



Tattva
JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

THE SECOND HANDSHAKE: CONSTRUCTIVE POSTMODERNISM IN CHINA TODAY

Zhihe Wang

The study of Whitehead in China can be dated back to the 1930s. At that time many leading philosophers in China were enthusiastic about Whitehead's way of thinking. Let us speak of this as China's first handshake with Whitehead. This handshake did not result in a long-lasting friendship, because the Sino-Japanese War and the war between the Communist Party and the Nationalist Party made struggle-thinking dominant and brought an end to Whitehead studies. Today, however, a second handshake is occurring, and it has the potential to become a long-lasting friendship. It is occurring through what the Chinese call the "constructive postmodern" movement. This movement began in 1995 and continues into the present. The movement combines a study of Whitehead with a re-claiming of classical Chinese traditions, showing how such a creative synthesis can be applied to practical problems in China today.

When we consider this movement, certain questions naturally arise: What effects has the movement already had in China? Will the movement grow in size, or will it devolve into a mere specialty for a small group of scholars? If it does grow in size, how might it contribute to a more sustainable and harmonious China? What obstacles does Constructive Postmodernism now face? How might this movement help China serve the interests of the broader world? These are the questions I address in this paper.

The Emergence of Constructive Postmodernism in China

"Constructive Postmodernism" refers to ways of thinking built upon Whiteheadian or process thought that favor pluralistic but integrative worldview and practice. Constructive Postmodernism in China is quite different from the deconstructive postmodernism of Europe and the United States. Constructive postmodernists are not against all things modern; they are not preoccupied with "texts" and "discourse" at the expense of human experience and human participation in the larger web of life; they are not content to criticize the values of modernity without offering constructive alternatives. Equally important, they are not opposed to metaphysics – and thus to cosmologies or metaphysically-oriented worldviews that offer integrative visions for society as a whole.

On the contrary, as Jay McDaniel has summarized, they are committed to: (1) the development of integrative worldviews that link science and spirituality and concern for human beings with respect for the earth; (2) the encouragement of forms of spirituality and wisdom that draw upon the best of the Chinese past as well as the best Western ideas, and (3) the cultivation of social practices that can help the Chinese overcome environmental problems and build sustainable communities in rural and urban settings. Thus constructive postmodernists are postmodern, not in the sense of being anti-modern, but rather in the sense of trying to build upon the best aspects of modernity and tradition, thus creating new ways of thinking.¹

The publication of the Chinese translation of *Reenchantment of Science*, edited by David Griffin, was a landmark in the emergence of constructive postmodernism in China. Before the book's publication in 1995, the only kind of postmodernism with which Chinese scholars were familiar was the deconstructive postmodernism of French philosophers such as Derrida and Foucault. The translation and publication of *Reenchantment of Science* made people aware of another kind of postmodernism, namely "Constructive Postmodernism." *The Reenchantment of Science* has been reprinted four times. At some universities, professors assigned the book to their graduate students on their "must-read" or reference list. In November 1996, *Studies in Dialectics of Nature* invited ten scholars to discuss the book. Comments were published in this national level journal (No. 1, 1997). In short, with the publication of *The Reenchantment of Science*, Constructive Postmodernism had officially stepped onto the Chinese academic stage.

In 2002 a conference on Whitehead and China made Constructive Postmodernism even more visible in China. 180 scholars participated in this historic event. Roughly

120 of them were from various parts of China. Many leading scholars of the Chinese academic world participated. Also, many national Chinese media personnel were present, including *The Peoples Daily*, *Guangming Daily*, *China Education Daily*, *Social Sciences Abroad*, and *World Philosophy*. A number of high government officials including Guiren Yuan, the Vice-minister of Education, came to the conference to welcome the scholars. This conference was regarded in China as an historic event.

After the translation of *The Reenchantment of Science*, more than twenty other constructive postmodern books have been, or are being, translated into Chinese. These include *Spirituality and Society*, *Process Theology; an Introductory Exposition*, *Founders of Postmodern Philosophy*, *Postmodernism and Public Policy*, *Beyond Dialogue*, and *Religions and God in A Postmodern World*. A number of Whitehead's own writings have also been translated: *Adventures of Ideas*, *Process and Reality*, *The Aims of Education*, *The Concept Of Nature*, and *Religion in the Making*. Moreover, a journal was inaugurated called *China Process Studies*. It includes articles by Chinese as well as non-Chinese process scholars. Additionally, eighteen centers for constructive postmodernism and process studies have been established in Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, Wuhan, Xian, Shandong, Hangzhou, Soochow, Guilin, Heilongjiang, Yancheng, Zhanjiang, and Shenyang, with foci ranging from postmodern philosophy, psychology, education, and religion, to science and values, sustainable urbanization, business ethics, theology and ecology.

