

# Currents and Undercurrents

## Climate Controversies in China

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Caijing Magazine

November 2010

## Limitation

- One major limitation: China is a huge country with great complexity. My description will be far from complete.
- I will try to make an objective description of a general picture.

# Big Picture

## Currents:

- The Chinese leaders and the central government are quite serious in climate change issue, regardless of their motivations.
- Due to the characteristic of Chinese politics, few climate controversy can be seen on the table.

## Undercurrents:

- Many officials and local government don't believe in climate change.
- The general public is far from informed on climate change issue.
- Lots of denials and conspiracy theory are popular.

# Outline

- 1 Government Policy
  - Basic Stance
  - Motivations
  - Internal Dissent
- 2 Public Opinion
  - Basic Situation
  - Two Aspects
- 3 Sources of Denials
  - Sceptics in Academics
  - Imports from the West
  - Conspiracy Theory

# Government Policy

## Basic Stance

- The most significant characteristic of Chinese politics: monopoly of political power and resources.
- The awareness of climate change issue in China is from top to bottom, not from bottom to top. And the climate policy is solely determined by government stance.
- There seems to be no such thing as “controversy” in China as in other countries.

# Government Policy

## Basic Stance - cont'd

Although there are criticisms, Chinese leaders are quite serious about climate change, and they are taking significant actions to fulfill their promises.

The most significant one is their carbon emission reduction target: lower the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions per unit of GDP (carbon intensity) by 40 to 45 percent by 2020, compared with 2005 level.

# Government Policy

## Basic Stance - cont'd

### *Too easy?*

It's just a relative indicator; the current carbon intensity is too high

### *Not easy*

- Carbon emission reduction calls for a transformation of growth pattern that needs significant reallocation of interests. e.g. closing down smaller, inefficient power plants, and outdated cement, iron and steel, and other manufacturing capacity
- Estimation shows that the gross technology investment with no economic return in the last five years was about 1.5 trillion RMB (more than \$200 billion) , and will increase to between 1.9-3.4 trillion RMB (about \$280-500 billion).

# Government Policy

## Basic Stance - cont'd

### *How?*

The way how they achieve the target, though flawed, also shows determinacy

Step 1. Decompose the big task into smaller ones, and assign them to lower-level government and enterprises

Step 2. Then “A championship contest with punishments”. e.g. Hebei Province’s “Double 30” policy

Furthermore, the target becomes legally binding domestically after written into the next Five-Year Plan



# Government Policy

## Motivations

### Motivations:

- Internal pressure: The ecological and environmental pressure has increased enormously. The old imbalanced economic growth pattern cannot be sustained.
- Outside pressure
- Possible opportunities. They regard low-carbon technology as the new direction of technology revolution, which might be an opportunity for China.

# Government Policy

## Internal Dissent

Dissent in the government:

- Government officials as individuals

A big fraction of government officials, especially at local levels, don't believe in climate change. Some of them even consider climate change as another bubble, as well as the financial bubble.

- Local government

More often than not, provincial and local officials consider emission reduction measures as obstacles to local GDP growth. Given the central government's policy, their reaction is trying to maximize their own benefit and use this policy as bargaining chips.

# Public Opinion

## Basic Situation

Although improving, the situation is not optimistic.  
The problem has only been in the sight of public for a few years.  
Public discussion is far from sufficient.

### Why?

- Top-to-bottom style: Not much room for people to participate.
- For normal people, there are many other priorities to concern.
- Most of the media treats climate change just as a temporary hotspot.

# Public Opinion

## Two aspects

- Less informed people in small cities and countryside  
with a very obscure view of climate change
- More informed people

The sceptical view and consiracy theory are quite popular. In an online survey by one of the most popular websites ([www.qq.com](http://www.qq.com)), 11,901 (32%) people agree that "global warming is just a hoax", 25,440 (68%) believe "it's not".

## Sources of Denials

Three intervened ways that science of climate change is denied in China:

- Sceptics in Academics
- Imports from the West
- Conspiracy Theory

# Underlying Denials

## Sceptics in Academics

- Mainstream has reached a consensus.
- Also quite a few sceptics, some of whom have taken positions in decent universities and institutions, and can get their ideas publicized in media.
- One difference from other countries: Most of sceptics may not be motivated by special interests.
- Still give their audiences the impression that there are major debates in climate change science.

# Sources of Denials

## Imports from the West

- Many denials in Western countries have been imported to China, some of which are quite influential. e.g. 'The Great Global Warming Swindle' by Channel 4, Britain
- Chinese people may get the impression that this topic is still very controversial in the West, thus we should also slow down as well. They may also doubt: why those Western countries keep asking us to fight climate change, while they themselves do not believe it? This leads directly to the conspiracy theory.

## Sources of Denials

### Conspiracy Theory

The most influential denial with "Chinese characteristics", is to consider the issue of climate change as a Western conspiracy to interfere China's development

The logic is simple:

Step 1: Carbon emission reduction means lower living standard, less business opportunities, etc. The positive side—it can be a driving force for a better economy and a better life—is ignored.

Step 2: The right to emit = the right to develop  $\implies$  emission reduction = less development

Step 3:  $\implies$  Climate change is another trap for China and other developing countries.



## Sources of Denials

### Conspiracy Theory - cont'd

#### Consequences:

- The Conspiracy theory has been used to get publicity, by stimulating narrow-minded nationalism.
- But the most dangerous thing is that conspiracy theory reinforces a mindset — the ideology that "enemies in the West are against us". We've seen this many times.

## Sources of Denials

### Conspiracy Theory - cont'd

How to deal with the conspiracy theory?

- My suggestion is to respect the facts, give credit to right actions, and discredit wrong ones, regardless of who takes the move. Always use fact, not another ideology, to against an ideology, otherwise the conspiracy would be justified.
- Fact is higher than ideology, not only in the case of climate change, but also when we are dealing with conspiracy theory.

## Summary

- Although there are flaws in the action, and internal dissention, government is serious about climate change.
- Public not fully awared.
- Sources of Denials: sceptics in academics; imports from the West; and most importantly, the conspiracy theory.

- Thank you!