

# ***Moral Business in the Future***

A Presentation for

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By

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Good morning ladies and gentlemen. It is a pleasure to be with you this morning and to join your discussion of the emergence of future business enterprises in China that (to quote your organizing brochure) “honor the triple responsibilities: profits, social morals, and environmental responsibility. That is my theme as well: what is the prescription for moral business in the future.

To begin to answer that question, I will be talking about three massive changes that set the stage for moral business behavior: 1) the new ethics of the next few decades, 2) the miracle of growth in China and the problems it entails and 3) the scientific and technological backdrop for businesses and society. Considering all of these, a picture will emerge for a moral business behavior.

Why these three themes? First, imagine this: If we could plot the status of science and technology as an index, beginning near zero in deep antiquity of civilization 30,000 years ago, rising slowly, and oscillating with good ideas and bad. Beginning in the 17th century, the curve slowly begins to swoop upward, and then accelerates with Newton, Mendel, Darwin, LaPlace, Freud, Einstein, and Watson and Crick. Despite the false starts and the wrong ideas (alchemy, phrenology, phlogiston, for example), science, and technology as we know it are very recent: perhaps one percent (300 years out of 30,000) of the time we call civilized. This momentum, this rapid ascent of achievement, will continue, I think and has to be a backdrop for all planning. For better or worse it will

define the worlds in which our children, their children, and all the others to follow will surely find themselves.

The second theme: growth of the Chinese economy and the problems it engenders, is familiar enough to all of you: a miracle of growth with many side effects from pollution to a growing poverty gap. It too can be represented by a curve accelerating upward plotting both the economic gains and the downside of those gains.

There is third plot of moral achievement. This curve begins at the dawn of civilization itself and is based on a set of rules about acceptable behavior. When civilization began 30,000 years ago, some forms of morality began then as well. There are also names on this chart: Aristotle, Moses, Christ, Mohammad, Kant, Gandhi. But their ideas did not extinguish the fog of atavism and egocentricity that the instinct of the jungle provided to us.

The future of a moral Chinese business environment lies in the mashing of these three curves; they set the stage for what “moral business” will mean in the next few decades.

We know that values change over time; oscillating with what we see today as desirable or undesirable experiments and fads. For better or worse the values of our fathers have been replaced with modernism. What drives such value changes? Many forces: technology (witness the effects of birth control pills on sexual behavior); cyclicity (what fathers like, sons will abhor); the conflict between science and religion; the media; politics; and demographics (an aging society), to name a few.

The Millennium Project of the American Council for the United Nations University recently performed a study of emerging ethics. It was designed to identify the key ethical issues of the next 50 years and the key solution principles which might be applied to solve these and other issues, principles like the golden rule which appears in almost all religions of the world. In this study there were 300 participants from Europe, Latin

America, North America, Asia, Middle East, Africa; they were academics, consultants, NGO's, government, and from the corporate world.

First of all, in the two round Delphi, participants were asked to identify key future ethical issues. The response was almost overwhelming; we received over 1300 suggestions. The issues centered on birth and death, around religion and its influence, around science, scientists and their responsibilities, around business and its responsibilities. Here are some examples:

- *Is it right to allow organizations to pollute if they pay a fee?*
- *Is it right to intervene when a country is endangering people?*
- *What are the ethical ways to develop artificial intelligence?*
- *Should religions give up claims of superiority?*
- *Should scientists be responsible for consequences of their work?*
- *Should international intervention stop violence against women?*
- *Should we clone ourselves, make “designer babies,” recreate extinct species, alter genetic lines?*
- *Should a person be constrained for propensity to crime?*
- *Is it ethical to extend lifespan, no matter what the cost?*
- *Do demands of collective intelligence outweigh those of individual identity?*
- *Is information pollution a crime?*

The two extreme views express by two different participants are captured in the following quotes. One person said:

- *The traditional nucleus of society- the family- will disappear; the concept of offspring will disappear, the human being will be seen as a couple of chemical reactions inside a bag. Birth and death will not be the basic points of life but singularities of machines. The machine society in which the human being is just another machine, that is the ethics of the future; no ethics at all as we see it today; no*

*values at all as we see them today. Good and bad will have no meaning for the future generations.*

And another:

- *I think that humanity will be better every year, will be more opened and compassionate, with great science and technology achievements in its favor and in favor of the planet. ... That process is gradual; but the difficult thing will be to detect and support populations that suffer religious and ideological oppressors, whose tendency to grow is evident now in Latin-America and Africa, disguised very well in pseudo-democratic postulates.*

Out of this mix come some perceptions about what decision principles should drive ethical decisions; these are: protection of the family; responsibility; protection of the future; security; protection of the planet; freedom; justice; and compassion.

Now let's look at the march of science. The rate of acceleration is itself accelerating. The pace quickens because new inventions and discoveries built on what has been learned before, an exponential, positive feedback process. An improved past leads to new platforms: for example software developers today take 100 GB hard drives for granted. The computer industry is now a trillion industry; hence more R&D funds.

