

Study on the “Social-Psychological” Mechanism of Farmers from Environmental Resistance to Collective Silence

Jinjun Zhang*

College of History and Society, Anhui Normal University, Wuhu 241002, China

* Corresponding Author: Jinjun Zhang; Jinjunzhang001@126.com

Abstract: Based on the relevant research results of academic circles and the case data of farmers’ environmental resistance in 8 villages in Guangdong Province, Anhui Province and Shaanxi Province, this paper analyzes the causes, initiators, subjects, methods and failure results of farmers’ environmental resistance. The study found that farmers’ environmental resistance is generally affected by environmental rights awareness, health risk concerns, economic interest needs, inner dissatisfaction and considerations of the continuation of village lineage, but it is different from place to place. The initiators of farmers’ environmental struggle are mainly middle-aged men or the elderly, and the main body is the elderly and women; the main ways are self-relief for environmental protection, seeking help from the media and environmental letters and visits. Generally speaking, the environmental resistance of these farmers has failed. The combined effect of the three “social-psychological” mechanisms of violent punishment, persuasive discipline and imitative obedience has led to the transformation of farmers from environmental resistance to collective silence to a great extent.

Keywords: Environmental resistance; Collective silence; Violent punishment; Persuasive discipline; Imitative submission

1. Introduction

Many research documents and rural reality show that since the reform and opening up, the ecological environment in rural areas has been seriously polluted in the process of industrialization, urbanization and regional differentiation. Environmental pollution has become one of the important factors threatening farmers’ health, rural public safety, rural social stability and the survival and development of villages. Since 2010, we have conducted field research on environmental pollution and farmers’ resistance in 8 villages in Guangdong Province, Anhui Province and Shaanxi Province. In addition to finding that farmers in some rural areas are silent in the face of professional anti-pollution barriers and strong organizations such as enterprises and governments^[1], we have also found that individual or collective environmental resistance has occurred in some rural areas. However, the outcome of a considerable number of environmental resistances is tragic, and in some rural areas, the phenomenon of collective silence after the failure of environmental resistance is emerged. Behind this collective silence, what

Copyright © 2021 Jinjun Zhang.

doi: 10.18063/esp.v6.i2.1390

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0) (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Received: Jun 14, 2021; Accepted: Aug 4, 2021; Published online: Aug 12, 2021.

kind of “social-psychological” mechanism is playing a role? Based on the relevant research results in the academic circles, this paper attempts to make a certain analysis and explanation.

2. Literature Review

China’s rural environmental problems have appeared since the founding of new China. In 1949-1957, due to some industrial enterprises, especially thermal power plants, are laid out and built along the rivers, the technical measures to deal with the “three wastes” are basically absent and the river is used as a sewer which caused a certain degree of pollution to the rural environment^[2]. From 1958 to 1965, under the guidance of the principles of “running iron and steel industry in a large scale” and “carrying out mass movement in a large scale”, small iron and steel and other “small soil groups” blossomed everywhere, and many rural areas were filled with smog, sewage and garbage^[2]. From 1966 to 1976, due to the one-sided emphasis on “taking grain as the key link” in agricultural production and the development of grain production at the expense of forestry, animal husbandry and fishery, deforestation, grazing destroying, reclamation of lakes and artificial terraces occurred frequently, damaging the agricultural production ecosystem and pollution accidents occurred frequently^[3]. Since the reform and opening up, China has been in an accelerated period of social transformation, which has highlighted and exacerbated environmental problems^[4]. In recent years, more and more development zones, industrial parks, especially chemical parks, have quietly sprung up in rural areas, and the excessive discharge of “three wastes” has become the main factor affecting rural environmental quality^[5]. According to the survey of 100 villages by Liu *et al.*, there are 57 surveyed villages with polluting enterprises in and around them. In these villages, 45% of the surface water is polluted by enterprise wastewater and waste, 20% of the shallow groundwater is polluted by industrial wastewater and waste residue, 39% of the air quality is affected by industrial and mining enterprise waste gas and dust, and 13% of the soil is polluted by factory wastewater and waste residue^[6]. Although there is no reliable data to prove when China’s rural environmental collective struggle first occurred after the founding of new China, it is certain that such events have appeared before the reform and opening up^[7].

