

Towards the possibility of transforming consumer culture into ecological civilization*

R. Šťáhel¹, S. Tomaščíková²

¹ Institute of Philosophy, Slovak Academy of Science,
19, Klemensova, Bratislava, 81109, Slovak Republic

² Pavol Jozef Šafárik University,
9, Moyzesova, Košice, 04001, Slovak Republic

For citation: Šťáhel R., Tomaščíková S. Towards the possibility of transforming consumer culture into ecological civilization. *Vestnik of Saint Petersburg University. Philosophy and Conflict Studies*, 2021, vol. 37, issue 4, pp. 694–705. <https://doi.org/10.21638/spbu17.2021.409>

The article analyzes the prospects of ecological civilisation in a media-driven society at the end of the 20th century and the first two decades of the 21st century. The self-identity of the individual is now formed within the culture-ideology of consumerism, which is defined by the excessive production and consumption of all kinds of goods and services. Public policies of this period are shaped by neoliberal principles emphasizing the individuals' benefit and their profit. The result of such a culture is an intensification of environmental and social destruction at the planetary level. Almost unlimited support for the growth of production and consumption faces the limits of the planetary system, its capacity to provide resources for continued growth, and to absorb pollution. Consequently, humanity faces the instability and unpredictability of the Anthropocene. From a philosophical point of view, the global environmental crisis opens up the problem of justifying regulations restricting the freedom of unlimited production and consumption. The concept of ecological culture or ecological civilization which is developing in contemporary China can be considered as the opposite of the culture-ideology of consumerism. It emerged in China in the mid-1980s as a response to the Soviet-formulated model of 'green culture.' This concept integrates several 'Western' concepts of sustainable development, eco-Marxism, ecological democracy, but it also incorporates several traditional Chinese philosophical concepts and thus can be perceived as part of the renaissance of traditional Chinese ways of thinking and interpreting the world. The question is whether the concept of ecological civilization is a real alternative to consumer culture. If the answer to this question is affirmative, then the possibilities of transforming the culture of consumption into an ecological civilization analysed in the article should be considered as trends of sustainable development.

Keywords: media-driven society, culture-ideology of consumerism, environmental devastation, social destruction, Anthropocene, ecological civilization.

* The research presented in this work is partially supported by VEGA project 2/0072/21 Tasks of Political Philosophy in the Context of Anthropocene, VEGA project 1/0447/20 The Global and the Local in Postmillennial Anglophone Literatures, Cultures and Media both granted by the Ministry of Education, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic, and by Samara National Research University. Slávka Tomaščíková is a research collaborator in the University of the Balearic Islands' Research Group in British and Comparative Cultural Studies (BRICCS).

Introduction

From the 1990s onwards, public policies and operating standards for public and non-public institutions in many countries began to be shaped by neoliberal principles¹ which are derived primarily from the idea of the individual acting for the purpose of maximizing individual benefit (*homo economicus*). Individual benefit is understood not only as the maximizing of profit from any activity but also as the maximizing of consumption. The concept of self-identity understood in this way has been built into our contemporary society of global mass media from an early age through the constant consumption of newer and newer goods and services. Even before they learn to read and write in school, children are raised by mass media to be shrewd, demanding consumers. From their earliest sensations, children are overwhelmed by consumption-based stimuli and objects and are exposed by mass media to a never-ending onslaught of advertising which promotes incessant consumption². Even in public education, they are systematically dependent on commercial products (tablets, software, applications, etc.). It is within this environment that the selves and self-identity of children are formed; the child emerges as an antisocial 'homo economicus', focused on personal gain and efficiency; an insatiable consumer of goods, services and experiences. As a result of the emergence of global mass media networks and marketing campaigns, this type of identity overwhelms the majority of national, ethnic and religious cultures. In the words of Sklair, globalization is driven by the culture-ideology of consumerism [4].

At present, however, this culture-ideology of consumerism, which includes the policy of supporting the growth of production and consumption at all costs, is encountering the limits of the planetary system, its capacity to provide resources for continued growth and also to absorb the pollution that accompanies this growth in production and consumption. It is no coincidence that up to half of all carbon released into the atmosphere since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution by mankind has been produced in just the last 30 years, a result of the globalization-accelerated development of the consumer-market society around the world.

The intensification of industrialization, the growth of the global population and its consumption demands in the last half century have led to the extensive devastation of the environment at the planetary level. This has resulted in mankind bringing an end the geological and climatic period of the Holocene, the mildness and stability of which allowed for the emergence of civilization with its mildness and stability. Humanity as a geological-climatic force now faces the growing instability and unpredictability of the geological-climatic era of the Anthropocene. The ongoing climatic changes and the sixth mass extinction event in the history of life on our planet are the most visible manifestations of the Anthropocene. The findings of natural sciences clearly demonstrate the catastrophic consequences of continuing this development, the culmination of which could be the collapse of Earth's life-support systems³. This development of course threatens not only the sustainability of the global economic and political system, the institutions of nation states

¹ On the domination of radical neoliberalism in the public discourse of V4-Countries — especially in Slovakia — over the last two decades, see [1] and also [2].

