



## Can Cultural Values Save the Environment?

A Panel Forum Marking the Publication of *Forging Environmentalism*

Joanne Bauer , Dale Jamieson , Keith Kloor , Guobin Yang , Richard Franke

September 13, 2006



Forging Environmentalism: Justice, Livelihood, and Contested Environments

- [Joel Rosenthal](#)
- [Joanne Bauer](#)
- [Dale Jamieson](#)
- [Keith Kloor](#)
- [Guobin Yang](#)
- [Richard Franke](#)
- [Questions and Answers](#)

**JOEL ROSENTHAL:** I'm Joel Rosenthal, President of the Carnegie Council. On behalf of the Council and the [Asia Society](#), which is co-sponsoring this event, welcome.

This is not only an opportunity to discuss a very important topic, but for us it's also a bit of a celebration and a bit of a milestone for the Council. The occasion is the publication of the book [Forging Environmentalism](#), which just appeared, M.E. Sharpe, publisher. We thought that we would use this occasion to have a substantive discussion of the book and the work that is in it, and showcase some of the people who have been part of it.

This is so much more than a book. It has been a program and a project of the Carnegie Council for, I will just say, several years—a major commitment, a multiyear effort, a multinational effort. Joanne will tell you a little bit about how this came about and the enormous mobilization that took place. So this is not just your average book, but a very important collaborative enterprise, which, I know, really pushed the frontiers of research and thinking on what we think is one of the most, if not the most, important topics for ethics in international affairs, and that is the global environmental situation that we are in today.

I can tell you that the work that was done in this collaborative effort will set the mark, I think, for discussion, at least for the next five years. I don't think that's hyperbole.

I want to also just say something about Joanne Bauer, who is the editor. But that's not really enough. She is the prime mover, the shaker, the overall architect. She really put this whole thing together. Again, it was more than a book; it was really a community of people, a network of people. I think the launching of the book will just be the start of more things that will follow. When the history of the Carnegie Council is written—and there will be a new history written on our centennial in 2014—I know this effort will be a very, very important part of that history. This has been an important part of this institution. I want to take this opportunity to thank Joanne publicly for all that work that she did to make that happen.

So this is both an opportunity to engage the issues and a bit of a celebration and a marking of that effort. I want to thank you, Joanne.

With that, I will turn the floor over to Joanne, who will introduce the panel.

**JOANNE BAUER:** Thank you, Joel, for those very, very generous comments.

I think it was about a dozen years ago, Joel, really going back to the early 1990s, that the Carnegie Council began thinking deeply about how it could make its mark on thinking about environmental issues. As Joel said, this was and continues to be an issue area that falls squarely within the Carnegie Council's mandate. After all, environmental issues are quintessentially global and fundamentally ethical.

I was very fortunate to be a part of that thinking, which ultimately led to this ambitious project, studying environmental values in four hugely significant countries—the United States, Japan, India, and China—upon which this book, *Forging Environmentalism*, is based.

Our work actually began with a series of workshops right here in this room, including people like Dale Jamieson, Sheila Jasanoff, and many of the authors who are represented in the book, along with many, many people who made a major impact on the book, beyond the authors.

The idea of the project was simply this: We wanted to better understand the social and cultural values that people bring to bear on environmental problems and how people mobilize those values to forge environmentalism, to create and sustain programs and movements of environmental action in their communities. We wanted to understand the variation across cultures and political contexts—in other words, how people in different parts of the world define environmental goals and objectives; how their values are shaped by lived realities, the cultural context, and the political struggles in which they forge their ideas about nature and the environment; and whose values matter and whose values don't in setting environmental priorities.

About two years ago, again in this same room, Gus Speth, the Dean of the Yale School of Forestry, former President of the World Resources Institute, and former UNDP administrator, came and spoke to us about his book [Red Sky at Morning](#). After reciting the grave threats facing the planet and lamenting of the international community to address them, he concluded that the solution rests with ordinary citizens, because the politicians have let us down. He said, if citizens don't take the helm, we'll lose this fight. In order to achieve such a movement of citizens, we need to have better intelligence on what motivates people to act and how, in doing so, they forge environmentalism and what the content of that environmentalism is and how it's changing.

The project was one effort towards this goal. But it's clear today, just looking at the headlines about climate change and environmental disasters taking place every day across the globe, that these issues go on and on, and have become, if anything, more important and more complicated.

In developing our project, having determined the need to get a better grip on the values dimension of the environmental crisis, the big question for us, and the question that spawned at least three meetings in this room—and if it weren't for a program officer at the National Science Foundation, who said, "Just get out there and start looking for things and find something," we may have gone on forever—the big question for us was how we were going to do this.

It simply won't work to survey people about whether they value the environment—who is going to say they don't?—unless you place before them a dilemma that forces them to choose between competing goods. It's not enough to ask people whether they care more about owls or jobs, for example, which was a big debate that was raging at the time that we were looking at this, unless they are people who are directly affected by the ultimate decision and public-policy outcome. Even then, people may not be able to clearly articulate the reasons for their support of a position, let alone have a clear sense of what values underlie that.

Nonetheless, aware of these challenges, we decided that the best way to go about understanding values was to engage in in-depth, sustained case studies, carried out by in-country research teams who would examine the experiences of communities trying to define environmental values in the context of struggles over their lives and livelihoods. The idea was to go up close and examine the values of all the stakeholders and their processes of interaction around particular environmental debates. In each country, we looked at resource-use cases and industrial pollution cases.

We chose to do this in the four countries that are the big players in environmental politics: India, China, Japan, and the United States. Together, these four countries account for half the world's population and economic output. They are also responsible for half the world's emissions of carbon dioxide, and the four countries are among the top five in terms of total carbon emissions. With real GDP rates still booming in China and India, and continuing to soar at 9 and 8 percent, in all likelihood, their carbon emissions will also rise. Beyond the global challenge, these countries face serious local resource and pollution concerns that have cumulative regional and global effects.

