

**Hyper-Linking Ecological Justice and Global Netizenship beyond Cyberspace?
Contours of Transnational Ecological Activism in / beyond Asia.**

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Abstract

Highlighting the role of the Internet / Web for social movements and civil society groups operating across state borders in the informational society (Manuel Castells), this paper attempts to contextualize transnational activism within broader power structures and provides an analysis of how this is related to problems of (e-)democracy, ecological justice and global civil society. By using concepts of Risk Society (Ulrich Beck), International Advocacy Networking (Margarett E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink), Globalizes Space (James N. Rosenau), and Cosmopolitan Democracy (David Held), the theoretically informed empirical case studies examine the transnational ecological movement in Asia.

Examining the dynamics of ecological activism, Part 1 of the paper delineates the linkages between transnational activism, participatory politics and e-mobilization for ecological justice. Part 2 highlights the differential form of mobilizations for transnational activism with two case studies of the Greenpeace China and Greenpeace Japan. Part 3 examines the new media opening up for individuals or novices (not the veteran activists) to directly participate in transnational advocacy activities, and discusses the socio-political meaning of the newly emerging political opportunity structures for electronic (e-) mobilization in and beyond the cyberspace, and questions how these will change the local, regional and transnational politics/justice in Asia. Part 4 examines the barriers and difficulties in advancing eco-democratization in Asian polities and the prospect of the eco-democracy project with special attention to the state's initiatives in controlling the access to, and monitoring the content of, the Internet. The last part of the project critically remarks upon normative and ethical issues regarding transnational eco-activism and e-mobilization.

1. Transnational Activism and E-Mobilization for Ecological Justice

Thanks to modern information and communication technologies (ICT), we are entering a new era of digital economy, polity and society. Participatory politics at a global scale seems more and more possible, allowing most forms of communication: one-to-one, one-to-many, many-to-one and many-to-many. Cyber-activism -hyper-linkages- is revolutionary in changing the mode of interaction for advocacy and empowerment, and power relationship between the state and people. The key issue here is the opening up of potential for transnational activism as far as interactivity, timeliness, active participation, and the progressive agenda setting are concerned, both in virtual and real political communities.

Three distinct yet inter-related debates on the governance of, and participatory politics in, the global system should be noted: the '*Globalized Space*' thesis of James N. Rosenau (1997; 1998), the *Cosmopolitan Democracy* concept developed by David Held (1995; 1998; 1999), and the *Transnational Advocacy Networks* (TAN) thesis of Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink (1998; 1999). Confronting globalization and the problematic of global governance, Rosenau (1997;1998) rightly identifies the nascent social agencies, networks and actions: NGOs, the internet and social movements respectively. As it is widely agreed upon that current existing global governance is largely undemocratic, possibilities for democratizing these structures need to be discussed (Dryzek 1999: 43) and that deliberation or communication is the central feature of transnational democracy. Local, regional and global ICT are referred to by James N. Rosenau (1998: 46-7) as one of the functional equivalents of democratic governance where transnational issues are beyond the control of nation-state nor the state-sponsored institutionalised regime, like the UN.

The notion of hyper-linking (e- democracy) is in line with the theory of 'Cosmopolitan Democracy' of David Held (1998; 1999), in which he argues that, in a world of overlapping communities of fate, *Cosmopolitan Democracy* is the creation of new political institutions and a diversity of NGOs in global civil society, with the democratic principle and praxis of broad access to avenues of civic participation at national, regional and international levels. More specifically, e-democracy is coupled with the 'activism front', e-mobilization (which is one form of cyber-activism) revolves around the strategic use of the new media by NGOs. E-mobilization occurs within the cyberspace in form of virtual communication between activists using various means, such as fax and short-message-sending (SMS), e-mail, webpages and hyperlinks.

2. Cyber-Rainbow Warriors in Actions

Below is the brief for two case studies of transnational ecological activism (1) Anti-Dumping of Toxic sediments/mud into South China Sea and (2) Cyber-Action initiative of Greenpeace Japan

2.1 Transnational Ecological Activism (TEA) against Toxic Dumping in South China Sea

In July 2000, Greenpeace China exposed that dredging-cum-dumping operation for the construction of the Container Terminal 9 (CT9), by the transnational corporations (TNCs), in Hong Kong had been seriously polluting the marine environment near Dangan Islands in the South China Sea. Direct confrontational actions took place on 5th September 2000, Greenpeace activists in orange dress boarded a dredging barge to protest the irresponsible dredging and dumping of contaminated sediment for the construction of CT9 in Hong Kong. In a series of protests thereafter, Greenpeace also condemned the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) for its complicity in the incident. The campaign demanded the EPD should immediately stop the dredging works to prevent further pollution of the sea (See the chronology of the CT9 case [<http://www.greenpeace-china.org.hk/>]). Public and the media attentions were drawn upon.