What is not commensurate with the situation of rural environmental pollution and farmers’ environmental struggle in China is that the research on farmers’ environmental struggle began in the 1980s. On the one hand, due to the breaking of the ideological forbidden zone, China dares to admit that its environmental problems are relatively serious; on the other hand, it is because the opening up of China both internally and externally has promoted the dissemination of environmental information, more and more people are beginning to be aware of China’s environmental problems^[4]. In 1983, Cai took the lead in writing an article on the settlement of environmental disputes caused by environmental pollution and destruction (including rural areas) by arbitration^[8]. Since then, especially since the 1990s, with the development of environmental sociology, environmental politics, environmental law and other disciplines in China, the literature on farmers’ environmental resistance has been gradually enriched. In the existing research, a small number of research literature show that there are successful or generally successful cases of farmers’ environmental resistance. In the study of farmers’ environmental resistance in a village in Northwest China, Jing found that local cultural factors such as clan identity, fertility culture, folk beliefs and Feng Shui concept ensure the success of farmers’ environmental resistance^[9]. Tong’s research shows that farmers can persist in environmental struggle for 20 years and win the success of class action, which is inseparable from the supporting reports of the media, the support of professional environmental legal aid (help) organizations and the support of environmental NGO networks^[10]. In China’s large-scale marine pollution incidents, the active intervention of the country is the key and core for the success of farmers’ environmental struggle^[11]. In their research, Chen *et al.* also found that farmers fought from individual to collective in

environmental pollution, but finally achieved a win-win situation by jointly building social enterprises^[12].

However, there are still quite a lot of research literatures show that the outcome of farmers' environmental struggle in China is often failed. Chen *et al.* found in their research that farmers' environmental struggle did not fundamentally improve their living environment. In recent years, villagers have been dying of cancer one after another, farmland compensation has been delayed, the government's commitment has not been fulfilled, and the evil forces and village "elites" continue to make profits from the environmental struggle, all of which have seriously dampened the enthusiasm of farmers to continue their fight. In the face of pollution, there have been great differences among farmers whether to continue to fight or choose silence or escape, and it is difficult to mobilize and organize collective struggle^[13]. Farmers' behaviors such as "blocking the road", "kneeling down to the mayor", "abusing" and "fighting" in the early stage of environmental resistance are the manifestations of primitive resistance, and this effort cannot be said to be a failure^[14]. However, it cannot be said to be successful. After all, farmers have been hurt to a certain extent, and their demands have not been fully met. It is difficult to effectively solve the problem of rural environmental pollution, which is closely related to the current political performance evaluation mechanism, the lack of independence of functional departments and the lagging legal system^[15]. The forces that make farmers more vulnerable to pollution (including capital, power, etc.) are precisely the forces that determine the difficulty of their environmental struggle^[16]. When using the analysis framework of "complaint petition" to study the environmental petition behavior of farmers, the author found that due to the inaction of local governments, two out of three environmental petitions were unsuccessful^[17]. Due to the logic of "reasonable pollution" and "no accident" of local governments in environmental pollution and the logic of "survivalism" and "minimum risk" of farmers, farmers still rely on local governments to solve environmental pollution problems to a great extent^[18]. Si's research found that farmers are limited by knowledge and power, and the "judgmental truth" of knowledge means to objectify man and nature limits their proof of pollution and pollution victims^[19]. Due to the limitations of farmers themselves and the lack of constructive soil for rural environmental problems, they cannot finally stop the pollutant discharge behavior of polluting enterprises or drive polluting enterprises out of the local area, and their environmental struggle is doomed to failure^[20]. In the research on the structure and cultural path of farmers' environmental resistance in China, through combing and analyzing relevant literature, the author found that a considerable number of farmers' environmental resistance often failed^[21]. Chen also analyzed the research on the failure of farmers' environmental struggle in some literature from the dimensions of struggle dilemma theory, political opportunity structure theory, culture and psychology theory, network and strategy theory and gender difference theory^[22]. The above research on the relationship between the state and farmers, the development mechanism of political and economic integration, the relationship between polluting enterprises and farmers, farmers' own factors, and the relationship between farmers and external resources focuses on the discussion of farmers' environmental resistance process, characteristics, constraints and failure reasons, which has important enlightening significance for the research of this paper. On this basis, the author also wants to further explore the phenomenon of collective silence after the failure of farmers' environmental resistance and the "social-psychological" mechanism behind it, in order to further advance the previous research.

3. Farmers' Environmental Resistance

This paper selects 8 villages surveyed by the author, including 2 in Guangdong Province, 3 in Anhui Province and 3 in Shaanxi Province. These villages are in areas with relatively backward economic development in the three provinces (see **Table 1**).

Table 1. Basic information of 8 villages, types of polluting enterprises, pollution types and environmental struggle periods

Province	Village	Category of polluting enterprises	Pollution type	Environmental resistance period
Guangdong	Village R, City G (county-level city)	Stone pit	Dust pollution and noise pollution	2002-2010
	Village X, City L (county-level city)	Chemical plant	Wastewater pollution	2004-2011
Anhui	Village L, County N	Chemical plant	Wastewater pollution	2003-2009
	Village T, City J (county-level city)	Chemical plant	Lead pollution, air pollution	2003-2009
	Village W, County Y	Gravel factory	Dust pollution and noise pollution	1995-2010
Shaanxi	Village Y, County F	Stone pit	Dust pollution and noise pollution	2003-2011
	Village B, County W	Oil plant	Waste water pollution and oil pollution	1996-2010
	Village W, County P	Chemical plant	Wastewater pollution and air pollution	2004-2010

