

Socialist Eco-civilization and Social-ecological Transformation

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Abstract: Eco-civilization or eco-civilization construction, which has become one of the most buzzing word among the green thinking and policy discussion in China after the 18th congress of CPC in 2012, is actually facing with the risk of being an ideologically and semantically ambiguous term. One negative consequences of this situation is that, as the reality has shown, it makes a critical academic study and cross-cultural dialogue of eco-civilization very difficult, if not impossible. One way to move out of this predicament, from an eco-socialist perspective, is to reveal and explicate the political dimension of eco-civilization, by clearly proposing a green-left alternative or politics of ‘socialist eco-civilization’.

Key words: socialist eco-civilization, eco-civilization construction, social-ecological transformation, China, green-left politics

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While getting better known to the world as a state strategy of China over the past decade, eco-civilization (*shengtaiwenming*) or eco-civilization construction (*shengtaiwenming jianshe*) is still a concept which can only be understandable in the Chinese context of discourse, a far less than expected international recognition—sympathetic response or criticism—even among the green-left academia (Magdoff 2012/2011; Salleh 2008; Morrison 2007). A key reason for this seemingly unfair situation is that, from my own thinking, eco-civilization as a concept and theory of environmental humanity and social science remains to be not fully explored and explained, though the remarkable efforts made by the Chinese colleagues (Huan et al. 2014; Zhang Y. 2014; Fang 2014; Lu et al. 2013; Liu S. 2006). As a result, connotations of this term are semantically and ideologically not clear enough, and in reality, it is too often regarded as a general designation of ‘green thinking/policy’ or just an up-to-date version of national environmental policy. My assumption is, inadequate and/or uncritical conceptualization and elucidation of eco-civilization should be first of all accused for its less warm reception by the outside world. Thus, in this essay, I will start from an overview of the evolution of this term by focusing on a more specific expression of ‘socialist eco-civilization’ rather than ‘eco-civilization’ in general, and then try to reveal its theoretical/practical potentials of green-left politics by comparing it with the discourse of social-ecological transformation intensely discussed at present among the scholars of critical political ecology. Finally, it will conclude with a brief introduction to China

Working Group on Socialist Eco-civilization (CWGSE) which is supported by Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, under the 2015-2017 framework project of ‘social-ecological transformation and sustainable development in China’, focusing on its primary thinking and planned work in the years ahead--a specific effort of us to put the idea/belief of socialist eco-civilization into practice.

An overview of the conceptual development of socialist eco-civilization

As an academic term in Chinese, eco-civilization was originally used by Qianji Ye, a well-known agriculturist, in his article which was published in 1984 in *The Journal of Moscow University* (scientific socialism edition), and then was translated into Chinese by *The Guangming Daily* on 18 February 1985. His major idea is that China should be devolved to develop a new pattern of civilization with the characteristic of a harmonious human-nature relation, by paying special attention to the future development of Chinese agriculture (Ye 1987). In contrast, it is until 1995 that Roy Morrison first coined the term in the English world with a similar meaning--referring to a new type of democracy and civilization (Morrison 1995).

From the late 1980s, eco-civilization, or sometimes eco-civilization construction, is gradually incorporated into the Chinese academic circle, in the sense that during a long process of modernization China needs to achieve both material and spiritual as well as institutional and social progress, or to construct a multi-dimensional systemic civilization, and ecological progress or improvement is at least as important as other societal aspects. Accordingly, one can find that a mainstream understanding to the concept of eco-civilization in the academic writings during this period is that it signifies the ecological or ‘relation with nature’ aspect of socialist modernization as a whole, or a more healthy and harmonious structure of human-nature relation as well as the practical pursuit in this direction (Li 2003; Liao 2001; Liu X. 1999; Liu Z. 1997; Zhang H. 1992). In this regard, the conceptualization of eco-civilization is from the outset not just a pure academic work or endeavor, and can only be explained from the particular Chinese context of discourse. Otherwise, one can easily raise an objection unable to refute that how we imagine an artificial division of the holistic civilization!

