

Is the River Chief System the Final Solution to China's Water Governance Problem?

Abstract

The recently introduced River Chief system is expected to fix the so-called “nine dragons ruling the waters” issue, a reference to the tangle of diffuse and unclear responsibilities for managing different aspects of China's environment and policies. Over 760,000 village level river chiefs and another 300,000 at the township, county and provincial levels have been named river chiefs. This is perhaps the world's largest water manager group. How does the system work? Can it dramatically improve the quality and integrity of China's water resources? What are the opportunities for and challenges to China's effective water governance?