

Abstract

This study explored the current opinions of Chinese citizens on environmental sustainability in China, while inquiring about the role of the Chinese government in shaping public consciousness on environmentalism. This case study was a qualitative analysis that was informed by both grounded theory and ethnographic content analysis (ECA) conducted through fifteen open-ended interviews with Chinese citizens and content analysis of government documents and media coverage that pertain to environmentalism. During the data collection and analysis process, the researcher considered the cultural landscape of China and reflected on how the media, Chinese spirituality, and communication patterns affect the conceptualization of environmentalism by citizens. This research found that public awareness of environmental sustainability is influenced by a social hierarchy of needs, philosophical legacies, allegiance to authority, and China's global position. Consequently, this research uncovered the importance of cultivating cultural awareness when non-Chinese citizens approach the topic of environmentalism in China.

Keywords: Chinese Government, Environmentalism, Public Opinion, Grounded Theory

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Chinese Perspectives on Environmental Sustainability: The Shaping of Public Opinion

As the population in China increases, the state of the physical environment is greatly impacted. Currently, China's population has reached 1.3 billion people and the country is the "largest global emitter of greenhouse gases by volume"; moreover, one third of the population lacks access to clean water, and deforestation and overgrazing has led to mass desertification (Bajoria & Zissis, 2008, para. 4). Lam (2008) examined the reality of environmental sustainability in China after a review of the Communist Party of China's 11th Five-Year plan published in 2006. She proposed that the government's strict authoritarianism enabled the feasibility of the plan. However, according to Bajoria and Zissis (2008) Chinese citizens have filed over 600,000 complaints about the state of the environment to the government in 2006 alone. The Chinese government's role in addressing environmental issues is at the forefront of sustainable change because of citizens' resolute allegiance and compliance towards government rule (see Rowe & Guthrie, 2009). Before the government can persuade a shift towards environmental advocacy, an understanding of how the Chinese perceive the environment is needed so that insights into the general attitude about environmental sustainability in China can be established. In this project, environmental sustainability was defined as "a movement towards redesigning the ways society's needs and wants are met so that they can be accommodated within the long-term carrying capacity of the environment" (Ministry of Economic Development, 2007, para.1).

What are the current attitudes and beliefs about environmentalism and environmental sustainability in China by the Chinese public? What is the government's role in communicating ideas about environmentalism and how does the cultural landscape affect Chinese citizens'

perception of nature? In the 1990s, Wong (2005) performed an examination of the level of environmental awareness by the Chinese; he highlighted green Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) as potential catalysts for a wave of environmentalist movements. In his research, Wong (2005) discovered a modest NGO movement whereby a cumbersome dependence on the government contributed to a weak understanding of the need for environmental consciousness. However, he found that if NGOs targeted “non-sensitive issues, they may make profound contributions in enhancing environmental policy implementation” (Wong, 2005, p. 39). In the current research project, through the use of grounded theory and ethnographic content analysis (ECA), the researcher acknowledged Chinese characteristics and government dependence as initial sensitizing concepts while providing an evolved understanding of the role of government in the evolution of perspectives on environmental consciousness. Consequently, this research also looked at how the government uses the media to relay its agenda on environmentalism and the consequences of communicating to the public through media that are controlled by the Communist Party of China. Furthermore, this study examined cultural dynamics and assessed how they may impact current perspectives on sustainability. In particular, the researcher explored the development of public perception on environmentalism with regard to McDaniel’s (2008) theories on the role of Chinese spirituality in the conceptualization of environmentalism in China, and Ting-Toomey’s (1994) reflections on the role of Chinese cultural communication patterns and how this affects the government’s presentation and dissemination of the topic. In brief, the overarching impetus of this research was to develop a theoretical understanding about the importance of contextual discourse on the topic of environmental sustainability in China.

Literature Review

Culture and Communication

The present research investigated how the Chinese government communicates about the topic of environmentalism in China and how this shapes the attitudes of ordinary citizens. In an effort to understand the Chinese governments' communication style, it was important to firstly account for the cultural context within a communication source that can facilitate attitudes and beliefs about the environment. Hofstede and Bond (1984) described Chinese culture as collectivist in nature with a strong degree of power distance and avoidance uncertainty. As such, the government's command over the population plays a significant role in how environmentalism is discussed in a Chinese context and how beliefs and opinions on the subject matter are shaped.

In order to further understand the communication context in China, the researcher explored cultural communication patterns by drawing on the work of Ting-Toomey (1994), who explored face-negotiation theory; this theory describes the phenomenon of cultural dynamics as a powerful force in affecting cultural groups' self-image, identity perception, and communication patterns. Face, as cited by Ting-Toomey (1994), "entails the presentation of a civilized front to another individual within the webs of interconnected relationships in a particular culture" (p. 1). In her work, Ting-Toomey (1994) specifically highlighted 'mien-tzu', which is the Chinese version of face-saving based in preserving honour and prestige. Ting-Toomey (1994) explained that mien-tzu is an element that "helps Chinese orchestrate their daily lives, influencing the way they interact with one another, bringing the delicate philosophical nuances to face into the real of daily existence" (p. 98). Ting-Toomey (1994) also suggested that mien-tzu is closely aligned with "Confucian ideals of social ordering" whereby Chinese citizens, who belong to different

social strata, demonstrate “different kinds and amounts of mien-tzu” (p.110). These ideas were relevant to the present research study as they illuminated how contextual communication patterns affect social hierarchies between the Chinese government and its citizens. Moreover, Ting-Toomey’s (1994) research allowed the researcher to facilitate a deeper understanding of the dynamics and nuances of communication that are critical in understanding how the government communicates about the topic of environmentalism.

Shaping Chinese Perspectives

Literature in the field of worldviews and environmental sustainability suggested that there is a link between environmental attitudes, philosophy, and spirituality (McDaniel, 2008). McDaniel (2008) argued that the Chinese conceptualization of environmentalism is fueled by the importance of harmony that is imbedded in spiritual and philosophical legacies brought forth by Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. Confucianism is a “scholarly way of life” brought forward by Confucius which values harmonious benevolence and “loyalty to one’s true nature” (Confucianism, 2010, para. 1). Chinese Buddhism, although there are many different branches, basically places emphasis on the present moment and values the role of reincarnation and a balanced existence (McDaniel, 2008). Taoism is a philosophy that suggests that the universe is a “flowing process of which humans are an integral part” and this philosophy also suggests that humans “dwell in harmony with the larger whole” (McDaniel, 2008, p. 282).

McDaniel (2008) correlated Chinese philosophical and spiritual values to the Chinese conceptualization of environmentalism; he suggested that although the Chinese hold the ideal of environmental sustainability, the practical application of environmental sustainability is a conscious effort that seems far beyond their reach. Throughout McDaniel’s (2008) analysis, he

maintained the idea that ‘integral sustainability’ is a more consistent reality for the Chinese. McDaniel (2008) defined integral sustainability as a community ideal that is “inhabited by people who feel a degree of spiritual satisfaction as individuals and who are kind to one another” (p. 273). He went on to suggest that these ideas of kindness and social harmony are imbued in the cultural ideal of nature in China.

McDaniel (2008) also argued that the Chinese are now seeking a modern approach to environmentalism that aligns itself with the western model, without the pitfalls associated with industrialization and modernization. Put more simply “they [Chinese citizens] hoped for a postmodern alternative that would build upon the best of the west but also avoid the worst, and somehow be distinctly Chinese. They hoped for a Green China” (McDaniel, 2008, p. 273). With an interest in recognizing the relationship between the Chinese cultural values and the physical environment, as suggested by McDaniel (2008), the role of Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucius principals were considered during data collection and analysis of this research. Moreover, the role of western cultural influences were also explored to determine if foreign values permeated the Chinese public consciousness about environmentalism and to determine if there were any prevailing attitudes about the environment facilitated by cultural heterogeneity or cultural homogeneity.

