

**Citizen Activism, Media, and
Health-related Environmental Issues in a Risk Society**
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Citizen activism in health-related environmental issues is a notable phenomenon in recent years in China. Yet different media have played quite different roles in different cases. In the SARS crisis in 2003, mass media initially remained quiescent while news and rumors were circulating online and by text-messaging. In the Songhua River pollution case in 2005, mass media were again blocked while controversy was firing up online. In two major pollution-induced rural riots in Zhejiang province in 2005, mass media coverage was meager. In the demonstrations against the XP project in Xiamen in 2007 and the Meglev train project in Shanghai in 2008, new media were important tools of mobilization while mass media coverage was more extensive than in earlier cases. In still other cases, some local citizen groups struggling against serious pollution have a hard time to publicize their cause, while other groups fighting less life-threatening issues (such as endangered species) gain a great deal of media publicity.

How do issue areas affect their chances of media publicity? What issues get more media coverage and why? Do health-related environmental issues, such as pollution and environmental disasters, feature prominently on the agendas of environmental NGOs? How do the resources and strategies of different social actors affect their use of and relations with media? How do they affect the issue areas they focus on?

Some scholars have studied how media mobilization by environmental NGOs has contributed to the construction of a green public sphere. Others have studied print media coverage of environmental controversies. Still others have studied the use of new media in environmental monitoring. Yet, how and why civic mobilization varies with the types of social actors, issues, and media has not been studied. This paper is a preliminary effort to map the field by identifying the main actors, issues, and media strategies and exploring their interrelations. The empirical analysis focuses on a carefully selected sample of cases aimed at identifying patterns and types of citizen activism in relation to media mobilization on health-related environmental issues. The study will shed light on larger questions concerning citizen activism, media transparency, and governance in the age of risk society.