

Harmonious Development in West China Based on Constructive Postmodernism

Développement harmonieux de l'Ouest de la Chine, fondé sur un post-modernisme constructif

YU Yong-yue¹

Abstract: West China represents 71% of the total land in mainland China. But believe it or not, due to being desert, among the soil of Western China, only 4.2% of it is arable. Given the limited arable land in West China, post-modernistic view on West China Development, in particular its stress on sustainability, I suggest that postmodernism, what I've been proposing, be our possible way out.

Key words: harmonious development; West China; constructive postmodernism

Résumé: L'Ouest de la Chine représente 71% de la surface totale de la Chine continentale. Vous le croyez ou pas, en raison de la désertification, dans la Chine de l'Ouest, seulement 4,2% de la terre est cultivable. Comme la terre cultivable est limitée dans l'Ouest de la Chine, une vision post-moderniste sur le développement de l'Ouest est nécessaire et l'accent doit être mis sur la durabilité. Je suggère donc que le post-modernisme, ce que j'avait proposé avant, devrait être notre solution possible.

Mots-Clés: développement harmonieux; l'Ouest de la Chine; post-modernisme constructif

1. A POSSIBLE BLUEPRINT FOR WEST CHINA DEVELOPMENT

The development of West China should take a new path. The path I propose here is built upon constructive postmodernism. The path, I would like to stress, isn't the one and only option but can serve as an alternative worth exploring.

¹ School of Political Science and Public Management, Wuhan university, China. (1967-), female, doctor degree of Political Economics, Professor of School of Political Science and Public Management in Wuhan University, mainly researching Western China Development. China. Address: School of Political Science and Public Management, Wuhan University, Wuhan, Hubei, 430072, P.R.China.

* Received 12 June 2009; accepted 21 August 2009

1.1 A Second Enlightenment

This Second Enlightenment, cherishing broader perspectives towards nature, consists of three aspects: ecological benefits, social benefits and economic benefits, and these three aspects, as my previous points might have implied, need to be valued in this fashion: ecological benefits being the priority and economic benefits being the least important.

This plan starts with education. Specifically, I'd like to see concepts of environmental protection and social justice incorporated into all our curriculum. Once these key concepts become values ingrained in people's minds, the policies and implementation of them just come naturally. Then we may see concrete plans which go along with sustainable development in agriculture, tourism and other aspects germinating and coming to fruition.

I believe that through the Second Enlightenment, we will see a light at the end of the tunnel — a better environment, a more just society but still a profitable economic structure.

1.2 Sustainable Agricultural Development

Modern agriculture depletes the land, uses huge amounts of petroleum products, pollutes the environment, brings disaster to the eco-system. Furthermore, it is misinterpreted economically, upsets farming communities and creates despair, upsets our values including respect for the land and the workers, with agriculture as the root of our culture tree. A traditional Chinese story tells of a fisherman who harvests all the fish by draining the pond. This "modern" system of agriculture drains our ponds.

Elton John's song for the 1995 "Lion King" was titled "Circle of Life". This popular piece happens to sum up my idea of sustainable agricultural development. This idea I borrow from Elton John's great hit is the harmonious cycle between/around agriculture, forestry, and fishing, etc. It has a broader meaning of agriculture. The adoption of chemicals should be kept to the minimum or banned. Such approaches can promise production with stable and sustainable profits.

1.3 Eco-conscious Tourism

Current tourism is the simple "come and go" approach — tourists come in, see the sights and go. We should count ourselves lucky if they don't leave behind any trash. The plan I have in mind is to turn these sites into classrooms. Tourists can still find themselves well entertained but at the same time, their eco-consciousness is raised. They are not only observers of this environmental protection movement but also participants and contributors. Such tourism brings in money but at the same time prevents possible damage to the environment. The earth becomes a better place to be.

1.4 Environment-friendly Consumers

Moderation has been a virtue highly appreciated by Chinese society. And I've meant to promote this virtue in almost every aspect. Now I'd like to suggest moderation by consumers, which to me is closely akin to the careful use of natural resources. Earlier I mentioned Chinese Westernization, or rather Americanization. China likes almost anything American, including values and shopping habits. Now Chinese people also try to keep up with the Joneses, living on credit cards as opposed to what they have in their pockets. This over-consumption isn't healthy. I would like to point my finger at the media. I would like to see the media approaching stories with critical eyes rather than an advertising intent. We need to retrieve moderation, the long-lost virtue. It's healthy for our minds, our bodies, and in a long run, our environment, our earth.

1.5 City-country Symbiotic Cooperation

There has been an oppressor/oppressed relationship between the urban and rural areas where the city plays the feudal lord while the small agricultural village is a poor peasant. I would like to call for re-structuring of the power dynamic. Specifically, I suppose it's a good idea to have the city serve as the nutrients to allow the nearby provincial towns to be better developed.

Agricultural towns and villages should be given the chance to preserve their identity as small villages and towns. They don't need to be urbanized in order to survive. This utopia needs the rise of the village folks' self-awareness and also urban folks' appreciation for the country. Like Western nations' re-exploration of the East, urban people help country people regain their self-confidence, the two groups live and work on an egalitarian basis and eventually this long sought utopia can be realized.