It should be noted that in terms of the typicality of the case study, the eight villages selected in this paper have no grand protest scenes, farmers' environmental protest has no media support reports, no help of professional legal aid organizations, no participation of environmental protection NGO, and no joint action across villages and regions. However, the author believes that such a case selection is of certain typicality. "As long as a case can focus on one category, it is typical regardless of the coverage of this category"^[23]. From the perspective of academic research, the "vigorous and magnificent" scene of farmers' environmental resistance is a typical study, and the "ordinary and unexceptional" scene of farmers' environmental resistance is another typical study. Perhaps, it is such a picture of farmers' environmental struggle that can better reflect the normal life and struggle of ordinary Chinese farmers. After all, tens of thousands of Chinese farmers suffering from environmental pollution arrange their own daily production and life in this way.

In terms of the causes of environmental resistance, farmers' environmental resistance in 8 villages is generally affected by environmental rights protection awareness, health risk concerns, economic interest needs, inner dissatisfaction and considerations of the continuation of village lineage^[24], but the causes of farmers' environmental resistance in each village are different, although there are some regional differences, they are not obvious.

From the perspective of the initiators of environmental resistance, the initiators of environmental resistance in six villages are male middle-aged or elderly people, which can echo Ying's view that "rural collective resistance is dominated by middle-aged and elderly people"^[25]. However, village T of City J in Anhui Province and village Y of County F in Shaanxi Province have no so-called initiators because they are individual environmental struggles.

From the perspective of the main body of environmental resistance, due to the intensification of rural social mobility and the hollowing out of rural population in the period of social transformation, the main body of environmental resistance in eight villages is mainly the elderly and women.

In terms of the ways of environmental struggle, the ways of environmental struggle in the eight villages mainly include environmental protection self-help relief, seeking help from the media and environmental petition.

Environmental protection self-reliance refers to the act of forcing the perpetrator's person or pollution facilities to stop pollution or damage in order to protect their own environmental rights and interests when they encounter environmental pollution and damage and cannot timely request public relief or obtain public relief^[26]. In fact, civilian environmental protection self-reliance does not necessarily use some kind of coercion or violence, but can also take actions such as scolding of pollution victims and consultation with pollution implementers. Seeking help from the media means that farmers go to the local newspaper or television station to seek help by calling or writing letters. Environmental petition refers to the behavior of farmers who go beyond the village committee and village Party branch to report rural environmental pollution problems and safeguard their environmental rights and interests to the town level government departments or government departments above the town level through letters, calls, online complaints or visits^[17] (see **Table 2**).

Table 2. Causes, initiators, subjects and ways of farmers' environmental resistance in 8 villages

Province	Village	Causes of environmental resistance	Environmental protest initiator	Environmental protest subject	Environmental resistance methods
Guangdong	Village R, City G (county-level city)	Awareness of environmental rights protection (weak), demand for economic interests, health risks concern and inner dissatisfaction	The aged	The elderly, women	Environmental protection self-reliance relief (collective negotiation with polluting enterprises), seeking help from the media, environmental petition (collective environmental protest)
	Village X, City L (county-level city)	Awareness of environmental rights protection (strong), demand for economic interests, health risks concern, inner dissatisfaction and continuous consideration of village context	The aged	The elderly, women	Environmental protection self-reliance relief (collective negotiation with polluting enterprises and violent rights protection), environmental petition (collective environmental protest)
Anhui	Village L, County	Awareness of environmental rights protection (strong), demand for economic interests, health risks concern, inner dissatisfaction and continuous consideration of village context	Middle-aged person	The elderly, women	Environmental protection self-reliance relief (collective negotiation with polluting enterprises and violent rights protection), recourse to the media, environmental petition (collective environmental protest)
	Village T, City J (county-level city)	Awareness of environmental rights protection (weak), demand for economic interests, health risks concern, inner dissatisfaction and continuous consideration of village context	No	The aged	Environmental protection self-reliance relief (negotiation between individuals and polluting enterprises), seeking help from the media, environmental petition (individual environmental protest)
	Village W, County Y	Awareness of environmental rights protection (weak), demand for economic interests, health risks concern and inner dissatisfaction	The aged	The elderly, women	Environmental protection self-reliance relief (collective negotiation with polluting enterprises), environmental petition (collective environmental protest)

Table 2. (Continued)

