

## Two Dimensions of Comprehending the Environmental Thought of Marx

LUO Chuan<sup>[a],\*</sup>

<sup>[a]</sup>Institute of Marxism, Southwest University, Chongqing, China.  
\*Corresponding author.

Supported by the Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities (SWU1309225).

Received 16 February 2015; accepted 22 March 2015  
Published online 26 April 2015

### Abstract

The environmental thought of Marx is usually elucidated in the academe from the theoretical dimension instead of paying attention to it from the methodological dimension. The comprehension of the environmental thought of Marx should not be limited in theory, but implemented in the thinking method as well as the thinking logic of such theory developed, which also be called the dimension of methodology.

**Key words:** Marx; The environmental thought; Theoretical dimension; Methodological dimension

Luo, C. (2015). Two Dimensions of Comprehending the Environmental Thought of Marx. *Studies in Sociology of Science*, 6(2), 32-35. Available from: URL: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sss/article/view/6857>  
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/6857>

### INTRODUCTION

The past studies on the environmental thought of Marx were mostly paid attention to its theoretical dimension and ignored its methodological dimension. As the writer of this paper, I think that it is necessary to discuss and study about how we should comprehend the environmental thought of Marx correctly on the base of its academic analysis. The comprehension of the environmental thought of Marx should not be limited in theory, but to find its methodology as our guide of constructing the ecological civilization.

## 1. THE COMPREHENSION OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL THOUGHT OF MARX FROM THE THEORETICAL DIMENSION

### 1.1 Reveal the Dialectical Unity Between Person and Nature From the Practical Aspect by Marx

All the old materialists, included Feuerbach, used to separate the relation between person and nature and made them detached from each other. Just as with John Bellamy Foster said that: Marx's materialism was not a mechanical materialism which separated the relation between person and nature and made them in opposite directions. It was the dialectical materialism that focused on the organic whole relation between human and nature (Foster, 2006, p.17). Marx said in his Economic & Philosophical Manuscripts of 1884,

Man is directly a natural being. As a natural being and as a living natural being he is on the one hand endowed with natural powers, vital power- he is an active natural being. These forces exist in him as tendencies and abilities- as instincts. On the other hand, as a natural, corporeal, sensuous objective being he is a suffering, conditioned and limited creature, like animals and plants. That is to say, the objects of his instincts exist outside him, as objects independent of him; yet these objects are objects that he needs- essential objects, indispensable to the manifestation and confirmation of his essential powers. (*The Collected Works of Marx and Engels [Volume ]*, 2009, p.209)

That is to say, human and nature are the unity of opposites. On the one hand, human make an active effect on the nature of makes nature get rid of the comfortable state, makes it be the "humanized nature" and use it to confirm the instinctive power of human being. On the other hand, human's production is limited by nature and nature is not only the objective precondition for human being, but also the essential condition of human's development.

## 1.2 Explanation on the Methods of Realizing the Harmonious and Unifying the Relation Between Human and Nature From the Practical Aspect by Marx

Marx explained from the aspect of practice not only in fields of thoughts and history but also in the natural world, which was the essential difference between him and other philosophical schools in understanding and solving the contradictory problem. Feuerbach once tried to make an explanation of the relation between human and nature from the perspective of historical materialism, but his understanding of the relation was non-historic and abstract, which was out of practice and only understood in objective and direct form. Therefore, the method of realizing the harmony and unity between human beings and nature has not been found yet. Marx considered that, “the object-oriented human essence is necessary whether from the view of theory or practice.” (*The Complete Works of Max and Angles [Volume 42]*, 1979, p.121) And that is to say, it is a target relation between human being and nature which is different from the free relation from the perspective of practical dimension. Besides, practice is the kink in maintaining this kind of target relation. The relation between human and nature is essentially a practical problem. In my ancient time, productivity was extremely backward that people were lacking the ability of acquiring and transforming the nature and they regarded the nature as gods to worship. In recent times, with the progress of the science and technology, the productivity acquired a rapid development and people began to remove some of the mystery of nature as well as conquered it as the dissident force. Nowadays, people have realized the duality of the modern industrial civilization: It has promoted the social progress, but also brought serious ecological problems. The cruel reality has elevated the understanding of the relation between human and nature to a new level and paid attention to pursuing the harmony and unity of this relation. According to three changes in the relation between human and nature, we can know that social practice, especially the production practice, is the fundamental impetus of changing the relation between human and nature. The changes in their relation do not depend on the subjective consciousness. The continuous progresses of productivity and production practice are the inexorable trend of historical development and the unifying relation between human and nature are necessary for the progress of human civilization. Therefore, from the perspective of the target relation between human and nature, it is not the thing that exists since the world began and consistent and it is the production of industry; the production of history; the production of activities from generation to generation (*The Complete Works of Max and Angles [Volume 1]*, 1979, p.48).

