

The Ecological Movement and the Influence of Constructive Postmodernism in China

Xiaohua Wang

It is my honor to give a lecture at the center for process study. I must extend my special thanks to Dr. John B. Cobb and Dr. John Quiring for inviting me to lecture here.

The topic of my lecture is "The Ecological Movement and the Influence of Constructive Postmodernism in China". Influenced by Buddhism and later Martin Heidegger's philosophy, I became a deep ecologist since 1994. From that time on, to study and spread ecologism has become most important part of my life. The ecologism gives me new vision, presents me a lot of chance to enrich my relation with the world. To give a lecture here is also the chance's donation. Everyone who attends my lecture has special relationship with me. So, I'll extend my gratitude to everyone here.

What I want to introduce first is the current situation of China ecologism movement. In order to finish this topic, I must introduce China's economical situation first, because most westerners don't know China well. They still think the major problem of China is shortage. In the book written by Lester Brown, *Who Will Feed China? (1995)*, the authors worries that the population growth means China has to import huge quantities of grains which will drive the price of grains up and work great hardship on the global poor. Lester Brown's opinion shows his ignorance of China --one problem of China's agriculture is the surplus of grain at present. In the northeast of china, there are too many grains to find granary to store them. The surplus of grain driving the price of grain low is one of the reasons why some peasants are poor, but most of the relative poor peasants still have enough food. Therefore, I want to tell everyone here the time of shortage in China has passed. Economic reform has eliminated the phenomenon of shortage since 1990s. At the same time, the economy of China finished the transition from being a seller's market to a buyer's market. The enterpriser and businessman need to study the customer's consuming psychology, the idea that the customer is God has been accepted by most of the Chinese enterpriser and businessman. In order to gain customers, the businessman not only wants to meet the basic needs of customers, but also to cater customer's desire for non-essential consumption. The forming of consumerism is the symbol of progress in the eyes of many Chinese economists, but I think it is exactly the very source of China's eco-crisis today.

Frankly speaking, China has paid enormous cost for the present economic growth. To some extent, the bumper harvest of agriculture and the surplus of grain are the result of excess land reclamation and using of chemical fertilizer and pesticide that cause desertification and pollution. Corresponding with the good news of grain

harvest, the sandstorm in the north of China is more and more serious. In the March of this year, the north of China met the most serious sandstorm in recent years. Sky, streets, trees, buildings, faces of walkers had all become yellow. While agriculture growth pays larger and larger ecological cost, the pursuit of industry modernization has caused serious environmental pollution. The ecology predicament of western countries in the modernization of the past and present is duplicated in China. Most Chinese scholars regard it as inevitable cost, the destiny, of any nation in the process of modernization. But the deep ecologists all over the world hold different and even opposite views. China ecological movement originated from the reflection on the eco-crisis: we have only one China, man has only one earth, if the so called development make us lose our only homeland in the boundless universe, then, what is the meaning of development? Therefore, the ecology consciousness has become a component of Chinese culture, though it is still marginal.

The ecological movement in China is developing in two dimensions: the official level and the folk level.

The official ecological movement focuses on environmental protection whose purpose is sustainable development. Its final goal is to promote the status of China in the international competitive pattern. So, in a sense, to protect the ecosystem is the competitive strategy of the nation, it connected with utilitarian calculation at the beginning, which is a common characteristic of official ecological protection all over the world. Therefore, bargaining on the ecological duty among the nations is unavoidable. President Bush refused to sign "Kyoto Protocol", giving a lot of nations the pretext to bargain. The nationalist in China seized the chance to criticize that the Chinese deep ecologist for being too naive to cope with the complicated situation of the world. The official ecology protection is doomed to be incomplete because of nationalism and the intense international competitive pattern. So, though I lay hopes on the government's ecological transition of policy making, I pay more attention to the folk ecological movement at present.

In the folk, the ecological movement is still marginal. To many Chinese people, deep ecologists are queer fellows. When I was a doctor candidate in Nanjing University, my schoolmates often joked with me: you are an eco-freak, why do you eat meat? The attitude toward deep ecologist is a bit better now in China, but most people still don't pay enough attention to them. The mainstreams of folk ideological trend in china are liberalism and nationalism. Both haven't pay enough attention to ecological movement, some of their principles are even contrary to ecologism. In order to make my point of view clear, I'll introduce and analyze them briefly.