After several rounds of confrontational action in Hong Kong, lobbying with the Beijing government and the protests to the London Convention (Convention to the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes [1972], see: <http://www.londonconvention.org/>) and its secretariat, the International Maritime Organization in London, Hong Kong's EPD subsequently stopped renewing permits for contractors to load highly contaminated dredged mud for final disposal near Dangan Islands. Followed up action was taken by the Chinese government in late September 2000. The contractors then appealed against the decision, but later dismissed by higher authority. Other international advocacy activism took place since then, including several protests to the London Convention and media campaign. Undoubtedly, the TEA has successfully shaped the public opinions, policy decision of both governments, and maintaining environmental justice against the polluters via campaign at local and international levels.

The major aspects of the TEA can be drawn here. Firstly, the TNCs' economic project at the expense of ocean environment, the governmental incapability to protect the ocean where geographically split between two territorial administrations, and the distancing (and the failure) of the international convents (like the London Convention) can only challenged by direct actions to witness and expose environmental crimes. Second, aided by ICT, the whole process shows that its global networking and solidarity support (<http://www.greenpeace.org/~odump/ocean.html/>), local public participation (indirectly supporting the protests) and the high profile protests (direct attack) can create powerful political image and pressure, pushing the government and corporations to abandon their wrongful practice damaging the environment. In short, the real time speedy e-

mobilization cultivates the boomerang effect of transnational activism (Keck and Sikkink, 1998: 12-13). Lastly but not just in this case, TEA can be articulated fully (speedy, stronger momentum) in different territorial spaces at international/global level by the networking of NGOs and inform-
logistics supports. In other words, the ICT enhanced TEA becomes powerful at the international stage, addressing the necessity for the promotion of cross-territorial and/or cross-institutional politics, transnational community, as well as cosmopolitan democracy, for transnational fate under the challenge of globalization of capital and economic processes (Held 1999; Rosenau 1998).

2.2 Cyber-Activism on/beyond the e-Gateway of Greenpeace Japan

Cyber-action recently becomes an integral part of global Greenpeace movement against environmental pollution (<http://www.greenpeace.org>). For this, each geographically anchored cell of the Greenpeace movement (like Greenpeace China and Greenpeace Japan) establishes their E-platform for international exchange of information for in-house action-strategies reference and externally, recruitment of volunteers for green mobilization. Cyber-activist is someone freely signed up for Greenpeace (regional office) Cyber-activism Community. They receive regular e-mail updates, participate in real time, on-line discussion, and help out Greenpeace campaigns. The TEA is working at all fronts: local, regional and global environmental issues; and cyber-activists recruiting from the cyberspace are hence borderless.

The cyberspace serves as an interactive and communication platform for green political will formation as well. Apart from Discussion List function, it is also strategically instrumental for global and/or regionally (trans-border) protest actions against specific environmental issue.

Within a limited time frame of a year since the cyber-action started from mid-March 2001, up to mid-March 2002, Greenpeace Japan has organized altogether fourteen rounds of cyber-actions. A synoptic view of these cyber mobilizations is provided here (Table 1):

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

From these mobilizations, we can identify five key aspects of cyber-activism, namely, (1) the nature of the ecological issues – local as well as global, (2) target(s) for political appeal and ecological solidarity: from political figures to pollution victims, (3) ICT-enhanced action strategy (clear, simple and direct), (4) timeliness and timing for mobilization (on and off-line, round-the-clock and the last-minute protests), and (5) mode of (real and virtual, transnational) participation of Cyber-Rainbow-Warriors.

Social (e-)mobilization via cyber space is though relatively new for the Asian Greenpeace

movement (<http://www.greenpeace.or.jp>), this mode of e-mobilization fits well with all activists and supporters. In addition, the e-mobilization is also reinforcing the predominant action strategy of the Greenpeace that emphasizes the use of direction action with minimum number of the selected activists but maximum media coverage, hoping to bring prompt political/business responses from the government, the public and the culprits of pollution. In short, this form of civic e-mobilization at cross-border and global level enabling individual to participate echoes the praxis of the *Cosmopolitan Democracy* (Held 1998, 1999).

