In China, water issues have posed a great threat to environmental risk governance. In particular, water pollution caused by rapid urbanization and industrialization has been widely discussed in China’s society nowadays. On one hand, this has led to the questioning of credibility and accountability of China’s environmental risk governance. On the other hand, this alludes to the imperatives to focus on the local confrontations with people’s increasing anxious feeling and their ongoing struggles that take place as the result of water crisis in China. Hence, the initial effort of this research is to study the process of environmental risk communication between government agencies and local people using an interface approach. According to Ortwin Renn, four forms of communication can be distinguished in the domain of risk governance – documentation, information, two-way communication (or mutual dialogue), mutual decision-making and involvement. To explore the different forms of risk communication, I will adopt a case study of risk communication on water pollution in Donying City, the Yellow River Delta of China. Considering the research context, this study will mainly focus on point source pollution, namely wastewater from domestic sewage and industrial wastes that is discharged from a single point.

Recently, the Dongying municipality has initiated a number of programs to broaden its communicative channel with the local people. To inform the public of water policies and measures for pollution control, a typical way that is favored by government agencies is to disseminate relevant information to the local residents. Besides, the local municipality has promised adequate public information display through building electronic infrastructure (official website, video etc.) to increase people’s accessibility. Moreover, they organize ‘on-line discussion forum’ regularly in order to encourage citizens to communicate and consult with the local officials about issues such as water supply and wastewater treatment. In spite of this, little is known about what kind of information about what takes place within the local water bureaucracy is available; how information affects people’s risk perceptions on water issues and their household behaviors; how information formulates their responses to water pollution and related issues; how institutional (dis) trust affects their attitude and actions to support/complement with the local municipality for sustainable water resource management. Based on these considerations, this research aims to address some key issues relevant to the research questions outlined below.

Research Questions:

1) How does the local water bureaucracy work generally in the setting of Dongying city? What are the opportunities and challenges the municipality faces for providing clean and reliable water supply to the local residents?

2) How is water pollution perceived in the local society? What are the main conflicts involved in the process of communication on water pollution?

3) How is water-related information transferred/communicated in the local society? If/How does this information affect people’s risk perception and their response to water pollution?

4) What mechanism/learning platform/ social infrastructure is in need to activate and (or) facilitate a transparent and shared information system for risk communication?