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THE INTRODUCTION OF LIFE-ENVIRONMENTALISM TO CHINA AND ITS SPECIAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Japanese environmental sociologists advanced Life-Environmentalism based on investigations of the environment of Lake Biwa, emphasizing that we should pay attention to the lives and positions of local residents to solve environmental problems. This is a representative theory of environmental sociology in Japan that could be applied to many environmental problems and cases.

This paper reviews the application and development of the theory of Life-Environmentalism, especially the “Position of Residents” in China, which arose and was developed in Japan. In particular, the authors have focused on the unique “position” in case studies of environmental problems in China. In order to determine the cause of this unique “position,” it is necessary to contrast it with the historical stages of the development of Chinese environmental sociology. Doing so shows that the development of Chinese environmental sociology itself has promoted Life-Environmentalism in China. Moreover, China’s environmental sociology pays attention to the macroscopic social structure: China’s social transformation and special political and economic integration system are typical examples. These classic theories have had a great influence in Chinese environmental sociology. Thus, when using Life-Environmentalism to discuss environmental problems in China, Chinese environmental sociologists tend to focus on government and policy when considering environmental issues, which constitutes what the authors call their unique “position.”

The formation of Chinese environmental sociology theory has been shaped by its social background, which has also influenced Life-Environmentalism for two reasons in particular. First, because of the urban and rural binary system, residents in rural China are in a complex position between “residents” and “producers.” Second, China’s environmental policy is government-led, placing a limit on the subjectivity of farmers (residents) who are the subject of environmental pollution. Under the special social environment in China, it is overidealized to discuss only the experiences of residents and communities without considering policy, government power, or social mechanisms. Therefore, the authors suggest that even though Life-Environmentalism has changed slightly in China, it may be better suited to the actual situation of environmental problems.

Key words: life-environmentalism; environmental sociology theory; environmental issues in China; unique position

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1. Introduction

Life-environmentalism is an important theory in environmental sociology. It takes a mainstream stance on environmental issues exemplified by either modern technologism, which claims that environmental issues can be resolved using modern technology, or natural environmentalism, which advocates for a form of nature from which humans are separated and in which no human intervention is present. However, life-environmentalism is divided into both types, seeking to improve environmental issues by approaching them from the position of the inhabitants living in the area. As is well known, life-environmentalism is a theory born from specific case studies in Japan, but according to Torigoe (1986), “life-environmentalism” is thought to be effective in areas with high population density like Japan or Asian countries. Furthermore, the reality and practicality of research in the environmental sociology disciplines have become increasingly important in China (Hong, 2014). Thus, there are many common elements with the “faithful and practical aspects of the realities of modern society” unique to life-environmentalism, as analyzed by Arakawa and Isogawa (2008). In other words, the life-environmentalism that originated in Japan is thought to have become a theory/analysis model that also has a high level of compatibility in China.

Using the issue of pollution in rural areas of China as an example, a wave of modernization swept through agriculture, and the separation of livestock and cultivated entities has become apparent through the industrialization of agriculture, but past research from the authors has shown that community agricultural practices inherited from rural China¹⁾ and the human relationships of mutual familiarity/assistance persisted in some inland rural areas (Zhang, Hu, and Miyoshi, 2018; 2019). However, a gap between the lives and practices of the local people has formed as a result of these facts being ignored and the advocacy of unified measures based on scientific rationale. As such, it becomes more important in resolving livestock waste problems to consider strategies for handling problems from the perspectives of people living on the land, rather than giving them the option of solving their problems through external power dynamics. This requires realistic solutions that consider the various agricultural forms and local customs of each region. To that end, it was believed that this study would also need to analyze from the theoretical framework (Torigoe and Kada, 1984) that is life-environmentalism, which “takes the position of preserving the livelihoods of people living in the community and emphasizing the experience of the people.”

However, despite their high compatibility, when approaching environmental problems in Chinese society from the perspective of life-environmentalism, it goes without saying that its actual circumstances must be taken into consideration prior to application. To that end, we must first consider the standing positions and perspectives of prior research when handling life-environmentalism, while arranging the background of how life-environmentalism was introduced and applied to China in the past. This theory has in fact been translated into

Chinese as early as 1988, but little attention was paid to it over the next 20 years or so. Japanese theories have been introduced and a wide range of developments in Japanese and Chinese case studies have been seen with the re-emergence of life-environmentalism in China in 2009, but it has also become evident that there were a number of differing points in the life-environmentalism of Japan and China. The detailed examination of these differences is expected to enable the further application of life-environmentalism to environmental issues in China, and contribute to the increased applicability of these theories to environmental problems not only in China, but also in other developing regions.

