UCLA
UCLA Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title
Resourceful Bureaucrats: How Chinese Officials (Fail to) Implement Environmental Policies

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9ms1d7d6

Author
Zipp, Daniel

Publication Date
2022

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

eScholarship.org
Powered by the California Digital Library
University of California

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Resourceful Bureaucrats:

How Chinese Officials (Fail to) Implement Environmental Policies

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology

by

Daniel Zipp

2022

© Copyright by

Daniel Zipp

2022

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Resourceful Bureaucrats:

How Chinese Officials (Fail to) Implement Environmental Policies

by

Daniel Zipp

Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2022

Professor Edward T. Walker, Chair

This dissertation has three empirical chapters that are organized around two central questions: (1) how and why regional, meso-level bureaucrats (fail to) implement some environmental policies in Shanxi and Henan provinces in North-Central China and (2) how to explain environmental policy implementation failure when both recentralization and environmental concerns have taken center stage. The empirical chapters deeply delve into the last central questions: What are the interests that affect and are affected by meso-level bureaucrats and how do meso-level bureaucrats use these interests to further their own goals when choosing which policies to implement and which to ignore? To answer these questions, I conducted 12 months of comparative ethnographic research (May 2018, August 2018 to July 2019) coupled with 148 semi-structured interviews of meso-level officials, civil society organizations, workers, and managers. The main finding is that state-defined interests are not singular, but are contested

social objects whose outcomes depend on material, cultural, and positional bureaucratic characteristics, as well as the key explanatory mechanism: individual resourcefulness. The first empirical chapter examines capital as an interest that mid-level officials use and negotiate, showing when, where, and how meso-level state officials resourcefully interact with state-owned, state-controlled, private, and illegal enterprises to further their own interests. The second empirical chapter continues to examine mid-level officials' interests and resourcefulness by showing the ways in which meso-level officials manipulate preexisting, nascent labor mobilizations to further their own goals, showing how mid-level officials manipulate mass incidents throughout the mobilization process to justify implementing or not implementing environmental policies. The final empirical chapter examines the ongoing political and positional interests that mid-level officials navigate, negotiate, and use when deciding how to implement environmental policies, showing the resourcefulness of these officials as they navigate their role as agents of higher-level bureaucrats as well as principles of lower-level agents, as well as colleagues to officials in horizontal bureaus. Mid-level officials resourcefully and skillfully play competing interests and powers off one another to pick and choose which policies they are going to (either partially or fully) implement and which ones they are going to ignore.

The dissertation of Daniel Zipp is approved.

Min Zhou

Karida L. Brown

Alex Wang

Edward T. Walker, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2022

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS **v**

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS **xi**

VITA **xiii**

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION **1**

STATE-LED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN CHINA 6

HOW TO BETTER UNDERSTAND AND EXPLAIN CHINESE GOVERNANCE 13

ENVIRONMENTAL MECHANISM DESIGN IN CHINA *20*

POLITICAL STRUCTURES: THE MESO-LEVEL AS BOTH PRINCIPAL AND AGENT *24*

POLITICAL PROCESSES: MESO-LEVEL ACTORS' RESOURCEFULNESS *30*

METHODS 33

SITE 42

OVERVIEW OF THE DISSERTATION 46

REFERENCES 49

CHAPTER 2: FORMATION OF EXTRACTIVE INDUSTRIES AND THE DEVELOPMENTAL STATE IN CHINA **60**

FORMATION BEFORE 1949 60

FORMATION THROUGH MAOIST THOUGHT (1949-1978) 64

FORMATION THROUGH THE REFORMS AND DENG XIAOPING THOUGHT (1978-2000) 72

FORMATION DURING WTO ASCENSION AND XI JINPING THOUGHT 80

REFERENCES 88

CHAPTER 3: RED CAPITAL, BLACK INFLUENCES, AND GREEN POLICIES: CAPITALS, COAL, AND CONTESTED POLICIES **90**

ECONOMIC PROTECTIONISM IN RURAL, NORTH-CENTRAL CHINA 91

EXPLAINING MESO-LEVEL OFFICIALS INTERACTIONS WITH ENTERPRISES: LOGICS AND VARIETIES OF CAPITALS IN NORTH-CENTRAL CHINA 95
STATE-OWNED CAPITAL AND THE STATE 98
STATE-CONTROLLED CAPITAL AND THE STATE 107
PRIVATE CAPITAL AND THE STATE 110
ILLEGAL COAL AND THE STATE 118
UNLICENSED COAL OPERATIONS AND PROTECTIVE UMBRELLAS *121*
OVERPRODUCTION AND OVERPOLLUTING; STATE QUOTAS AND MONITORING *127*
CONCLUSION 132
REFERENCES 138
CHAPTER 4: MANIPULATED MOBILIZATIONS: EXHORTATION AND SUBSUMPTION OF LABOR PROTESTS **142**
NEGOTIATED, NON-ZERO-SUM STATE AND CIVIL SOCIETY GOALS 152
JOINTLY CONSTRUCTED FRAMES: NOSTALGIC PASTS AND IMAGINED FUTURES 156
ECONOMIC FRAMES: PROSPEROUS PASTS AND FUTURES *157*
LOCAL PROTECTIONISM AS A DOMINANT FRAME *162*
JOINTLY CONSTRUCTED TARGETS 171
APPROPRIATE(D) TACTICAL REPERTOIRES AND ORGANIZATIONS 183
CONCLUSION 191
REFERENCES 193
CHAPTER 5: MESO-LEVEL BUREAUCRACY: DILEMMAS OF THE POSITION IN POLICY IMPLEMENTATION **200**
UNCOUPLING POLICY AND PRACTICE IN CHINA 203
RECOUPLING IN CHINA THROUGH RECENTRALIZATION: MECHANISM DESIGN 205
EXPLAINING POLICY-PRACTICE OUTCOMES 209

Gaming 215

Deflection 226

Warnings 233

Fraud and Deception 238

Rejection 246

CONCLUSION 249

REFERENCES 253

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION 265

Summary 267

REFERENCES 275

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 3: INTERVIEWS 40

TABLE 4: (NON-)RESOURCEFUL RECOUPLING AND DECOUPLING 213

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1: LOCAL-LEVEL STATE 26

FIGURE 2: MESO-LEVEL STATE 26

LIST OF MAPS

MAP 1: MAP OF RESEARCH AREA 43

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to briefly thank those who have helped me be the scholar and person that I am today. My journey as just a kid from Akron to UCLA was tortuous and at times tortured, and I would not have been able to do it without the support of so many people. In no way is this list exhaustive, and if I have forgotten you, it is more of a reflection on my failures than on yours.

To those who inspired me to and allowed me the freedom to read, question and explore the world, and continually learn—particularly my parents, Jan Yoder and John Zipp; my sister, Kate Zipp; and my partner, Charlotte Hopkinson: Thank you.

To the faculty at Oberlin College who taught me to think critically, mentored me with care and rigor, and sparked my love of Chinese politics—particularly Sheila Jager, who first inspired me to study China; Hsiu-Chuang Deppman, Pauline Chen, Liu Fang, Li Kai, and Yao Jie, the fantastic Chinese professors who gave me the tools and encouragement necessary to pursue my passions; and Marc Blecher, who put me down this path and has offered continual support, mentorship, and friendship: Thank you.

To the staff, faculty, (under)graduate students, and friends at UCLA who have encouraged and supported me, challenged me, and taught me how to be a sociologist—particularly Wendy Fujinami, Michelle Fielder, Simbi Mahlanza, Dreama Rhodes, and Irina Tauber; César J. Ayala, Zsuzsa Berend, James Desveaux, Jeffry Guhin, Kevan Harris, Marcus Anthony Hunter, Aliza Luft, Tanya Stivers, and Wei-hsin Yu; and Wisam Alshaibi, Caitlin Ahearn, Nada Ali Ramadan, Taylor Aquino, Abraham Calderon, Noureddine Chtaini, Leydy Diossa Jimenez, Juan Delgado, Nick DiRago, Sima Ghaddar, Zach Griffen, Neil Gong, Joel Herrera, MJ Hill, Nathan Hoffmann, Nihal Kayali, Bernard Koch, Tianjian Lai, Andrew Le,

Kyle Nelson, Qiaoyan Li Rosenberg, Joelle Rosenberg, J Shim, Gabriel Suchodolski, Victoria Tran, Gilad Wenig, Sandy Xu, and Ashelee Yang: Thank you.

To those who I interviewed, observed, shared with, and befriended in China, without whom this project would be nothing: Thank you.

To Isaac Jilbert, Paul Martinez, Oscar Mayorga, and Ian Peacock, whose brilliance and friendship I value beyond measure: I will be forever grateful for you and forever thank you.

To Edward T. Walker, Min Zhou, Karida Brown, and Alex Wang, whose encouragement, scholarship, commitment, and efforts have pushed me to be the best scholar I could be (with the caveat that all mistakes in the following document are my own): I am appreciative beyond measure and thank you deeply.

To my family—Jan Yoder, John Zipp, Kate Zipp, Nick Hatt, Lily Zipp-Hatt, Isabelle Hopkinson, John Hopkinson, Charlotte Hopkinson, Sébastien Hopkinson, and Elly Hahn—who have supported me throughout this journey, who have never stopped believing in me and loving me, and who have always been my bedrock: Thank you from the bottom of my heart; je vous remercie de tout mon cœur.

Finally, to Charlotte Hopkinson, I dedicate this dissertation to you, for your unfailing support and encouragement; your questions, comments, and edits on many, many, many iterations of this project; and your love: Thank you!

VITA

EDUCATION

2015-2017	M.A., Sociology University of California, Los Angeles
2009-2013	B.A., Politics (High Honors) and East Asian Studies Oberlin College, OH

ARTICLES

2021*	Zipp, Daniel Y. “Chinatowns Lost? The Birth and Death of Urban Neighborhoods in an American City” *City & Community*. *Featured Article, December 2021
2015	Zipp, Daniel Y. and Marc Blecher. “Migrants and Mobilization: Sectoral Patterns in China, 2010-2013.” *Global Labour Journal* 6.1: 116-26.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Fall 2022	Sociology 254—Political Sociology Instructor
Spring 2022	Cluster 20C—Global Histories of Racial Economies Instructor
Winter 2022	Cluster 20B—Interracial Dynamics in American Culture and Society TA
Winter 2022	Sociology 180A—Course on Asian Community: Border-Crossing, Diasporic Formation, and Social Transformation in Asia TA
Fall 2021	Sociology M148—Sociology of Mental Illness TA
Summer 2021	Sociology 133—Collective Behavior Instructor
2020-2021	Sociology M191DC—Center for American Politics and Public Policy (Senior Capstone) Fellow
Summer 2020	Sociology 182—Political Sociology Instructor
Spring 2020	Sociology M115—Environmental Sociology TA
Winter 2020	Sociology 173—Economy and Society TA
Fall 2019	Sociology 182—Political Sociology TA
Spring 2017	Sociology 101—Development of Sociological Theory TA
Winter 2017	Sociology 181A—Sociology of Contemporary China TA
Fall 2016	Sociology 133—Collective Behavior TA

MENTORING

2021-2022	Honors Thesis Mentor, UCLA Department of Sociology
2020-2021*	Honors Thesis Mentor, UCLA Department of Sociology *Winner of the 2021 Lisa Mederos Prize for Research Excellence

AWARDS, GRANTS & FELLOWSHIPS

2021-2022	Departmental Service Award, Sociology Department, UCLA
2021-2022	Silton Undergraduate Research Mentorship Award, Sociology Department, UCLA
2020-2021	Silton Undergraduate Research Mentorship Award, Sociology Department, UCLA
2019-2020	Excellence in Teaching Award, Sociology Department, UCLA

2017	Graduate Research Mentorship Program Fellowship, University of California, Los Angeles Graduate Division, $20,000
2016-2017	Excellence in Teaching Award, Sociology Department, UCLA
2016	Graduate Summer Research Mentorship Program Fellowship, University of California, Los Angeles Graduate Division, $6,000

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

2022	Manipulated Mobilizations: How Meso-Level Officials Subsume Labor Protests, Annual Meeting, American Sociological Association (2022)
2022	Mutually Constitutive Mobilizations: State-Worker Responses to Environmental Policies in Authoritarian Regimes, Annual Meeting, Society for the Advancement of Socio-Economics (2022)
2022	Mutually Constitutive Mobilizations: State-Worker Responses to Environmental Policies in Authoritarian Regimes, Chicago Ethnography Conference (2022)
2021	"Extracting Resistance: Coal, Environmental Policy, and Economic Development in the Chinese Hinterland," Annual Meeting, European Sociological Association.
2021	"Extracting Resistance: Coal, Environmental Policy, and Economic Development in the Chinese Hinterland," Round Table, Annual Meeting, American Sociological Association.
2021	"Extracting Resistance: Coal, Environmental Policy, and Economic Development in the Chinese Hinterland," Development Studies Association Conference, University of East Anglia.
2021	"The (Non)Coalescence of the State: Decoupling Environmental Policy in the Chinese Hinterland," First Doctoral Conference on the Social and Political Constitution of the Economy, Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies, Cologne, Germany.
2021	"Confronting King Coal in China: The State, Capital, and Labor in a Dying Industry." IV ISA Forum of Sociology, Porto Alegre, Brazil.
2020	"Shanxi and Henan's Ecological Development Projects," Internet Conference on Regional Environment and Ecology, Henan University.
2020*	"The (Non)Coalescence of the State: Decoupling Environmental Policy in the Chinese Hinterland," Annual Meeting, American Sociological Association.
2019	"Confronting King Coal in China: The State, Capital, and Labor in a Dying Industry," Annual Meeting, American Sociological Association, New York.
2019	"山西河南两省农村发展比较 (Comparing Shanxi and Henan's Rural Development Projects), 第十一届"黄河学"高层论坛暨"古文字与出土文献语言研究"国际学术研讨会 (The 11th "Yellow River Studies" High-Level Forum and Conference of "International Studies on Ancient Chinese Language and Unearthed Documents"), Henan University, Kaifeng, Henan, China.
2018	"Chinatowns Lost: The Life and Death of Urban Neighborhoods in an American City," Annual Meeting, American Sociological Association, Philadelphia.
2014	"Migrants and Mobilization: Sectoral Patterns in China, 2010-2013," Conference on Governance, Adaptability and System Stability under Contemporary One-Party Rule: Comparative Perspectives, Nanchang, Jiangxi, China (with Marc Blecher).

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In the 40 years since its opening and reforms, China has developed into a global political and economic powerhouse due to unprecedented, sustained economic development. China's pursuit of economic growth based on heavy and light industrialization, extractive industries, transportation infrastructure, and construction enabled unprecedented economic development, turning China from a political and economic hinterland to a global superpower.

However, China's industrialization has not been without problems. Political, economic, and environmental contradictions are embedded within the Chinese state-led economic development model, contradictions that threaten to not only undermine but implode the political and economic structures that sustained China's rise. Decentralization, both politically and economically, led to the Chinese miracle, but it also led to a form of corporatism and local protectionism that has diverted funds from the state towards individuals. Heavy and light industrial and commercial manufacturing, construction, and mining have built the Chinese economy, but they have also stunted economic growth; stuck in a middle-income trap of production for the global economy while unable to increase domestic consumption, the Chinese economy has recently struggled to maintain its miraculous growth. Further threatening Chinese economic development is its reliance on fossil fuels, both domestic and foreign, increasing the amount of renewables in the energy mix while decreasing the reliance on coal and oil has been a major goal of the Chinese state. Environmental protection, always low on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, has increasingly risen in importance as pollution has affected not only Chinese citizens, but perceptions of China at the global stage. These contradictions inherent and obvious in Chinese political structure and economic development have necessitated a profound break from past political economic models of development.

In response to international environmental norms, a rapidly deteriorating environment, energy security concerns, and an effort to reorganize they domestic political and economic structures, the Politburo (the Chinese Communist Party's highest decision-making body), the State Council, and Xi Jinping have increasingly issued pro-environmental, anti-coal policies, programs, and campaigns.

Since 2014, there has been a concerted effort to promote sustainable energy policies that sought to decrease coal production and consumption (thus curbing air pollution) while increasing the amount of renewables in the energy mix. The most notable of these policies are the Energy Revolution Strategy of Production and Consumption to 2030, the Thirteenth Five Year Plan and the Thirteenth Five Year Energy Development Plan, the Strategic Action Plan for Energy Development, the Action Plan for Air Pollution Control, and the Three-Year Action Plan for Winning the Blue-Sky War. The Four Revolutions and One Cooperation strategic concept bolsters these campaigns and plans. Each of these plans, campaigns, policies, and laws aimed to quantify and standardize the environment into some*thing* that can be effectively governed. As these plans were put into effect and it was made known that national government wanted decreases in coal consumption and production, meso-level actors at the (sub)provincial-level vigorously implemented not only the letter of the policies but the spirit as well.

These policies were all supplemented by other changes to Chinese political and economic structures, including the restructuring of the Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP) into the Ministry of Ecology and Environment in 2018, giving it much more regulatory and enforcement powers; a flurry of new laws aimed at strengthening the implementation of pollution and environmental sustainability policies, such as the 2014 Environmental Protection Law, the 2015 Air Pollution Prevention and Treatment Law, the 2015 Environmental Impact Assessment Law,

the Greenhouse Gas Control Work Plan, and the Energy Development and Power Sector Development Plans; and the application of a vertical management system of environmental governance at the 2015 CCP Plenary session (Zhao et al. 2020). There is little to no doubt that these signaled that "the Chinese state is squarely 'back' in the business of environmental governance" (Shin 2018) and that environmental sustainability and protection is now a "prominent part of the central government agenda and discourse" (Ran 2017).

The central Chinese state is taking the politics and economies of the environment seriously, but it is not the only agendum and discourse. Understanding both the political economies and political processes of Chinese environmental politics also helps to understand other "central government agenda and discourses." The environment has now joined political and economic concerns as centrally important. Reigning in corruption and increasing the role of the Chinese Communist Party, social stability measures and labor control, economic growth and state-led capital, and now environmental politics are all centrally designed policy domains. The central state has made moves to fundamentally alter its economic base to reduce reliance on coal for economic development, to recentralize the state and Party in an effort to more closely align meso- and local-level actors' actions to the center's goals, and to quell (real and perceived) social instability centered around environmental destruction.

As the Chinese central state aims to recentralize its diffuse political, economic, and now environmental policies and implementation, meso-level actors (those who are between and betwixt the central state in Beijing and the local state in the lower rungs of the state hierarchy; provincial- and city-level actors) become more closely tied to the agenda and discourses from the center. Considering the importance of environmental policies for the central state and the recentralization efforts, there should be significant changes to the processes of Chinese environmental politics and

economics. And, there was. Not only did local officials in Shanxi and Henan—two of the largest coal producing provinces in the country and world—implement Xi's policies, but they did so enthusiastically from 2016 until 2018. But, since 2018, coal production and consumption has steadily increased. Why is there an increase in environmental economic policymaking and a decrease in environmental economic policy enactment? How can we explain this divergence in an era of recentralization and an era in which environmental concerns have taken center stage?

Focusing explicitly on two underdeveloped provinces (Shanxi and Henan) that rely on extractive industry but have different levels of environmental policy implementation, allows for understanding different environmental political processes on the ground in places where the most intensive and intense environmental destruction is occurring. What does this sudden and enthusiastic implementation of environmental policies tell us about Chinese state processes and the role of the central state's designs, incentives, pressures, and interests in meso-level implementation? Why, after a brief but profound period of steadfast adherence to Beijing's policies, did meso-level officials' actions decouple from the center's goals and how do we understand this decoupling during the recent wave of recentralization?

In both Shanxi and Henan, coal production and consumption plummeted in these years. Coal mines were closed, coal workers were furloughed and then laid off, and coal-reliant industrial sectors decreased their output. Additionally, meso-level actors built new green areas, increased renewable energy support, and championed green development. But, since 2018, coal production and consumption in Shanxi and Henan—like in the rest of China—has increased, although much less in Henan than in Shanxi. In Shanxi, shuttered coal mines were reopened or reorganized into existing coal conglomerates, workers were rehired, and coal was shipped throughout the country. On a dreary Tuesday in March 2018, I was sitting on a train traveling from a small coal village to

the capital of Shanxi, Taiyuan, and while waiting for 5 minutes outside of the old Taiyuan Train Station, I counted three trains, each of their 60-plus cars loaded to brim with coal, en route to the industrial manufacturing to the south and east. In Henan, coal production and consumption increased, but at a much lower rate and, more importantly, alongside green development projects.

Because of the interconnected environmental, economic, social, and political drivers of Chinese coal politics, coal policies become the ideal case study for understanding Chinese politics and state-led economic development processes, especially in Shanxi and Henan where pressures are not homogenous, but fluctuate and are in constant competition with each other. The constellation of different economic, political, normative, and social pressures that explain environmental policy acceptance, reconfiguration, and/or rejection is different across different places and times and therefore must be empirically observed. The political processes and structures underlying these constellations of pressures show how meso-level actors use and resist power from central and local state actors, civil society organizations (both domestic and, crucially important for environmental politics, international) and labor, and capital.

Beyond the empirical importance of Chinese environmental politics and economics for curbing global climate change, Chinese coal policies also present an important theoretical case for understanding environmental governance processes more broadly, the Chinese developmental state, and state processes in meso-level implementation of central state policies. Because environmental policies affect the political and economic processes and because they generalize out to these policy domains, environmental policies become the ideal case to study state political and economic processes.

STATE-LED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN CHINA

Since the People's Republic of China's founding in 1949, there has been a pattern of "letting go" and "tightening up" (fang/shou) which has defined state administrative practices (Baum 1996; He 1996; Kostka and Nahm 2017) and been used to explain the particular brand of Chinese state-led development that has allowed China to become the largest economy in the world. The Deng (1978-1989), Jiang (1989-2002), and Hu/Wen (2002-2012) eras were characterized by a period of "letting go" during which political and economic decentralization and rising local protectionism in both politics and economics ruled the day (Bulman and Jaros 2020). The Chinese Communist Party sets policy guidelines and ensures that they are followed by maintaining control over personnel while also allowing discretion at the subnational level. During the reform era (generally since the opening up reforms which began in earnest in the early-1980s), provinces and provincial-level cities (i.e., important cities that are governed like provinces) have enjoyed considerable freedom in the implementation of economic and social development policies (Donaldson 2016; Landry 2008; Lieberthal 1997; Lin 1995; Mertha 2017a; Zheng 2007). Provincial leaders were required by the center to consult with and get approval from Beijing before making substantial political decisions, but that did not mean that Beijing's ideas or priorities always took precedence (Heilmann and Melton 2013), and—in fact—Beijing's preferences were often disregarded. The extant literature on the Chinese developmental state from the opening up reforms until Xi Jinping's ascension to power correctly addresses China as politically centralized and administratively decentralized. But, since 2012, the Xi era has brought about "tightening up" practices and policies, harkening back to Maoist control both in academic and journalistic press, which has—until recently—gone unaddressed.

The tightening up of Chinese state-led economic development has also led to a shift away from the economic model of the past; instead of a develop at all costs mindset, the central state has hoped to transform the Chinese economy from a middle-income, manufacturing-based economy to one based on innovation and consumption. Green technology and renewable energy have become the bedrock upon which the central state hopes to build the new Chinese economy. This new period of centralization has then ushered in an era of politics and economics that the letting go periods could not have sustained. Only a centralized state could connect the political, economic, and environmental processes and structures, seeing them as some*thing* to be coordinated and governed. The story that follows shows how Chinese state-led development has shifted from decentralized and destructive to centralized and controlled with environmental concerns at the forefront, leading to a specific form of political and economic processes meant to govern the environment.

The Chinese economic success of the late-1980s through the mid-2000s was explained by a distinct "local development state" caused by processes of "letting go (Blecher and Shue 2001; Nee, Opper and Wong 2007; Segal and Thun 2001). Beijing actively and slowly sought to share power with the provinces through fiscal policy, thus allowing local officials greater control over local political economies. "The policy of fiscal decentralization and intergovernmental fiscal-sharing contracts, which started in the early 1980s, allowed local governments to benefit from local economic growth, thus generating their unprecedented enthusiasm for economic development" (Li, 2005 #720); see (Montinola, Qian and Weingast 1995; Oi 1995). This type of "market-preserving federalism" (Fligstein and Zhang 2015) was meant to bolster economic growth at the local level which would trickle up to Beijing along with newfound legitimacy. Instead of only leading to economic development, local states were developing their own infrastructure and filling their own

coffers in a form of local corporatism (Lin 1995; Oi 1999; Walder 1995) and "perverse federalism" (Mertha 2005) which further empowered provincial governments vis-a-vis the center. Because provincial leaders are tasked with advancing provincial-level economic development, they built local support and clients (Mattingly 2016; Zheng 2007; Zhou et al. 2003), often increasing the power of provincial leaders on the ground while decreasing the punitive power of the center. Perverse federalism not only highlights the power of provincial governments, but it also focuses on the rent-seeking behavior of local officials.

The literature of Chinese political economy highlights the patron-client relationships between local officials and local capital. In China, a key feature of its political economy is the "strong alliance between the local state and capital" (Friedman 2013). Local governments have substantial involvement and intervention in economic development (Oi 1995) and it is mediated through extensive personal relations and even clientelism between businesses and local state (Sun and Huang 2016). The strong alliance with capital has also led to "numerous accounts of local governments being quite explicit with investors that they have no intention of strictly enforcing laws passed by the central government" (Friedman 2014). Because local governments must prioritize economic development and the attraction of capital, both domestic and foreign, "companies bribe tax officers and build patron-clientelist connections with tax officers and government officials to evade taxes and realize other business benefits" (Zhang 2017). These benefits, though, are not solely for the economic well-being of their jurisdiction. Local officials often siphon off profits and bribes to fulfill their own interests and fill their own personal coffers (Lin 2011). The state's goal then is to shepherd local capital into an accumulation strategy that dovetails with local officials' interests (Chibber 2009). However, patron-client relations have recently come under fire; "the party-state can and does swiftly remove local officials who are

deemed disloyal, incompetent, or corrupt" (Lin 2011). The nuances of patron client relations—from how market actors seek out state agents (Hoang 2018) to how state agents seek out viable market partners, how state agents navigate the limits of acceptable corruption, and how and which market actors should be championed or rejected—are all unresolved in the literature and will be taken up later in the dissertation. Here, the relevant questions are how the central state seeks to ameliorate rent-seeking by local officials and meso-level officials navigate central policies and local actions to meet national economic development goals and political goals that seek to curb their discretion and tie them to the central state.

During the most recent, and enthusiastic, period of "letting go" under the Deng, Jiang, and Hu regimes, scholars of Chinese politics have emphasized the role of the subnational government over that of the national government, from Lieberthal and Oksenberg's (1988) theorization of China's "fragmented authoritarianism," to Mertha's (2005) "soft centralization," to Zheng's (2007) "de facto federalism." Through the mid-2000s and beyond, "fragmented authoritarianism" was the most dominant and durable heuristic used to study Chinese state politics. The key idea is that policy made at the center becomes increasingly open to changes as it radiates outward; parochial vertical agencies in different regions have disparate organizational and political goals that affect the outcome of policies as these parochial agencies are the bureaus tasked with implementing central policy. Lieberthal and Oksenberg (1988) explained diffuse energy policy—the lack of a coherent national policy in practice and on paper—as a result of local officials' pursuit of different interests and policies with access to vastly different budget constraints. Chinese politics is thus explained by bureaucratic bargaining at the local level leading to incremental change (Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988). Efforts in the mid-2000s by the Chinese state to more fruitfully align local interests with central interests took the form of "soft centralization" (Mertha 2005). Focusing on

the decentralized budget and financial constraints as the main driver of policy decoupling at the local level, the central state began efforts to vertically strengthen bureaucratic control of local budgets, finances, and enterprise administration, but instead of strengthening control at the central level, the state recentralized to the provincial level. Zhang's (2007) "de facto federalism" also focuses on the increasing power of the provincial and local level vis-a-vis the center but highlights that the hierarchical system of governance is divided in such a way that both the center and local levels make the final decisions on different policies and that decentralization has been institutionalized to the extent that the central state cannot unilaterally impose its will on the provincial or local levels. Local governments were therefore able to develop their own economic and political power bases independent of the central state, thus creating divergent political and economic interests that the center was too weak to realign. Not only was the central state unable to coerce local states to align their interests with the center, but local states were also able to have an advantageous position when bargaining with Beijing. This decentralization of the Chinese system of economic and political governance, part of a prolonged "letting go" phase, created ample space of decoupling of policy and practice at the local level, with Beijing unable to control local level officials.

The federalist model, while initially problematizing the monolithic nature of the Chinese state, fails to account for different interests and goals across levels of the state and across localities. Intergovernmental relations vary across China and across different vertices within the state. Furthermore, there is a false dichotomy in the federalist model between local and central that fails to account for the fact that state agencies in China operate with each other rather than over or under one another. Fragmented authoritarianism also tends to focus on the national state's interactions with the local state (not the other way around) and usually focuses on local states that are wealthy

and important to the national state for one reason or another (discussed more below) . When there are differences, they are perverse instead of a feature of the state. Scholars tend to treat political factors and policy outcomes, then, as exogenous and externalities rather than explore why these policy outcomes were implemented and adopted or adapted. Furthermore, fragmented authoritarianism has little theoretical leverage to explain state-led economic development processes under Xi Jinping's re-centralizing efforts and the subsequent crackdowns on non-compliant localities or levels within the state bureaucracy.

The increased autonomy of local officials, both in economic and political decision-making and control, both allowed for Xi Jinping's rise to power and became a focal point for the Xi regime. Xi Jinping has sought to recentralize power through increasing monitoring of local officials' actions with regard to central policies in order to tighten control of rent-seeking local officials (Ahmad 2019). By constraining local agents' ability to implement policies according to their own design "local officials have again become less innovative and more conservative, lest they draw unwanted attention from Beijing" (Donaldson 2016). These efforts of "tightening up" have sought to not only recentralize political and economic power in the hands of Xi Jinping and the central state apparatus, but also to align local interests with central interests. Chinese state policymaking, both its objective and outcomes, needs to be reexamined in light of the recent "tightening up" era (Nahm 2017). A major aspect of Xi Jinping Thought—and thus of the new era of recentralization—is environmental sustainability.

Xi Jinping's self-elevation to "core leader," his enshrinement of Xi Jinping Thought into the constitution, and his revamping of Maoist-style campaigns (Andreas and Dong 2018) has been part and parcel of the renewed "tightening up" period of Chinese politics and economics. All three individually and combined have been used to reassert central oversight of local officials, both

vertically and horizontally (Bulman and Jaros 2021; Van Rooij et al. 2017), which might "seem to imply that we can say goodbye, for now, to the era of decentralization" (Ahlers 2018). Since 2012, as "centralizing trends unfolded, enforcement [of central environmental policies] over time has become stricter and more frequent" (van Rooij 2017). In this new era of "tightening up," the "power balance between central and local governments has been tipped decisively in the centre's favor as Xi has removed powers and discretion from local governments, introduced new monitoring and sanctioning practices, and signalled a zero-tolerance approach to non-compliance with central directives by sending thousands of local officials to prison" (Kostka and Nahm 2017). The efforts of the central state to recentralize policymaking to ensure faithful adherence to its policies started at the 18th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party and was further solidified five years later at the 19th Congress.

These recentralizing efforts make national policies essentially "products of top-down design and overall planning" (Li 2019), therefore, it makes sense to critically evaluate top-down design promulgated at the National Congresses. Since the 18th National Congress of the CPC, when Xi Jinping effectively took control of the Party apparatus, local government agency has been treated as greatly constrained by the central state (Yang and Yan 2018; Yu and Huang 2019). The emphasis on hierarchy and discipline emanating from the center has, according to this line of research, effectively discouraged local agents from acting in any way but in accordance with Xi Jinping (Yu and Wang 2019). The central state has reinforced hierarchical control and monitoring and fostered adherence to its own operating procedures (Zeng 2020), something that China's decentralized authoritarianism was unable to do during the Hu/Wen regime, especially in regard to environmental policies (Economy 2014). The efforts to recentralize were in their infancy in 2012, but five years later, at the 19th Congress, they were in full effect and full force, leading to

top-down, command-and-control political, economic, and environmental policies. In light of this new wave of recentralization, how should we understand Chinese political processes and structures? How are central policies designed and how are they implemented in the Xi Jinping era to ensure that those who implement these policies do so faithfully? How do those tasked with implementing policies implement them, reconfigure them, or refuse to implement them?

HOW TO BETTER UNDERSTAND AND EXPLAIN CHINESE GOVERNANCE

To answer these questions, I propose a new framework for 1) understanding the Chinese state and its specific way of governing its environment and 2) for explaining different policy enactment and outcomes. To understand the Chinese state and Chinese political, economic, and environmental processes and structures, I show how central state actors view themselves —and are viewed—as mechanism designers who design policies and enforcement mechanisms for meso-level actors to ensure that central policies are faithfully and energetically implemented. To understand when, how, and why these policies are not faithfully implemented by meso-level actors, I explicate a process called interstitial resourcefulness, showing the circumstances under which and methods by which meso-level actors reconfigure, reject, and/or accept central state policies.

Central Policies as Mechanism Design

Since *Seeing like a State* (Scott 2008), the sociology of the state has recognized and investigated the relationship between modern statecraft and knowledge production (Liebler et al. 2017; Loveman 2014), categorization and standards (Fourcade 2021a; Fourcade 2021b; Fourcade and Gordon 2020; Timmermans and Epstein 2010), and development with international organizations (Broome and Seabrooke 2007). Political sociology more broadly has extended the concept of "seeing" to other organizations; "seeing like an [organization]" has become a common title to invoke ways of seeing the world and flattening it, to classify the world and quantify it, and

to standardize and order the world in a way that at once makes it legible to the governing organization and fundamentally alters those who are governed by the organization. The dialectical mapping exercise of "seeing" is crucial for explaining how the Chinese central state designs plans for environmental governance and mechanisms to enforce compliance at lower levels.

This framework of dialectical "seeing" is crucial for understanding mechanism design in 1) environmental governance and 2) attempts to couple mid-level cadres' actions to central-level policies and outcomes. For environmental governance, the state must first turn the environment into something that can be measured, perceived, and governed—or seen. How the Chinese state sees the environment (and those who have interest in the environment) shapes how the central state designs policies to effectively govern the environment. Furthermore, how the state sees the environment interacting with other things to govern (i.e., international norms, the economy, and civil society) determines the designs and mechanisms that the central government will institute in its environmental governance. To effectively see and thus govern the environment, the Chinese central state has engaged in a mapping exercise of sorts—the environment has been bounded into quantifiable goals that intersect and overlap with economic and social stability goals, rendering some parts of the environment as governable and actionable and others as terra nullius. Coal policies have been mapped, made legible, quantified, ordered, and standardized by central state elites—or designed. This is in part due to some high modernist ideal of improving life, but more concretely (and definitely less utopian), these policies were created in response to international pressure and a desire to take a leading role on the international stage, in response to a desire to fundamentally shift the economy towards green development and (more importantly) away from middle-income manufacturing, and in response to (perceived or real) civil societal pressure in major coastal cities.

In response to the highly visible and rampant corruption and implementation gaps in policy (and environmental policy more specifically), the central state has promoted a new model of top-level design governance (Yang and Jian 2018). The central state has made moves to shift meso-level and local state actors' incentives by changing the promotion evaluation criteria and the Constitution, as well as implementing new campaigns (such as the anti-corruption crackdown on "Tigers and Flies and the sweep away the black influences campaign). The central state views itself as a mechanism designer through these hard attempts at recentralizing the state power from the meso-level to the national. This is a category of practice that must be understood if we are to understand the changing incentive structures (for the carrot and the stick) for meso-level actors and the seriousness with which Beijing is implementing environmental policies. Before going into the empirics that exemplify the central state's move towards understanding itself as a mechanism designer, I first explain what a mechanism designer is and why the central state is so keen on seeing itself as such a designer.

Mechanism design is a useful category of analysis when a central actor (in organizations more broadly and the state specifically) structures incentives so that lower-level participants behave in a way that the central actor desires. Mechanism design focuses on two intertwined moments (the design and the mechanism); mechanism design refers to "designed interactions with a focus on the strategic incentives that they create" (Carroll 2019). First, I will focus on the design aspect and then transition to the empirical mechanisms designed to force meso-level implementation.

First introduced into English, the word design originally was more similar to designate. However, the meaning of design has shifted away from this original meaning and now means 1) to plan or to intend something and 2) to draw or trace out forms. Although these two definitions

are seen as distinct from both each other and its original meaning, they can be fruitfully combined. Here, I use design not only as "the process of inventing physical things which display new physical order, organization, form, in response to function" (Alexander 1964) or "the conscious and intuitive effort to impose meaningful order" (Papanek and Fuller 1972), but both; design is the process of planning intentional action to impose a meaningful order in an otherwise ambiguous setting and to designate an actor to carry out these actions. This combinatory definition of design "as form and order and designing as purposeful human action geared toward producing that order" (Murphy 2016) highlights the "directedness (Duranti 2015) towards an anticipated order and outcome, even if that push towards meaningful order is not successful. Thus, in order to design—which includes the designation of action to an agent—the designer must create incentives for the agent that structure the agent's actions towards the original design.

The Chinese central state and the Communist Party designs incentives for its lower-level actors so that they can close the implementation gap highlighted above. This implementation problem is why Beijing sees itself as a mechanism designer, trying to ensure acceptable outcomes by changing the incentives that lower-level state actors have, both positive and negative. When complete monitoring of agents and/or complete knowledge is untenable, the principal needs to align agents' actions to its designs (Holmström 1979). This is especially true in an organization like the CCP which has 91 million members and the Chinese state more broadly which includes 33 provincial-level regions, 334 prefecture-level divisions, 2,862 county-level divisions, 41,034 township-level administrations, and 704,382 basic level autonomies. Because of the sheer size of the Chinese state administration, Beijing thinks that they can control these lower-level actors if they can design the correct incentive structure. As an official in Henan said about the central state: "They want to make sure we do what they want so they induce us to do what they want by

threatening us or promoting us" (Interview 55). Beijing, seeing itself as the mechanism designer that must both select competent agents and then compel these agents to align their self-interested goals with those of the principal (Miller 2005), has paid particular attention to negative incentives. The process of demotion or removal involves an extensive repertoire of institutional mechanisms that "constitute a particularly big stick and within which pressures to comply can be uncomfortable, even excruciating" (Mertha 2017b). Beijing has designed hard and soft targets, as well as allowing for a tertiary category of localized targets, that officials must meet in order to continue as state or Party officials, win promotion, and avoid demotion.

Xi Jinping's new wave of hard recentralization has initiated by the central state to corral local level actors into being more responsive to environmental policies issued forth from the center by changing their incentive structures; using the provincial-level state as an intermediary, Beijing has used a plethora of tactics in order to incentivize the local-level state to implement its environmental policies (Wong and Karplus 2017). Beijing's tactics for holding local-level actors accountable for environmental governance include personnel management—demotion and promotion (Edin 2003; Li and Zhou 2005); cadre evaluation—adding environmental scored to the report card on which local-level actors are graded (Wang 2013); and adding environmental policies as veto targets—goals which if the local-level actor fails to meet result in automatic punishment (Birney 2014; Heberer and Trappel 2013; Shin 2017). By adding environmental policies to the veto target list, along with economic growth and social stability, the center is highlighting the importance and urgency of its environmental policies—although the urgency of its environmental policies may have less to do with environmental protection and more to do with self-preservation (Wang 2015) and concerns that by not acting on environmental issues the CCP and the national leaders, specifically, will lose legitimacy (Wang 2018). But, the report card is meaningless if state

actors do not follow directives from the center; state actors who defy Beijing are rarely in the position to argue that they scored well in stability maintenance and economic performance. As another Henan official put it: “You get demoted when you don’t follow orders” (Interview 56). These recentralization policies, changes in cadre and state actor evaluations, and Beijing’s urgency were all put in place in order to close the incentive gap and to change the central-meso-local relations in environmental governance processes.

Furthermore, at the 19th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in October 2017, Xi Jinping outlined the 14 basic tenets of Xi Jinping Thought, which were then formally enshrined in the constitution alongside Mao Zedong Thought and Deng Xiaoping Thought. Just as Maoist and Dengist Thought presented radical shifts in Chinese governance, Xi Jinping Thought represents a fundamental break from the politics of the last 40 years. The first tenet was to solidify that the Party—now firmly under the direct control of Xi—was supreme: "The Party exercises overall leadership over all areas of endeavor in every part of the country” (Xi 2014). The last tenet imposes strict Party oversight while “exercising full and rigorous governance over the Party” (Xi 2014). Taken individually, they highlight the new approach to centralization and Party management that were meant to reign in the freedoms of local officials under the Hu/Wen regime. And, when they are combined together, they show the full force of the recentralization campaign under Xi Jinping; the Party’s dominance over policymaking and Xi’s dominance over the Party to “resolutely correct misconduct in all its forms” (Xi 2014) finalized the process of recentralization and was instituted so that the CCP could effectively punish those who disregarded the incentive mechanisms that they designed, adding a further incentive to follow the center’s designs.

In addition to the hard attempts at recentralization under the authority of the central state, Beijing has also implemented new campaigns and programs to compel lower-level state actors to

implement Beijing's designs. Chief among these campaigns aimed at monitoring lower-level officials and enforcing compliance are 1) the anticorruption campaigns and 2) the sweep away the black influences campaign. These campaigns were designed and implemented "to make us [lower-level officials] follow their [central state] policies faithfully and resolutely" (Interview 6). These broad campaigns have been used extensively and for broad purposes by higher-level state actors and officials to punish lower-level officials for failure to enthusiastically comply with central policies.

In sum, Beijing sees itself as a designer of mechanisms that align meso-level and local-level state actors' agency to Beijing's desires. The central state is a principal with a clear idea of policy goals and a plan on implementing those goals but relies on lower-level state and Party officials to actually implement those designs. These meso-level agents of the central principal have promotion incentives alongside demotion and/or dismissal de-incentives that tie their actions to the designs of the central state. In carrying out the officially promulgated goals of the central state, though, meso-level actors also rely on lower-level state and party officials, creating a nested series of principal-agent relations and another level of design. While the mechanisms stay the same—meso-level actors have a say in their subordinates' promotion, demotion, or dismissal reports—the designs of meso-level actors may change in ways that allow for a reconfiguration of the central state's designs or, in some cases, even an outright refusal of those designs. This is in large part due to the non-rational interests of the agents both at the meso-level and the lower-level. Beijing designs mechanisms that assume rationality, but meso-level and lower-level actors have various interests including—but not limited to—the rational maximizing incentives designed by Beijing. The practice of mechanism design is crucial for understanding not only why Beijing has instituted the policies they have and how, but also for understanding the incentive structures and

relationships that meso-level actors navigate as they implement (or fail to implement) central policies.

Chinese environmental politics exemplify the process of mechanism design. Chinese environmental policies and processes are top-down, command-and-control designs that now have mechanisms attached to them to enforce faithful implementation.

Environmental Mechanism Design in China

The dominant mode of understanding Chinese environmental governance is through the lens of environmental authoritarianism (Lo 2015). Broadly defined, it is the "policy model that concentrates authority in a few executive agencies manned [sic] by capable and uncorrupt elites seeking to improve environmental outcomes" while limiting public participation to a "narrow cadre of scientific and technocratic elites" leading to "rapid and comprehensive" responses to environmental issues that usually limit some individual freedoms (Gilley 2012). Environmental authoritarianism conceptualizes a highly centralized system, led by a handful of elite bureaucratic agencies and agents at the central level, which then designs environmental policies (Beeson 2010; Gilley 2012; Shen and Shang 2020). Instead of nudging or using market-based solutions, like liberal democracies, the environmental authoritarian governance model highlights the use of mandatory policy instruments such as strict top-down plans which have clear targets and even clearer penalties for agents who fail to follow or comply (Schreifels, Fu and Wilson 2012). Because of the central state's willingness to address environmental issues and to enforce centralization through a more stringent disciplinary design, China is a typical case for understanding environmental authoritarian governance (Beeson 2010; Shen and Shang 2020; Wang and Jiang 2020) through goal setting.

Environmental authoritarianism differs from neoliberal, democratic environmental governance based on not only top-down command but also by the different stakeholders involved. Unlike in liberal democracies wherein the mass public pushes elites (both in the state through the ballot box and in business through consumption patterns), in authoritarian regimes the public is (nominally) silenced. Instead of being accountable to the public who may be experiencing the effects of environmental degradation, authoritarian regimes can successfully exclude the masses from environmental governance.

This distinct goal-based, top-down environmental governance process relies heavily on command-and-control regulation centered on bureaucratic targets and controls for local officials, who may be performing to the masses but are not beholden to them (Wang 2016a). It is this combination of many laws under the rubric of state planning and crisis scanning and responses beyond these laws that define China's environmental governance processes (Zhao et al. 2020). The CCP has vigorous enacted and established national priorities and goals articulated through Five-Year Plans, a flurry of environmental protection laws, and multiple and massive environmental campaigns to assert top-down control and to align various levels of governments with central policies. These environmental policies and correctional campaigns were reinforced by strengthening and centralizing environmental enforcement, overseen and directed by the Party (Kostka and Nahm 2017; Kostka and Zhang 2018; Van Rooij et al. 2017; Zhao et al. 2020). Early studies on Chinese environmental authoritarianism through goal setting "have been overwhelmingly positive in their assessment of its effectiveness, especially in the areas of pollution mitigation and energy policies" (Zheng et al. 2014), see also (Li et al. 2016; Li 2019).

However, more recent work during the beginning of the recentralization efforts under Xi Jinping, has problematized the successes of environmental authoritarianism and top-down

environmental governance processes. The biggest concerns focus on inconsistent compliance (Zhang 2017) caused by the dispersion of implementation ((Ahlers and Shen 2018; Eaton and Kostka 2014; Kostka 2016). These critiques help focus on an important point: there are nuances in Chinese environmental governance processes that must be investigated on site to understand the lived, on the ground conditions and the strategies chosen by officials as they implement or fail to implement policies. These critiques also lead us to ask important questions about why environmental policies are promulgated in the first place, especially in authoritarian regimes, and to whom elite environmental governance processes are accountable. The answers to these questions help explain tight and loose implementation of environmental laws, policies, programs, and campaigns in rural China.

The crucial importance of environmental policies to Chinese statecraft can be seen both at the national and international level. In order to promote economic development and avoid social unrest, the Chinese state has undergone extensive changes to their policies and politics at the (sub)national level. In order to become a driver—rather than a passenger—on the international stage, China has also sought to leverage environmental policies and outcomes to gain power and prestige, especially as the United States has taken a back seat since 2016.

In response to rampant corruption and implementation gaps in policy, the central state has promoted a new model of top-level design governance (Yang and Jian 2018). This hard attempt at recentralizing the Chinese state have made local level actors more responsive to environmental policies issued forth from the center; using the provincial-level state as an intermediary, Beijing has used a plethora of tactics in order to incentivize the local-level state to implement its environmental policies (Wong and Karplus 2017). Beijing's tactics for holding local-level actors accountable for environmental governance include personnel management—demotion and

promotion (Edin 2003; Li and Zhou 2005); cadre evaluation—adding environmental scored to the report card on which local-level actors are graded (Wang 2013); and adding environmental policies as veto targets—goals which if the local-level actor fails to meet result in automatic punishment (Birney 2013; Heberer and Trappel 2013; Shin 2017). By adding environmental policies to the veto target list, along with economic growth and social stability, the center is highlighting the importance and urgency of its environmental policies—although the urgency of its environmental policies may have less to do with environmental protection and more to do with self-preservation (Wang 2015) and concerns that by not acting on environmental issues the CCP and the national leaders, specifically, will lose legitimacy (Wang 2018). These recentralization policies, changes in cadre and state actor evaluations, and Beijing's urgency were all put in place in order to close the incentive gap and to change the central-meso-local relations in environmental governance processes.

Internal political and economic incentives, though, are not the only interests acting on Chinese environmental governance processes. Both the international community and the central state's desire to be a global leader in the international community push the central state into taking seriously environmental governance. Environmental movements and norms at the suprastate level have begun to gain traction in China, and these movements and norms have influenced the upper echelons of the Chinese state dating back to the Hu/Wen regime. In addition to these semi-democratic mechanisms of popular support affecting state action, a threat to China and the Chinese state's image at the international level can explain some environmental governance processes. As the Politburo seeks to become a driver on the international stage, environmental politics became an instrument to strategically use to claim Chinese leadership in international meetings.

The central state's desire to shift the Chinese economy from "the workshop of the world" to one driven by domestic consumption and new technologies combined with external pressures from the international community (suprastate organizations, international nongovernmental organizations, and developed countries) and internal stakeholders (most notably labor and civil society actors and organizations within China) to create a new state-led model of economic development in the Chinese countryside. The reliance on manufacturing and extractive industries has not only destroyed the Chinese countryside, but it has also drastically limited economic potential. As the Chinese state tries to dismount their economy from the treadmill of production and extraction that has hitherto been the hallmark of their economic development strategy, a new environmental economic and political regime has been created. The central policies designed in order to govern the environment effectively and uniformly have also created mechanisms to ensure compliance with these policies. But, as I will show throughout this dissertation, meso-level actors often reject or reconfigure these central designs. The next section will explain the political structures and processes that allow for meso-level agents to accept, reconfigure, and/or reject central designs.

Political Structures: The Meso-Level as Both Principal and Agent

The separation of meso-level and lower-level state and Party officials is another crucially important intervention of this dissertation, as well as understanding the role of these actors in environmental governance and the politics of economic development. The concept of the local state in China is too broad to be theoretically or empirically useful; China's state administrative hierarchy is officially divided into six nested rungs (central, provincial, prefecture, county, township, and basic level autonomy which includes villages, communities, and the street-level). In the literature, it is common to lump all five subnational government rungs into the "local state"

(Jin, Qian and Weingast 2005; Nahm 2017; Oi 1995; Spires 2011). In two important articles both published in the same year, Marc Blecher (2002) examined the local state in Tianjin and their responses to laid-off worker protest and Hurst and O'Brien (2002) examined a similar response across local states including Datong, Luoyang, and Shanghai. Whereas Tianjin (the Jin in the oft-studied Jing-Jin-Ji) and Shanghai (part of the equally often studied Yangtze River Delta) are both municipalities and treated as provinces, Datong and Luoyang are prefecture-level cities in the north-central hinterlands with much different relationships to the center, interests, and institutional freedoms. In Henan province, Luoyang is further lumped into the local state with "one of the poorest villages in Sheqi County" (O'Brien 1996); rural villages in Zhejiang (Deng and O'Brien 2013) are in the same category as Hangzhou (the capital of Zhejiang and a major city in the Yangtze River Delta) (Ahlers and Shen 2018); and street-level officials in Beijing and Shenzhen (Lee and Zhang 2013) are treated as similar to as the provincial-level municipal and city-level officials in Beijing and Guangdong (Spires 2011).

In addition to lumping five rungs of the state into one singular category, the locus of academics' interest in the local Chinese state has been primarily in three places: Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei (Jing-Jin-Ji), Shanghai and its surrounding areas (Yangtze River Delta, often shortened to YRD), and Shenzhen and Guangzhou (part of the Pearl River Delta, or the PRD). "Most studies of urban and regional governance in China have been based on data gathered in the relatively developed and internationalized provinces of southeastern China, where city-level units enjoy more resources, wealth, and access to the global economy" (Jaros 2014). These metropolitan centers function as showcases—or "theaters of state power" (Blockmans 2003)—which are not representative of most of Chinese politics. As is clear from past work by (Shirk 1993), (Goodman 1997), and others, there are major differences in how Beijing and provinces approach development

and even how central-local relations function between wealthier coastal regions and lagging interior regions.

