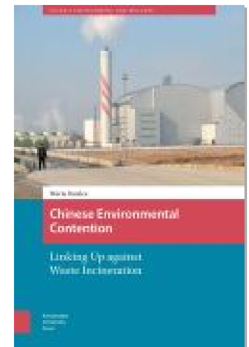
6. Conclusion: Networked Contention: No Longer Fragmented, Not Yet a Movement



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6 Conclusion

Networked Contention: No Longer Fragmented, Not Yet a Movement

This chapter outlines the network of incineration-related contention that has emerged under Hu Jintao based on the findings from both the three case studies presented in the previous chapters and the broader case spectrum. It then turns to the prospects and limitations of scaling up local contention and forming an issue-specific movement and, moving beyond the issue field of waste incineration, the implications for Chinese environmental activism more broadly. In the conclusion, the chapter comes back to the social movement literature and discusses what the findings of this study reveal about networked contention, the dynamics of diffusion, and scale shift in the context of a restrictive political regime.

Environmental Actors Linking Up: Implications for Local Anti-Incineration Contention in China

Contrary to the scholarly literature's widespread assumption that contentious local communities in China are isolated from both each other and supra-local environmentalists, the affected communities in this study are by no means secluded entities. Facilitated by the liberalizing media landscape and frequent reporting on social and environmental issues under Hu Jintao, by the spread of the Internet and particularly social media during the same period, and by the growing local engagement of intermediaries – often functioning as brokers between different localities – at the time of research, the affected communities under study have established a dense network of ties with each other and with members of the Chinese 'no burn' community. This network permits diffusion processes and learning effects across geographic space. The nature of linkages established by local communities and their role in individual struggles do, however, depend strongly on the local context. As in the previous chapters, this section first discusses the nature and role of horizontal linkages before turning to vertical ties.

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Horizontal Ties: Linkages Among Local Contentious Communities

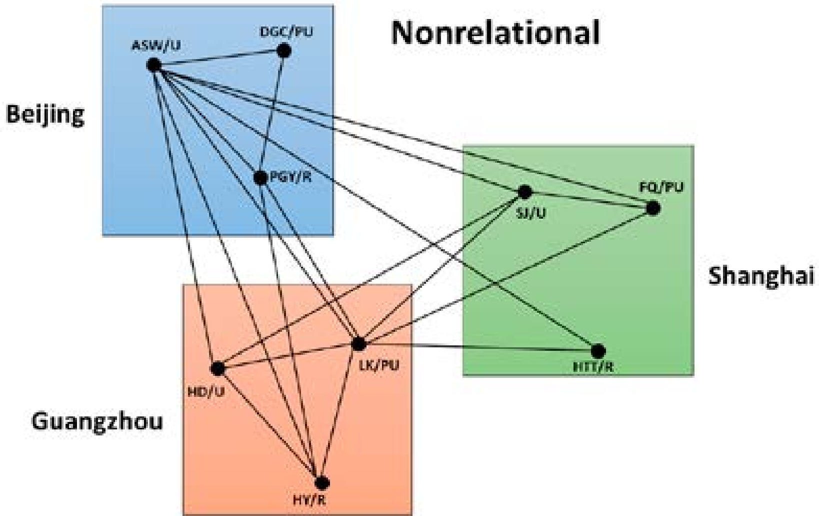
As shown in the previous case studies, local communities affected by planned or operating incinerator projects in their neighbourhood are significantly impacted by the actions of their predecessors in other localities. The contentious communities in Beijing have established relationships not only within their cluster, but also with communities in other parts of the country and across different issue fields. These linkages are not restricted to urban cases, but also link rural and peri-urban communities to a sprawling network of ties between contentious communities across the country.

This finding is supported by the larger spectrum of case studies collected for this research. Figures 6.1 to 6.4 illustrate that all cases in the sample are embedded in the country-spanning network of linkages, with each community linked to at least two of the other communities in the sample. In the figures, a line between two cases indicates that at least one of the two communities has experienced some kind of influence from the other case (with earlier cases impacting later ones, in the case of non-simultaneous contentious actions).[112] The linkages are separated into the categories of nonrelational ties; direct relational ties based on one-time face-to-face contact, such as at meetings and conferences; and more sustained relational ties based on either online communication or intensified face-to-face contacts.

Within this network, some cases have emerged as important role models for other local struggles and can be regarded as 'initiator' or 'spin-off' movements, as those terms are used in social movement theory. As outlined in Chapter Three, the urban cases of Liulitun and Asuwei in Beijing as well as the urban Panyu case in Guangzhou have significantly impacted many of the other communities. Among these, the Asuwei campaigners have established linkages with every other case in the sample (see Figures 6.1 to 6.4). The high impact factor of these cases has several reasons. First, their respective community members were very active in disseminating information online, thus making it easy for other affected communities to access information about their activities via the Internet and social media. Second, all three

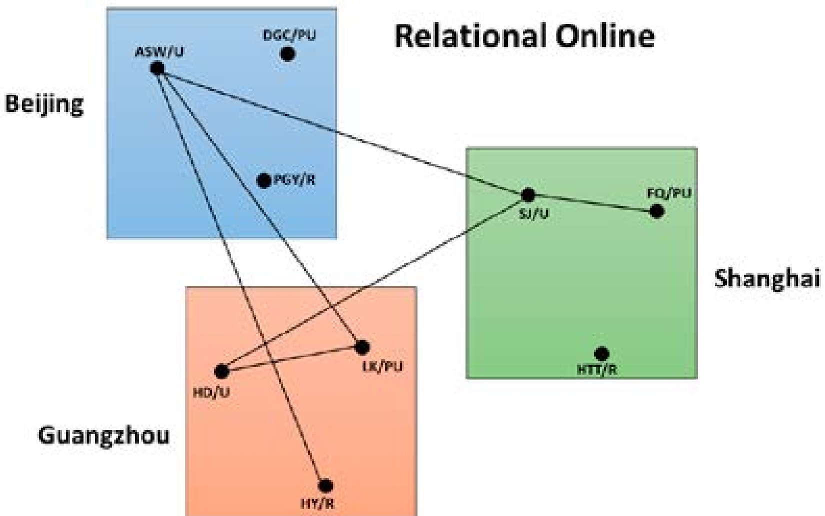
112 The sample cases can broadly be distinguished into two phases, with about half experiencing a peak year in 2009 and 2010 (Auwei, Dagong, Panguanying, Huadu, and Likeng), and the other half between 2011 and 2013 (Huangtutang: 2011, Songjiang: 2012; Huiyang and Fengqiao: 2013). However, most local struggles spanned several years and some experienced various phases of contention (e.g., Asuwei, Panguanying, and Huadu, where renewed siting procedures triggered second phases of contention). Thus, most cases had some overlap in time. The figures display all of the linkages found in the data, irrespective of the phase of contention when they were established. Further linkages may exist that were missed during the data collection process.

Figure 6.1 Nonrelational linkages among sample cases



Notes: Acronyms before the slash indicate the case; for full case names and further information see Appendix IV. Acronyms after the slash indicate the setting: U = Urban, PU = Peri-Urban, R = Rural. LLT, GAT and PY are central background cases not included in the sample.
Source: Own compilation. I thank Tobias Scholz for assistance with generating these figures.

Figure 6.2 Direct relational linkages among sample cases (face-to-face; one-time)



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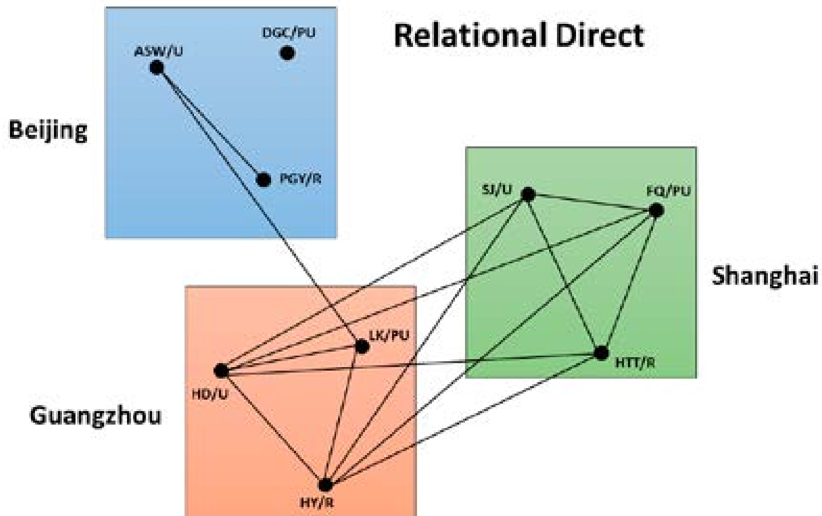
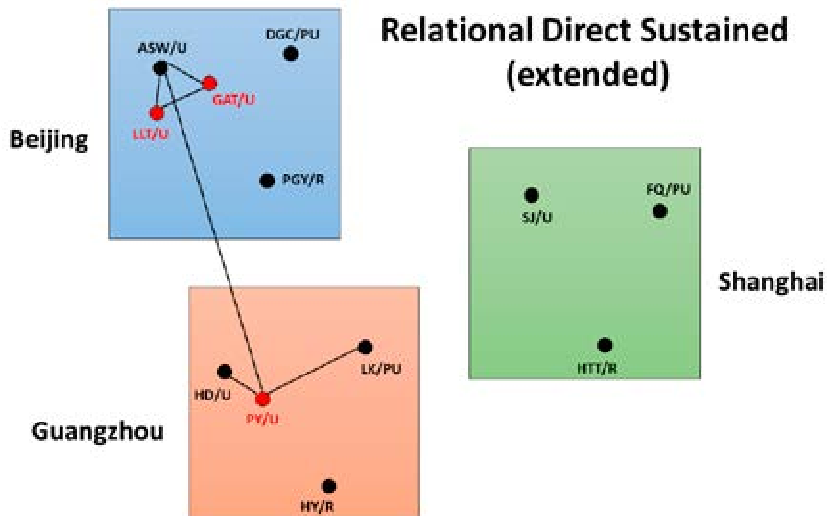
Source: Own compilation. I thank Tobias Scholz for assistance with generating these figures.