Therefore, this manuscript specifies the various developments that life-environmentalism achieved in China through the stages of development it underwent there, and why these differences occurred, by systematically organizing the papers and books on life-environmentalism that have been transmitted in “Chinese.”

2. Birth of Life-Environmentalism in Japan and its Introduction to China

Shortly after the introduction of life-environmentalism in the 1984 book, *The History of Environmental Changes between the Water and the People* in Japan, Torigoe detailed the basic positions and research framework of life-environmentalism in 1986. He indicates that, with regard to an analytical framework for investigating environmental issues, a researcher in life-environmentalism must understand the “popular morality” that is created by the state and deeply rooted in the consciousness of inhabitants, as well as the mutual understanding of inhabitants and the heterogeneity that causes this. He also introduces in detail the “daily knowledge” of inhabitants, or in other words, the three elements of personal experience, common sense of life in the inhabiting organization (e.g., village), and popular morality brought from outside of the inhabiting organization (Torigoe, 1986). This paper, which explained the analytical framework of life-environmentalism, especially that of daily knowledge, was excerpted and translated in 1988 and published in China’s “Digest of Foreign Social Sciences.” (Torigoe and Xu, 1988) This marked the first introduction in China of life-environmentalism, which is one of the theories of environmental sociology born in Japan. However, China in the 1980s was focused on economic development, and the study of environmental sociology in China was still in its infancy; thus, Japan’s life-environmentalism was simply introduced without any major influences.

It was approximately 20 years later in 2009 that life-environmentalism came into the spotlight again in the field of environmental sociology in China. Song (2009) translated Torigoe’s work into Chinese and once again transmitted the perspectives of life-environmentalism and inhabitants in China. However, as this was a translation, it did not touch upon environmental case studies in China or the applicability of life-environmentalism in China. Environmental sociology in China²⁾ has gradually seen development since 2010, and

thus Japan's life-environmentalism has received increasing attention.

3. Widespread Development of Life-Environmentalism in China

In addition to translations and introductions of theories, there have been many case studies that incorporated the theory and analytical models of life-environmentalism since its appearance in China. Search results by the author on China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), which is the largest manuscript database in China, with the keyword “life-environmentalism,” showed a total of 34 articles published from the 1980s to September 2019, with its information summarized in Table 1³⁾. There are Japanese researchers and Chinese researchers with a research history in Japan among the papers published in Chinese. Of the 34 articles in total, there was one article each in 1988 and 1999, and a total of seven articles by 2011, but this greatly increased from 2013 to 2018, with a total of 27 articles published during this time. Themes on broader environmental issues such as residential garbage collection were addressed as themes in addition to issues of resource management. Furthermore, it should be mentioned in advance that each study had a slightly different research perspective or analytical framework. This chapter will specifically clarify where the differences in research perspectives are while managing this wide range of developments.

TABLE 1.
Related publications organized by year

Year	Content	Number	Author(s)	Notes
1988	Introduction to life-environmentalism theory	1	Torigoe and Xu (1988)	Translated by Xu
1999	Introduction to life-environmentalism theory	1	Wang (1999)	
2009–2011	Introduction to life-environmentalism theory	4	Song (2009)	Research history in Japan
			Bao (2010)	Research history in Japan
			Li (2011)	Research history in Japan
			Li (2011)	Research history in Japan
	Introduction to life-environmentalism theory + Chinese case study	1	Torigoe and Yan (2011)	Translated by Yan
2012–2018	Introduction to life-environmentalism theory	7	Lu and Qi (2013)	
			Zhao and Ren (2014)	
			Zhao (2014)	
			He (2015)	
			Zhang (2013)	
			Chen (2015)	
			Wang and Huang (2017)	
		1	Li (2015)	Research history in Japan
		1	Wang, Zhang, and Torigoe (2014)	

2012– 2018	Chinese case study	10	Li (2012)	
			Zhang (2013)	
			He (2013)	
			Wu (2013)	
			Geng (2014)	
			Wu (2018)	
			Tang and Wang (2018)	
			Xi (2017)	
			Wang (2017)	
			Gao, Cao, and Wang (2016)	
	Japanese case study	1	Chen (2017)	Research history in Japan
		4	Yang (2014)	Research history in Japan
			Yang (2015)	Research history in Japan
			Li (2018)	Research history in Japan
			Li (2019)	Research history in Japan