FIGURE 1: LOCAL-LEVEL STATE

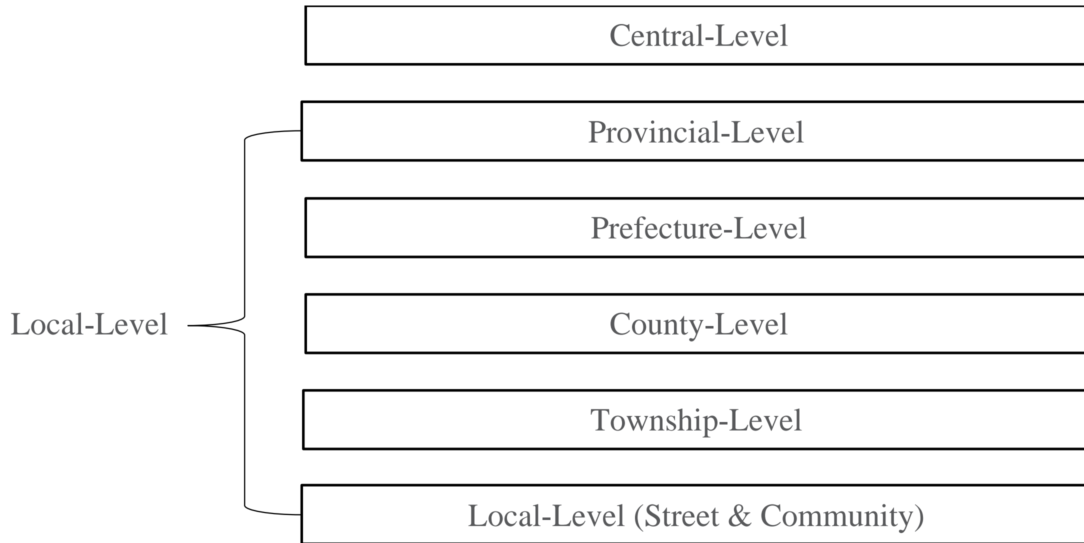
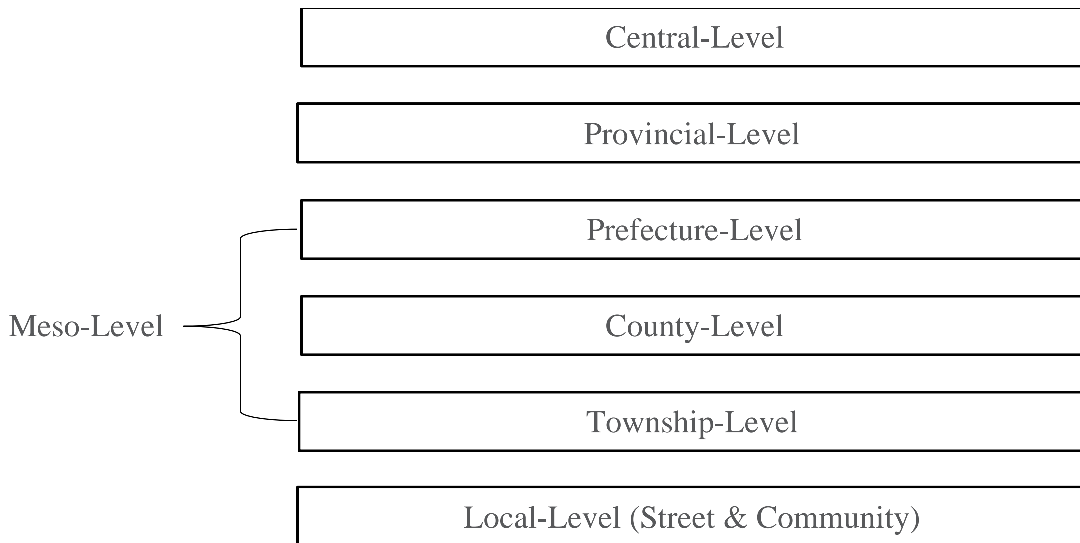


FIGURE 2: MESO-LEVEL STATE



There is a dichotomy between the coast (the Pearl River Delta, Yangtze River Delta, and Jing-Jin-Ji are all coastal) and the hinterlands. It is unclear to what extent findings from these areas generalize to inland regions with poorer, more closed, and more state-oriented economies. Inland provinces are a key for urban and regional governance, but policymaking is a multilevel process

in which meso-level, central, and local actors maneuver to advance their respective priorities. These meso-level actors, especially in the central provinces, are often ignored but this dissertation takes seriously the meso-level state as political actors. Situated as an interstice between the national and the local, embedded in Beijing's power structures and accountable to the locals, sub-provincial state actors do much of Chinese statecraft. By changing the scales at which we study the Chinese state, I am better able to understand the empirical functioning of the state while also being better able to theorize about the quotidian running of the state.

The meso-level officials whom I interviewed at the prefecture-level (e.g., Taiyuan), county-level (e.g., Taigu County), township-level (e.g., Shuixiu Township), and village-level (e.g., Baicun Village) would not only all be referred to as local in the literature, but would be considered at the same level as the megalopolis Jing-Jin-Ji and the cities in Pearl River and Yangtze River Deltas. By disaggregating the local into sub-provincial meso-level, I am able to highlight the meso-level and the interstitial role of these actors between the central state and the grassroots. This disaggregation also allows for better purchase on nested principal-agent relationships, a necessity in policy implementation from the center to low-level officials. Meso-level officials are the prism through which policies are implemented, going in as policy-as-written from central-level and provincial-level state officials and then accepted, reconfigured, or rejected by the meso-level officials. For policies, there is one pathway down from the higher levels and many pathways out from the meso-level.

The meso-level is also where much of Chinese statecraft happens. Meso-level officials interact with citizens (unlike central- and provincial-level officials) while having to maintain stability beyond a specific incident (unlike local officials). There are more meso-level officials than provincial-level officials and meso-level officials have administrative staff members (unlike

local-level officials). Meso-level officials have more resources (unlike provincial-level officials), and they have the ability to use, disperse, and manage land (unlike local-level officials), thereby increasing local economic development; whereas provincial-level officials are oriented towards macro-economic and long-term development and local-level officials are not as focused on economic development compared to stability maintenance, meso-level officials manage small- and medium-sized enterprises, private firms, local government financial vehicles, and public-private partnerships. Meso-level officials also have the administrative capacity to enact their own interests (unlike local-level officials) while only occasionally being surveilled by the central state (unlike provincial officials who are—or believe they are—constantly monitored and "seen" by superiors in Beijing).

The provincial state in China is underfunded and understaffed, especially compared to the meso-level, and has their interests and administrative capabilities tied closely to the center. Provincial officials seek promotion and increased status and reputation, hoping that they will be folded into the central level. Local-level officials seek to dominate and use their power within their limited jurisdiction, sometimes legitimately and sometimes illegitimately. Meso-level officials have to juggle interacting with superiors and subordinates, promotion and stagnation, and their own personal ties to the communities in which they live and work.

The mechanism design literature and the literature on the Chinese state often focuses exclusively on a dyadic principal-agent relationship; the central state is the principal, mechanism designer while every other state actor (who are called "local" actors or the "local" state in the Chinese state literature) is the agent tasked with figuring out and implementing the central state's desires. Not only does this ignore nested principal-agent relationships, but it also conflates different levels of the state with different material and institutional powers and freedoms into one

single, unitary actor: the local state. Rather, it is analytically, methodologically, and empirically prudent to disaggregate out the meso-level because of their role as both principal and agent, their different orientations and interactions with superiors and subordinates, their roles as mediators between the public and the state, and their personal and professional interests.

Because state legibility projects are primarily theorized from the state, we know more about the motivations and actions of central state elites than how people respond to state actors. This, though, does not mean that we should not investigate the central state's designs, but rather that we must examine the designs alongside with the actions of those who are "seen" or whose actions have been designed. The mechanisms that the state creates to invoke compliance with its designs are crucial because they are constitutive of state designs. State leaders at higher levels restrict the scope of action and capacity of lower-level actors both in the policies that they design and the mechanisms of control that put into these policies. The central state designs internal control by adding environmental targets (standardized, categorized, and quantified) to the cadre report card, making some hard veto targets and other softer. By doing this the central state is determining what must be seen and acted on and what the lower-level actors can hide. For lower-level state actors, the promotion tournament and career ladder has many new standards, and the "nice thing about standards is that there are so many to choose from" (Kelty 2008), p. 143). The strategic, political actions of the lower-level state and party officials comes from the myriad designs of the central state in regard to environmental, economic, and social stability maintenance projects and the playing of certain mechanisms of control off of one another. Because there are so many standards from which to choose, meso-level officials engaged in processes of accepting some standards, reconfiguring some, and outright rejecting others.

Political Processes: Meso-level Actors' Resourcefulness

I call the process of accepting, reconfiguring, and/or rejecting "resourcefulness." This process is interstitial because it is located at niches between the power structures (building off Michael Mann's (1986) use of interstitial) of the central state, civil society, and capital—the meso-level bureaucracies of the Chinese states. Different pressures, interests, logics, mechanisms, and designs come into contact at the meso-level and, once there, conflict. Not only does the state most clearly and importantly interact with the market at the meso-level, but it also engages with civil society and labor.

Not only are the offices interstitial, but so too are the people. The cadres and officials who are key actors in Chinese statecraft and the acceptance, reconfiguration, and/or rejection of the central state's designs are positioned between and within power structures and their main duties revolve around connecting these power structures together. Interstitial also highlights the differential monitoring that meso-level state actors have from Beijing. Although the common refrain of "heaven is high and the emperor is far away" highlights the independence of regional actors, for some of these actors the emperor is closer than for others. The second meaning of interstitial moves beyond the idea of an interstice as a physical niche; building on Roman Catholic ordination, interstices are also periods of time between promotions (or as the case may be in China, demotions) where officials are encouraged to work on secondary projects as well as their primary objective (promotion). Interstices, then as they are being used here, are bureaus and bureaucrats located between the central state and the local, between citizens and the state, and between capital and the state and these bureaucrats (for the most part, although as I will show later not always) are hoping for promotion out of the interstice which requires them to work on many different and competing state projects simultaneously.

The differing and competing state projects and standards—a hallmark of the Chinese state—is where the concept of resourcefulness is an important theoretical intervention. By resourcefulness, I meant the ability to demystify or de-fog competing policies to figure out which policies must be implemented as written, which can be reconfigured to suit official's personal and professional wants, and which can be rejected. Resourcefulness includes know-how—the understanding of the rules of the game and the understanding and ability to use those rules to one's own benefit. Resourcefulness is also the ability to cope with the unknown; rather than viewing uncertainty as a constraint, resourceful officials view uncertainty as an opportunity for them to use their agency to push forward their own personal and professional goals. Resourcefulness also includes ingenuity and astuteness; to be resourceful, officials must have the skills and the creativity to work with others to successfully reconfigure or reject policies. Finally, resourcefulness is the ability to get oneself out of trouble and to avoid punishments for failing to faithfully implement policies; avoiding monitoring and punishment, especially during recentralization and increased bureaucratization, involves craftiness and wiles.

While defining resourcefulness, it is also necessary to define what is not resourcefulness. Standard bureaucracy—wherein top-down designs are more effective, officials were higher performing and succeeded at implementing as many environmental policies as possible, and officials bought into the recentralization efforts and the ethos of environmental policies—is not resourceful. In standard bureaucratization, officials do not have to use their resourcefulness to figure out how to move forward or how to implement some policies while ignoring other policies; there is no know-how, no uncertainty, no ingenuity beyond the confines of the policies as written, and no avoidance of superiors or punishment. Standard defiance—wherein officials are either (1) bad at their jobs or make mistakes or (2) comply with bureaucratic mandates when inspected—is

also not a resourceful process. When officials cock up (Mann 1986) their job, they are not acting with ingenuity or creativity. When officials ceremonially comply (Meyer and Rowan 1977), they are not using their know-how nor are they avoiding punishments through astuteness or their understandings of the leeway available in policies as they are written.

The central Chinese state—as a mechanism designer—creates policies knowing that the officials who are tasked with implementing these policies will engage in acts that are both hidden from the central state and based on knowledge that is also hidden from the central state. But, the central state also hides their knowledge from the implementing actors; there exists an informational asymmetry going both from and towards the central state. Because the central state provides competing policies to be implemented and no blueprint for meso-level actors, they must use their available resources, their resourcefulness, and their (not insignificant) insight in order to determine how to best act. These resources are not just material, but cultural and relational. The process by which meso-level state actors determine which policies they can ignore, which they can reconfigure, and which they must faithfully implement is what is meant by resourcefulness.

This resourcefulness is different from both social skill (Fligstein 1997; Fligstein 2001) and institutional entrepreneurs (Battilana, Leca and Boxenbaum 2009). Whereas social skill is important for highlighting the ability of actors to engage outside of their institutional structures as dupes, the focus of skilled actors—and the skills the marshal—are to induce collective action, mainly in the form of a challenger carving out an institutional niche or confronting incumbents. Skilled actors use their own social skill—a craftiness maybe instead of an ability to craft—to challenge, either covertly (cf. covert action) or overtly in direct power struggles. Institutional entrepreneurs are actors who leverage resources to create new or transform existing institutions (Battilana, Leca and Boxenbaum 2009; DiMaggio 1988; Garud, Hardy and Maguire 2007;

Maguire, Hardy and Lawrence 2004). Institutional resourcefulness is neither about (trans)forming institutions or solely about actors' ability to leverage resources. Resourcefulness similar to bricolage, but whereas bricolage is constructing something with a clear, fixed idea of what you need to build, and the resources required to build it, resourcefulness is both the process of figuring out what needs to be built, how to do it, and with what tools.

Resourcefulness helps us to understand both the structural and personal actions of meso-level state actors and the differential interests, values, and relations that these actors have and use. Meso-level actors have differing personal and institutional priorities due to their location at the interstice of lateral institutions, pressures, interests, and designs. Meso-level state actors are accountable to not only the central and local state, but also capital and civil society, including labor.

The emergence of these pressures, interests, designs, and control mechanisms is as important as the ways in which meso-level actors resolve these conflicts by accepting, reconfiguring, or rejecting state policies. This constellation then explains the level of decoupling from central designs, from no decoupling to complete rejection of the policies.

METHODS

For this study, the people whose deeds are to be studied are sub-provincial, meso-level state actors and Communist Party cadres; coal miners, managers, and bosses; and government operated non-governmental organization members. These actors are embedded in social structures and contexts that are complex, sometimes to the point of illegibility, and shifting, but their deeds—past, present, and future—are not simply determined by these shifting complex structures (Bartley 2007; Clemens 2007; Djelic and Quack 2003). There are indeed impersonal forces at work, but how those structures penetrate these actors, how these actors assimilate these structures, and how they are resisted, reconfigured, and/or rejected are a key part of this study. This is not just a

methodological point, but a theoretical point that drives forward this dissertation project. Meso-level state actors' resistance, reconfigurations, and rejections are a key part of how the state in China functions—in regard to the national state, capital, and labor—and understanding under what circumstances local state actors resist, reconfigure, and/or reject cannot be understood solely as a function of state or economic structures or (a priori) interests independent of the person and context.

The forgotten middle—both the actors themselves and the sites where they act—is full of sociological and historical agents whose actions fundamentally shape the course of the Chinese state, which has global ramifications and theoretical implications for understanding the developmental state. Meso-level state actors—whether at the street-, village-, township-, county-, or prefecture city-levels—are directly tasked with driving forward economic growth, maintaining stability, and enforcing the myriad of policies enacted by Beijing—a synecdoche for the central state, Communist Party ruling organs, and—since 2012—Xi Jinping.

With this in mind, I have chosen to focus on the sub-provincial meso-level state, local coal workers and bosses, and provincial organizations in Shanxi and Henan because they represent the "critical points of [the] intersection of scales and units of analysis and [thus] can directly examine the negotiation of interconnected social actors across multiple scales" (Gille and Riain 2002). These key actors are interstices between the local, national, and international; labor and capital; and state and society more broadly, allowing me to see the lived experiences of statecraft most clearly. The periphery—meso-level state actors in the Chinese interior hinterland, the coal sector as a fossil of the past, and organizations that are neither free from the state nor given the resources of the state—is central to understanding the relationships between the state and various vertical and horizontal hierarchies, the state and capital, and the state and labor.

I conducted 12 months of ethnographic research (May 2018, August 2018 to July 2019) coupled with 148 semi-structured interviews in Shanxi and Henan provinces in North-Central China. The only way to understand the rejections, reconfigurations, and acceptances of policy—statecraft in other words—is by observing state managers and the only way to understand the role of capital and labor in the developmental state is to observe coal bosses and workers and their interactions both with each other and with the state. Observation, though, is rarely enough; in order to understand the motivations, and thus the actions, of these actors, I asked them, sometimes while observing their behavior and other times during an interview. The rest of this section will detail how I found my informants and gained access and trust followed by detailing who I observed and interviewed.

While in the field, I found and connected with my research subjects mainly through snowball sampling and guerrilla interviewing. During the two years that I previously lived in China, I cultivated connections with local Communist Party officials in Shanxi and Henan, as well as with professors, workers, and students. These contacts proved invaluable to me as I conducted my research by allowing me to gain a foot in the door with future informants; for some of my research subjects, I would not have been able to interview them or observe their actions without a recommendation from these key gatekeepers.

Furthermore, I made contacts with government operated non-governmental organizations (GONGOs) who in turn would connect me to informants. By working with quasi-non-governmental organizations, I was able to meet with state officials, Communist Party members, coal managers, and miners. The relationships that I cultivated through these organizations allowed me to gain more access to a wider swathe of subjects. For example, I have made contacts with the workers in the Shanxi Coal Museum who introduced me to both state bureaucrats and coal

managers. GONGOs also highlight an important aspect of Chinese civil society: it is not an independent third sphere separate from and in opposition to the state, as it is commonly conceived of in the West. Rather than view the public sphere as a free space wherein the middle class can come together to act out their interests, it is important to recognized that the Chinese state surveilles, curtails, subsumes, and punishes organizations in the third realm (Huang 1993). That, though, is not to say that there are not groups independent from and in opposition to the state, just that most formally-organized groups have less institutional and ideological leeway than their counterparts in Western, liberal democracies.

I was able to use the established network connections to further my research; through snowball sampling, I was able to gain legitimacy in the eyes of those whom I interviewed and made them much more willing to talk to me in the first place and much more comfortable discussing subjects that may have been more taboo with a stranger. Although snowball sampling was very helpful, it was not without its difficulties. A few informants were unwilling to "sponsor" me for fear that my research would lead to retaliation—one informant joked that—after helping me secure interviews with other informants—if any Party or state officials asked me any questions about who was providing me with information, I should mention one of his colleagues because my informant "had an eye on his job for years." (Interview 2018).

However, few were unwilling to help for fear of retaliation. Rather than hurt me, my status as a sympathetic foreigner, simultaneously knowledgeable about their plight and ignorant of the depth of their struggles (Solinger 2006), allowed me to gain trust and further interview participants. Not only has the ability to recognize that these actors—who are often ignored in the social science literature—are indeed sociological subjects and drivers of history allowed me access to their knowledge, but convincing them that they are indeed subjects worthy of study allowed me to gain

greater access to their lived experiences. Furthermore, my status as a University of California, Los Angeles Ph.D. student allowed me to gain entree to spaces and people who would normally be wary of both foreigners and academics. Because government and party officials knew of UCLA and knew that I was not going to share data with either government or party officials in China, they were more willing to engage with me and my research.

I was also able to use messaging services like WeChat and QQ, to connect with more research subjects more easily. WeChat groups have also been very helpful in meeting new informants; as well-respected and well-connected informants created messaging groups and added me to preexisting groups, my entrée into the field site and ability to conduct interviews was made easier. Because of their distance from Beijing—both physically and in terms of importance—few informants were unwilling to use an Internet-based—and thus hypothetically monitored—messaging service. Once I returned to America, though, that number increased; while in Shanxi and Henan, people were more than willing to communicate via messaging apps, but fewer are willing to send international messages because they believe that their messages are more likely to be checked by censoring bureaus—these beliefs further bolster by an increasingly tense relationship between Beijing and Washington.

In addition to my key contacts and snowball sampling—which might run the risk of only observing or interviewing a closed circle—I engaged in what "guerrilla interviewing" (Gold 2019). The basic premise, and one that I had much success with before, is that I engaged people on the street in seemingly idle conversation. Because most places of work were originally closed to me, I would sometimes engage workers—both state managers and coal miners and managers—during their free time when they left their gated workplaces. Sometimes this involved me going to shopping centers like malls, open air markets, grocery stores, or food stands; going near schools

during afternoon or evening pick up times; or even going to places of leisure like pool halls, mahjong rooms, or card or chess tables set up on the side of roads.

My status as a foreigner was able to help me begin interviewing when engaging in guerrilla tactics; instead of being skeptical of me seemingly randomly approaching them in public, most informants were happy that I was engaging them in Mandarin Chinese and that they were being seen talking to a foreigner, conferring on them some status; it was not uncommon for my informants—or taxi drivers, for that matter—to exhibit me to their friends by taking me to where their friends were socializing—often a card, mahjong, or pool table—and proudly exclaim something along the lines of "look at my foreign friend who wants to talk to me." In places where outsiders—both from other provinces in China and other countries—are uncommon and only seen on television or the Internet, the rarity of outsiders bestows whoever is seen talking with the outsider with a status bump. This is especially true in both rural Shanxi and Henan where foreigners are rare.

Through snowball sampling and guerrilla interviewing, I conducted 93 interviews with key informants and government officials and a further 53 with coal miners; I interviewed 146 people over 12 months and observed countless more. Semi-structured, but in-depth, interviews (lasting no less than 30 minutes and averaging around 1.5 hours, although some involved multiple day trips) with government officials, Party members, and with the workers themselves allowed me to gain a clearer picture of the Chinese political and social reality, especially because there is often a paucity of reliable quantitative data. Semi-structured interviews also allowed me the freedom to pursue topics as they arise; instead of sticking to a pre-written script of questions, I had a set of guiding questions that provided a base for the interview. Interviews, when coupled with ethnographic observations, allowed me to confront instances of attitudinal fallacies—when self-

reported attitudes and behaviors conflict with the actual lived realities and experiences (Jerolmack and Khan 2014)—that occur.

Of those who I interviewed (most of whom I observed in action), 77 were in Shanxi, 66 in Henan, and 3 in Beijing (see the interview table). I interviewed seven people in the Shanxi and Henan Environmental Protection Bureaus, respectively, as well as three Environmental Police officers in Shanxi and a Ministry of Ecology and Environment official in Beijing. I also interviewed two tax officials in both Shanxi and Henan. In addition to these state officials, I interviewed and observed 26 Party officials in Shanxi and another 22 in Henan. In Shanxi, I interviewed and observed 1 provincial-level, 4 prefecture-level, 13 county-level, and 8 township-level or below officials. In Henan, I interviewed and observed 1 provincial-level, 7 prefecture-level, 5 county-level, and 9 township-level and below officials. As for coal managers, in Shanxi, I interviewed and observed 9 (6 legal and 3 illegal) and in Henan 5 (4 legal and 1 illegal). In Shanxi, I interviewed 28 coal miners (21 legally employed and 7 in illegal mines) and in Henan 25 (16 employed in legal mines and 9 in illegal mines). In addition, I embedded myself in one GONGO is Shanxi and 3 (GO)NGO in Henan. I also interviewed two academics in Shanxi (one at each Shanxi University and Shanxi Agricultural University), five in Henan (at Henan University), and two in Beijing (one at each Peking University and North China Electricity and Power University). Not only was I able to interview and observe state and Party managers and coal managers and miners, but I was also able to supplement these interviews and observations with academics and (GO)NGO embedded within extractive industries.

TABLE 3: INTERVIEWS

	Shanxi	**Henan**	**Beijing**
(GO)NGO*	1	3	
Environmental Protection Bureau	10	7	
Ministry of Ecology and Environment			1
Academics**	2	5	2
Tax Office	2	2	
Party Officials	26	22	
Province-level	1	1	
Prefecture-level	4	7	
County-level	13	5	
Township-level	8	9	
Coal Bosses	9	5	
Legal	3	4	
Illegal	6	1	
Coal Miners***	27	24	
Legal	21	16	
Illegal	6	8	
Total	77	68	3
*Counted by organization, not discrete interviews			
**Too few to disaggregate and ensure confidentiality			
***Often were conducted in groups			

The participant-observation data that I collected varied according to access as well as sector—I was unfortunately only able to observe in low-level state meetings, often being encouraged to observe meetings in lower-level state bureaus while being denied entry to meetings at a higher-level (even more unfortunately, I was not allowed to participate in statecraft). That being said, I was able to sit in on various meetings at the local level of the state, from meetings discussing how to deal with illegal coal mining to meetings concerning the possibility of future labor protests. In addition to official meetings, I was able to join lunch and dinner banquets, which is where a surprisingly high percentage of state business is conducted. I was able to participate and observe banquets held not only by state managers, but also by coal managers and even miners. I was able to observe but unable to actually participate in coal mining at the point of production—in open pit mines, I was allowed to observe coal miners in action, but was forbidden from entering

mineshafts for safety reasons. I also observed a few labor protests ranging in size from three people to a much more substantial involvement, but importantly did not participate. The triangulation of the lived experiences of my informants, their answers to questions, and macro-level quantitative date allows for a fuller picture of the role of the local state as an interstice between the national state, other local state actors, capital, and labor.

Although participant observation and interviewing these key actors are the dominant methods I engaged in this dissertation project, in order to more fully understand the impersonal structures in which these actors operate, I supplemented my research with secondary sources and primary quantitative date where applicable. This allows me to get a greater purchase in understanding the extra-local (beyond the micro-interactions within the here-and-now) and socio-historical context (Burawoy 1991) in which these meso-level actors act.

In order to prepare my pre-written set of base questions, in order to double-check my interviewees' responses, and in order to obtain a fuller picture of the political and economic reality of daily life in China, I used secondary sources. Having access to public and government libraries in China allowed me to use a wide array of statistical and demographic data, both from the United States and China; journal articles and scholarly books, written in both English and Chinese; newspaper databases and, while in China, daily periodicals; official documents; and web-based social media sites such as WeChat, QQ, and Weibo. Secondary sources are necessary for widening the scope of ethnographic and interview-based data and useful for theorizing and generalizing about the interactions that I observe.

In addition to using secondary sources to widen the scope of my observations and interviews, I used secondary sources in order to further explain causality. State managers at the (sub)provincial level and their relationships with other state actors and coal managers and coal

miners and their relationships with each other and the state are not fixed entities enacting their specific attributes, but these are all formed historically and sociologically. How (sub)provincial state and Party officials were shaped and reshaped and how their relationships with one another were configured, reconfigured, and/or made meaningful are important questions that are necessary for understanding state and Party officials observed actions and answers. The same is true of coal miners and managers. Instead of treating these actors as fixed entities and their deeds as discrete outcomes caused by a priori "interests," either rational action (see Coleman 1994 for rational action as a basis of causality) or as the intersection of desires, beliefs, and opportunities (Hedström and Ylikoski 2010). Instead of these assumptions inherent in fixed entity epistemology, I follow Hirschman and Reed's (2014) "formation stories" and I lay out the formation of these meso-level actors as sociological and political actors in their own right.

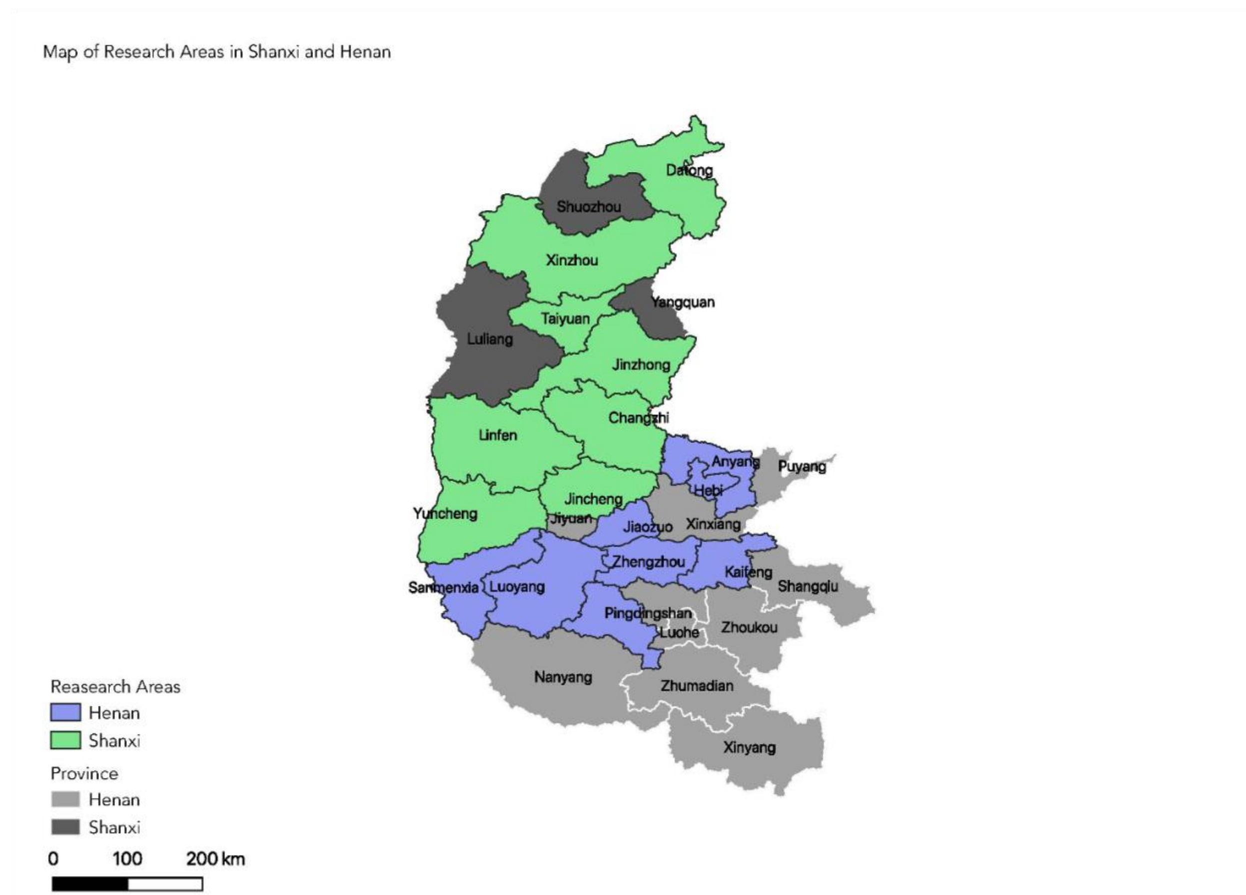
SITE

Coal is not mined throughout China. Chinese coal fields are located mainly in North-Central China, where some of the largest coal reserves in the world lay in the shallow earth under the Loess Plateau. Inland China has historically and recently relied on coal production for the bulk of its economic development; from heavy manufacturing and steel production to coal mining, North-Central China is more coal-reliant than Beijing and the rest of China. And, because this study focused on the meso-level state and its interactions with labor, capital, and other state actors, that is where I will focus this study.

My framework necessitates a principal area of analysis: Shanxi and Henan provinces in North-Central China. Coal is king in Shanxi and a regional lord in Henan. Located in North-Central China, Shanxi is China's largest coal producing province. In 2015, Shanxi mined almost 1 billion tons of coal, which accounted for over a quarter of China's total coal production and produced

over 50 million tons more than China's next largest coal producing province (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2016). This represents an increase in coal production, both gross and as a percentage, from 2012; Shanxi coal production increased by 10 percent, approximately 100 million tons, over three years (Lin et al. 2018). In 2016, Shanxi was hit the hardest by Beijing's anti-coal policies (IEA 2018), mining and consuming less coal than Inner Mongolia. But, by 2017, Shanxi coal production and consumption were back on the rise (IEA 2018). For most of Shanxi's history, coal production and consumption have been a way of life, contributing to economic and political power, as well as defining the dominant cultural ethos.

MAP 1: MAP OF RESEARCH AREA



Since the early 1900s, Shanxi has poured most of its local resources into coal production. Between 1994 and 2018, an average of more than 18 percent of the labor force in Shanxi worked in coal mining, and, at its peak in 2013, more than 1 in 5 urban workers in Shanxi were coal miners; 103,000 toiled in the mines of Shanxi (16 percent of all coal miners and 22 percent of all workers in Shanxi). Coal mines are the largest employer in Shanxi (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2016). In contrast to the commonly studied sunbelt (and the Pearl River Delta), Shanghai (and the Yangtze River Delta), and Beijing (and the surrounding Jing-Jin-Ji area composed of Beijing, Tianjin, and Hebei whose provincial nickname is Ji), the percentage of the urban workforce employed in the financial, information technology, and research sectors is extremely low; only 6.7% of the urban workforce in Shanxi has high-skill employment. Additionally, the percentage employed in manufacturing (with a plurality of the manufacturing jobs available in heavy industry, i.e., coal-reliant) and construction is relatively low. Not only is coal king, but there is a dearth of both high- and low-skilled jobs outside of the coal mines available to Shanxi workers. Additionally, coal jobs are good jobs; Shanxi miners, on average, earned 68,633 CNY, compared to the provincial average of 46,407 CNY and the national average 51,483 CNY. By focusing my research in Shanxi, I am studying the largest coal mining region in the world's largest coal consumer.

More specifically, in Shanxi, I spent time researching in Taiyuan, the provincial capital and largest city located in central Shanxi near the Gujiao mines; Datong, the second largest city, located near Inner Mongolia and the Tashan minefield; the Fenxi, Liliu, and Xishan mines located between Taiyuan and Datong; and Changzhi and Jincheng, located near the coalfields of southeastern Shanxi. The field sites are thus both urban and rural, seats of state power and mines run by local coal bosses, and the provincial capital and second largest city to small county-level governments with few people and less economic development.

The proposed framework is principally concerned with comparisons between locales within Shanxi and Henan provinces. Comparing Shanxi and its coal producing neighbors to the east (Henan) would allow for greater theoretical leverage. I am able to compare how local states interact with the other state bureaus, labor, and capital in one province where coal is king (Shanxi) and another where coal is an important local sector in the northwest, but not as important on the provincial level (Henan). In 2017, Shanxi produced 872 million tons of coal (which would make it the world's second largest coal producing country) and Henan only mined 118 million tons (which would make it the eighth largest coal producing country in the world), most of which was mined along the Henan-Shanxi border in the northwest (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2018). Like Shanxi, Henan is a middle to poor province that is reliant on low-skilled jobs for the bulk of its economic activity. A little fewer than 30 percent of urban workers in Henan work in manufacturing and approximately 16 percent work in construction. Compared to the 1 out of 5 mining workers in Shanxi, in Henan 1 out of 22 urban workers labor in Henan's mines; 62,600 people mined in Henan (9.8 percent of all coal miners and 5.8 percent of all workers in Henan). This non-reliance on coal on a provincial level means that there is an abundance of other low-skilled jobs available to laid-off or furloughed workers, that capital is more varied by sector, and that the local state has a different configuration of interests in regard to the coal industry. But, coal jobs are the best of these low skilled jobs; in Henan, mine workers earned 51,158 CNY, or 134 percent of the provincial average of 38,301 CNY. Comparing local and provincial responses and worker responses to their newfound precarity in places where coal is not king allows for a better understanding of the role of local and regional political economies and histories on the everyday interactions between labor, capital, and other bureaus of the state.

Specifically, in Henan, I spent time in the two largest cities (Zhengzhou, the capital, and Kaifeng). Additionally, I conducted research in the major mining regions: In the north of Henan, Anyang (with its large mines and steel production) and Hebi (the only producer of meager lean coal in China); Jiaozou and Yima, both located in the northwest along the Shanxi-Henan border; and Pingdingshan, a prefecture-level city in south-central Henan. Like in Shanxi, the field sites represent a good variation of urban and rural, prefecture-level cities and the provincial capital, mining and manufacturing areas, and a wide array of economic development.

OVERVIEW OF THE DISSERTATION

The empirical chapters of this dissertation focus on meso-level officials' resourcefulness in their (failure to) implement environmental policies and the specific constellation of interests that meso-level officials have, create, and use as they resourcefully (fail to) implement policies. The constellation of interests includes the material and cultural importance of coal to the region (Chapter 2), specific enterprises and their logics of capital (Chapter 3), civil society and labor (Chapter 4), and other state officials (Chapter 5). Although the central state attempts to control all of these independent interests (material importance through macro-economic policies, enterprises through socialism with Chinese characteristics, civil society through social stability maintenance projects and surveillance that leave little room for independent action, and recentralization efforts to tie lower-level state officials to the center), the central state is not totalizing and meso-level officials have the resourcefulness to use existing interests, create interests anew, and bundle competing interests as they attempt to elide policy implementation.

Chapter 2 (The Formation of the Case) provides historical background about the political economy of development in Shanxi and Henan, highlighting both 1) historical political decentralization and recent recentralization and 2) the importance of coal production and

consumption in local economies, cultures, and politics. I situate Shanxi's and Henan's political economies within the broader Chinese and global economy to understand the formation and development of the constellation of interests that affects meso-level officials' desire to implement policies.

Chapter 3 (Red Capital, Black Influences, and Green Policies: Capitals, Coal, and Contested Policies) explains how meso-level officials interact with coal and coal-reliant enterprises to determine which enterprises to punish and which to protect, focusing on how the interaction between managers and officials influences these decisions. Arguing against protectionism, I show the resourceful and nuanced ways in which meso-level officials in Shanxi and Henan interact with state-owned, state-controlled, private, and illegal firms to further their own personal and professional interests.

Chapter 4 (Manipulated Mobilizations: Exhortation and Subsumption of Labor Protests) shows how meso-level officials use existing labor grievances and ongoing labor mobilizations to further their own interests, subsuming and exhorting worker mobilizations through directly negotiating goals, jointly constructing and bridging frames, coordinating targets, and determining appropriate tactics. Meso-level officials enter mobilizations as advisors, exhorting labor groups to protest in such a way as to support meso-level officials' interests. Manipulated mobilizations, though, are a double-edged sword; as mid-level officials use labor mobilizations to push back against central policies and further their own individual (personal and bureaucratic) goals, labor mobilizations gain strength and often push beyond the delineated boundaries of acceptable protest. This chapter argues that mobilization processes (goal construction, framing, targeting, and choosing appropriate tactics) are contingent as well as contested with and between the state and labor and, therefore, must be explained in situ. Worker or public resistance, compliance, or

quiescence to central-level environmental policies is neither pre-determined nor pre-constructed. I explicate the subtle and hidden forms of everyday resistance in which mid-level officials engage when they subsume and construct labor and community movements for or against specific environmental policies and outcomes. I also show the interdependence between civil society actors—mobilized, informally-organized labor groups and (GO)NGOs—and the state in an authoritarian regime.

Chapter 5 (Meso-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Position in Policy Implementation) examines the means by which mid-level officials resourcefully engage with higher- and lower-level officials, as well as colleagues in their own department or other horizontal departments, to either implement environmental policies or not. This chapter makes clear the process by which meso-level officials resourcefully negotiate their roles as state bureaucrats. It unpacks this process by examining how meso-level officials strategically use their own and their colleagues', supervisors', and subordinates' economic, political, cultural, and positional interests, as well as the formation of those interests through these interactions.

Finally, Chapter 6 (Conclusion) offers summary comments on the implications of this study for the understandings of 1) Chinese environmental politics, specifically, and decarbonization politics broadly; 2) the importance of the meso-level state in policy implementation; 3) the ways in which policies are contested and interests are crystallized, negotiated, and discovered by those who implement policies; and 4) political economies of development and climate change.

REFERENCES

Ahlers, Anna L. 2018. "Introduction: Chinese governance in the era of 'top-level design'1." Taylor & Francis.

Ahlers, Anna L, and Yongdong Shen. 2018. "Breathe easy? Local nuances of authoritarian environmentalism in China's battle against air pollution." *The China Quarterly* 234:299-319.

Alexander, Christopher. 1964. *Notes on the Synthesis of Form*: Harvard University Press.

Bartley, Tim. 2007. "How Foundations Shape Social Movements: The Construction of an Organizational Field and the Rise of Forest Certification." *Social Problems* 54(3):229-55.

Battilana, Julie, Bernard Leca, and Eva Boxenbaum. 2009. "How actors change institutions: towards a theory of institutional entrepreneurship." *Academy of Management annals* 3(1):65-107.

Baum, Richard. 1996. *Burying Mao: Chinese politics in the age of Deng Xiaoping*: Princeton University Press.

Beeson, Mark. 2010. "The coming of environmental authoritarianism." *Environmental Politics* 19(2):276-94.

Birney, Mayling. 2014. "Decentralization and veiled corruption under China's "rule of mandates"." *World Development* 53:55-67.

Blecher, Marc, and Vivienne Shue. 2001. "Into leather: state-led development and the private sector in Xinji." *The China Quarterly* 166:368-93.

Blockmans, Wim P. 2003. "Reshaping cities: The staging of political transformation." *Journal of Urban History* 30(1):7-20.

Broome, André, and Leonard Seabrooke. 2007. "Seeing like the IMF: Institutional change in small open economies." *Review of international political economy* 14(4):576-601.

Bulman, David J, and Kyle A Jaros. 2020. "Loyalists, localists, and legibility: the calibrated control of provincial leadership teams in China." *Politics & Society* 48(2):199-234.

Bulman, David J., and Kyle A. Jaros. 2021. "Localism in Retreat? Central-Provincial Relations in the Xi Jinping Era." *Journal of Contemporary China* 30(131):697-716.

Burawoy, Michael. 1991. *Ethnography Unbound: Power and Resistance in the Modern Metropolis*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Carroll, Gabriel. 2019. "Robustness in mechanism design and contracting." *Annual Review of Economics* 11:139-66.

Chibber, Vivek. 2009. "Reviving the Developmental State? The Myth of the National Bourgeoisie." *Socialist Register* 41(41):144-65.

Clemens, Elisabeth S. 2007. "Toward a Historicized Sociology: Theorizing Events, Processes, and Emergence." *Annual review of sociology* 33(1):527-49.

Deng, Yanhua, and Kevin J O'Brien. 2013. "Relational repression in China: using social ties to demobilize protesters." *The China Quarterly* 215:533-52.

DiMaggio, Paul J. 1988. "Interest and Agency in Institutional Theory." Pp. 3-22 in *Institutional Patterns and Organizations: Culture and Environment*, edited by Lynne G. Zucker: Ballinger Publishing Co.

Djelic, Marie-Laure, and Sigrid Quack. 2003. "Theoretical building blocks for a research agenda linking globalization and institutions." *Globalization and institutions: Redefining the rules of the economic game*:15-34.

Donaldson, John. 2016. *Assessing the balance of power in central-local relations in China*: Routledge.

Duranti, Alessandro. 2015. *The anthropology of intentions*: Cambridge University Press.

Eaton, Sarah, and Genia Kostka. 2014. "Authoritarian environmentalism undermined? Local leaders' time horizons and environmental policy implementation in China." *The China Quarterly* 218:359-80.

Economy, Elizabeth. 2014. "Environmental Governance in China: State Control to Crisis Management." *Daedalus* 143(2):184-97.

Edin, Maria. 2003. "State capacity and local agent control in China: CCP cadre management from a township perspective." *The China Quarterly* 173:35-52.

Fligstein, Neil. 1997. "Social skill and institutional theory." *American behavioral scientist* 40(4):397-405.

—. 2001. "Social skill and the theory of fields." *Sociological Theory* 19(2):105-25.

Fligstein, Neil, and Jianjun Zhang. 2015. "A New Agenda for Research on the Trajectory of Chinese Capitalism." *Management and Organization Review* 7(01):39-62.

Fourcade, Marion. 2021a. "Ordinal citizenship." *The British Journal of Sociology* 72(2):154-73.

—. 2021b. "The unbearable rightness of being ranked." *British Journal of Sociology* 72(2):203-06.

Fourcade, Marion, and Jeffrey Gordon. 2020. "Learning like a state: Statecraft in the digital age." *Journal of Law and Political Economy* 1(1).

Friedman, Eli. 2013. "Insurgency and institutionalization: The Polanyian countermovement and Chinese labor politics." *Theory and society* 42(3):295-327.

—. 2014. "Alienated Politics: Labour Insurgency and the Paternalistic State in China." *Development and Change* 45(5):1001-18.

Garud, Raghu, Cynthia Hardy, and Steve Maguire. 2007. "Institutional entrepreneurship as embedded agency: An introduction to the special issue." Sage Publications Sage UK: London, England.

Gille, Zsuzsa, and Seán Ó Riain. 2002. "Global Ethnography." *Annual review of sociology* 28(1):271-95.

Gilley, Bruce. 2012. "Authoritarian environmentalism and China's response to climate change." *Environmental Politics* 21(2):287-307.

Gold, Thomas B. 2019. "Guerrilla interviewing among the getihu." Pp. 175-92 in *Unofficial China*: Routledge.

Goodman, David SG. 1997. "China's provinces in reform." *NY: Routledge*.

He, Baogang. 1996. "Dilemmas of pluralist development and democratization in China." *Democratization* 3(3):287-305.

Heberer, Thomas, and René Trappel. 2013. "Evaluation processes, local cadres' behaviour and local development processes." *Journal of Contemporary China* 22(84):1048-66.

Hedström, Peter, and Petri Ylikoski. 2010. "Causal Mechanisms in the Social Sciences." *Annual review of sociology* 36(1):49-67.

Heilmann, Sebastian, and Oliver Melton. 2013. "The reinvention of development planning in China, 1993–2012." *Modern China* 39(6):580-628.

Hoang, Kimberly Kay. 2018. "Risky investments: How local and foreign investors finesse corruption-rife emerging markets." *American sociological review* 83(4):657-85.

Holmström, Bengt. 1979. "Moral hazard and observability." *The Bell journal of economics*:74-91.

Huang, Phillip CC. Huang, Philip CC. "" Public Sphere"/" Civil Society" in China? The Third Realm between State and Society." *Modern China* 19(2): 216-240

IEA. 2018. *World Energy Statistics 2018*. Paris: International Energy Agency Publications.

Jaros, Kyle Alan. 2014. "The politics of metropolitan bias in China."

Jerolmack, Colin, and Shamus Khan. 2014. "Talk is cheap: Ethnography and the attitudinal fallacy." *Sociological Methods & Research* 43(2):178-209.

Jin, Hehui, Yingyi Qian, and Barry R Weingast. 2005. "Regional decentralization and fiscal incentives: Federalism, Chinese style." *Journal of public economics* 89(9-10):1719-42.

Kelty, Christopher M. 2008. *Two bits: The cultural significance of free software*: Duke University Press.

Kostka, Genia. 2016. "Command without control: The case of C hina's environmental target system." *Regulation & Governance* 10(1):58-74.

Kostka, Genia, and Jonas Nahm. 2017. "Central–local relations: Recentralization and environmental governance in China." *The China Quarterly* 231:567-82.

Kostka, Genia, and Chunman Zhang. 2018. "Tightening the grip: environmental governance under Xi Jinping." Taylor & Francis.

Landry, Pierre Francois. 2008. *Decentralized Authoritarianism in China: the Communist Party's control of local elites in the post-Mao era*: Cambridge University Press New York.

Lee, Ching Kwan, and Yonghong Zhang. 2013. "The Power of Instability: Unraveling the Microfoundations of Bargained Authoritarianism in China." *American Journal of Sociology* 118(6):1475-508.

Li, Hongbin, and Li-An Zhou. 2005. "Political turnover and economic performance: the incentive role of personnel control in China." *Journal of public economics* 89(9-10):1743-62.

Li, Huimin, Xiaofan Zhao, Yuqing Yu, Tong Wu, and Ye Qi. 2016. "China's numerical management system for reducing national energy intensity." *Energy Policy* 94:64-76.

Li, Yifei. 2019. "Bureaucracies count: environmental governance through goal-setting and mandate-making in contemporary China." *Environmental Sociology* 5(1):12-22.

Lieberthal, Kenneth. 1997. "China's governing system and its impact on environmental policy implementation." *China environment series* 1(1997):3-8.

Lieberthal, Kenneth, and Michel Oksenberg. 1988. *Policy making in China: Leaders, structures, and processes*: Princeton University Press.

Liebler, Carolyn A, Sonya R Porter, Leticia E Fernandez, James M Noon, and Sharon R Ennis. 2017. "America's churning races: Race and ethnicity response changes between census 2000 and the 2010 census." *Demography* 54(1):259-84.

Lin, Jiang, David Fridley, Hongyou Lu, Lynn Price, and Nan Zhou. 2018. "Has coal use peaked in China: Near-term trends in China's coal consumption." *Energy Policy* 123:208-14.

Lin, Nan. 1995. "Local market socialism: Local corporation in action in rural China." *Theory and society*:301-54.

—. 2011. "Capitalism in China: A centrally managed capitalism (CMC) and its future." *Management and Organization Review* 7(1):63-96.

Lo, Kevin. 2015. "How authoritarian is the environmental governance of China?" *Environmental Science & Policy* 54:152-59.

Loveman, Mara. 2014. *National colors: Racial classification and the state in Latin America*: Oxford University Press, USA.

Maguire, Steve, Cynthia Hardy, and Thomas B Lawrence. 2004. "Institutional entrepreneurship in emerging fields: HIV/AIDS treatment advocacy in Canada." *Academy of management Journal* 47(5):657-79.

Mattingly, Daniel C. 2016. "Elite capture: How decentralization and informal institutions weaken property rights in China." *World Politics* 68(3):383-412.

Mertha, Andrew. 2017a. "Centrifugal Empire: Central–Local Relations in China
Jae-Ho Chung
New York: Columbia University Press, 2016 x + 216 pp. $60.00; £44.00 ISBN 978-0-231-17620-0." *The China Quarterly* 231:811-12.

—. 2017b. "“Stressing Out”: Cadre Calibration and Affective Proximity to the CCP in Reform-era China." *The China Quarterly* 229:64-85.

Mertha, Andrew C. 2005. "China's “soft” centralization: Shifting tiao/kuai authority relations." *The China Quarterly* 184:791-810.

Miller, Gary J. 2005. "The political evolution of principal-agent models." *ANNUAL REVIEW OF POLITICAL SCIENCE-PALO ALTO-* 8:203.

Montinola, Gabriella, Yingyi Qian, and Barry R. Weingast. 1995. "Federalism, Chinese style: the political basis for economic success in China." *World Politics*:50-81.

Murphy, Keith M. 2016. "Design and anthropology." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 45(1):1-17.

Nahm, Jonas. 2017. "Exploiting the implementation gap: policy divergence and industrial upgrading in China's wind and solar sectors." *The China Quarterly* 231:705-27.

National Bureau of Statistics of China. 2016. *China Statistical Yearbook 2016*. Beijing China.

Nee, Victor, Sonja Opper, and Sonia Wong. 2007. "Developmental state and corporate governance in China." *Management and Organization Review* 3(1):19-53.

O'Brien, Kevin J. 1996. "Rightful resistance." *World Politics* 49(1):31-55.

Oi, Jean C. 1995. "The role of the local state in China's transitional economy." *The China Quarterly* 144:1132-49.

—. 1999. "Two decades of rural reform in China: An overview and assessment." *The China Quarterly* 159:616-28.

Papanek, Victor, and R Buckminster Fuller. 1972. "Design for the real world."

Ran, Ran. 2017. "Understanding blame politics in China's decentralized system of environmental governance: actors, strategies and context." *The China Quarterly* 231:634-61.

Schreifels, Jeremy J, Yale Fu, and Elizabeth J Wilson. 2012. "Sulfur dioxide control in China: policy evolution during the 10th and 11th Five-year Plans and lessons for the future." *Energy Policy* 48:779-89.

Scott, James C. 2008. "Seeing like a state." in *Seeing Like a State*: yale university Press.

Segal, Adam, and Eric Thun. 2001. "Thinking globally, acting locally: local governments, industrial sectors, and development in China." *Politics & Society* 29(4):557-88.

Shen, Wei, and Shu Shang. 2020. "Tackling Local Protectionism in Enforcing Foreign Arbitral Awards in China: An Empirical Study of the Supreme People's Court's Review Decisions, 1995–2015." *The China Quarterly* 241:144-68.

Shin, Kyoung. 2017. "Neither Centre nor Local: Community-Driven Experimentalist Governance in China." *The China Quarterly* 231:607-33.

—. 2018. "Environmental policy innovations in China: a critical analysis from a low-carbon city." *Environmental Politics* 27(5):830-51.

Shirk, Susan L. 1993. *The political logic of economic reform in China*: Univ of California Press.

Solinger, Dorothy J. 2006. "Interviewing Chinese people: From high-level officials to the unemployed." *Doing fieldwork in China*:153-67.

Spires, Anthony J. 2011. "Contingent symbiosis and civil society in an authoritarian state: Understanding the survival of China's grassroots NGOs." *American Journal of Sociology* 117(1):1-45.

Sun, Xiaoyi, and Ronggui Huang. 2016. "Extension of state-led growth coalition and grassroots management: A case study of Shanghai." *Urban Affairs Review* 52(6):917-43.

Timmermans, Stefan, and Steven Epstein. 2010. "A world of standards but not a standard world: Toward a sociology of standards and standardization." *Annual review of sociology* 36:69-89.

Van Rooij, Benjamin, Qiaoqiao Zhu, Li Na, and Wang Qiliang. 2017. "Centralizing trends and pollution law enforcement in China." *The China Quarterly* 231:583-606.

Walder, Andrew G. 1995. "Local governments as industrial firms: an organizational analysis of China's transitional economy." *American Journal of Sociology* 101(2):263-301.

Wang, Alex. 2016. "Climate change policy and law in China."

Wang, Alex L. 2013. "The search for sustainable legitimacy: environmental law and bureaucracy in China." *Harv. Envtl. L. Rev.* 37:365.

—. 2015. "Chinese State Capitalism and the Environment." in *Regulating the Visible Hand? The Institutional Implications of Chinese State Capitalism*, edited by Benjamin L. Liebman and Curtis J. Milhaupt. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

—. 2018. "Symbolic Legitimacy and Chinese Environmental Reform." *Environmental Law* 48(4):299-760.

Wang, Hao, and Chengxu Jiang. 2020. "Local nuances of authoritarian environmentalism: A legislative study on household solid waste sorting in China." *Sustainability* 12(6):2522.

Wong, Christine, and Valerie J Karplus. 2017. "China's war on air pollution: can existing governance structures support new ambitions?" *The China Quarterly* 231:662-84.

Xi, Jinping. 2014. *The governance of China*: Foreign Languages Press.

Yang, Xuedong, and Yan Jian. 2018. "Top-level design, reform pressures, and local adaptations." *Governance innovation and policy change: Recalibrations of Chinese politics under xi Jinping* 97.

Yang, Xuedong, and Jian Yan. 2018. "Top-level design, reform pressures, and local adaptations: an interpretation of the trajectory of reform since the 18th CPC Party Congress." *Journal of Chinese Governance* 3(1):25-48.

Yu, Jianxing, and Biao Huang. 2019. "Mapping the progress of local government innovation in contemporary China." Pp. 119-38 in *The Palgrave handbook of local governance in contemporary China*: Springer.

Zeng, Qingjie. 2020. "Managed campaign and bureaucratic institutions in China: Evidence from the targeted poverty alleviation program." *Journal of Contemporary China* 29(123):400-15.

Zhang, Changdong. 2017. "A fiscal sociological theory of authoritarian resilience: Developing theory through China case studies." *Sociological Theory* 35(1):39-63.

Zhao, Xiaofan, Oran R Young, Ye Qi, and Dan Guttman. 2020. "Back to the future: Can Chinese doubling down and American muddling through fulfill 21st century needs for environmental governance?" *Environmental Policy and Governance* 30(2):59-70.

