

The Construction of the Harmonious Coexistence between Humanity and Nature within the Ecological Civilization Framework

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Abstract: *Humans originate from nature, being a product of it. The relationship between humans and nature is fundamentally one of symbiosis and coexistence. Practice acts as the intermediary bridging humans and nature, forging a tighter connection between the two through this bridge. On one hand, through practical activities, humans explore nature to meet their production needs, and by transforming nature, they enhance productive capabilities. On the other hand, the relationship between humans and nature constitutes a shared destiny and is the most fundamental relationship in human society, profoundly influencing human social activities. Ecological civilization represents a vital form of human civilization. Reflecting on how to properly position the relationship between humans and nature, accommodating nature while understanding its laws, and constructing a harmonious and symbiotic development relationship is crucial. This reflection holds significant importance for pondering the direction of human development and comprehending the implementation of the Five Major Development Concepts.*

Keywords: *Nature; Human-Nature Relationship; Community of Shared Destiny; Ecological Civilization; Relationship Construction*

1. Introduction

The exploration of the relationship between humans and nature has always been within the purview of scholarly investigation. Traditional Chinese civilization has consistently upheld the principles of unity between heaven and humanity, adherence to the natural way (Dao), and the pursuit of harmonious coexistence between humans and nature. This ethos aims to foster a cooperative relationship characterized by symbiotic harmony. However, the relentless pursuit of infinite profit, inherent to capitalism, has exacerbated the contradictions between humans and nature, leading to an escalating ecological crisis on a global scale. The construction of ecological civilization is a millennium-long endeavor crucial to the sustainable development of the Chinese nation. Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the Central Committee and the State Council have attached great importance to ecological civilization construction. The 18th National Congress of the Party incorporated the construction of ecological civilization into the overall layout of the "Five-Sphere Integrated Plan" of socialism with Chinese characteristics. The 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China proposed that "Respecting nature, conforming to nature, and protecting nature are intrinsic requirements for comprehensively building a socialist modernized country." [1] In the face of challenges such as limited environmental capacity, the fragility of ecosystems, resource wastage, and global climate change in China, how to strategically plan for development from the perspective of harmonious coexistence between humans and nature and promote symbiotic harmony between humans and nature is a critical consideration. This not only embodies the fundamental principles that ecological civilization construction in the new era must adhere to but also represents the inheritance and innovation of Marxist views on nature and ecology. Furthermore, it constitutes a significant aspect of China's modernization with Chinese characteristics and a new form of human civilization.

2. The Formation and Development of the Concept of Nature

2.1 *The Emergence of Primitive Conceptions of Nature*

The English term "Nature" finds its origins in the Latin word "Natura," signifying the inherent characteristics developed by plants, animals, and other aspects of the world's appearance. [2] "Nature" is commonly associated with the "natural world," encompassing the entire objective universe, including human society. In a narrower sense, it refers to the inorganic and organic realms studied in scientific disciplines. Engels pointed out that "the world is not an assemblage of finished things, but a collection of processes".[3] Similarly, nature is also a collection of processes, and the concept of nature undergoes its own developmental process. Therefore, a brief overview of the concept of nature is conducive to further exploration of the relationship between humans and nature.

In Western thought, the concept of nature can be traced back to ancient Greece. Ancient Greek philosophy, known as natural philosophy, primarily focused on nature. Philosophers of that era regarded elements such as water, air, ether, fire, and earth as the fundamental components of all things. Thales, considered the father of philosophy, was the first to explain the origin of all things using natural substances. Aristotle, in his work "Physics," emphasized the intrinsic connection between natural phenomena and nature itself, distinguishing them from human-made phenomena. With the development of modern natural sciences, nature has become synonymous with what we commonly refer to as the natural world. These brief summaries reveal the intimate and inseparable connection between nature and the objective material world.

In ancient China, the concept of nature emerged during the Pre-Qin period. Laozi's philosophy of "Tao follows the natural way," and Zhuangzi's development of Laozi's idea of "harmonizing with nature, following the natural course," as well as the Confucian concept of "the unity of heaven and humanity, the interaction between heaven and humanity," all contributed to the early formation of the notion of nature. During the Wei and Jin dynasties, Ji Kang and Ruan Ji believed that restraining one's desires was in harmony with nature. In the Tang Dynasty, the emphasis was on the unadorned, natural state without artificial embellishments. In the Song Dynasty, nature became associated with simplicity. In the Ming Dynasty, nature acquired aesthetic significance, emphasizing genuine expression and the inherent beauty of nature, prioritizing the natural over external influences. By the late Qing Dynasty, influenced by Western culture, the translation of "Nature" from English, which the Japanese rendered as (ziran), led to the equivalence of the Chinese term "ziran" with the English term "Nature." During this period, the scientific understanding of nature also gradually entered the public consciousness.