Province	Village	Causes of environmental resistance	Environmental protest initiator	Environmental protest subject	Environmental resistance methods
	Village Y, County F	Awareness of environmental rights protection (weak), demand for economic interests, health risks concern and inner dissatisfaction	No	The aged	Environmental protection self-reliance relief (negotiation between individuals and polluting enterprises), environmental petition (individual environmental protest)
Shanxi	Village B, County W	Awareness of environmental rights protection (strong), demand for economic interests, health risks concern, inner dissatisfaction and continuous consideration of village lineage	Middle-aged person	The elderly, women	Environmental protection self-reliance relief (collective negotiation with polluting enterprises), seeking help from the media, environmental petition (collective environmental protest)
	Village P, County P	Environmental rights protection awareness (strong), economic interest needs, health risk concerns, inner dissatisfaction	The aged	The elderly, women	Environmental protection self-reliance relief (collective negotiation with polluting enterprises), seeking help from the media, environmental petition (collective environmental protest)

Judging from the results of the environmental struggle, the collective or individual environmental protection self-reliance behavior negotiated with polluting enterprises in eight villages has basically no effect. The farmers participating in the action were either threatened by the violence of the polluted enterprises, or encountered the joint violence of the polluting enterprises and the local government, or were persuaded by the words of the owners of the polluting enterprises, or persuaded by the words of local government officials”. Although farmers in some villages have received a little economic compensation, it is insignificant compared with the environmental pollution they have suffered. Farmers’ environmental resistance has not received effective response or support from the media and local governments, and some people have been “persuaded” by local government officials in environmental letters and visits.

On the whole, the environmental struggle in these villages has failed (see **Table 3**).

In the investigation, the author found that some farmers in these villages have been very reluctant to talk about their so-called environmental struggle experience. They said that they have “seen some so-called researchers and college students year by year. They are tired and don’t want to say any more”. Although the failure of farmers’ environmental struggle in eight villages is certainly as cause for concerning the environmental pollution of these villages and the living conditions of farmers, it seems that this is not the main aspect. What is more worrying is their collective silence after the failure of environmental struggle. In their words, “a lot of efforts have not been successful”. They have “lost confidence” in the environmental struggle. They think that “making trouble around” is meaningless and don’t want to “make trouble” anymore. The environmental struggle in these villages gradually subsided around 2010, not only the collective struggle did not happen again, but also the sporadic, scattered and isolated individual struggle.

Table 3. Results of environmental resistance in 8 villages

Province	Village	Environmental protection self-relief	Help from the media	Environmental Petition	Environmental protest results
Guangdong	Village R, City G (county-level city)	Being “dissuaded” is basically invalid	No response	No result, being “persuaded”	Failed (only a little financial compensation)
	Village X, City L (county-level city)	Being “dissuaded” encounters violence and is invalid		No result, being “persuaded”	Failed
Anhui	Village L, county N	Being “dissuaded” and encountering violence are basically ineffective	No result	No result, being “persuaded”	Failure (only a little financial compensation)
	Village T, City J (county-level city)	Being “dissuaded” is invalid	No result	No result, being “persuaded”	Failed
	Village W, County Y	Being “dissuaded” is basically invalid		No result	Failure (only a little financial compensation)
Shanxi	Village Y, County F	Being “dissuaded” is invalid	No result	No result, being “persuaded”	Failed
	Village B, County W	Being “dissuaded” is invalid	No result	No result, being “persuaded”	Failed
	village P, County P	Being “dissuaded” is basically invalid	No result	No result, being “persuaded”	Failed (only a little economic compensation)

4. The “Social-psychological” Mechanism of Farmers from Environmental Resistance to Collective Silence

After the failure of environmental resistance in 8 villages in Guangdong Province, Anhui Province and Shaanxi Province with the characteristics of occasional, temporary, transient and incident, farmers appeared the phenomenon of collective silence. What kind of “social psychological” mechanism makes them lose confidence and eventually move towards collective silence? As we know, an important task of sociology is to explain social phenomena. Many sociological researchers often use social mechanisms to explain some social phenomena. The important feature of social mechanism is to explore the facts behind a certain social phenomenon and establish a certain causal relationship from the aspects of structure, system and group behavior. The psychological mechanism mainly analyzes some psychological or social phenomena of individuals or groups from the psychological level of individuals or groups, and establishes some causal links. Due to the complexity of the phenomenon of farmers’ collective silence, it is difficult to give a satisfactory or convincing explanation simply from the social mechanism or psychological mechanism. This paper attempts to integrate social mechanism and psychological mechanism to explain the phenomenon of farmers’ collective silence from the aspects of structure, system, group behavior and group psychology. Therefore, it uses the expression of “social-psychological” mechanism rather than “social psychological mechanism”. At the same time, we must be clear that this paper studies the “social-psychological” mechanism of farmers in eight villages from environmental resistance to collective silence, which may only be explained from some causal mechanisms, rather than trying to build a grand logical system to pursue the so-called universal law of causality. The author found that it was the three “social-psychological” mechanisms of violent punishment, persuasive discipline and imitative obedience that led the farmers in eight villages to collective silence after the failure of environmental resistance to a great extent.