Zheng, Siqi, Matthew E Kahn, Weizeng Sun, and Danglun Luo. 2014. "Incentives for China's urban mayors to mitigate pollution externalities: the role of the central government and public environmentalism." *Regional Science and Urban Economics* 47:61-71.

Zheng, Yongnian. 2007. *De facto federalism in China: Reforms and dynamics of central-local relations*: World Scientific.

Zhou, Xueguang, Qiang Li, Wei Zhao, and He Cai. 2003. "Embeddedness and Contractual Relationships in China's Transitional Economy." *American sociological review* 68(1):750-102.

CHAPTER 2: FORMATION OF EXTRACTIVE INDUSTRIES AND THE DEVELOPMENTAL STATE IN CHINA

The following shows the formation of Shanxi and Henan as crucial sites for the Chinese developmental state, the formation of the key actors in not only extractive industry and its reliant secondary industries (coal, steel, rail transportation, energy production and consumption) but also state actors (sub-provincial, provincial, and national) and their relationships, as well as the formation of coal as the bedrock of China's economic development from poor, rural country to an economic superpower.

Coal's importance in both industrial development and as a factor in climate change cannot be overstated. As coal burning fuels industrial growth so too does it destroy the physical and atmospheric environment. We have known that the burning of fossil fuels would lead to environmental disaster for over a century, yet over that same century we saw massive quantities of coal being burnt as countries raced to economically develop. China is an exemplary case of this phenomenon: At the dawn of the founding of the People's Republic of China, coal production and consumption were limited in scope and intensity—mainly carved out niches by competing European powers—but by the end of the century, only 50 years later, China was the largest coal producer and consumer in the world. The questions of how and why China so rapidly developed its coal industry are of crucial importance to understanding not only the present moment of Chinese economic development policies, but the actors involved, from the local and national state to coal conglomerates and illegal coal bosses to the miners themselves.

FORMATION BEFORE 1949

"China has 5000 years of history, [Chinese] coal has 6000!" (Interview 26 with a meso-level Shanxi official, October 2018). The Chinese coal industry's production has not been steady

over the millennia, though. Prior to 1931, China's coal industry was barely an industry; local mines produced enough coal to heat, both food and homes. But, that was soon to change. British, German, and Russian companies and interests built massive coal mines in the northeast to supplement their domestic coal production, and after 1931, Japanese interests built mines in the Northeast (Thomson 2003). The period between the fall of the Qing and the ascension of the Communist Party set the groundwork for both the importance of coal production in China, more broadly, and Shanxi and Henan—although to a lesser extent—specifically. Not only were the sites of coal mining being formed, but so too were the relationships between key actors; Shanxi and Henan produced central elites who later would go on to support—materially and politically—the rapid development of coal as a key national industry. As the European coal producing countries saw their production decline, China was laying the groundwork to surpass them, even as they were carving up China for their own use and as China was fighting two wars, one a civil war and the other against Japan.

In Shanxi, the influence of foreign powers, the Guomindang, and revolutionary forces, though, were stifled by the exceptional efforts of the warlord Yan Xishan—a man whose control of Shanxi began in the Republic Era in 1911 when China was ruled by Yuan Shikai (the first president of the Republic and a native of Henan) until the Communist Party took full control of the province in 1949. Yan Xishan was a major influence in the development and modernization of the province; Yan's Provincial Ten-Year Plan of Economic Reconstruction—influenced by Soviet central planning—not only recognized the importance of the massive coal reserves under Shanxi but also strived to utilize coal to achieve rapid and lasting economic development. To that end, between 1930 and 1934 coal production doubled in Shanxi (Goodman 1999). Unfortunately, for both Yan and Shanxi, coal could not be exported at a meaningful scale due to the lack of rail transportation and Shanxi's isolation from the eastern and northeastern industrial bases. That is

not to say that Shanxi was not industrialized, though; since the early 1920s, Shanxi underwent an initial wave of industrialization, first in the manufacturing of arms and military equipment and then later expanding to other heavy, coal-reliant industry. The early years of foreign investment and development saw the first wave of massive coal production in Chinese history and, in fact, some 20 of the original mines represent the largest mines still in operation in China today. Yan Xishan's influence as an implementor of a command economy focused on rapid industrialization based on coal mining and coal-reliant industries—which was stifled by the lack of transportation available to ship coal—and his influence as a thorn in the side of both the Guomindang's and the Communist Party's infrastructural and despotic powers in Shanxi were paramount in the formation of the key actors—provincial and sub-provincial state agents (and their relationship with the center), coal managers, coal miners, rail workers and managers, and heavy manufacturing industries—throughout the CCP's rule.

Both the war against the Japanese and the civil war that continued afterwards decimated the coal industry and transportation networks crucial for shipping the unearthed coal from the remote north-central hinterlands to ports and industrial centers in the east. Although before 1937, China's coal industry compared well with that of other countries, by 1949 China ranked ninth in the world in coal production, mostly due to the damages done in Henan and the inability of Shanxi to mine and move its coal. As border regions—part of the Jin-Ji-Lu-Yu (Jin is the provincial nickname for Shanxi that harkens back to its central role in the creation of "Chinese-ness" and Yu is the provincial nickname for Henan)—Shanxi and Henan suffered immensely from both Japanese attacks and Chinese efforts to repel or stymie the Japanese advance; when Kaifeng, Henan's capital at the time, was captured by the Japanese in 1938, the Guomindang broke the levees of the Huayuankou dam and destroyed many of the dikes near Zhengzhou in order to slow the advancing

Japanese army on its way to Wuhan. Not only was Henan's capital captured, but the resulting floods as the Guomindang retreated killed almost million people and affected some 12 million more people, mostly in Henan. But, the bombings—by all sides—were not the only disasters to befall Henan. In 1942, probably in no small part due to the flooding four years earlier, a great famine killed approximately 2 to 3 million people in Henan, with a further 4 million people fleeing. As Henan was abandoned, the people were left to starve, eat their neighbors, or sell their children for food (Lary 2010; Liu 2012). Shanxi, protected by Yan Xishan and massive grain reserves, did little to aid Henan; the failure of the Guomindang would not be resolved by neighboring provinces and was exploited as a rallying cry by the Communist Party for political gain among the rural population. The famine, though pushed from collective memory (Liu 2012), was a critical moment in one of China's most populous provinces, decimating its rural base and labor force.

The Japanese War and the subsequent renewal of the Civil War left the country in shambles, although the destruction was not evenly distributed among provinces. Although Shanxi and Henan were two of the four provinces that were buffer zones during the war with Japan, Shanxi was able to come out of the wars much better than Henan, although both were still considered poor, remote provinces when they were brought into the People's Republic. While economically disadvantaged, both Shanxi and Henan were relatively politically advantaged. Key central cadres—for example Peng Zhen, a member of the Central Committee, then a member of the Central Secretariat, and finally a member of the Politburo before he was purged in the Cultural Revolution; Bo Yibo, the first Minister of Finance, Politburo member, Vice-Premier, and chair of the State Economic Commission before he was purged by the Gang of Four; and An Ziwen, the first head of the Personnel Ministry, a standing committee member, and a vice minister of the Central Organization Department before he was purged in the Cultural Revolution as one of the 61 Renegades—were

all from Shanxi and served with distinction in Shanxi before their rise to national prominence. Furthermore, although they were all purged, they were rehabilitated by Deng Xiaoping, who by no small coincidence served in Henan and Shanxi during the war with the Japanese. The connections, both in terms of nativity and career, led Shanxi and Henan, although to a lesser extent, to have strong relations with the center during the early years of the People's Republic.

The strong connection between the central state and the provincial state was bolstered by the Soviet-style economic planning that Mao would later espouse. The bombings, looting, and general destruction that were witnessed by key central actors in Shanxi and Henan combined with the imperative to economically and industrially develop required that the newly formed People's Republic rapidly restore the coal industry, catapulting Shanxi and Henan from war-torn border regions to key sites in China's early central state-led development planning. The chaos of civil and defensive war, famine and floods, and an economy in shambles confronted the Communist Party as they founded the People's Republic of China on October 1, 1949.

FORMATION THROUGH MAOIST THOUGHT (1949-1978)

The tumult did not end in October 1949. Under Mao Zedong's influence, the next 29 years would see China undergo some of the most destructive periods in its history. Although, the first decade of Communist rule was relatively stable, aided and bolstered by Soviet capital and strategists sent to Beijing to help China rapidly develop in order to present a unified front against Western imperial capitalism. Enshrined as part and parcel of Maoist Thought, the centrally led development strategy exemplified by the Soviet-style Five Year Plans became a mainstay of China's political economy. Another mainstay was the centrality of coal in the developmental state project. Coal policies were introduced before, during, and in conjunction with the First Five Year

Plan. The coal fields of Shanxi and Henan saw substantial central state investment, both materially and politically, leading to strong ties between subprovincial and central state managers.

But, this stability, like China's relationship with the Soviet Union, was short-lived. Starting in 1958, Mao launched the Great Leap Forward. During a four-year period of massive political upheaval and distrust and economic depression, further damage would come in the form of the Great Chinese Famine, one of the worst famines in human—let alone Chinese—history. The economic and political costs of the Great Leap Forward—to say nothing of the human loss and suffering—led Mao to take a step back from power. However, Mao's step back from rule was short-lived. In 1966, Mao exerted his influence once more by launching the Cultural Revolution, which marked Mao's return—I would not call it a comeback because Mao had been there for years exerting influence—to central leadership. During this chaotic decade, millions were purged, millions more were killed, and the central state was in shambles unable to control the provinces while still trying to impost Maoist thought. By the time Mao died and the Gang of Four were arrested in 1976, untold damage was done, but while the whole of China was reeling, the coal industry was relatively undamaged. By the time Deng Xiaoping ascended in 1978, China had undergone massive economic and political destruction, yet coal was stronger than ever. Shanxi and Henan were key provinces in the development of the national economy, coal managers and miners were well-paid and provided with stable employment during a time that was anything but stable, and key coal-reliant industries were just beginning to take off. The Restoration Period, the Great Leap Forward, and the Cultural Revolution were crucial events in the formation of the development of coal policies and policies aimed at coal-reliant industries promulgated at the central and provincial level and the formation of actors and their relationships with one another.

During the Restoration Period (1949-1952), the central Ministry of Fuel Industry was tasked with gaining control of the country's coal supply, reconstructing the existing mines that were looted or bombed, and concentrating new mine construction explicitly in the north in order to jumpstart the Chinese economy under Communist rule (China Coal Industry Ministry 1983). With the aid of Soviet advisors who were sent to help China not only establish itself as a communist ally to the USSR but also as an economic power, China's coal mines were brought under national planning and divided into three categories: Central Mining Administration (CMA) mines, local state (LS) mines, and local non-state (LNS) mines (Wang 1982). The largest and best-funded coal mines were CMA mines, with a target of approximately 72 percent of output coming from CMAs compared to 20 percent from LS mines (Thomson 2003). Many of the mines created or recreated in the 1950s were located in Shanxi—with a fewer portion of mines created in Henan, although these mines were of exceptional size. It was during this early period of restoration and development that the Soviets instilled an idea in the upper echelons of the Chinese state that iron, steel, and energy were the basis upon which the economy developed. An idea made palatable by the efforts of Yan Xishan's Soviet-style economic development plan in Shanxi and upper echelon's ties with both Shanxi and Henan.

In 1949, China produced 32.43 million tons of coal, compared to the 480.6 million tons mined by the United States (The History of Coal Mining in Contemporary China Compiling and Study Group 1990; Van der Hoeven 2013).These figures do more than simply show the drastic difference between coal production; they indicate the level of development between arguably the most developed country and the newly formed People's Republic of China. The 32.43 million tons of coal mined in 1949 represented 96.3% of China's energy basket. The lack of coal and diverse energy sources underpin the lack of industrial development, rail transportation, and construction

projects. Furthermore, the large coal producing provinces of Shanxi and Henan were incredibly underdeveloped. In 1949, Shanxi (without Datong and its massive minefields; Datong and northeast Shanxi was part of Chahar Province until 1952) produced 2.67 million tons of coal, which would increase 10,200 percent to 275.01 million tons in 1989. Although Shanxi represented some 8 percent of the Chinese total of coal production, its coalfields were untapped. The same was true of Henan. The coal miners in Henan produced 0.9 million tons (almost 3 percent of the Chinese total), compared to the 88.58 million tons in 1989 (a meager 9,742.2% increase). With the lack of coal mining jobs available and, relatedly, steel production for heavy and light industry, rail transportation, and construction projects, wages in China were severely depressed, and this was especially true in Shanxi and Henan. The average worker in Shanxi made 159 CNY a year compared to the 242 CNY workers in Henan averaged. During the years that follow, coal would become a major part of the Chinese planned economy, fueling industrial growth and the Chinese miracle.

The efforts of the Ministry of Fuel Industry, and their Soviet advisors, were successful, for the most part. From 1949-1952, Chinese coal production doubled; in 1952, Chinese coal miners dug 66.49 million tons of coal from the earth, 9.94 million tons from Shanxi alone (almost 15% of Chinese coal production) and a further 3.3 million tons from Henan. Although Shanxi was the second largest coal producing province in China and Henan the seventh, they only consumed 0.8 and 1.4 million tons of coal, respectively. Workers in Shanxi and Henan were not employed in transforming coal from the raw material mined in their provinces into steel or energy, and this was reflected in their low wages relative to the national average. The average worker in Shanxi earned 375 CNY per year and in Henan that number dipped to 347, compared to the national average of

445 CNY per year. Coal mining was a relative well-paying job, especially in the CMAs where coal workers were deemed to be of national importance.

The national importance of coal, combined with industrial and rail production, was further enshrined in the 1st Five Year Plan (1953-1957). During the course of the Five-Year Plan, the central government invested almost 30 million CNY into coal production and infrastructure—which represented a not insignificant portion of Chinese expenditure. In fact, coal investment was more than 40 percent of the total energy investment over the Five-Year Plan. Not only did the First Five Year Plan significantly fund coal production, Shanxi more broadly was favored. Over the course of the Plan, a total of 2.1 billion CNY was invested in the province, with 75 percent of that total coming from the central state. And, by the end of the Plan, in 1957, 30 percent of Shanxi's gross value of industrial output—which relies heavily on coal production in Shanxi—was produced by central enterprises (Goodman 1999). While the importance of coal was being cemented by the central state and provincial state actors were becoming second-tier national elites, coal miners also saw their material benefits and status increase. The average yearly wage in Shanxi increased by over 150 CNY over the Five-Year Plan (remember the average wage in 1949 was 159 CNY), with the average worker earning 608 CNY compared to the national average of 624 CNY. Workers in Henan, like Shanxi, were paid below the national average; Henan workers only averaged 546 CNY in wages. Although these were poor, in-land provinces, coal mining provided not only a higher wage than the provincial average, but also provided the workers with higher status employment.

The importance of coal, especially coal from Shanxi and Henan, to the central state was seen clearly during the Great Leap Forward (1958-1962). The Chinese coal industry was—for the most part—spared the massive unrest and turmoil, destruction and devastation, and general and

incisive chaos experienced by the whole of China during the Great Leap Forward. During the first two years of the Great Leap Forward, which coincided with the 2nd Five Year Plan, the central state invested 38 million CNY in coal, more than the previous five years combined. It was also during these two years that Chinese coal production took off. In 1958, Chinese coal miners doubled their total from the previous year; in 1957, Chinese colliers mined 130.7 million tons and in 1958, during the beginning of the Great Leap Forward, they mined 270 million tons of coal. Perhaps more amazingly, in 1959, China produced 369 million tons of coal. After giving Henan and Shanxi mines to People's Commissions, in December 1959 the Central Committee and the State Council reclaimed them, establishing the central government as the dominant partner during a movement of decentralization (Thomson 2003). During the two years of People's Commission mining, Shanxi and Henan produced 80.7 million tons of coal (12.6 percent of the national total) and 44.33 million tons (7 percent of the national total), respectively. The importance of coal, and more specifically of coal miners, was also further exemplified during the Great Leap Forward. As wages dropped throughout the country due to the massive unrest and disruptions of work, Shanxi workers earned the national average in 1959, due in no small part to coal miners wages. The wages in Henan, even more surprisingly, increased during the Great Leap Forward; the average wage of Henanese workers increased from 441 to 445 CNY, which may seem paltry and statistically insignificant, but the significance of an increased yearly wage during one of the most chaotic periods in Chinese history is anything but insignificant. Wages in the coal industry were key to this increase as work in the coal fields of Henan went full steam ahead.

The remarkable progress of the Chinese coal industry as a whole, and specifically in Shanxi and Henan, can be seen the clearest after the Great Leap Forward. Not only was coal spared the chaos of the Great Leap Forward, but it thrived. Central Planning (in a time of decentralization),

strong provincial leaders (in a time of distrust and upheaval), and backbreaking and well-compensated labor (in a time of labor stoppages) were all key in the formation of coal as a strategic national resource and as a source of national, provincial, and occupational pride. In the three years between the Great Leap Forward (1958-1962) and the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), China produced 663 million tons of coal, of which 16 percent was produced in Shanxi and 8 percent in Henan. Shanxi and Henan coal workers were well-paid for their efforts, as well. As the national average wage crept up from 576 in 1963 to 590 CNY in 1965, in Shanxi the average wage was 65 CNY more per year than the national average. The average salary in Henan in 1964 was 606 CNY compared to the national average of 586, and although the average Henan salary was more than the national average in 1963, it decreased dramatically in 1965 to 503 CNY. In times of famine and destruction, coal workers produced massive amounts of coal, were well compensated, and provided the material and moral support for not only the coal sector as a whole but the provincial leaders, at least in Shanxi.

The respite from tumult was brief for the whole of China, though; the Cultural Revolution began in 1966 and lasted until Mao's death in 1976. The upheaval and destruction rendered during these years has been a source of much writing, academic, journalistic, and popular. But, while the whole of China suffered massively, the coal industry was less affected. Over the ten-year period, Chinese miners removed 3.9 billion tons of coal from the earth, Shanxi coal miners were responsible for 15 percent of that total and Henan miners 9 percent. During a time period in which central officials were sent to rural Shanxi and Henan as punishment (pictures line the inside of drum towers throughout rural villages in both provinces showing those who were purged and sent to the hinterlands; Xi Jinping's father was purged in 1963 and sent to Luoyang, Henan interestingly enough), the officials and coal managers were relatively safe from censure due to the strategic

importance of coal and their distance from Beijing. Although, unfortunately for some coal-reliant managers, the importance of the coal industry was not enough to save them from all the upheaval of the Cultural Revolution—in the case of the workers at the Taiyuan Railway Bureau, the importance of coal was a detriment when they were occupied by Red Guards. Coal miners, though, were not only spared, but saw their value increase, both materially and in terms of status. Materially, the average wage for workers in Shanxi during the Cultural Revolution was 605.5 CNY per year, compared to the national average of 578 CNY. Coal miner wages in Shanxi and Henan were more than the national average and allowed these workers to survive the tumult and turmoil, even as wages in Henan as a whole suffered; the average yearly salary over the ten-year period was 551 CNY. Not only were coal mining wages relatively high to the national and provincial average, but the work was relatively easy for most coal miners. Although the mines were dangerous, because of an abundance of labor, most workers in Shanxi and Henan (where surface or opencast mines are more common) were underworked. The incremental labor output ratio, a measure of labor productivity per employment unit, averaged 0.7:1 (Sinton et al. 1992; State Statistical Bureau 1987). Furthermore, during the Cultural Revolution, the number of colliers employed in state mines more than doubled from 1.6 million miners in 1966 to 3.5 million in 1976. Coal mining paid well, bestowed high status on its workers and managers, and did not require an overabundance of work. Coal was a pathway for economic development, touted and supported by Beijing throughout not only the Great Leap Forward but also the Cultural Revolution.

The early (re)development of the coal industry was set back decades during the Cultural Revolution, which made the 800 percent increase in coal production from 1953 to 1978 even more remarkable (China Coal Industry Ministry 1997). Not only did China go from the ninth largest coal producing country to the third, but it also fundamentally altered its consumption patterns. In

1953, only 58 percent of Chinese coal was used in industrial and energy production, whereas by 1978, 82 percent of coal was used by industry and energy production (Thomson 2003). Under Mao's leadership, Shanxi and Henan coal were established as crucial to the economic development of China, making coal miners and managers as well as local officials in Shanxi and Henan a fundamental part of both the economic and national projects. In addition to the elevation and extraction of coal, coal-reliant industries thrived. During the Maoist era, more than a quarter billion CNY were invested by the central government in the overhaul of China's railroad networks. The steel needed to produce the tracks and the coal shipped over those very same tracks were crucial for Chinese economic development; the steel and rail industries, especially in Shanxi and Henan, were national heroes, and so too were their workers, managers, and state overseers. The elevation of coal in material and cultural status did not end with Mao. At a National Working Conference on Practicing Economy in April 1978, coal was further enshrined as the basis of China's long-term energy strategy (Chao 1979)and three months later, Vice-Premier Kang Shi'en urged coal mines to rapidly increase production during an emergency national conference on economic development (China Coal Industry Ministry 1983). On the eve of reforms, the CCP was signaling to the coal industry—in general—and Shanxi and parts of Henan—more specifically—that coal was still an important part of the state's economic development goals.

FORMATION THROUGH THE REFORMS AND DENG XIAOPING THOUGHT (1978-2000)

The economic stagnation of the late 1970s combined with a push by Deng Xiaoping to legitimate CCP rule by raising living standards (Naughton 1995) set forth the opening and reform (*gaige kaifang*) of the Chinese state and economy. Maoist central planning was to be added on to by Dengist "socialism with Chinese characteristics;" although Maoist Thought was—and is—still

enshrined in the Chinese constitution, Deng Xiaoping Thought has supplemented and supplanted it. State planning was not to be left behind with Mao and his chosen successor—Hua Guofeng—but rather was to be combined with market forces in order to promote China's economic development and modernization.

The opening and reforms were not evenly distributed across sectors, provinces, or time. Unlike Mao, Deng did not dive into his experiments with central state planning or opening up; as the traditional saying (popularized by Deng in October 1984) goes: China was to "cross the river by feeling the stones." Coal and its reliant industries, though, were relatively untouched stones by the market. A large and dependable source of energy and industrial output was necessary to spur economic development and to create the Chinese economic miracle. Coal had a necessary and important function in the improvements of three of the Four Modernizations—the defining feature of Deng's attempts at economic development which consisted of modernizing agriculture, industry, defense, and science and technology. Coal was the backbone of China's industrial output, fueling steel, transportation, and energy sectors, as well as supplying the raw materials necessary for wide-scale military production. Additionally, the coal industry was bolstered by the increased development of science and technology, allowing for more efficient and economically beneficial coal washing, processing, and production. Because of its crucial importance to Deng's economic modernization plans and because, as mentioned above, market and state planning are not contradictory in Dengist Thought, coal continued to be centrally managed at a higher rate than other industries, providing substantial material, political, and reputational bonuses to coal managers and coal miners

The connection between the central state and Shanxi and Henan also remained somewhat strong. Although some people were let to get rich first, these people were not in Shanxi and Henan;

the opening and reforms started in the South and the East Coast and allowed capitalists and workers alike to become very rich very quickly. The option of national elite was never available to those in Shanxi and Henan, but the coal industry allowed for Shanxi and Henan residents to become second-tier national elites, much richer than their provincial comrades in other sectors. During the opening and reforms, state managers in Shanxi and Henan; relations between the center and (sub)provincial managers; and coal and its reliant industries, managers, and workers were given more material, technological and technical, and political support than they were under Mao.

During the early years of the reform era, China also began to take its place as a global leader in coal production. In 1976, when Mao died, China produced less than half a billion tons of coal, but by 1983, China produced 714.5 million tons. Not only did Chinese coal production increase by almost 50 percent, but it surpassed the United States, producing almost more than 150 million tons more coal (Van der Hoeven 2013). In 1981, Shanxi and Henan were the two leading coal producing provinces in China, producing 21.3 and 9.4 percent of all coal in China, respectively. Each would remain in their respective positions (Shanxi as the largest coal producing province and Henan as the second) until 1998 when Henan dropped to third. Accompanying the increase in production, miners' wages increased dramatically, both relative to the national average and in simple terms, from 1978 to 1983. The average national salary rose from 615 CNY in 1978 to 826 CNY in 1983 while collier's average salary went from 676 CNY in 1978 to 880 CNY in 1983. Shanxi's average wage hovered near the national average, rising above it in 1978, 1979, and 1983, whereas Henan's average wage was below the national average (averaging 48 CNY less than the national average over this time period). Not only was state funding and state planning increasing, but so too were miners' wages. Coal workers, managers, and the provincial leaders

overseeing coal workers and managers benefitted both materially and in status in the early years of the reforms.

In order to ameliorate the rampant capacity issues—in 1981, more than 130 mines across China, but mostly located in Shanxi, Henan, and Inner Mongolia, were operating at less than 65 percent capacity (Thomson 2003)—the State Council set up the Shanxi Regional Energy Planning Office in 1982. Despite its name, the Office would be responsible for all of Shanxi, western Henan, northern Shaanxi, and the Jungar region of Inner Mongolia, creating one of the largest coal operations in the world. Also included under the auspices of the Office were most of the 30 fully mechanized coal mining systems that China purchased from England and Germany in 1974, the 1979 Antaibao Joint Venture with Occidental Petroleum, and the four coal mining projects in Shanxi funded by a joint venture between the Export-Import Bank of Japan and the Bank of China. Additionally, coal bases in Central Shanxi, Southeast Shanxi, and Henan were established beginning in 1982 (Workers' Daily 1982). The early years of the reform era saw Shanxi and Henan receive massive amounts of state funding and development, even as the state backed away from its leading role in other parts of the country.

It was also during the mid-1980s at the Shanxi and Henan became major transportation hubs. In 1984 alone, a coal train left Shanxi every six minutes—which would increase to every four minutes by the end of the century—and a further 5,000 trucks supplemented the coal shipped by rail; coal accounted for more than 90 percent of Shanxi's total rail capacity (Jing 1984). The importance of railroads in 1984 were further compounded by the opening of the Antaibao Mine in the Pingshuo Mine Area in north-central Shanxi, the world's largest open-cast mine at the time (Goodman 1999). The opening of an enormous mine further increased Shanxi's (over)production of coal which was, before the massive investment in railroads, often unable to be shipped outside

of the province. In order to meet demand, the central state poured massive amounts of money and labor power into expanding the provinces' rail network, with new lines, double tracking, and improved technology connected the coal mines and cities of Shanxi to not only the rapidly industrializing east coast but also to other mining and industrial hubs in Henan. In fact, the first double track electrified railway in China was between Taiyuan and Shijiazhuang, connecting the coal capital of Shanxi with the steel capital of Hebei. After the Sixth Five-Year Plan, double-tracking and increased technical improvements (such as electrification) of railroad tracks were announced in both Shanxi and Henan, as were projects connecting them. When Chinese officials mentioned the importance of railways and new rail construction and investment throughout the 1980s, Shanxi was explicitly mentioned as a key province ((Xinhua 1985), for an example). Shanxi was indeed "a focal point" (Gao 1984) of the state's development project and the coal mines and industrial cities of Henan were not far out of focus.

The mid-1980s were a crucial point for the coal mining industry in China. In the early reform era, China surged ahead in coal production on the global scale, coal miners' salaries reflected their national and provincial importance, and coal consumption skyrocketed as coal was shipped from these hinterland provinces to the rapidly developing coastal areas, most notably the Jing-Jin-Ji, Yangtze River Delta, and the Pearl River Delta. In 1985, Chinese miners produced 872 million tons of coal, more than 150 million more than in 1983. Not only did Shanxi and Henan produce 24.55 percent and 9 percent of Chinese coal in 1985, but Shanxi and Henan produced coal cheaply; they had the second and third lowest production cost in state mines (CNY/ton) at 24.49 and 28.41, respectively, compared to the national average of 29.33 and that number was even lower in local mines. But, this was not because wages were low. In fact, coal wages were 115 percent of the national average in 1985. As miners' wages increased with their productivity, their importance

to provincial and national development was solidified. Furthermore, coal was an important source of income for provincial leaders in Shanxi and Henan; in Shanxi alone, coal represented a profit of 3.94 billion CNY, which was more than enough for Shanxi coal managers and state managers to be counted as second-tier elites.

Throughout the remainder of the 1980s and into the early-1990s, the Chinese state experimented with special economic zones and increased marketization in coastal, eastern regions, far away from the north central hinterlands of Shanxi and Henan. At the Third Plenum of the Fourteenth Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party in October 1992, it was officially enshrined that China would work towards becoming a "socialist market economy," thereby reducing the direct involvement of the state in the market. By 1994, the price of 80 percent of producer goods, 85 percent of agricultural products, and 95 of industrial goods were determined by the market with only fourteen items remaining under the state distribution system, of which coal and steel were two (Tseng et al. 1994). Coal and steel, which of course requires coal to produce, were deemed too important for national economic development to be left to market forces alone. In 1995 alone, 85.4 percent of the total amount of coal produced was used for industrial production, including in the manufacturing of steel.

The mid-1990s were a crucial juncture for both marketization and state planning of the economy. In 1996, Shanxi began to implement a state-led economic development plan called the Overtaking Strategy in large part because—as the Provincial CCP Secretary Hu Fuguo said (quoted by (Goodman 2013))—"Shanxi is an isolated, inland province with a low market growth rate, poor investment environment, a shortage of capital and human resources, and a definite tension between the drive for development and environmental concerns." This tension was seen clearly although the air above Shanxi was anything but clear; in 1996, Shanxi was the most

polluted province in China and had the highest incidence of lung cancer, largely due to the fact that coal mines represented 10 percent of all the land in Shanxi. The Overtaking Strategy, though, highlighted the necessity of coal and its reliant industries at the expense of health. The Overtaking Strategy was composed of "Three Foundations," namely stable agricultural production, infrastructure development, and support for key industries, coal being the basis of the latter two; "Four Key Projects," of which mining coal, building transportation networks, and generating electricity were three; and "Four Campaigns," of which reforming state enterprises and increasing financialization impacted the coal industry directly.

In 1997, financialization—if not marketization—hit the coal industry; the short-lived Ministry of Coal Industry (1993-1998) established an enterprise group out of the Datong (Shanxi) Coal Mines and listed four coal companies—one in Shanxi (Antaibao) and two in Henan (Pingdingshan and Zhengzhou)—on the domestic stock market (Thomson 2003). In that same year, China produced 1.37 billion tons of coal, or 36.16 percent of the global total. To put that in comparison, the United States—the second highest producing country mined .91 billion tons of coal and the OECD countries combined (including the United States) produced 1.45 billion tons of coal. China also was the world's leading consumer of coal, using 1.39 billion tons of coal. As coal production and consumption increased, though, the number of workers employed in coal mining decreased due to technological and technical increases. In 1997, 851,000 workers toiled in Chinese mines and the next year that number dropped to 721,000, with 7,000 miners in Shanxi and 2,000 in Henan losing their jobs. Although there was a decreased in the number of colliers, their wages increased from the previous year; the average wage of coal miners in Shanxi was 6,962 CNY (compared to the provincial average of 5,641) and in Henan miners averaged 7,372 CNY (compared to the provincial average of 5,781). Both Shanxi and Henan wages were below the

national average (7,479 CNY) and Shanxi's miners made less than the miner average throughout the country while Henanese miners earned more than the national average. Miners in both Shanxi and Henan would make more than their respective provincial average for every year over the next 20 years, except for 2016 when miners in Henan earned 94.6 percent of the average provincial wage. It was in the late-1990s that the coal industry matured into the juggernaut that it now is.

Leading up to China's ascension to the World Trade Organization, China became the world's largest exporter of coking coal, with 40 percent produced in Shanxi alone (Thomson 2003). Hundreds of thousands of jobs were created in order for China to claim its place as the world's leader in coal production, and most of these jobs were well-paying (especially in regard to the wages outside of the coal industry in the economically undeveloped hinterlands) (Pan 1996). Not only were coal miners well-paid, but they were underworked; thousands of workers in Shanxi and Henan were given lifetime employment, high wages, and were grossly underworked, often doing little productive work for decades while garnering high wages in a high-status field (Pan 1996). But, it was not all bread (or noodles) and roses. In the mid-1990s, approximately 14 percent of global carbon dioxide emissions came from China, which made China the second largest polluting country in the world (although they would have been third if the Soviet Union were counted) (Thomson 2003). Additionally, according to the World Resource Institute (1998), nine of the ten most polluted cities in the world were in China—although that number is disputed by the IEA who claim it is a more reasonable five of ten (International Energy Agency 1999). This tension between environmental destruction and economic development fueled by coal, highlighted by Shanxi officials in the early- and mid-1990s, would become extremely important to the Chinese state and economy in the new century.

FORMATION DURING WTO ASCENSION AND XI JINPING THOUGHT

The coal-fueled tension between environmental destruction, economic growth, and state versus market planning came to a head during the first years of the new century. The Chinese state under Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao continued the efforts of their successors Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin to engage in policies of economic and political decentralization while solidifying Party rule. Coal prices dropped, the central state—in order to meet the demands of the World Trade Organization, which they so desperately wanted to join—privatized some of the coal sector and defunded other parts, and coal miners and managers—for the first time in their lives or their parents' lives—were laid off. These changes, though, did not stymie China's coal production; as miners were laid off and their mines sold or shut down, they dug staggering amounts of coal from the earth in order to fuel the continued economic development of the eastern seaboard, but also too the new socialist countryside and the harmonious society, two of the keystone projects during the Hu/Wen regime. Coal managers and miners, especially in Shanxi and Henan where there was a dearth of alternative employment, were shunted to the side, leading to massive unrest. The first decade of the 2000s, under Hu and Wen, saw Shanxi and Henan—their (sub)provincial managers and relationship to the center and their coal managers and miners—lose materially and politically, although the coal mines that survived were producing coal at an unprecedented rate in human history, making the coal managers and miners who were not laid off materially and politically well-off as well as increased their status.

Starting in the late-1990s and continuing through the beginning of the 2000s, Beijing made it a national priority to join the WTO (ascending in December 2001), which included ceding more planning power to the market and price indices. The price of coal dropped drastically, and mines were shuttered in order to appease the WTO; rather than interfere with the market, the central state

closed a significant number of mines in response to price decreases in coal. Although mainly aimed at poor performing and smaller mines, 370,000 coal miners were fired across China from 1997 (when the Asian Financial Crisis began) through 2003 (when Jiang Zemin was succeeded by Hu Jintao as the President of the People's Republic), of whom 132,000 toiled in the mines in Shanxi and a further 122,000 in Henan. The loss of high-status and high-paid employment (if you were lucky enough not to be fired from your mining job, however, your salary increased by approximately 6,000CNY in Shanxi and 7,000CNY in Henan) caused massive unrest throughout the erstwhile coal mining areas. Because throughout the opening and reforms peacocks had been flying southeast—a colorful Chinese proverb that highlighted the fact that not only workers, but substantial amounts of capital have flocked to the eastern and southern coasts—the north central hinterlands were left with few jobs and fewer capital investments for those coal miners who were laid off and coal managers who lost their capital. This led to a wave of strikes and protests throughout Shanxi and Henan (more discussed below).

Although coal miners in Shanxi and Henan were disproportionally fired from the well-paid and well-regarded jobs between 1997 and 2003, the coal industry over that same 6-year period struggled early and then rebounded quickly. Between 1997 and 2000, Chinese miners produced an average of 100 million fewer tons of coal each year, producing fewer than a billion tons of coal in 2000 (the lowest coal producing year since 1988). However, the following three years averaged an increase of 223 million tons of coal per year, starting a remarkable decade of continuous increased coal production.

The following year, when the Hu/Wen regime was firmly in control and hitting its stride, was a great year for Shanxi, Henan, and the coal industry. In March 2004, Wen announced the Rise of Central China Plan with the aim of accelerating the development of Central China (Shanxi

and Henan included) specifically in regard to grain production, the production of raw materials and energy (e.g., coal), the manufacture of modern equipment (which necessitates coal), and the building of transportation networks and hubs (which would rely on coal to build and would transport coal once built). In addition to the announcement of strong central involvement in the political economy of the north central hinterlands, the good news continued for Shanxi's coal industry; 70,000 coal miners were hired, earning an average yearly salary of more than 17,000CNY, 4,000CNY more than the average earning in Shanxi and 1,000CNY more than the national average. A similar pattern of wages (both in average and compared to national and provincial averages) held for Henan, although 4,000 workers lost their jobs. In terms of the coal industry more broadly, it was another banner year. Coal production and consumption increased approximately 20% to almost two billion tons produced and consumed in an effort to develop China from a middle-income country into the upper echelons of the world economy.

Throughout the first decade of the 2000s, China was no longer content sitting on the sidelines of international politics; one of the first initiatives of the fourth generation of Chinese leadership was not only to harmoniously develop the internal socialist state but also to promote harmonious—sometimes translated as peaceful—development of the socialist state abroad. As the newest member of the WTO and increasingly one of the most powerful economies in the world, Hu and Wen made China's international rise to a global actor a priority. No longer an isolated state only looking internally for political and economic development plans, Chinese leadership would increasingly be intertwined in global politics and economics, although under the Hu and Wen regime it would be as a player in global politics and economics instead of as a leader. Hu and Wen merely wanted to integrate China into the world rather than make the world in their own image like their successor Xi Jinping.

In the wake of the international criticism—both from states and international nongovernmental organizations—leveled at China for its role in weakening the Copenhagen Accord, in late 2010 (when Xi Jinping was selected as Vice Chair of the Central Military Commission, generally seen as the beginning of his rise to the top of the Party and State apparatuses) the Twelfth Five Year Plan was being debated at the fifth plenary session of the 17th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. Covering 2011 through 2015, the Five-Year Plan aimed to both adress inequality and environmental issues at home. In terms of inequality, the central state aimed to develop rural and inland areas, including Shanxi and Henan; the north central hinterlands which were largely left behind during the opening and reforms were now becoming more of a focus. As part of the new Five-Year Plan—which emphasized increase rail network as well as increasing developmental aid in the hinterlands—and the Rise of Central China Plan, Zhengzhou became a major transport hub and the center of the planned Central Planes Economic Zone (which was announced in November 2012). Shanxi and Henan might now develop much like the rapidly and radically developed special economic zones of the south and eastern seaboard, which was desperately needed; in 2012, workers in Shanxi and Henan earned, on average, 2,533CNY and 9,431CNY, respectively, less than the national average.

In terms of environmental protections, though, the story is much different; from 2010 to 2012, China mined approximately 10.4 billion tons of coal and averaged an increase of approximately 225 million tons of coal a year. Chinese coal consumption numbers are nearly identical. By 2012, 631,000 coal miners, 69,000 more than 2010, were employed in Chinese mines, with 90,300 of those miners in the mines of Shanxi and another 63,000 in Henan. Those 90,300 miners in Shanxi earned an average salary of 71,541CNY, more than 27,000CNY more than the average worker in Shanxi and approximately 25,000CNY more than the national average. The

miners in Henan made significantly less, but were still relatively well-off compared to their provincial comrades and the national average; in 2012, Henanese miners earned 55,425CNY, 18,000CNY more than the provincial average and 8,656 more than the national average.

By the beginning of Xi Jinping's tenure in November 2012, China was economically and politically decentralized, internationally intertwined, and environmentally devastated, in large part due to the continued growth of the coal industry. In the years since, Xi Jinping has reinstituted waves of both political and economic recentralization under Party rule; has sought to not only expand Chinese influence throughout the globe, but to take a leading role in global governance and challenge American and European hegemony in Africa, Latin America, and Asia, as well as at the suprastate level; and has made substantial efforts to reverse the environmental damage that 60 years of rapid, coal-led development caused. All three became central tenets of Xi Jinping Thought, which was added to the Chinese Constitution alongside Mao Zedong Thought and Deng Xiaoping Thought. As Xi consolidated power in the central state and Party—and himself—disobedience was punished severely, and influential Party members not aligned with Xi or accepting of Xi Jinping Thought were purged quite publicly.

Chinese coal mines produced almost 4 billion tons of coal in 2013 alone—more than 3 billion more tons than the second largest coal producing state, the United States (EIA 2019)—and China as a whole consumed 4.25 billion tons of coal. To reach such astronomical production levels required 636,500 coal workers, 103,000 of whom were from Shanxi and another 62,600 from Henan. For the sake of comparison, there were 80,396 coal workers employed in the United States in 2013 (EIA 2019). Chinese coal miners were also well-paid for their Herculean effort; the average miner in Shanxi earned 68,633CNY—22,226CNY more than other workers in Shanxi and

17,150 more than the national average—and the average miner in Henan earned 51,158CNY—12,857CNY more than the average Henanese worker but 325CNY less than the national average.

It was not surprising that coal peaked in 2013 and steadily—although not sharply—declined as more and more of Xi Jinping's policies were promulgated. Since 2014, Xi has promoted energy policies that sought to decrease coal production, consumption, and pollution while increasing the amount of renewables in the energy mix. The most notable of these policies are the Energy Revolution Strategy of Production and Consumption to 2030, the Thirteenth Five Year Plan and the Thirteenth Five Year Energy Development Plan, the Strategic Action Plan for Energy Development, the Action Plan for Air Pollution Control, and the Three-Year Action Plan for Winning the Blue-Sky War. The Four Revolutions and One Cooperation strategic concept bolsters these campaigns and plans. As these plans were put into effect and it was made known that Xi wanted decreases in coal consumption and production, (sub)provincial actors vigorously implemented not only the letter of the policies but the spirit as well.

As coal production decreased from 2014 through 2016—the third longest stretch of coal production decreases since 1912, the two longest were 1943-1946 (when the average tonnage of coal produced was less than 40,000) and 1997-2000 (see above)—so too did employment numbers and wages. In 2014, China produced 100 million fewer tons of coal than the year before; in 2015, China produced 127 million fewer tons of coal than in 2014; and in 2016, the recent nadir caused and wanted by Beijing and Xi, China produced 335 million fewer tons than in 2015, or half a billion fewer tons than when coal production peaked in 2013. As production decreased, so too did employment. After reaching its peak of 636,500 workers in 2013, the number of people employed in Chinese mines decreased by 145,600 workers by 2016. Of those laid off workers, 11,900 were from Shanxi and 17,400 were from Henan. Wages too were depressed. Shanxi miner's average

wages decreased every year, hitting their lowest point in 2016 when the average coal worker earned 55,921, less than 83 percent of the national average; starting in 2015, Shanxi coal miners earned below the national average for the first time since the first wave of lay-offs at the turn of the century. A similar pattern held for Henan; coal miners in Henan saw their earnings drop to 46,833CNY in 2016 and made significantly less than the national average across this time period, hitting a low point of 69% of the national average or approximately 20,000CNY less.

The low production and consumption numbers and employment and wages in the coal industry was meant to be permanent; in 2016, the Thirteenth Five Year Plan was approved and capped coal production and consumption, pollution, capacity, construction, and the proportion of energy mix, while outlining plans to merge and close plants and mines producing 1 billion tons of coal. New coal mining projects would not be funded according to the Plan and mines with fewer than 300,000 tons of coal produced per year would be closed. The Five-Year Plan combined with the above energy policies and China's active role in the Paris Agreement—especially after the United States' planned withdrawal as early as 2017—were widely hailed by international nongovernmental organizations and environmentalists as China finally taking the right steps in terms of coal production, further bolstered by the actual, concrete decline in the coal in the coal industry under Xi.

In 70 years, China went from an outpost of semi-colonial coal production to a world leader in the coal industry. The coal industry in Shanxi and Henan, caressed and supported by the national state and its various organs, grew immensely and were key players in the economic boom that sustained 10 percent GDP growth per year throughout the reform era and into the Xi Jinping era. Local officials, coal managers, and the miners themselves were well rewarded and regarded. Although they would never be the elite state managers, the billionaires who made their fortune on

the market, or the marketized workers in the south and east, they were elites, both relatively to their environment and as second-tier national elites. For the whole history of the People's Republic of China, coal has been integral for the state and economic development, until now.

REFERENCES

Chao, Yu-shen. 1979. "The Thirty-Point Decision on Industry: An Analysis." *Issues and Studies* 15(1):48-63.

China Coal Industry Ministry. 1983. "China Coal Industry Yearbook." Beijing: China Coal Industry Ministry.

—. 1997. "China Coal Industry Yearbook." edited by China Coal Industry Ministry. Beijing.

Gao, Zongwen. 1984. "Basic Construction Statistics: Coal Mine Enterprise Management Basic Reading Material." Beijing: Meitan gongye chubanshe.

Goodman, David SG. 2013. "7 King Coal and Secretary Hu: Shanxi's third modernisation." Pp. 211-47 in *The Political Economy of China's Provinces*: Routledge.

Goodman, David SG, and Gerald Segal. 2000. "THE MANY WORLDS OF CHINA'S PROVINCES." *The Economies of Asia, 1950-1998: Critical Perspectives on the World Economy* 1:478.

International Energy Agency. 1999. *Coal information*: OECD/IEA.

Jing, Wei. 1984. "Large-Scale Development Mapped Out." in *Beijing Review*. Beijing.

Lary, Diana. 2010. *The Chinese People at War: Human Suffering and Social Transformation, 1937-1945*: Cambridge University Press.

Liu, Zhenyun. 2012. "Why Won't the Chinese Acknowledge the 1942 Famine?" *The New York Times*.

Naughton, Barry. 1995. *Growing out of the plan: Chinese economic reform, 1978-1993*: Cambridge university press.

Pan, Weier. 1996. "Discussion on the Reemployment of 500,000 Coal Mine Staff and Workers." edited by Coal Economics Research.

Sinton, Jonathan E, MD Levine, Feng Liu, WB Davis, Jiang Zhenping, Zhuang Xing, Jiang Kejun, and Zhou Dadi. 1992. "China energy databook." Lawrence Berkeley Lab., CA (United States).

State Statistical Bureau, National Fixed Investments Section. 1987. "China Fixed Asset Investment Statistical Data: 1950–1985." edited by Zhongguo tongji chubanshe. Beijing.

The History of Coal Mining in Contemporary China Compiling and Study Group. 1990. "Zhongguo jindai meikuang shi (The History of Coal Mining in Contemporary China)." edited by Meitan gongye chubanshe. Beijing.

Tseng, Wanda, Hoe Ee Khor, Kalpana Kochhar, Dubravko Mihaljek, and David Burton. 1994. "Economic reform in China: A new phase."

Van der Hoeven, Maria. 2013. "World energy outlook 2012." *International Energy Agency: Tokyo, Japan*.

Wang, Maolin. 1982. "Meitan gongye qiye guanli (Coal Industry Enterprise Management)." edited by Shanxi Renmin Chubanshe. Taiyuan, Shanxi.

Workers' Daily. 1982. "Broad Prospects for China's Coal Industry." in *Workers' Daily*. Beijing.

Xinhua. 1985. "'State Owned Mines Boost Output'." in *Xinhua*. Beijing.

CHAPTER 3: RED CAPITAL, BLACK INFLUENCES, AND GREEN POLICIES: CAPITALS, COAL, AND CONTESTED POLICIES

This chapter explains how meso-level officials interact with specific coal (and coal-reliant) enterprises to determine which, if any, factories to shutter; when and how to shutter them; and how enterprise managers, and their relationships with meso-level officials, influence these decisions. Arguing against protectionism as the dominant explanation for implementation gaps between central-level environmental policies and on-the-ground implementation in rural China, I show the resourceful and nuanced ways in which Chinese meso-level officials interact with local and international, private, state-owned, and illegal capital to further their own, their jurisdiction's, the Party's, and the State's competing interest to decrease coal consumption and production while increasing the capitalist production in coal-reliant localities.

Meso-level officials' resourcefulness—their ability to demystify or de-fog unclear and competing policies, which entails a combination of know-how, ability to cope with the unknown, ingenuity, astuteness, and the ability to get oneself out of trouble—is the key mechanism that explains officials' interactions with enterprises as they (fail to) implement coal policies. Rather than serving either the interests of (1) the central or local state or (2) individual enterprises or the coal sector more broadly, meso-level officials resourcefully implement policies according to and in accordance with their own personal and professional interests. Although separate from state interests, professional interests may overlap with state interests; for example, officials who wish to be promoted (a professional interest) are more likely to attempt to implement as many policies as they can and work enthusiastically for their superiors. Personal interests are influenced by other factors, such as a cultural ethos (that either places central importance on coal as in Shanxi or one that places central importance on ecological modernization and civilization as in Henan),

a desire for kickbacks or petty bribes, a quid pro quo or a chit to call in at some point in the future with other bureaucrats, a fondness or animosity for other bureaucrats or enterprise managers, and/or calculations about the best way to increase their status or reputation (which may be converted into professional advancement but is primarily concerning personal interests). Just as individual enterprises have their independent interests, so too do meso-level officials, who then must navigate both the enterprise's and their own interests in order to implement or fail to implement environmental policies. How meso-level officials do this, and which interests become more salient at different junctures, is the main focus of this chapter.

ECONOMIC PROTECTIONISM IN RURAL, NORTH-CENTRAL CHINA

The most prevalent explanation used for understanding the wide gaps between policies-as-written and policies-as-implemented in China, and especially in regard to environmental policies, has been that officials fail to implement policies as a form of economic protectionism, harkening back to Neo-Marxian understandings of state actors as acting merely in the economic interests of the capitalist class (Bulman and Jaros 2021; Eaton and Kostka 2017; Gilley 2017; Kostka and Hobbs 2012; Nahm 2017; Shin 2017; van Rooij, Na and Qiliang 2018; Wang 2016b). Protectionism is further broken down into local protectionism and central protectionism. Local protectionism is the counterpart of central protectionism, and both individually explain why officials *fail to implement* policies. However, neither can explain why some officials *implement* policies.

Underlying both types of protectionism are the assumptions that officials are financially dependent on polluting firms, that economic development is the most important function and the most important target for officials, and that firms and officials both prioritize short-term profit maximization above long-term goals and interests. In addition to these assumptions,

understandings of implementation gaps often fall into false binaries (center versus local, principal versus agent, economic development or environmental regulation, private or public ownership), overlooking significant empirical deviation (especially in places far from the major economic and political centers on the eastern coast) and changes in governance since Xi Jinping's rise.

In the case of local protectionism, and localism more generally, the major assumption is that short-term economic development at any cost is prioritized over long-term central government policies, creating implementation gaps on the ground (Nahm 2017) and significant variation across China in terms of both economic development and environmental regulation (Fu, Cai and Jian 2020; Wang and Hao 2012). Local protectionism—*defang baohu zhuyi*—is often attributed to either (1) goal imbalance between economic growth and environmental protection, especially in coal-reliant North Central China where there are few industries and fewer avenues for economic development that are not coal-reliant, or (2) crony capitalism wherein local officials are bought and paid for by managers and owners, especially relevant in areas where there are singular, dominant industries that have the means and desire to buy off state-Party officials (Bulman and Jaros 2021; Liu et al. 2021a; Nahm 2017). The structure of incentives that prioritizes economic targets combines with diffuse administrative authority, to make it irrational and unlikely that local officials would support s and enforce environmental policies (Lieberthal 1997) because there is sufficient latitude and flexibility for local officials to ignore their superiors and significant bonuses and rewards to be gained by increasing economic productivity. In addition to legitimate rewards (promotion and end-of-year performance bonuses), local officials also gain illegitimate rewards (patronage and petty corruption) from firms when they fail to enforce environmental regulations (Bulman and Jaros 2021), leading to a

crony capitalism (Hung 2018; Lyu and Singh 2021) in which rewards are passed through social networks. Environmental policies are ignored when economic elites control the state apparatus through their personal connections with local officials in charge of environmental regulation (Goodman 2016). Local protectionism is the most commonly accepted way to explain implementation gaps in environmental policy in China.

Although the main mechanisms for local protectionism—entrenched linkages between local officials and economic elites, ample freedom and flexibility in policy implementation, and an incentive structure that favors economic development—were prevalent at the turn of the 21st century (Li 2004), it may no longer be the case, especially considering Xi Jinping's rise and his efforts to recentralize Chinese politics. Part and parcel of the recent recentralization efforts has been shutting down local protectionism through increased monitoring and moving decision-making from the lowest levels of the Party-state up to meso-level and central-level officials, further complicating the analytical binaries of local and central and principal and unruly agent upon which localism is based. In addition to these structural changes, environmentalism has become a more important target and economic targets have been relaxed somewhat; gone are the days when environmentalism was merely symbolic and gone are the days of 10% GDP growth per annum.

Central protectionism, on the other hand, is attributed to centrally-owned and centrally-managed state-owned enterprises, who, because of their important role in the national economy and because their managers administratively outrank meso- and low-level officials, are willing and able to ignore any policy that would negatively impact their profit margins (Dittmer 2021; Eaton and Kostka 2017; Karplus and Wu 2019; Liu et al. 2021b; Lo and Tang 2006; Ma and Liang 2018; Wang 2015). Because SOEs are the most important source of revenue for many

local jurisdictions, especially in underdeveloped areas where the primary sector and/or heavy manufacturing are dominant, local governments have economic incentives to resist any policies that might affect SOEs negatively, often accomplishing this resistance through collusion with SOEs' managers (Lorentzen, Landry and Yasuda 2014), although this is frequently an assumption made (Eaton and Kostka 2017) rather than an empirical fact. In addition to being embedded in the local economies, SOE managers and leaders are embedded within the central-level bureaucracy, holding a higher administrative rank than environmental regulators, or are former high-ranking state officials who have passed through the revolving door between the upper-echelons of the state and business sector, who still are high ranking within the Party (Wang 2015). This problem is especially pervasive in the "two high, one resource," coal-reliant industries, such as steel, cement, power, and petrochemicals, as well as coal itself (Wang 2015). These two mechanisms lead to an "insider control problem" (Chen 2021), wherein SOEs are protected and ignore central-state policies because lower-level officials cannot regulate them.

