Abrahamic vs. Asian Values

Theoretical and Practical Observations from an Ecological Perspective

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Our planet is struggling against unprecedented assaults that include environmental pollution, destruction of entire ecosystems, the aesthetic degradation of nature, human overpopulation, resource depletion, industrial growth, technological manipulation, military proliferation, and, now emerging as the most pressing and desperate of all problems, abrupt massive species extinction, and in cases of recently discovered ones, often before they are given names. Zoos and botanical gardens are becoming the only safe havens for endangered species.

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The word cultivation itself implies a movement away from natural processes. It is a matter of arresting succession, not allowing the manifold variety to flourish. For the sake of maximization in yield and thus profit, we aim at monoculture. By doing so it is possible to maintain a fast-food culture (high in calories but low in nutritional value).

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Dominant Western Society (1/2)

... aggressively practices an over-exploitation of resources

... displays an insatiable hunger for energy

... applies a modern type of slavery

... focuses on quantity rather than quality

... favors job partitioning & task overload

... disintegration of family structures

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unproductive elderly (THROW-AWAY society): we are “progressing” so fast in our modern western society, that it will become even more difficult for the elderly to catch up. This age group has already attained the attribute as being the burden of society. Unproductive, not contributing to the advancement of the modern manufacturing processes, they are being declassified as useless & concentrated in specialized care centers (nursery homes) …. As if their experiences, sacrifices, and efforts are worthless in this new world order (somehow similar to Nazi-Germany, when undesired elements of society have been gathered in concentration camps and burnt later-on – with the only difference that nowadays we do not yet use the inmates of the nursery homes as combustibles to fuel power plants for tele-heating systems (….compare Pavel Kohut’s “Conditorei Miriam”). Only the young and dynamic can be successfully integrated into an ever increasing demanding, consuming and wasting production cycle. Like a hamster in a cage they push the threadmill till to the point of exhaustion without even progressing a bit.

homogenisation (biopoverty rather than biodiversity): homogenisation in information technologies has lead to the massive invasion of computer viruses, worms and hacker attacks. To fight of plant diseases, homogenisation in agriculture requires huge amounts of herbicides & pesticides. Homogenisation in a globalized world makes us all look-a-like’s, with similar desires, longings, habits, housing – even the cities look all the same. Globalization not only means homogenization, modernization, intensified competition, it includes also an increase in political, social, cultural, and religious conflicts in both an inter- and intra-national context. We are not actually aware of the explosive potential of ethnicity, language, culture, and religious fundamentalism in all three major monotheistic religions, we must learn to appreciate that the quest for roots is a worldwide phenomenon (Tu WeiMing, 1998).

information overload: the sheer endless chain of information pouring onto us (print media, radio, TV, internet and email, mobile communication technologies, etc.) is drowning us. We don’t have the time anymore to reflect on each single information unit and what sort of effects it has on our physiological well-being. It is not surprising that we in that 24hour society suffer from chronic sleep deprivation (electricity is to blame) along with all its consequences. In fact, technologically, we are well ahead when comparing it to our biological evolution (based on the hormone-related responses, our bodies still react as if we were still in the stone age). Far too often the flood of information is causing us to switch into a sort of “tilt-mode”, in which we are even incapable of perceiving the simplest information.

entertainment (emotional overdrive): Prime time TV shows and mega sport events are capable to gather entire nations in front of their TV-sets – designed computer-animated virtual heroes brainwash entire generations of kids to match the new world order. The persistant temptation of gaming (casinos, arcades, shopping centers, all inclusive holidays, etc), suggest that paradise is just a “cent” away. The quest to have fun has created countless strategies to make us consume, to refeel the sensation that comes along with it and has nothing in common with happiness and the feelings of joy (gluecksgefühl). It goes even that far that emotions are conditioned in a way to push harder and stronger – and we all know that the ultimate tools to achieve that is drug misuse.

courting death: we are fomenting wars, watching with sickening horror, movies in which maniacs slice and dice their victims, or hurrying to our own deaths in fast cars, through cigarette smoking, or by committing suicide. Death obsesses us - our responses are so strange that we not only kill for food, we kill each other along with the natural forces that nourish life on this planet (P.O. Ingram, 1997).
We no longer consider Earth as "sacred" (Raven, 1993); we no longer treat our planet with the respect it deserves; and as a member of the Dominant Society, I'm tempted to ask ….

… are we as human beings, a viable species on this endangered planet?

Sacred Earth: We are “Killing our World” wrote botanist Peter H. Raven (1993). Our feeling of alienation in the modern period has extended beyond the human community and its patterns of material exchanges to our interaction with nature itself. Especially in technologically sophisticated urban societies, we have become removed from that recognition of our dependence on nature.