4.1. Violent punishment

Violent punishment is a common method used by some local governments and polluting enterprises to deal with the “trouble making” behavior of farmers to polluting enterprises. The main purpose of punishment is to prevent farmers from “making trouble” and “no trouble”. Especially under the background of the hollowing out of rural population, the semi-acquaintances society and the weakening of social and community norms in the period of social transformation in China, the use of this method is a good way to deal with the old people and women who came to “make trouble” and the effect of “killing one to make example” can be better achieved. The most subtle way for local governments or polluting enterprises to suppress public positive actions is to characterize public actions as disturbance of public order and emphasize the illegality of public actions, and thus isolating public actions and avoiding the support and solidarity of lawyers, non-governmental organizations, news media and other external forces^[27], so as to facilitate them to exercise direct violent punishment against farmers. In the eight villages surveyed by the author, many young and middle-aged labor forces have been “absent” in rural areas for a long time, and some even haven’t returned for years. The elderly and women left behind in the villages are “double weak” physically and willfully. Most of them can’t withstand the violent punishment or violent threat of strong local governments and polluting enterprises, so they are forced to collective silence.

In village X, city L, Guangdong Province, farmers’ environmental resistance has been carried out three times, all of which were completed by women. It is a kind of strategy that women in rural areas should not be beaten in the period of social transformation if they are helpless. The first environmental struggle caught the owners of polluting enterprises off guard, but in the second, especially the third, dozens of “security guards” employed by the owners of polluting enterprises injured the leading women and some other women and old people, which greatly shocked all farmers involved in the environmental struggle. In L village, N county, Anhui Province, polluting enterprises employ black and evil forces to beat and threaten farmers involved in environmental resistance. When there are a large number of farmers involved in environmental resistance, the local town government will also use the police station officers and “public security joint defense team” to deal with farmers who come to “make trouble”. After the environmental resistance, the leading farmers will be abused and threatened by some black and evil members again and again. In villages where there is no collective environmental struggle, such as R village in G City, Guangdong Province, W Village in Y County, Anhui Province, B village in W county and P village in P County, Shaanxi Province, farmers only consult and negotiate with the owners of polluting enterprises based on relevant environmental protection laws, regulations or reasons. However, every time they are surrounded by a group of “security guards” of polluting enterprises which, for farmers participating in environmental struggle, is a potential “symbolic threat”. In T village, J city in Anhui Province and Y village F county in Shaanxi province, where the individual environmental protest happens, the strong family power of polluting enterprises is a potential “symbolic threat” or force of “punishment” which explained why no collective environmental protest took place on these two villages. Two farmers in T village, J city, Anhui Province who secretly petitioned the local town government were severely beaten for “other reasons” after returning to the village. Some farmers say: “There’s no body behind us in the government. It’s useless to petition, let alone the town government. Is that where we should go? Isn’t it obvious that we’ll be beaten back?” Several farmers in Y village, F county, Shanxi Province also went to the local town government to petition. On their way back, they were abused and threatened by family members of polluting enterprises. Farmers gradually dare not fight or give up fighting in the face of repeated violent punishment or threats.

4.2. Persuasive discipline

Different from the violent or threatening means of violent punishment, persuasive discipline is a relatively mild “peaceful” means, which mainly refers to the so-called “persuasion” of polluting enterprise owners and local government officials to deal with the farmers who “make trouble” in polluting enterprises or appeal to government departments through the so-called “truth telling”, “reasoning” or “reprimand”. The purpose is to tame these “disobedient” and “restless” farmers, let them follow the rules, don’t think about “making trouble” and be honest farmers. In the words of farmers, after all, the “big mouth” of polluting enterprises and local governments, the “small mouth” of ordinary people, and the “troublemaker” farmers sometimes “have to obey”.

