

Enlightenment of John Keats's Ecological Viewpoints to Modern Society

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Keywords: John Keats; ecological viewpoints; enlightenment; modern society; ecological civilization

Abstract: With the deterioration of ecological crisis in the process of human civilization, ecological problems have been paid close attention to all over the world. All the results show that ecological construction is urgent. In his short life, Keats wrote many poems containing ecological thoughts, as well as letters expressing his views on human and nature. Keats's ecological viewpoints reflected in his poems and letters are summarized into three points: human is part of nature; returning to nature; coexistence of human and nature. Inspired from these three points, three enlightenments to modern society are drawn as follows: firstly, establishing concept of green ecological civilization, abandoning action of destroying nature blindly in pursuit of interests; secondly, upholding ecological future view and constructing ecological civilization with a long-term perspective so as to leave a good natural environment for descendants; thirdly, cherishing an ecological global view and protecting ecological environment from the standpoint of all mankind around the world to build a beautiful earth for humans. Based on Marxist ecological views, President Xi Jinping of China has put forward a new concept of development for China, which includes "green" development to solve environmental problems. Keats's ecological viewpoints has certain reference value to the construction of ecological civilization for China today as well.

1. Introduction

Ecological environment problem is a major problem faced by all countries in the world, the global shortage of resources and ecological crisis are posing a serious threat to the survival and development of human beings. However, to solve environmental problems, it is necessary to fundamentally change the concept of human beings. Keats had begun to practice his ideas of ecological themes more than a hundred years ago. The ecological concern in his ecological viewpoints has long-term enlightenment and positive influences on the following studies which cannot be underestimated.

Most scholars applied theory and method of Ecological criticism for studying Keats's ecological viewpoints, and though studies of Keats's ecological viewpoints have been abundant and in depth, there are two limitations. The first is that most scholars just relied on Keats's poems while neglecting the fact that Keats's correspondence is an important research source. The second is that few scholars associated ecological viewpoints of this English Romanticism poet with the construction of ecological civilization nowadays. Li Zhihua had studied the cultural enlightenment of Wordsworth's poems to the construction of ecological civilization and beautiful China, but for John Keats, similar domestic research in China is still in a blank^[1]. Keats's ecological view is worth studying today for two reasons. First of all, ecological construction is urgent. Secondly, Keats's ecological viewpoints is in line with the new era of China. Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC), President Xi Jinping has put forward a series of new ideas, new strategies and new measures on the construction of ecological civilization, thus forming China President Xi Jinping's thought on ecological civilization. Therefore, the study of Keats's ecological

viewpoints is in line with the requirements of the new era of China.

2. Keats's Ecological Viewpoints

The 19th century Romanticism poets were all concerned about nature. Among them, John Keats was the most representative one who had a firm viewpoints towards nature, so his ecological viewpoints had drawn great attention from scholars. For example, HaoYajie has examined Keats's ecological ideas, discussed on Keats's opinions towards the relationship between human and nature [2]. Based on his poems and letters, Keats's ecological viewpoints can generally be summarized into three main points.

2.1 Human is a part of nature

Keats thought that human is a part of nature rather than separated from each other. In other words, human's life which is a process from birth, growth and finally to death should be conformed to the rules of nature. In the poem "The Human Seasons", process of human's life was compared to four seasons of nature by Keats, which gave a full play of the theory that human is an integral part of nature. In the poem, as a part of nature, human being had to go through four similar seasons in their lives: a man in his juvenile stage was naïve and full of fantasies as "He has his lusty Spring, when fancy clear / takes in all beauty with an easy span"^[3]; when he grew up as a young man, he was passionate to pursue what he wanted and "dreaming high" with the one he loved just like the enthusiasm of summer; and in his middle age, as Keats wrote:

His soul has in its Autumn, when his wings;
He furleth close; contented so to look
On mists in idleness—to let fair things
Pass by unheeded as a threshold brook.^[3]

He became much more peaceable and was no longer as impulsive as he used to be; finally, in his agedness, as "He has his Winter too of pale misfeature"^[3], his white hair could tell what he experienced and the life was going to an end. One can conclude from this poem that human being's life follows the same rule as the reincarnation of nature, it just proves that human is a part of nature.

"The Human Seasons" conveyed Keats's thought that human and nature followed the same rule. Keats wrote in this poem: "Four seasons fill the measure of the year; / There are four seasons in the mind of man:"^[3]. He associated human's mind with four seasons in nature. When man had "fancy clear" in his mind, it just liked spring; man's "summer" in his mind when he was passionate and had "honed cud"; in "autumn" he "furleth close"; and "he has his winter too of pale misfeature". It can be concluded from this poem that human is as a product of nature, the fluctuation of his mood had the same rhythm with the change of seasons, which also illustrated that Keats sees human as a part of nature.