But for the purposes of this study, the countries are significant not so much for what makes them similar, but for what makes them distinctive. As Clark Miller wrote in the volume, economically, they span a diversity of approaches to bridging markets and government planning, and they include the three largest economies in the world. They include the widely regarded icon of Western *laissez-faire*, liberal free-trade economics, and the intellectual leader of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Politically, they are four of the world's current great powers, including the last remaining communist power, the world's oldest democracy, and two countries whose current form of governance has been adapted from legacies of occupation by Western countries with noticeably different notions about how to construct a democratic polity. Their inhabitants include some of the world's richest and poorest people, not to mention large, influential populations of many of the world's major religions, including Buddhism, Protestant and Catholic Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, and Shintoism.

Last but certainly not least, each possesses a highly regarded, well-funded environmental science community.

Since this is such a huge project, we are especially fortunate to have with us on this occasion a panel of experts who can illuminate the question, "Can values save the environment?" particularly with respect to what we see happening in three of these four contexts: the United States, China, and India. Time did not permit us to also engage a speaker on Japan, but I really recommend the material on Japan in this book. It's a fascinating study that tracks a change in Japanese conceptions of human/nature relations alongside a change in democratic politics, which ultimately gives a greater voice to local publics.

Each of these panelists has in one way or another been involved in the book. We asked them to be here to talk to us today because of the important thinking and writing that they have been doing about environmental values and politics over many years in the course of their careers.

**Dale Jamieson** is professor of environmental philosophy at New York University and an adviser to the project. He will talk about why values are important to making headway on ameliorating environmental problems, with reference to American politics.

**Keith Kloor** is senior editor at Audubon magazine and author of the foreword to the U.S. chapter in the book. He will talk to us about the American political scene, focusing on a topic that has been the recent focus of his own work and is of crucial importance to this country, and which happens to tie together the U.S. case studies in this book. That topic is energy.

**Guobin Yang** of Barnard College, whose work on environmental NGOs in China was formative to the analysis of the China chapter of our volume, will examine the importance of the state-centered approach to environmental protection in China and comment about the emergence of a new civic environmentalism in China and its importance to promoting value plurality.

**Richard Franke** of Montclair State University, who provided valuable comments on drafts of our case study of the Kerala fisheries, will draw upon his many years as a scholar of economic development in Kerala to discuss the role of values in environmental politics in India today.

Before I turn to the panel, I have far too many people to express my thanks to, but, first and foremost, my deep appreciation goes to Joel Rosenthal, Eva Becker, Zornitsa Stoyanova, and the many, many others here at the Council who supported the project, and many of the contributors. I see Mary Child in the audience, who was an author on the Japan and China chapters. We are grateful to the National Science Foundation, the U.S.-Japan Foundation, and the Henry Luce Foundation, who provided the support for this project.

There are many, many, many others, including, of course, the authors in this book, who are too far-flung to be with us here today, and the many hundreds of people who opened their doors, as well as their hearts and minds, to our researchers and allowed themselves to be interviewed for this project.

I will now give the floor to Dale Jamieson.

**DALE JAMIESON:** Thank you, Joanne.

I must start by saying that it's my misfortune, or perhaps yours, that I am both a professor and a philosopher. Professors famously really only know how to express themselves in fifty-minute segments. The problem with philosophers is that it takes about fifty years to figure out what to say in a fifty-minute lecture. Although this project went on for a very long time, it didn't go on quite that long. So since I am not sure how much of substance I will be able to say in this period of time, I have chosen, instead, to be edifying. I hope you will find something of value.

Since the dawn of the environmental movement, and before, there have been small voices telling us that the environmental problems that we face are really fundamental problems of the human heart and spirit, that they pivot not on new technologies or the reform of economic or legal systems, but rather on fundamental human values.

To give you just a few examples of this, [Aldo Leopold](#), considered by many to be the patron saint of the American environmental movement, writing in the late 1940s, wrote that he advocated what he called a Land Ethic which would "change the role of Homo sapiens from conqueror of the land community to plain member and citizen of it."

Rachel Carson, whose book [Silent Spring](#) is widely credited with sparking the contemporary environmental movement, wrote that the human race is challenged more than ever before to demonstrate our mastery, not over nature, but of ourselves.

E.F. Schumacher, whose writings were extremely influential in the 1970s, particularly a collection of his essays called *Small Is Beautiful*, talked about the importance of reorienting the economy along lines that he referred to as "Buddhist economics," already engaging the importance of looking cross-culturally at the way that we organize our societies.

More recently, in 1991, at a lecture at UCLA, [Vaclav Hável](#), the Czech poet and first president of the reborn Czech Republic, told his audience that he was coming from a country that "supplies the whole of Europe with a strange export: sulfur dioxide. When I think about what has brought about this terrible state of affairs and encounter on a daily basis obstacles that keep us from taking action to change it, I cannot help concluding that its root causes are less technical and economic in nature than philosophical."

In that lecture, Hável went on to talk about "the arrogance of modern man, who styles himself the master of nature and the world, the only one who understands them, the one whom everything must serve, the one for whom our planet exists."

Part of why I think it's important to remind you of some of these voices, in addition to just the sheer pleasure one takes in reading such eloquent statements, is because these are really not the voices that one hears most often in a discussion of environmental problems. The voices one hears on an everyday basis—and, indeed, these are important voices, too, and they bring important techniques to the table—the voices that are more prevalent speak to us in the language of economics or of engineering, biology, of physics or of chemistry. There are real dangers to framing the environmental problems that we face as technical problems that can only really be expressed and understood in the languages of these disciplines.

One consequence of framing the problems in this way is that ordinary citizens are excluded as responsible agents from this discourse. If the problem is seen as the tragedy of the commons, for example, then there is no question of individual responsibility in producing the problem, because, after all, people are simply behaving as people do; it's a structural problem.

Similarly, when problems are framed in this way, the idea that human agency may be involved in finding solutions to these problems also tends to drop out. When we talk about the possibilities of hydrogen cars or of sequestering carbon, where are people in this story?

