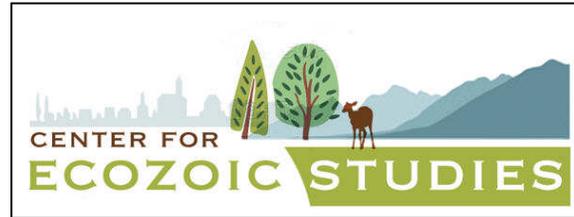


CES Monthly Musings

May 2010

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*Seeking integral community
in an ecological age*

“Ecozoic” means “house of life.” An “Ecozoic Society” means a society of life.

**The “Ecozoic Era” is a time of mutually enhancing relationships
among humans and the larger community of life.**

The “Great Work” is living the promise of the ecozoic.

In this issue: “**Objections to Ecological Civilization—Nonlocal, Noncultural,**” by Robert Wolff; and “**Fourth International Forum on Ecological Civilization,**” “**Interfaith Consortium for Ecological Civilization,**” and “**China and Ecological Civilization,**” each by Herman Greene.

OBJECTIONS TO ECOLOGICAL CIVILIZATION—NONLOCAL, NONCULTURAL

The Center for Ecozoic Studies is giving increasing attention to “ecological civilization,” notwithstanding the many thoughtful objections to the association of “civilization” with a meaningful future.

In this *Musing* as well as in some to follow, we will include discussions of objections to the concept. In our March *Musings*, we published “Barbarity, Civilization and Decadence: Meeting the Challenge of Creating an Ecological Civilization,” by Arran Gare. Robert Wolff of Hawaii responded with this critique:

I read with great interest the Daniel Martin (January) and Arran Gare (March) essays about ecological civilization. As I read, it seemed clear that the authors accept that civilization is something designed, man-made, a human creation with ideally a universal application—civilization as opposed to, and better than, barbarism, savagery . . . civilization requiring dialogue.

I live in a civilization that is unquestionably getting more barbaric and savage while loudly proclaiming its superiority. Perhaps that is why I’m uncomfortable thinking about “civilization.” It suggests something exalted, grand, uniquely human of course, advanced, high, spiritual, good, etc. I’m more familiar and more comfortable with the concept “culture,” which I define as the unique necessarily local way a group of people have learned to live in dynamic balance with each other and with and within their unique, local (not global, very rarely national) environment. Culture includes customs, of course, and values, etiquette, and language . . . always intimately connected to and part of the natural world, the place where they live. Cultures are not transferable, they are tied to place, circumstances, even time.

In the previous century many indigenous cultures were healthy, effective, human(e), but above all sustainable because they were part of the local ecology, they *were* the local ecology. Our so-called Western civilization has essentially destroyed all indigenous cultures and replaced them with a rapacious brutal capitalism designed (yes) to make a few people very rich by exploiting the resources, including humans, of the planet. All over the planet progress was said to be working for export and to import your food. The tie between humans and their environment was deliberately cut. Sustainable ecological cultures were destroyed, leaving shocked populations that had no choice but to migrate to a city to survive. More than half of the 6.8 billion humans today live in mega cities, in a poverty never known before on this planet. One billion people are starving, no income and so, no food. That is *civilization*?

Westerners thinking *civilization* always think of Greece and Rome, only a few thousand years ago. There were other civilizations much farther back. All of them manmade, planned, all of them much more barbaric than the ecological cultures they replaced. All of them crashed, because none of them were sustainable.

The central point of my reaction to “ecological civilization” is that humans cannot survive without being, and knowing themselves to be, an integral part of a local ecology. A civilization is not designed. It cannot be created, it must grow. Dialogues cannot be only between people, but must also be a continuing relationship, conscious and aware, with the unique mix of plants, animals, rocks, soil, rainfall, seasons. Yes, a small group of people can learn to live together in harmony (how else would we have survived for one or two hundred thousand years), but in order to be sustainable it must be tied to an environment, a place. A unique place with unique and undoubtedly constantly changing, shifting, circumstances. Ecologies are dynamic balancing acts. As soon as the small group tries to make their way a universal system it cannot but fail. Global warming is a planetary event, our adaptations cannot be but local. The rude and savage thoughtless interference with ecological cultures everywhere always destroy, however spiritual they were planned to be.