² On the role of the global mass media in the indoctrination of the public with ideologies of growth, industrialism and consumerism, see [3].

³ For more on this, see [5].

and their political systems, and, last but not least, all traditional culture and, ultimately, global industrial civilization which all originated in the climatic era of the Holocene.

Culture-ideology of consumerism

The culture-ideology of consumerism not only shattered the normative order of constitutional democracy by weakening its presumptions in the efficacy of inclusive policies aimed at reducing social disparities and by reducing the role of the citizen to that of producer and consumer, but also placed a marked emphasis on the growth of production and consumption, thereby significantly exacerbating the devastation of the environment. In addition to social inequality, environmental inequality has widened to unprecedented proportions. Due to the excessive consumption of their lifestyles, the richest half percent of the world's population (approximately 40 million people) produces up to 14 % of global greenhouse gas emissions. On the other hand, the poorest 50 % of the world's population are responsible for only 10 % of global emissions [6]. At the same time, the climatic changes caused by these emissions have the greatest impacts on the countries of the so-called Global South, the vast majority of which are former European colonies that have been severely impacted by centuries of colonialist plundering of their natural and human resources. It is for this reason that the majority of the world's poverty is found in these states. The end result of this inequality is that the social and environmental costs of consumer culture are passed on to other societies or states and their populations. Ongoing climate change has further highlighted the link between deepening social inequality and social and environmental risks [7, p. 258].

In discussions about the need for further growth — increased production and consumption leading to the exploitation of natural resources and pollution of all components of the environment — this fact is rarely mentioned, although “The richest countries in the world contribute the most to global warming and are thereby threatening the very survival of the poorest countries. Even today these same rich countries are spending billions of dollars or euros on protecting themselves from the worst outcomes of global warming, such as drought and rising sea levels. Two thirds of the carbon dioxide and greenhouse gases gathering in the earth's atmosphere originate in almost equal measure from the United States and Western European countries” [8, p. 79].

In essence, globalization is the continuation of colonialism by new means, or the imperial mode of living (IML), that is, living at the expense of others. As Band and Wissen state:

The IML implies that people's everyday practices, including individual and societal orientations, as well as identities, rely heavily on: 1. The unlimited appropriation of resources; 2. A disproportionate claim to global and local ecosystems and sinks; and 3. Cheap labour from elsewhere. The availability of commodities is organised through the world market, backed by military force and/or the asymmetric relations of forces as they have been inscribed in international institutions. The concrete production conditions of the consumed commodities are usually invisible [9, p. 75].

One reason for the present situation is that the culture-ideology of consumerism has become the basis of political culture in recent decades. In this context, Kohák speaks of the ‘strategy of deferred’ *hope* without which the current economic and political system would most likely collapse because: “In a world of glaring inequalities, we have only been able to maintain social peace by promising a *better future*” [10, p. 377]. This is also why only

governments that can manage to increase the level of consumption of the population, i.e., to meet its growing consumption needs, are considered legitimate. The unsustainability of such a policy is not taken into account by governments, corporations or consumer citizens. An essential part of the culture-ideology of consumerism is the ethos of individual independence or personal freedom. However, it does not take into account the fact that the more complex a society is, the denser the network of dependencies which surrounds each individual, while dependence on the state of the environment is basic and limiting⁴. Too often, however, individuals are subject to the self-deception of independence from anyone and anything — except their own abilities⁵, a narrative which is instilled in them by the marketing and advertising industries.

The paradox, however, is that this notion is prevalent in highly complex societies in which each individual is both dependent and interdependent on a wider network of relationships and systems — social, technical and natural — than at any other time in human history. Many of these relationships, systems and risks (for example, energy, transport, communication, financial or environmental) are completely beyond the control of the individual simply because they are, in essence, truly global phenomena⁶. However, the ability of the average individual to perceive their dependency on these networks is relatively limited, not only because of their primary interest in their own immediate surroundings and personal relationships, but also because of the aforementioned neoliberal narrative which dominates public discourse. This narrative convinces them of their freedom and independence as well as the possibility of virtually unlimited consumption of goods and services. As has been stated by Hohoš, “individual freedom came to mean individualized consumption in a consumer society, and consumer freedom within the framework of the market mechanism became a means of self-realization and individual independence” [12, p.42]. In this situation, any suggestion that today’s form of society based on the culture of consumerism and the right to profit, regardless of the means and consequences, is unsustainable goes unheeded; it is overwhelmed in a flood of offers for a new car, TV or exotic vacation.

