

Carrying Forward the Legacy of Dr. Cobb and Composing a New Global Symphony of Ecological Civilization: A Review of the Grand Commemorative Gathering Honoring “Eco-Sage” Dr. John B. Cobb, Jr. on the First Anniversary of His Passing

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Abstract: This review recounts the global online gathering honoring the life and legacy of John B. Cobb, Jr. on the first anniversary of his passing. Co-hosted by the Center for Process Studies and the Institute for Postmodern Development of China, the event brought together scholars, practitioners, and students from around the world to remember Dr. Cobb’s life, interpret his process-relational and ecological vision, and recommit to the work of building an ecological civilization. The article highlights Cobb’s continuing influence in China, his cross-cultural legacy, and the global community carrying his thought forward.

Keywords: *John B. Cobb, Jr.; ecological civilization; process philosophy; constructive postmodernism; China; cross-cultural dialogue*

Across the Pacific, from dusk in Claremont to dawn in Beijing, longing in the Eastern and Western hemispheres was woven into a single thread. As the twilight of Pacific Time February 7, 2026 spread over Claremont, the morning light of Beijing Time February 8 had already caressed the land of China. More than a hundred colleagues in the fields of process thought and constructive postmodern philosophy gathered online for a virtual commemorative meeting themed “Trusting Life” to mourn the first anniversary of the

passing of "Eco-Sage" Dr. John B. Cobb, Jr. The memorial meeting was co-hosted by the Center for Process Studies (CPS) and the Institute for Postmodern Development of China (IPDC). Dr. Andrew Schwartz, Executive Director of the Center for Process Studies, and Dr. Meijun Fan, Program Director of the Institute for Postmodern Development of China, jointly presided over this significant commemorative event.

From the moment of silent mourning at the opening to the message of new life at the end, from the in-depth review of his thoughts to the enthusiastic sharing of practices, from the intergenerational spiritual resonance to the cross-cultural integration of wisdom, this commemorative meeting, structured around seven sessions and anchored in longing and inheritance, outlined the ideological radiance and spiritual height of Dr. Cobb's life, and further united the colleagues' firm belief in carrying on his mission and forging ahead toward the future of ecological civilization.

Born in 1925, Dr. Cobb devoted his century-long life to the study of Alfred North Whitehead's process philosophy and his lifelong efforts toward the advocacy of ecological civilization. He integrated Western process thinking with the wisdom of Eastern culture, lighting a beacon of thought for humanity to break free from the predicament of modernity. The Chinese civilization has long held the tradition that "Honoring the deceased and remembering the past deepens people's moral integrity." This remembrance is not only a tribute to a giant of thought, but also a reflection on the common future of humanity, allowing Dr. Cobb's wisdom to shine more brightly in the integration of Eastern and Western cultures.

Opening & Moment of Silence

Silent mourning is the most sincere longing, a spiritual resonance transcending mountains and seas, and it aligns with the Confucian reverence that "In offering sacrifices, one should be as if the deceased were present, and as if the gods were present." It allowed every participant to have a dialogue with Dr. Cobb across time and space in their hearts. At that moment, the wind of the Pacific blended with the clouds of China. People of different languages and skin colors all felt a heartfelt sorrow for the same name and a shared conviction for the same belief.

Subsequently, Dr. Mary Elizabeth Moore, President of the Cobb Institute, and Professor Liu Xiaoting, Head of Beijing Center for Process Studies at Beijing Normal University and former Editor-in-Chief of *Studies in Dialectics of Nature*, opened the sharing with "Why We Gather." In a few words, they expressed the original intention of

this gathering. As a disciple of Dr. Cobb and a representative of Chinese process philosophy research respectively, they interpreted the significance of this commemorative meeting from Western and Eastern perspectives: to mourn a giant of thought who dedicated his life to process philosophy and the ecological cause, to inherit a constructive postmodern thinking that resolves the predicament of modernity, and to unite a global community with the goal of ecological civilization. Their speeches, like a spring breeze, dispersed the barriers of time and space, making more than a hundred colleagues deeply aware that this gathering is not only a remembrance, but also a rallying; not only a look back, but also a new start. This is a vivid embodiment of the "community spirit" advocated by Dr. Cobb, as stated in *The Great Unity* from *The Book of Rites*: "When the great way prevails, the world is shared by all." Bound by common ideals and pursuits, like-minded people are connected no matter how far apart they are.

