

POINT OF VIEW / *Goshi Sato*

Japan can help fix China's environment woes

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Visitors to China who take in the mushrooming skyscrapers, luxury cars and fashionably attired citizens can easily forget that they are in a developing nation. Considering China's remarkable economic growth, it is understandable why some are suggesting Japan should cut its official development assistance.

But even a cursory review of China's environmental problems makes it clear that that would be a step with terrible and far-reaching consequences for Japan and the rest of the world.

Take, for example, the Beijing Electronic Zone. There alone, 128 small coal boilers are being used to supply hot water to homes for central heating. But many of them are not fitted with desulfurization systems. They are discharging vast amounts of sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides into the atmosphere and contributing to high levels of air pollution.

In Beijing, the amount of pollution in the atmosphere exceeds safe en-

vironmental levels on more than 100 days a year. In fact, on the day I visited Beijing in February to look into the environmental situation, the air was so thick with photochemical smog that I found myself coughing as I walked the streets.

A cogeneration plant that uses gas boilers is now under construction in the electronic zone. When it is completed, it will replace 102 small coal boilers and is expected to cut annual coal consumption by 300,000 tons, emissions of sulfur dioxide by 1,755 tons, nitrogen oxides by 1,229 tons and soot dust by 2,103 tons.

Actually, 80 percent of the construction cost of the plant is covered by yen loans. The yen loan is an ultra-long-term, ultra-low-interest means of assistance that the Japanese government provides to developing nations as part of the economic cooperation provided for in bilateral agreements.

For several years, Japan has been giving China yen loans to put toward important environmental initiatives. They are being used to install desulfurization and dust collection sys-

tems at ironworks, to build water supply systems and to construct sewerage networks.

Currently, 60 environmental conservation projects funded by yen loans are under way in China and are making steady progress.

However, in 2004, before a summit meeting between then Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi and Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao in Laos, Koizumi said it was time Japan withdrew the loans. Since then, the Japanese government has decided to stop extending them to China from 2008.

It is true that Beijing and other local governments in China must be responsible for dealing with their own domestic environmental problems. But developing countries will always be inclined to attach greater importance to economic development than environmental protection.

This is clear from the experience of Japan, which also generated enor-



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mous amounts of pollution during its period of high economic growth. To solve China's environmental problems, outside technology, experience and funds are needed.

Moreover, pollution transcends national borders. Polluted air and water reach Japanese shores across the Sea of Japan. The destructive power of China's environmental pollution is so strong that no matter how much Japan makes an effort to fight it—with initiatives such as the summer "cool biz" campaign or reusable shopping bags—it will continue to wreak havoc in ever greater measures.

The solution to the Chinese environmental problem is important not only for Japan but also the global community. Japan should continue to provide yen loans tied to environmental projects or come up with other support measures to replace them.

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