

A6 OPINION

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American grandma, 78, bikes around, pushes pedal power in city

Mary Frances Dunham

DEAR editor,

Since Shanghai resembles New York in climate and topography, and in the variety and density of traffic, Shanghai readers may indeed be interested in how New York has come a long way in putting more of its citizens on two wheels as well as two feet.

Pro-bike advocacy over the past 30 years in New York is currently reaping its most remarkable results.

Recently Times Square, the heart of New York, has been fully closed to motor traffic.

New York cyclists and pedestrians now enjoy the completion of the "emerald necklace," a continuous greenway around the entire island of Manhattan, a dream originating with Mayor John Lindsay in the 1970s.

After a long fight Central Park is finally car free. Today cyclists can cross all the various bridges that connect Manhattan to the city's outer boroughs. An ever-expanding network of bike lanes knits together the city's neighborhoods on all sides.

Bicycles are permitted on subway trains. These benefits have resulted from the dedicated attendance by advocates at government meetings, as well as from their participation in countless street demonstrations.

News of NYC bicycle advocacy is available on the Website of Transportation Alternatives and in its journal, "Reclaim" (formerly "Street Beat").

The Website Time's Up contains lists of their pro-bike activities from weekly "critical mass" rides to bike repair classes.

The latest journal of the ITDP (Institute for Transportation Development and Policy) contains articles about sustainable transportation around the world, including in its latest issue the transformation of Times Square and the progress on bike-share programs in China.

An article in the form of an interview with me and my family might be fun for your readers: "Expat gran'ma rides a quadricycle in Shanghai..." (Soon I will be 78 years old and due to Parkinson's disease

I have added riding wheels to my bicycle.)

Along with my late architect husband, a specialist in tropical architecture and in city planning, I have lived in Dhaka, Bangladesh, Kolkata, India, and other large cities, including Kunming in 1988.

I am an ethnomusicologist by profession, but I lead a second life devoted to bicycle advocacy wherever I have happened to live.

You may be able to find on the Internet an article that I wrote about how cyclists in 1987 fought successfully to regain three major avenues that the New York City government had banned to them.

Currently I live with my daughter Katherine Dunham (an architect and urban designer working with Arup), her husband, Steve Sweeting (jazz pianist), and her two sons, Nick (age 13) and Xano (age 7).

We are into our fourth year in Shanghai. We live in a lane house off Nanjing Xi Lu near

the Jing'an Temple.

We frequently travel in the city by bicycle. We even use an abandoned *san-lun-che* (tricycle), which we call our Lamborghini.

Since last fall I have met with Susan Evans of "Good to SH" and "Cool Bike," whose group bicycle ride last December you covered in your paper. I was away at the time, but my family and friends joined the ride and I have seen their photos as well as Susan's video reminiscent of similar New York rides.

I have with me hard copies of the latest journals of the ITDP and of Transportation Alternatives.

The latest ITDP journal includes an illustrated article on the transformation of Times Square and on cities in China that have bike-share programs.

If I know specific topics that you might like to explore, I can send for further information from both organizations.

(The author is a member of the Institute for Transportation Development and Policy and of Transportation Alternatives, New York City. She now lives in Shanghai.)

We even use an abandoned *san-lun-che* (tricycle), which we call our Lamborghini.

China's high cost of prosperity and GDP

Ni Tao

CHINA'S first national census of pollution sources has highlighted the glaringly high price the country has paid for its rush to prosperity.

In a report issued Tuesday and hailed by environmentalists as a big step toward greater transparency, China makes no secret of the magnitude of its pollution problem, which turns out to be much worse than previously reported.

Several issues addressed by the report may send chills down people's spines. Notably, the pollution of the country's waterways in 2007 was more than twice as grave as was shown in official figures released at the time.

The surge in pollution figures revealed by the census is caused in part by the expanded scope of the survey and in part by different calculating methods.

For a country that is yet to be freed from the grip of a "GDP cult," this report came as a compelling negation of the decades-old economic growth formula, in which high GDP is valued above almost everything else — whatever the cost to people and the environment.

Zhang Lijun, vice minister for environmental protection, emphasized the link between pollution and industrial growth in some regions, during a press conference on Tuesday.

"Emissions of industrial pollutants vary wildly across regions and industries, with more developed and densely populated localities leading the nation in dumping major pollutants like sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxide," Zhang said. "It's a structural problem."

More disturbing is the fact that for the very first time agricultural pollution has been taken into account when the census, which took two years to complete, was compiled. And it is found to pose no less a threat than industrial pollution to China's fragile water systems.

