

Eco–Philosophy

—The Theoretical Foundation of Ecological Civilization Construction

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Abstract: Eco–philosophy perceives the world from an ecological perspective, so it is also called the ecological world view. According to Eco–philosophy, the world is a complex “man–society–nature” ecosystem, a community of shared life that exists and works in the form of an integral whole as a living organic system. With the relationship among man, society, and nature being its basic problem, and the harmony of the three being its target, Eco–philosophy, as a holistic philosophical world view, goes beyond the modern philosophy of subject–object dichotomy and helps to facilitate the ecological civilization construction with its new world view, epistemology, methodology and axiology.

Keywords: philosophy of subject–object dichotomy; eco–philosophy; inertia in the path; ecological civilization

The outstanding achievements of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) marks a new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Xi Jinping, the general secretary of the CPC, pointed out, “History has proven that an era of great social changes must be a time of huge development for philosophy and social sciences. At present, China is undergoing the broadest and most profound social reform in its history and undertaking the most grand and unique practical innovations in human history. Such great unprecedented practices will generate enormous power and broad space for developing theories and flourishing academic research. This is an era that needs theory and gives rise to theory, an era that needs thoughts and gives rise to thoughts.” In 2012, the 18th National Congress of the CPC formulated the strategy of “making great

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efforts to promote ecological progress,” which was incorporated into the five-pronged approach consisting of economic, political, cultural, social development, and now ecological civilization construction. In 2017, the report delivered at the 19th National Congress of the CPC presented a detailed explanation of the strategic plan in accelerating the reform of the ecological civilization system, promoting green development and building a beautiful China, and presenting a route map for China to promote the ecological civilization construction and green development in the future. Under the leadership of the CPC, this was a great pioneering step for the Chinese people to become the forerunners of ecological civilization construction and enter a new era of human civilization. A new age needs a new philosophy. In the process from the philosophy of “nature governed by man” in the period of industrial civilization to the philosophy of “respecting nature,” or the philosophy of “man–nature subject–object dichotomy” to the philosophy of “unity of man and nature,” the basic theories have accomplished their innovation and transcendence, and a new philosophical paradigm has come into being.

1. Transcending modern philosophy of subject–object dichotomy

Modern philosophy is a philosophy of man–nature subject–object dichotomy. Accordingly, man is the subject and the only subject, the subject of existence, value and cognition, and thus is empowered with subjectivity, i.e. purposiveness, initiative, self–consciousness, creativity, cognitive ability and wisdom, all of which amount to the value of a human being; while other living creatures and nature are objects with no subjectivity, no purposiveness, no initiative, no self–consciousness, no creativity, no cognitive ability or wisdom, and

therefore have no value, serving only as the objects for man to study, use and transform. Holding high the great philosophical banner of subject–object dichotomy, people marshaled their powerful subjectivity in their struggles against nature to improve productivity, and finally produced the great achievements of industrial civilization. However, the great accomplishments also produced an ecological and social crisis that swept over the world from the second half of the twentieth century to the present day resulting in the rise of the great worldwide environmental protection movement and the emergence of a new philosophical paradigm.

1.1 The modern philosophy being a philosophy of subject–object dichotomy

The sixteenth to eighteenth centuries saw the emergence of the modern philosophy of subject–object dichotomy.

That was an era of great victory for the sci–tech revolution and worldwide industrialization, from which a corps of great minds summed up experience and created a philosophy to represent the spirit of their times. Engels pointed out, “But during this long period from Descartes to Hegel and from Hobbes to Feuerbach, these philosophers were by no means impelled, as they thought they were, solely by the force of pure thinking. On the contrary, what really pushed them forward was the powerful and even more rapidly onrushing progress of natural science and industry. Among the materialists this was plain on the surface” (p. 233). With Descartes, its founder, and Newton, the great physicist, as its chief representatives, the modern philosophy of subject–object dichotomy is also called the “Newton–Cartesian World View.”

Descartes put forward his classic philosophical statement, “I think, therefore I am.” This statement enhances man’s self–awareness and promotes man’s subjectivity. He was also the founder of dualism, the subject–object dichotomy. According to Descartes,

there are two substances, matter and mind (thinking), which exist apart from and without depending on each other; the motion of the physical world works according to the laws of mechanic force and can be concluded as the simple displacement of molecules and atoms. Marx (1957) pointed out, “Descartes in his physics endowed matter with self-creative powers and conceived mechanical motion as the manifestation of its life...Within his physics, matter is the sole substance, the sole basis of being and knowledge” (p.160).