1.liberalism—It has great influence in Chinese intellectual circle and has formed the tendency of contending with nationalism. The basic idea of liberalism is that only the economic freedom can guarantee the political freedom, so, China should establish a through market economy system, and promote political reform through marketization. Most liberalists are afraid that if we recommend ecological protection too early, the Chinese market development will be hindered. This is the reason why they don't pay attention to china ecological movement.

2.Nationalism—most of the nationalists in China are known as "the new leftist".

They worry about the gap between the rich and the poor, hold that the government should intervene in the market through macro adjustment and control. They also emphasize on building a strong China who can compete with Big Powers, such as the U.S.A. Especially after president Bush refused to sign the "Kyoto Protocol", their attitude became more radical. Though I disagree with their major view and oppose their position, but I have to acknowledge that the globalization and nationalism are contradictory in the term of ecological protection, at least in the view of short-term affect.

By the simple narration and analysis above, we can see that the mainstream of Chinese folk ideological trend is not ecologism. The logic that the eco-crisis is the inevitable result of modernization, and the eco-crisis can only be overcome after the abundant modernization, is overwhelming in China. So, the China's ecological movement is in the marginal state in folk too.

But the ecologism movement does exist tenaciously. The China ecological movement took shape in the 1980s, and made the transition from environmentalism to ecologism in 1990s. The numbers of ecologist in China are small, but their will is strong, some of them regard the ecologism as their faith. The participant's cultural level is high, including scholars, writers, artists, engineers. There are still few ordinary people who participate in it.

I'll introduce the ecological movement in China in three levels:

1.The ecologism as a practice—There are few but extremely firm deep ecologists in China. They observe the ecological state of the Yellow River, the Yangtze River, the desertification area in northwest of China on foot, trying to protect the ecosystem in china. Yang Xin, a famous environmentalist, has observed the headstream of the Yangtze River several times. Having witnessed the deterioration of ecological condition of the Yangtze River, he set up the first folk protection station in the headstream area of Yangtze River. He has attracted many volunteers to work together with him. Now he is the symbol of the Chinese environmentalist. Apart from individual environmentalist, there are some non-government environmental protection organizations. For example, Friends of Nature, a famous environment protection association, often organizes people to plant tree, protect birds, donate money for eco-protection. There are dozens of environmental protection website at present, which publish various kinds of ecological information, but it is a pity that the amount of browsing is quite small. The deep ecologists are lonely in China, to take the ecologism as a kind of practice is a few people's life style.

2.The ecologism as a culture—The ecologism has already become a subculture in China, from eco-philosophy to eco-literature, the Chinese ecologism culture has set up a system. Such books as Saving The Earth and The Future of Mankind (Song Zhuliang), Eco-ethics(Yu Mochang),On Ecological Literature and Arts(Lu Shuyuan) have been published in recent years. The authors of those books are all intellectual. So, I must say that the intellectuals are not only the conscience of the society, but also the conscience of the universe, especially the conscience of eco-system. I am one of the originators of Chinese eco-culture. Since writing Manifesto of Chinese Ecologist in 1994, I devote myself to propagate ecologism and published a large number of papers

and prose. But those intellectuals, including me, often split on theory and practice of everyday life because of the context of consumerism and utilitarianism in China. Sometimes they propagate the ecologism on one hand, maintain life of high consumption on the other hand. This is a meaningful phenomenon.

3. Ecologism as a faith—It is still the choice of a few people to regard ecologism as faith. So far as I know, Buddhism and Christianity explain their doctrine in the view of ecologism, but Buddhist and Christian in China is absolutely minority. I myself try to promote ecologism to be a belief system, and have written an essay, “*Which X Should We Faith In?*”, in which I advocate post-religion belief. In my view, human should believe in the totality of life. But my work in this dimension is far from completed. However, I must admit that the ecologism as a faith is nearly absent in China on the whole.

This is current situation of China ecologism movement—it brings hope, but still has a long way to go. The deep ecologist including me can only lay hope on future.

Now I want to introduce the spiritual resource of China’s ecologism movement briefly. Though the China ecologism movement is still in the initial stage, its spiritual resources are quite clear.

There are resources native to China, for example, the idea of the Unity Between Man and Nature, the worship of nature in the philosophy of Taoist, there are also resources from foreign cultures, such as the influence of postmodern western theory and the holism of India. Among the Chinese philosophers, Laozi is valued more and more. His saying, “earth is the master of man, heaven is the master of earth, Tao is the master of heaven, nature is the master of Tao”, is extremely close to the ecologism principle. His famous saying “to be content with what one has is to be rich” is coincided with the western steady-state economics, his criticism on utilitarianism, technology and competition is very enlightened to modern ecologist. So, in a sense Laozi is the pioneer of the ecologism movement. I hope western scholars can pay attention to laozi’s philosophy.