Yet these softer voices that I began by referring to, I think, are never really still, even though sometimes they are drowned out. I think that most of us recognize in some way that environmental questions confront us with fundamental challenges to our world views, to our outlook on the world, to our values. But how do we think about values? How do we study them? How do we even know that there is such a thing as values?

Here, part of the problem is that we are the inheritors of intellectual traditions that, throughout much of the 20th century, tried and eventually failed to banish discussion of values from even the human sciences, much less the natural sciences. But there is a relative impoverishment of our discourse, of the languages and methods that we have to study values, that is a consequence of this 20th century intellectual enterprise. As a result, in our attempts to investigate the value theoretic dimensions of problems such as the environmental problems we face, we are left to wander around in the dark in our attempts to shed a little light on these essential questions.

Going back to the first three meetings of Joanne's project, no methodologies to take off the shelf, no vocabularies that are well-worn and true that can be applied to these problems. We don't have the antecedents for thinking about these questions, in the way that we do for so many other questions.

So in a way, I think the correct way, or the best way, or one way of reading this fine book that Joanne and her colleagues have produced is to read it as a report of their walkabout in the world, their investigation, their story, their narrative, their exploration of this terrain of environmental values. The result is not a precise roadmap that answers every question that we might ask about the environmental values of Indians, Americans, the Chinese, or the Japanese. Rather, what it is, is a first approximation. It tells us roughly where the mountains and rivers are, where the dragons may lie in wait for us. It's a little like the map that [Lewis and Clark](#) produced after their first voyage to the West.

But much of the book's power, I think, comes from the fact that although this is conceptually a rough mapping, a rough staking out of the terrain, the book is also chock-full of very particular stories of real people and their experiences of environmental conflict and of environmental degradation. These stories give us the materials to try to go further, to theorize more, to conceptualize in deeper ways, to ask our own questions, and begin to fill in the map. This is really just a way of saying that, in addition to the theorizing that goes on in this book, there is also a very rich archive of data that can be used and explored by people with different interests and predilections.

But what do we say to the skeptic who doubts that environmental questions pose challenges to our values, who sees them as a matter of end-of-pipe regulation or geoengineering climate or something of that sort? I have

already alluded to one response that can be given: We will not fully understand, I claim, the behavior that produces these problems without appreciating the value systems that generated them.

But that's a complicated, difficult, challengeable claim. There is, I think, a simpler and more direct answer to why studying environmental values matters, and it's this: From Benxi City, China, to the Cajun country of Louisiana, environmental problems concern real damages caused to real people, usually the poorest people, usually the most vulnerable people. These actions, these policies, that cause these damages also benefit other people. It's not just present people who suffer these harms, but also future generations, those who are yet unborn. Most difficult to theorize, most difficult to find a vocabulary for appreciating is the fact that these damages, these harms, are also being imposed on the other forms of life with which we share the planet.

When described in this way, this is a paradigm of a moral problem. Moral problems essentially involve harms and damages that some cause to others for their own benefit. The fact that we tend not to see environmental problems in this light is really, in my opinion, a matter of willful denial. Perhaps the most important benefit, I think, of the publication of *Forging Environmentalism*, is that whatever one thinks of the particular cases, whatever one thinks of the theoretical methods that are constructed in this pursuit, it will be more difficult in the future to sustain this willful denial that environmental problems pose fundamental challenges to our values.

Thank you.

**KEITH KLOOR:** I was delighted to be asked to participate in this project because, as an environmental journalist, I have long been fascinated by what I would consider the cultural drivers of environmental issues. As I see it—and I'm not a philosopher; again my orientation is as a journalist—I see ethics shaping culture, I see culture shaping the politics or driving politics, and then I see politics shaping or driving policy. So I am interested in how the environmental issues have been influenced by this process.

I am a magazine journalist primarily, so I try to look at the bigger picture here. I am looking for larger narratives to tell some of these stories that play out.

For me, I guess the environmental narrative that has played out over the last 100 or 150 years has been nature-centric. I think Dale just cited some of the luminaries of this movement and quoted some of the folks that I believe have that nature-centric value. The narrative is not perfect; it's not linear. You could say, let's think back to Teddy Roosevelt and a couple of years before that, when loss of wildlife was really becoming a big issue. That was a big driver there for the wildlife refuges, the parks that were set up—how to manage the forests and the lands for wildlife. So I believe wildlife was one of the first big narratives we saw that played out.

After that, there was the wilderness narrative. For the next twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years, the wilderness movement came to prominence. So this nature-centric narrative went from wildlife to wilderness. Then, along the same lines, you saw concerns of ecosystem. There was a science of ecology that became prominent and started to inform the environmental movement. You had an ecosystem science, then.

By the 1960s and 1970s, you saw endangered species become a prominent theme. By the 1980s, we saw biodiversity become a prominent theme.

This is simplistic, I know. The environmental movement is a lot more complex than that. But I believe that, as we look at what people understand as the larger environmental movement, the popular environmental movement has been very nature-centric.

Where does energy fit into this narrative? It's a driver, certainly, for the two studies in the book that I introduced—for example, [the study of a community outside Tucson, Arizona](#), that was one of the first solar communities, the technology that was coming to light in the 1980s. In that case a sub-theme of the energy issue was sustainable development. The driving impetus behind it was that people wanted to live in a sustainable way, harmoniously with nature.

I have been struggling with where energy fits within this larger narrative of the nature-centric environmental movement. In the 1960s, the contemporary environmental movement burst onto the scene, with concerns over pollution and public health. Today I see the energy issue drawing from both of these themes. It is playing out in the popular culture today in the topic of global warming. Today we're seeing magazine articles with titles like, "The Heat Is On," "Climate Change," "Global Warming Technology Review," "The Oilaholics," "Energy's Future Beyond Carbon," "Cleaning Up Carbon," "The Nuclear Option," "Hopes for Hydrogen," and "Biofuels and Renewables."

