

The global warming hypothesis versus history

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The Fang Zhi is kind of a government gazette that has been issued by Chinese governments for thousands of years. Data on extreme weather events and famines are included in this gazette. The data show that floods and droughts are common in China and that they are periodically particularly severe. A cyclical pattern of famines caused by severe droughts and floods may be traced back through all of recorded history in China. The period of this cycle has been estimated to be about fifty years.

A peculiarity of this weather cycle is that floods and droughts can occur at the same time in China because weather in southern China is about 180 degrees out of phase with that in northern China. History has recorded many cases when the south is flooding from torrential rainfall while the north is in drought or conversely when the north is flooding and the south is dry.

Much of the sociology, philosophy, literature, and politics of China have been shaped by the flood and drought cycle. Some scholars go so far as to claim that all of Chinese history is one of the people's fight against famine caused by this calamitous cycle of weather. One of the largest infrastructure projects in history is the failed attempt to link southern Chinese rainfall with northern Chinese rainfall using a very ambitious canal network. The construction and maintenance of granaries on an immense scale has consumed a succession of Chinese dynasties while famines have been the downfall of others.

The current drought in Hainan and Guangdong along with torrential rains and floods in northern China fits the known pattern of extreme weather in China. If you truncate history at 1961, however, these weather events will appear to be unusual and unnatural. An equal and unnatural cause for this kind of weather may then be assessed. In particular, those with a predisposition to the global warming hypothesis contained in the Kyoto Protocol will find in these events the kind of evidence they seek to support their position (Waiting in vain for rain that's two years late has Hainan's farmers fretting about their future, The Nation, June 3, 2005).

Fossil fuel consumption has risen dramatically since 1961. The data also show what appears to be an irregular increase in the CO₂ content of the atmosphere in parallel with rising fuel consumption. At the same time we find the average temperature of the earth has been rising since 1979. It is tempting to draw a causal link from fossil fuels to CO₂ and from CO₂ to temperature and from there to freaky weather events.

These relationships appear so convincing that no further scientific evidence is sought to support the subsumed causalities. In the Chinese weather data however, the global warming enthusiasts have been undone by the Fang Zhi. Their claim that fossil fuel consumption is to be blamed for this year's drought in southern China and floods in northern China appears specious in light of history.

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