Since our cultural domain facilitates excessive behaviour in almost any field, it is time to ask ourselves whether we have the right to be so invasive … in regards to ourselves, to the others, to entire ecosystems and eventually to the entire biosphere?

Can Earth’s ecosystems cope with our uncontrolled expansion – or can we simply consider this sort of growth devastating for us and future generations - (only to be rivalled when comparing it with a terminally ill patient suffering from a fatal cancer)?

Unfortunately, we have substituted idealistic values with materialistic ideals – and these have become our points of references.

We always will remain children
And however old the world might be,
humans will remain the kids they are!
smash their toys with utter force and jubilee,
just as kids like to do near and far!
Once everything is done to pieces
and nothing left to spoil,
with fresh delight and as it pleases
to play with what is left across the soil!

Wir bleiben alle Kinder
Und wird die Welt auch noch so alt,
der Mensch, er bleibt ein Kind!
zerschlägt sein Spielzeug mit Gewalt,
wie eben Kinder sind!
Wann alles erst mal klein zerstört
und nicht mehr zu verderben,
so sucht er wieder - neu beglückt
und spielt dann mit den Scherben!

(Carl Spitzweg, 1808–1885)
Stress is the response to a temporary tough situation. In a natural system dynamic stability is the result of it.

Whenever organisms thrive and interact with abiotic stressors (solar, hyperhaline, acidic, bacterial, macrofanua-flora, etc), they are subject to a variety of stresses. If these factors exceed the buffing capacity of the affected organism (dynamic range of tolerance) they tend to restrict their chances of survival.

Stress: stress is in most definitions considered to be a significant deviation from the conditions optimal for life and eliciting changes and responses at all functional levels of the organism which, although at first reversible, may also become permanent. According to the dynamic concept of stress, the organism under such conditions passes through a succession of characteristic phases. Stress can be described as a state in which increasing demands made upon an organism lead to an initial destabilization of function, followed by normalization and improved resistance or chronic damage and eventually even premature death.

- **alarm**: the onset of disturbance is followed by stabilization of the structural and functional conditions (for the normal pursuance of vital activities). Too rapid an intensification of the impairment results in acute collapse (acute damage). If the intensity of the stimulus remains unchanged restitution in the form of “repair” process is quickly initiated.

- **resistance**: restitution leads onto the resistance phase, in which, under continuing stress, the resistance increases (hardening). Due to the resulting improvement in stability, normalization can take place despite continued stress (adaptation).

- **exhaustion**: if the state of stress lasts too long, or if the intensity of the stressor increases, a state of exhaustion may set in, thus rendering the organism susceptible to infections that occur as a consequence of impaired host defences, and leading to premature collapse. However if the impairment was merely temporary, the functional state is restored to its original level. If necessary, any damage incurred may be repaired in a phase of regeneration. If the limits of tolerance are exceeded and the adaptive capacity is overtaxed, premature damage or even death may result.

Single celled organisms, plant, animals (incl. humans) and even ecosystems behave exactly the same way. Indeed, we are quite familiar with this response pattern if we imagine ourselves rushing to an appointment but wasting time while stuck in a traffic jam. Stress hormones rush through our body and …. Well, I am sure everyone has already experienced such a situation. The only difference now and then (referring to our fore/mothers-fathers), is that nowadays we have to “sit” it out, while our relatives in the stone age had the chance to run away. Chronic stress acts like a pressure-cooker, at a certain point it will explode, similar to a machine permanently operated at high RPM, eventually the pistons will get jammed up.
In order to understand the implications resulting from such a scenario, we should briefly focus on some basic issues.

- **atmo-, hydro-, geo-/lithosphere**: these are the three basic foundations that make up our planet;
- **biosphere**: the biosphere constitutes the manifold diversity of life – be it aquatic, terrestrial or a combination of both.
- **antroposphere**: the successful colonization of the entire globe of *Homo sapiens*, along with the capabilities to produce tools, utilizing natural energy sources for his purposes (animals, wind, water, later on even slaves, and machines) made this species so successful in exploiting the vast but limited natural resources of this planet.

**growth patterns**: curves for exponential growth (left) and logistic growth (right). The difference between them is a measure of environmental resistance. **Webner-Fechner Law**: Sensation increases arithmetically as a stimulus increases geometrically; the least perceptible change in stimulus intensity above any background bears a constant proportion to the intensity of the background; i.e. the smaller the stimulus, the larger the reaction – or to put it in simple terms: the 1st piece of cake tastes excellent, the 2nd piece is superb, the 3rd piece goes with fatigue, the 4th piece turns you pale-green, the 5th piece causes your stomach to revolt - you will throw up.