A Life of Thought and Practice

The speech by Dr. Jay McDaniel, Chair of the Board of the Center for Process Studies, set the intellectual tone for the entire meeting. From the perspective of Whitehead's process philosophy, he condensed Dr. Cobb's spiritual legacy into six "lures for feeling", explaining to participants why Cobb's thoughts transcend time and space and become an eternal spiritual guide. Dr. McDaniel said frankly that it might be more appropriate to understand Dr. Cobb's passing as "passing forward." For he never truly belonged to the past; he "passed forward" into people's hearts and memories, and even came to us from the future, summoning later generations to move forward with the possibilities he had turned into reality. These six lures are the essence of Dr. Cobb's life of thought and practice, and even more the precious spiritual wealth he left to humanity.

1. To be curious about the whole of the world, and not to compartmentalize our knowledge into self-contained domains, and to aspire to be "organic intellectuals." He urged people to view the world from the perspective of the interconnection and interdependence of all things, regarding biology, psychology, ecology, economics and many other fields as an organic whole, and breaking the shackles of the disciplinary division of learning in modernity.

2. To be inspired by the grand dream of ecological civilization, calling on humanity to respect and care for one another, and more importantly, to care for the entire community of life. This is the cross-cultural extension of the Confucian thought of "benevolence", extending from "loving people" to "loving all things," and making the spirit of benevolence

that "One who wishes to establish himself should help others establish themselves; one who wishes to achieve himself should help others achieve themselves" the core value of ecological civilization.

3. To recognize ourselves as persons-in-community, and reject isolated individualism. He believed that communities spread outward like ripples, extending to the entire Earth Community. This is in line with the Mohist idea of "Universal love and mutual benefit," making people deeply aware that an individual's destiny is always closely linked with the destinies of others, with nature, and with heaven and earth.

4. To believe that all things possess spirit, breaking the illusion of "lifeless matter" or "meaningless existence," and pointing out that the universe is filled with *qi*—a core concept originating from Chinese Daoism. It integrates facts and values, allowing people to discover beauty in the vitality of all things, even in the face of tragedy. This is precisely the Western expression of the view of life in the *I Ching* that "The great virtue of heaven and earth is to give birth to all things," urging people to revere the intrinsic value of all things.

5. To practice kindness in daily life and live a simple, unpretentious life, replacing artificially created desires and greed with genuine needs. This aligns with the Daoist wisdom of "Embrace simplicity and purity, reduce selfish desires," as well as the Confucian way of self-cultivation that "A gentleman does not seek excessive comfort in food and lodging." With his own life as a model, Dr. Cobb interpreted that simplicity is both dignity and freedom.

6. To center our lives on love, believing that the universe is enfolded in a deeper love, living by faith, and embracing every life with tender care. This is the integration of the Buddhist spirit of "Compassion for all beings and delivering them from suffering" and the Western thought of universal fraternity, making love the spiritual bond that connects all things and builds communities.

Dr. McDaniel's interpretation is like a key that unlocks the door to understanding Cobb's thoughts, making the participants deeply aware that Dr. Cobb's thoughts are not an isolated Western philosophical theory, but the common wisdom of humanity that is deeply integrated with the wisdom of Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism in the East. This has also laid a profound cultural foundation for the dissemination and practice of his thoughts in China.