The energy issue, I think, is a confounding one for a lot of people. About five or six years ago, one of the stories I worked on was about garbage. It was an explosive issue here in New York, and so I wanted to understand what the politics of garbage were and the policy behind it and who were the communities affected. So I set out to follow

my own garbage from my home in Brooklyn. It was quite a journey. I had a lot of different things going on. The garbage industry here in New York has been long dominated by the mob. So to make it more interesting for our readers, I found an old mob bodyguard, who was a former chauffeur and bodyguard to one of the Mafia families in New Jersey that control the garbage racket there. He got injured from them and he was cast aside. He was disillusioned. He became an environmentalist, of all things. [Laughter]

I had him as my chauffeur. He drove me from Brooklyn. Our first stop for the garbage was where it was actually transferred. It was a community in Williamsburg and Greenpoint, where a lot of transfer stations are. That is when I found out that this was a huge issue for local people. Then we followed the garbage on a tractor-trailer to a community outside of Pennsylvania, where the community was fighting waste management. They were trying to enlarge the size of their dump.

I did this because I really wanted to personalize it. I felt that I could not articulate the importance of this issue without actually trying to say, "Here's the garbage. You put it out to the stoop, but it doesn't necessarily just disappear; it goes somewhere else."

I kind of see the energy issue as similar to that, where we really don't know where our energy comes from. We don't know where the byproducts of it go. Sometime I would like to do a similar type of story on energy, following what happens when I turn on my coffeemaker: Where does the electricity come from? How is it generated? How many of us even know what kind of energy is generating our lights and our electricity and all that?

I think there is a lot of struggle today with the energy issue. You see it over global warming. People just don't know how to relate to it. They understand that it's a big problem, but they can't wrap their minds around it. I think part of the reason is that our focus for so long has been so nature-centric: nature good, pollution bad. We understand nature, we love nature, and that has been sort of the meta-narrative for a lot of environmental journalists and magazines like *Audubon* and *Sierra*. But we can't just get to the energy issue through nature. We have to investigate it some other way. It's not as compelling to people.

One of the communities that I wrote about was victimized by oil fuel waste. But average Americans just say, "Hey, that's a terrible thing. That's bad. But it's not in my backyard." I am hoping that this book is able to help people get beyond that reaction.

But it's tough. As journalists, we mirror what is going on. I look back at *Audubon* magazine over 100 years, and it's like a mirror of society—all the different issues that we have covered and how we have covered them.

Energy is a very vexing, tough issue to get your arms around. I am thinking now of the BP commercials that ran a few years ago. I don't know if people remember them. One of them had a woman out in a field somewhere saying that she was really concerned about global warming, but she loved her car. She was concerned about the environment, but at the same time, she loved her car. She didn't want to make that tradeoff.

I think there is a disconnect right now with energy. We see it in how we treat the issue. The community outside Tucson that I introduced in the book was progressive and affluent. They could had the wherewithal to move to this solar energy-based community. That's great. That's a nice thing. We like to write a lot about that. But there wasn't a lot of ink spilled, I believe, over the communities in Louisiana that had to live with the byproducts of the waste that is produced to fuel our cars and our homes.

This is going to play out for a while. The popular thing now is global warming. That's the big narrative, along with oil. We still don't see a lot about waste.

But we'll see. We will keep doing our job. We will keep writing about it and keep trying to find ways to illuminate it.

Thank you.

**GUOBIN YANG:** Good evening.

First, I would like to thank Joanne for inviting me to this conversation and congratulate Joanne also on producing such a superb piece of scholarship.

The volume has many wonderful things to recommend it. I am particularly struck by the richness and depth of the case studies and the coherence of the overall arguments and the visions. The volume, I think, weaves together a picture of the diversity of environmental values embedded in policies, communities, personal lives, and social practices and conflicts.

I would like to highlight two general arguments or visions. One is **the embeddedness of environmental**

**values.** The authors find no distinct sphere of environmental values that stands apart from other values. Rather, environmental values are embedded in values concerning work, family, community, religion, health, and all these other things.

A striking example is in the Japan chapter. When it was discovered that fish from the Minamata Bay were poisonous because of pollution, local people continued to eat them. It was extremely painful to come to terms with the fact that the sources of their livelihood and communal life had been damaged. It was as if they had lost a part of themselves. They refused to believe it, because doing so would violate their sense of identity and community.

The embeddedness of environmental values suggests that the promotion of a certain set of environmental values has to entail a whole set of other values. For example, to promote environmental protection also entails the promotion of protection of communities, lifestyles, and traditions. The opposite is also true: In a world of increasing dis-embeddedness of the environment, to talk about social and political change must also entail a vision of the environment.

This, I think, is a central message of this book. In other words, to forge environmentalism is really about the forging of society, politics, and culture.

A second important message of the book is **value plurality**. The case studies demonstrate that there is not a uniform set of environmental values within a society or across societies. Rather, environmental values are diverse. Moreover, these diverse values are stratified, they are not equally visible, and they will often be in tension or conflict. Often, the differences in environmental values are tied to other values. In one of [the China cases](#), for example, the values of laid-off workers were in conflict with those underlying the government's environmental campaigns. Government officials in the city of Benxi, one of the case studies in the China chapter, were concerned with the city's international image, but laid-off workers were worried about their immediate livelihoods.

The issue of value plurality raises important questions about social inequality and the politics of recognition and representation. The diversity of values means that policymakers, communities, and citizens have to confront values that are different from their own. How should they face differences? How should these differences be reflected in policies? The volume proposes the following ethical vision:

"In our quest for a solution to the crisis, we need to resist a single narrative. Rather, we need a fusion of horizons where the moral universe of the other becomes less strange."

This is an allusion to a very important argument by the Canadian philosopher, [Charles Taylor](#).