The philosophy of subject-object dichotomy interprets all natural and social phenomena according to the law of mechanical force, and thus is called a “Mechanistic World View.” Featured primarily by dualism and reductionism, this philosophy “attempts to employ the laws of mechanics to interpret all natural phenomena regarding all processes and phenomena of various distinct properties (like chemical, biological, psychological) as mechanical. It believes that motion is not an ordinary change but the mechanical spatial displacement of an object as a result of the external force that is the mutual collision of objects,” and it “denies the internal source, qualitative change, the leap of the development and its enhancement from the lower to the higher and from the simpler to the more complex in relation to the motion of an object” (Rozentali & Eugene, 1975, p. 686).

This mechanistic world view was summed up by Carolyn Merchant, an American scholar, in five presuppositions. (1) Matter is composed of particles (ontological presupposition). (2) Cosmos is an order of nature (principles of identification). (3) Knowledge and information can be abstracted from the natural world (realm-independent presupposition). (4) Problems can be analyzed into parts processed by mathematics (methodological presupposition). (5) Sense data are separated (presupposition of epistemology) (Merchant, 1999,

p.250). “On the basis of these five presuppositions about substances, science since the seventeenth Century has been universally regarded as knowledge about an external world, objective, value-neutral, and realm-independent,” she further pointed out, “these presuppositions are completely compatible with another properties of a machine—the possibility to control and rule nature,” guiding the development of science and technology, industry and government decision-making so that “the presuppositions on existence, knowledge and methods will make it possible for mankind to manipulate and control nature” (p. 249). “According to the Cartesian view, this method is the key to conquering nature, because these reasoning methods employed by geometries ‘urge us to imagine that everything within the range of human cognitive ability may be interrelated in the same way.’ In this way, there will be nothing far away, or invisible in the dark, out of our reach”(p. 253). This is the main viewpoint of the “Newton-Cartesian world view.” Over more than 300 years under its guidance of the industrial revolution, this view served not only as the philosophical foundation for the great success of human science and technology and the accomplishments in industrialization, but also as the philosophical basis for humans to plunder, dominate and rule nature.

1.2 The philosophy of subject-object dichotomy being a great achievement of human cognition

Against medieval philosophy, Descartes denied the authority of the church, believed in the power of human reason, and created a new scientific method for understanding the world, and replacing blind faith with knowledge and reason. This is of great significance.

Eco-philosophy is the theoretical foundation for constructing an ecological civilization.

First, modern philosophy affirms and develops human subjectivity, encouraging and publicizing

man's fighting spirit. The Newton-Cartesian philosophy of subject-object dichotomy, as a great achievement of human cognition, is a great progressive idea. In the theoretical dualistic mode of subject-object dichotomy, man and nature are independent of and against each other. Man is the subject, and nature is man's object; the person is active, while the object is passive; the person has value, while nature, as the object, has no value; the subject rules the object; man, as the subject, is the master and ruler, while nature, as the object, is the target of man's conquest, manipulation and transformation, thus the thought that man rules nature was formed and the corresponding related actions were done. This thought has promoted man's subjectivity and fighting spirit, brought into full play man's initiative, enthusiasm, creativity and wisdom, and developed the fighting perseverance against negative conditions and created enormous wealth both materially and spiritually. All that human beings have created is related to this and thanks to its guidance, human beings have achieved such success today.

Second, modern philosophy guides the development of modern science and technology and has realized its breakthrough. The thinking mode of modern natural science was formed according to the cognitive methods of the subject-object dichotomy philosophy and its reductionism, and it became the philosophical and methodological basis for the development of modern natural science. Marx pointed out that, formed from the second half of the fifteenth Century, the thinking mode of modern natural science "divides nature into various parts, classifies the various processes and things of nature into specific groups and studies the internal structure of the organism according to its various anatomical forms" (pp. 23-24). It has furthered scientific research and kept it going. The analysis method of reductionism has simplified the

process of human cognition, shortened the time of understanding things, made human understanding of nature more thorough, refined and deepened, and the division of science and technology more accurate and specialized. Great progress has been made in natural science and technology, such as mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, astronomy, geology and other natural sciences, as well as various technical sciences, all of which have developed rapidly and vigorously, having contributed to man's understanding and transformation of the world.