2. A CONCRETE LAYOUT FOR WEST CHINA DEVELOPMENT

West China represents 71% of the total land in mainland China. But believe it or not, due to being desert, among the soil of Western China, only 4.2% of it is arable. Given the limited arable land in West China, post-modernistic view on West China Development, in particular its stress on sustainability, I suggest that postmodernism, what I've been proposing, be our possible way out.

2.1 Promoting Postmodern Agriculture

"I observe that, in agriculture, we are already moving into a postmodern world." says Prof. Dean Freudenberger, the famous expert in regenerative agriculture.

Postmodern approach on agriculture, indeed, is a big umbrella. Generally speaking, it may consist of organic agriculture, alternative agriculture, bio-dynamic agriculture, biological agriculture, low-input agriculture, natural agriculture, permanent agriculture (i.e. permaculture) and regenerative agriculture. Regardless of all these different names, all these methods share a common goal—— maintain the sustainability of agricultural development, balance of eco-system, public and individual health, and long-lasting development of the globe. Those 12 provinces in West China may vary from one another given their unique geographical features, ethnic/population formation and cultural characteristics. They may pick the method(s) which appear to be best suitable for their individual situations.

Basically, all possible options can be summarized into at least three categories: organic production, eco-systemically integrative production and leisure-tourism production.

The above three production models focus on different sides of the same story: organic production on technological aspects, eco-systemically integrative production on managerial aspect and leisure-tourism production on lifestyle. Each province can take the method(s) that it sees fit. Of course, these three methods aren't the only options and I encourage the germination and development of new possibilities.

2.2 Stimulating Cultural Industry and Education

As I've mentioned earlier, only 4.2% of the land in West China is arable. It's quite ridiculous to expect the majority of people in West China to reside on this tiny portion of land. Textile industry seems to have come to the West China residents' rescue. Yes, the intrusion of the textile industry indeed creates jobs. In fact, following the textile industry, there comes the dyeing industry. But both industries aren't what West China needs, should West China like to maintain its un-contaminated beauty and its sustainability. Both industries cause pollutions. A possible better choice is the cultural industry, given its emerging and

environment-friendly nature.

The Las Vegas experience is unarguably amazing. My only concern is that Chinese culture might not be able to accept or value gambling. Yet I think the basic model may work. What I envision is a Chinese capital of films in West China, especially given its vast, yet-to-developed territories. The initial step is to attract film companies back east to come over and build up divisions in West China. It'd be better could those film companies move their headquarters over. It is true that other than the vast land, West China might not have much to offer, unlike Los Angeles to New York back in 1920's to 1930's with its smiley sunshine. The government may offer tax deduction/reduction/remission for the first film firms may enjoy tax-free privileges for a period of time.

Now with a burgeoning capital of films in West China, there must be a dire need for actors and actresses. Then here come job opportunities for locals, many of who are minorities and have been noted for their choreographic arts/ exotic music and dances. Hopefully to have the performances better organized and the actors/actresses better trained, we may need a school to train these actors/actresses and develop good personnel specializing in art management. A college/university can be beneficial to the whole community. In addition to serving as a training school for performers and managerial staff on an undergraduate level, the college/university can have the live-performing, filming sites as its naturalistic laboratory and in turn give its research outcomes back to the community to help it flourish. Some possible programs I have in mind are art management, ethnic relations, recreational management, etc. Just to bring in the environmental issues we have discussed, I suppose a program in environmental management can be a good idea as well. At any rate, I would like to see close co-operation among all of these programs, what Claremont Colleges calls interdisciplinary approach to a problematic. My ultimate goal is to see the regions better developed under the condition that damages to the environment can be kept to the minimum and the unique cultural features of the regions can be highly cherished and preserved. On a rather mundane level, with the college/university erected, the whole area will be blooming as students domestic and foreign, in particular those out of town, will come over to spend some time there. Stores to sustain students' daily life will be open one after another and this will somewhat help the local economy. On an international level, similar to other tourist towns, with the one-of-a-kind cuisines, ethnic costumes, music and etc, tourists both domestic and overseas, will be allured to this utopia.

The above Hollywood/ Las Vegas model, admittedly, may not be suitable for all provinces in West China. Xinjiang, given its unique cultural characteristics, may be a stronger candidate for Hollywood in China. I propose a Williamsburgh model for all other 11 provinces (and of course, it should be applicable on Xinjiang as well). Williamsburgh realized its significance in the history of Southern United States development. So it took into serious consideration when developing itself, especially given the fact that it once served as the capital of Virginia before the government moved to Richmond. The center of the city, Colonial Williamsburgh, is situated adjacent to The College of William and Mary. The live history museum and the university maintain a nepotistic relationship— the university depends on the re-enacting groups but in turn, the re-enacting groups rely on the university archaeological research to preserve/discover artifacts.

