Ader’s (1995) study illustrates that real world conditions do not influence the media agenda directly. In other words, what determines newsworthiness is not the objective characteristics of issues (Altheide 1976). Rather, it is structured by various factors such as competition over newspaper space, reporting norms and editorial concerns (Earl, Martin, McCarthy, and Soule 2004).

Second, description bias concerns the veracity with which selected events are reported in the press (Earl, Martin, McCarthy, and Soule 2004). Researchers have identified five devices: metaphors, exemplars, catchphrases, depictions and visual images, and three reasoning devices: roots (causal analysis), consequences and appeals to principle (Gamson and Modigliani 1989). Each one can be used to transfer salience,

which means to make certain issues or problems stand out relative to neighboring ones and thus draw more public attention to these issues or problems.

Factors Determining Media Frames

Media frames are determined by three main factors, including reporters, advertisers and media owners (Dispensa and Brulle 2003). Reporters determine what is newsworthy by considering if the story has certain qualities, such as whether or not it is important and interesting. The qualities which reporters approve of are shaped by journalistic norms and conventions, which are affected by the sense of objectivity of the journalist, the journalist's prime source of information, and the company the journalist works for, such as right-to-center or left-to-center newspapers (Dispensa and Brulle 2003).

Advertisers are an important source for newspapers' profits. Many newspapers are almost wholly dependent on advertising revenue, and thus the influence of advertisers puts a constraint on what is published in the newspaper (Dispensa and Brulle 2003). In order to maintain advertising clients, newspapers must make their content appealing to the high-quality audiences who have the ability to shop at the advertisers' stores. Some advertising companies even dictate specific rules for stories. For example, Proctor and Gamble (P&G) stated that "special attention shall be given to any mention of the grocery and drug business as well as any other group of customers of the company" (Dispensa and Brulle 2003: 85).

Finally, ownership of media organizations has become a particular concern of researchers in recent years as they try to understand the context in which media images

are produced (Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, and Sasson 1992). Boykoff (2007) says that framings are derived through combined structural and agential components. Because journalists and editors are under pressure from their owners, the media owners' preferred meanings and interpretations affect how the media frames news stories (Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, and Sasson 1992). For example, increases in toxic pollution in the drinking water supply of New Orleans in 1988 were almost exclusively attributed to a simple natural phenomenon rather than to a combination of low water levels and discharges from chemical plants near that city because newspaper owners did not want to implicate several powerful institutional actors, including the state bureaucracy, as contributors to that hazard (Hannigan 1995).

If media are owned or sponsored by corporations, commercial concerns are important elements of media content. Papers have the task of making a profit and protecting the images of corporations as good citizens, and thus their content needs to attract advertisers and be politically safe. (Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, and Sasson 1992)

Similarly, the political party's media undertake the task of transmitting the spirit of the government and protecting the image of the ruling political party. Political interests have long tried to influence media coverage of particular topics in order to affect the public's understanding and perception (Boykoff and Rajan 2007). Information in the mass media is the only contact that many people have with politics (McCombs and Shaw 1972), so by guiding the editors and journalists on choosing and displaying news, a political party can easily shape public opinion on politics, and even also alter the criteria citizens use to evaluate the political leaders (Behr and Iyengar 1985). A study showed that if audience members feel a need for orientation on a political issue, they will turn to

the media for that orientation (Hugel, Degenhardt and Weiss 1989). Strategic politicians know how to promote particular issues as an effective way to enforce their power. They understand which issue benefits them and their party, so they will deemphasize those that are not helpful (Carmines and Stimson 1993). When policy concerning controversial social issues is developed, policy makers will use the news media to try to sway public opinion to support their disparate points of view (Andsager 2000).

Therefore, it is safe to say that news stories are not completely objective or balanced, but are affected by many factors besides the issues themselves. Thus, media coverage of any given issue vary across different media.

Key Factors in Constructing Environmental Problems

The debates over whether the rise and decline of environmental problems is socially constructed have lasted for a long time. The realist approach asserts that social problems are objective phenomena with real impacts. Researchers are supposed to discover what the problem is and to educate the public about the possible dangers and potential remedies (Williams and Frey 1997). According to this approach, the rise and decline of environmental problems depend on the conditions themselves, and science supplies the knowledge needed to stimulate and guide social-political action (Taylor and Buttel 1992). However, this approach neglects the complex manner in which individuals negotiate and construct their experiences of the natural and social world, and thus it is inadequate to explain the process (Williams and Frey 1997). The constructionist approach argues that conditions do not become social problems unless they are defined as such by claim-

makers, who have their definitions publicized by the media and legitimized by policy-makers (Dunlap and Marshall 2007).

These battles subsided as most constructivists adopted the mild or contextual approach, which “maintains a distinction between what participants believe or claim about social conditions and what is ‘in fact’ known about the condition” (Burningham and Cooper 1999), and most realists move toward the critical realist perspective, which recognizes that humans must perceive and may misperceive “actual” conditions (Dunlap and Marshall 2007). Therefore, there seems to be agreement on the social construction of environmental problems. Environmental problems do not simply emerge from changes in objective conditions, but interests, values, conflict and power shape people’s conceptions of environmental reality and influence its formation (Murphy 1994).

Constructing environmental problems involves three important tasks. The first task is assembling environmental claims, which concerns the discovery and elaboration of a problem. It includes naming the problem; distinguishing it from other similar or more encompassing problems; determining the scientific, technical, moral or legal basis of the claim; and identifying who is responsible for taking ameliorative action (Hannigan 1995). The original problem can be discovered not only by scientists, who have the expertise and resources to discover new problems, but also by citizens who have close contact with the environment. A necessary factor for successful environmental problem construction related to this task is scientific authority for the claims’ validity.

Presenting environmental claims is the second task, aiming at commanding attention and legitimizing the claims. Because public attention is a scarce resource allocated through competition in a system of public arenas (Hilgartner and Bosk 1988), an

environmental problem should be seen as novel, important and understandable in order to command attention. Claim-makers can achieve this by using graphic, evocative verbal and visual imagery, or by using particular incidents or events to exemplify certain environmental issue, such as nuclear accidents. However, commanding attention is not sufficient for environmental problems to be moved to the agenda for public debate. Legitimacy of the emergent environmental problems in media, government, science and the public must also be considered. The possible ways to achieve legitimacy are to “pinpoint an event, which constitutes the turning point for an environmental problem and when it breaks through into the zone of legitimacy,” or to have legitimate and authoritative sponsors of environmental claims (Hannigan 1995). An important factor promoting the success of this task is media reports, in which claims are framed as both real and important. Newig (2004) says that it was not until the development of mass media that a broader kind of public came into being. Without media attention, it is difficult for environmental problems to command wide attention from the public and political leaders.

Broad public support can contribute to invoking action on environmental claims, which is the third task. However, attention and legitimacy do not ensure the action will be taken, because many factors can contribute to the loss of attention at the point of decision, such as a national economic crisis. Therefore, Hannigan (1995) says that ongoing efforts seeking to affect legal and political change by claim-makers are necessary. Media attention is very helpful for this task too, because consistent media coverage can motivate broad public support and invoke public reactions.

Media's Role in Constructing Environmental Problem

Among all the factors contributing to constructing environmental problems, media attention is indispensable for the last two tasks, and thus it is significant for constructing environmental problems successfully. The role played by mass media in the social construction of environmental problems is named by Hannigan (1995) as “environmental education,” which means to make the public aware of environmental problems and to educate the public about the possible dangers and potential remedies. Because environmental issues can conflict with economic development and thus become controversial sometimes (Dunlap 1975), and controversial issues are more likely to be socially constructed by people in power -- including politics, interest groups, etc, (Ader 1995) -- media's agenda-setting effect is strongly demonstrated on environmental issues.

The rise and decline of people's concern about our environmental problems is closely related to the media's agenda. Hannigan (1995) points out that public concern is partially independent of actual environmental deterioration and is shaped by factors like the extent of mass media coverage, because the media clearly dominate as sources of information about environmental pollution, while personal sources, such as friends, rank further below (Murch 1971). People obtain most of their political, economic and scientific information from the media, especially television and daily newspapers, which tell them how important an issue is, instead of from real world cues (Ader 1995, Boykoff and Rajan 2007).

