

# Chinese middle class protesters challenge chemical plant in Dalian, 2011

- [\(mainly or initiated by\) people of color](#) [1]
- [local community or neighborhood-level campaign](#) [2]

## Timing

### Time period notes:

The planning and organizing timeline of the Dalian rally is unknown though likely occurred soon after the Mufia tropical storm damaged the retaining wall outside the Fujian chemical plant during the week of August 8th. Because this information is unknown the timeline of this action is based solely on when people entered the streets.

14 August

2011

to:

15 August

2011

## Location and Goals

### Country:

China

### Location City/State/Province:

Dalian, Liaoning

### Location Description:

Northeastern coastal city

[View Location on Map](#)

### Goals:

Protesters wanted the Fujian chemical plant to be closed and moved out of Dalian, thus ending the risk of a paraxylene leak.

## Methods

### Methods in 1st segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 162. Sit-in

### Methods in 2nd segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 4th segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 5th segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 6th segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 037. Singing ›At some point a number of protesters sang the Chinese national anthem.

Segment Length:

8 hours

## **Classifications**

Classification:

Defense

Cluster:

Environment

Group characterization:

- White-collar middle class workers
- many young professionals

## **Leaders, partners, allies, elites**

Leaders:

Not known

Partners:

Center for Legal Assistance to Pollution Victims

External allies:

Not known

Involvement of social elites:

Bai-Yansong, television host

## **Joining/exiting order of social groups**

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Bai-Yansong
- White-collar middle class workers
- many young professionals

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Additional notes on joining/exiting order:

Though lawyers from the Center for Legal Assistance to Pollution Victims spoke in support of protesters in Dalian, their specific involvement is unknown.

Segment Length:

8 hours

## **Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence**

Opponents:

Fujia Chemical Company, Chinese Government

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

None

Campaigner violence:

There was one documented case of a protester throwing a bottle at police officers, but the protest was otherwise nonviolent. State media reported some minor scuffles, though details are unclear.

Repressive Violence:

There was widespread censorship of social media and local newspapers. An unconfirmed number of protesters were arrested.

## **Success Outcome**

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

6 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Total points:

10 out of 10 points

When the tropical storm Muifa broke along the shore of the northeastern Chinese city of Dalian on 8 August 2011 it broke through the protective dike in front of the Jinzhou Industrial Complex. The dike was immediately protecting some 20 metal tanks holding oil-based chemicals at the Fujia Chemical Plant. The Chinese government dispatched emergency workers, the Dalian Border Guard, and the military to provide emergency repairs to the dike. Local residents near the plant were evacuated.

The Chinese government reported later that week that no chemicals escaped, but residents expressed their concerns on the Sina Micro blog (Weibo) that they did not trust the government's report. Local television host Bai-Yansong publicly complained when a CCTV (China's government-controlled news source) show on dangerous projects in Dalian was cancelled. When his micro blog was frozen, he created a new account and criticized government infringement on "the public information sphere." Other reports indicate that journalists inquiring at the Fujia plant that week had been denied and detained. When official reports were leaked that the plant had not fulfilled initial environmental impact tests, residents became increasingly incensed.

Resident concern over the danger of the Fujia Plant spread widely in Dalian following the storm and the public censorship of information. Residents began to call for the removal of the plant and the paraxylene that the plant produced. Paraxylene (PX) is a benzene-based chemical used to make polyester products as well as plastic bags and bottles. PX is carcinogenic and can cause severe damage to vital organs and death.

It is unclear what group or individual organized the protest against the Fujia plant, but reports indicate that a poster was spread about the micro blogs on 13 August calling for a "group stroll" on Sunday 14 August from 10am on the People's Square toward the Municipal Government Building in Dalian. The term "stroll" had been previously adopted by other grassroots activists in China as a euphemism for protest marches. Blog posts also show that during the week of 8 August, Dalians were increasingly talking about the 2007 protest in the coastal town of Xiamen, which successfully led to the shutdown of a PX plant in that region (see "Chinese residents force relocation of chemical plant in Xiamen, 2007").

Reports indicate that an initial group of protesters gathered at the Municipal Building and commenced a sit-in there early Sunday morning. The identity of this first group has yet to be confirmed, and researchers are encouraged to examine the uncensored local newspaper reports provided by the Chinese Media Project.

By midday Sunday 14 August official government estimates report over 12,000 protesters gathered in front of the Dalian Municipal Government Building. Other estimates run as high as 70,000 protesters. There were many riot police, though specific numbers are unknown. Though some scuffles were reported by government media, including the throwing of water bottles at police officers, the protesters remained widely nonviolent and details of the scuffles were unclear. It is reported that at one point the protesters broke out in song, singing the Chinese national anthem.

Marchers were clearly highly organized, with preprinted shirts, signs, and slogans stating "Get out Fujia PX!," "PX out!," "I love Dalian and reject poison!," and "Protect Dalian!" amongst others. Though the identity of organizers is not yet known, it is widely accepted that social media and micro blogging were crucial for the spread of information amongst Dalian residents.

In an attempt to disperse the crowds, local Communist Party Secretary Tang Jun climbed atop a police vehicle to address the crowds that Sunday. He promised to close and move the Fujia plant but was met with chants of "Time!" "When will it move!," and protesters did not disperse.

An official report that the Fujia plant would be immediately shut down came later Sunday night. On Monday morning, reports show that the plant was still operating, but protesters largely dispersed. Later that day the plant

was shut down and it was confirmed that it would be moved to an undecided location away from Dalian.

Censors attempted to erase Internet posts referring to the Dalian protest and the authorities blocked searches for the terms “PX,” “Dalian” and “Dalian Protests” for a number of weeks after the event. Citizens often reposted pictures with euphemistic captions, or no reference to the location in order to get media through the censors. In particular, the government has sought to erase all reference to Tang Jun’s attempt to directly disperse protesters by addressing their demands.

Despite intense censorship, word of the success of the Dalian protest circulated throughout China and has been cited as inspiration for a number of more recent grassroots environmental protests, including the successful closure of a polluting solar panel plant in Haining (see “Chinese farmers protest solar panel plant pollution, 2011”).

## Research Notes

Influences:

A number Dalian protesters referred to the inspiration of the successful expulsion of a paraxylene plant in the seaport of Xiamen by protest in 2007 (see "Chinese residents force relocation of chemical plant in Xiamen, 2007")(1). Following the success of the Dalian protesters, a number of grassroots groups began demanding the closure of polluting plants in their communities, including the Haining solar panel plant in September 2011 (see "Chinese farmers protest solar panel plant pollution, 2011")(2)

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Additional research contributed by Adam Century, Edy Yin and Shi Da

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Additional Notes:

Due to heavy censorship by the Chinese government, much of the information on this matter is from outside news media. For a detailed study of the censorship of this protest, see the China Media Project.

Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

Pauline Blount, 13/11/2011

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