A primary but to a large extent unnoticed political impulse for eco-civilization, came from a decision on promoting the development of forestry issued on 25 June 2003 by the central committee of Communist Party of China (CPC) and State Council in which for the first time eco-civilization is officially adopted as a ‘flagship term’ in the national governmental policy, ‘to construct an eco-civilization society with beautiful mountains and rivers’. It is worth noting that, though, eco-civilization here is used more like an adjective than a noun word, and with a relatively limited focus on forestry or ecology.

Another significant turning-point was the 17th congress of CPC held in October 2007. Eco-civilization historically appeared in the central committee of CPC’s working report, emphasizing the importance of ‘constructing eco-civilization’ and raising ‘eco-

civilization perceptions' (Hu 2007: 20). For the former, it refers to introduce/implement certain policy measurements such as reshaping an industrial structure, growth mode and consumption pattern which can save energy and resources and protect the ecological environment, promoting a rapid expansion of circular economy and renewable energies, and controlling effectively the major pollutants so as to improve the quality of ecological environment; for the latter, to cultivate an environment friendly way of thinking and living style in the public. Noticeably, rather than offering a clear definition of what is eco-civilization, this most authoritative official document only summarizes its two key aspects: eco-civilization construction and eco-civilization perceptions cultivation. Accordingly, an issue easy to cause controversy from this fact is that one may question closely whether or not eco-civilization and eco-civilization construction are the same thing.

Inspired by the 17th congress of CPC, a number of noteworthy research results on eco-civilization have been achieved in the next five years. For instance, in the book of *On Eco-civilization* (Ji 2007) eco-civilization is classified into four aspects: consciousness, behaviour, institutions and industry, and *Ten Theses on Eco-civilization* (Zhang W. 2012) discusses the ten policy fields in relation to eco-civilization: political leadership, policy guidance, laws and regulations, green industry, advanced technology, ecological enterprises, ecological culture, societal participation, regional integration, international exchange and cooperation, while *Eco-civilization Construction: Theory and Practice* (Wu 2008) and *Theory and Practice of Socialist Eco-civilization Construction* (Wang and Yang 2011) are the case studies of Xiamen City and Hainan Province. A mixed feature of the writings in this time is that researchers pay more attention to realistic path and local practice of eco-civilization construction, rather than rational analysis of eco-civilization concept itself. An appropriate example here is that both Mouchang Yu and Xueming Chen emphasize the socialist implication or dimension of eco-civilization in their homonymous book of *On Eco-civilization* (2010, 2008)--arguing that the essence of socialism and the essence of eco-civilization are coherent and the social formation of eco-civilization is eco-socialism, but their proposals did not cause wide acceptance and response of scholars in the academic circle.

The 18th congress of CPC in November 2012 marks a new stage of eco-civilization in China, theoretically and practically. In the central committee of CPC's working report, there is an independent chapter of 'Vigorously promoting eco-civilization construction', which provides a much more detailed generalization of the theoretical and policy connotations of eco-civilization construction (Hu 2012: 39-41).

Comparing with the statement of two phrases ('constructing eco-civilization' and raising 'eco-civilization perceptions') in one paragraph five years ago, this chapter, especially its first and last paragraphs, explicates more systemically and radically what eco-civilization or eco-civilization construction exactly means or refers to in a perspective of CPC. Reading its text, in my opinion, three points can be drawn. First of all, a systematic exposition as such represents a new viewpoint of eco-civilization or a

more civilized ecological sensitivity of CPC as a leftist governing party. Arguably, formulations found in it such as ‘Respecting nature, adapting to nature and protecting nature’ and ‘Cherishing nature, protecting ecology’ are environmentalist or even ecologist thinking, a very new element of the CPC’s ever greening political ideology over the past decades (Huan 2010: 195-199).

Secondly, such an exposition indicates a process of political reorientation for CPC, ranking eco-civilization construction as one of the key tasks of socialist modernization, or at least as important as other developmental targets such as economic growth, political modernization, social development and cultural construction. Adhering to the way of thinking or principle of ‘Five-in-one’ (*wuweiyiti*) implies that CPC and the Chinese government are gradually shifting to a more balanced, comprehensive and scientific discourse expression of modernization or development, after more than 35 years continuously insisting ‘Taking economic construction as the central task’ or ‘Development is of overriding importance’ (Deng 1992: 377).

