

# Responsibility and Ethical Reflection on the Current Ecological Crisis

## A Philosophical Exploration of Organic Marxism\*

Bingfeng Meng

Xi'an University of Technology  
Xi'an, China 710054

Lihua He

Xi'an University of Technology  
Xi'an, China 710054

**Abstract**—Under the deep intervention of the human practical activities, the natural ecosystem is gradually becoming unbalanced, suffering an unprecedented crisis. After a systematic reflection on the causes of the ecological crisis, organic Marxism puts forward a series of new ideas. Adhering to the principles of Marx's dialectics, we should analyze and treat organic Marx's theory. Only in terms of the theme of ecological crisis, we should pay more attention to the idea of organic ecology and long-term thoughts.

**Keywords**—ecological crisis; organic Marxism; responsibility; reflection

### I. INTRODUCTION

Since the middle of the 20th century, with the rapid development and promotion of modern science and technology, the self-subjectivity of human beings has dramatically increased and even reached a state of expansion. People think that they can control everything, which can be called over-rationalization. It seriously threatens the survival and development of nature which include the environment, and even of human beings. The most direct manifestation about over-rationalization is the emergence of global, continual and deep ecological crisis. Generally speaking, the existence and development of ecosystems have their own regularity. Looking through the whole natural system, there is a self-ecological chain that can be adjusted to reach a certain equilibrium state. However, due to the human activities and the seriousness of natural destruction, this "self-balancing" state is artificially broken, the ecosystem already became unbalanced. While the continuous innovation of science and technology and the continuously changing and developing human social activities, there are a series of new ethical and moral issues. In other words, the destruction of ecological civilization accompanied by human civilization.

### II. REFLECTIONS ON ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

Everything has its own value, and people try their best to maximize it. Human society need consider their interests, so they should take the responsibility to protect the nature. After systematic reflection, organic Marxism holds that the capitalist system and modernity are the roots of the ecological crisis.

#### A. The Limitations of the Capitalist System Highlighted by the Global Ecological Crisis

The most devastating ecological and humanitarian disasters were caused by global capitalism, said by organic Marxism. The difference of communism's doing everything possible, and distributing according to needs, with serious theoretical and practical injustice, is that capitalism advocates that doing everything and allocating according to market.

First of all, it is not contribute to social fairness and justice (especially for ordinary laborers), but widens the gap between the rich and the poor people. Organic Marxism points out that capitalist free markets are not free, and believes that the free market doctrine which proposed by the father of capitalism Adam Smith, has flaws and deficiencies. That's because the foundation of the capitalist theory is not only let every citizen to be selfish and act for one's self-interest, but it also advises and encourages them. So the individuals who under the capitalist system are primarily paying attention to their own private interests. Therefore, capitalism has spawned such a huge underclass. But hard work does not bring them wealth and comfort.... The rich countries make themselves become the biggest beneficiaries by designing and leading the world economic system, which proved by a series of facts. This market is not a 'free' market; it is for the underworld. It is actually a real slave market.

Second, A serious ecological disaster was caused by capitalist system. For the benefit of the ecological environment, organic Marxism believe that no matter the individuals, governments, societies, or the countries, they all need self-control, and keep moderate accumulation of wealth. Unfortunately, the core and impetus of the capitalist system is the accumulation of capital. Under the guidance of the free market, people mistakenly think that everyone should earn

---

\*The research project of the key base of the Shaanxi Provincial Education Department: A Study on the construction of responsibility ethics of college students in the new media era (number: 16JZ047); the results are supported by the academic innovation team of the youth social science of Xi'an University of technology.

what they have earned, so they became selfish and excessive to use the natural resources. The result of this consumption is that everyone looks up to the sky and sees an ecological crisis. The earth has reached the limit of its ability to withstand excessive human consumption, so now because of their abuse all natural objects are suffering in pain. Organic Marxism draw a clear conclusion: that is, capitalism as an economic philosophy is the victim of current ecological crisis and its severity.

