

Ruth S. Adams
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2007 WINNER
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Environmentalism as Catalyst for the Development of Civil Society in China

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This issue of the Journal of International Policy Solutions marks the second annual publication of the Ruth S. Adams Graduate Student Essay Competition Winner. The Ruth Adams Competition is an annual graduate student essay competition on the topic of international civil society. It asks students to explore the role of global civil society in impacting any national or international issue.

The competition honors Ruth S. Adams (1923.2005), a former visiting scholar at UCSD and the editor of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists for more than a decade. Charismatic, deeply principled, and compassionate, Adams devoted her life to a wide array of nongovernmental organizations. She was the only woman in attendance at the very first Pugwash Conference on Science and World Affairs in 1957, which was sponsored by Albert Einstein, Linus Pauling, and other preeminent scientists. She organized cooperative international scientific efforts on Third World development, arranged for the training and financing of international security scholars, and actively supported enhanced roles for women in international relations research. To further the goals to which she devoted her life, her friends, colleagues, and organizations who share in Ruth's vision have created this essay competition.

This year's winner, Joshua Wickerham, analyzes the response of Chinese civil society to environmental threats and the implications for political actors.

ABSTRACT

The goal of this paper is to determine how willing the principal actors in China's economy are to bear the potential social and economic costs of sustainable development as a proxy for understanding the depth of the development of civil response to China's environmental threats. The conclusions are based on trends, opinions, and actions of three main groups: the government, consumers, and corporate managers.

It is an open secret that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) wants to cultivate civil society in the People's Republic. Beijing just wants to maintain one-party rule and avoid the inherent instability of transitioning democracies¹ as this happens. Especially where it involves environmental protection, officials have begun gradually introducing frameworks for citizens to participate in drafting legislation, addressing grievances, and enforcing regulations. In a highly significant departure from Stalinist-Maoist-Dengist communist ideologies pursued since the 1949 revolution, the Hu-Wen administration is increasingly emphasizing the importance of non-state actors in extending the rule of law, open debate, and personal responsibility with regards to the environment. According to Beijing's own calculations, China's transition to a path of sustainable development cannot take place without creating legitimate space for citizens to challenge corruption and unlawful behavior, and for new ways in which civil society, business, and government work together.

Almost all the experts have been wrong about the Chinese environment. Its state of degradation is much worse than people imagined even one year ago. Experts have predicted

for years that the United States would continue to be the biggest CO₂ producer. However, after accounting for data errors and miscalculations, the newest estimates point to China surpassing the United States as early as next year.² Yet the response by the Chinese people is also staggering. According to opinion polls, published data, and the literature about the dynamic interplay of the three groups in this study, it is clear that the degradation of the immediate natural environment is of high concern to Chinese in all socioeconomic sectors. Less clear is how public opinion and the potential for coordinating individual action combine to spur China's coming environmental transformation.

Cursory summaries dismiss the average Chinese citizen, emphasizing their selfish price-pinching market activity, low education levels, and ignorance of environmental concerns. While these assessments have some credence, they do not account for the dramatic rise in the number of Chinese environmental NGOs, which are too numerous to estimate, much less count.³ Most current studies cannot account for or

¹ Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao has made repeated pronouncements that China's transition to democracy is still at least 100 years away. See East-West Center.

² Naughton, personal interview.

³ This has to do with the complicated nature of Chinese NGO governance, including restrictive registration processes, caps on the number of NGOs per geographic area, and perhaps fear of government oversight. The All-China Environmental

even acknowledge the rise of environmental participation in China. They ignore the surging market for organic and Green Food.⁴ They focus on the fact that, like citizens worldwide, Chinese still exhibit selfish characteristics of only wanting to pay for pollution that affects them personally.⁵ China finds itself low on the Kuznet Curve pattern of high-polluting developing economies transitioning to a low environmental impact economy, meaning that traditional economic theory points to steadily increasing pollution before a peak and decline.⁶ Scholars expect a technocratic solution to China's environmental problems.⁷ Still, evidence suggests that attitudes have shifted dramatically in recent years, even indicating that Chinese environmental awareness is reaching a critical mass which spells imminent changes for the Chinese economy and society. Concern about lack of environmental progress has reached unprecedented levels.⁸ What if China's environmental revolution is not slow? These data show that, just as the more traditional aspects of the Chinese economy surprise even seasoned veterans, China has the potential for a dramatic shift in the way its citizens treat the natural world, and the way citizens understand their role in civil society. By fostering environmental awareness, tolerance for dissent, and international cooperation, China can take advantage of rising personal income, education levels, and environmental concern

Federation (ACEF) estimates that environmental NGOs in China will continue to grow at 10-15% annually for the foreseeable future. This estimate is based on a survey of the *Development Situation Report on China's Civil [minjian] Environmental Organizations* (中国环保民间组织发展状况报告, *Zhongguo Huanbao Minjian Zuzhi Fabiao Zhuangkuang Baogao*) conducted by ACEF and the *China Youth Daily*. Civic organizations represent 7.2% of environmental groups, while government-initiated groups stand at 49.9%, though only 23.3% were duly registered with Civil Affairs authorities. These groups play an important role in "enhancing environment protection awareness," "monitoring and policy recommendation," "poverty alleviation and promoting green economics," "safeguarding the rights of vulnerable groups," and "biodiversity conservation." Nearly 30% of groups have no full-time staff and suffer from "lack of funds." Clearly, estimating the number of environmental groups in China at this time is next to impossible. See: China Development Brief, July 2006. "Green Grow the NGOs – Oh! Says Close-to-Government Group." pp. 22-3. Ho (p. 10) describes the institutional barriers to full NGO registration.

⁴ Green Foods were developed in 1994 under the State Environmental Protection Agency. They are defined as "non-polluting, safe, high-quality, and nutritious." See Xinhua.

⁵ Hay, Stavins, Vietor, p. 159.

⁶ Naughton, p. 487.

⁷ Day, preface.

⁸ In one recent online poll conducted by Xingua News Agency, more than 90 percent of visitors said there was "no time to delay" on environmental projects. Though not an unbiased sample or poll, it is indicative of growing unrest of inadequate environmental laws and burgeoning civil society, "新华网副总裁白林说, 两会前夕, 新华网推出的两会热点关注调查中, 有超过90%的网民认为环境保护工作极其紧迫刻不容缓关注度前所未有的。Xinhua Wang fuzonghai Bai Sen shuo, liang hui qianxi, Xinhua Wang tuichu de liang hui re dian guanzhu diaocha zhong, you chaoguo 90% de wangmin renew huanjing baohu gongzuo ji qi jinpo keburonghuan guanzhu du qian suo wei you." See Qingdao Environmental Net.

to embark on what may be the most widespread non-economic ideological campaign since the Cultural Revolution.

TRADITIONAL NOTIONS AND GOVERNMENT ATTITUDES, ACTION, AND RESPONSE

Before the 20th Century, no fewer than a dozen words would have been required to describe the English notions of "nature" in traditional Chinese.⁹ Throughout dynastic China, the natural world was usually considered something that could be improved upon.¹⁰ Just look at a Chinese nature painting and you'll invariably see a person or a small house. More dramatic were the effects of Mao's calls to wage war against nature—from felling fruit trees to smelt iron during the Great Leap Forward, to the New Socialist Man image concocted during the Cultural Revolution.¹¹ Even still, these were not so much radical departures from an old ideal as continuations of previous dynasties' indifference toward environmental degradation.¹² For reasons that exceed the scope of this paper, western naturalists cannot expect Chinese to view nature as something pristine, virgin, or original. There is no "return to nature" movement, but instead the call to envision living in harmony with the environment, part of the government's call for a "harmonious society."¹³ For our purposes, the definition of sustainable development put forth by the World Commission on Environment and Development is suitable to describe the ideal of China's emerging environmental trajectory:

"Sustainable Development is the ability of humanity to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. [It] is not a fixed state of harmony but rather a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development and institutional changes are made consistent with future as well as present needs."¹⁴

This very notion that "[sustainable development] is not a fixed state of harmony" frightens party hardliners, but has been a natural outcropping of China's social and economic development. For the first time in its history, CCP leaders mandated public commentary on 2003 draft legislation, which was environmental.¹⁵ Since the first National Conference on the Environment in 1973, the government has gone from considering nature as irrelevant during the Deng era¹⁶ to seeing energy consumption, moderation, and pollution reduction as top priorities.¹⁷ From a system of few laws and many heavy polluters with little enforcement in the 1970s and 1980s,¹⁸ China has evolved into a system that, according to government figures, brings more than 95 percent of buildings

⁹ Weller, pp. 8, 20-23.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Cannon, p. 27.

¹² Naughton, p. 487.

¹³ This call is being led by the government and echoed by environmental NGOs. The author theorizes this to be an extenuation of the Hu-Wen administrations' theme of a "Harmonious Society."

¹⁴ World Commission on Environment and Development, p 43.

¹⁵ Ma

¹⁶ Cannon, p. 28.

¹⁷ Specifically, the government set the target of "reducing energy consumption per unit of gross domestic product by 20 percent and major pollutants discharge by 10 percent in the Eleventh Five-Year Plan." See Xinhua b.

¹⁸ Day, pp. 35-6.

to conformity with environmental standards, with more than 99 percent of major projects receiving environmental impact assessments.¹⁹ The attitude of the government used to be that development was a *precondition* for sustainable development.²⁰ Now sustainable development is a goal unto itself, even though small fines and lack of enforcement means the State Environmental Protection Agency's (SEPA) major strength comes through media and education.²¹

In an April 2006 speech at the opening meeting of the 6th National Environmental Protection Convention, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao laid out the central government's strategy for three transformations of Chinese environmental attitudes.²² First, the economy will transform from one that stresses GDP growth at the expense of the environment to one that places equal value on GDP growth and environmental protection. Second, these two areas should march in lockstep. Third, a transformation of the political structure of environmental enforcement will occur, replacing administrative action with the integrated approach of enforcing environmental standards according to law, economic activity, and the research and development of new environmental technologies. This combines an as-of-yet unclear combination of investment control, industry regulation, and pollution prevention. Wen stresses the importance of citizen awareness (*zijue*) of environmental issues.

In a speech at the end of 2006,²³ Pan Yue, Vice Director of SEPA, reiterated Wen's concerns, but stated also that Chinese should "seek the essence of socialism." In an October 2006 interview,²⁴ Pan described "eco-socialism" as being important to the future of the CCP. He says this system, "lay[s] the blame for the global environmental crisis at the feet of the capitalist system, and propose[s] using Marxist dialectics to repudiate a purely economic rationality."²⁵ Though Pan does not consider himself an eco-socialist, he says socialism is "more able to provide people with fully-rounded development. In particular, green activists and socialists are able to agree on balancing economic growth and the environment, equality of distribution and grassroots democracy."²⁶

While CCP leaders are taking great risk to promote a sphere of public dialogue about the future of the Chinese ecological and economic governance structure, their efforts to put environmental concerns at the forefront of national policy are also very pragmatic. This allows them to co-opt a burgeoning social movement and bring it under Party jurisdiction. It shows a practical responsiveness to citizen concern about the environment, which is important for political stability.

From a Party standpoint, opening this kind of debate also creates threats to political stability. The first is from activists who insist on the links between environmental issues and democratization.²⁷ The second and more manageable risk is public dissent that targets officials who fall short of environmental goals, which, in many cases can be seen as

beneficial to good governance and in line with the Hu-Wen administration's anti-corruption campaigns, initiated in late 2006 in the run-up to the 17th Party Congress in 2007. These charges could test the limits of transparency and government tolerance for scrutiny. As with most Chinese policies, the central government's public stance is difficult to enforce at the local level. That the CCP would tolerate and even encourage public participation in the environment demonstrates the importance of environmental protection to the Chinese leadership beyond the previous Party line of economic growth as the number one priority.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT DELINQUENCY AND INCREASING PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

According to statistics, Chinese citizens' trust in the government ranks highest in the world,²⁸ even though a majority of Chinese are unhappy with the country's current environmental laws. As of 1998, two thirds of Chinese were dissatisfied with environmental laws, compared to 60 percent in the United States.²⁹ A nation-wide opinion poll on Chinese people's attitudes toward the environment released in January 2007 revealed that 73 percent of respondents agreed they had "swallowed their anger" on environmental issues.³⁰ In a March 2007 Xinhua online survey, 90 percent of respondents said there was "no time to delay on environmental legislation."³¹ Though not an unbiased figure, this survey reflects drastic changes in environmental attitudes since the 2003 environmental law. Public frustration over the environment is reflected in citizens' level of anger, and the disconnect between citizens and government officials over environmental progress. Though reams of old surveys provide insight into sometimes contradictory data on public opinion toward government action on the environment, a 2006 opinion poll conducted by government authorities in Shanxi Province probably provides one of the most appropriate and accurate lenses to examine the sentiment of the masses. Pollsters asked whether "a mayor who grows the economy at the expense of the environment" should keep his job. Seventy-one percent of citizens answered "no," while 91 percent of government officials said "yes."³² Essentially, this reveals the distance between the central government's macro view of environmental protection through sustainable development, and citizens' higher environmental priorities. It also shows that incentive structures for local government officials and the means of evaluating these leaders are not yet in accordance with central government ideals. Keeping local officials in line goes a long way toward explaining why the Party is willing to allow and even promote an environmental movement.

COMPLAINT LETTERS AS A MEANS OF UNDERSTANDING ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS AND GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Citizen complaints can be an indicator of both environmental quality and citizen awareness of the environment. Since

¹⁹ SEPA data

²⁰ Gao pp. 95-6.

²¹ Ma

²² Xinhua c

²³ Pan Yue

²⁴ Zhou Jigang

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Economy has an interesting section on China's new non-Party environmentalist political actors. See Economy, pp. 131-169.

²⁸ "78 percent of Chinese respondents said they trust the government to do 'what is right,' compared to a worldwide average of only 38 percent." See China CSR

²⁹ This according to the 1998 International Environmental Monitor Survey, coordinated by Environics International. See EcoIQ.

³⁰ They actually agreed to the statement "忍气吞声, rentitunsheng". See Xinhua e

³¹ Qingdao Environment Net

³² Ma

1995, the State Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) has annually recorded the number of complaint letters it receives. According to a 1996 nationwide World Bank study, complaints in the early 1990s were below socially optimal levels.³³ The study showed that city residents in affluent Shanghai were six times more likely to make complaints than rural residents in more impoverished Gansu Province. It also showed and that government agencies were highly responsive to these complaints. The authors theorize that this reflects a higher willingness to pay in urban areas, which generally are better off financially and have higher disposable income.

The authors say that the major problem with this model of environmental awareness and pollution assessment is that most of the complaints deal with "nuisance" pollution and may ignore truly hazardous but less obvious problems, such as colorless or odorless contamination, which may go entirely unnoticed. Using the researchers' scale, a one degree increase in traditional "dust and soot pollution" had a complaint elasticity of .2, while less obvious pollutants like sulfur dioxide and "chemical oxygen damage" were insignificantly correlated with complaint levels.³⁴

The fact that some groups complain more than others reflects differences in education levels. Highly educated citizens are not only more likely to know about environmental issues, but do not face the potential embarrassment of engaging more educated government officials, a phenomenon researchers label the "silencing effect." Holding everything else constant, high income provinces were 110 percent more likely to complain than less educated provinces.³⁵ A one percent increase in literacy rates led to 1.7-1.8 more complaints.³⁶ Ceteris paribus, when researchers grouped complaints into literacy rate levels, an increase above the 60-84 percent literacy rate had the same effect as a doubling of income or a ten-fold increase in pollution density levels.³⁷

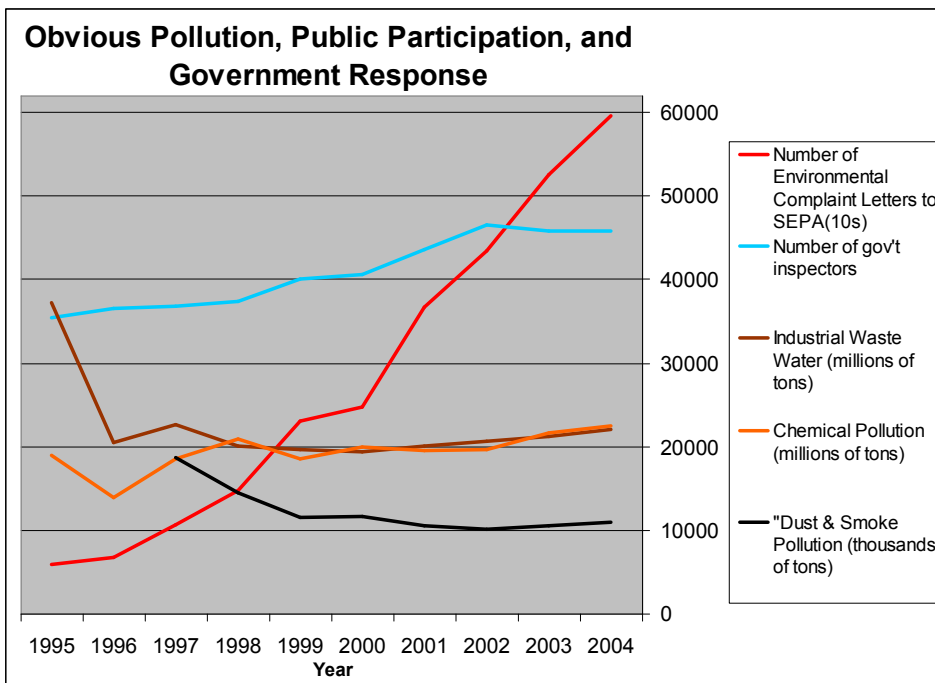
According to SEPA figures, the agency received a little over 595,000 letters in 2004, a 13.2 percent increase over the previous year. (See graph below). On average, complaints increased 47 percent every year from 1995 to 2004. Assuming the World Bank findings are true today, there are three potential reasons for this increase. First, environmental awareness is rising. Second, incomes are rising. Third, pollution levels are rising. At first glance, all of these seem true. But when we graph the "obvious pollution" levels over the same period, we see that industrial waste, water discharge, chemical pollution, and the traditional category of "dust and smoke" pollution are fairly constant. Complaint letters, meanwhile, soar.

Year	complaints	inspectors	complaints/inspector ³⁸
2004	595852	45849	12.99597
2003	525988	45813	11.4812
2002	435020	46515	9.352252
2001	367402	43629	8.42105
2000	247741	40674	6.090893
1999	230346	40105	5.743573
1998	147630	37467	3.940267
1997	106210	36773	2.88826
1996	67268	36586	1.838627
1995	58678	35452	1.655139

If we compare this letter data to the number of government inspectors working on environmental cases, we see little correlation. The number of complaints per worker has

increased eight times over the nine-year period, which explains at least five possible non-exclusive characteristics of the relation between citizens and SEPA. First, SEPA may have seen great gains in worker efficiency, which seems unlikely but not impossible. More likely, we can corroborate the 1998 and 2006 surveys about people being unhappy with environmental protection laws and enforcement. Third, the data reflect China's socio-economic transformation, showing the effects of rising income, the WTP factor, education levels, and decreasing tolerance levels for pollution. Fourth, they reflect the government's willingness to hear and respond to complaints. Lastly, these data may also help us to understand the level of citizen action in dealing with environmental concerns. For example, it could be that citizens are dealing with more environmental issues on their own and are not relying as heavily on inspectors. Considering Minister of SEPA Zhou Shengxiang's

admission that his agency, with some 300-odd staff, has almost no power at the local level, we cannot safely rule out any of these possible factors.³⁹ Obviously SEPA is only



³³ Dasgupta, Wheeler

³⁴ Ibid, p. 11.

³⁵ Ibid, p. 13.

³⁶ Ibid, p. 12.

³⁷ Ibid, p. 15.

³⁸ SEPA

³⁹ Qingdao Environmental Net

capable of dealing with the nation's worst polluters, and even then mostly through media campaigns.⁴⁰ If we can rule out efficiency gains in the inspection regime, this provides fairly compelling evidence that locals are dealing with environmental issues at the village, town, county, city, and provincial levels by putting pressure on polluters and corrupt officials. Lastly, we cannot deny the fact that these data may be as shoddy as an unregulated coal mine. Still, if the pollution data are biased, SEPA may be the one agency more inclined to show that pollution levels have risen, as that could encourage central leaders to grant the agency more power. More objective pollution level data may be able to substantiate or repudiate these claims, but only SEPA data is available.

CITIZENS' ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS: PROMINENT ISSUES, KNOWLEDGE, AND WILLINGNESS TO PAY A PREMIUM FOR HEALTH AND PERSONAL SAFETY

Public's Rank-Ordered List of Problems at National Level⁴²

Problem	Rank			
	1998 Adult	Youth	1995 Overall	Rural
Public Order	1	4	3	3
Education	2	3	2	2
Population	3	2	4	4
Employment	4	5	10	9
Environmental Protection	5	1	6	9
Social Security	6	6	NM	NM

Public Knowledge of Environmental Concerns⁴³

Problem	Never Heard of Such Problem (%)		
	Overall	Urban	Rural
Global Warming	23.9	8.7	44.1
Ozone layer Depletion	40.9	20	68.9
Acid Rain	52.4	33.8	77.3
Fresh Water Shortage	26	11.9	44.8
Reduction of Biodiversity	25.8	14.7	40.7

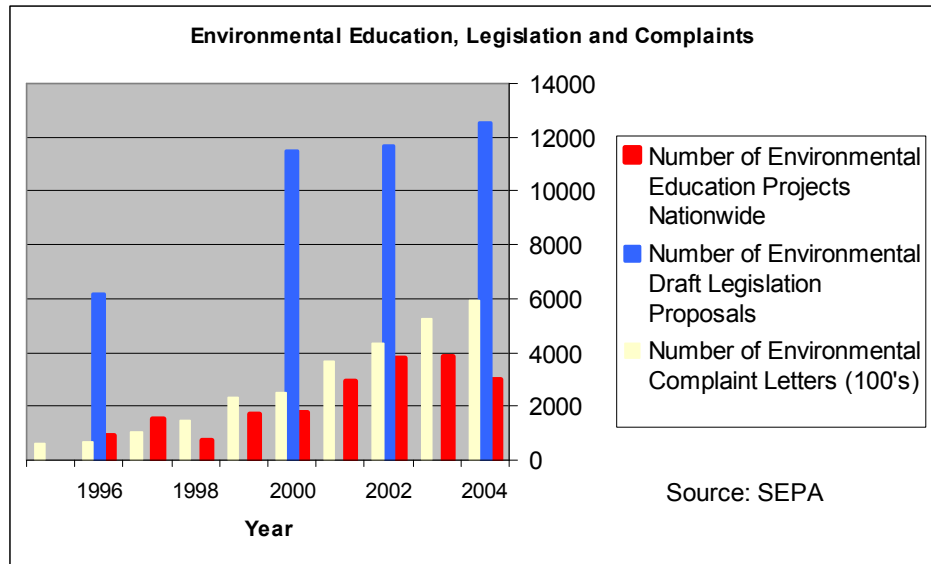
The first published environmental surveys in China were carried out in 1990. The data are as confusing and contradictory as they are potentially illuminating. As one would expect, they showed great differences in opinion across sociodemographic levels. Poor, less educated Chinese are less likely than urban Chinese to know about environmental issues, but more likely to be upset with the state of the environment because they see more immediate effects than

just air and water pollution.⁴⁴ In 1995, 1998, and 1999 surveys, adults across all regions ranked environmental concerns well below issues like public order, education, population, employment, and economic development. Another survey of 3,000 adult residents in ten cities in the year 2000 shows environmental concerns trumping all others for the first time,⁴⁵ but respondents to a 2002 poll by the China Daily shows the environment ranked at tenth place.⁴⁶ In 2005, urban residents ranked air quality as their number one concern, above social security and economic development.⁴⁷ Data on rural Chinese opinions is slim.

Public's Rank-Ordered List of National Development Goals 1999⁴¹

Goal	Rank
Economic Development	1
Scientific Research	2
Population Control	3
Social Justice	4
Environmental Protection	5

Though evidence of a recent general shift among the masses from ignoring the environment to emphasizing sustainable development is sometimes contradictory and not completely substantiated, overall evidence points to a likely turnaround in environmental attitudes in China. This could be due to many factors, including increased government focus on environmental problems, a perceived worsening of pollution and environmental problems, the result of transition economy considerations like rising income levels and alleviation of other problems, or a combination of the above. Just as the World Bank study revealed, increased environmental education likely has a huge effect on the increase in complaints, although it is hard to corroborate this with survey results. An important factor to consider is the substantial rise



in the number of educational activities in recent years, as well as the number of environmental draft legislation proposals.

⁴⁰ Gao, pp95-6.

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 45

⁴² Lee, Yok-Shui F., in Day, pp. Day. p. 44.

⁴³ Day, p. 50

⁴⁴ Ibid. pp. 35-65.

⁴⁵ US Embassy Beijing, 2000 poll of 3000 people in 10 ten cities: 1st concern: environmental degradation and protection top concern of 3000 urban Chinese. 2 unemployment, 3 children's education, 4 social stability, 5 crime, 6 corruption, 7 economic growth 8 social security.

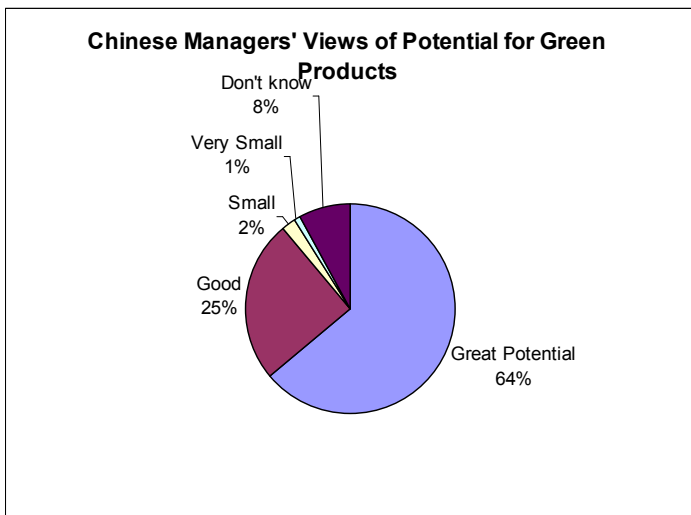
⁴⁶ Straights Times

⁴⁷ Business Week

Also important is that general knowledge of large-scale, non-nuisance environmental issues starts from a very low baseline, as the table above indicates. Even a dramatic increase in citizens' knowledge of the environment probably leaves China far below developed country in terms of mobilizing citizen participation on issues like global warming, acid rain, and biodiversity loss. Still, the most recent survey results, listed in the table above, are from 1999. 2006 surveys by SEPA indicate that more than 80 percent of respondents are willing to pay a premium on goods that are better for their health, but only if the price premium is not over five percent.⁴⁸ The survey also reveals that people are most willing to spend extra money on bath products, food, and household electrical appliances. Willingness to pay for less localized environmental concerns is unknown, but, theoretically, should be on the rise. Still, even by paying more for perceived benefits to health and better taste that Green Foods provide, these products reduce farmer injury from pesticide exposure, minimize the environmental degradation by over spraying pesticides and fertilizers, and involve consumers at an everyday level in making a difference with their purchases alone.

CHINESE MANAGERIAL SURVEYS ON THE POTENTIAL FOR GREEN PRODUCTS, CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND WILLINGNESS TO PAY FOR GREEN DEVELOPMENT

Though corroboratory or baseline data from managers in other countries and regions is not forthcoming, Chinese managerial surveys show a high potential for green products in the mainland Chinese market.⁴⁹ It is not clear how "green