Thirdly, such an exposition also heralds a major adjustment of governance strategy and policy concerning how to achieve the above goals of ideological greening and political reorientation. According to it, four major policy initiatives promoting the construction of eco-civilization include: ‘Optimize the pattern of land and space development, comprehensively promote resource conservation, increase the natural ecosystem and environmental protection, and strengthen the construction of eco-civilization system’ (Hu 2012: 40-41). Obviously, it is by no means easy to fully implement these measurements without profoundly reforming the current government structure and governance. Rather, so-called promoting eco-civilization construction is to a large extent a ‘self-revolution of government’ (Zhang Y. 2015).

Since 2012, the central committee of CPC and State Council have issued three follow-up documents in this policy field: *Decision to Comprehensively Deepen the Reform of Several Major Issues* (2013), *Suggestions on Promoting the Construction of Eco-civilization* (2015) and *Overall Plan for the Reform of Eco-civilization System* (2015). All of them are of crucial importance in the sense that, acting as an up-to-date version of road-map or policy-initiative basket, these documents will to a large extent determine how the grand idea of eco-civilization to be implemented or realized in the years to come. And indeed, by reading them, one can have a better understanding of the evolution of certain policy from an early suggestion to a mature public policy, ‘ecological red line system’ and ‘ecological compensation system’, for instance. Need to emphasize is that, however, the most authoritative formulation and interpretation of eco-civilization or eco-civilization construction is undoubtedly the chapter of the central committee of CPC’ working report to 18th congress.

Looking back the conceptualization of eco-civilization over the past decade, we can find two very prominent phenomenon. First, there is an obvious difference or ‘dislocation’ of focus between the academic researchers and the policy decision-makers.

Scholars of environmental humanity and social science prefer the term of ‘eco-civilization’, emphasizing its new characteristics of the relationship between human and nature or as a type of civilization differing from modern or industrial society, thus very much an understanding at the philosophical or ethic level. According to this notion (Lu et al. 2013:13), eco-civilization and its practice, is to a large extent an ecological negation and transcendence over modern industrial and urban civilization, and has a close connection with a new kind of economic, social and cultural institution framework and perception basis.

By comparison, it seems that CPC and the governmental departments prefer the term of ‘eco-civilization construction’, emphasizing its connotations as a policy guideline and coverage (‘the starting-point of policy’) (Xia 2007). Arguably, ‘constructing eco-civilization’ and raising ‘eco-civilization perceptions’ in the working report to the 17th congress of CPC, ‘five-in-one’, ‘three developments’ and ‘four key strategies and general tasks’ in the working report to the 18th congress of CPC, ‘four items of institutional and system reform’ in the *Decision* of 2013, and ‘greening’ and ‘the eight key tasks’ in the *Suggestions* of 2015, all should be understood in this context.

Second, there still lacks of reflective or critical discussion of eco-civilization from a perspective of environmental humanity and social science. In order to make up for this deficiency, for instance, I have suggested that the concept of eco-civilization can be in a broad sense defined by a four-implication description (Huan 2014): at the level of philosophy and ethics, eco-civilization is a weak eco-centrist (environmentally-friendly) natural or ecological relation value and morality; at the level of political ideology, eco-civilization is an alternative economic and social formula differing from the dominating capitalist one; at the practical level, eco-civilization construction refers to the part of appropriate relation between human and nature throughout the process of creating a socialist civilization, or the governments’ daily-work of ecological and environmental protection; in the specific context of modernization and development, eco-civilization construction refers to the green dimension of socialist modernization and economic and social development. What I want to emphasize is that, while talking about eco-civilization, we should notice both the double dimensions of theory and practice, and the double dimensions of ‘deep-green’ and ‘red-green’ perspectives.

In addition, I have suggested that eco-civilization (construction) as a systemic theory of environmental politics or eco-culture in China can be expounded from the following three aspects or sub-dimensions (Huan 2015a): a ‘green-left’ ideological discourse on development of the governing political party, an environmental political-social theory insisting on a comprehensive transformation or re-construction of contemporary society, and an organic way of thinking and philosophy with a strong link to the Chinese and/or classic tradition. In doing so, I believe, the theory of eco-civilization or eco-civilization construction can be a quite radical one--both in terms of reality criticism and future imagination.