In agreement with Hohoš, Lipovetsky characterizes the same social and cultural trends, taking into account the intricacy of economic power and the markets and their representation in public discourses, in his studies of *hypermodernism* — a concept which embraces the complexity of the ever-changing aspects of individualism. For Lipovetsky, hypermodernism is an extreme form of consumerism, or hyperconsumerism, which is typical of the economic intensification of market powers, creating a culture with a constant demand for more and more commodities and services, also specified as a cult of excess. The new possibilities of communication and consumption which have been brought about by the emergence of digital technologies and globalization at the end of the 20th century have not only diminished geographical and temporal limits but have also resulted in a significant social and cultural reorganization of democratic societies characterized by

⁴ For the environmental limits of personal freedom, see [11].

⁵ It is this type of attitude, favouring competitiveness over solidarity, that results in the erosion of the social cohesion of modern societies. Wealth and the social status which it confers is interpreted as the result of personal abilities and activities, while the knowledge that wealth is in fact generated by productive social institutions, generations of accumulated knowledge and, last but not least, available natural resources is pushed aside.

⁶ Jobs at one end of the world depend on demand and purchasing power at the other end of the world; air quality and environmental safety in, for example, Europe depends on the way in which energy is produced and the level of safety of nuclear power plants on other continents, etc.

a substantial rise in consumption, communication and individualism, which are represented by hypercapitalism, hyperclass, hyperpower, hyperterrorism, hyperindividualism, hypermarket, and hypertext [13, p. 30–31].

Depending on their age, media literacy and economic capacity, hypermodern individuals search for mediated practices which they can connect to and/or apply to their own everyday practices. Due to the influence of multimedia and the internet, hyperconsumerism, represented in economic terms by shopping malls and non-stop customer services, is practiced via lifestyle magazines, new genres of reality television, and the ever-growing number of food sites and food ordering mobile phone applications. In Lipovetsky's *Society of fashion* (2005), ordinary everyday activities follow the mediated hypermodern practices that are driven by the search for novelty, travel, well-being, and entertainment. Hyperindividuals focus on their quality of life, and they want to be interconnected and independent at the same time. Their social behaviour reflects the above-described self-construction which is performed in the acts of their everyday existence. They live for the present, in constant movement, demanding continual novelty and desiring to be happy. Their lives are characterized by flexibility, adaptability and endless improvement. Their well-being, self-fulfilment, comfort and leisure require immediate satisfaction. "Consume without delay, travel, enjoy yourself, renounce nothing: the politics of a radiant future have been replaced by consumption as the promise of a euphoric present" [13, p. 37]⁷.

The culture-ideology of consumerism thus explicitly envisages the right to overconsumption (referred to as consumer freedom or the right to choose), regardless of the working and social conditions of the consumed commodity's production or the environmental costs of its production, transportation and its subsequent processing as waste after use. The right to overconsumption thus also takes into account the 'right to pollution.' This leads to the belief that consuming more goods than a country is able to produce sustainably is not only normal but is even the goal of most economic activities. It reproduces a way of life that is so energy-intensive that it is not possible to lead it without the import of energy and other raw materials, without consuming a much larger share of renewable and non-renewable resources than a country would be entitled to on the basis of its population. This creates a carbon footprint and a volume of waste incomparably higher than the inhabitants of most countries of the world can afford. The establishment of a system of formal and informal education as well as promoting the image of 'the good life' created by the entertainment industry, media and advertising leads to the habit of demanding more and more goods, services and experiences. Also, fulfilment of this 'overdemand' is considered as the meaning of life or even practically the only acceptable way of life. At the same time, most pollution is shifted (or externalized) to the countries of the poor Global South, at the very least as a result of most environmental-intensive production activities being relocated to these regions and the regular attempts of the wealthy Global North to transport their waste materials to the poorer countries of the Global South. Transportation of the newly produced goods across half the globe and the consequent shipping of waste back to the production areas multiplies the carbon footprint of even seemingly modest lifestyles.

⁷ For more on this, see [14].

Eco-civilization and sustainable development

If there is still the possibility of reversing the development of a state in which the global ecosphere will no longer support the existence of civilization, then humanity has only a very short time in which to act. At the same time, the nature of this risk means that the necessary changes will have to affect the entire normative system of global civilization and will also have to influence the understanding of self-identity and the idea of a 'good' or 'meaningful' life. This will be difficult to achieve without abandoning the current culture-ideology of consumerism. At the very least, standards will have to be set to limit arbitrariness in the production and consumption of all goods and services, and thus in the production of waste and the devastation of the environment⁸. From a philosophical point of view, the global environmental crisis and other related crises (climate, water, waste, land, deforestation, biodiversity, etc.) also open up the problem of justifying regulations restricting the freedom of unlimited production and consumption⁹. The growth of production and consumption is perceived as the norm, or even as the goal of public policies, regardless of the devastating consequences for the biosphere and civilization. The imperative of growth runs counter to the fundamental imperative of sustainability¹⁰ and also to the basic physical limit of the finite nature of natural resources and the ultimate ability of the planetary ecosystem to absorb pollution.

