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4 Environmental Politics in East Asia

Citizen advocacy about environmental issues in East Asia emerged directly in response to the negative human health and economic consequences of rapid industrialization. Across the region, environmental activism began when people living near polluting facilities began to feel the effects of industrial pollution. Local residents organized to try to stop harmful pollution. Initially, governments and corporations were predictably resistant to change and were often violent in their attempts to coerce communities into accepting the costs of pollution in exchange for a variety of economic and other benefits. When residents refused to be bought off, government and corporate actors engaged in a wide spectrum of responses, ranging from violent suppression, coercion, and co-optation to compromise and even innovation.[1]

While initial movements in the region took the form of classic NIMBY (not in my backyard) struggles that dissipated once the pollution issues were resolved, over time they became more sophisticated. Activists found ways to work with local and national governmental officials, as well as corporations, to gain better environmental outcomes. They broadened the scope of the issues they focused on from strictly pollution to include recycling, conservation, climate change, and others. Now, activists across the region, whether they are private citizens concerned about the environment, nongovernmental organization (NGO) professionals, business entrepreneurs, or civil servants, are able to take advantage of the internet and social networking technologies to connect with others in their own country and abroad who are seeking positive environmental change.

Although regime type affects the resources available to activists, as the previous chapters demonstrated, it has not significantly changed the advocacy methods that advocates have employed. The biggest national-level

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differences in East Asia can be explained by the differences in the timing of when environmental issues became politically salient in each country. The timing of environmental movements in East Asia mattered in three ways. First, it mattered with respect to the political opportunities available in domestic politics—for example, was the ruling party vulnerable and willing to address environmental concerns? Second, timing mattered with respect to the political opportunities available in global politics—for example, was the environment on the global political agenda? Finally, it mattered in terms of sequence, because countries that experienced environmental movements later were able to learn from those who had gone before. The next section describes, in the order in which they occurred, the environmental movements of the four countries that serve as this book's focus: Japan, followed by Taiwan and South Korea, and most recently, China. This will be followed by a profile of environmental activism in the region today.

Environmental Movements in East Asia

Japan

Japan's environmental activism began at the turn of the twentieth century as a consequence of the dramatic industrial expansion initiated by Japan's Meiji Restoration. During the 1890s and early 1900s, village protests erupted first against copper mines: the Ashio mine in Tochigi Prefecture, Sumitomo's mine in Ehime Prefecture, and Hitachi's mine in Ibaraki Prefecture. In all three cases, sulfur gas pollution emitted from smokestacks, combined with heavy metals and acid released as wastewater into local streams, decimated the livelihoods of nearby farmers and fishers, causing serious health and livelihood problems for the local residents. Although the government and corporations initially tried to suppress and buy off the protesters, the plants eventually made significant investments to reduce pollution and compensate victims. Once the pollution was reduced and the victims' families were compensated, the protests died off.[2]

Environmental activism resurfaced again during the early postwar period. High-growth policies favored economic growth over environmental protection, resulting in toxic outcomes that threatened lives and livelihoods across the Japanese archipelago.[3] By the end of the 1960s, environmental pollution had become a major, national political issue. Once again the protests began as residents living near the industrial plants complained to

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the companies and local governments, and then they began taking more aggressive political action to pressure companies to clean up their plants.

Unlike in the prewar cases, which were eventually resolved through a combination of government pressure and corporate measures to placate residents, in the postwar cases residents were unsatisfied with government and company responses. Local residents also now had access to democratic processes—they could elect proenvironmental political leaders into public office and take corporate offenders to court. By the early 1970s, 40 percent of Japanese were living in areas with progressive chief executives, and by 1975 many of Japan's major cities, including Tokyo, Kyoto, and Osaka, had progressive mayors.[4] Joining counterparts in the United States and western Europe, pollution victims took to the streets to draw the attention of the public to their concerns. They also took the polluting corporations to court. To the surprise of many, environmental advocates won their lawsuits in what came to be known as the Big Four pollution cases, requiring significant and immediate action on the part of the companies, and giving elected officials a wake-up call about their responsibilities to keep people safe and healthy.[5]

The government reacted relatively quickly to the widespread and growing concerns about the environmental costs of its growth-first economic policies. Unlike its undemocratic, prewar predecessors, the postwar ruling party, the conservative Liberal Democratic Party, was sensitive to electoral pressure from opposition parties, and it reacted quickly to pass a sweeping array of environmental legislation in 1970 in what has come to be known as the Pollution Diet. Companies complied, and from that time forward, Japanese corporations, especially large ones, have tried to stay ahead of pollution issues to avoid the commercial consequences of a negative corporate image, as well as prevent additional intrusive government regulation.[6]

The Japanese case demonstrates that while the timing of an environmental crisis can put political pressure on ruling parties, it does not always mean the departure of those parties from power. In both the early 1900s and 1970, Japan's ruling party and major corporations were able to mollify the public, finding policies that enabled them to address environmental health issues without having to give up political power.