Figure 6.3 Online relational linkages among sample cases



Notes: Acronyms before the slash indicate the case; for full case names and further information see Appendix IV. Acronyms after the slash indicate the setting: U = Urban, PU = Peri-Urban, R = Rural. LLT, GAT and PY are central background cases not included in the sample.
Source: Own compilation. I thank Tobias Scholz for assistance with generating these figures.

Figure 6.4 Sustained direct relational linkages among sample cases (face-to-face; sustained)



Notes: Acronyms before the slash indicate the case; for full case names and further information see Appendix IV. Acronyms after the slash indicate the setting: U = Urban, PU = Peri-Urban, R = Rural. LLT, GAT and PY are central background cases not included in the sample.
Source: Own compilation. I thank Tobias Scholz for assistance with generating these figures.

communities fully immersed themselves in the issue of waste incineration and compiled comprehensive materials about the technical aspects and risks of incineration that offered important information and critical frames for other (particularly resource-poorer) communities (cp. Chapters Three and Four).

Third, the three cases featured prominently in the national media, where they were hailed as positive examples of successful interaction between local governments and an aggravated public. As described in Chapter Three, the Asuwei campaign leader turned into a media star after turning into a full-time environmentalist and founding his own environmental organization. A similar career can be observed in the case of the main Panyu campaign leader and has also been seen in other issue fields (Cai and Sheng 2013). Both this media prominence – which ensured that information about the cases would reach less Internet-connected rural communities, such as Panguanying, via the mass media – and the campaigns' (temporary) success in obstructing the plants added to their radiant power. Another case that reached national media prominence and was well-known among other affected communities was the case of Likeng in Guangzhou, which first brought the health-related risks of waste incineration (particularly cancer) to the attention of the public and media and served as an important warning signal and awareness trigger for many other communities.

The emergence of initiator or 'spin-off' cases was further facilitated by the strategic dissemination of information by 'no burn' community members, who pointed other local communities to the positive examples of Asuwei, Panyu, and Panguanying and promoted their use of 'rational' and legal means rather than disruptive and potentially violent action. This included disseminating the comprehensive research report compiled by Asuwei campaigners in the action 'toolkit' compiled by Nature University (cp. Chapter Three) and promoting the Panguanying struggle as an example of a successful case of environmental litigation (cp. Chapters Four and Five).

The nature and depth of the linkages between different contentious communities vary and permit different kinds of diffusion effects. The Beijing cluster cases show that horizontal linkages are largely restricted to nonrelational ties without establishing online or offline personal relations. Closer relational ties were only developed between the urban homeowner cases in Beijing (Liulitun, Gaoantun, and Asuwei) and, across clusters, with the homeowners in Guangzhou's Panyu district. The rural and peri-urban cases in the Beijing cluster (Panguanying and Dagong) showed little interest in establishing closer personal linkages with any other cases either in the cluster region or in other parts of the country despite repeated opportunities.

This pattern is also visible in the larger case spectrum. As shown in Figure 6.1, the communities in the sample are linked primarily via nonrelational

linkages. Here, the Internet and social media functioned as the main channels for the diffusion of information both within clusters and across time and space. Social media in particular played a crucial role in most of the cases as an important source of critical and less strictly censored information. Affected communities could follow the activities of other communities almost in real-time via microblog services, weblogs, or public online forums, or could learn about prior actions without having to establish personal contact. The availability of such online information played a major role in the onset and development of the majority of the cases under study. While the urban communities in the sample were more acquainted with using the Internet to strategically disseminate information about their own claims and activities, the Internet was also used as an important source of information by peri-urban and rural communities. Internet access by individual community members sufficed to make full use of the web as a valuable source of information (such as in Panguanying, as described in Chapter Four, or in Fengqiao and Likeng). For the dissemination of information about their own case, rural communities mainly relied on intermediaries acting as communication nodes to the outside world – particularly when media reporting about their case was blocked or limited.

A second major channel for the nonrelational transmission of information was reporting about waste incineration and related local contention in the mass media – which was also mostly available online. Reporting about waste incineration projects became more frequent after the risks related to incineration started to attract public and media attention in 2009. Nonetheless, supra-local and Chinese-language reporting about local anti-incinerator struggles remained limited to a handful of cases independent of which cluster region the cases were located in. As outlined above, the cases that featured prominently in the mass media were mainly Liulitun, Asuwei, and Panyu as positive examples and Likeng as the first incinerator-related cancer case. A particularly important role was played by the CCTV program broadcast in the context of the 2009 International Dioxin Symposium in Beijing, which prominently featured the Liulitun struggle and helped to unfold its impact as a 'spin-off' movement (impacting, among others, the Asuwei and Panguanying cases in the Beijing cluster as well as Panyu and Huadu in Guangzhou).

Apart from the Internet and mass media, deliberate brokerage efforts by members of the Chinese 'no burn' community and by individual activists such as the Asuwei and Panyu campaign leaders also fostered nonrelational diffusion processes between the different communities. As outlined above, the intermediaries strategically informed affected communities about the

activities and success or failure of other communities in order to increase issue awareness and expectations of success and to actively influence the mode of action used to oppose the incinerators.

While the nonrelational linkages illustrated in Figure 6.1 span all clusters and also link peri-urban and rural cases, it is noticeable that linkages among the Shanghai cluster cases are more limited than in the other two cluster regions. This can mainly be attributed to the rather isolated villager community of Huangtutang, who established few ties with other communities, and those only after a violent clash with public security forces had already occurred. Moreover, since Huangtutang villagers had limited access to the Internet and media reporting of the case was blocked, other communities did not learn about the case unless directly informed by intermediaries.

Direct relational ties based on online or face-to-face communication were significantly more limited, as reflected in the Beijing cluster cases. This was not due to a lack of opportunity: as shown in Figure 6.2, many of the communities in the sample, particularly those in the Shanghai and Guangzhou clusters, had the opportunity to establish direct relational linkages during meetings and conferences. However, only a few of them established more sustained communication either online (Figure 6.3) or based on face-to-face relations (Figure 6.4) – even in cluster regions where geographic proximity would have permitted regular offline meetings.

Like in the Beijing cluster, the majority of relational ties (Figure 6.2) were deliberately brokered by members of the Chinese 'no burn' community with the aim of bringing together affected communities in different localities. Most importantly, members of several local communities were present at a two-day symposium on the 'public supervision of municipal solid waste incinerators' (生活垃圾焚烧厂公众监督研讨会, *shenghuo laji fenshao chang gongzhong jiandu yantaohui*) organized by Nature University in Shanghai in June 2013. This symposium had the explicit goal of linking affected communities, lawyers, and national and international experts and environmental organizations to promote local contention against incinerator projects and to foster a national issue network.[113] Present at the symposium were, among others, members of all of the Shanghai cluster sample cases (Songjiang, Huangtutang, and Fengqiao – the first two more or less concluded at the time of the conference), campaigners from the

113 A similar symposium was again organized by Nature University and Wuhu Ecology Center – with the support of GAIA – in Shanghai in April 2014 under the title 'Community Training on the Impacts of Waste Incineration' (垃圾焚烧影响社区培训, *Laji fenshao yingxiang shequ peixun*).

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ongoing Huadu and Huiyang cases, and members of the ongoing cases in Hai'an county (Jiangsu Province), and in Taizhou city and Hangzhou city's Binjiang district (both in Zhejiang Province).

Most of the other relational ties displayed in Figure 6.2 were based on deliberate brokerage efforts by intermediaries. Most communities in the Beijing cluster (Liulitun, Gaoantun, Asuwei, Dagong, and Panguanying) were brought together at symposiums and public forums by the Beijing-based environmental organizations in the attempt to spark more direct communication between the communities. In a similar vein, the Guangzhou cluster communities had personally met at meetings organized by Panyu campaigners and their newly founded organization or during simultaneous petitioning activities. Some cross-cluster relational ties were established during the shooting of a Phoenix TV program on the pros and cons of incineration. Campaigners from the Beijing homeowner cases (Liulitun, Gaoantun, and Asuwei) and members of the Panyu and Likeng communities were invited to present their cause during this program (see Chapter Three). This was not necessarily intended as an opportunity for community members and intermediaries to meet personally, but did have that effect.[114]

Despite these personal meetings, the communities developed few intensified online or face-to-face relational ties. After the Shanghai conference, only the Huadu and Fengqiao communities established online contact with Songjiang community members, who they asked for advice (Figure 6.3). None of the sample communities present at the conference developed more sustained relational ties based on face-to-face communication, even within clusters (Figure 6.4). The Phoenix TV recording initiated some online and face-to-face communication between the Asuwei and Likeng communities (with the latter asking the Asuwei campaign leader for advice and active assistance). The Songjiang and Huiyang communities also used social media and email to contact the Asuwei campaign leader for help due to his media and online prominence (Figure 6.3). Sustained relational ties based on face-to-face communication were only established among the homeowner cases in Beijing and Guangzhou – with regular cross-cluster meetings between Asuwei and Panyu campaigners – and among the cases within Guangzhou municipality, with Panyu acting as the central communication node (Figure 6.4). Overall, more online ties were established by urban communities, as was to be expected due to their better access to and familiarity with the Internet.

114 A similar phenomenon was also observed by Zhu (2017) in Maoming, where activists were provided with the unintended opportunity to establish networks at an official press conference.