The concept of ecological culture or ecological civilization which is developing in contemporary China can be considered the opposite of the culture-ideology of consumerism. The concept of eco-civilization emerged in China in the first half of the 1980s [17, p. 36] in response to the Soviet-formulated model of 'green culture' [18, p. 43]. Originally established as a philosophical initiative, it was also understood as a paradigm shift in the interpretation of man's relationship to the world, i. e., human society and the world (as nature or the natural environment). However, it was also transformed into a new development strategy, a kind of Chinese version of the concept of sustainable development¹¹ which later became the imperative of public policies; the Chinese government proposed "a policy of pursuing green development and building an co-civilization, which involves the management of the relationship between humans and nature in a comprehensive, scientific, and systematic manner" [21, p. 4]. The concept of eco-civilization was actually implemented into the Constitution of the People's Republic of China (PRC) as one of the fundamental constitutional principles¹². At the same time, however, it is also a vision of future society, a goal to which not only the development of China [22] but ideally also the development of global civilization should be directed¹³.

⁸ For more on this, see [15].

⁹ For more on this, see [11].

¹⁰ On the internal contradiction of global industrial civilization between the imperative of growth and the imperative of sustainability, which is already reflected in the changed nature of revolutions and national and interstate conflicts, see [16].

¹¹ China's concept of sustainable development, which is an integral part of the project of building an eco-civilization, contains a 'Five-in-One' model that integrates not only the economic, social and ecological, but also the political and cultural dimensions of development. See also [19]. For the limits and contradictions of the concept of sustainable development, see [20] Stahel.

¹² For a clear timeline of the institutionalization of the concept of ecological civilization into the PRC's political and constitutional system, see [21]. In 2018, the position of the ecological civilization concept in the Constitution of the PRC was further strengthened, so that this concept is in fact one of the basic constitutional principles.

¹³ For a Chinese understanding of globalization, see [23].

At the philosophical level, this concept integrates several 'Western' concepts (sustainable development, eco-Marxism, ecological democracy¹⁴), but it also incorporates several traditional Chinese philosophical concepts. It is even perceived as part of the renaissance of traditional Chinese ways of thinking and interpreting the world, consciously following several concepts of Confucianism¹⁵, Taoism [29; 30]¹⁶ and also some tenets of Chinese Buddhism [31, p.293]. It has been pointed out that none of these traditional Chinese streams of thought has ever been dominated by Western anthropocentrism, which separates humans from nature or creates a dichotomy of human and nature; on the contrary, the image of man as a part of nature and the search for harmony — of man with nature and, last but not least, of man with society — has always been an inherent element of all traditional Chinese concepts¹⁷.

Eco-civilization should be seen not as an extinction but rather a continuation: a higher degree of development of industrial civilization, just as industrial civilization is a continuation and a higher degree of agrarian civilizations. Unlike agrarian and industrial civilization, however, it presupposes an integrative and dividing image of the world: an understanding of the relationship between human and nature, not as opposed or even antagonistic but rather as intertwined and conditioned. From this point of view, it is Chinese culture and philosophy that proves to be extremely stimulating, because traditional Chinese ontology, which is followed by the contemporary Chinese image of the world, has never postulated such a sharp dichotomy between humans and nature as is already evident in the basic spiritual sources of Western civilization, such as the Homeric epics or the biblical Old and New Testaments. Similar 'founding' texts of Chinese spiritual culture understood man and the human community as a part of nature, rather than as being in opposition to it, and they also perceived the existential dependency of human society and culture on the state of nature. Therefore, we may consider the concept of eco-civilization as a development or updating of a motif which has always been at least implicit in the Chinese image of the world and man's place within it.

Given the current scientific knowledge of the Earth and evolution, the concept of eco-civilization presupposes the necessity of drafting a cosmology, i.e., an overall picture of the world built on an ecological, evolutionary and symbiotic basis and, therefore, not on an economic¹⁸, theological or geopolitical intellectual foundation. It is based on how communities (not only human) transform their environment in order to expand the pre-suppositions of their existence, at the same time accepting that they are determined and limited by this environment [34, p. 141]. In other words, individual subjects (physical, economic, political) are not separable from the system of planet Earth, either theoretically or practically. Part of the classical and modern concepts of civilization, however, is the distinction or separation of humans or human society from nature — the civilized citizen

¹⁴ Pan refers to Morrison's work *Ecological Democracy*, published in 1995 [24, p. 34].

