

AJISS-Commentary

The Association of Japanese Institutes of Strategic Studies

IIPS

Institute for International
Policy Studies



The Japan Forum on
International Relations

JIIA

The Japan Institute of
International Affairs
(Secretariat)

RIPS

Research Institute for
Peace and Security

Editor:

Akio Watanabe

Editorial Board:

Kenichi Ito
Masashi Nishihara
Seki Tomoda
Taizo Yakushiji

Online Publisher:

Yukio Satoh
President, JIIA

No.21. 24 January 2008

HELP CHINA IMPROVE ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS

Katsuya Tsurusaki

From the 1990s through 2005, China's GDP grew at an average annual rate of more than 9 percent. To power this record growth, China's steel production tripled to 390 million tons between 2000 and 2006 and its coal consumption jumped by 230 percent to 1,000 million tons between 2000 and 2005. This rapid industrialization and economic growth, however, has left China with serious environmental degradation. Japan, which has followed a similar development path since World War II, is trying to help China shift gears toward a more environment-friendly policy with a focus on measures to raise public awareness.

The views expressed in this piece are the author's own and should not be attributed to The Association of Japanese Institutes of Strategic Studies.

China is facing grave environmental problems. Waste water pumped out by the chemical and paper manufacturing industries is polluting rivers and lakes across the country. Accidents at chemical plants often hit the headlines. China's steel and cement production, now the world's largest, is graying the air. The air pollution in Beijing, caused by the combined effects of the widespread use of cars and industrial emissions, is such that on many days city residents are unable to enjoy clear sunlight. With the spread of acid rain and the contamination of oceans beyond its national borders, China's environmental problems are already becoming a global issue. Against such a backdrop, the Chinese government has started reviewing its economy-oriented policy, saying it would aim at the construction of a more environment-friendly society.

Japan suffered similar industrial problems during the period of rapid economic growth after World War II. The Japanese government implemented various measures, such as investing in R&D for environmental technologies and introducing subsidies to encourage the construction of pollution control facilities, but none of these proved decisive enough. This led an advisory panel on Japan's industrial structure to conclude that preventive actions on the part of industry are crucial to protecting the environment. In accordance with this panel's recommendation, the government introduced the nation-wide Pollution Control Manager System, which obliges companies in designated industries to set up pollution control personnel organizations in their factories and to station certified managers well versed in the regulatory and technical aspects of pollution control there. This measure, in combination with other preventive regulations, the development of environment technologies and investment in facilities, played a pivotal role in Japan's battle against environmental pollution. Japan succeeded in overcoming its conventional environmental problems by the 1980s.

Japan has provided China with various pollution control technologies, such as those necessary for emission gas and wastewater treatment facilities. However, such technologies were introduced only at a handful of large and advanced

corporations. The overwhelming majority of Chinese companies, mostly small and medium-sized, was unable to afford the costs and lacked the necessary human resources. Furthermore, of the large and advanced corporations that introduced those technologies, many had to give up their pollution control plans once technology transfer arrangements with Japan expired; only a few could afford the running costs and skilled workers with high environmental awareness. China has also received many technology transfers from foreign countries, but none has resulted in any drastic improvement in its environmental problems.

This experience convinced China that voluntary efforts by companies to take preventive measures are as important as the introduction of new technologies and regulations, and in December 2005 China's State Council advised establishing a factory-level supervisory system. This was followed by a decision by the State Environmental Protection Administration (SEPA) to create the Enterprise Environment Manager (EEM) System modeled after Japan's Pollution Control Manager System. SEPA then approached Japan for cooperation and the SEPA-affiliated Sino-Japan Friendship Centre for Environmental Protection conducted research on the Japanese system for several years in cooperation with Japan's International Cooperation Agency. Based on this collaborative relationship, the Japanese government decided to help China develop and implement the EEM System as a JICA project starting afresh in 2006.

Japan believes it is important for each company to train environment specialists with a keen sense of environment protection. Therefore Japan has proposed that in the new Chinese system, those responsible for the manufacturing process should double as the directors of pollution control organizations. The pollution control organizations will be staffed by certified supervisors whose expertise is tested and updated through national exams and training sessions. China has basically agreed to this Japanese idea and is already working to build such a system. As if to support this plan, Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda reiterated Japan's commitment to assist China's human resources development efforts in the fields of environment and

energy efficiency when he visited China last month.

In the past few decades, Chinese companies have worked hard to achieve the national goal of strong economic development. Most of China's foreign assistance has come in the form of technologies necessary to sustain high levels of production. Yet what is needed for China from now on is the construction of an environment-friendly society. Notwithstanding the economic gap between urban and rural areas, ordinary citizens are reportedly growing conscious about environmental problems. In my experience, the most crucial element in solving environmental problems is raising the awareness of both companies and citizens. Japan should place greater emphasis on this aspect and assist China in developing training and educational programs designed to raise public awareness on environmental issues. 

Katsuya Tsurusaki is Senior Technical Advisor at the Japan Environmental Management Association for Industry (JEMAI).