After a few decades off the global political agenda, the environment has once again risen to the top of international political discussions. A combination of the end of the Cold War, political instability in the Middle East, rising energy needs, growing concern about energy security, and rising

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scientific evidence about the multitude of threats related to climate change has brought the environment to international and national political agendas around the world. Citizens have also developed very sophisticated methods of networking with each other within and across borders, creating additional pressure on political and corporate decision makers.

The contemporary form of environmental politics in Japan can be traced to the events leading up to the Third Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, held in Kyoto in November 1997. Before the conference, Japanese environmental activists created the Kiko Forum [Environmental Forum] in Kyoto to connect local environmental organizations to each other and to groups from around the world. The successful creation of the Kyoto Protocol by participating governments was mirrored in the successful solidification of the global NGO community through the actions of the Kiko Forum and others.[7]

These networks grew dramatically as internet technology spread. In 2000 there were fewer than fifty thousand internet users in Japan (about one third of the population), and that number had more than doubled by 2010.[8] By 2016, internet usage exceeded 90 percent for Japanese between 13 and 69 years of age. Examples of environmental networks in the country include the Kiko Network (the new name for the Kiko Forum), the Japan River Restoration Network, and the Climate Action Network Japan, to name a few. Commercial networks related to the environment also proliferated—for example, the Japan Green Purchasing Network, Eco-Networks, and GreenBizJapan. These groups usually have connections to international NGOs, but large international environmental organizations, such as Greenpeace, the Nature Conservancy, and World Wildlife Fund, do not generally have offices in Japan, or their offices are a fraction of the size of those found in other countries.[9]

In the aftermath of the triple disaster of 2011, which included a devastating earthquake, a tsunami, and a nuclear disaster that took the lives of nearly twenty thousand people in the northeast region of Japan, these networks of organizations were critical in providing immediate assistance to those in need in disaster areas. They also helped focus the Japanese public on the importance of a wide variety of environmental concerns, especially those related to energy, conservation, and community resilience.[10]

Environmental politics reached a fever pitch following the disaster, with all segments of society getting involved. Japanese government officials have

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been working with global organizations and governments to improve international nuclear safety protocols and standards, disaster management, and eco-city development.[11] The corporate sector has also responded with innovative plans. For example, within weeks of the disaster, billionaire Masayoshi Son gained the cooperation of nearly all of Japan's governors for a bold new plan that would dramatically enhance Japan's renewable power infrastructure and expand renewable energy across the region.[12]

Private citizens and civic groups have also formed innovative groups. Safecast established an interactive map just days after the disaster that serves as a crowdsourced platform where individuals from around the world upload and view radiation readings from individual Geiger counters in an effort to offer a nongovernmental source of radiation information to the public. Networks of antinuclear groups such Sayonara Nukes have taken advantage of public outrage and new social networking technology to organize regular, simultaneous protests all over Japan, with the numbers of participants often reaching into the tens of thousands.[13]

It is now nearly ten years after the disaster, and environmental advocacy efforts have become more focused. Public protests about nuclear power plants have died down, No Nukes Japan stopped mapping protest events in 2012, and nine of Japan's forty-two operational reactors have been restarted.[14] Japan liberalized its electricity market in 2016 and is moving rapidly toward the expansion of solar, wind, and hydrogen as sources of energy for the country.[15] Many cities and NGOs have been active in efforts to curb greenhouse gas emissions—the city of Tokyo reduced its energy consumption more than 20 percent between 2000 and 2015, with the industrial and transportation sectors making astounding 41 percent and 42 percent reductions, respectively.[16]

Contemporary environmental politics in Japan is sophisticated and complex. Millions of ordinary citizens are working through local organizations to improve their local environments. Hundreds of small organizations help link Japanese citizens with local policymakers and with international environmental organizations around the world. Dozens of groups work closely with counterparts around the world and with high-level government officials in Japan. However, for the most part, environmental politics in Japan, as in the rest of East Asia, remains somewhat bifurcated. At an elite level, there are a small group of technocrats from the government, civil society, and business working on high-level issues of national and international

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environmental policy. At the grassroots level, millions of Japanese are working in local groups to improve the environment in their communities. Both groups are making significant headway, but many challenges remain, and local efforts are often disconnected from national ones.