As aforementioned, Wong (2005) also established a connection between environmentalism and Chinese cultural ideals. He found that Chinese characteristics contributed to an overall weak understanding of environmental consciousness in China. In his study, he addressed the Chinese publics’ knowledge through an evaluation of their environmental literacy. He discovered that “the results indicate that many Chinese people did not possess basic

knowledge of major environmental problems” (p. 41). He suggested that the media and green NGOs are responsible for increasing environmental literacy to the general public and that they can do so by working with Chinese cultural elements.

Wong (2005) also suggested that Chinese cultural characteristics attribute to how the public prioritizes environmental issues; more specifically, he described how citizens “were inclined to underrate the seriousness of environmental problems” (p. 41) due to a “strong ‘government-reliance’ attitude towards environmental protection” (p. 45). Furthermore, Wong (2005) postulated that the role of NGOs in China is affected by Chinese cultural ideals; for example, he suggested that the Chinese non-confrontational style, their focus on building relationships, and their concern for public safety is reflected in the actions and orientations of NGOs in China. Wong’s (2008) theories were relevant to the current research because they provide an initial understanding as to how Chinese cultural values affect the status of environmentalism. The present research study used Wong’s (2008) work as a backdrop in helping the researcher to explore the nature of communication on environmentalism in China and how cultural legacies contribute to this dialogue.

The Role of the Media

Yao (2008) researched the correlations between media usage by Chinese citizens who consider themselves to be environmentalists. Yao’s (2008) research hypothesized that Chinese environmentalists have more confidence in their government and the media than non-environmentalists, and that political interest, post-materialism, and news media promote environmentalist attitudes. Through an examination of data from the fourth wave of World Values Survey for China, Yao (2008) found that “that news media use is a statistically significant

positive moderator of being a Chinese environmentalist” (p. 276). Yao’s (2008) research was valuable to this current study because it provided insights as to how the media acts as a catalyst for the promotion of environmental advocacy; moreover, Yao (2008) highlighted correlations between political interests, engagement, and environmental beliefs.

The present research study engaged Yao’s (2008) research by examining the link between political governance, civil society beliefs, power roles, and environmental consciousness through an ECA of Daily News controlled by the Community Party of China. The present research highlighted themes beyond Yao’s (2008) research by also focusing on the role of globalization and internationalization which has a growing effect on news coverage in China, especially with reference to the topic of environmental sustainability.

Due to the political structure of China as a communist country, the majority, if not all, media outlets are controlled by the government; in this way, China’s cultural homogeneity remains intact. In Rantanen’s (2005) mediagraphical analysis, she offered insight into this challenge of bringing global topics into public discourse when values of cultural homogeneity reign supreme. Rantanen stated,

There is something in Nationalism, especially at its highest stage, that makes it homogenous, inward looking and closed. To be able to stay that way it has to ‘protect’ itself from other cultures and reject cultural influences from outside. This ‘protection’ can only fully happen when media and communications are scarce and controlled by national authorities. (Rantanen, 2005, p.88)

With respect to Rantanen's (2005) media analysis, the present research examined if the Communist Party of China's control of the media significantly impacted how, why, and what the Chinese public has access to with reference to the topic of environmentalism.

Perceptions of the State of the Chinese Environment

The shaping of public opinion on environmentalism and environmental sustainability requires an in-depth examination of government documents that highlight these topics. Prior research in this area by Lam (2008), which investigated China's eleventh Five-Year Plan for sustainable development, suggested that increased international pressure and citizen awareness have added enough pressure towards China that the Five-Year Plan on environmentalism can be implemented and actualized. Lam (2008) credited the Chinese government's adherence towards environmental growth, rather than continued fiscal growth, for the future success of the 2008 urbanized plan. Lam (2008) researched this topic through an evaluative analysis of past and present Five-Year Plans on environmental sustainability while drawing correlations to global initiatives and historical leadership. Lam (2008) concluded that the Chinese government had admitted its failure to overcome health, income, and environmental disparity and it is now able to progress towards environmental advocacy; moreover, Lam (2008) believed that China would be able to initiate this process quickly because "the government's long reign and strict authoritarianism will allow enactment of the tough initial steps for sustainable change" (p. 252).

Lam (2008) presented her research in favor of the actions of the Chinese government and communicated her advocacy for President Hu Jintao's Five-Year plan. Lam (2008) emphasized the lack of consistency and action of previous environmental laws and policies, while continuing to place esteemed value on President Jintao's prospective strategies. The present research

project employed ECA on the Hu Jintao report at the 17th annual Party Congress (October 2007), which outlines the work of the Communist Party over the past five-years, to understand if Lam's (2008) findings are consistent with the present report. Moreover, the present research sought to represent Chinese citizens' perspectives about government initiatives through open-ended interviews. This strategy was implemented in an effort to understand the realities of the Chinese public as they make sense of the initiatives set forth by the government to address environmentalism.

The present study contributed to a growing body of knowledge because it established a connection in the field of communication and culture to the field of environmental sustainability. The researcher intended to uncover factors that affect how the government shapes public consciousness about environmentalism in China and to develop an understanding as to how these factors are affected by cultural dynamics. Through an examination of prior research, and primary research in the field, the intentions of this project were met and the details of theory development will be discussed further in the methods and findings section below. Furthermore, an unintended finding occurred during the research project, the researcher discovered the importance of facilitating cultural intelligence when exploring the topic of environmental sustainability for non-Chinese citizens.

Method

Objectives

The objectives of this research were to better understand how Chinese citizens conceptualize environmentalism in China. This research also sought to recognize the cultural context that facilitates communication about the topic and how the government conveys this

communication to its citizens. Furthermore, the aim of this research was to discover patterns of discourse that affect the state of environmentalism in China. In summation, the researcher's goal was to cultivate knowledge of how public consciousness about environmental sustainability is constructed and maintained in China.

Study Design

This research study was a qualitative analysis that was informed predominantly by grounded theory with secondary support from ECA methods. Charmaz (2009) explained grounded theory as a methodology that “serves as a way to learn about the worlds we study and a method for developing theories to understand them” (p. 10). Glaser and Strauss (1967) founded the methods of grounded theory which include components such as “simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis”, “constructing analytic codes and categories from data”, “using the constant comparative method”, “constructing the literature review after developing an independent analysis”, “sampling aimed toward theory construction, not for population representativeness”, and “advancing theory development during each step of data collection and analysis” (Charmaz, 2009, p. 5-6). With these components in mind, the researcher was heavily involved in reflexive analysis of the data throughout the planning, gathering, and dissemination of the data. Upon approaching the topic of Chinese perspectives on environmental sustainability in China, the research was initially influenced by the work of Wong (2005) whose theories on government dependence and the role of Chinese cultural characteristics laid the foundation for initial sensitising concepts. During the data collection process, whereby the researcher conducted interviews with Chinese citizens through a convenience sample that would best lead to theory construction, the data revealed themes that extended beyond Wong's (2005) findings,

such as the role of spirituality and cultural homogeneity of media in China. The researcher felt that need to employ ECA of government documents pertaining to environmentalism as an auxiliary source of data collection (Altheide, 1996): ECA of these documents provided the opportunity to emphasize emergent themes and topics that surfaced in the interview data analysis and allowed for a more conclusive theoretical understanding of the research topic.

Altheide (1996) described ECA as a method that is characterized by “constant comparison for discovering emergent patterns, emphases, and themes in an analysis” of human cultures (p. 13). Altheide (1996) considered the need for supporting methods to grounded theory because grounded theory is oriented towards building theory by generating clear hypotheses that may result in eliminating or abandoning materials in the data collection process, whereas ECA is a focused process that generates clear descriptions and definitions of themes by collection of a variety of materials. As a result, the researcher revised her research methods to include both grounded theory and ECA methods to enhance the breadth and depth of data collection and analysis.

Altheide’s (1987) ECA methods were used in this research in particular because his approach extends beyond conventional content analysis and employs an approach whereby narratives are reflexively examined, therefore aligning to the foundational elements of grounded theory. As such, the research process for this thesis was facilitated by mutually reinforcing methods that consisted of the acknowledgement of sensitising concepts, a nonlinear process of data collection, and the continuous reflection on emergent themes, which eventually led to the development of theory. After an independent investigation of the topic, the literature review was conducted to reinforce the validity of emergent themes.

Grounded theory data gathering tools.