The speech by Professor Yang Fubin, a renowned expert on Whitehead studies and Chief Editor of *The Complete Works of Whitehead*, further interpreted the great value of Dr. Cobb from the perspective of academic inheritance. As the third-generation inheritor

of Whitehead's process philosophy, Dr. Cobb's life was one of devoting himself to academic research and passing on the intellectual torch, and more importantly, one of caring for the world and fulfilling his mission. Professor Yang Fubin pointed out that in today's world, the uninterrupted inheritance of Whitehead's process philosophy research, the constructive postmodern thought becoming an important resource for reflecting on modernity, and China's ecological civilization construction obtaining a solid philosophical foundation, all benefit from Dr. Cobb's pioneering efforts and perseverance. He devoted his life to closely linking philosophical wisdom with the destiny of humanity, and used the power of thought to light a beacon for humanity to resolve the ecological crisis.

Professor Yang quoted Whitehead's view in *On Immortality*: "Every actual entity that comes into being in the universe merges its value into the entire cosmic organism, becoming material for the universe's creative advance," profoundly interpreting the true meaning of Cobb's "immortality." True immortality does not lie in the length of life, but in the depth of thought, the breadth of value, and whether the spiritual wealth left to human civilization can nourish future generations forever. Although Dr. Cobb has passed away, his thoughts have long become an important part of the universe's creative advance and the spiritual foundation for humanity to move toward ecological civilization. This immortality is the most appropriate annotation for the "Eco-Sage," just as stated in Zuo Zhuan: "The highest achievement is to cultivate virtue, the next is to render meritorious service, and the third is to leave behind wise words. These three achievements endure for all time, and this is what is meant by immortality." Dr. Cobb achieved true immortality through cultivating virtue, rendering meritorious service and leaving behind wise words.

Personal Remembrances and Testimonies

The session of Personal Remembrances and Testimonies brought Dr. Cobb's image from the palace of thought to vivid life. The sharing by Dr. Andrew Schwartz, Executive Director of the Center for Process Studies, Ms. Yan Xiaoxia, Founder of Beijing Whitehead Kindergarten, and Professor Yang Li of Harbin Normal University, told of Dr. Cobb's personal charm and the practical power of his thoughts through personal experiences, making the longing concrete and warm. Among them, Professor Yang Li took her connection with process philosophy and Dr. Cobb as the clue, showing how Cobb's thoughts moved from theory to practice, how they changed a person's way of thinking, and even the educational practice of a group. Professor Yang Li's bond with Whitehead's philosophy began with an academic report by Dr. Zhihe Wang in 2007, and behind this

bond was Dr. Cobb's persistent efforts to uphold and quietly inherit Whitehead's philosophy in an era when it was not recognized.

In 2013, Professor Yang Li met Dr. Cobb for the first time in Claremont, and this encounter became an important turning point in her academic career and educational practice, making her deeply feel the importance of Whitehead's philosophy and educational thought for Chinese education. Since then, Professor Yang Li has led her graduate students in the "Evening Reading of Whitehead" for more than nine years, integrating process-relational thinking into curriculum and teaching research. Since 2010, she and her graduate students have never missed the 18 Process Summer Academies in China, making Whitehead's thought their "insightful eyes" to see the world. She quoted Cobb's judgment in *Why Whitehead?*: "The world needs a certain kind of synthetic thinking. Whitehead comes closest to providing the kind of synthetic insight universally needed." Moreover, with Cobb's pursuit that "My greatest interest lies in the application of this thought," she integrated process philosophy into her graduate students' theses and works, turning abstract philosophical thought into an effective tool to solve China's educational problems. Professor Yang Li's sharing let the participants see the strong vitality of Cobb's thoughts. The best way to remember a great sage is to turn his thoughts into power to change the world, and this is exactly what Dr. Cobb most hoped to see.

Cobb's Relevance for Our Time

The session of Cobb's Relevance for Our Time, which highlighted the contemporary value of Cobb's thoughts, featured speeches by Dr. Mary Evelyn Tucker, Dr. John Grim, Professors at the Yale School of the Environment and two leading figures in the global discussion of Confucian ecological wisdom, Mr. Li Wenliang, winner of the "Cobb Common Good Award" and President of Dongguan Getwell Co., and Ms. Yu Siquan, a new farmer and ecological writer. From the two dimensions of cross-cultural dialogue and local practice, they interpreted the contemporary and global significance of Dr. Cobb's thoughts, and especially highlighted their deep alignment with Chinese culture and China's ecological civilization construction.

