



Nature and Culture, West and East

Social Change in Asia

April 2, 2020

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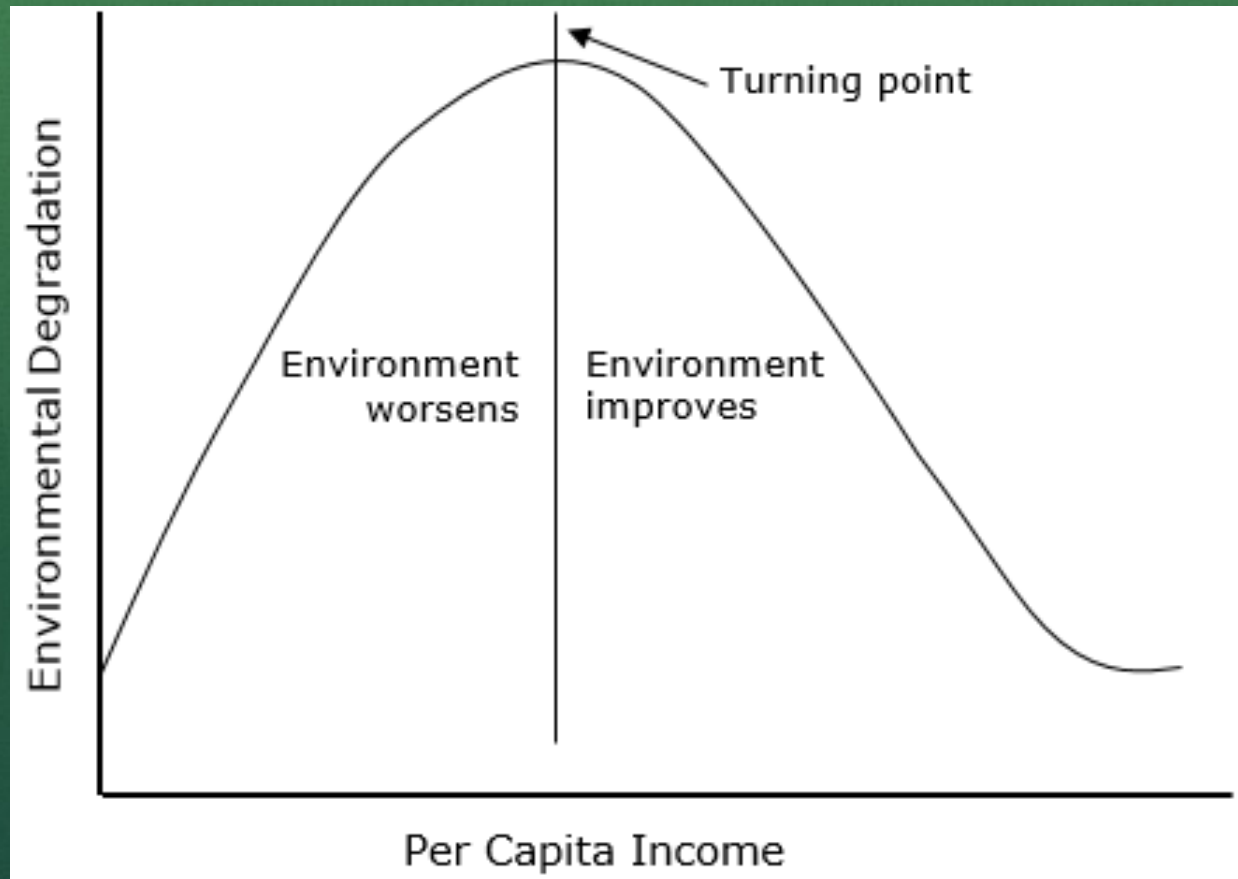
“nature” in Taiwan

- Weller — in 1970s fieldwork in San Xia (outside Taipei) no “nature” in his notes
- Weller — mid 1980s “nature” everywhere
 - Environmental demonstrations over industrial plant locations, garbage dump locations
 - 1984 National Parks reestablished (after having been first set up in 1937 under colonialism, but neglected after 1945)
 - 1987 Environmental Protection Administration set up
 - Glossy magazine *Nature* (Da Ziran 大自然)
- Related changes in China early 2000s

Reasons for Environmentalism

- Part of the spread of modernity (i.e. “parallel adaptations” p. 6)?
 - Reaction to environmental destruction of industrialization? (Environmental Kuznets Curve)
 - Urbanization and rising wealth led educated classes to nature tourism and appreciation?
 - New transportation infrastructure made this possible
- Spread of specifically Western ways of conceptualizing nature and human interactions with it (i.e. globalization or “cultural imperialism” p7)?
 - Colonial (and now Western) tourism practices
 - International development programs
 - Worldwide environmental NGOs

Environmental Kuznets Curve



Weller's View pp7-8

- Global convergence through modernity and globalism a factor, but this can easily be overemphasized
- Each country that embraces globalism is **selective** in what about globalism it embraces
 - Accepts some things, rejects others
 - Usually modifies and reworks those aspects they do accept
- Context is important
 - People in different social positions (classes) within a country react to nature differently
 - Local political and administrative structures affect power dynamics of environmental movement

