

# The Reality We Face

“Our Only Choice” A new vision for the long-term survival of humanity and the Earth

By *Venerable Master Haiyun Jimeng*

My friends! Whether you have lived here in the past, or you are going to live here in the future, or you are living here today, have you carefully considered how long we have lived here on Earth? Just what is this world? What sort of a person am I? Is my way of living right? Am I alive? What have I been doing all my life? What do I want to do with my life? Is this the way we are supposed to live? Who am I? Do I know how to breathe? Is my life meaningful and valuable? Are you and I satisfied with the way we are living? How do I evaluate myself? How do I evaluate this Earth, our home? Some people say human civilization is already several tens of thousands of years old; others say that it has existed for millenniums old; others say something else... What do you say?

## Section 1: Re-considering our magnificent civilization

Since the Renaissance in Europe, humanism had rapidly spread for 500 years and developed into a scientific and, legalistic world view which in different contexts might be referred to as humanism, anthropocentrism, or materialism. With the support of both the public and private sectors<sup>1</sup>, such a worldview gradually spread around the planet. This life style and social attitude had developed on Earth as the only representative new civilization and could be called the mainstream culture. After the Second World War, the decline of the European civilization and the rise of the US led capitalism further pushed the European humanistic, affluent civilization into a **profit-based realistic civilization**. Profit maximization has become today's US mainstream cultural characteristic!

A comprehensive survey of the progress of world economic development and social construction since the Second World War reveals that the US capitalist civilization plays a leading role. Many people have proudly pronounced that God is dead<sup>2</sup> and that man will conquer nature;

---

<sup>1</sup> Public sector refers to the government; private sector refers to business.

<sup>2</sup> These were the words of the German philosopher Nietzsche, who advocated breaking away from monotheism and redefining all values; but his words have been abused by careerists to rationalize selfishness and the exploitation of others.

people are infatuated with the unprecedented achievements of science and feel their incomparable glory and excitement. But, in sharing these achievements and excitement, we also detect under the glaring lights of economic development and society construction, behind the tall buildings of their achievements, looms a profound shadow with a fearful dark side. Along with economic development and social progress, have come uneven resource distribution, cutthroat competition, and all sorts of environmental degradation, all of which generate widespread unhappiness; people suffer from index unceasingly rises and happiness index actually drops repeatedly instead!<sup>3</sup>

My friends! Do we really want to trade happiness for economic development? Are we even aware of the inversely proportional relationship between so-called “development” and happiness? Is this kind of exchange normal with regard to the present conditions of humanity and mother Earth? Can humanity bear the huge burden of its continuous economic development and side effects? Before the fanfare of capitalist civilization has begun to fade, its side effects are already hitting us like a ton of bricks! Does this not cause for prudent re-consideration?

## Section 2: The reality we face - A vicious cycle

Whether we call this current mainstream culture the US capitalist civilization or high-efficient civilization, its contradictory phenomena are the results of tilted mainstream cultural values. We called it the “accomplice structure or structural deviation of modern civilization.” Such accomplice structure congeals a system of value judgment and social values based on competition, benefit and power.