It must be admitted that, from a retrospective perspective, those potentials of eco-civilization or eco-civilization construction as an academic concept or theory are far from fully realized. Obviously, the close relation of this term or discourse with the Chinese party politics or development priority ideology has thus far hindered rather than promoted a democratic and real constructive discussion among the academics. For the ‘red-greens’ or eco-socialists like us in particular, an urgent issue is how to promote China to implement the socialist eco-civilization agenda within a capitalism-dominated world as the central committee of CPC’s working report to the 18th congress has officially approved and committed. The precondition for finding a right answer to this question is that we can correctly answer the other two concrete questions first: is it a perfect model or road provided by the Western countries in dealing with their ecological and environmental problems over the past decades--or is it appropriate to say ‘West’s today is our tomorrow’? And then, is it possible and desirable for us to follow the ‘shallow-green’ or eco-capitalist measurements in achieving a socially-just and environmentally-sustainable future, or we need to have/practice a new kind of thinking and choice, and why it can only be an eco-socialist or red-green one.¹

Socialist eco-civilization in a perspective of social-ecological transformation

To make it more internationally communicatable, a comparative analysis of socialist eco-civilization from a perspective of social-ecological transformation or critical political ecology will surely be helpful. In my opinion, socialist eco-civilization and social-ecological transformation can be to a great degree considered as two different versions of contemporary global discourse of green-left politics, seeking for a societal reconstruction approach to the multi-dimensional crises caused by the dominant capitalist mode of production and living as well as way of thinking.

For this purpose, we have recently strengthened our contact with the major experts in the research field of social-ecological transformation, especially a global network of ‘Alternatives to development model’ led by Prof. Ulrich Brand from the University of Vienna. By the end of 2015, more than six feature articles are translated into Chinese², which offer a general analysis of green capitalism and social-ecological transformation from a perspective of global environmental politics. On 31 March-11 April 2015, in collaboration with RLS Beijing, we organized a workshop/lecture series of ‘Green capitalism and social-ecological transformation’ at *Peking University, Renmin*

¹ China can claim to have a strong tradition of eco-socialist thinking or research, including in the study field of eco-civilization. For instance, as early as late 1980s Prof. Sihua Liu has clearly pointed out that socialist modern civilization is a high degree of unity of socialist material, spiritual and ecological civilizations (Liu S. 1989: 275, 276). It is also true that, however, even after the 18th congress of CPC in 2012, too many scholars and governmental officials avoid deliberately to use the term of ‘socialist eco-civilization’.

² Ulrich Brand and Markus Wissen, ‘Global environmental politics and the imperial mode of living’, *The Journal of Poyang Lake*, 1/2014, pp. 12-20; Ulrich Brand and Markus Wissen, ‘Green economy strategy and green capitalism’, *Theoretical Trends Abroad*, 10/2014, pp. 22-29; Ulrich Brand, Xueming Chen, Qingzhi Huan, Yunfei Zhang and Rensheng Liu, ‘Who eats the pollution? The answer from green capitalism’ (academic dialogue), *China Newspaper of Social Science*, 13 May 2015; Ulrich Brand, Camila Moreno, Rensheng Liu, Yunfei Zhang and Qingzhi Huan, ‘Green capitalism, social-ecological transformation and global left’ (academic conversation), *The Journal of Poyang Lake*, 3/2015, pp. 59-66; Ulrich Brand, ‘How to get out the multi-crises: A critical social-ecological transformation theory’, *Social Sciences Abroad*, 4/2015, pp. 4-12; Victor Wallis, ‘The search for a mass ecological constituency’, *Social Sciences Abroad*, 4/2015, pp. 31-40.

University of China, *Zhongnan* University of Economics and Law, *Wuhan* University, *Fudan* University and *Tongji* University. Prof. Ulrich Brand was invited giving a series of lectures or leading talks on green growth, green economy, green capitalism, social-ecological transformation, critical political ecology, eco-Marxism and the current global green-left, etc.. Chinese experts of eco-civilization study including Xueming Chen, Qingzhi Huan, Yunfei Zhang, Yuchen Wang, Sihua Liu, Ping He and more than 200 young scholars attended these activities. In addition, Dr. Camila Moreno from Brazil also joined all of the discussions and shared her thinking with us from a Latin-American perspective.

