

The Marxist Thought on Ecological Civilization

Wang Wei

Sichuan Technology and Business University, Chengdu 620000, Sichuan Province, China
Email: 363269626@qq.com

ABSTRACT

Although there is no clear thought of ecological civilization in Marxism, its theory emphasizes that the relationship between human and nature is the harmonious unity of internal civilization. The thesis expounds the Marxist view of nature from three aspects: the superior relation between human and nature, the dependence relation between human and nature, and the symbiosis and co-prosperity relation between human and nature. The thesis expounds Marxist ecological civilization thought from the aspects of "harmony between human and nature" ideological foundation, historical view, values, development view and system, etc. These thoughts have important guiding significance for the construction of ecological civilization construction of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and also provide theoretical reference for the transformation of China's development concept.

Keywords: *viewpoint of nature; the unification of harmony and practice*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the 19th century when Marx and Engels lived, ecological problems were not obvious, but Marx and Engels had already discovered the ecological problems caused by the capitalist industrial revolution, and began to think about solving the problems of ecological environment and resources. In their works of philosophy, political economy, scientific socialism, there are abundant ecological civilization thought.

2. THE MARXIST VIEW OF NATURE

Although Marxist classical writers do not directly use the concept of ecological civilization, their theoretical system has a very rich and profound ecological civilization thought, the essence of which is the harmony between human and nature, the interdependence and internal unity of "subjective nature" and "objective nature". Engels pointed out that "the whole nature we are faced with forms a system, that is, the whole of the objects in relation to each other." [1], and in this interconnected whole, human and nature are directly identical. Marx clearly pointed out that: human is the product of nature, is one part of the nature, "we together with our own flesh, blood and brain are part of nature and exist in nature". Engels also believes that "human came from the animalia" is an indisputable fact that human is a species and a part of nature. After the emergence of human, through practice, "human really proves himself to be a

species-being ... Only then did nature manifest itself in his works and his reality." It is human who distinguishes himself from nature, who distinguishes the human world from nature. This also highlights the most distinctive feature of Marxist theory "practice", firstly, practice promotes the transformation of nature from natural nature to humanized nature; secondly, practice combines the objectivity of nature, priority to human beings, human characteristics and history into a link.

2.1. The superior relationship between human and nature

From Marx and Engels's *German Ideology* to Engels' *Outline of Political Economy Criticism*, from Marx's *Das Kapital* to *Critique of Gotha Program*, we can see that although Marx and Engels emphasized the subjectivity of human beings and the dynamic and creative role of labor, Marx and Engels did not forget the origin of nature, the external nature of the constraints and "priority", "prior to the existence of human nature" has always been the theoretical premise of Marxism. On the other hand, Marx always insisted that nature includes both "the nature of human" and "the nature around human", is the internal unity of "subjective nature" and "objective nature", and is the dual nature of "the natural conditions for the survival of producers" [2]. From the point of view of practice, Marxism affirming the objectivity of nature, attaching importance to the priority of human and attaching importance to its personal characteristics and

historical development, and advocating the unity of human and nature in society, which is the only correct thinking form for us to understand and deal with the relationship between human and nature.

2.2. The dependence between human and nature

For Marx, on the one hand, human depends on nature and cannot do without it. As a Chinese saying goes, "human lives by nature". Nature is the basis for human's survival and development. Our direct living materials, materials for life activities, objects and tools, etc., are derived from and inseparable from nature, which is "human's inorganic body". Not only that, human's spiritual life also depends on the nature. Nature "is the inorganic world of human's spirit, the spiritual food which human must process beforehand in order to enjoy and digest." [3] In order to live and not die, human must keep in touch with nature. On the other hand, the real nature is also inseparable from human. "Nature which separated from man means nothing to human." The nature that does not have a practical or cognitive relationship with the human subject is "nothing" to the real person, just as there is no existence. Human's practice is an objective activity, while the nature, as the object of human, is the objectivation of human's essence. The nature that man faces is the "humanized nature" created by human through production and labor practice [4]. Without human and his activities, the nature cannot manifest the value and significance of its existence.

2.3. The symbiosis and co-prosperity relationship between human and nature

What is the link between human and nature? How do human beings relate to nature? It is productive labor, and it is productive labor that closely connects human with nature. "Labor is first of all a process between human and nature, a process in which human causes, adjusts, and controls the material changes between human and nature through his own activities." [5] Human has the initiative, can correctly understand and use the law of nature, human can "reasonable adjustment" to nature. Waste from the production process "can be returned to the land as waste, or used as raw material for other production departments", and some waste such as "iron filings" can be recycled "back and forth between two factories". Marx and Engels strongly condemned the over-exploitation and violation of the laws of nature. They strongly criticized the people who "wanted to get cultivated land" and destroyed forests, even making them "barren". They advocated the symbiosis and common prosperity between human and nature.