In R village of G city and X village of L city, Guangdong Province, L village of N county and W village of Y county, Anhui Province, B village of W county and P village of P county, Shaanxi Province, some farmers have repeatedly consulted with the owners of polluting enterprises, but it is difficult to meet each time. It is not easy to have the opportunity to meet. The owners of polluting enterprises always “put the facts” and “reason” first, and then “scold”. The farmers are always helpless and always return in vain. Pollution business owners seem to have the same face. The owners of pollution enterprises in T village, J city, Anhui Province and Y village, F county, Shaanxi Province always rely on their local so-called “prestige” and “spectacular” family forces to “persuade” farmers who come to “reason” one after another through “reprimand”, and they have “tried repeatedly”, so that they have formed the habit of solving farmers’ “trouble” by “reprimand”. Not only do the owners of polluting enterprises have nearly consistent behavior patterns, but the behavior patterns of local government departments also seem to be highly consistent. The farmers in R village of G city and X village of L city in Guangdong Province once looked for the leaders of the town. The leaders of the town said, “many places in Guangdong are very developed, and we also need to develop here. I hope you will focus on the overall situation and don’t care about the little pollution in front of you”. The farmers were speechless and helpless. In an environmental protest in L village, N county, Anhui Province in 2008, a leader of the local town government came forward to “convince” and “persuade” the “troublemaking” farmers. He said that there was only one enterprise in the town. If it moved away, there would be no source of financial revenue in the town. Please be considerate of the difficulties of the town and say that the enterprise should add environmental protection equipment to ensure environmental protection, but later facts proved that all this was just a verbal commitment. In the three large-scale environmental petition events of farmers, the leaders of N county government and town government “persuaded” the petitioners by means of “reasoning” (emphasizing “reasonable pollution”, saying that economic development is bound to pollute the environment, but these are temporary), “united village cadres to persuade” and so on. Farmers later said that they “lied about all these words”, “cheated again and again” and “there is no way to return to them and trust them again”. In the petition process of farmers in T village, J city, Anhui Province, the leaders of the town used the methods of “facts” (saying that the lead plant has realized environmental protection operation, the pollution is basically gone, and the lead plant has driven the local economic development and improved the living conditions of farmers), and “reasoning” (saying that there is no point in appealing to the higher level. If the lead factory moves away, T village will go back for decades and everyone will starve again) to convince and persuade the petitioners to go away. The farmers in W village, Y county, Anhui Province once went to the leaders of the Environmental Protection Bureau of the county, who quickly replied, “after strict testing, the environmental protection of the gravel factory meets the standard”. This way of “putting the facts” makes the farmers very helpless. In the face of the farmers in Y village of F county, B village of W county and P village of P county in Shaanxi Province, the leaders of the local county government and the town government are almost the same caliber. In particular, a leader of W county government said that oil is the economic lifeline of the country. The impact of farmers’ petition is very bad and will affect the overall

situation of national economic development. In the face of repeated “reprimands” and “persuasions”, the farmers were finally disciplined and gradually stopped fighting.

4.3. Imitative submission

Under the great external pressure of violent punishment and persuasive discipline, farmers in eight villages in Guangdong, Anhui and Shaanxi began to show imitative obedience in the face of environmental pollution. In a sense, obedience stems from deprivation. Farmers’ right to fight against the environment has been deprived by polluting enterprises and local governments. In these villages, if farmers find that others no longer act, they are afraid or unwilling to act again, their psychology of “fear”, “fear of accident” and “fear of hindsight” is particularly obvious under the control of “survivalist” logic and “risk minimization” logic. Gradually, they no longer have any hope of improving rural environmental pollution through environmental struggle. They feel that since “making trouble around” has no result, it is meaningless to continue “making trouble”, and they have generally lost their confidence in continuing environmental resistance.

After the failure of the farmers’ environmental struggle in village R of city G and village X of city L in Guangdong Province, the farmers found that several environmental activists basically work at sunrise and rest at sunset every day. After lunch, they play mahjong or casually talk about people and things that have nothing to do with environmental pollution. They no longer “touch” the topic of environmental pollution, let alone want to take action. In the face of day-to-day environmental pollution, farmers live the same pastoral life as when there was no environmental pollution in the past. Some farmers are quite dull when interviewed. In L village of N county and W village of Y county in Anhui Province, since the leading farmers became “honest”, other farmers also lost the courage to continue to fight because they “lost confidence together” and didn’t want to “make trouble” any more. In T village, J city, Anhui Province, when individual farmers who had theories with polluting business owners or petitioned were subjected to violent punishment and persuasive discipline, the imitative obedience among farmers was particularly obvious. They said that there was “no way out” in the face of lead pollution and “we can live only one day at a time”. In Y village of F county, B village of W county and P village of P county in Shaanxi Province, farmers also have no confidence to continue to fight in imitation obedience. In addition, it should be pointed out that in the process of investigation, the author found such a phenomenon: farmers’ “gossip” played an important role in their imitative submission. If some farmers stop fighting against the environment because of violent punishment or persuasive discipline, they will soon infect more and more farmers in the village, even farmers in nearby villages, and these farmers will also show imitative obedience first or later. In their own words, fighting alone is definitely not an option in the environmental struggle, “making trouble” together, and finding government departments are not working either. Now “there’s no way out” and “let’s just go on with it”.

5. Research Conclusions and Further Discussion

Based on the research results of farmers’ environmental resistance in academic circles, this paper analyzes the causes, initiators, subjects, methods and results of farmers’ environmental resistance in 8 villages in Guangdong Province, Anhui Province and Shaanxi Province, and discusses the social phenomenon of farmers from environmental resistance to collective silence and the “social-psychological” mechanism behind it. The combined effect of the three “social-psychological” mechanisms of persuasive discipline and imitative obedience has led farmers to move from environmental resistance to collective silence to a great extent. As farmers are the bottom vulnerable groups in China’s political, economic and social status, they are in a very obvious vulnerable position in the distribution of power and resources. The “social-psychological” mechanism of violent punishment,

persuasive discipline and imitative submission is actually rooted in the social structure, system, the structural network of various existing powers and interests in rural society^[28] and the norms of rural communities that have been greatly weakened.