Shapiro's Views (Chap 4)

- National identity and historical memory (both cultural constructs) shape attitudes toward the environment
 - China="middle kingdom", but remembers recent history of imperialist victimization ("superiority/inferiority complex" p85)
 - Acutely aware of how the world might be viewing China (Olympics/pollution, etc.)
- Traditional religious practices (sacred groves, sacred mountains) may function to preserve nature

Premodern Chinese Concepts

- “heaven” 天 that which regulates the universe
 - Anthropomorphized “heavenly ruler” 天帝
 - Moral and physical qualities merged in this concept (天命, 風水) – Emperor’s virtue could affect the operation of nature
 - Qi (material force 气) and li (order 理) emerge from the great ultimate (太極) to form the world through interplay of yin and yang (陰陽)
 - Heaven, earth, and man similar to nature and culture
 - Daodejing: 人法地，地法天，天法道，道法自然 Man follows the ways of the Earth, The Earth follows the ways of Heaven, Heaven follows the ways of Dao, and Dao follows its own ways [*not* “the way of the Dao is nature”]
 - Non-action (wuwei 無為) as a precept
- Confucian notion of harmony between heaven (nature) and man 天人合一

Traditional Views of Nature in Korea

- Emphasis on the landscape as a dynamic source of power coming from a mixture of indigenous belief, fengshui (p'ungsu), and Buddhism
 - Chǒnggi (精氣) – Chinese origin, but in Chinese emphasis is on “essence” rather than the Korean “pure material force all things possess” or “material force that is the basis of mental and bodily activity”
- Koreans see chǒnggi in the landscape – with mountains seen as especially powerful
 - “The Korean race has received the chǒnggi of Paektu Mountain” [from the dictionary]
 - Most Buddhist temples are in the mountains, shamans make mountain pilgrimages to obtain spiritual power, and Christian churches often have mountain prayer sanctuaries

“Nature in Anthropology”

- That which is not *culture* — symbolic thought and language, and social rules (the most fundamental of which is the prohibition of incest--Lévi-Strauss, *Elementary Structures of Kinship*)
 - Note Weller p 8 distinguishes “environment” (physical world) from “nature” (social construction of environment)
- *State of nature* — living in a state of unregulated lawlessness with no authority for an ethical or moral code
- *Mother Nature* — personification of the creative and regulative power that operates in the material world and is the immediate cause of its actions

Many “natures” in West

- “Most complex word in English language” (Weller p20)
- Linguistically in historical order
 1. senses relating to innate character (“human nature”) 人间本性 (cf Weller p23)
 2. heredity (as opposed to environment) (“nature or nurture”) 先天/教育
 3. creative and regulative power that is conceived as operating in the material world, and is the cause of its phenomena (“force of nature”) 自然力 (in traditional thought qi 气 had this function)
 4. the above power personified (“Nature”) 大自然
 5. plants, animals, and other features and products of the earth itself, as opposed to humans and human creations (“live in nature”) 生活在自然中
 6. Without the characteristics of civilization (“be in a state of nature”) 处于原始的状态

Nature in Christian Texts

- Christian views
 - God created the heaven and earth and all the creatures living therein
 - He created Adam in his own image with Eve for a companion
 - He gave Adam dominion over all the earth
- What is nature?
 - It is God's creation that we can understand by studying it
 - But man, being made in God's image, is not part of nature and has dominion over it

Other notions

- Great Chain of Being
 - The universe is a hierarchy with God sitting at the top followed by angels, then humans, and then animals, and other living things
 - All natural things have a soul, or essence, but the completeness of souls varies with the hierarchy (Lions are “king of beasts”, followed by domestic animals, etc.) but going all the way down to minerals.
- Notice
 - This puts humans *in* nature rather than *over* nature, and was common in Medieval Europe
 - The “soul” that animates things can be seen as parallel to the Chinese qi

Enlightenment

Disenchanted Nature

- (17th 18th c) God put the universe into motion, but does not tend it day-to-day
 - One can understand God by understanding how the universe operates
 - Humans are not properly part of the natural universe
- Contrasting views of “State of nature”
 - Hobbes — “nasty, brutish, and short” (authoritarian)
 - Rousseau — idyllic and egalitarian (Noble Savage, social contract)
- Notice
 - Views of “nature” and views of “society” tend to be complementary

Conquest of Nature

- Confluence of development of secular science with imperialism *disenchanted* nature
 - Humans must use technology to bend nature to their will
 - The most advanced humans must also bend less advanced humans to their will
- These notions came to China in the late 19th century
 - Yan Fu 嚴復 (1854-1921) – famous translator of Darwin and other Western scientists into Chinese (used “heaven” 天 for nature in 1890s translations) cf Weller p43
 - Earlier Japanese translations used 自然選択 for “natural selection”