Empirical studies find that the quantity and patterns of media coverage affect public concern over environmental problems. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, media

coverage of environmental issues rose dramatically in the United States and journalists regarded environmental issues as a major category of news for the first time (Hannigan 1995). This increased media attention was presumably seen as contributing to the concomitant rise in public concern about environmental problems during the same period (Dunlap and Marshall 2007). A research of Japanese newspaper coverage of global warming showed that a dramatic increase in newspaper coverage from January 2007 correlated with an increase in public concern for the issue (Sampei and Aoyagi-Usui 2008). Christine Ader's (1995) study found that the amount of media attention devoted to pollution influenced the degree of public salience for the issue. Mazur's study emphasized the role of the quantity of coverage in affecting public concern and governmental actions. He indicated that unrecognized hazards often rose to public and governmental concern when they received heightened coverage by media, especially by *The New York Times* (Mazur 1998). Similarly, some significant environmental problems, such as the lack of treatment of urban sewage in Canada, failed to receive public attention because of their lack of newsworthiness (Hannigan 1995).

While media coverage generates societal attention to environmental problems, it can also promote changes of values and attitudes toward the environment and environmental policies and thus set the agenda firmly (Mazur 1998, Dipensa and Brulle 2003). As a result, environmental coverage is often affected by political parties, interests groups, and companies, who have power and rights to affect media coverage, because they have different interests in environmental problems. Solving environmental problems can threaten the benefits of business and industry (Dunlap 1975), and thus often cause controversy between countries, parties or even within a party. For example, developing

countries do not want to give up the use of coal and automobiles; however, some developed countries are trying to lessen the use of both because they have learned that coal and automobile use cause environmental problems (Dispensa and Brulle 2003). In the United States, democrats and liberals are more concerned about environmental quality than are their republican and conservative counterparts, because of the traditional Republican-conservative favoritism toward business and opposition to social change (Dunlap 1975). Therefore, left-of-center and right-of-center journalists have exhibited different tendencies towards news decisions (Graber, McQuail and Norris 1998). If media controllers hold disagreements over environmental issues, the news media can be used as the tool to sway public opinion to support their disparate points of view (Andsager 2000). Therefore, different media often pay attention to different environmental issues, and a single environmental issue is interpreted in multiple ways by different media (Hannigan 1995) because of the vested interests of media controllers.

A number of studies have charted the rise and fall of media attention to environmental problems, such as global climate change, and come to a conclusion that the environmental problem constructions are related to external factors, such as ownership and events. By reviewing O'Meara's *New York Times* and *Chicago Tribune* analyses, Schoenfeld, Meier, and Griffin (1979) pointed out environmentalism first appeared without much press attention. The environmental message did not appear on the media's agenda extensively until legislative acts, events and accidents lent it salience. Mazur's study attributes the rising media attention to environmental problems in 1987-90 and falling media attention in 1992-96 to the interaction between journalists and other various sources of news-scientists, government agents and environmentalists (Mazur

1998). Boykoff (2007) analyzed both the quantity and contents of US and UK newspaper coverage of climate science between 2003 and 2006. The study revealed that the ebbs and flows of coverage were related to various events, such as the G8 summit, and the release of the Al Gore film *An Inconvenient Truth*. Boykoff and Boykoff (2007) examined the newspaper and television coverage of climate change from 1988 to 2004, and attributed the notable increases in coverage in 1990, 1990, 1997, 2001-2002, and 2004 to ecological meteorological, political, and scientific events. Dispensa and Brulle (2003) conducted a comparative study of media coverage on global warming across three countries, and came to the conclusion that different interests and openness of media owners allow for different forms or degrees of media coverage. For example, the U.S. media has tended to portray global warming as less serious than in some other nations, because its economy is strongly tied to fossil fuel industry.

All of the studies show that because of the media's agenda-setting effects, policy makers or interest groups try to use media to sway public opinion on new environmental policies and projects related to environment, also environmental coverage is influenced by media owners' interests and preferences, and thus environmental coverage reflects newspaper owners' attitudes toward environmental issues. For example, the more environmental reports they publish, the more interest they create on environmental issues; while the tone of the articles can influence how the public views environmental problems.

Several studies of media coverage of environmental problems have focused on differences across countries, or the media of two major political parties or interest groups in one country. Because protecting the environment requires big investments and can conflict with economic development of a country, different political parties in a country

or different countries are likely to treat environmental problems differently (Dispensa and Brulle 2003, Dunlap 1975) Therefore, comparisons of the media in different countries, and comparisons of the media of different political parties, deserves researchers' attention. However, in some countries there is only one major political party and all media are belonged to that political party. For example, the Chinese Communist Party is the only major party in China, and it monitors all the newspapers in this country, while all other political parties in China are not allowed to publish any newspaper for the public. So it is impossible to study the newspaper coverage of two different parties in the People's Republic of China. Therefore, comparisons of the environmental coverage of Chinese Communist Party representative newspapers and non-Party representative newspapers become significant for understanding the social construction of environmental problems in China.

Mass Media in People's Republic of China

In the late 1960s, Alan Chalkley introduced a new idea of the "development journalist" as he talked about the media in developing nations. The "Development journalist" has the responsibilities of not only informing audiences of the facts and offering context and interpretations, which are deemed the tasks of all journalists, but also involves promotion (Campbell 2004: 50). Hachten argued that development journalism would result in or would require state institutions controlling news media organizations, and thus the capacity to challenge or question those institutions would be significantly diminished (Hachten 1992).

In many developing Asian nations, this kind of state influence has existed and appears stronger than in Western societies. In Asian culture the community is deemed to take precedence over the individuals, so duty to the community and state overrides individuals' rights. As a result, in these Asia countries the press has limited freedom when compared with the press in Western countries, which usually consider press with its starting point as "the smallest, most universal unit of concern: the individual" (Campbell 2004: 52). So the press in developing Asian nations is more likely to be subjected to state influence.

As a big developing country in Asia, China's media is strongly influenced by the State. As is widely known in China, the press is called the mouth of the Chinese Communist Party and is used as a method for transmitting the Party's will to the public. At the beginning of the establishment of the People's Republic of China, the state was regarded by many western scholars as exerting monolithic, totalitarian control over society, and having complete control of all means of effective mass communication (Friedrich and Brzezinski 1965). Even nowadays, publishing or broadcasting unwelcome views may lead to punishment (Ling and Huss 2002). All media must follow publishing policies and approved rules.

On the one hand, China's mass media have only limited freedom; on the other hand, this freedom is increasing gradually. After opening to Western countries and enacting reforms in its economy, substantive changes have happened in China's media structure. Wu Guoguan (2000) generalized three changes: decentralization, socialization and marketization. To put it specifically, the media have changed from being concentrated in the national capital to being dispersed to cities; they pay more attention to average

peoples' lives instead of focusing on transmitting the Party's will; more media rely on market competition for their survival rather than their connections with the state (Wu 2000). The central government's decentralization policies increased the news media's commercialization, which forced China's information gatekeepers to distinguish themselves from their competition (Borton 2004). As a result, the competition of news media has brought higher standards of reporting in the form of investigative articles, exposes of environmental degradation and some other dark sides of society, as long as the news contents do not offend the basic rules, such as not attacking the image of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The role of the Chinese press has changed from a purely Party propaganda conduit to a provider of information for emerging middleclass consumers.

Generally speaking, however, China's media industry still handles perhaps more government and legal business than media elsewhere (Lee 2000b). China is still highly authoritarian, arbitrary, and intrusive (Lee 2000a). As a result, some people call it "bird-caged press freedom" (Chen and Chan 1998).

According to a report at the end of 2006, there are a total of 1935 newspapers on circulation in China (Lin 2007). In general, these newspapers can be classified into three categories: Party newspapers, city newspapers, and newspapers for specific professions. The Party newspapers and city newspapers take the vast majority of the newspaper market, but the newspapers for specific professions are facing severe challenges of limited readership (Liu 2006). As the name suggests, Party newspapers are the representative newspapers of the CCP, with the goal of providing political propaganda for the Party. Although the Party is trying to make small changes in the format of

transmission, it continues to use the media to transmit official news and policies. They attempt to send particular signals to the public through the media that can be referred to as authoritative (Lee 2000b). Usually Party newspapers don't have to worry about market competition, because governments, government enterprise and other state organizations are all required to subscribe to certain Party newspapers, and thus most of their readers are government officials and workers at state organizations. For example, state, local governments, and state organizations should subscribe to *People's Daily*, which is a national Party newspaper and the most authoritative Party newspaper in China. It is under the direct guidance of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. In addition to the national Party newspapers, there are many local Party newspapers, which belong to and are run by different local governments. All the state organizations under local governments' jurisdiction must subscribe to that local Party newspaper.