Compared with previous studies, although this study has taken a step forward, there are still some problems to be further discussed: first, farmers in 8 villages in Guangdong Province, Anhui Province and Shaanxi province finally chose silence after the failure of environmental resistance. I wonder whether this is the ignorance and misfortune of farmers or the heaviness and sadness of the country? Second, will these silent farmers wake up under the pressure of structure and system in the period of social transformation, the deepening degree of heterogeneity of rural society, the weakening of rural community norms, the hollowing out of population and the increasing atomization of farmers? How can we wake them up? Third, in the period of social transformation in China, when the development strategy has changed, especially when green development and environmental governance have changed from concept to national decision-making, why should farmers fight to solve the problem of rural environmental pollution? Fourth, because the phenomenon of farmers from environmental resistance to collective silence involves many aspects such as structure, system, psychology, emotion, cognition, value and interests, it needs interdisciplinary cooperation of sociology, psychology, politics and economics to further promote relevant research.

Conflict of Interests

No conflict of interest was declared by the author.

Funds

[Fund project] general project of National Social Science Foundation of China (13bsh025); Youth Fund for Humanities and Social Sciences Research of the Ministry of Education (12yjc840057); Project supported by the start-up fund for doctoral research of Anhui Normal University (161-070075).

References

1. Chen A. Shuiwuran Shijian zhong de Liyixiangguanzhe Fenxi (Stakeholder Analysis in Water Pollution Incidents). *Zhejiang Academic Journal* 2008; (4): 169-175.
2. Qu G. Zhongguo Huanjing Baohu Shiye Fazhan Licheng Tiyaoyao (Summary of the Development of Environmental Protection in China). *Environmental Protection* 1988; (3): 2-5.
3. Zhou X, Tang W. *Zhongguo Nongcun Huanjing Baohu (China Rural Environmental Protection)*. Beijing: China Environmental Science Press; 1996. p. 128.
4. Hong D. *Shehui Bianqian yu Huanjing Wenti: Dangdai Zhongguo Huanjing Wenti de Shehuixue Chanshi (Social Change and Environmental Problems: A Sociological Interpretation of Environmental Problems in Contemporary China)*. Beijing: Capital Normal University Press; 2001. p. 85.
5. Wan B. Luoshi “Xingdong Jihua” Zhuoli Jiejue Nongcun Wuda Huanjing Wenti (Implement the “Action Plan” and Strive to Solve five major Environmental Problems in Rural Areas). *Environmental Protection* 2007; (1): 15-17.
6. Liu H, Wang Z. Cong Baicun Diaocha Kan Nongcun Huanjing Wenti (On Rural Environmental Problems from the Survey of 100 Villages). *China Reform* 2007; (4): 70-72.
7. Tong Z. *Lichen yu Tedian: Shehui Zhuanxingqi xia de Huanjing Kangzheng Yanjiu (Course and*

