Paradigm Shift:
The Effect of Zen in Preventing Environmental Destruction

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ABSTRACT

“Wrong views and values” fortify desires, but “right views and values” curb their desires bringing satisfaction and subsistence. Section 2 describes the current crisis of global warming on the earth and the sea, warning its grave danger for humanity. Section 3 suggests measures to prevent environmental destruction, arguing the necessity of a paradigm shift from “Greedy economics” (modern economics) to Chisoku economics (Buddhist economics). Section 4 explains the necessity of religion (reunion with holiness), Buddhism, and Zen, which enable the concrete witness of nirvana (no-wind, of karma, Pure Land) and a wakeful life to actualize this paradigm shift. Section 5 explains how the practice of Zen can facilitate an actual shift of ego, economy, and ecology to the solution of these problems. The authors conclude that it is necessary for us to wake up from wrong “views and values” (due to karma) to realize the wholly wholesome way of all on all levels and realms in cultivation (education, practice) and verification (enjoyment, perfection).

KEYWORDS
Awakening and Activation of Views and Values, Buddhist Economics, Chisoku Economics, Global Problems and Solutions, Global Warming, Paradigm Shift, Zen Buddhism

1. INTRODUCTION

E. F. Schumacher states in his book Small is Beautiful (1973) that our world, formed by thought, chemistry, and technology, is simultaneously involved in three crises. Let’s examine these three crises.

1. Humanity’s true character is choked and becoming weak in inhumane technology and organization.
2. The environment that sustains human life is being hurt and developing symptoms of collapse.
3. Nonrenewable resources essential to our contemporary human economy – especially fossil fuel resources – are in a state of imminent shortage. The root of the problem is matter for matter’s sake, a belief in big technology and the pursuit of richness, which is nothing but greed and jealousy.

Today, Japan’s government and people in general espouse the same “view and value” of growth for growth’s sake, both in the economy and in the structure of society. That is, Japan’s successive governments, like those of western countries, believe that a person can propel the political and economic systems that gives a nation feelings of happiness and satisfaction based on a “man-centered principle and the worldview of matter-centered principle.” This idea causes fatal damage to people and exposes them to “the crisis of the global environment and human life.” Namely, people want
only their happiness, they do not focus very much on the happiness or even the existence of their future offspring, they run without stopping in their fulfillment of desires, and they don’t think at all of what they should do toward a sustainable future. It is our opinion that humanity must change its current paradigm of “views and values” in order to protect the earth and human life, i.e., shift from a human-centered and matter-centered worldview to an earth-centered and earthly-familial worldview. In considering how we might approach this paradigm shift, we will introduce the Pure Land of Zen and propose that its worldview – with elements of ego, economy, and ecology situated in a Buddhist context – will be useful in reducing environmental destruction.

We will examine this issue in four sections as follows: first, we will look at the present situation of the destruction of the environment; next, we will examine the causes of this environmental destruction and summarize some suggestions that have been proposed for correcting it; then, we will discuss the principles and practice of Zen (the Pure Land of Zen); and, finally, we will consider the positive effect Zen can have on an environment that faces imminent destruction.

2. THE PRESENT SITUATION: DESTRUCTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT

At present, pollution and destruction of the environment expands on a global scale. Groups involved in the protection of the environment and activists worldwide consider that the situation will soon become critical, and they suggest that we must correct it. Let’s begin by summarizing the various issues as outlined by Yoshiyuki Takagi (1996).¹

Worldwide temperatures are rising from an increase in the discharge of CO₂, which comes from fossil fuels such as oil and coal that are used as an energy source for the expansion of our economy. This abnormal rise in temperatures results in a rising of the sea level and the submergence of national lands. In addition, by burning these fuels, sulfurous oxide and nitrogen oxide are produced, polluting the air. The pollutants melt into rainwater and become acid rain, which acidifies soil and water, damaging forests, coral reefs, etc. Through excessive human actions on forests, coral reefs, etc., the ecosystem is destroyed and prompts the extermination of many living things within it. Our atmosphere is also at risk. When, for example, refrigerant agents such as those used in refrigerators, air-conditioners, or vending machines are used, chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) are released into the air, depleting the ozone layer and creating additional pressures on the existence of living things on the earth.

We see that environmental destruction is caused by such factors as global warming, depletion of the ozone layer, acid rain, and the destruction of forests and coral reefs – all of which contribute to the extermination of species on this living planet. Moreover, the nature of our current global environment is to repeat the chain of environmental destruction, with population explosion, poverty, and the depletion of resources all contributing factors. A further consequence of this destructive spiral has been the widening economic gap between developed and developing countries, and the rich and the poor within each country, where the accumulation of wealth in developed countries and the rich becomes the debt of developing countries and the poor, and where the economy of the world breaks down and indications of imminent collapse begin to appear.

Next, let’s look at the present situation of global warming as reported in “Climate Change 2013: The Physical Science Basis,”² the contribution by Working Group 1 to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

2.1. Global Warming of the Earth

Publication of the Fifth Assessment Report of the IPCC has begun after an interval of six years. This first report of Working Group 1, issued on September 27, 2013, concludes that the effects of rising global temperatures and sea levels will not be avoided. It also shows that the cumulative quantity of humanity’s CO₂ discharges and the rising of the average temperature on earth have an almost proportional relationship. This means that estimates of the quantity of CO₂ discharge can be used to determine future temperatures.
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