**logistic growth**: experienced to a certain extend exponential growth, but intuition tells us that even this must flatten out to logistic growth (sigmoidal path).

i) agricultural food supply
i) population growth;

i) ecosystem stability (climax community);

i) even in economical terms (some ones gains is some one else's loss);

**IPAT** (http://atlas.aaas.org/index.php?part=1&sec=theory): In every human interaction with the environment -- even in the simplest societies -- the three major elements are in play. They can be linked in the famous formula introduced by Ehrlich and Holdren:

\[ I = P \times A \times T, \]  

**Impact = Population x Affluence x Technology**

More explicitly, environmental impact is the product of population, multiplied by consumption per person, multiplied by the amount of resources needed, or waste created, while producing each unit of consumption.
The Success of the productive and technological achievements can be measured by the Population growth over the last three centuries (http://atlas.aaas.org/index.php?part=1&sec=scale):

The scale of our activities depends on our population numbers, our consumption and the resource or pollution impact of our technologies. All three of these factors are still on the increase. The maps above illustrate the increasing spread and density of the human population over the last three centuries.

The destiny of the planet is in our hands as never before, yet they are inexperienced hands. We are modifying ecosystems and global systems faster than we can understand the changes and prepare responses to them. All the factors in this vast equation affect each other constantly. In a globalized world the elements of human activity interact with each other and with local and planetary environments.
i) **Trophic pyramid**: itself, it delimits the nutritional borders (i.e. the top predator cannot simply become larger than the assigned area – these limits are related to the trophic base represented by the primary producers). The energy transfer is from the bottom up; plants and other photosynthetic organisms from the 1st trophic level receive the sunlight needed (1%) to convert CO₂ to sugars (and other chemical bonds like ATP, cellulose etc.). The amount of energy trapped, or fixed, in new biomass is called the net primary production. Organisms that feed on these producers constitute the 2nd trophic level of all food chains. If the tertiary consumer eats animals, it is called a carnivore. Because biomass stores energy, only a fraction of the biomass of one trophic level becomes part of the next trophic level. On average only 10% of the biomass in one trophic level becomes biomass in the next. The 90% biomass loss is basically the result of metabolic activity (respiration), faecal losses, and reproductive losses. A reason why meat consumption constitute a huge burden onto the entire ecosystem.

ii) **alternative food webs** include, agriculture, life stock (fish farming, cattle farming), or even insects! The advantage of farming is obvious as we no longer depend on yields in hunting and gathering, but can plan ahead as stocking food provides long term survival to overcome droughts, and harsher periods of the year (compare with 7 year draught during ancient times). Hunting is probably a trait left by our ancient grand-grand-fathers of the paleolithicum. Nowadays we show that feature when we want to impress our neighbours with a hunter’s trophy nailed onto the wall, a tiger carpet spread out over the floor, a brand new car in front of the driveway…

iii) **arrows**: currently, humanity extracts more biological resources than nature is capable to substitute. The collapsing numbers in top predators eventually forces us to harvest on the trophic level below. In order to counterbalance the lower energetic content of the trophic level below, even larger amounts of biomass has to be extracted to level out the losses experienced with the collapse of the uppermost trophic level; i.e. more has to be fished even though stocks are dwindling.

iv) **fishing down the food web**: Pauly et al, has proven that this trend is in fact occurring. For all marine areas, the trend over the past 50 years has been a decline in the mean trophic level of the fisheries landings, from slightly more than 3.3 in the early 1950s to less than 3.1 in the late 90’s. A dip in the 1960s and early 1970s occurred because of extremely large catches [>12·E⁶ metric tons per year] of Peruvian anchoveta (sardellen) with a low trophic level of 2.2 (±0.42). Since the collapse of the Peruvian anchoveta fishery in 1972–1973, the global trend in the trophic level of marine fisheries landings has been one of steady decline. Fisheries in inland waters exhibit, on the global level, a similar trend as for the marine areas:
Briefly a summarized conclusion regarding the fate of the Dominant Society:

- **catastrophe**: since the exponential expansion of the dominant society into every aspect eventually must reach its limits, the structures to us so familiar are (according to Meadows et al) doomed to failure. After an impressive period of growth, the major indicators (resources, food, population, industrial output and pollution) take a reverse trend until collapsed all together.

- **number of Earth consumed**: Wackernagel et al, even suggest that in the late 70’s of last century, we have already crossed the threshold of sustainability. According to their assumptions, since almost 35 years, the dominant society is crediting future generations to guarantee the survival of our energy hungry social model.

- **abundance**: Simon and even Lomborg though, attempt to readjust the growth patterns. Based on several prime indicators, they showed that growth is still possible, since new technologies coupled with market strategies (supply & demand) are capable of pushing the limits to growth further up.