¹⁵ On the relevance of Confucianism in contemporary Chinese philosophical thinking and the effort to understand the ongoing social processes in China, see relatively recent works by Bell [25; 26]; Dunaj [27; 28] and Kögler and Dunaj [29].

¹⁶ See e. g., Miller [30], or Lu [31].

¹⁷ On the role of Taoism in formulating this idea in Chinese culture and the impetus for the concept of eco-civilization that draws from it, see Schönfeld and Chen [32].

¹⁸ However, the concept of eco-civilization does not consider it necessary to reduce economic activities, but it does assume the need for their strict regulation so that their consequences do not exceed the limits of sustainability. For more, see [33].

from the savage barbarian. A further integral part of this concept is the building of walls and the demarcation of borders and spheres of influence¹⁹.

However, the concept of ecological civilization presupposes a paradigmatic change in the understanding of science or sciences, at the very least in the sciences of human and society, including the study of culture. No longer will physics (and its application in mechanics) serve as the model of science; this role will be taken by ecology and it will be used as the interpretive framework for the study of society, politics and economics. Ecology is based on the knowledge that the essence of the evolution of ecosystems is symbiosis and not the struggle for survival. The determining principle is, therefore, neither competition nor even (competitive) struggle, but mutually beneficial cooperation, a principle which applies to ecosystems as well as to every organism. Even the human body is the result of symbiosis of billions of cells and bacteria, not their mere mechanical connection nor the selfish efforts of individual cells and bacteria to succeed at the expense of others. Therefore, a complex regulatory system is vitally important because in the absence of such a system, any organism rapidly succumbs to internal disruption. From this point of view, society — and within it the economy — should then be perceived as a highly integrated organism operating within the planetary ecosystem. Thus, no society, culture or civilization, and certainly not one of their subsystems such as the economy, can function in the long run at the expense of ecosystems, nor can they even struggle with them. Understanding mankind as the opposite of nature (or the environment), the basis of the current civilization paradigm, is therefore a key problem that the concept of ecological civilization seeks to overcome [35].

It remains an open question whether the concept of eco-civilization can replace consumer culture. On the one hand, this concept recognizes the need for conscious change in consumer habits and the reduction of individuals' 'ecological footprint' and society as a whole, a goal which can be achieved by a combination of systematic education, public policy and information as well as promotion campaigns in the media aimed at favouring environmentally sustainable [17, p. 165–179] or green consumption [36, p. 151–168]. On the other hand, China is trying to continue its hitherto very successful policy of eradicating poverty²⁰ and is simultaneously attempting to reduce its dependence on exports by promoting domestic consumption. However, both of these policies are based on the assumption that the Chinese population's consumption will continue to rise. In addition, phenomena described by Hohoš (consumer freedom within the framework of the market mechanism as a means of self-realization and individual independence) and Lipovetsky (hyperconsumerism) are on the rise in contemporary China as well. Only time will tell whether the concept of eco-civilization referring to the traditional ideals of Chinese culture — the harmony between nature and man — can be reconciled with the social and economic policies of contemporary China²¹.

¹⁹ According to Beck, the assumption of separate 'natural' and 'social' forces is characteristic of the modern narrative. However, he believes that ongoing climate change points to the exact opposite, i. e., the interdependence of the 'natural' and the 'social' [7, p. 256].

²⁰ China's historically unique economic and social rise since 1978 has lifted about 800 million people out of poverty [37]. However, this unprecedented rise in number and speed now threatens to bring about the worsening effects of climate change in China itself. These include the massive floods in the summer of 2020 which caused so much damage to agriculture that the world's most populous country is once again facing the threat of food insecurity for the first time in decades.

²¹ For a political and intellectual discussion of the concept of eco-civilization in the context of the Anthropocene in China, see [38].

It should be understood that while Western environmentalism tends to look for patterns of harmonious coexistence with nature in cultural or lifestyle-based concepts, such as trends in Christianity or even in Buddhism (or, more specifically, its Western interpretation), Chinese environmentalism turns to its own cultural and philosophical roots. At least from the perspective of greater acceptability among the people of China and compatibility with the Chinese socio-economic and political-administrative model of societal organization²², environmentalism offers a better chance for the successful implementation of the concept of eco-civilization in Chinese society. For Western culture, it is again an opportunity to look at one's own attempts to manage the environmental consequences of industrialism and consumerism from a different perspective, and possibly to learn something new. As Horyna states: "The ability to learn, that is to allow other cultures or civilizations to influence one's thinking, may be considered one of the hallmarks of cultural development" [40, p. 146]. Due to colonialism, but also the messianism and proselytization which have been part of Western culture since its inception, this could be a serious problem²³.