3. Synergy of Global Green Netizenship and Ecological Justice

Undoubtedly, both of our case studies highlight the new character of *Cyber-Rainbow-Warriors* in actions. For e-mobilization, four major issues are critical. First and foremost is the new mode of political lobbying and political will formation process. Cyberspace provides good information with hyper-link to others and is a safe haven for people to have imaginative and innovative encounters with global policy environmental problem. Under the previous regime of environmental politics, it was not possible for people to be actively engaged in (even in the previous Greenpeace movements), except passively learning from the mass media. More specifically, the cyberspace (for novice as well as veteran activists) is a learning by/with doing, action-oriented media at both individual and collective levels – they act with just a few clicks, sending support/appeal letter or animated E-Card to the target(s).

Second, environmental politics has its territorial relevance for local, regional and national political processes. The ICT enhanced cyber-cum-social mobilization extends the territorial relevance and enables outsiders' influence channeling into and beyond the local and regionally specific, territorially defined, environmental struggles. Hence, this form of TEA articulates the higher level/order of global concern (another political ideology or will?) into national/regional/local political spaces (the 'boomerang effect' noted by Keck and Sikkink). In the Greenpeace Japan e-mobilization, the struggles for anti-nuclear power plant, the anti-PVC campaign, the anti-incinerator plant, as well as the local referendum for nuclear energy highlight this ICT enhanced mode of advocacy (and its multiplying effect) towards a new form of democratic governance for sustainable development.

Third, it is the multiple linkages of TEA in/beyond the cyberspace. The linkages are beyond territorial bound geographical localities and they extend to numerous individuals who used to be passive observers (of the mass media) and call upon their participation in a less militant, yet supportive, role for the protest movement. Here, individuals can make a difference in the global

politics, especially on those issues (refugees, environment, animal and human rights) normally neglected by the present inter-nation states system.

Last but not the least is the emergence of a new political culture for participatory politics. The cyberspace reinforces the civic forces to extending the horizon of ecological action - keeping the ecological issues alive even the social movement become dormant), the arena/space for politicking, as well as the publikum (public sphere beyond one's locality) for political decision making. The new political e-mobilization follows the logic of the proximity to communication and its connectivity, rather than the traditional one with territorial/administrative rigidity. With the growing significance of this new form and mode of politicking, the ecological (sub-)politics is more leaning to go in-depth cyber and outwardly, global. Hence the synergy between global green citizenship and ecological justice is highly likely.

4. Expanding (Cyber-)Political Opportunity Structure in Asia?

Cyber-visitors for the homepage for Greanpeace Japan and Greenpeac China were amount to 326,700 (first seven months in 2001) and 111,3000 (August 2000 to July 2001) respectively. These figures might not be high if compared with those hit-rate in the information-entertainment sector, but they are believed be higher than the agencies (political party) for traditional politics can have. What makes them significant is their accessibility and real time, round-the-clock engagement in local, regional and global mobilization. From the Greenpeace China's web-page-visiting statistics, the visitors are more local and regional than previously we expected. This suggests that there is also a local and regional anchorage for international NGOs.

Thanks to the state's e-government project and burgeoning development of ICT market in Asia, wired and wireless access for communication has been expanding tremendously. All figures indicate an expanding cyberspace in Asia. For the broadening of cyberspace, despite its incubating of individualism, profit, self promotion and greed, the increase of both wired and wireless communications in volume, bandwidth and frequency terms can largely help to develop the size, power base and influence of critical mass for new alternative politicking in the cyberspace, which in turns might challenge the traditional political establishment (Stefik 1999).

On the prospect of cyberactivism and e-democracy in Asia, three issues needs to be tackled: barriers against cyber-activism, digital divides and cyber-imperialism. As the size and volume of cyberspace will develop at geometric progressive scale, so does the struggle for the control in the region. Second, digital deficiency and divide are problematic in Asia Pacific. The Internet backbone is still controlled (over 50%) by developed economies. The gap within Asian countries is also very

wide: around 20% of the adults in the rich part of Asia are online but less than 1% of the people in the poor part using Internet (ITU, 2000). Therefore, the problem of digital divides is serious and need to be addressed (Kenny et al. 2000). Last but not least, the cyber-engagement should guard against the imperialist controls of English language and American cultural repercussions (Main 2001). As long as the Internet is based on existent social cultural structure, the Internet will likely reinforce cyberimperialism (Ebo 2001; Ogura 2001, Wyatt et al. 2000). How to confront cyberimperialism, as well as managing the diversity within transnational activism movement, will be the challenge for social agencies.

