

Editorial

## Humanity and Sustainability

Shu-Kun Lin

MDPI AG, Postfach, CH-4005 Basel, Switzerland; E-Mail: lin@mdpi.com;

Website: <http://www.mdpi.org/lin/>

Received: 2 September 2011 / Accepted: 12 September 2011 / Published: 16 September 2011

---

So far our open access publishing company MDPI (Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute) has published mainly science, medicine and technology journals. To become a multidisciplinary publisher, we launched the journal *Sustainability* [1]. More recently, we started to run several social science journals, including *Societies* [2], *Religions* [3], *Administrative Sciences* [4] and *Behavioral Sciences* [5]. Today we published the first paper [6] of the inaugural issue of *Humanities* (ISSN 2076-0787). This will be an international open access journal, publishing scholarly papers of high quality across all humanities disciplines.

As a publisher, I would like to publish journals surrounding the topics of sustainability and I believe the humanities as a discipline of academic studies are very important. As a scientist, I believed science and technology will only benefit human beings. I was raised in a small village, living a very primitive life in a peasant family: no electricity, no machines, of course no TV and no refrigerator. Now, the life of my children is completely different. Even my own life has completely changed. I have witnessed very rapid changes: more and more machines are used to consume mineral resources and energy and to pollute the environment, in order to produce more and more powerful machines (we are also launching a journal titled *Machines*, in which the relationship between Man and machine should be an interesting topic.). Machines are more and more like human individuals consuming resources themselves (we are launching a journal titled *Resources*).

What is the very human condition for us to preserve so that human beings' existence is sustained? What features are the most important for a human to be labeled as rich, successful or highly respectable? Regarding consumption and possession, is it *material* (for example, a man or a family or a country is the owner of isolated precious metals such as a large pile of gold bars, or the owner of many houses and cars) or alternatively *information* (for example someone has a lot of knowledge, or has watched many movies where the amount can be measured by number of bits, or know-how, *etc.*), or both? There are some other human traits which might find difficult to be quantitatively assessed by weights (for material) or bits (information); these characteristics of human beings as an intelligent animal are probably spirituality or morality, *etc.* It is said that humanities studies do not apply

quantitative scientific methods. I wonder if degree of beauty, degree of honesty, degree of heroism, etc., can be defined or not.

Probably what is most important to the sustainability of human beings is virtues (heroism, altruism, honesty, frugality, etc.) and traditions. I watched the American movie *Witness* several times [7] from which I learnt that the Amish communities are allowed to preserve their Ordnung and live their own traditional life, tolerated by other communities and protected by the government. For another example, Anson Burlingame (1820–1870), an American, might be regarded as one of the most respectable figures in the history of the modern world: his great diplomatic work for the Chinese Qing Empire (or Manchu Dynasty, 1644–1912) perhaps has prevented China from becoming divided colonies of Western powers.

While research, development and production of *material* objects in our industrial systems depend on resource exploitation, humanities studies and practice themselves may not necessarily need any significant amount of material resources. Humanities studies deal almost exclusively with *information*. A typical intellectual (including scientists) of my previous generations in China must learn many humanities subjects, for example, the four arts of the Chinese scholar *qin* (music), *qi* (strategic board game), *shu* (calligraphy) and *hua* (painting), and five Confucian virtues *ren* (charity), *yi* (justice), *li* (courtesy), *zhi* (wisdom), *xin* (sincerity). A typical scholar in an Eastern Asian country (China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam and perhaps other countries) in the early days learn and use *wenyanwen* (Classical Chinese or sometimes called Literary Chinese), similarly to how Latin was studied and used by scholars in many Western countries before. If we, the people, give up all humanities studies and practices, individuals will become more or less machines. Humanities study and practice do not destroy our ecological system and the practices, if resumed or widely continued, are themselves the very sustainability of human tradition and identity.

With rapid globalization and the increasingly widespread availability of the Internet, the time is now ideal to publish the journal *Humanities* in open access format.

Enjoy publishing with us.

## References and Notes

1. *Sustainability* journal homepage: <http://www.mdpi.com/journal/sustainabilities/>.
2. *Societies* journal homepage: <http://www.mdpi.com/journal/societies/>.
3. *Religions* journal homepage: <http://www.mdpi.com/journal/religions/>.
4. *Administrative Sciences* journal homepage: <http://www.mdpi.com/journal/admsci/>.
5. Behavioral Sciences journal homepage: <http://www.mdpi.com/journal/behavsci/>.
6. Bednarik, R. The origins of human modernity. *Humanities* **2011**, *1*, 1-53.
7. See: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Witness\\_\(1985\\_film\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Witness_(1985_film)).

© 2011 by the authors; licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>).