A Fragile Convergence: Understanding Variation in the Enforcement of China's Industrial Pollution Law

By

Dr Benjamin Van Rooij
Leiden University, The Netherlands

Date: Friday, 10 October 2008
Time: 11:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon
Venue: M802

All interested are welcome
A Fragile Convergence: Understanding Variation in the Enforcement of China's Industrial Pollution Law

ABSTRACT

Benjamin Van Rooij
Carlos Lo

Official statistics and independent survey data show that in the last decade China has witnessed a remarkable change in its enforcement of environmental pollution violations, moving towards more formalistic and coercive law enforcement with more enforcement cases as well as higher fines. The data also show that there is considerable regional variation with coastal areas having more and higher punishments than those in the hinterland. This paper explores these findings, seeking to understand the explanation and meaning of these temporal and regional variations. It does so using three sets of data: governmental statistics of 1998-2006, a series of surveys conducted amongst enforcement officials in three provinces between 2001 and 2006, as well as fieldwork derived data showing actual practices at the grassroots level. The study shows how enforcement changed when a convergence of forces and factors occurred including changes in national policy and law, increased wealth and diversification of the economy, grassroots community pressure and increased pro-environment policies of local governments. The paper argues that such convergence has been fragile, as national pressures have lacked consistency and local community and government support evaporates when dominant sources of income are at stake.