

## **ECOLOGICAL CIVILIZATION AND THE 19<sup>th</sup> NATIONAL CONGRESS OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF CHINA**

**By Herman Greene**

The term “ecological civilization” is becoming increasingly important in the global discourse, especially in China. A scientist 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 former President Hu Jintao’s report to the 17<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in November 2007.

In 2009 I received an invitation from Peking University to attend the International Symposium on Ecological Civilization to be held in Sanya, Hainan, China, which I did attend. I was amazed at the content of the invitation, which stated:

The world of the 21<sup>st</sup> 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 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.

Within this context participants were asked to consider:

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.

In March of 2010, I received another invitation, this time to the First International Conference on Chinese Traditional Culture and Ecological Civilization which was to be held in Beijing 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. I also

attended this conference. 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.

The usage of the term continues to grow inside and outside of China.

Most recently the term was again highlighted as a goal for China in President Xi Jinping’s report to the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party. These congresses are held once every five years. The President’s report to the congress takes over one year to prepare and when delivered becomes the most important document shaping Chinese policy for the ensuing period.

In the first part of the report, Xi stated approvingly that China had made much progress on ecological civilization since the last congress. Notably, the report put “beautiful China” along with “rich and strong, democratic, civilized, harmonious” as the words to describe the goals for China’s future. For the Chinese people, “beautiful China” means “green China,” a China with a healthy ecological environment.

The third part of the report concerned basic strategy. “Greening” was listed along with “creative, coordinated, open and sharing” as the five basic concepts for China’s development.

In the fourth part of the report Xi stated there were three great challenges that China faced: pollution, financial risks, and poverty relief.

The overall theme of the report was "Secure a decisive victory in building a moderately prosperous society in all respects and strive for the great success of socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era," and it set goals for China through 2049, the 100<sup>th</sup> year anniversary of the founding of the New China. From now to 2035, the goal is for China to realize basic socialist modernization. From 2035 to mid-21st Century, the goal is for China to be a great modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, harmonious, and beautiful.

All of Part IV of the report is about ecological civilization. The title of the part is “Speeding reform of ecological civilization system and building beautiful China.” The report said that humans and nature are a life community. Humans must respect nature, follow nature, and protect nature. Only by following the principles of nature will humans avoid taking the wrong way in receiving nature’s gifts.

The report also stated that the modernization China is seeking is one of humans and coexisting in harmony with nature. The report listed four requirements: The first is to promoting green development. The second is to attach emphasis to solving prominent environmental problems. The third is to step up efforts on eco-system protections. And the fourth is to reform the monitoring systems of the ecological environment.

Part XII of the report was on “human community with common destiny.” It said that humans are facing many common threats with which no country can deal alone. Xi called on all the peoples in the world to build a human community with a common destiny and construct a world with lasting peace, safety for all, shared prosperity, openness, inclusion, cleanliness, and beauty.

The report given by Xi offers a strong vision of China’s future. Western reports on the congress express concern about the tightening of Xi’s and the Communist Party’s rule over China. Realities never measure up to the glorious visions we propose. Still, we may celebrate the promise of ecological civilization offered by Xi and join with him and the people of China as part of that human community with a common destiny in the realization of that promise.

Here is a link to a summary of the highlights of the report: [China Daily](#). The highlights concerning the environment are [here](#).