Taiwan and South Korea

As was the case in Japan, South Korean and Taiwanese environmental organizations began as community protests against instances of local environmental pollution. Rapid industrialization under a developmental state prioritizing economic growth had the expected result of high levels of pollution. When farmers and fishers found their livelihoods threatened by contaminated soil and water, and when residents found themselves and their loved ones getting sick at unusually high rates, they began to protest.

The beginning of South Korean and Taiwanese environmental movements strongly resembled the early stages of environmental organizing in Japan. Disgruntled and largely disempowered residents appealed to their local government officials and directly to the factories themselves. Usually they found a sympathetic ear, but their complaints were largely met with a variety of appeasement measures that were intended to make the political problem go away for the local elites but not take significant steps to address the pollution issues.

Of critical difference in the South Korean and Taiwanese cases as compared with the Japan one was their timing. The timing of their movements mattered in all three dimensions mentioned earlier. The domestic political context at the time of the emergence of environmental movements meant that they became inexorably entangled with democratization movements and strongly linked with liberal political parties. The international context at the time meant that groups could take advantage of the rising global concern with environmental issues, the political openings brought about by the end of the Cold War, and the increasing international support for both environmental activism and third-wave democratization. Finally, because South Korean and Taiwanese environmental movements followed those in the United States, Europe, and Japan, they were able to learn tactical and strategic lessons about grassroots organizing and political advocacy from those who had gone before.

Taiwan Taiwan's first environmental protesters were victims of industrial pollution: farmers, fishers, and local residents who had their health and

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livelihoods threatened by nearby industrial production. From 1980 to 1987, 97 percent of environmental protests were reactive—victims seeking redress against damage that had already occurred. Examples include a lawsuit in 1981, when villagers in Hua-t'an Village demanded compensation from local brick manufacturers for damage to their nearby rice paddies. They eventually won NT$1.5 million (US$375,000).[17]

In a context where newspapers were increasingly reporting on local pollution issues, Taiwanese citizens were also affected by international events. Although not as geographically widespread as the Chernobyl explosion that would follow two years later, in 1984 a disastrous gas leak from a Union Carbide factory in Bhopal, India, killed two thousand people and made major headlines across the globe. Taiwanese were already feeling sensitive to the damaging effects of chemical pollution in their own communities, and they immediately recognized that they were similarly vulnerable to such a disaster. The very next year, protests and threats of violence against pesticide companies in Hsin-chu and T'ai-chung forced the closing of both factories for cleanup.[18]

The largest turning point for Taiwan's environmental movement occurred in 1986, when residents in the port town of Lukang began a protest against a planned titanium dioxide plant. The protest represented a shift away from a strategy of reactive protests against damage already done to proactive political action aimed at preventing damage that had not yet occurred. According to James Reardon-Anderson (1997), if the protest had happened earlier, it would have been crushed; if it had happened later, it would not have been noticed. "But it came just at the time when environmental consciousness in Taiwan had reached a critical mass and as the government was introducing political reforms that gave unprecedented scope to new forms of civic action." In that context, a small group of determined local activists "focused the attention of the entire island on this sleepy provincial town, raised the national consciousness about threats to the natural environment, and challenged the rules that government officials and industrial leaders in Taiwan had come to take for granted."[19]

All of these activities coincided with the rise of the middle class and the beginning of the third wave of democratization that would sweep East Asia and the world in the next decade. Taiwan ended martial law in 1987, and a number of groups that would lead Taiwan's environmental and democratization movement, such as the New Environment Foundation,

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Taiwan Greenpeace, the Taiwan Environmental Protection Union, and the Homemakers' Union Environmental Protection Foundation, were founded shortly thereafter.

As was the case in Japan, in Taiwan, the fact that early environmental movements had emerged to fight local pollution problems made it difficult for them to grow beyond NIMBY protests. Groups tended to focus primarily on local pollution issues and would disband once a particular battle was over.[20] Throughout the 1990s the Taiwanese movement continued to grow, and political reform spread such that by the end of the decade, citizens were well placed to hold their governments accountable for poor decisions in the wake of the Asian (and global) economic crisis of 1997. In 2000 Taiwanese ousted the Kuomintang, which had ruled the island for nearly forty years, electing native-born Chen Shui-bian of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). Because environmental organizations and their leaders were closely linked with liberal political parties, activists enjoyed considerable access to policymaking during the eight years the DPP was in power.