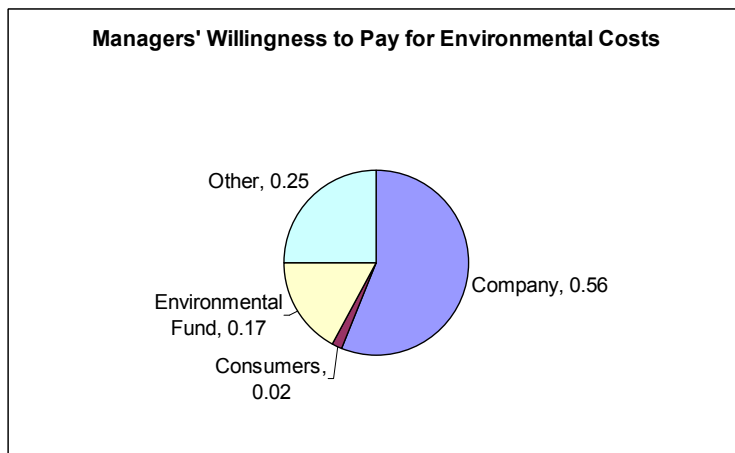
product" was defined, or if managers' view of green products is consistent with their managerial objectives. There are a wide variety of factors driving managerial decisions to pursue green development strategies, namely government regulation, fear of negative publicity, "goodwill," management values, corporate culture, social norms, and pressure from investors, employees, or consumers.⁵⁰ Carefully designed

⁴⁸ SEPA survey

⁴⁹ Steger, Fang, Wei, eds. p. 38.

⁵⁰ Vogel, David J. "Opportunities for and Limitations of Corporate Environmentalism." See Hay, Stavins, Vietor, p. 201.

studies that have looked at increased probability of profits or shareholder value from environmentally friendly firms have found negative correlation or unexplained positive correlation.⁵¹ It should be noted that in the above-cited study, 90 percent of managers originally answered that they were "very willing to pay" for environmental protection, but



researchers adjusted this number because of bias, which they did not explain in detail.⁵² One potential cause of this error is that managers are overly optimistic about the potential for developing green products in an open survey, but face limitations from firm governance structures and shareholder profit expectations. On the other hand, Chinese industry is starting from such a low efficiency level that there is significant potential for cost savings from greening operations.

Manager willingness to pay for environmental protection surveys in China again show that managers are optimistic about their ability to clean up operations.⁵³ Unlike developed country enterprises, where environmental protection may lead to a decline in profitability, Chinese companies may indeed see increases in efficiency that benefit their bottom line. Again, the absence of comparable international survey data provides no baseline for the Chinese data, but there is still reason to be optimistic about these trends, especially concerning the growth in Chinese corporate social responsibility.⁵⁴

CONCLUSION

Chinese citizens have taken the first steps on the path to sustainable future development. The degree to which this new growth will be dictated by business interests, legal reforms, and stronger enforcement policy remains to be seen. The potential for dynamic, consumer-driven sustainability has certainly not reached its zenith and in fact progress remains quite likely given that China has not reached a high waste, high consumption pattern. There is no evidence that Chinese consumers will be less responsive to this environmental challenge than consumers elsewhere.⁵⁵ Corporate and industry responsibility toward sustainable development has just begun and should continue as the government realigns incentives and consumers exhibit further willingness to pay.⁵⁶

⁵¹ Reinhardt, Forest L., "Perspectives from the Business Literature." See Hays, Stavins, Vietor, pp. 170-7.

⁵² Steger, Zhaoaben, Wei, p. 38.

⁵³ Ibid, p. 76.

⁵⁴ Personal Interview, William Valentino, April 2007.

⁵⁵ UNDP, pp. 47-8.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 48.

While China's current and projected environmental problems are historically unprecedented, so are other dynamics in the Chinese economy and society, like NGO growth and environmental awareness and education. Central government leaders have shown that China's potential solutions to environmental problems may make the Middle Kingdom the first country to develop an environmental movement that involves ideology without political struggle, but government policy, business action, and public campaigns are not enough. While guidelines for environmental protection can be imposed from above, truly caring for the earth requires personal commitments and accountability from multiple stakeholders. Citizens along a polluted river cannot count on weak central government environmental regulations and lax enforcement. Bringing polluters to justice requires coordinated civil campaigns. Preventing a neighbor from using excess chemical fertilizers or pesticides that pollute a village water source cannot be imposed by the government. In a crisis exacerbated by unchecked global capitalism, Chinese citizens have an opportunity to help the environment with their pocketbooks. With the government's ostensible backing, Chinese can claim rights and raise their voices against corrupt leaders. But much of this remains to be seen. However China's environmental civil rights movement unfolds, the next decade will prove decisive for the environment in China and the world.

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