Semi-structured and open-ended interviews took place in person, over the phone, and via email; each interview was approximately one to two hours in duration. The participants included 4 male and 11 female adults between the ages 19-30 who are Chinese citizens fluent in English. A translator was present for 6 of the 7 interviews conducted in Jinan, China. These 15 participants grew-up in a variety of urban and rural cities across China and are now either attending post-secondary education or working in professional careers in the city of Jinan, which is located in the north eastern part of China. The sample population was selected through a convenience sample via snowball sampling; the participants were randomly selected from a network of associations the researcher acquired while studying in Jinan, none of the participants had any specific professional knowledge on the topic of environmental sustainability. The researcher selected a convenience sample of participants who were not principally familiar with environmental sustainability in an effort to acquire responses that would best represent the beliefs of the general population. After conducting initial one-to-one interviews in China, participants were asked for their assistance in recruiting participants who would like to be interviewed via phone and/or email. The additional eight interviews took place both over the phone and by email communication.

All participants were notified of the aims of the research and that the information they provided would be kept confidential; as such, participants were required to sign consent forms prior to the interviews, which detailed the objectives of the research and participants' contribution to this project. All respondents were also made aware that they could withdraw from the process at any time. One-to-one interviews and interviews via phone were tape-

recorded and transcribed; interviews conducted via email were printed and saved in secure locations. Participants were made aware that the information they provided would be made available to them at any time and that their personal information would be kept anonymous.

Grounded theory study conduct.

Coinciding with grounded research methods, interviews were conducted in three stages in order to revise interviewing strategy based on emerging data (Charmaz, 2009). In the first stage, seven participants were interviewed and critical reflection followed this process to establish emerging constructs. The critical reflection component involved the researcher scribing the recorded interviews and making notes on any concurrent themes that emerged from this data. In the second stage, another four participants were interviewed to elaborate on the emergent themes. The final stage, which consisted of four interviews, allowed the researcher to reach the point of saturation.

In initial interviews, respondents were asked to share their personal beliefs about environmentalism and sustainability in China and how the government presents messages about the physical environment and environmentalism in China. In the second set of interview, the researcher explored questions based on themes that emerged in the first set of interviews and the initial ECA review. The third set of interviews allowed the researcher to confirm findings from the first two waves of interviews and from the ECA data.

All interview participants were made aware that the researcher is a Canadian student with superficial western knowledge about environmental sustainability and environmentalism in China and wanted to understand, through the eyes of her participants, how environmentalism is communicated. Moreover, the researcher consistently asked participants to fill her head with

authentic knowledge about their experiences with the topic, and that this knowledge would be used to help other Canadians understand the Chinese experience of environmentalism. The researcher was constantly concerned with building rapport and facilitating a relationship between herself and her participants, as these are critical cultural values to Chinese culture; as such, the interviewer would invite her participants to ask her questions and to re-connect with her at any point—before, during, or after—the research process. The researcher disclosed her passion for learning about environmentalism and environmental sustainability but did not articulate beliefs or opinions on the subject matter. She also disclosed this information and told her participants that she was still building awareness about environmentalism, cultural dynamics, and international and intercultural communication, and therefore was allowing this research project to help her continue to develop an understanding and awareness of the topic of environmentalism and the dynamic factors that shape this topic in different communities around the globe.

The researcher chose qualitative research methods in an effort to encourage her participants to speak candidly about their experiences with the topic of environmentalism. Below is a sample of the most frequently asked questions during all three waves of interviews:

1. How do you think the government defines environmental sustainability? Is it different than how you define it?
2. What types of information have you received on environmental sustainability from the government?
3. Can you describe the most important lessons you have learned from the government about the environment.

4. In your opinion, are the messages authoritative, passive, or community oriented? (For example, when the government explains the environment to citizens is it strict? Or relaxed?)
5. What are the messages you have received? Do you remember any specific words or slogans?
6. What is your prediction about the future of the Chinese environment in five years?

After the first wave of interviews was conducted, the research acknowledged the implicit presence of Buddhist and Confucius thought in participants' responses. This acknowledgment came as many of the participants emphasized the role of harmony and balance with respect to the conceptualization of environmentalism and sustainability initiatives. In an effort not to guide the participants' responses or to assume their allegiance to any particular spiritual belief or philosophy, the researcher did not specifically ask whether or not participants felt that their ideas on nature were influenced by Buddhism or Confucianism; rather, the researcher asked participants in the second wave of interviews if they felt that harmony and balance plays a role in how the environment is discussed in China. Participants in the second wave of interviews proclaimed the importance of these factors. They did not, however, elaborate on the presence of balance and harmony or emphasize how these factors affected their perception of nature and the environment. After reflecting on the strong inherent undertones of these ideas in the first wave of interview responses, and the placid emphasis in the second wave of responses, the researcher decided not to introduce this question in the third wave of interviews; this was in an effort to draw this theme out more authentically and comprehensively.

Participants, in all three waves of interviews, were offered an opportunity to analyze if their perceptions of the environment are influenced by communication they receive from the government; they had a chance to comment on the tone, type, and content of environmental communication and to relay their ideas on the effectiveness of these messages. Participants also had an opportunity to share their opinions about factors that they think may influence a lack of interest in environmentalism and how this could be improved.

ECA data gathering tools.

Two publicly available English translations of government documents were accessed to perform ECA; these documents include the Hu Jintao Report at the 17th Party Congress (2007, October), which is a document provided by the Communist Party every five years and coverage on environmentalism and/or environmental sustainability from October 17th, 2009 to November 1st, 2009, in the *China Daily*, which is a popular English news source controlled by the Communist Party of China.

ECA study conduct.

The ECA method of data collection included content analysis of a government documents and media coverage that cited environmentalism in China. The use of ECA allowed the researcher to develop an understanding of the communication styles and strategies the Chinese government uses in written dialogue about the environment. Furthermore, the frequency and depth of narratives allowed the researcher to extend the depth of questions that were posed to respondents during interviews. Texts were analysed through an examination of the word choice, frequency, lexical style, topics, themes, metaphors, and target audience of environmental

messages. Importantly, the accessibility of this topic was evaluated; Altheide (1987) described accessibility as the relative access writers have to gain information about a topic or issue.

Both the *China Daily* articles and the Hu Jintao Report at the 17th Party Congress (2007, October) were evaluated in an effort to understand how available the topic of environmental sustainability is and the degree and depth of this access; keeping in mind that these documents are in English, the researcher factored in the role of the audience and how this played a valuable role in the analysis. More specifically, the researcher compared the ECA data and interview data to understand if messages pertaining to environmentalism in China were being delivered to research participants, whose mother tongue is not English. As such, the ethnographic phenomena that the researcher sought through ECA methods reinforced the grounded theory methods used in the interview data collection process.

Data Analysis

As was previously mentioned, the researcher began to identify a need to explore additional materials through ECA methods after she conducted an initial analysis and reflection on emergent themes from the first wave of interviews. The researcher employed memo-writing techniques, which are characteristics of grounded theory methods (Charmaz, 2009), to reflect on ideas that surfaced in the field and to establish the need for ECA. Charmaz (2009) described memo-writing as a crucial part in data analysis that “provides a space to become actively engaged in your materials, to develop your ideas, and to fine-tune your subsequent data-gathering” (p. 72). After incorporating ECA methods in the data-gathering process, and after conducting the second and third wave of interviews, the researcher read through all of the scribed interview data, the *China Daily* articles, and the Hu Jintao Report at the 17th Party Congress

(2007, October); this process was facilitated multiple times to acquire familiarity with the materials and to establish preliminary ideas about the defining similarities and differences between the data. Additionally, the researcher conducted line-by-line analyses of all the textual data multiple times, while pausing for reflection in between each analysis to allow all of the resonant themes to surface. From this extensive data exploration process, the researcher identified concrete categories.