Even though they had access, however, many activists felt as if their interests were pushed aside in favor of big business once the parties they had supported gained power. As one Taiwanese activist phrased it to me in 2010, "The DPP changed when it took power. When it got into power it didn't like the environment anymore." Another stated, "They want the votes, but they don't want to hear the voices."[21] However, even their limited access was severely curtailed when voters returned conservatives to power, electing Ma Ying-jeou of the Kuomintang in 2008. When the global financial crisis hit at the end of the year, Ma was quick to put "green growth" at the top of his strategies for economic recovery, making significant public investments to promote green technology and green industry related to the information technology industry, renewable energy, eco-tourism, and the like.

Although the conservative governments and businesses were promoting environmentally friendly economic development, environmental activists often felt completely shut out. Several suggested that the election brought back the very same people who were in charge under the military government. One Taiwanese activist was very blunt in assessing the situation for me in 2010: "[In Taiwan] corporations are a shadow government. Our government is their puppet."[22]

Responding to what they perceive as a lack of effectiveness and access, Taiwanese activists are beginning to shift their tactics away from protests

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and partisan politics. Environmental leaders talked to me about how the public and the policymakers have become anesthetized to public protests, such that they are no longer effective as a mode of advocacy. Instead, scientific and policy reports that give policymakers new information about an environmental problem and create an opportunity for dialogue about solutions appeared to be more effective.[23] Even after the DPP's return to power in 2016, Taiwan's environmental politics may be moving closer to the model found on the Chinese mainland, where advocacy has been aimed at working with the government rather than against it. It also exhibits the same bifurcation of environmental advocacy found in Japan: many small, local grassroots groups working on a volunteer basis to improve their communities and a few elite organizations working to influence policy, but not much in between.

South Korea Of the four countries under examination in this book, South Korea is an outlier because unlike the other three countries, which have either no professional environmental advocacy organizations or only very small ones, South Korea boasts the largest in the region: the Korean Federation for Environmental Movements (KFEM) has more than fifty local branches and nearly one hundred thousand members, and it is deeply involved in local and national politics.[24] The highly politicized and well-organized nature of environmental politics in South Korea makes it somewhat distinct from the environmental politics found in the other three countries.

South Korea's environmental movement has grown out of and has contributed to a long history of protest politics. The country's tradition of mass protests can be traced back more than a century, beginning with the 1894 Donghak peasant movement protesting government corruption. Other famous mass movements in South Korea include the March First Movement protesting Japanese rule in 1919; the April Revolution, when student and labor organizations successfully ended the autocratic rule of Syngman Rhee in 1960; the failed student-led prodemocracy protests in May 1980; and the successful democracy movement of June 1987. This long history helped normalize protest, even violent protest, as a regular method through which civil society organizations would engage the state. Although considerably less violent than their predecessors, contemporary South Korean civic organizations, of which environmental organizations are one group, continue to favor confrontational modes of political engagement.[25]

Scholar and environmental activist See-Jae Lee argues that South Korea's environmental movement has passed through four stages: negation (1960s

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and 1970s), where neither the state nor civil society viewed the other side as legitimate; resistance (1980s), where the state acknowledged the existence of civic actors but did not view them as partners for dialogue and sought to suppress them; negotiation (1990s), where both sides recognized each other and struggled against each other for policy influence and public support; and participation (2000–present), where environmental organizations are incorporated into the state's decision-making process and participate in jointly developed policy projects.[26]

Early environmental organizations in South Korea were generally located in churches and universities and were focused primarily on raising environmental consciousness among the population.[27] However, as was the case for Japan, Taiwan, and now also China, high-speed growth policies led to rapidly deteriorating environmental conditions that threatened human health and livelihoods. Early environmental protest movements in South Korea, like their counterparts elsewhere in the region, began with residents' demands for compensation for damages caused by industrial pollution. The first major case to generate national attention was in the Ulsan and Onsan areas of Gyeongsangnam-do Province. Construction of the government-approved Ulsan Industrial Complex began in 1962, and in 1967 farmers began to demand compensation for agricultural losses. In 1971 they formed a pollution countermeasures committee, and 1978 they increased their demands to include financial aid for relocation, as well as compensation for residents experiencing health damages. Urban residents in large cities such as Seoul and Inch'on also began to protest against noise and air pollution.[28]

Responding to growing public concern, a small number of environmentalists, religious leaders, and prodemocracy activists formed the Pollution Research Institute (PRI) in 1982 in order to conduct pollution-related research independent of the government.[29] In contrast to the local NIMBY protesters, who were usually farmers, fishers, and local residents living near factories, the PRI had connections to national church leaders, leading academics, and student groups. It was the first professional environmental organization in South Korea with dedicated staff and office space.[30] Because of its close connection with student groups involved in the democracy movement, the antipollution movement was also seen as an antigovernment movement, so the government tried to prevent connections between local grassroots NIMBY groups and the professional environmental organization.[31]