(Organized by the author from CNKI data)⁴⁾

3-1. About the Theoretical and Analytical Framework

Of the above-mentioned CNKI academic papers, the most cited and representative are the papers by Song (2009) and Bao (2010). Song (2009) re-introduced Torigoe's theories of environmental sociology in 2009 and provided particularly detailed explanations centered on the sociological importance and influence of the position of inhabitants emphasized in life-environmentalism. Furthermore, the article states that life-environmentalism emphasizes the importance of inhabitants and lives themselves, and that it is a theory that observes environmental issues with individuals or groups of residents as actors. To stand in the position of people signifies respecting the lives of inhabitants and using their wisdom to explore the relationship between people and nature. The article states that the "position of the resident" advocated by life-environmentalism is particularly effective in addressing two fundamental problems: environmental problems due to the contradiction between one person and nature (resource utilization), and those due to the contradiction between two individuals and people (social dilemma). However, the article by Song is limited to a general introduction of the basic theories and research methods of life-environmentalism.

However, environmental problems in Japan are divided into the historical stages of the pollution/development issues period (until the early 1980s) and the period of the universalization of environmental problems (from the 1980s onwards) (Fig. 1) (Funabashi, 2011). Life-environmentalism (pollution/development issues period) was originally a theory that was born at a different time from that of social dilemmas (period of the universalization of environmental problems), and whether it is appropriate to incorporate social dilemmas in life-environmentalism is still up for debate. As can also be seen in Fig. 3, despite 2009 being the year in which the blank period ended, only Japanese theories were introduced. Afterwards, Bao (2010) explained that despite following the historical stages of environmental problems in Japan, life-environmentalism appeared as an important theory among publications that

introduced the entire theory of Japanese environmental sociology during the “pollution/development issues period.” Bao further indicated that unlike Japan where two relatively distinct periods of environmental problems can be seen, China cannot be easily classified in this way, instead experiencing the pollution/development issues period and the period of universalization of environmental problems simultaneously. Meanwhile, the appearance of “life-environmentalism” can also be seen not only in academic papers, but also in Chinese scholarly books. For example, the first annual “Chinese environmental sociology” conference was held in 2007, with conference proceedings introducing “life-environmentalism” as a research paradigm. Other than this, there is the translation (Song, 2009) of *Environmental Sociology: Thinking from the Position of the Resident* (Torigoe, 2004). Works of Japanese researchers are summarized in papers and books that introduce these theories, and note the characteristics of life-environmentalism written by the Japanese (e.g., autonomy). However, these are very similar to translations, and it goes without saying that there are no discussions based on the full consideration of actual situations in China.

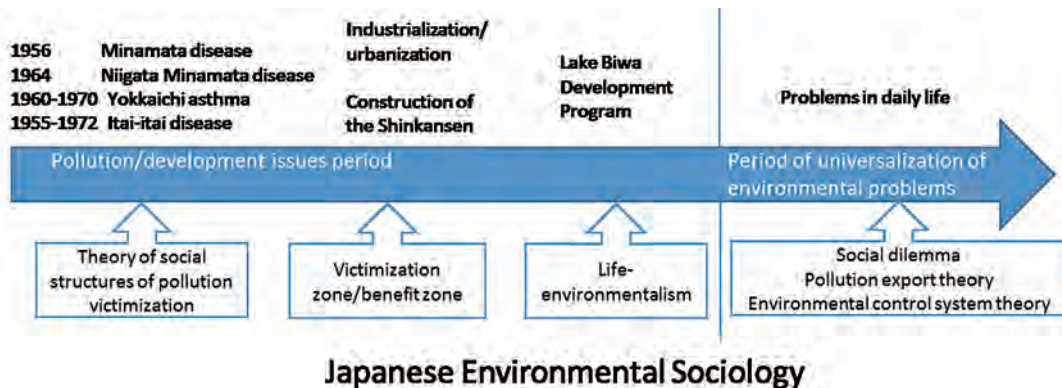


FIGURE 1.

Historical stages of environmental sociology and environmental problems in Japan
(created by the author using Funabashi (2011) as a reference)

Even among papers on life-environmentalism, those that focus on the introduction of the theory in this way quickly began to garner more influence in China’s academic world after 2009⁵⁾, but there was a lag of approximately 25 years from its birth in Japan in 1984. In this paper, this period is referred to as the “blank period,” which will be focused on further. However, before clarifying why this blank period exists and the causes of it, China’s environmental sociology development itself first needs to be studied. Environmental sociology in China has undergone the stages of development as shown in Fig. 2 below.