According to Brand (2015a), in light of the economic crisis in Europe and the US and the fact that policies of sustainable development have largely failed, now it seems that the concept of ‘green economy’ is attractive for certain socio-economic actors, and in various programmatic conceptualizations, green economy has been proclaimed as an approach to overcome the existing multiple crises and constitutes a social, ecological and economic win-win situation. In his opinion, the green economic strategy is crystallizing a new emerging capitalist formation, which can be referred to as ‘green capitalism’. This is taking place in a situation in which the old formation--neoliberal finance-dominated capitalism--is experiencing a profound, multifaceted crisis. As we all know, capitalism constrains not only social relations but also relations between society and nature. Like other relationships between society and nature under capitalist conditions, green capitalism is realized in a highly selective manner in some branches and some regions while excluding other people and other regions and putting the material lives of those excluded at stake. For him, the concept of green capitalism is related to the uneven development of capitalist economy in time and space as well as the current international economic and political order. In particular, hegemony of an ‘imperial mode of living’ has given the European countries and the US an edge in terms of the global division of labor, access to natural resources and the use of space for environmental pollution. Worse still, some elites from developing countries and emerging economies have unconsciously made it a goal to pursue the imperial mode of living. Based on above analyses, he argues, for the green-lefts, it is essential to realize that green growth and green economy are nothing but policy instruments used by capitalism to regulate its growth and contain the accumulated crisis, and we should consider green capitalism as one form of capitalist development, which will span an unknown period of time.

As far as I am concerned (Huan 2015b), on the one hand, ‘green capitalism’ and ‘social-ecological transformation’ as a couple of analytical (rather than normative) concepts can indeed help us to deepen our understanding to the political and economic essence of ‘green trend’ led by the Western countries and the contemporary feature of ‘green-left’ political forces in a process of strategic and political reorientation. In other words, it is reasonable to say that, following the development of contemporary capitalism into a new stage of ‘green capitalism’, ‘climate capitalism’ or ‘low carbon capitalism’, political discourse and practice of the international community fighting against

capitalism must also shift towards a ‘green-left’ or ‘transformative-left’ one.

It is not a coincidence that my own research on eco-capitalist theory and practice in a perspective of environmental politics has come to a similar conclusion (Huan 2015c). My main points are as follows: if it is broadly defined as a model or approach of gradually solving environmental problems supported by the economic and technic innovation, within rather than challenging the dominant capitalist institutional framework of market system and democratic politics, then, it has to be recognized that eco-capitalism as a mainstream school of environmental politics is playing a prominent role in leading to environmentally-friendly policy and social change, if not the most significant one. Moreover, arguably, it is the eco-capitalist thinking and strategy as such, which is carrying out a mission of creating new opportunity of ‘green economic growth’ and ‘green political legitimacy’ in a post-industrial era. Therefore, one can understand that in reality eco-capitalism actually attracts a large number of political followers and supporters, though many of them may dislike or avoid to use the term itself. Of course, from a perspective of eco-socialism, it is very clear that eco-capitalism is just a ‘shallow-green’ political theory, which tries to incorporate the ecological dimension from a capitalist framework rather than to regulate capital from an ecologist principle or way of thinking.

On the other hand, I strongly believe that there can be a distinctive expression and interpretation for the discourse of social-ecological transformation under the background and context of today’s China, and that is why we propose the term of ‘socialist eco-civilization’ (Huan 2013, 2009). For us, socialist eco-civilization is a combination of socialism (social justice) and ecology (ecological sustainability), which stands for a historical alternative to modern capitalist system as well as its ideology and values. Historical experience in the pre-capitalist era has shown that when economy is placed within rather than above the whole society, the logic of capital, if capital does exist, has to adapt itself to traditional society norms and ecological rationality--at least it would not be monopolized or hegemonic. Recognizing this, of course, does not mean that we should regress to the pre-modern society. Rather, it indicates that we should look forward on a green future, and for that purpose the first consensus we must reach is that hegemony of the logic of capital--its contemporary form--is challengeable. Combating ecological problems, in the final analysis, requires a new type of ‘social relations’ or ‘societal-natural relation’, and such a new relation or relation structure is the fundamental implication of socialist eco-civilization.

