

Documentary as Visual Evidence: Social Injustice Behind Air Pollution and Pandemic Outbreak in China and India

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China and India suffer from some of the worst levels of air pollution in the world today. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) database, among the top 100 most air polluted cities by particulate matters, 54 are from China and 16 are from India. These two countries also accounted for over 50% of total premature deaths (with over 1.15 million in China and 1.09 million in India) associated with ambient outdoor air pollution in 2016 (WHO, 2018). As part of the Global Challenges Doctoral Centre programme, this presentation will showcase documentary clips from China and India and examine the multiple impacts of air pollution and the more recent pandemic outbreak on the low social-economic status (SES) communities. Drawing on a bottom-up ethnographic approach, this GCRF-funded project examines how to use media to engage researchers and stakeholders in a wider discussion on social injustice behind air pollution. It explores how environmental documentaries can be employed to create visual evidence and engage a wider community of researchers and stakeholders in the debates on the causes of environmental injustice.

With the research team from Institute of Development Studies and Beijing Normal University, the multi-disciplinary project adopts a highly innovative research design to combine documentary filming, policy and political analysis, and anthropological observation into one research inquiry on the marginalised people's daily lives in Jingjinji (China) and Delhi (India). A series of documentary clips and talking heads that were filmed between Nov 2016 and May 2020 will be shown during the first half of the presentation. The current pandemic outbreak has intensified social issues around social inequality and injustice among low SES communities. This project addresses this issue by visually documenting the stories with migrant workers in Delhi since the lockdown in late March 2020 in order to use documentaries as visual evidence to examine social exclusions and dual challenges from air pollution and pandemic outbreak faced by vulnerable communities in China and India.

Project Website: <https://research.kent.ac.uk/researchservices/gcrf-partnership-development-fund-project/>