In Wong's (2005) research he established significant themes like the role of Chinese characteristics in NGOs, government-reliance in public participation on the environment, and the role of public awareness due to government control. The researcher used these themes as initial sensitising concepts, which were useful in guiding the researcher into sorting the data into preliminary categories. The data was then analyzed using axial coding to sort the data into more meaningful categories (Charmaz, 2009). Axial coding is a framework strategy that helps researchers identify causality and consequences of relationships between categories and subcategories (Charmaz, 2009). Through the use of axial coding and extensive analyses, the researcher was able to establish first order themes and higher order themes from the raw data. These categories and subcategories further evolved into grounded theory phenomena, which will be discussed further in the results section.

Validity and Reliability

The limitations of this research process stemmed from the challenges of organizing and making use of the plenitude of data gathered through interviewing and content analysis and also the intercultural and communication barriers that can occur during cross-cultural communication. With these limitations in mind, the researcher followed a set of procedures to increase the

reliability and validity of the data. Firstly, the researcher conducted interviews both in Canada and in China with the help of a third party facilitator who is a Chinese citizen with a strong command of the English language. She was present for any translation requirements and helped to attract research participants with a strong understanding of English when the interviews took place via email and phone. Secondly, the researcher spent three weeks in China, specifically to build cultural competency and knowledge of Chinese cultural dynamics, in a variety of cross-cultural and intercultural communications courses and exercises. Thirdly, the researcher sorted, analyzed, and reflected on data multiple times, while keeping in mind Wong's (2008) findings that were mentioned in the literature review as sensitising concepts to establish categories and subcategories that consistently represented the raw data from all three sources. Furthermore, the researcher has provided an appendix of raw data findings, which includes richly detailed notes and the thematic categories, as evidence of the credibility and the trustworthiness of these findings.

Results

As mentioned in the study design section, this research process was conducted by using both grounded theory and ECA. These two methods were used concurrently in an effort to establish concrete emergent themes that offered insights from the public and from government communication on the topic of environmental sustainability. The researcher found consistent evidence between all three sources of data, and more specifically, themes from the *China Daily* articles correlated to themes from interview respondents which indicated that messages from an English news source were transferred to Chinese citizens, whose first language is not English, and that the topic is indeed accessible.

The data from all three sources was coded using axial coding. Once this process was completed, the researcher was able to organize the data into the table below (Table 1.1). In this table, the first order themes are the initial raw themes that emerged directly from the ECA data and the interviews. These themes were then grouped by overarching themes that provided contextual understanding of the first order themes. Lastly, five concrete phenomena, which emerged out of the first order and higher order themes, were established in the theoretical development process. The process of using grounded theory allowed the researcher to establish theoretical connections between public opinion and government communication practices. Below is a table of how these connections were created and examples from the data:

Table 1.1

Public Consciousness on Environmental Sustainability in China as Shaped by the Government

Phenomena	Higher Order Themes	1 st Order Themes
Hierarchy of Social Needs	Economic Development	Industrialization Modernization Scientific innovation Population Role as developing nation Expansion Temporary sacrifice of the environment Current condition of the economy
Cycle of Physical Environment	Harmony and	Cycle of Nature

	Balance	Buddhism (implicit) Cultural Characteristics Confucius thought (implicit) Temporary environmental improvements
Political versus the Personal Saving face-bring in cultural elements	Responsibility	Government roles Laws and punishments Corporate roles Citizen initiatives Citizen health and safety The role of NGOs
Public Awareness	Peripheral Awareness	General statements by the government to improve environmentalism Lack of focus on citizen awareness Looming government dissidence Fragmented knowledge about environmental sustainability
The Role of Internationalization and Globalization on Environmental Sustainability in China	Global Position	Globalization Emerging market Global competition Honouring global commitments Western concepts of environmentalism

Hierarchy of Social Needs

When the topic of environmentalism and environmental sustainability was broached with participants, and when it was addressed in the Hu Jintao Report at the 17th Party Congress (2007, October) or in the *China Daily*, the primary theme that emerged was economics and development. Foremost in the Hu Jintao Report at the 17th Party Congress (2007, October), is the goal of the Communist Parties to build the Chinese economy and focus on development, which includes the pursuit of scientific development and technologies to stimulate rapid growth in the economy. In this report, there are multiple references to development, scientific innovation, reform, and opening markets which were deemed as avenues that will lead to economic advances. The essence of the Hu Jintao Report at the 17th Party Congress (2007, October) can be found in one section of the report where Hu Jintao (2007, October) declared a modern approach to industrialization, growth, and the consumption of resources:

We must keep to the new path of industrialization with Chinese characteristics, pursue the policy of boosting domestic demand, particularly consumer demand, and propel three transitions in the mode of economic growth: the transition from relying mainly on investment and export to relying on a well coordinated combination of consumption, investment and export, the transition from secondary industry serving as the major driving force to primary, secondary and tertiary industries jointly driving economic growth, and the transition from relying heavily on increased consumption of material resources to relying mainly on advances in science and technology, improvement in the quality of the workforce and innovation in management. (para. 61)

As Hu Jintao (2007, October) specifically addresses environmentalism in China, there are four paragraphs with less than 250 words each which discuss the topic of environmentalism and environmental sustainability, the entire document is 20,828 words in length. Throughout these paragraphs, the topic of environmentalism is paired with ideas about production and economic growth. Here is an example of how the topic of sustainability is broached:

We must adopt an enlightened approach to development that results in expanded production, a better life and sound ecological and environmental conditions, and build a resource-conserving and environment-friendly society that coordinates growth rate with the economic structure, quality and efficiency, and harmonizes economic growth with the population, resources and the environment, so that our people will live and work under sound ecological and environmental conditions and our economy and society will develop in a sustainable way. (Jintao, 2007, October, para. 43)

The parity between economic growth, industry, development, consumption and environmentalism is then transferred onto Chinese citizens. In the interviewees' point of view, the economy is emphasized as the pinnacle of needs. The majority of respondents explained that pollution and environmental degradation is an obvious effect in the pursuit of enhancing the economy and development in a country with a cumbersome population. One respondent suggested, "We are a developing country; we cannot help but generate a lot of garbage and pollution" (Participant 6). When asked how the government communicates about the topic of environmentalism, another respondent cited:

You know the Chinese [have] a lot of problems and they have a large population. I know the leader, the Chinese leader, some of the Chinese leaders are very smart but the Chinese

government does not have enough money. You know we must avoid the pollution maybe the government does not have enough money but Chinese people have their own traditional habits. I think it's very hard to change it all at once so maybe they [the government] just give announcements to the people. (Participant 7)

With these ideas emerging there was also a sense that environmental sustainability would naturally become a foremost concern after the Chinese economy experiences exponential growth, with the belief that investment in environmental initiatives could generate more income for China. One participant described environmental sustainability as follows:

And you know in many developing countries the rate of economic development is very high so I think in my opinion, I think the developing rate is connected with the rate of pollution. So I think it's inevitable, yes, it's inevitable to pollute our air or water or something else. We should develop our economy in a very high rate, so we can't avoid to pollute some areas. (Participant 3)

Another participant cited, "but now with the growth of economies we have become more powerful, more money to invest in the environment" (Participant 5).

The aforementioned viewpoints are further reinforced by the *China Daily* coverage where 12 out of 15 news articles in a three week span reference environmentalism or environmental sustainability in China with a strong undercurrent of highlighting the economy and industrial development. One article stated that the inability to meet carbon emission rates is due to the financial restrictions of a developing nation:

The report also said that China, with its growing population and low level of industrialization and urbanization, cannot afford to make a legally binding commitment

for a reduction target of carbon emissions, nor an accurate peak time for its greenhouse gas emissions. (Jang, 2009, para.10)

Another article described how a community's health is suffering due to lead poisoning from a local smelting plant. This article drew attention to health and safety risks associated with prioritizing financial gains over attention to environmental degradation: "In the pursuit of wealth, neither the company nor local people have given due attention to pollution. The poisoning incident is a lesson for the government, the company and local people" (Yu Bo, as cited in Li Yuefeng & Xinhua, October 17, 2009, para. 20). Interestingly, this quote was taken from Yu Bo, an official with the Jiyuan city government, who is publicly decrying government efforts to address the situation in the community. This emergent theme will be further discussed when the phenomenon that explores public awareness is addressed, which focuses on an undercurrent of government dissidence by Chinese citizens.

The phenomenon of hierarchical prioritization concerning environmentalism in the Chinese public conscience is a major theory established in this research project. This theory suggests that Chinese citizens place environmentalism on lower hierarchical level of importance and emphasise the need for development. With this in mind, there was also a common belief among participants that environmental initiatives could occur after a strong economy has taken hold, some believed that it would be concurrent so long as the environmental initiatives were based on growing and expanding the economy. Present research demonstrated how citizens' allegiance to governance affects the level of concern for environmentalism and where citizens place environmental sustainability in China on their list of hierarchical social needs.

Cycle of Physical Environment

One of the themes that emerged in Wong's (2008) findings was the role of Chinese Characteristics embedded in the conceptualization of NGOs in China. The researcher used the term 'Chinese Characteristics' within this research to encompass the role and influence of Chinese spiritual and philosophical values that influence the conceptualization of environmentalism in China. As McDaniel (2008) suggested, "their [the Chinese] sensibilities are shaped in various degrees by the legacies of Confucianism, [T]aoism, and Buddhism", which highlight harmony with nature (p. 272). McDaniel (2008) explained the different conceptualizations of harmony and their links to philosophy, he stated there are "two kinds of harmony that have been important in traditional Chinese thinking: harmony between people, as emphasized in Confucianism, and harmony with nature, as emphasized in philosophical Taoism" (p. 278). With McDaniel's (2008) philosophical and spiritual definitions in mind, participants often cited the role of balance and harmony when they were asked how they would describe the physical environment. To highlight this, one participant explained the physical environment in China as follows: "The environment is very important and I think the most important is that it's a circle. It's a balance. It makes me think that everything is a circle; the social environment is a kind of circle—just like philosophy" (Participant 7).

Furthermore, Buddhist values on reincarnation emerged in the interview data as many respondents' responses carried the theme of the circle of life. In the interviews, participants often cited how the environmental conditions in China would get better and many cited the cyclical nature of the environment. Moreover, respondents and *China Daily* articles often highlighted how during the Olympics the environment was restored. One respondent cited, "In

our country if you pollute the environment, then you rescue it” (Participant 2). This viewpoint was further expressed by another participant who painted a picture of the physical environment in her hometown:

I think that every area of China has implemented some environmental policy to protect the environment. Yeah, take my hometown for example, my hometown is named for a coal city, and many years before the air of my hometown was black and there was big smoke in our cities’ air. But now the sky is blue. (Participant 3)

Furthermore, when participants were asked about specific policies that the government had put in place to protect the environment, one respondent stated:

Yeah, recently the national games, and not only the national games, but also the 2008 Olympic games in Beijing, they took the cars in the odd numbers and the even numbers to reduce the exhaust of the cars. I think it’s a really good direction. We hold the Olympic and the national games; you pay more attention to that. (Participant 8)

When participants were asked what the future of Chinese environmentalism and environmental sustainability will look like in the coming five years, the majority of respondents agreed that it would indeed be better. One respondent illustrated this point in the following way:

I strongly believe it will become better. The air is more fresh and blue and blue skies so we can see the stars clearly. The government will put more pressure and the school will educate the students more. We should enhance the pressure to the broadcasting, the television, and the paper. (Participant 4)

It became apparent in the data that the Chinese cultural characteristics helped to cultivate the belief that resources are infinite and thus the environmental circle is self-sustaining and fluid.

Furthermore, individual or micro-scale initiatives to protect the environment were not a focus for average citizens because there was a belief that the government would restore balance and harmony to the environment, which is another reification of the importance of Chinese characteristics characterized by a resolute trust in the government that will be discussed in the following phenomenon.

Political Versus the Personal

Another emergent phenomenon that arose in the dissemination of the data is the idea that the environment is a topic removed from the public consciousness. More specifically, there was a sense of political versus personal with reference to regulations, policies, laws and the need for awareness. In the interview data, it became increasingly apparent that citizens demonstrated a distant attitude towards the topic. One respondent said, “I know the laws and the law is very important but it’s not very concerned with our personal life” (Participant 7). Interview participants often referred to the roles and responsibilities of the government, which highlighted their trust in governance once more. For example, one respondent stated, “I admit there are still many cases [where] to earn the perfect economy, it is at the cost of the nature. But I believe our government can handle it with good ways” (Participant 14).

With that being said, there were some topics that demonstrate looming sense of concern about governance from citizens, mostly with respect to the presence and conceptualization of NGOs in a Chinese context. One respondent stated, “There is something I can’t agree with the government, about how to organize NGO. You know NGO? I think NGO should play a more important part in this activity. But in our country there isn’t, there is less impact” (Participant 2).

Moreover, when citizens cited the need for corporate and public agency, with reference to environmentalism, there was a sense that the government does act, however, interview participants indicated that the legal ramifications are not consistent and there is little consistency in companies' adherence to the laws imposed by the government. An example of this is as follows:

Sometimes the thing is the policy, the government put the pressure to the factory and the factory did it [stop polluting] for a while and then after that when they get the public punishment and they give the money to the government, then after a few times they do the same thing again. (Participant 4)

The *China Daily* also framed environmental action with a focus on corporate and political responsibility, rather than individual or citizen responsibilities. In all of the *China Daily* articles, there were no references to citizen responsibility with concern to environmentalism or environmental sustainability. Rather, many of the articles focused on corporate incidents of producing harsh chemicals and pollutants that affect citizens' health, and the effective measures taken by government (or that need to be taken by governments) to address these situations. For example, one article revealed that "the quality of one-fifth of the country's drinking water sources failed to reach national standards, leaving 90 million people with no access to clean water" (Jing, October 28, 2009, para. 2). While another article suggested the responsibilities of the government: "Environmental protection officials yesterday urged local governments to ward off heavy-metal pollution and beef up efforts to ensure the safety of drinking water" (Jing, October 28, 2009, ¶1).

Much like the *China Daily* articles, the Hu Jintao Report at the 17th Party Congress (2007, October) avoided citing any citizen responsibilities or initiatives that need to be taken by citizens; instead, the report referred to the responsibilities of the Communist party and initiatives that are currently being taken in the arena of scientific development to increase conservation of resources, while improving the production in industries.

Public Awareness

The next theme is the role of public awareness on the topic of environmentalism. The renowned Chinese Environmentalist Ma, was quoted by the *China Daily* as highlighting the need of public awareness in an effort to address the environmentalist movement in China; he stated, “I realized that the whole process could hardly be meaningful or effective, without the widespread participation of the people” (Ma, as cited in Yidong, October 27, 2009, para. 16). This *China Daily* article spotlighted Ma’s (as cited in Yidong, October 27, 2009, para. 16) contribution to a burgeoning environmentalist movement in China; however, this article was the only article to address the need for public awareness. Moreover, the Hu Jintao Report at the 17th Party Congress (2007, October) did not mention the environment or public awareness in the section on social development and livelihood; instead this section highlighted the need for a harmonious society facilitated through education, employment, and medical benefits.

An interesting theme that arose at several points in the data collection was the looming citizen dissidence and scepticism of the government with reference to environmentalism and public health and safety. In fact one *China Daily* article reports: “Although relevant government departments have promised the facility will meet the State’s environment protection requirements, we still worry the project will pollute the environment and harm our health, said a

resident from Riverside Garden housing development” (Caixiong, October 27, 2009, para. 2).

This looming dissidence was also reinforced by respondents who often highlighted citizen petitions to stop government sanctioned companies that pollute, and by citing a controversial protest that shut down a polluting paper company.

While reflecting on the undertones of government dissidence, it became apparent that the majority of interview respondents also assumed that public awareness is minimized because it is believed that the government has control of the situation; as such, there is a peripheral knowledge about environmental sustainability in China. One respondent affirmed this idea when she describes the efforts taken by the government to reduce pollution and environmental degradation in the country, she stated, “they [the government] have take[n] some measures, effective measures, to keep the pollution and for example they have built a special forest in the west in the west of China” (Participant 1).