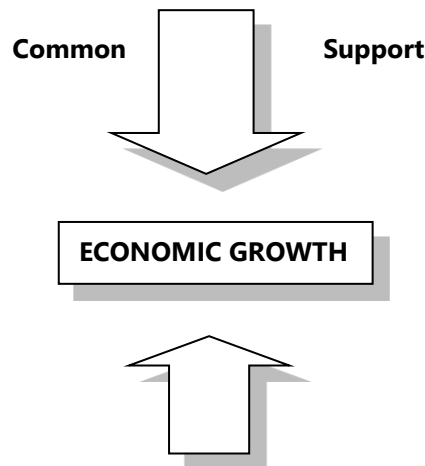
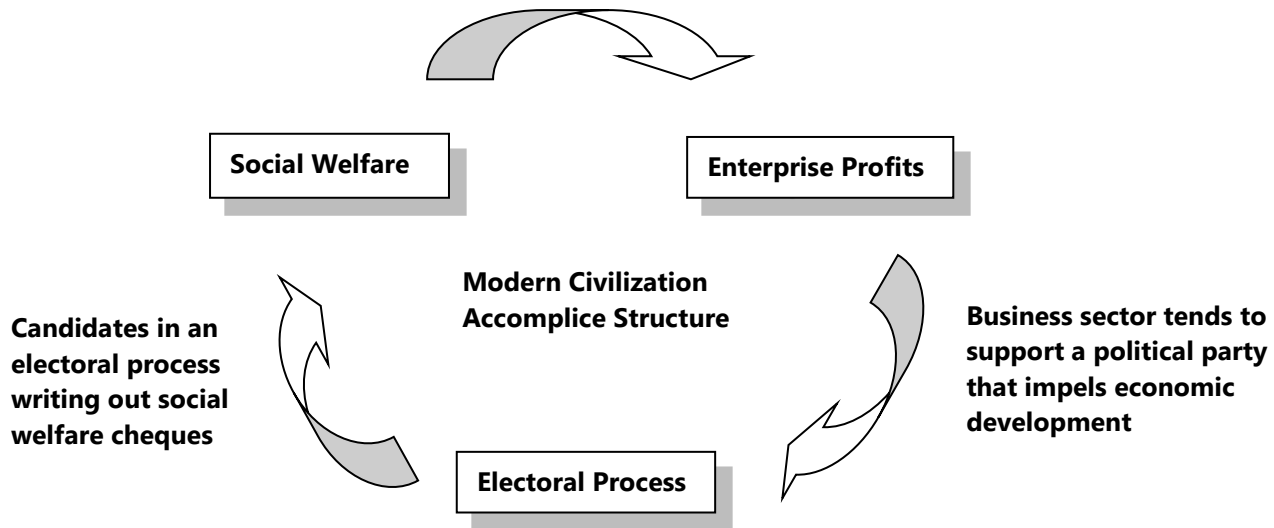
In Democratic welfare states, this results in a structure comprised of three main factors: 1). the electoral process; 2). social welfare; and 3). business profits. Why? This is because in order to get elected, a candidate must write out attractive social welfare checks; **after the election, in order to keep one’s political promises, one must increase tax revenues; in order not to offend people**

---

<sup>3</sup> According to the results of the European Happy Planet Index (“HPI”) published in 2007 by the New Economics Foundation (NEF) and Friends of the Earth, the European country with the highest HPI was Iceland; England ranked 21<sup>st</sup>, which was below even Romania. Andrew Simms, NEF’s Policy Director and Head of Climate Change and Energy, said that the more a nation’s economy is market-oriented, the less happy its people are. “We have expended many resources on manufacturing, purchasing, and consumption, but if these do not help to improve the quality life, what good are they?” This is worth considering. Source: Overseas Chinese Net News Center. European Happy Planet Index: Icelanders are the happiest, Estonian people the least happy.

by **increasing tax rates**, the only way to increase tax revenues is to expand business profits. Hence, one is trapped in a vicious cycle requires perpetual economic growth. Thus **economic growth is the central goal of a free economy**. This can be illustrated as follows.

**In order to realize social welfare policies, the government must increase tax revenues, which are sourced from profits of economic activities**