The book also has a political vision. It suggests that if there is no uniform set of values, then it will be crucial to create public spaces for different social groups to articulate their values. The volume shows that for those whose voices are marginalized, the most important instrument is social movements and community mobilization. Of the four country cases, the only cases that do not involve such community mobilization are the China cases. This is very revealing.

I would like to use the rest of my time to reflect on the China cases in light of the two visions of value embeddedness and value plurality.

If we consider the big picture of the intersections of policy, development, environment, and personal lives in contemporary China, and we only have space for two cases, I can't think of better choices than the two cases we already have in the volume. One is about pollution in a traditional industrial city, one of the major industrial towns, actually, in socialist China, in northeast China: Benxi, to be precise. The other case is about nature conservation in Sanjiang Plain. So these are the two case studies.

There are three reasons for the importance of these two cases. First, the cases illustrate remarkably well a new facet of the Chinese state: Namely, the combination of the earlier mode of top-down political campaigns with ongoing institutional reform in response to the new challenges posed by environmental degradation.

By the way, the China cases are both about state-initiated environmental campaigns. The state has a very important role in this. I think this is crucial, because this reflects very well the kinds of important political changes that have been taking place in China over the past decades.

Secondly, the two cases also capture the tensions and conflicts that have accompanied China's market transformation. We see the tensions between the central and local governments, between environment and development, between business enterprises and government officials, between citizens and government, and so on. The cases reveal the human impact of industrial restructuring, by giving voice to laid-off workers and

migrants.

Take the example of tensions between the central and local governments. We tend to speak of the Chinese state, the Chinese government. But this chapter shows extremely well a kind of fragmentation of the Chinese state, that the state is not a homogeneous thing. The chapter shows that the Chinese state is really very much fragmented, in a sense. Thus, the book says, for example, "the central government's environmental policies have been filtered through the local governments' capacity, resources, vision, and interests, as well as their political power and limitation."

The conflicts between the local government and the Sanjiang Nature Reserve, one of the major case studies in northeast China, reflect these kinds of tensions. At one point, when the Nature Reserve Management Bureau and the local government clashed over the digging of drainage ditches in the nature reserve, the Nature Reserve Bureau asked the police to detain the local government's contractors who were digging the ditches, but the local government threatened to obstruct the Nature Reserve Bureau's preservation work, because the bureau is in that location. So there are very dramatic tensions and conflicts between local governments and a branch of the central government. The Nature Reserve Bureau is a branch of a ministerial-level agency in the central government.

Finally, the two cases also illustrate well the fundamental role of the state in environmental policymaking. At the same time, they reveal the limits of citizen participation and resistance. The chapter notes towards the end, though, that while channels for public input are limited, they are increasing, as reflected in the increasing number of environmental complaints that are recorded.

I would like to add a footnote to this point and discuss briefly what I call the rise of a new civic environmentalism in China in the past ten years or so. This civic environmentalism has three components: **a green discourse, a set of practices, and an organizational base**. I will say something very briefly about each, and then I will have a few concluding remarks.

Although the state has been promoting environmental protection through public campaigns, public discourse about the environment is a more recent phenomenon. We see this kind of discourse in various channels, from the mass media to the Internet, the new media. In the official environmental discourse, "sustainable development" is a key term. But it is also a key term in the civic green discourse. They have different meanings, though. The civic environmental discourse differs in its emphasis on public participation, on cultural change, and on political change. While recognizing that environmental problem solving depends on the joint efforts of government, citizens, and NGOs, the civic discourse emphasizes the role of citizens and the importance of developing an NGO culture.

A good example is a speech delivered by an NGO representative from Qinghai province, in the western part of China, at an NGO workshop in Beijing in October 2002. Referring to the central government's ambitious plan to develop the western regions, the speaker argued that in western minority regions such as Qinghai and Tibet, the protection of the biodiversity of the natural environment should be integrated with the protection of cultural diversity, and that local communities should be involved in the decision-making process. This is a good example of the new civic discourse.

This discourse is associated with a set of new practices. These practices include those we find in other country studies in this volume, such as litigation, community organizing, and policy advocacy. In addition, there is a great deal of emphasis on public education, public debate, and public campaigns. There have been many campaigns since the mid-1990s. One of the most famous ones, which is still ongoing, is the campaign against the building of dams on the Nu River. We see a lot of media coverage of this, so I am not going to go into it.

The third element of this civic environmentalism is organizational base, which is, really, the development of environmental NGOs. These organizations have grown in number, are diverse in organizational forms, and are active in a broad range of activities. On the tenth anniversary of the founding of Friends of Nature, which is one of the most influential environmental NGOs, I talked with its president and founder. I asked him, "What do you think was the most important contribution of Friends of Nature in its first ten years?" He said that its most important contribution was its impact on the building of a Chinese civil society, of an organizational base for civic organizing, for community organization. Through its own growth and struggles, Friends of Nature provides a model of voluntary civic organizing in China.

I would like to, as a footnote, say the chapter really shows remarkably well how state-initiated environmental campaigns interact with local communities, local governments. I also want to emphasize this relatively new trend.

In conclusion, I would like to suggest that these two visions—just returning to the beginning points about environmental embeddedness and value plurality—are not confined to environmentalism, but have broader implications for the world today. If there is no uniform set of environmental values, this means that in order to tackle environmental challenges, there must be channels for ordinary citizens, especially those directly exposed to the harms of environmental degradation, to articulate their concerns. How to do that? I think one of the



challenges is to build or reinvigorate the public sphere for public discussion.

Similarly, if there is no distinct sphere of environmental values, this means that environmental changes must always entail changes in other areas of social life, such as politics, culture, and economy. Translated into policy, this means that efforts to improve and protect the environment must go hand in hand with efforts to redress social inequality, alleviate poverty, protect community, and promote cultural diversity.

Embedded environmentalism, therefore, is a plea for systematic change. This, I think, is the most important message of this remarkable volume.

Thank you.

**RICHARD FRANKE:** The phrase issued earlier that the book "pushes our thinking," I think, is very appropriate. So what I would like to do is share with you a little bit about the thinking that I was pushed to do, particularly on the topic of understanding Indian environmentalism.

