

## “Made in China”

By David E. Roy

In the United States, we are used to seeing the words, “Made in China,” on countless products: shoes, dishes, electronics, car parts, and on and on. The Mac laptop on which I am writing this column was assembled in China. The same with the Microsoft mouse I’m using (I believe in tech diversity).

Most of these items were originally designed in the US but, because they can be manufactured far less expensively in China, production was shifted to the Orient.

### **The Latest “Product” from China**

There is something else created in the US that recently has been carried to China and is undergoing a rapid expansion of its “production facilities.”

If this development continues at its current rate, it has the potential to return to the US, not as a less-expensively manufactured product identical to the original, but as something new, something with a uniquely Chinese design.

This “product” is *process thought*, the metaphysics originated by 20<sup>th</sup> Century mathematician-philosopher Alfred North Whitehead.

### **I Hear Your Groans, But ...**

Okay, okay, I hear your groans. I know that most of the time, most of us, myself included, do not particularly enjoy reflecting on the ground of our being, which includes *how* we look at the world.

But, if we don’t take time to do that every now and then, we remain enslaved to a worldview that directly contributes to every single issue with which social progressives are concerned (e.g., people and the environment being treated as a means to an end, the end being wealth for a few).

Moreover, in the history of ideas, what is happening in China is a truly amazing story. It has the potential to help not only China, but the US and other Western nations, to make the changes necessary for a more just, a more sustainable world society by radically modifying the prevailing worldview.

So, bear with me.

### **18 New Centers for Process Studies in China**

Here is what is happening: Over the last decade, China has established 18 centers for process studies at 18 university sites. That is a truly phenomenal number all by itself and even more so when compared to the US.

The only such organization in the US, the Center for Process Studies (located on campus at the Claremont School of Theology) was founded in 1973 and only after enormous struggle.

### **Why is China So Interested?**

Why is China so interested in this difficult philosophy that has, quite frankly, been marginalized across the board by the vast majority of serious academicians in the US (and elsewhere in the Western World)?

Process scholars in the West have struggled unsuccessfully for decades to be taken seriously by leaders in the world of scholarship. Two factors that have worked against a more mainstream acceptance of process thought are the challenges of mastering Whitehead's ideas and the fact that the God word is used by him in *Process and Reality*, his major work.

Many believe it is the second factor that is far and away the more important of the two. There are, after all, people who master Kant and other highly challenging thinkers.

### **The Idea of God Has Been the Kiss of Death**

But the idea of God, even as abstractly and formally defined as it is for Whitehead, is the kiss of death in so many fields today.

In China, however, this has not appeared to be an issue. For one thing, the Chinese culture includes the non-theistic traditions of Confucianism and Buddhism. In those practices, there is no need to get rid of the idea of God because it is not there in the first place.

Likewise, Taoism, while having a mystical quality and pointing therefore to something outside the individual, has a variety of gods, but does not focus on a monotheistic God in the vein of the Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

### **China is Not Reflexively Atheistic**

Simply put, this means that the Chinese culture is not reflexively against theism. It is more theistic neutral. Also helpful is the fact that any theology emerging from process thought is not going to be evangelistic.

China's receptivity to process thought comes at an important transition in its own history where it is striving to balance its four millennia of cultural history with its perceived need to master the science and technology it needs to be a world power.

### **Process Thought Holds Together Science *and* Values**

Process thought has the capacity to bridge these two radically different worlds. Whereas science (hard and soft) has sought to be value free (objective, value neutral), process thought embraces both science and values.

This union of values and science is a major part of what attracts these academicians in China. They can see their way to enfolding the ancient wisdom of Confucius, for example, with cutting edge work in neuroscience.

Another part of the attraction to Whitehead's ideas is the way they have been developed by several American leaders, in particular David Ray Griffin.

### **David Griffin & Constructive Post-Modernism**

Griffin caught the attention of one of the intellectual leaders in China's university system, Zhihe Wang. Wang and others had been pursuing a post-modern agenda in the efforts to move China forward in the world.

However, the dominant post-modern approach was "deconstructionism." In this approach, the modern worldview is "deconstructed" but nothing is offered in its place.

Griffin, meantime, had authored and edited a series of books with the State University of New York's Press (SUNY) on *constructive* postmodernism. In this approach, the modern view is deconstructed and then immediately replaced by an alternative picture.

For example, the modern worldview emphasizes separateness and disconnection. Instead of simply saying this is wrong, process thought supports our deepest intuitions about our real degree of connectedness.

### **Zhihe Wang: The Bridge to China**

Griffin's work was so compelling to Wang that eventually he came to Claremont to earn his doctorate under Griffin. As a result, Wang has been the bridge to China and he has been extraordinarily effective.

The question, of course, is where all of this will lead, both in China and potentially the rest of the world. Much of it depends upon what happens in China.

Process thought is being used to guide the development of academic programs in China (including one in psychology; more on that later). These programs, in turn, have the potential to influence leaders who eventually will govern the nation.

### **China at a Crucial Juncture**

China is at a crucial juncture in its development. In recent decades, China has shifted from a position that environmental problems only happened in the West because of failings unique to the West to a position of growing concern about its own contribution to damage to the environment. However, development still appears to trump environmental protection, according to Jared Diamond (*Collapse*).

China's next focus is on improvements for its vast rural areas. Unlike the US, the vast majority of Chinese citizens still live on farms. If China pursues the easiest and quickest approach, it would create instant cities. This of course would accelerate environmental destruction.

If, on the other hand, China chooses a simpler approach, it would limit itself to improving roads so commodities from the rural areas could be more easily brought to market; providing rural health clinics; and securing the electrification of the outlying regions.

Leaders with a process perspective would advocate for sustainable agriculture and against practices that damage the earth's resources (such as many more cities).

### **Perhaps China Can Guide the West**

It should be our hope that China eventually can guide us in the West toward a more sustainable and just relationship with our world.

Speaking of China, by the time you read this, I will be in that country to deliver a paper at a conference in Jinan on, "Process Psychology: The Next Fifty Years." I'll let you know what happens.