On the other hand, non-Party newspapers, including the city newspapers and newspapers for specific professions, are actively involved in market dynamics and competing for individual subscribers or advertising dollars, so these kinds of newspapers need to appeal to average people through truthfulness, timeliness, and even creative style. Non-Party newspapers' purpose is to satisfy readers' curiosity about what is happening around them and all over the world. These papers are not the mouth of the Chinese Communist Party, but they still have to abide by certain rules of the Party. For example, they cannot attack the image of CCP. Compared to Party newspapers, they have a less close relationship with the Chinese Communist Party. Therefore, non-Party newspapers are closer to average people and may be slightly "liberal," which means they may report

what Party newspapers would never possibly report, as long as they do not go against the basic rules for press and publication of People's Republic of China.

It is obvious that neither of these two kinds of newspapers can have absolute press freedom, and the difference between them is that how much influence they get from the authority or the Chinese Communist Party. All papers are expected to support the CCP's agenda, but due to the different degrees of influence from the Party the Party newspapers and the non-Party newspapers are hypothesized to have a different orientation in news selection and description.

China's Environmental Problems and Environmental Coverage

As one of the biggest developing countries in the world, China is making progress in industrialization, but also creating severe environmental problems. First, desertification, and soil erosion are getting more and more serious. The area of water and soil erosion takes almost 38.2% of the whole country area, and the area of desertification is increasing by 2,460 square kilometers every year, which is equal to a middle-sized town (Wang 2005). The deterioration not only brings increasing loss of usable soil, but also affects other aspects of the ecosystem.

Second, China's forests are damaged and the diversity of species is being reduced. The tropical zone rainforest in Xishuangbanna was reduced by one third from 1950 to 1990, and the level of China's forest coverage is far behind the average level of the world (Wang 2005). This threatens many plants and animals living in the forest.

Third, water resources face problems, such as shortage and pollution. China has 669 cities, with 400 of them not having an adequate water supply, and it is expected that China will face a water shortage of 600 to 700 billion cubic meters by 2050 if the present situation continues (Wang 2005). Nearly 40% of China's rivers are grade V, which means not suitable for drinking, industry, or agriculture, and 90% of the ground water is polluted. China has the second lowest per capita water use in the world, less than one third the world average (Turner and Ellis 2007).

The fourth environmental problem is air pollution, which is causing growing health problems. It is estimated that 300,000 people a year die prematurely from respiratory diseases (Economist 2004). The main reason is that about 70% of China's energy needs are supplied by coal-fired power stations, and thus China has the world's highest emissions of sulphur dioxide, which also increases acid rain (Economist 2004). Furthermore, the rapid growth of car usage accelerates urban air pollution, especially when many of those cars do not even reach the oldest European emission standards.

Fifth, China faces an energy crisis. China's energy sector has a number of weaknesses, including a shortage of domestic oil and gas reserves, and a geographic mismatch between the location of primary energy resources and the main centers of demand (Andrews-Speed 2005). This requires a very high rate of investment to transform and deliver a large quantity of energy, and the current level of energy consumption efficiency is low. Furthermore, coal continues to be an important energy source, and it is not only in low energy efficiency, but also creates pollution.

In addition to these five aspects, China also has a wide range of other environmental problems, including natural disasters, sound pollution, and garbage treatment.

It is wrong to attribute the cause of all these environmental problems only to human beings, but it is safe to say that human behavior accelerates environmental deterioration. The focus on economic development is one major cause for these environmental problems. For a long time, China only paid attention to its GDP, and lacked environmental concern at all, neglecting its exploitation of scarce resources and the pollution created by industrialization. In 1998, research indicated that for most of the Chinese bureaucracy, the goals of economic growth and environmental protection were not seen as mutually exclusive, because economic growth was regarded as eventually helping to pay for environmental cleanup (Edmonds 1998).

However, as environmental problems became serious enough to affect people's lives, and as these problems became an obstacle constraining economic growth in China, the Chinese government started to consider how to build a harmonic relationship between GDP and environment. Policy makers even proposed a new package of "right-sounding initiatives" like a "green GDP" to take environmental costs into account when developing the economy (Economist 2004).

Meanwhile, as the bridge between the public and the only major political party in China, the mass media in China have given increased attention to environmental reports. Nowadays environmental issues have become an established part of journalism in China. Many newspapers have special sections for environmental reports, and many television stations are making environment-related programs, such as "Green Space" on CCTV (China Central Television), and "Environmental Focus" on CETV (China Educational Television).

But some researchers point out the media's role in environmental education is not effective, because according to "Report on China's Public Environmental Protection and Well-being" (2006) public environmental concern was very low. Pan Yue, deputy head of the State Environmental watchdog ministry, claimed that the government and mass media should take the responsibility for this low level of public environmental concern. A study indicated that China's environmental coverage has some major problems. First, the environmental reports are usually very short, because they are inclined to report on some issues or problems, while hesitating to analyze their causes or long-term effects. In other words, in-depth reports are not common in environmental coverage. Second, they lack in terms of balanced coverage. For example, some newspapers give more space to the improvements made on environmental protection in order to create an image of a blooming country. Third, the environmental coverage lacks consistency. When an environment-related theme day came, such as World Environment Day, environmental reports bloomed, while on other days, their quantity was slight (Li 2007) .

I hypothesize that these shortcomings in current environmental coverage in China are reflected on both Party newspapers and non-Party newspapers, but to different degrees. Therefore, in addition to finding out the differences in environmental coverage between Party newspapers and non-Party newspapers, my study examines these shortcomings.

In general, I developed two research questions. First, is there any difference in environmental coverage between Party newspapers and non-Party newspapers, and if so, in what ways? One possible example is that the Party newspapers show less concern over environmental issues than do non-Party newspapers. Because environmental protection

can conflict with economic development, especially in a fast-growing developing country, the leaders in China may place more importance on economic development. Although general environmental concern has increased a lot during recent years, there is still a possibility that the leaders today attach more importance to economic development than to environmental protection, because economic development is important for a developing country. In order to have public support for new economic or environmental policies, the Chinese Communist Party may promote or deemphasize particular environmental issues through the mass media as an effective way to enforce their power. So the treatment of environmental coverage may differ between Party newspapers and non-Party newspapers, while the Party faces the dilemma of choosing between economic development and protecting the environment. The Party newspaper may have less environmental reports and be inclined to use positive tones to report environmental issues and problems, while the non-Party newspapers may report more environmental problems and use neutral or negative tone.

The second research question is whether differences exist between the national Party newspaper and local Party newspapers, and if so, in what ways? My hypothesis is that the differences are geographic. The national Party newspaper may express concern more about environmental problems in the whole country and even the whole world, while the local Party newspapers may pay more attention to local areas.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Data Retrieval

The dataset for this study is composed of newspaper articles from *People's Daily*, *Beijing Daily*, and *Beijing Youth Daily* from July 1st, 2001 to June 30th, 2007. *People's Daily* is the national official newspaper in China that is regarded as the organ of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. It is the most influential and authoritative newspaper in China. This newspaper serves as a liaison between the Party and the people, telling the people what the Party expects them to do and reporting the people's views and wishes to the Party leadership to some degree (Chang 1989). Its publication started in June 1948 and it has a nation-wide circulation. The majority of its readers are government employees. *People's Daily* brings readers the latest information about the policies, views and activities of the Chinese Government as well as major domestic news and international news. Its circulation size is 2.33 million copies per day. *Beijing Daily* is also a Party newspaper, but on a local level. It belongs to the Beijing Municipal government – China's second largest municipality. *Beijing Daily* was put in circulation in October 1952 and has become a popular newspaper for the Beijing area, providing information about politics, society, economy, sports, culture, and business. Its readers are from every social class, and the majority of the readers live in Beijing. Its circulation size is about 400,000 copies per day.

Different from *People's Daily* and *Beijing Daily*, *Beijing Youth Daily* is a non-Party newspaper, and it was put in circulation in March 1949. It reports from the perspective of youths and is popular for its critical viewpoints. As a non-Party newspaper, *Beijing Youth Daily* has to be actively involved in market dynamics and rely on strong entrepreneurship. It is the first newspaper in Mainland China to go public on the Hong Kong stock market. Although the *Beijing Youth Daily* is under the censorship of the Beijing Municipal Party Committee's Communist Youth League, it can be considered as non-Party newspaper. Its circulation size is about 600,000 copies per day.