The overall reluctance to establish sustained relational ties among the communities can partly be attributed to the restrictive political setting, in which closer relations between different contentious communities still pose a significant risk. Collaborative action across localities or engagement in another community's struggle are still a political taboo and can lead to serious repercussions, as pointed out by several community members from different cases. As outlined in Chapters Three and Five, this perception of political risks prevented the Beijing homeowner cases from establishing collaborative action or getting actively engaged in other cases in the area (such as Dagong). The Asuwei campaign leader, a trained lawyer, declined the request to function as a legal representative for the Likeng villagers for similar reasons. In a similar vein, contentious action among the Guangzhou cluster cases was deliberately disconnected despite the simultaneity of the campaigns. The contentious communities in Guangzhou municipality (Panyu, Huadu, and Likeng) reported that they had formed an 'alliance of support' similar to the homeowner communities in Beijing, but had refrained from any active collaboration due to the related political risks. An exception was some joint petitioning activities by the Panyu and Likeng communities in 2009 and early 2010.

Also in part attributed to the political risk, all of the urban communities under study who had successfully obstructed an incinerator in their neighbourhood (Liulitun, Panyu, Huadu, and Songjiang) refrained from becoming involved in the new localities even though the projects were moved to nearby rural areas within the same district. The prevalent explanation for this lack of engagement given in interviews was that (certain kinds of) environmentally-related contentious action were tolerated by the regime if they were based on one's own grievances. Once contentious action was conducted in the name of another community, however, it was regarded as highly political and likely to meet with repercussions – as personally experienced by several community members who had attempted to assist resource-poorer communities around the new project sites.

Apart from the apparent political risks, another reason for the lack of closer relational ties was just as evident: simple lack of interest on the part of many communities. The rural and peri-urban communities in particular – but also the majority of urban community members – showed little interest in actively engaging with other communities. As reflected in the Panguanying and Dagong cases (Chapters Four and Five), many communities expressed doubts that they could learn from other communities via direct relational ties because they either had already gathered all of the information they deemed necessary via nonrelational ties and did not see

any added value in direct communication, or regarded their own cases as significantly different from other cases. Only urban communities sought to learn from each other via direct exchange, while rural and peri-urban communities preferred to rely on intermediaries for assistance. Several of the communities also regarded other cases as 'bad examples', which was a strong disincentive for establishing closer ties (such as the Asuwei campaigners' negative assessment of other 'NIMBY' cases or the Panguanying villagers' critical evaluation of Gaoantun and Dagong).

Most importantly, many communities simply took little interest in other communities' grievances or broader waste and environmental issues beyond their personal concerns. Except for individual urban campaigners, the communities' concerns and activities largely revolved around their own well-being, without shifting from a Not-In-My-Backyard to a Not-In-Anybody's-Backyard attitude. Whenever their struggles came to an end (deemed successful or not), most community members returned to their daily lives without continuing to give attention to the issue. This includes a widespread lack of interest in the nearby and mostly rural new sites of relocated projects among (urban) community members, which contributed to an environmental justice debate among intermediaries and some of the (particularly rural) communities.

The lack of interest beyond individualized local concerns significantly limits the prospects for scaling up local contention based on collaborative action or a heightened sense of solidarity among affected communities. The exact reasons for this lack of interest and the extent to which they are related to China's (political) culture, such as its Confucian heritage, are hard to pin down. A similar lack of interest in other communities and broader environmental issues has also been observed in other countries. However, it is likely that in China this is at least enhanced by the political risks related to engaging with other contenders.

An exception were the campaign leaders and individual community members of the resource-rich Asuwei and Panyu communities, who continued to care for the issue of waste incineration beyond their own localities and founded their own environmental organizations dedicated to promoting more sustainable waste policies, as outlined in Chapter Three. Here, a shift from not only NIMBY to NIABY took place, but also from anti-incineration to pro-alternative waste management approaches. Both shifts are necessary for broader policy changes in the issue field. Individual Songjiang community members also showed a continued interest in waste issues – with one of them planning to establish a local waste recycling project – and attempted to assist the villager communities around the new site. These attempts to

assist were curtailed by both political pressure and a lack of awareness and interest on the part of the villagers.

Apart from the linkages established among the communities affected by incineration, the local campaigners were also strongly influenced by contentious communities from other issue fields. Most communities referred to the anti-PX protests in Xiamen as an important point of reference. As outlined in Chapter Three, the Liulitun community had actively learned from the almost simultaneous contention in Xiamen and also spread these learning effects to other contenders. Similarly, Songjiang campaigners reported that they had learned a lot from the previous struggle against the extension of the city's magnetic levitation (maglev) train. Through close personal ties with several of the maglev campaigners (some of whom had moved to Songjiang), Songjiang community members received important advice on protest activities and how to circumvent observation and online censorship by public security forces. Due to the repercussions they had previously experienced, however, the maglev campaigners declined to get actively involved against the planned incinerator.

Several of the communities – particularly the more tech-savvy urban communities that could access a wider array of (English-language) information and surmount the Chinese Firewall to enter the World Wide Web to find uncensored information – were also influenced by anti-incinerator struggles in other parts of the world, thus extending the network of linkages to a transnational scale. None of the communities developed direct relational ties with campaigners abroad, except for Panyu, where the community members met some Taiwanese anti-incineration activists who were visiting Guangzhou for a media event.

Local Impacts: The Role of Horizontal Linkages for Anti-Incineration Struggles

Despite the overall limitation to nonrelational linkages, the emerging ties still permitted diffusion processes among the affected communities, which had a major impact on both individual struggles and the overall development of anti-incineration contention in China. Since active engagement in other localities was largely taboo, the content exchanged between communities was mainly restricted to information and did not encompass other types of (more manifest) resources. Local factors (primarily the communities' resource structure and the local political and socio-economic setting) played a more important role in the development of linkages and diffusion effects than regional factors did.

Amid the restricted access to reliable information, critical information – particularly about the details and hazards of incineration, contentious actions in other parts of the country, and possible modes of action – passed between the communities played a crucial role in the awareness process of most cases under study. Such information provided important cognitive cues and alternative frames for many communities, initiating the first sense of alarm, contributing to a collective interpretation of the situation, and fostering the formation of a contentious consciousness and cognitive justification for taking action. However, as described by Jeffrey Broadbent (2003: 222-226) in the case of environmental protests in Japan, not much 'cognitive liberation' was needed for most of the communities under study. External cognitive cues about hazards or regulatory failures related to the waste facilities generally fed into broader ambivalences towards modernization and resonated with the overall sense of risk and distrust of experts and governments (cp. also Lora-Wainwright 2013d, 2017). Most communities had prior experiences of political deprivation (such as prior corruption issues, land grabs, or a lack of participatory structures) or, particularly in urban cases, a more fundamental sense of repudiation of many aspects of the political system. Moreover, most communities had experienced prior environmental grievances such as pollution and health issues, since many of the incinerator sites in the sample were home to other industry or waste facilities such as landfills that had already burdened the local environment for years (such as in Liulitun, Gaoantun, Asuwei, Songjiang, Panguanying, Likeng, Fengqiao, Huangtutang, and Hai'an).

These prior experiences and broader concerns generally facilitated the mobilization of action unless they had already led to a sense of lacking political efficacy and resignation, as in the case of Dagong described in Chapter Five. Many homeowners in urban communities had attempted to escape the environmental downturns of urbanization and invested large sums of money to move to cleaner and calmer suburban areas or neighbouring districts, which were again being threatened by planned incinerator plants (Asuwei, Huadu, Panyu, Huiyang). This often agitated the communities and fostered the onset of contentious action, particularly when a lack of transparency about the planned projects had obscured the possibility for making an informed decision about where to invest to find a clean living environment. Hence, while more detailed information was central in later stages of the awareness process and for taking action, not much was needed to trigger the first sense of alarm and injustice that caused many communities to activate their own resources and actively search for further information – a process that in urban areas generally lead to a

substantial amount of lay expertise. This was particularly the case in later struggles, when waste incineration had already become a major public and media issue and thus resonated with many of the communities.

After the first stage of initial awareness, externally provided information and cognitive cues helped many of the local communities pierce the 'information haze' caused by the highly contested and technical issue of waste incineration in combination with restricted access to reliable information and a prevailing distrust of the claims of party-state officials and (government) experts. Such external information helped certify alternative frames and interpretations that deviated from those promoted by party-state representatives and companies. This was relevant for all cases in the sample irrespective of their setting. Information about or compiled by other communities (such as the Liulitun 'opinion booklet' or the Asuwei research report) proved to be an important resource for campaign leaders across the country, allowing them to certify their concerns and issue interpretations both internally vis-à-vis their own communities – thus functioning as mobilization resources, as described in the Panguanying case – and externally towards the larger public and project proponents (such as government and company representatives and official experts). Here, many communities referred to other cases to frame themselves as one in a lengthening line of communities standing up for their rights and against misguided waste policies carried out on the back of the *laobaixing*, thus adding legitimacy to their claims and activities.

Knowledge about other contentious communities also impacted many of the campaigners' perceptions of threat and opportunity, as suggested in the literature on contentious politics. Knowledge about successful cases raised several communities' expectations of success and contributed to their decision to resort to contentious action. Information about the success or failure of other cases also had a significant impact on the mode of action employed. The perceived higher chances of success for nondisruptive modes of action led to a significant emulation of tactics and strategies and a convergence of methods across the cases. Due to the prominence of communities that had (temporarily) succeeded in obstructing projects via 'rational' and legal means (such as Liulitun, Asuwei, Panyu, and Panguanying, but also cases from other issue fields such as the anti-PX struggle in Xiamen), these were the preferred methods adopted by the communities in the case sample. The convergence of tactics was further reinforced by 'no burn' community members' repeated urging to resort to peaceful and legal means. All of the urban cases under study employed 'peaceful strolls' and mass petitions – thus emulating the Xiamen and Liulitun communities

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and their successors such as Asuwei and Panyu. The communities actively adopted means such as writing 'opinion booklets', printing (similar) slogans on paper sheets or T-Shirts for use during the strolls – since the shouting of slogans was deemed politically unfeasible – and using similar symbols, such as gas masks (prominently introduced by the Panyu campaigners in 2009). Moreover, imitating the prominent cases and guided by 'no burn' community members, most urban, rural, and peri-urban communities included legal means – such as letter-writing, information disclosure requests, administrative redress applications, and environmental litigation – in their portfolio of activities.