Conclusion

As the complex environmental, social and economic crises of global industrial civilization deepen, a concept built on the idea of a harmonious society or the 'harmony between man and nature' might be more appropriate than a concept which sees society as a constant competitive struggle of all against all, in which nature is reduced to resources that provide a competitive advantage to he who owns it. Nature is understood by the concepts of consumerism and industrialism as a source of wealth and power, and thus unavoidably conflict and rivalry. These dominant concepts do not consider a planetary system to be the primary source and at the same time a prerequisite of life.

The concept of eco-civilization attempts to combine the traditional Chinese worldview with the knowledge that the sciences of the planetary system bring about the causes and possible consequences of the Anthropocene. In an environment influenced by Chinese culture, the concept of eco-civilization can be successful, which in itself would have a huge impact on the planetary ecosystem. However, the open question remains of whether a concept based on such a different ontology and worldview can be applied or at least reciprocated in Western civilization, especially if it seeks to maintain its global dominance at all costs through increased military spending instead of investing in the development and implementation of environmentally sustainable technologies.

It should be borne in mind, however, that all civilizations known to date have disappeared because they failed to cope with the crises which they faced as a result of their in-

²² For the characteristics, sources and current relevance of the Chinese model of societal organization, see [25], and also [39].

²³ This is not a new problem. Since the 17th century, Chinese thought in the West has been explored primarily with the intention of finding ways and means to convert China to the Christian faith; since European colonial powers were unable to rule China militarily or economically until the 19th century, they also attempted ideological means. As Horyna shows, Leibniz did not escape this temptation either; although it was not he himself who discovered China and its philosophy for Western culture, he was certainly the first representative of classical European philosophy who not only consciously renounced Eurocentrism [39, p. 147] but even pointed out that in addition to Western, i. e., European, culture, there was also an Eastern, predominantly Chinese, culture, both of which must be considered important for the entire world and must therefore be understood as equivalent [39, p. 157–158]. This is a position which even today is not fully accepted in some fields of Western discourse.

ability to cope with the consequences of their own growth; indeed, many have fallen as a result of the devastation of the environment that had originally made their rise possible. Thus, in assessing social order and cultural maturity of a civilization, sustainability should be viewed as having a higher value than growth. The maturity of a civilization must therefore be judged by its ability to survive a period of crisis and decline, not by the masterpieces and products of its heyday. Periods of crisis and decline have a chance to be handled without resulting in collapse by civilizations that can, in time, identify the real risks and threats and which can, at the same time, draw up adequate concepts for the organization of society. On the basis of such an approach, civilizations can develop administrative and organizational skills allowing them to provide their populations with the minimum level of protection from bad weather or epidemics, and, at the very least, the availability of at least basic foods, drinking water and medication.

References

1. Dunaj L. (2014), To Deficits of Democratic Thinking in Slovakia, in Javorská, A., Mitterpach, K. and Štáhel, R. (eds.), *Philosophica 14: Rendering Change in Philosophy and Society*, Nitra: UKF, pp. 7–20.
2. Dunaj L. (2015), The Pragmatist Approach to Sociocultural Transformation as an Alternative to Neo-liberal Radicalism, *Philosophica Critica*, vol. 1 (2), pp. 19–31.
3. Štáhel, R. (2016a), Climate Change and Social Conflicts, *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology*, vol. 15, (5), pp. 480–496, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15691497-12341403>
4. Sklair, L. (2009), The Globalization of Human Rights, *Journal of Global Ethics*, vol. 5 (2), pp. 81–96.
5. Steffen, W. J. et al. (2015), The Trajectory of the Anthropocene: The Great Acceleration, *Anthropocene Review*, vol. 2, (1), pp. 81–98.
6. Wiedmann, T., Lenzen, M., Keyßer, L. T. and Steinberger J. (2020), Scientists' warning on affluence, *Nature Communications*, vol. 11, is. 1, art. no. 3107, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-020-16941-y>.
7. Beck, U. (2010), Climate for Change, or How to Create a Green Modernity? *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 27 (2–3), pp. 254–266.
8. Beck, U. (2008), Climate Change and Globalisation are Reinforcing Global Inequalities: High Time for a New Social Democratic Era, *Globalizations*, vol. 5 (1), pp. 78–80, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14747730701610413>
9. Brand, U., Wissen, M. (2018), Imperial Mode of Living, *Krisis*, 2018, no. 2, pp. 75–78. Available at: <https://archive.krisis.eu/imperial-mode-of-living/> (accessed 21.05.2020).
10. Kohák, E. (1997), Fenomenologie a ekologie — opora a spoluzávislost, *Filosofický časopis*, vol. 45 (3), pp. 363–379.
11. Štáhel, R. (2016b), Environmental Limits of Personal Freedom, *Philosophica Critica*, vol. 2 (1), pp. 3–21, <https://doi.org/10.17846/PC.2019.2.1.3-21>.
12. Hohoš, L. (2007), Globalization and a Normative Framework of Freedom, *Human Affairs*, vol. 17, pp. 42–53.
13. Lipovetsky, G. (2005), *Hypermodern Times*, Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press.
14. Tomaščíková, S. (2020), *Postmillennial Media — Discourses Where Food Cultures Meet Everyday Practices*, Samara: Samara University Publishing House.
15. Štáhel, R. (2017), Self-limitation as the Basis of Environmentally Sustainable Care of the Self, *Human Affairs*, vol. 27 (4), pp. 444–454, <https://doi.org/10.1515/humaff-2017-0036>
16. Štáhel, R. (2016c), *Environmental Crisis and Political Revolutions*, in Arnason, J. p. and Hrubec, M. (eds), *Social Transformations and Revolutions: Reflections and Analyses*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp. 99–120.
17. Pan, J. (2014), *China's Environmental Governing and Ecological Civilization*, Beijing: China Social Science Press and Springer-Verlag GmbH, <https://doi.org/10.1007/678-3-662-47429-7-2>.
18. Lipitskij, V. S. (1984), Ways of Fostering Ecological Culture in Individuals under the Conditions of Mature Socialism, *Vestnik Moskovskovo Universiteta, Teoriia nauchnogo kommunizma*, vol. 12 (2), pp. 40–47. (In Russian)
19. Goron, C. (2018), Ecological Civilization and the Political Limits of a Chinese Concept of Sustainability, China Perspectives. Special Feature: Power and Knowledge in 21st Century China: Producing, *Social Sciences*, vol. 26 (4), pp. 39–52.