#### *B. Modernity Is the Deep Cause of the Global Ecological Crisis*

Organic Marxism holds that there are three major consensus: the first two are related to the ecological crisis, and the third one is the death of modernity. In their view, the modern civilization is gone, and the ecological civilization is a new symbol that will lead the new era and the human race to move forward. In the whole world, organic Marxists are convinced that only China can lead and realize the sustainable development of ecological civilization. Why is China? They give a direct and straightforward answer that is because of the characteristics of modern Western civilization are atomism and fragmentation. Basing on the classical Marxist theory, organic Marxism believes that the individuals in human society is connected with each other. More precisely, a society, country or culture constitutes its members, rather than a group of independent, discrete individuals that makes a society, nation or culture. Actually all the relationships are created by ourselves, but individualism hold that each individual is an isolated unit. Even though the West has exported a lot of bad ideas, but the individualistic concept is the most harmful one. So organic Marxism believes that the problems of the global environmental have arisen by its modernity.

Organic Marxism makes the judgment of the era of civilized transformation in the context of globalization that against the reality, and mentioned that the civilization that undermines the environment led by modern Europe and North America is ending and a new ecological civilization is just around the corner for us. Those who broke the global ecosystem, however, they can't repair it. On the contrary, in the developing countries, especially in Asia, a new foundation of ecological civilization is about to be established. And in this age of civilized transition, China, as the most probable leader, must complete this special mission. It must change the ecological development of the current Western world. And as a moral and spiritual leader, China has the responsibility and ability to promote itself, for strengthening the organic cooperation on the global level, and realizing the healthy and sustainable development of ecological civilization.

#### *C. The Leader's Virtue Is One of the Main Causes of the Ecological Crisis*

Plato said in his book "Utopia": "If a country can make a good start, it will be like a rotating wheel, moving faster and faster. Because good education creates good quality, and these excellent qualities which are brought by good education will continue get improved." Aristotle holds that

the leader who is the person with the highest virtue. By Plato, organic Marxists communicated to us that if a nation's leaders are both moral and ethical, they can wisely and successfully lead the whole country, and create an atmosphere healthy and harmonious for the individuals and families. But what is the reality? As a ruler and leader of the country, do they have noble virtues? Capitalism believes that all the outstanding achievements and progress which have made in the development of modern society, such as the rapid advancement of science and technology, the prolongation of human life, the continuous improvement of living standards, they are all caused by the free market mechanism of capitalist. For the ecological environment, organic Marxism proposes that the capitalist worldview has disadvantages to reconcile itself, because it is an economic and political system which based on the principle of self-interest. And it was called low-level system. By this inferior system, the existence of state and its rulers are not only for the welfare of the public, but for collecting as much power as possible, essentially for the satisfaction of his own personal interests. Organic Marxism analyzed this system from these four aspects to: the first is "Opportunity for obtaining and enjoying capital". [1] (P53) the second is "Status of education and training", the third one is "Country and region", and the last one is "Race". They also make a conclusion that the fact is irrefutable. There are a lot of external factors that a lot of individuals cannot determine the fate of their life in the liberal market. But these facts already shaken the view that we should attribute major achievements of modern times to capitalism. In the reality, however, capitalism, which is unguided and unrestricted in human competition, has provided social welfare and improved the quality of life for the majority of people. On the contrary, when people are truly integrating themselves from words and deeds, it means they are aiming to pursue common well-being. When people serve their common welfare from inner beliefs and practical actions, they will receive greater benefits, and then the social community will be formed. In other words, organic Marxism considers that all people, including leaders, are selfish when they are under a capitalist political and economic system. If the people just only care about self-interest, it will be impossible to produce effective public welfare. Therefore, now with the gradual deterioration of the ecological environment which was caused by capitalism, people must find a good solution to solve this problem. So organic Marxism is an active attempt and exploration of this program.