Information about other cases also contributed to the formation of a collective (contentious) identity in several cases. Across the case spectrum, the communities' primary identity frame centred on the protection of their rightful claims and interests (as captured by O'Brien and Li's (2006) notion of 'rightful resistance'). However, as outlined in the Asuwei and Panguanying cases, this self-perception often broadened to a wider identity frame of being members of a Chinese *weiquan* community, which spread across the cases. Most communities depicted themselves as but one in a country-spanning wave of affected communities standing up not only against waste incinerator projects in their neighbourhood, but also against environmental degradation more generally. Several of the rural and peri-urban communities linked this with an 'injustice frame' (Futrell 2003), criticizing how resource-poorer and more vulnerable villager communities were expected to bear the burdens of the growing amounts of waste produced by urban residents and the downturns of urbanization and modernization more generally, thus feeding into a broader environmental justice debate. Some of the communities also presented themselves as members of a (trans-)national 'no burn' community. However, this alignment of local self-perceptions with broader identity frames was predominantly used to further localized claims and did not result in a larger community of solidarity or alliances across the cases.

Last but not least, the information transmitted via horizontal linkages changed the resource structure of many of the communities under study, thereby enabling or facilitating the mobilization of contentious action. As outlined above, knowledge about (successful) modes of action employed in other localities and state responses to those actions that indicated the boundaries of the politically permissible were important resources for most communities. This included legal knowledge and information related to the modes of action that were possible within the Chinese political framework. In particular, information about contentious action in other parts of the country helped resource-poorer rural and peri-urban communities who

might otherwise not have been able to conduct or proceed with contentious action (as outlined in the Panguanying case in Chapter Four). As in Panguanying, information about the activities of other contenders also pointed several of the communities in the sample toward intermediaries active in the issue field (such as Zhao Zhangyuan, the lawyer Xia, or Nature University), who could then be approached for assistance by the affected communities.

Both resource-rich urban and resource-poorer rural and peri-urban communities benefitted from the action-related technical and issue-specific information transmitted via horizontal ties. Externally provided information about the details and hazards of incineration, related regulations and standards, and mandatory procedures – such as those related to the EIA process – provided the basis for contentious action in most communities in the sample. Such issue-specific information also enabled the local communities to adopt broader issue interpretations and align their frames with the arguments and interpretations of the (trans-)national 'no burn' community, such as portraying the Chinese context as unsuited for waste incineration or regarding incineration as a misguided and unsustainable waste policy. As in the case of identity frames, this was predominantly used to add weight to the communities' localized claims rather than fostering broader claims.

As demonstrated in the Dagong case described in Chapter Five, diffusion effects strongly depend on the local context: they can only unfold if anchored in sustained local action. In cases where fragmented local interests or a sense of lacking political efficacy demobilized local communities, the existence of strong horizontal or vertical ties was not sufficient for mobilizing unified local action and diffusion processes failed to take effect. Apart from Dagong, this was also observable in the peri-urban Shanghai communities of Fengqiao and Yuqiao, where an overall sense of the futility of contentious action and lack of political efficacy by self-perceived *laobaixing* who were without education and resources stopped large parts of the communities from taking sustained or coordinated action despite active mobilizing attempts by both community members and intermediaries. A similar resignation tempering pollution-related action despite an awareness of its negative effects is also described by Lora-Wainwright (2017) in her anthropological investigation of pollution-affected rural communities. Like in the communities studied by Lora-Wainwright, a long-term sustained strategy that could have united the different social groups in Dagong was impeded by their overall sense of lacking political efficacy and the inevitability of urban and economic development. In Fengqiao, their sense of the futility of action was further coupled with the villagers' economic dependency on a nearby industrial

park. While they recognized that economic and industrial development was the cause of pollution, they regarded it as inevitable since they depended on it for their livelihood. This seemed to also affect their attitude towards the planned MSWI project.

The impacts of external linkages were also hampered where local communities preferred relocation to fighting against incinerator plants in their neighbourhood. Again, this was mainly the case in peri-urban neighbourhoods, particularly if the villager communities no longer cultivated their own land. The defence of land was a major mobilizing force for several rural communities (such as for the farmers in Panguanying, Huangtutang, and Huiyang). Without an attachment to land, several of the communities turned to relocation claims in the hopes of improving their livelihood through compensation payments or because they had already suffered from previous pollution in the area which they hoped to escape (such as the villager communities in Asuwei and in later stages also Likeng). Such relocation or compensation claims were complex and can not necessarily be understood as the communities' preferred path of action. In several cases such claims were based on the above-described feeling of resignation and lack of political efficacy or were a strategic reframing of claims where other demands and contentious action had failed (such as in Dagong and Likeng). Most of the communities in this study were all but unified when it came to attitudes towards relocation (as described in the Dagong case, where different preferences contributed to stifling collective action either against the plant or for relocation).

Repressive party-state reactions can also hamper diffusion effects and disrupt contentious action at any point in the struggle, as was the case in Dagong, Gaoantun, Likeng, and Huiyang. In this study, urban communities seem more immune to political pressure. This can be attributed to the larger number of campaigners, better access to the Internet and social media as mobilizing devices and for the dissemination of information, and the less easily discernible leadership structure of such groups.

The Two Facets of Chinese Environmental Activism Linking Up: Vertical Ties Between Local Communities and Environmentalists

Apart from the horizontal ties amongst local communities, this study has also revealed a dense network of linkages with supra-local intermediaries active in the issue field. In contrast to the widespread assessment in the literature that Chinese environmentalists are shunning direct engagement at the local level, leaving local communities isolated from intermediary

support (e.g., Johnson 2010, 2013a; Matsuzawa 2012; Tang 2012; van Rooij 2010; D. Zhao 2007), the cases under study show that environmental organizations, experts, and lawyers engaged in the field of waste incineration were becoming increasingly active at the local level at the time of research. At least under Hu Jintao, the 'two facets' of Chinese environmental activism – grievance-based local contention and environmentalist action – were linking up in the field of waste incineration and forming an alliance for the mutual benefit of both sides.

As suggested by the literature, the environmental organizations contacted by contentious communities in the early years of Chinese anti-incineration contention did indeed decline to become actively engaged in the local struggles (such as in the cases of Liulitun, Gaoantun, and Asuwei described in Chapter Three). This greatly changed throughout the course of the research period. The growing numbers of local anti-incinerator campaigns after 2009 started to attract the organizations' attention and – in combination with major transnational influences – several environmental organizations soon started to get actively involved in the issue field (see Chapter Two). As in other (Western) countries, it was grievance-based local action that brought the issue of waste incineration to the attention of national-level environmental organizations. After the foundation of the Beijing-based organization Green Beagle in 2009 as the first Chinese environmental organization with the explicit aim of supporting local communities affected by environmental degradation, several other Chinese organizations dedicated to waste issues started to actively assist local communities living in the surroundings of planned or operating incinerators. They approached local communities on their own initiative (as in the case of Dagong) or became involved when contacted for advice and assistance (such as in Panguanying). This network of organizations was institutionalized in 2011 with the foundation of the Chinese 'Zero Waste Alliance'. Under the lead of Green Beagle (and its later split-off organization Nature University) and with the help of transnational organizations such as GAIA and IPEN, the organizations in this study not only supported local communities and impacted their local struggles, but also used these local engagements to further their own higher-level advocacy work for more sustainable waste policies and against regulatory failures in the environmental realm.

Via their joint engagement in some of the local cases, the environmental organizations in the issue field closed ranks with environmental experts and a handful of lawyers and legal associations such as the Beijing-based Center for the Legal Assistance to Pollution Victims, who are dedicated less to waste issues and more to furthering environmental litigation in China (cp. Chapter Two). Together, these three main groups of actors – environmental

Table 6.1 Vertical linkages between intermediaries and local communities

Intermediaries \ Cases	HD/U		PY/U		LK/PU		HY/R		ASW/U		LLT/U		GAT/U		DGC/PU		PGY/R		SJ/U		FQ/PU		HTT/R	
Zhao Zhangyuan (BJ)	NR		NR RO	RD RDS	NR		NR RO		NR RO	RD RDS	NR RO	RD RDS	NR RO	RD	NR	RD	NR	RD RDS	NR RO		NR		NR	RD RDS
Guangzhou expert (GZ)	NR RO	RD RDS	NR RO	RD RDS	NR RO	RD RDS																		
Individual Beijing lawyers (BJ)					NR		NR RO	RD RDS	NR	RD	NR RO	RD RDS	NR RO	RD RDS	NR	RD	NR	RD RDS				RD		RD RDS
Center for the Legal Assistance to Pollution Victims (BJ)																	NR	RD RDS						RD
Nature University / Green Beagle (BJ)	NR RO		NR RO	RD	NR RO	RD RDS	NR RO	RD RDS	NR RO	RD RDS	NR RO	RD RDS	NR RO	RD RDS	NR RO	RD RDS	NR	RD RDS	NR RO	RD	NR RO	RD	NR RO	RD RDS
Friends of Nature (BJ)	RO	RD RDS	NR RO	RD	NR				NR RO	RD RDS	NR	RD	NR	RD	NR	RD	NR				NR			RD RDS
Global Village of Beijing (BJ)									NR						NR		NR							
Aifen Huanbao (SH)																								
Wuhu Ecology Center (Wuhu, Anhui)							NR RO								NR		NR							
Zero Waste Alliance (national)															NR		NR							

Intermediaries \ Cases	HD/U	PY/U	LK/PU	HY/R	ASW/U	LLT/U	GAT/U	DGC/PU	PGY/R	SJ/U	FQ/PU	HTT/R
Global Alliance of Incinerator Alternatives (GAIA) (transnational)	RD	RD	RD	RD	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	RD	NR RD	RD
International POPs Elimination Network (IPEN) (transnational)		NR		RD	NR				NR	RD	RD	RD
Other international experts and NGOs	NR	NR		NR	NR	NR	NR			NR	NR	

Notes: Acronyms before the slash indicate the case; for full case names and further information see Appendix IV. Acronyms after the slash indicate the case setting: U = Urban, P = Peri-Urban, R = Rural. Acronyms after the intermediary names refer to their home base: BJ = Beijing, GZ = Guangzhou, SH = Shanghai. LLT, GAT and PY are central background cases not included in the sample. The fields in the matrix indicate the types of linkages established between the intermediaries and local communities: NR = Nonrelational, RD = Relational Direct (based on one-time face-to-face interaction), RO = Relational Online (direct online communication), RDS = Relational Direct Sustained (sustained direct relations based on face-to-face communication).

