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Opening Comments for conference on ecological civilization

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I would like to welcome you to this conference on behalf of Yale University, in particular the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies and the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology.

Our School of Environmental Studies is seeking solutions to environmental problems across the disciplines of science, policy, economics, industrial ecology, communications, and most critically values and ethics. We are aware that environmental problems require interdisciplinary cooperation, and thus we are delighted to participate in the rich variety of perspectives on display at this conference. We are particularly grateful to the Pulitzer Center and the School of Communications for their partnership with Yale in this enterprise. Indeed, our Dean, Sir Peter Crane, sends his special greetings to this gathering. He is eager to have this partnership continue beyond our discussions today.

When my teachers Theodore deBary and Thomas Berry came to China together in 1948-1949, no one could have imagined the changes we see here today. We are all keen to understand more fully the challenges China is facing in terms of economic development and environmental protection. These are not easy to reconcile. Indeed, the international community has been seeking answers since the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992 set forth a framework for sustainable development. The world is ever more in need of an "integral ecology" that brings together a fresh understanding that people and the planet are part of one interdependent life community. Such an integral ecology affirms the cooperation of science and ethics, knowing that our problems will not be solved without both.

Today's meeting, then, represents a new period of this cooperation. In the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology we have been working for two decades with hundreds of scholars to identify the cultural and religious grounds for a more diverse environmental ethics for the flourishing of the Earth community. Between 1995-2004 we organized ten conferences at Harvard and published ten volumes to examine how the world's religions can contribute to a sustainable future.

In this same spirit, the traditions of China (Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism) will be explored today, building on the work of academics, environmentalists, policy makers, journalists, and film makers across China and the US and UK. These diverse perspectives are needed in China, but also are a valuable part of global discussions on ecological ethics.

Central to these global discussions is the Pope's Encyclical on the Environment. In two days the world will awaken to a clarion call from Pope Francis to address our environmental and climate

problems from within this broader cooperative framework of integral ecology. The Pope's Encyclical will illustrate that the moral values of Christianity (and all the world's religious traditions) are now in dialogue with ecology. Science and policy alone can't solve these problems. Instead, we will need the cosmologies and ethics of the world's religions. That is the premise of this conference. Clearly China has unique historical and contemporary perspectives from Chinese religious traditions to offer this dialogue.

For example, Confucianism contributes to an integration of Heaven, Earth and human, Daoism evokes a sense of the microcosm of one's body being part of the macrocosm of the universe, and Buddhism deepens our understanding of interdependence of humans and all life systems. These cosmologies or world views have direct implications for the ethics of how we live our lives in relation to nature and other humans. That is what our academic colleagues are exploring in Chinese texts and traditions while our film maker and journalist colleagues are now documenting this "integral ecology" on the ground. This blend of ideas and practice will be a new creative ground for creating ecological civilization in China and beyond. We look forward to hearing the panels and seeing the films that illustrate this so richly.