Thirty international conferences have been held in China and in Claremont, and three Summer Academies have taken place. Twenty visiting scholars have come to Claremont for further studies. Hundreds of writings on Constructive Postmodernism and process thought have been published by Chinese authors. These include the books such as *On the Third Kind of Metaphysics—A Study of Constructive Postmodern Philosophy* by Weifu Wu (Shanghai: Xuelin Press, 2002), *Postmodern Ecological Science and Technology—A Constructive Perspective* by Xianjing Xiao (Beijing: Science Press, 2003), *Globalization and Postmodernity*. Edited by Zhihe Wang (Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2003), *A Dictionary of Postmodernism* edited by Zhihe Wang (Beijing: Central Compilation and Translation Press, 2004), *A Worldview for the Ecological Age* by Jing Cao (Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 2007), *Process and Salvation—Whitehead Philosophy and Its Religious Implications* by Ming Huang (Beijing: Religion Culture Press, 2006), *Ecological Theology and Salvation—A Study on John Cobb's Ecological Theology* (Beijing: Religion Culture Press, 2008).

Impacts

It is clear that Constructive Postmodernism in China has been growing. Evidence suggests that it will continue to grow. The impact of Constructive Postmodernism on China is reflected not only in the fact that the names of the leading constructive postmodern thinkers, such as David R. Griffin and John B. Cobb, appear on the test paper for graduate students, on Central Higher Party School's newsletter, and *Beijing Daily*, but also in the following six ways.

1. Constructive Postmodernism has changed people's view on postmodernism. As we mentioned before, prior to the encounter with constructive postmodernism the Chinese understood postmodernism only as negative criticism and deconstruction of modernity. For example, *Philosophical Researches*, the top journal of philosophy in China, published an article in which the author argued that "Postmodernism views Humanism as an enemy." and "takes pleasure in turning traditional values upside down."²

However, the appearance of constructive postmodernism changed the picture. As Xiaohua Wang argued, "Because of the appearance of *Reenchantment of Science*, we have realized that it is too indiscreet of us to reject postmodernism since another kind of postmodernism has occurred and showed us a bright future. It is Constructive Postmodernism."³

A research report titled "Toward Constructive Postmodernism" by the Philosophy Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, states: "There is a gradual shift of attitude toward postmodernism in Chinese academia from rejection to affirmation in some sense. Postmodernism shifted its direction from 'critical postmodernism. to 'Constructive Postmodernism'. It has, therefore, become an important way for China to learn the trend of philosophical development, to have direct dialogue with foreign philosophy, and to pay attention to China's actual issues."⁴ Before the report, Xiping Zhuo, Director of Religion Institute, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, had envisioned the fundamental transition in postmodernism from destructiveness to constructiveness, from negativeness to positiveness, from pessimism to optimism, and recognizes the contribution by constructive postmodernism in this transition.⁵

Constructive Postmodernism is regarded by Yong Pei, Senior Official at the State Bureau of Religious Affairs, as "a very positive and constructive contemporary movement with farsighted vision."⁶ For Shujin Huang, Director of the Philosophy Department, National Defense University, Constructive Postmodernism is "a new attitude toward the relationship between humans and nature, individuals and society, individual and individual." For Zhong

Chen, Philosophy Professor at Soochow University, "If the human history of ideas is a grand long picture, then the reflection and critique of modernity in the past half century is an important page. If the postmodern movements and streams such as deconstructive postmodernism and post-colonialism make this picture diverse and colorful, then it is Constructive Postmodernism that provides points of contact.. Its emphasis on creative transformation, organic plurality, the open self, and the common good, makes this picture full of genuine vitality and hope." ⁷

Even a leading scholar in deconstructive postmodernism, Xiaoming Chen, literature Professor at Peking University, has recognized the constructive side of postmodernism. He affirmed, "Now we should focus our attention on more constructive postmodern theory and knowledge. The active presence of Constructive Postmodern theory and postmodern theology in the contemporary West clearly has clearly shown that the postmodern is not against human nature and history. Postmodernism [...] is looking for the spiritual homeland for our time."⁸ For Yong Xia, "many postmodernists have a positive and constructive side. In some sense, postmodernism aims at breaking the new iron chains the Enlightenment made for us...What postmodernism pursues is a new liberation for humans."⁹

Many postmodern points of view, especially the emphasis on diversity and plurality have been accepted quite widely in China. In Yong Pei's words: "As a matter of fact the Chinese people and China's government have unconsciously applied the postmodern idea..." ¹⁰ When we read China's leaders' talks such as Hu Jintao's speech at Yale University in 2006 and Wen Jiabao's in Paris in 2005, we can readily feel the postmodern tone. In his speech at L'Ecole Polytechnique de Paris, December 6, 2005, Wen Jiabao, Premier of China, said, "Cultural plurality is an important feature of human civilization. The cultural plurality in human society is an objective reality like the eco-diversity is in nature."¹¹ Sharing the same tone, Hu Jintao, President of China, told Yale students and faculty that "A composer cannot write enchanting melody with one note, and a painter cannot paint a landscape with only one color. The world is a treasure house where the unique cultural achievements created by people of all countries are displayed."¹²

2. Constructive Postmodernism has challenged the Chinese to rethink modernization by pointing out its negative consequences. Leaders are now talking about a new form of healthy modernization and "Green GDP," which bypass the worst aspects of Western modernity. Healthy modernization is now understood to be "constructively postmodern" development.