In the context of modernization of China, the culture of eastern holism, including Indian philosophy and Chinese ancient philosophy are regarded as the symbol of backwards by most Chinese, consciously or unconsciously. It is western culture that exerts more influence on China’s ecological movement. The so-called “West” is an ambiguous concept that signifies the nations who are advanced than China, such as Europe, U.S.A, Canada, sometimes including Japan. Western green philosophy, green ethics and green literature have exerted great influence on china ecological movement. The common characteristic of green culture is the surmounting of anthropocentrism. In the vision of green culture, man is not the center of the world, nor is he the end of everything; the world—the ecosystem—is a big family, man is only one kind of member in it; the fish, bird, tigers and trees are members of the family too, the relation between man and them is relation of different members in the family; therefore, we should not care about man only, but should care about the fish, bird, tiger, trees, care about all lives, care about the ecosystem. In order to reach this state, it is not enough to recommend environmental protection, we must transcend the utilitarianism attitude toward the world, turn ourselves from businessman to poet,

existed poetically, and finally surmount the modernity. As to modernity, scholars have given various definitions, such as industrialization, urbanization, rationalization, but these definitions are not essential. In my view, the core of modernity is subjectivity, namely, the dichotomy of subject and object. Man regards himself as subject, and the nature as object. Subject is conqueror, he constructs a world, he is the center and end of this world, he regards the object as the tool and materials to realize his will as subject. This is the very reason for "the death of nature". The origin of the eco-crisis of contemporary time is modernity, the eco-crisis is the crisis of modernity, and it can only be overcome when modernity is surmounted. It is impossible to realize the ecologism completely on the premise of keeping modernity. So, the real ecological culture belongs to postmodern. In short, the ecologism is one dimension of postmodernism, postmodernism must embody the ecological dimension.

It is time for me to declare my view of constructive postmodernism—it is among a few postmodernism that are really postmodern. There are a lot of postmodernisms, but most postmodernisms don't point to real post-modernity because these theory have no positive plan to build a new world which beyond the horizon of modernity, they has nothing more than negative dimension. In contrast to those postmodernism, constructive postmodernism is more suitable for human situation in the time of globalization. Here I use the phrase constructive postmodernism to refer the theory of John B. Cobb, David Ray Griffin and the other thinkers of this school. It inheres Whitehead's process philosophy that hold the universe is a organism. In the vision of constructive postmodernism, the ecosystem is the common home of man and the other lives. Just as the slavery in the human society must be abolished, the slavery between man and nature must be abolished too. The modernity has eliminated the slavery in society but intensify the slavery of man to nature, it is the very reason that the modernity must be surmounted. Professor David Ray Griffin said: man should not regard various kinds of lives as the means for man to achieve their purpose, but regard them as their own ends. In order to realize this constructive holism, man must transcend modernity, especially, the anthropocentrism, building a postmodern world. John B. Cobb and David Ray Griffin have put forward the concepts of postmodern religion, postmodern economics and postmodern politics. So, they try to conceive the concrete and practical plan to push the postmodern turn. I am willing to be a postmodernist in this sense. You can feel the power of constructive postmodernism in my lecture. The influence of constructive postmodernism in china is mainly produced through the constructive postmodernism book series, such as *The Re-enchantment of Science* (published in 1995). Translated and introduced by Chinese scholars, for example, Zhihe Wang, constructive postmodernism is regarded as one of the most important school of postmodernism in China. It has become an important spiritual resource of China's ecological movement and its influence is even greater than Whitehead's philosophy, because the Whitehead's main works have not been published in China. However, I want to point out a interesting fact honestly: the main part of American constructive postmodernism is postmodern theology, but most Chinese scholar are not interested in the theology in the system. Perhaps it is due to the non-religious character of contemporary Chinese culture. Therefore, the

constructive postmodernism should pay attention to the particularity of different culture.

The postmodern world has not yet attained, the postmodernism is still a movement to begin. The imagination of postmodern world in the view of constructive postmodernism has the characteristic of utopia, more or less. This is not its deficiency, but its honor. The crisis of modernity means that the post-modernization must begin, only can the arrival of postmodern save the human and the world. The fate of mankind and the fate of whole ecosystem depend on whether the postmodern turn can succeed. So, the project of constructive postmodernist is sacred.