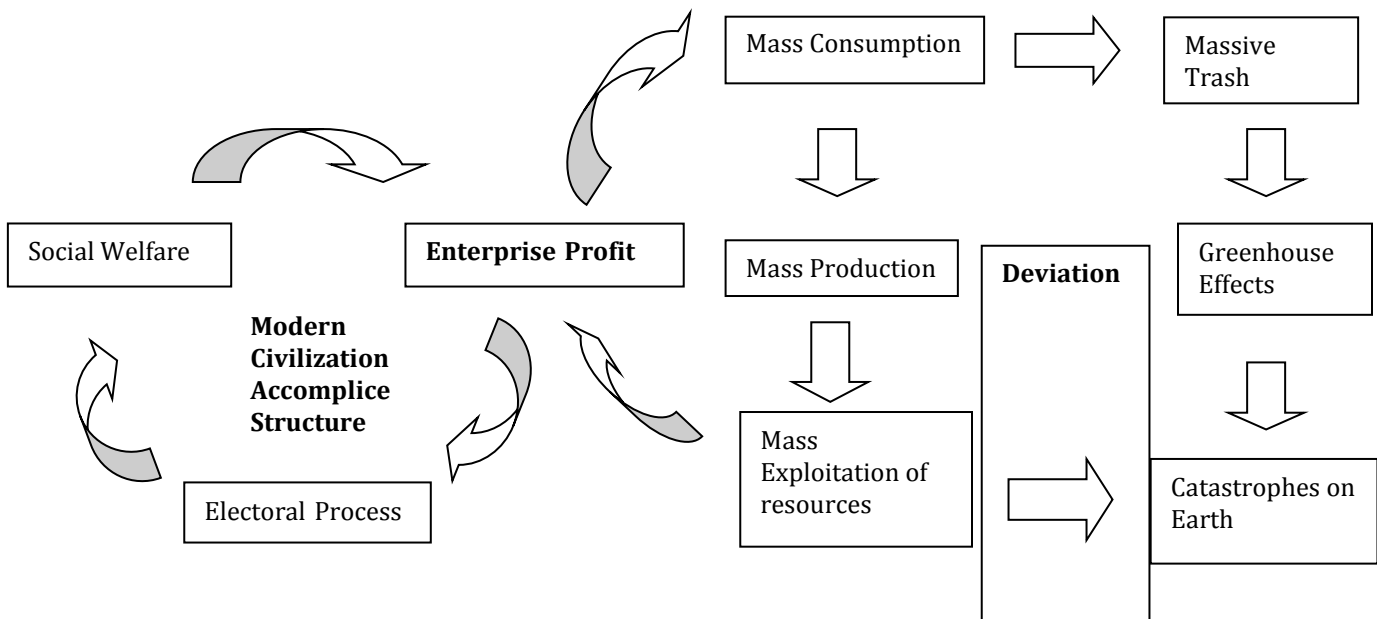


### **THE DEVIL THAT DEVASTATES THE WORLD**

Today, both developed and developing countries brutally carry out a succession of ignorant behavioural patterns under the full disguise of the philosophy of the accomplice structure. Note that these behaviours and values are caught in this vicious cycle, and this is by no means restricted to democratic or capitalist countries; communist countries also emphasize social welfare, but since this requires capital, the open market economy is permitted and supported to a certain extent. Thus

it can be seen that, social welfare and the free economy are the key elements of this vicious cycle. Although, the political system is inevitably part and parcel of this vicious cycle, reforming it will not bring long-term improvement; the key lies in formulating and applying wholesome values.

Did you know that under the accomplice structure, an enterprise must maximize its profits infinitely in order to satisfy its profit-making desire? This desire to maximize profit infinitely is the main cause of deviation! To satisfy the insatiable desires for profits, businesses must infinitely expand their markets and the quantities of goods consumed. The chain of causes and effect is as follows: An **enterprise’ infinite desires for profit leads it to promote mass consumption**; mass consumption requires **mass production**, this requires **mass** exploitation of resources, creating massive pollution and such phenomena as the greenhouse effect. This process is illustrated in the diagram below.



“Enterprise profit” is the key element, from which spring free competition, mass production, and mass consumption, which, together with the pay-by-instalment method, causes extensive damage to humanity and the environment. Let us analyze these three elements of modern civilization.

1. **Free competition:** This not only wastes natural resources, but also leads to uneven distribution of incomes and benefits. Because cutthroat competition is the norm, conflict and fear of success or failure abound, placing people under tremendous stress.
2. **Mass consumption:** Mass production must be supported by mass consumption in order to maintain profit. However, mass consumption cannot fully and efficiently use resources and therefore produces massive pollution and, causing large-scale destruction to natural ecology and creating unprecedented catastrophes and irreparable damages to mother Earth. These social values and behavioural patterns based on careless and wasteful use of natural resources not only create social conflicts but also reduce life towards materialistic values and a deviated morbidity.
3. **Pay-by-instalment:** This seemingly great inventions of US culture have in fact destroyed the frugality and stable life style, causing human nature to appear superficial, imitate popular fashions, and not to treasure existing achievements, and thus trapping the whole society and the individual in restlessness and fear. Moreover, by encouraging indiscriminate consumerism it contributes to the depletion of the resources that our descendants will require, and accelerate the scale of expansion of disasters on Earth!

