

# China's environmental challenges have global implications

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Unlike Vegas, what happens in China doesn't stay in China.

The country's environmental challenges have worldwide implications, so more developed nations, such as the United States, need to help China adopt integrated solutions for the sake of global sustainability, a Michigan State University environmental scientist argues.

"What happens in China affects the rest of the world," said Jianguo "Jack" Liu, University Distinguished Professor of fisheries and wildlife. Liu is known around the world for his work on [environmental sustainability](#) and coupled human and natural systems and is the lead investigator of the International Network of Research on Coupled Human and Natural Systems, funded by the National Science Foundation.

"China is growing very quickly and as its economy has grown, so have its environmental challenges. The first thing everyone needs to do is recognize the relationship between humans and the environment. Environmental problems are an indicator of human problems. By protecting the environment, people protect their health and their livelihoods," he said.

"Every country needs to recognize the important link between human and natural systems," said Peter Raven, president of the Missouri Botanical Garden and noted China scholar. "We focus on China because the country is developing so fast. In 2002, the [Chinese government](#)

compared the growth in gross domestic product to environmental destruction and both were about 10 percent. Those numbers aren't compared any more because it makes the economic statistics look bleak. China's biodiversity, one of the richest sets of organisms in the world, is seriously threatened by extinction in the decades to come, but if preserved, offers great opportunities to us all for the future."

Liu and Raven's paper, "China's Environmental Challenges and Implications for the World," is published in the September issue of *Critical Reviews in Environmental Science and Technology*.

The paper examines long-term and recent socioeconomic and environmental trends in China and outlines a systems approach to tackling China's environmental issues. Those include using economic stimulus money to invest in low-emission industries such as solar and bioenergy; better coordination of environmental and economic activities at all organization levels; and working together with developed countries, such as the United States, and developing countries, such as India, to develop a global climate agreement and reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

"In the past, China's motto was 'conquer nature.' People thought that development should come first and pollution could be cleaned up later," explained Liu. "It is encouraging that this attitude has begun to change. Investment in green technologies is increasing dramatically. However, fundamental changes in the development model and in the administrative system are urgently needed. Through institutional, scientific and technological innovations, [China](#) can help achieve global sustainability."

Liu holds the Rachel Carson Chair in Sustainability at MSU and is director of the MSU Center for Systems Integration and Sustainability. This research is funded by the National Science Foundation and supported by the Michigan Agricultural Experiment Station.

Provided by Michigan State University

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