

Ecological Civilization in the People's Republic of China

Dennis Bartels

The People's Republic of China (PRC) is making rapid progress in reducing carbon emissions (Hilton 2024; Woolner and Jones 2025). In the PRC, de-carbonization is seen as part of a process aimed at achieving "Ecological Civilization" (Bing *et al.* 2023). President Xi Jinping described the main policy initiatives of Ecological Civilization as follows:

We will promote a revolution in energy production and consumption, and build an energy sector that is clean, low-carbon, safe, and efficient.

We promote a sound economic structure that facilitates green, low-carbon, and circular development.

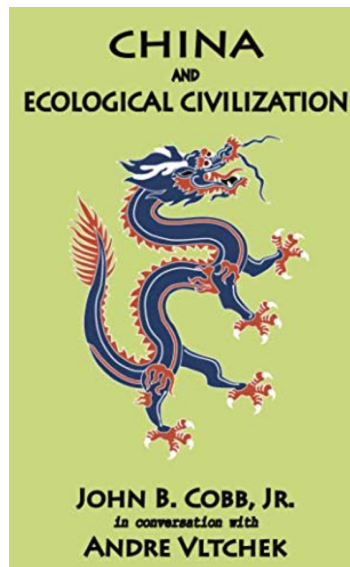
We encourage simple, moderate, green, and low-carbon ways of life, and oppose extravagance and excessive consumption.

We will improve systems for regeneration of croplands, grassland, forests, rivers, and lakes. (qtd. in Williams 2017)

In June, 2025, a forum on Ecological Civilization was held at Pomona College, in Claremont, California. It was attended by over 100 delegates from a dozen countries, including 20 "experts" from institutions in the PRC. Some of these institutions were Beijing Normal University, Nanjing University, and Shanxi University (Xinua 2025).

A similar symposium was held in June, 2025, at The School of Marxism, Zhejiang Normal University, Jinhua, Zhejiang, China. The main theme of the forum was "Organic Process Philosophy, Traditional Chinese Culture, and Ecological Civilization." Another theme at the symposium was "Practical Pathways of Constructive Postmodernism." Participants in the forum included Prof. Yang Li, of Harbin Normal University, and Prof. Wang Yin, Dean of the School of Marxism at Zhejiang Normal University (<https://my.zjnu.edu.cn/myen/2025/0604/c19066a520219/page.htm>).

According to Aaron Gare (2009), the concept of Ecological Civilization was first proposed in 1984 by Soviet scientists, then elaborated in the PRC (Cobb, Jr., and Vltchek 2019).



The theoretical foundation of Ecological Civilization is process philosophy/theology, which was mainly derived from the metaphysical views of the British-born mathematician and philosopher, Alfred North Whitehead (b. 1861 - d. 1947).

Process philosophers argue that the fundamental features of all natural phenomena are interconnections between ongoing processes as opposed to the conventional view of natural phenomena as interaction between objects with specific spatio-temporal locations (Rescher 2000).

Process theologians, notably John B. Cobb, Jr., identified Divinity as the non-personified totality of interconnected processes. Divinity propels, or “lures,” ever-expanding interconnections between processes (Cobb, Jr., and Griffin 1976). The concept of divinity proposed by process theologians bears similarities to the concept of divinity proposed in the 17th century (CE) by the philosopher, Baruch Spinoza (Di Poppa 2010).

Proponents of process philosophy suggest that the continuity of interconnectedness between ongoing processes eliminates the conventional distinction between mind and body. It also eliminates the conventional distinction between nature and humanity.

Aspects of process philosophy have been linked to the work of Teilhard de Chardin (Kong and He 2025), Henri Bergson (Macallan 2020), and David Bohm (Griffin 1983; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=17VKGcmWVCw>).

In the PRC, the term, “post-modern,” connotes process philosophy/theology, not the views of the French post-modern philosophers, including Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault (Wang, He, and Fan 2014).

Chinese academics, encouraged by the Chinese Communist Party, have attempted to integrate process philosophy, Confucian views of the relationship between humanity and nature, and Marxist dialectics.

Proponents of Ecological Civilization contrast capitalist/anthropomorphism, which centres on exploitation of nature by humanity, with Confucian cosmocentrism, which centres on harmonious relations between nature and humanity (Hansen, Li and Svarverud2018).

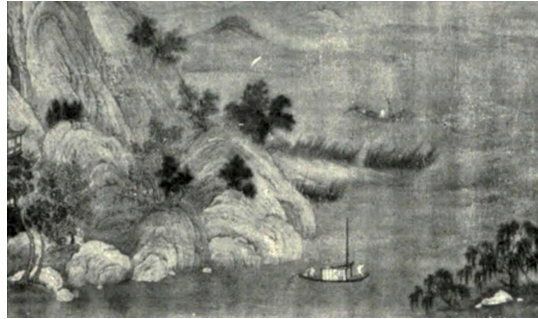


Image above: landscape painting by Wang Wei, Tang Dynasty, *ca.* 750 CE, Wikimedia Commons

Proponents of ecological civilization also focus on Marxist “laws of dialectics” (Engels 1877; Foster 2020), particularly “negation of negation,” to characterize relations between humanity and nature. A formulation of the “law of negation of negation” is as follows: “whenever a transformation of something into something else occurs, the new entity retains some features of the former entity but also negates/eclipses certain features when the second entity is transformed into a third entity” (Bartels 2020).

According to Chen Yiwen (2024), academics in the PRC are exploring “the negation of the negation” concerning the unity, alienation, and reconciliation of humanity and nature. This academic trend delineates Marxist ecology into three distinct elements: “(1) the view of humanized nature, emphasizing the unity of humanity and nature; (2) the critique of capitalism focusing on the alienation between humanity and nature; and (3) the perspective of the Communist revolution, highlighting the reconciliation between humanity and nature.”