TABLE I
SUMMARY OF THE THREE NEWSPAPERS IN THE STUDY

Newspaper	Dates of Publication	Party&Location	Estimated circulation size
<i>People's Daily</i>	Jun. 1948-present	National Party newspaper	2.33 million copies per day
<i>Beijing Daily</i>	Oct.1952-present	Local Party newspaper	400,000 copies per day
<i>Beijing Youth Daily</i>	Mar.1949-present	Local non-Party newspaper	600,000 copies per day

The data I have collected dates from July 1, 2001 to June 30, 2007. I initially chose 1998 as the starting point of my research, because Edmonds' study predicted that Chinese people's environmental concern would begin to increase from 1998. Edmond said that when Bill Clinton, the President of the United States, visited China in 1998, an entire discussion session in Guilin was devoted to environmental issues. This indicated that China was increasingly placing the environment in a prominent position (Edmonds 1998). But unfortunately, because of the limitation of the available electronic archival, *Beijing Youth Daily* could only be traced back to July 2001.

The sample set was accessed and compiled through the database of “CNKI” (China National Knowledge Infrastructure). I collected all the articles on environmental issues in these three newspapers by searching out articles containing any of the following words or phrases: air pollution, sand storm, smog, glacier, El Nino phenomenon, global warming, warm winter, rainstorm, unusual weather, climate change, raising of water surface, greenhouse, ozone layer, drought, shortage of water supply, water pollution, flood, acid rain, soil erosion, decrease of forest, wetland deterioration, desertification, noise pollution, radioactive pollution, nuclear pollution, energy crisis, Oil shortages, ecological balance, diversity of species, litter pollution, and the Three Gorges project. I also searched for papers articles with the word “environment (environmental)” as a key word, but discovered many articles containing the word “environment” talk about something not related to the environmental issues or problems. In Chinese, environment is "huan jing," but not all of the huan jing is related to the environment. For example, when people say "a beautiful place," they will use "huan jing" to indicate "place." There are many other similar examples.

The CNKI database allowed me to search articles containing any word, as well as articles having “environment” as a key word, but it did not provide comprehensive data from 2001 to 2007 for all the three newspapers. The CNKI database lacked the newspaper articles in *Beijing Youth Daily* from April 2004 to present. In order to complete the collection, I search *Beijing Youth Daily*'s website, using the same searching strategies. As a result, the articles from *Beijing Youth Daily* cover 07/01/2001 through 06/30/2007, the same as for the other two newspapers. Therefore, newspaper articles

from *People's Daily*, *Beijing Daily* and *Beijing Youth Daily* from 07/01/2001 to 06/30/2007 are the subject of my study.

I assume that use of these key words pull out all the environment-related articles from the CNKI database and newspaper website. These key words are drawn from several categories of major environmental problems, including air pollution, water resource problems, climate change, soil pollution, noise pollution, energy shortage, vegetation problems, and other issues, such as sand storms and Three Gorges project, which are major problems China and the world are facing (Wang 2005, Miller 1990). I also interviewed Master's students majoring in Environmental Protection at Beijing Normal University (Xu Jie etc.) and a Ph.D student majoring in Environmental Science at Oklahoma State University, and to insure that these key words provide comprehensive coverage of environmental problems in China.

Coding Examples

This study focuses on comparing the total environmental coverage across the three newspapers, and thus content analysis will be used. The individual article was treated as the unit of analysis. Frequency, article length, article tone, and geographic concern are coded. Frequency refers to how many times the newspaper has covered environmental problems. Because my study focuses on the total amount of attention to environmental issues, the number of articles and the average length of each article are counted. Furthermore, I coded for "tone," in order to capture what kind of image of environmental problems these three newspapers tried to present to their readers. To determine the

“tone,” a five-point scale was ranked from highly positive (5) to highly negative (1). Positive content means that environmental problems are portrayed as having been remedied, or that the government is taking measures to remedy them. Negative content stresses the deterioration of the environment. Therefore, articles only mentioning the positive sides were coded as 5, completely positive, while articles only mentioning the negative side were coded as 1, completely negative. Neutral articles (3) balanced both sides or were without demonstrable tone. Articles demonstrating tones between completely positive and neutral were coded as 4, while articles demonstrating tones between completely negative and neutral were coded as 2.

Finally, the geographic variation of these three newspapers’ environmental coverage is also a subject of my study. Therefore, whether an article talked about local, national, or international/other countries’ environmental problems and issues was also coded. This will be analyzed to answer my second research question.

In order to clarify the coding schemes, I present a few examples of coded articles, which are translated from Chinese.

Example #1: from *People’s Daily*

Title: Jiangxi will invest 12 billion Yuan on environmental protection

Author: Zhang Min

Date: 03/25/2002

Body:

“Jiangxi will invest 12 billion Yuan on environmental protection, which is part of the tenth five-year plan. It is at least twice the investment in environmental protection as the ninth five-year plan. According to the tenth five-year plan, Jiangxi will improve

obviously its programs for preventing air pollution, ecological protection, development of basic construction, recovering waste water and other residue... ”

This article only talked about the measures the Jiangxi government will take to improve environmental quality, so its tone was coded as completely positive (5), and its geographic concern was coded as local. The coding table is like the following one:

TABLE II
CODING EXAMPLE #1

date	title	word count (Chinese characters)	Tone	local	natio nal	interna tional
20020 32501 1	Jiangxi will invest 12 billion Yuan on environmental protection	518	5	Jiangxi	0	0

Example #2: from *Beijing Daily*

Title: Beijng starts to apply the national standard to the sewage treatment since May.

Author: Li Siyuan

Date: 01/20/2003

Body:

“China is a country with a shortage of water resources. Its per capita share of water resources is only one-fourth of the average level of the world. In order to improve the efficiency of water utilization, the Standardization Administration of the People’s Republic of China issued three national standards about the reuse of urban recycling water. They are “Classification of reuse of urban recycling water,” “Reuse of urban recycling water -- quality of urban miscellaneous water,” and “Reuse of urban recycling

water – quality of landscape water,” which will be carried out beginning May 1st, 2003. According to the experts from the Standardization Administration of the People’s Republic of China, the total urban and industry sewage discharge in 2001 was 42.84 billion tons, while the urban sewage discharge was 22.77 billion tons. Usually, after certain treatment, 70% of the urban sewage can be reused. This means that by reusing urban recycling water, China can increase the quantity of utilizable water by at least 50% while keeping the current supply quantity the same. However, China hasn’t classified and reutilized water resource properly until now, and much sewage has been discharged directly into the sea. As a result, only 40% of the sewage has been reused, far behind the average level of advanced countries, which is 75% to 80% of the sewage. Meanwhile, although some cities have reused urban recycling water, they lack certain rules to monitor their water quality and environmental side-effects. Reusing the urban recycling water is an effective method to save water resources, to reduce water pollution, to improve environmental quality, and to fix the problem of shortage of urban water resources. Therefore, the three new standards for the reuse of urban recycling water indicate that China is actively improving the ability of protecting the country’s water resource.”

This article showed that China has a big problem with the shortage of water resource on one hand; but on the other hand, it talked about three new standards for reusing recycling water to be implemented May 1st 2003, and these three standards were expected to strongly improve the country’s utilization of water resource. Therefore, the article’s tone was code as neutral, because it balanced both the positive and negative

sides. Its geographic concern was coded as national, because it talked about the whole country's water problems. The coding table is as following.

TABLE III
CODING EXAMPLE #2

	date	title	word count (Chinese characters)	Tone	local	natio nal	interna tional
20030 12000 0	01/2003	Beijing starts to apply the national standard to the sewage treatment since May 2003.	679	3	0	1	0

Example #3: from *Beijing Youth Daily*

Title: A total of 1 billion people in Asia will possibly face the problem of water shortage

Author: Qian Zheng

Date: 12/19/2006

Body:

“Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports that global warming will probably cause a severe water crisis in Asia. It is possible that more than 1 billion people in Asia will face water shortages in 2050. Global warming will also increase flooding, serious diseases, and an increase food prices in some areas.