The central protection problem, though, has some glaring issues. First, it is based on assumed relationships and collusion, without much empirical evidence to support it. Second, with the restructuring of environmental regulation and the recent recentralization efforts, meso-level officials have stronger administrative capabilities and more oversight, both in terms of their ability to oversee others and others' ability to oversee them. Third, and most importantly, part of the recentralization efforts under Xi Jinping have been to corral SOEs under the banner of the Party-state. In 2016, Xi Jinping claimed that SOEs are surnamed the Party (Dittmer 2021) and in 2018 the former head of COSCO Shipping in a *Communist Party of China News* article claimed that SOEs were surnamed the Country (Ma 2018). Beyond the rhetoric of control and management of SOEs, in practice SOEs put political and social considerations before purely

economic rationale (Lee 2020). This "primacy of politics" (Lee 2020) makes Chinese state capital a different variety of capital that is not profit-maximizing, like private capital, but rather is distinctly connected to and attuned to the interests of the Chinese Party-state.

Further missing from these both of these arguments, beyond the changing empirics of Chinese politics, is the *how* of local and central protectionism—the process behind actual instances of lower-level officials picking and choosing which policies to implement and central SOEs using their connections or economic capital to overrule state regulation—and the *why*—beyond simplistic, prima facie, and/or functionalist arguments. By disaggregating simple binaries—from central and local to central, meso, and local; from principal and agent to principal-agent/principal-agent; from private and state-owned enterprises to state-owned, state-controlled, private, and illegal; and from environmental regulation or economic development to understanding them as non-zero-sum—I am able to better describe the empirical reality of *and* theorize state-capital relations.

EXPLAINING MESO-LEVEL OFFICIALS INTERACTIONS WITH ENTERPRISES: LOGICS AND VARIETIES OF CAPITALS IN NORTH-CENTRAL CHINA

The resourceful bundling of different types of capital and the resourceful understandings of the different logics of economic capital explain how, where, and why meso-level officials in Shanxi fail to enforce environmental policies when dealing with enterprises and how, where, and why meso-level officials in Henan are more willing and able to enforce environmental policies. Capital—the sources and uses of power—has various forms and limitations; actors within specific social relations have different access to different valued, scare resources and, therefore, have a different menu of actions available to them (Bourdieu 1985). Although Bourdieu conceptualized capital as operating within a hierarchical, zero-sum game, capitals can be

accrued, converted, and/or exercised by those who have the skills and ability to do so. Capital is thus a capacity to do something, not just necessarily the capacity over someone (Bonikowski 2015), resulting in non-zero-sum games in which actors accumulate different capitals, invest them in different relationships, exercise them with others, and convert them into different capitals as different relationships require. Among the different types of capital relevant for understanding the political relationships between enterprises and meso-level officials in rural, inland China are economic capital (the power derived from the ability to use and convert financial resources), cultural capital (the power derived from the ability to use, embody, and convert the "rules of the game"), informational capital (the power derived from the ability to use and convert knowledge), social capital (the power derived from the ability to use and convert social ties), symbolic capital (the power derived from the ability to use and convert status), reputational capital (the power derived from the ability to use and convert how those perceive the focal actor), and administrative or organizational capital (the power derived from the ability to use and convert control over resources and the coercive power of positions within hierarchies) (Ocasio, Pozner and Milner 2020). The resourceful ability of mesolevel officials and managers to gain, use, invest, and convert these different types of capital in Shanxi and Henan explain the implementation gap in environmental policies.

In addition to the different types of capital, there are logics of capitals, here the most important varieties of logics of capital are within economic or material capital. There are broadly speaking four varieties of economic capital present in Henan and Shanxi provinces—(1) state-owned capital, (2) state-controlled capital, (3) private capital, and (4) illegal capital—each with differing interests and relations with the state. The logic of state-owned capital—as in the case of state-owned enterprises (SOEs)—is to serve the interests of the state (whether they be economic,

social stability maintenance, environmental, or some other legitimating force). Logics of state capital are empirical questions that change in different places and in different times; no state has unified interests and not all states have the same (or even similar) interests. The logic of state-controlled capital—as in the case of corporations that are merely controlled by the state through connections, either *guanxi* (the relations between people) or through red or crony capitalism (the capture of corporations by Party officials)—is individual profit-maximization through rent-seeking. The difference between state-owned and state-controlled is empirically and analytically important. Some state-owned enterprises are in fact state-controlled, with the enterprise acting as the property of the managers not the state. Some state-controlled enterprises are privately-owned, but have shifted their orientation towards personal gains realized through connections with meso-level officials. The logic of private capital is profit maximization, as well as longevity. These logics are intimately intertwined, but they are not the same thing; when forced to choose between profit-maximization in the short-term and organizational continuance in the long-term due to exogenous pressures (here: from the state and global market forces), private capital will maximize longevity over quarterly or yearly profits. Finally, the logic of illegal capital is longevity, accomplished by avoiding and evading the state. Illegal capital is profit-driven, but because they risk imprisonment for their activities, illegal capital is more concerned with evading state detection and maximizing profit as quickly as possible. These different logics of capital inform different relations with the state and with labor, though the primary focus here is on state-capital relations., and different ways in which state officials and managers resourcefully bundle their interests and actions in order to achieve their desired goals, often working together towards those goals and sometimes working against one another.

In Shanxi, state-owned capital is predominately—and dominated by—large, centrally-owned SOEs or state-controlled corporations, there are few larger private companies and fewer internationally-owned private enterprises, and illegal capital has a strong foothold in local economies. Meso-level officials in Shanxi are more readily able and willing to not implement environmental policies that would have negative repercussions on their economies not because of the primacy of economic targets over environmental targets (as local and central protectionism would suggest) but rather because meso-level actors and managers bundle their material, cultural, social, symbolic, administrative, and organizational capitals together, leveraging these capitals into implementation gaps on the ground. In rural Henan, state-owned and state-controlled corporations are smaller compared to Shanxi (both in terms of economic and political importance); private capital is much sought after and has a stronger presence than in Shanxi, especially large, internationally-owned private firms; and illegal enterprises, while present, operate at a much smaller scale (both relative to the the legal, formal market in Henan and to the illegal market in Shanxi). Like in Shanxi, meso-level officials and managers in Henan resourcefully bundle their different types of capitals to further their own and collective interests, but this often results in closing implementation gaps on the ground. The following part of this chapter will focus on how managers and state officials create and use different types of capitals and their attendant logics to further their own interests, leading to widening implementation gaps in some parts of Shanxi and narrowing implementation gaps in some parts of Henan.

STATE-OWNED CAPITAL AND THE STATE

Although historically state-owned enterprises (SOEs) have been able to evade environmental regulations in the past, SOEs sometimes work with meso-level officials to meet environmental standards and policies. The question, therefore, is not whether or not—or the

extent to which—SOEs shirk their environmental responsibilities, but how SOEs work with meso-level officials to selectively and resourcefully implement some environmental targets. The focus, therefore, is both on the process—how managers and cadres come to find acceptable balances, how cadres regulate SOEs, and how SOE use their importance in the national economy (as national champions) to pick and choose—and the specific policies that cadres enforce and managers implement.

One of the primary duties of meso-level officials is to work with SOE, especially national champions within their jurisdiction, to further develop economically. Meso-level officials have historically taken the backseat in these partnerships, allowing SOE to dictate the terms of engagement. However, since Xi Jinping's rise—and the 2018 SOE reforms—the Party has attempted to place SOEs under meso-level officials and has shifted its thinking from "managing enterprises" to "managing capital" by "separating capital and management within the enterprises" (Interview 75, Beijing professor, July 2019). Underlying the shift to managing capital is an understanding of state-owned capital as a unique form of capital with a different logic than other types of capital: namely, serving the interests of the state. State-Party politics shape SOEs' interests, not profit maximization.

Meso-level officials, especially in economically underdeveloped areas that rely on coal and coal-based manufacturing, view state-owned enterprises as state-owned capital to be managed according to their interests; meso-level officials do not wish to run enterprises, but seek to shape capital in support of their personal and professional goals (Interview 32, Shanxi meso-level official, January 2019). State-owned enterprises, especially the national champions in steel and coal production, view themselves as vital for both economic development goals and social stability maintenance goals because of their "heavy social burden" in the form of social safety

nets, tax burdens, and stable employment for large numbers of workers (Interview 96, Henan SOE manager, April 2019). Meso-level officials' and managers' logics coincide in such a way as to coordinate goals and outcomes, although the goals are contested and change over time.

A national champion SOE manager in northern Shanxi province explained: "We want state intervention and guidance on environmental policies; we need state support to become ecologically modern and economically competitive" (Interview 85, Shanxi SOE manager, December 2018). Following meso-level officials' guidance and national policies and campaigns, this national champion has attempted to make its production and facilities more environmentally friendly through introducing "clean coal" and coal scrubbing, recycling waste on site, vertically integrating smaller mines and production facilities, physically greening their expansive mining and production facilities, increased research and development into ecological production, and introducing an ecological corporate culture (Interview 85, December 2018). However, the SOE is hampered by the lack of fiscal and symbolic support given by meso-level officials, leading to inefficient and ineffective environmental policy implementation on the ground.

Clean coal is a concept that both meso-level officials (Interview 35, November 2018) and SOE managers (Interview 85, December 2018) in Shanxi have touted as a way to move forward with coal production and consumption while still following through on their environmental targets. Clean coal, though, is rarely ever defined or differentiated from "dirty coal." In this way, clean coal has become a slogan that officials and managers shout but is without meaning; clean coal is "like a house built on a beach, there is no foundation, so the waves wash it down" (Interview 76, Beijing-based university professor, July 2019). One of the tangible ways in which coal is cleaned is through coal scrubbers attached to smokestacks. Because they are relatively cheap and easy to retrofit, meso-level officials have insisted that SOEs add scrubbers to all of

their smokestacks, and the national champion SOEs have been more than willing to comply. “Scrubbers are great for us, we show that we care about the environment and they are easy to do, everyone is happy with scrubbers” (Interview 85, December 2018). Unlike other, smaller operations, national champion SOEs use their scrubbers because their interests coincide with meso-level officials’ interests for clean coal and lessened pollution.

In addition to clean coal, national champions have heeded meso-level officials’ commitment to close down underperforming facilities through vertical integration—including purchasing smaller mines and production facilities, which are then relocated to town-sized plants in periurban areas—and idling facilities that are less profitable. Efforts to reduce the number of coal producing and consuming facilities are a large part of the environmental targets that meso-level officials must meet, and are resourcefully constructed as win-wins for SOE and meso-level officials. For meso-level officials, they meet their environmental goals while ensuring that those responsible for meeting their economic goals are performing well. For SOE, they get to expand their coal production and consumption operations, increase profits, and make meso-level officials happy by helping them meet their goals (Interview 85, Shanxi SOE manager, December 2018; Interview 96, Henan SOE manager, April 2019). Furthermore, when SOE designate less-profitable operations as “idling,” they are technically reducing the number of operating facilities while keeping them on standby in case meso-level officials reverse course with their environmental policy enforcement or if coal prices increase. These idled plants are inactive, but not permanently shuttered, meaning that they could easily and quickly return to service; in contrast to plants that are closed, equipment sold, and workers fired, idled plants are merely furloughed until necessary. Vertical integration has allowed SOEs to work with meso-level

officials, realizing their goals to "comprehensively" work with the state and "manage state-owned capital" (Interview 32, Shanxi meso-level official, January 2019).

In addition to these efforts to use clean coal and reduce the number of inefficient operations, SOEs have been at the forefront of literal greening efforts. One of the most successful instances of this physical greening, and one that was vociferously praised by meso-level officials (Interview 32, January 2019), was a national champion's "adding green, managing green, loving green" campaign. Over the course of this green campaign, more than 90,000 trees and 180,000 shrubs were planted on the SOE's campus, representing one of the largest carbon sink efforts in North-Central China (Interview 85, Shanxi SOE manager, December 2018). Again, the idea was proposed by meso-level officials as a way to greenwash their jurisdiction; officials could meet environmental targets by introducing green areas and providing government subsidies to increase the number of trees and shrubs in their jurisdiction, and SOEs have large, ugly campuses that would benefit from increased greenery. These resourceful solutions to joint problems are a way in which SOEs work with meso-level officials to implement easy environmental policies and campaigns, while ignoring the harder-to-implement and more ecologically friendly policies.

Clean coal, vertical integration and idling, and physical greening are all relatively affordable for SOEs, who resourcefully use political, economic, and social pressures to create win-win scenarios with meso-level officials. In contrast to these simple and environmentally dubious outcomes, more environmentally friendly targets cost more; SOE have financial barriers to implement real environmental policies, so they need more state support and favorable loans (Interview 85, Shanxi SOE manager, December 2018; Interview 96, Henan SOE manager, April 2019). SOE managers claim that they need more state funding, through national programs like

the Middle and Western Great Exploitation Strategy and reduced social burdens in the form of tax relief, in order to enact meaningful change. Rather than wanting less state involvement, managers want the state to provide and manger their capital better, reducing the financial barriers to effective and consequential environmental outcomes. Just as funds are made available for renewable energy sources, mainly solar in Henan and Shanxi, national champion coal and coal-reliant enterprises want funds to be made available for them to ecologically modernize (Interview 85, Shanxi SOE manager, December 2018; Interview 96, Henan SOE manager, April 2019). Meso-level officials are more than willing to provide funds for SOEs where they are able (Interview 32, Shanxi meso-level official, January 2019). Their ability to provide funds, though, is linked to how resourcefully both meso-level officials and SOE managers are able to justify their expenses as environmentally-oriented and how they can claim that funding allocated to them will meet stringent national goals. SOEs and meso-level officials, individually and jointly, want to determine what counts as meeting environmental policies' and campaigns' goals, but when they involve central-level officials who have the administrative and organizational capital to control the decision-making process, they are often held to stricter standards, leading to fewer available funds for easy and environmentally dubious programs, and demands for real closures rather than idling.

Demands for real closures are specific to the number of operations that must be closed, but not specific as to which operations must be closed, giving meso-level officials discretion to pick and choose which facilities to close. This freedom is appreciated, but does represent a problem for meso-level officials: How do they decide which SOE to "punish" with closures when there is no obvious answer? When there are severely underperforming facilities, zombie plants, or idling facilities, meso-level officials easily close them with little pushback from SOE.

But, when there are no obvious candidates for closure and meso-level officials must close a facility, their decision-making process involves reputation, status, social connections, and how well SOEs respond to non-environmental state initiatives.

On an unusually hot March day in 2019, a meso-level official in Shanxi toured me around the rural outskirts of his jurisdiction, explaining how, in order to meet his environmental targets and hopefully get a bonus, he was forced by his superiors to close one of the two coal processing facilities in his jurisdiction (Interview 34, Shanxi meso-level official, March 2019). During the winter, he was figuratively at a crossroads and, while explaining his conundrum, we were literally stopped at a crossroads—on two of the four corners were the competing coal processing facilities whose fate he decided during the winter, one still operational and the other boarded up and abandoned. He explained that these facilities were as identical as can be in terms of economics and quantified data; they had similar numbers of workers, similar profit margins, similar output, and similarly valued land considering they were across the street from each other (Interview 34, Shanxi meso-level official, March 2019). The decision of which to close eventually came down to one facility's reputation as a "good" facility that was aligned with "socialism with Chinese characteristics," as well as the connections that the facility's management made with meso-level and local officials, and the other facility's reputation of "only caring about profit" regardless of what is "best," ignoring state campaigns in favor of the market (Interview 34, March 2019). These extra-economic considerations were crucial in the deciding which one to keep open and which one to shut down permanently.

As we continued to walk and discuss the decision-making matrix, I noticed that there were three huge red banners hanging across the two buildings visible from the main gate—and the main gate itself—of the still operating facility, saying: (1) "Make Progress While Ensuring

Stability," (2) "Safe production; Protect the Environment," and "Environmental Protection Through Quality Products" (field notes, March 2019). These red banners were clearly not new; they bore the marks of winter and wind, as well as being sun-bleached. The operating facility was openly showing that it was "adhering to the new development concept, promoting high-quality development, and striving for excellence in the pursuit of first-class excellence," all of which were necessary components of being a "good Chinese" enterprise (Interview 34, March 2019). This reputation, combined with the outward display of state-Party slogans, gave the first plant a distinct advantage over the second plant, making the meso-level official "look bad" and "lose face within the Party" if he would have closed the former plant in favor of the latter (Interview 34, March 2019). Publicly aligning with the dominant political interests saved one state-owned enterprise's coal production facility and the failure to do so doomed another's because meso-level officials believed that they were not properly aligned with the expectations of state-owned enterprises, underscoring the importance of "politics first" for state-owned enterprises.

While walking back to the meso-level official's office, I noted how close both processing facilities were; it was only about a 10-minute leisurely stroll back along a major street to reach the office compound. The distance was shorter for managers at the still operating facility, though, than it was for those formerly employed by the one that was shut down. Managers at the open facility were often seen and heard interacting with local officials and meso-level officials in the compound, buying meals and drinks, and creating and maintaining "harmonious" relations with officials (Interview 34, March 2019). These relationships were then instrumental in determining which enterprise was more viable and which was "not as invested in the [political] community" (Interview 34, March 2019). Social relations further showed that the managers understood that

the enterprise was secondary to the interests of meso-level officials, making it a better partner for meso-level officials and showing that managers who behave in the interests of meso-level officials would thrive.

In addition to state-owned enterprises that followed meso-level officials' wants in regard to environmental policies, there were SOEs that openly defied meso-level officials, either because (1) they were protected by central-level bureaucrats, making them administratively higher ranked, or (2) they figured that these environmental policies were merely for show and not "real" policies meant to be followed (Interview 86, Shanxi SOE manager, December 2018). There has been much written about the first point, and I was unable to observe any central protectionism in action. The second point, however, remains empirically and analytically interesting. Meso-level officials had to convince SOE managers that environmental policies were important and had to be followed, if they wished to control coal production and consumption, or they had to convince their superiors that they were trying to rein in SOEs while indicating to the managers that these were not important policies. In Henan, officials had to convince SOE managers that they were to limit coal production and consumption, whereas in Shanxi, officials had to convince their superiors that they were trying to limit coal in accordance with national policies.

In both Henan and Shanxi, meso-level officials used the same tactic in their interactions with SOE managers: meso-level officials would invite managers in for a closed-door meeting. When hoping to corral SOE managers, closed door meetings are an invitation for managers to be admonished privately. When public naming and shaming are not feasible or viewed as counterproductive, meso-level officials would kindly invite SOE managers to "drink tea" and discuss how they should responsibly behave (Interview 64, Henan meso-level official, May

2019). These were antagonistic meetings in which officials would threaten to sanction managers if they were unwilling or unable to follow official mandates; "managers are not above the law and they need to be reminded of that, they need to know that the Party's policies come first and that there are consequences to their actions" (Interview 64, May 2019). In contrast to these meetings in Henan, in Shanxi, meso-level officials would invite SOE managers to private meetings, hoping that their superiors would think that these meetings were antagonistic like in Henan (Interview 24, Shanxi meso-level official, May 2019). During these meetings, officials and managers would literally drink tea and casually discuss environmental targets, saying that officials "hoped" that managers would follow environmental guidelines (Interview 24, May 2019). At the conclusion of the meeting, "some officials" would have managers sign a pledge to follow environmental policies broadly in order to show their superiors that the "meeting was a success" (Interview 24, May 2019). Because these meetings were behind closed doors, but their existence was widely-known, meso-level officials were able to construct a narrative of the meeting for their own benefit.

STATE-CONTROLLED CAPITAL AND THE STATE

State-controlled enterprises differ from state-owned enterprises in many crucial empirical and analytic ways, necessitating the split between the logics of enterprises that are state-owned and those that are merely state-controlled. The logic of state-controlled enterprises is to use the enterprises for personal and/or professional gain, either through rent-seeking and corruption (using firm assets for personal gain) or through cultivating political connections (orienting the firm towards the personal interests of meso-level officials) in order to use those connections for material, social, or reputational gain. For meso-level officials, state-controlled enterprises are a way to line their pockets through kickbacks or direct involvement, increase their reputation and

status within the state-Party apparatus, and direct decisions to align with their personal or professional goals. It is also important to note that state-controlled enterprises can be privately- or publicly-owned; state-controlled enterprises are not merely state-owned enterprises that have suffered orientation shifting, but comprise of any type of firm that has been captured by connections between managers and officials for personal gain.

In this way, personal connections, and the personal gains accrued through these connections, are the driving logic of state-controlled enterprises and their relationships with the state. Managers and meso-level officials work together to extract personal benefits in both Shanxi and Henan, ensuring that coal production continues in spite of central mandates to reduce coal production and central mandates aiming to increase the role of the Party in state-owned enterprises through increased and diversified oversight. Because coal production is a large source of material, status, and reputational gain; because meso-level officials and managers have spent years cultivating network ties; and because meso-level officials and managers have the administrative discretion to control their respective organizations, coal-based state-controlled enterprises become "selfish" and "localized" to meso-level jurisdictions and officials (Interview 19, Henan environmental protection bureau official, April 2019). Meso-level officials resourcefully create and use their connections with public and private firms to further their own interests through crony capitalism, and in Shanxi and Henan that means supporting increased coal production and coal-related pollution. Although, in Henan unlike in Shanxi, there has been increased efforts to diminish meso-level control of private and public firms.

Public sector managers—and those who are in coal production and coal-reliant manufacturing and energy production are mostly public sector managers—must have "good connections" to meso-level officials if they hope to conduct "any kind of business at any scale"

(Interview 95, Henan coal-reliant manager, April 2019). These “good connections” indicate the closeness between political and economic elites, highlighting the immerse of political elites—meso-level officials—into the economic structure, leading to “insiders” having favorable access to land, labor, and loans and protection against negative externalities, such as central policies to reduce coal usage. Crony capitalists are not state or Party officials, but rather those with whom meso-level officials have close network ties. This closeness allows for both meso-level officials and managers to snowball their wealth, creating a win-win for individuals at the expense of environmental targets.

This rent-seeking behavior, by both managers and meso-level officials, manifests in both business and politics as the protection of their joint interests. Rather than focusing on maximizing profits and organizational longevity, managers aim to tie themselves to the leading cadres in their jurisdictions in order to “create a viable business environment” in which managers “gain and officials gain” material and status-based rewards (Interview 95, Henan coal-reliant manager, April 2019). Rather than focusing on politics and meeting all of the targets that central-level officials have mandated, meso-level officials become embourgeoised to a degree, focused on exploiting network connections to further their own individual interests (Interview 19, Henan environmental protection bureau official, April 2019). Because both managers and meso-level officials shift their goals to the utility of their mutual connection, petty—and not so petty—corruption occurs, often involving both (1) the stripping of business assets for personal gain and (2) the unfettered continuation of pollution and coal production.

Meso-level officials have historically sought to “manage” private coal mining corporations, focusing their energies on “promoting the vitality of the corporations” so that economic windfalls would be translated into personal gain—through kickbacks and gifts that

allow the official to gain status—and professional gains—through increased economic development and increased reputation (Interview 94, Henan coal manager, May 2019). "Hypothetically speaking, if Party A were to provide Party B with advantages or if Party A were to not disadvantage Party B, then Party B must return the favor. This is not accepting a bribe, but rather a way for everyone to win. Party B gets to make more money and Party A gets rewarded"(Interview 94, May 2019). Meso-level officials who fail to properly enforce central mandates to curb coal production or coal pollution, then, are providing advantages to coal producing and polluting enterprises at "great personal risk" and it "would only be fair" for the official to receive "something for their efforts" (Interview 56, Henan official, December 2018). Meso-level officials in charge of curbing coal pollution make professional and personal connections with managers as part of their official duties, then they leverage these connections to realize material rewards. These material rewards in turn allow for conspicuous consumption wherein meso-level officials rise in status among their peers and the population more broadly. Professionally, material gains are realized within the firm, leading to stronger economic performance ratings and a reputation within the state=Party.

PRIVATE CAPITAL AND THE STATE

Economic development is one of the main targets that meso-level officials must meet in order to be promoted and to earn both end-of-year bonuses and respect from national-level officials. In the economically disadvantaged rural, North-Central provinces of Henan and Shanxi, this can be done through encouraging national champion SOE (discussed above) or by attracting private businesses, both foreign and domestic. In Henan, foreign direct investment (FDI) is highly sought after, with officials hoping to replicate the success of Shenzhen and Shanghai, often stressing that 30 years ago Shenzhen was a "mud town" and outside of the Bund, Shanghai

was not better (Interview 63, Henan official, April 2019). In contrast, Shanxi is more provincial, hoping to create an economic environment for private small- and medium-sized enterprises to thrive in rural areas and large domestic companies, like Foxconn, to transfer operations from the coast to large cities in Shanxi in the hopes that cheaper labor costs and fewer and lower taxes would incentivize companies to move inland (Interview 35, Shanxi official, November 2018). State officials wish to work with private entrepreneurs in order to meet their economic targets, often at the expense of environmental targets.

For managers, Henan presents something akin to *terra nullius*; in rural, Northern Henan there are few industries outside of steel manufacturing and coal mining and a large, young population seeking better work than heavy industry and mining. With plentiful workers and few competitors, rural Henan offers an ideal setting for private capital, especially considering that meso-level officials are more than willing to provide incentives (in the form of tax breaks, subsidies, and cheap land) to private capital in order to draw private investment. Unlike Henan, though, Shanxi does not present a particularly attractive environment for private enterprises; not only are the fewer workers but they are heavily concentrated in mining—1 in 5 urban workers are coal miners (National Bureau of Statistics 2020)—older, and less educated than their peers in Henan, and Shanxi workers are content with coal jobs. Unlike Henan where there are few dominant industries, the dominance of coal, and large national champions, in Shanxi leaves little room for private investments, although meso-level officials in larger cities are strongly pushing for domestic transfers, hoping to replicate the flying geese model—that a country will catch up economically by developing a certain industry, which will then have spillover effects into other industrial development, eventually leading to international transfer of wealth (Kojima 2000)—within China. Private, profit-maximizing, and survival-oriented corporations are more willing

and able to conduct business in Henan than in Shanxi, and to work with meso-level officials in Henan rather than in Shanxi.

In the economically underdeveloped interior, Chinese meso-level officials resourcefully work with private corporations, promising large profits and organizational survival through multi-year contracts, in order to meet economic targets, at times using national-level environmental policies as recruitment tools (like in Henan) and at other times ignoring national-level environmental and economic policies as recruitment tools (like in Shanxi). And, although national banks are directed to give SOEs favorable loans and provide loans to SOEs instead of privately-owned enterprises, meso-level officials have the administrative freedom to support privately-owned enterprises in their jurisdiction by providing tax breaks, land, and, in some cases, guaranteed cheap labor, ensuring profit maximization and organizational longevity.

In Henan, workers and meso-level officials both want to "modernize" the economy, pushing economic development not through primary and secondary industries like mining and steel production, but rather through tertiary, service and information/technology jobs (Interview 63, Henan official, April 2019). Environmental targets are not the primary goal driving this transformation, but they do help convince other meso-level officials to back plans meant to attract foreign private investment into Henan. The primary driver here are the economic targets that meso-level officials must meet in order to gain promotion, reputation, and end-of-year bonuses, but there are spillover effects into environmental targets and environmental targets are used as negotiating chips for meso-level officials and managers.

An example of this modernization project can be seen in the shantytown renovation efforts in which meso-level officials have engaged and how they have worked with private investors and corporations to build new housing, new commercial centers, and new jobs for

economically disadvantaged rural populations in Henan (Interview 60, Henan meso-level official, April 2019). The goal of shantytown renovations is to convert “forest people, mountain people, and cave people” into “city-dwellers” who live in “modern homes with modern heating and modern plumbing” capable of working “good jobs” nearby, and the only way to do this was through “attracting private investment” to the area (Interview 60, April 2019). These rural areas are especially attractive for “shantytown renovations” because they contribute little to the economy (so any improvement would be a huge win for meso-level officials) and because they are environmentally and socially unacceptable (environmentally because the workers are coal miners, use coal to heat and cook, and destroy the environment; socially because they are reminders of how poor some of China’s poorest are and they are blight to the local area).

In order to attract this investment, meso-level officials can opt to use funds from the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development, although those funds are highly competitive and often come with more strings attached than meso-level officials are willing to accept, leading them to court private investment, mostly through public-private partnerships (PPPs) (Interview 60, April 2019). PPPs allow for private corporations to mitigate risk, while maximizing rewards; meso-level officials provide the financial backing, land, and (in the case of some PPPs) guaranteed labor (either in the form of flexible labor or in the displaced workers from the former shantytown). PPPs are legally binding, formal contractual relationships between meso-level officials and specific companies, mutually committed to providing a specific function (here: shantytown renovation). Mutual commitment is usually reified through personal connections, as in the case here; meso-level officials actively sought personal connections with foreign and domestic managers in order to find acceptable partnerships, and managers were willing to be courted because of the economic gains and the knowledge that these officials were unlikely to be

transferred or promoted in the near future (if their meso-level patron is gone, the project might grind to a halt) (Interview 60, April 2019). Meso-level officials ensure that private enterprises have guarantees of profit and of longevity. These PPPs were heavily favorable to private corporations.

In exchange for meeting private enterprises demands, meso-level officials are guaranteed some level of economic development, while incidentally improving in environmental and social categories. Instead of relying on coal for heating and energy needs, officials took advantage of low renewable energy prices and partnerships with private firms to build solar, wind, and natural gas operations. Instead of relying on coal jobs for marginal employment, former shantytown dwellers were packaged as flexible labor for local secondary industries, lower coal production and coal-based pollution. And, finally, instead of "dirt people" former shantytown residents became "citizens" (Interview 60, April 2019), worthy of respect from other citizens and aiding in the reputational development of the meso-level officials. Not only would "Henan modernize" but meso-level officials were also attracting investment and because "investment begets development," Henan was one step closer to being an economic powerhouse. The environmental targets were merely spillover effects from the desire to attract investment.

In Shanxi, on the other hand, private capital was not sought after in rural areas; meso-level officials only worked with large private enterprises in a select few metropolitan areas (and their peri-urban surroundings), preferring to allow centrally-owned SOEs to dominant rural economies. That is not to say that private companies did not exist in rural areas, just that they represent a smaller market share and are viewed as "second-class" when compared to large SOE conglomerates (Interview 28, Shanxi meso-level official, November 2018). In these rural areas, private enterprises were meant to "fill in the gaps" left by the national champions.

In rural Shanxi, there were no large, foreign private firms, but only small, local private capital in the service industry (restaurants, local department stores, and groceries), light manufacturing (glass or ceramic production), and construction (although most construction workers left rural Shanxi to migrate to large coastal cities, in an identical fashion to that which Sarah Swider [2015] described). These local firms were supported by government officials because they were necessary for individual consumption and, as long as coal miners were earning good wages, were affordable ways to recycle coal wages into the local economies (Interview 20, Shanxi tax official, April 2019). Coal workers earned above-average wages and needed places to spend those wages, and meso-level officials hoped that they would bolster the local economies through consumption. Instead of relying on primary extraction as the main source of economic development for local economies—most of which would be siphoned off to national firms and thus Beijing bureaucrats (Interview 20, April 2019)—meso-level officials wanted to recycle wages into local consumption, thus appearing to meet economic goals aimed at creating a middle-class, consumption-based economy. Coal workers were therefore an integral part of the economic consumption base in rural Shanxi, not just the production base.

If officials were to shutter coal production facilities, recycled wages through consumption would decline, hurting local economies further. However, if coal facilities remained open and workers continued to earn their above-average wages, then they could spend on local products, leading to economic gains across the board. Therefore, private firms pushed meso-level officials to shirk their environmental responsibilities in favor of economic targets (Interview 47, October 2018; Interview 49, Shanxi official, May 2018). Although this urging of meso-level officials was sometimes done by outright bribery and corruption, it was more frequently done resourcefully,

through a combination of transforming and using cultural schema and the ability to have and use information concerning local economic targets and development.

Meso-level officials pushed local products (like ceramics and vinegar) within their jurisdiction through various means in order to promote "local business interests" by "ensuring that workers buy good, local products," thus making officials "look good [to their superior]" (Interview 47, Shanxi official, October 2018). This meso-level official would always mention local products to workers when he inspected them or meet with worker delegations, strongly suggesting that they spend their money wisely on good, local products. Local products were advertised on local roads and in neighborhoods (on bulletin boards and painted on walls) with common themes surrounding how good citizens "buy local" and it benefits everyone if one spends their money locally (field notes, October 2018). These ads were directed at coal workers because they were only ones who could afford to buy from the foreign stores (Interview 47, October 2018). This was especially important during the massive wave of anti-foreign (and especially anti-American) sentiment spurred by trade competition in 2018-2019. These cultural schema of being a good citizen and a good consumer were strong motivators, and ones that meso-level officials pushed in conjunction with local firms.

Meso-level officials also worked closely with local firms to meet economic goals, giving managers information about what was required of them (both managers and meso-level officials) and imploring them to cut costs and raise revenue (Interview 49, May 2018). This informational capital (Bourdieu 2005)—the ability to access and then mobilize data for one's own interests—is crucial for the relationship between local firms and meso-level officials. Because meso-level officials rely on local firms for their economic performance, they often make managers aware of ways in which both parties can benefit by meeting these goals. When local firms know what

meso-level officials want, they can then use that knowledge to pressure officials to act in their interests (Interview 49, May 2018). Local firms (not related to coal production) would "strongly suggest" that if meso-level officials were to close down coal production operations, then they would lose a significant consumer base because people would migrate or no longer be able to afford their products, which might cause the local firm to go bankrupt, following up this suggestion with rhetorical questions about how meso-level officials would be able to meet their economic goals (Interview 49, May 2018). Information about what economic goals needed to be met and how likely officials were to meet them were an important resource for local firms to put pressure on meso-level officials to ignore environmental targets.

The large metropolitan areas in Shanxi are relatively underdeveloped compared to the eastern seaboard, and even compared to similarly ranked cities in Henan, and rely heavily on coal and coal-reliant industries economically. That presents both a problem and a potential blessing for meso-level officials: it is a problem for private enterprises hoping to enter the market because of the stranglehold that coal and coal-reliant industries have on the workforce, culture, and even the officials themselves, but it is also a blessing because as the central government aims to restrict coal and economically develop the interior provinces, there are opened gaps for enterprises to exploit. With low land prices, cheaper labor, and state incentives from the national- and meso-level (both financial and political), large cities in Shanxi have become particularly attractive (Interview 28, Shanxi meso-level official, November 2018), especially with the push to develop Shanxi's cities outlined in the 12th (2011-2015) and 13th (2016-2020) Five Year Plans.

In Shanxi's largest and most economically developed cities, private capital and foreign direct investment actively seek partnerships with provincial and meso-level officials, promising economic development in exchange for cheap land, cheap labor, and little to no taxes for a

certain period of time (Interview 28, Shanxi meso-level official, November 2018). Land, the purview of meso-level governments, has been a major revenue draw for these officials; selling or leasing the land for private investment is a common way in meso-level officials fill their coffers, and large, foreign private investment is the most lucrative investment for meso-level officials. Large foreign investment has a double benefit of allowing meso-level officials to reach economic targets and increasing their reputation and status within the party-State apparatus (Interview 28, November 2018). Meso-level officials, aware of private firms' interest in their jurisdictions, actively seek out firms to relocate from coastal cities (Interview 28, November 2018; Interview 29, Shanxi official, December 2018). Both foreign managers and meso-level officials know this and work together to ensure that they can secure land within cities.

Labor, though, is more complicated, especially in Shanxi where 1 in 5 urban workers are in the coal production industry (National Bureau of Statistics 2020) and many workers migrate to eastern cities looking for better jobs. Additionally, Shanxi does not boast a particularly well-educated workforce, leaving high-tech and financial service sector firms unlikely to invest in urban Shanxi. Secondary manufacturing, mainly in electronics and clothing industries, though, view urban Shanxi as a viable alternative to the eastern coastal cities where they currently have factories. As wages increase in the large manufacturing cities in the Pearl River Delta and the Yangtze Delta, firms view inland cities as acceptable replacements because land is cheaper (as it is undeveloped) and labor is cheaper (as wages are much lower). Meso-level officials know this and actively seek to convince private capital to relocate inland.

ILLEGAL COAL AND THE STATE

Although there have been concentrated efforts at the national- and meso-levels to limit the illegal coal market (both in production and consumption) and illegal coal pollution, illegal

coal and coal-reliant industries still operate freely in parts of rural Shanxi and rural Henan where local states and economies are weaker. Illegal coal production generally occurs (1) in unlicensed or unauthorized mines or (2) when licensed or authorized mines overproduce or over-pollute. Overproduction is rampant in both Shanxi and Henan, although unauthorized mines are much more common in Shanxi.

Illegal, unlicensed coal operations often exist under the "protective umbrella" of meso-level or lower-level officials—social networks that provide cover for illegal coal miners and managers—in exchange for kickbacks—materially in the form of cash payments, as well as increased cultural and reputational capital. The dominant logic of this form of illegal capital is not to avoid the state so much as to work with the state to avoid state sanctions while maximizing profits without concern for labor or environmental impact. The goal is to extract as much profit as possible while evading state sanctions for as long as possible.

Illegal coal pollution occurs when coal operations pollute over their legally prescribed limit or they fail to scrub the gasses as they exit through smokestacks. Failure to install sulfur dioxide scrubbers is rare, although it does happen, whereas over-polluting, often literally under the cover of darkness, is a common phenomenon everywhere. Illegal overproduction occurs when coal mines ignore limits on production, often selling the excess coal on the black market to individual households or to small or medium coal-reliant enterprises. Illegal overuse of water occurs when coal mining operations tap into water sources that are protected or they use more water than they were allotted, both are due to the water-intensive coal mining practices in North-Central China. Finally, overextension occurs when mining operations expand beyond the allocated land approved for mining activities, which is more common in underground mining (and harder for meso-level officials to spot) but does occur in opencast mining. Overproduction,

overuse, overextension, and overpollution are also facilitated by social capital and material capital; operations that have connections to meso-level officials (more so than lower-level officials) and those that are important to the local economy are able to use those capitals to influence meso-level officials to turn a blind eye to their overproduction, overuse, overpollution, and overextension. The dominant logic of this form of illegal capital is to avoid the state and its monitoring capabilities while maximizing profit.

Although meso-level officials do often allow illegal coal and coal-reliant enterprises to operate within their jurisdictions, they do selectively crackdown on illegal coal. Meso-level officials have literally blown up illegal coal mines, burying all the equipment in underground mines. Meso-level officials have arrested illegal coal managers, including a cross-province manhunt. Meso-level officials have fined and shamed overproducing, over-polluting, overusing, and overextending mines, sometimes with mere slaps on the wrist and other times with severe punishments. Providing cover for illegal coal mining operations is not a constant nor is it a given in either Shanxi or Henan.

In this new era of increased environmental monitoring, increased administrative power to sanction meso-level officials, and increased importance given to environmental targets coupled with the large, Mao-style anti-corruption campaign aimed at these illegal operations, how do meso-level officials interact with illegal coal operations? How and why do they protect some illegal operations and punish others? And, how do they further their own personal goals while they (fail to) implement centrally-designed environmental policies? Meso-level officials and illegal coal and coal-reliant managers resourcefully use and manage different varieties of capital (material, social, cultural, reputational, and organizational, often in combination with each other) in order to further their own individual goals.

Unlicensed Coal Operations and Protective Umbrellas

Unlicensed coal operations typically occur when either (1) small mines are closed and then reopened by the managers without government approval or (2) groups of men work informally in small opencast or underground mines in order to mine enough coal for personal use, selling the excess to their connections for small profits. The focus of here will be on the former because they are more common and have a greater impact socially, economically, and politically for the region, workers, managers, and meso-level officials. These types of illegal coal operations are also more common.

The Small Mine Closure Program, a campaign aimed at the permanent closure of coal mines that produce fewer than 300,000 tons of coal equivalent (Lo 2020), was created in the 1980s but has seen a resurgence in enforcement. According to an environmental police officer in Shanxi (Interview 52, March 2019), not only had enforcement and implementation been major focal points in the province, but Shanxi officials aimed to permanently close around 35 (of the 950) coal mines in Shanxi because they produced under 600,000 tons of coal equivalent a year. These mine closures would meet the central demands to reduce the number of small coal mines and reduce production by approximately 15 million tons of coal equivalent, which is only a 1.5% decrease in Shanxi's annual production, but would be seen as both a "good faith effort" by meso-level officials in the province to follow Beijing's environmental policies and "a reduction in coal production, a promotion of safety, and a modernizing of Shanxi's coal industry" (Interview 52, March 2019). Some of the small mines designated for closure were owned and operated by the largest centrally-owned state-owned coal enterprises and some were simply small- and medium-enterprises that sold their coal to domestic manufacturing and energy producers. Meso-level officials decided which small mines to close, how to close them, and what to do with the mines

after they were closed differently based on the available material, cultural, social, reputational, and organizational capitals that they and coal managers were able to marshal and convert.

Small- and medium-enterprises were more likely to be permanently shut down by officials who enforced their decision by collapsing mineshafts, burying mining equipment and embedded coal under tons of blasted rock. Often, meso-level officials would undertake these permanent closures on an accelerated schedule, leaving formerly legal mines permanently closed and formerly legal coal mining equipment inaccessible; “my mine and mining equipment, as well as millions of tons of coal, are buried underground, permanently gone, because I did not have time to salvage it, officials came and very shortly thereafter the mine was gone” (Interview 84, former coal manager in Shanxi, March 2019). Although the former mine manager “understood the policy and supported it,” he was shocked that he, a prominent figure in the local political and economic scene, was “punished” (Interview 84, March 2019). His reputation as an influencer of local politics, rather than saving him through local protectionism, had the opposite effect; meso-level officials who were aware of his reputation and connections to local officials and the local business community, saw the former manager as a potential threat and therefore an perfect target for the Small Mine Closure Program and a perfect target for more “effective closure” (Interview 52, March 2019; Interview 84, March 2019).

Meso-level officials used their organizational capabilities to overrule local-level officials who wished that the mine remain open and to accelerate the process of closing the mine, allowing little to no time for local officials to work with the former manager and threatening local officials with sanctions if they were unwilling or unable to comply with meso-level demands. Material concerns, notably employment and coal profits, were relegated by meso-level officials who sought to break up undue influence on local officials, which is why meso-level

officials decided to take drastic measures to permanently shut down the mine (Interview 52, March 2019). When Shanxi officials closed small mines run independently and privately, they actively sought to limit the possibility that these mines would be later reopened as unlicensed mines and in doing so they were able to achieve the double goal of (1) lowering coal production and closing inefficient mines and (2) breaking local protectionism.

In addition, meso-level officials in Shanxi would often arrest (or attempt to arrest) unlicensed coal managers under the "sweeping away the black influences" campaign that sought to break the hold that illegal coal mining operations had on local governments (Interview 120, Shanxi illegal coal manager, November 2018). One alleged illegal coal manager-cum-gang leader in rural Shanxi province owned and operated small mines, buying off local officials and living lavishly. Meso-level officials attempted to permanently close his mines—shutting down his source of income and and his source of bribery—and arrest him for running what amounted to a parastate mafia, leading to a provincial manhunt that ended when the illegal coal boss was arrested in a neighboring province by central authorities (Interview 120, November 2018; Interview 77, Shanxi professor, November 2018). After he was arrested, the unlicensed coal mines were permanently closed and meso-level and national-level officials monitored them closely for any indication that they were reopened by associates of the former coal gang boss. For meso-level officials in Shanxi, this was a huge win: they were able to break up a local gang and thus win a battle in the war against black influences; they were able to permanently close unsafe and unlicensed coal mines, resulting in less coal production and fewer mines within their jurisdictions; and they were able to publicly deter illegal coal managers from flaunting their regulations. Meso-level officials were willing and able to move against this illegal coal manager because of increased monitoring and sanctioning powers from the central government through

environmental and anti-corruption campaigns and because he was "openly and ostentatiously showing off" his wealth and power over local officials (Interview 120, November 2018). The increased organizational and administrative power of meso-level officials gave them the ability to target illegal coal managers and their local protective umbrellas, but his reputation and his "gaudy displays of wealth" that "shamed state-Party officials" made meso-level officials willing to engage in a prolonged operation against this specific illegal coal manager (Interview 120, November 2018). Officials were reclaiming their authority over illegal coal, implementing national policies, and reasserting their status.

Unlike small- and medium-enterprises, though, when Shanxi meso-level officials shut down small mines operated by national champions, they were more likely to leave the mines untouched, shutting them down on paper and allowing (or turning a blind eye to) unlicensed mining by transferring the responsibility of ensuring that these small mines stay shut down to the SOE rather than inspection teams. One of the largest coal mining state-owned conglomerates in Shanxi, China, and the world "has ensured that they will permanently close illegal and unregulated small mines within their vertically-integrated mining operations" in order to both "improve efficiency" and "comply with environmental regulations" (Interview 6, Shanxi environmental protection bureau official, March 2019). Unlicensed coal mining operated the same as licensed coal mining, just without the proper, official authorization. As one newly-made illegal coal manager told me: "Last year, I was a manager of [this small mine] producing under 900,000 tons of coal a year; this year, I am a manager of [this mine] but I officially produce no coal. Nothing has changed, just the paperwork" (Interview 91, Shanxi illegal coal manager, February 2019).

This was then framed as a win-win situation for the meso-level officials and the SOE (Interview 6, March 2019; Interview 91, February 2019): meso-level officials would be able to claim that they were shutting down small, inefficient heavily-polluting and unsafe mines and the SOE was able to tout itself as a more streamlined, efficient, and green enterprise, all the while shut down mines would be reopened as unlicensed, illegal mines operated by the same managers and worked by the same workers producing the same amount of coal (if not more because they were no longer fettered by national limits on coal production). Nationally important SOE had the material capital (the critical importance of national champion SOEs cannot be overstated in the local, provincial, or national economies) to influence meso-level officials in ways that local, small mines simply could not; rather than using money to influence local officials, centrally-owned SOE would use their money, their status as national champions, and their political and personal connections to influence central and meso-level officials. As noted above, many SOE managers also held higher administrative rankings than the meso-level officials who were in charge of monitoring environmental compliance, bringing to bear their administrative and organizational ability to sanction meso-level officials if meso-level officials were to re-inspect formerly shut down small mines (Interview 6, March 2019). In Shanxi, centrally-owned SOE are able to flaunt environmental regulations by continuing to run unlicensed coal mines without sanction.

In Henan, centrally-owned SOE that have engaged in similar practices of running illicit coal mines that were previously shuttered faced reputational and material punishment. Unlike in Shanxi where illegal coal operations bolstered the reputation of national champion SOEs through corporate greenwashing and the SOE's economic performance through increased production, in Henan large SOE were named-and-shamed, publicly and vociferously, for attempting to flout

environmental policies, safety regulations, and the state when they attempted to reopen previously closed small mines (Interview 16, Henan environmental protection bureau official, December 2018). Fines levied against large SOE in Henan for unlicensed coal mining, while rarely amounting to deterrent levels, did serve as warning shots for SOEs, letting them know that "even though they were centrally-owned, they could not do whatever they wanted" (Interview 18, Henan environmental protection bureau official, April 2019). In addition to fines, naming-and-shaming corporations for unlicensed coal mining was part of meso-level officials' repertoire for enforcing small coal mining closures. Officials would publicly list corporations who were fined and why in the hopes that reputational damage would deter other corporations from attempting unlicensed mining or to force those engaged in unlicensed mining to stop (Interview 18, April 2019). Meso-level state officials were able to recognize the precarious reputational status of SOE in Henan and translate that into compliance. Because centrally-owned mining SOE in Henan were smaller and less important in local and national economies, they were easier to control.

Finally, reputation and status matter for meso-level officials when determining which operations are allowed to continue and which must be shut down. Illegal coal managers who openly flaunt their wealth and their ability to ignore rules and regulations are often targeted by meso-level officials because they allow meso-level officials to meet pro-environment and anti-corruption targets as well as regain some level of status and reputation among their peers and the people within their jurisdiction. Illegal coal managers seek to avoid state detection, and one way they do this is by being inconspicuous so as not to "show up" local- and meso-level officials. Officials "care about what others think of them" and illegal coal managers "have to know not to draw attention" (Interview 121, Shanxi illegal coal manager, November 2018). Conspicuous

consumption made illegal managers targets, so illegal coal managers would avoid large purchases (one lamented that he wanted to buy a Ford pick-up truck but instead only bought small, black colored Chinese-made cars so that officials would not be "jealous" of his money and car) in the hopes of avoiding state interference (Interview 121, Shanxi illegal coal manager, November 2018). Local protection umbrellas, if they were blatant and obvious to outside observers (local citizens who would see that coal bosses had more money than officials and anti-graft inspectors who would see that illegal coal operations are thriving instead of being shut down), would lead to severe punishments for both officials and coal managers, so illegal coal bosses were more willing to forego expensive cars and displays of wealth in order to ensure organizational (and personal) survival.

Overproduction and Overpolluting; State Quotas and Monitoring

As the central- and meso-level states attempt to curtail coal production by placing limits on the amount of coal that mines can legally extract, mining operations attempt to evade these regulations for as long as possible in order to maximize their profit in the short-term. Overproduction—the illegal mining of coal over the quantified limit imposed on the mine by the state—and over-polluting—illegally releasing more than the state-imposed limit of pollutants — are ways in which formally legal coal mining operations attempt to increase their profit margins in the face of state regulations. In Shanxi and Henan, overproduction was a common phenomenon, especially as coal prices increase during the winter months. In Shanxi and the more rural parts of Henan, over-pollution—mostly in the form of failing to scrub the sulfur dioxide that coal and coal-reliant plants released—was common.

Overproduction can be resourceful and it can be non-resourceful. Resourceful overproduction occurs when meso-level state officials and coal managers use available material,

organization, social, reputational, and cultural capitals to justify overproduction and continue to overproduce; non resourceful overproduction is simple corruption or data falsification, and is very common in all industries in China. In order to comply with national policies to limit coal production, the Henan government imposed strict restrictions on how much coal individual mines could produce (determined by the size of the mine, past production data, and the dictates of the national state), but official data collection process was flawed: coal managers provided whatever data they wanted to inspection teams and meso-level officials (Interview 93, Henan coal manager, May 2019). Because there is no efficient way for the state to quantify coal production at the point of production, they must rely on the coal mining enterprises themselves to provide the data, leading to rampant underrepresentation of tons of coal mined, especially because harsher restrictions were put in place during the winter months, when coal demand increased (Interview 93, Henan coal manager, May 2019). If officials questioned the data that managers provided, managers might offer "envelopes of cash" to officials hoping that "money would make the issue disappear" (Interview 97, Henan illegal coal manager, April 2019). The central-level state is aware of these forms of rampant, non-resourceful overproduction tactics, and have attempted to curb them through increased monitoring (both increased monitoring of mining operations and increased monitoring of meso-level officials), making these attempts riskier for meso-level officials and managers. When the external risks increase, meso-level officials and managers resort to resourceful ways to justify—and therefore work with others — and continue in their illegal overproduction.

Resourceful overproduction in Shanxi and Henan was often achieved through local protection umbrellas—the social networks that connect officials and managers and through which the former protect the latter—not just because of the economic benefits of producing more

coal during peak demand, but also because of the cultural importance of coal, the fact that some meso-level officials relied on coal for their status and their reputation within the state-Party apparatus, and meso-level officials had the administrative capability to sanction—or threaten to sanction—local-level officials. Meso-level officials allowed illegal overproduction, and sometimes encouraged it (Interview 85, Shanxi coal manager, December 2018), for many different empirical reasons, not just because of the importance of coal and coal-reliant industries in local economies.

In Shanxi, the cultural importance of coal cannot be overstated. By placing limits on coal production, which some officials understood as necessary (Interview 12, Shanxi environmental protection bureau officer, March 2019), meso-level officials believed that Beijing was turning their back on a large part of Shanxi culture, history, and economics. A common sentiment in coal-reliant areas of Shanxi—which is most of the province and includes some its largest cities and poorest rural communities—was that coal was the foundation upon which Shanxi and even China was built: "Chinese history is 5,000 years old, coal's history is 6,000 years old…[this area] was founded because of coal and it flourished because of coal" (Interview 26 with a meso-level Shanxi official, October 2018). Because of the cultural attachment to coal as a source of pride within the region, officials were willing to turn a blind eye to overproduction quotas. Meso-level officials "do not believe in these policies [limits on coal production for small- and medium-enterprises], they do not want to enforce these policies, and they do not want their people to go without coal this winter" (Interview 86, Shanxi coal manager, December 2018). Coal managers, aware of the importance that coal holds for certain official, would lament how Shanxi culture was declining due to restrictions on coal production and usage to meso-level officials when they came to inspect the facilities and collect production data. Meso-level officials who agreed with

these sentiments, then, would either not “closely inspect” the data provided to them, or they would encourage managers to continue pre-restriction levels of production (Interview 33, Shanxi meso-level official, January 2019). This cultural deployment translated into illicit overproduction and the collusion between meso-level officials and managers.

Overproduction was also seen as an easy way for meso-level officials to bolster their reputation with local and national officials. Local officials appreciated meso-level officials who allowed coal operations to overproduce because they would not interfere in local officials’ affairs, thus increasing their reputation as friendly officials (Interview 42, Shanxi meso-level official, November 2018). National officials, and officials in horizontal bureaus, appreciated overproduction (when they were aware of it happening or if they could surmise that is was occurring) because it allowed for increased economic performance; happy lower-level officials, coal managers, and coal miners; and still met the officially designed requirements regarding coal production, thereby increasing meso-level officials’ reputations above (Interview 42, Shanxi meso-level official, November 2018). Reputation matters for promotion (or stagnation); those with a good reputation in the halls of power are promoted, gaining status and material rewards, and those who with a bad reputation experience stagnation and fewer end-of-year bonuses.