Keats's ecological viewpoint of regarding human is a part of nature can also be revealed in his poem, "To Autumn"^[3], in which Keats depicted a scene of plant maturity and abundant harvest of autumn. At the beginning of this poem, Keats depicted natural scenery of autumn, and used "seasons of mists" as the "painting's" background, "with fruit the vines", "to bend with apples the moss' d cottage-tree", "to swell the gourd", "plump the hazel shells" and the busy "bees" constituted a harmonious picture. Human was the protagonist in the second part. Keats portrayed the delight and satisfaction of reaper to make a harvest picture of human-centered. Keats put human—a mortal life—into lively nature and depicted a harmonious picture in order to convey the thought that human is a part of nature and his desire for living in beautiful nature.

2.2 Returning to nature

Keats advocated returning to nature, and hated to live in city. One of his sonnet, "To One Who Has Been Long in City Pent," reflected his thought. In this sonnet, Keats compared himself to "the one who has been long in city pent", it is clear that the time living in a big city was really harsh for him. The word "pent" has a meaning of being trapped in some place, in other words, the city was a kind of "cage" for Keats. So from this, it can be found that Keats was a person who loved nature and the

wish of Keats to return to nature was very strong.

His longing for returning to nature can also be found in his letters. In his letter, "To Benjamin Bailey, 18, 22 July 1818," he wrote:

"I should not have consented to myself these four Months tramping in the highlands but that I thought it would give me more experience, rub off more Prejudice, use [me] to more hardship, identify finer scenes, load me with grander Mountains, and strengthen more my reach in Poetry, than would stopping at home among books even though I should reach Homer...The first Mountains I saw, though not as large as some I have since seen, weighed very solemnly upon me. The effect is wearing away, yet I like them mainly."^[4]

Keats thought it was better to stuck himself in mountains than stay at home among books because he could get more inspirations in nature. People lived in city would never know the beauty of nature and feel the solemn of nature as Keats felt when he saw the mountains, because the industrial civilization had made city been polluted with a huge smoke hung over on it, so the beauty of nature was luxurious for the people lived in the city. As a poet, only returned to nature could he write so many poems with ecological thoughts.

His desire of returning to nature and contacting with nature was fully reflected in his "Sleep, and Poetry", which portrayed a legendary fairyland and the kingdom of the gods of flowers. In this poem, he wrote:

"Taste their pure fountains. First the realm I'll pass
Of Flora, and old Pan: sleep in the grass,
Feed upon apples red, and strawberries,
And choose each pleasure that my fancy sees;
Catch the white-handed nymphs in shady places,
To woo sweet kisses from averted faces, -
Play with their fingers, touch their shoulders white
Into a pretty shrinking with a bite"^[3]

In his imaginary world, or we can say in his dream, he wanted to "sleep in the grass" and taste apples and strawberries, and catch "the white-handed nymphs". In his dream, it was an ideal world with green plants seen everywhere, cute animals and beautiful nymphs. As far as he was concerned, it was the nature that endowed him with all kinds of glorious things. So his desire to return to nature and get in touch with nature that reflected in his poetry was so strong.

2.3 Coexistence of human and nature

After Industrial Revolution, human beings' activities have been destroying the beauty and harmony of nature. Keats thought human and nature coexisted, in other words, only in a harmonious and quiet natural environment could human beings live a healthy and happy life or human would get sick. At that period, the industrial civilization destroyed environment of city, and also, human being themselves. In his letter to John Taylor, 5th September 1819, he wrote:

"And if this sort of atmosphere is a mitigation to the energies of a strong man, how much more must it injure a weak one—unoccupied—unexercised. For what is the cause of so many men maintaining a good taste in Cities but occupation. An idle man, a man who is not sensitively alive to self interest in a city cannot continue long in good Health."^[4]

In the letter, Keats persuaded Taylor to live in a place with fresh air. It is clear that Keats thought air in city was harmful to people's health, but fresh air in rural area was not. It can be concluded from these lines that Keats considered that not only human and nature followed the same rules but also had the same fate, people would benefit from good natural environment, otherwise people would get sick if he lived in a harsh environment. These lines of the letter showed viewpoint of coexistence of human and nature, that human's healthy life relies on the balanced nature.

In his work, Keats also expressed his anger to the fact that human destroyed the balance of nature. In his "Robin Hood. To A friend", he wrote:

"She would weep, and he would craze:
He would swear, for all his oaks,

Fall' n beneath the dockyard strokes,
 Have rotted on the briny seas;
 She would weep that her wild bees
 Sang not to her—strange! that honey
 Can't be got without hard money!"^[3]

This poem showed that industrial revolution had led to prosperity of transportation and shipbuilding industries. A large scale of old-grown forest had been cut down to meet the market demand for wood. As a result, Robin Hood and his friends had lost their homes, and even animals in the forest had lost their shelters. The story depicted in the poem had fully reflected the relation of coexistence between human and nature, which verified Keats's ecological viewpoint. With progress of human society, the world was changing all the time, but the relation of coexistence would never change, so human beings had made themselves in a dangerous situation of losing their home after they had broken up the balance of nature.