20. Stáhel, R. (2019), Sustainable Development in the Shadow of Climate Change, *Civitas: revista de ciências sociais*, vol. 19 (2), pp. 337–353, <https://doi.org/10.15448/1984-7289.2019.2.31971>.
21. United Nations Environment Programme (2016), *Green is Gold: The Strategy and Actions of China's Ecological Civilization*. Geneva: UNEP. Available at: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/greenisgold_en_20160519.pdf (accessed 12.09.2020).
22. Hansen, M. H. et al (2018), Ecological Civilization: Interpreting the Chinese Past, Projecting the Global Future, *Global Environmental Change*, vol. 53, pp. 195–203, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2018.09.014>.
23. Hrubec, M. (2020a), From China's Reform to the World's Reform, *International Critical Thought*, vol. 10 (2), pp. 282–295, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21598282.2020.1778969>.
24. Morrison, R. (1995), *Ecological Democracy*, Boston: South End Press.
25. Bell, D. A. (2010), *China's New Confucianism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
26. Bell, D. A. (2015), *The China Model: Political Meritocracy and the Limits of Democracy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
27. Dunaj, L. (2016), Towards Critical Aspects of Confucianism, *Ethics & Bioethics* (in Central Europe), vol. 6 (3–4), pp. 135–145, <https://doi.org/10.1515/ebce-2016-0016>.
28. Dunaj, L. (2017), The Inner Conflict of Modernity, the Moderateness of Confucianism and Critical Theory, *Human Affairs*, vol. 27, pp. 466–484, <https://doi.org/10.1515/humaff-2017-0038>.
29. Kögler, H. H. and Dunaj, L. (2018), Beyond Ethnocentrism: Towards a Global Social Theory, in Giri, A. K. (ed.), *Social Theory and Asian Dialogues*, Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 69–106.
30. Miller, J. (2017), *China's Green Religion: Daoism and the Quest for Sustainable Future*, New York: Columbia University Press.
31. Lu, Sh. (2017), *The Ecological Era and Classical Chinese Naturalism: A Case Study of Tao Yuanming*, Singapore: China Academic Library, Springer.
32. Schönfeld, M. and Chen, X. (2019), Daoism and the Project of an Ecological Civilization or Shengtai Wenming, *Religions*, vol. 10, p. 630, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel10110630>.
33. Stáhel, R. (2020), China's Approach to the Environmental Civilization, *Human Affairs: Postdisciplinary Humanities and Social Sciences Quarterly*, vol. 30 (2), pp. 164–173, <https://doi.org/10.1515/humaff-2020-0016>.
34. Gare, A. (2017a), From 'Sustainable Development' to 'Ecological Civilization': Winnig the War for Survival, Cosmos and History, *The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, vol. 13 (3), pp. 130–153.
35. Gare, A. (2017b), *The Philosophical Foundations of Ecological Civilization: A Manifesto for the Future*, London: Routledge and Earthscan.
36. Xie, Z. and Pan, J. (2018), *China's Road of Green Development*, Beijing: Foreign Language Press.
37. Allison, G. (2018), Beijing's anti-poverty drive has lessons for all, *The Telegraph*, 28.08.2018. Available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/china-watch/society/decreasing-chinas-poverty/> (accessed 12.09.2020).
38. Marinelli, M. (2018), How to Build a 'Beautiful China' in the Anthropocene. The Political Discourse and the Intellectual Debate on Ecological Civilization, *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, vol. 23, pp. 365–386, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-018-9538-7>.
39. Hrubec, M. (2020b), The Historical Resources of China's Model: Relevance to the Present, *Human Affairs*, vol. 30, pp. 134–145, <https://doi.org/10.1515/humaff-2020-0014>.
40. Horyna, B. (2020), The Origins of Modern Cross-cultural European Interpretations of Chinese Philosophy. New Thoughts on China in the Work of G. W. Leibnitz, *Human Affairs*, vol. 30, pp. 146–163, <https://doi.org/10.1515/humaff-2020-0015>.