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In 1983 heavy metal pollution made the water near the Ulsan complex so toxic that the government suspended fishing rights. Immediately the people took to the streets to demand financial compensation for lost revenue, and the PRI began an independent investigation into the situation. In 1985 it released a very detailed report that claimed that more than five hundred people in Onsan suffered from cadmium contamination. The press offered considerable public exposure to the findings, and the issue became one of national interest. Soon after the PRI report, the Environment Administration conducted its own tests and reported that the illness spreading among the Onsan population was not a pollution-related disease. Residents and the PRI refuted the official test results and engaged in a series of public protests. Eventually, the government was forced to concede to the growing pressure from environmental groups and the public and resettle about forty thousand residents to new areas.[32]

Although martial law was lifted in 1981, it was not until the creation of a new constitution that guaranteed basic civil rights in 1987 that the legal protections needed for the creation of environmental organizations were established. Soon afterward key organizations, such as the Citizens' Alliance for Economic Justice, Green Korea United, and the KFEM were established and became important organizations for the combined environmental and democratization movements.

Throughout the 2000s, South Korean environmental organizations expanded their membership and broadened the scope of their issues, moving beyond merely responding to situations of environmental degradation to initiating preventive campaigns. One such campaign, led by the KFEM, was the anti-Doggang Dam campaign, which aimed to prevent the construction of a new dam and protect the natural ecosystem of the river. The campaign had a sophisticated strategy that included promoting tourism to the river. It also utilized cultural symbols, such as the annual Jeongseon Arirang festival, and ecological symbols, displaying rare species of fish and otters that live in and along the river. In 1999 President Kim Dae-jung's government formed a citizen-government joint investigation panel to research the dam, and a year later the committee recommended that construction be canceled. On Environment Day, June 5, 2000, Kim announced the New Millennium Vision for the Environment and pledged to repeal construction plans.[33]

In the 2000s, after receiving a considerable political boost with the victory of Kim in the 1997 presidential elections, South Korea's environmental

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groups grew increasingly politically involved and enjoyed closer connections to the government, serving on joint panels and being appointed to key government positions. They joined several other NGOs in forming the Citizens' Alliance for the 2000 General Elections, which was a protransparency, anticorruption campaign that blacklisted candidates with records of political corruption or illegal activities and succeeded in defeating fifty-six of the eighty-nine candidates it targeted. President Roh Moo-hyun of the Millennium Democratic Party pledged to create a "participatory democracy" in South Korea, appointing many civil society activists to government positions and expanding NGO participation in policymaking.[34]

Just as had been the case in Taiwan, in South Korea, the liberal renaissance had ended by the end of the decade, bringing the environmental movement's access to policymaking to a wrenching end. In late 2007 South Korean voters elected Lee Myung-bak of the conservative Grand National Party, and he assumed his post as president in February 2008. Once again paralleling the events in Taiwan, when the global financial crisis hit at the end of the year, Lee promoted "green growth" as a key component of a strategy for economic recovery. The Four Rivers Project, a massive plan to reengineer the country's major rivers, became the core of South Korea's Green New Deal, an economic stimulus package that pledged $40 billion (equivalent to 4 percent of total gross domestic product [GDP]) for four years to promote sustainable economic growth.[35]

Environmental activists in South Korea faced the same problem as their counterparts in Taiwan. Although the conservative government and businesses were publicly promoting environmentally friendly economic development, activists felt completely shut out. As one South Korean activist explained it to me in an interview in 2010, "The ex-government valued governance and wanted to hear civil society. It didn't decide everything on its own but always had channels with civil society. This government doesn't."

However, in contrast to the Taiwanese activists who are shifting strategies and trying to find more ways to work with the government, South Korean activists are returning to the protest repertoires of the past. In April 2008, fewer than two months after the new conservative government assumed office, it reversed the decision of the previous liberal administration, re-allowing the import of US beef, which had been banned since 2003 after evidence of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE, or mad cow disease) had been identified in the US. Playing on food safety fears spurred by BSE and the

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concurrent tainted milk scandal in China, building on rising anti-US nationalist sentiment among the youth, and capitalizing on national discontent with the new conservative leadership, the KFEM joined other environmental and social groups to support public protests against the national government. The protests, which came to be called the Candlelight Protests because they were usually held at night and protesters brought candles, grew to be national in scope and attracted hundreds of thousands of protesters from late May through August. Interestingly, although Taiwan experienced a similar reversal in its ban on US beef, its protests remained isolated and small, failing to grow as they did in South Korea.[36]

The Candlelight Protests in 2016–2017, combined with the impeachment of President Park Geun-hye on corruption charges (she was ultimately sentenced to twenty-four years in prison),[37] gave new energy to liberal opposition parties' and environmental organizations' efforts to reclaim political power. They were successful, and Democratic Party leader Moon Jae-in became South Korea's twelfth president on May 10, 2017. With his election, environmental activists once again had exceptional policy access, as he named activists to key policy positions in his administration.