5. Prospects of Transnational (Cyber-)Activism and Ecological Justice

Our study of TEA highlights the national and supra-national political establishments' failure to perform the ethical-morally sound and compatible functions to protecting the environment and the underprivileged when they pursue their goal for economic development. Transnational activism at this historical conjuncture serves as a powerful challenge/reminder for the supra-national bodies to abide the basic condition/morality for development (Rosenau 1997,1998; Keck and Sikkink 1998). Recent militant protests at the venues (say, the G8 in Genoa, Italy, July 2001) of the EU, the G8, the IMF, the WTO, and World Bank summits have been forcefully articulating the fundamental contradictions between the haves and have-nots, and visualizing the exposing socio-economic fault-lines between the rich and poor, the developed and underdeveloped worlds. Though it is highly questionable about the success of these campaigns, one thing for sure is that the actively engaging developmental debates on equitable share of the globalization project – a forgotten, dark and tragic dimension of the champion of global capitalism – are rejuvenated through the transnational activism.

The cyber-activists project highlights the extent of the potential of the Internet as a creator of non-territorial communities of like minded people who may converge in cyberspace for political purposes that constraint the alternatives open to organizations in the real world (Rosenau 1998: 46) With the coming of 3G mobile technologies and the further bandwidth broadening for wired communications, more cyber-actions are foreseeable and expected. The Netizens behavioral repertoire will shape the politicizing in and beyond the cyberspace, addressing to global/local issues, though in accordance with the information available on-time, real-time, just-in-time and across the once geographically bound time-zone differences. For widening and deepening of the new political opportunity structure, e-mobilization, e-democracy and TEA will be influential in broadening and deepening the scope and extent of democratic, participatory politics in local and regional spaces: *New Politics* at locality and in global arena enjoys the comparative advantage of ICT-enhanced

media and strategies, and the organizational form of international/global NGOs tends to be cellular, network and mutual dependent with a more horizontal power structure. And the effects of the *New Politics* are: glo-calization (globalization-cum-localization) of ecological issues and politics – politics in *Globalized Space*, and the articulation of sustainable development at multi-level, flexible time-spatial modality and domain – following the logics of *Cosmopolitan Democracy*.

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Table 1: Cyber-Actions of the Greenpeace Japan (15 March 2001 – 10 March 2002)

Issue	Territory / Target	Action* / Actors	Time Frame	ICT & Content
Urging Japanese & US Governments to Support Kyoto Climate Agreement	Global Campaign: Governments Prime Minister US President	3rd Call: 68 2nd Call: 254 13300 worldwide 1686 from Japan	Two Calls 3.-30 Jul.01. 22.-30.Jun.01	E-Card + One Person-One E- Letter Appeal (OPOL)
Global Ban of Nuclear Test	Global Campaign	N.A.	One Call 30.Aug.01 - 13.Nov.01	OPOL
Save Ancient Forest (Canada) Save Ancient Forest	Global Campaign: Canada & Japan Govt. & Business	100	Two Call 15-30.Mar.01 6.Mar. 02~~	OPOL
Stop the Death Threat to Eco-Activists in Amazon	Global Campaign for Solidarity	N.A.	One Call 10.Oct.01 ~~	OPOL
Stop US's Star War Missile Plan	Global Campaign US & Japan	2nd Call: 60. 1st Call: 118.	Two Calls 30.Jun.01- 3.Aug.01	E-Card + OPOL
Anti Nuclear Power Plant in Chukok Region, and Japan	National /Regional Government Power Company	224	Two Calls 27.Apr.01~~ 30.May.01~~	E-Card + OPOL
Anti-PVC Packaging / Toys	Global Campaign Govt. Ministry Business Sector	272	Two Calls 8.Jun.01~ 17.Dec.01 ~~	E-Card + OPOL
Anti-Incinerator Plant in Japan	National / Local City Governments	234	One Call 23.May.01~~	OPOL
Village Referendum on Nuclear Power Plant	Local Leadership National & Regional Policy	130	One Call 19.Apr.01.- 24.Apr.01	OPOL
Stop Reprocessing Plant in Japan	National / Regional Government	Not Available (N.A.)	One Call 19.Oct.01 ~~	OPOL

*Action is defined as confirmed/registered communication (of E-Card/Appeal Letter) forward to the appropriate targets via the cyber-centre of Greenpeace Japan. (Figure update: 10.March.2002).

OPOL: One Person One Letter (E-mail) Appeal

NA: Not Available.

~~ On Going Campaign