

TOWARD A NEW WORLD DHARMA:
RECONCEPTUALIZING CITIZENSHIP, COMMUNITY AND THE
SACRED IN THE GLOBAL AGE

By

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Summary

This dissertation addresses the problem of how, in a global future, humanity is to comprehend the singularity of the place, the biosphere it calls home. Will communities, nations, and the earth itself, for example, be regarded as ‘one’ place in which many live, or as the product of many separate, but linked compositional elements? The ‘many in the One’, or the “One in the many”? From the perspective of International Relations, in a global future will ‘integration’ at the individual level necessarily imply ‘homogenization’ at larger intercultural levels? Might the conditions of existence in a global future be understood rather as the universalization of certain key values and practices that respect the diversity of distinct regional differences? What spiritual or ethical ideas will serve as a unifying meta-narrative in a global age? These are questions of keen interest to those whose lives are touched in some way by the growing convergence of cultures, especially by the stream of classical East and South Asian wisdom paths now flowing into the West.

For such individuals, and for those whose understanding of the world is tempered by the findings of contemporary dynamic systems theory and its groundings in Western cognitive science, the coordinates of these steadily arising mutualities may be observed as the manner in which, for example, Taoism, Hinduism and Buddhism respectively recognize the concept of ‘from the beginning interdependence’—*pratitya samutpada*, or dependent origination, and that which China’s ancient animists understood as *Tao*. Similarly, contemporary Western scientists such as David Suzuki now expound the idea of ecological ‘innerconnectivity’ that leads organically to the Gaia Hypothesis, viewing Earth itself as a self-regulating planetary biological system—as a sentient being.¹ This is summarized from a contemporary position by the Vietnamese Zen Buddhist master Thich Nhat Hanh as ‘Interbeing’ (1995: 11; 1996: 37; Pagels, 1995: xx).

Conceptually, interbeing or interdependence has profound ramifications in terms of the social, cultural and political dimensions of authority. As a scientifically verifiable condition of existence increasingly compatible to both Asian and Western world-views, it

¹ Suzuki, David (2003), “Human Activities Give Rise to New Diseases,” *Common Ground*, August, 2003: 7.

shapes a method by which the societies of Western liberal democratic traditions and Asia's Confucian and Sanskrit-inflected worlds alike may respond to the deeper challenges of a global future. In terms of citizenship, as American author Maxine Hong-Kingston suggests, there is a seed of border-crossing opportunity; a possibility in which both Asian and Western cultures can 'heal the wounds of history' in moving toward a shared, global future in the 21st century.²

Yet globalization as an idea has already encountered widespread international resistance. Given that a truly global age has not yet properly emerged, in what capacities might 'healing' opportunities develop within the narrow, ethically amoral, investor-driven economic interpretations of reality which, so far, have defined 'globalization'?³ How, this thesis inquires, may a 'global future' be comprehended as a new, or renewed world-view; one that embodies contemporary intercultural and ecological realities of diversity, complexity and interconnectedness?

New ages of awareness require new epistemologies and historiographies. In forging ideas of interconnectedness with the more worldly concept of 'commonwealth', this thesis questions and examines what the fuller meanings of a global future may be, arguing that any new civilizational paradigm must engage the challenge it poses to such concepts as ethics, progress, rule of law, self-reliance, and sustainable economic development. Amplifying the idea of interdependence as 'commonwealth', it considers contemporary and classical ideas of what individual citizenship itself has meant. Indeed, since Aristotle, the very idea of citizenship has been understood as an ethical linkage between the individual and *polis*, between human community and physical place: the universal is found in the local.⁴

² Hong Kingston, Maxine (1998), *Hawai'i One Summer*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

³ Identified by George Soros (1998) in "World Capitalist Crisis" as, "...characterized not only by free trade but more specifically by the free movement of capital. The system is very favourable to financial capital which is free to pick and choose where to go, and it has led to the rapid growth of global financial markets. It can be envisaged as a gigantic circulatory system, sucking up capital into the financial markets and institutions at the center and then pumping it out to the periphery either directly in the form of credits and portfolio investments, or indirectly through multinational corporations" (p. 4).

⁴ Aristotle (1970), *Politics*. Trans. T.A. Sinclair. London: Penguin.

Borrowing from Futures Studies in International Relations, this thesis seeks to critique and construct what R.S. Slaughter identifies as “a pattern of interpretation”,⁵ or a mandala of consciousness representing the unity between individual, larger community and ecological place—between the local and universal, between physical and metaphysical. In this enterprise one is not far from the approach of the Master, Confucius, who seeks similar order in Book III.8 of the *Lun Yu*, or *Analects*.⁶ For purposes of clarity, and because an explicit vocabulary is useful in leading toward common expectations, the thesis identifies this pattern of interpretation as an expression of ‘literacy of place.’ Heuristically, it is the cultivation of such literacy of place that forms the knowledge base from which one can begin examining interdependency and ‘commonwealth’ as renewing *seeds* in the articulation of what Foucault identifies as an *episteme*.⁷ Conceptually, this episteme will be a form of *new world dharma* for the global age.