One of the easiest ways to start is to think about similarities to and differences from the environmental movement here in the United States that probably most of us are familiar with. I think we can see four similarities with the Indian situation:

- First of all, in both countries, we have a generally open, democratic political environment.
- Secondly, both countries have significant scientific establishments, with the knowledge and technical skills to carry out the kinds of research that are required.
- Third, both countries have substantial well-educated segments of their populations that are becoming increasingly concerned with environmental protection.

These three together lead to a kind of fourth similarity that I would say can be summarized by saying that in both countries the situation favors what you might call the science and law approach, which is mentioned several times in the book.

There are also two or three major differences in environmentalism between India and the United States. India actually has a national environmental clearinghouse and research center, the Center for Science and the Environment, which really stands out in its influence, its technical capacities, and so forth. I couldn't find anything quite comparable in the United States—remarkably, we might say. There is no NGO in this country that fills the role that the CSE fills in India. Maybe the combination of the Sierra Club and the Union of Concerned Scientists equals what they are capable of doing there.

On the other hand, India has an enormous disadvantage in the sense that it has a much larger and very impoverished population, despite the recent high growth rates. So in terms of resource management and resource protection, there is an even more overwhelming number of people who really don't have the capacity to make choices to not collect firewood or not go fishing, just because those resources might be endangered. So that constitutes a striking difference.

It also appeared to me, based on the case studies, particularly the Delhi study, that the Indian courts have a lot greater power to enforce laws. But they also share with the situation in the United States a strong tendency of the courts to rule in favor of upper- or middle-class interests if poor people's interests are involved in the case.

As the book points out, India is experiencing—and maybe we could say "as in the United States"—what they call a divergent environmentalism, which pits different interest groups against each other. That tends to interfere with one of the proposals that the book makes, which I thought was very fascinating and important. They say, "The democratic space must include room for communities to forge environmentalism consistent with what they value in their lives." That is, of course, easy to say and very difficult to carry out in practice.

So it raises, for me, the question: What kinds of political institutions or arrangements could best foster forging a non-disjunctive environmentalism? I think we can consider this question both in theory and by looking at a few existing grassroots experiments. I am just going to mention a kind of follow-up to [the Kerala fisheries study](#) that is in the book.

First of all, to think about this theoretically, it's useful to distinguish two general forms of democracy. The one we are most familiar with in the United States, I think, can best be described as "interest-group democracy," which fits in well with representative political institutions. Interest groups fight for control of various amounts of democratic political space, either through elections of other types of activities.

But there is another form of democracy that may lend itself more to solving the kinds of problems that the book

raises. I think this is the form of democracy that has more recently been referred to as "deliberative democracy." There is a whole Web site called [The Real Utopias Web site](#). Erik Olin Wright, sociology professor at the University of Wisconsin, runs this. They are trying to look at examples of where people are working to go beyond interest-group democracy. One of the reasons is that interest-group democracy almost always results in victories of upper- or middle-class groups over poor or disenfranchised groups. That has to do a lot with the very nature of political systems, which I think you can kind of imagine, even if I don't go into it.

Both the Delhi and Kerala case studies in the book illustrate interest-group politics and the benefits that come from it, but also the limitations. But in the Kerala case, there are now signs of movement towards this other form of democracy. I think it has a lot of implications, which I will try to mention just a few of here, briefly.

Kerala is known as sort of a haven for left-wing movements and elected communist governments over the last several decades. But what's interesting to me about Kerala is that Kerala's left wing has been unusually innovative and creative in coming up with new types of ideas, rather than just engaging in class struggle, which is one form of interest-group politics. That's the way they would, perhaps, prefer to describe it.

In the book, and I think here tonight, Joanne mentioned that solutions ultimately must lie with ordinary citizens. Along those lines, from 1996 to 2001, Kerala, under a left-wing ministry, launched what they called the People's Campaign for Decentralized Development. This was a campaign that attempted to mobilize ordinary citizens in assemblies at the village level and to make recommendations, and actually attempt to carry out their own development programs, with grants from the state government, which, instead of giving them down through the line departments, like the Irrigation Department or the Animal Husbandry Department, would simply give a portion of the state budget to every village in the state and say, with very limited restrictions, "Figure out what you want to do and do what you need to do in your community."

One aspect of this is that it generated a tremendous amount of enthusiasm and activity, all kinds of projects. A lot of people became involved. But at another level, it really signals the process of transforming previously class-based and caste-based protest organizations—trade unions, associations of all kinds, workers' organizations, and so forth—from being protest organizations, primarily, trying to win things from the state, to becoming actual actors in carrying out the development of their own communities. This really required them to engage in deliberation. Groups, from the richest to the poorest, met together in assemblies and argued out the different kinds of things that they wanted to have happen.

Along those lines, I think it's significant that a great deal of unexpected environmentalism came out of this period, much of which is now continuing in the present period. I am just going to mention a few of the elements.

First of all, local assemblies that meet on a regular basis and are open to all citizens—not just meetings of elected officials that local people sit and listen to. They innovated by expanding these into development seminars, having locally elected planning task forces that mixed ordinary people with scientists and engineers to design features of their development.

One of the ways in which they tried to minimize the differences between rich and poor, powerful and less powerful, was by emphasizing the development of cooperatives and networks of cooperatives. There is a long history of cooperatives in India that many people can justly be cynical about, but the cooperatives that they set up were organized primarily around microcredit institutions, which had some differences with the famous [Grameen Bank](#) programs and emphasized not just individuals taking loans and then being responsible as part of a group, but groups taking loans and the whole group benefiting, rather than individuals. They found that this allowed them to focus the investments much more effectively.

They also engaged in extensive local resource assessment and environmental planning, with the assistance of trained scientists and a large group of people that I think can best be described as "barefoot geographers"—a little takeoff from the Chinese barefoot doctors—to map out the seas and so forth. But one of the things they tried to do was to bring the different communities together so that the networks of cooperatives would crosscut the different environmental niches. I will just give you one example.