Some West China residents may strongly resist the grand proposal. Their urgent concern is how to "put their hands into their mouths". Agricultural development seems to be a solution to the problem. But I would like to say that, given the limited arable land, not all of them would be able to put bread on the table by growing crops. Cultural industry may be a better choice. Cultural industry isn't limited to arable land so one doesn't need to be on or own that 4.2% land to be eligible. Furthermore, cultural industry is more promising. One may earn more with less intensive labor.

2.3 Living Energy-saving Lifestyle

In a "typical" modernist society, to make sure that there'll be enough power at their disposal, people keep building power plants, nuclear ones and those run by burning coals. There has been a conventional notion/proposal that we come up with safer and more environment-friendly power plants. But sticking to my sustainable environment protection statement, I presume, rather than searching for new energy, we

may minimize our consumption or even dependence upon energy, in this case electricity and gasoline in particular. A few examples, both domestic and international, may serve as inspirations as we build up our New West China. The first one is eco-friendly transportation. It has been deemed a common sense that replacing automobiles and motorcycles with bicycles can be good for our environment. But a bicycle builder/manufacturer in Santa Cruz, California, has made an even more impressive statement. As opposed to building up his bike with iron/steel, metal in general, which is un-regenerative, he made his bike out of bamboo. This idea sounded crazy at first but it has been proven that this novice was feasible. Bamboo, for residents in West China, is easy to obtain, in comparison to our western counter-parts who might need to import it. Better still, as the inventor of this great innovation, such bikes are easy to maintain and fix. "You just need some Super Glue", he said, if the bike even broken down or fell apart. The bike wouldn't become bulky trash if indeed it were time for its retirement/demise. A bamboo bike can save energy as a normal bike does but it can take one step further not becoming hard-to-get-rid-of trash when it does complete its service.

Energy-saving lifestyle consists of not only the proactive cut of energy consumption but also the utilization of eco-friendly energy. It's almost considered a fad to make the best use of solar power/energy. What I have in mind feasible in West China context are housing which cleverly use the solar energy. One model derives from Yongding (China) Hakka Community Earth Buildings. These mushroom-like round apartment complexes allow each unit to receive equal amount of sunlight during the day thanks to their shallow courtyards in the centre. This means little need of light during the day. Given the long hours of day light in West China, such a house model sounds especially appealing and smart. To our astonishment, in these seemingly modest houses, we can find amazing natural ventilating, water recycling and sewage systems.

Another model stems from the Crestone Community, Colorado. This group of people builds their "Natural Strawbale House" with the materials locally available. These smart houses let sunlight in during the day from their big windows facing south and the heat, trapped and absorbed, starts to emit after dark. This way, a heater is barely needed even during winter. It has been reported that even when it's snowing, the interior temperature can remain up to 60-70 °F.

These two models, nevertheless, just come as possible paths that West China may take. Given the diversity of Western China geographical features and ethnic formation, one or two models may not be applicable to all those 12 provinces.

What I am suggesting here, is to keep options open but the key point to live a life based on what is available locally and on the conviction that damages to the environment and consumption of un-regenerative resources can be kept to the minimum.

2.4 Reforesting and Regenerating West China

One way the central government can help West China while also benefiting East China would be a massive program of re-forestation and perhaps new forestation. In West China, even much of the non-arable land, such as Tibet, can still support trees of one sort or another.

Since the major rivers on which East China depends arise in West China, and since forests are a major contribution to their health, it is definitely in the interest of East China to improve them. They also counter global warming to some degree and support tourism. Eventually they can support a lumber industry which, as lumber becomes globally scarce, can be quite valuable. Forests actually increase rainfall and also release the water gradually, reducing flooding. Based on lumber, some parts of West China could develop new industries rather than send all the lumber for use in East China.

One should also see whether some of the land that is no longer arable could be regenerated. Such regeneration usually needs to be subsidized, because the plantings that begin the process have no commercial value. Few farmers can afford this, but society as a whole benefits in the long run.

I've been aware of the fact that I might sound like an idealist. But a better world always starts from an ideal and its realization relies on one's constant efforts to make it possible. Unlike East China has been contaminated both materially and spiritually, West China stands alone as China's last Utopia. I have a

dream to keep the Utopia as it is. Anyone who wants to have their minds purified will have this paradise to go to, away from urban pollutants, and they may come out refreshed and as new individuals.

REFERENCES

- Arran E. Gare. (1995). *Postmodernism and the Environmental Crisis*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Clifford W. Cobb and John B. Cobb, Jr. (1994). *The Green National Product: A Proposed Index of Sustainable Economics Welfare*. Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, Inc..
- David R. Griffin. (1988). *Spirituality and Society: Postmodern Visions*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- David W. Orr: *Ecological Literacy: Education and the Transition to a Postmodern World*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1994.
- Ervin Laszlo. *A strategy for the Future*. New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1974. Herman E. Daly: *Beyond Growth*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.
- Herman E. Daly. (1999). *Ecological Economics and the Ecology of Economics: Essays in Criticism*. Cheltenham, UK. Northampton, MA, USA: Edward Elgar Publishing, Inc..
- Herman E. Daly and John B. Cobb, Jr.(1994). *For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Editor: Martin Gagnon