Modernization has been a dream for China for almost one hundred years. After the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese government joined those of most developing countries in treating modernization as its goal. China's achievements on its path toward modernization such as its fast GDP growth have amazed the world. However, the price has been extremely high, including; environmental problems, an increasing gap between the rich and the poor, and the loss of faith among its people. Is there any alternative to the current form of modernization? Constructive postmodern thinking proposes such an alternative.

In his article titled "The Weicheng (Fortress Besieged) of Modernization and Its Transcendence - On the Values Orientation of Constructive Postmodernism and its Inspiration", Kang Ouyang, a leading Marxist scholar in China and Vice Provost of Huazhong University of Science and Technology, explores the positive and negative sides of modernization. For him the latter *includes treating economic growth as the ultimate goal; neglecting ecology, the value of tradition, and aesthetic wisdom as complements to scientific knowledge; rejecting the positive role that religion can play in human life; and overemphasizing individuality at the expense of community. Constructive Postmodernism has been successful in bringing up these issues to prevent us from repeating "the same mistakes the West made."*¹³

Today more and more Chinese people are realizing that Westernized modernization is not the only way for China to develop. For Lanxian Xiang, regarding GDP growth as the main goal of a nation without considering social justice and morality is a typically mechanical understanding of development, which is a merely "Western notion."¹⁴ Stemming from these factors along with others, such as critical social and environmental problems, the idea of "ecological civilization," with its strong postmodern color, was introduced by the Chinese government. In the words of Huibin Li, an official scholar of the Central Bureau of Compilation and Translation, a top think tank of the Chinese government, "If ecological civilization is a civilization after industrialization and, postmodern means after modern, then, ecological civilization and postmodern civilization originally should be the same topic."¹⁵

The concept of ecological civilization reflects an important shift in the Chinese government's understanding of development. Rather than stressing GDP growth as the core of development, as it did in the past, the government now recognizes that, to be sustainable, development requires a harmonious relationship between man and nature. Such a concept did not develop in a vacuum; Constructive Postmodernism has played a significant role. In the words of Pan Yue, head of

the Environment Department of China, "Socialist ecological civilization is a critical absorption of environmentalism, eco-ethics, and postmodernism."¹⁶

3. Constructive Postmodernism has enriched and colored contemporary Chinese academia by providing alternative views on the many issues with which Chinese intellectuals deal. In particular, it has opened up discussions of postmodern education, sustainable agriculture, urban design, environmental economics, postmodern law, postmodern freedom, and postmodern democracy. When examining the writings on Constructive Postmodernism and process thought, one can generally divide them into the following three categories:
 - a) Philosophy. Some Chinese scholars focus on the theoretical exploration of Constructive Postmodernism or process philosophy or Whitehead. Such books as *On The Third Kind of Metaphysics—A Study of Constructive Postmodern Philosophy* by Weifu Wu, *Process and Salvation* by Ming Huang, and such articles as Zhen Han's "The Value of Adventure—My Reading of Whitehead" (*Academic Researches* 9, 2002), Zhihe Wang's "Whitehead as a Postmodern Thinker." (*China Process Studies* 1, 2004), "Interpreting the Constructive Postmodern Notion of Creativity" by Lingling Luo and Song Zhang (*Journal of Northeastern University* 5, 2004), "Constructive Postmodern Holism" by Jinmei Chen (*Studies in Dialectics of Nature* 8, 2000), "Could David Griffin's Post-modern Science Be Tenable?" by Xianjing Xiao (*Journal of Hebei Normal University* 2, 2003), "A Study on the Constructive Postmodernism Thoughts of David Ray Griffin" by Ping Zhang (*Journal of Jilin Normal University* 5, 2004), "Toward a Postmodern Philosophy of Education—Whiteheadian Process Philosophy of Education" by Yuehou Qu and Zhihe Wang (*Philosophical Researches* 5, 2004), Yuehou Qu's "The Hard Core Doctrines of Process Philosophy and Its Theological Implication." (*Seeking Truth* 4, 2007), "On Freedom with Deep Responsibility—Toward a Postmodern Freedom." by Zhihe Wang (*Philosophical Researches* 11, 2008).
 - b) Comparative studies. Some scholars are interested in comparing Constructive Postmodernism to other systems of thought. The following articles represent this interest: Linghong Kong's "Constructive Postmodernism and Zhuang Zi Thought" (*Seeking Truth* 3, 1998), Zhong Cai, "Postmodern Science and Traditional Chinese Scientific Thought." (*Science, Technology and Dialectics* 3, 1999), Xuezhi Zhang's "The Concept of Event in Whitehead and Zhang Dainian" (*Journal of Peking University* 5, 2004), Lizhi Wang's "Whitehead and Kant" (*Philosophical Researches* 6, 2007), Xiuvao Tao's "Hegel and Whitehead" (*China Process Studies* Vol.2, 2007), Guihuan Huo's "Hegel, Marx, and Whitehead"