Acceleration also results from synergy among disciplines- what is learned in one field sparks new insight in another. Genetics: biosciences, microscopy, computers, data processing, imaging, physiology, materials sciences are all cross feeding. There are synergies among metallurgy, chemistry, computers, data processing, microscopy, and genetics. Embryology benefits from knowledge of cellular development and differentiation in genetics. Information storage learns from the gene as an information storage device. Such cross-disciplinary jumps used to happen before, but not to the extent that they do now or will in the future.

Acceleration of science and technology also comes from new instrumentation, examples are: the scanning tunneling microscope, rapid DNA sequencer, high energy collision machines, cooperative computers pursuing a common problem (e.g. SETI); the Hubble orbital telescope reaching out to the edges of creation, the super-cooled IR orbiting observatory that looks through dust. Today with massive storage of errorless data, nothing is forgotten. Communications are high speed; information- through Internet is universally available.

Collaboration takes place at a distance; large scale scientific projects transcend national borders; technology flows much more freely around the world. Standards have been established so a plug made in one country fits a socket from another.

Where are we now on the roadmap to the future? Knowledge of genetics leads to disease cures, increased intelligence; and the development of new bio weapons and- who knows? The genetic basis for mental disease and behavior (IQ, learning, homosexuality, aggression, criminality, alcoholism); understanding development and differentiation; individualized medicine; aging control ; human selection; augmentation of mental and physical capacity; biological weapons; pathogen countermeasures; and revival of old species.

The billions of synapses in the human brain are being mapped now as well; neuro-anatomy is well on the path to understanding not only where certain kinds of thought occur- the new phrenology- but the mechanisms of thought itself. “The Allen Institute of Brain Science seeks to combine genomics with neuro-anatomy by creating gene expression maps for the brain.” And from these threads: human- computer symbiosis, the possibility of human to human transfer: synapse interconnect; methods to improve collective intelligence; thought-control technology. Research has already been proposed to build laboratory mice with 100% human brain cells.

Some scientists see trans-humanism as a natural consequence of these activities, shortly down the road. “Trans-humanism is an emergent philosophy favoring the use of science

and technology, especially neuro-technology, biotechnology, and nanotechnology to overcome human limitations and improve the human condition.” It encompasses genetic selection –choosing characteristics of progeny; performance improvement –temporary or permanent, mental or physical, and within performance improvement, extensive anti-ageing and delaying of death.

We talk of the possibility of atomic scale assembly machines that can copy themselves and produce a billion more machines in a year, each born with the memory of the machines that went before

While we have this massive push forward, this accelerating acceleration, we also have unsolved problems of our global society. Where are rational energy systems, medical treatment for poor people, the solutions to climate change, means for preserving biological and cultural diversity, techniques for anticipating natural disasters and improving water availability? Where are the social psychological means for dealing with prejudice? Where are the techniques for avoiding the worst of unanticipated side effects of our decisions: the diminished ability to tell what is real, the compromises to privacy, loss of biodiversity, the threats of Internet (e.g. publishing information on drugs and dangerous technologies)?

Is regulation the answer? When the Millennium Project asked this question of managers of science, most felt that organizations designed to regulate the course of S&T would inevitably fail to keep pace and that such commissions cannot be virtually free from corruption. Yet, they also told us that they believed that science disciplines cannot effectively self-regulate. So, in the end, science- we believe- without global ethics can lead to disasters.

Business without ethics can also lead to disaster; in China, economic development is accelerating using the benefits of science and technology, and is accelerating as science does. This growth is leading into richer but much degraded future. Pan Yue of the

ministry of the environment says these problems will soon overwhelm the country.<sup>1</sup>  
China's GDP growth is the marvel of the world- 9.5 percent per year, yet according to Pan Yue:

- *To produce goods (of a given) worth we need seven times more resources than Japan, nearly six times more than the United States and, perhaps most embarrassing, nearly three times more than India. Things can't, nor should they be allowed to go on like that....raw materials are scarce, our population is constantly growing,...habitable and usable land has been halved over the past 50 years, ...the environment can no longer keep pace, acid rain is falling on one third of the Chinese territory, half of the water in our seven largest rivers is completely useless, while one fourth of our citizens do not have access to clean drinking water. One third of the urban population is breathing polluted air, and less than 20 percent of the trash in cities is treated and processed in an environmentally sustainable manner. Finally, five of the ten most polluted cities worldwide are in China.*

In short, growth without ethics can lead to disasters.

These then are the special charges for businesses in China: guide science toward a desirable future, achieve economic goals with care, and make decisions with moral integrity.

What principles can guide decisions for business? From our study of ethics:

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<sup>1</sup> Interview in Der Spiegel, March 7, 2005.  
<http://service.spiegel.de/cache/international/spiegel/0,1518,345694,00.html>

- *Do no harm*
- *Be fair*
- *Show tolerance*
- *Serve society*
- *Mitigate suffering*
- *Enhance human survival  
(educate)*
- *Care for future generations*
- *Treat customers and other  
organizations the way the you  
would like to be treated*
- *Serve as a standard for other  
businesses*

China has a tradition of wisdom and it has much to teach other countries of the world. It will take conscious effort to introduce such notions into business but if your country can do this- perhaps through mechanisms such as China 500- it can lead the world not only in economic matters, but in peace, justice, and inspired decision making.