The speech by Dr. Tucker and Dr. Grim revealed the origin of Dr. Cobb's cross-cultural vision. Born in Kobe, Japan in 1925, Dr. Cobb spent his teenage years immersed in East Asian culture. The racial discrimination in the American South deeply troubled him, while the inclusiveness and wisdom of East Asian culture earned his admiration. This early experience became the starting point of his cross-cultural dialogue.

The academic dialogues he co-chaired with Masao Abe, a great Zen master of the Kyoto School in Japan, became a model of cross-cultural communication, pioneering a new direction of open communication, patient listening, in-depth learning and mutual transformation, and laying the foundation for the formation of the field of cross-cultural spiritual dialogue. Cobb's cross-cultural exploration eventually took deep root in China. His sincere understanding of Chinese culture and philosophy enabled him to work with colleagues such as Dr. Zhihe Wang and Dr. Meijun Fan to promote the creative transformation of traditional Chinese culture and the construction of ecological civilization, and assist China in establishing more than 30 process and constructive postmodern centers. Tucker and Grim compared Cobb's influence on China to that of John Dewey, who promoted pragmatism in China in the early 20th century. This evaluation appropriately highlighted the profound significance of Dr. Cobb for the Chinese ideological and practical circles. Dr. Cobb's thoughts have formed a deep resonance with China's ongoing ecological civilization construction, and his emphasis on reflecting on modernity is exactly the inherent demand for China to break through the unsustainable development model and pursue the harmonious coexistence of humans and nature.

If the speech by Dr. Tucker and Dr. Grim demonstrated the cross-cultural value of Cobb's thoughts, Mr. Li Wenliang's sharing let the participants see the vivid practice of Cobb's thoughts in China's local ecological enterprises. When Mr. Li Wenliang first met Dr. Cobb in Shenzhen in 2018, Cobb's words—"Out of over two hundred countries worldwide, only China has proposed ecological civilization. The hope for ecological civilization lies in China"—took root in his heart like a seed. In 2024, after listening to Mr. Li Wenliang's practice report on Getwell's "51-25-24 Equity Scheme of Harmony between Heaven, Earth and Humanity," the centenarian Dr. Cobb called it a "gift for my centennial birthday." This recognition is a great affirmation of China's local ecological practice. The "Harmony between Heaven, Earth and Humanity" ecological enterprise governance model promoted by Mr. Li Wenliang is exactly a feasible path for enterprise ecological transformation by integrating Cobb's ecological civilization thought with the traditional Chinese wisdom of "Unity of man and nature." As the climate crisis intensifies day by day, Cobb's call that "Humanity must shift from the self-destructive path of industrial civilization to ecological civilization" is deafening. The practice of Chinese enterprises is confirming his judgment and fulfilling his dream.

He Lai, Vice President of the Jilin Provincial Federation of Social Sciences and a senior professor at Jilin University, and Dr. Attila Grandpierre, a Hungarian expert in ecological civilization studies and Research President of the Budapest Centre for Long-Term Sustainability in Hungary, together with fellow scholars, commemorated Cobb's lifelong academic dedication and exemplary personal character. He Lai said that he was invited by Dr. Zhihe Wang and Meijun Fan to visit the Center for Process Studies, Claremont, and was lucky to meet Dr. Cobb, and he has deeply missed him for more than 20 years. In his view, Dr. Cobb is a philosopher who achieved a high unity of personal conduct and academic pursuit, which reminded him of Feuerbach's view that true philosophy is not only about writing books and expounding theories, but also about shaping the person who expounds them. From his interactions with Dr. Cobb and his academic works, he gained extremely important enlightenment. Seeing numerous scholars participate in the meeting and his thoughts spread widely around the world and form an important intellectual trend, Professor He Lai believed that Dr. Cobb's thoughts and personal demeanor will continue to influence people's beliefs and also have a profound impact on China's development.

