

Press Release

[[Time : October 26 & 27, 2007]]

[[Place: The Sun City International Conference Center of Peking]]

[[Host : Center for International Business Ethics, and the Center for Applied Ethics Chinese Academy of Social Sciences]]

Topic: U Consumer Rights and Corporate Responsibility

As the two major driving forces of the market economy, enterprises and consumers co-exist interdependently, yet juxtaposed to one another.

In the past thirty years, the global market structure has changed drastically. A crucial change is the inevitable shift of power between these two entities: from enterprises to customers. This trend has become increasingly obvious since the new age of globalization.

Economic globalization and information digitalization drive this change. For corporations, this means more market opportunities and more intense market competition. For customers, it means better choices, more convenient information channels, and stronger power of discourse.

The academic field focuses on Corporate Social Responsibility as a compelling research subject. However most research has mainly focused on two aspects: how to strengthen the company's external administrative supervision and how to optimize the organization's internal management structure. As an academic institution dedicated to researching business ethics and its practice, CIBE has found that furthering corporate social responsibility can neither totally rely on the government's laws and regulations, nor corporations' self-discipline. The simple reason is that consumers express deep concern for corporate social responsibility because of their vested interest in this matter. Satisfying customers is no doubt the core of corporate social responsibility. From a broad and global perspective, the concept of customers has become synonymous with citizens or even human-beings. Therefore, consumer rights constitute an important component of human rights.

The constant development of the market economy is the crucial element for China to consolidate and expand the achievements of economic reform. Meanwhile, full implementation of the scientific concept of development and building a harmonious society are the main themes to promote social progress in China today. In a market economy, consumers' health and safety conditions (not only materially but also psychologically) serve as important indicators to the degree of civilization and social harmony. Moreover the implementation of sustainable business development, with customers' rights and interests at its core, will be a powerful tool for enterprises to enhance customer value and gain competitive advantage.

With the strengthening of consumers' purchasing abilities, the broadening of their choices , and the enhancement of their information and knowledge processing capability, consumers' primary concerns have been not only product quality and price but increasingly a greater concern for the

company's managing philosophy, production process, and leadership value systems. All of these concerns serve as criteria in purchasing decisions. Whether a company has the hope of crossing the boundary into the new economic era depends on its ability to adjust to consumers' new value judgments and criteria and implement the right moral principles in operation and production. Correspondingly, with a globalized and hyper-competitive economic era characterized by standardized product quality, the maxim that "everything comes from the customers' needs" should not be the corporation's superficial public relations message. Companies should extend consumer rights to a more profound level with the consumers' well-being as their primary concern by establishing a sustainable and harmonious relationship with each stakeholder, instead of merely aiming to "achieve profitability by satisfying customers."

From the initiation of the Center for International Business Ethics (CIBE), we have received support from many institutions, such as the Association for International Business Ethics, Hong Kong (AIBE), the Peking University Press, and the Markkula Center for Applied Ethics, Santa Clara University, USA (MCAE). We are glad to get to know many cherishing the same ideals, including our co-organizer, the Research Institute of Applied Ethics, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing (CASS), the Stillman School of Business, Seton Hall University, USA, the Macau Center for Business Ethics (MCBE), the LIBA Business School of India, the Institute for the Renewal of Chinese Traditional Culture, Beijing, the Corporate Governance Research Center, Nan Kai University, the European China Center for Leadership and Responsibility (ECCLAR), and the Center for Research of Economics, Management, and Arts (CREMA), Switzerland.

The demands of consumers determines the level of enterprises' responsiveness. A company's social responsibility is determined by how customers recognize their rights and interests, and how they propose them. In other words, where there are no enlightened customers, there are no socially responsible companies.

That's why the theme of this international business ethics conference is "consumer rights and corporate responsibility." Bearing consumer rights in mind, our objective is to promote production by consuming, promote responsibility by proposing consumer rights, and in essence carry on the advancement of the corporation's social responsibility.

We are honored to have invited renowned scholars, government officials, leaders of NGO's and corporate managers from many countries around the world. During the conference, we will carry out profound analysis of and extensive discussions about the theme of "consumer rights and corporate social responsibility" from different perspectives, including organizational development, social development, business management, consumer trends, product safety, and international trade. As we know, females have a dominant role in defending consumer rights and purchasing decisions. So we include the topic of "female and consumption" in the two-day agenda, with a proposal from the Green Consumption Alliance Corporation and the participation of the Women's Network for a Sustainable Future (WNSF).

Finally, we sincerely hope that this conference can provide those who care about consumer

rights, company restructuring, and social harmony with positive inspirations from a new and more profound perspective.