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organizations, experts, and lawyers – formed what in this study is captured as the Chinese 'no burn' community. While the number of actors actively engaged at the local level remains limited, they have nonetheless played a major role in the majority of the cases under study. Table 6.1 lists the main intermediaries involved in the sample (and some background) cases, and indicates the nature of the linkages they established with the respective communities. As in Figures 6.1 to 6.4, these linkages are separated into nonrelational ties, direct relational ties based on one-time face-to-face contact, such as at meetings and conferences, and more sustained relational ties based either on online communication or intensified face-to-face contacts.

Across the case spectrum, none of the cases in this study was fully isolated from intermediary support (see Table 6.1). Due to the growing prominence of both the issue of waste incineration and individual intermediaries (cp. Chapter Two), an increasing number of communities actively established contacts with the 'no burn' community during the time of research. However, as pointed out by several 'no burn' community members, many cases of local anti-incinerator contention (particularly in rural areas) are still unknown to both the public and intermediaries, and thus remain isolated from potential intermediary support.

As shown in Table 6.1, the core Chinese 'no burn' community members actively engaged in local struggles across the country were professor Zhao Zhangyuan, the environmental organizations Green Beagle/Nature University and Friends of Nature, and a handful of lawyers – all of them based in Beijing. These intermediaries had direct contacts with all (Zhao Zhangyuan and Nature University) or most (Beijing lawyers and Friends of Nature) of the affected communities under study, regardless of their cluster region.

Zhao Zhangyuan, a retired researcher from the Chinese Research Academy of Environmental Sciences, turned into a fierce and outspoken critic of waste incineration after conducting his own research into the issue in 2001 (see Chapter Two). In the following years, he played a similar role for Chinese anti-incineration contention as the professors Paul Connett and Barry Commoner have played for the anti-incineration and environmental justice movements in the United States. After his personal engagement as a critical expert in the urban Beijing campaigns (Liulitun, Gaoantun, and Asuwei), he reached national media prominence by outing himself as a fierce opponent of China's waste incineration policies during a meeting in Guangzhou in 2010 (cp. Chapters Two and Three). Due to his prominent appearance in the media, his publication of online articles and blogposts, and his active engagement in the early local campaigns, all of the affected communities in this study were impacted (through nonrelational linkages) by his critical

assessment of incineration technology. Many of the communities also directly contacted him for advice and assistance (such as the urban Beijing cases, Panguanying, Panyu, Songjiang, and Huiyang). Other intermediaries such as Nature University or the Beijing lawyers also told local communities to contact professor Zhao and actively engaged him in local struggles (such as in Huangtutang and Likeng). While in earlier years Zhao paid site visits to several communities across the country, in later years his declining health and the growing political pressure did not permit him to undertake local visits.

A country-wide role was also played by the Chinese environmental organizations active in the issue field under the lead of Green Beagle/ Nature University and Friends of Nature. Starting with active engagement in the larger Beijing area, they soon expanded their activities to other parts of the country, facilitated by the growing number of local organizations active in the Zero Waste Alliance that could be mobilized to reach out to local communities in other regions. During the research period, Nature University – who was both present in the media and easy to find online – in particular gained significant prominence among the affected communities and was actively contacted by most communities in the sample, albeit at different stages of contention. Other Beijing-based organizations such as Global Village of Beijing were primarily engaged via nonrelational ties, such as participating in the advocacy campaigns led by Nature University and Friends of Nature without establishing direct contact with the affected communities (cp. the Panguanying and Dagong cases in Chapters Four and Five). These case-related issue campaigns were joined by the Anhui Province-based environmental organization Wuhu Ecology Center and other members of the Zero Waste Alliance (see Table 6.1).

The local engagement of Beijing-based lawyers and the legal association Center for the Legal Assistance to Pollution Victims primarily focused on cases in the Beijing cluster area. However, after they acted as legal representatives in cases that succeeded in obstructing planned facilities, such as Liulitun and Panguanying, and that received wider attention, they were also contacted by communities or were actively involved by other 'no burn' community members in cases in other parts of the country (such as in Likeng, Huiyang, and Huangtutang).

Beyond Beijing, the number of supra-local intermediaries engaged in more than one struggle is very limited. In Shanghai, only the environmental organization Aifen Environmental Protection Science and Technology Service Council Center (爱芬环保科技服务咨询中心, *Aifen huanbao keji fuwu zixun zhongxin*, hereafter referred to as Aifen) collected some information and communicated with Shanghai community members (Caolu and Yuqiao,

both not included in the sample). As members of the Zero Waste Alliance, Aifen staff introduced members of Nature University to the two communities during their visit to the Shanghai area. In the Guangzhou cluster, a social science researcher working on social conflicts at Guangzhou's Sun Yat-sen University (中山大学, *Zhongshan daxue*), who established close ties with members of the contentious communities in Guangzhou municipality (Panyu, Huadu, and Likeng) functioned as an important expert in and information broker between these cases. Moreover, in both Beijing and Guangzhou, the Asuwei and Panyu campaign leaders and their newly founded organizations (Green House and Eco Canton) became important members of the 'no burn' community. They are not included in Table 6.1 because they were mainly contacted by other communities in their function as successful and knowledgeable contentious community members and because their organizations are primarily dedicated to promoting sustainable municipal waste policies and are less directly focused on incineration (cp. Chapter Three).

Further, the domestic Chinese 'no burn' community was joined by members of the global anti-incineration movement. In particular, the transnational organizations GAIA and IPEN joined ranks with the Chinese environmental organizations, supporting and participating in their case-related issue campaigns, certifying their claims and activities, and otherwise embedding them into the transnational anti-incineration movement (cp. the Beijing cluster cases in Chapters Three to Five). This included the participation of GAIA and IPEN staff in the Shanghai conference for affected communities (see above), which permitted the present local communities to establish direct relational ties with members of the transnational network. As in the case of horizontal linkages, however, none of these ties were intensified after the conference (see Table 6.1). Under the lead of Wuhu Ecology Center and Eco Canton, GAIA staff also paid site visits to the affected communities in Guangzhou (Panyu, Huadu, and Likeng).

Other international experts and organizations, such as the central figures of the US anti-incineration and environmental justice movements Paul Connett and Barry Commoner, as well as transnational organizations such as Greenpeace and the World Health Organization, impacted the local communities in this study via nonrelational information flows. Here, urban communities with access to the World Wide Web and the ability to read English-language information played an important brokerage and translation role for less Internet-acquainted local communities – such as via the information in the Liulitun 'opinion booklet' or the Asuwei research report, which were distributed to the rural and peri-urban communities (cp. Chapters Three and Four) .

Local Impacts: The Role of Vertical Ties for Anti-Incineration Struggles

Despite the limited number of supra-local intermediaries who became directly engaged at the local level, the established vertical linkages had a major impact on the spread and development of local anti-incineration struggles. Many of the 'no burn' community members' case-related activities were embedded in or the starting point for broader issue campaigns, as described in the Panguanying and Dagong cases (Chapters Four and Five). Overall, strong learning effects are discernible on the part of the intermediaries throughout the research period. Through their engagement in different local struggles, they expanded and consolidated both their individual repertoires and their collaborations with each other. Their activities at the local level thus became more knowledgeable, professionalized, and effective over time. Across the case spectrum, all intermediaries developed their own core set of activities which they offered to the affected communities, irrespective of their location or local situation. As in the case of diffusion effects based on horizontal linkages, however, the actual role played by intermediaries was strongly dependent on the local context.

Professor Zhao Zhangyuan played an important role for most communities in this study as trusted expert who provided hard-to-obtain 'neutral' information on waste incineration and its harms within the overall 'information haze'. As in the cases of Asuwei and Panguanying (Chapters Three and Four), the information provided by Zhao played an important role in the awareness process of most communities in the sample, either by consolidating a first sense of alarm, like in Panguanying, or by functioning as cognitive cues and alternative frames, like in both Panguanying and Asuwei. This helped foster the communities' collective interpretation of the situation and the formation of a contentious consciousness, as suggested in the social movement literature.

As a renowned expert on incineration, Zhao also played an important role for the certification of critical information – both internally, by substantiating campaign leaders' warnings of environmental and health effects emanating from the plants vis-à-vis their own communities, and externally, by legitimizing the local communities' claims and activities towards the public and project proponents. He presented his views in media articles and interviews, online publications, and in direct communication with party-state institutions, companies, and government-commissioned experts. Here, information provided by Zhao was often more trusted than that provided by environmental organizations, since several (particularly urban) communities suspected 'NGOs' to be irrational, radical, or tendentious – as

expressed by members of the Asuwei, Songjiang, and Fengqiao communities. A similar 'Achilles' heel' of environmental organizations, who tend to be regarded as emotive, is also described by Mertha (2008: 146).

