

EMERGING GLOBAL LEADERSHIP ON CLIMATIC STABILIZATION: WHY CHINA WILL STEP FORWARD

PETER H. KOEHN, PROFESSOR OF POLITICAL SCIENCE & DIRECTOR,
GLOBAL PUBLIC HEALTH PROGRAM, UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

PRESENTATION AT THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL FACILITY

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THE GLOBAL LEADERSHIP *VOID*

CLIMATE CHANGE IS A
“HOAX” CREATED BY
CHINA

The USA should
withdraw from the
COP21 Paris agreement



TRUMP'S EARLY ANTI-LEADERSHIP ACTIONS

- EPA
 - Scott Pruitt, Administrator; stacks top offices (*NYT*, 8 March 2017)
 - budget *proposal*: \$2.6 billion cut (-31%); “zeros-out” climate-change programs
 - reduce EPA personnel from about 15,000 to 11,800
 - remove or ease regs. Link regenerated econ growth with fossil-fuel energy production
- Eliminate U.S. funding for the Green Climate Fund and its two precursor Climate Investment Funds (State, Treasury)
- Replace EPA cuts with increased GHG-intensive military spending

STILL TO BE DECIDED

- **Help mobilize the billions of \$ needed annually so poor countries can choose low-carbon pathways and adapt to climate change?**

CHINA

WORLD'S *LEADING* GHG EMITTER

CHINA CAN FILL THE VOID LEFT BY US WITHDRAWAL

- President Xi Jinping: China is prepared to step up as protector of global environment. Paris agreement “is a responsibility we must shoulder for the sake of our future generations.”
- Strategy: “serene under tumultuous clouds” – Mao Zedong
- China’s soft power

NOT AN IDLE CLAIM. EVIDENCE:

- 103 specifically designated coal-fired power plants. 2020 limit on coal-fired power generation
- national carbon market; cities already trading carbon credits. If these exchanges work, “will be powerful examples for the rest of the developing world” (Henry Paulson Jr., *NYT* 20 Sept. 2016)
- decoupling econ growth from use of fossil fuels (decrease carbon intensity 60%-65%)
- >US\$360B: renewable energy sources thru 2020. Rapid transition non-fossil-fuel based energy. Industry leader in solar & wind. Greenpeace researcher: China could meet its 2020 solar-installation goals by 2018
- green finance “strategic imperative”; 40% global market in sale of green bonds
- China’s GHG reductions: leveling off planet-wide emissions past 3 years

THE LESS ROSY PICTURE

- Coal gasification (coal-to-gas) plants
- Coal-powered steel production
- Offshoring emissions (resource exploitation and transportation)
- Increased domestic *consumption* and 6.5-7% GDP growth thru 2030
- Paris Agreement: transparency and verification
 - reliable coal-consumption statistics
 - Accurate reporting and verification systems?
- Reliable national *and* bottom-up *impact evaluations*?
- GHG emissions peak no later than 2030?
 - increases in motor-vehicle ownership and operation
 - depends on greater energy efficiencies (Ming Yang and Xin Yu, *MASGC*, 2015)

WHY WILL CHINA STEP FORWARD? THE DEBATEABLE QUESTION

- Response to imposed top-down decisions prodded by international negotiations and regulations?
- *Or*, primarily driven by independent, bottom-up developments and pressures?



4Cs: 2 PRINCIPAL THEMES

- 1. Local level is key (bottom-up position)*
- 2. Public health will drive China's interest in GHG-emission mitigation*

4Cs' SUBNATIONAL FOCUS

- Subnational low-carbon initiatives largely determine China's progress
- Highlights under-the-radar local govt & NGO initiatives (chpt 4)
- Summary: impressive, but insufficient

SINCE THE BOOK

- COP21, cities pledged to accelerate GHG reductions
- Bicycle resurgence: e.g., shared bikes in Beijing
(*NYT*, 20 March 2017; also P. Koehn, “Back to the Future: Bicycles, Human Health, and GHG Emissions in China.” *China Environment Series* 9 (2007):123-126)
- Important recent related scholarship

SULAN CHEN & JUHA UITTO*

- Subnational initiatives need to be “mainstreamed” into policy
- Scaling up thru replication. E.g., ‘eco-cities’ or ‘low-carbon cities’ (Joss and Molella, 2013)
- 3rd pillar of UNDP’s small-grants programme: community empowerment (CE). CE essential because “the quantity of problems exceed the capacity of the state.”
- How can China’s communities be further mobilized for climate protection?
- **“Accountability Delegation: Empowering Local Communities for Environmental Protection in China,” Development (2016).*
- *“Small Grants, Big Impacts: Aggregation Challenges” in Evaluating Environment in International Development, edited by Uitto (2014).[also Uitto’s chapter 14 in that book]*

FENGSHI WU & YUAN XU*

- Transnational linkages among US and Chinese NGOs
 - Their work is sustainable and “not easily interrupted by administrative or regime shifts in either country”
 - Transnational advocacy networks emerging
 - Environmental protests no longer locally defined and confined. An “imagined community” of broader stakeholders spread the word nation-wide.**
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- **“Sino-American Environmental Relations: The Potential of Trans-Societal Linkages,” Issues & Studies* 49, 3 (2013):73-110.
 - **23 March 2016 presentation by Fengshi Wu at the “Changing Landscape of Environmental Public Participation and Protest in China” forum, Wilson Center, China Environment Forum.