Received: March 28, 2021

Accepted: September 17, 2021

Authors' information:

Richard Stáhel — PhD, Associate Professor; richard.stahel@savba.sk

Slávka Tomaščíková — PhD, Associate Professor; slavka.tomascikova@upjs.sk

К возможности трансформации потребительской культуры в экологическую цивилизацию*

Р. Стяхел¹, С. Томашчикова²

¹ Институт философии Академии наук Словакии,
Словакия, 81109, Братислава, ул. Клеменсова, 19

² Университет Павла Йозефа Шафарика,
Словакия, 04001, Кошице, ул. Мойзесова, 9

Для цитирования: *Stahel R., Tomaščíková S. Towards the possibility of transforming consumer culture into ecological civilization // Вестник Санкт-Петербургского университета. Философия и конфликтология. 2021. Т. 37. Вып. 4. С. 694–705. <https://doi.org/10.21638/spbu17.2021.409>*

В статье анализируются перспективы экологической цивилизации в управляемом средстве массовой информации обществе конца XX и двух первых декад XXI в. Авторы исходят из факта самоидентификации личности под влиянием идеологии массового потребления, которая определяется чрезмерным производством и потреблением всех видов товаров и услуг. Политическая основа данной идеологии коренится в неолиберальных принципах, в основе которых лежат экономическая выгода производителей и доход, которым обладают потребители. Результатом повсеместного господства консьюмеристской идеологии и культуры является усиление экологического и социального кризисов на планетарном уровне. Практически неограниченная поддержка роста производства и потребления сталкивается с ограничениями способности планетарной системы обеспечивать ресурсы роста и поглощать загрязнения. Соответственно, человечество сталкивается с нестабильностью и непредсказуемостью антропоцена. С философской точки зрения глобальный экологический кризис инициирует проблему легитимации нормативных положений, призванных ограничить свободу неограниченного производства и потребления. Модель экологической культуры или экологической цивилизации, развивающаяся в современном Китае, может рассматриваться как противовес культуре и идеологии массового потребления. Провозглашенная в Китае в 1980-х годах как ответ на сформулированную в Советском Союзе модель «зеленой культуры», она объединяет несколько «западных» парадигм: концепцию устойчивого развития, экомарксизм, экологическую демократию, не отказываясь при этом от традиционных китайских философских учений — даосизма, конфуцианства, китайского буддизма. Китайский энвайроментализм воспринимается сегодня не как копия западных образцов, а как элемент возрождения традиционных китайских способов интерпретации мира. Авторы статьи поднимают вопрос о том, является ли концепция экологической цивилизации реальной альтернативой культуре потребления, и приходят к выводу: ответом на вызовы эпохи антропоцена может стать постепенное преобразование культуры потребления в экологическую цивилизацию.

Ключевые слова: медиауправляемое общество, культура-идеология потребления, разрушение окружающей среды, социальное разрушение, антропоцен, экологическая цивилизация.

Статья поступила в редакцию 28 марта 2021 г.;
рекомендована к печати 17 сентября 2021 г.

Контактная информация:

Стяхел Рихард — доц.; richard.stahel@savba.sk

Томашчикова Славка — доц.; slavka.tomascikova@upjs.sk

* Представленное исследование поддержано следующими проектами министерства образования, науки и спорта Республики Словакии: 1. VEGA 2/0072/21 «Задачи политической философии в контексте Антропоцена», 2. VEGA 1/0447/20 «Глобальное и локальное в англоязычной литературе, культуре и СМИ», и Самарским национальным исследовательским университетом. Славка Томашчикова является научным сотрудником исследовательской группы британских и компаративистских культурологических исследований Университета Балеарских островов (BRICCS).