Most women don't go out in the boats, but the wives of fishermen tend to be unemployed, and most of the fishing communities live below even the local Kerala poverty line. Having the women organize microcredit cooperatives to manufacture soap, school equipment, certain kinds of electrical goods, and other things meant that they could begin to take part in the community that also includes the agriculturalists and the local industrial workers. So at least a kind of framework for an alternative form exists. The cooperatives meet every Sunday afternoon. The meetings are public. They are open to anyone, even people who are not in the cooperative. They are right down the street from people's houses. So a constant deliberation is going on.

I think what this illustrates is at least an attempt to do something that the book says—and I agree with them—is a desirable direction to try to move in. This is as follows: Environmental decisions are soundest when they

incorporate the perspectives and knowledge of those whose labor brings them closest to the resources. The extent to which we can figure out how to design structures that will facilitate this process, I think, is one of the extents to which we may be able to solve the environmental crisis that affects all of us.

## Questions and Answers

**QUESTION:** Could you tell us more about the process of getting the data? How did you get it?

**JOANNE BAUER:** We had in-country research teams in each of the countries. We specified some criteria. They chose the cases. The first job was to decide what the case was going to be and then identify the stakeholders surrounding the cases and interview all of those people, and then find the documents. These were in-depth, qualitative interviews with as many people as possible. We had a long list of the various institutions that the researchers should look at.

But this was an evolving process. We had eight meetings of all the research teams. They took place in India; they took place in China; they took place in Japan; several took place here. There were constant readjustment and learning from the other researchers about different methods and what would work. The cases themselves kind of became a heuristic for how they were going to carry out the study.

In short, there were some surveys done, but we believed it was very important to have sustained dialogue with the broadest possible range of stakeholders and then try to analyze and pull from that what was going on in those cases.

**QUESTION:** I would like to hear Dale Jamieson's thoughts on, in the United States today, the relation between ecological economics, sustainability, and environmentalism. Are there strong connections? How did this come about intellectually, briefly? Is this the dominant way of thinking about environmental issues today in this country?

**DALE JAMIESON:** I don't think I can really answer your question. Let me just make one or two brief comments.

One is that ecological economics as a movement is still a relatively marginal movement within economics and intellectual life, in general. It's interesting, provocative work—vanguard work, you might say—but it's not, anytime soon, going to provide a new paradigm for how to think about issues where economics and the environment come together.

Sustainability at this point is, in my opinion, a relatively empty concept. Being in favor of sustainability is like waving the flag. It means you are with one gang and against another gang. There is a point to doing that. But the challenge is to provide meaningful content to that concept.

The last thing I will say is that I think the greatest challenge, when you think about environmental values in America, is something that in a recent paper I have called an American paradox, which involves a contrast between the United States and Europe. The contrast is this: In the United States, as in Europe, survey data will show that most people are willing to fly the flag of sustainability. But the difference is that when it comes to almost any substantive issue that involves tradeoffs, Americans are unwilling to make them and Europeans aren't.

That, to me, is the site where the most interesting thinking is about where values policy and national differences come together.

**QUESTION:** My question is about energy. We all know that oil prices have really increased quite a lot in the past few months or the last few years. Energy is really a fact in the environment, increasing the pollution. I know everybody is searching for alternative energy, like solar in Tucson, Arizona, or other kinds of alternatives.

Comparing nuclear energy, is it comparatively cleaner than oil? Also we know there are damaging issues, like Chernobyl and Three Mile Island.

How do we juggle the different energy and growth issues and the war in Iraq—all this complexity?

**KEITH KLOOR:** The energy issue, I agree, is really complex. There are a couple of things driving it. One is the obvious one, every day. There's the price of gas. So we have an increase in hurricanes in the last few years, spiking gas prices, and you have this sort of perfect storm where you have the war in Iraq, and instability in the Middle East. Supposedly, we are in this age of peak oil, where we're getting to the point where we're running out of fossil fuels, although there is a lot of argument to counter that. So you have all these factors coming together. And then you have global warming, which is the biggie hanging over everything.

But they don't all track together. We have a hard time, even when we cover it at Audubon; it's really hard to disentangle all these issues. And it's cyclical. When was the last time energy really popped up? In the early-

to-mid-1970s, and then again in the late 1970s, with the two energy crises. That's when it became big. That's when we had the last innovation in alternative energy and wind and solar.

The solar-powered village in Tucson which is in the book was really an outgrowth of the last big energy crisis. That was it; we had to face it. There was no getting around it.

But I still argue that the impetus for people to get behind this is really to try to live more harmoniously with nature. The sustainability issue is there, too, but I agree with Dale that it's a happy buzzword. It doesn't really mean a whole lot. That has been around now for a while. So it's driven by the politics. It's driven by the economics and the political situation today.

Gas prices have started to come down in the last few months. Don't be surprised if all of a sudden we don't feel this sense of urgency. If gas stays above \$3.00 a gallon for another couple of years, I think there will be a drive to do something about it, for very pragmatic reasons. It will be forced, possibly, by political changes, the political winds changing in Washington.

Global warming? It's coming and going. I save these *Time* magazine covers. There was a *Time* cover a couple of years ago, showing a boiled egg in a frying pan. They did another special issue on it. I don't know. I don't see it reaching a critical mass yet. Al Gore's movie is very popular. We did a big profile in *Audubon* magazine. But the cause and effect of global warming is so far out and so complex, in many people's minds, that unless there is something that even scientists say isn't really related—and that would be more hurricane activity—I think, paradoxically, that would force people to act, although it's debatable whether that's actually related to climate change.

I don't know if that answers it, but there is a lot going on.

**QUESTION:** The way you have framed the panel title, I'm assuming that the authors do believe that cultural values, in fact, can save the environment. But I'm wondering where the authors, based on their own work and their reading of the book as a whole, lay their greatest hope of finding a model where cultural values, in fact, can do such hard work.