The idea that a government initiated special forest can off-set environmental destruction exemplifies citizens’ devotion to government authority. More to this point, interview participants acknowledged that they presently had limited knowledge about the topic of environmentalism but they proclaimed that this was due to their allegiance to governance that could not be understood by non-Chinese. One respondent stated, “so, I think our mind is conducted by Chinese government. Yeah, so maybe sometimes you think, foreigners think that policies are not fair or not good for everyone, but we think it’s fair, it’s suitable for Chinese situation” (Participant 3). This participant’s quote exemplifies the collectivist nature of Chinese culture and the preservation of mien-tzu as cited by Ting-Toomey (1994). In her research, along

with the help of Yang (1981), she described the role of mien-tzu with respect to collectivism and social order:

Hence the emphasis in collectivism is said to place upon social orientation, which “represents a tendency for a person to act in accordance with external expectations or social norms, rather than internal wishes or personal integrity, so that he [or she] would be able to protect his [or her] social self and function as an integral part of the social network. Here solidarity and social consciousness are more decisive as determinants of behaviour than individuality and self-assertion” (Yang, 1981, p. 159-60 as cited in Ting-Toomey, 1994, p. 125).

The power of mien-tzu allows the Chinese government to encourage social cohesion and consensus building, which helps to shape the thoughts and opinions of ordinary citizens on the topic of environmentalism. It is important for non-Chinese citizens to be mindful of this cultural characteristic because an understanding of this type of communication pattern can shed insights on how foreign environmental advocates can approach environmental initiatives in a Chinese context.

When respondents were asked if they could cite examples of pollution and environmentalism, the majority of respondents highlighted spitting or ‘white pollution’ as major forms of pollution of which they are aware. White pollution is the use of plastic bags, which all respondents suggested had become such an issue now that they must bring cloth bags or pay for plastic bags when they shop in grocery stores. When asked what is the most effective way to inform citizens about the environment, one respondents said, “official documents and the

government should make some official documents and then handed out to every province, every city and then to every people—that is the most effective way” (Participant 1).

This participant also suggested that public awareness about environmentalism in China needed to be facilitated through fragmented communication and knowledge about the topic, she stated, “because we are all citizens, belonging to one city, so the official can’t tell everyone at the same time—but government can tell in pieces” (Participant 1).

It is important to highlight the context of the communication concerning environmentalism in China. Chinese Communist governance and Chinese political culture encourage government reliance, collectivist values, trust, and foster the belief that the government has all of the control; therefore, this research identified the powerful role of the government over public distribution and awareness concerning the topic of environmentalism.

Global Position

The final phenomenon is the role of globalization as both a heterogeneous and homogenous force and how this affects the shaping of environmental sustainability in the public consciousness. Through the data analysis, a frequent theme that emerged was the idea that opening up to global markets can increase environmental sustainability but the government will only allow this in so far as it does not compromise Chinese cultural values. This idea is best demonstrated in the Hu Jintao report at the 17th Party Congress (2007, October), wherein it described the need to explore foreign markets whilst maintaining a relationship between man and nature, which connotes Confucius cultural values and thus ties back in to the aforementioned phenomenon on the cyclical nature of the environment, the quote is as follows:

We need to correctly understand and handle the major relationships in the cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics and balance urban and rural development, development among regions, economic and social development, relations between man and nature, and domestic development and opening to the outside world. (Jintao, 2007, October, para. 44)

The report goes on to explore the economic benefits and the cultural challenges of globalization and further references the need for balance. The following quote speaks to President Jintao's trepidations with respect to opening up to foreign markets:

China is opening wider to the outside world, but international competition is becoming increasingly acute, pressure in the form of the economic and scientific dominance of developed countries will continue for a long time to come, both predictable and unpredictable risks are increasing, and the need to balance domestic development and opening to the outside world is greater than ever. (Jintao, 2007, October, para. 38)

Throughout the ECA analysis of the Hu Jintao Report at the 17th Party Congress (2007, October), it became apparent that the communication strategies employed by President Jintao included light cautionary messages to preserve Chinese values and the power of the Communist Party, whilst expanding financially. More to this point, Jintao (2007) expressed China's commitment to remain removed from imposing any influence on other countries by stating the following: "We will never interfere in the internal affairs of other countries or impose our own will on them" (para. 92). In this brief statement, Jintao (2007) alluded to China's expectation for the same degree of respect and privacy in internal affairs as it imposes on outside countries.

Within the *China Daily* articles, the idea that opening up to the outside world would encourage fortuitous benefits for China, both economically and in terms of environmental sustainability, dominated news coverage. One article cited: “Wind power will continue to see rapid growth in China in the future, as the government is encouraging the use of more clean energy in total energy consumption” (Zhihong, October 26, 2009, para. 7). While another suggested that “China’s demand for environmentally friendly technologies will remain robust. This will continue to be a strong growth area for Siemens in China” (Zhihong, October 26, 2009, para. 18). These ideas, however, were conveyed as though developed nations were trying to explore emerging ‘green’ markets, which would translate into financial gains for China, but that these endeavours would only occur if China could remain relatively homogenous to outside cultural influences.

The idea of encouraging citizens to remain true to socialist beliefs is further increased in the Hu Jintao Report at the 17th Party Congress (2007, October) as the following quote sheds light on the delicate approach to encouraging cultural homogeneity as part of the socialist responsibility: “Socialist culture is thriving as never before, but the people have growing cultural needs and have become more independent, selective, changeable and diverse in thinking, setting higher requirements for the development of an advanced socialist culture” (Jintao, 2007, October, para. 38).

Through the ECA of the Hu Jintao Report at the 17th Party Congress (2007, October) there was increasing evidence that the government encouraged reform and an opening up to foreign markets in an effort to improve the economic and environmental situation in China, this was enveloped in the linguistic undertones that China needs to remain closed to western ideas

that could interfere with communism and Chinese culture. This is indeed a warranted concern of the Chinese government as many interview respondents cited the need for foreign education and western popular culture initiatives to help shape their concern about environmentalism in China. When asked how people become aware of environmentalism in China one respondent replied,

I think it depends on the government attribution to advertisements to advertise and to some extent I think there is also some attribute to companies. You know they bring a new idea about protection and there are more people coming back from western countries and they bring this idea from outside. (Participant 2)

Another respondent stated: “Maybe they [Chinese citizens] should see more movies, like *2012*. Have you seen it? In my opinion, it is a very important medium. They can remind people to realize something” (Participant 8). Without these popular cultural references, like the reference to the recent apocalyptic movie *2012*, there was a general lack of awareness about the environment in other nations; there was however, an understanding that environmentalism is different and there was a consistent curiosity to how environmental sustainability is conceptualized in the researchers’ host country.

Discussion

Chinese perspectives on environmentalism are heavily influenced by a hierarchy of social needs, government allegiance, collectivism, history, and spirituality; these factors contribute to fragmented consciousness of environmental sustainability by Chinese citizens. This research found that Chinese cultural characteristics affect the shape and tone of environmentalism and, as such, facilitating awareness of Chinese culture is imperative to understanding the ways in which the Chinese perceive environmentalism in their country.

This study recognized Wong's (2008) theories on government-dependence and cultural characteristics as the scaffolding which provided the basis of theoretical development for this research. Wong's (2008) research identified how strong government reliance led to a modest NGO movement in China, whilst arguing that this modest NGO movement "offers a breakthrough in the 'government reliance' attitude towards environmental protection" (p. 54). While Wong's (2008) conclusion may appear to have been a contradiction, he highlighted that a modest movement is still a progression towards environmentalism within a Chinese cultural context. Although the present research study was not specifically focused to the development of NGOs in China, the data from this study did demonstrate weak public consciousness on environmentalism whilst also discovering that the Chinese government is currently making efforts to take control of the situation and act towards environmentalism. Examples of this could be found in the ECA review of the *China Daily* and the Hu Jintao Report at the 17th Party Congress (2007, October), these documents called attention to current projects taken on by the government and the ways in which the government is seeking innovation and modernization in China with sustainability in mind. The present research is concurrent with Wong's (2005) findings, which suggested that environmental protection is a topic that is addressed in China's "civil society development" (p. 54) , even if it is only currently a peripheral consideration.