(*China Process Studies* Vol.2, 2007), Shaojun Li's "Constructive Postmodernism and Complexity Studies" (*Journal of Capital Normal University* 4, 2004), Lizhi Wang's "Process Philosophy and the Dao of the University—A Comparison between Whitehead's and Confucius' Creativity Principle." In *Higher Education of the Future*, ed. by Changchun Cheng (Changchuan: Jilin People Press, 2007.), and "Process Psychology and Chinese Taoist Thought" by Ting Jiao and Fengqiang Gao (*Journal of Shandong University of Science and Technology* 2, 2007), Meijun Fan's "The Notion of Harmony in Whitehead and Chinese Philosophy." (*Philosophy & Culture Monthly* 7, 2007), Zhaoming Dan's "Labor, Freedom and Process Harmony—Viewing Marx from Whitehead" (*Journal of Tangshan Normal College* 4, 2008).

- c) Application of Constructive Postmodernism to the social-political field. This is the richest and fastest-growing field in the constructive postmodern movement in China. Realizing the value of Constructive Postmodernism, Chinese scholars are trying to apply this new approach or way of thinking to the social, political field in order to solve the various pressing issues facing China. For example, Guihuan Huo, a senior researcher of the Chinese Academy of Social Science, has explored the significance of Constructive Postmodernism in resolving the conflict between science and the humanities.¹⁷

The following list of articles can provide readers with a clear impression of this literature. "The Inspiration of Constructive Postmodernism for China's Higher Education" by Fei Li (*Education Today* 1, 2008), "The Inspiration of Constructive Postmodernism for Creating a Harmonious Society" Desheng Bu, Yi Ma and Xiaohui Liu (*Journal of Shanxi Party School* 2, 2008), "The Inspiration of Constructive Postmodernism for Moral Education of Graduate Students" by Wei Zhang (*Degree and Graduate Education* 3, 2005), "The Inspiration of Constructive Postmodernism for Chinese Medicine" by Yuanzhao Wang (*Journal of Liaoning Chinese Medicine* 5, 2006), "The Relationship between Science and Religion from a Constructive Postmodern Perspective" by Xiong Sun (*Journal of Zhejiang Party School* 6, 2003), Yunqiu Gao's "Analyzing the Economic Man from the Perspective of Process Philosophy." (*Orient Forum* 5, 2005)

"On Constructive Postmodern Reconstruction of Postmodern Education," Jian Feng (*Journal of Hunan Normal University* 5, 2005), "Constructive Postmodernism and Chinese Party History Studies" by Chuanliang Shen (*Party History Studies* 1, 2006), "Promoting a Constructive Postmodern

Culture of Birth" by Mingxing Zeng (*Population* 4, 2004), "Constructive Postmodernism and Chinese Jurisprudence" by Xuebin Liu and Yingjun Ma (*Journal of Shanxi Party School* 3, 2006), "Reflect on and Promote the Development of China's Modernization from a Constructive Postmodern Perspective" by Yougang Zhuang, (*Marxism and Reality* No.2, 2007), and so on.

4. Constructive Postmodernism has promoted education reform in China both by providing process-oriented experiments in education and bringing educators and philosophers together for dialogue. The current education system in China is in crisis. More and more people have become dissatisfied with test-oriented and value-free education. Constructive postmodern education based on Whitehead's process education meets people's needs by offering a fresh, wisdom-oriented perspective. According to Dina Pei, education professor at Beijing Normal University and a leading figure in education reform in China, "Whitehead's process education, its appreciation for co-creation, its emphasis on difference, and its regarding life as subject of education, have a very inspiring role to play in China's education innovation."¹⁸ She and her colleagues have been applying process insights to China's education innovation. So far ten Chinese universities, a hundred elementary and middle schools, seven local government education departments, and three educational institutions have joined this program.