- **?**: obviously we have not yet reached these limits of growth that so many wanted us to believe in. And still, with the overall impact of the anthroposphere onto the life support system of our planet, it seems evident, that the energetic turnover is upsetting the delicate balance of our biosphere. I think everyone will agree that we as members of the dominant society have to adjust the current pattern, if we want to preserve a level of biodiversity that we are familiar with for our next generations.
Western Approach

... as depicted by the Abrahamic Pecking Order
and is the licence for the power to controll all.

ROOTS: the great monotheistic traditions are the major sources of (western) moral and political attitudes. These religions focuses on humanity’s uniqueness as a species. Let me show this with this particular sketch:

i) mother earth: if one wants theological license to increase radioactivity without constraint, to consent to the bulldozer mentality of developers, or to encourage unbridled harvest of old-growth forest, historically there has been no better scriptural source than Genesis, chapter 1 and 2.

ii) nature: although a hierarchy higher, it is still at the lower end with regards to the entire entities resting above; human beings are given domination by God over nature;

iii) animals & plants: God commands humanity to subdue nature and multiply the human species; this layer is exclusively reserved for humanity to proliferate (to feed on);

iv) women: human beings are exclusively segregated from the rest of nature … with women filling the gap between man and nature.

v) men: the mythological injunctions to conquer nature, the enemy of God and humanity, are here ... the contemporary ecological crisis represents a failure of prevailing Western ideas and attitudes: a male-oriented (patriarchal) culture in which it is believed that reality exists only as human beings perceive it; whose structure is a hierarchy erected to support humanity at its apex. The position of men at his level is probably the reason why materialistic ideals could survive till modern times. Critics say that it man is actually the prototype, whereas the woman is the perfectionized version of this series as it was made from an already refined product – the rib!

vi) god: god transcends nature; nature is a creation, an artifact, of a divine craftsman-like male creator. Using god as the supreme entity to whom we are responsible to, generates a problematic escape-goat of God will fix it anyway!

In fact, by simply separating the places of worship with daily life, we created an ambivalent situation. We go there to churches, synagogues, mosque, to worship the holy ideals, and at the same time we use it to "dump" - so to speak - our sins, as if we are dealing here with a (spilling) trash-can. Once back out, in "good old nature" (or that what's left of it), rather than contemplating the very roots of our existence in a natural setting, we flip-flop back into this familiar habit of oppression.

Callicott and Roger: nature is viewed politically and hierarchically - God over humanity, male over female, humanity over nature - which establishes an exploitative ethical-political pecking order and power structure. The image of god-in-humanity is the ground of humanity's intrinsic value, but non-human entities lack the divine image and are religiously and ethically disenfranchised and possess merely instrumental value for god and human beings. The biblical view of nature's instrumental value is compounded in mainline Christian theology by an Aristotelian-Thomistic teleology that represents nature as a support system for rational human beings.
Buddhist Approach: here we find the apex point at the bottom, and we see that the cone broadens as it rises. This is the model that Sponberg calls the hierarchy of compassion.

i) **Spiral**: as one ascends the vertical, developmental axis, the inverse to the previous happens. The upward movement augments one's inter-relatedness with the environment. The vertical movement is not a simple, linear upward assertion of control over gradually more and more of the rest of existence; here the hierarchy of compassion, vertical progress is a matter of "reaching out", actively and consciously, to affirm an ever widening circle of expressed inter-relatedness. Such an ever-broadening circle plotted as a developmental line becomes the spiral path as illustrated.

Unlike in the previous case, progress along this spiral path confers no increasing privilege over those who are below on the path. Quite the contrary, it entails an **ever-increasing sense of responsibility**. This profoundly ethical sense of responsibility for an ever-greater circle of realized relatedness is what is expressed by the Buddhist term *karuna* (wisdom in action).

In addition, Buddhist thinking does not consider a dualistic terminology separating things in good or evil. The aim in life is to detach oneself from emotions. To ignore the course of the time … Which is a human invention anyway. Eventually the Buddhist’s ultimate goal is *Nirvana*, a state which we would define as nothing, but for a serious Buddhist it is everything!

Compare human existence with the concept of “degree of freedom” – stones have the least degrees, plants a bit more, animals even further and humans with their thinking capabilities the most.
Daoist Approach (道 the way)

... Is considered a model of harmony.