## 1.3 Analysis With Historical Materialism on the Ecological Problems From the View of History by Marx

Although capitalist mode of production played an important role in promoting the productivity unprecedentedly, it also brought some serious problems such as environmental pollution, ecological destruction, etc.. Marx gave the analysis and thinking with historical materialism on ecological problems. Marx investigated into the relation between human and nature from the perspective of historical development by revealing the epistemological causes of ecological problems. He said that, “in human history..... even those most outstanding figures would not see those certain things because of blindness in judging. And then they would find that in surprise those things they had not seen before uncovered at some point.” (*Selections of Max and Angles [Volume 4]*, 1995, p.579) In the process of knowing and changing the nature, we could not master the compatible rule of “human-nature-society” because of the limitation of history. Therefore, it has caused many negative consequences such as environmental pollution and ecological destruction in using nature. Marx reveals that the capitalist system is the root cause and outlet of generated ecological problem by means of lubrication capitalist economy system. In the capital, Marx largely describes the picture that capitalists proceed unlimited production for the sake of pursuing surplus value so that lead to economic crisis and ecological crisis. Economic crisis and ecological crisis are inevitable as long as transfer “capital logic”. Therefore, capitalist system has no capacity to realize the harmony and unity of “people-nature-society”. In order to realize the harmony and unity of “people-nature-society”, the root outlet is to transform the capitalist mode of production focused on “capital logic” so as to ultimately realize the communist production mode. For the communist production mode “is equal to humanitarianism as the completed naturalism, While it is equal to naturalism as the completed humanitarianism, and it is the true settlement between human and nature as well as human and human”.

## 2. GRASP THE ENVIRONMENTAL THOUGHT OF MARX FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF METHODOLOGY DIMENSION

The environmental thought of Marx is based on inspecting and thinking capitalist society, and proposed mainly for solving current problems. Therefore, these theoretical achievements are inevitable to stamp time brand and have certain historic limitations. A great many conditions have changed up to now. It has already been hard to meet the desirability taking Marxism to guide realistic question if

only grasping and applying the environmental thought of Marx from the perspective of theory.

First of all, Not all of Marx's ordinary discussions to ecological problems are accord with practical conditions here and now. Marx considers, capitalist nature (that is capitalist logic) is pursuing surplus value endlessly and greedily, which is absolutely anti-ecological. There is no doubt that as long as the capitalist system exists, ecological crisis is inevitable just like economic crisis. However, present developed capitalist countries have already entered into post-industrial age on after another.

Objectively speaking, western countries have achieved great theoretical achievements and made significant theoretical contribution in the process of ecological civilization exploration and construction: On the one hand, the rapid development of numerous theories including ecological philosophy, ecological economics and ecological politics, which make present western ecological thought abundant and mature gradually; on the other hand, the appearance of green politics has enriched western environmental politics to a large extent and enriched Hesperian ecological civilization theory. (Wang, 2011)

Certainly, it is merely capitalist countries' local adjustment to production relationship revealed in ecological problem. In the long term, only carrying out sublation to capitalist system and replace it as more advanced social system can truly unify people and nature. However, there is no gainsaying that the present age is quite different from Marx's. It is actually not according with Marxism in nature if only searching for effective medicine to solve present ecological crisis from Marxist works.