According to the report, the biggest problems brought by global warming are increasing temperature and water shortages caused by reduced precipitation. One of the

most important water resources in Asia, the Himalayas' glacier, keeps shrinking, and this will cut India's utilizable water in-half by 2025."

This article talked about the water crisis in Asia, without mentioning anything on the positive side. So its tone was coded as completely negative, and its geographic concern was coded as International/ other countries. The coding table is as following.

TABLE IV
CODING EXAMPLE #3

	date	title	word count (Chinese characters)	Tone	local	natio nal	interna tional
20061 21900 0	12/200 6	A total of 1 billion people in Asia will possibly face the problem of water shortage	187	1	0	0	1

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Frequency of Environmental Coverage

After excluding duplicate articles, articles not related to environmental problems, and articles out of the targeted time period, a total of 4971 articles remained for content analysis. Between July 2001 and June 2007, *People's Daily* had 3582 articles covering environmental problems and issues, while *Beijing Daily* and *Beijing Youth Daily* had only 758 articles and 631 articles respectively. Both the total number of articles covering environmental problems in *People's Daily* and the number of articles in each month are much greater than for the other two newspapers'.

This large difference can be explained by their different circulation sizes. As a national newspaper with a much larger circulation size than the other local newspapers, *People's Daily* has a much larger budget and more resources. It employs more environmental reporters and sets up more local news agencies all over the country and even the world.

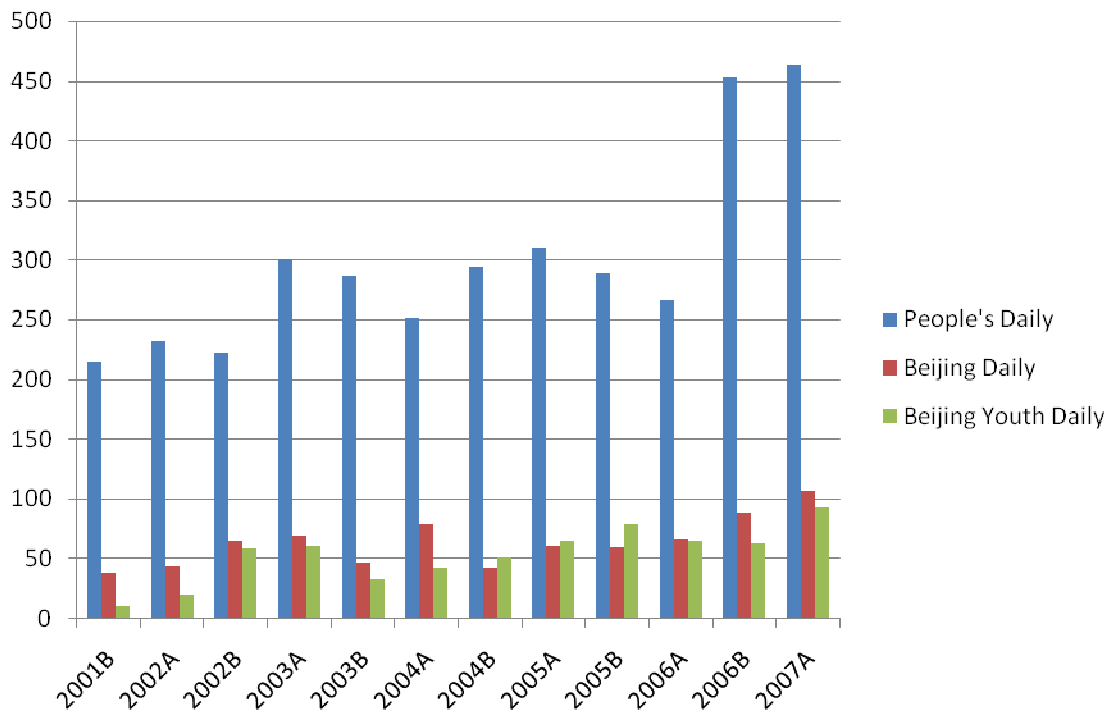
Furthermore, the result that *People's Daily* and *Beijing Daily* have more articles covering environmental problems than *Beijing Youth Daily* reveals that the Party newspapers do provide more coverage for environmental issues than non-Party

newspapers do.

In order to evaluate the trend, I counted the total number of articles on environmental issues every six months from July 2001 to June 2007 for each of the three newspapers. The frequencies of articles rose and fell throughout the study period, but in general, these three newspapers increased their attention to environmental problems (Figure I).

Figure I

Trends in Environmental Coverage, 2001-2007, by Six-month Periods *



* 2001B indicates the later half of 2001. 2002A indicates the first half of 2002, etc.

This growing attention results from awareness of the increasingly serious environmental situation brought by rapid economic development in China, and the increasing international pressure for solving China's environmental problems. According

to research on China's environmental condition, China's discharge of sewage increased from 43.3 billion tons in 2001 to 52.3 billion tons in 2005; the emission of sulphur dioxide increased from 19.48 million tons in 2001 to 25.49 million tons in 2005; emission of smog also increased from 10.70 million tons in 2001 to 11.82 million tons in 2005; and the total energy consumption increased from 2001 till 2005 (Yang 2007: 22).

The deteriorating environment attracted media attention from all over the world, especially after Beijing's successful bid for the 2008 Olympics in 2001. One of the reasons Beijing won was its "Green Olympics" plan, with a goal of cleaning its air and water by 2008. As one of the most rapidly growing cities in China, Beijing has serious environmental problems with air, water and even energy. The poor environmental conditions made the world think of Beijing as "Smoglympics" (Turner and Ellis 2007). Therefore, Beijing invested \$12 billion in an effort to green the 2008 Olympics and initiated its "Blue Sky Program" that required clean energy use in the Olympic village and closing nearly 200 industries in the region, converting buses and taxis to cleaner fuels, and encouraging clean transport pilot projects (Turner and Ellis 2007). In addition, in preparation for the Olympics, advanced technologies, including water recycling, rainwater utilization, and reclaimed water source heat pumps, were widely used in Beijing. No matter how "green" the Olympic game finally proved to be, the summer game pushed environmental protection in China-- especially Beijing-- to a higher level, and as time was approaching 2008 the whole world was paying increasing attention to environmental protection and improvement in China. Therefore, it is not surprising that during 2001 to 2007 media coverage of environmental issues was increasing.

However, media coverage of environmental problems in all the three newspapers was not increasing smoothly, but had ebbed and flowed during the six years (Figure 1). Boycoff (2007) said that key and concatenate events produce particular increases in media attention to environmental issues. There was a sudden increase in all the three newspapers in early 2003. Contributing to this increase was the severe SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) breakout in China. In spring 2003, a mysterious lethal virus, called atypical pneumonia in China and defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as SARS, first broke out in China's southern Guangdong province and then spread to Beijing and other regions in the country (Tai and Sun 2007). Thousands in China were infected with SARS, and hundreds died. The SARS issue triggered Chinese citizens' anger towards the government's cover-up and increased their desire for media transparency.

The first known SARS case reportedly occurred in Guangdong province on 16 November 2002 (CDSR 2003). A directive from the propaganda ministry was sent to all media outlets in China in January 2003, instructing all reporters and editors not to report the spread of a pneumonia-like virus which had killed several people in Guangdong, and the Guangzhou provincial propaganda department also issued similar orders in late February to the local media (Tai and Sun 2007). The Propaganda Department of the Central Party Committee, together with local propaganda departments, was directly in charge of media control at the national and local levels. Even when WHO issued a global alert about SARS on March 12th and declared SARS, "a worldwide health threat" on March 15th (CDSR 2003), the Propaganda Ministry instructed the Chinese media not to report this news (Tai and Sun 2007). But mounting international pressure (international

media and organizations) made the SARS issue into a crisis for the newly-issued leadership of Hu Jintao's administration, and thus forced the Chinese government to end its coverup of the SARS issue. Facing citizens' anger and international blame about its inaccurate and late disclosure of the facts, the Chinese government issued several apologies to the Chinese and international public, and promised a more open media environment in the future. This event gave the media more freedom to report social problems in the future.

Meanwhile, the consideration of how SARS started and spread resulted in wide discussion on environmental pollution, especially on aspects of treatment of sewage and ecological protection, because research found that human being's poor environmental behavior partially contributed to the SARS breakout (Li 2003). More media transparency and increased country-wide attention to environmental issues generated by the SARS issue explained the sudden increase of environmental coverage in early 2003 in the national Party newspaper -- *People's Daily*. Since then, the environmental coverage on *People's Daily* has kept at a higher level than in previous years. As Beijing's local newspapers, *Beijing Daily* and *Beijing Youth Daily* were also influenced by SARS issue, and their quantities of environmental articles also reached high point in early 2003.

