

[Economic growth is the way to beat pollution](#) [1]

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As China flashes its new wealth buying up the world, there is no shortage of people spraying on cheap perfume and offering themselves for sale. One of the worst aspects of my visit to a Shanghai conference last week was the presence of large numbers of Western enviro-academics. After Climategate I don't know how they dare go out in public; but then they are just frantic to set up joint projects with the locals.

Not surprising. As the US hoodlum Willie Sutton (almost) said when asked why he robbed banks: "That's where the money is." China's government and universities are awash with the stuff, and they've worked out that they have to say something nice about climate change if they are to continue building three coal-fired power stations a week and expect the West just to stare at its shoes.

True, the pall of smog that hangs over all China's big cities is awful. I too remember the smell and grime of everyone's coal fires when you walked down any UK street, and when 'pea-soupers' were a regular part of life in London. Folk from 'The Smoke' must have suffered the same for most of the last 200 years: it was the price of our economic growth, no different to the price that China is paying today. But when you do grow and become rich, you can afford to deal with your pollution. Compared to the necessity of feeding your family, clean air seems a bit of a luxury. And at least now we know how to clean up our city air: the Chinese will not need to re-invent the same technology, so their clean-up will come much faster.

City pollution certainly isn't pleasant for the local population, though the debate continues regarding its possible global effects. But the Chinese aren't throwing money at Western academics to learn how to clean themselves up (though they may yet clean things up by simple administrative fiat). They are doing it to buy friends and influence people. Well, to buy friends, at least.

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