. . . .

I see cultures as mini-civilizations. What characterized all indigenous cultures until not that long ago is that they were ecologies: humans intimately interacting in and with their unique environment. Any group of people will learn to live together within a specific and unique environment of which they are, and know themselves to be a part.

Our Western civilization, and probably all historical “high” civilizations we know of, are the opposite. They are attempts to create a way of being not in, but on top of an environment, where the environment becomes only resource. All historical civilizations (empires) crashed because they used up their available resources, they stepped out of the circle, they took more from than they were giving back to Earth.

The story of the Plymouth Pilgrims has always seemed an icon of our Western way of thinking—utterly disconnected from Earth, wrapped in a manmade thought structure that hardly is of this planet any more. The Pilgrims arrived without any preparation, without a thought that this continent might be different from the homes they left. They would have starved the first winter if the Indians had not helped them survive—and then they slaughtered the same Indians when they refused to accept the system of thinking the Pilgrims brought. Who are the savage barbarians?

What I miss in the discussions of achieving or working toward an ecological (presumably universal) civilization is Earth, the planet, the larger ecology in which we are embedded to use an ugly modern word.

To be sustainable, the culture of a group of people — necessarily local, and therefore small — must be in intimate and conscious interaction with Earth in a unique location. That is how we survived for millennia. Communities, societies, cultures are not planned, designed, as IBM wants to do for us. They grow in and as a part of an ecology. Humans must know themselves in their own unique niche, part of an ecology—not outside, better than, owning, controlling, designing an “ecological” something that we think of as civilization.

Words get in the way. "In the beginning was the Word," and the Word limits dialogue. In an ecology the dialogues are the essence, constantly shifting, changing.



robert wolff (sic)

See <http://www.wildwolff.com/aboutauthor.html>

FOURTH INTERNATIONAL FORUM ON ECOLOGICAL CIVILIZATION

On May 3-4, 2010, I attended the Institute for Postmodern Development of China's (IPDC) "Fourth International Forum on Ecological Civilization," which was held in Claremont, California, and was co-sponsored by the Central Compilation & Translation Bureau of the Communist Party of China, Center for Process Studies, Claremont Graduate University, and Pitzer College. Over 60 people came to the conference from China (There were only about 30 from the United States.) The IPDC (see <http://www.postmodernchina.org/cgi/index.php>), led by Zhihe Wang and Meijun Fan, has established an amazing presence in China. IPDC has led over 30 conferences in China on such subjects as business ethics, postmodern (non-industrial) agriculture, science and the human spirit, ecological civilization and education, and has established centers in more than 18 universities in China.

The term "ecological civilization" did not come from IPDC (or from any Thomas Berry-related group or organization), it came from China. As discussed in the last article in this *Musings*, it has been a prominent topic in China since the 17th National Congress of the Chinese Community Party, which was held in November 2007. It is no wonder. The official population of China is given as around 1.2 billion but many believe it is at least 1.5 billion (almost a quarter of the world's population), and the land area on which people live is no larger than the United States east of the Mississippi River. The rapid development of China dramatically raises the question whether it is possible to both develop a modern economy and be ecologically sound. This is, of course, not only a question for rapidly industrializing nations like China, but also for established industrial nations.

The point though is China is taking this question seriously—it has to . . . so do we.

The "news" from this conference to me concerned the extraordinary clarity of the Chinese scholars on the relations of humans and nature. One hardly knows what to make of this given the kind of development that is being undertaken in China. In part, this reflects the schizophrenia we all share of being involve in one conception of development (modern, economic, industrial, growth) and believing in another. Yet, I am persuaded that there is a deep meaning to this dialogue and that out of it will come a transition in civilization that will make the ecological age as different from the modern age as the modern age was from the medieval age.