Over-pollution, like overproduction, is a process that be done non-resourcefully and resourcefully, with coal managers working alone or in collusion with meso-level officials to pollute more than the legal limits, which have been steadily lowered across China and severely lowered in Shanxi, a “key” province in the battle to control pollution, and Shanxi’s border with Henan (Interview 1, Ministry of Ecology and Environment official, July 2019). There are two general ways in which pollution emission, the biggest coal-related pollutant is sulfur dioxide, reduction is achieved: (1) reduced production, leading to reduced sulfur dioxide emission, and

(2) the use of flue gas desulfurization systems, or sulfur dioxide scrubbers or simply scrubbers as they are commonly called, which trap post-combustion gases in an alkaline solution, thereby reducing the pollutant emissions when coal is burned. Scrubbers are seen both within the state and the coal industry as effective and practical ways to make coal cleaner. The first thing that many meso-level governments did when implementing national anti-pollution laws was to force coal production facilities to retrofit their smokestacks with scrubbers, and compliance was nearly total (Interview 1, Ministry of Ecology and Environment official, July 2019). The issue is not in failure to install scrubbers, but rather the failure to use them. Coal combustion facilities flaunt environmental regulations by regularly not using scrubbers, only turning them on when meso-level inspection teams visit.

Running scrubbers at full power and efficiency is “too costly” for many small- and medium-enterprises, so rather than constantly using scrubbers, managers instruct workers to either shut off the scrubbers—usually at night or during the summer months when inspections are less likely to happen—or run the scrubbers at lower-than-optimum levels—during the winter months when inspections are likely and combustion increases (Interview 87, Shanxi coal manager in an illegally-polluting firm, November 2018). The overriding logic of short-term profit maximization and state evasion result in using scrubbers at suboptimal levels to greatly reduce costs and to avoid state sanctions when inspections do occur. With newly retrofitted scrubbers, most plants could raise the removal efficiency of sulfur dioxide from zero to “acceptable levels” within half an hour if the scrubbers were off and “5-10 minutes” if they were running at suboptimal levels (Interview 87, November 2018). In Shanxi and rural Henan, where pollution is more extreme, pollution regulations more restrictive, and inspections more frequent, meso-level officials may “work with” coal managers to ensure that scrubbers are being used at

lower levels year round because “it is better than nothing” and if surprise inspections do occur then managers will be able to quickly “amend their operations” (Interview 38, Shanxi meso-level official, December 2018). Officials threaten to use their ability to levy heavy sanctions against firms, from small- and medium-enterprises to large SOEs, if they fail to meet pollution targets during inspections, causing managers to cultivate social ties with officials in the hopes that they will be given advance warning of inspections, although surprise inspections have been increasing in frequency; “I always tell [managers at a coal combustion facility] that inspections are coming if I am aware of them, but I am not always aware, so they must keep their scrubbers running [because] it is good for everyone” (Interview 38, Shanxi meso-level official, December 2018). Officials may not care about the environmental impacts of running scrubbers or not, but they do care about meeting environmental targets for their own personal advancement.

CONCLUSION

The ways in which meso-level officials in Shanxi and Henan bundle different types of capital to further their own personal and professional interests while interacting with enterprises (either punitively—by enforcing Beijing’s environmental policies—or protectively—by failing to enforce anti-coal policies) explain implementation and implementation gaps. Meso-level officials in Shanxi and Henan accrue, convert, and exercise different types of capital—economic, cultural, informational, social, symbolic, reputational, and administrative—in their interactions with different enterprises. Enterprise managers and officials have different logics of operation, leading to different interactions with meso-level officials. In Shanxi, meso-level officials attempt to protect large, state-owned coal and coal-reliant enterprises because these enterprises are integral to local and provincial economies, embody the dominant cultural ethos of the province, have strong connections to the central Party and central state, and are administratively superior to

meso-level officials—managers here often are higher ranked in state-Party hierarchy than meso-level officials who are in charge of implementing environmental policies. Furthermore, in Shanxi, meso-level officials' status and reputation is dependent on coal, not just their professional advancement and material interests; Shanxi officials' limited national status is directly linked to coal and without coal they would be viewed as backwater officials and officials' reputations would plummet. In contrast, in Henan, meso-level officials attempt to punish individual coal and coal-reliant enterprises—while advancing economically in other sectors—because these enterprises, while dominant in local economies, are viewed as dinosaur industries that are actually slowing down the potential economic development of the province; embody a cultural ethos stuck in the past, contrasted against the modern and advanced ecological civilization that Henan strives to become; have fewer connections to the central state and more connections to the local state, making them administratively subordinate and reputationally weaker. Meso-level officials in Henan gained status and reputation, as well as professional advancement, when they were able to implement environmental policies and move Henan towards a modern ecological civilization.

Meso-level officials in Shanxi and Henan had to work with and regulate different types of enterprises with different types of logics. When interacting with meso-level officials, managers of different types of enterprises—state-owned, state-controlled, private, and illegal—behave differently according to their own organizational logic. Meso-level officials are cognizant of this and use this knowledge to bundle different types of capital together to ensure compliance with meso-level officials' decisions to either punish the enterprise—by closing their operation, firing or furloughing employees, or fining managers or the enterprise itself—or protect the enterprise—

by failing to enforce policies as written or even actively discouraging managers from following policies.

State-owned enterprises (SOEs)--the first type of enterprises—generally serve the interests of the state, with larger tax and pension requirements, stable employment requirements, and a mandate to ensure stability while still making (but not maximizing) profit. In Shanxi, SOEs were national champions, the largest and most centrally-important enterprises in the primary energy and heavy manufacturing sectors. SOEs in Shanxi are administratively superior to meso-level officials and are accountable to the central state, making them at once more likely to ignore environmental policies (they outrank those in charge of enforcing policies) and more likely to follow environmental policies (they are dependent on and an arm of the central state who has written these policies). I show that meso-level officials in Shanxi often resourcefully work with SOE managers to skirt environmental policies because of their embodiment of coal as the central cultural, social, political, and economic object in the province. I also show the resourceful ways in which meso-level officials in Shanxi hide or conceal their efforts to shirk their environmental responsibilities. In Henan, SOEs were smaller and more willing to be regulated by meso-level officials and serve in their duty as an arm of the central state. Meso-level officials were able to resourcefully convince enterprises to fire or furlough workers and comply with reductions of pollution and coal production by converting cultural ideas of the proper way SOEs should act with the shared idea of an ecologically modern and advanced province. How and why SOEs (fail to) implement environmental policies cannot be explained without examining the different capitals that resourceful meso-level officials bundle in their interactions with managers and the interests that exist prior to and are created during these interactions.

State-controlled enterprises—the second distinct form of enterprises—are those enterprises that have had their profit or stability maximization goal captured by managers and/or officials, shifting the operational logic from either serving profit (in the case of private firms) or serving the state (in the case of SOEs) to serving individual managers' and officials' personal gain. The operational imperative to maximize individual profit through connections with meso-level officials means that meso-level officials create win-win scenarios for themselves and managers. In Shanxi and Henan, this manifests as meso-level officials allowing firms to continue to produce coal and pollute at rates proscribed by state environmental policies for material kickbacks. Meso-level officials were then able to convert these kickbacks into status and reputational gains, leading to stronger cadre report cards and better relationships with superiors and subordinates.

Private firms are motivated by profit maximization and organizational survival, with the latter trumping the former if managers are forced to pick between the two. Private firms can be classified as small, medium, and large and local (provincial), domestic (Chinese), and foreign. In Shanxi, private firms were small to medium, local or domestic service or light manufacturing firms. These firms were supported and championed by meso-level officials in rural Shanxi who hoped that those workers who made above-average wages (i.e., coal miners) would support these businesses, keeping money circulating within the province. Therefore, rural meso-level officials were recalcitrant to furlough or fire workers or harm the coal industry in any way. In urban Shanxi, though, meso-level officials actively sought to recruit large domestic and foreign enterprises to relocate from coastal cities by offering them cheap labor, which could be made available by firing or furloughing coal and coal-reliant workers. Meso-level officials also actively sought out central funding to support these efforts, funding that came with increased

supervision and less latitude to act in one's own interests, thereby closing implementation gaps in urban Shanxi. In Henan, environmental policy implementation was a spillover of economic development activities aimed at modernizing Henan's rural and urban economies and increasing the percentage of within-province migration.

Finally, the operational logic of illegal coal operations is either to avoid the state or fall under the state's protective umbrella, while earning as much profit as possible as quickly as possible—because neither avoiding the state or being protected by the state is tenable for long periods of time. Meso-level officials who hope to make a name for themselves in national news and with their subordinates are quick to crackdown on illegal coal mining operations, leading to arrests and the destruction of mines and mining equipment. For those meso-level officials with the ability, resourcefulness, and biographic capital (young, well-education, well-connected, and willing to move out of coal mining areas), these drastic measures are a great way to secure the good-will of superiors and to make provincial and national news, furthering their personal and professional interests. However, for those who do not have the ability or desire to be quickly move up the state-Party hierarchy, illegal coal mining operations, both in terms of unlicensed mines and overproducing mines, are lucrative, but professionally dangerous. Resourceful accounting practices allowed SOEs to run illegal, unlicensed coal mines in Shanxi and Henan, although those in Henan were punished for it and those in Shanxi were protected.

The resourceful ways in which meso-level officials interact with different types of coal and coal-reliant enterprises allows for greater understanding of both state processes of policy implementation and state-capital relations. By disaggregating the different types of enterprises and their attendant operational logics, I show that meso-level officials engage with firms

according to the firms underlying logic, allowing for meso-level officials to bring managers into officials' efforts to implement or elide central policies.

REFERENCES

Bonikowski, Bart. 2015. "The Promise of Bourdieusian Political Sociology." *Theory and society* 44(4):385-91.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1985. "The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups." *Social Science Information* 24(2):195-220.

—. 2005. *The social structures of the economy*: Polity.

Bulman, David J., and Kyle A. Jaros. 2021. "Localism in Retreat? Central-Provincial Relations in the Xi Jinping Era." *Journal of Contemporary China* 30(131):697-716.

Chen, Gang. 2021. "Consolidating Leninist Control of State-Owned Enterprises: China's State Capitalism 2.0." Pp. 43-60 in *China's Political Economy in the Xi Jinping Epoch : Domestic and Global Dimensions*, edited by Lowell Dittmer. Singapore: World Scientific.

Dittmer, Lowell. 2021. "Transformation of the Chinese Political Economy in the New Era." Pp. 3-40 in *China's Political Economy in the Xi Jinping Epoch*, edited by Lowell Dittmer. New Jersey: World Scientific.

Eaton, Sarah, and Genia Kostka. 2017. "Central Protectionism in China: The "Central SOE Problem" in Environmental Governance." *The China Quarterly* 231:685-704.

Fu, Tong, Chao Cai, and Ze Jian. 2020. "The Illusion of "Win–Win" Solution: Why Environmental Regulation in China Promotes Firm Performance?" *Structural Change and Economic Dynamics* 52:366-73.

Gilley, Bruce. 2017. "Local Governance Pathways to Decarbonization in China and India." *The China Quarterly* 231:728-48.

Goodman, David S.G. 2016. "China's Emerging Ruling Class: Power, Wealth, and Status under Market Socialism." Pp. 243-61 in *Handbook on Class and Social Stratification in China*, edited by Yingjie Guo. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar.

Hung, Ho-Fung. 2018. "Chinese State Capitalism in Hong Kong." in *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Hong Kong* edited by Tai-lok Lui, Stephen WK Chiu, and Ray Yep. London: Routledge.

Karplus, Valerie J., and Mengying Wu. 2019. "Crackdowns in Hierarchies: Evidence from China's Environmental Inspections." *MIT CEEPR Working Paper*.

Kojima, Kiyoshi. 2000. "The "flying geese" model of Asian economic development: origin, theoretical extensions, and regional policy implications." *Journal of Asian Economics* 11(4):375-401.

Kostka, Genia, and William Hobbs. 2012. "Local Energy Efficiency Policy Implementation in China: Bridging the Gap between National Priorities and Local Interests." *The China Quarterly* 211:765-85.

Lee, Ching Kwan. 2020. "The specter of global China." in *The Specter of Global China*: University of Chicago Press.

Li, Cheng. 2004. "Political Localism Versus Institutional Restraints: Elite Recruitment in the Jiang Era." Pp. 29-69 in *Holding China Together: Diversity and National Integration in the Post-Deng Era*, edited by Barry Naughton and Dali Yang. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lieberthal, Kenneth. 1997. "China's governing system and its impact on environmental policy implementation." *China environment series* 1(1997):3-8.

Liu, Xiaowei, Salman Wahab, Mumtaz Hussain, Yi Sun, and Dervis Kirikkaleli. 2021a. "China Carbon Neutrality Target: Revisiting FDI-Trade-Innovation Nexus with Carbon Emissions." *Journal of Environmental Management* 294:113043.

Liu, Zheng, Hongtao Shen, Michael Welker, Ning Zhang, and Yang Zhao. 2021b. "Gone with the Wind: An Externality of Earnings Pressure." *Journal of Accounting and Economics* 72(1).

Lo, Kevin. 2020. "Ecological Civilization, Authoritarian Environmentalism, and the Eco-Politics of Extractive Governance in China." *The Extractive Industries and Society* 7(3):1029-35.

Lo, Wing-Hung Carlos, and Shui-Yan Tang. 2006. "Institutional reform, economic changes, and local environmental management in China: the case of Guangdong province." *Environmental Politics* 15(02):190-210.

Lorentzen, Peter, Pierre Landry, and John Yasuda. 2014. "Undermining authoritarian innovation: the power of China's industrial giants." *The Journal of Politics* 76(1):182-94.

Lyu, Weicheng, and Nirvikar Singh. 2021. "A Model of Embedded Autonomy and Asymmetric Information."

Ma, Liang, and Jiaqi Liang. 2018. "The Effects of Firm Ownership and Affiliation on Government's Target Setting on Energy Conservation in China." *Journal of Cleaner Production* 199:459-65.

Ma, Zhihong. 2018. "Be a Qualified Secretary of the Party Committee of a State-Owned Enterprise (做个合格的国有企业党委书记)." in *Chinese Communist Party News Network*. Beijing: People's Daily.

Nahm, Jonas. 2017. "Exploiting the Implementation Gap: Policy Divergence and Industrial Upgrading in China's Wind and Solar Sectors." *The China Quarterly* 231:705-27.

Ocasio, William, Jo-Ellen Pozner, and Daniel Milner. 2020. "Varieties of Political Capital and Power in Organizations: A Review and Integrative Framework." *Academy of Management annals* 14(1):303-38.

Shin, Kyoung. 2017. "Neither Centre nor Local: Community-Driven Experimentalist Governance in China." *The China Quarterly* 231:607-33.

van Rooij, Benjamin, Li Na, and Wang Qiliang. 2018. "Punishing Polluters: Trends, Local Practice, and Influences, and Their Implications for Administrative Law Enforcement in China." *China Law and Society Review* 3(2):118-76.

Wang, Alex L. 2015. "Chinese State Capitalism and the Environment." in *Regulating the Visible Hand? The Institutional Implications of Chinese State Capitalism*, edited by Benjamin L. Liebman and Curtis J. Milhaupt. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wang, Junmin. 2016. "Taking the “Red Hat” off Chinese Private Entrepreneurs: Institutional Dependents, Innovative Collaborators, and Political Opponents." *Sociology of Development* 2(3):293-321.

Wang, Shuxiao, and Jiming Hao. 2012. "Air quality management in China: Issues, challenges, and options." *Journal of Environmental Sciences* 24(1):2-13.

CHAPTER 4: MANIPULATED MOBILIZATIONS: EXHORTATION AND SUBSUMPTION OF LABOR PROTESTS

On a brisk November day in Taiyuan, the capital of Shanxi province, a small group of middle-aged workers gathered, holding a 15-foot, white banner across which they had boldly painted a statement: "[Company] still has yet to pay us our hard-earned money (literally: blood and sweat money)" (field notes, November 2018). Two weeks earlier, in Shuozhou, a large mining-reliant city in Northwest Shanxi province, a similar number of middle-aged workers gathered under a similar white banner, this time declaring that they were "not class enemies," but "vulnerable people with good hearts" who poured their "blood, sweat, and youth" into a company only to be rewarded with dispatch workers replacing them and the company refusing to pay owed wages (field notes; interviews 98, 99, 100, coal-reliant workers; November 2018). Both protests appear to be standard, bread-and-butter protests, increasingly commonplace occurrences in modern Chinese labor politics. During the 12 months that I was conducting fieldwork in China, there were more than 1,600 labor protests, with 127 of those protests occurring in Henan (the second most protests) and 41 in Shanxi (an average number of protests) (China Labour Bulletin 2022).

However, these two protests were manipulated mobilizations. In both Shanxi and Henan, meso-level officials use labor mobilizations to further their own interests vis-à-vis the central state, subsuming and exhorting worker mobilization, negotiating goals, jointly constructing and bridging frames, coordinating targets, and appropriating tactics. I call this process mutually constitutive mobilization. The meso-level state subsumes labor mobilization, entering into mobilization as an advisor backed by the use of legitimate and illegitimate force. Mutually constitutive mobilization, though, is a double-edged sword; as meso-level officials use labor mobilizations to push back

against central policies and further their own individual (personal and bureaucratic) goals, labor mobilizations gain strength and often push beyond the delineated boundaries of acceptable protest.

In Shanxi, meso-level officials encourage and subsume labor protests to organize mobilizations in support of coal and resisting central policies meant to curtail coal production, consumption, and pollution. In Henan, meso-level officials encourage and subsume labor protests to organize quiet mobilizations in support of decarbonization so that meso-level officials can push neoliberal reforms under the guise of ecological (green economic political, and cultural) development. In both provinces, though, state interests took precedence over worker interests. Additionally, in both provinces workers were emboldened by successful mobilizations and tried to push beyond the negotiated limits of meso-level state officials' acceptance of mobilization, leading to crackdowns against workers and the public through legitimate channels (e.g., the police) and illegitimate channels (e.g., targeting family members, hiring men to harass and beat protesters).

The concept of manipulated mobilizations highlights that mobilization processes (goal construction, framing, targeting, and choosing appropriate tactics) are contingent as well as contested with and between the state and labor and, therefore, must be explained in situ. Worker or public resistance, compliance, or quiescence to central-level environmental policies is neither pre-determined nor pre-constructed, highlighting the need for comparative and extended ethnography in political sociology and environmental studies, especially at the meso-level. I explicate the subtle and hidden forms of everyday resistance in which meso-level officials engage when they subsume and construct labor and community movements for or against specific environmental policies and outcomes.

Manipulated mobilizations maintain CCP rule while strengthening meso-level officials' individual and positional interests through processes of negotiation, mobilization, and

renegotiation. Generally, meso-level officials in both Shanxi and Henan use labor mobilizations to further their own interests vis-à-vis the central state by subsuming and exhorting worker mobilization through processes of negotiating goals, jointly constructing and bridging frames, coordinating targets, and appropriating and determining appropriate tactics. After goals, targets, frames, and tactics are mutually decided by both meso-level officials and civil society actors, a "mass incident" occurs—the event—which forces meso-level officials to meet with civil society actors through institutionalized channels—and thus count for or against their stability maintenance efforts. After this second round of officially-sanctioned negotiation, there is either a resolution (both parties acquiesce to the previously mutually-agreed upon terms) or civil society actors are emboldened by their mobilization and engage in further, non-sanctioned or negotiated, incidents, leading to (threats of) violent repression. Although this is the general blueprint for mutually constitutive mobilizations in Shanxi and Henan, they differ in form and substance in both provinces.

Meso-level officials have turned to manipulated mobilizations to further their own interests because of recentralization efforts, changing cadre evaluation system, crackdowns on corruption, and environmental policies and laws that disproportionately affect coal-reliant provinces. Fractured elites and the importance of coal to the material and cultural capital of meso-level officials in Shanxi and Henan has created a political opportunity structure that only allows for state-led resistance through resourceful, non-institutionalized channels.

Stability maintenance—*weiwen*—has shifted in meaning from punishment to management (Xu and Li 2011); although punishment and "striking hard" still exist as methods to maintain a docile civil society, the focus has shifted from discipline to. building people- and service- centered governance to resolve mass disputes under the CCP (Fewsmith 2012; Lee and Zhang 2013).

Stability maintenance has also been recentralized by giving meso-level officials (municipal officials and above) the power to evaluate lower-level cadres and stability maintenance is "the most important [veto-target] for us [meso-level officials]" (Interview 55, May 2019). Not only is stability maintenance a hard target (i.e., a failure in this area is a failure in all areas and leads to a denial of bonuses, promotion, and any honors), but meso-level officials are those who are tasked will rewarding or punishing lower-level officials for their ability to handle and/or prevent social disturbances and industrial accidents (which are especially relevant in coal mining, one of China's most dangerous occupations). Bureaucratic pressures flow down from meso-level officials (Lee and Zhang 2013), but they also flow upwards from lower-levels officials and civil society actors. It is meso-level officials who direct both negotiations with and surveillance/information gathering on citizens. These negotiations between meso-level state officials and civil society actors—aggrieved and not-yet-aggrieved individuals and groups, as well as formal nongovernmental organizations—and the force by which they are supported are the empirical focus of this chapter.

In contrast to conceptions of civil society mobilizations as discrete, independent forces, separate from and antagonistic towards the state (Lu 2019; McAdam 2003; McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2003; Oliver and Myers 2003), mobilizations can be a mutually constitutive tool to be manipulated, negotiated between meso-level state actors, on one hand, and civil society actors, on the other hand. Traditionally, theorists have viewed mobilizations as "coevolving" with distinct and inherent sides through "inter-actions" with the state and other actors in their environment that are dependent on one another in both time and content of action (action 1 precedes reaction 1 which causes action 2, etc.) (Oliver and Myers 2003). This has led to a false dichotomy in mobilization studies that highlights a cohesive unit—the "challenger"—that struggles against another cohesive unit—the "power-holding state"—using distinct antagonistic and reactive tactics

that leads to direct and indirect outcomes in one "sides" favor, with more-or-less clear "winners" and "losers" (Cress and Snow 2000). Further muddying analytical understandings of the interactions between actors is the concepts of "movement spillovers" (Meyer and Whittier 1994) and "diffusion" (Oliver and Myers 2003) have become catch-all categories of indirect outcomes and their effects on other mobilizations. Missing from these accounts is how seemingly antagonistic actors actually work together to create new pathways forward for mobilizations; rather than discrete, diametrically opposed forces challenging for limited, zero-sum power, mobilized civil society actors and state officials may work together or state officials may resourcefully manipulate civil society mobilizations to create win-win scenarios.

The imperative to create win-win scenarios is especially important in authoritarian regimes where officials have to walk a fine line between tolerating dissent and control (Marquis and Bird 2018; Qiaoan and Teets 2019; Yuen and Cheng 2017). Stability and legitimacy are often threatened by—imagined or real—mass mobilizations in authoritarian regimes, with scholars focusing on control and concession as a false dichotomy of state responses to civil society mobilization (Yuen and Cheng 2017). Control is usually conceptualized as either coercion and repression (Elfstrom 2021; Li and Elfstrom 2021; Ong 2022; Schatz 2009; Stern and Hassid 2012) or softer forms of control (Lee and Zhang 2013; Marquis and Bird 2018) and "responsiveness," wherein the state allows some limited mobilizations as a bellwether (Cai 2004; He and Warren 2011; Lorentzen 2017). Coercion and repression are not that palatable for many state actors because they have the potential to spiral participation, increasing instability. In contrast, narrowly focused mobilizations with specific targets (Gallagher 2017) are allowed as long as they remain "controllable," allowing the state not only to maintain stability, but enhance it (Minzner 2006; Van Rooij, Stern and Fürst 2016). This responsiveness, though, creates a political structure wherein civil society actors need

to engage in "troublemaking tactics" (Chen 2012; Chen and Moss 2019) in order to be noticed. However, this leaves these mobilizations open to state manipulation.

State actors subsume mobilizations, entering into mobilizations not as an adversary, but as an advisor backed by the use of legitimate and illegitimate force, in order to further their own positional and personal interests. Instead of civil society being a distinct, independent actor, meso-level officials in rural, inland China view civil society actors as useful tools to further their own positional and personal goals, as well as a viable channel for challenging policies that meso-level officials are reluctant to pursue. Meso-level officials manipulate all aspects of mobilizations, from their goals and grievances, framing, targets, and tactics and organizations. It is not the "world outside" of a mobilization that is the key to understanding the mobilization's dynamics (Meyer 2004), but rather the world manipulated by meso-level officials.

Grievances—the central claims a mobilization is making (Simmons 2014)—are at once central to studies of mobilizations and neglected by theorists (Snow and Soule 2010); although a necessary condition for mobilization to occur, grievances are seen as having little explanatory power and are often taken to be constant (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1988) and determined by specific "real life situations" with "real consequences" for actors (Zald 1991). These "real" situations and consequences can be divided into two broad, ideal types: hard grievances—"those in which a large fraction of some population is exposed to clear change or chance of change in their living conditions" —and soft grievances—which are subtle in their impact, more prone to changing social definitions" (Zald 1991, p. 349). Intimately linked to grievances is goals, or desired outcomes. Mobilizations occur because of an externally imposed grievance on a subset of the population, which then mobilizes to alter the initial grievance (Zald and Ash 1966). For coal miners in Chinese coal-reliant provinces, the environmental policies enacted by the central

government would be a clear example of a “hard grievance” and with a clear goal: if implemented fully and faithfully, workers would be fired or furloughed and the way of life for many workers would be drastically changed, so it would be reasonable to assume that these policies would cause worker mobilizations aimed at ensuring that these policies are not implemented as written.

Missing in the understandings of grievances and goals is how each is constructed and the ways in which meanings are giving to grievances, which in turn impacts the understandings of ways to address and redress grievances (Simmons 2014). Instead of viewing grievances as exogenous to mobilizations, grievances can be manipulated and created within ongoing mobilizations. Grievances and goals are ever changing, not constant, through interactions—not just inter-actions where actor 1 acts leading actor 2 to react leading to actor 1 to react—often manipulated and molded through direct negotiations between seemingly antagonistic sides. These manipulated grievances and goals, then, lead to different outcomes that are both direct and indirect. Resourceful meso-level officials can appropriate and manipulate grievances to further their own personal and professional goals, leading to direct and indirect outcomes.

In addition to manipulating grievances and goals, resourceful meso-level officials can manipulate framing processes (Snow et al. 1986). Mobilizing actors engage in the production and maintenance of meanings through frames—the “schemata of interpretation” that allows people to “locate, perceive, identify, and label” occurrences that people experience (Goffman 1974). Rather than being carriers of ideas, actors engaged in mobilization produce meaning, maintain those meanings, and negotiate those meaning against others (Benford and Snow 2000). This framing contestation (Ryan 1991) is central to understanding framing processes (Snow and Soule 2010; Snow, Vliegenthart and Ketelaars 2019), typified by three forms of contestation: counterframing against the frames of others, frames disputes within the organization or movement, and the

contestation between events and existing frames. By focusing almost exclusively on framing contests, theorists miss the mutually constructive aspect of framing. Not all framing processes are antagonistic between opposing groups; acceptable frames can be agreed to between state officials and mobilized workers in a non-zero-sum manner.

Another central focus of mobilization studies is who protests target to redress their grievances and achieve their goals. This is a strategic process (Rucht 1988; Schwartz 1988) that involves interactions with and inter-action between challengers and targets (McAdam 1983; Walker, Martin and McCarthy 2008). The centrally of the state as the main target and repressor of mobilized civil society actors—even though corporations are targeted regularly—is dominant within the field (Walker, Martin and McCarthy 2008), leading to a reified dichotomy of protestor group versus the state. One large exception here is the labor movement. Workers regularly and routinely target their employers, although this is more complicated in placed where the economy is dominated by state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and where unions are subsumed within the state structure (the All-China Federation of Trade Unions [ACFTU]) in China (Friedman 2014). Because the state is comprised of many institutional and individual actors—from central-, meso-, and lower-level bureaucrats to SOE and ACFTU managers to Party members—with their own sets of professional and personal interests, state elites are often divided (McAdam 1996), increasing the number of targets within the state for mobilizations (Walker, Martin and McCarthy 2008). Although mobilizations choose their targets strategically, sometimes those targets are not the most appropriate targets. Additionally, the target may "help" the mobilization select an appropriate alternative target, one that would further their own interests.

The repertoire of tactics—the "thinkable" practices and ways of doing—available to civil society actors are a central aspect of mobilizations (Clemens 1993; Della Porta 2013; Tilly 1993;

Walker and Vasi 2022). Tactics can be conventional—like letter-writing and petitioning (Minzner 2006)—to confrontation and radical—like mass protests (Elfstrom 2021; Zipp and Blecher 2015) and suicides (Chan and Pun 2010), and actors determine the appropriate tactics in situ, structured by the social and political context (Walker and Vasi 2022). The key features highlighted by mobilization theorists are regime characteristics (Tilly and Tarrow 2015), as well as economic and social forces (Silver 2003), and exogenous shocks (Edelman, Leachman and McAdam 2010). What is missing from the discussion of tactical repertoires, though, is that the determination of appropriateness and, therefore, the tactic that mobilizations will use is not necessarily something that occurs within the mobilization itself. While outside factors affect the menu of options available to contentious actors, it is assumed (implicitly or explicitly) that the final decision is made by the contentious actors themselves, although contentious actors are frequently steered to pick certain tactics from the menu. Meso-level officials in China manipulate worker groups into choosing the appropriate tactics for worker protest, modifying existing tactics to create win-win situations for officials and workers alike.

In addition to manipulating workers into selecting the appropriate tactic(s), meso-level officials also manipulate workers into choosing the appropriate organization or organizational channels for their grievances. In western democracies, one of the central foci of mobilization research is on social movement organizations (SMOs): A "complex, or formal organization which identifies its preferences with a social movement or a counter-movement and attempts to implement those goals" (McCarthy and Zald 1977) 1218. SMOs—or related terms like "advocacy organizations" (Andrews and Edwards 2004), "civil society organizations" (Diani 2015), or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Almeida and Chase-Dunn 2018)—are analytically central to mobilizations and are a crucial resource that mobilizations can bring to bear in contentious with

the state. In China, though, where civil society is more closed and independent organizations are rare, organizations can be viewed as counterproductive to civil society actors' interests (Alpermann and Bondes 2019) and are often repressed (Franceschini and Nesossi 2018). However, meso-level officials in China sometimes advocate for workers to use NGOs—often government-sponsored or government-organized non-government organizations (GONGOs) (Chen and Moss 2019)—to negotiate with the state, knowing that these NGOs will advocate for concessions rather than transgressions. NGOs and other formal organizations are easy for the state to manage and manipulate, channeling (Bartley 2007; Jenkins and Eckert 1986) and co-opting (Gamson 1975; Selznick 1980) protests away from radical activities and towards moderate goals and tactics. Where there are fewer formal SMOs or NGOs, meso-level officials will manipulate workers into small, informal groups that are easily controlled and surveilled, thus reducing worker militance.

It should be noted that although channeling (Brulle and Jenkins 2005; Earl 2003; Jenkins and Eckert 1986) and co-optation (Holdo 2019) are types of manipulated mobilizations, they are different than the types that I am describing and analyzing. Whereas channeling argues that external funding "channels" activism into institutionalized and routinized tactics as well as "channeling" goals away from radical ones towards moderate goals aimed at continuing to secure funding (e.g., Matthews 2005), the manipulation that I am describing is broader and involves state officials appropriating mobilizations for their own personal and professional benefits while still conceding some to mobilized workers. Whereas co-opting absorbs challenges and challengers, the manipulated mobilizations here are not necessarily working with elites but are worked by elites, giving mobilized workers advantages while meso-level officials use them to further their own personal and professional goals.

NEGOTIATED, NON-ZERO-SUM STATE AND CIVIL SOCIETY GOALS

The strategy of meso-level officials and formal or informal civil society leaders meeting face-to-face (mianyi) is a prevalent means of channeling aggrieved civil society actors into acceptable goals, although with the recent crackdown on banquets and corruption, these direct negotiations have decreased somewhat. Face-to-face meetings during a lavish banquet are a "fast and effective way of exchanging ideas (jiaoliu)," but because these meeting happen before mass incidents occur, higher-level officials view them as simple graft wherein meso-level officials use public funds for a free meal (Interview 73, Henan meso-level official, April 2019). The anti-graft crackdowns have decreased the prevalence of direct negotiations and have narrowed the acceptable people with whom to negotiate; meso-level officials meet with both formal organization representatives and informally organized groups of potential protesters when they do negotiate directly with civil society actors, however it is more common for informal groups to negotiate through signaling or boundary-testing.

Civil society actors, especially formal organizations, have ideas of what they would like to achieve and how meso-level officials can redress their grievances in an ideal world, but they "know that what [they] want is often not what [they] can get" (Interview 5, Non-Governmental Organization manager in Henan, May 2019). For non-governmental organizations that exist both in a liminal legal space and in a precarious financial situation, goals of self-preservation and organizational longevity trump the short-term goals of their aggrieved members. As an NGO manager in Henan explained: "[A meso-level official] invited me to dinner so that we could mutually understand each other's position" regarding the potential job losses and furloughs coming due to Beijing's environmental policies (Interview 5, Non-Governmental Organization manager in Henan, November 2018). This direct meeting was called in anticipation of a grievance. During

this meeting, the official laid out his desire to give workers the ability to leave coal jobs and rural Henan in favor of more attractive jobs in urban centers in Henan, all the while stressing that ecological civilization was a necessary step towards China's political and economic future, both home and abroad (Interview 5, Non-Governmental Organization manager in Henan, May 2019; Interview 66, meso-level official in Henan, May 2019). Pragmatism and national zeal were combined to form a "real understanding" and a basis of narrowly acceptable goals that the NGO could petition the state to achieve, namely funds to help coal workers transition to self-employed (getihu) workers and funds to transition coal mining areas into "green" tourist attractions.

Directly negotiating goals with formal organizations is pragmatic and often stabilizing, both for the organization and the state. NGOs like that they know what they can and cannot do to ensure their own longevity and meso-level officials are able to maintain stability while furthering their own positional and personal interests. However, direct negotiation with informal groups is much more precarious, both for meso-level officials and the informally-organized citizen and labor groups.

Aggrieved citizens and workers first seek redress from local, lower-level officials (whereas formal organizations have the institutional knowledge and organizational resources to begin their pacification efforts at a higher level) before they are either pushed up to meso-level officials by lower-level officials or actively seek out meso-level officials for protection from local officials or local enterprises. Informal organizations that were able to meet with meso-level officials face-to-face were able find an uneasy middle ground, narrowly defining goals and grievances that furthered meso-level officials individual and bureaucratic goals at the expense of the group's more radical or expensive initial goals.

The recovery of (limited) wage arrears (against certain coal mining operations and coal production facilities) and demanding stable employment without the fear of furloughs or dispatch laborer replacing salaried, full-time, long-serving workers were acceptable goals negotiated by informal coal miner coalitions and meso-level state officials in both Shanxi and Henan. Wage arrears have long been the leading cause of worker mobilization in China, but not all wage arrears are equally actionable for both workers and state and Party officials. From whom workers can demand fair renumeration of wages in arrears and for how much are contested questions, and ones that meso-level officials would rather discuss through face-to-face negotiations. A group of legal coal miners made their way to Taiyuan to discuss the backpay that they were owed from their company because local officials "were colluding with [their boss]" to cheat them out of their earned wages (Interview 101, group of four Shanxi coal miners, November 2018). If the meso-level officials with whom they met were unable to ensure that the group was awarded their complete wages due, they claimed that they would be forced to protest, and they made this threat known (Interview 101, November 2018; Interview 27, Shanxi meso-level official, November 2018). After quickly speaking with and negotiating with an official, the goals shifted from demanding complete renumeration (which was unlikely to happen) to demanding partial renumeration (which would be much more palatable to the coal mining operation) and a promise that the meso-level official would "look into" the possibility that there was undue collusion between the local state and capital if these workers made a public demonstration claiming that this was the case. The workers found this to be an acceptable, short-term solution to their problem, and although they were wary of the official's claims, they were emboldened to take the first step towards a public protest (Interview 101, November 2019). The meso-level official did not resolve any of the workers' issues, but he negotiated appropriate goals for the group to demand when they

did engage in their "mass incident," leaving workers partially satisfied but still willing to engage in public demonstrations to further their interests. For the meso-level official, this was seen as a clear win; he would be able to solve an incident of social instability in a potential rival's jurisdiction while also being able to crackdown on illicit activity, both of which would increase his personal standing and increase his bureaucratic mandate over the local level (Interview 27, November 2018). Finding acceptable, non-zero-sum goals through direct negotiation is an important tactic in meso-level officials' repertoire of stability maintenance.

Although direct negotiations are important, increasingly, meso-level officials and worker groups rely on negotiating through non-direct mechanisms, the most common of which is signaling intent or engaging in boundary-testing (similar to signaling intent but involves small-scale opening salvos of protest to demonstrate that worker groups are serious in their goals). Just as workers signal and make noise through boundary-testing, meso-level officials signal appropriate goals for workers and aggressively crackdown on goals that go beyond the narrow confines of acceptable protest. For workers, appropriate goals are found when officials do not meet workers with violent repression, requiring signaling and testing to figure out the boundaries of acceptability and violence.

Workers and meso-level officials generally feel that wage arrears are an appropriate goal because 1) they earned wages and have a moral and legal right to the wages and 2) they are defensive, bread and butter issues that do not threaten to upset the political order (Interview 79, Henan professor, May 2019). However, workers and officials often differ as to the amount of wages owed that workers are entitled to and protest for; workers often want all of their earned wages whereas officials are hesitant too force companies to fully compensate their workers. Finding an acceptable middle ground is, therefore, imperative.

Boundary-testing, small-scale protests are often used by workers with the goal of figuring out the acceptable wage arrear goals (Interview 117, Shanxi coal miner, April 2019). How the state responds determines whether or not the original goal was acceptable; for example, in Taiyuan, police were called on protesters, leading to violent classes in April 2019, leading workers to infer that worker demands for wage arrears and pension payments were too much when combined because another small-scale wage arrear protest in Taiyuan in March was not met with repression but instead led to negotiations between workers, capital, and the meso-level officials (Interview 117, April 2019). Workers seen and learn from previous signals and tests, choosing their goals based on previous state reactions to protest.

Goals are not inherent to groups or situations nor are they predetermined and fixed. Instead, goal construction is a joint process in which the state and citizen work together; rather than being completely antagonistic, working towards zero-sum goals, often workers and the state resourcefully negotiate acceptable goals to further both of their interests. These non-zero-sum and negotiated goals are a tactic used by meso-level officials to maintain stability and increase the power of the state through civil society (Mann 1986), making Party and State rule more durable.

JOINTLY CONSTRUCTED FRAMES: NOSTALGIC PASTS AND IMAGINED FUTURES

Dominant frames in both Shanxi and Henan were jointly constructed through in-person discussions with formal and informal worker groups and meso-level officials. Although rarely explicitly discussed as acceptable messages and slogans for workers to use while protesting, meso-level officials were able to stress certain ideas and phrases that workers should use so that meso-level officials would be able to appropriately respond. In Shanxi, the jointly constructed frames fit within a meta-frame of economic stability and development that relied on coal production and consumption. In Henan, the jointly constructed frames fell within a meta-frame of the Chinese

Dream, promising ecological development and ecological civilization that relied on moving away from manufacturing and industrial development as well as traditional rural culture in favor of a brand of cosmopolitanism with Chinese characteristics. In Henan, there was also a large push for health and safety standards and concessions for occupational disease and injury (mainly pneumoconiosis).

In Henan, like in Shanxi, the dominant frames surrounding economic development, local protectionism, and environmentalism were jointly constructed, both through in person discussions and signaling and boundary-testing. However, the content of these frames differed drastically. Economic development, under the "Chinese dream" slogan and frame, was to be achieved through neoliberal individualism rather than state-backed manufacturing. Local protection, instead of frames levying blame at lower- or higher-level officials seeking to curb coal usage, was framed in terms of modernizing the economy, and protecting the environment, local interests, and local health. Lastly, environmentalism was not something to be decried, but a way of life that was more civilized and cosmopolitan.

Economic Frames: Prosperous Pasts and Futures

Frames that amplified economic stability and maintaining coal-reliant production while avoiding political stances were imperative for meso-level officials; "if [workers] want wages in arrears or stable employment [not to be replaced by dispatch workers], then we can help them" (Interview 49, May 2018), implying that anything beyond these narrow confines was beyond the meso-level official's ability to rectify and might be met with a different state response. When meeting with workers, meso-level officials echoed these sentiments and even explicitly told workers how to frame their economic issues in a way that would garner state support rather than state antagonism. "We were told to say that we are victims of greedy local bureaucrats or greedy

capital and to not say that we have legal rights" (Interview 108, three Shanxi coal miners, December 2018). After meeting with officials, these workers held signs outside the headquarters of the mining company for whom they were employed saying that they were good people forced to do a bad thing (protest) due to economic struggles which negatively impacted their family (they could not afford education, healthcare, nor the ability to buy food). They explicitly framed their incident as a plea for "survival," with other signs asking bystanders and other workers to "look at [them] because one day it could be you" who has to fight for economic stability.

Meso-level officials used this incident internally to argue to that these workers were fighting not for individual survival, but the survival of Shanxi and the limited economic development that Shanxi has had through coal-reliant manufacturing and industry. When discussing the issue with a meso-level official in the environmental protection bureau, one official claimed that "soon we will be helpless like [these workers]" if coal policies were followed to the extent that Beijing required (Interview 10, January 2019). Officials resourcefully leveraged "helpless" workers into pitiful and pitied figures who represented the Shanxi's present political and economic situation, and, if the central state's coal reduction policies were faithfully implement, Shanxi's future.

When appeals to Shanxi's future were inadequate to convince colleagues of the necessity of coal production, officials resourcefully repackaged the frame by emphasizing that it was not only Shanxi that would suffer, but individual officials. The subject in "we will be helpless" changed from "our province" to "we", changing the collectivity from the province to groups of individuals attached to the ego. By removing the abstraction and tying personal outcomes to provincial outcomes, meso-level officials stressed that without coal capital and the stability that

coal jobs brought to the province (Interview 10, January 2019), officials would have less-than-stellar report cards, hurting their bonuses, chances of promotion, and status within the Party.

In Henan, economic prosperity was also a dominant meta-frame for state officials to resourcefully manipulate in order to promote their own interests. The most dominant frame, both in terms of usage and effectiveness, was the "Chinese Dream." The "Chinese dream" became a meta-frame of economic, political, and environmental justice that meso-level officials and workers constructed to push other officials (in different vertical rungs of the official hierarchy and in other bureaus) to implement anti-coal policies. Workers were inundated with messages about the centrality of the Chinese dream to the Chinese political economy; on every government building (at every level) in Henan that I visited, the "Chinese dream" was either postered or painted in large red letters. Walking to and from coal production facilities, near public transportation stops and train stations, and in the courtyards and parks surrounding large apartment buildings, the Chinese dream was plastered and painted, often in red and/or accompanied by beautiful paintings of imagined futures. This was not an accident. Meso-level officials wanted citizens to see the importance of the slogan in official discourse so that officials and citizens could work towards a non-zero-sum bargain (Interview 68, Henan official, February 2019). If workers used the language of the Chinese dream, officials were then forced by policy mandates to negotiate with workers.

The Chinese dream implored workers to "make China rich and powerful" (common poster through Henan, field notes), but the pathway to riches and power was constructed through direct negotiations (Interview 140, coal worker in Henan, May 2019). By beginning their grievances with a plea to make China and Henan rich and powerful, meso-level officials were able to explain to workers their vision for economic development, which involved modernizing the economy (moving away from manufacturing and mining and moving towards information technology,

service work, and finance) and modernizing employment (giving workers improved flexibility in the job market, both locally and within Henan so that they would migrate to a bigger city within Henan rather than to coastal cities) (Interview 67, Henan official, February 2019). In the past, coal was able to provide moderate wealth for many communities within Henan, but the future would be built on "modern" economics and both the freedom to 1) choose careers and 2) work freelance or as a small business owner (Interview 67, February 2019), a frame that pushed workers and recalcitrant officials to support and implement anti-coal policies.

Meso-level officials resource framing of furloughing and firing of coal workers—both miners and those in coal-reliant secondary industries like energy and heavy manufacturing—as maneuverability in the job market was well received by workers. Unlike in Shanxi where this similar process was framed as "breaking the iron rice bowl"—a euphemism for stable employment that was able to provide food for one and one's family—and an attack on the workers who made China great, in Henan the process was framed as empowering workers by giving them the freedom to find much less physically demanding jobs with potentially much better pay. Workers, when confronted with furloughing in Henan, did not protest nor did they demand their jobs back because they welcomed the opportunity change career paths—for the younger workers—or run small shops or food stands in bigger cities (Interview 141, Henan miner, May 2019). Meso-level officials were able to resourcefully frame precarity as a benefit to workers, therefore meeting environmental policy goals to decrease the number of coal miners and coal produced, meeting economic development goals by creating a flexible workforce with fewer benefits and guaranteed wages, and meeting social stability goals by having workers buy into these changes.

In a small gathering on one of the first warm days of May outside a government building in rural Henan, three workers held a banner mimicking signs they had seen in town: "Chinese

dream: Equality between urban and rural areas and equality between officials and citizens" (Interview 137 and field notes, Henan coal miners, May 2019). Because they had seen these signs near their work, miners thought that they were officially approved slogans that could be used to frame their grievances. They were wrong. The subtext claiming that officials were using their power and privilege to line their own pockets at the expense of citizens was not endorsed by the meso-level officials confronted with disgruntled workers seeking to protect their jobs as the country's demand for coal decreased during the summer months. Workers were invited inside to "drink tea," a euphemism for meeting with state security agents who press upon you the need to act "responsibly" and not a meeting with officials to discuss the goals of the aggrieved group over a nice cup of tea (Interview 137 and field notes, May 2019). Some signals are misinterpreted and boundaries are transgressed, leading to a crackdown and signals to other groups showing which frames are legitimate and which are illegitimate.

Meso-level officials stressed to workers and internally to colleagues and subordinates that the "Chinese Dream" was purely economic—where the imagined future was one of economic prosperity caused by job market flexibility and moving away from manufacturing and mining as the economic base—not political (Interview 68, Henan official, February 2019; Interview 138, Henan miners, May 2019). Economic development—one of the the three veto targets, alongside social stability maintenance and environmental protection—is a key target for meso-level officials and when combined with the other two veto targets becomes the highest priority for officials and an easy and resourceful way for officials to succeed. On the other hand, anti-graft campaigns and other political reforms are only dangerous; if supervisors, colleagues, or subordinates who have animosity towards a meso-level official hear that there are aggrieved citizens protesting against any type of corruption—however broadly construed—then they have the ability to bring in

investigators under the anti-corruption corruption campaigns meant to “sweep away the black influences,” potentially leading to naming and shaming, stagnation, demotion, and—in extreme cases—dismissal from the Party and arrest. Therefore, political framing of the “Chinese Dream” is heavily “discouraged” and economic framings are encouraged (Interview 68, Henan official, February 2019; Interview 139, Henan miners, May 2019), making workers much more likely to frame their discussions with meso-level officials as ways to improve individual and collective economic outcomes.

Local Protectionism as a Dominant Frame

Meso-level officials throughout Shanxi felt that Beijing’s policies in regards to reducing coal production, consumption, and pollution (at both the industrial and individual level) would destroy the local economy and local ways of life, but because of their positions as bureaucrats tasked with implemented these policies, they had no choice but to obey unless these policies actively interfered with stability maintenance and workers explicitly blames coal policies or state officials during their protests. If workers wanted meso-level officials to act in support of coal policies and coal workers, then they were told that they should “blame officials who only care about their own black hats [official bureaucratic positions]” (Interview 118, Shanxi coal worker, November 2018). By claiming that central officials were failing to perform their duty towards aggrieved, low-paid workers in favor of keeping their “cushy jobs” (feichai, literally fat official) in Beijing, workers were able to seek protection from the meso-level and meso-level officials would have an obligation to act in support of workers by failing to implement coal policies as written. The framing of not implementing coal policies as a form of local protectionism against higher-level officials was resourcefully created by meso-level officials, flipping the common

complain of local corruption and exploitation on its head—meso-level officials had to protect workers from the whims of central officials not those of lower-level subordinates.

This frame imploring meso-level officials to protect local interests from "black hat officials" had specific boundaries of acceptability that workers had to test. Meso-level officials would crackdown on any protests that implied that the bureaucrats in "cushy jobs" only "caring about their black hats" were environmental police, environmental protection bureau officials, provincial tax officers, or officials who were deemed important (either for their ability to promote the meso-level officials or who had the ability to impede the meso-level official's promotion) (Interview 6, Shanxi environmental protection bureau official, March 2019). Workers figured out which officials were "good" or "bad" (i.e., those who could be acceptably framed as black hat bureaucrats and those who could not; this was neither a moral judgement nor a reflection of the work that officials did, but rather was a euphemism for the ability to frame these officials in negative lights) through a process of trial and error, wherein errors were met with police beatings and intimidation and successes were met with open negotiations (Interview 106, group of Shanxi coal miners, March 2019). Although, when workers were met with violent repression for framing officials as corrupt and rent-seeking, their framing of the situation then resonated with other workers; "[one] cannot claim to be innocent and beat workers" (Interview 106, March 2019), thus emboldening workers and solidifying the frame.

In addition to protecting local interests from central demands, a common resourcefully and jointly constructed frame in Shanxi revolved around protecting Shanxi and its residents from environmentalism, a Western, bourgeois concept that has been imposed upon China and rural Chinese culture. Similar to "Pittsburgh over Paris" (Ted Cruz's anti-Paris Agreement slogan that emphasized local steel and coal production as well as heavy manufacturing) in the United States,

there was a nationalistic and anti-environmentalist response to policies meant to curb coal production and consumption in the largest coal producing and consuming region in China. Evoking the importance of coal in Shanxi became a way for meso-level officials to resourcefully defend failing to implement coal policies and for workers to defend their livelihood and culture. A meso-level official explained the importance of coal to me and to coal miners as an integral part of Shanxi history and a part that he would do his best to protect: "Chinese history is 5,000 years old, coal's history is 6,000 years old…[this area] was founded because of coal and it flourished because of coal" (Interview 26, Shanxi official, October 2018). China's ascent to a world power and its greatness after a century of humiliation were directly caused by coal and coal-reliant manufacturing.

Coal miners blamed Western (and specifically American, French, and German) politicians for "putting pressure" on China to abandon coal mining and the culture and material that made "China great" in an effort to weaken China vis-a-vis the West (Interview 116, Shanxi coal miner, October 2018). This framing was directly and resourcefully manipulated by Shanxi officials who were unwilling to implement policies that outlined specific coal production targets. Officials—when meeting with workers, when touring and inspecting plants, and on WeChat and other online platforms—would often openly and vociferously praise coal's role in making China a "strong and powerful" country that is no longer inferior to other West, but a global superpower in its own right (Interview 115, Shanxi coal miner, October 2018). A group of coal miners saw an official's post on WeChat praising the movie Wolf Warrior 2—a jingoistic, Rambo-esque movie expounding China's power abroad which became Chinese highest grossing movie of all time within its first two weeks—for its portrayal of Chinese strength and its efforts to show that China and Chinese people were not inferior to the West. When the official came to inspect the coal mine where these

miners worked, they explained to him that these environmental policies were a form of Western hegemony, forcing China into a position of inferiority, and that they thought the days of Western countries dictating what China does and does not do were (directly quoting the climax of Wolf Warrior 2) “fucking history” (Interview 114, Interview 115, Shanxi coal miner, October 2018). This official was pleased to have workers’ support in his efforts to convince his colleagues that they should not reduce production within their jurisdiction (Interview 26, October 2018). Coal miners and meso-level officials took the “Make America Great Again” slogan and “Pittsburgh over Paris” rhetoric from WeChat stories and news sources, resourcefully coopting these frames into acceptable and actionable frames against policies meant to limit coal production, consumption, and pollution.

Intimately connected to these anti-environmental-cum-anti-West sentiments were masculinity frames that connected coal with manliness. At the personal level, meso-level officials were quick to frame attempts at reducing coal production as attacks on men and their ability to provide for their family, frames which were then expanded to men providing for their country. When meeting with workers, either through formal channels or in informal settings like while eating at open-air barbecue stands, meso-level officials in Shanxi’s more rural, more coal-reliant areas were quick to point out miners’ masculinity and how they are “real men” doing “hard, honest” work with actual, tangible outcomes, contrasted against those in tertiary sectors who “sit inside” and produce nothing (Interview 24, Shanxi official, May 2019). Meso-level officials were also quick to point out how good coal miners’ wages were, sometimes even joking that the miners made more money than the officials so it must be easy for the miners to find wives and girlfriend. When these officials were tasked with furloughing coal workers within their jurisdiction, workers used these frames to petition for full employment. Workers argued that they were young, full-blooded

men who needed to work full-time in order to afford the requisite house and car that would attract women (Interview 111, Shanxi coal miner, May 2019). Meso-level officials then resourcefully repackaged this claim into a justification for keeping workers employed full-time (Interview 25, Shanxi official, May 2019). Anti-coal policies were framed as foreign attacks on Chinese men and their ability to marry, a key issue among young men in (rural) China and for the Party as birthrates are declining and young men become disillusioned.