South Korea's environmental movement shares with those of China, Japan, and Taiwan its origins as NIMBY protests against pollution that was harming human health and livelihood. It shares with Taiwan's movement its close links to the democracy movement. However, it remains unique in the region for its highly political organizational structure. Just as South Korean activists were able to learn from Japanese and Taiwanese, Chinese government officials and environmental advocates have been paying very close attention to the South Korean and Taiwanese experiences and are working to ensure that the movement in their country takes a different path.

China

Environmental policy did not feature prominently in China's politics until Mao Zedong, and then it was largely as antienvironmental policy. Judith Shapiro argues compellingly that Mao's policies were not just proindustrialization; collectively they amounted to a "war against nature."[38] It wasn't until Deng Xiaoping's efforts to introduce some market reforms in the late 1970s that China's economy started to take off. Reforms that began as experiments in special economic zones were expanded to include much of the country by the late 1980s, spreading wealth and pollution in their wake.

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By the 1990s, with the end of the Cold War hostilities and the rise of the other economies in East Asia, foreign investment was flowing into China and new policies made it easier for Chinese to travel and study abroad. By the time that Beijing hosted the United Nations' Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, China had begun the groundwork to enter the World Trade Organization, which it joined in 2001, and was becoming more economically, politically, and socially integrated into the rest of the world. According to many activists, the World Conference on Women was an eye-opening experience for the Chinese political leadership. In addition to the official representatives from governments around the world, more than five thousand members of a variety of NGOs poured into the city for the event. Their large numbers and the productive role that they played at the conference helped make the Chinese leadership aware of the rising importance and usefulness of the nonprofit sector.[39] This impression was solidified for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 2008 after a devastating earthquake in Sichuan killed nearly seventy thousand people. Just as they had in Japan after the 1995 and 2011 earthquakes, international and domestic NGOs rushed to the scene to assist with the rescue and reconstruction efforts. Their numerous successes helped to demonstrate the usefulness of the NGO sector to the Chinese leadership, which moved quickly to support the sector and integrated it into the CCP-directed political system.[40]

As was the case for the other countries in the region, environmental activism began primarily at the local level with citizens protesting pollution by particular factories in their villages. Because of the size of the country and the scope of the problems, local protests are much more widespread in China than elsewhere, with official statistics recording tens of thousands of separate environment-related protests every year.[41] Policy responses to public protests are generally not local because the central government is the primary crafter of environmental policy. It does this in close consultation, both formal and informal, with a wide variety of stakeholders, including academic experts, who often also represent NGOs, and the business community.[42] One of the main institutional mechanisms for this consultation in all four countries is the use of government-organized NGOs. In China as elsewhere, these organizations provide an institutional location where environmental activists, technical experts, and policymakers work together to address environmental issues.[43]

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Unlike the environmental movements in other countries in the region, China's movement came of age when it could take advantage of the experiences in other countries and draw on the enormous resources of the international NGO sector.[44] These international environmental NGOs see themselves as utilizing a wide array of delicately balanced political tools that provide negative and positive pressure, with many NGOs in all fields tending to favor the latter type of activity over the former. As one activist I interviewed phrased it, "Big confrontational actions don't work in China. We try to push the boundaries of what civil society can do slowly.... We have and need to establish ourselves as a constructive partner."[45]

Starting from the late 1990s and accelerating through the 2000s, the number of international NGOs in China proliferated, and they have also expanded their staffs and offices. The primary reasons for their involvement are the scale and scope of the environmental problems in the country. China is now the largest emitter of greenhouse gasses in the world,[46] and there is no doubt that the fate of the global environment is heavily influenced by what happens in China.