2.2 *The Formation of the Concept of Nature from the Marxist Perspective*

From the perspective of Marxist philosophy, it is evident that the development of any phenomenon is influenced by both subjective and objective factors within the context of human social evolution. However, Marx's understanding of nature differs significantly from that of previous philosophers. Marx's perspective on nature can be traced back to his high school graduation thesis. In this work, Marx considered nature and God to be of equal standing, with animals confined to the limits set by nature's activities. Humans, according to Marx, must seek their means to achieve the goals set by God, representing Marx's earliest understanding of nature. Throughout Marx's intellectual development, he was profoundly influenced by the thoughts of Hegel and Feuerbach. Marx critically absorbed the natural philosophies of both thinkers. Hegel advocated adopting a dialectical approach to understanding the changes and developments in nature. However, his starting point was the "absolute spirit"; nature was considered a product of the absolute spirit, and its dialectical laws were also seen as products of objective consciousness. In the realm of natural philosophy, Feuerbach espoused a materialistic perspective, positing that matter determines consciousness, with consciousness being a reflection of material reality. Intuitionism stands out as a distinctive trait of his natural philosophy, wherein nature serves as the objective object reflected by human perception. The relationship between humans and nature, in Feuerbach's view, remains unidirectional, where nature exists purely as an objective reflection for humans. A significant flaw in Feuerbach's perspective emerges in his historical outlook, wherein he succumbs to idealism. Marx critically assimilated Hegel's and Feuerbach's dialectical methods and the principle of material primacy, enriching and advancing his own ideas on nature. Although Marx did not produce a dedicated work on the philosophy of nature, his insights on this topic are reflected in his seminal works addressing other issues.

In Marx's Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 (hereafter referred to as the

"Manuscripts"), he states, "Without the natural world, without the sensory external realm, workers cannot create anything." He further emphasizes that nature not only provides the means for labor in the broad sense of supplying necessities but also in the narrower sense of furnishing the materials necessary for life. Nature serves as the foundation for human production and sustenance, providing the necessities for human life and offering selfless provisions. [4] In *The Holy Family*, Marx and Engels' perspective on nature is evident in their critique of the Young Hegelians' exaggerated emphasis on self-consciousness, negating the objectivity of nature. Within Marx's literary works, the concepts of free nature and humanized nature have been introduced, signifying his nuanced understanding of the concept of nature.

3. Practice has emerged as the pivotal link in mediating the relationship between humanity and nature

In the course of natural evolution, human beings have emerged as integral constituents of nature. The relationship between humans and nature is not static or unchanging; it evolves with the development of productive forces, advancements in science and technology, and enhancements in human cognitive abilities. However, all these transformations are fundamentally mediated by practice. Looking back at human history, in primitive societies with extremely low levels of productive forces, humans were merely one part of the natural world, relying primarily on gathering and hunting for sustenance. They were deeply dependent on nature and lacked the ability to confront it. Simultaneously, they could not comprehend various natural phenomena, leading to fear, awe, and worship of nature. With the advent of agricultural civilization, human understanding of nature accumulated based on the previous stage. Productive forces also saw further enhancement, gradually reducing human reliance on nature but not eliminating it entirely. Humans still needed to depend on nature. At this point, human dependence on nature differed from the primitive stage. Humans started utilizing natural laws to develop production to meet their needs. In this process, humans' ability to transform nature continually strengthened, yet it remained limited and unable to fully challenge nature. Under the impetus of industrial civilization, humanity entered the industrial era. During this period, unrestrained pursuit of economic goals, rapid advancements in science and technology, and unbridled exploitation and destruction of nature to satisfy desires for wealth led to an antagonistic relationship between humans and nature. With the onset of the information age, human life underwent revolutionary changes. Through intangible networks, people can communicate and access information anytime, anywhere. Although it may seem that the connection with nature has decreased, in reality, nature continues to be the foundation and prerequisite for human societal development. Humans have also realized that establishing a harmonious relationship with nature is of paramount importance.