Failing to enforce furloughing and firing requirements outlined in policies and laws was also framed as a masculine benefit for the country. Men would work, producing necessary goods for trade and manufacturing; men would earn good salaries, spending it in the domestic market and would be able to afford (both materially and culturally) to get married and have children; and mining would continue to make Chinese men strong (Interview 24, May 2019). When a new, younger meso-level official was unconvinced by his colleagues attempts to sway him into ignoring furlough requirements, he was told to talk with workers and "hear what they have to say" (Interview 25, May 2019). The workers repeated back to him these masculine frames. The manipulation and negotiation of these masculine frames was a resourceful process wherein officials used their ingenuity to cobble together disparate ideas of masculinity into a comprehensive frame under which they could justify their failure to reduce coal employment.

Meso-level officials were able to frame their failure to implement specific policies as a form of local protectionism—protecting Shanxi from economic and material ruin, protecting Shanxi from neoimperial domination through environmentalism, and protecting Shanxi's men's masculinity.

In Henan, the "Chinese Dream" was not just used an economic frame, but this meta-frame was also resourcefully repackaged to denote a form of local protectionism. The Chinese Dream

denotes a future built upon "ecological civilization," a common party slogan that has been heavily promoted as a key facet of Xi Jinping's Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, that protects China's environment and a form of modernity that would protect Chinese culture and economy. The Chinese dream was also invoked by both meso-level officials and workers with regards to environmental protection and the notion of being civilized. "Ecological civilization" and "ecological modernity" could be brought about by "loving and protecting the environment" and changing the economic base of production away from coal-reliant industrialization, all subsumed within the meta-frame of the Chinese Dream (Interview 69, Henan official, April 2019) as a form of local protection.

When workers evoke images of modernity and civilization, they do so as a contrast to their lived reality and as a way to protect an image they have of their life as it is or as it should be. In Shanxi, the lived reality of coal-based production and coal-based culture was to be protected as an inalienable part of the culture. In Henan, though, the lived reality of rural life was seen as "backwards" and in need of change; Western ideas of what it means to be modern and civilized had immense power among both workers and officials in Henan who saw "modernity" as an achievable goal contrasted against their "traditional" reality (Interview 69, Henan official; Interview 80, Henan university professor; Interview 125, Henan coal miner group; April 2019). Modernity meant a "style of civilization" created by "people working together with nature" to create "healthy" and "happy" cities and towns (Interviews 80 and 81, Henan University Professors, April 2019). Protecting local environments and protecting local people and economies were not diametrically opposed, but rather could be combined together if meso-level officials were able to implement anti-coal policies.

Meso-level officials needed local citizens' and labor's support in moving away from coal and coal-reliant manufacturing, and they garnered that support by offering a better future than the present reality based on green development and environmental protection. These two concepts were historically seen as antithetical to one another; China should and must use nature and natural resources to quickly develop. However, under Xi Jinping's Thought on Ecological Civilization, these two should and must be combined because "clear water and green mountains are mountains of silver and gold" (the "two mountain theory" on green development that is central to Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization and often postered and painted on walls in rural townships). Meso-level officials, when meeting with workers, spent a lot of time and effort explaining the dialectical relationship between clear water and green mountains, on the one hand, and economic development, often recruiting professors from local universities (who are also Party members) into efforts to educate coal miners (Interview 130, Henan coal miner, May 2019; Interview 82, Henan professor, May 2019). One group of workers who were the recipients of Party officials' education efforts later met with local officials demanding that their locality adhere to "these new developmental concepts and strive towards excellence" without relying on coal, therefore giving these workers a "better life" and Henan "high-quality" development (Interviews 129-132, Henan coal workers, May 2019). The ecological civilization frame was jointly constructed and then manipulated by meso-level officials—both directly through face-to-face interactions and indirectly when meso-level officials directed signage to be posted or painted near worker compounds, factories, and town squares—to push subordinates, colleagues, and superiors into implementing Beijing's anti-coal policies meant to reduce coal production, the number of coal miners, and coal pollution.

Workers were told to use the Chinese dream in conjunction with ecological civilization, modernity, and protection in both face-to-face meetings after their original framing of their grievances were deemed to be too radical and through signals that worker groups picked up via posters, WeChat, and even the daily news (Interview 125, April 2019). Official mouthpieces of the Party and State implored workers to think ecologically and act in an ecologically civilized and modern fashion with the express purpose of helping meso-level officials justify their anti-coal policy implementation in rural Henan (Interview 69, April 2019). The meso-level state subsumed frame creation and bridging to exhort workers to pressure other officials who were unwilling to implement policies or to give meso-level officials the backing they needed to implement the policies themselves using under the (often literal) banner of ecological civilization.

Meso-level officials also framed anti-coal policies, especially those related to reducing pollution and the number of coal miners, as measures to protect local health, Most notably, meso-level officials framed their implementation as protecting workers from both pneumoconiosis (or black lung disease) and occupational hazards like mine explosions and residents from cancer. Officials thereby combined environmental and social stability goals into a single frame that resonated with workers, citizens, and other officials in the state-Party apparatus who saw these goals as morally correct and as both easy to accomplish and beneficial for their careers.

Pneumoconiosis is intimately connected—both in public imaginations and workers' realities—with coal mining. Black lung disease (or coal workers' pneumoconiosis), caused by the inhalation of (coal) dust particles, is the predominate occupational disease in China; over 90% of the 1 million documented occupational disease cases in China are pneumoconiosis and official statistics—which drastically undercount the total number of cases—indicate that more than 1 million Chinese coal miners suffer from it (Legal Daily 2010a; Legal Daily 2010b; Zhou 2010).

The death rate from pneumoconiosis is approximately three times higher than the date rate from coal mining explosions (Zhou 2010). Those who suffer from pneumoconiosis are older coal miners who have spent their lives underground, toiling in body-breaking manual labor to fuel Henan's and China's economic development. These workers have been requesting support from the state, Party, their mines, and the public at large since the early-2000s, but have generally not been successful.

Workers have developed their own frames in their plight for medical care and renumeration due to pneumoconiosis, but they have been largely unsuccessful because meso-level buy in has been low. Without meso-level officials' support, local officials and coal companies could ignore pneumoconiosis as a prevalent issue.

Local officials often refused to recognize documentation of the disease from other localities or forced workers into long, drawn-out legal battles that often would conclude before judgement because the miner died. The most prominent example of a local official refusing to accept a diagnosis from another jurisdiction occurred in 2009 in Henan, and spread rapidly through traditional news media and nascent social media (Henan Daily 2009). As the story was related to me by a professor in Henan (Interview 79, April 2019), a coal miner from Xinmi, a county-level city administered under Zhengzhou (the prefecture-level capital of Henan), was diagnosed in hospitals in Zhengzhou with pneumoconiosis, however the local official in charge of occupational safety refused to recognize the diagnosis because it did not come from the Xinmi Centre for Disease Control and Treatment, which misdiagnosed him with tuberculosis. The worker went on to have a thoracotomy in Zhengzhou; in order to force the local official to recognize his diagnosis of pneumoconiosis, the worker underwent a procedure in which surgeons cut open his chest to literally see the coal dust in his lungs. This case was a national and personal embarrassment that

still marred Xinmi's and Zhengzhou's local officials' reputations and because of this case, meso-level officials were more likely to intervene in pneumoconiosis-related issues (Interview 74, Henan official, May 2019). When workers claimed pneumoconiosis in central Henan, officials listened.

Officials also helped workers make pneumoconiosis claims by arranging meetings with non-governmental organizations specializing in workers' rights and workers' health claims, encouraging workers to publicly demonstrate, to meet with meso-level officials above the street-level and county-level officials, and to engage in legal procedures with the state-Party's support. The loss of face from the 2009 pneumoconiosis case was still fresh in state officials' minds and they would gladly help workers with pneumoconiosis-related renumeration if it meant no bad press or central-level involvement. Although pneumoconiosis claims are as old as organized coal mining, meso-level officials would exhort workers to press those claims and help them in doing so in order to push through anti-coal policies. When workers press pneumoconiosis claims, meso-level officials are able to argue that they are protecting local workers by limiting the number of coal workers. If there are fewer coal workers, then there are fewer cases of pneumoconiosis; if there are fewer tons of coal mined, then there is less coal dust flying around and fewer cases of pneumoconiosis.

JOINTLY CONSTRUCTED TARGETS

In both Shanxi and Henan, the targets of manipulated mobilizations were jointly constructed between meso-level state officials and workers with meso-level officials exhorting workers towards specific targets while heavily punishing workers who directed their protests towards unapproved targets. Worker groups who directed their concerns towards the "correct" target were invited to negotiate settlements with meso-level officials—often being brought into patron-client networks in Shanxi or bought off in one-time payments, as was more common Henan.

Those who directed their concerns towards the "incorrect" target were often invited to "drink tea"—a euphemism for informal detention by security bureau officials—or were subjected to more direct violence against their persons, their families, or their property. In Shanxi, meso-level officials constructed both (1) local officials and central policies, thereby making meso-level officials workers' protectors, and (2) dispatch workers and the companies that hired them as viable targets for worker protest. In Henan, meso-level officials constructed both (1) political rivals, thereby creating the necessary justification for officials to punish those who may threaten their position, and (2) local, small/medium coal-reliant enterprises, thereby closing down less profitable organizations while meeting national quotas, as viable targets for worker mobilization.

Local—street- and community-level, as well as township-level—officials are often the target of worker and aggrieved citizen protest in rural China. Given free rein during the latest period of Chinese decentralization and with little oversight, local officials are often construed as "evil" and "corrupt" in both popular and higher-echelon state-Party imaginations (Interview 78, Shanxi professor, November 2018). Because lower-level officials have the ability and the incentive to wield their position within the state to extract undue burdens from local populations, workers often target local officials as the locus of their ire, asking meso-level officials to intervene in situations in order to protect workers from corrupt locals (Interview 78, Shanxi professor, November 2018; Interview 35, Shanxi official, November 2018). The targeting of local officials by workers in not new, but the manner in which workers come to target local officials and the effects of this targeting—this manipulated targeting—is a new tool in the social stability maintenance toolbox used by meso-level officials to increase their own infrastructural power through civil society and despotic power over local officials and workers who aim at other targets.

In Southeastern Shanxi, a local official attempted to meet the pollution reduction targets outlined in a bevy of centrally-mandated state policies and campaigns by fining and naming-and-shaming those within his community who were using coal to heat their homes and their beds during the early winter months (Interview 112, coal worker, December 2018). The community also experienced furloughing at the same time, meaning that workers were at home and had significantly less spending money; workers could not afford to not heat their homes during the day and night and they could not afford more environmentally-friendly heat sources (even if they had the desire to install alternative heat sources, which many did not). Those being affected by the fines and furloughing had an obvious target—the local officials' implementation of national policies—and obvious grievance—fines and furloughing. However, when they met with other local officials, they were denied redress and told that officials were doing their job as outlined by national policies and that these policies were meant to make China stronger in the future, hinting that if workers were to continue seditiously mobilizing against the local officials and their work to reduce coal-based pollution, then they would be severely punished (Interview 113, coal worker, December 2018). Like other workers, this group of workers escalated their concerns to meso-level officials.

Unlike other workers—most of whom were ignored by meso-level officials; shunted into long, draw-out legal battles; or had perfunctory meetings after which they were either ignored or directed towards legal avenues of redress—this group of workers met productively with a meso-level official who entreated workers to continue in their plight (Interview 112, coal worker, December 2018). Instead of targeting the national policies regarding furloughing and fines for at-home coal usage, this meso-level official exhorted workers to target the local official himself; rather than target the position or the roles of the position, the meso-level official manipulated

workers into targeting the person. The local official was not “faithfully and energetically implementing policies”—as the other local officials claimed (Interview 113, coal worker, December 2018)—but was using these policies as a way to line his own pockets through petty rents. The target, therefore, was not national policies over which meso-level officials had little sway, but local official corruption, over which meso-level officials had near limitless power due to the “sweeping away the black influences” anti-corruption campaign.

Workers shifted their target—and their framing of the target—from abstract ideas about fairness and far-away policies to a very concrete target: a local official misusing his position and power to further his own material interests under the guise of environmentalism. Once workers targeted corruption and a local official who could be labeled as corrupt for extracting rents—not fines which are legitimate and go to the state-Party apparatus, but payoffs which went directly into his pocket—meso-level officials had both the moral imperative and official duty to investigate (Interview 32, Shanxi official, January 2019). Corruption was a viable target due to the massive “sweep away the black influences” campaign—leading to the purging of nearly 50,000 Party officials and 40,000 criminal co-conspirators since its inception in 2018 (Feng 2021). The arrest and sentencing of Zhang Zhixiong, a local cadre in a nearby rural community, for (1) the organizing and leading of an illegal mining operation and (2) installing members in the local-level "two committees of the village” in order to control the mining industry in the region was fresh in the minds of local- and meso-level officials. Meso-level officials could successfully paint local-level officials as members of organized criminal syndicates or, at least under the sway of local gangsters, if aggrieved citizens mentioned or hinted at local-level corruption (Interview 32, Shanxi official, January 2019).

After meeting with the meso-level official, workers targeted the local official's corruption in levying fines—claiming that the money was either going directly to his pocket or to local triadic organizations' who would then funnel money towards local officials—or furloughing workers—claiming that the picking and choosing of which workers to furlough was influenced by local coal bosses who had given local officials economic kickbacks or had political leverage over them (Interviews 112 and 113, Shanxi coal workers, December 2018). The meso-level official manipulated the target shift in order to stop the local-level official from implementing national anti-coal policies, furthering his own positional and personal interest. By sweeping away a local black influence, by stalling furloughing attempts and increasing the consumption market for coal, and by placating aggrieved workers, the meso-level official was able to bolster the scores on all three of his hard-veto targets, therefore giving him better odds at promotion and an increased likelihood of lucrative bonuses.

In addition to targeting local-level officials, meso-level officials swayed workers and aggrieved citizens to target national-level policies—but not higher-level cadres—and seek meso-level protection from these policies. Because local-level officials were accountable to meso-level officials as subordinates, local-level officials were acceptable targets for mobilizing meso-level officials into action, but because meso-level officials were accountable to higher-level superordinates, higher-level officials were not a viable target for mobilizing meso-level action. Although higher-level officials could not be fruitful targets, their policies certainly could be; meso-level officials were tasked with implementing policies and ensuring that their subordinates were following policies, so meso-level officials would be responsible for remedying the situation if workers targeted the effects of those policies.

During the winter of 2018-2019, a group of workers approached Shanxi environmental protection bureau (EPB) officials concerning the implementation of furloughing policies and policies with explicit, quantified coal production and consumption goals (Interview 9, Shanxi EPB official, March 2019). These workers were not arguing that local officials were overzealous or corrupt, but that any policy implementation would cause undue disadvantage to Shanxi coal workers and citizens who relied on coal for heating. Workers initially sought protection from EPB officials in the form of lax inspections or failure to implement policies; workers beseeched these officials to not implement policies and to not punish those local officials who were refusing to implement anti-coal policies (Interview 9, March 2019). These proposed solutions were too risky for EPB officials.

Instead, EPB officials resourcefully manipulated the target away from the inspection process and towards the policies themselves. The EPB official was careful to explicitly caution workers from targeting specific officials who may have been involved in the promulgation or writing of national laws or campaigns; "I told them that it is not [our bosses'] fault, it is not [Xi's] fault, it is not our fault: it is the law" (Interview 9, March 2019). By blaming the abstraction—the policy or the campaign—workers sought meso-level officials to intervene in local implementation of national laws. These workers went back to their community and held a "small event with a couple of people holding a couple of signs" decrying the effects of the anti-coal policy implementation (Interview 9, March 2019), thus forcing the EPB officials to evaluate process and impacts of the implementation of coal reduction policies within this jurisdiction. Meso-level EPB officials found that local officials were too enthusiastic in their implementation and were in dereliction of their duty towards their citizens and workers, thereby requiring that officials loosen regulations on individual coal consumption and relax coal production limits. Meso-level officials

then could resourcefully manipulate social stability maintenance goals into their failure to implement environmental laws.

In addition to lower-level state-Party officials and higher-level policies, a common target for worker grievances were dispatch workers and the companies that hired such workers. In response to furloughing and policies and campaigns to lay-off coal miners, some local officials and coal mining and coal-reliant operations furloughed or fired regular workers only to hire dispatch or temporary workers, replacing the working-class elite in Shanxi with precarious labor. Some meso-level officials welcomed this opportunity for a more flexible workforce and increased profit margins—more so in Henan than in Shanxi, although there were Shanxi officials who were supportive of such measures. But, most meso-level officials in Shanxi were morally opposed to implementing policies that reduced stable coal jobs because they were viewed as an assault on workers and on the material and cultural basis of the province. Workers' targets were resourcefully shifted from the companies who used dispatch workers to the policies that allowed companies to replace furloughed and fired workers with irregular workers—which was itself a resourceful way in which officials followed the letter of the laws (by reducing coal workers) but not the spirit of the laws, leading to more coal workers by number but less spent on coal workers' salaries.

A former legal coal miner in northern Shanxi explained that when his former mine furloughed workers—they had not yet fired workers, but workers were anticipating lay-offs—the mine hired migrant laborers from Inner Mongolia and other, poorer areas within Shanxi as temporary workers to offset the lost labor from mandated furloughs and to keep up productivity in the winter months (Interview 119, Shanxi illegal coal miner, December 2018). Obviously distraught, he and his fellow workers gathered outside of their former employer's offices, demanding to be rehired full time with full wages. They were beaten by the mine's security

officials (Interview 119, December 2019). Local officials, beholden to the mine for economic prosperity, were unwilling to intervene in what they deemed was an “internal affair” (Interview 119, December 2019). When meso-level officials were made aware of the situation through social media posts, they saw an easy opportunity to resourcefully use labor mobilizations and grievances to further their own interest in not implementing anti-coal policies (Interview 39, Shanxi official, December 2018).

A meso-level official, who saw images of bloodied workers on his WeChat feed (similar to FaceBook or Twitter wherein people post images and stories for others to see and interact with), decided to meet with a couple of the workers who were abused (Interview 39, Shanxi official; Interview 119, Shanxi illegal coal miner; December 2018). In that meeting, the meso-level official lamented that local officials were colluding with local capital to hire dispatch workers from other jurisdictions—benefiting corrupt officials, large corporations, and “foreign” workers—at the expense of Shanxi workers. The meso-level official hoped that workers would see that the cause of their problems were migrant temporary workers from elsewhere and the companies that were profiting off of the firing and furloughing of Shanxi’s workers (Interview 39, December 2019). And, they did; workers went back to the mine’s gates and held signs targeting flexible workers (Interview 119, December 2019). By shifting the target, meso-level officials gained justification for failing to implement furloughing policies. In fact, the workers who protested were later rehired without contracts but for full wages; because the coal mining operation could not legally rehire furloughed workers, even with meso-level support, they illegally hired the workers back and meso-level officials turned a blind eye to the operation. According to the official statistics, then, workers were furloughed in the meso-level officials’ district, but the workers were happy and coal production continued unabated.

Although grievances against specific targets existed before and beyond the ultimate targets of Shanxi worker protest mobilizations, those who were successfully targeted were sometimes chosen as targets because meso-level officials resourcefully subsumed the role of picking and choosing targets for workers, exhorting workers to target specific people, policies, and corporations. In actually manipulating worker mobilizations, meso-level officials furthered their own goals for higher standing within the state-Party apparatus, for promotion and bonuses, and for continued coal production because of the cultural value that they assigned to coal.

Just as in Shanxi, meso-level officials in Henan also resourcefully manipulated mobilizations by helping workers choose acceptable targets, and by delineating a targets acceptability through in-person meetings and signaling unacceptability through crackdowns. In Henan, meso-level officials constructed both (1) political rivals and (2) local, small/medium coal-reliant enterprises as viable targets for worker mobilization. Rather than targeting local officials exclusively, as in Shanxi, meso-level officials in Henan mobilized workers against officials who they considered to be political rivals or officials with whom they had private disagreements in order to justify levying professional sanctions against them. Rather than targeting dispatch workers, as in Shanxi, meso-level officials mobilized workers against the small- to medium-sized coal-reliant operations (mines, processing plants, steel manufacturers) in order to better justify closing down these operations when environmental concerns were not enough to sway workers or citizens.

The "sweep away the black influences" anti-corruption campaign was often used as a Maoist-style purge of political rivals, as seen in Shanxi above. In Henan and in other provinces (like neighboring Shaanxi), the "sweep away the black influences" campaign was often tied in with environmental campaigns, seeking to not only remove coal's influence from local areas, but remove those who were gaining political popularity and economic benefits due to that influence,

i.e., rivals. When collusion and corruption was difficult to prove, or when citizens did not care enough about potential corruption, anti-environmental claims could be added to an official's charges to gain support from higher-level officials before the official's arrest and during prosecution (Interview 83, Henan university professor and Party member, April 2019). Meso-level officials in Henan ensured that workers targeted political rivals, either subordinates or colleagues (in their bureau or other bureaus), with charges of failing to follow environmental policies as enthusiastically as they should, often leaving the accusations of collusion between local coal capital and the rival unspoken and unspecified because they are harder to prove.

An EPB official in Henan (Interview 15, December 2018) was "eyeing" his colleagues job, and had been for years, because it was in a better location and was a slightly more prestigious job, but the colleague was firmly entrenched in the position and too valuable to be promoted out of the position. The only way for the first official to get the job that he so desperately wanted would be if his colleague was demoted or if he lost his veneer of invaluableness, making him likely to be transferred to a less prestigious bureau in a worse locality, both of which were unlikely to happen without outside influence (Interview 15, December 2018). The solution was to be found in workers' mass mobilizations.

Young men in Henan want better jobs than coal mining or other coal-reliant industry can provide; instead of working all day in backbreaking labor, looked down upon by those in tertiary industries in the more-developed eastern Chinese seaboard, Henanese young men dreamed of leaving their rural realities behind for opportunities to work in service industries in Shanghai, Beijing, or Shenzhen (Interview 133, Henan former coal miner, January 2019). However, because coal and coal-reliant jobs are plentiful and well paying, even compared to jobs in the cosmopolitan East, workers were unwilling or unable to risk migrating for other jobs (Interview 134, Henan

former coal miner, January 2019). These two workers (Interviews 133 and 134) were excited when they heard of possible furloughing to meet coal miner reduction numbers during the winter of 2018-2019 because it would give them the impetus to leave their jobs and their rural, provincial life behind to migrate to Shanghai. They were not furloughed, and nobody else in their vicinity was furloughed or fired. When the aforementioned EPB official came to inspect the mines, they asked him about future furloughing and firing (Interview 15, Henan EPB official, December 2019; Interviews 133, 134, Henan former coal miners, January 2019). After a short conversation, these workers decided to file a complaint with the Environmental Protection Bureau, claiming that their mine was ramping up production and increasing their hours, rather than reducing both.

In a follow-up interview with the environmental protection official (Interview 15) in late May 2019, he claimed that he was preparing for a big promotion to the job that he had wanted for years because his rival "lost face" when it came to light that workers were not being furloughed or fired in coal and coal-reliant industries. Workers were later furloughed once the complaint found its way into the appropriate hands. This meso-level official resourcefully manipulated existing grievances, but by changing their target for his own benefit, he reduced the number of coal workers in Henan.

Although using worker mobilizing to target personal rivals did occur, it was much less common than using worker events to target small- to medium-sized enterprises that were not profitable but were being artificially kept alive by the state-Party apparatus. Worker mobilizations gave meso-level officials the justification and support that they needed—both with other state-Party officials and with workers—to shutter coal mines and coal-reliant factories that were hitherto resistant to being closed down. This option was particularly attractive to meso-level officials who had other pet projects that were being underfunded because funds were being used to supplement

the market failure of local capital (Interview 63, Henan official, April 2019). Meso-level officials were able to resourcefully exhort workers to target unprofitable mining or manufacturing companies in order to further their own interests, which had the side effect of reducing coal production, consumption, and pollution.

Coal-reliant workers in a coal processing plant (where coal is processed from a raw product to coking coal through thermal distilling) that was artificially kept alive by supplements from state-Party had not been paid in two months when they finally protested for wages in arrears before the Chinese New Year in early 2019 (Interview 135, Henan coal-reliant worker, April 2019). The protest took the form of a group of workers meeting at the factory gate, holding signs demanding that the company pay them wages owed. This was a standard, bread-and-butter protest like hundreds of protests that occur around the New Year. However, because the company was so intimately connected with the state, meso-level officials quickly became involved in negotiations with these informally organized workers.

During face-to-face negotiations concerning backpay, meso-level officials questioned how and why the company was still operating, if workers even wanted to be there, and if the money spent on keeping the operation going could be spent more wisely (Interview 63, Henan official, April 2019; Interviews 135 and 136, Henan coal-reliant workers, April 2019). These questions were neither rhetorical nor genuine, instead the meso-level official asked them to spur workers to think through their answers (Interview 63, April 2019). Workers concluded that the company should not be operating, that they did not want to work in coal-reliant jobs, and that the money could be spent on paying them owed waged and in modernizing Henan (Interview 136, April 2019). When these negotiations ended and workers were promised around 60% of owed wages, workers refused what they considered a paltry handout and instead resumed their protest outside the factory

gates. This time, though, they targeted the company by demanding it pay wages in full and then shut down to improve the development of an "ecological civilization" in rural Henan (Interview 136, April 2019). The ecological civilization frame—discussed above—combined with a clear and accessible target—a failing coking plant—made meso-level officials act.

The meso-level official shuttered the coking operation and paid workers 80% of wages owed—a clear win for workers when the norm is around half of that if they are lucky and 0% if they are not. This was a resourcefully crafted win-win scenario for the meso-level official and workers. For the meso-level official, he was able to successfully maintain social harmony, shut down a coking operation under the environmental guidelines and policies, save his jurisdiction money by stopping payments to a failing operation, and he used that money to invest in his pet project: rural revitalization through and modernization through the building of indoor, flushable toilets. For workers, they received some wages in arrear and they were able to cut ties with the coal-reliant company allowing them to look for work in Zhengzhou, the capital of Henan where there are more job opportunities for independent entrepreneurs and in the service sector.

Meso-level officials in Henan resourcefully negotiated workers into targeting specific rivals and specific companies in order to further their own interests. Environmental issues were present in all interactions, but their effects were secondary. Meso-level officials used environmental frames to spur targeting that would allow for the greatest individual rewards.

APPROPRIATE(D) TACTICAL REPERTOIRES AND ORGANIZATIONS

Meso-level officials in Shanxi and Henan "help workers find the most appropriate [or proper] tactics" (Interview 27, Shanxi meso-level official, November 2018; Interview 69, Henan meso-level official, November 2018) in order to preserve stability and find a win-win-win situation for officials, enterprises, and workers (often in that order of importance). In both provinces, meso-

level officials stressed that they would only be willing and able to help workers who played by their rules; “if workers act properly and sincerely, then we can help, but if they behave atrociously or display shocking(ly bad) behavior, then we are forced to maintain order” (Interview 33, Shanxi meso-level official, February 2019). On the ones hand, workers are unable to know what “proper and sincere” behavior is without directly interacting with meso-level officials. Past acceptance or repression is not an indicator of present or future acceptance or repression, leaving workers to actively seek out interactions with meso-level officials in order to ensure that they are engaging in appropriate measures to resolve their issues. On the other hand, meso-level officials seek out workers to appropriate their protests for their own interests, and this can only be done if the workers engage in the appropriate manner, otherwise meso-level or lower-level officials may be forced to violently repress worker activism. Meso-level officials resourcefully negotiate proper and appropriate protest tactics with workers in order to appropriate those protests for their own personal and/or professional interests.

The universe of acceptable tactics, for both workers and meso-level officials, is quite small, but can be encapsulated by the maxim to “keep it short and small” in Shanxi and to use institutional channels in Henan. In Shanxi, meso-level officials stressed to workers, that only short and small protests would be acceptable; small gatherings outside of places of employment, public parks, or government buildings were appropriate as long as they were “orderly” and lasted no more than three days. In Henan, meso-level officials stressed the importance of formal organization—often using non-governmental organizations (NGOs)—and going through appropriate, institutional channels for conflict resolution. By channeling protests into the state, meso-level officials were bolstered by central-level mandates requiring that stability be maintained and by organizing formally with civic organizations, the state would be “forced” to take their demands more seriously.

When workers informally gathered in large groups, they were met with police officers, both in uniform and in plain-clothes. Rural Henan officials also would hire non-state sanctioned enforcers to rough up informal protest leaders, signaling that the right way to protest was through formal organizations. Meso-level officials in both Shanxi and Henan used worker protests for non-environmental issues to their advantage in pushing their own pro-coal interests in Shanxi and pro-environmentalist interests in Henan.

In Shanxi, meso-level officials are willing to allow public protests as long as they are "more economic than political" and are short, simple, and one-off events (Interview 24, Shanxi meso-level official, May 2019). The tactics can be confrontational, they can target the state, they can even be a "nuisance," but they cannot metastasize and they cannot attempt to bring others into their protest events. Bringing others into the protest makes the dispute political and a threat to "stability," although the stability that the meso-level officials care about is more personal; they know that a worker protest in rural Shanxi is not going to destabilize the regime, but it might destabilize their career within the state-Party apparatus (Interview 24 and 25, Shanxi meso-level officials, May 2019). Meso-level officials share their desire for short and small protest tactics with workers through a variety of mechanisms, though face-to-face negotiations with worker representatives and indirect boundary-drawing are the most common.

Workers who petition the state for some form of redress often elect a worker representative, or a group of representatives (usually 3 or 5, depending on the size of the worker collective), who are tasked with presenting information to the relevant targets and negotiating with each target individually or jointly. These representatives are not often the most radical or the most connected, but are those who are willing to be the face of the group and able to effectively communicate in standard Mandarin, a problem for many migrant workers (who are unable to speak the local

language or have thick accents) and coal workers (who speak local patois and are often under-educated). The worker representative(s) in smaller, more rural locations has more opportunities to meet with meso-level officials, whereas in larger, coast cities, worker representative(s) usually meet with lower-level officials because meso-level officials think that they are "too important" for "these kinds of meetings" (Interview 25, Shanxi meso-level official, May 2019). It is in these meetings that goals, framing, and tactics are discussed and agreed upon.

Often, these face-to-face negotiations will start with workers expressing their grievances, then meso-level officials attempting to corral and change those grievances into acceptable goals, followed by a discussion of how those goals can be met by both sides, concluding with a plan that outlines what each side will do in the near future (it is in this concluding part of the meeting that appropriate tactics are decided). In a representative example, one meso-level official in Southwest Shanxi explained the process of face-to-face negotiation in order to determine the best tactics available for workers and, more importantly, himself:

> "A worker representative came to us because [his coal-reliant manufacturing company] was cheating the pension contribution system by only declaring the workers' basic income instead of the actual monthly wage, which was much higher. So, we start by saying that we know you [workers] are not bad people for wanting to protest and the company is not a bad company because they need to make money; both parties are forced into doing what they are doing…after a bit of time, we agreed that no more than 15 workers could protest in front of the local tax bureau for three days, no more time and no more workers would be allowed, and afterwards they would accept the outcome and go home. I then went to the tax bureau and talked with colleagues there; we decided to force the company into a small, lump-sum payment to workers and increased tax monitoring. For their support in the plan, [the company] was given fewer environmental inspections and a new contract to increase production. It was a win-win-win." (Interview 25, May 2019).

Workers were given the appropriate tactic with clear specifications on time and number of participants allowed. Meso-level officials were able to cause a disturbance that would force tax bureaucrats to act because it was literally outside their door. And, meso-level officials were able to push their own interests to increase economic development (ramped up production in an

important local industry), to maintain stability (successfully demobilize a protest event in a way that workers and the enterprise were happy), and to increase coal production and consumption (increased production meant increased coal usage which meant increased coal mining elsewhere and fewer environmental inspections meant that the company could increase that production as much as they wanted). This small and short protest outside of a key bureau was appropriate for both workers and officials and then was appropriated by officials to further their own personal and professional interests. These types of small protests were common in Shanxi, even as there was a larger crackdown on organized labor protests in Beijing and Guangdong.

The crackdown on labor NGOs, many of which were foreign-funded and supported, in China's economic and political powerhouses on the eastern seaboard were a cause of consternation in Henan among labor organizations. But, there were a couple of key differences between NGOs on the coast and Henan's. First, whereas the (labor and environmental) NGOs on the coast were (for the most part) funded by and supported by foreigners—making them anti-Chinese at best and seditious at worse—the NGOs in Henan were Chinese run and operated, with no foreign support or even awareness of their existence. Second, whereas NGOs on the coast were more antagonistic towards the state or viewed as confrontational even when they were channeling workers' issues into appropriate state forums, NGOs in Henan often worked closely with the meso-level state, leading to a form of administrative absorption that limited their effectiveness (for workers' interests) but allowed them to continue to operate smoothly. Finally, whereas NGOs have been involved in the recent history of contentious labor politics on the coast due to massive numbers of rural migrants, the NGOs in Henan have been working with the local state to actively incentivize return migration, hoping to steal away workers that they lost to the coastal cities through incentives that would allow former migrant workers to start their own businesses in Henan's larger cities.

Meso-level officials in Henan work with and co-opt (both labor and more generalized) NGOs, pushing them as the only appropriate method for workers to gain redress from the state and punishing those workers who do not avail themselves of NGOs' services.

Unlike in Shanxi were meso-level officials met and directly negotiated with worker representatives, meso-level in Henan were reticent to meet with workers unless they were formally connected to a recognized and legally-registered NGO (Interview 5, Henan NGO manager, May 2019). Here, worker representatives are not elected from among the pool of aggrieved workers, but rather the worker representative is a formal organization that is recognized by the state and, therefore, has a working relationship with state officials. Meso-level officials prefer dealing with NGOs because they are easier to monitor and control, they are easier to co-opt and absorb, and they are "less erratic" than workers on their own (Interview 5, May 2019). The working relationship with NGOs make it much easier for meso-level officials to stress the appropriate tactics available to NGOs and then resourcefully appropriate those tactics for their own personal and professional interests, namely realizing Henan as an ecologically-minded, economically-developed province.

A meso-level official put me in contact with an NGO manager that he had a "good relationship with" because they were working on a joint effort to "create balanced economic development and rational distribution of wealth" by using central-level funds to provide training for people who are willing to change jobs from being a coal miner to either a service worker or a small-business owner (Interview 55, Henan meso-level official, May 2019; Interview 5, Henan NGO manager, May 2019). Because coal mining is a dangerous for workers and the environment, as well as viewed as a relic of "old ways of thinking about economic development and energy use," the central government has allocated "literally 100 billion yuan [100 billion is also used

colloquially to mean a myriad, but the manager stressed that he meant it literally]" for workers like coal miners to upgrade their skills and change careers, but this money was only accessible in Henan through state partnerships with NGOs (Interview 5, May 2019). Therefore, when workers were fired or furloughed, or merely threatened with firing or furloughing, the state directed NGOs to work with these soon-to-be laid-off workers in order to prevent them from causing a disturbance and to ensure that these workers (who are generally older—in their 40s and 50s, rapidly approaching the mandatory retirement age for men—and less educated, i.e., less employable) are able to find employment (Interview 5, May 2019). "Initially, workers were upset at the prospect of being laid-off, but we were able to help them see that this was an opportunity; the could get better jobs, learn new and modern skills, and earn money before they even started work again. By working with [meso-level officials in Henan], we are able to ensure social stability and economic advancement…moving towards an ecological civilization" (Interview 5, May 2019). In addition to funneling workers' potential grievances into NGOs, meso-level officials were also able to funnel workers themselves into different jobs, thus meeting their economic goals, social stability maintenance goals, and their environmental targets demanding reducing the numbers of coal workers in the province and decreasing coal production.

When NGOs engage with workers on behalf of the state, they stress that this is the best deal for workers; protesting firing or furloughing will only lead to punishment, whereas working with NGOs can lead to benefits. "I tell them: if you want subsidies, tax breaks, cash payments, re-training, or a new life, then we can get that for you, but if you want to drink tea with the police, then you can join protests" (Interview 5, May 2019). This severely weakened any support for non-NGO tactics because workers were unwilling to risk punishment for minimal rewards when they could gain more substantial rewards by simply registering with the NGO. This double

absorption—of the NGO and the workers—is a key mechanism for resourcefully maintaining control while enforcing environmental regulations.

However, not all workers chose register with NGOs, believing that the service industry jobs or small-business ownership opportunities were more precarious than stable coal mining jobs and that because they had been coal mining for the past couple of decades, they would have little chance to succeed in the (more) open market (Interview 5, May 2019; Interviews 142 and 143, Henan gray market coal miners, May 2019). When these workers tried to find other workers to join a protest against imminent firing, they were tracked, monitored, and photographed by lower-level state officials; verbally and physically abused by plainclothed police officers; and had their families and other relations threatened (Interviews 142 and 143, May 2019). This signaled to these workers, and any other worker who these workers tried to enlist, that such tactics were not appropriate and it would be disastrous if workers engaged in such tactics. The outcome was that there were few non-institutionalized worker activism in Henan, especially compared to Shanxi.

In Shanxi, where there are fewer NGOs of any kind and workers are more entrenched in coal and coal-reliant jobs, meso-level officials negotiated appropriate tactics with worker representatives in order to resourcefully use worker protest to further their personal and professional goals, namely increasing economic outputs and solving social instability, while ignoring environmental targets. In contrast, in Henan, where NGOs are organizationally stronger and embedded within local governance structures, meso-level officials channeled workers into NGOs, avoiding worker protests while tapping into central-level funding and moving away from coal-based economic development, therefore meeting economic, social, and environmental targets. Although meso-level officials were able to resourcefully negotiate tactics and organizational outcomes in their favor, workers were objectively worse off, though they viewed their outcomes

as wins. This is crucial for meso-level officials. Workers were happy with their outcomes, whether it is precarious futures in Henan or pittances of what they are legally-owed in Shanxi, thereby increasing social stability in both provinces.

CONCLUSION

Rather than viewing mobilizations as adversarial, wherein labor groups challenge the state's or firm's power, I show that mobilized civil society actors can act with state officials, leading to non-zero-sum outcomes. In Shanxi and Henan, meso-level officials directly negotiate with aggrieved workers to determine acceptable goals and grievances, jointly construct and bridge frames, coordinate targets, and find appropriate tactics which meso-level officials then appropriate for their own benefit. These processes are contingent and contested, neither pre-determined nor pre-constructed, but are constantly changing based on meso-level and worker inter-actions and interactions. Mobilizations in rural Chinese coal country are not discrete, independent, antagonistic forces, but rather are mutually constituted and manipulated, leading to increased social stability and differential environmental outcomes.

Channeling and co-optation are types of manipulated mobilizations, but they are not the only kind of manipulated mobilizations. Rather than state funding being the mechanism by which workers are demobilized, institutionalized, and routinized as in the case of channeling, the manipulated mobilizations that I describe entail no financial backing from state actors and often encourages non-routinized and non-institutionalized mobilizations as a means to further meso-level officials' own personal and professional goals. The mobilization is not channeling into the state but rather has its meanings altered to benefit the state. Rather than being absorbed into the state apparatus as in the case of co-opting, meso-level officials keep workers at arm's length, using worker mobilizations to accomplish unrelated goals.

Unlike channeling and co-optation, which outline distinct mechanisms for demobilization, manipulated mobilizations in Shanxi and Henan do not have clearly defined and distinct endpoints for workers. When meso-level officials manipulate labor protests, negotiate with and recognize workers as aggrieved parties who have the ability to achieve some of their initial goals and earn some benefits, meso-level officials create a double-edged sword: workers become emboldened by their (however limited) success. Worker emboldenedness can manifest in increased worker protest, as was the case in Henan, or workers pushing beyond the delineated boundaries that meso-level officials deemed acceptable.

Henan has become the province with the largest number of labor protests in recent years, in no small part due to protest diffusion. Workers hear about other successful worker protests, mostly through informal network connections (coworkers, migrants from the same area, WeChat and QQ), without hearing about the involvement of meso-level officials, leading workers to demand the same benefits. Without the backing of meso-level officials and without the jointly constructed acceptable goals, frames, targets, and tactics, worker protest is adversarial and viewed by state officials (at all rungs of the state) as destabilizing. Whereas manipulating mobilizations is a tactic in the authoritarian toolkit of social stability maintenance, when protests expand beyond the acceptable limit, they become dangerous, leading to crackdowns.

Meso-level officials do not manipulate every protest, but resourcefully pick and choose which mobilizations can be successfully manipulated to further their own personal and professional goals, which has environmental outcomes. Worker mobilizations can be manipulated in ways that would punish coal producing and coal-reliant enterprises, as was the case in Henan. Worker mobilizations can be manipulated in ways that would allow coal mining operations to skirt environmental policies, as was the case in Shanxi.

REFERENCES

Almeida, Paul, and Chris Chase-Dunn. 2018. "Globalization and social movements." *Annual review of sociology* 44(1):189-211.

Alpermann, Björn, and Maria Bondes. 2019. "Networked Contention against Waste Incinerators in China: Brokers, Linkages and Dynamics of Diffusion." Pp. 253-65 in *Handbook of Protest and Resistance in China*, edited by Teresa Wright. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar.

Andrews, Kenneth T, and Bob Edwards. 2004. "Advocacy organizations in the US political process." *Annual review of sociology*:479-506.

Bartley, Tim. 2007. "How Foundations Shape Social Movements: The Construction of an Organizational Field and the Rise of Forest Certification." *Social Problems* 54(3):229-55.

Benford, Robert D, and David A Snow. 2000. "Framing processes and social movements: An overview and assessment." *Annual review of sociology*:611-39.

Brulle, Robert J, and J Craig Jenkins. 2005. "Foundations and the environmental movement: Priorities, strategies, and impact." *Foundations for social change: Critical perspectives on philanthropy and popular movements*:151-73.

Cai, Yongshun. 2004. "Managed participation in China." *Political Science Quarterly* 119(3):425-51.

Chan, Jenny, and Ngai Pun. 2010. "Suicide as protest for the new generation of Chinese migrant workers: Foxconn, global capital, and the state." *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 37(2):1-50.

Chen, Xi. 2012. *Social protest and contentious authoritarianism in China*: Cambridge University Press.

Chen, Xi , and Dana M. Moss. 2019. "Authoritarian Regimes and Social Movements." Pp. 666-81 in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, edited by David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, Hanspeter Kriesi, and Holly J. McCammon. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

Clemens, Elisabeth S. 1993. "Organizational repertoires and institutional change: Women's groups and the transformation of US politics, 1890-1920." *American Journal of Sociology* 98(4):755-98.

Cress, Daniel M., and David A. Snow. 2000. "The Outcomes of Homeless Mobilization: The Influence of Organization, Disruption, Political Mediation, and Framing." *American Journal of Sociology* 105(4):1063-104.

Della Porta, Donatella. 2013. "Repertoires of contention." *The Wiley‐Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*.

Diani, Mario. 2015. *The cement of civil society*: Cambridge University Press.

Earl, Jennifer. 2003. "Tanks, tear gas, and taxes: Toward a theory of movement repression." *Sociological Theory* 21(1):44-68.

Edelman, Lauren B, Gwendolyn Leachman, and Doug McAdam. 2010. "On law, organizations, and social movements." *Annual Review of Law and Social Science* 6:653-85.

Elfstrom, Manfred. 2021. *Workers and Change in China: Resistance, Repression, Responsiveness*: Cambridge University Press.

Franceschini, Ivan, and Elisa Nesossi. 2018. "State repression of Chinese labor NGOs: a chilling effect?" *The China Journal* 80(1):111-29.

Friedman, Eli. 2014. *Insurgency trap: Labor politics in postsocialist China*: Cornell University Press.

Gallagher, Mary E. 2017. *Authoritarian legality in China: Law, workers, and the state*: Cambridge University Press.

Gamson, William A. 1975. *The strategy of social protest*.

Goffman, Erving. 1974. *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*: Harvard University Press.

He, Baogang, and Mark E Warren. 2011. "Authoritarian deliberation: The deliberative turn in Chinese political development." *Perspectives on politics* 9(2):269-89.

Holdo, Markus. 2019. "Cooptation and Non-Cooptation: Elite Strategies in Response to Social Protest." *Social Movement Studies* 18(4):444-62.

Jenkins, J. Craig, and Craig M. Eckert. 1986. "Channeling Black Insurgency: Elite Patronage and Professional Social Movement Organizations in the Development of the Black Movement." *American sociological review* 51(6):812-29.

Lee, Ching Kwan, and Yonghong Zhang. 2013. "The power of instability: Unraveling the microfoundations of bargained authoritarianism in China." *American Journal of Sociology* 118(6):1475-508.

Li, Yao, and Manfred Elfstrom. 2021. "Does Greater Coercive Capacity Increase Overt Repression? Evidence from China." *Journal of Contemporary China* 30(128):186-211.

Lorentzen, Peter. 2017. "Designing contentious politics in post-1989 China." *Modern China* 43(5):459-93.

Lu, Yao. 2019. "Empowerment or Disintegration? Migration, Social Institutions, and Collective Action in Rural China." *American Journal of Sociology* 125(3):683-729.

Marquis, Christopher, and Yanhua Bird. 2018. "The Paradox of Responsive Authoritarianism: How Civic Activism Spurs Environmental Penalties in China." *Organization Science* 29(5):948-68.

Matthews, Nancy A. 2005. *Confronting rape: The feminist anti-rape movement and the state*: Routledge.

McAdam, Doug. 1983. "Tactical innovation and the pace of insurgency." *American sociological review*:735-54.

—. 1996. "Conceptual origins, current problems, et al." *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements. Cam-bridge: Cambridge University Press*:23-40.

—. 2003. "Beyond structural analysis: Toward a more dynamic understanding of social movements." *Social movements and networks: Relational approaches to collective action*:281-98.

McAdam, Doug, John McCarthy, and Mayer Zald. 1988. "Social Movements pp. 695-737 in N. Smelser (ed.) Handbook of Sociology." London: Sage.

McAdam, Doug, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly. 2003. "Dynamics of contention." *Social Movement Studies* 2(1):99-102.

McCarthy, John D, and Mayer N Zald. 1977. "Resource mobilization and social movements: A partial theory." *American Journal of Sociology* 82(6):1212-41.

Meyer, David S. 2004. "Protest and political opportunities." *Annual review of sociology*:125-45.

Meyer, David S, and Nancy Whittier. 1994. "Social movement spillover." *Social Problems* 41(2):277-98.

Minzner, Carl F. 2006. "Xinfang: an alternative to formal Chinese legal institutions." *Stan. J. Int'l l.* 42:103.

Oliver, Pamela E., and Daniel J. Myers. 2003. "The Coeveolution of Social Movements." *Mobilization: An International Journal* 8(1):1-24.

Ong, Lynette H. 2022. *Outsourcing Repression: Everyday State Power in Contemporary China*: Oxford University Press.

Qiaoan, Runya, and Jessica C. Teets. 2019. "Responsive Authoritarianism in China: A Review of Responsiveness in Xi and Hu Administrations." *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 25(1):139-53.

Rucht, Dieter. 1988. "Themes, logics, and arenas of social movements: A structural approach." *International Social Movement Research* 1(1):305-28.

Ryan, Charlotte. 1991. *Prime time activism: Media strategies for grassroots organizing*: South End Press.

Schatz, Edward. 2009. "The soft authoritarian tool kit: Agenda-setting power in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan." *Comparative Politics* 41(2):203-22.

Schwartz, Michael. 1988. *Radical protest and social structure: the Southern Farmers' Alliance and cotton tenancy, 1880-1890*: University of Chicago Press.

Selznick, Philip. 1980. *TVA and the grass roots: A study of politics and organization*: Univ of California Press.

Silver, Beverly J. 2003. *Forces of labor: workers' movements and globalization since 1870*: Cambridge University Press.

Simmons, Erica. 2014. "Grievances Do Matter in Mobilization." *Theory and society* 43(5):513-46.

Snow, David A, and Sarah Anne Soule. 2010. *A primer on social movements*: WW Norton.

Snow, David A, Rens Vliegenthart, and Pauline Ketelaars. 2019. "The framing perspective on social movements: Its conceptual roots and architecture." *The Wiley Blackwell companion to social movements* 77:392-410.

Snow, David A., Jr. Rochford, E. Burke, Steven K. Worden, and Robert D. Benford. 1986. "Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation." *American Sociological Review* 51(4):464-81.

Stern, Rachel E, and Jonathan Hassid. 2012. "Amplifying silence: uncertainty and control parables in contemporary China." *Comparative Political Studies* 45(10):1230-54.

Tilly, Charles. 1993. "Contentious repertoires in great Britain, 1758–1834." *Social science history* 17(2):253-80.

Tilly, Charles, and Sidney G Tarrow. 2015. *Contentious politics*: Oxford University Press.

Van Rooij, Benjamin, Rachel E Stern, and Kathinka Fürst. 2016. "The authoritarian logic of regulatory pluralism: Understanding C hina's new environmental actors." *Regulation & Governance* 10(1):3-13.

Walker, Edward T., Andrew W. Martin, and John D. McCarthy. 2008. "Confronting the State, the Corporation, and the Academy: The Influence of Institutional Targets on Social Movement Repertoires." *American Journal of Sociology* 114(1):35-76.

Walker, Edward T., and Ion B. Vasi. 2022. "Industry Repertoires: How Transgressive and Conventional Industry Associations Seek to Counter Contention." *American behavioral scientist*.

Yuen, Samson, and Edmund W. Cheng. 2017. "Neither Repression Nor Concession? A Regime's Attrition against Mass Protests." *Political Studies* 65(3):611-30.

Zald, Mayer N. 1991. "The continuing vitality of resource mobilization theory: Response to Herbert Kitschelt's critique." *Research on social movements: The state of the art in Western Europe and the USA*:348-54.

Zald, Mayer N, and Roberta Ash. 1966. "Social movement organizations: Growth, decay and change." *Social forces* 44(3):327-41.

Zipp, Daniel Y., and Marc Blecher. 2015. "Migrants and Mobilization: Sectoral Patterns in China, 2010-2013." *Global Labour Journal* 6(1):116-26.

CHAPTER 5: MESO-LEVEL BUREAUCRACY: DILEMMAS OF THE POSITION IN POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

There is a long-standing interest in the politics of decoupling (Meyer and Rowan 1977, 1978; DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Silbey 1984; Oliver 1991; Kellogg 2006). A foundational argument of institutional theory is that organizations look and function differently on paper than in practice—work on the ground is often loosely coupled to or completely decoupled from the organizational structures. Emphasizing symbolic compliance (Edelman 1992), ineffective policies (Dobbin, et al. 2011; Kalev, et al. 2006), or policies that were enacted but never meant to be implemented (Westphal and Zajac 2001), decoupling highlights organizational efforts to secure legitimacy without engaging in meaningful action or disruption to the organization, buffering internal activity from external uncertainty. Yet despite such buffering efforts, policies are sometimes faithfully implemented.

Relatively little attention has been paid to the everyday actions of meso-level officials after the promulgation of new laws and policies, how these laws and policies are negotiated and embodied within organization (Coburn 2004; Hallett 2007; Hoffman and Ventresca 2002; Scott 2005), and the contested micro-level processes of recoupling and decoupling. Using the case of Chinese meso-level actors' (provincial- and city-level actors who are between the central state in Beijing and the local state in the lower rungs of the state hierarchy) implementation of environmental policies, I introduce the concepts of *resourceful recoupling and decoupling* to explain how, when, where, and why meso-level actors accept, reconfigure, or reject central-level recoupling efforts.

Beyond the empirical importance of Chinese environmental governance for curbing global climate change, Chinese coal policies also present an important theoretical case for understanding

environmental governance processes more broadly, the Chinese developmental state, and state processes in meso-level implementation of central state policies. Because of the interconnected environmental, economic, social, and political drivers of Chinese coal politics, they are the ideal case study for understanding Chinese politics and state-led economic development processes where pressures are not homogenous, but fluctuate and are in constant competition with each other. The constellation of different economic, political, normative, and social pressures that explain environmental policy acceptance, reconfiguration, and/or rejection differs across place and time. The political processes and structures underlying these constellations of pressures show how meso-level actors use and resist power from central and local state actors. Even when states have the desire to pass environmental protection laws, they may not be implemented fully or faithfully.

In explicating resourceful recoupling and decoupling, I make three interrelated theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions to political sociology, and its nexus with organizational studies.

First, I examine when and where states attempt to limit officials' autonomy in policy implementation by designing policies and enforcement mechanisms that both standardize and quantify outcomes and increase enforcement and monitoring mechanisms. Bureaucratization and policy enactment can be fruitfully theorized and analyzed as efforts to recouple policy and practice. Recoupling is the process by which organizational practices and myths that are loosely connected to the daily lived experience of those within the organization become tightly connected (Binder 2007). Recoupling processes are promulgated by higher-level principals so that there is less deviation on the ground from agents, therefore ensuring that higher-level designs and desires are realized. However, lower-level state actors in China often actively resist these central pressures. Despite the pressure from above on lower-level Chinese state actors through intensive recoupling,

lower-level officials engage in resourceful resistance. By asking when and where policies are implemented, reconfigured, and/or rejected, I am able to show how recoupling efforts fail, both over time and place. Instead of explaining recoupling practices through only changes in the external environment, I argue that the external environment is necessary, but not sufficient, to explain recoupling processes and their failures. In addition to material and cultural characteristics of the external environment, internal characteristics of position within the bureaucracy and individual resourcefulness are required to explain the success and/or failure of recoupling efforts.