Secondly, theoretical achievements that can reflect the spiritual nature of Marx ecological thought ("three aspects" mentioned before) have important guiding significance to ecological civilization construction, but it needs to rise to the height of methodology. On the one hand, thinking mode and thinking logic determines the theoretical achievements formed, that is how people think forms relevant theoretical achievements. On the other hand, theoretical achievements reflect and embody certain thinking mode and thinking logic, that is methodology generated by this theory can be revealed, through inspecting the theory itself. Therefore, the grasp of environmental thought of Marx shouldn't be limited to theory, but up to methodology, that is when understanding and grasping the environmental thought of Marx, it needs to consider ecological problem like Marx. Then how to grasp the environmental thought of Marx from the dimension of methodology? We hold the point that the subject needs to think about problems like Marx when understanding and grasping the environmental thought of Marx. It contains two relevant problems in the rule: subjects need to think like Marx when understanding and grasping the environmental thought of Marx, that is to think from the thinking mode and thinking logic of practice perception and grasping relevant ecological

problems. Marx clearly points out that "the main defect of all materialism(including Feuerbach's materialism) is that, when understanding object, reality and sensibility only from objective or visual perspective, rather than treat them as emotional human action, practice or subject to understand." (*Selections of Max and Angles [Volume 1]*, 1995, p.54) Understanding and grasping the environmental thought of Marx from practice includes multiple meanings, such as understanding the dialectic relationship between human and nature from practice, understanding the generated necessity of ecological crisis under the capitalist system from practice and solving the root path of human and nature contradiction from practice. Only learn to take advantage of practical thinking mode and thinking logic to think about the environmental thought of himself like Marx can one truly understand and grasp it so as to understand and grasp the spiritual nature and theoretical essence of the environmental thought of Marx.

The subject needs to think like Marx when facing and dealing with present social ecological problems. After entering into 21<sup>st</sup> century, ecological problem has already become a great topic of common concern. Without a doubt, "ecological energy is spread all over the whole society, and an ecological new century is coming" (Du, Fan, & Cao, 2012). At that time, thinking ecological problems like Marx is not only the spiritual nature of the environmental thought of Marx, but also the foundation of solving the ecological problem and guiding era development. That is to say, thinking ecological problems like Marx is the key in determining whether the subject can truly understand the spiritual nature of the environmental thought of Marx and effectively guide ecological civilization construction practice, when the subject grasping and applying the environmental thought of Marx.

---

## CONCLUSION

---

In a word, we should both pay attention to the theoretical dimension and the methodological dimension of environmental thought of Marx when study it. To some extent, studying environmental thought of Marx from the methodological dimension is more important than from the theoretical dimension. Specifically, subjects not only need to think like Marx when understanding and grasping the environmental thought of Marx, but also need to think like Marx when facing and dealing with present social ecological problems.

---

## REFERENCES

---

- Du, X. M., Fan, X. X., & Cao, A. Q. (2012). *Marxism ecological view of contemporary China* (p.5). China Social Sciences Publishing House.

- Foster. (2006). *Marxian ecology: Materialism and nature* (p.17). Beijing, China: Higher Education Press.
- Selections of Max and Angles (Volume 1)*. (1995). Beijing, China: People's Publishing House.
- Selections of Max and Angles (Volume 4)*. (1995). Beijing, China: People's Publishing House.
- The Collected Works of Marx and Engels (Volume 1)*. (2009). Beijing, China: People's Publishing House.
- The Complete Works of Max and Angles (Volume 1)*. (1979). Beijing, China: People's Publishing House.
- The Complete Works of Max and Angles (Volume 42)*. (1979). Beijing, China: People's Publishing House.
- Wang, H. B. (2011). Practice, achievement and dilemma of western developed countries building ecological civilization. *Research of Marxism*, (3).