Maybe it is not accidental that what Pei has said and done reminds us of another leading education reformer in China. Her name is Xiaoman Zhu, president of the National Central Institute for Education Studies and the head of the National Education Plan Office in China. Zhu identifies herself as a Whiteheadian; she and her colleagues have been promoting curriculum reform in China. In her keynote speech entitled "A Whiteheadian Understanding of China's Curriculum Reform", presented at the International Conference on "Process Thinking and Curriculum Reform," July 19-20, Yantai, Shandong, China, she emphasized the influence of Whitehead's education on curriculum reform in China. In her talk she explained why Whitehead is so important to China: "Among all foreign philosophies, Whitehead's process philosophy is the way of thinking that is most convergent with the aim of China's education reform and with deep Chinese tradition. It has strong affinity with Chinese ideas such as organic thought, interrelationship, and concrescence. Also, it stresses harmony and balance. This is a philosophical way of thinking which is very helpful in the wide promotion of China's education reform and in dealing with various conflicts that appear during this process."¹⁹

She stressed that Whitehead's concepts, such as value, feeling, personal experience, importance, and rhythm have played a significant part in China's educational reform; and then explained how these ideas have influenced the new curriculum that she and her colleagues have developed. This is especially noteworthy because efforts of educational reform in China now affect 35 million students who already have used the new curriculum.

5. Constructive Postmodernism has enhanced China's environmental movement by providing a philosophical foundation. As Griffin argues, Constructive Postmodernism is ecological in the real sense because it "provides support for the ecology..."²⁰ Therefore; there is an intrinsic connection between Constructive Postmodernism and the environmental movement in China. According to Yijie Tang, philosophy professor at Peking University, a top scholar in traditional Chinese philosophy and culture, "Process philosophy criticizes binary thinking and views nature and humans as an interrelated bio-community. This idea has important implications for the solution of the ecological crisis facing us today."²¹

This explains why Chinese environmentalists "prefer Constructive Postmodernism represented by David Griffin,"²² said Fanren Zeng, former president of Shandong University, who is a founder of eco-aesthetics in China. For Xiujie Wang, Chair of Liaoning Literature Association, who is well known in China as an "ecological female author", "Constructive Postmodernism is the philosophical foundation of ecological literature." To Xiaohua Wang, "the fate of human beings and the whole eco-system will be determined by whether the postmodern turn succeeds."²³ Among Chinese environmentalists, Sheri Liao has been most successful in putting Constructive Postmodernism into the practice of environment protection. With a major in philosophy, Ms. Liao is China's best-known environmental activist and journalist. She founded the Global Village of Beijing in 1996, and has received commendations from the United Nations and the White House. The focus of her work has been on promoting a sense of individual responsibility and empowerment in relation to environmental issues in China.

Over the years, though, she became convinced that a genuine environmental movement in China must have a spiritual foundation which draws upon the intuitive wisdom from the Chinese past. She gradually found that constructive postmodern thinking or process thought can provide a philosophical grounding for the environmental movement. According to Sheri Liao's understanding, the constructive postmodern movement is a reflection on and a correction of modern fragmental and hegemonic thinking. (I may have missed the meaning of the preceding sentence.) "It places emphasis on wholeness, difference and

uniqueness, while promoting ecological economy, organic agriculture, natural life cultivation, eco-architecture, spirituality, and simplicity of life - qualities that have sustained Chinese civilization for 5000 years."²⁴

6. Constructive Postmodernism has encouraged the Chinese to revalue their traditions and attempt to recover those aspects that will build a green China that is socially just, ecologically sustainable, and spiritually satisfying. In China since the May Fourth movement, which can be called "China's first enlightenment," its ancient tradition has been treated as something to be completely abandoned. "Down with Confucianism" was the most famous slogan of that time. The Chinese abandoned the spiritual resources of their tradition such as respect for heaven, awe of the Dao and 'harmony with difference.' We are now struggling to reclaim these traditions. Lacking any faith or sense of the divine, people easily worship the secular. That explains why scientism and worship of money are so popular today in China as well as in the West.

However, Constructive Postmodernism helps the Chinese find the value and charm within their past because of its respectful attitude toward tradition.²⁵ This partly explains why the Chinese people would like to embrace postmodernism in its constructive form rather than the deconstructive one. In a speech at Claremont, Kang Ouyang said: "as a Chinese scholar, I especially noted that many constructive postmodernists are very friendly to Chinese people and Chinese culture. The Center of Process Studies has set a good example in this regard. Many postmodernists stress the importance of Chinese culture in overcoming modern problems and try to find enlightenment from traditional Chinese culture. This will certainly stimulate Chinese scholars to study their own traditional culture, to discover other possible resources, and to enlarge its influence in the further development of world culture."²⁶