### III. THE LESSONS THAT WE LEARNED

Three years ago, organic Marxism has formally proposed, and it is advanced and desirable to take its ideas and viewpoints. However, there are still some areas that we need to be discussed and practically tested. Basing on this, we should uphold the principle of Marxist dialectics to analyze and treat Organic Marxism. For the theme of ecological crisis, we can learn from the following aspects:

#### *A. Organic Ecological Thinking*

The most important thing about ecology is the relationship between man and nature. So organic

philosophical thinking emphasize the “relationship,” just like Marx emphasized: “Man is the sum of all social relations.” [2] (P60) Therefore, this organic ecological thinking refers to the requirement that we look at the world the various elements of the system as a whole, such as people, things, etc. The relations together constitute a fate community that is interconnected and interdependent.

Ecological thinking and ecological civilization are not just ideas and theories, but practical actions. In Confucianism of traditional Chinese culture, they emphasized that in the process of man’s production and life, which is necessary to live in harmony with nature; that means to achieve “the unity of heaven and man”, and this “unity” is nature. On the issue of the relationship between man and nature, the Confucian ideology emphasizes people’s responsibility for nature and believes that people should have a highly responsible attitude towards nature. While understanding and grasping nature in accordance with the laws of natural development and harmony with nature, and need further practice and explore. This ideological influence is far-reaching and has great theoretical and practical significance in the contemporary world. The global capitalism has caused the most serious ecological and humanitarian disasters in the history of mankind. China led in formally proposing and actively building an ecological civilization. The report of the 17th CPC National Congress put forward ecological civilization, and it was written into the Party’s program of action. The 18th Party Congress further put forward the concept of the development strategy of the “Five in One” overall layout, expanding ecological civilization construction into the overall layout of socialist construction, and demand: we will increase natural ecological systems and environmental protection and strengthen the construction of an ecological civilization system. And we must strive to achieve a green development and beautiful China. The report of the 19th CPC National Congress clearly stressed that building an ecological civilization is the Chinese nation’s millennium plan for continued development, we must establish and practice the idea of green mountains that are gold or silver mountains and treat the ecological environment as if it were treated to live. These conclusive statements tell us that facing the temptation of interest resources, the “community of interest” and the contradictory status of the “community of life” that for to humans coexist together it requires sustainable development. The perspective is needed to unify the relationship between human and nature, not just an exclusive focus on economic construction and development, we must do it in a correct way to deal with the complex relationship. Only in this way that can we promote a sustainable economy. We must rationally care about interests, intuitively assume the ecological responsibility, and properly regulate the relationship; so as to achieve a balance between humanity and nature.

### *B. The Long-term Overall Vision*

Nowadays ecological crisis did not happen overnight but gradually emerged by the development of human society. Therefore, we cannot solve the ecological crisis problem

immediately, but we need make long-term plans, and from a holistic view of all aspects of human social development.

Consistent with Marx’s relations and organic philosophical thoughts, when we talking about the current ecological crisis, besides paying attention to the complex relationship, we also need to stress the overall thinking and vision. The long-term overall vision emphasizes that the world is composed of many individuals. From a long-term and global perspective, and whether this world refers to the entire earth or not, these individuals and groups are intertwined and interrelated, which is the sum of the various components. Organic Marxism believes that wisdom comes from the whole group. In contrast, fool people can not realize it, so that they just can only come true some short-term goals. Western countries are usually accustomed to operating their cities and countries step-by-step. Although they have some achievements in some areas, but lacking an overall perspective made these achievements limited. A more integrated view creates an internal, coherent and consistently great civilization. After the formulation and implementation of five-year development plans, China, will promote the development of the socialist cause with Chinese characteristics in a long-term and overall manner. In terms of ecological civilization construction, the “five in one” construction put forward by the Chinese leaders, proceed toward a long-term perspective of integrity. The purpose is to improve the ecological environment and to build an ecological civilization with the construction and development of the economy, politics, and culture. From the perspective of the overall, the ecological environment as a global issue of commonality, it must start from the interests of the entirety of humanity, various countries and regions to establish a mechanism concerted cooperation. If we promote the effective solution of ecological and environmental issues, the Earth will become a healthy and sustainable development ecosystem.