As can be seen from Fig. 2, environmental sociology appeared in China as early as the 1980s, but the period from the 1980s to the early 1990s was seen as a “spontaneous research period without subject awareness” (abbreviated as “spontaneous period”), after which the period from the mid-1990s onwards was the “subjective research/construction period with

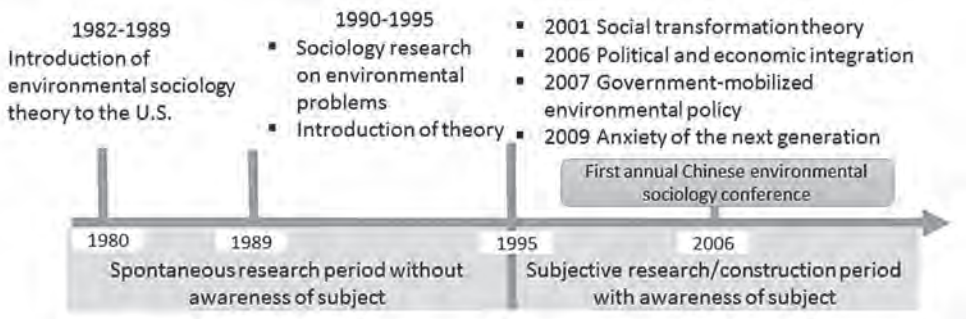


FIGURE 2.

Development of environmental sociology in China
(organized by the author based on Hong (2007))

subject awareness” (abbreviated as “subjective period”) (Hong, 2007). The introduction of international theories was predominant prior to 1995, and “environmental sociology” was not recognized in some disciplines, instead touching upon ecological and social development (Ma, 1993; Lu, 1994; Hong, 1995).

From the late 1990s, the recognition that “environmental sociology” was an independent field gradually became widespread, and its importance was increasingly emphasized by many researchers (Ma, 1998; Hong, 1999). Environmental sociology research inevitably increased after environmental sociology entered its subjective period, and the first meeting of the Chinese environmental sociology conference in 2007 in particular further increased awareness of the field in China. In this way, the introduction and development of life-environmentalism in China has an essential relationship with the underlying development of the entire field of environmental sociology in China. In other words, it was first with the development of environmental sociology that more Chinese researchers began to pay attention to environmental sociology theory from abroad, including that of Japan. At the same time, problems and research themes that have become the focus of environmental sociology in China have also been thought to have had a large influence on the development of life-environmentalism. This will be detailed in Section 4, but it is seen that the “life-environmentalism” used in China is thought to have been influenced by environmental sociology in China while being distinctly different from Japanese theory. With this in mind, further discussions on how to evaluate “Chinese life-environmentalism” will be provided.

3-2. *Incorporating Life-Environmentalism in China: A Special Development*

After a long blank period and the development of Chinese environmental sociology itself, Japanese life-environmentalism was gradually introduced to China incorporated in a variety of environmental sociology research. In this section, the development of life-environmentalism in China will be organized, with a primary focus on case studies.

Research that used Japanese life-environmentalism or that alternatively considered actual

cases of environmental problems in China from the position of the “resident” appeared from 2010 onwards. Most of these studies focus on the relationships and discrepancies between the environmental policies implemented in rural or pastoral areas, and the traditions and cultures of local people. For example, the problems of open burning, New Years’ firecrackers, and household waste disposal in rural Chinese areas have been discussed. Local governments have issued policies and orders that impose strict penalties for violators of open burning laws, but it is incredibly difficult to effectively prevent open burning in villages. Gao, Cao, and Wang (2016) considered its causes with two aspects from the viewpoint of life-environmentalism: dissociation between government policies based on scientific knowledge and “local knowledge with regard to ‘farmland restoration with straw’,” and changes in farmers’ lifestyles and the outflow of labor due to modernization. The effectiveness of past top-down policies in rural areas with a deeply-rooted local culture was questioned as a result, and it was concluded that policy guidance was a more effective method than strict regulations in preventing future open burning. Furthermore, there is also a compulsory ban policy, the “fireworks/firecrackers ban policy,” that is similar to the open burning ban policy. Despite firecrackers being part of Chinese tradition and culture, they have been banned since the 1980s due to concerns about environmental problems such as air pollution and noise. Wu (2018) indicated that the firecracker ban policy ignored the lives and traditional customs of residents, and furthermore proposed that policies should avoid conflict between residents and traditional culture. Though this paper is not related to humans and nature, it should be noted that it focuses on the “resident” as an important concept. In other words, as argued by Wu herself, life-environmentalism has often been used to restore the relationship between humans and nature, but the concept of the “position of the resident” can be applied to other environmental problems.