Today more and more people have realized the important role religion can play in promoting a harmonious society and an ecological civilization. In the words of Ye Xiaowen, chief of the State Administration for Religious Affairs of China, "*Religion is a positive, valuable force in building a harmonious society.*"²⁷ For Pan Yue, "From the Taoist view of the Tao reflecting nature, to the Confucian idea of humans and nature becoming one, to the Buddhist belief that all living things are equal, Chinese religion has helped our culture to survive for thousands of years. Chinese religion can be a powerful weapon in preventing an environmental crisis and building a peaceful harmonious society."²⁸ Inspired by Constructive Postmodernism, Dedong Wei, a researcher of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, felt the convergence between Constructive Postmodernism and Buddhism. In his opinion, "Buddhism is

postmodern in the real sense. It is very possible and realistic for Chinese to cherish, study, and highlight the excellent elements in Buddhist ecological outlook in order to avoid the detour of modernization."²⁹

Why Constructive Postmodernism has been Successful

A question might be raised: Why has Constructive Postmodernism mushroomed in China so quickly? Besides the tremendous efforts of Process thinkers such as David Griffin, John Cobb, Jay McDaniel, George Derfer, John Buchanan, Ronald Phipps, Zhihe Wang, Yuehou Qu, and Guihuan Huo, Yong Pei, and Meijun Fan, etc, six points can be made.

1. Constructive postmodernism meets the needs of China for fresh ideas and new alternatives to the modern development model. While China has risen dramatically in terms of its economic development, serious problems have accompanied that development: wide gaps between rich and poor, a loss of faith due to the corrosive effects of market-driven values, and, of course, environmental problems. Constructive Postmodernism helps address these problems. Chinese scholars agree with John Cobb's analysis: the current world is in urgent need of credible comprehensive insights, and of a mode of thinking that integrates various knowledge fragments into a common and internally consolidated integer.³⁰
2. The emphasis on social responsibility by constructive postmodern thinkers resonates with the social concerns of Chinese intellectuals. To some Chinese, "the most distinguished feature of Constructive Postmodernism is its character of practice, namely, applying theory to practice."³¹ The social and ecological concerns of constructive postmodernists resonate deeply with a Chinese intellectual commitment to "be the first to feel concern about state affairs and the last to enjoy yourself."
3. China seeks a "third way" beyond a mere repetition of tradition and a mere imitation of the West. Constructive Postmodernism offers that third way. As an integrative way of thinking, Constructive Postmodernism transcends the either-or binary thinking and tries to integrate the best parts of Chinese tradition and the modern West in a creative way. This way of thinking reflects the essence of Tao whose value lies in its power to reconcile opposites on a higher level. This explains why Griffin's statement in the preface to the Chinese version of *The Reenchantment of Science* is so well received in China: "China may avoid the negative influence by learning the mistakes the Western world has made and actually become a real postmodern society."³²

4. There are intrinsic affinities between Constructive Postmodernism and Chinese tradition, which make it easy for the Chinese to accept Constructive Postmodernism. For example, traditional Chinese thinking is inherently organic and relational in its orientation. Constructive Postmodernism is also organic and relational, showing how a worldview of this sort can be rational as well as spiritually meaningful. A great deal of writing such as "Taoism and Constructive Postmodernism" by Xianghai Li, Chair of Department of Philosophy, Nankai University, finds that the fluid, relation-intrinsic panexperientialism of Constructive Postmodernism "has something in common" with the Taoist understanding of nature and the cosmos.³³

Dr. Meijun Fan inquired into the relationship between constructive postmodernism and Zhuang Zi, a great ancient Chinese thinker. Her studies indicate that, first, there is a commonality between the constructive postmodern sense of oneness with nature and the concept of unification of humankind and nature in Zhuang Zi. According to Griffin, "postmodern persons do not feel like aliens in a hostile or indifferent nature. Rather, they feel at home in the world."⁶ In Zhuang Zi, we read this: "To become together with nature and feel oneness with nature is a lofty aesthetic realm." Secondly, both Constructive Postmodernism and Zhuang Zi undermine the complacency and parochialism of human beings. Zhuang Zi says, "I am in the world, just like a little stone and a little tree in a mountain." In her book, *Contemporary Interpretation of Traditional Chinese Aesthetics* (China Social Sciences Press, Beijing, 1997, 2005), Fan compares Whitehead's philosophy of organism to the traditional holistic Chinese consciousness reflected in the notion of "harmony is beauty." Further, she offers an extensive discussion of the similarities and differences between ecological consciousness in traditional Chinese aesthetics and the ecological consciousness of the contemporary West. Her conclusion is that the organic holistic consciousness that both Whitehead and ancient Chinese thinkers convey is significant to our lives in that it helps us to "overcome the fragmentation of modern thinking - divisions such as those between humanity and nature, individual and individual, male and female, and soul and body."³⁴

5. Constructive Postmodernism shares many common interests with Marxism, such as caring for the poor, defending justice, and pursuing the common good. Thus it is possible for Marxists to be open to constructive postmodern ways of thinking and still retain their allegiance to Marxist analysis. The "convergence" is not only reflected in their transcendence of both human-centrism and West-centrism,³⁵ but also in their social concerns including social justice and eco-justice. As Huibin Li states, "We need to protect the legally-established ecological rights of individuals, families, communities, and nations, and defend ecological equality and ecological justice. I think this is not only

the intrinsic component of ecological civilization, but also the ideal and goal Marxists and constructive postmodernists will struggle for."³⁶

6. Constructive Postmodernism meets the need of China for harmony. China's government has adopted the view that China can and should become a harmonious society and an ecological civilization. Constructive Postmodernism offers conceptual underpinnings and practices that can help China realize those aims. In addition, Constructive Postmodernism embraces pluralism: a plurality of cultures, of ways of thinking, of ethnic traditions, of religions. China today is seeking a way of thinking that welcomes these kinds of pluralism. Constructive Postmodernism offers that way.