“Clear Waters and Green Mountains,” by Huangdan.
[Huangdan2060](#)

Over the last decades, the policy initiatives of Ecological Civilization devised in the PRC have been elaborated to combat the climate crisis in the rest of the world (Wang, He, and Fan 2014).

The view that the PRC is a Communist dictatorship with no regard for human rights is omnipresent in Western mass media and social media. This view could provide an ideological underpinning for a nuclear conflict between major capitalist powers on the one hand, and the PRC, Russia, and the DPRK on the other. A nuclear exchange, however minor, would result in a nuclear winter which would exterminate humanity (Foster 2022; Ellsberg 2017). A related possibility is that increasing carbon emissions, partially emanating from a renewed global arms race, could result in a climate catastrophe that would exterminate humanity (Gayle 2025; Foster 2022).

Despite propagation of climate science denial in mass media and social media that are owned or controlled by petro-states and/or fossil fuel interests, the increasing frequency and severity of fossil-fueled extreme weather events may compel growing numbers of people around the world to realize that rapid reduction of carbon emissions will require massive state intervention in “free market”/capitalist economies to curb carbon emissions (Bartels and Bartels 2020).

The worsening climate crisis may also compel Western and Japanese mass media and social media to explore Ecological Civilization in the PRC.

The initial line of the refrain of the Communist anthem, *The Internationale*, written by Eugene Pottier one month after the brutal suppression of the Paris Commune in 1871, is terrifyingly appropriate for characterizing the possibilities mentioned above:

‘Tis the final conflict...

Will the final conflict be a prologue to Ecological Civilization based upon socialism, renewable energy technologies, sustainable agriculture, and comprehensive economic planning (Xinhua 2025)? Or will a “victory” by petro-states, fossil fuel and related industries, and their political allies, bring human extinction?



Image from *Global Times*

Author

Dennis Bartels, Ph.D., is a retired anthropologist. He and his daughter, Natasha Bartels, MA, are members of Next Generation Energy Alternatives, a Toronto-based charity mandated to promote renewable energy technologies. They are co-authors of, “WW II tactics could be key to combating today's climate crisis” (*National Observer*, 12 January 2020).

References

- Bartels, Dennis. 2020. “Dialectical Materialism and Quantum Processes.” *Cultural Logic*. Vol. 24.
- Bartels, Dennis and Natasha Bartels. 2020. “W.W. II tactics could be key to combating today’s climate crisis.” *National Observer* (12 Jan).
- Bing, Xue; Han Bin; Hongqing Li; Xiaohua Guo; Hong Yang; Heiko Thomas; and, Stefan Stückrad. 2023. “Understanding ecological civilization in China: From political context to science.” *PubMed*. [US] National Library of Medicine (Dec.).
- Chen Yiwen. 2024. “Marxist Ecology in China: From Marx’s Ecology to Socialist Eco-Civilization Theory.” *Monthly Review* (1 Oct.).
- Cobb, J.B., Jr., and David Ray Griffin. 1976. *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition*. Philadelphia Westminster Press.
- Cobb, J.B., Jr., and Andre Vltchek. 2019. *China and Ecological Civilization*. Badak Merah Semesta.

- Di Poppa, Francesca. 2010. "Spinoza and Process Ontology." *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, Vol 48, Issue 3.
- Dreyer, Jacob. 2024. "Xi Thinks China Can Slow Climate Change. What if He's Right?" *New York Times* (19 April).
- Ellsberg, Daniel. 2017. *The Doomsday Machine*. Bloomsbury USA.
- Engels, Friedrich. 1877. *Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science/Anti-Dühring*. In Emile Burns, ed. 1935. *A Handbook of Marxism*. NY: International Publishers.
- Foster, John Bellamy. 2022. "'Notes on Extermination' for the Twenty-First-Century Ecology and Peace Movements." *Monthly Review* (1 May).
- 2020. "Engels' *Dialectics of Nature* in the Anthropocene." *Monthly Review* (1 Nov.).
- Gayle, Damien. 2025. "Revealed: NATO rearmament could increase carbon emissions by 200 m tonnes a year." *Guardian* (29 May).
- Gare, Aaron. 2009. "Barbarity, Civilization and Decadence." *Chromatikon* 5: 167-189.
- Griffin, David Ray. 1983. *Physics and the ultimate significance of time: Bohm, Prigogine, and Process Philosophy*. State University of New York Press.
- Hansen, M.H., H.T. Li, and R. Svarverud. 2018. "Ecological Civilization: Interpreting the Chinese Past, Projecting the Global Future." *Global Environmental Change*, 53.
- Kennedy, Charles. 2025. "China's Oil Demand to Peak Within 5 Years as India's Continues to Climb." *Oilprice.com* (22 May).
- Kong, Shifu and Simeqi He. 2025. "Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Thomas Berry, and Process Philosophy; Report from the Conference at Beijing Normal University." *Sino-US Times* (Jan. 14).
- Macallan, Brian. 2020. "Back To Bergson: The Continuing Importance of Bergson for Process Philosophy and Theology." *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, Vol. 16, No. 2.
- Rescher, Nicholas. 2000. *Process Philosophy: A Survey of Basic Issues*. University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Wang, Zhihe, Huili He, and Meijun Fan. 2014. "The Ecological Civilization Debate in China." *Monthly Review* (1 Nov.).
- Williams, Jeremy. 2017. "What is China's Ecological Civilization?" *The Earthbound Report* (8 Oct.).

Woolner, Derek and David Glyne Jones. 2025. "China and renewable energy: The global impact." *Pearls and Irritants* (8 July).

Xinhua. 2025. "Experts laud China's leadership in promoting eco-civilization" (7 July).