Philosophy of Daoism: (tai ji tu, diagram of the greatest ultimate) tries to trace the two features Yin and Yang in which the description of movements - motion and tranquility - appears. Taiji cannot exist neither without Yin nor without Yang.

i) Yin: feminine, yielding, permissive, withdrawing, mystical, receptive, moon & earth, darkness, destruction, cold, moist, submission, passive, negative, evil;

ii) yang: masculine, hard, managing, aggressive, rational, commanding, heaven & sun, brightness, creation, hot, dry, dominance, active, positive, good;

Yin & Yang: in general Yin and Yang refer to the two opposed and complementary forces that pervade the cosmos and give rise to the myriad bipolar oppositions in the world: soft and hard, dark and bright, male and female, and so on. In the technical vocabulary of cosmic resonance theory, Yin and Yang represent two states or polarities of Qi, one passive and yielding (Yin, -), the other one active and dynamic (Yang, +). Thus, the "good" and the "bad" (if we want to stress these expressions) are intrinsically connected. We can't separate them!

The concept of Taiji is both the starting and the ending point of all things and it will always sustains connections among all things rooted in it as the origin. In fact, the dots in each domain symbolize the idea that each time one of the two forces reaches its extreme, it contains in itself already the seed of its opposite. Taiji can be seen as the state of equilibrium, harmony, which means that all things mutually support and complement one another. It does not make the human the centre of the world but instead constitutes the between-ness, or among-ness of the human species.

In Chinese culture, Daoism is the “soul” of Chinese culture and emphasizes the non-rational, individual aspects of life... emotions, intuition, psychic, physical, etc.
**Neo-Confucian Approach**

Confucianism is a way of learning, learning to be human.

… and therefore is considered a integrative model of unity.

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Confucian Approach: Neo-Confucians seem to have deliberately rejected simplistic reductionist models. They define human beings in terms of integrated visions (Tu WeiMing, 1998). We can actually envision the Confucian perception of human flourishing, based upon the dignity of the person (not hierarchy), in terms of a series of concentric circles:

i) **self**: human beings are sentient beings, capable of internal resonance not only between and among themselves but also with other animals, plants, mountains, etc., indeed with nature as a whole.

ii) **family**: the intimate structure of individuals joined by family ties;

iii) **community**: human beings are social beings. As isolated individuals, humans are weak.

iv) **society**: Human beings are political beings, in the sense that human relatedness is differentiated in terms of hierarchy, status, and authority.

v) **nation/world**;

vi) **humanity**: human beings are also historical beings sharing collective and cultural memories, traditions, ritual, and “habits of the heart”.

vii) **self**: human beings are metaphysical beings characterized by the ultimate concern to be constantly inspired by and continuously responsive to the mandate of heaven (not the same heaven as in Christian beliefs - thus better translated as cosmos).

In fact, on top of all Confucian virtues does not stand justice but the human generosity. As in Daoism, supporters of Confucianism accept that both good and the bad features reside within each of us, but they become highly suspicious in regards to those people who do not admit their own weaknesses. **Confucianism is a way of learning, learning to be human.**

Even though this concept may not at all sound unfamiliar, members in the dominant society have lost touch to it. As shown at the beginning with the recent trends in China, our families are restricted to ourselves, a companion, and maybe a single child. It is said that in Chinese culture, Confucianism is the “backbone” of Chinese culture and emphasizes the rational, social aspects of life and can be considered in a broader aspect as a *Codex for social behavior*. But even there, the younger generation paying tribute to the western-way-of-life is locking themselves up in high-security homes, cocooning behind their walls, socializing with people in their cyber-world, and eventually leaving perhaps some space for selected friends, but that’s it. The society for them as well as us as such has turned out to be an alienated, dangerous and anonymous place, well beyond holistic reach.
**Western:** with the top down structure of our dominant society, we eventually achieve total synchronization of the entire world, bringing about the same patterns of reasoning, same behaviour (materialistic attitudes, consumerism, etc), imprinting on others the same culture (along with the same modern-type diseases, obesity, heart diseases, depression, PMS, menopause, osteoporosis, to name just a few – diseases not known to the common people centuries ago – simply because people/women then were most of the time lactating or pregnant and died earlier), favouring:

i) few selected staple foods we feed on, substituting the huge diversity available in nature;

ii) the same is happening in the media industry – Hollywood is dominating the scene with brain-dead screenplays, while the global players in information distribution feed the public with pre-filtered (censurized) bulletins to guide the masses for their scope;

iii) few world languages wipe out local dialects that do not even have a written history (degeneration of own language – increased use of foreign terms);

iv) western medicine over traditional (and if traditional knowledge is used, the owners of that knowledge do not benefit, as the multinationals keep patent-rights for themselves). In the arts, paintings are evaluated just on the basis of the signature, no longer on the artistic values;

v) in economics, competition is often fierce and deadly and has nothing to do with the survival of the fittest (niche); among nations this can go as far as spying on each other (e.g. USA uses the “fight against terror” as a pretext to pursue their goals). People attain value only if they have a brand-name outfit. We buy stuff with money that we do not have (creditors) to impress people that we do not like!