Second, I disaggregate process from outcome and examine the wide range of possible policy enactment and recoupling outcomes. The literature on coupling fails to examine the process of when, where, why, and how practices are (re-/de-)coupled with goals. Instead, they are viewed as static states of being that must be explained (e.g., why are goals decoupled or loosely coupled from practices on the ground). Recoupling is a contingent process and outcome that must be explained *in situ* rather than as a mere change of state. In examining recoupling state practices in rural China, I found three categories of processes and outcomes: recoupling (the acceptance of the central state's centralizing and standardizing efforts), reconfigurations (between completely successful recoupling and completely unsuccessful uncoupling), and uncoupling (the rejection of the central state's recoupling efforts). How meso-level actors respond to central-level recoupling efforts is neither automatically determined nor is it pre-constructed, highlighting the need ethnographic understandings in political sociology and organizational studies, especially at the meso-level.

Third, I follow the efforts of Tim Hallett and his collaborators (Hallett and Ventresca 2006; Hallett 2007, 2010) to "inhabit" organizations with people, their actions, social interactions, and processes of meaning- and decision-making. Although there has been a resurgence of micro-level

studies of politics, the state, and organizations in response to the macro-level gaze common in studies of the state and neo-institutionalism, the meso-level is missing. Recoupling requires buy-in and action not only from the central (principal) and the street-level (agent) officials, but also from the meso-level actors who occupy the dual role of principal to the street-level official and agent of the central official. Without an understanding of the meso-level and the grounding of data and theory within the lived experiences of the meso-level actors, we can neither observe nor fully explain recoupling processes and outcomes. By taking an inhabited view of the state, I am able to show how the internal and external environments as well as individual resourcefulness and position explains the extent of policy implementation by meso-level actors.

In addition to these theoretical arguments, by inhabiting the Chinese state, I am also able to advance substantive, methodological, and practical claims. Substantively, additional effort needs to be spent in capturing the everyday practices of meso-level actors in policy implementation; it is vital to open the "black box" of the state and organizations more broadly to differentiate the groups and levels within the state to show both how policy implementation works (or does not work) on the ground and how it works across time and place. Methodologically, this can only be measured through observation and ethnographic interviews (Rinaldo and Guhin 2019). Furthermore, I am able to show the ex-ante interests that affect policy implementation and how these interests conflict and are made anew via on the ground interactions. Meso-level actions provide the theoretical leverage to explain (re-/de-)coupling and offer solutions to such problems.

UNCOUPLING POLICY AND PRACTICE IN CHINA

The most common form of uncoupling studied has been policy-practice uncoupling (Bromley and Powell 2012), which highlights the gap between implemented policies and lived practices. Rather than take for granted the Weberian assumption that organizational practices are

tightly coupled with organizational structures and policies, the ideas of uncoupling and loose coupling help to explain the activities of people and units within an organization. The organizational myth (Meyer and Rowan 1977) that there is a tight linkage between the practices of an organization on paper and those practices in daily life hides the gap between them (Elsbach and Sutton 1992; Weick 1976; Westphal and Zajac 1994, 2001). Therefore, policies themselves cannot be a predictor of quotidian activities within the organization or by the organization.

In response to rampant decoupling, elites within organizations attempt to recouple policy and practice by increasing regulation and monitoring. Coercive pressures within the organization seemingly offer strong incentives for meso- and lower-level actors to implement centrally promulgated policies. This is especially prevalent in the state. Backed by the legitimate use of force, central-level state officials are able to use force, legal action, and promotion/demotion to align meso-level actions with central-level policies, rather than hoping that informal or repetitional punishments suffice (Oliver 1980; Heckathorn 1990; Sabin and Reed-Tsochas 2020). However, an important puzzle remains: even when central-level officials provide support for new policies and actively discourage decoupling through force and other pressures, meso-level officials only sometimes successfully recouple their actions.

Policy-practice coupling is useful in understanding Chinese politics. The Chinese state during the Deng (1978-1989), Jiang (1989-2002), and Hu/Wen (2002-2012) eras was characterized by policy-practice uncoupling (Bulman and Jaros 2020; Donaldson 2011; Landry 2008; and Zhang 2011). The central state was unable to coerce local states to align their interests and activities with the center's policies, and this decentralization of the Chinese system of economic and political governance (Baum 1996; He 1996; Kostka and Nahm 2017) created ample space for uncoupling of policy and practice at the local level. The Chinese state encouraged this type of uncoupling—

or “market-preserving federalism” (Fligstein and Zhang 2011)—which was meant to bolster economic growth at the local level, trickling up to Beijing along with newfound legitimacy. However, because of these uncoupling practices, local states developed their own infrastructure and filled their own coffers in a form of local corporatism (see Lin 1995; Oi 1999; Walder 1995) and “perverse federalism” (Mertha 2005), social stability and economic development were undermined throughout the Jiang and Hu/Wen eras, ushering in the focus on political recentralization in the Xi era.

RECOUPLING IN CHINA THROUGH RECENTRALIZATION: MECHANISM DESIGN

Following the initial criticism by Orton and Weick (1990) that decoupling is frequently studied at one time—and place—as if it were unchanging, I draw from Espeland’s (1998) insight on recoupling—the process by which policies and practices become connected. In education (Hallett 2010; Spillane, et al. 2011), anti-discrimination laws and policies (Kelly and Dobbin 1998), and human rights regimes (Cole 2012; Hafner-Burton and Tsutsui 2005), practices have been recoupled to policies. Here, I expand recoupling processes to state policy implementation.

Xi Jinping’s self-elevation to “core leader,” the enshrinement of Xi Jinping Thought into the constitution, and a revamping of Maoist-style campaigns (Andreas and Dong 2018) has been part of the renewed recoupling of Chinese politics, economics, and environmental policies (Bulman and Jaros 2020) signaling the end of the uncoupling era (Ahlers 2018; van Rooij 2017). The local officials increased autonomy in economic and political decision-making and control became a focal point and increased efforts to recentralize political and economic power in the central state apparatus and to align local and central interests (Ahmad 2018; Donaldson 2016; Nahm 2017) turned decoupling into recoupling. In this new era of recoupling, the “power balance between central and local governments has been tipped decisively in the center’s favor as Xi has

removed powers and discretion from local governments, introduced new monitoring and sanctioning practices, and signaled a zero-tolerance approach to non-compliance with central directives by sending thousands of local officials to prison" (Kostka and Nahm 2017, p. 568). Local government agency has been greatly constrained by the central state, recoupling practice to policy (Yu and Wang 2019), especially regarding environmental policies (Economy 2014).

Although previous uncoupling processes were readily apparent in environmental policy and practice (Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988), Chinese environmental policy before 2016 uncoupling had high legitimacy costs for the state and threatened to undermine Chinese economic development (Wang 2018), prompting central-level recoupling efforts (Nahm 2017). To recouple policies and practice, the central state has promulgated a bevy of specific, targeted policies and has increased the monitoring of implementation while increasing the benefits of implementation and the punishments for failing to implement policies. With increased monitoring capabilities (Power 1994; Strathern 2000) and shifting costs and benefits for uncoupling and recoupling (respectively), policy-practice uncoupling should be less common (Bromley, et al. 2009; Bromley and Powell 2012; Coburn 2004) and recoupling processes should be more common. It is necessary to examine the state's actual efforts to recouple policy and practice, both in their designs and mechanisms enforcing the faithful implementation of such designs.

Chinese central state actors view themselves—and are viewed—as *mechanism designers* who create policies and enforcement mechanisms for meso-level actors as an attempt to ensure that central policies are recoupled. To design effective policies and their implementation mechanisms, the central state engages in a mapping exercise (Scott 1998) wherein state actors see and flatten the world so that it may be classified and quantified (Timmermans and Epstein 2010), and thus standardized and ordered in a way that at once makes it legible through designed policies.

This dialectical mapping exercise of “seeing” is crucial for explaining how the Chinese central state designs policies and mechanisms to recouple compliance at lower levels.

To govern its environment, the state must first turn the environment into something that can be measured, perceived, and governed—or “seen.” How the Chinese state sees the environment (and those who have interest in the environment) shapes how the central state designs policies to effectively govern the environment. To effectively see and, thus, govern the environment, the Chinese central state has bounded the environment into quantifiable goals that intersect and overlap with economic and social stability goals, rendering some parts of the environment as governable and actionable and others as *terra nullius*. Environmental policies broadly and coal policies specifically have been *designed*—they have been mapped, made legible, quantified, ordered, and standardized by central state elites. Chinese environmental politics exemplify the process of mechanism design—they are top-down, command-and-control designs that now have mechanisms attached to them to enforce implementation.

Mechanism design focuses on two intertwined moments (the design and the mechanism)—designing is the process of planning intentional action to impose a meaningful order in an otherwise ambiguous setting and to designate an actor to carry out these actions. Thus, the designer must create incentives (mechanisms) that structure the agent’s actions towards the original design. When complete monitoring of agents and/or complete knowledge is untenable, particularly due to the size of the organization, the principal needs to align agents’ actions to the principle’s designs (Holmström 1979). The size of the Chinese state administration makes it impossible to directly control all the agents to ensure effective recoupling; therefore, to control lower-level actors, the central state tries to design a correct incentive structure.

The Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) environmental policy has been *designed* through national priorities and goals articulated in Five-Year Plans, a flurry of environmental protection laws, and multiple and massive environmental campaigns to assert top-down control and to align various levels of governments with central policies. This goal-based, top-down environmental governance process relies heavily on command-and-control regulation centered on bureaucratic targets and controls for local officials (Wang 2016; Zhao et al. 2020). The central state has reinforced hierarchical control and monitoring and fostered adherence to its own operating procedures by constraining local agents' ability to implement policies according to their own design (Donaldson 2016; Zeng 2020).

Beijing has concurrently implemented various positive and negative *mechanisms* that change the incentives that lower-level state actors have to ensure acceptable outcomes (Wong and Karplus 2017). Such mechanisms include personnel management—demotion and promotion (Edin 2003; Li and Zhou 2005); cadre evaluation—adding environmental scores to the report card on which local-level actors are graded (Wang 2013); and veto targets—environmental policy goals which, if the local-level actor fails to meet, result in automatic punishment (Birney 2013; Heberer and Trappel 2013; Shin 2018). However, the report card and veto targets are meaningless if state actors do not follow directives from the center. These recentralization policies were implemented to close the incentive gap in environmental governance processes and are backed by a "particularly big stick…within which pressures to comply can be uncomfortable, even excruciating" (Mertha 2017). Early studies on Chinese environmental authoritarianism (Beeson 2010; Gilley 2012) through goal setting "have been overwhelmingly positive in their assessment of its effectiveness, especially in the areas of pollution mitigation and energy policies" (Zheng et al. 2014; see also Li et al. 2016; Li 2019).

These environmental policies and correctional campaigns were reinforced by strengthening and recentralizing environmental enforcement, overseen and directed by the Party (Kostka and Zhang 2018; Van Rooij, et al. 2017; Zhao, et al. 2020). Since 2018, there has been an increase in environmental policies and policing and increasing enforcement to recouple environmental policies and practices. However, in that same time, there has been an increase in coal production and consumption.

Although the central state hopes to restrict the scope of action and capacity of lower-level actors both in the policies and the mechanisms of control that they design by adding environmental targets (standardized, categorized, and quantified) to the cadre report card, there still exists a gap between policy and practice. Recent work centering the recoupling efforts under Xi Jinping has problematized the successes of the top-down environmental governance recoupling processes, focusing on inconsistent compliance (Zhang 2017) caused by diffuse implementation (Ahlers and Shen 2018; Ran 2017). To understand how, why, and where recoupling efforts are successful or unsuccessful requires examining the designs alongside the actions of those who are "seen" or whose actions have been designed. The strategic, political actions of the lower-level state and party officials comes from the myriad designs of the central state regarding environmental, economic, and social stability maintenance projects, confounding efforts to recouple policy with practice.

EXPLAINING POLICY-PRACTICE OUTCOMES

Recoupling efforts within a single organization, such as the Chinese state, vary across time and place and therefore have varied outcomes because states are sets of relations (Martin 2018; Martin and Judd 2020) cobbled together with different interests, resources, capacities, and even abilities which in turn causes differentiated outcomes, necessitating comparison between

subnational state units. Because the state is not organizationally homogenous (Morgan and Orloff 2016), within-state variation is a significant empirical reality (McDonnell 2017) that must be explained

Political life is a game with multiple players in which determining a rational move is simply not possible (Martin and Lembo 2020), so we must take interests, values, logics, and actions as concrete and competing (Martin and Lembo 2020). State-defined interests are not singular, but rather contested social objects whose outcomes depend on material, cultural, and positional bureaucratic characteristics, as well as individual resourcefulness, all of which are individually necessary but insufficient to explain those outcomes.

Economic explanations for decoupling and the failure to recouple are ubiquitous in political sociology and neo-institutionalism. Under such explanations, if lower-level officials were to enact policies, then they would be at an economic disadvantage, therefore decoupling—or the failure to recouple—is a rational response (Meyer and Rowan 1977). Not only would recoupling environmental policies and practices affect the material base of production for meso-level officials, but it would also disrupt local power relations (Lin 1995; Oi 1999; Walder 1995; Zheng 2007; Tang 2011; Mattingly 2016), which could possibly explain the central state's inability to couple policy and practice at lower levels (Dobbin 1994). However, purely economic explanations are unable to explain when and where recoupling occurs; economic explanations explain decoupling well, but often fail to explain recoupling in places and times where the material outcomes of recoupling are negative in the short-term.

Like economic explanations, cultural and bureaucratic explanations are necessary but not sufficient. Cultural explanations of decoupling and recoupling explain them as an unwillingness or willingness of lower-level actors (Cole 2005, 2012; Lorentzen 2017); decoupling processes fail

and recoupling processes succeed when culture "out there" either remains out there or is successfully internalized, allowing for mimetic and normative pressures to explain outcomes (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Haveman 1993; Mizruchi and Fein 1999). Recently, efforts to explain coupling have focused on culture within bureaucratic niches (McDonnell 2017; 2020). The dominant cultural ethos within a bureaucracy cannot be explained purely by bureaucratic position, but must take into account how those within the bureaucratic office understand and use cultural schema. That does not mean that bureaucratic positions do not matter. The meso-level bureaucracies within the state are located at interstitial niches between the power structures of the central state, civil society, and capital (building off Michael Mann's (1986) use of interstitial). Different pressures, interests, mechanisms, and designs come into contact at the meso-level and, once there, conflict. By adding economic and positional (the interstice) interests and pressures to these schemata, recoupling can be better explained in both process and outcome, but not wholly explained.

Individual resourcefulness is the last characteristic necessary to explain cases of differentiated and contingent recoupling and decoupling. By resourcefulness, I mean the ability to demystify or de-fog, a combination of know-how, ability to cope with the unknown, ingenuity, astuteness, and the ability to get oneself out of trouble. It is similar to bricolage, but whereas bricolage is constructing something with a clear, fixed idea of what you need to build and the resources required to build it, resourcefulness is both the process of figuring out what needs to be built, how to do it, and with what tools. Because the central state provides competing policies to be implemented—not just environmental policies, but economic and stability maintenance policies that often have conflicting goals—and no blueprint for meso-level actors, who must use their available resources, their resourcefulness, and their insight to determine how to best act. These

resources are not just material, but cultural and positional. The process by which meso-level state actors determine which policies they can ignore, which they can reconfigure, and which they must faithfully implement is what is meant by resourcefulness.

This resourcefulness is different from both social skill (Fligstein 1997, 2001) and institutional entrepreneurship (Battilana, et al. 2009). Whereas social skill is important for highlighting the ability of skilled actors to engage outside of their institutional structures, the focus of the skills they marshal is to induce collective action. Skilled actors use their own social skill—a craftiness instead of an ability to craft—to challenge in direct power struggles. Institutional entrepreneurs are actors who leverage resources to create new or transform existing institutions (Battilana 2009; DiMaggio 1988; Garud, et al. 2007; Maguire, et al. 2004). Resourcefulness is neither about (trans)forming institutions or solely about actors' ability to leverage resources. However, resourcefulness helps us understand both the structural and personal actions of meso-level state actors and the differential interests, values, and relations that these actors have and use.

Economic, cultural, and positional bureaucratic interests combine with meso-level resourcefulness to explain meso-level officials' different levels of central policy implementation. In China, the economic base (either coal-reliant or diverse) and the dominant cultural ethos ("eating bitterness" or "ecological civilization") within meso-level officials' jurisdictions as well as the positional interstice and orientation that meso-level officials adopt (orienting themselves to higher-level, lower-level, or horizontal officials) are all helpful for understanding the different levels of policy implementation from acceptance to rejection. But, purely structural and/or cultural explanations miss the immense amount of resourceful work that meso-level officials do in navigating their interests and implementing (or failing to implement) policies. Structural interests, ex-ante calculations of risk, and resourceful skills explain why and how meso-level officials (fail

to) implement central-level policies. Resourceful recoupling or decoupling can only be explained by the combination of economic, cultural, positional characteristics the individual resourcefulness of meso-level officials. This matrix of interests is both empirical—two people with similar co-variates often act dissimilarly (Martin and Judd 2020)—and theoretically important in our understandings of political action, organizational behavior, and recoupling and decoupling processes and outcomes.

What follows is an analytical framework that draws on, combines, and adds to the scholarship on China and on our conceptual toolkit for analyzing the state, the political economy of development, and environmental governance by showing the relational processes and configurations of interests and power that explain under what circumstances meso-level state actors accept, reconfigure, or reject central state policies.

TABLE 4: (NON-)RESOURCEFUL RECOUPLING AND DECOUPLING

	Recoupling	Decoupling
Resourceful	Creative Bureaucracy • Gaming • Deflection	Creative Defiance • Warnings • Fraud and Deception • Rejection
Non-Resourceful	Standard Bureaucracy • Acceptance • Institutional Bricolage	Standard Defiance • Myth and ceremony • Cock up/Foul up

Resourceful recoupling is a process of creative bureaucracy wherein meso-level officials both game different standards and policies against one another, effectively instituting some policies and ignoring others, and deflect some policy-practice decoupling through efforts that highlighted the bureaucratic weakness of their office and their efforts to strengthen those weaknesses. Resourceful decoupling is a processes of creative defiance wherein meso-level officials engaged in both complicated efforts to warn other officials of incoming inspections meant

to ensure that policies and practices were aligned, fraud and outright deception, and efforts to completely reject central-level policy implementation while avoiding obvious (and punishable) offenses.

Although some efforts to recouple or decouple policy and practice involved resourcefulness, others did not. Meso-level acceptance and implementation of as many policies as possible did occur through processes of standard bureaucratization in select departments in institutional interstices where the bureaucratic ethos was stronger (similar to McDonnell 2017) and where officials viewed their positions as steppingstones to better jobs elsewhere in the state-Party apparatus. One Environmental Protection Bureau (EPB) official explained: “If I do my job well, then I can get out of [here] and go somewhere better (Interview 7, March 2019). Environmental policies were enforced fully within the department.

Standard defiance did also occur; some meso-level officials engaged in ceremonial compliance to the broader myth of environmentalism only when inspected (Meyer and Rowan 1977) and others simply were bad at their jobs and made mistakes (cf. Mann’s [1986] cock up/foul up theory of state action) rather than actively and resourcefully defying central-level designs. Fraudulent data (discussed below) were sometimes instances of meso-level resourcefulness, but other times were simple mistakes due to fat fingers. When supplying data on coal closures to an EPB official, one meso-level official, rushed and flustered by the surprise inspection, mistakenly reported that there were four coal mines operating within his jurisdiction, when in fact there were five (Interview 14, December 2018), appearing as though officials were implementing environmental policies. This cock up was neither resourceful nor premeditated, but it did lead to policy-practice gaps on the ground.

When the economic base of their jurisdiction is diverse, the dominant cultural ethos revolves around concepts of ecological civilization or modernization more broadly, and meso-level officials orient their actions towards higher-level officials and central-level policies, meso-level officials are more likely to game standards off one another. When the economic base of their jurisdiction in coal-dependent, the dominant cultural ethos is ecological civilization, and their actions are oriented towards higher-level officials and central-level policies, meso-level officials are more likely to engage in deflection tactics when they are in coal dependent jurisdictions. When the economic base of their jurisdiction is more diverse, the dominant cultural ethos is eating bitterness, and they orient their actions towards lower-level officials, meso-level officials are more likely to engage in fraud and deception. When their jurisdictions rely on coal for their economic base, the dominant cultural is eating bitterness, and they orient themselves horizontally or towards lower-level officials, meso-level officials are more likely to engage in outright rejection of central-level policies. Finally, as to the mechanism of surprise inspections from higher-level officials increases, meso-level officials are more likely to engage in warning tactics regardless of economic base, dominant cultural ethos, and positional orientation.

GAMING

The "nice thing about standards is that there are so many to choose from" (Kelty 2008, p. 143), and meso-level officials pick and choose which standards, policies, campaigns, suggestions, and laws to follow out of the myriad available. When presented with many standards, often in conflict with each other on their face, meso-level officials must act resourcefully to determine which standards to follow and which to ignore, which can be fruitfully combined and which are mutually exclusive, and which ones have the biggest consequences (either positive or negative). I call this process gaming the system and it relies not only on ex-ante risk assessments, but also in

resourceful understandings of what is and can be possible, what higher-level officials want even when they refuse to share that information with meso-level officials, and ad hoc partnerships across horizontal bureaus to meet collective goals. Gaming often occurs when meso-level officials 1) pick and choose which standards, laws, and/or policies to follow and which can be ignored by playing standards off of one another and 2) follow the letter of the law but not the spirit (similar to a work-to-rule practice in which workers only do the minimum that they are required to do by their contracts), often taking the form of shifting coal production, consumption, and pollution numbers rather than reducing those numbers outright.

According to a State Council circular released in December 2018, the central government increased the number of targets that local governments needed to meet on major policies to 30, an increase of six from the previous years (State Council 2018). These 30 designs had a scoring mechanism that highlighted obvious results. Being scored on 30 objectives is "too much" (Interview 38, December 2018), so when faced with too many policies to implement, meso-level officials are forced to pick and choose which to follow and which to lay to the side, a process that requires figuring out what policies their superiors want followed, which policies their subordinates will implement, and which objectives are reasonable. When the objectives cannot be met, meso-level officials engage in another type of gaming wherein they show their loyalty to the Party in the hopes that it buys them a reprieve from the center and/or higher-level inspectors.

Perverse incentives have long been studied in Chinese federalism (Mertha 2005) and environmental policy more specifically (Ran 2013). The general argument has been that the central government provides more incentives for meso-level and lower-level officials to engage in poor implementation or non-implementation of environmental policies rather than full implementation because economic and social harmony policies and designs were given more weight by the center.

The incentive structure, though, has been radically changed under Xi Jinping; environmental targets have been added alongside economic and social harmony targets while simultaneously lower-level and meso-level discretion has been curtailed. This policy shift can be best seen in the Five-in-One Plan which combines the five economic, political, cultural, social, and ecological targets together into one master target against which all officials will be judged for promotion, demotion, removal, and/or arrest. The sine qua non is the political; according to Xi Jinping (quoted in the China Daily 2018), "comprehensively deepening reform involves a complex system and cannot be completed by relying on only one or a few department—it is necessary to establish a higher-level leadership system in order to give better play to the core leadership role of the Party, and to ensure that reform is implemented smoothly and universally." Implementation, coordinated by the center and higher-level officials, of environmental policies then not only is prioritized at the same level as economic and social stability policies, but failing to implement these policies is a direct attack against the Party. These both signal that meso-level discretion is being constrained and that failure to implement the central-level designs will no longer be tolerated.

However, because there are so many standards to be met, and they are often in direct conflict with one another, meso-level officials have to pick and choose which policies and standards to follow. Meso-level officials choose to implement policies or standards that fit multiple categories and/or that are easy to do (Interview 31, November 2018). The easiest options are the first on which meso-level officials focus, followed by category-spanning objectives or objectives that were deemed by higher-level officials to be of more importance than others, and the last ones that they will attempt are those that are difficult to do and/or those that conflict with other hard veto targets.

The easiest targets that officials met were often then used instrumentally by resourceful meso-level agents to argue that they are working towards environmental goals and therefore should be praised and given more time to implement the more difficult objectives. The two most common easy environmental objectives that meso-level officials accomplished early and often were 1) increasing green spaces and 2) increasing renewable energy sources within the local energy basket. Both of these are easy to do because they require little investment, little buy-in from local stakeholders and higher-level officials, and (because the baseline was so low) any increase in both categories is a huge improvement; in May 2018, an official in Henan admitted me to me that his numbers in both categories "may have been inflated due (to) a low base" (Interview 70).

When I first went to Shanxi and Henan, I was shocked by the monochromatic and dreary landscape; the sky was constantly and consistently gray over the yellowish-gray dirt-covered ground. When I returned in 2018, a new color was added throughout the provinces: green. As I took trains and buses between localities and walked around these areas, I was shocked by how verdant rural China had become in a mere couple of years. Meso-level officials built parks throughout their more populated areas and planted copses of trees alongside roads and railways, across from industrial parks, and in former mining areas. Planting trees and flowering shrubs is both easy to do and a way for meso-level officials to show their affinity for green policies because "trees are green" (as a Henan official told me with a chuckle; Interview 70, May 2018). Parks may also be resourcefully categorized in both environmental targets and social stability or harmony categories because meso-level officials argue that parks near residents increase quality of life.

In addition to parks, officials planted millions upon millions of trees in Shanxi in Henan, arguing that they are both are carbon sink and increase the beauty of the land. In Henan, tree-planting campaigns were often coupled with tourism campaigns; a Henan official explained to me

how he was tasked by the provincial government and funded by both the province and the center to convert former mining areas into tourist attractions, and he was to "spruce [the former mine areas] up" (he couldn't resist the pun and switched to English for it, but he did make sure to clarify that he was not planting any spruce trees; Interview 69, May 2018). In Henan, mining areas, including former strip mines, were turned into parks, tree farms, and tourist areas meant to increase money flowing into the area and serving as a carbon sink. One former strip mine in Henan also was adorned with windmills at the top of its plateau with a tree lined path leading down into the stripped out gorge. In Shanxi, tree copses were mostly planted across from coal production and consumption areas, rather than replacing them. In almost every locality, across from smelting plants, mines, electrical plants, and factories were groves of recently planted trees. Even newly built coal plants were greened; as I was toured around a coal smelting plant that was built in 2017, I was told by a meso-level official that the plant was fitted with the newest "clean-coal technologies" (although he was unable to elaborate what that meant) and that he personally ensured that the plant had plenty of trees to offset the carbon that was being polluted (Interview 35, November 2018). Although his insistence that "these things balance each other out" is not supported by science, it was supported by higher-level officials who commended him for his efforts to make his coal production base more green (Interview 35, November 2018). When presented with quantified standards concerning the number of trees that meso-level officials needed to plant, the underlying logic and spirit of the standard was ignored, and there was a race to meet the lowest possibly quantity outlined as acceptable.

The same process held true for renewable energy, mostly in the form of solar panels. Central-level policies and higher-level designs dictated that meso-level officials increase the number of solar panels in their sphere of influence. Meso-level officials were quick to realize that

they were instructed to increase solar panels, not necessarily solar usage, mostly because the electricity grids in these areas were not able to connect to solar energy. Where meso-level officials did not plant trees, they grew solar farms; along roads and railways and across from industrial parks, meso-level officials built solar farms. One of the largest solar farms that I witnessed in Henan, and proudly shown to me by a meso-level official, was across from one of the largest steel manufacturing plants I had witnessed in Henan. The meso-level official explained to me that because he was exceeding the solar panel targets, he was given leeway in curbing the pollution from the steel plant because his bosses knew how much work and energy he was putting into environmental policies elsewhere (Interview 71, May 2018). Solar panels were mandated to be added to coal processing plants and warehouses by meso-level officials in both Shanxi and Henan. As part of the process to make cleaner coal, Shanxi officials required coal plants, warehouses, and the offices wherein coal management worked to be retrofitted with solar panels or to have solar panels included in all new builds (Interview 39, December 2018). Solar panels were seen as easy targets to meet and (because of government subsidies) they were cheap, making them the ideal targets for meso-level officials to implement when faced with a choice of policies to follow.

Solar panels also provided meso-level officials with an easy way to cheat the system. Some in Shanxi allowed for fake solar panels to be installed. What appear to be solar panels from a distance were in fact replicas made to look like solar panels to deceive inspection teams. Another common tactic that meso-level officials employed was putting tiny, fake solar panels of street lights and bus stops, making it appear as though those fixtures were powered by solar panels when they were in fact coal-powered (Interview 37, December 2018; field notes). Higher-level instructions to meso-level officials were simply to increase the number of solar panels, so when

inspection teams came and counted the panels, meso-level officials were praised for the number of panels installed.

When easy targets are unavailable, either because they have already been met or because all the targets assigned to an official are more difficult, officials will choose a high-priority target to follow almost exclusively; rather than attempting to complete many targets and failing at some or all, officials will pick one target that they believe is of high value and complete it well. This is a resourceful process. Higher-level officials rarely present one, singular target as of highest importance and instead provide many targets that are all deemed as important, leading to meso-level officials engaging in constructive work to not only figure out which targets should be met but also how to meet the chosen target. In different places, and at different times, the target will be different and the process of meeting the target will be different, but they all include working relationships across different bureaus and with lower-level officials in an effort to please higher-level officials and to persuade those higher-level officials that even though the meso-level officials failed to meet some targets, their success in the chosen target compensates for that failure.

In rural locations in both Henan and Shanxi, rural revitalization often took precedence over coal-related targets and in urban Henan and Shanxi, sweeping away the black influences was often prioritized. There were differences in what rural revitalization entailed in rural Henan and Shanxi. In Shanxi, rural revitalization focused on agricultural improvements to a greater degree than in Henan, where rural revitalization focus on tourism, civilization, and social stability/harmony. Although there were differences, the common refrain that meso-level officials must focus on rural revitalization was consistent. In fact, a constant refrain throughout rural Shanxi and Henan was "focus on central document number 1: implementing rural revitalization." (Interview 58 with a Henan official, April 2019; Interview 40 with a Shanxi official, March 2019).

Meso-level officials in Henan, more so than in Shanxi, were willing to spend a lot money on their pet projects in an effort to parlay the success of a high value target into forgiveness for failing to complete and/or meet environmental targets; in 2019, Henan was the first province in China to issue local government debt and planned on allocating more than 45 billion RMB. Often, these projects were for social harmony/stability or economic targets, such as schools (Interview 59, April 2019), shantytown renovation (Interview 60, April 2019), and light rail projects (Interview 62, May 2019). Shantytown renovation (a common project for which local-government financial vehicles are usually used, see more below for LGFVs) was not simply building new houses and apartments to replace those that are failing, but also used to facilitate tourism. By implementing shantytown renovation projects, Henan officials ensured social stability, ushered these rural localities into modernity, and were designed to be aesthetically pleasing in the hopes that people would visit these new areas (Interview 60, April 2019).

In addition to these rural renovations, Henan officials spent hundreds of millions of RMB on the construction and renovation of rural toilets, which state media referred to as ”nothing more than two bricks, one hole, breeding insects, and a fiery stink” (Xinhua 2017). According to an NGO in Henan (Interview 3, May 2019), meso-level officials in Henan built more than 5,000 public toilets in rural areas and over 1,500 in tourist locations, as well as renovating some 2 million household toilets in rural areas. As one Henan official told me (Interview 63, April 2019), toilets were a perfect pet project to choose because they spanned multiple categories and would align with higher-level goals; toilets would improve the living standard of rural residents (social harmony/stability), would invigorate local tourism (material benefits), and would align with the center’s goals of building an ecological civilization (human waste is a large contributor to environmental degradation in rural areas and having modern toilets is indicative of a modern

society). Because of his sole focus on building and renovating toilets, this meso-level official neglected his coal-related environmental targets. However, because he did so well with this project, he was not punished for failing to meet other targets and was given accolades. Whereas coal-related targets are often invisible to most people and higher-level officials, building and renovating actual things made for concrete examples of improvement and therefore were ideal for meso-level officials.

In Shanxi, the focus was more on agricultural improvements and improving food sanitation. Rural banks were more amenable to giving loans to rural residents in Shanxi, especially when meso-level officials used their influence to make the process of securing an unsecured loan easier (Shanxi tax official, Interview 20, April 2019). Furthermore, officials in horizontal bureaus were more willing to help meso-level officials in Shanxi achieve non-coal-related goals because of the cultural and material importance of coal. For example, ministry of agricultural workers were more willing to help meso-level officials achieve targets surrounding curtailing illegal food production and sales when compared to ministry of water officials who had little to no incentive to help meso-level officials curtail run-off pollution from coal, for example. As one official in Shanxi explained (interview 34, March 2019), curbing illegal food production and sales was a high priority task that involved coordination and cooperation across at least six different bureaus and was readily visible to citizens and higher-level officials alike. This was a win-win scenario that would be used to justify ignoring other targets.

Another common way in which meso-level officials played standards off of one another was literally by playing a game. In January 2019, the phone application Study Xi, Strong Nation (a pun on study—*xuexi*—and Xi Jinping's surname where the app's name can be read as study to increase the strength of the country and study Xi Jinping Thought to strengthen the country) was

launched, immediately climbing to the top of China's most downloaded and used applications. By the end of January, meso-level officials all over China, and especially in rural areas, where inspections were likely, and where officials were at risk of censure for other transgressions (Interview 69, January 2019), were not only requiring that lower-level officials download the app, but they were also requiring that lower-level officials attend "work trainings" wherein they were taught how to use the application.

Furthermore, meso-level officials in some jurisdictions in Shanxi (Interview 38, February 2019) and Henan (Interview 54, January 2019) required that lower-level officials earn a number, sometimes as high as 40 per day, of the platform's Xi Study Points that are accrued by habitually using the platform and engaging in the content. A user earns .1 point for watching a video or article posting on the app, 1 point per half hour on the app, and a certain number of points for engaging with other users via the comment section of videos. These points were doubled during "lively intervals" users would earn double points Monday through Friday from 8:30-10:00pm and Saturdays and Sundays from 9:30-10:30am and 3:30pm-4:30pm. By requiring an extremely high number of points per day, meso-level officials ensure that lower-level officials and others within their bureau are spending their free time using the app and learning Xi Jinping Thought. As one Shanxi official explained to me via WeChat during the Chinese New Year vacation: "By earning points we can show that we are dedicated to the Party…although it interferes with [my time with my family], [they] understand that I have to earn these points…[but] I am always tired because I am up until 11:00pm [earning points] (Interview 38, February 2019). Spending hours on the app, both during peak hours and at work during breaks or specially assigned times, meant that official's realm of freedom was slowly being eroded, replaced with necessary work assigned by meso-level officials to offset their failures in other policy arenas. When I asked why he was spending so much

time on the app and not with his family, he responded that he would be disciplined if he did not reach the minimum number of points (and endure snide comments if he simply reached the goal instead of exceeding it) and that because of his upcoming higher-level inspection he needed to study Xi Thought well so that they could see that he is enthusiastic about the Party and following Xi Jinping Thought even if he had not meet his coal-related targets (coal pollution numbers were very high that January, especially in relation to the previous year's January numbers).

The last form of gaming that meso-level officials resourcefully played was shifting coal production and consumption numbers to hide the true numbers from higher level inspection teams while realizing the full benefits of strong production and consumption. By far the most common shifts involved mergers and relocations, although a third type did occur: shifting production and consumption from legal enterprises to illegal, bolstering a shadow industry while hiding the true statistics from higher-level inspectors and bosses (more discussed below with fraud and deception tactics).

"I was told to reduce coal pollution in [city in his jurisdiction], but not in [a rural county in his jurisdiction outside of the city]. So, what do I do, eh? Relocations!" (Interview 67, February 2019). When tasked with reducing coal consumption in a city within his jurisdiction, but not within the jurisdiction as a whole, a meso-level official in Henan used his interstitial position between local officials who would only protect their limited jurisdictions and higher-level officials who only inspected the city accounts looking for decreases to shift production from the city proper to the outskirts. Although city officials were unhappy at losing the material benefits of a coke smelting plant, the meso-level official was able to 1) open a new "industrial park" in his domain and 2) reduce coal consumption in the city targeted by high-level cadres. Relocations were a common strategy in Henan and the richer areas of Shanxi, where meso-level officials were keen

to create “state of the art” industrial parks that were simply just relocated heavy manufacturers from nearby cities. Meso-level officials used their position and their resourcefulness to create another multi-win scenario: They cut coal capacity in the city, they created “new” jobs and “new” industry in the rural outskirts of the city, they did not lose any material benefits (although lower-level officials did because they revenue generated from the plants was no longer within their jurisdiction), and they were able to publicize the move as a way of turning cities into “a modern, habitable place to live” (Banner hung across the now-defunct offices of a relocated firm, field notes, March 2019).

While relocating plants, officials were also presented with an opportunity to consolidate and merge plants to “streamline” efficiency and follow MEE orders to “promote consolidation in the coke and steel industry.” (MEE document, October 2018). A county-level official in Southeast Shanxi told me that he was “encouraged” (a euphemism underscored by him asking me if I understood) to merge steel and coke plants together when they relocated to his jurisdiction from the nearby city (Interview 28, November 2018). A similar process happened in Henan, although those were more likely to be acquisitions than mergers (Interview 74, May 2019; how meso-level officials determined between merger and acquisition will be discussed in a later chapter). “Sector consolidation” (as mergers and acquisitions were called) had the effect of shutting down “minnows” which were inefficient and inflated the number of active steel and coking plants and creating mega-plants; by consolidating production, meso-level officials shut down a large number of coal consuming and producing plants while increasing output and tax revenue.

DEFLECTION

Meso-level officials engage in efforts to redirect and delay blame and punishment when they fail to meet their targets through common deflection tactics like 1) making excuses and 2)

ingratiation. These officials know that they failed in their duty and that it will eventually affect their status (via naming and shaming) or, worse, affect their career trajectory. When faced with negative repercussions from higher-level officials, either within their bureau (e.g., a direct supervisor) or in a higher rung of the state/Party hierarchy, meso-level actors resourcefully attempt to delay punishments through deflection. This is less risky than engaging in warnings, fraud, and outright rejection, but because it is a stalling tactic, it is riskier than gaming priorities against one another. Deflection tactics, though, have an added benefit over gaming; whereas when meso-level officials have to actively engage in gaming and still may be punished for failing to meet their targets, meso-level officials who engage in deflection tactics do little to no extra work and may still avoid harsh punishment simply by changing the timeline.

In December 2018, I met with a Henan environmental protection bureau official in one of China's (and thus the world's) most polluted cities. It was freezing cold and most people were heating their houses with coal, a cause of consternation for many meso-level officials. Because this locality is generally considered one of the worst in the world, even the central government has its eyes here. After we walked through some districts so that the meso-level official could show off the new heating infrastructure to replace the outdated coal-reliant heating, we stumbled upon a huge pile of semi-burnt coal that had been unceremoniously dumped in an alleyway with other garbage. When I asked this official why he and other meso-level officials were unable to effectively curtail home coal use, he replied that other officials "always have endless excuses" for not doing their job (Interview 13, December 2018). Later that day, while talking with another meso-level official, I saw firsthand an example of the most common form of excuse: weather.

A meso-level official who was in part of an interdepartmental task force to clean up air pollution had just been yelled at by the leader of the task force three days before for being lazy in

his efforts to curb pollution (Interview 56, December 2018). In response, this official sent a written memo to his boss, opening with the following paragraph:

The degree of air pollution is related to the seasonal climate and daily life activities of people. Generally, in summer and autumn, the air is the cleanest and the lightest, and the air pollution is the heaviest in the first two months of winter and spring. During the day, the air is clean at noon and afternoon, and the air pollution is heavy in the morning, evening and evening. Among them, 7:00 pm and 7:00 pm are pollution peak hours. When the ground temperature is higher than the air temperature, an inversion layer is formed in the sky, which is pressed against the ground like a cover, and various pollutants are not easily diffused. Generally, the back layer is thicker in the evening and winter and spring, which affects the polluted air on the ground and spreads, so the air pollution is the most serious. (Interview 56, December 2018).

Inspection teams came during a particularly cold spell of weather and they were measuring pollution at sunrise and sunset, so the meso-level official argued, he was not to blame for higher pollution readings, but in fact, the inspectors were to blame for their choice of when to inspect. The meso-level official was not lazy and not in dereliction of duty, but rather was simply fighting against the "natural" rhythms of the climate and the social rhythms of everyday life. His boss loved the argument and the memo, eventually passing the memo off as a product of the task force (and therefore him) when he sent it to the inspection team. I later saw the exact same wording on an official poster in Shanxi to deflect increasing blame from citizens and lower-level officials directed at meso-level officials, underlying how ubiquitous weather excuses were and how officially-recognized they were.

Another weather-related excuse that was used commonly in the Fenwei Plain (Shaanxi, Shanxi, and Henan; interestingly fenwei is a homophone for atmosphere or climate) blamed the

wind for high pollution readings. Because these jurisdictions are inland, on a plain, wind direction and speed affects them more than other localities (Interview 27, November 2018). Furthermore, because the rapid changes in both wind direction and speed, pollution that originated outside of the meso-level officials domains finds its way into their localities, artificially increasing the pollution numbers for some officials. While some meso-level officials were able to use this weather-based excuse to their advantage (e.g., the wind blew the pollution to a neighboring jurisdiction, so the official gets all the rewards while doing no work), the opposite was also true; the wind could and did blow pollution into their jurisdictions. Another "natural disadvantage," for meso-level officials was the lack of wind. Some coal producing regions are surrounded by mountains or are in valleys (whereas the capital of Shanxi—Taiyuan—means great plain, an hour south of Taiyuan is a district called Taigu, or great valley), which means that the pollution that they do produce cannot be dissipated by wind (Interview 36, May 2018). Here, instead of the wind blowing in pollution, wind was unable to blow pollution away, causing higher than normal air pollution readings that were no fault of the meso-level officials in charge of reducing pollution.

Some officials, rather than relying on shaky science or blaming geography, deflected their pollution reduction efforts away from coal and towards other polluting agents, notable volatile organic compounds (VOCs). The basis of the claim was that meso-level officials were significantly reducing coal-reliant pollution, but their efforts to reduce total pollution were hampered by people using VOCs in their everyday lives, and because it is not possible to separate PM2.5 readings caused by coal and PM2.5 readings caused by VOCs, meso-level officials should not be blamed for high pollution levels (Interview 54, Henan official, December 2018). A common argument was that hair spray, perfume, and cleaning supplies were a significant polluter and that wives and mothers-in-law (the wife's mother) were to blame for using these products; if they engaged in

"green consumption" and "recognized environmental labels" (or lack thereof) on the products that they purchased, then they would realize that "maintaining and protecting a peaceful environment" starts with what she does and the air pollution problem would decrease (Interview 54, December 2018).

These excuses, usually given to justify a lack of behavior rather than to justify behavior (the notable exception being meso-level officials who blamed VOCs in kitchens and restaurants so that they could crackdown on food stalls [how meso-level officials decided which stalls to close is discussed further below]), rarely led to absolution. But, as meso-level officials knew, that is not what they were meant to do. Deflection through excuses are delay tactics and are meant to show that officials are doing their best in unforgiving circumstances. Meso-level officials also knew that they had to do and/or say something to justify their actions (or lack of actions), otherwise their superiors or inspection teams would view their (in)action as an outright refusal to engage with centrally-mandated policies. In response to excuses, higher-level officials were likely to reprimand meso-level officials rather than take any extreme actions, such as demotion or removal, which would be on the table if meso-level actors were found guilty of outright refusal.

After being reprimanded or if meso-level actors knew that they were soon to be reprimanded, officials engaged in ingratiation tactics, hoping for lesser punishment(s). The two most common ways to ingratiate oneself was to tie yourself closer to the Party and/or flatter the reprimander. Ingratiation to the Party took the form of studying Party buzzwords and key concepts, similar to gaming different policies off of each other but only engaging at the level of speech rather than concrete action; ingratiation to the person often took the form of open flattery and bribery (although most would contend that plying superiors with food and drink is an expected part of the political game in rural China). Ingratiating oneself to the person is commonly used and comes

before attempts at ingratiating oneself to the party; only when failing to successfully deflect and/or delay by flattering a higher-level official, do meso-level officials engage in Party ingratiation.

Simple flattery and petty corruption through banquets and small gifts were often attempted, but rarely successful in stopping punishments, but they were useful for lessening punishments. Meso-level officials across bureaus would often share information about types of alcohol higher-level officials enjoyed, what cigarettes they smoke, and what restaurants were sure to please them through online group chats in WeChat or QQ (WeChat group chat field notes). They learned these facts and then acted on them. One meso-level official in Shanxi saw a pack of Marlboro cigarettes in my slingback pack when I took out my small notebook and pen as we were sitting in his office. He asked if I smoked and when I told him that I did not, he asked if he could have the pack because he heard his boss loved American cigarettes, but they were too expensive for him to buy. He explained that his boss was mad at him, but maybe he could soften him up with some Marlboros (Interview 30, March 2019). When supervisors were hard to be pleased by flattery or gifts, then officials attempted ingratiation to the Party.

After one official in Henan was taken to task by a supervisor from the capital, he told me that he responded by claiming that he would "comprehensively carry on despite any setbacks," a phrase that is common Party banner term (literally printed on enormous red banners hung around office buildings) and one that I saw painted on walls outside of lower-level Party and state buildings throughout China, because "how can he refute" the Party's argument that there are setbacks but officials should be allowed to rectify them (Interview 65, May 2019). This meso-level official continued by explaining that he would "roll up [his] sleeve's and work hard" from now on, effectively admitting that he was not working as hard as he should have been on completing these tasks but echoing another common Party buzz phrase (Interview 65, May 2019). Although these

attempts at ingratiation to the Party did not cause this particular meso-level official to escape reprimand, he was only shamed and forced into another round of supervision at some point in the future. He delayed his ultimate judgment while reducing his penalty in the short-term by resourcefully using Party buzzwords to his advantage.

Another way in which meso-level officials ingratiated themselves to the Party was through formal rectification procedures, most commonly through a "self-confession" including a statement that they would begin deep and comprehensive rectification of their misdeeds. A throwback to the Mao Era, self-confessions are gaining in popularity, although the "self" part may be a misnomer in most cases; meso-level officials are often forced into self-confession either explicitly by a supervisor or inspector or choose to self-confess when they feel there is no other option to save their career. Although there are no official rules for a self-confession, meso-level officials have figured out how to successfully engage in a self-confession that will not deflect blame but delay punishment. Self-confessions, therefore, must be (according to a Henan official who had witnessed many self-confessions, Interview 72, April 2018), not only very enthusiastic, but they must be fervent in their willingness to engage with the desires of higher-level officials (literally if the top thinks it is good, below must think it great, a phrase famously said by Xi Jinping in 2015). By showing that they recognize their mistakes, that they are committed to rectifying their mistakes, and that they are fervently engaged with the Party and Xi Jinping, meso-level officials avoid harsh punishment and often are given a specific timeframe in which they must work hard on implementing specific tasks. And, because these are usually publicized either internally or (if the problem is large enough) to the greater public, meso-level officials learn from others as to both the form and content of a self-correction.

WARNINGS

A riskier, and more resourceful, way in which meso-level officials reject central-level mandates and policies is through warnings and obstructions. A common way for higher-level officials to ensure that lower-level subordinates are faithfully and enthusiastically implementing the principle's desires is through the mechanism of surprise inspections. As they are designed, a surprise inspection consists of a team of inspectors dropping in on a department to inspect their work and their ledgers (the specific investigation team will focus on certain ledgers, e.g., fiscal accounting, environmental policies, social stability maintenance). Meso-level officials are also tasked with surprise inspections of both local capital and lower-level officials (discussed in further detail below). For officials being inspected, inspections are fine as long as they are not a surprise; given enough warning, meso-level officials can clean up their books and their appearances (both of their physical offices and often of their clothing) to pass muster. Therefore, there are two types of warnings in which meso-level officials engage: 1) warning other meso-level officials that inspections are coming and 2) warning coal producers and consumers that the meso-level officials are coming to inspect them, although here I will solely focus on the first.

There has been plenty written about how meso-level officials are on the other end of warnings and obstructions when they are doing their job, but they also engage in similar (although less violent, more in a later chapter) processes when they are inspected. Just as local capital (mostly in the construction, mining, and manufacturing industries) has a sophisticated network of early warning systems to alert them to government inspections and a complicated system of obstructions and obfuscations to hinder those inspections when they do happen, meso-level officials have adopted and adapted similar strategies when inspected by higher-level officials.

Meso-level officials used advanced warnings to engage in fraudulent behavior, often relying on a network of co-collaborators and co-conspirators to overcome information asymmetries, namely when inspections were occurring. Networks of officials across different departments, and ranks within departments, warn others within their networks that surprise inspections are coming, sometimes weeks in advance (as soon as the inspectors decide who they are going to inspect, although the when is sometimes kept secret) and sometimes mere minutes before the inspectors arrive at the gate to the government building. These networks rely on reciprocity; as one official in Henan told me: "We all work together on different [official, centrally-mandated] projects [through their everyday jobs], so we look out for each other (Interview 64, May 2019). When meso-level officials become aware of an imminent surprise inspection, they feel obligated to tell their colleagues and hope that their colleagues will repay the favor when they are inevitably up for a surprise visit from inspectors.

A common way to warn colleagues, was to talk in euphemisms about a visit from a friend from a higher-level department who was coming into town to visit. For example, an official in southeastern Shanxi, while trying to schedule a more formal interview, told me that he was unavailable for the foreseeable future because he had "friends from Taiyuan" coming to see how he was doing at his job (Interview 38, December 2018), specifically concerning his efforts to lower individual coal consumption during the frigid winter months. In my feigned naïveté, I mentioned that I have few friends and fewer who cared about coal policies, prompting him to take pity on my ignorance and explain that he was warned of an upcoming inspection to track his progress because the statistics for the fourth quarter coal consumption numbers were being collected and collated.

Usually, surprise inspections, though, were described as surprise because meso-level officials were given between a couple of hours and 15 minutes warning. On a freezing, both

literally and figuratively, November day in 2018 (interview 44 and field notes), I was sitting in the sweltering office of a meso-level official discussing his upcoming plans to curtail coal consumption throughout the winter by curbing how everyday citizens used coal to warm their homes. The irony of us sweating in an 80-degree office was all but lost on him until he received a phone call from his friend in the provincial department. After grunting into the phone acknowledging the impending inspection and hanging up after a mere 30 seconds, he jumped to the windows and began throwing them open before rushing to the thermostat and turning it off. Confused and cold, I asked (slightly forcefully) "what are you doing?!" as the temperature in the room plummeted. Inspectors were coming within the hour according the phone call that he received and it would not be a good look for him if inspectors caught him heating his office to such extremes given that he was tasked with curbing indoor heating during the winter. Unfortunately, I too had to go; he did not want to have his inspection recorded by an outsider.

Warnings are, by themselves, not very dangerous for meso-level officials. The punishment for warning other officials that surprise inspections are happening is rarely more than a slap on the wrist, usually amounting to a higher-level official simply telling the offender to not do it again or admonishing them to do it better (Shanxi official, Interview 49, May 2018). But, repeated patterns of warning others or being warned by others amounts to insubordination and puts the meso-level official and their network at risk for naming and shaming, career stagnation, and/or demotion. Furthermore, making simple changes like adjusting the temperature of the office, were part and parcel of the expected game between inspectors and those being inspected. The bigger issues occurred when meso-level officials used advanced warnings to 1) obstruct inspections or 2) engage in data fabrication and/or falsification so that their accounts would be squared or show improvements.

Obstructing inspections is a common tactic resourcefully used by meso-level officials if either they did not have enough advanced warning to obfuscate their misdeeds or their misdeeds would be visible during an inspection. Meso-level officials' obstructive tactics generally fall into one (or more) of the following categories, from less risky and resourceful to more and thus more common to less: 1) delaying or refusing to provide information to inspectors (fraudulent data also exists and is discussed further below), 2) outright refusal to engage with or interference with the inspection as it is occurring, and 3) attacking or framing inspectors for the actions of the meso-level official (although I never witnesses nor heard of meso-level officials in engaging in this behavior when being inspected by superiors, I did hear of capital using this tactic when meso-level officials came to inspect them, discusses in further detail in a later chapter).

Delaying tactics, although less risky and less skillful, are a ubiquitous tactic used by meso-level officials when they have not been warned of an inspection. An official in Henan, while recapping a recent investigation he conducted as part of his tasks in the environmental protection bureau, explained that the official he was inspected did not have the quantified data available for the inspector: "You want the data but I had no time to prepare it for you because this is an unannounced visit" (Interview 17, April 2019). Obviously, the solution would be to tell the official that he was to be inspected so that he could get the data ready and presentable for the environmental protection bureau. Eventually, the meso-level official provided the data to the inspector, turning a refusal into a mere delay.

Refusing data is much less risky for meso-level officials and not quite artful, but it is generally tolerated as long as the refusal turns into a delay. In contrast, refusing to engage with inspectors after they have arrived or actively interfering with inspections is quite risky and to pull

it off effectively (without being censured or arrested) requires one to be a "crafty bastard" (Interview 51 with a Shanxi environmental police officer, March 2019). Usually, though, those that refuse to engage with investigators, commonly by pretending to not be in the office, and censured for dereliction of duty because "why were they not at their job at 10am?" (Interview 51, March 2019). The more resourceful meso-level officials would try to subtly interfere with ongoing inspections through distractions and diversions, as well as the less subtle tactic of offering bribes.