For instance, the chemical oxygen demand (COD) — a major gauge of water pollution — required to feed the growth of agriculture totals 13.24 million tons, or 43.7 percent of national chemical oxygen demand, according to the report.

Given so many gloomy facts, the candor with which China owned up to its pollution levels is laudable. But candor alone will not guarantee less pollution in the future, so long as some officials and business people are still left unchecked

— and in some cases eagerly encouraged — to ravage the environment for quick development profits.

Those people who fall under the spell of the "GDP cult" and discharge untreated sewage (among other things) into China's rivers simply don't realize or don't care that worsening pollution will eventually take its toll on their profits and worse — stymie their sustainable growth.

Of every 10 yuan (US\$1.46) they make from their operations, half the sum or even higher may eventually be lost in the form of belated pollution control costs, according to some research.

This inherently flawed quest for GDP was summed up by Pan Yue, also a vice minister for environmental protection, when he wrote in a 2006 opinion article: "... more realistic estimates put environmental damage at 8-13 percent of China's GDP growth each year, which means that China has lost almost everything it has gained since the late 1970s due to pollution."

At the press conference on Tuesday, vice minister Zhang Lijun said: "China's pollution levels may peak by the time its per capita income reaches US\$3,000." China's current capita income stands at around US\$2,100 but it is way above

US\$3,000 in certain coastal areas where industries are clustered.

In contrast with many Western countries, where pollution levels begin to decline after per capita income hits US\$8,000, China's "different growth path" — as Zhang put it — may enable it to "scale back pollution at an earlier point." However, he gave no reason for his optimistic, but not unqualified, assessment.

The high price China has paid for its long-overdue environmental protection is ultimately borne by its own people. Numerous villages along the country's prosperous eastern coast have reported a startling surge in cancers and lead poisoning among residents due to chemical plants operating in their vicinity.

The newly released census may well prompt some genuine reflection on the mixed blessings of China's hectic growth — and alarm.

Things are likely to get worse before they get better, and this adage rings true for a country like China where pollution has swollen to epic proportions — but any attempt to combat it is likely to encounter resistance from some local officials who simply cannot define "prosperity" as anything beyond GDP figures.

High GDP is valued above almost everything else — whatever the cost to people and the environment.

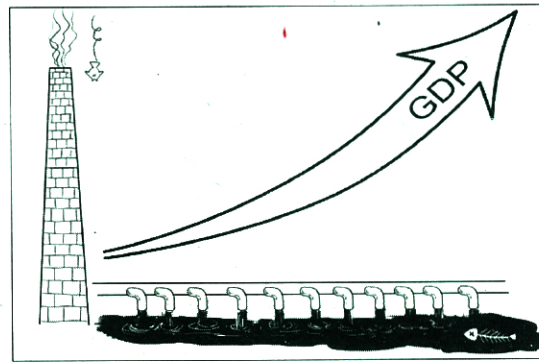


Illustration by Zhou Tao/Shanghai Daily

NATO calls for Asian links

Paul Ames

NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen caught some people by surprise at the weekend with his call for the North Atlantic alliance to turn itself into a global security forum with increased ties with China, India and certain other countries.

But his speech at the Munich Security Conference put into the public domain what many at NATO headquarters have been saying privately for some time: that faced with increasingly globalized threats, the alliance has to develop new relationships

way beyond its traditional heartlands in Europe and North America.

Rasmussen's speech on Sunday goes beyond that, saying the time has come to "turn NATO into a forum for consultation on worldwide security issues." He specifically mentioned the need to work with the major Asian countries. "This network of consultation and cooperation would be even stronger if countries such as China and India were to take part as well," he told the conference.

Many at NATO headquarters believe that it makes

sense for the Western alliance to start serious talks on security cooperation with the Asian countries given the global nature of 21st century threats such as terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, organized crime, cyber threats, piracy and climate change.

Rasmussen's proposals drew support at the Munich conference from former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and from Canadian and German ministers.

Whether the Asia powers would want to go that far remains to be seen. But both

China and India have been increasing contacts in recent years. NATO's Deputy Secretary General Claudio Bisogniero visited Beijing in November 2009, the first such visit by such a high-ranking alliance official.

During his visit, he suggested a series of "step-by-step" moves to boost relations, such as talks between military staff and exchanges of speakers at military training academies.

Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi's attendance at this year's Munich Security Conference marked a first for a Chinese foreign minister.

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