Among the leading studies of life-environmentalism in Japan, there have been numerous studies that verified the rationality of policies from the position of the resident or those that converted institutional policies as a result (Kin, 2018), and it is thought that life-environmentalism is naturally inclined towards policy. With this in mind, the reason why the author raised the concept of a “special development” was that the “position of the resident” referred to in a paper in China⁶⁾ interpreted the lives of people from an “empirical theory,” which was believed to be somewhat different from the “position” in which our “standing position” is placed in local residents. Thus, rather than being completely based on the position of residents from the outset, they hold a complex, multi-layered position that allows them to pay attention to the lives and culture of residents while standing on the position of policy. This enables them to arrive at policy analyses and proposals. Research on the previously-mentioned open burning and firecracker problems started with the open burning and firecracker ban policies from the outset, and discussions on how policy and regulations should occur while utilizing life-environmentalism as an analysis approach when conducting policy analysis have been at the center of their research.

This multi-layered position is most apparent in the papers of Wang (2017) and Tang and Wang (2018). Wang (2018) conducted policy evaluations for improving the living environments in rural China. First, high-frequency inspections and their corresponding inspection countermeasures were conducted under the governance of top-down pressure-based systems⁷⁾, and results from the “institutional dissimilation”⁸⁾ of environmental governance. This resulted in villagers adopting the attitude of “outsiders” with regard to resolving environmental problems, which clarified the problems in the Chinese system. They also introduced the case study of special measures to collect and dispose of household waste that considered the positions of residents in Z village in Shaanxi Province, and this verified the effectiveness of life-environmentalism in promoting voluntary participation. Note that the “experience” (e.g., production, lifestyle) of villagers who are the residents of the villages are considered here, but what is discussed in this manuscript is primarily policy measures that respect the living practices of residents. Other than this, a shared angle can be seen in discussions on environmental problems of pastoral areas in China (Xi, 2017). Xi sought to review the limits of the effects of national-level projects and policy such as banning policies and ecological immigrants in pastoral regions of China, while linking the national perspective proposed by Scott (1999) and the resident perspective of life-environmentalism. Both value the living knowledge of residents, but the national perspective focuses on the power structures behind the large national policies while neglecting the local knowledge and lives of residents ignored under these power structures. Finally, Xi argued that the government needs to value the positions and rights of residents in pastoral areas while comparing the national and resident perspectives. In other words, rather than stand in the position itself, one should approach or value/consider the position of the resident. Among examples of the former case, the secretary of the village committee proposed this, but the villagers only went so far as to accept it, and it was unclear how the autonomy and living knowledge of the villagers were being used at the initial stage. This point is thought to be very different from case studies seen in Japan.

However, it must be pointed out that such “special development” is not necessarily seen in all research on “residents.” All of the papers that describe the special “multi-layered position” raised above are arguments by researchers who specialize in Chinese environmental sociology. However, according to the author’s careful inspection, among all of these Chinese theorists, those who have experience studying or researching in Japan do not show many differences in position when discussing life-environmentalism. Furthermore, although not explicitly declaring “life-environmentalism,” research on environmental problems from a folklore and anthropological approach describes the lives of “residents” in detail, and there are many studies that clarify the discrepancy between policy and actual living conditions based on the common sense of life in the community (= theory of consciousness in life-environmentalism, particularly that of common sense of life in residential organizations). For the former case, Yang (2014, 2015) introduced a successful example of water quality

improvement measures at Lake Biwa from the “position of residents,” while arguing for the importance of “rebuilding the relationship between people and nature” based on the history and culture of local residents. Torigoe (2011) also uses examples in China to explain the characteristics of life-environmentalism, which emphasizes the importance of history and experience. These research papers each stand in the position of the resident, and emphasize the uniqueness of the resident’s experience and local history. With regard to the latter case, examples include Zhang (2013), who clarified the reality that there is a disconnect between the actual circumstances of living conditions among livestock farmers in Inner Mongolia and top-down “forbidden grazing” policies, and interpreted that livestock farmers were engaged in various forms of protest. This type of research does not explicitly state the “position,” but the detailed description of the daily lives and historical culture, as well as the living knowledge of residents is an analogous aspect with the perspective of the resident in life-environmentalism. With this in mind, the next section will provide detailed discussions on why these various developments exist and the causes of these differences in positions among these various developments.