The other big increase in media coverage of environmental issues occurred in late 2006 and 2007. *People's Daily* and *Beijing Daily* increased their environmental coverage significantly, while *Beijing Youth Daily* declined its environmental reporting a little bit in late 2006, but increased it in 2007. The increase can be explained by two external events. First, China declared a new priority-- Harmonious Society in October 2006, which was a signal of the shift in the Party's focus from promoting all-out economic growth to solving

worsening social tensions. One of the six rules of a harmonious society is to create an environment-friendly society. The goal of creating a harmonious society was also set as the main goal of government work. As a result, the quantity of environmental articles in *People's Daily* and *Beijing Daily* increased a lot. The other reason for the increasing environmental coverage is that as time approached 2008, the whole country, especially the capital city Beijing, became more anxious to solve its environmental problems in order to make the Olympic Games successful. Ecological protection, energy saving and emission reduction had become popular words in media coverage of environmental problems and protection. Thus, all the three newspapers' environmental coverage increased as approaching 2008.

Beijing Daily had a sudden increase in early 2004, while the other two did not. Its increase was due to a newly issued policy by Beijing Municipal government. Liu Qi, secretary of Beijing municipal committee of the CPC, issued new environmental policies to the Beijing Olympic Organizing Committee. The policies ordered the Organizing Committee to minimize the environmental damage in Olympic project constructions, to always strive to protect ecological balance, environment and resources, and to update the progress toward achieving a Green Olympics. This new policy greatly heightened the environmental coverage in *Beijing Daily*, the Party newspaper in Beijing, in early 2004.

The analyses show that the coverage of environmental problems and issues in *People's Daily*, *Beijing Daily* and *Beijing Youth Daily* are all affected by important events, but by different types of events. The Party newspapers' coverage on environmental issues are influenced both by new policies related to environmental protection and social events which create environmental concern, while the non-Party

newspaper's coverage on environmental issues is likely to be influenced by social events related to the environment rather than policies. For example, SARS triggered a big increase in environmental reporting in all the three newspapers, but the "Harmonious society" policy only attracted increasing attention from the two Party newspapers. Furthermore, the environmental coverage of the national Party newspaper is more sensitive to national environmental policy than to local environmental policy, and the environmental coverage on the local Party newspaper is sensitive to both the national policy and the local policy. For instance, the new environmental policies issued by the Secretary of the Beijing Municipal Committee of the CPC only attracted big increasing attention in Beijing Daily.

Article length

As I reviewed these news articles, I found that articles with in-depth analyses and explanations are usually longer than one page in a PDF file which is about 1000 Chinese words. Those articles only reported issues and facts without dealing with the possible causes and future impacts are usually very short, less than 1000 Chinese words. So I defined articles with more than 1000 words as long articles, and the rest as short articles. Although length is not absolutely accurate for judging news articles' foci, it is a good indicator of how much attention the newspapers want their readers to pay to their environmental reports.

For each of the three newspapers, short environmental articles are more frequent than long environmental articles. For example, 45% of all the environmental articles on

People's Daily are long, and while 46% of those in the *Beijing Daily* are long, as are 43% in the *Beijing Youth Daily*. Thus, no matter if it is a Party newspaper or non-Party newspaper, a national newspaper or local newspaper, stories about environmental issues and problems tend to be short.

This result is consistent with earlier research, which indicated that environmental articles on China's newspapers are short and lack depth (Li 2007). Because environmental articles are usually short, they often neglect the root cause of those problems as well as the political, economic, and cultural aspects of the problems. Therefore, it is not easy for readers to get a good sense of the seriousness of environmental problems, the factors that cause them or the steps needed to solve them. The result is that newspapers articles are unlikely to produce strong environmental consciousness among Chinese citizens. For example, a study found that only 3.5% of females in China learned environmental knowledge through mass media (Li 2007).

One reason for the short length of most environmental articles are characteristics of news media. The deep analysis of environmental problems usually requires scientific explanations, comprehensive analysis and evaluation, which are published through books (Zhang 2004). Because newspapers usually cannot provide enough room or time for reporting most environmental problems in depth, newspapers prefer short environmental articles, which usually are about environmental problems themselves.

TABLE V

ARTICLE TONE AND ARTICLE LENGTH FOR THE THREE NEWSPAPPERS

	<i>People's Daily</i>	<i>Beijing Daily</i>	<i>Beijing Youth Daily</i>
Positive & Long	22% (791)	30% (228)	14% (86)
Positive & Short	27% (972)	38% (288)	19% (121)
Neutral & Long	10% (363)	5% (37)	5% (31)
Neutral & Short	10% (366)	8% (57)	5% (31)
Negative & Long	13% (470)	11% (87)	24% (149)
Negative & Short	17% (620)	8% (61)	34% (213)
Total	99%* (3582)	100% (758)	101%* (631)

* Rounding error.

Article Tone

When I ran the crosstabs for the factors of “tone” and “length,” I found that the most common style for the two Party newspapers, *People's Daily* and *Beijing Daily*, was short articles with a positive tone, but the most common style for the non-Party newspaper, *Beijing Youth Daily*, was short articles with a negative tone. For *People's Daily*, almost half (49%) of the environmental articles have a relatively positive tone, 20% of them have a neutral tone, and the rest (30%) are with a negative tone. For *Beijing Daily*, about 68% of all the environmental articles have a positive tone, and only 13% have a neutral tone and 19% have a negative tone. However, a majority (58%) of the environmental

articles in the non-Party newspaper, *Beijing Youth Daily*, are written from a negative perspective, and only 33% of them have a positive tone.

TABLE VI
AVERAGE ARTICLE TONE IN EACH HALF YEAR FROM JULY 2001 TO JUNE
2007

	<i>People's Daily</i>	<i>Beijing Daily</i>	<i>Beijing Youth Daily</i>
2001B	3.7	3.9	3
2002A	3.3	3.6	2.9
2002B	3.7	4.3	2.7
2003A	3.3	4	2.9
2003B	3.4	4	3
2004A	3.3	4	2.8
2004B	3.5	3.5	2.2
2005A	3.1	4.3	2.7
2005B	3.6	3.6	2.3
2006A	3	3.8	2.5
2006B	3.2	4.1	2.1
2007A	3.6	4.1	2.3
Average	3.4	3.9	2.7

Using the five point scale of article tone, I calculated the average scores of article tone for the three newspapers in each half year. First, the scores for *People's Daily* are between 3.0 and 3.7, averaging 3.4. Thus, generally speaking, *People's Daily* reports environmental problems and issues in a rather positive manner. This means that when *People's Daily* presents environmental problems, it puts more emphasis on the bright side than the dark side of the problems. For example, when it reports on serious pollution in a city, it emphasizes more on how the government is taking measures to solve the problem.

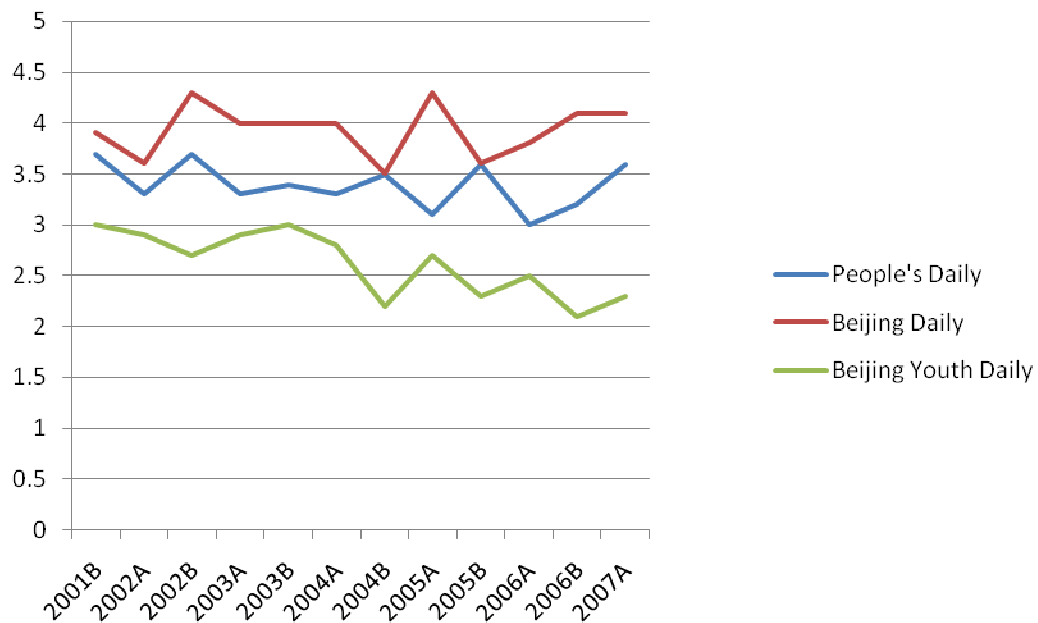
Second, the scores of *Beijing Daily* are between 3.6 and 4.3, and its average tone is a very positive 3.9. *Beijing Daily* doesn't emphasize the seriousness of problems, but often

puts emphasis on what the Beijing Municipal Government has done or plans to do for improving environmental quality in Beijing. *Beijing Daily* serves a propaganda role for the Beijing Municipal Government.