The first keynote was given by Xiangdong Ye, Ph.D., Consul, Head of Science and Technology Office, the Consulate General, The People's Republic of China in Los Angeles. He said there are four qualities in the harmonious society:

- Nature and man (sic)
- Society and man
- Man and man
- Mind, body and spirit

And he said, "The human like any form of life is an organic part of Earth and a child of Mother Earth." In the future we must think in terms of systems and organic integration. Production must conform to the law of nature. We must highlight respect for farmers and proper use of land.

The Chinese as a whole rejected a separation of man and nature in the sense that one could become whole without the other. For example, Chengxiao Cai, Guizhou Normal University, in his paper on "Sociality and Implications of Ecological Civilization," wrote

First, we should reject anthropocentrism, which would destroy nature and human's sustainable development, but we should not be reduced to naturalism just for the sake of nature without considering human development. Second, [in bringing this new reality into being] we must rely on the relationship between man and nature, and the relationship between man and society, especially the social relationships among people."

. . . China seeks to develop "ecological civilization" from the perspective of "social civilization system," which is constituted of material civilization, spiritual civilization, political civilization (system civilization), social civilization (in a narrow sense) and ecological civilization.

Echoing concerns discussed in the April 2010 *Musings* on fairness among nations and between developing nations and developed nations. Dr. Cai wrote:

From a global perspective, we should emphasize the development of all humanity, and take each nation's and each race's interests into consideration. We should not hinder the construction of global "ecological civilization" and damage the ecological interest of mankind just for one nation's sake. Therefore, to unify history, reality and the future dialectically and materialistically is of special importance.

Many papers considered ecological values in Chinese traditional culture. This aspect of Chinese traditional culture had a great impact on Thomas Berry's thinking. Just to take one, Chunhua Gao wrote "On the Eco-Value of Ancient China: 'The identification of Man with the Universe.'" He wrote of how for the Chinese "Tian" (translated as "Heaven") was not an unreal mystical world, it was the actual material world and its order. There was and is an identify of man and the universe. Further, through Daoism there was an emphasis on the equality of all modes of being and the unity of all things. This also came through Chinese Buddhism. Finally there was the concept of "human-heartedness to all things" (compassion for all things).

INTERFAITH CONSORTIUM FOR ECOLOGICAL CIVILIZATION

The Center for Ecozoic Studies, along with the Temple of Understanding, Green Faith and the International Center for Religion and Earth are founding members of the Interfaith Consortium on Ecological Civilization (ICEC). Here is a description of ICEC from its draft vision statement:

Purpose

The *general purpose* of the Interfaith Consortium for Ecological Civilization is to provide interfaith leadership in the transition to an ecological civilization. The *specific purpose* is to create frameworks, processes, and programs for individual and cultural transformation that will lead to an ecological civilization.

Mission

The mission of ICEC is to facilitate a dialogue¹ among the various sectors of society on ecological civilization and to gather faith responses from this dialogue in forms (frameworks, practices, programs) that will inspire and assist the individual and cultural transformation that is the necessary foundation of an ecological civilization.

Focus

The focus of ICEC efforts will be the *how* of change, rather than on statements about change and what specifically should be done.

¹ *Dialogue* as used here refers to deliberate and skillful interaction for the development of (new) shared understanding, versus discussion that leads to mutual understanding at best or debate that leads to compromises (weak agreements) and winners and losers.

Ecological Civilization

Ecological civilization may be thought of as a set of overarching commitments that will reinvigorate the great historical civilizations that continue into our time, in replacement of the globalizing Western culture of today. And so, ecological civilization will find distinctive expression in—and it will reinvigorate—the major cultures and religious communities of the world today.