While environmental activists in China benefited from the timing of their environmental movement by being able to draw on the experiences and resources of environmental movements in other countries, the Chinese government also learned valuable lessons from the Japanese, South Korean, and Taiwanese experiences. From Taiwan and South Korea, the CCP leadership learned that local environmental protests can transform into national democracy movements if allowed to grow. From the Japanese experience it learned that if the party in power can accommodate or even exceed the public's demands for environmental action, the party can remain in power and even enhance its legitimacy. As a result, the Chinese government has been working at multiple levels to prevent the formation of national environmental movements that might transform into democratization movements and has been striving to develop aggressive environmental policies to address its citizens' rising concerns.

In response to spreading protests, the central government is ramping up its efforts to improve the environment in the country. At the same time, it has diversified and strengthened the legal and political mechanisms through which it can monitor and control the activities of the NGO sector.[47] Thus, although China supports many proenvironmental activities

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and will listen to environmental activists, it is working very hard to ensure that advocates remain cooperative partners with the party-state and do not engage in any activities that might challenge the CCP.

Patterns of Environmental Activism in East Asia

Like their counterparts from around the world, environmental activists in East Asia are working in a number of different issue areas. This section will provide an overview of the activities of East Asian environmental organizations, examining especially the issue areas in which they engage and the types of strategies they employ. The data are from an original database built from information gathered from environmental groups in China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, about one hundred groups in each country. More details about the methodology for collecting the data can be found in appendix B.

Figure 4.1 demonstrates that there is remarkable similarity across all four countries in terms of the issues about which they are most active. Pollution, conservation, and biodiversity got the most attention—a majority of groups in most of the countries had activities that engaged with these three issue areas. Energy, climate, and recycling issues were the next most popular, with environmental justice and transportation attracting less attention.

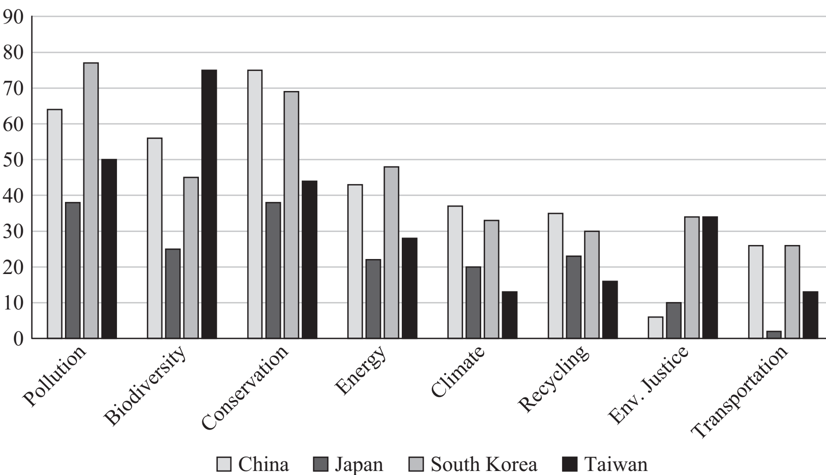

Figure 4.1
Environmental issues in East Asia (percent of each country's organizations engaged in each issue area).

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Overall, China and South Korea are more engaged in more issues than Taiwan or Japan—they led engagement for six of the eight issue areas, but the patterns are not consistent. Japan generally had lower levels of engagement on the issues than the other countries. It may be that Japan's lower figures are a result of the fact that Japan's environmental movement is the oldest, so its environmental groups tend to specialize a bit more, resulting in a smaller proportion of the groups engaging on any particular issue.

Figure 4.2 shows that environmental organizations in East Asia are not just working on similar issues, they are employing similar strategies. The two most common strategies are public education aimed at the grassroots