II. Citizenship and a New World Dharma

Individually or communally, the idea of citizenship is analogous with benefits and obligations.⁸ How citizenship and the notions of community and participatory civil society might best define themselves in an ecologically sustainable global future are, as psychologist Sam Keen relates, key elements in rectifying the contemporary crisis of

⁵ Slaughter, R.A. (2002), “Beyond the Mundane: reconciling breath and depth in futures inquiry.” *Futures*. August, v34 i6 p 493(15). Retrieved 1/30/2004. Bond University Academic Library, Infotrac: <http://web4.infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/infomark/818/308/45995159w4/purl>

⁶ Confucius (1979), *The Analects*, trans. D.C. Lau. London: Penguin.

⁷ Foucault, Michel (1972), *The Archeology of Knowledge*. Trans. Alan Sheriden. London: Tavistock.

⁸ John Ralston Saul (2001) articulates, “the Athenian idea of citizenship—flawed and limited though it was—put public service, civic education, democracy and restraint ahead of wealth, economics, self-interest and emotion (325).

meaning and purpose that is both the detritus of the Industrial Age, and an identifying signature of post-modernist intellectual inquiry (1994: xvi, 4; see also Kung, 1994:9-10).

By borrowing from the interdisciplinary realms of literature, cultural anthropology, ecological and sociological inquiry, and from ethics and political discourse, this thesis aims to construct further route-maps beyond the ‘new paradigm’—an ambiguous term often employed to describe new expressions of a more sustainable, wholistically-envisioned, interdependent future. It critiques ideas such as citizenship, sacredness and bioregional identity in light of various intercultural models. And in identifying the still-evolving path of engaged living practice that this thesis looks to articulate, as a boundary-extending term of reference it formally names this practice a *new world dharma*. Originating in the Sanskrit, *dharma* is a manifold term implying law or living in accordance with principles of justice. In Buddhism, these principles have been identified by The Buddhas. Also implied is the capacity of natural phenomena to preach these principles—for example, falling blossoms may enlighten an observer to the nature of ‘impermanence’ (1998, *Seeker’s Glossary of Buddhism*).

Why a *new world dharma*? As Slaughter explains, “It has become clear that our ability to understand the world ‘out there’ crucially depends on an underlying world of reference that is ‘in here’” (p. 18). This is attested to by growing interest in the role of cultural aesthetics within international relations, and by the UNESCO draft convention on cultural diversity signed by 137 nations in June, 2005.⁹ Epistemological futures work, Slaughter argues, represents the deeper loam of this form of inquiry (ibid). If the future is to be one in which the crisis of meaning and purpose is addressed through a globally, or planetary-minded citizenship, it must therefore be one in which humanity, science, technology, creativity, and nature can coexist in a home-place severely compromised by inexorable global environmental degradation. This alone compels the emergence of a new ecologically-attuned consciousness.

⁹ *Millenium: Journal of International Studies*, has recently hosted a conference at the London School of Economics (October, 2005), specifically addressing “International Politics, Representation and ‘the Sublime’”. Additionally, the UNESCO draft convention on cultural diversity held in Paris was signed by 137 nations on June 3, 2005. A statement by the government of France declares that the convention, “recognizes the specific nature of culture, its contribution to development and to social cohesion; it confirms the sovereign right of states to adopt and implement cultural policies; it makes the protection and promotion of cultural diversity a major area of international cooperation policies” (www.ambafrance-us.org/news/briefing/us060605.asp)

Presently, much of North American environmental thought is inspired by renewed appreciation of traditional Native Animism and Buddhist practice. The chief popularizers in America of Buddhism especially were literary auto-didacts. They took inspiration from Chinese T'ang dynasty and Japanese medieval poets, and from viewing classical Sino-Japanese scroll landscape paintings of the Sung and Ming periods. Some journeyed to Asia and became Zen Buddhist practitioners; others followed various martial traditions in Japan; while yet others ventured to India, returning with information and skills from various Hindu and yogic devotional streams.¹⁰

From the late 1970s onward, a steady migration to the West of master adepts from 'the Three Chinas' also encouraged Taoism's taking root in the West,¹¹ and frequently through introduction to the latter, Western interest was also awakened to the works and teachings of 'the Master', Confucius. Often, as is the case in cross-pollination among species, hybridization has since taken place and continues to do so in the West—a reflection of East and South Asian history where China's *sanjiao gui*, or 'three-in-one' spiritual amalgam of Taoism-Confucianism-Buddhism has flourished; and similarly throughout the Sanskrit world with Hinduism's capacity to absorb and co-exist alongside bewildering numbers of spiritual concepts and deities in something generally like peaceable fashion.