Admittedly, putting forward the concept of eco-civilization itself can be considered as a sign that China has already realized that it needs to achieve a historical synthesis of new modernization, environmental good governance and revival of traditional ecological wisdom. The so-called ‘five-in-one’ is exactly a typical expression out of this kind of understanding and thinking. In other words, no matter in terms of the seriousness and complication of environmental challenges confronting China and the various resources it does have, eco-civilization construction will necessarily be a

comprehensive process of ‘greening’, or greening of the entire society. A perspective of socialist eco-civilization, however, implies a more clear and conscious integration of ecological consideration and socialist alternative. It is a pity that the socialist nature of socialist eco-civilization has been inadequately discussed so far by the Chinese scholars. Many of them take it for granted that a socialist country led by CPC will definitely heads for a socialist eco-civilization. Given historical experience and the real process, I am suspicious with this assumption. In fact, even the appearance and spread of green capitalism in Europe and the USA, as Ulrich Brand have convincingly demonstrated (Brand and Wissen 2015b; Brand 2014), can be a double-edged sword to the eco-civilization construction in China. Partly because of this, too many Chinese researchers are still devout believers in the results, models and ideas of environmental management in the European countries and the USA, which is the very reason why the perception of ‘pollute first, clean up later’ is so entrenched. Therefore, it is extremely important that the mainstream Marxist scholars need to pay more attention to enriching the ecological implication of the Chinese socialist system in line with the practice of eco-civilization construction, which will turn over to further promote the practice (Huan 2015d).

In one word, more attention of the ‘green-left’ scholars in Europe and the USA is to the discourse of anti-green capitalism and the practice of social-ecological transformation based on a critical political ecological analysis of the current capitalist reality, by comparison, the Chinese eco-Marxists are putting more of their efforts on theoretical exposition and practical promotion of socialist eco-civilization. We are actually working for the same goals with the little different approaches! By introducing such a comparative angle of view, we can not only keep some reasonable and patient expectation of contributions to a socially-just and ecologically-sustainable future of earth from the Chinese side, but also have a better exchange and dialogue regarding how to identify our common enemy in reality and define our common goals of future, arriving at a more effective mid-and-long-term strategy for the global green-left.

For instance, there are some common basic issues which need to be further explored for the study of both socialist eco-civilization and social-ecological transformation (Huan 2016): 1) envisioning the societal and ecological institutional restrictions—concrete forms and practical approaches—on capital and the logic of its operation; 2) considering more positively to preserve the so far non-marketization areas and the fields outside of market system such as family life and community activities; and 3) (re-)discovering and promoting the alternative implications of modern institutions such as ‘state’, ‘government’, ‘society’, ‘planning’, ‘education’, ‘technology’ and ‘entrepreneurship’.

A skeleton for further study of Socialist Eco-civilization in China

On 26-27 June 2015, the Research Institute of Marxism (RIM), *Peking* University and RLS Beijing, co-organized a symposium on ‘Socialist eco-civilization and the green-left study in China in a perspective of social-ecological transformation’. Except for the opening and closing ceremony, this one-day discussion consists of four panels, focusing

on ‘Social-ecological transformation theory and socialist eco-civilization’, ‘Socialist eco-civilization theory and practice in China’, ‘Major case studies on socialist eco-civilization construction’ and ‘China Research Group on Socialist Eco-civilization: working rules and research issues’. Altogether, more than 50 scholars including 15 from outside of Beijing participated in this symposium.

In the main speakers, Qingzhi Huan--organizer of this symposium--first reviewed the major ideas of Ulrich Brand’s critical political ecology as well as his lecture series on ‘green capitalism and social-ecological transformation’ in April, stressing the methodological relevance for Chinese colleagues to deepen the study of socialist eco-civilization in China, and then discussed the stimulation effect of eco-Marxist theory on eco-civilization institutional innovation. Xueming Chen from *Fudan* University generalized the four key points of green-left position: 1) the logic of capital rather than production itself is the root cause of current ecological crisis; 2) the contemporary world as well as China is now in a predicament of maintaining economic growth and protecting the environment; 3) helping the globe move out of this predicament is the only way for China to show the rationality and legitimacy of its modernization development or the so-called ‘China Road’; 4) China should focus on dealing with the ecological crisis from its ‘root’, meaning to reconstruct the current mode of production and living. Yunfei Zhang, a professor of *Renmin* University of China, analyzed the different understandings to the term of ‘social-ecological transformation’ within the Chinese context, suggesting that the emphasis of dialoguing with international counterparts should be put on promoting the study of socialist eco-civilization theory and practice in China.