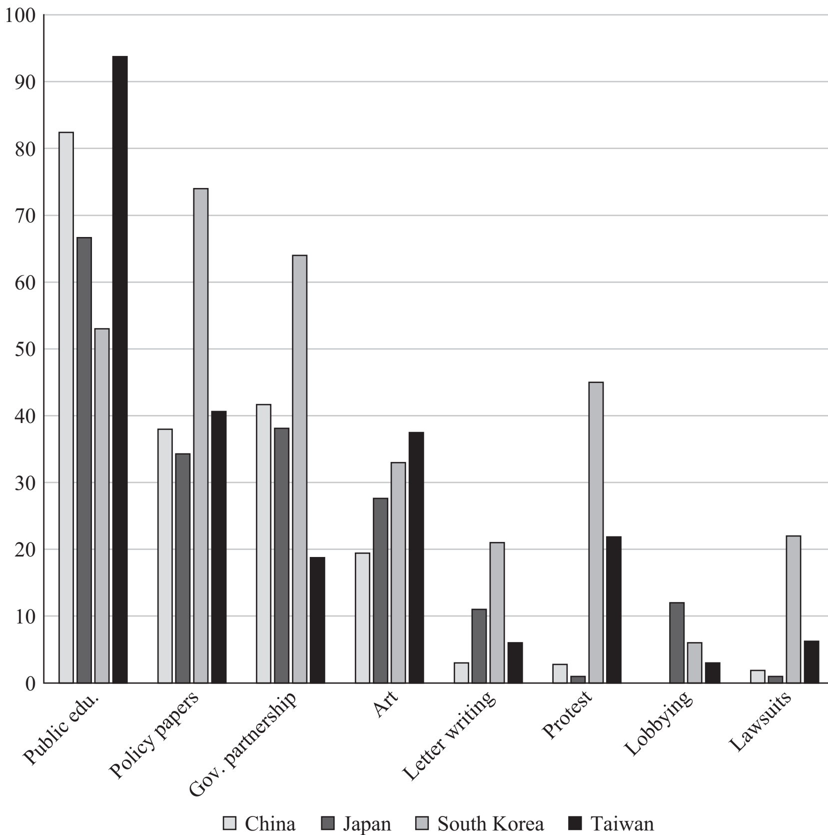

Figure 4.2
Advocacy strategies of environmental organizations in East Asia (percent of each country's organizations that employ each strategy).

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level and policy papers aimed at elites. Forming partnerships with government is also very common across the region, with more than half of the South Korean organizations engaged in government partnerships, and more than a third of Chinese and Japanese organizations doing the same. Art was moderately common everywhere, with between 20 and 40 percent of organizations supporting or engaging some form of environmental art in conjunction with their advocacy efforts.

Letter writing, protest, lobbying, and lawsuits were much less common everywhere, with the notable exception of South Korea. Although we see very few patterns of engagement that follow regime type, the two countries whose history has linked environmental politics with partisan politics—South Korea and Taiwan—are also the two countries that engage in the most protests and have the most lawsuits.[48] For South Korea especially, it is likely that its history of contentious protest and partisan political culture has contributed to the prevalence of more contentious forms of advocacy in the country.[49]

Conclusion

East Asia is well known for its strong governments, global businesses, and weak advocacy sector, so it is somewhat surprising that environmental policy in the region has progressed so far. This chapter has offered a brief overview of the history of environmental politics in the region, as well as a sketch of the kinds of issues and strategies common among environmental organizations there.

Across the region, high-speed industrialization led to toxic pollution and intense citizen pressure to address local environmental crises. East Asia's pro-growth developmental states then evolved into eco-developmental states,[50] responding to the demands of their citizens and becoming global leaders in a number of environmental policy areas. Japan, the first country in the region to engage in proenvironmental policy transformation, now enjoys some of the best air and water quality among developed countries, and it has become a global leader in a number of green technologies, including electric, hybrid, and hydrogen cars; recycling and waste management; and green construction.[51] Like Japan, South Korea and Taiwan have largely cleaned their air and water and are now expanding their national forests, as well as devoting resources to green-growth technologies.[52]

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Finally, while China still has a long way to go to improve the toxic environment faced by its citizens, it has set ambitious goals and has been exceeding them, especially in the energy sector. It pledged to cut emissions per unit of GDP by 45 percent by 2020, and by the end of 2017 it had cut its carbon dioxide emissions per unit of GDP by 46 percent from 2005 levels. Similarly, by 2018 it already surpassed its 2020 goal for solar deployment and now accounts for more than half of global photovoltaic demand. By the end of 2016, China's wind power generation exceeded that produced by all of Europe and was more than twice the wind power produced in the United States.[53]

Although all four countries have made considerable progress improving their environmental policies in some areas, they continue to struggle in many areas of environmental policymaking that negatively affect business. Japan remains one of the few countries in the world to defy global norms against whaling;[54] the illegal wildlife trade continues to thrive in China;[55] indigenous groups struggle to gain environmental justice in Taiwan;[56] and South Korea's industrial air and water pollution problems continue to worsen.[57] While this book focuses on advocacy success, it is important to remember that environmental challenges remain large in the region, success is by no means guaranteed, and there are still many, many areas where environmental policies lag far behind where they need to be to ensure a healthy future.

The next five chapters will take a closer look at specific strategies that have proved to be effective for advocates in the region and across the world. These chapters are intended to offer more details about exactly how these strategies work in different contexts, with the hope of providing insight into how advocates can be effective in generating behavioral change among individuals, corporations, and governments, even under hostile political conditions.

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Effective Advocacy

Lessons from East Asia's Environmentalists

By: Mary Alice Haddad

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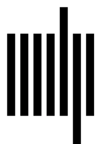

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