The prerequisite for human existence lies in the maintenance of vital life processes. Through practical activities, humans acquire the necessities for survival from nature, facilitating the expansion of their own productive capacities. Practice becomes the means through which humans transform and utilize nature along an inevitable path. As Marx aptly stated, "In the domain of practice...man can only live by appropriating nature, and it is through this process that he works upon the material of natural substances." [5]

Simultaneously, the forms of practice are continually evolving with the development of human societal productive forces, spanning from primitive societies to agricultural communities, then industrial societies, and finally culminating in the information age. Human practical activities serve as the intermediate link propelling societal progress, continually influencing the actual development of productive forces. Through practical engagement, a bridge is constructed between humanity and nature, tightly intertwining the two, fostering a closer relationship. This interconnection forms the foundation upon which human societal productive forces and production relationships can flourish.

Human attitudes towards nature drive societal changes, reflecting shifts in humanity's ability to reshape nature and alterations in the human-nature relationship. Practice serves as the intermediary that links humans with nature. While nature provides the means for human survival, humans, in turn, possess the capacity to actively transform nature, prompting natural changes. The relationship between humans and nature is dialectical, characterized by mutual dependence, universal connection, and perpetual development. The outcomes of this relationship vary with the unfolding of practical activities. For instance, practices aligned with scientific laws have a promoting effect on the relationship between humans and nature. Conversely, activities contravening natural laws have destructive consequences, plunging the human-nature relationship into crises. Examples include the frequent occurrence of extreme weather events such as floods, droughts, and forest fires due to global climate change,

extensive overexploitation of natural resources in regions of urban overpopulation surpassing natural carrying capacities leading to urban challenges, and the extinction of species resulting from excessive exploitation of natural resources.

4. Discussion of the issue of man and nature in the original classics

Marx states in the Manuscripts that "..... the animal produces only itself, while man produces the whole of nature; the animal is constructed only according to the measure and the needs of that clock to which it belongs, while man knows how to construct according to any one of the scale, and man also constructs according to the laws of beauty." [6] The greatness of human beings lies in the ability to construct their needs according to their own will through practice. But human needs are infinite, people in order to satisfy their own needs constantly to the nature of their own mark, and nature to provide humans to meet the needs of the material is limited, in the limited and infinite contradiction between man and nature changes in the relationship between man and nature, man and nature relationship problems have gradually come to the fore.

In Capital Marx explicitly states that capitalist production "destroys the material transformation between man and land"[7], whereas a communist society would "rationally regulate the material transformations between them and nature"[8]. After the Industrial Revolution, human civilization experienced a period of transition from an agrarian civilization to an industrial civilization. In the historical stage of industrial civilization, insisting on profit growth as the goal is the purpose of the production mode of the whole capitalist society. Under the guidance of this production mode, the subjective position of human being is overly respected, and nature becomes the object of exploitation by capitalism, which leads to the intensification of the contradiction between human beings and the nature, and evolves into a global ecological crisis. This profit-oriented mode of production is characterized by the expansion of reproduction, which inevitably leads to the deepening of the plundering of nature in order to achieve the goal of profit. Therefore, the capitalist society that follows this mode of production is a heartless and indifferent society that is overshadowed by capital and profit. This is mainly reflected in two aspects: on the one hand, the whole society under the domination of capital, scientific and technological progress, the mode of production has made a qualitative leap, which results in a great change in the relationship between human beings and nature from "natural deterrence of human beings" and "human beings obedience to nature" to the control of nature by human beings. The result has been a dramatic change in the relationship between man and nature from "nature intimidates man" and "man obeys nature" to human control over nature.

On the other hand, socialized machine production provided new material conditions for the purpose of achieving the unlimited multiplication of capital, and mankind, having just been liberated from the external forces of nature, was unfortunately trapped again in the chains of capital. Built on private ownership, the view of nature under the rule of money is a thumbing of the nose at nature. Capital turns nature into a tool for acquiring wealth, and the depletion of natural resources seems to be the right thing to do, resulting in the arbitrary extraction and misuse of natural resources, leading to their depletion and the intensification of the antagonism between human beings and nature. The profitability of capital has led to the further evolution of material production into "capital production". This kind of production mode that destroys the material transformation between man and nature also destroys the original ecological cycle process of nature, and "creates" an irreparable crack in the material transformation cycle and the ecosphere, resulting in an irresistible ecological disaster. Engels pointed out: "Let us not revel too much in our human triumphs over nature"[9], nature "retaliates" for every human victory. Under the control of capital, nature has become a pure object of excessive human needs, which in turn aggravates the contradictions and antagonisms between human beings and between human beings and society.

