



中国与世界，环境危机大家谈 WHERE CHINA AND THE WORLD DISCUSS THE ENVIRONMENT

“The rich consume and the poor suffer the pollution”

[Pan Yue](#)
[Zhou Jigang](#)

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Pan Yue, deputy director of China's State Environmental Protection Administration, sparked debate with his recent essay *On Socialist Ecological Civilisation*. Here, he tells Zhou Jigang about the global inequalities that threaten China's environment.

Zhou Jigang: We all know the global [environmental crisis](#) is worsening. What is the cause of this change?

Pan Yue: The fundamental cause is the capitalist system. The environmental crisis has become a new means of transferring the economic crisis.

ZJ: You met with representatives of the [German Green Party](#) in April and discussed, among other things, ecological socialism and sustainable development. What is the purpose of studying [eco-socialism](#)?

PY: Actually, the Green Party does not represent eco-socialism.

I study eco-socialism, but that is not to say I am in full support of it. It is too idealistic and lacks ways of solving actual problems, particularly for developing countries. However, it does provide political reference for China's scientific view of development, and gives socialist ideology room to expand. More importantly, it gives a theoretical basis for the establishment of fair international rules.

ZJ: How did eco-socialism come into being. What does it consist of?

PY: The green movement arose out of a re-evaluation of western industrial civilisation. Although the Reformation, the Renaissance and the Industrial Revolution were all contributing factors to the birth of western industrial civilisation, the root cause was colonialism, which permitted the large-scale relocation of developed countries' economic and social contradictions. To ensure this relocation could proceed smoothly, capitalism created a set of international rules to protect its own interests, and environmental issues are a case in point. Developed countries account for 15% of the world's population, yet use over 85% of its resources. They raise their own environmental standards and transfer resource-intensive and polluting industries to developing nations; they establish a series of green barriers and bear as little environmental responsibility as is possible. In the end, the green movement found that any problem can be relocated, except pollution, because we all live on the same planet.

"The economic and environmental inequalities caused by a flawed understanding of growth and political achievement, held by some officials, have gone against the basic aims of socialism and abandoned the achievements of Chinese socialism."

Green activists believe that although capitalism and socialism are political opposites, they are identical in the way in which they industrialise and are both products of Western industrial economics. Some of them believe that the intrinsic aims of socialism are more suited to an ecological society. In comparison with capitalism – and excluding productive forces – socialism is fairer, puts more emphasis on morality and honesty, and is more able to provide people with fully-rounded development. In particular, green activists and socialists are able to agree on balancing economic growth and the environment, equality of distribution and grassroots democracy.

After the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe, new Marxist thinkers found that ecological issues presented a heaven-sent opportunity to expose the capitalist system and unite socialists. They sought out ecological viewpoints in the works of Marx and Engels, in statements such as: “naturalism is humanism, and humanism is socialism;” “the relationship between man and nature is that between man and man, just as the relationship between man and man is that between man and nature;” and “our world faces two revolutions – reconciliation between man and nature, and between men themselves.” They laid the blame for the global environmental crisis at the feet of the capitalist system, and proposed using Marxist dialectics to repudiate a purely economic rationality.

In this way, environmental activists and socialists started to unite, with many former Communist Party members and leftists participating. Politically, this union became known as the “red-green alliance”, ideologically as eco-socialism.

ZJ: China, a socialist country, apart from facing the environmental colonialism of developed capitalist nations, is also seeing its own rapid economic development exacerbate the environmental crisis. How should [China's current environmental crisis](#) be viewed?

PY: “Sustainable development” is commonly defined as economic growth, environmental protection and social justice. “Social justice” is a core concept of “sustainable development” and also a core aim of socialism. So, in theory, socialism is more suited to the realisation of sustainable development than capitalism. But China's environmental crisis has arisen, basically, because our mode of economic modernisation has been copied from western, developed nations.

In 20 years, China has achieved economic results that took a century to attain in the west. But we have also concentrated a century's worth of environmental issues into those 20 years. While becoming the world leader in GDP growth and foreign investment, we have also become the world's number one consumer of coal, oil and steel – and the largest producer of CO2 and chemical oxygen demand (COD) emissions.

With the rise of globalisation, developed countries have transferred their industry to developing nations as a form of environmental colonialism. In China, pollution has been moved from east to west and from the city to the rural areas. The rich consume and the poor suffer the pollution. The economic and environmental inequalities caused by a flawed understanding of growth and political achievement, held by some officials, have gone against the basic aims of socialism and abandoned the achievements of Chinese socialism.

As a socialist country, China should unite with other developing countries to oppose an international economic order which causes environmental inequality. Domestically, it should establish systems to prevent unbalanced development from causing environmental risks. From this we can see the wisdom and correctness of the political ideals put forward by the Communist Party Central Committee: the scientific view of development and the construction of a harmonious, resource-conserving and environmentally-friendly society – and how urgent and necessary it is to promote an entirely new type of industrialisation.

ZJ: You once said that an ecological civilisation is the fourth stage of human civilisation, and an advance on the previous stage of [industrial civilisation](#). What problems and strengths does China face in achieving this stage?

PY: Western countries are currently replacing traditional industrial civilisation with eco-industrial civilisation. This involves the three main ideals of sustainable development (environmental

protection, preservation of resources and ecological balance), some aspects of Protestant ethics and the main points of eco-socialism, along with new production and lifestyle concepts such as circular economies, new energy sources and green consumption.

China's circumstances, in particular the imbalance between its population, resources and environment, mean that traditional western industrial civilisation is not an option. China is a socialist country and cannot engage in environmental colonialism, nor act as a hegemony, so it must move towards a new type of civilisation. Ideas such as the scientific view of development and building a harmonious, resource-saving and environmentally-friendly society, as put forward by the Central Committee in recent years, have laid the foundation for doing so.

A significant number of people see a scientific view of development as simply a change in the mode of economic growth, even believing that establishing a resource-saving and environmentally-friendly society is merely a matter of technology. But that is only one aspect. The scientific view of development seeks a comprehensive and sustainable change of politics, economics, society, culture and theory – a transformation of civilisation. And so, the period between now and 2020 will be crucial in determining whether China can complete this transformation from traditional to eco-industrial civilisation.

China faces some difficulties in achieving this. Firstly, there is a tension between our population, resources and environment. Secondly, in today's world, each country vies for energy, resources and the environment. We cannot export our pollution as developed countries can. We must resolutely work towards to a new style of industrialisation, whatever the price. Japan is a good example of this.

Our strengths lie in the rich historical, cultural and theoretical resources we can carry forward. We are in east Asia, we can learn from the experience of combining Confucianism with industrial civilisation, and also draw upon the successful combination of European socialism with western civilisation. Our socialist political theory contains within it the core concept of eco-industrial civilisation – social justice. We are already working tirelessly to make the construction of a socialist environmental culture and ecological civilisation our duty and mission.

Pan Yue is deputy director of China's State Environmental Protection Administration (SEPA). Part of a new generation of outspoken Chinese senior officials, Pan has given rise to a tide of environmental debate, attracting enormous attention and controversy. On Socialist Environmentalism was published in China Economic Times on September 26, 2006.

Zhou Jigang, formerly of Economics magazine and Hong Kong's Phoenix Weekly, has focuses on in-depth reporting about macroeconomics and current affairs. His investigations into radioactive pollution in Baotou and China's underground industries both caused great controversy in China.

Also by Pan Yue on chinadialogue: [The environment needs public participation](#)

<http://www.chinadialogue.net/article/show/single/en/493--The-rich-consume-and-the-poor-suffer-the-pollution->



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