The present study's theoretical development extended beyond Wong's (2008) postulations as the researcher found that citizens were also removed from the topic of environmentalism because the communication they received from the government on the topic encouraged macro scale initiatives by big business rather than micro scale efforts by citizens to help improve the environment. Examples of this can be found in the lack of discourse on citizen

participation that was further embedded in the *China Daily* articles and in the Hu Jintao Report at the 17th Party Congress (2007, October), which emphasised trust and allegiance to government initiatives and avoided communication on active engagement by citizens for environmental initiatives.

Furthermore, the current research was also consistent with Lam's (2008) findings that suggested the government is presently emphasizing initiatives towards environmentalism; however, the extent to which the topic of environmentalism is transferred to citizens has not yet reached the point of advocacy for the cause. The present research found that although the topic of environmentalism is accessible to citizens and citizens do have some awareness about environmental sustainability in China, topics like economic development and a focus on building industries were primary concerns. As such, after an independent analysis of the interview data and the ECA of government documents, the researcher established that Chinese citizens place environmental sustainability on a lower hierarchical scale due to their concerns about the status of their country as a developing nation.

Another valuable postulation brought forth by Wong (2008), was the role of Chinese characteristics; more specifically, Wong (2008) cited the cultural importance of non-confrontation, group cohesion, and effectiveness in the process of green NGO facilitation. Again, without a specific objective to establish an understanding of environmental NGOs in China, the present research was concerned with how public consciousness on environmentalism was impacted by cultural dynamics. The role of collectivism, philosophy, and spirituality was discovered in the present research through interview respondents implicit reference to the role of balance and harmony in the conceptualization of nature and environmentalism, these emergent

themes stretched beyond the scope of Wong's (2008) study. Upon further reflection, these themes emerged as a major theoretical breakthrough of this research, and as such the researcher sought to reinforce this theory by exploring the works of McDaniel (2008) and Ting-Toomey (1994). McDaniel (2008) and Ting-Toomey's (1994) research helped to bring the undertones of Buddhism, Confucius thought, and collectivism to the surface from the interview data and ECA of government documents. The researcher was able to reflect upon the cultural dynamics cited by these two authors and apply this reflexive thought to the data analysis. Through this process the researcher was able to establish the theory that environmental consciousness is facilitated by and through cultural characteristics of communalism, Chinese spirituality, and philosophical legacies.

Finally, this research moved beyond Wong's (2008) theories as the data brought forth the role of globalization, which includes both heterogeneous and homogenizing forces. China's global position was emphasized in this research as it exemplified Rantanen's (2005) conceptualization of media distribution in a homogenous country. These ideas were further discovered in Hu Jintao Report at the 17th Party Congress (2007, October), which alluded to the struggles of expanding global markets while maintain cultural legacy. The present research was able to develop a theory as to how China seeks to maintain a global position that promotes cultural homogeneity amidst international pressure to conform to global environmental standards.

In summation, interview respondents cited the need for the government to promote more awareness in the media about environmentalism, as many citizens know that this topic should be of more concern. This idea can be best summarized by McDaniel (2008) as he stated, "the ideal

of sustainability is important to increasing numbers of Chinese, even as they realize that their communities fall short of it” (p. 270). It is important to keep in mind that China is a communist country, and as such, public accessibility to outside perspectives on sensitive topics becomes a challenge. China’s closed-door policy on cultural influences and tight control of the media encourage a placid understanding of the state of environmental affairs in China, which leaves the public with the idea that the environment is a concern but not an urgent matter of interest, thus contributing to a fragmented consciousness. Most of the respondents suggested that environmental messages and environmental awareness are not prevalent in China because these ideas are not relevant to a developing nation that struggles to gain power in a global context. Subsequently, the overarching theory developed in this study is that China’s cultural conditions facilitate a unique understanding of environmentalism that requires comprehensive awareness by non-Chinese citizens.

After Thoughts

Why is it important to understand Chinese culture with reference to environmental sustainability? The researcher carried this question with her throughout the entirety of the research process and continues to build on her understanding of the importance of cultural reflection with respect to the topic of environmentalism across different cultures. Thomas and Inkson (2009) highlight the need for cultural intelligence in their work on living and working globally. They cited the need for awareness about cultural dynamics facilitated through knowledge, mindfulness, and skills. More specifically, they cited cultural knowledge as the understanding of “cross-cultural phenomena”, mindfulness as observation and interpretation of “particular situations”, and skills as required elements “to adapt behaviour” and “to act

appropriately and successfully in a range of situations” (Thomas & Inkson, 2009, p. 22). During this research project, the researcher sought to employ Thomas and Inkson’s (2009) ideals on cultural intelligence to offer a unique perspective on environmentalism in China; a perspective whereby the researcher wanted to understand how environmentalism is shaped without comparing Chinese sustainability to a western model or by condemning China’s environmental record. Instead, this research project was structured with cultural intelligence in mind so that the reality of environmentalism in China could be fully recognized.

Most interestingly, the researcher found that the Chinese citizens held the belief that resources are infinite and as such this off-sets concern about global warming and pollution. The value of harmony plays a vital role in Chinese cultural beliefs and, as such, affects the conceptualization of the physical environment and ideas on environmental sustainability. Yao’s (2008) research described two ways that harmony and nature are conceptualized in China: “there are both thoughts of harmonious oneness of the universe and man (‘Tian Ren He Yi’; see Ga 206), and thoughts of man being the master of his own fate (‘Ren Ding Sheng Tian’ see Shek, 2005) (as cited in Yao, 2008, p. 275). The former bearing Confucius values and the latter exemplifying the message brought forward by Mao Zedong during the Cultural Revolution in 1966 (Cultural Revolution, 2010).

With reference to the Maoist idea that “man can conquer nature” (Wu, 2006 as cited in Yao, 2008, p. 275), the role of political power and dominance over the physical environment is deeply engrained in the public consciousness. During the Cultural Revolution in China, there was a shift in values that resulted in strict focus towards the present environment and concern about the future of China (Cultural Revolution, 2010). At that time, the government encouraged

the abandonment of Confucianism in the pursuit of reasserting communist governance. This time period was characterized by a concern for present perceptions of power and authority. As the economy and social life in China began to decline, the revolution came to an end in 1969 (Cultural Revolution, 2010). Proceeding this period a return to traditional elements was restored and a focus on the strengths of historical Chinese roots emerged again (Cultural Revolution, 2010). Thus, with this cultural history in mind, it is essential for non-Chinese citizens to understand that the shaping of a harmonious environment in China carries with it messages of both power and dominance over nature and Confucius ideas of harmonious balance sought through unity with the elements.

Furthermore, facilitating an awareness of Chinese communications styles allows non-Chinese citizens to understand why many citizens feel removed from discourse surrounding sustainability. Citizens are content with following directives by their government, and the interview data suggested that citizens do not feel the need to take actions on their own accord that would increase environmental sustainability; instead, the focus for many citizens is on how big companies and governments can work together to promote this issue.

The cultural dynamics of collectivism, saving face, and the reign of a Communist government encourage a natural personal distance from the topic of environmental sustainability by citizens. The idea of fragmented knowledge on the topic occurs as a result. Chinese citizens know that environmentalism is a concern, a global concern, but their allegiance and devotion to their government assures them that the capable hands of the government have the situation under control. With these Chinese cultural understandings in mind, the topic of environmental sustainability takes on new meanings. This research demonstrated the need to facilitate cultural

awareness so that work in this area of study can expand to new cultures and so that continued research can be performed on similar collectivist cultures, or on cultures with similar governance. The researchers hope was that the present study would act as a catalyst for continued investigations in the field of environmentalism and communication, facilitated through cultural intelligence.

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Appendix

Table 1.2

Elaboration of Table 1.1: Public Consciousness on Environmental Sustainability in China as Shaped by the Government

The following table is the raw data that led to the development of Table 1.1 which is in the Results section. This raw data has been provided as evidence of the credibility of the findings.

