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## China through a lens

**“The sheer scale and scope of China’s economic, social and environmental challenges in the early 21st century are quite simply mind-blowing” Ed Gillespie, co-founder of Futerra**



*Workshop participants filmed, photographed, wrote and most of all talked to each other, focusing on the societal and environmental issues from their different perspectives.*

*The group visited cities and rural areas in Guangdong, which has seen such enormous growth in the past 30 years that it is now the country’s richest province*

The challenges of mass urbanisation and development, and the symptoms and repercussions of such rapid change in social, environmental and economic terms, were the topics under examination during a fascinating week-long visit to the Pearl River Delta area of China. The workshop, which took place in May 2006, was a partnership between the RSA Arts & Ecology programme, the London School of Economics, Arts Council England, and Vitamin Creative Space, Guangzhou – the first art space in the Pearl River Delta dedicated to contemporary and international cultural exchange and a platform to encourage cross-border activities and dialogue.

UK participants included artists Jeremy Deller, Keith Wilson and David Cotterrell; curator Francesco Manacorda; landscape architect Jo Gibbons; architect Theodore Spyropoulos; Ed Gillespie, creative director and co-founder of Futerra; Scott Lash, director of the Centre for Cultural Studies and professor of sociology at Goldsmiths College; Alan Boldon, head of MA arts and ecology at Dartington College of Art

and Dan Gretton, co-director of Platform.



**“China and the west face the same challenges. We can explore better ways of doing things together, sharing the UK’s experiences since the Industrial Revolution...**



**and using open cultural spaces to have constructive dialogue across disciplines”  
Michaela Crimmin, RSA  
head of arts**

*Formal discussion was kept to a minimum, informed by presentations from people working on new local developments*

International participants included the artist Heman Chong; Tianshu Pan, associate professor of social development and public policy, Fudan University; Jiang Jun, editor-in-chief of Urban China; Li Yuhong, professor of landscape architecture; Doreen Heng Liu, principal architect/founder of NODE architecture; novelist Hu Fang, and curator Zhang Wei, co-directors of Vitamin Creative Space; and Cheng Xujun, a developer based in the Delta who, together with Doreen Heng Liu, generously supported the workshop.

The workshop forged some inspirational connections that have the potential to develop into future links



with China. Some of the ideas and issues raised will be profiled at the Arts & Ecology conference at the London School of Economics on 11 and 12 December 2006 (see [Investigation Ecology](#) for more details).

**“It’s too easy to criticise China for environmental pollution when most of it comes from supporting the manufacture of goods exported to the west – we have simply off-shored it” Paul Crake, RSA programme director**



*With language a frustrating barrier for many of the participants, digital cameras proved a useful aid to communication*



**“Society is rapidly stratifying as urban economic opportunity opens up huge gaps between a growing professional elite and hundred of millions of subsistence farmers” Ed Gillespie, co-founder of Futerra**



*Hearing of the visit, local officials organised an impromptu performance*

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