The coexistence of human and nature in harmony was also reflected in Keats's letters. The benefit that the poet had received from nature was not only material but also spiritual. In Keats's letter to J. H. Reynolds, 21st September 1819, he wrote:

"How beautiful the season is now, how fine the air, a temperate sharpness about it. Really, without joking, chaste weather, Dian skies. I never lik' d stubble fields so much as now—Aye, better than the chilly green of the spring. Somehow a stubble plain looks warm—in the same way that some pictures look warm—this struck me so much in my Sunday's walk that I composed upon it."^[4]

The beauty of nature made Keats in a good mood, and at the same time also gave him spiritual inspiration. He wrote "To Autumn" after that day. From these lines, it can be seen the dependent relation between human and nature and the integration and mutual assistance between human and natural wisdom which also verified Keats's ecological viewpoint of coexistence of human and nature.

3. Enlightenment of Keats's Ecological Viewpoints to Modern Society

Keats believed that human was a part of nature, he emphasized that the fate of man and nature relates closely, and that man should stay in harmony with nature. Marx and Engels thought that although man can understand and remold nature to some degree, the exertion of their initiative should be limited, and man should always revere nature and follow the laws of nature. President Xi Jinping has inherited this idea, pointing out that "Building an ecological civilization is vital to sustain the Chinese nation's development. We must realize that lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets and act on this understanding, implement our fundamental national policy of conserving resources and protecting the environment, and cherish the environment as we cherish our own lives."^[5]

3.1 Establishing concept of green ecological civilization to build beautiful living environment

First of all, it is necessary to build the concept of green ecological civilization. At present, traditional development model that characterized by large amount of consumption of resources and energy and serious pollution of environment has been difficult to sustain. Relying solely on technical means cannot avoid deterioration of environment essentially. Establishment of concept of green ecological civilization of "life community" is necessary for man to change way of thinking and build ecological civilization. As President Xi Jinping of China said in his report at the 19th CPC National Congress on October 18, 2017, "Man and nature form a community of life; we, as human beings, must respect nature, follow its ways, and protect it. Only by observing the laws of nature can mankind avoid costly blunders in its exploitation. Any harm we inflict on nature will eventually return to haunt us....The modernization that we pursue is one characterized by harmonious coexistence between man and nature."^[5] Man should adhere to the idea of harmonious symbiosis between human and nature, speed up construction of ecological civilization while developing economy so that human beings can enjoy not only abundant materials but also beauty of green waters and mountains.

3.2 Upholding ecological future view and to leave a good natural environment for descendants

Keats believed that human and nature were in a community of destiny. When nature was destroyed, man would also lose home on which they depend for their survival. Nowadays, the embodiment of this interdependence has a certain lag, when man sacrifice valuable resources and energy as the price of huge economic benefits, and in the future man will become victim of their own evil deed. For the benefit of human descendants, man must uphold an ecological future view, and build ecological civilization with long-run perspective for future generations.

3.3 Cherishing ecological global view to build a beautiful earth for humans

Keats, like the first generation of lakeside poets, used poetry to express his concern for country and people when he saw thousands of people suffering from urban pollution. This kind of thought can be sublimated into a kind of worry of all mankind today, which also enlightens us to establish a global ecological view, that is, looking at the protection of ecological environment from a global perspective and making ecological civilization benefit all mankind. Since construction of ecological civilization is related to future mankind, international community should work hand in hand to seek road of global ecological civilization. As for China, Chinese people should also carry out afforestation and greening through multilateral cooperation mechanisms such as the “Belt and Road Initiative”, make joint efforts to improve the environment. Only by sharing the responsibility of environmental protection and the construction of global ecological civilization can the international community achieve constructing global ecological civilization.

4. Conclusion

Based on Keats's poems and letters, Keats's ecological viewpoints can be summarized into three points: human is a part of nature; returning to nature; coexistence of human and nature. And based on Keats's three ecological viewpoints, three enlightenments can be drawn for modern society as follows: The first is establishing concept of green ecological civilization. The second is upholding an ecological future view in order to leave a good environment for descendants. The last one is cherishing global ecological view to build a beautiful earth for human beings, since human and nature share the same fate as an entirety. Keats's ecological viewpoints summarized from his poems and letters are insightful and inspiring not only for China but also for all countries in their way to ecological civilization construction in modern society.

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