Zhao assisted several communities by offering them advice and information that was helpful for mobilizing action (such as in the urban Beijing cases, in Panguanying, Panyu, Huiyang, Songjiang, and Huangtutang). This included providing the communities with: technical information related to incineration; legal knowledge and information about the mandatory procedures related to MSWI projects, including the collection of evidence related to procedural flaws such as in the EIA process; and advice related to other modes of action, such as peaceful strolls and seeking media attention. In several cases, Zhao also served as a broker between different communities and with other 'no burn' community members. Further, he functioned as a central diffusion node between domestic communities and the transnational anti-incineration movement by providing Chinese-language translations of transnational materials that enabled the local communities' (identity) frame to align with that of the transnational 'no burn' community – although, as outlined above, this was mainly used to promote localized claims.

Similar roles were played by the environmental organizations active in the issue field. The organizations' activities and related impacts on local contention outlined in the Beijing cluster cases encompass the standard repertoire of activities employed by organization staff across the wider case spectrum. Like professor Zhao, the organizations provided critical issue-specific information on waste incineration and its risks, as well as on the activities of other communities across the country. This fostered communities' awareness processes, promoted the formation of a collective contentious identity, raised communities' expectations of success, and certified their claims and activities both within the community and towards the public. The provision of information was standardized in the 'toolkit' specifically compiled by Nature University staff to assist affected communities, which was distributed to all community members who sought the organization's advice and was also available for public download from an organization member's Sina microblog account starting in 2012 (cp. Chapter Three).

The organizations also certified the local communities' claims and activities through media outreach activities and by inviting local community members to public forums and symposiums targeted at providing them with a public platform to disseminate their claims and grievances. By disseminating information about the cases via their personal and online networks, the organizations functioned as important communication nodes with the

outside world, particularly for less Internet-acquainted rural and peri-urban communities (like in Panguanying, Likeng, Huangtutang, and Fengqiao). In some cases, this generated external attention included a protective function for the local campaigners, as described in the Panguanying case (and in Huangtutang, Likeng, and Huiyang).

The organizations also actively assisted the communities in the mobilization of contention by providing both relevant information and further assistance and support – thus filling resource-gaps and impacting the development of contentious action. This was particularly relevant for resource-poorer communities in peri-urban and rural areas, but also during the later stages of urban struggles (such as in Asuwei, Huiyang, and Songjiang). Like Zhao, the organizations actively promoted legal and peaceful means and warned contentious communities against taking disruptive and potentially violent action – thus fostering a convergence of strategies across the different cases. As outlined in the case studies, the organizations' mobilizing support included the provision of: detailed technical information about incineration; information regarding environmental laws and regulations and the mandatory environmental procedures related to MSWI projects, including active assistance in finding evidence of procedural flaws (such as EIA fraud); assistance with submitting information disclosure requests, filing administrative redress applications or environmental lawsuits, and finding legal representation; and mobilizing advice and information related to other modes of action (such as strolls and petitions); as well as representing local communities during negotiations with government institutions or companies, including letter-writing campaigns such as to the MEP. In Panguanying, Nature University staff also took on an important protective function for the contentious villagers and acted as election observers during the local village elections (see Chapter Four).

The organizations (particularly Nature University) also deliberately attempted to broker direct horizontal communication, learning processes, and alliances between the different communities. Before 2013, they mainly invited community members to symposiums and public forums in Beijing and distributed contact information among the communities. Since 2013, the organizations have attempted to promote horizontal linkages on a national scale – such as in-person via the Shanghai conferences mentioned above, or online via the establishment of issue groups on the messaging service WeChat (微信, *Weixin*) and other social media platforms. These brokerage efforts include attempts to provide local communities with access to (trans-)national experts, lawyers, and media representatives by inviting them as speakers and participants to both case-related symposiums and the Shanghai

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conferences. While intensified horizontal linkages based on these meetings remained limited, as outlined in the previous section, the symposiums did help several communities establish valuable contacts with intermediaries and journalists who proved helpful in later stages of contention (such as the media contacts established by Panguanying villagers or contact with the Beijing lawyers established by the Huangtutang and Huiyang communities). Like professor Zhao, the organizations also functioned as important diffusion nodes between domestic communities and the transnational 'no burn' community, hence enabling local communities' alignment of (identify) frames with the transnational anti-incineration movement.

The third main actor group in the Chinese 'no burn' community, the mainly Beijing-based lawyers and legal associations, primarily facilitated the communities' access to justice by providing legal advice and representation and assisting in the collection of evidence (such as in the case of EIA flaws). The active engagement of lawyers and their success in some of the earlier cases contributed to the convergence of strategies across the case spectrum, with many communities including legal means in their contentious repertoire due to their heightened expectations of success for this mode of action. As described in the case of Panguanying (Chapter Four), some of the lawyers also played additional functions such as the dissemination and certification of the communities' claims in the media, through their own publications, and at symposiums and conferences. They further acted as representatives of some of the communities in negotiations with party-state representatives or companies. Irrespective of the density of linkages between local communities and lawyers, the success of legal activities was strongly dependent on whether the advocates could find a legal entry point in the cases. Despite active attempts to legally assist the communities in Huangtutang or Huiyang, for example, this was not possible in these cases.

While the core repertoire of activities offered by the 'no burn' community members in this study is similar across the case spectrum, the extent to which local communities made use of this engagement varies significantly. This is clearly visible across the Beijing cluster cases described in Chapters Three to Five. Like the Asuwei campaigners, the other urban communities in this study were largely self-reliant in their initial problem awareness, search for information, and mobilization of action. They mainly fell back on their own resources and extensive social networks (including to other contentious urban communities). In this context, the major role of intermediaries was played by trusted domestic experts (such as Zhao Zhangyuan) or international experts who provided critical information

and interpretive frames that helped the communities pierce the overall 'information haze' and come to a collective interpretation of the situation.

More divergence can be seen in the case of peri-urban and rural communities. Overall, these resource-poorer communities were more dependent on intermediaries and many actively sought their assistance. Here, the case of Panguanying is at one end of the case spectrum: the villagers made full use of the assistance and advice provided by intermediaries (see Chapter Four). The Dagong case stands at the other end of the spectrum: no unified and sustained contentious action emerged despite several 'no burn' community members' active attempts to promote collective activities (see Chapter Five).

As outlined in the previous section, horizontal and vertical linkages fail to take effect if they are not rooted in local contention. 'No burn' community members repeatedly pointed out that their efforts to get engaged at the local level were in vain if the local communities did not take sustained or coordinated action themselves – apart from Dagong, this was also observable in Nangong, Fengqiao, and Yuqiao, as well as in Lanzhou city (兰州市, *Lanzhou shi*) in Gansu Province (甘肃省, *Gansu sheng*) and Luodai town (洛带镇, *Luodai zhen*) in Sichuan Province (四川省, *Sichuan sheng*). In these cases, the intermediaries soon reached their limit and often turned to more promising cases. This was particularly the case when local communities did not believe in the possibility of success through contentious action, lacked a sense of political efficacy, or were scared away from further action by repressive party-state responses at any point in the struggle. Moreover, if the priorities and modes of action significantly diverged between the local communities and intermediaries – if local communities decided to opt for relocation rather than opposing the incinerator project, like in the case of the Dagong villagers, for example – it became evident that collaborations between local communities and environmentalists were still be somewhat of an 'uneasy alliance' (McAdam and Boudet 2012: 135) as described in the literature.

Beyond Localized Struggles: Networked Contention and the Prospect for a Broader Movement

As outlined in the previous section, the environmental actors in this study were far from isolated from each other; rather, they were connected via an extensive network of linkages across sites and social groups. In the social movement literature, such ties are regarded as a promising basis for a potential scaling up of local contention, i.e., a shift in the scope and scale of contentious

issues from the local to regional, national, or transnational levels (Givan, Roberts, and Soule 2010; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001; McAdam and Boudet 2012; Tarrow 2010). Within China's restrictive political setting, however, the prospect of scaling up a local contention based on horizontal linkages is limited. While the network of contention found in this study has played a significant role in the spread and development of local anti-incineration contention, the political framework has hampered collaborations across localities and the formation of alliances that are active beyond individual settings. In particular, resource-poorer peri-urban and rural communities have avoided fostering direct relations with other communities or becoming active beyond their own localities. While urban homeowner communities within individual municipalities have formed loose 'alliances of support' (such in the urban Beijing and Guangzhou cases, and also across issue fields like between the Songjiang and maglev campaigners in Shanghai), more formal alliances or collaborative action are regarded as politically taboo. In a similar vein, repercussions were feared or experienced by urban homeowners who attempted to assist resource-poorer (rural) communities in their region – such as in the case of relocated incineration plants.

Horizontal collaborations were impeded not only by the political setting, but also by the communities' overall lack of interest in other communities' grievances and broader waste-related or environmental issues. This lead to a widespread lack of interest in intensified relations with other communities not only on the part of rural and peri-urban contenders, but also by the majority of urban community members. As outlined above, most affected communities were primarily concerned with their own localized claims and grievances. Rural and peri-urban communities in particular did not see the potential for much added value in establishing closer ties with other contenders. In most cases, contentious action receded soon after the local struggles were concluded. This was also the case for urban campaigns that lead to the relocation of incinerator projects to nearby rural areas. While a few individual campaigners tried to assist the resource-poorer successor communities, most community members returned to their daily lives and regarded the new projects as beyond their concern – feeding into an environmental justice debate among members of the 'no burn' community. While this localized attitude is likely enforced by the political hazards related to getting involved elsewhere, it also reflects a broader tendency to show little personal interest beyond individual concerns, as observed in other studies (e.g., Jian and Chan 2016). The extent to which this is influenced by the political context or is part of the Chinese (political) culture is hard to discern. In Western countries, many local struggles against hazardous construction projects also tend to

revolve mainly around localized grievances and do not produce broader claims or activities (Futrell 2003; McAdam and Boudet 2012; Schively 2007; Walsh, Warland, and Smith 1997). It is likely that in China this is at least enhanced by the political risks related to engaging with other contenders.