These three means completely stem from economy of scale based on mass production. Thus, free competition is an excuse for economy of scale, mass consumption results from export of mass production, and the pay-by-instalment system guarantees the quantity of output under economy of scale. This is the core principle of structural affection of modern civilization! These three means altogether support one explicit goal, viz. economic growth!

My friends! This accomplice structural affection finds its roots in values based on insatiable desires for profit, which destroys human nature and neglects humanistic values based on humanism. Under such materialistic values, man has recklessly squandered natural resources, recklessly slaughtered animals, recklessly denuded forests, and brought about the extinction of numerous species and is now threatening the natural ecological balance! Such morbid structural accomplice has caused extreme damage to our natural and social ecological balance, resulting in today's natural and man-made disasters!

My friends! Why have human and universal values become so skewed towards competition, profit making, and power? What sort of world do we face? What is the reality? This civilization founded on values of desires and plundering has emerged since the present era of European civilization and has been leading the world's mainstream culture for 500 years. Today, although we don't see plundering of coloured people such as Africa in the past, the plundering of resources through economic activities is indeed extremely common everywhere in the world. Plundering has changed in form, but not in essence! The rise of Europe, US, Japan and six other such great nations all take competition and plundering as their mainstream civilizations. How can these barbaric acts be the gentlemanly paragons of such great nations? How can we be proud of such civilizations? This is worth re-consideration!

### **Section 3: Buddhism in universal value reform**

My friends! What is the reality we face? Economic growth has become a pervasive value, and is the prime culprit destroying human nature, spirituality, human goodness, and ecological balance. It becomes contemporary world mainstream culture and universal values. With the popularization of this accomplice structure, worldwide plundering attack and defence combats will intensify, avulsion of human nature, spoiling of spirituality, interpersonal callousness, and world disasters will be aggravated. Why? This is because of the core values of Buddhism are harmony, balance, spirituality, humanity, and humane sentiments. The core values are completely missing in the process of formulating such mainstream civilizations. The result is, today's universal values are based on plundering, trapping mankind and the Earth in unprecedented catastrophes!

Fortunately, much of the world's populations and regions are not influenced by such universal values, even though they may suffer from the devastating effects of such economic growth! One-seventh of the world's population (i.e., G7, the world's seven largest industrialized nations) enjoys 90% of the world's resources, but this comes at the expense of the rest of the world population living in poverty and starvation! How can this social welfare achievement be the conscience of technologically advanced countries? Therefore, we appeal that you use the ultimate guiding principles of Buddhism and Confucius's "Doctrine of the Great Learning" as the basis for reforming universal values and rationally distributing resources, so that everybody may live in stable and safe conditions.

My friends! Why is Buddhist philosophy able to guide the new world's universal values? Indeed, the Buddha's Mahayana teachings have placed primal importance in cultivating and

elevating one's spirituality. In order to realize ultimate goodness, Mahayana teachings have specially put forward education compatible with such spiritual goal that emphasizes family and social harmony, and deep consideration for the long-term survival of the environment and ecology. This philosophy indeed has great value in guiding human harmonious social reform. However, during the formation of modern civilization in the recent 500 years, Buddhism was roughly speaking dormant. Regrettably, it has remained stubbornly defensive of traditional Buddhist cultures and has not really concerned itself with the development of universal thoughts and values!

But, my friends! Any crisis can take a favourable turn! In the past, we may have been absent, but now, this critical juncture of life and death is precisely the best opportunity to take positive actions to save the Earth! The recent call of the World Buddhist Sangha Youth (WBSY) for Buddhists to cross-existing boundaries and break through traditional restrictions has resonated far and wide. We must now go further: **our original intent has been to care for all humanity; we must stand firm to reconsider the development of world civilization. Besides exactly identifying the crux of the issues we face, we must propose a new age prospect to preserve the fruits of our present civilization and impel the continued long-term survival of humanity and the Earth.** The realization of the Buddhist Bodhisattva spiritual path is the most concrete proof of such actions to break through traditional boundaries!