Challenges

Despite these many advantages, it must also be admitted that Constructive Postmodernism is not mainstream in China today. It is a growing movement, but still a minority one. The obstacles to its growth are:

1. Linear thinking. Many people still believe that history must inevitably follow a linear model: namely, premodern, modern, and postmodern. They believe that China must become modern before becoming postmodern, not realizing that postmodernism can be a contemporary alternative to unhealthy modernization.
2. Compartmentalization in the academic world. As influenced by Whitehead, Constructive Postmodernism invites and even requires transdisciplinary ways of thinking, whereas the departments in universities divide scholars into rigid disciplines. Many scholars are unwilling to engage in interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary thinking, fearful that such thinking compromises the purity of their disciplines or challenges inherent assumptions in ways that impede progress within their areas of specialization.
3. Mechanistic materialism. Some scholars in China are still deeply influenced by mechanistic materialism and thus oppose the religious dimension of constructive postmodernism. They are also suspicious of the constructive postmodern view that the whole of the nature – even inorganic matter – has a kind of aliveness to it.
4. Worship of science. Closely related to mechanistic materialism, scientism is still very powerful in China. For example, Nanyuan Zhao, Professor at Tsinghai University, argued against Constructive Postmodernism. For him, "Postmodern science is a pseudoscience through and through."³⁷ For him the ecological call to "revere nature" is unscientific.

In addition, Constructive Postmodernism has been criticized by some Chinese as utopian. But, to Xiaohua Wang, "it is not its weakness but its honor instead."

These obstacles are quite serious. Constructive postmodern thinkers in China must work very hard to overcome them, if the movement is to continue and grow. But this growth is the best hope for China and, ultimately, for a world that will inevitably be affected by China.

Fortunately, there are some examples of the constructive postmodern idea being put into practice. The Shenzhen local government recently proposed "Using Postmodern Idea to build a new Long Gang (a city) representing Shenzhen's new 21st century level of development." They regard constructive postmodern thought as the guiding principle and policy for Long Gang's development. "Postmodern thought" in the mind of Weiliang Yu, Mayor of Long Gang, refers to "a constructive reflection on modernization, but not anti-modernization. It places emphasis not only on comprehensive, sustainable, and harmonious development, but also on humane caring, public participation, and harmonious co-existence between humanity and nature in order to develop better and faster by avoiding the 'blind spots' and 'wrong way' of modernization, taking no detour or less detour."³⁸ We hope the Long Gang local government can succeed in putting these constructive postmodern principles into practice.

Despite the advances, "the voice of constructive postmodernism" as Yong Pei pointed out, "is still not loud enough."³⁹ Actualizing postmodernization in China is still "a huge undertaking." Nevertheless, borrowing Jordan S. Gruber's phrase, "Constructive Postmodernism" may be "the most worthwhile undertaking now imaginable."⁴⁰

Notes:

1. Jay McDaniel, "Mei's Invitation: A Gentle Asceticism for Chinese and Americans." In *Crosscurrents*. Vol. 57, No.4, 2008.
2. Youzheng Li, "On the Strategy and Consequence of Postmodernism." *Philosophical Researches* No. 2, 2002.
3. Xiaohua Wang, "A Real Postmodern Postmodernism—Comments on *Reenchantment of Science*." <http://www.xici.net/b325795/d17596730.htm>
4. Philosophy Institute of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, *Newsletter of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences*, April 15, 2003.
5. Xiping Zhuo, "Postmodern Movement and the Response of Theology." *Journal of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Graduate College* 3, 1997.