5. Reflections on the construction of a harmonious symbiotic relationship between man and nature in contemporary times

The convening of the National Conference on Ecological Environmental Protection in May 2018 formally established State Leader's Thought on Ecological Civilization, which systematically explains the relationship between man and nature, protection and development, environment and people's livelihoods, and domestic and international relations, marking a new high level of the Party's understanding of the regularity of the construction of socialist ecological civilization. The report of the 20th Party Congress states that "Chinese-style modernization is a modernization in which human

beings live in harmony with nature"[10]. It is necessary to firmly establish and practice the concept that green water and green mountains are golden silver mountains, and to plan development at the height of the harmonious coexistence of human beings and nature"[11], allowing China to establish the development concept of harmonious symbiosis between human beings and nature, and pointing out the direction for the construction of a harmonious symbiotic relationship between human beings and nature in China.

First of all, the key to dealing with the relationship between human beings and nature and realizing harmonious coexistence between human beings and nature lies in human beings. From the concept of conflict and confrontation between human beings and nature to the concept of human beings guarding nature, human beings are interdependent communities with nature. Man and nature are a community of destiny, and the relationship between man and nature is the most basic relationship in human society. As Marx said, "Nature, in so far as it is not itself the body of man, is the inorganic body of man, and man lives by nature." [12] Nature is man's inorganic body, man obtains material materials for survival from nature, man and nature are interdependent communities, the need to strengthen the construction of ecological civilization, to strengthen ecological environmental protection, and to advocate a green and low-carbon way of life should become a worldwide value code. We should adhere to the basic national policy of conserving resources and protecting the environment, insist on green development, and integrate the construction of ecological civilization into all aspects and the entire process of economic, political, cultural and social construction.

Secondly, the relationship between development and protection should be correctly handled. The relationship between human beings and nature is the most basic relationship in human society. Under the logic of capitalist thinking, economic development and environmental protection are antithetical, and economic development must be carried out at the expense of the ecological environment, and the management of the ecological environment must incur huge economic costs. Under the guidance of Marx's ecological thought, and based on the Chinese people's experience of harmonizing the natural environment and development in practice, and drawing on the results of economic ecology, General Secretary State Leader put forward the idea that "green water and green mountains are golden silver mountains" of the two mountains theory of this scientific concept. The protection of the natural environment and economic development are not opposites, not at the expense of one party, they are dialectical and unified relationship. The 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) has profoundly elaborated that the harmonious coexistence of human beings and nature is one of the Chinese characteristics of Chinese modernization, and that the promotion of the harmonious coexistence of human beings and nature is one of the essential requirements of Chinese modernization, and has made the following statement: "Promote green development, and promote the harmonious coexistence of human beings and nature."

Finally, the realization of harmonious coexistence between human beings and nature must be guaranteed by a targeted and operational system. First, the protection of biodiversity requires the establishment of a sound practical mechanism for ecological compensation. In accordance with the principles of environmental carrying capacity, it is essential to make rational choices and optimize regional development and conservation, while respecting the laws of natural development and operating in accordance with them; secondly, the ecological civilization construction target evaluation system should be used as a criterion for evaluating the results of local development. Therefore, it is imperative to enhance the evaluation system, refine the emission indicators and taxation standards for high-polluting and high-emission industries; thirdly, the implementation of ecological environment protection mechanisms requires a strict monitoring system to ensure effective oversight and appropriate penalties for illegal and non-compliant polluting enterprises; fourthly, digital information technology provides new approaches for ecological environment protection. Digital technology enables real-time monitoring and localization of environmental pollution and pollution sources. Through the integration of virtual and physical components, digital technology educates citizens on environmental awareness and enhances public participation.

6. Conclusions

Humans are products of nature, as nature nurtures human beings. Fundamentally, humans and nature have a symbiotic relationship, and practice serves as the intermediary connecting humans and nature, making their relationship even closer. On one hand, through practical activities, humans explore nature to satisfy their own production needs. They transform nature to promote productivity. On the other hand, humans and nature are part of a shared destiny, constituting the most fundamental

relationship in human society, which influences human social activities. Ecological civilization is an important form of human civilization. Reflecting on how to correctly position the relationship between humans and nature, adapting to nature while understanding its laws, and building a harmonious and symbiotic development relationship are crucial for contemplating the direction of human development and understanding the implementation of the Five New Development Concepts.

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