On May 7, 2010, ICEC held its inaugural event. Entitled “Exploring the Implications of Ecological Civilization,” this was a side event held in connection with a meeting of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development in New York City. The panelists were:

- Dr. Mary Evelyn Tucker, Yale University School of Forestry and Yale Divinity School, Founder of the Forum on Religion and Ecology
- Dr. Wolfgang Sachs, Fellow at the Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Energy and the Environment in Germany
- Dr. Erin Lothes, Earth Institute, Columbia University
- Mary Beth Kass, Bedford, New York, 2020 Project
- Herman Greene, Center for Ecozoic Studies

CHINA AND ECOLOGICAL CIVILIZATION

(The following talk was presented by Herman F. Greene, J.D., D.Min. at the Interfaith Consortium for Ecological Civilization Side Event to the 18th Session of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development, New York City, May 7, 2010)

My comments will primarily concern the current discourse on ecological civilization in China. I first became aware of this discourse when I received an invitation in January 2009 to participate in a Symposium on Ecological Civilization in Sanya, China. I immediately liked the term because I thought it was large enough to cover the massive transformation that is needed in human society. I also thought it correctly indicated that change would need to take place at the highest orders of human society to meet the crises we face in both human development and the relations of humans and nature.

The term ecological civilization was new to me, but I later learned that scientists in the former Soviet Union called for an ecological civilization in 1984. The idea was taken up in China by Ye Qianji in 1987 and later by Pan Yue of China’s State Environmental Protection Administration (SEPA). The idea came into prominence when it was included as a key element in Hu Jintao’s report² to the 17th National Congress of the Chinese Community Party in November 2007.

When I received the invitation to the conference in January 2009, I could hardly believe what I was reading. It seemed as though the Chinese had jumped ahead in conceiving of the changes that are needed in human society.

My invitation stated:

The world of the 21st century suffers from many increasingly serious global social problems: population explosion, resource shortage and depletion, environmental degradation, and polarizing of rich and poor. These problems, together with the recent financial crisis, pose unprecedented threats to the future of the human race. Many scientists and scholars have come to a consensus that ecological civilization is the only correct choice for continuing human survival and development. But opinions differ on questions such as what ecological civilization is and how ecological civilization can come into being. Now, thoughtful theoretical studies on ecological civilization are

² Mr. Hu is the General Secretary of the Chinese Community Party. He gave the report of the Central Committee of the Chinese Party to the Congress.

urgently needed, so that feasible measures can be put forth and a consensus in the international community can be reached to promote the achievement of this goal.

With this as context they called for a conference to consider, among other things,

1. Ecological civilization as a new stage of human civilization after agricultural civilization and industrial civilization;
2. The relation between ecological and environmental problems and the market economy and globalization;
3. Preconditions, thoughts and measures to achieve ecological civilization;
4. Ecological civilization and sustainable development of society;
5. Ecological civilization and human equality, freedom, welfare and all-around development; and
6. Experiences of ecological civilization.

I attended the conference and it was quite good.

In March of this year, I received another invitation, this time to the First International Conference on Chinese Traditional Culture and Ecological Civilization, which will be held in Beijing in October 2010 and be sponsored by SEPA, the Chinese Association for Science and Technology, the Chinese Society for Environmental Sciences, and the International Conference of Yi-Ching Studies. This invitation stated

Ecological civilization is a more advanced stage of the development of human civilization ... toward which the whole of humanity is striding in pursuit of harmonious and coordinated development of humanity and nature after reflecting on the malpractices of production, lifestyle and values in the process of industrialization for 300-plus years.

Chinese traditional culture, containing incisive thoughts of ecological harmony, such as "human-being is an integral part of nature" and "the way of nature is the way of human-being", reflects the ecological wisdom coinciding with many principles advocated as being in modern ecological civilization. These principles successfully guided China's practices in the coordinated development of traditional agricultural and natural ecology for thousands of years. At present, with the serious challenge of global environmental pollution and ecological crises, it is quite valuable in theory and very important in practice to discuss how to inherit and carry forward the fine elements of our traditional culture to be a rich source of ideas for the construction of socialist ecological civilization.