Apart from direct alliances and collaborations, communities across the case spectrum aligned their issue and identity frames both with each other and with the (trans-)national 'no burn' community. Most of the communities under study regarded themselves as part of a broader *weiquan*-community or the (trans-)national 'no burn' community and actively aligned their issue frames with both other contenders and the 'no burn' actors, but this alignment was primarily used to further the communities' localized claims and activities and did not produce collective claims beyond the individual localities. An actual shift from NIMBY to NIABY claims as observed in Western countries – albeit also limited in those contexts (Futrell 2003: 377; McAdam and Boudet 2012: 135) – only occurred on the part of the resource-rich urban communities in Asuwei, Panyu, and Songjiang, where it was limited to individual community members. The campaign leaders of Asuwei and Panyu have not only turned to focus on broader waste and environmental issues and attempted to impact municipal waste policies, but have also founded their own organizations dedicated to promoting more sustainable waste policies at higher political levels. Here, a shift of claims and grievances well beyond the local level has occurred and in some cases has produced effective policy changes, as described in Chapter Three (cp. also Johnson 2013a, 2013b; Wong 2016). While such developments have been limited to individual members of what has been termed the Chinese 'middle class', these cases nonetheless show that local struggles can scale up and produce results at higher political levels in China.

While the prospects for scale shifting based on horizontal networks remain limited, collaborations between local contenders and the Chinese 'no burn' community, i.e. between the 'two facets' of Chinese environmental activism, have significantly furthered the interests of the supra-local actors in this study. Vertical cooperation between the two groups has strengthened a national-level advocacy network that tackles not only waste-related issues but also broader environmental problems. As has been observed in other world regions, the growing number of local struggles against incinerator projects in China has helped bring the issue of waste incineration onto the agenda of environmental organizations and promoted the formation of a Chinese 'Zero Waste Alliance' (cp. Chapter Two). Moreover, joint engagement in individual local struggles has intensified the collaborations between different actor groups in the Chinese 'no burn' community, thereby strengthening their advocacy activities.

As outlined in these case studies, many of the 'no burn' community members' local activities were embedded in advocacy campaigns targeting national-level political institutions, which increased public and media attention to not only the risks associated with waste incineration and China's national waste policies, but also the broader regulatory failures reflected in the issue field. These include the lax implementation of EIA procedures or other environmental laws and standards at the local level, weaknesses in China's environmental litigation system, lacking public participation and transparency in the environmental realm, and local corruption issues more generally. The resistance of local communities has significantly enhanced national-level actors' struggle for greater awareness and policy change related to these issues. In some cases, locally-rooted national advocacy activities have produced manifest results, such as the MEP's nation-wide critical evaluation of EIA units or the national media campaign about EIA fraud at the local level (as described in Chapters Four and Five). By aggregating localized claims and grievances into broader public demands and long-term advocacy campaigns, supra-local intermediaries have not only lifted disparate local claims and grievances to the national level, but have also transformed the mostly short-lived local struggles into more sustained policy advocacy.

For the time being, it is unlikely that these developments will consolidate into an issue-specific or environmental movement. Within China's restrictive political framework, networked contention against waste incinerators has stalled at a meso-level of contention between fragmented activism and a full-grown movement. Particularly in the current political climate, it is unlikely that the Chinese 'no burn' community will continue a trajectory of growth and institutionalization. However, the existence of networked contention as a meso-level social phenomenon is a significant development in and of itself in the Chinese political context, strengthening the supra-local actors in the issue field and facilitating their assistance in local conflicts. At the same time, the actors stay loosely organized enough to not prompt repression by the party-state. Networked contention may thus hold significant advantages under the current adverse political conditions in China.

Beyond Waste Incineration: Linking Up as a Broader Trend in Chinese Environmental Contention

The findings from this study are limited to the issue field of waste incineration and cannot simply be transferred to Chinese environmental activism at large. The field of waste incineration can be regarded as a most likely case

for the emergence of linkages among the actors in China's green sphere, particularly because the close relationship between the issue of waste incineration and broader waste policies permits the alignment of local grievances with broader claims and has attracted the attention of a large number of environmental organizations. This has facilitated the emergence of vertical linkages and national-level policy advocacy when compared to other siting disputes, such as those against PX plants, in which local grievances tend to remain more localized since they are less easily embedded into the activities of supra-local actors with a broader political agenda. In addition, the presence of a vivid global anti-incineration and 'zero waste' movement and the close linkages between the Chinese and transnational 'no burn' communities have promoted Chinese anti-incineration contention and the emergence of a Chinese issue network in the shape of the 'Zero Waste Alliance'. Similar to the role of professors Connett and Commoner in the US anti-incineration and environmental movements, the prominent role of Zhao Zhangyuan as an anti-incineration expert with national influence can be regarded as somewhat exceptional. His position as a retired researcher facilitated his outspoken stance against incineration, since he did not have to fear retaliation linked to his employment situation (interview Zhao 8-11-12).

The local engagement of the large number of supra-local actors in the waste realm has significantly fostered the emergence and spread of local anti-incinerator conflicts. The (media) prominence of many of the 'no burn' community members has greatly facilitated local communities' access to information and external assistance. This was enhanced by the public and media debate about incineration after 2009, which made information not only about the risks of incineration but also about numerous local anti-MSWI struggles publicly available. Media information about these cases could then be complemented with online information. This availability of critical information and the rise of a rather clear-cut and outspoken community of opponents have facilitated the assessment of risks for local communities and their access to external assistance, especially when compared to other issue fields and types of polluting plants in China.

Moreover, most opposition to incinerator projects in China has taken the shape of siting disputes against planned or not yet completed facilities. Siting disputes are a specific form of environmental contention that differ from the conflict in cases where pollution has already occurred. The perception of anticipated risks and particularly health effects in often highly technical siting disputes tends to rely heavily on knowledge, information, and expertise. In many of the anti-incinerator struggles under study, this high initial threshold was overcome by building on ongoing conflicts about already existing waste

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facilities such as landfills in the vicinity. In these cases, the clearly discernible smell from the operating facilities had already produced grievances that rendered opposition to another – even more harmful – waste facility more likely. This was the case with the opposition to several operating incinerator plants such as in Likeng or Gaoantun, where it was the stench or dust from the waste combustion that first angered the residents, who only found out about the more hidden environmental and health hazards associated with incineration when looking deeper into the matter. This is different from other types of hazardous facilities such as nuclear plants, where environmental and health hazards are less palpable, and mobilization relies on a sense of alarm related to hidden risks even in the initial stages of awareness. Moreover, when compared to other polluting industries, contention against waste incinerators is facilitated by the rareness of economic dependencies on or (expected) benefits from the plants for the local population, which might otherwise hamper open opposition to polluters (cp. Deng and Yang 2013; Lora-Wainwright 2017; McAdam and Boudet 2012; Tilt 2010).

While the siting of other types of hazardous facilities, particularly PX plants and other waste facilities, has also produced significant local resistance in China, waste incineration can thus be regarded as particularly favourable for the emergence of local conflicts and the development of networked contention. This was confirmed by several of the intermediaries interviewed for this study. The construction of nuclear power plants, which in other countries has produced strong local reactions and national-level anti-nuclear movements (Kitschelt 1986; Markham 2005; Sherman 2011a; Walsh, Warland, and Smith 1997), have thus far triggered relatively little resistance at either level in China (Sheng forthcoming; Sheng 2014; Grano and Zhang forthcoming). This is interesting particularly in light of the nuclear disaster in Fukushima in 2011 and China's expansive nuclear strategy (Dorfmann 2015; He 2013; *Probe International* 2011; Wang 2013). Moreover, while some supra-local engagement in local contention has been observed and national-level alliances have formed in anti-dam disputes (Büsgen 2006; Mertha 2008), the environmental organizations, other intermediaries, and Chinese social science researchers interviewed for this study have regarded anti-dam contention as significantly more disparate and parochial than anti-incineration contention. The specific reasons for these limitations and a structured comparison across issue fields that would permit a more comprehensive assessment of the transferability of the findings of this research to other issue areas is an interesting entry point for future research.

Nonetheless, the emergence of networked contention among the different actors in China's environmental arena has also been observed in

recent studies investigating the resistance to other types of industrial and infrastructure projects and Chinese environmental contention more broadly. On a horizontal scale, research has found that diffusion processes and 'spill-over' effects via Internet- and mass media-based learning processes between affected communities have driven the nation-wide protest wave against PX plants that has spread across China since the first major anti-PX protest in Xiamen in 2007 (Zhu 2017). Horizontal ties have, to some extent, also played a role in the small number of Chinese anti-nuclear protests (Grano and Zhang forthcoming). This suggests that the new communication channels enabled by the pluralizing media landscape and the spread of the Internet, particularly social media, under Hu Jintao have also fostered communication and diffusion processes between contentious communities in other areas.

On a vertical scale, recent studies have observed intensifying linkages between local street protesters and environmental organizations or other supra-local policy advocates in other environmental issue fields (Steinhardt and Wu 2015; Sun, Huang, and Yip 2017; Tang forthcoming; Wright 2018). Wright (2018: 115-37) argues that a central factor in the relative success of recent environmental protests compared to other types of popular protests is the engagement of environmental organizations, which provide aggravated local groups with information, advice, and support. Sun, Huang, and Yip (2017) show that supra-local intermediaries – including regional and national-level environmental organizations, lawyers, and journalists – played an important role in the development of the local struggle against a planned PX plant in Kunming in 2013. To assist the local community there, these intermediaries drew on a repertoire of activities similar to that observed in this study, including media and public outreach activities, the promotion of information disclosure requests, environmental litigation, and letter-writing campaigns. Moreover, and again similar to the national issue campaigns described in this study, environmental organizations' engagement in the Kunming episode and the occurrence of similar problems in other localities prompted them to conduct a thorough and in-depth investigation of disputed PX and other chemicals projects across the country. This not only added legitimacy to the local contenders, but also resulted in broader policy advocacy.