Dr. Attila Grandpierre pointed out that Dr. Cobb's lifework has been animated by a singular focus: addressing humanity's most urgent challenges by preserving and healing the world upon which all life depends. Central to his vision is the recognition that living beings are feeling, acting beings—and that human identity is thoroughly interdependent with all life and with Nature as a whole. To grasp this interdependence, he insists, we must understand life as a force present everywhere, including in us. It is not merely what makes us alive; it is what heals our sicknesses and injuries, what drives evolution toward ever more complex forms, and what finally flowers into love and thought. This force—with which we can seek to align ourselves—is the process that gives living beings life and enriches it; it is sacred. The greatest power in the world, he teaches, is the power that comes from faith in Life and the ideas this faith inspires. One and the same factor in the Universe produces and sustains life wherever it occurs, encouraging in humanity the widest possible extension of concern to all living beings. If by "world" we mean the encompassing meaningful order, then Life itself is the creator of that world—not only purposeful in itself, but the source of all derivative purposes in living things. Because what makes for life, love and hope is not simply the decision of any individual, but a Spirit that moves us all, the Spirit of Life remains at work in ever new and unforeseeable ways, countering and circumventing the obstacles humanity places in its path. At the planetary level, the *raison d'être* of

humanity—and of every person—is to contribute to enriching the web of life with novel, unique and unchangeable values.

Trusting Life: A Shared Moment of Silence and Response

Different voices, the same longing, made the emotions of this commemorative meeting more intense. The session of Trusting Life: A Shared Moment of Silence and Response pushed the emotions of the meeting to a climax. Dr. Andrew Schwartz read an excerpt from Dr. Cobb's *Ten Ideas for Saving the Earth*: "I believe that inspiration within and beneath the creativity of the universe is divine. We humans have the unique responsibility to protect one another and the rest of the natural world. We are beckoned by God to be caretakers of nature." Dr. Fan Meijun, Program Director of the Institute for Postmodern Development of China and Dean of the Cobb Ecological Academy, read a classic sentence from *Five Foundations for an Ecological Civilization*: "The need is to move beyond preoccupations with my calling to our calling as creatures among creatures on a small planet...With the courage to challenge modern ways of thinking today, there is hope for humanity tomorrow." These words are the exhortations Dr. Cobb left to humanity, his faith in life and his expectations for the future. The subsequent shared moment of silence allowed every participant to have a dialogue with Dr. Cobb in their hearts, with their own inner selves, and with the entire community of life. As the melody of Passing Light, a piece co-created by Dr. Meijun Fan and AI, flowed, the life of Dr. Cobb, who was like a stream of light illuminating humanity's ecological path, emerged in the hearts of the participants. And this light will surely be passed on by countless ecological practitioners, shining together and spreading across the world.

Carrying Forward the Torch

The session of carrying Forward the Torch is the spiritual core of this commemorative meeting. The impassioned speeches by Professor Guo Haipeng, Director of the Center for Whitehead Studies at Beijing Normal-Hong Kong Baptist University (BNBU), Ms. Ding Shasha, Secretary-General of the Luoyang Cobb Workstation, and Dr. Liu Wei, President of the Hebei Psychological Counselors Association, accepted the ideological torch passed on by Dr. Cobb and made a promise to move forward. Professor Guo Haipeng delivered an affectionate speech titled "From Commemoration to Continuation: Whitehead, Cobb, and the Work Ahead." He said that the best way to remember Professor Cobb is to carry on his legacy, advance his cause, and do things that would bring him comfort. He shared