WEILA GONG*: CAUTION

- Local government capacity depends on sufficient trained personnel. Alliances with key local actors, particularly with the low-carbon industrial sectors, also huge.
 - Uneven transition progress at 3 low-carbon city pilots because LG competence gaps still need to be addressed.
 - Tremendous potential exists at city level.
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- *“Limits to a Bottom-up Approach in China’s Low-carbon Transition? Evidence from the Low-carbon Practices in Local China.” paper presented at the International Studies Association annual meeting, Atlanta, 16-19 March 2016.

PROMISING DEVELOPMENTS: TRANSNATIONAL CAPACITY-BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS

- International, bi-lateral, NGO, and diaspora levels (chapters 6 & 7 of 4Cs).
- Chen & Uitto (2016) predict China's "local governments will feel more willing to provide financial, technical and political support to NGO [environmental-protection] projects."
- Recent examples of transnational collaboration:
 - Guangdong Provincial Dept of Housing <--> RAND
 - US Green Building Council: LEED scoring & certification mechanisms

Source: Wilson Center event

CONSTRAINING DEVELOPMENTS

- State enterprises and subnational officials: protecting steel-production enterprises
- Francesch-Huidobro's Shanghai study (*Applied Energy*, 2016): central govt policy shifts have created an enabling environment for subnational govts actions. Principal constraint "limited public understanding of climate change and its potential consequences"

POLICY FRAMING

- China's subnational govts face a policy-framing challenge (Chpt 5 of 4Cs)
- 2015 Yale study of awareness of climate change
- *Climate-driven* framings versus *climate-incidental* ones (emphasis on other anticipated (co-)benefits and costs)
- Issue bundling in ways that link climatic stabilization to cherished place-based values and resonate in compelling ways with local grievances, worries, and desires (also see Peter Koehn, "Climate Policy and Action 'Underneath' Kyoto and Copenhagen: China and the USA." *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews (WIREs): Climate Change* 1 (March/April 2010):405-417)

PUBLIC HEALTH AS DRIVER

Fundamentally and universally: “people’s quality of life depends on the quality of their local environment”
(Kickbusch, 1999)

- **4Cs foresees that public health will be particularly decisive in driving China to take a leadership role in adopting low-carbon pathways***
- ***This possibility is reinforced by chapters on pollution (by Wong and Wong) and malaria (by Yang and Zhou) in the 2014 *Routledge Handbook of Global Public Health* in Asia edited by Sian M. Griffiths, Jin Ling Tang, and Eng Kiong Yeah and in the chapter 7 treatment of “Human Health, Well-being and Climate Change in China” in *Climate Risk and Resilience in China*, edited by Rebecca Nadin, Sarah Opitz-Stapleton, and Xu Yinlong (Routledge, 2016).**

POLLUTION, POLLUTION, POLLUTION

- Air pollution will be China's tipping point
- *Airpocalypse* Estimates premature deaths due to ambient pollution range from 400,000 to 1,200,000 inhabitants
- Ground-level vehicle emissions rival or exceed coal soot (Wong, *New York Times*, 18 August 2016, p. A10)

Beijing sent out its highest level of smog alert on Dec. 16, 2016 ..., suspending schools and restricting cars on the road while the city remains shrouded in a visible—and toxic—fog

First 5 weeks of 2017, PM 2.5 concentration in Beijing nearly 2x higher than 2016.



UNDER THE DOME DOCUMENTARY BY CHAI JING (2015)

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T6X2uwlQGQM>
- 12:44-12:55; 21:00-23:13; 1:38:42-1:39:38

COMPARE WITH AL GORE'S "NEW THINKING ON CLIMATE CRISIS" TED TALK (2008)

https://www.ted.com/talks/al_gore_s_new_thinking_on_the_climate_crisis

- 3:47-4:46

UNDER THE DOME DOCUMENTARY BY CHAI JING (2015)

- Framed air pollution as an urgent health issue in compelling visual and personal terms to millions of viewers and social-media participants. All levels of government taking notice
- *UTD* illustrates the power of climate-incidental framings
- Still missing: policy framings that target consumer demand and motor-vehicle operations

CONCLUSION

“What good is all that rising G.D.P., if there is no clean air to breathe?” T. Friedman (2013)

- **Health presents the principal community-mobilizing opportunity. The connection of air pollution and health to GHG-emissions control can be framed in a compelling manner**
- **China’s self-interest in a healthy population necessitates early transition to a low-carbon development pathway.**
- **Subnational officials and local NGO leaders are positioned to perform powerful framing roles**
- **Bottom-up concern for the health of current and future generations will drive China to become a role model in mitigating GHG emissions and to rise to fill the void in global climatic leadership created by withdrawal of the USA**

Back to the future?



What goes around,
comes around

View to the south from
the Empire State Building,
Nov 24 1966

US commitment to clean
air came in 1970 with
creation of EPA (*NYT* 1 March
2017)

SHIPS PASSING IN THE
NIGHT?