Compounding these contemporary encounters of Asian and Western world-views is the growing appreciation in North America of its original Animist, Shamanic heritage. Internationally, a form of ecumenical 'World-Beat' has also emerged through multicultural and environmental NGO activities particularly, and this exposure to indigenous peoples and their localized eco-spiritual groundings worldwide has added a further dimensional

¹⁰ Post-WW II Western sojourners in Asia included Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen, and Robert Aitken Roshi, who studied Zen Buddhism in Japan. John Stevens and George Leonard also studied Aikido there. Bill Porter and Mike O'Connor studied Buddhism and Taoism in Taiwan and China. Allen Ginsberg studied Hindi devotional traditions in Benares: all returned, wrote extensively of their experiences, and have since been followed by two generations of successors. See also Kenneth Rexroth, "The Influence of Classical Japanese Poetry on Modern American Poetry"; in *World Outside the Window*. New York: NDP, 1987, pp. 267-274.

¹¹ Taoist master Chen Man-Ching left Taiwan for New York in 1964 and introduced North America to Tai Chi Chuan. The eminent Taoist healer Mantak Chia moved to New York from Thailand in 1979 and has since brought awareness of Nei Kung/Nei Tsang *chi* transmission to the West. Similarly, Tai Chi master and traditional Chinese physician Ng Ching-Por left Hong Kong for Vancouver in 1978 and through the medium of television brought wide exposure to traditional Taoist traditions.

flavour to the melding of practice lineages currently taking place. As Western population groups respond to the wholistic world-views brought to light by the world beat/*new world dharma* phenomenon, it is unsurprising that a significant renewal of interest in historic Euro-Celtic consciousness with its own pantheistic grounding is also underway. Indeed, the Celtic renaissance of these peoples and their culture that was until recently still repressed is emblematic of the entire contemporary search for meaning and purpose in the Western mind.

What makes the evolution of this *new world dharma* distinct—this mingling and strengthening of faith and humanist traditions—is the underlying activist nature of its birthing. An inspection of the constituent make-up of the 1999 Seattle anti-WTO coalition reveals that many of the aforementioned groups and traditions were, and continue to be, front and centre participants (Aaronson, 2001; Broadbent, 2000: 374). And if one notes the current boom of Buddhism in the West, the encounter of Buddhism with Christianity’s ‘faith in action’ spirit and concern for social justice assumes greater importance. The Buddhist Peace Fellowship, for example, which represents a bridging of activist elements from a broad range of Buddhist practice has its ethos in the virtue of *karuna*, or compassion, yet is fuelled by a drive that derives arguably from Christianity’s engaged commitment to ‘overcoming’ obstacles.¹²

This then shapes the perceptual grain of the evolving *new world dharma*. It offers concrete practices in how one is to live in a changing world, and provides inspiration in motivating both individuals and communities toward the social activism needed to shape political discourse and the public policy-making necessary to preserve the earth as a sacred entity.

Constructing a model of practice for the present intercultural moment and for its deepening future is a form of intellectual exogamy. It requires thinking from outside one’s own tradition. The reward is an opportunity to rewrite narratives addressing cultural development in a global future that includes wider adaptation of diverse philosophical perspectives and a more profound awareness of the natural world—to redefine existing concepts of citizenship for a more enlightened age. In this way it becomes possible to truly

¹² The author is grateful to Robert Aitken-Roshi for his elucidation of this evolutionary interfaith development during interviews and conversations, 1996-present.

heal the old wounds of humanity's shared history, and to transcend the lesser intellectual, social and political virtues of a 'homogenized' global future in favour of a *universalized* palette of human values for our global common-wealth.

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Note: in translating Chinese terms, pinyin has been used throughout the dissertation wherever possible, however Wade-Giles is also employed regarding such Buddhist and Taoist terms that have entered conventional use.

(Epigraph)

Some individuals are sent out in adolescence to see if they can get a power vision all by themselves. They go out and come back with a song which is their own, which gives them a name, and power; some begin to feel like a 'singer.' There are those who use songs for hunting, and those who use a song for keeping themselves awake at night when they are riding around in slow circles taking care of the cows; people who use songs when they haul up the nets on the beach. And when we get together we have drinking songs and all kinds of communal pleasure gathering group music. There are war songs, and particular specialized powerful healing songs that are brought back by those individuals (shamans) who make a special point of going back into solitude for more songs: which will enable them to heal. There are also some who master and transmit the complex of songs and chants that contain creation-myth lore and whatever ancient or cosmic gossip that a whole People sees itself through. In the Occident we have such a line, starting with Homer and going through Virgil, Dante, Milton, Blake, Goethe, and Joyce. They were workers who took on the ambitious chore of trying to absorb all the myth/history lore of their times, and of their own past traditions, and put it into order as a new piece of writing and let it be a map or model of world and mind for everyone to steer by.

Gary Snyder, "Poetry, Community & Climax"

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