the progress of the Center for Whitehead Studies. In 2025, with the strong support from all parties, significant progress was made in the translation, compilation and publication of *The Complete Works of Whitehead*. Several volumes have been published, and the remaining volumes are progressing in an orderly manner. The publication of this complete collection will provide a more solid and comprehensive textual foundation for a systematic and in-depth understanding of Whitehead's thought, and help the Chinese academic community participate in global philosophical dialogue. In addition, 2025 marked the 100th anniversary of the publication of Whitehead's seminal work *Science and the Modern World*. To commemorate this occasion, the center, in cooperation with the Center for Process Studies in the United States, successfully held an international academic symposium titled "Science and the Postmodern World: A Centennial Review of Whitehead's Vision and Intellectual Legacy." Scholars from China and the United States transcended the boundaries of time and space to jointly review the century-old wisdom of this philosophical giant, explore the enlightenment of his philosophy for contemporary ecological civilization, and let classical thought regain vitality in the current context. With the approach of the 14th International Whitehead Conference, this ideological journey will continue to extend, writing a philosophical chapter for the future between inheritance and innovation.

As a representative of practitioners, Ms. Ding Shasha shared her exploration of bringing Cobb's thoughts from the study to public life. As the Secretary-General of the Luoyang Cobb Workstation and also responsible for the practice of the Songshan Global Geopark Research & Study Museum and the Longmen Aquarium, she deeply understands that museums and aquariums are not only places for displaying knowledge, but also stages for disseminating ecological civilization. She proposed to transform the venues from "information disseminators" into "platforms for consciousness connection and action catalysis", making philosophy perceptible and turning the community of life from abstract academic language into a heartfelt embodied experience. Transforming traditional knowledge display into relational and process narratives, making every visit an immersive dialogue about symbiosis, responsibility and hope.

Dr. Liu Wei, President of the Hebei Psychological Counselors Association, fondly recalled Cobb's enlightenment for his career—integrating Western psychology with the traditional Chinese classic *The I Ching*. This enlightenment opened a new realm for his research, allowing him to take a path of Sino-Western integrated psychological services in practice and forge ahead in exploring the "organic healing with Chinese characteristics."

Dr. Liu Wei affectionately talked about the purple magnolia in Cobb's courtyard and his life attitude of "dancing with nature", and frankly said that "spring has never left"—he expressed his longing for Cobb with poetic language, moving everyone present.

Passing the Torch, Carrying on the Legacy with New Vigor

The closing session of Acknowledgments and Farewell was the end of longing and the beginning of hope. The acknowledgements by Dr. Bruce Hanson, Vice President of the Institute for Postmodern Development of China (IPDC), and Dr. Zhihe Wang, Executive Director of (IPDC), made the participants feel the warmth and strength of this commemorative meeting. The most touching moment was the speech by Chen Jirong, a high school student. This young girl from Beijing No.11 High School came into contact with Whitehead's academic thought and Cobb's ideas at the 18th Process Summer Academy held at Zhejiang Normal University in 2025, thus opening a completely new perspective to see the world. She frankly said that Cobb's constructive postmodern thought taught her to view the world from a holistic and connected perspective, bid farewell to one-sided thinking, integrate different disciplines, and gain a deeper understanding of building a harmonious and sustainable society. Under the guidance of process philosophy, she has improved her ability to solve problems in practice and hopes to take philosophy as her research direction in university in the future, contributing to humanity's solution to ecological problems. The speech of this young scholar let the participants see the future of Cobb's thoughts, and also made people firmly believe that Cobb's cause will surely have successors.

Finally, Dr. Zhihe Wang reaffirmed the value of Cobb's thoughts. For him one of Dr. Cobb's greatest contributions is that he helped build a process community, a constructive postmodern community and an ecological civilization community on a global scale, and "mutual fulfillment and helping others fulfill their goodness" is the code of this community. Dr. Cobb practiced organic language throughout his life: "Speak warm words, nourishing words, responsible words and constructive words." And his words are exactly a reflection of his inner vision and great pattern. In conclusion, "Process philosophy makes you wise; ecological civilization brings you happiness. Let us join hands, inherit the intellectual legacy of Cobb, and strive for the creation of a global ecological civilization." With the Chinese New Year wish of "May success come at once," Dr. Wang brought this commemorative meeting to a successful close.

Yang Lidi, born in 1981, is currently a lecturer at the School of Marxism, Xi'an Technological University. Her research interests include traditional Chinese culture, process philosophy, and Marxist philosophy, etc.