### *C. A Common Humanistic Spirit*

During the development of human society, especially for the construction of ecological civilization, we not only emphasize rationality, science and value humanities. But the responsibility to cultivate and develop the humanistic spirit. For the ecological environment, the core of the common humanistic spirit is to establish the “you have me and I have you” value concept of a community of human destiny. There is only one earth one, and each country shares a world, Xi Jinping said. Nowadays, all countries are interdependent, so we must inherit and carry forward the purposes and principles of the UN Charter to build a new type of international relations, centering on win-win cooperation, and build a community of human destiny. In a global and holistic view, it not only embraces Western modernity, but also transcends the boundaries of race, culture, nation and ideology. It is epoch-making for solving a series of prominent global issues including the ecological crisis and economic crisis. So the theoretical is a significance and strong practical guidance.

The human-fate community, a global common humanistic spiritual value concept, specifically includes four

aspects: the interdependent international power concept, the common interest concept, the sustainable development concept, and the concept of global governance. Under the background of globalization, people realized that the world of information technology has become flatter. The interests of countries, regions, nationalities, and social groups in the world are intertwined to form a network of global interests. The common interest has become more and more obvious, and human society is an interdependent community of one destiny. It requires mutual advocacy of common ground, common ideals, win-win international relations, and shared ideas to promote mutual respect and fairness. The new international relations of justice and cooperation and win-win results truly works to consider the long-term interests of all mankind to consider the problems and achieve a truly sustainable development of the ecological environment.

#### *D. A Strong Responsibility*

Once upon a time, human beings endeavored to use all living things except ourselves as a resource that can be exploited and developed as a tool. An objective that meets the needs of human survival and development treats all resources as available for human life. In the struggle, mankind is dazzled by the successes and failures of the times. Some of them even put forward the slogan "Humans conquer the heavens" to transform the nature, such as making lakes and creating seas, utilizing land reclamation, and so on. Until the nature revenges on human beings, such as Er Ninuo phenomenon, greenhouse effect, mudslides, frequent natural disasters, lack of natural resources, etc., these are a warning to humanity. Uncontrolled development and destruction of resources will be harmful for the nature and mankind. The reason why people distinguish themselves from other organisms is that people not only exist in a purely natural form, more importantly, but human beings consciously, competently, and rationally govern all the nature. On the basis of harmonious coexistence with nature, we must follow and conform the development regularity of nature. Only people can autonomously understand the regularity of the development of things, and seek a mutual restriction and mutuality between productivity and the ecosystem. The mechanism for promotion must conform the regularity, and intellectually determine the mode of circular ecology and green development, and be symbiotic to find a balance point with each other in action. Therefore, human beings should shoulder the responsibility of maintaining ecological balance and protecting the environment, and ethically and morally constrain their own behavior. As a member of the natural world, human beings must uphold the concept of harmony and adopt scientific methods. They must be responsible for the current state and the future of nature. It reflects the inheritance of the human social responsibility ethics, and also reflects its integrity, human production, and life. Areas such as material exchange are becoming more and more complex. People at the moment cannot grasp all aspects of life. To be aware of responsible to the overall behavior of nature and human beings, and emphasize overall macroscopical responsibilities, requires the degree of spatial expansion which has long-term demands on human society and time.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

In a word, the theoretical interest of organic Marxism lies in the organic combination of Marxism, Chinese excellent traditional culture, and process philosophy, such as an open new Marxism, which analyze and study the social issues in the modern era, and quickly forms a series of action programs, principles, policy guidelines and so on. As mentioned above, it is obvious to see the advantages and disadvantages of organic Marxism. For the majority of scholars, their views are different from with each other, but organic Marxism holds that it is worth our studying, concerning and reflecting on the unreasonable reality of today's society, and putting into practice.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] Philip Clayton, Justin Heinzek, translated by Meng Xianli, etc. *Organic Marxism: An Alternative to Capitalism and Ecological Disaster* [M]. People's Publishing House, 2015.
- [2] *Selected Works of Marx and Engels (Vol.1)* [M]. People's Publishing House, 1995.