4. Discussion of Differences in Position and their Causes

Clarification of the causes of these positions and their differences must consider the development of Chinese environmental sociology organized in Section 3-1. It should be particularly noted that this is strongly associated with the “blank period.” As mentioned above, the “blank period” refers to the gap of life-environmentalism in the field of environmental sociology in China, which does not mean that there is a gap in Chinese environmental sociology itself. In other words, this was because, if anything, the field of environmental sociology in China was developing during this blank period. Fig. 3 compares the development over time of Chinese environmental sociology and Chinese life-environmentalism. During the blank period of life-environmentalism (1988–2009), Chinese environmental sociology entered the subjective research period in 1995 after undergoing the stages of sociology research on environmental problems during the spontaneous period and the introduction of international theories. Extremely powerful Chinese environmental sociology theories based on the realities of China’s environmental problems were proposed after 2000, which included social transformation theory⁹⁾, political and economic integration, government-mobilized environmental policy, and next-generation anxiety¹⁰⁾. With the beginning of modernization in China from the 1980s, the country has seen rapid economic development and growth but also emerging environmental problems. In response to the various environmental problems that have materialized in China’s modernization, Chinese sociologists have focused on the major problem of “dissonance between economic development and environmental protection” caused by social transformation, as well as the political and economic systems greatly

associated with this dissonance. In other words, these researchers are thought to have a tendency to view China's environmental problems from a macroscale angle, placing particular emphasis on political systems and policies. These theories serve as the theoretical basis for Chinese environmental sociology. Furthermore, Japanese and U.S. theories have also become increasingly influenced by these theories, based on these foundations. Therefore, as Chinese environmental sociology itself has developed and increased its influence, so too has attention increased on life-environmentalism in Japan. Meanwhile, life-environmentalism in Japan came back in vogue after a certain extent of development in Chinese environmental sociology. Thus, it is only natural that it was influenced by the theories of Chinese environmental sociology, which focus on macro-scale structures and government systems. For these reasons, it is thought that instead of entirely standing on the "position of the resident," a multi-layered position that ultimately returns to government and policy while still considering the position of the resident was seen.

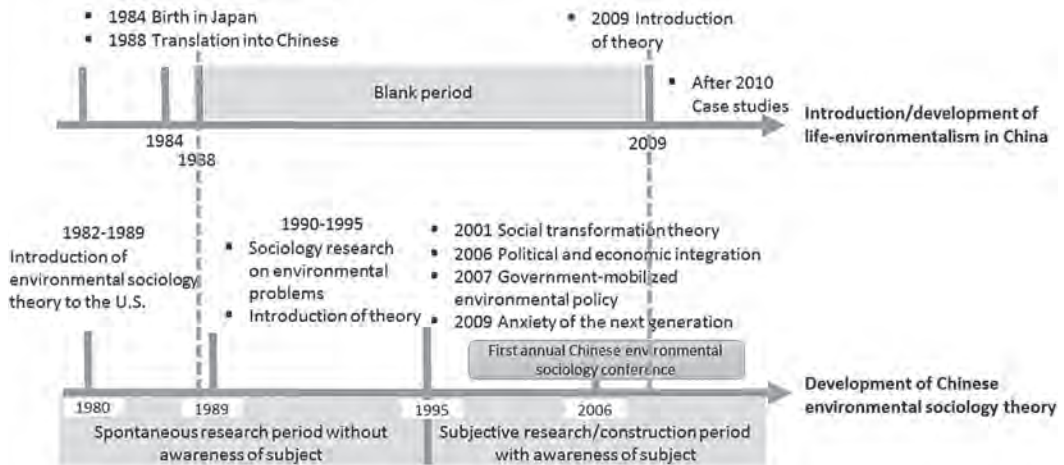


FIGURE3.