Third, the average scores of article tone for *Beijing Youth Daily* are between 2.1 and 3.0, and its average tone is 2.5, by far the lowest score among the three newspapers. These scores indicate that *Beijing Youth Daily* is basically reporting environmental problems from a negative perspective. For example, when *Beijing Youth Daily* reports the damage from flood, it presents the facts on how many people suffered from the flood, how bad the damage was, and how much economic loss it caused. Compared with *Beijing Youth Daily*, *People's Daily* often reports flood issues with a special emphasis on describing the efforts that government leaders and soldiers put into rescue missions.

FIGURE II

TRENDS OF “ARTICLE TONE” OF THREE NEWSPAPERS FROM LATE 2001 TO EARLY 2007



The above figure reflects the trends of environmental article tones in the three newspapers. In general, only *Beijing Youth Daily* has an obvious declining tone from 2001 to 2007. The two Party newspapers, *People's Daily* and *Beijing Daily*, tend to fluctuate around 3.5 and 4.0, respectively. Compared with the two Party newspapers, the non-Party newspaper *Beijing Youth Daily's* tone score starts at 3, but ends up below 2.5, indicating that it has become more critical about environmental problems. As the 2008 Beijing Olympics was approaching, solving environmental problems in Beijing seemed increasingly urgent. In 2001, Beijing promised a "Green Olympics" to win the Olympic Games, but greening Beijing had not resulted in slowing the pollution down. Beijing was like "an athlete trying to get into shape by walking on a treadmill yet eating double cheeseburgers at the same time" (Yardley 2008). Beijing's Olympic bid intensified a stunning urban boom. Since 2000, Beijing's gross domestic product jumped 144 percent; new office buildings and apartment towers were rising every week; more than 1.7 billion square feet of new construction had been started, most of it unrelated to the Olympics. Therefore, although dirty, coal-burning furnaces have been replaced, lowering the city's sulfur dioxide emissions, fine-particle pollution have been exacerbated by booming citywide construction, which shows no signs of letting up. Although polluting factories have been gradually moved or closed, auto emissions are rising as the city added up to 1,200 new cars and trucks every day (Yardley 2008). Therefore, the efforts for a "green" Beijing Olympics had negative effects on the environment in Beijing, which attracted more attention from people in the country and all over the world. At the same time, *Beijing Youth Daily* had an increasingly negative tone for environmental reports. This

shows that *Beijing Youth Daily* is positioned to discover and criticize problems in Chinese society, and thus reports environmental problems from a more critical perspective.

However, compared with *Beijing Youth Daily*, the Party newspapers *People's Daily* and *Beijing Daily* have a much softer tone toward environmental problems. Their trends show that they have kept emphasizing the improvement in problems and the central government's and local governments' good performance in solving environmental problems. A recent study shows that although there may be a little improvement in certain areas, China's general environmental conditions are becoming worse (Zheng 2007). Under such a situation, *People's Daily*, the national newspaper, should have a declining tone score for its environmental coverage. But although its tone score fluctuates around 3.5, its general trend is becoming a bit more positive in coverage. So it is obvious that the image of environmental problems that *People's Daily* wants to transmit to the public is not created according to the problems themselves. Instead, its news making process seems influenced by its goal of protecting the Party's image. Thus, when it comes to environmental coverage, the two Party newspapers consistently provide propaganda for the Communist Party of China.

Geographic Variation of Environmental Coverage

I categorized articles according to locations where the problems occurred or to which they are related. All together there are 34 province-level administrative units in China, including 4 municipalities, 22 provinces, 5 autonomous regions, 2 special districts, and

Taiwan, which is claimed by People's Republic of China as the 23rd province, but is not currently under the administration of the People's Republic of China. Furthermore, Yangtze River and Yellow River are also two locations in my study. In recent years, the ecosystems of these two important rivers in China have been destroyed. Heavy river traffic on the Yangtze River, and river-side industries, have caused death of the local wildlife population, and even led to extinction of precious species. The Yellow River also has a severe problem with its rising river bed, which causes huge floods around it. Based on all these 36 local regions, plus the Bohai sea, as well as national-wide and international levels, I coded all newspaper articles in my study into 39 categories. However, Macau is not listed in the following table, since no articles talked about environmental problem in Macau.

As shown in table VII, 47% of all the environmental articles in the *People's Daily* focus on national environmental issues, while for *Beijing Daily* only 5% and *Beijing Youth Daily* only 20% of the environmental coverage focuses on national issues. So not surprisingly, the national Party newspaper pays more attention to nation-wide issues. Moreover, the national Party newspaper also covers more provinces, municipalities, autonomous regions, and special districts than do the two local newspapers. *People's Daily* covers a total of 36 local regions, but *Beijing Daily* covers only 5 local regions and *Beijing Youth Daily* covers 31 local regions. Among all the local regions which those two local newspapers cover, Beijing is the city receiving the highest attention as to be expected for Beijing papers. A total of 92% of the environmental articles in *Beijing Daily* focus on Beijing, while the percentage of articles on Beijing in *Beijing Youth Daily*

is 31%. Thus, clearly the two Beijing local newspapers focus more on Beijing's environmental issues than does the national newspaper, as would be expected.

TABLE VII
GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS OF ENVIRONMENTAL ARTICLES

Location	<i>People's Daily</i>		<i>Beijing Daily</i>		<i>Beijing Youth Daily</i>	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Beijing	98	3%	694	92%	198	31%
Tianjin	5	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Hebei	37	1%	0	0%	2	0%
Shanxi	64	2%	0	0%	2	0%
Inner Mongolia	89	2%	0	0%	8	1%
Liaoning	23	1%	0	0%	5	1%
Jilin	29	1%	0	0%	0	0%
Heilongjiang	65	2%	1	0%	15	2%
Shanghai	12	0%	0	0%	2	0%
Shandong	35	1%	0	0%	2	0%
Jiangsu	99	3%	0	0%	5	1%
Zhejiang	32	1%	0	0%	3	0%
Anhui	22	1%	0	0%	1	0%
Fujian	29	1%	0	0%	1	0%
Hongkong	2	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Jiangxi	31	1%	0	0%	1	0%
Henan	27	1%	0	0%	2	0%
Hainan	10	0%	0	0%	2	0%
Hubei	38	1%	0	0%	2	0%
Hunan	41	1%	0	0%	8	1%
Guangdong	48	1%	1	0%	9	1%
Guangxi	15	0%	0	0%	5	1%
Chongqing	74	2%	0	0%	16	3%
Sichuan	38	1%	0	0%	4	1%
Guizhou	23	1%	1	0%	0	0%
Yunnan	34	1%	0	0%	3	0%
Tibet	31	1%	0	0%	12	2%
Shanxi	52	1%	0	0%	5	1%
Xinjiang	54	2%	0	0%	5	1%
Gansu	68	2%	0	0%	2	0%
Qinghai	39	1%	1	0%	14	2%
Ningxia	20	1%	0	0%	1	0%
Bohai Sea	1	0%	0	0%	2	0%
Yangtze River	46	1%	0	0%	5	1%
Yellow river	41	1%	0	0%	8	1%
Taiwan	2	0%	0	0%	0	0%

National	1665	47%	35	5%	126	20%
International	543	15%	25	3%	155	25%
total	3582	100%	758	100%	631	100%

Research has shown that events tend to be more important to those who are close to them (Bendix and Liebler 1999). Therefore, the local newspapers pay more attention to events occurring in the Beijing area, while the national newspaper--whose readers are located all around the country-- pay attention to events in all areas of China.