The only times that I witnessed an attempt at distraction and an attempt at bribery occurred with the same informant, although others were more than willing to discuss things that they "had heard." Unfortunately, I was to be both the distraction and the bribe (Interview 47, October 2018). This meso-level official in Shanxi messaged me on WeChat asking if I was available to meet with him and some friends from Taiyuan for a meal, when I prodded about who the friends were and where we were to meet, I found out that they were an inspection team who whose leader was fond of American culture and wanted to meet a real "foreign friend." The official hoped that my presence would distract the inspectors from doing their job. I declined. Three hours later, he messaged me again asking if I would be willing to provide tutoring lessons for a friend's young child. Unsurprisingly, the friend was the inspector from Taiyuan and I was being bartered for a less rigorous inspection. Again, I declined. When there is not a foreigner to be used, which is the case most of the time, meso-level officials still try to distract inspectors with banquets or trips to newly built shopping centers, karaoke bars (KTV), or places where officials could indulge in less savory entertainment (this was especially common in place like Datong, or so I "had heard" from an official [Interview 46, Shanxi official, October 2018], where gambling dens and prostitution were common). Bribery often involved covering the costs of the distraction, plus alcohol, or simple "envelopes stuffed with money" (Interview 46, October 2018). To attempt bribery and/or

distraction, meso-level officials, though, needed to know that their target would be receptive to the tactic.

Often, the same networks used to provide early warnings could be used to gather intelligence on the inspectors and their teams, focusing on their personalities, family background, and amenability or if they were stubborn. This information was then freely shared throughout the network, usually in phone calls but sometimes in large WeChat or QQ groupchats where stubbornness was openly praised as showing that the inspector was an upstanding person (正人) who loved his job and faithfully performed his duties. Insiders knew that this was meant to dissuade them from attempting bribery or distraction, whereas outsiders simply saw a meso-level official publicly praising a superior.

FRAUD AND DECEPTION

One of the most common of the hidden information and tactics that meso-level officials use is some form of fraud or deception. The process of figuring out what they can and cannot do; how to shirk implementing policies that they perceive damaging to themselves, their bureaus, and/or their jurisdiction (usually in that order); and what tools they can use and resources they can marshal is a tortuous process that involves learning from others' successes and failures and reacting to higher-level countermeasures to force meso-level implementation. Instead of actively and openly disobeying orders or failing in their duties, meso-level officials will use their ingenuity and ability to quickly adapt to get out of following orders and the laws they are tasked with implementing.

Meso-level fraud and deception can be categorized into two broad types: outright fraud and hiding revenue and debt. Outright fraud is the most basic and requires the least amount of skill, resources, and cooperation, although that is not to say that cooperation does not occur. Hiding

revenue and debt involves complicated accounting, local government financial vehicles and subsidized loans going to environmentally unfriendly companies.

In July 2019, I was able to set up a meeting with a Ministry of Ecology and Environment official in Beijing. He was hard to meet with; I first heard of him through another informant in May 2018, right after the Ministry of Environmental Protection changed its name to the Ministry of Ecology and Environment. We first met in Tiananmen Square before seeking a reprieve from the 90-degree heat and oppressive smog (he called it fog) in a crowded coffee shop. The crowd provided a good amount of noise which covered our conversation, allowing him to speak more freely During the 45 minutes that we spent drinking our Americanos, he lamented that meso-level officials in the Fenwei region (Shaanxi, Shanxi, and Henan) often presented him and his team with "false reports containing counterfeit or tampered with statistics" (Interview 1). Counterfeit statistics were easy for meso-level officials to provide, whereas tampering with the statistics required considerable interstitial resourcefulness.

A common problem that the central Chinese state has encountered throughout the opening and reform period, has been rampant false statistics provided by local governments to the National Bureau of Statistics and bureaus in charge of ensuring that economic and social stability policies were being followed. This is true too of environmental policies, but whereas GDP statistics were inflated, coal consumption and production numbers were artificially lowered. A Shanxi official from the central plateau explained his process of cooking the books to me as we went shopping at an open air market: Later that day, he would drive out to a coal plant with a colleague and they would smoke cigarettes and drink fenjiu (a local Shanxi variant of baijiu, and even more potent) with an official at the coal plant who would tell the meso-level officials how much coal was produced, refined, and consumed on site (Interview 43, November 2018). He described this

situation as a win-win-win. He and his colleague won because they could drink and smoke while not doing work; the company won because it was neither inspected nor punished; and his boss and higher-level officials won because they would report lower production and consumption.

Although most officials were willing to go to coal producers and consumers in order to be feted, some few were unwilling to be publicly or privately treated to food, alcohol, and rest. Instead, as one official in Henan told me about his "colleagues," some officials accepted cash bribes in exchange for fraudulent numbers; an envelope stuffed with cash could always be attached to the production and/or consumption numbers provided to the local government (Interview 61, April 2019). These, again, are viewed as "win-win-win" scenarios carefully and resourcefully brokered by enterprising meso-level officials. When these "win-win-win" scenarios could not be brokered, some meso-level officials tampered with the correctly accrued statistics.

When working alone, it was easy for meso-level officials to make typographical errors when submitting reports to their supervisors. The key was to make it seem either 1) believable (as one middle-aged official explained to me: "I can say that I am 38 years old and people will believe me, but I cannot say that I am 25" [Interview 64, May 2019]) or 2) what their boss wanted to hear. Both of these were undefined for the meso-level officials; some of their bosses wanted to meet but not exceed central demands, some wanted to show that they were vigorously implementing central policies and therefore wanted sharp cuts from previous years, and some wanted modest declines that showed that the meso-level actors were trying to comply with Beijing but needed more resources from the center (this often came in the form of subsidized loans, discussed below).

The difficulty for these officials was simple: they could not ask their boss how their boss wanted them to tamper with the statistics. I witnessed a clever work around from this dilemma. As I was sitting, talking to a young woman working the front area of the office space, I heard a bureau

boss tell a subordinate that the boss saw the subordinate's draft memo about the statistics for the National Bureau of Statistics and the subordinate mistyped 20,000 when he probably meant 10,000 tons of coal, a simple typo due to fat fingers (field notes March 2019).

The last way of cooking the books that I witnessed in both Henan and Shanxi was shutting down coal production facilities and plants that consumed coal that had already shuttered their doors. Unlike zombie firms (more below) which are fries that are artificially kept alive, these firms died and then were killed again. In northwest Henan, I accompanied an official to examine a closed down coal mine. We found an abandoned mine, big enough for about six workers according to my informant. The mine had not been operational through the winter of 2018-19, but the official I was with officially shut it down in May 2019. He was able to "claim another victory" against coal producing facilities while doing no work and because the mine was not counted in earlier inspections of the county, he could then keep another mine open; as he explained to me: "if there are ten mines accounted for, I find one and shut it down, there are officially nine mines" (Interview 74, May 2019). In terms of his promotion report card, he was responsible for closing down a mine while reaping the material benefits of the open mines and the social stability that stable employment provided for him. It was a win-win-win and a quick application of interstitial resourcefulness.

Fabrication (the reporting of made-up numbers) and falsification (the reporting of false numbers) are extremely risky ways of rejecting policies and supervision from supervisors, but they are not the only fraudulent deception in which meso-level officials engage. In addition to presenting fraudulent statistics, meso-level officials engage in removing data from the accounting ledger completely. Rather than make up data or give fake data, some meso-level officials opt to

remove the data from the reports presented to their superiors. The two most common ways of hiding data and even firms and mines is through: 1) hidden debt and 2) shadow industries.

In addition to limits placed on coal consumption and production, the central government placed limits on how much local governments can spend on coal production and consumption. By capping the amount of funds available to meso-level and lower-level officials, the central government hoped to design a mechanism wherein even if these officials wanted to increase coal usage, they would not have access to the capital necessary to expand production. Additionally, central regulations do not allow local governments to borrow money or to directly participate in the municipal bond market. Unfortunately, rather than stoppering the spigot of funds available to meso-level officials, these rules and policies simply forced meso-level officials to turn to "alternative fundraising avenues," as one Shanxi Tax Bureau official euphemistically explained (Interview 20, April 2019). The three most common alternative fundraising avenues are: 1) local government financial vehicles (LGFVs), 2) unregulated corporate loans backed by local governments, and 3) public-private partnerships (PPPs) which allow for local governments to "disguise" their financing (Interview 20, April 2019; echoed by a Henan tax bureau official in Interview 23, May 2019). Although tax officials know that these hidden debts are being incurred, they do not know how extensively they are used and how much debt is being incurred. During my time in Shanxi and Henan, I only witnessed and was told about one instance of a PPP and a handful of LGFVs from my informants, but that is not to say that the other two are not used or used less frequently, just that LGFVs were more normalized and "easier" for meso-level and lower-level officials to implement (Interview 21 with a Shanxi tax bureau official, April 2019).

The one instance of a PPP partnership with city-level officials and a "private enterprise" of which I was made aware was used in Henan to fund a industrial development project in the city.

The official with whom I spoke (Interview 53, April 2019) was both resourceful and charismatic, and he used his affability to his advantage. Because of the competing pressures from a myriad of goals that his cadre report card insisted he meet, he was tasked with both creating, funding, and building an industrial park in his city while simultaneously lowering government expenditure and industrial pollution. For him, of these three tasks, he could accomplish two with a fraudulent PPP agreement. According to my informant, there were two ways of setting up the cooperation between the government and capital, the first involved using companies that you or your network had relations with (either through ownership, cf. red capitalism, or a good working relationship). This was risky though because it would be obvious to anyone with eyes what you were doing and inspectors would shut you down as soon as you attempted the partnership. The second option, then, was to create a company out of thin air instead of found a real company. With the help of a network of collaborators in a number of different departments, both horizontally and in lower-level positions, my informant found an old website that had not been updated in years, got an unregistered telephone number, and created what looked to be a real company website. He later told me that he got the idea from a central government circular in September 2018 that warned low-level governments that they needed to update their decade-old websites and answer their landlines. With this "private enterprise" ready to partner with the city government and take on the debt necessary to build the industrial park, the city government was able to off-book its debt (reining in government debt) while building an industrial park. As I have already discussed, gaming (playing one objective off of another) is common, although the fraudulent aspect here is what makes both the ex-ante risk and the resourcefulness greater.

By effectively creating an off-budget borrowing mechanism through fraudulent companies, meso-level officials are able to not incur more debt while continuing to build. Here, the building

was for a heavy manufacturing industrial park which will inevitably increase coal consumption within the city and pollution, although that is in the future and (hopefully, for meso-level officials) someone else's problem. In creating these fake PPPs and hiding their debt, meso-level officials effectively turn PPPs into LGFVs, a type of special purpose vehicle (SPV) to skirt restrictions on borrowing restrictions for specific projects, usually infrastructure related.

LGFVs are "absolutely necessary" (literally that circumstances require action) for local governments to meet their economic targets (Shanxi official, Interview 29, December 2018). Because local and central government debt is calculated differently and because meso-level officials are tasked with both reducing their debts and instigating improve projects within their jurisdictions, meso-level officials are stuck with the unenviable task of spending money, incurring no extra costs, and increasing their revenues. The resourceful answer to this dilemma is off-balance-sheet borrowing through LGFVs.

Not only is this form of debt forbidden, but often so too is what the debt was used for; instead of using the SPVs to update housing or make existing manufacturing plants greener, local officials often use the funds to build new infrastructure projects that often consume massive amounts of coal and some that are meant to increase coal production (either through mining, transportation, or coking) (Henan tax official, Interview 23, May 2018). A meso-level official in the environmental protection bureau in Shanxi explained how the process worked, and how it was used to benefit meso-level officials in the short-term:

"Okay, okay, okay, it is very complicated, but it is also easy. [Let's say] you want to build a train track to transport coal from the mines to somewhere else. First, you need to create a vehicle to finance the project (and take the debt). But this new fund has no assets so why would the bank give you a loan? You provide local state-owned land as the assets. Of course, without the land you

cannot repay the loans, but that is in five years or so; not your problem (probably)" (Interview 8, March 2019).

Offloading the debt, increasing coal consumption (through the construction of infrastructure projects) and coal projects, and not incurring any debt during their tenure to do so has enormous benefits for meso-level officials.

The ex-ante risk calculation of hidden debt is too great for meso-level officials who are both resourceful enough to take advantage of these situations and in a position that they believe requires them to rely on coal production and consumption for their best interests, material and within the Party structure. Defaulting on your LGFV, a very real possibility and one that happened for the first time in August 2018 in Xinjiang, is bad (and the aftermath of the Xinjiang default and the fear it spread among meso-level officials is a testament to how bad it is for these officials), with demotion being an optimal outcome. But the benefits in the short-term provided meso-level officials with promotions, praise and respect, and material benefits in the form of kickbacks from the projects and increased revenue to their jurisdiction.

The last common way that meso-level officials use their interstitial resourcefulness to hide coal production and consumption while reaping the material and status-based rewards of that production and consumption is by either tacitly or explicitly allowing for a shadow industry to thrive as legal industries are shuttered. Meso-level officials become a "protective umbrella" for illegal coal production and consumption operations, and some went so far as to encompass the whole supply chain, from mining and extraction to transportation on trucks and even on trains to smelting and coking (Shanxi environmental police officer, Interview 50, March 2019). According to an illegal coal boss in Shanxi, when restrictions were implemented by officials on coal production and consumption, some meso-level officials were content to shut down legal coal

production and consumption and allow former managers to continue running the operation (often literally) under the cover of darkness (Interview 92, February 2019). These parallel, illegal industries are extremely dangerous for meso-level officials; if they are caught by environmental law officers or inspection teams, meso-level officials most likely would face expulsion from the Party and jail, in addition to fines and public shaming.

REJECTION

To fail to comply completely and openly with central policies requires meso-level officials to be "extremely audacious (Interview 45 with a Shanxi meso-level official) and, therefore, was rare. When rejection did occur, though, meso-level officials marshaled cultural and material reasoning to justify their rejections and to fight punishments that were handed down. Most, if not all, localities' in Shanxi and Henan cultural and material resources were in some way based on coal, and some meso-level officials were determined to defend that base.

The history and cultural importance of coal, for some localities, cannot be overstated. "Chinese history is 5,000 years old, coal's history is 6,000 years old…[this area] was founded because of coal and it flourished because of coal." (Interview 26 with a meso-level Shanxi official, October 2018). While the scars of the coal industry have left the land and people pockmarked, they are also a source of pride. The coal-based cultural ethos in rural Henan and Shanxi is infused with strong elements of masculinity and the importance of local culture and resources to China's rise as a great power. Those meso-level officials in Shanxi and Henan who only have status and money due to coal are those who are the most likely, and willing, to outright reject central policies aimed to curtail coal production and consumption.

The cultural ethos of coal relies on masculinity, a sense that others view these officials and their locality as inferior, and a pride in their local area and this cultural ethos is resourcefully

mobilized by meso-level officials in order to reject environmental policies and to win other meso-level and local-level actors to their side in the ensuing power contestations with higher-level actors. This cultural ethos is sometimes combined with a material claim; not only is coal part of the local culture, but it is necessary for economic development and social stability, therefore not only should meso-level officials reject these policies, but it is their obligation to reject these policies (Interview 42 with Shanxi meso-level official, November 2018).

In early-May 2019, when the weather finally began to warm up, I was having dinner at an outdoor barbecue stand with a group of meso-level officials in a coal-mining city in rural, Southeast Shanxi. Due to the restrictions their boss put on banquets, the barbecue joint was the best option for dinner. As we were sitting, cramped on tiny stools, drinking beer and cooking our own meat (vegetables were lacking, unless they were wrapped in bacon), the officials began to discuss the upcoming round of inspections from Beijing and how they were worried, in a fashion, because they had not been implementing the various policies that were aimed at reducing the city's massive coal production and consumption. These officials who were coming to inspect were painted as coddled elites who never had to struggle for anything in their lives and did not understand the hardships on the ground in most of China. Instead, they were effete, effeminate, and entitled comrades (which also doubles as a homosexual slur) who would not be able to survive working at the lower-levels of government. Inspection teams from Beijing were carpetbaggers and these officials claimed that they had a moral and masculine duty to reject their policies. When a younger, newer official in the group questioned if it was smart to flaunt regulations and policies like this, he was told to "be a man, huh" and that real men despised being ruled by such arrogant and weak officials (Interviews 24, 25, May 2019). In Southwest Shanxi, I heard similar sentiments. Higher-level officials never "ate bitterness" unlike the meso-level officials in coal country.

The cultural ethos of “eating bitterness” is tied to masculinity as well as to local histories and cultures that take pride in the ability of residents to survive in harsh situations. Although, nationally they are second-tier elites at best, meso-level officials in Henan and Shanxi have pride in their ability to survive and thrive despite hardship, and when those who have no hardship try to impose further hardship on these officials by taking away their only source of status and material benefit, some officials outright reject the policies. This local pride was further damaged when meso-level officials found out that the Belt and Road Initiative allowed for and encouraged coal production and consumption beyond China’s borders.

Mimicking a “Pittsburgh over Paris” narrative that was simultaneously being used in America, Chinese officials in Shanxi and Henan were outraged that central policies curbed their main source of income and status while encouraging coal usage in Southeast Asia, spurring a rejection of these policies and rallying other officials in their insubordination. As one official in Shanxi’s northern coal plateau questioned why he had to ramp down production while Chinese money was spent on ramping up coal production in Southeast Asia: “Our country is going to spend more than 100 billion RMB on coal in Cambodia, Vietnam, and Bangledesh, and I have to curb production here?!” (Interview 32, January 2019). A friend of this official in a Shanxi environmental protection bureau would later tell me during an inspection of a coal plant that he agreed with his friend and that his superiors were “pissing money away” (which is also a wordplay on dumbasses; Interview 33, February 2019) by spending on coal in other countries rather than in his own backyard to justify why he was not going to shut down the plant even though his superiors wanted him to.

Although these instances of outright rejection were rare (I only encountered these few), they do show a resourcefulness that meso-level actors use when interacting with their peers. Failing

to comply with your superiors' orders is not something that is taken lightly and getting others to agree with you to subvert your bosses shows a distinct skill and shows that cultural ideas of masculinity and status more generally are part of the constellation of interests and pressures impacting policy implementation in rural China. What is more common, and still insubordinate, is the use of deception. Meso-level actors recognize that openly defying their superiors and the center is unlikely to end well for them, so they do so using hidden information and hidden tactics.

CONCLUSION

The goals in this chapter are to advance our theoretical understanding of the state-cum-organization (Walker 2021) in three ways: To 1) separate process from outcome in policy implementation by 2) filling in gaps in the policy-practice decoupling, and recoupling literatures by showing mechanisms of compliance and resistance, as well as the competing interests and skills that inform compliance and resistance, which 3) can only be accomplished by disaggregating organizations into distinct rungs—center/principle, meso-level/principle and agent, and local/agent—and then inhabiting the organizational rung.

I show when and where states' attempts to limit officials' autonomy in policy implementation—by designing policies and enforcement mechanisms that both standardize and quantify outcomes and increase enforcement and monitoring mechanisms—paradoxically lead to increased resistance. Meso-level officials are pressured from competing and contradictory organizational schema (Heimer 1999), making these bureaucracies and their policy implementation a kind of "contested terrain" (Edwards 1979) wherein workers resist efforts by their managers to rein in their autonomy. The pressures from the central state to improve environmental governance, through policies designed to standardize and quantify coal production, consumption, and pollution include promotion for faithful and energetic implementation or

stagnation, demotion, removal, and—in some extreme cases—imprisonment for failure to respond adequately to central mandates. There are many risks in decoupling and few rewards in recoupling, yet both occur to certain decrees. It is *how*, *why*, and *where* that meso-level resourcefulness developed and unfolded through in recoupling and decoupling that is theoretically valuable.

Extreme, formal enforcement of negative consequences, though, is not necessary for resourceful recoupling and decoupling and the concept of resourceful recouping can be fruitfully applied to cases of informal (Sabin and Reed-Tsochas 2020) or partial (Cole 2012; Hafner-Burton and Tsutsui 2005) enforcement, expanding our understandings of gaps between policy and practice beyond the carrot and the stick and beyond structural explanations of compliance or resistance.

I have described various resourceful strategies that meso-level officials use in their efforts to implement policies and shirk efforts to monitor and enforce their implementation, showing how meso-level officials engage in processes of resourceful recoupling and decoupling differently depending on a bevy of environmental and personal characteristics, including their economic base, dominant cultural schema, positionality within the state bureaucracy, and—most importantly—their individual resourcefulness. These characteristics shape meso-level officials' willingness and ability to engage in risky partial recoupling and decoupling. The concepts of resourceful recoupling and decoupling highlight that each individual characteristic is necessary but not sufficient to explain recoupling and decoupling of policy and practice, but also that these processes are neither knee-jerk reactions to or against top-level designs nor are they pre-determined by structural factors.

Resourceful recoupling and decoupling also highlights that these processes are contingent as well as contested and, therefore, must be explained *in situ*. Resistance, compliance, or quiescence to central-level recoupling efforts is neither pre-determined nor pre-constructed,

highlighting the need for comparative and extended ethnography in political sociology and organizational studies, especially at the meso-level. Contributing into an expanding set of inquiries into moments of resistance with organizations broadly and the state specifically, I explicate the subtle and hidden forms of everyday resistance in which meso-level officials engage, from the masked warnings to their networks about inspections to the ingratiation work to the Party and person that meso-level officials hope will delay punishment or distract bosses. Beyond this contribution to the scholarship of the state, this work also speaks to organizational studies, showing the myriad of ways in which top-level policies are designed with enforcement mechanisms and the quotidian reactions of those who are being designed.

The concepts of resourceful recoupling and decoupling also speak to principal-agent theories more broadly (Reed 2017; Shapiro 2005) by shifting the focus to the meso-level who is at once principal to the lower-level and agent to the central-level. Policy implementation must be filtered through meso-level officials, therefore understanding the prism of the meso-level, from the policy entering the meso-level to the myriad of ways that it is filtered out from the meso-level, is crucial for any understanding of policy implementation, from environmental policies to civil rights (Edelman 1992; Kelly and Dobbin 1998) and school policies (Coburn 1994; Hallett 2007). Without this positional understanding of the meso-level and the grounding of data and theory within the lived experiences of the meso-level actors through inhabiting their bureaucratic positionality, we can neither observe nor fully explain recoupling processes and outcomes.

This study encourages research into moments of organizational and intrastate resistance, especially during recoupling efforts, and compliance, which are better understood as contingent, resourceful processes. Future research should spend additional effort to capture the everyday practices of meso-level actors in policy implementation, opening the “black box” of the state and

organizations broadly to differentiate positions and principal-agents within the state to show not how policy implementation works (or does not work) on the ground and across time and place. Interests and implementation (or failure to implement policies) conflict and are remade through on the ground interactions with managers, subordinates, and bureaucrats in horizontal bureaus. Once these interests and actions are understood and typified, solutions to policy-practice gaps can be offered.

REFERENCES

Ahlers, Anna L. 2018. "Introduction: Chinese governance in the era of ‘top-level design’1." Taylor & Francis.

Ahlers, Anna L, and Yongdong Shen. 2018. "Breathe easy? Local nuances of authoritarian environmentalism in China's battle against air pollution." *The China Quarterly* 234:299-319.

Ahmad, Ehtisham. 2018. "Governance models and policy framework: some Chinese perspectives." *Journal of Chinese Governance* 3(2):129-57.

Andreas, Joel, and Yige Dong. 2018. "The Brief, Tumultuous History of “Big Democracy” in China’s Factories." *Modern China* 44(5):455-96.

Battilana, Julie, Bernard Leca, and Eva Boxenbaum. 2009. "2 how actors change institutions: towards a theory of institutional entrepreneurship." *Academy of Management annals* 3(1):65-107.

Baum, Richard. 1996. *Burying Mao: Chinese politics in the age of Deng Xiaoping*: Princeton University Press.

Beeson, Mark. 2010. "The coming of environmental authoritarianism." *Environmental Politics* 19(2):276-94.

Bromley, Patricia, Hokyu Hwang, and Walter W Powell. 2012. "Decoupling revisited: Common pressures, divergent strategies in the US nonprofit sector." *M@ n@ gement* 15(5):469-501.

Bromley, Patricia, and Walter W Powell. 2012. "From smoke and mirrors to walking the talk: Decoupling in the contemporary world." *Academy of Management annals* 6(1):483-530.

Bulman, David J, and Kyle A Jaros. 2020. "Loyalists, localists, and legibility: the calibrated control of provincial leadership teams in China." *Politics & Society* 48(2):199-234.

Campbell, John L. 1993. "The state and fiscal sociology." *Annual review of sociology* 19(1):163-85.

Coburn, Cynthia E. 2004. "Beyond decoupling: Rethinking the relationship between the institutional environment and the classroom." *Sociology of education* 77(3):211-44.

Cole, Wade M. 2005. "Sovereignty relinquished? Explaining commitment to the international human rights covenants, 1966-1999." *American sociological review* 70(3):472-95.

—. 2012. "Human rights as myth and ceremony? Reevaluating the effectiveness of human rights treaties, 1981–2007." *American Journal of Sociology* 117(4):1131-71.

DiMaggio, Paul. 1988. "Interest and agency in institutional theory." *Institutional patterns and organizations culture and environment*:3-21.

DiMaggio, Paul J, and Walter W Powell. 1983. "The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields." *American sociological review*:147-60.

Dobbin, Frank. 1994. *Forging industrial policy: The United States, Britain, and France in the railway age*: Cambridge university press.

Dobbin, Frank, Soohan Kim, and Alexandra Kalev. 2011. "You can't always get what you need: Organizational determinants of diversity programs." *American sociological review* 76(3):386-411.

Donaldson, John. 2016. *Assessing the balance of power in central-local relations in China*: Routledge.

Economy, Elizabeth. 2014. "Environmental governance in China: State control to crisis management." *Daedalus* 143(2):184-97.

Edelman, Lauren B. 1992. "Legal ambiguity and symbolic structures: Organizational mediation of civil rights law." *American Journal of Sociology* 97(6):1531-76.

Edin, Maria. 2003. "State capacity and local agent control in China: CCP cadre management from a township perspective." *The China Quarterly* 173:35-52.

Elsbach, Kimberly D, and Robert I Sutton. 1992. "Acquiring organizational legitimacy through illegitimate actions: A marriage of institutional and impression management theories." *Academy of management Journal* 35(4):699-738.

Espeland, Wendy Nelson. 1998. *The struggle for water: Politics, rationality, and identity in the American Southwest*: University of Chicago Press.

Espeland, Wendy Nelson, and Michael Sauder. 2007. "Rankings and reactivity: How public measures recreate social worlds." *American Journal of Sociology* 113(1):1-40.

Fligstein, Neil. 1997. "Social skill and institutional theory." *American behavioral scientist* 40(4):397-405.

—. 2001. "Social skill and the theory of fields." *Sociological Theory* 19(2):105-25.

Fligstein, Neil, and Jianjun Zhang. 2011. "A new agenda for research on the trajectory of Chinese capitalism." *Management and Organization Review* 7(1):39-62.

Fourcade, Marion, and Kieran Healy. 2017. "Seeing like a market." *Socio-economic review* 15(1):9-29.

Garud, Raghu, Cynthia Hardy, and Steve Maguire. 2007. "Institutional entrepreneurship as embedded agency: An introduction to the special issue." Sage Publications Sage UK: London, England.

Gilley, Bruce. 2012. "Authoritarian environmentalism and China's response to climate change." *Environmental Politics* 21(2):287-307.

Gold, Thomas B. 2019. "Guerrilla interviewing among the getihu." Pp. 175-92 in *Unofficial China*: Routledge.

Hafner-Burton, Emilie M, and Kiyoteru Tsutsui. 2005. "Human rights in a globalizing world: The paradox of empty promises." *American Journal of Sociology* 110(5):1373-411.

Hallett, Tim. 2007. "Between deference and distinction: Interaction ritual through symbolic power in an educational institution." *Social psychology quarterly* 70(2):148-71.

—. 2010. "The myth incarnate: Recoupling processes, turmoil, and inhabited institutions in an urban elementary school." *American sociological review* 75(1):52-74.

Hallett, Tim, and Marc J Ventresca. 2006. "Inhabited institutions: Social interactions and organizational forms in Gouldner's Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy." *Theory and society* 35(2):213-36.

Haveman, Heather A. 1993. "Follow the leader: Mimetic isomorphism and entry into new markets." *Administrative science quarterly*:593-627.

He, Baogang. 1996. "Dilemmas of pluralist development and democratization in China." *Democratization* 3(3):287-305.

Heberer, Thomas, and René Trappel. 2013. "Evaluation processes, local cadres' behaviour and local development processes." *Journal of Contemporary China* 22(84):1048-66.

Heckathorn, Douglas D. 1990. "Collective sanctions and compliance norms: A formal theory of group-mediated social control." *American sociological review*:366-84.

Heimer, Carol A. 1999. "Competing institutions: Law, medicine, and family in neonatal intensive care." *Law and Society Review*:17-66.

Hoffman, Andrew J, and Marc J Ventresca. 2002. *Organizations, policy and the natural environment: Institutional and strategic perspectives*: Stanford University Press.

Holmström, Bengt. 1979. "Moral hazard and observability." *The Bell journal of economics*:74-91.

Jerolmack, Colin, and Shamus Khan. 2014. "Talk is cheap: Ethnography and the attitudinal fallacy." *Sociological Methods & Research* 43(2):178-209.

Jin, Hehui, Yingyi Qian, and Barry R Weingast. 2005. "Regional decentralization and fiscal incentives: Federalism, Chinese style." *Journal of public economics* 89(9-10):1719-42.

Kalev, Alexandra, Frank Dobbin, and Erin Kelly. 2006. "Best practices or best guesses? Assessing the efficacy of corporate affirmative action and diversity policies." *American sociological review* 71(4):589-617.

Kellogg, Katherine C. 2009. "Operating room: Relational spaces and microinstitutional change in surgery." *American Journal of Sociology* 115(3):657-711.

Kelly, Erin, and Frank Dobbin. 1998. "How affirmative action became diversity management: Employer response to antidiscrimination law, 1961 to 1996." *American behavioral scientist* 41(7):960-84.

Kostka, Genia, and Jonas Nahm. 2017. "Central–local relations: Recentralization and environmental governance in China." *The China Quarterly* 231:567-82.

Kostka, Genia, and Chunman Zhang. 2018. "Tightening the grip: environmental governance under Xi Jinping." Taylor & Francis.

Landry, Pierre Francois. 2008. *Decentralized Authoritarianism in China: the Communist Party's control of local elites in the post-Mao era*: Cambridge University Press New York.

Lee, Sanghoon, and Dae-Won Oh. 2015. "Economic growth and the environment in China: Empirical evidence using prefecture level data." *China Economic Review* 36:73-85.

Li, Hongbin, and Li-An Zhou. 2005. "Political turnover and economic performance: the incentive role of personnel control in China." *Journal of public economics* 89(9-10):1743-62.

Li, Yifei. 2019. "Bureaucracies count: environmental governance through goal-setting and mandate-making in contemporary China." *Environmental Sociology* 5(1):12-22.

Lieberthal, Kenneth, and Michel Oksenberg. 2020. *Policy making in China*: Princeton University Press.

Lin, Nan. 1995. "Local market socialism: Local corporation in action in rural China." *Theory and society*:301-54.

Lorentzen, Peter. 2017. "Designing contentious politics in post-1989 China." *Modern China* 43(5):459-93.

Maguire, Steve, Cynthia Hardy, and Thomas B Lawrence. 2004. "Institutional entrepreneurship in emerging fields: HIV/AIDS treatment advocacy in Canada." *Academy of management Journal* 47(5):657-79.

Mann, Michael. 2012. *The sources of social power: volume 1, a history of power from the beginning to AD 1760*: Cambridge university press.

Martin, Isaac William, Ajay K Mehrotra, and Monica Prasad. 2009. *The new fiscal sociology: Taxation in comparative and historical perspective*: Cambridge University Press.

Martin, John Levi. 2018. "Getting off the Cartesian clothesline." *Sociological Theory* 36(2):194-200.

Martin, John Levi, and Nick Judd. 2020. "Tasks for the political sociology of the next ten years." *The new handbook of political sociology*:243-66.

Martin, John Levi, and Alessandra Lembo. 2020. "On the other side of values." *American Journal of Sociology* 126(1):52-98.

Mattingly, Daniel C. 2016. "Elite capture: How decentralization and informal institutions weaken property rights in China." *World Politics* 68(3):383-412.

McDonnell, Erin Metz. 2017. "Patchwork Leviathan: How pockets of bureaucratic governance flourish within institutionally diverse developing states." *American sociological review* 82(3):476-510.

—. 2020. *Patchwork Leviathan*: Princeton University Press.

Mertha, Andrew. 2017. "“Stressing Out”: Cadre Calibration and Affective Proximity to the CCP in Reform-era China." *The China Quarterly* 229:64-85.

Mertha, Andrew C. 2005. "China's “soft” centralization: Shifting tiao/kuai authority relations." *The China Quarterly* 184:791-810.

Meyer, John W, and Brian Rowan. 1977. "Institutionalized organizations: Formal structure as myth and ceremony." *American Journal of Sociology* 83(2):340-63.

Meyer, John W, Brian Rowan, and MW Meyer. 1978. "The structure of educational organizations." *Schools and society: A sociological approach to education*:217-25.

Mizruchi, Mark S, and Lisa C Fein. 1999. "The social construction of organizational knowledge: A study of the uses of coercive, mimetic, and normative isomorphism." *Administrative science quarterly* 44(4):653-83.

Morgan, Kimberly J, and Ann Shola Orloff. 2017. *The many hands of the state: Theorizing political authority and social control*: Cambridge University Press.

Nahm, Jonas. 2017. "Exploiting the implementation gap: policy divergence and industrial upgrading in China's wind and solar sectors." *The China Quarterly* 231:705-27.

Oi, Jean C. 1995. "The role of the local state in China's transitional economy." *The China Quarterly* 144:1132-49.

—. 1999. "Two decades of rural reform in China: An overview and assessment." *The China Quarterly* 159:616-28.

—. 1999. *Rural China takes off: Institutional foundations of economic reform*: Univ of California Press.

Oliver, Christine. 1991. "Strategic responses to institutional processes." *Academy of management review* 16(1):145-79.

Oliver, Pamela. 1980. "Rewards and punishments as selective incentives for collective action: theoretical investigations." *American Journal of Sociology* 85(6):1356-75.

Orton, J Douglas, and Karl E Weick. 1990. "Loosely coupled systems: A reconceptualization." *Academy of management review* 15(2):203-23.

Pfeffer, Jeffrey, and Gerald R Salancik. 2003. *The external control of organizations: A resource dependence perspective*: Stanford University Press.

Power, Michael. 1994. *The audit explosion*: Demos.

Ran, Ran. 2017. "Understanding blame politics in China's decentralized system of environmental governance: actors, strategies and context." *The China Quarterly* 231:634-61.

Reed, Isaac Ariail. 2017. "Chains of power and their representation." *Sociological Theory* 35(2):87-117.

Richard, Edwards. 1979. "Contested terrain: The transformation of the workplace in the twentieth century." *New York: Basic Boks*.

Rinaldo, Rachel, and Jeffrey Guhin. 2019. "How and why interviews work: Ethnographic interviews and meso-level public culture." *Sociological Methods & Research*:0049124119882471.

—. 2019. "How and why interviews work: Ethnographic interviews and meso-level public culture." *Sociological Methods & Research*:0049124119882471.

Sabin, Nicholas, and Felix Reed-Tsochas. 2020. "Able but Unwilling to Enforce: Cooperative Dilemmas in Group Lending." *American Journal of Sociology* 125(6):1602-67.

—. 2020. "Able but Unwilling to Enforce: Cooperative Dilemmas in Group Lending." *American Journal of Sociology* 125(6):1602-67.

Scott, James C. 2008. *Seeing like a state*: yale university Press.

Shapiro, Susan P. 2005. "Agency theory." *Annu. Rev. Sociol.* 31:263-84.

Shin, Kyoung. 2018. "Environmental policy innovations in China: a critical analysis from a low-carbon city." *Environmental Politics* 27(5):830-51.

Silbey, Susan. 1984. "The consequences of responsive regulation." *Enforcing regulation*:147-70.

Spillane, James P, Leigh Mesler Parise, and Jennifer Zoltners Sherer. 2011. "Organizational routines as coupling mechanisms: Policy, school administration, and the technical core." *American educational research journal* 48(3):586-619.

Spires, Anthony J. 2011. "Contingent symbiosis and civil society in an authoritarian state: Understanding the survival of China's grassroots NGOs." *American Journal of Sociology* 117(1):1-45.

Strathern, Marilyn. 2000. *Audit cultures: Anthropological studies in accountability, ethics, and the academy*: Psychology Press.

Timmermans, Stefan, and Steven Epstein. 2010. "A world of standards but not a standard world: Toward a sociology of standards and standardization." *Annual review of sociology* 36:69-89.

Timmermans, Stefan, and Iddo Tavory. 2012. "Theory construction in qualitative research: From grounded theory to abductive analysis." *Sociological Theory* 30(3):167-86.

Van Rooij, Benjamin, Qiaoqiao Zhu, Li Na, and Wang Qiliang. 2017. "Centralizing trends and pollution law enforcement in China." *The China Quarterly* 231:583-606.

Walder, Andrew G. 1995. "Local governments as industrial firms: an organizational analysis of China's transitional economy." *American Journal of Sociology* 101(2):263-301.

Walker, Edward T. 2021. "Organizational theory in political sociology." *Sociology Compass* 15(3):e12860.

Wang, Alex L. 2013. "The search for sustainable legitimacy: environmental law and bureaucracy in China." *Harv. Envtl. L. Rev.* 37:365.

—. 2018. "Symbolic Legitimacy and Chinese Environmental Reform." *Environmental Law* 48(4):699-760.

Waters, Tony. 2015. *Weber's rationalism and modern society: New translations on politics, bureaucracy, and social stratification*: Springer.

Weick, Karl E. 1976. "Educational organizations as loosely coupled systems." *Administrative science quarterly*:1-19.

Westphal, James D, and Edward J Zajac. 2001. "Decoupling policy from practice: The case of stock repurchase programs." *Administrative science quarterly* 46(2):202-28.

Wong, Christine, and Valerie J Karplus. 2017. "China's war on air pollution: can existing governance structures support new ambitions?" *The China Quarterly* 231:662-84.

Wood, Michael Lee, Dustin S Stoltz, Justin Van Ness, and Marshall A Taylor. 2018. "Schemas and frames." *Sociological Theory* 36(3):244-61.

Yang, X. 2015. "Why local governments are lack of innovation impetus." *Decision-making*.

Yang, Xuedong, and Jian Yan. 2018. "Top-level design, reform pressures, and local adaptations: an interpretation of the trajectory of reform since the 18th CPC Party Congress." *Journal of Chinese Governance* 3(1):25-48.

Yu, Jianxing, and Biao Huang. 2019. "Mapping the Progress of Local Government Innovation in Contemporary China." Pp. 119-38 in *The Palgrave Handbook of Local Governance in Contemporary China*: Springer.

Zajac, Edward J, and James D Westphal. 1994. "The costs and benefits of managerial incentives and monitoring in large US corporations: When is more not better?" *Strategic management journal* 15(S1):121-42.

Zald, Mayer N, and Michael Lounsbury. 2010. "The wizards of Oz: Towards an institutional approach to elites, expertise and command posts." *Organization studies* 31(7):963-96.

Zeng, Qingjie. 2020. "Managed campaign and bureaucratic institutions in China: Evidence from the targeted poverty alleviation program." *Journal of Contemporary China* 29(123):400-15.

Zhang, Changdong. 2017. "A fiscal sociological theory of authoritarian resilience: Developing theory through China case studies." *Sociological Theory* 35(1):39-63.

Zhao, Xiaofan, Oran R Young, Ye Qi, and Dan Guttman. 2020. "Back to the future: Can Chinese doubling down and American muddling through fulfill 21st century needs for environmental governance?" *Environmental Policy and Governance* 30(2):59-70.

Zheng, Siqi, Matthew E Kahn, Weizeng Sun, and Danglun Luo. 2014. "Incentives for China's urban mayors to mitigate pollution externalities: the role of the central government and public environmentalism." *Regional Science and Urban Economics* 47:61-71.

Zheng, Yongnian. 2007. *De facto federalism in China: Reforms and dynamics of central-local relations*: World Scientific.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

This dissertation sought to explain how and why meso-level officials in China (fail to) implement environmental policies. Meso-level officials (prefecture-level, county-level, township-level bureaucrats) are crucial for understanding policy implementation in China because they are the prism through which central-level policies are enforced, they are supervised by the central state and in charge of supervising the myriad of local- and street-level officials, and are in contact with citizens (unlike central- and provincial-level officials) and corporations (unlike local- and street-level officials). Meso-level officials, for the past 50 years or so, have also had significant leeway in implementing policies, leading to implementation gaps between policies-as-written in Beijing and policies-as-enacted on the ground. This latitude, though, has been severely curtailed since Xi Jinping's ascension. Since 2012, the Chinese state has undergone recentralization efforts, aiming to tie local officials to meso-level officials and meso-level officials to central-level officials through increased supervision and monitoring and severe punishments for lower-level officials who attempted to shirk monitoring.

In addition to recentralization efforts, the Chinese state has undergone significant shifts in terms of economic development and environmental sustainability and protection. Hoping to move away from manufacturing-dependent economic development and the coal upon which that development is based, the Chinese central state has been actively promoting environmental policies aimed at reducing coal production and consumption and policies aimed at increasing renewable energy sources while decreasing coal-burning within the energy sector. Environmental targets have been added alongside economic development and social stability maintenance as the three key metrics upon which meso-level officials are graded for promotion, stagnation, demotion, or, in serious cases, firing and arrest.

Within the first couple of years of this changing political environment, Chinese coal production and consumption drastically decreased as meso-level officials enthusiastically and faithfully implemented Beijing's environmental policies. However, since 2016, coal production and consumption has increased. This dissertation sought to answer how and why some meso-level officials in China's coal producing regions have failed to implement these policies and others have implemented these policies. The key mechanism to explain either implementation or the failure to implement policies is resourcefulness.

By resourcefulness, I meant the ability to demystify or de-fog, implying a combination of know-how, ability to cope with the unknown, ingenuity, and astuteness, as well as the ability to get oneself out of trouble. Because the central state provides competing policies to be implemented and no blueprint for meso-level actors, they must use their available resources, their resourcefulness, and their (not insignificant) insight in order to determine how to best act. These resources are not just material, but cultural and relational. The process by which meso-level state actors determine which policies they can ignore, which they can reconfigure, and which they must faithfully implement is what is meant by resourcefulness.

Through 12 months (May 2018, August 2018 to July 2019) in-depth participant observation and 148 interviews with meso-level officials, coal miners, and coal and coal-reliant firms' managers in Shanxi and Henan provinces, I found that meso-level state officials resourcefully interact with managers, workers, and other state officials to further their own personal and professional interests. The constellation of these interests—state-capital, state-labor, and state-state interests—exist before interactions with others, but often they are created and recreated through interactions with other actors. In short, although Beijing has attempted to ensure that meso-level officials implement environmental policies by trying to design policies that align meso-

level officials' interests with central-level officials' interests, these designs are not effective enough to limit meso-level officials' resourcefulness in furthering their own interests.

Meso-level actors have differing personal and institutional priorities due to their location at the interstice of lateral institutions, pressures, interests, and designs. Meso-level state actors are accountable to not only the central state, but also capital and civil society and labor. The empirical focus of this dissertation concerns how meso-level officials interact with corporate, labor, and state stakeholders as they attempt to either implement or elide environmental policies.

SUMMARY

In Chapter 3, I show that rather than serving the interests of specific coal and coal-reliant firms as the hegemonic explanation for why meso-level officials fail to implement environmental policies would expect, meso-level officials at times protect corporations from environmental policies and at times punish corporations for environmental degradation. Resourceful meso-level officials choose to punish or protect to further their own individual, personal and professional goals, not merely serving the interests of individual firms. Meso-level officials interact with four different types of enterprises—state-owned, state-controlled, private, and illegal—and, in their interactions with each type, marshal different resources and different logics to either force corporations to comply with environmental policies or to allow corporations to ignore these policies. These are not predetermined; officials bundle and convert different types of capital—material, social, administrative, informational, symbolic, and reputational—to enforce their interest on corporations and their managers. Not only do I show how officials impose or fail to impose laws on corporations, but I also gain theoretical leverage to explain state-capital relations in a socialist regime.

By differentiating different types of enterprises—state-owned, state-controlled, private, and illegal—and explicating their different organizational logics, I am able to explain the ways in which state officials manage enterprise's interests, getting some to comply with environmental regulations and allowing others to evade central-level policies, which can be generalized beyond national boundaries and nationally-situated enterprises. These enterprise ideal types are global, and state officials' understandings of their different logics can explain the way in which the state attempts to control enterprises' interests and actions.

In Chapter 4, I show that meso-level officials resourcefully manipulate ongoing labor protests, subsuming and exhorting labor protests in order to (fail to) implement environmental policies based on their personal and professional goals and interests. Labor mobilizations are not necessarily antagonistic towards the state; in fact, meso-level officials directly negotiate with labor mobilizations, determining the appropriate goals, targets, frames, and tactics. Meso-level officials then use these mobilizations to justify whether or not they implement environmental policies. This resourceful manipulation of labor protests into "appropriate" protests allows for a win-win situation. Meso-level officials are able to maintain stability by solving mass incidents and are able to do what they want in regard to environmental policies. For workers, they gain some redress for their initial grievances, as long as they stay within the appropriate parameters of protest. Workers, though, may be emboldened by manipulated protests; when workers see that their protests are at least partially successful, successful protest may bolster other workers into protesting beyond the designated boundaries of acceptable mobilizations. This chapter contributes to our understandings of state-labor relations, labor mobilizations, and authoritarian stability maintenance efforts.

By showing the ways in which interests are mutually constructed between state officials and civil society actors, both informally- and formally organized, I make contributions to not only

stability maintenance efforts in authoritarian regimes and their ongoing durability, but also to mobilizations more broadly. Meso-level state officials paradoxically use aggrieved and mobilized groups to ensure social stability, not as merely information gathering data points to understand where people are aggrieved, but to manipulate aggrieved citizens into furthering officials' interests. I also show that the interests of mobilized civil society actors are not always in opposition to the state, problematizing the challenger/authority binary and its understanding of inter-actions wherein one acts against the other prompting the other to act. Grievances, interests, and goals are mutually constructed, with the state subsuming these processes and exhorting workers and other civil society organization to act for state officials' personal and professional interests and goals.

In Chapter 5, I show the myriad of ways in which meso-level officials work with other state officials—mainly subordinates and colleagues in their own and horizontal bureaus—to resourcefully implement and fail to implement policies. I described various resourceful strategies that meso-level officials use in their efforts to implement policies and shirk efforts to monitor and enforce their implementation, showing how meso-level officials engage in processes of resourceful implementation and failure to implement differently depending on a bevy of environmental and personal characteristics, including their economic base, dominant cultural schema, positionality within the state bureaucracy, and—most importantly—their individual resourcefulness. I explicate the subtle and hidden forms of everyday resistance in which meso-level officials engage, from the masked warnings to their networks about inspections to the ingratiation work to the Party and person that meso-level officials hope will delay punishment or distract bosses. This chapter contributes to our understandings of on-the-ground state-state interactions between bureaucrats, the state as an organization, and organizational studies of implementation gaps in policies.

Conclusion

The contributions and implications of this study of meso-level officials and their (failure to) implement environmental policies informs our understandings of: (1) The importance of the meso-level; (2) the ways in which policies are contested and interests are crystallized, negotiated, and discovered by those who implement policies; (3) political economies of climate change, development, and authoritarianism; and, finally, (4) Chinese environmental politics and their effects on global climate change. These implications have profound impacts (1) theoretically for our understanding of organizations (and the state as a specific type of organization), political economy, and interests; (2) methodologically for disaggregating and accessing organizations; and (3) empirically for combating global climate change.

The importance of the meso-level in organizations, and especially the state as an organization, is a key theoretical, methodological, and empirical contribution of this study. Meso-level officials are key decision-makers in organizations, acting as both principals to lower-level officials and agents to higher-level officials, interacting with those outside of the organization, and administratively capable of enacting their vision and their interests. Here, in the state, meso-level officials are those who do much of statecraft, acting as a prism for central-level policies, as an interstice between civil society (labor and organizations) and the state, and as a manager of the interests of specific firms, all of which fall outside of the purview and capabilities of higher- and lower-level officials. By explicitly focusing on the meso-level, especially those who are far from the central theaters of power in China, allows me to show the critical importance of meso-level officials for the day-to-day operations of organizations, as well as their profound impacts on the macro-level outcomes of organizational policies.

In addition to the analytical importance of the meso-level, I show that the meso-level needs to be disaggregated to gain methodological clarity and purchase for explaining organizational

processes. The false binary between high- and low-level officials within an organization hides the important distinctions between hierarchical ranks. In China, provincial-level officials cannot be lumped into the same category as those three rungs below them. Instead, I disaggregate the state by their administrative capabilities, resources, and orientations, showing that the meso-level (prefecture-, county-, and township-level) is distinct from both the central- and the local-level, highlighting the need for future studies to take seriously this tripartite grouping of the state.

Empirically, the meso-level officials, especially in places outside of the large metropolitan centers of Chinese political economy, are the locus of quotidian statecraft, having profound impacts on Chinese politics and environmental degradation, which have global impacts. Often forgotten within China—and never thought about outside China—I aimed to explicate the importance of rural, underdeveloped provinces for understanding Chinese state politics and environmental impacts. The meso-level officials in coal towns determine the fate of our fight against global climate change, both in China and abroad. The meso-level officials in Shanxi, the world's largest producer of coal, and Henan, the 8th largest coal producer, are important not only sociologically, but politically and historically. If we can understand how and why some meso-level officials fail to implement policies and how and why others do implement policies in places where coal matters (materially, socially, culturally), then we can more successfully combat global climate change.

Understanding how, where, and why meso-level officials in Shanxi and Henan (fail to) implement environmental policies is empirically crucial for understanding global climate change. Shanxi, a province far removed from international (and even Chinese) imaginations and understanding, and its border with northern Henan is the most important site of global climate change. Shanxi alone produces over 1 billion tons of coal a year; Shanxi produces 14 percent of

the world's total coal compared to India (the world's second largest coal producing country) which produces 12 percent of the world's coal. If Henan were a country, it would be the 8th largest coal producing country in the world. Simply put: we cannot understand the fight against global climate change without understanding this region's coal production. The future of global climate change relies on the Chinese state passing and implementing environmental laws and policies that curb coal production and pollution in Shanxi and Henan.

Meso-level resourcefulness—another key theoretical and empirical finding of this study—has profound impacts for how we understand the ways in which policies are contested and interests are crystallized, negotiated, and discovered by those who implement policies. Throughout this dissertation, I ask when and where environmental policies are implemented, reconfigured, and/or rejected by focusing on the coal producing regions within Shanxi and Henan provinces. I show how central-level efforts to constrain meso-level officials' actions succeed and fail over time and place, highlighting that changes in the external, political environment are necessary but not sufficient to explain policy outcomes. In addition to the political external environment, external economic and cultural characteristics are necessary. But, internal characteristics of position within the bureaucracy (meso-level officials are subordinate to the central level but superordinate to the local level, different bureaus have different resources and power within the state hierarchy) and individual resourcefulness are required to fully explain policy implementation outcomes. This has consequences for our understandings of the Chinese state specifically and state processes more broadly, authoritarianism, and state-led development and political economies. This also has empirical consequences for understanding global climate change.

I show how the Chinese central state acts a mechanism designer to limit the available pathways meso-level officials have in policy implementation, attempting to ensure that those who

are tasked with implementing policies actually do so. By explicating the various mechanisms of policy implementation during recentralization efforts in an authoritarian regime that capriciously uses the law and its monopoly on the use of force (legitimate or not) to enforce its policies, I show the ways in which implementation gaps can and cannot be closed, thus informing our understandings of state and organizational processes.

I also show the ways in which state power over and through civil society and economic spheres is embodied and enforced. Arguing against the state as a protector of corporations, I show the ways in which the state punishes and protects corporations, allowing for greater theorization of state-capital relations, especially in a regime that is ostensively socialist. Meso-level officials also have the power and the resourcefulness to manipulate ongoing and existing civil society grievances for their own benefit, thus adding a new tactic to the authoritarian social stability maintenance toolkit. This has profound impacts on our conceptions of political economy of climate change, development, and authoritarianism.

Finally, I show that environmental policy promulgation is not enough to curb global climate change. The end goal of environmental activism cannot be policies-as-written, but we must ensure that they are implemented. Even if states do pass environmental laws meant to curb climate change in the short- and long-term, their enforcement is not guaranteed, even in top-down, centralized, authoritarian states. China's lack of climate change mitigation policy implementation is not because of political uncertainty (Hovi, Sprinz and Underdal 2009; Victor 2011)—the recent recentralization efforts by Xi Jinping (Xi 2014) and the addition of environmental targets to the cadre report card (Wang 2016a) means that environmental policy is, and will continue to be, at the forefront of Chinese statecraft. This failure also cannot be explained by a global tragedy of the commons wherein China fails to pass environmental policies (Ortmann and Veit 2022) because

China seeks to grow first and clean up later, like already developed states in the Global North (Spilker 2012). All of this problematizes decarbonization efforts that rely on state laws and policies to solve climate change.

REFERENCES

Hovi, Jon, Detlef F Sprinz, and Arild Underdal. 2009. "Implementing long-term climate policy: Time inconsistency, domestic politics, international anarchy." *Global Environmental Politics* 9(3):20-39.

Ortmann, Jakob, and Walter Veit. 2022. "Theory roulette: Choosing that climate change is not a tragedy of the commons." *Environmental Values*.

Spilker, Gabriele. 2012. "Helpful organizations: membership in inter-governmental organizations and environmental quality in developing countries." *British Journal of Political Science* 42(2):345-70.

Victor, David G. 2011. *Global warming gridlock: creating more effective strategies for protecting the planet*: Cambridge University Press.

Xi, Jinping. 2014. *The governance of China*: Foreign Languages Press.