- Characteristics: Research on Environmental Resistance in the Period of Social Transformation). *Gansu Theory Research* 2008; (6): 85-90.
8. Cai S. Yong Zhongcai Fangshi Jiejue Huanjing Jiufen de Tantaoyao (Discussion on Solving Environmental Disputes by Arbitration). *Journal of Environmental Management* 1983; (1): 23-25.
 9. Jing J. Renzhi yu Zijue: Yige Xibei Xiangcun de Huanjing Kangzheng (Cognition and Consciousness: Environmental Struggle in a Northwest Village). *Journal of China Agricultural University (Social Sciences)* 2009; (4): 5-14.
 10. Tong Z. Biandongde Huanjing Zuzhi Moshi yu Fazhande Huanjing Yundong Wangluo: Dui Fujiansheng P Xian Yiqi Huanjing Kangzheng Yundong de Fenxi (Changing Environmental Organization Model and Developing Environmental Movement Network: An Analysis of an Environmental Protest Movement in P County, Fujian Province). *Journal of Nanjing University of Technology (Social Sciences)* 2014; (1): 86-93.
 11. Chen T. Guojia Jieru Beijing xia de Diceng Huanjing Kangzheng Yanjiu (Research on the Underlying Environmental Struggle under the Background of State Intervention). *Journal of Hohai University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)* 2015; (3): 33-38.
 12. Chen S, Bai X. Cong Kangzheng Dao Gongjian: Huanjing Kangzheng de Yanbian Luoji (From Resistance to Co-construction: The Evolutionary Logic of Environmental Resistance). *Journal of Hohai University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)* 2015; (3): 28-32.
 13. Chen Z, Bao Z. Zhidu Bianqian, Liyi Fenhua yu Nongmin Huanjing Kangzheng: Yi Hunansheng X Shi Z Diqu wei Ge'an (Institutional Change, Interest Differentiation and Farmers' Environmental Struggle: A Case Study of Z Area, X City, Hunan Province). *Journal of Minzu University of China (Philosophy and Social Sciences)* 2013; (4): 50-61.
 14. Li C, Zhao X. Quntixing Shijian zhong de Yuanshi Dikang: Yi Zhedong Haicun Huanjing Kangzheng Shijian Weili (Primitive Resistance in Group Events: Taking the Environmental Resistance Event in Haicun village, East Zhejiang Province as an Example). *Society* 2012; (5): 179-193.
 15. Luo Y. Xiangcun Gongye Wuran zhong de Huanjing Kangzheng: Dongjingcun Ge'an Yanjiu (Environmental Struggle in Rural Industrial Pollution: A Case Study of Dongjing Village). *Academia Bimestrie* 2010; (2): 91-97.
 16. Zhang Y. Huanjing Kangzheng zhong de Zhongguo Jingyan (Chinese Experience in Environmental Resistance). *Academia Bimestrie* 2010; (2): 66-68.
 17. Zhang J. "Sukuxing Shangfang": Nongmin Huangjing Xinfang de Yizhong Fenxi Kuangjia ("Complaint Petition": An Analytical Framework for Farmers' Environmental Petition). *Journal of Nanjing University of Technology (Social Sciences)* 2014; (1): 78-85.
 18. Zhang J. Zhuanxingqi Guojia yu Nongmin Guanxi de Yixiang Shehuixue Kaocha: Yi Anhui Liangcun "Huanjing Weiquan Shijian" Weili (A Sociological Investigation on the Relationship between Countries and Farmers in Transition: Taking the "Environmental Rights Protection Event" in Two Villages in Anhui Province as an Example). *Journal of Southwest Minzu University (Humanities and Social Sciences)* 2012; (9): 59-63.
 19. Si K. Nongmin Huanjing Kangzheng zhong de "Shenpanxing Zhenli" yu Zhengju Zhanishi: Jiyu Dongcun Nongmin Huanjing Susong de Renleixue Yanjiu ("Judicial Truth" and Evidence Display in Farmers' Environmental Resistance: An Anthropological Study Based on Farmers' Environmental litigation in East Village). *Open Times* 2011; (8): 130-140.
 20. Chen Y. Youxiande Huanjing Kangzheng: Yi X Zhen Zhoubian Jumin de Huanjing Kangzhen Weili (Limited Environmental Resistance: Take the Environmental Resistance of Residents Around X Town as an Example) [PhD thesis]. Nanjing: Nanjing Agricultural University; 2011.
 21. Zhang J. Guonei Nongmin Huanjing Weiquan Yanjiu de Jiegou yu Wenhua Lujing (Structure and Cultural Path of Domestic Farmers' Environmental Rights Protection Research). *Journal of Hohai University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)* 2013; (3): 41-45.

22. Chen T. Zhongguo de Huanjing Kangzheng: Yixiang Wenxian Yanjiu (Environmental Resistance in China: A Literature study). *Journal of Hohai University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)* 2014; (1): 33-43.
23. Wang N. Daibiaoxing Haisi Dianxingxing: Ge'an de Shuxing yu Ge'an de Yanjiu Fangfa de Luoji Jichu (Representativeness or Typicality: The Attribute of the Case and the Logical Basis of the Case Study Method). *Sociological Studies* 2002; (5): 123-125.
24. Zhang J. Zhuanxing Shiqi Nongmin Huanjing Weiquan Yuanyin Tanxi: Yi Anhui Liangcun Weili (Analysis on the Reasons for Farmers' Environmental Rights Protection in the Transition Period: A Case Study of Two Villages in Anhui Province). *Journal of Nanjing University of Technology (Social Sciences)* 2012; (3): 91-99.
25. Ying X. Caogen Dongyuan yu Nongmin Qunti Liyi de Biaoda Jizhi: Sige Ge'an de Bijiao Yanjiu (Grassroots Mobilization and the Expression Mechanism of Farmers' Group Interests: A Comparative Study of Four Cases). *Sociological Studies* 2007; (2): 1-23.
26. Qian S. Lun Huanbao Zili Jiujie (On Self-relief of Environmental Protection). *Journal of Zhejiang University (Humanities and Social Sciences)* 2001; (5): 145-150.
27. He J, Wang W, Ye JZ, *et al.* Huanjing yu Jiankang: Kuaxueke Shijiao (Environment and Health: An Interdisciplinary Perspective). Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press; 2010. p. 224.
28. Wu Y. "Quanli—Liyi de Jiegou Zhiwang" yu Nongmin Quntixing Liyi de Biaoda Kunjing ("The Network of Power-Interest Structure" and the Expression Dilemma of Farmers' Group Interests: An Analysis of a Case of Quarry Dispute). *Sociological Studies* 2007; (5): 21-45.