This result becomes more obvious when I narrow the comparison to the national Party newspaper and the local Party newspaper, which are *People's Daily* and *Beijing Daily*. Almost half (47%) of the environmental articles in *People's Daily* focus on national issues, while 38% are about local areas widely scattered among the regions of China. In contrast, for *Beijing Daily* 92% of the environmental articles focus on the Beijing region. In addition, *People's Daily* gives more coverage to international issues than does *Beijing Daily*, 15% versus only 3%. Therefore, the national Party newspaper and the local Party newspaper clearly show difference in the geographic focus of their news coverage, as the national newspaper provides more comprehensive geographic coverage.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this study is to explore the ways that the Chinese Communist Party tries to construct environmental problems as issues through its representative newspapers, the national *People's Daily* and the local *Beijing Daily*. I included a non-Party newspaper, *Beijing Youth Daily*, as a relatively liberal newspaper to compare with the two Party newspapers. By examining the frequencies, article tones, article lengths, and geographic variations in three Chinese newspapers' coverage of environmental issues over a 6-year period, from July 2001 to June 2007, I found that all three newspapers' coverage of environmental problems and issues increased substantially. However, obvious differences in coverage exist among the national Party newspaper, the local Party newspaper, and the local non-Party newspaper.

Summary of Three Comparisons

The first comparison is between the Party newspapers and the non-Party newspaper (*People's Daily/ Beijing Daily* versus *Beijing Youth Daily*). This comparison focuses on the total pattern of environmental coverage and the "tone" scores. The Party newspapers have more articles covering environmental problems and issues than does the non-Party

newspaper, *Beijing Youth Daily*. Also, both the Party newspapers tend to take a positive tone in their average article. This means that the Party newspapers prefer to portray environmental problems and issues from a positive perspective, stressing improvement already achieved and measures taken by the government to deal with the problems. In contrast, the non-Party newspaper tends to portray environmental problems from a more critical perspective, emphasizing the environmental damage done to citizens. Because of its critical perspective, *Beijing Youth Daily* is more popular among young people, compared with *People's Daily* and *Beijing Daily*.

The difference among Party newspapers and non-Party newspapers becomes more obvious when controlling for the geographic factor. Because *People's Daily* is a national newspaper, and has a much larger circulation size than the other two newspapers, the comparison between *Beijing Daily* and *Beijing Youth Daily* is a clearer indicator of the difference between Party and non-Party newspapers, and thus directly shows how the factor of "Party" affects environmental coverage.

Beijing Daily carries more environmental articles than does *Beijing Youth Daily*, but it uses a very positive article tone, whereas *Beijing Youth Daily* has a somewhat negative article tone. The Beijing Party newspaper does attach importance to environmental issues, because the Party has realized the significance of environmental protection and also feels the pressure from both inside and outside of the country. However, the Party newspapers stick to the role of propagandizer, and thus their environmental coverage tries to lead the public to think about environmental problems in the way the Party prefers it to do. By using a positive tone in reporting environmental problems, Party newspapers are more

likely to encourage their readers to see environmental issues in a positive light, emphasizing efforts of the government to deal with problems.

Moreover, the Party newspapers' propaganda role is also shown by the trends of their article tones. When the actual environmental conditions were deteriorating, and environmental problems in Beijing were causing more and more people both in and out of the country worried about the success of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, newspaper articles could have reported the actual anxiety and concern. However, only *Beijing Youth Daily* showed an increasingly negative tone, while the two Party papers maintained their generally positive ranges. The reason why the Party newspapers hesitate to be critical of environmental problems in China is to protect the good image of the Party. Although the Chinese Communist Party has realized the importance of environmental protection, given the pressure of developing the economy, the Party cannot give up economic development for environmental improvement. What it has done so far is to incorporate environmental protection into the plan for economic development, but because of various conflicts within government departments environmental protection projects do not succeed very well (Zheng 2007). Therefore, emphasizing the efforts the Party has put on environmental protection to the public is helpful for pacifying the public regarding towards environmental problems and maintaining their support.

Furthermore, the ups and downs in environmental coverage of the newspapers are found to be related to key events, such as SARS in 2003, but the Party newspapers are affected more by events like government decrees and policies. Compared with *Beijing Youth Daily*, *Beijing Daily's* environmental coverage significantly increased with coverage of new environmental policies issued by the Beijing Municipal Government for

the Olympic Games. However, *Beijing Youth Daily's* coverage does not follow governmental issues closely, but is concerned more on events affecting citizens such as SARS and pollution exacerbated by construction for the 2008 Olympics Games.

The first two comparisons aim at the first research question: Is there any difference in environmental coverage between Party newspapers and non- Party newspapers, and if so, in what ways? The third comparison is going to answer the second research question: Is there any difference between national Party newspapers and local Party newspapers, and if so, in what ways? In order to control for the factor of "Party," the third comparison is between *People's Daily* and *Beijing Daily*.

My study reveals that geography affects Party newspapers' environmental coverage. This study finds out that *People's Daily* pays more attention to environmental problems at the national and international level, and on an average provides similar coverage of different provinces and special districts in China. But *Beijing Daily* focuses more on the Beijing area, with 92% of all its environmental articles during late 2001 to early 2007 focusing on Beijing region.

The other difference between the national Party newspaper and the local Party newspaper is that the *Beijing Daily* shows an even stronger propaganda function on environmental coverage than does the national Party newspaper. For *People's Daily* 49% of the environmental articles are positive, and its average "tone" score is 3.4. For *Beijing Daily* 68% of the environmental articles are positive, and its average tone is 3.9. This difference may be attributable to two possible factors. First, *Beijing Daily* is concerned more about the Beijing area and *People's Daily* is concerned more about the entire nation. It is possible that the actual environmental conditions in Beijing are better than the

nationwide environmental conditions, so *Beijing Daily* has a higher tone score than *People's Daily*. Second, local governments and the central government sometimes have conflicting interests, due to severe competition among different local governments. Although the central government proposed the idea of “sustainable development” many years ago, local governments kept enlarging their local industries, getting more funding, and largely neglected environmental costs (Zheng 2007). So transmitting a good image of the local government on environment-related issues is one of the ways a paper like *Beijing Daily* can assuage local citizens while minimizing investments in environmental protection.

Limitations and Recommendations

This study has some limitations, because of China's special situation. The Chinese Communism Party (CCP) is the ruling party, while other parties cannot be in power. This situation results in all the media being subject to the censorship of CCP. Even though *Beijing Youth Daily* is not a Party newspaper, a lot of its staff are Party members, and the newspaper's views cannot attack the CCP directly. So the influence of “Party” does have effect on the non-Party newspaper too, but not so much as for the official Party newspapers.

Furthermore, my study focused only on the analysis of media coverage of overall environmental problems. However, previous studies in other nations have conducted analyses on media coverage of specific environmental problems, such as global warming (Sampei and Aoyagi-Usui 2008, Boykoff and Boykoff 2003). Future research to analyze

China's media coverage of specific environmental problems, comparing Party papers with non-Party papers, may provide insight into the Chinese Communist Party's attitude towards specific kinds of environmental problems.

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Scope and Method of Study: Content Analysis on Three Chinese Newspapers

Findings and Conclusions: I examine the coverage of environmental issues by three major newspapers in China, and find that all three newspapers' coverage of environmental problems and issues increased from July 2001 to June 2007. However, by examining the frequencies, article tones, article lengths, and geographic foci of each paper, I find obvious differences among the national Communist Party newspaper, the Beijing Party newspaper, and the Beijing non-Party newspaper. First, the two Party newspapers provide more coverage of environmental problems than does the non-Party newspaper. The Party newspapers often report environmental problem from a relatively positive perspective, while the non-Party newspaper is more likely to use a critical and negative perspective. Therefore, the Party newspapers seem to provide propaganda for the Party on the issues of environmental problems. Second, the Party newspapers' environmental coverage seems strongly influenced by the government's environmental policies and perspective, while the non-Party newspaper's coverage is strongly influenced by social issues. Third, the national Party newspaper gives more coverage to nationwide environmental problems, while the local Party newspaper pays more attention to the local area.

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