

Sleepless in Ningbo

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Following the recent “Symposium on a New Type of Major Power Relationship” (see [Beijing Charts](#)), our Chinese hosts provided a tour of several cities and facilities, including factories producing solar panels and windmills. I wanted to stay in my hotel and write an op-ed on energy and climate, but was told this would be a major *faux pas*, so instead I stayed up one night writing “[World’s Greatest Crime Against Humanity and Nature](#).”

The city we visited that day, with population at least comparable to New York City, was bustling in development and construction. The mayor described numerous programs to improve efficiency and impressive environmental requirements on new buildings including extensive use of renewable energies. When I asked about the energy source for their power, I learned that it was 78% coal, 12% gas, 7% oil and 3% renewable. They were making a major effort to increase the portion from renewables, striving for a goal of 6% within a few more years. However, because of their rapid development, their power use had increased 8.8% in the past year and would be continuing to surge. Thus efficiency and renewables are not causing carbon emissions to decline – on the contrary, emissions are growing rapidly.

This situation was predictable. It is not difficult to understand. But it is exceedingly difficult to communicate. Foundations and major environmental organizations (“greens”) are pretty much on the same page, so don’t expect to get support if you question their position. Instead, expect to be attacked. These groups have scientists on their staffs, but they do not act like scientists, continually questioning their own position with an open mind. Instead, like scientist-deniers, renewables-can-do-all scientists act like talking-head lawyers hired to defend a predetermined position. I used to think that they would change their tune as a little more empirical data on energy use accumulated. Instead, like climate-deniers, they cherry-pick data, concluding that we are on the verge of renewables providing all of our energy.

The Koch brothers could not purchase such powerful support for their enterprise. The renewables-can-do-all greens are combining with the fossil industry to lock-in widespread expansion of fracking. Courageous actions to block mountaintop removal, tar sands pipelines, destructive long-wall mining and all such things will be in vain without adequate energy alternatives. Obama is not supporting fossil fuels because he loves them. He does not have adequate alternatives.

Greens fanatically support an anti-nuclear-power agenda, asserting that even low level radiation is harmful to human health, an assertion that is not supported unequivocally by scientific evidence. Meanwhile the evidence of far more harmful fossil fuel pollution surrounds me, whether I look forward, backward, right, left. Over 1,000,000 Chinese citizens die from the pollution each year.

The day after leaving Ningbo my asthma got out of control. I was directed to the emergency room of the local hospital, which efficiently provided appropriate medication. For your information: cost of emergency room visit, 6 yuan ~ \$1; cost of medication 5 yuan ~ \$0.85.

China is our friend. We are all in the same boat. We must try to help them deal with their pollution. If they gasify coal on large scale (they are copying a Jimmy Carter plant), we will all cook.

China will find that something like a carbon fee-and-dividend system is needed internally, as regulations are not enough. Energy efficiency + renewables + nuclear power must be accompanied by a rising carbon fee to phase out pollution. A dividend aids social justice, as the effect is progressive, low income people gaining money. The public can see that economic conditions are improving and the public surely would welcome the opportunity to be part of the solution to pollution.