**DALE JAMIESON:** I would like to take the opportunity to register my agreement with much that Professor Yang said about the idea of values being entwined with other values. The problem here is that there aren't any obvious levers. What there is, is a lot of stuff that is bound together, and if you ignore one of the strands, then it's very hard to make change.

Just as an example of that, let's talk about this business of reducing the use of fossil fuels. Often, there's an extremely unproductive discussion that is very easy to get into, where some people say, "It's very important for us to change our values about consumption so that we reduce our use," and so on and so forth, and other people say, "No, no. What we need are energy taxes. Forget these values about conservation and so on."

But what's obvious is that you don't really get energy taxes without people having some value change. Part of why—Keith is exactly right—we are not going to get significant reductions in the use of oil in the United States is that, in order to do that, you have to have predictable, steady increases in price. That's what changes behavior, not this sort of ricocheting behavior. That's too much like dieting or something. But the only way you get that is when we as a society say that what we want to do is to become less reliant on fossil fuels. Because once we have those values, then, we will not punish politicians who put in place a new set of incentives.

So I don't think you can just take people to the equivalent of green Sunday school, or whatever the appropriate religious analogy is, and change their values and then that will change their behavior and change societies. Nor do I think you can pummel people into changing their values by hitting them over the head with social policies. You need each strand of this to go together in a very careful way. That's part of what is so frustrating about both studying these issues and trying to make change.

**JOANNE BAUER:** We have time for one more question.

**QUESTION:** I'm curious why you think sustainability is an empty phrase. My work has been involved with indigenous people in various countries, and it seems to me that sustainability is self-interest. In other words, you protect this forest so that you can continue to cut from it, or you work on sustainable fishing so that you can continue to earn your livelihood. So it seems to me that it was a very direct connection. You two see something quite different, and I don't understand.

**KEITH KLOOR:** Your point is well-taken. Perhaps I was being a little flip. I agree with you; there are some real concrete examples of sustainability happening.

But I'm thinking more generally of the culture at large. I just think it's really very cursory. I saw a *Newsweek* cover a couple of weeks ago, "The New Green Generation." I don't see anything happening in a way that is really changing people's values towards the environment, changing behavior. I still think that we are essentially pretty selfish; in a sense, we are not really considering how to live in a sustainable way. There are things happening at the margins. There is a lot of talk about carbon footprints now and offsetting the carbon reductions. But that's not going to stop anybody from jetting around. They may donate thirty dollars to offset the carbon reductions by planting a tree. But I don't necessarily see it happening on a real fundamental basis.

There has been a lot of talk about sustainability. I think the definition of it changes. Someone else can speak to this, but I actually haven't been able to keep it straight—what sustainable development is and what sustainability is.

**GUOBIN YANG:** I think I read somewhere that there are more than forty definitions of sustainable development. In the case of China, it has been a slogan that has been used by diverse groups, with very different interests. The government, obviously, has been promoting this as a very important part of economic development. The new slogan is "Sustainable Development." But then the empty part of this is that the business corporations are now also waving this flag. "We are doing sustainable development," they say for instance, when building dams and so on.

But for the NGOs, for the grassroots organizations, in China, which have relatively limited political space for organizational development, this slogan is very important. It's an international slogan. It has global appeal. The government is promoting this rhetoric. Therefore, for many of these organizations, sustainable development is a very powerful, empowering rhetoric for justifying their own actions.

**RICHARD FRANKE:** I would like to speak up for the concept of sustainability. There may be lots of definitions. There are lots of definitions of everything out there. But that doesn't make it all worthless.

The essential definition that comes from the [Brundtland Report](#), which I think is still there, says it is: "the ability to live well in a way that does not compromise the ability of future generations to live well." That's what it is. I will give you two examples of how it works out in an operational way.

- In farming, the developing field of permaculture, which is depending a great deal upon discoveries made by indigenous cultures that we are now rediscovering - learning how to plant corn, beans, and melons the way the Iroquois did, for example, farming without loss of soil fertility - this can be done. It's technically possible. The concept of sustainability leads us to try to do it that way.
- In the area of energy, we try to figure out ways to produce and use energy without harmful side effects. Those can also be operationalized and turned into scientific research projects and public campaigns.

So I think, not only in China, but here in the United States, sustainability offers us a lot to think about.

**DALE JAMIESON:** Just very quickly, I don't want to enter the argument, except to point out that the discussion has shifted from sustainability to sustainable development. Already, that shows how large the wobbles are in the concept.

But the main point I want to make is this (and this is just kind of a deep conceptual thing to think about): The notion of sustainability is fundamentally, in some sense, a conservative concept. It's about maintaining something. I think the greatest challenge that we face is how to cope with change. I think that's the greatest challenge in two respects:

One is, if you look at this in a long-term way, almost everything that we think of as being valuable about human societies and cultures has actually occurred in a relatively unusual, surprisingly stable period in earth's history. In fact, through most of the history of earth, the planet has been much more dynamic and natural changes have been much greater than they have been in this relatively short period of human history. If this experiment that humanity is on is going to continue, we can't be shocked by and unprepared for the odd hurricane, whether it's caused by global warming or whether it's caused by nature.

So that's one thing. We have to do better at coping with natural change.

Secondly, the great lesson of the 20th century is, of course, that humanity is now a huge motor of global change. We are not at all prepared to cope with that motor, as well.

That is not an argument against sustainability, exactly, as a concept. But it is to say, in addition to thinking about sustaining things, we also have to start learning how to be nimble in coping with change, both natural change and change that is caused by humanity. I think, to some extent, we need new concepts and a new language for thinking about those problems.

**QUESTION:** Wouldn't it be better to plan for change?

**DALE JAMIESON:** What a novel idea. Have you thought about writing a letter to Washington?

**JOANNE BAUER:** Thank you to Dale, Keith, Guobin, and Richard. Thanks for all your great questions.

Copyright © 2012 Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs