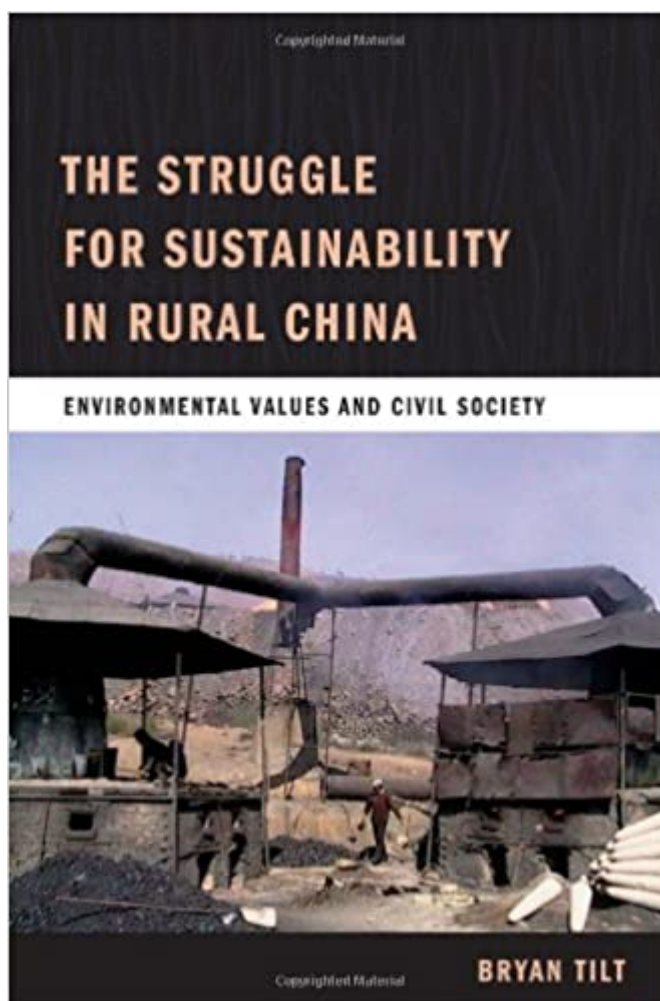


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# The Struggle For Sustainability In Rural China: Environmental Values And Civil Society



## Synopsis

Though China's economy is projected to become the world's largest within the next twenty years, industrial pollution threatens both the health of the country's citizens and the natural resources on which their economy depends. Capturing the consequences of this reality, Bryan Tilt conducts an in-depth, ethnographic study of Futian Township, a rural community reeling from pollution. The industrial township is located in the populous southwestern province of Sichuan. Three local factories—a zinc smelter, a coking plant, and a coal-washing plant—produce air and water pollution that far exceeds the standards set by the World Health Organization and China's Ministry of Environmental Protection. Interviewing state and company officials, factory workers, farmers, and scientists, Tilt shows how residents cope with this pollution and how they view its effects on health and economic growth. Striking at the heart of the community's environmental values, he explores the intersection between civil society and environmental policy, weighing the tradeoffs between protection and economic growth. Tilt ultimately finds that the residents are quite concerned about pollution, and he investigates the various strategies they use to fight it. His study unravels the complexity of sustainable development within a rapidly changing nation.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Tilt's remarkable... timely book, which offers a major contribution to the study of China and environmental governance in the developing world. (Anna Lora-Wainwright *The China Journal*) An interesting and illuminating book for scholars who wish to understand the present ecological

situation in rural China and the daily conflict between values and actions that confront the local governments and citizens of China. (Li Ying China Quarterly)An important addition to environmental studies of China. (Yan Gao H-Environment)Struggle for Sustainability has something important to offer a wide audience...its manageable rendering of technical and scientific industrial production and pollution measurement reaches the nonenvironmental specialist; and its lucid prose and compelling ethnographic evidence have the potential to attract a lay readership beyond the environs of academia. (Jennifer Hubbert American Anthropologist)

Bryan Tilt is assistant professor of anthropology at Oregon State University. His research focuses on economic development and environmental protection in China, and he has conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Sichuan and Yunnan provinces.

Bryan was a great professor; he knew his material and knew how to teach it to everyone in the class well. His book reflects his knowledge and love for the field of study.

I was assigned this book for a comparative development class in grad school. I found it very interesting compared to other case studies in the field. It's one of those cases that sort of defies logic (shutting down polluting factories can lead to increased pollution) and also lets you in on some useful history/culture and analysis (role of rural factories, role of media in china, etc). I've lent this book multiple times to classmates and will replace it if it is not returned. It had a reserved place on my shelf.

This book is an excellent study of the ways China's environmental devastation plays on the ground in a rural region. Tilt shows how awful the Maoist "struggle against nature" is in reality. This book provides valuable contexting for other, more broad and general work on the Chinese environment (books by Vaclav Smil, Elizabeth Economy, K. Abe and James Nickum, etc.). More important, it is part of the sobering answer to China-boosters like Thomas Friedman and Orville Schell. They live in a dream-world, accepting China's distorted "growth" figures and neglecting not only environmental costs but human rights issues, apparently thinking that economic growth can be sustained indefinitely in the absence of personal freedoms. Tilt's book, which is particularly balanced and cautious (not alarmist or extreme-environmentalist), is an ideal corrective.

Author Tilt's book is based on three periods of field work totaling about 7 months between 2001-06,

centered at Futian Township. By 2006, its factories (zinc smelter, coking plant, and coal-washing plant) had been closed for three years for non-compliance with pollution standards. Their role had primarily been to serve Panzhihua Iron and Steel. The impact of their closure was to create considerable financial problems for the township due to their no longer paying taxes. In 2005 China's EPA stopped 30 major industrial projects for failure to conduct environmental impact analyses. Ultimately the zinc smelter moved to the next town after receiving a better economic and regulatory deal. Local government began investing in low-technology, labor-intensive factories in the 1980s to absorb surplus labor released by economic reforms, and to boost local incomes as well as tax coffers. By the early 2000s, these TVEs employed 135 million and provided one-third of the nation's GDP. Tilt says they also created up to 2/3 of the environmental problems, though I doubt that - normally one would expect the much bigger SOE factories to be the major contributors. Mao had viewed industrialization as the key to China's future - thus, Deng's subsequent on development was not a change. Many urban Chinese consider rural people to be an impediment to national goals. Falling behind on eg. family-planning or population growth requirements (including household registration) risks losing subsidies from district and provincial governments. On the downside, Tilt's work contained too much material on environmental bureaucracy, and even the rationale for its need.

Anybody can enjoy this book; it's for anybody interested in pollution in rural China, not just for anthropologists.

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