In a similar vein, Steinhardt and Wu (2015) in a study of four environmental protests against different construction projects[115] and Steinhardt

115 The four environmental protests under scrutiny are the anti-PX protest in Xiamen (2007), the anti-incinerator protest in Panyu (2009), a tree-saving campaign related to the construction

(forthcoming) in a follow-up study of 25 cases of environmental contention find that Chinese environmental organizations were increasingly active at the local level during the observation period (between 2007 and 2016) and that a mutual reinforcement of street mobilization and policy advocacy was taking place. A similar finding is reported by Tang (forthcoming) in her study of 20 environmental protests. She argues that environmental protests in today's China are characterized by a 'multifaceted advocacy dimension': different social actors, including affected communities and supra-local actors such as social organizations and lawyers, employ different strategies and together invoke the necessity of policy change for environmental governance.

While their case studies are all related to environmental contention, Steinhardt and Wu (2015) point to similar developments in other areas and regard this as part of a new repertoire for popular contention in China that signals broader developments in Chinese contentious politics. While more research about the linkages between different sites and actor groups in the Chinese environmental realm is needed and while these developments might have been curtailed under the current leadership, the developments described in this study and the emergence of networked contention point to a broader trend in Chinese environmental activism, at least under the government of Hu Jintao.

Beyond China: Networked Contention, Linkages, and Diffusion in a Restrictive Political Setting

The potential for the formation of an environmental or other social movement is significantly hampered in the context of a restrictive political regime. This study shows that networked contention in the form of a meso-level phenomenon between fragmented activism and a full-blown movement can nonetheless develop under adverse political circumstances and foster both local and higher-level contention. Within the limits imposed by a restrictive setting, this loosely organized form of resistance can hold significant advantages for contentious actors by strengthening supra-local policy advocacy and facilitating the engagement of supra-local actors in local conflicts without attracting too much attention.

The findings from this study speak to the literature on the diffusion of contention and contentious politics more broadly. They shed light on

of a new subway station in Nanjing (2011), and the anti-PX struggle in Kunming (2013) also investigated by Sun, Huang, and Yip (2017).

the exact ways different types of contentious actors may link up under a restrictive political regime and how these linkages can foster both local and higher-level contention in such a context. The channels and mechanisms that drive contention-related diffusion and the scaling up of local contention to higher levels have mainly been investigated in the context of Western democratic countries. Only few studies have looked at diffusion or scale shift in authoritarian settings where the dynamics of contention tend to diverge widely from those observed in liberal Western regimes – and most of those studies have only tackled certain aspects of the phenomenon (Lohmann 1994; McAdam et al. 2010; Osa 2003; Osa and Schock 2007).

The horizontal and vertical linkages behind networked contention are shaped by the political context. In regimes where close relationships among contentious actors are associated with high personal risks, it is unlikely that horizontal linkages between affected communities will take the shape of formal supra-local alliances, collaborations, or new organizational forms that could be the basis for scaling up local contention to regional or higher-level movements, as suggested by the social movement literature based on research in democratic contexts. As this study shows, however, this does not mean that contenders do not link up under a restrictive framework. Instead, diffusion processes are based more on informal networks and loose 'alliances of support' (see the Beijing and Guangzhou cases) as also observed by Osa (2003: 78). As suggested in the literature (Bennett and Segerberg 2012; Diamond 2010; Diamond and Plattner 2012; Earl and Kimport 2011), information and communication technologies, particularly social media, play a crucial role in both enabling relational diffusion across geographically dispersed localities and allowing the broadcast dissemination of information. Overall, diffusion processes in such restrictive contexts are particularly reliant on nonrelational ties via the Internet and mass media, since the formation of offline and online relational linkages is hampered by associated political risks. For the resource-poor, less internet-savvy communities in this study, vertical relational linkages with intermediaries remained a major diffusion channel. Where open support is risky, it may take the form of informal advice and the online provision of precious information.

The nature of these linkages renders the scaling up of local contention or formation of a broader movement based on horizontal ties among affected communities unfeasible. As this study shows, however, the diffusion processes enabled by networked contention can nonetheless play a particularly important role in the spread and development of local contention under restrictive conditions and produce 'protest waves' or 'cycles of contention' in an adverse political climate. Overall, the same basic mechanisms that

drive the diffusion of contention in Western democratic regimes are also at play under restrictive conditions, although there are specific features in how these mechanisms intertwine and what role they play for local contention within a restrictive political framework.

First, the information disseminated via horizontal and vertical linkages is of particular importance for the awareness process of affected communities, and hence for both the onset and development of local contention, in settings where access to uncensored and critical information – particularly to the highly relevant technical and medical information that is needed to assess the nature and risks of environmentally hazardous projects such as incinerators, PX and nuclear plants, or dam projects – is limited (compare with Mertha 2008). This includes fostering the first awareness of related risks, a collective interpretation of the situation, and a cognitive justification for contentious action. As this study shows, 'neutral' experts, (transnational) organizations, and social movements in other world regions are particularly important sources of information, while supra-local intermediaries function as important 'translators' and diffusion nodes between the transnational contentious community and local contenders.

Second and closely related, these above sources of information play a particularly important role in the certification of information within the overall 'information haze'. Due to the highly contested nature of environmental issues, particularly health-related ones, the certification of the communities' claims and activities is not only important vis-à-vis the public and project proponents, but also internally vis-à-vis the affected communities if collective action is to be mobilized despite the risks associated with contentious activities.

Third, as outlined in the literature on diffusion processes in authoritarian contexts (Allagui and Kuebler 2011; Lohmann 1994; Lynch 2011; Mueller 1999), the transmitted information plays a central role in changing the affected communities' perceptions of threat and opportunity. Against the backdrop of potentially repressive party-state responses and the blurred and continuously shifting boundaries of the politically permissible, knowledge about other contentious communities, their activities, and related party-state reactions can have a significant impact not only on the onset of contention but also on the mode of action that is employed. In this study, knowledge about other communities' activities not only helped the adopting contenders assess the risks related to certain kinds of activities, but also increased or decreased their belief in the chances of success of certain types of action – such as legal actions – within the restrictive political opportunity structures.

Fourth, diffusion scholars have pointed to the role of information flows for 'identity formation', i.e., the formation of a shared contentious identity

within the local context or as part of a broader contentious struggle or movement. As this study demonstrates, the self-perception of affected communities as part of a broader (national or transnational) wave of contention can constitute a strong mobilizing force and help community members overcome their reluctance to resort to contentious means in the context of high political risks and insecurities associated with contentious action. However, it is unlikely that a scaling down of identity frames to the local level leads to broader claims, alliances, or communities of solidarity in this context. Rather, the affected communities in this study adopt identity and other frames primarily to further their own localized claims.

Fifth, diffusion processes may also impact the dynamics of contention by changing the adopting communities' resource structure, thus enabling or facilitating the mobilization and organization of action. Under a restrictive political framework with limited access to critical issue-specific and action-related information, such information plays a particularly important role in the onset and development of contention. This includes the above-mentioned information about specific tactics, strategies, and organizational forms that have been applied in other sites of contention and that can be emulated by the adopting communities. This also includes information about the opportunities provided within the legal and political system, as well as hard-to-obtain issue-specific information, expertise, and evidence that is critical for taking action in often highly technical environmental disputes. The resource-poorer communities in this study were particularly dependent on the provision of more manifest resources for mobilizing action, including financial support, legal advice, and representation in negotiations with project proponents. Here, intermediaries can play a major role, particularly in rural struggles, by filling in resource gaps that would otherwise render contentious action unfeasible.

With regards to changing the resource structure of affected communities, this study has observed another aspect that is not covered in the literature on the diffusion of contention. In a repressive context where contentious action is often met with repercussions and entails high personal risks, particularly for community leaders, networked contention can play an important protective function, thus enabling a broader contentious repertoire. This is best demonstrated in the Panguanying case, but also played an important role in several other cases in this study. For example, the materials provided by other communities or the state media can be distributed without making the distributors vulnerable to legal repercussions as the authors of the material. Intermediaries can also be called on as experts or eyewitnesses to refute official claims, allegations, or charges, thereby protecting local campaigners from repressive party-state actions. In several of the cases in this study,

external attention from intermediaries, journalists, and researchers (including myself) and the public dissemination of information about ongoing events helped to raise the costs for state repression. In the case of Panguanying, this included the role of organization staff and journalists as election observers and as eyewitnesses in official charges against a community leader.

Networked contention can also have a significant impact at higher political levels in a restrictive setting. In a political context where the range of activities by supra-local actors and particularly social organizations that is tolerated by the regime is limited, collaboration with local communities helps broaden these actors' repertoire of action and can strengthen a national issue network that also tackles broader (environmental) problems. It permits them to address larger issues or regulatory failures that manifest at the local level – such as lacking implementation of environmental regulations or adverse policy effects – and adds weight to their higher-level political claims. As shown in this study, local action can be embedded in or the starting point for long-term national-level advocacy campaigns that increase public and media attention to the issues at hand and place pressure on policymakers. While the emergence of a full-blown movement might be restricted, networked contention can thus help lift disparate local claims and grievances to the national level and transform the mostly short-lived local struggles into broader public demands and more sustained policy advocacy. At the same time, the actors themselves stay small and loosely organized enough to remain under the radar of state forces. As such, networked contention can hold significant advantages in a restrictive political setting and merits attention in its own right.