

Growth v. Environment or Growth and the Environment, China's Dilemma

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China's extraordinary growth and the damage that this has done both to its domestic environment and to global problems are well known. Less represented in popular discourse is the rise of environmental concerns in both the population and the government of China. Declarations by top officials, official policies and actions show how worried they are by both the impact on their citizens now and the critical threats posed in the future by water shortage, pollution of the air, soil and water, and rising sea levels caused by global warming. China is also concerned about its international image. But faced by a world in recession, shrinking export markets slowing domestic growth, rising unemployment, increasing unrest, will China's authorities, particularly at provincial and city level sacrifice environmental improvement to the need to promote growth, salvage loss-making industries, save banks saddled with non-performing loans to industries and local governments, and preserve employment.

The urgency of these problems must weigh heavily on all authorities. In the cash -strapped countries of USA and most of Europe the majority of citizens seem to have decided that any actions to reduce emissions of greenhouse gasses that involve sacrifices can be postponed. Some citizens and their governments are in denial. Others may still talk of concern, but their actions in terms of misguided subsidies that continue, and useful ones that have been cut, suggest a lack of commitment to cutting greenhouse gasses.

What does recent history of China's policies and actions in terms of interventions at home and internationally imply for their future contribution to global warming and the protection of China's population from the consequences of both local pollution and of global warming?

The aim of this contribution is to distil from basic statistics on trends in China's energy consumption, energy efficiency, proportion of energy from renewable and non-polluting sources, water consumption and availability, agricultural and industrial pollution, as much as can be drawn from the data. Next, to examine what can be learned from reports of incidents of pollution, internal debates and contributions to these by NGOs, and finally China's contribution to international discussion of global warming and its willingness to act to reduce China's contribution to the production of green house gasses and local pollution.