Third, modern philosophy lays the theoretical foundation for modern industrial production and guides the industrialization and modernization of human life. The Newton-Cartesian philosophy of subject-object dichotomy has guided industrialization and modernization of human life, giving full play to man's power over nature, and won a great victory in transforming and utilizing nature. Carolyn Merchant (1999) pointed out, "The new definition of substance in philosophy and science of the seventeenth Century is similar to and compatible with the structure of a machine: (1) A machine is made up of parts. (2) A machine sends special information about the world. (3) A machine is structured according to some order and law (and is manipulated in some orderly sequence). (4) A machine works in an overall environment that is restricted and accurately-defined. (5) A machine empowers us to dominate nature" (p.255). The application of reductionist thinking in industrialization created a more thorough, professional and accurate division of labor, innovated mechanization, automation and the machine assembly line of mass manufacturing. Industrial manufacturing was rapid, successful and efficient production. It produced a variety of products, and continuously supplied the market, creating huge wealth and modernizing human life.

Today, all the achievements of industrial

civilization, including both material and spiritual wealth, are obtained under the guidance of modern philosophy, which has already been brilliantly recorded in the history of human civilization. But at the same time, it should be noted that the challenge of man's sustainable survival posed by the global ecological crisis and social crisis facing human beings is also a manifestation of the negative effects produced by the limitations of the subject-object dichotomy.

1.3 The limitations of the subject-object dichotomy philosophy

Subject-object dichotomy philosophy is the reason industrial civilization has accomplished its great achievements but also the reason for it to come to an end. It is implied by the worldwide crisis in the era of industrial civilization, namely, the crisis in the social relationships between man and man, the crisis in the ecological relationships between man and nature, and by the serious threat posed by it to mankind's sustainable survival that the philosophy of subject-object dichotomy has serious limitations and negative effects, which are mainly embodied in the following three aspects: first, it emphasizes the man-nature separation and confrontation, stands for the philosophy of struggles, and advocates for man's dominating and ruling of nature. This is the root cause of the contemporary ecological and social crises. Second, it stresses the reductionist analytical method and the linear thinking mode, believing that the dynamics of things comes from the nature of the parts, and the parts determine the whole, thus the distinction between the primary and the secondary is a must, and the secondary must be centered on the primary. Third, it emphasizes the values of anthropocentrism (Yu, 2010).

The limitations of the subject-object dichotomy philosophy can be said to have existed from the very early times when the primary mission of human beings was to promote man's own subjectivity,

enthusiasm, creativity and wisdom to grow more powerful through the rapid exploitation of nature to win a dominating position. But, man's dominating and ruling of nature enslaved and exploited nature. Now nature has begun its counterattack in forms of environmental pollution, ecological destruction and resource shortages producing an ecological crisis that is posing a serious challenge to human survival, compelling humans to acknowledge the values and the status of life and nature.

The limitations of the subject-object dichotomy philosophy have been fully exposed, and they are fundamental. Usually, the transformation of a philosophical paradigm begins with problems, the challenge of which calls for a transformation of philosophy. This is why a new age needs a new philosophy. Engels pointed out, "Only the philosophy that is most fully adapted to the times and to the universal scientific concept of this century can be called a true philosophy. With the changes of the times, the system of philosophy has also changed naturally. Since it is the mental crystallization of the times and the living soul of culture, philosophy will, someday, sooner or later, touch and influence the contemporary real world not only internally in its content but also externally in its form. Today, philosophy is finding its way deep into the hearts of contemporary people, fulfilling them with love and hatred" (Yu, 2010, p.121). Although this is what Engels said more than 100 years ago, it still applies to our present society.

A new philosophy is needed in the new era, one that is realistic and that can guide the construction of an new ecological civilization.

