

Ecological Transformation, Agriculture, and the Survival of Humanity

João Pedro Stédile

The three articles in this issue of the international edition of Wenhua Zongheng (文化纵横) offer complementary views on issues that are fundamental to the survival of humanity: food production, agroecology, environmental restoration, and renewable energies. Committed to the causes of their people and of all humanity, the Chinese authors present readers with concrete experiences from the reality of their country.

Unfortunately, in the West, Chinese intellectual perspectives and debates on contemporary global realities are utterly ignored, even within leftist circles.

By sharing the perspectives of our Chinese comrades, translated into different languages, I believe that this journal provides an invaluable service.



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The global left is indebted to those who are seriously engaging in these crucial debates. Too few intellectuals are concerned with delving into such reflections. Generally, leftist parties remain trapped in slogans, clichés, and dogmas, as Mao Zedong had warned. Meanwhile, the debate within universities – and most of society – is limited to diagnoses of problems, while avoiding a number of pressing issues and failing to analyse the capitalist movement towards exploiting natural resources for extraordinary profits. Such reckless processes lead to environmental crimes and climate change.

As early as the nineteenth century, Karl Marx observed how industrial capitalism could affect the environment. Rosa Luxemburg deepened this analysis, examining capital's interest in privately appropriating natural resources as part of its primitive accumulation. Later, Vladimir Lenin and Nikolai Bukharin argued that the imperialist phase of capitalism

would inevitably lead to assaults on natural resources, driven by the need for raw materials to fuel factories and expand capitalist markets.

During the revolutionary processes in Russia, Eastern Europe, and China –and later, the people’s revolutions in Cuba and Vietnam – environmental concerns were secondary, as these countries first needed to address the basic needs of the people through productive investments that generated economic progress and improved the wellbeing for their entire populations. As a result, by the 1970s, the global environmental agenda lacked a clear programme. Amid the Cold War, the United States – through its government and capitalists – pushed the so-called Green Revolution worldwide. This name stemmed from the ideological need to counter the ‘red’ people’s revolutions that had occurred. Additionally, the US argued that adopting agrochemicals would lead to a revolution in agricultural productivity, ensuring food for all.

At the time, the United States was already hegemonic across much of the world with its cultural and media apparatus, and was easily able to persuade governments and countries to adopt its ‘revolution’ without critical examination. In 1970, the primary proponent of the Green Revolution and the adoption of agrochemicals, US wheat researcher Norman Borlaug, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

Today, the Green Revolution can be critically analysed as a production model focused on large capital, seeking to expand its reach over vast agricultural regions. Under this model, these areas were turned into consumer markets for industrial inputs from US transnational companies, pushing them to buy hybrid seeds, agrochemicals, fertilisers, pesticides, and farming machinery. It was based on monoculture and large-scale production, implemented indiscriminately without consideration of the environmental consequences. In some ways, this model also influenced countries building socialism.

Today, we are immersed in the most severe environmental crisis in human history. Climate change and its consequences – such as floods, hurricanes, droughts, and polar ice melt – endanger thousands of plant and animal species, destabilising nature across the planet. This situation affects the entire world, regardless of the actions of individual countries, as we all share a common home. There are perhaps no words more relevant to our dilemma than the warning Fidel Castro issued in a historic speech delivered at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992: ‘An important biological species is in danger of disappearing due to the rapid, progressive destruction of its natural living conditions: the human being. We are now aware of this issue, though it is almost too late to prevent it’.

The articles in this issue of *Wenhua Zongheng* help readers understand how China has dealt with these problems over the past three decades. Ding Ling and Xu Zhun examine the contradictory impacts of the Green Revolution in China and argue that the country needs to undergo an ecological transformation to attain the vision of an ‘ecological civilisation’ promoted by the country’s leaders. Meanwhile, Xiong Jie and Tings Chak examine the environmental restoration process, studying the case of Erhai Lake, one of many areas damaged during recent decades of rapid economic development and certain agricultural production models. Finally, Feng Kaidong and Chen Junting analyse the historical development of China’s electric vehicle industry, an important component in the country’s transition to a new energy economy that can also promote industrialisation processes in the Global South. Together, the scholars provide detailed testimonies about various aspects of the environmental question in China, across different regions of the country, and identify implications for the rest of the world, particularly for countries in the Global South.

It is urgent that people’s organisations, peasant movements, leftist parties, and progressive governments worldwide embrace ecological transformation as central to development projects in our countries. We bear the responsibility of

producing food in harmony with nature, protecting it for future generations, and mitigating the consequences of climate change. We have an obligation to produce healthy food, without pesticides, for the entire population. To this end, it is necessary to adopt agroecology as a production model that opposes the capitalist model and its transnational corporations.

We must combat deforestation and related fires, pursuing massive, people-oriented reforestation programmes in both rural and urban areas, and planting native and fruit-bearing trees in every possible space. Concrete policies to protect springs, rivers, and freshwater lakes are also essential.

It is imperative to adopt public policies that defend the interests of the entire population and peasants. Developing agro-industrial systems in cooperatives on local scales will be necessary, ensuring the production of healthy food without chemical additives or ultra-processed ingredients that cause enormous health issues for the population.

Finally, I advocate for the creation of a list of proposals and concrete programmes that promote critical thinking and accumulate reflections, helping activists and their organisations to care about and adopt truly revolutionary programmes in this direction. The adoption of a production model based on agroecology and polyculture, rather than monoculture and its pesticides, is an urgent necessity to save the planet and is also a clearly anti-capitalist policy.

The capitalists do not want to abandon their Green Revolution programme. They will continue expanding their immense farms, practising monoculture, using genetically modified seeds, agrochemicals, and pesticides, with increasingly large machines that drive labour out of the countryside. When they speak of defending nature, they only propose forest carbon credits, converting oxygen into capital bonds that do not change the agrarian reality of our countries.

It is absurd to use existing forests as instruments of speculative capital, allowing capitalists to compete among themselves for the extraordinary income generated. This capitalist model does not produce food but only agricultural commodities – goods subject to speculation in the futures market and stock exchanges. This is not agriculture; it is merely the domination of capital over nature's assets.

Agriculture is the science and art of cultivating the land to produce, in harmony with nature, what humans need, especially the food that fuels life. Capitalists are destroying agriculture, and by doing so, they are jeopardising the future and the ability to produce food for the entire population. This generates profit but at the cost of exploiting workers and committing environmental crimes against nature.

I am certain that the reflections of our Chinese comrades will help deepen the debate in all people's and leftist organisations about this important challenge of our time.



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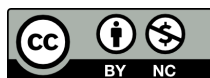
❖ **About this paper:** This paper was originally published in English by WENHUA ZONGHENG, A Journal of Contemporary Chinese Thought in [December 2024](#), A collaboration between (文化纵横) Dongsheng and Tricontinental.

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