Phenomenon: Hierarchy of Social Needs
Higher Order Themes:
Economic
Development
1 st Order Themes:
Industrialization
·Modernization
·Scientific innovation
·Population
·Role as developing nation
·Expansion
·Temporary sacrifice of the environment
·Current condition of the economy
Raw Data: China Daily

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- industrial development as a threat to the environment
 - pursuit of wealth over attention to pollution
 - accelerated development, reform and growth as key to development strategy
 - exploration of low-carbon economy as part of initiatives for urbanization and industrialization
 - reducing carbon emissions inhibited by financial perils
 - reform and Opening up of Communist party in the 1970's led to a decline in water quality of Jin'gou he River
 - emphasis on economic growth over environmental and personal health
 - shrinking protection zones for safe water sources

Raw Data: Hu Jintao Report

- the scientific outlook on development is a primary theme of the report
- developing an enlightened approach to development, which focuses on production and expansion and a consideration of ecology and conservation
- increasing GDP and economic returns while reducing consumption of resources
- increasing domestic demand, exports, and relying on scientific innovations to concurrently reduce consumption
- development as a top priority in rejuvenating the country

Raw Data: Interviews

- protection of the environment shouldn't influence the economy
 - paying more attention to economics
 - making efforts to protect the environment but impeded by role as a developing nation and the
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size of the population

- connecting economic rates with pollution rates
 - develop the economy first and then develop attention to pollution and environmentalism
 - China's economy is growing and becoming more powerful so there is more money to invest in the environment
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Phenomenon: Cycle of Physical Environment

Higher Order Themes:

Harmony and Balance

1st Order Themes:

- Cycle of Nature
 - Buddhism (implicit)
 - Confucius thought (implicit)-explicit with reference to the role of education
 - Temporary environmental improvements
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Raw Data: China Daily

- planting trees to act as a natural barrier to the spread of pollutants
 - international and National events prompting temporary improvements in the environment
 - closing factories for International and National Games
 - improvements in air qualities for World Expo
 - location to water decreases the possibility of pollutants
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Raw Data: Hu Jintao Report

- friendly society that coordinates harmonious growth rate between the economy and the
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environment

- balanced sustainable development
- harmonious and peaceful development fostered through unity of citizens
- develop a relationship between man and nature (implicit Buddhism)
- social equity, justice, honesty, stability and order (implicit Buddhism)
- live in harmony to ensure a favourable society
- balancing reform
- circular economy with a controlled pattern of consumption of resources

Raw Data: Interviews

- current pollution rates will be better in the future
 - if you pollute the environment you can rescue it
 - during the Olympics the government restricted the number of cars on the road
 - cities that are known to produce coal, whose air was black, has now turned blue
 - strong belief that the air will be more fresh and blue and that the stars will be visible in the next 5 years
 - the environment will be better because people will have an increased consciousness because of the government's efforts
 - the environmental circle
 - the environment requires balance
 - the lifespan of the physical environment as a cycle
 - greenhouse gas emission will be controlled
 - the role of education to improve people's consciousness to repair the environment
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·imbalance between the environment in Eastern China versus Western China

Phenomenon: Political Versus the Personal

Higher Order Themes:

Responsibility

1st Order Themes:

- Government roles
 - Laws and punishments
 - Corporate roles
 - Citizen initiatives
 - Citizen health and safety
 - The role of NGOs
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Raw Data: China Daily

- lead poisoning due to proximity to lead smelters
 - the need for energy subsidies for low income groups to improve the national environment
 - environmental protection officials putting pressure on governments to reduce heavy-metal pollution
 - poor water quality and the lack of access to clean water supplies for citizens due to pollution by factories
 - the importance of monitoring systems to control pollution by large national and international corporations
 - the use of petitions and protests by local citizen groups whose health has been directly affected
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by pollutants from factories

Raw Data: Hu Jintao Report

- governmental promotion of energy and resource efficient structures for industries.
 - the Government's promise to bring pollution under control
 - upholding the Communist Party's role as the core of leadership in directing the overall situation to improve environmentalism and to control corporate and citizen initiatives
 - transformation from consumption based economy to an economy that relies on science and innovation to increase conservation of the environment
 - attempting oversized goals to increase economic development and safeguard the environment without an extensive plan of action to increase environmental conservation
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Raw Data: Interviews

- citizens have firsthand knowledge of environmental degradation that the government can't see due to proximity to sites where pollution is rampant
 - the belief that NGOs should play a more important role but they do not
 - superficial initiatives by the government to suggest that they are taking action on the environment
 - the need for more strict and consistent laws for corporations and factories
 - the need for advertisements to help the environment that are more personal; specifically, more compassionate, humorous, and target a youth audience by using famous people or popular culture
 - more governmental policies for citizens and corporations to improve environmentalism
 - community initiatives are more common than NGOs but less powerful
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- current environmental laws are not applicable to the general population, unless citizens live in big cities, they are more concerned with large scale pollution by factories.
 - factories that commonly polluted, like paper factories, are shut down
 - environmental communiqué to citizens is just to remind citizens but communiqué to corporations is strict
 - the Government has control of the situation, so it is not a concern for the common citizen
 - fear of punishment and government loyalty ensures that citizens will follow all and any rules set forth by the government
 - government's ability to rule by instilling public virtue
 - the belief that it is the government's responsibility to provide education about protecting the environment
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Phenomenon: Public Awareness

Higher Order Themes:

Peripheral Awareness

1st Order Themes:

·General statements by the government to improve environmentalism

·Lack of focus on citizen awareness

·Looming government dissidence

·Fragmented knowledge about environmental sustainability

Raw Data: China Daily

·the idea that the government has the power to shape public consciousness about participating in

low-carbon consumption, but that this has not yet occurred

- environmentalist belief that the process of environmental sustainability cannot be realized without the widespread participation of the citizens
- the need to promote public access to databases that record environmental quality
- protests and petition to stop construction of factories that pollute in local areas
- distrust in State environmental protection requirements

Raw Data: Hu Jintao Report

- no mention of environment and health-in the section on social development and livelihood
- general statements about environmental awareness being established in the future
- emphasis on citizens' rights to be informed-without mentioning their rights to knowledge of environmental sustainability

Raw Data: Interviews

- white pollution (the need to use cloth bags instead of plastic bags)
 - spiting as a form of pollution
 - consistently emphasising the slogan 'One World' as the primary message citizens receive from the government about environmental sustainability
 - the urgency of the environment but the lack of help from the government to realize this
 - the effective measures taken by the government to reduce pollution include building a special forest
 - belief that the government can't urge all of the citizens at once that they must tell citizens in pieces
 - more advertisements would encourage more knowledge on the topic
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- foreigners don't think that government policies are fair but Chinese citizens feel that they are suitable
 - the need for public pressure and public embarrassment to urge citizens to practice environmentalism
 - the need for more education and targeting youth audiences
 - awareness that environmentalism is necessary for future generation but there is a lack of concern about the current state of the environment for the current population
 - awareness about petitions to stop factories from polluting and awareness of one protest that helped close a paper factory in Xiamen
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Phenomenon: The Role of Internationalization and Globalization on Environmental Sustainability in China

Higher Order Themes:

Global Position

1st Order Themes:

·Globalization

·Emerging market

·Global competition

·Honouring global commitments

·Western concepts of environmental sustainability

·The Internet

Raw Data: China Daily

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- developed nations exploring emerging ‘green’ markets in China
 - China’s determination to develop a sustainable economy to keep up with other nations
 - moving towards a low-carbon economy in an effort to honour international commitment and to move towards expansive economic growth
 - reduce dependence on international energy market
 - challenge of honouring greenhouse gas commitments without the financial help and a priori commitment of developed nations
 - Chinese environmentalist educated in the west concerned about informing international corporations about the environmental impact in China of their products
 - developed nations encouraging Chinese nations to use alternative energy sources
 - the growth of environmentally friendly technologies fostered through international partnerships

Raw Data: Hu Jintao Report

- openness to international market
- promote global competitions for emerging environmentally sustainable markets and emergent technologies
- adhering to the basic state policies but integrating international ideas about environmentalism and conservation initiatives
- globalization within a Chinese context

Raw Data: Interviews

- the belief that foreign countries and foreign companies set a good example
 - the emerging role of western ideas and western popular culture that encourages awareness about environmentalism
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·the lack of awareness about environmental sustainability in other countries

·the lack of awareness about how the Chinese environment is perceived
