

Environmental consciousness in Vietnam

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Abstract: This paper presents findings of a preliminary exploration of the environmental consciousness of urban Vietnamese. Based on in-depth interviews in Hanoi with 20 respondents from various walks of life, it finds a high level of awareness of environmental problems and a considerable degree of concern about this issue. Most respondents report that they themselves, and their family members and friends, are concerned about environmental problems, but they believe government officials and leaders of big corporations and enterprises are not concerned. They say that they believe that humans are destroying nature because of the urgent need for resources on the part of the poor and the desire for wealth on the part of the rich and powerful. The views of respondents about ideal relations between humans and nature can be categorized in terms of two general cultural models. The first model views nature as a limited resource on which humans must rely for their survival. The second model views nature and human beings as having a balanced and interdependent relationship. The models are similar in that both express anthropocentric and utilitarian views. Most lay informants express variants of the first model, saying that human welfare depends on the natural environment. In particular, they stress, physical health concerns. Almost all of the elite interviewees employ variants of the second model, stating that people's activities have impacts on nature, and nature reactively affects the welfare of human beings. Consequently, they perceive a need to maintain ecological balance. Deforestation is recognized as a serious problem by all respondents but they display considerable differences in their assignment of blame for causing this problem and also in their proposed solutions to this problem. In comparing deforestation with other problems, most consider that deforestation is a more important problem than air pollution, climate change and global warming, and natural disasters, but less important than traffic accidents and the future of the Vietnamese economy.

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