vi) sporting events only glorify the winner, while the competitors are losing out (aiming at the ultimate goal of higher, faster, further, even if that involves anabolic substances to meat that goal); the Olympics lost their spirit as the IOC is constantly involved in proving that the athletes are free of that stuff – but let’s remember that we only can look for known substances!

vii) the violent manner in which western society infiltrates almost every aspect of life becomes obvious when looking at the political hotspots (middle east, India-Pakistan, Philippines, Indonesia (Ambon, Irian Jaya), S.- & W-Sudan, Nigeria, etc.). Already today the US provide 50-60% of the global arms sales. And it is no secret that Osama Bin Laden and Saddam Hussein are primarily the result of US-foreign policy (Wagenleiter, 2003). As the conflict in IRAQ showed, we no longer respect people, even the defeated are dishonored in the most disrespectful manner (female soldiers that put a naked soldier on a leash – the most profound humiliation for a real Muslim).

viii) placing the humans at the center not only neglects but also discredits other life forms and vanish in the abyss of insignificance and ultimately in self-destruction. The materialistic attitude (anthropocentrism) underlines the most egoistic attitudes of man … see the pope how he hangs on life.

An observation well in line with the genetic relationships unveiled by recent gene mapping programs. And still, the contemporary modern human behaves more like a three year old child rather than a responsible being, which cries aloud when in need of the mother or of the father, but is completely self-sufficient when involved in some kind of play (E. Fromm, 1986 – see also Carl Spitzweg).

Globalisation must not only take it must also give; i.e. giving the chance to other cultures and society to express themselves, and recognize their achievements, their way of thinking.

**Eastern:** "human intelligence is considered "simply one form of awareness among many others."

i) men can live better lives if they cut their desires to the minimum;

ii) life and death is within the larger process of natural and cosmic transformation; there were ceaseless cycles;

iii) eating plant/herb is a better regimen;

Gary Snyder suggests 3 aspects that are at the center of a reinhabitory ecological ethic:

1. feeling gratitude: it generates humility and a sense of awareness of the wider self.

2. taking responsibility for your own acts: minimizing destructive human impact on the land and allowing room for the flourishing of non-human others.

3. keep contacts with the sources of energy: mindful food preparation, through walking meditation, and / or gardening work practice.

**Daoist simplicity:**

- too much color blinds the eye
- too much music deafens the ear
- too much taste dulls the palate
- too much play maddens the mind
- too much desire tears the heart
**Monotheistic** (http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/wwtgod/3518375.stm): the aggressive nature of western ideology (religion) is best seen in the recent survey made by the BBC involving 10000 individuals in 10 different countries. This is underlined by the words of the head of the current US-administration: “Behind all of life and all of history, there's a dedication and purpose, set by the hand of a just and faithful God” (President Bush - http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/wwtgod/3513709.stm).

**Selected extracts from religious texts** (http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/wwtgod/3513709.stm):

- 'You must utterly destroy them; you shall make no covenant with them and show them no mercy' (Torah, Deuteronomy 7:1-2)
- 'Thou shall not kill' (Torah, Exodus 20:13)
- 'Fight in the cause of God against those who fight you, but aggress not' (Koran 2:190)
- 'Whoever fights in the cause of God, then gets killed or attains victory, we will surely grant him a great recompense' (Koran 4:74)
- 'When all efforts to restore peace prove useless and no words avail, lawful is the flash of steel' (10th Sikh guru, Guru Gobind Singh)
- 'May your weapons be strong to drive away the attackers, may your arms be powerful enough to check the foes, let your army be glorious, not the evil-doer' (Hinduism's Rig Veda 1-39:2)

Let me compare this with traditional shadow boxing (TaiJiQuan): although it has the touch of martial arts, over centuries it became the meditative slow-motion set of movements that we know today. I will try to highlight the peaceful character by a poem written by the Dao-master Zhang YouLiang (1992):

**Poem:**

Allow the thoughts to fade away,
make the shoulders and arms feel heavy,
breath deep into the belly,
any movement originates from the hip,
these are the principles of TaiJiQuan

Die Gedanken loslassen,
Schultern und Arme fallen lassen,
tief in den Bauch atmen,
aus der Hüfte heraus bewegen,
das sind die Prinzipien des TaiJiQuan

**Buddhism:** Buddhism and its philosophy is a reflection of the moment; the ability to live completely in the present, deeply aware and appreciative of life. A classical Buddhist attitude is reflected by Thich Nhat Hanh, a Thai Buddhist activist; before the end of the Vietnam War, he was asked whether he would rather have peace under the communist regime, which would mean the end of Buddhism, or rather the victory of democratic Vietnam with the possibility of Buddhist revival. His answer was straightforward and to the point: "to have peace at any price" .... which outlines the peaceful character of Buddhism.