Marxist Views of Nature

- labor theory of value — “surplus value” (Mehrwert) is created when workers apply labor to materials
 - Materials themselves have no inherent value, and come to have value only through their transformation by labor
- Capitalists seek to extract surplus value from workers through exploitation (i.e. by owning means of production)
- Capitalist accumulation is endless (accumulation begets more accumulation), and thus capitalism is environmentally unsustainable
- System of private property alienates workers from their labor and from their environment

Soviet Views of Nature

- While Marx himself thought the environment should be sustained communist countries (from the Soviet Union on) had distinctive views:
 - Because resources (like air) require no labor, they lack value, so that scarcity of resources was not acknowledged (scarcity thought to be socially produced)
 - Saw environmental abundance waiting for exploitation by scientific socialism
 - Since labor is the source of value, there is no reason to limit population growth
 - Marx was a bitter critic of Thomas Malthus who argued that population growth always exceed food supply
- Conquest of nature rhetoric was appealing to central state planners
 - Lenin: Communism is Soviet power plus the electrification of the whole country."

Nature for its Own Sake

- New Rousseauian notion that nature is perfect and civilization is corrupting disputes the traditional view that uncultivated land is ugly and wicked
 - New view that wilderness is God's creation in perfection uncorrupted by man
- Americans in this vein established parks (John Muir agitated for Yosemite) for spiritual refreshment
- Some Russians saw returning to the land as spiritually transformative (Tolstoy's novel *Resurrection* popular in Asia)

New Culture and May 4th 1919

- New Culture Movement followed founding of the Republic of China in 1912 (overthrow of the Manchu Dynasty)
 - Centered in Beijing and Shanghai and advocated vernacular language use and modern thought
- May 4th 1919
 - Student demonstrations against Japanese demands to Shandong in Treaty of Versailles
 - Morphed into a mass movement that soon split along liberal/radical lines

Mao's China 1949-1976

- Mao's vision separated humans from the environment
 - Concentrated exertion of human will and energy can alter material conditions so that struggle can overcome all difficulties
 - Humans must conquer nature through mass mobilization
 - Military terminology 人定勝天 “man must conquer nature” 突擊攻擊播種的小麥 “wheat sown by shock attack”
 - Result: soil degradation, deforestation, overuse of water resources, soil contamination from rural industrialization during the Maoist period (1950-1976)

Judith Shapiro's Reasons

- In *Mao's War against Nature: Politics and the Environment in Revolutionary China* (2001)
- Political repression
 - Many intellectuals, scientists, and officials who were experts were purged for criticizing grandiose plans
- Utopian urgency
 - Thought that mass mobilization could transform society quickly because communism would "unchain China from the fetters of imperialistic capitalism" and open up unimaginable productivity
- Dogmatic uniformity
 - Central planning imposed "one size fits all" plans on diverse regional landscapes
- State-ordered relocations
 - Large-scale movement of people into ecologically marginal environments

North Korea

- All Shapiro's reasons for Maoist China apply also to North Korea through the 1990s (and many of these attitudes had been imported from the Soviet Union)
 - “humanocentric utopianism” of Juche thought (Kim Il Sung — “man is the master of all things”)
 - Central planning imposed an industrialized agriculture policy
 - Large scale irrigation and reclamation projects
 - “mechanization and chemicalization” led to acidification of soil
 - Deforestation and cultivation of steep slopes
 - “shock troops” 돌격대 conquer the land to create heaven on earth 지상낙원

Shapiro on Contemporary China

- Rather than Maoist conquest of nature, more consumption-based destruction as China becomes wealthy
- Food as medicine (those that confound categories are powerful)
 - Rhinocerus horns, pangolin scales, bear gall bladders — implicated in spread of Covid-19 virus
 - Ginseng (also liked by Koreans, although they cultivate ginseng on a large scale)
- Ivory for carving leading to decimation of elephants
- Within China concern about adulterated food
- Three Gorges Dam was widely opposed on environmental grounds, though prestige of the project pushed it through
- To what extent do traditional attitudes shape modern activity?

Pangolin 穿山甲

- Weller p35
- Anteater that burrows into the ground but climbs trees
- Has scales like a reptile but suckles its young like a mammal



Sorting out “Natures”

- Are humans inside nature or separate from nature?
- Do humans have dominion over nature?
 - Is there a God separate from nature?
- Is nature considered a living, powerful organism that affects human beings, or is it considered mechanical or inert?
 - Is there reciprocal influence of nature on humans and humans on nature?
 - Is nature enchanted or disenchanted?
- Is nature considered to have intrinsic value, or does it have only economic value?
- Does the landscape have a relationship to national identity or not?

Summary of Chinese Nature

- Weller pp 39-41
 - Most Chinese ideas of nature rely on the concept of qi (material force)
 - Because this runs through everything this doesn't distinguish nature from culture
 - Sometimes power is connected with order and the emperor
 - In other cases that which is Other and disorderly is the most powerful