3. MARXIST THOUGHT ON ECOLOGICAL CIVILIZATION

On the discussion of civilization, Engels said in his *Origin of the Family, Private Ownership and State*, "Civilization is a matter of practice and a social quality." Civilization embodies the essence of human beings, is the result of human practice, "which is the result of mankind's long-term hard work for its own survival and development". [6] That is to say, civilization is the product of human production practice. It is social and restricted by social forms. It is the progress of human society and all the achievements of human progress. Specifically speaking, it refers to the sum of the material, spiritual and institutional achievements that people have made while transforming the objective material world, constantly overcoming the negative effects in the transformation process, actively improving and optimizing the relationship between man and nature and between man and man, and building an orderly ecological operation mechanism and a good ecological environment.

3.1. Marxist ideological basis of "harmony between human and nature"

In the process of explaining the production, accumulation and circulation of capital, Marxist theory of surplus value reveals that the development of capitalism has brought about many environmental problems, which reflects Marx's emphasis on the ecological environment and ecological civilization in the capitalist world. Marx clearly pointed out in the economic and *Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* that the relationship between man and nature appeared "alienation" under capitalist production conditions. Engels pointed out in his book *Dialectics of Nature* that, "civilization is a process of confrontation, in the form of the process so far is to make the land barren, make the forest wilderness, make land does not produce its first product, and worsen climate" [7]. Engels also exposed the air and water pollution in English cities in his books *Letters from the Uppey Valley* and the *Condition of the English Working Class*, and warned people not to be complacent about the triumph of nature, which retaliated against us for every victory we achieved. Not only for that, as a part of nature, human beings not only obtain the materials needed for survival and development from nature and transform nature according to their own purposes, but also must follow the laws of nature and maintain the balance of the ecological system, which is a pair of non-antagonistic contradictions. Marx and Engels' view of "unity of human and nature", that is, human's relationship to nature is restricted by human's social relationship, and human's social relationship is also restricted by human and nature, established the basis of Marx and Engels' thought and theory of "harmony between human and nature".

3.2. Marxist historical viewpoint of "harmony between human and nature".

Marx's and Engels' thoughts on the harmonious history between human and nature are mainly embodied in *Theses on Feuerbach*, *German Ideology*, *Das Kapital* and *Dialectics of Nature*. Marx and Engels believed that human history or human activities should also be examined from two aspects: one is human's role in nature, the other is the role of human on human. And the effects are mutual. Marx believed that the relationship between human beings and nature is mainly through the production activities of human society, which mainly includes the production of social life and social material. No matter which kind of production, the basis and premise are nature and natural material production. Marx believes that in the real world, the nature has the "priority", but this is not the original nature of nature, but "nature" of anthropology and people through their activities in accordance with the useful way to change the configuration of natural material, keep the original natural into "humanized nature". The humanization of nature and the naturalization of human constitute the historical process of increasing unity between human and nature. On this basis, Marxism and Friedrich Engels examined the relationship between society and nature. On this basis, Marx and Engels investigated the relationship between society and nature from the concrete human practice activities, and established the theory of harmonious history between human and nature. The viewpoint of practice introduces epistemology, affirms that practice is the basis to grasp and understand the relationship between human and nature, and points out that nature has priority in the development of human society.

3.3. The Marxist values of ecological civilization

Marx's ecological civilization thought is the dialectical materialism thought formed by rejecting the modern metaphysical and mechanical view of nature and axiology. Modern metaphysics mechanistic view of nature and theory of value to the relationship between human and nature was isolated, the separation of dynamic and static nature of human evolution, use the metaphysical way of thinking to grasp the relationship between human and nature, can not see the "natural history" and "historical nature" the dialectical unification relations, leading to increasingly worsen the relationship between human and nature, ecological problem is becoming more and more serious. Marx and Engels inherited and developed the essence of Hegel, Feuerbach and other philosophers, and believed that nature is not only material and objective nature, but also a social existence, that is, humanized nature. Marx and Engels was analyzed by using the method of dialectical unity of natural attribute and social attribute, the people's initiative

and passivity, people's subjective consciousness and the material practice of the three categories, relations systematically reveals the duality people's practice, stressed people should try to dialectical way of thinking to grasp the relationship between human and nature, to analyze and deal with ecological problems. In *Economics -- Philosophical Manuscripts, 1844*, Marx explicitly advocated the unification of "human naturalism" and "natural humanitarianism". He said, "this communism, as finished naturalism, equals humanism, and as finished humanitarianism equals naturalism; It is the real solution of the contradiction between human and nature, between human and human, the real solution of the struggle between being and essence, between objectification and self-confirmation, between freedom and necessity, between individual and kind." "Society is the complete and essential unity of human and nature, the true resurrection of nature, the naturalism realized by human and the humanitarianism realized by nature." [8] From Marx's judgment of the ideal society, we can see that it is his two principles to establish the harmonious relationship between human and nature and between human and human. We can also say that Marx's vision of a future society is a society of ecological balance, the relationship between human and nature should be harmonious coexistence, from deep is between people and nature, and really solve the contradiction between person and person, is the existence and essence, objectification and self-verification, freedom and necessity, individual and class struggle between the real solution, a fundamental and implement the theory established in accordance with the natural conceptions of thoroughly, reflects the "natural history" and "historical nature", "subjective nature" and "objective nature", "naturalness" of "social" "practical" inner civilization concept of dialectical unification, and this is the essential connotation of Marxist ecological civilization.

3.4. Marxist system viewpoint of "harmony between human and nature"

Marx and Engels pointed out that the realization of harmony between human and nature first needs the institutional premise. When Marx and Engels studied the modern natural environment, they insisted on linking it with the social contradictions at that time. On the one hand, Marx acknowledged the unprecedented productive forces of capitalism; on the other hand, Marx also pointed out that capitalist mode of production promoted sharp opposition among people, which reflected in the nature and formed the disharmony between human and nature. Marx and Engels believed that ecological problems were fundamentally caused by the capitalist system. Only by abolishing the capitalist system and realizing communism (socialism) can ecological problems be solved. They made it clear that there was a need for "a complete transformation of the mode of production we have had up to now, and with it of our present social

system as a whole". In other words, the fundamental means to solve this contradiction is to establish a kind of institutional premise to transcend capitalism and establish the communism of "unity of human and nature". Marx pointed out that "Communism is the positive abrogation of private property, that is, of human's self-alienation... It is the real solution to the contradiction between human and nature, between human and human, the real solution to the struggle between being and essence, objectification and self-confirmation, freedom and necessity, individual and class." [9] It can be seen that only after the transition to the communist society can people transcend the inherent contradictions of the capitalist society and finally achieve the "reconciliation between human and nature" and "reconciliation between human and himself".

3.5. Marxist development thought of "harmony between man and nature"

The exposition of Marx and Engels on the unity of human and nature shows that their thoughts contain rich ecological dimensions and Marx's development concept also has rich ecological implications. Dialectical materialism and historical materialism are the philosophical basis of Marx's concept of development. Marx has always insisted on understanding development from the overall perspective of certain social relations, regarding the development of the productive forces as the foundation of social development, and regarding social development as a natural historical process, so its development is a kind of overall sustainable development. Marx's concept of development elucidated the "two elevations" of human, that is, he was promoted from other animals in terms of species and from other animals in terms of society, so as to highlight the relationship between human and nature and society. Marx's concept of development reflects human's dominant position in nature and society and provides theoretical basis and target preset for the sustainable development of mankind. Marx's concept of development elucidating the "two measures" of social development, namely the measure of matter and the measure of human, which constitute the external and internal measures of social development. Marx's concept of development points out that only the unity of subjective and objective development is in accordance with the laws of nature and society. This is the only criterion for sustainable development.

4. CONCLUSION

To sum up, Marxist thought of "ecological civilization" not only points out that nature plays a primary role in man's survival and development, but also holds that man is also a part of nature and the relationship between human and nature is realized through labor practice. Taking the concept of practice as the philosophical starting point of human survival and

development and the realistic starting point of world history, it is concluded that only by transcending capitalism and transiting to communism can human beings realize the "reconciliation between human and nature and between human and himself", and only in this way can human beings realize sustainable development. They opened a new way to understand the relationship between human society and the natural world. In today's world, ecological and environmental problems are becoming increasingly serious, and no one can ignore the value of nature. The scientific nature and foresight of Marx and Engels' ecological civilization thoughts are of great theoretical significance and practical value for China's solution of resource and environmental problems.

FUND PROJECT

The Humanities and Social Sciences Research and Planning Project of the Ministry of Education in 2019 "Zhou Enlai and Ecological Environmental Protection Work Research" (Grant No. 19YJA710023)

REFERENCES

- [1] Friedrich Engels, *Nature Argument*, Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1971: 124.
- [2] Karl Marx Frederick Engels *Selected Works*, Book 1, Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1995:45.
- [3] Karl Marx Frederick Engels *Collected Works*: Book 20, Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1971:110.
- [4] Karl Marx Frederick Engels *Collected Works*: Book 42, Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1979:97.
- [5] Karl Marx Frederick Engels *Collected Works*: Book 1, Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1956:666.
- [6] Xu Qixian, *The Study of World Civilization*, Jinan: Shandong People's Publishing House, 2001:7.
- [7] Friedrich Engels, *Nature Argument*, Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1984:552-553.
- [8] Karl Marx Frederick Engels *Collected Works*: Book 42, Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1979:122.
- [9] Karl Marx Frederick Engels *Collected Works*: Book 42, Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1979:120.