

John Bellamy Foster's Ecological Marxism and the Enlightenment to China's Ecological Civilization

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Abstract. This paper gives an account of John Bellamy Foster's thoughts on ecological Marxism by critically inheriting western Marxism and expounding the relationship between ecological crisis and capitalism. Foster proposed the idea of ecological materialism and developed the theory of metabolic rift which made a profound criticism of capitalist ecology these views are coincided with the ecological thinking of Xi Jinping, General Secretary of the CPC Central Committee, Chinese President and Chairman of the Central Military Commission. It is expected that Foster's thoughts on ecological Marxism are of great significance to China's ecological construction.

Introduction

Foster's ecological Marxism is seen as an important part of contemporary ecological Marxism. He reorganized the development of Marx's materialist thoughts and had an insight into the Marxist ecological perspective on the capitalist ecological crisis. From the available literature, we can seldom find the studies related to Foster's ecological Marxism and the corresponding inspirations to the construction of socialist ecological civilization of China. Hereby, it is of significance to clarify what kind of ecological development concept that Foster proposed can be regarded as beneficial to the Green Development Concept carried out in a context of the construction of China's socialist ecological civilization. This will thereby help enrich the theoretical research of western Marxism and have great theoretical significance for research on the Sinicization of Marxism.

The Theoretical Origin of Foster's Eco-Marxism

Ecological Thoughts of Marxist Theory

The development Marx's ecological thoughts includes the following stages: (1)Marx critically studied Hegel's philosophy of idealism. Later on, Marx realized that relying on theory alone could rarely solve the problem though extending of the thoughts of Ludwig Andreas Feuerbach, so he turned his attention to the practice. (2)The second stage began with his work Manuscript of Economics and Philosophy in 1844 where he contends man changes nature through labor to promote productive forces. Hence Marx's theory has obtained content of ecology, aiming at the study of the existence of society and reasons for the opposition between man and nature. (3)The third stage begins with Engels's book in 1845 State of British Working Class, in which Engels attacks the industrialization system of capitalism and declares that the ecological crisis arises from the unbridled plunder of natural resources by the bourgeoisie, thus linking the ecologically environmental problems with the social system. (4)The formation stage of Marx and Engels' ecological thought marks the fourth stage. Especially in Capital, Marx and Engels believe that the production process of capitalism is the root of the ecological crisis, so they deeply criticize the

ecological consequences caused by capitalism, making the ecological illustration in the theory more scientific.

Western Ecology Marxist Thoughts

O'Connor indicates that the contradiction of capitalism includes two aspects: one is between productivity and production relationship and the other is among productivity, production relationship and the realistic condition of production. But Foster disagrees with James O'Connor's second view on the social contradiction. He draw a conclusion, through a series of analyses, that we shouldn't have taken all environmental damage as a profit-generating which may actually have little influence on extending the scale of economies in a limited biosphere[1]. It is believed that the destruction of the environment will not lead to the increase of production costs, and the ecological crisis will not lead to the economic crisis as well. Moreover, he stressed that the economic crisis was caused by the first contradiction, that is, the opposition between production relations and productivity, and that the natural crisis could not be owed to the social and economic factors. In addition, Rice, Pai and other scholars also describe the relationship between ecological crisis and capitalism different angles, affecting the development of Foster's theory.

The Core of Foster's Eco-Marxism

Ecological Materialism is the Basis of Marx's Ecological Thoughts

Foster's study of ecological Marxism is to create and enrich ecological materialism. Analyzing the concept of materialism and the development of Marx's thought, he concludes: Marx's world view is a profound, truly systematic ecological worldview oriented from his materialism theory [2]. That is, Marx's materialism is ecological in nature. Foster believes that Marx's ecological materialism is a dialectical materialism view that integrates into practical materialism on the basis of onthetalism and epistemological materialism.

Reconstructing Marx's Theory of Metabolic Rift

When constructing Marx's theory of metabolic rift, Foster mainly analyzes from the ecological and social perspectives: ecologically speaking, Foster contends that material transformation exists in nature. As Marx declared: Machines disintegrate because of the destructive effects of natural material transformations. Iron will rust while wood will decay [3].In capitalist agriculture, land, chemical and mechanical production conditions, even fertilizer have to be metabolized [4].To put it socially; material transformation mediated by labor exists between nature and society. Therefore, Foster's concept of metabolic rift is defined as follows: the transformation between nature and social materials is restricted by the natural law of life-- the constant material transformation takes away the original nutrients in the soil. This nutrient cannot be returned on time, resulting in the alienation of soil composition elements, which is contrary to the law of life of nature. Foster believes that it is the social material transformation of capitalism that violates the natural law, which leads to metabolic rift in the material transformation between nature and society. For example, When Spanish growers burn forests on their slopes in Cuba and illustrate that wood ash as the fertilizer of the most profit-generating coffee trees is enough to share through generation to generation, they can hardly imagine the tropical rain will wash away the uncapped fertile soil and leave only bare rocks in the future [5].