**Population Bomb:** Recently, at a lecture in Berkeley, the Dalai Lama spoke about the population dilemma. One solution, he suggested that we all should become nuns and monks. With a twinkle in his eye, he mused that probably most of us would not want to do that. He than said, "many people consider abortion to be an act of violence, contraception counterproductive, but the practice of birth control must be used. Because of the unique ways in which Buddhism values human life, only children who can be well cared for, physically, emotionally, and spiritually, should be conceived - without exhausting the emotional, material, and spiritual resources of their parents, their community, and this planet – the classical "quality versus quantity" approach.
Daoist View: (taïjì tuì, diagram of the greatest ultimate) tries to trace the two features Yin and Yang in which the description of movements - motion and tranquility - appears. Taijì cannot exist neither without Yin and nor without Yang.

Yin & Yang: the oscillation between the two polarities is a natural process and can be found in any aspects of life; i.e.: from the food we eat (a healthy diet should contain both elements – definitely not the case with fast food), in a person’s character (changing moods through the day), the biological cycles within all of us (sleeping-awake cycle, hormonal cycles); even in diseases (any illness is a disruption of this balance).

The principle Yin-Yang it is not, what we usually would call a duality, but rather an explicit dualism that expresses one implied unit, such as good & bad, hot & cold, happiness & sadness, healthy & sick or life & death. Here, health must not be regarded as being entirely liberated from any malaise – this is simply impossible as viral, bacterial and other attacks constantly inflict micro-traumas onto our cells – with the only difference that we are not yet aware of it – health in this regard must be understood as a slight undulating path between sick and healthy extremes, suggesting to our brain that we feel perfectly fine (tickle the immune system to trigger an Eu-stress response). Only when a disease starts to gain momentum then the oscillatory pattern displays a wild swing towards the “sick” bias only to swing then back to the healthy state once recovery sets in.

Together, Yin and Yang is said to be (daō the way). The passionate union of Yin and Yang, like the union between female and male, therefore constitutes the eternal model of the universe. The sexual polarization has lead to unification of opposite genders (sex is a transmitted disease that will, ultimately be fatal – Tichy, 2004). However, it does not stop here; this polarization is manifested in both sexes, even within both females and males. Indeed, it goes even as far as, the female body produces male hormones - likewise does the male body produce female hormones, which assigns us a bisexual psychology. In fact, this polarization is the source of our creativity. The very same polarity is evident elsewhere in nature; obviously not only in animals and plants, but also in the fundamental nature of this planet - among the polarities of rain and sunshine, of river and ocean, of day and night, of light and dark, of spirit and matter, of young and old, of life and death, - as said before, one without the other would not make any sense. A brief remark about life and death: death is within every one of us; it occurs at a continuous rate, every second millions of cells undergo apoptosis (programmed cell death) and are substituted by new ones. Continuously on this planet people die while newborns follow. It is a natural process, it is a basic law.
Hyper-Yang: It is in the roots of thinking and feeling of Chinese people that the principle of this polarity is manifested (a principle that should not be confused with the conflict or opposition of ideas). In the metaphors of other cultures, the light is in war with the darkness, life with death, the good with the evil, and positive with negative (rudimentarily, the concept of Yin & Yang is likewise found in Christianity – without bad, there can’t be any good). In fact, it is this separation, that the greater part of the world developed an ideal, which **cultivates the pleasant while oppressing the unpleasant** and ultimately gave rise to the contemporary Hyper-Yang of destructive Abrahamic rationalism (although insignificant, it is worth mentioning the hyper-bra cult of females that surgically increase their breast size to monstrous proportions). We, in our dominant western society, think in separating terms rather than in complementary terms! In addition we tend to sharply draw lines between entities, lines that in reality do not exist – there are only gradients and transition zones.

For the traditional way of Chinese thought, this is contradictory and does not at all establish great harmony. In analogy to the electrical current, the opposing polarities “+” and “-” can't exclude each other; just as north and south, light and darkness, strong and weak, rising and falling, male and female, etc. are different aspects of a same system, and the disappearance of one of the two would mean disappearing of the same system.

In similar fashion our 24h society disrupts this fine regulatory balance of counteracting hormones released during various times of the day. Already studies are under way trying to interfere with these cycles to maximize individuals performances to meet the requirements of our society; e.g.: to counter-act with increasingly burnt-out and depressed people, drugs are developed especially to target cabin crew staff in long-distance flight and other night-time active personnel. Even though this seems an interesting approach it is just another attempt opposing natural cycles and should be questioned the same way as some people do when considering the allopathic medical approach in western medicine (rather than resolving the roots of a disease they just tackle the physical = cosmetic aspect of a medical case).

