

**The Social Process:
Life is economic, political and cultural**

Open up China Daily any given day and one is greeted by a view of the social process. A new trade agreement between China, Japan, and South Korea (economic) is inked. The order and organizing of China's (*hutou*) registration to make urban and countryside living equitable (political) is an urgent need. Providing clear elements of a China Dream for affirming the country's new global prominence (cultural) is the call of the hour. It goes on.

To be human is to be inescapably involved in matters of survival and sustenance (economic), ordering chaos (political), and celebrating the journey from birth to death (cultural). This three, together with all the particular processes that make them up, create the whole system we call society, or the social process.

The Social Process triangle is an attempt by the Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA) to define a historical standing point for its work and the need for a comprehensive descriptive and analytical tool to illuminate the workings of society. Along with many ICA members since the 70s, we work and tweak the model.

The triangle is a metaphor, a map, not territory. Choosing the triangle rather than the circle (a comparison with the three elements of the *taiji* - yin, yang, and the center waits for articulation) as a process is to delineate three distinct parts that relates to each other systemically.

A malfunction in any part reverberates on the whole. An effective functioning on one part is

also reflected on an equilibrated functioning of the whole! If there is no basic balance abiding between the three major processes, the whole process suffers from a destructive imbalance.

Society rest on these three dynamics, each important in itself but each relate to the other as a crucial part of the whole system of society.

In our time, we notice a young generation solely intent in joining the economic middle class: an income from secure employment, a paid for car and a house mortgage, and the means to take a family on vacation to Hainan, or *Dongjing*. Other considerations are off the table as all efforts go into passing exams for a certificate or a diploma to be marketable in the workplace.

Add the increasing fragmentation of *Zhongguo* into regional and ethnic divisions, special urban causes and countryside issues, a governmental rhetoric that values pluralism of causes and cultures, and the sense of the wholeness of society, what is common to all, gets lost in the shuffle.

Western philosophy has long gravitated around the triumvirate of "Me, We, and Thee" - the individual (psychology and art), society (history and sociology), and the beloved mystery of life (philosophy and religion).

We might make a case for the East's triumvirate to be "I, We, and Tao", with the "We" as the locus of practical considerations. That, for the moment, is in the field of trade and commerce, industry and social economy, to the detriment of individual human awareness and the intuitive and contemplative *Tao* wisdom of the "Way Life Is".

Thus, it seems important to re-image society again in such a way as to emphasize its wholeness, its systemic interrelatedness, and the necessity of balance between its functions.

The three basic dynamics of society - economic, political and cultural - are based on three basic drives found in all humans and all societies.

The first is the drive for survival. Self-preservation is the most basic in all of life, and its sustenance in existence is everyone's daily preoccupation. This drive is that-without-which there can be no other aspect of life.

The second is the drive for order, to organize society through consensus by law and its enforcements (often in the form of a social contract, or a legal constitution), and consent to be governed by others. Individual freedom and security with justice for all defines the political dimension of life since the 17th century.

The third is the drive for meaning that brings significance to communal survival and order, the economic and political dimensions of society.

This is expressed in the symbols of human consciousness, of records and artifacts, dances and songs, rites and rituals, the beat of the drum over the journey from birth to death.

There is a dynamic tension between survival and communal order, the economic and the political. Access to resource, production and distribution is weighed against the welfare of all. Cultural value referees the play.

We exist, ergo, we play!
Life is economic, political and cultural.