Development of Chinese environmental sociology and the introduction/development of life-environmentalism in China (created by the author)

The reason why Chinese environmental sociology focuses on government systems is also due to the underlying realities of the environmental problems in China. First, the realistic background refers to the dual rural/urban system¹¹⁾ in China in addition to the above-mentioned "social transformation." "Rural" is designated as a keyword in almost all papers, indicating the problematic area. Under such a dual rural/urban system, Chinese farmers are in the complex position of both "inhabitant" and "producer." This is a major characteristic of farmers, who are the main subject of rural environmental problems in China. The structure that is the dual system, that supports industrial and urban economic development, creates absolute disparities between urban and rural areas, and these disparities have not disappeared. Wu (2013) depicts a situation under such a dual system in which farmers, despite being

driven by waves of modernization, reluctantly continue their productive activities despite recognizing their potential for destroying the environment. In other words, farmers in rural areas of China are both producers and residents, but at the current stage, they first face the issue of survival and need to continue productive work, rather than “voluntarily conducting environmental protection work with the hope of living happily.” Therefore, Wu emphasized that the theories of life-environmentalism in its original form would not be applicable to the actual circumstances of China, instead proposing a “survival-environmentalism.” In survival-environmentalism, Chinese farmers under the dual system are both “producers” and “residents,” and they would choose the role of producer in order to survive. Utilizing the autonomy of “survivors” or the knowledge of inhabitants requires the elimination of the dual system that is at the underlying root of the issue and looking at the overall social structure and government policy. These are also considered to be an important factor that leads to the “multi-layered position” when applying life-environmentalism to China.

The other reason is related to the government’s environmental policies themselves. Environmental policy in China has been said to be either a “crisis-response,” top-down government-mobilized environmental policy (Xun and Bao, 2007) or government-led environmental policy (Xia, 2000), where the government imposes environmental governance. Furthermore, the previously-introduced top-down pressure-based system shows the relationship between the central and local governments. In such a system, local governments are primarily evaluated based on the indicators of economic aggregates and growth rates. Under such pressure, local governments are forced to focus on attracting and expanding industries, effectively forming mechanisms of economic growth of a “so-called political and economic integration.” Economic development is emphasized by local governments, and the farmer, who is the main subject of environmental problems in rural areas, is forced into a passive position. For these reasons, the political system and the position of government were unavoidable when observing the environmental problems of China from the “position of the resident.” This is thought to be the fundamental cause of the multi-layered position of life-environmentalism in China.

This manuscript compares the differences between life-environmentalism used in China and theories in Japan, but its objective is not in establishing one’s superiority over the other. In contrast, it must be recognized once again that the theories developed in Japan in their original form would not be applicable to Chinese examples if the life-environmentalism of Japan was borrowed and applied to Chinese environmental problems on the basis of the realities in China and the various theories in Chinese environmental sociology. If anything, it is suggested that this altered “position” may have rational and effective aspects to it.

5. Conclusions

This paper focused on the “position of residents” in the “life-environmentalism” that was born and developed in Japan, and organized/discussed its incorporation into research on environmental problems in China. Various developments were seen in China after the introduction of life-environmentalism, and this paper focused particularly on the special “position” in case studies of Chinese environmental problems. The historical stages of the development of Chinese environmental sociology were focused upon in order to investigate the causes of this special position. A comparison of the timelines of both developments showed that the development of Chinese environmental sociology itself promoted the spread of the Japanese theory of life-environmentalism, and that Chinese environmental sociology theories were a significant influence on Chinese environmental sociologists who tried to apply life-environmentalism. Chinese environmental sociology focused on macro-scale social structure, a classic example of which is the social transformation of China or its unique political and economic integration system. Influenced by these factors, Chinese researchers were thought to first focus on government and policy when thinking about environmental problems. Furthermore, the formation of Chinese environmental sociology theory also developed on the foundation of China’s large social background. In general, this foundation is thought to be composed of two parts. The first is the complex positions of “resident” and “producer” held by farmers living in rural areas as a result of the dual rural/urban system. The second is the government-led environmental policy of China, where there are limits to the expression of autonomy by farmers (residents), who are the main subject of environmental pollution. Under such a unique Chinese system, there are limits to entirely ignoring policy or government power, and discussing only the experiences of residents or communities. The author believes that it is because of this foundation that there is a higher affinity in China for a life-environmentalism that is different from the Japanese original, and thus why it is applicable in China.

This paper mainly compares the life-environmentalism of Japan and China from the perspectives of the positions of residents, and the results clarified the differences and their causes. Of course, the mechanism of lifestyle analysis such as the “empirical theory” emphasized in life-environmentalism, or in other words, depicting the conditions of why people came to a given action through fieldwork on the experiences of residents and detailed considerations of the relationship with the region (Arakawa and Isogawa, 2008), has both points of similarity and differences between the Japanese and Chinese variants. Furthermore, life-environmentalism in China is incorporated not only in the joint management of resources, but also in research on other environmental problems (rural waste collection, firecracker problems, etc.). In the present research, the authors would like to continue investigating future issues including empirical analyses and differences in research subjects.