**Specialist vs. generalist:** what makes science unique and special, the great strength of science, is also its tragic flaw or weakness. You see the very essence of science is that experts must focus on a part of nature. We try to bring it into the laboratory and isolate it from everything else. But in the process from separating it from the context that made it of interest in the first place, we loose all sense of where it fits and why it matters. And the essence of the scientific ideal is that we must objectify that what we are observing. We must remain distant from it, we must look at it through a microscope, we give it numbers so we can feed it into a computer, we don't feel emotional or passionate about it because that may color the way that we interpret our data. What you see the very act of distancing ourselves from that object of nature means that we no longer care.

**Holistic view:** eastern science (traditional chinese medicine - TCM, Tibetan art of healing – **Kundun**, and others) almost always attempt to see the entire picture; e.g. patterns of thought on a mental level regulate feelings (emotions) which are ordered in an hierarchically fashion. According to these schools, the roots of a disease in an individual are rooted in the emotional and mental imbalance and expressed on a physical level. Mental processes and emotions influence the disposition, and both levels are tightly interwoven. In fact, diseases on a mental or physical level are fundamentally sicker than a person who exhibits only physical symptoms. Interestingly, this outstanding way of classifying an imbalance of a human’s homeostasis can also be found in western Homeopathy. We lost ties to nature – a cat after a meal makes a nap. Westerners instead, are active almost the entire day – not surprising that we complain about headaches. But allopathy helps out with a quick remedy, which unfortunately has the side-effect of irritating the stomach lining. In order to tackle that we take something that heals our irritated stomach. Unfortunately this harms the kidneys, so another remedy is taken to minimize renal damage, which itself has the disadvantage to harm the liver, and so forth – but at least the headache is gone …. only sick people support the pharmaceutical industry.
Conclusion

…. different ways of thinking should be encouraged;

…. trans-disciplinary solutions should be looked after;

…. a holistic teaching concept should be implemented (generalists vs. specialist);

…. balanced strategies should be worked out on a local and global scale (sustainability);

危机      .... We²Ji¹
(danger & chance)

…. nature can do without us, but we can’t do without nature!

After all: Don’t Worry – Be Happy
THANKS for Your attention

04-05-29    Madl    17

Even though the concepts so far presented are largely generalized. Knowing that this is not necessarily correct, it is useful to emphasize the direction we are heading to. Neither one nor the other is entirely in the wrong or the right, only together as an entire unit can we interfere correctly for a sustainable future.

- **thinking:** It can’t be right if we impose our monopolistic conception of the world onto others; it is time that we accept different world views; opening ourselves to different ways of reasoning increases the possibilities of a peaceful common future; it also favours a balanced concept can be achieved when recognizing the potentials such fruitful inspirations. A 9th century Zen text states:

> When others are in the wrong, I am partly responsible. When I am in the wrong, I alone am to blame (Buddhism & Ecology p.285).

- **trans-disciplinary:** Conflict potentials must be dealt with as soon as it is becoming recognized as such; concepts rooted in eastern cultures should be integrated in western mainstream thinking:

- **teaching:** Alternative views should be transmitted as early as elementary school all the way up to university. Too often, specialization detached westerners from the very essence of life, rendering us unaware of the intrinsic web of life. Ideally, the western approach starts at the very basic unit, and reaches out to comprehend the whole, while the eastern approach is doing the opposite. I tried to outline that with an adapted concept taken from prof. Patry. Here the Chinese character DongXi (do¹ng, the east, and xi¹ the west) stands for the object, the thing. But together in complementary manner both eastern and western concepts can be reciprocally inspiring. The Hua-Yen school of Buddhism offers as the metaphor for the world an infinite net, at each intersection of which lies a jewel in which exists every other jewel and where every part of the net depends for its existence on dynamic awareness of every other part.

- **strategies:** We should practice the principle of renunciation – not necessarily to all of them but to some.

- **Wei Ji:** As stated by the Chinese characters for “Crisis” – which is actually a pictogram composed of two individual characters We¹ (which stands for danger) and Ji¹ (which stands for chance), conveys an interesting and quite obvious interpretation of the current dilemma between common practice and theoretical solutions. Copying our value system will sooner or later have a tremendous effect on the Chinese way of life and before long it will not have the desired effect that we of the dominant society may think it will. Knowing a bit the Chinese mentality, I am convinced that rather than unconditionally accepting these concepts, they will alter our concepts in a way to leave their imprints based on their 4000 year old reckoning. A fact that we might have to cope with in the not so distant future.

A final comment about this classical Chinese painting. As evident, classical paintings of this kind characterize human existence as being part of the ecosphere. Thus if we only practise some of these principles, the world would and will be a better place for all of us and the generations still to come.