6. Yong Pei, "Postmodern Issue in China's Modernization", http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_5380a309010001ze.html
7. Zhong Chen, "Development Ethics in Constructive Postmodern Context." *China Process Studies* Vol. 2, (2007).
8. Xiaoming Chen, "After Critique: The Hard Process of Chinese Postmodernism." *China Book Review* No. 3, 2006.
9. Yong Xia, "The right of Philosophy and Localism." *Reading* No. 6 (2002).
10. Yong Pei, "Why China? —The Significance of China to the Postmodern Movement." *Process Studies* Vol. 35.2 (Fall-Winter, 2006), 359.
11. Wen Jiabao, Speech at Ecole Polytechnique de Paris, December 6, 2005. http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2005-12/07/content_3886424.htm
12. Speech by Chinese President Hu Jintao at Yale University. <http://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/zxxx/1259224.htm>
13. Kang Ouyang, "The Weicheng (Fortress Besieged) of Modernization and Its Transcendence — On the Values Orientation of Constructive Postmodernism and its Inspiration," *Seeking Truth*, 1 (2003).
14. Lanxian Xiang, "China's Reform should Get Rid of Westernize Dogmas," *Global Times*, February 4, 2008.
15. Huibin Li, "Postscript to *Ecological Civilization and Marxism*." *Ecological Civilization and Marxism*. Eds. Huibin Li, Xiaoyuan Xue & Zhihe Wang. (Beijing: Central Compilation and Translation Press, 2008), pp.227-28.
16. Pan Yue, "On Socialist Ecological Civilization." *China Economy Times*, September 26, 2006
17. Guihuan Huo, "Hegel, Marx and Whitehead—Viewing the Conflicts between Sciences and Humanities from the Basic Transformation of Mode of Thinking in Western Philosophy Embodied by 'Process' " *Journal of Jiangsu Administration College* No.5 (2006).
18. Deina Pei, "Viewing China's Education Innovation from a Process Perspective." conference paper for "International Conference themed Process Thinking and Education Innovation," Claremont, CA, January 27-29, 2008.
19. Xiaoman Zhu, "Viewing China's Curriculum Reform from the standpoint of Process Philosophy." *Culture Communication*. No. 29 (2007).
20. David Griffin, "Introduction to SUNY SERIES in Constructive Postmodern Thought." In *Reenchantment of Science*. Ed. David Griffin. (Albany: State University of New York, 1988), xi.
21. Yijie Tang, "Reflective Western Scholars View Traditional Chinese Culture." *The People's Daily*. February 4, 2005.
22. Fanren Zeng, "Ecological Aesthetics: A Brand New Ecological Aesthetics in the postmodern context." *Journal of Shanxi Normal University*. No.3 (2002).
23. Xiaohua Wang, "China's Environment Movement and Constructive Postmodernism." A lecture at Center for Process Studies, Claremont.

24. "Liao Xiaoyi: A Thinker in Action." *Finance Times*. Oct. 28, 2007.
25. David Griffin, "Introduction to SUNY SERIES in Constructive Postmodern Thought." In *Reenchantment of Science*. Ed. David Griffin. Albany: State University of New York, 1988, xi.
26. Ouyang Kang, "Contemporary Marxism in China and Process Thought" (a lecture delivered at Center for Process Studies, Claremont, August 21, 2001)
27. Ye Xiaowen, "Religion and Social Harmony." *People's Daily*, November 28, 2006.
28. Pan Yue, "Marxist Notion of Religion Must Catch up with Time." *Huaxia Times*, December 15, 2001.
29. Dedong Wei, "Buddhist Ecological Outlook." *China Social Sciences*, No. 5, 1999.
30. John B.Cobb, Jr, *Why Whitehead?* (Claremont, CA: Process and Faith Press, 2004), p. 2.
31. Weifu Wu, "A Brand New View of Philosophy—A Preliminary Exploration of Constructive Postmodern Philosophy." *China Process Studies* Vol.2 (2007).
32. David R. Griffin, "Preface to Chinese Version of *Reenchantment of Science*. Ed. Zhihe Wang. Beijing: Social Sciences Document Publishing House, 1995, p.13.
33. Xianghai Li, "Taoism and Constructive Postmodernism." *Journal of Tianjin Normal University* No.5 (2004).
34. Meijun Fan, *Contemporary Interpretation of Traditional Chinese Aesthetics*. (Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, Beijing, 1997), p.62.
35. Bin Pan, "Marxism and Postmodernism", *Philosophical Trends*. No. 9, 2002.
36. Huibin Li, "Ecological Rights and Ecological Justice." in *Ecological Civilization and Marxism*. Eds. Huibin Li, Xiaoyuan Xue & Zhihe Wang. Beijing: Central Compilation and Translation Press, 2008, p. 66.
37. Nanyuan Zhao, "Anti-scientism is a Antiscientific slogan." *Science and Society* No.3, 2003.
38. "Building a New Postmodern Long Gang—an Interview with Weiliang Yu, Mayer of Long Gang." *Shenzhen Business Newspaper*. http://www.sznews.com/zhuanti/content/2007-06/18/content_1246582.htm
39. Yong Pei, "Yong Pei, "Why China? —The Significance of China to the Postmodern Movement." *China Process Studies* Vol.2 (2007).
40. Jordan S. Gruber, "The Second Enlightenment Project: A Preliminary Analysis." <http://www.integrativespirituality.org>.