On Monday and Tuesday of this week I participated in yet another conference on ecological civilization held in Claremont, California.³ More than 60 scholars came from China for this conference. It was sponsored by the Institute for the Postmodern Development of China and co-sponsored by the Central Bureau for Compilation and Translation, the main publishing bureau of the Chinese government. This was the agency that translated Marx into Chinese in an earlier period to guide the Chinese people and now it is working on ecological civilization.

Here is just a random sample of the thinking of the Chinese scholars. Shusong Wang of Qiqihar University wrote:

Advanced science and technology created by humans has conversely ruled humankind and subverted original cultural patterns. This requires us to proceed from the cultural perspective to undertake thorough-going philosophical thinking in the fields of ecological essence, existence, history, values and ecological culture. Culture is the production, accumulation and development of practices by humans, and nature is also a source of human culture. In a sense, cultural history

³ "The Fourth International Forum on Ecological Civilization," May 3-4, 2010, Claremont, CA, Co-sponsored by the Institute for Postmodern Development of China, the Central Compilation and Translation Bureau of the Communist Party of China, Center for Process Studies, Claremont Graduate University, and Pitzer College.

can be said to be one in which human beings change nature, and every cultural creation, either directly or indirectly, reflects the relationship of humans and nature.

I was astounded by the quality of thought presented and I doubt that it could be reproduced in the American academy because the Chinese somehow enter deeply into the relationship of humans, human culture and nature and the organic and dynamic relations involved. Further they had given themselves to the premise that industrial civilization must now give way to ecological civilization.

Does this mean that the Chinese have arrived at ecological civilization? A Communist Party official at the conference arguing with one young Chinese scholar insisted that this was indeed the case.

I returned home this week to read these stories about China. One was of the Shanghai World Expo just opened on May 1. Shanghai has spent \$4.2 billion preparing for this event, more than twice what was spent for the 2008 Olympics in Beijing. Billed as an expo to stimulate discussion of “urban maladies,” *The Economist* quotes a senior organizer as saying visitors are supposed to experience “the sensation of being in a fantastic movie of light and sound, of entering a theme park full of colour and attractions.”⁴

Huanent Power, China’s biggest utility announced that it increased its production of electricity in China by 40% in the first quarter of this year. *The Economist* states that power added in China in this year alone will approach the entire installed capacity of electric power generation in Germany or France, and further that China has accounted for “80% of the worlds’ new generating capacity in recent years and will continue to do so for many years to come.”⁵

Yesterday *The New York Times* reported, “Even as China has set ambitious goals for itself in clean-energy production and reduction of global warming gases, the country’s surging demand for power from oil and coal has led to the largest six-month increase in the tonnage of human generated greenhouse gases ever by a single country.”⁶

So China . . . ecological civilization or not?

China may not yet be ecological civilization, but it has taken the lead in this discourse.

The event this evening was organized by the newly formed Interfaith Coalition on Ecological Civilization. Its purpose is “To facilitate a dialogue among the various sectors of society on ecological civilization, and gather faith responses from this dialogue in forms that will inspire and assist the individual and cultural transformation that is the necessary foundation of an ecological civilization.”

May this conversation grow.

* * * * *

The mission of CES is to offer a vision, through dialogue, of an ecozoic society and contribute to its realization through research, education and the arts.

To become a member of CES, send a letter to CES at 2516 Winningham Road, Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27516, USA, with your contact information and dues. Dues for each calendar year are US\$35 (individual or family); outside USA, Canada and Mexico, add US\$10. Sustaining Member US\$135. You may also pay your dues online at www.ecozoicstudies.org. Contributions are welcome.

⁴ “Living the Dream,” *The Economist*, May 1, 2010.

⁵ “Lights and Action,” *The Economist*, May 1, 2010. The article quoted Edward Chen of Credit Suisse, an investment bank, concerning China’s 80% share of world’s increase in energy generation.

⁶ Bradshear, Keith, “China’s Energy Use Threatens Goals on Warming,” *New York Times*, May 6, 2010, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/07/business/energy-environment/07energy.html> (accessed May 7, 2010)