Relational Institutions and ENGOs in China: From Nu River to Changzhou

The fast expansion of NGOs in China and much more complex environment NGOs facing compared with their western partners attracts more and more scholarly attention, particularly on their interaction with Chinese governments. A number of studies illustrate various strategies adopted by Chinese NGOs to co-opt with governments by pointing out the importance of leaderships, personal connections, organizational resources, and political opportunities from resource-mobilization perspective and institutional theory.

This paper aims to combine these two perspectives by exploring the interaction between actors (NGOs, governments, and other stakeholders) and the institutions ruling them. Two cases are examined carefully, including well-known dam-building case in Nu River, Yunnan province, and the polluted land public litigation case in Changzhou, Jingsu Province. The finding shows that with the development of public awareness of environmental protection in China, collaborative action is much more adopted by involved actors in order to overcome institutional obstacles. However, the governments are also learning skills to deal with protest and advocacy activities. Even though formal law and regulations have been established to facilitate the participation of social actors into the policy process, the outcome of the advocacy activities is still very situation and relational based.