This symposium is also the inaugural meeting of ‘China Research Group on Socialist Eco-civilization’. Participants for this symposium, with the support of RLS Beijing and RIM of *Peking* University, decide to set up this permanent research unit, which consists of 20 core members and about 15 expert members. Qingzhi Huan of *Peking* University is the chair of CRGSE.

A basic consensus for all the CRGSE members is that, socialist eco-civilization is a more radical or ‘green-left’ version of eco-civilization or eco-civilization construction, clearly proposing a combination of socialism (social justice) and ecologism (ecological sustainability) in dealing with the multi-challenges confronting China today. To put differently, we believe, only by replacing the increasingly pro-capital institutional framework as well as the underlying values and perceptions with a new pattern of eco-socialist society can the seemingly ecological problems be solved in a socially just and sustainable way. It is self-evident that constructing socialist eco-civilization is not just a process of adding some green elements to the reality, as quite a lot of people still think; instead, it means and necessitates a comprehensive or social-ecological transformation of the present Chinese society. Therefore, to make socialist eco-civilization as our green future, we need to simultaneously work at the three levels: identifying and defining a full set of key values or beliefs for socialist eco-civilization, such as social justice or

equity, ecological sustainability, economic well-being or sufficiency, which should be mutually consistent or supporting; envisioning a real alternative institutional framework of socialist eco-civilization, characteristic of the ecologically civilizationized economy, politics, society and culture, which are fundamentally different from the capitalist ones; analyzing and encouraging all kinds of mechanism and practical approaches experiments targeting at or conducive of socialist civilization, such as the demonstration areas of eco-civilization construction at the different administrative or spatial levels, introduction of the green evaluation index of economic and social development and the multi-dimensional eco-compensation systems, etc..

According to the above basis, the mid-long-term goal of CRGSE is to develop into a research network, or a 'red-green' think tank, which can play a flagship role in the theoretical study and practical promotion of socialist eco-civilization in China and organize regional and global exchanges and dialogues with the international colleagues in the study of social-ecological transformation or 'green-left' politics by focusing on the three research fields: 1) eco-Marxist or eco-socialist theories (including Marx and Engels' ecology thoughts, eco-Marxism abroad, green-left theories in a broader sense); 2) socialist eco-civilization theory (especially focusing on its economic, political, societal and cultural institutional components as well as a whole), 3) socialist eco-civilization practice (paying more attention to the major institutional and policy instruments and actuating mechanisms).

In 2015-2017, CRGSE will concentrate its work on the following three issues: 1) eco-Marxism and socialist eco-civilization theory, 2) case studies of the eco-civilization demonstration areas in China, 3) the Greater Beijing regional integration and eco-civilization construction. In order to achieve the above objectives, we plan to organize two annual workshops (2015/2016) and an international conference (2017), and hopefully the final results from these activities can be published in English while concluding this round of project.

Concluding remarks

Just like what happened with the term of 'sustainable development' or 'green economy' (Brand 2012; Salleh 2012), eco-civilization or eco-civilization construction, which has become one of the most buzzing word among the green thinking and policy discussion in China after the 18th congress of CPC in 2012, is actually facing with the risk of being an ideologically and semantically ambiguous term. Among the others, one negative consequences of this situation is that it makes a critical academic study and international dialogue of eco-civilization very difficult, if not impossible, as the reality has already shown. One way to move out of this predicament, we as eco-socialists argue, is to reveal and explicate the political dimension of eco-civilization or eco-civilization construction, by clearly proposing a green-left alternative or politics of 'socialist eco-civilization'. Once again, it is not a minor change of just adding a modifier for eco-civilization or eco-civilization construction; rather, it indicates a much more radical green-left thinking and solution to the multi-crises the contemporary world (Hollender 2015; Lang

and Mokrani 2013), in which China is now becoming an integral part after more than 35 years' reform and openness policy. Of course, it is still an open question that China can to what an extent achieve the goal of socialist eco-civilization. For many reasons--both in the positive sense and in the negative sense, however, China is one of the rare countries in the globe today which should begin with and is able to lead such a historic shift of civilization.

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