Notes

- 1) In his 1948 work, *From the Soil*, the well-known Chinese sociologist and anthropologist Fei Xiaotong proposed the “rural society” as the ideal form in his culmination of rural research independently conducted prior to the founding of the People’s Republic of China. The most fundamental characteristic of the traditional Chinese social structure that is the farming society is expressed as “patterns of differential order.” In other words, the social structure of the “rural society” was composed of innumerable private relationships, and each individual network spreads concentrically with different “selves” at each center. This base structure was referred to as a “pattern of differential order (model of order and disparities).” The differential order meant that the “self” mentally ranked and arranged others in concentric circles with different diameters, and with “differences” created according to “order.” People also provided mutual help and did not worry about short-term economic gains or losses at the “self” level due to mutual familiarity; if anything, they were able to engage in long-term cooperation and shared production while providing mutual help. The rural society that resulted in such a pattern of differential order was a society that was self-sufficient through agriculture, and thus the land was a lifeline to farmers. In this way, the rural society had the three characteristics of “land dependence, low mobility, and knowledgeable society.” (Fei, 1948)
- 2) The current environmental sociology society in China has undergone multiple complex changes, but has formally settled on the name of the “Environmental Sociology Society” in 2009. Additionally, they held their first “Environmental Sociology Symposium” in 2007 and have since held a biennial national conference.
- 3) A total of 64 articles were automatically output when searched using “life-environmentalism” as a keyword, but papers that were unrelated to the actual content at hand were excluded.
- 4) Furthermore, there were some articles analyzed that were not included in CNKI. The articles featured in this paper include not only those in CNKI, but also other related articles.
- 5) There was one article that focused on the introduction of theory in 1988, but its concentration and influence can be seen from 1999 onwards.
- 6) This indicates articles that were transmitted in Chinese and where authors had no previous experience in environmental sociology research in Japan.
- 7) The pressure-based system occurred during the process of converting from a planned economic system to a market-based economic system. Resources can be concentrated in a short period of time to address major problems, overcome departmental resistance, and reduce uncertainty. The quantification of tasks and the high materialization of awards and punishments are combined as a specific mechanism of the so-called pressure-based system

(a political system based on strong amounts of pressure) in order to catch up with economic growth and achieve other goals. In order to achieve tasks and indicators, local political organizations at all levels (with party committees and governments at the core) quantify these tasks and indicators, assign them to lower-level organizations and individuals, complete them within the specified time, and distribute political and economic rewards or punishments based on the completion status.

- 8) Institutional dissimilation refers to the execution circumstances of an institution in which the systems and policies executed by lower-level local governments were born in response to social needs, but the actual operations became dissociated from the social environment and separated from external social needs. The system (object) is originally the product of the needs of the people (subject), but in reality, priorities become shifted and the system becomes the subject (Institutional dissimilation of base governments; accessed at <http://reading.caixin.com/107350/107369.html> 20190929).
- 9) “Social transformation” refers to both 1) “Institutional transition” in the form of “transition of a highly-concentrated planned redistribution economic system to a socialist market economic system,” and 2) “Structural transformation” in the “transformation” from a “closed, agricultural/village-based traditional society” to an “open, industrial/urban modern society.” Hong (2000) argued that the industrialization and urbanization that accompany “social transformation” had shortened consumerism and actions, advanced mobility, and worsened China’s environmental problems. Furthermore, China’s unique environmental problems have also been tied to this “social transformation.”
- 10) Next-generation anxiety is a term that refers to the traditional anxiety held by the Chinese people: end of a lineage.” The next-generation anxiety of the Chinese people expresses the social anxiety generated in their pursuit of the modernization of China. This social anxiety has been used to explain the causes of cultural elements that result in the shortening of measures to improve environmental problems (Chen, 2010).
- 11) During the collective age prior to the implementation of reforming and opening policies, industrialization was promoted through the formation of a dual structure by policies based on regional conditions of cities and rural areas, using their administrative division based on the family register system. Rural areas have been positioned as raw material supply sites that produce the materials needed for industrialization (including agricultural crops that feed the urban population) in a cheap and stable manner based on nationally controlled prices. Furthermore, industrial products were produced in urban areas based on cheap raw materials produced in rural areas, and industrial productivity was improved as a result (Suzuki, 2000).

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