Criticizing the Ecology of Capitalism

In Foster's opinion, the causes of the current environmental crisis are that vested interests cherish profit too much in environmental protection and governance instead of solving environmental problems, and that the scale and complexity of the world economy have increased latent environmental problems.

During the exploration of ecological crisis, Foster advocated four anti-ecological characteristics of the capitalist development model: First, wealth is the only lasting connection between things.

Second, it doesn't matter where everything goes as long as it re-enters the capital cycle. Third, market regulation is relatively more effective. Under the guidance of this market fetishism, nature was exploited in a predatory way. As Foster always put it, the vibrant earth has been dismembered. Fourth, the abundance of nature is a free gift to the proletariat. Capitalism's arbitrary plundering of natural resources and energy and the greedy destruction of the environment have brought lots of terrible effects, but they pass the ecological debt to the innocent victims. Accordingly, Foster reaches to the following conclusions: First, the endless pursuit of interests is the root of the ecological crisis. Second, the admiration for wealth is the ideological and cultural reason of ecological crisis. Foster figured out that the United States became one of the most powerful countries of capitalism after World War II, and used this hegemony to control major international organizations through formulating international rules in favor of the dominant national interests of capitalism[6]. Foster hold the opinion that under the unreasonable order, the developed countries plunder the wealth of raw materials from developed countries, destroying the ecological balance of the peripheral countries. On the contrary, the developing countries increase the exploitation of raw materials and aggravate the local ecological crisis in order to repay the heavy debt.

Foster firmly believes that the ecological crisis is rooted in the capitalist system, and that any attempt to solve the ecological crisis is hopeless within the framework of capitalist system. Therefore, Foster advocates that ecological revolution should be used to change the capitalist system, to establish the ecological socialist society, and eventually to solve the survival crisis of mankind. Foster sometimes recognizes the ecological revolution as a component of the social revolution, and sometimes equates the ecological revolution with the social revolution. If such a revolution is to create equality, sustainability and human freedom, it must draw momentum from the struggling working people and those at the bottom of the global capitalist hierarchy, as foster suggests. [7]

The Enlightenment of Foster's Eco-Marxism to China's Ecological Construction

The Theory of Metabolic Rift's Contribution to the Relationship between Natural and Social

When Foster addressed that capitalists considered the pursuit of profit as the ultimate goal, he mentioned that development should be people-oriented and only socialist society can meet the needs of people mainly rather than simply chasing profits in the process of production. Consequently, Foster advocates applying the people-oriented idea to the protection of the environment in order to achieve harmony between man and nature ultimately.

Xi Jinping, General Secretary of the CPC Central Committee, attaches great importance to the construction of ecological civilization. He regards the construction of ecological civilization as an access to the Chinese dream and devotes himself in the construction of beautiful China. He stressed that the construction of ecological civilization is the fundamental plan related to the sustainable development of the Chinese nation, and we must respect nature and protect the environment because humanity and nature are in the community of one destiny co-existing harmoniously. Meanwhile the theory of metabolic rift is highly compatible with the scientific view of harmonious coexistence between man and nature advocated by Xi Jinping, which provides valuable ideological resources and realistic enlightenment for the construction of ecological civilization in China, and new ideas for us to correctly deal with the relationship between nature and society.

Foster's Thought of Ecological Revolution Inspires China's Thinking on Ecological "Revolution"

Foster states that only by changing the mode of production of capitalist system and establishing ecological socialism can us really get rid of the dilemma of ecological crisis. In traditional capitalist system, the countries ignored the protection of environment and endlessly plundered resources from nature, causing serious ecological crisis. In the process of China's modernization, if we blindly follow the pattern of western countries, it will trigger off similar ecological problems. As a large

socialist country, China should learn from the experience of the early developed countries to avoid the same tragedy.

At the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, General Secretary, Xi Jinping proposed to speed up the reform of the ecological civilization system and build a beautiful China. Since the 18th National Congress, China's ecological civilization construction has made rapid progress. We change the mode of production, create a resource-saving and environment-friendly society, and establish correct ecological values. An "ecological revolution" has taken place quietly in our country, and China is also approaching a new era of ecological civilization progressively.

Conclusion

Foster focuses on the influence of Feuerbach's philosophy on Marxist materialism, and clarifies the ecological dimensions through the organic unity of nature, man and society. This lays the philosophical foundation for ecological materialism. Besides, Foster criticizes the capitalist society via the theory of metabolic rift, revealing that the ecological revolution and the socialist revolution work as a whole for the liberation of human beings and nature.

In China, we should not only learn from the West in science and technology, but also study of western scholars in the process of transition to ecological civilization. Although foster's study of ecological Marxism was born in North America, it is still of significance to the construction of ecological civilization in China. Through Foster's reflection on modern industrial civilization, he studies the relationship between man and nature and devotes himself to social development and ecological balance. His thoughts on ecological materialism and criticism to the system of capitalism have enlightened Chinese to establish a positive attitude towards labor and life, but may be less effective compared to that of Xi Jinping's in ecological construction of China. Therefore, it is expected that the process of China's ecological modernization will be promoted with the guidance of Xi Jinping's ecological thoughts in the new era of socialism.

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