

CHINA - GUANGZHOU

Environment and development are two major concerns.... Through its arduous efforts of many years, especially those made since the Industrial Revolution, mankind has made brilliant achievements in transforming nature and developing economy. Yet neglect of environment in the course of industrialisation, particularly the irrational exploitation and utilisation of resources, has caused global environmental pollution and ecological degradation posing a real threat to the survival and development of mankind. (Li Peng, 1994, p.1)

The chapter reports findings from the Guangzhou survey in the People's Republic of China. China is highly diverse and the situation in Guangzhou is viewed as a case study drawn from the more affluent eastern and south eastern coastal region of China, which is undergoing rapid economic development. Guangzhou is probably the most important city in the southern part of Mainland China and is the capital of Guangdong Province. This city of over 6 million people is located at the northernmost end of an industrial axis which runs down the Zhu Jiang Kou (Pearl River Delta) to the Hong Kong SAR. Over the last decade, following Deng Xiao Ping's 'Open Door' industrialisation policy of 1978, this region has become the site of frenetic industrial development with growth rates in GDP well above the national average. Its economy has boomed but, as with other industrial areas in China, this has not been without serious environmental degradation.

Guangzhou exemplifies many of China's environmental problems which are mainly those of environmental pollution and ecological destruction. The Environmental Protection Bureau (EPB) in Guangzhou is active in monitoring the state of the environment although, while producing annual statistics, no comprehensive report exists, as say in Australia. Despite continuing expenditure on environmental schemes, Guangzhou suffers from a number of environmental problems.

- The waters of rivers draining into Zhu Jiang Kou are highly polluted with agricultural and industrial wastes and water pollution is the most serious problem faced.
- Industrialisation has led to a problem in disposing of toxic wastes from the textiles, plastics and electronics industries. Output of solid waste in general is doubling every decade.

- Despite control measures over the last two decades, land clearance has led to increased rates of run-off that has resulted in silting and flooding.
- Urban expansion has led to habitat loss and reduced biodiversity.
- Air pollution from the industrial use of sulphurous fuels and nitrous oxides from vehicles has contributed to acid rain. In the early 1990s, the average rain pH value was reported as 3.67.
- Air-born particulate matter from the incomplete combustion of fuels and from construction, have led to health hazards as particulates have trebled during the 1990s.
- The continued use of CFCs contribute to ozone depletion.
- Increased demand for food has led to increased risk from chemical fertilisers and pesticides in the countryside around the city.
- There are water shortage in times of low rainfall and, despite efforts in treatment and protection, water quality concerns as a result of pollution.

(Edmonds, 1996, based on data from the

Statistical Yearbook of Guangdong and other local sources)

Incomes in Guangzhou exceed these in some nearby impoverished rural districts by a factor of ten or more. With low incomes and unemployment in central and western China, there has been a drift to the cities in the East such as Guangzhou aggravating existing urban environmental problems. The link between the ability to generate acceptable incomes and the development of a sustainable environment, i.e. sustainable living, in China is clear but brings the dilemma between development and the environment to the forefront. The need for environmental protection and environmental protection education is well understood and, for example, Guangdong has been spending nearly 15 billion yuan (US\$1.8 billion) in the late 1990s to combat pollution (SCMP, 1996). The need for environmental education is accepted if the environmental plans are to be successfully implemented. The effectiveness of environmental education in turn, however, requires understanding of the present patterns of environmental knowledge and beliefs. Before describing the survey results, the first half of the chapter sets out the cultural and economic context in which the young people's beliefs and understanding regarding the environment have developed.

INFLUENCES ON ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE ENVIRONMENT

Cultural Context

Confucian cultural perspectives are at the heart of traditional beliefs in China. Traditional perspectives have not been officially encouraged since 1949, but these beliefs remain deep in the psyche of Han people. They are a part of their roots. These beliefs have been reviewed in other reports involving Chinese people (see the report, for example, for Hong Kong) and therefore are only summarised here. Three points can perhaps be made. First, Chinese culture is a culture of the 'heart' rather than the 'mind' (Hsu, 1975). It is moral rather than a psychological issue. Second, Confucianism puts the person at the centre and is seen as humanistic in character

(Moore, 1967). Third, unlike many other cultures, China has no creation myth (Mote, 1989), the Chinese believing that the cosmos was spontaneously self-generating. This underpins an anthropocentric view of life and the person's surroundings. Protection of the environment is hence a priority if it fits with the needs of the individual but, on the same argument, so too is an acceptance of environmental degradation.

Generalising about Chinese culture, however, is very difficult, not the least because of the ethnic diversity in the PRC and the intermixing of peoples in industrial honey-pots such as Guangzhou. Whilst the stereotype is the Han Chinese culture of Eastern and Central China, the country incorporates a number of what are termed ethnic minorities. Some, such as the Tibetan people, who are dominantly Buddhist, and the Moslem people of Xinjiang in the far-west, have distinct and separate cultures. Even amongst Han people differences in attitudes appear, for example, between northerners and southerners and between the peoples of the Mainland and Taiwan. As a pertinent illustration, Bond (1991) notes that most people who claim a Chinese cultural base tend to espouse conservative values rather than change values such as independence and novelty; however, the exception is people from Guangzhou who fall in the change half of the spectrum.

If traditional social perspectives lead to an ambivalence in views about the environment, then the more so do recent changes. Hofstede (1980), on the one hand, argues collectivism is more dominant than individualism in Chinese society, the paramount concern being for the integrity and advancement of the group and the common good of the community. Yang (1988), however, notes that many Chinese in Taiwan today put value on individualism, a perspective that looks to the future and which accepts mastery over nature. These people prefer a life combining action and enjoyment; meditation and submission to external forces are rejected. In the context of Guangzhou, it is apposite that many of the economic characteristics are tending in a similar direction to that in Taiwan leading arguably to similar attitudinal outcomes. Thus, whilst in the PRC socialist ideology espouses collective perspectives in which the individual works for the betterment of the state, social and economic forces often lead to individualism and environmental disregard if it is not consistent with the drive towards self-improvement.

What we see in Guangzhou in particular, as generally in much of China, is a three-way tension between traditional, socialist and contemporary norms. This is not to deny areas of complementarity and symbiosis. Many of the traditional social norms, for example collectivism and acceptance of authority, are consistent with the norms of the socialist state as is the individualism that generates economic wealth in the service of the country. Further, people who are more individualistic and materialistic would not see them selves as rejecting traditional values but reinterpreting them in the context of China in the 21st century. Yet, at the same time, there are conflicts which come from unbridled development that create a new balance in which environmental stewardship is a risk.

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