2. Eco-philosophy being a new philosophy

Eco-philosophy perceives the world from an ecological perspective, so it is also called the

ecological world view. According to eco-philosophy, the world is a complex “man-society-nature” ecosystem, a life community that exists and works in the form of an integral whole as a living organic system. With the relationships among man, society, and nature being its basic problem, and the harmony of the three being its target, Eco-philosophy can be regarded as a holistic philosophical world view.

2.1 Eco-philosophy emerging as a new philosophical paradigm

Eco-philosophy arose from the great environmental movement in the middle of the 20th century which was similar to the fact that modern philosophy came into being during an age of criticism. In the 16th century's European Renaissance, the literary and scientific world was prevailed by the proposition that “happiness is on Earth.” It criticized religious ignorance and asceticism, asserted human rights and denied religious authority. At the time of the French Revolution in 1789, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen was delivered to the world, declaring “men are born and remain free and equal in rights,” formulating thoughts like “natural rights, separation of powers, freedom, equality, and fraternity.” Inspired by philosophers such as Descartes, Bacon, and Locke, the German philosopher Kant finally concluded and put forward the famous statement “Man is an end,” and observed that “man is the highest legislator of nature,” thereby anthropocentrism had accomplished its theoretical establishment and created the modern world of humans in the development and practice of the industrial civilization.

Eco-philosophy arose from a new age of criticism. In the middle of the 20th century, environmental pollution, ecological destruction and resource shortages put the world in an ecological crisis, while in the early 21st century, the economic, credit, and global social crises are confronting the



Immanuel Kant

world with a potential, fundamental turning point, from industrial civilization to ecological civilization, embracing another great era when all schools of thought are contending for acceptance and attention. It was the western world that first saw the emergence of new cultures, the ecological culture, such as eco-philosophy, eco-politics, eco-Marxism, eco-socialism, eco-ethics, eco-economics, eco-law, eco-literature, eco-feminism, and eco-theology, all of which share a common viewpoint, that is, to criticize and attempt to surpass the philosophy of subject-object dichotomy, to go beyond the analytic thinking of reductionism, and propose the value that “man lives in harmony with nature,” indicating the birth of a new philosophical world view.

In 1973, Arne Naess, a Norwegian philosopher, published his paper *The Shallow and the Deep, Long-range Ecology Movement: A Summary* and

put forward the concept of “deep ecology.” From the critiques on modern philosophy to the further exploration into “environmental problems,” it proposes a new philosophical view by comparing deep and shallow ecology. In 1984, in collaboration with George Sessions, another representative of deep ecology, Naess innovated an eight-tier platform, namely eight main points for deep ecology: (1) The well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman life on Earth has value in themselves (intrinsic value, inherent value). These values are independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes. (2) Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of these values and are also values in themselves. (3) Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs. (4) The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease in the human population. The flourishing of nonhuman life requires such a decrease. (5) Present human interference with the nonhuman world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening. (6) Policies must therefore be changed. These policies affect basic economic, technological, and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present. (7) The changes in ideological change is mainly that of appreciating life qualities (dwelling in situations of inherent value) rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living. There will be a profound awareness of the difference between big and great. (8) Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to participate in the attempt to implement the necessary changes (Lei, 2001, pp. 52–57).

These are the main viewpoints of eco-philosophy. Deep ecology, together with western Eco Marxism, eco-socialism, eco-ethics, eco-economics, eco-law, eco-literature, eco-feminism, and eco-theology, is also a school of eco-philosophy

and also expresses the basic eco-philosophical viewpoint, that is, to surpass “subject-object dichotomy” and advocate “harmony between man and nature” which receives agreement from all its different schools.

2.2 The emergence and the development of Chinese eco-philosophy in ecological civilization construction

In the 1980s, Chinese eco-philosophy got off the ground by introducing western academic viewpoints. It has two major characteristics: being rooted in the profound Chinese philosophy which is a “living” philosophy, a kind of ecological philosophy, and having gained a great impetus for development as a theoretical foundation for ecological civilization construction which has already begun in China.

Professor Meng Peiyuan (2004) observed that Chinese philosophy is a living philosophy which has a three-layered connotation. The first is that the “living” philosophy is a generative philosophy rather than the western-like ontological philosophy. Both the Daoist idea that “the *Dao* is the underlying principle behind the creation of the myriad of things” and the Confucian idea that “nature nurtures all living things” focus on the generative relationship between the origin of the world, *i.e.* *Dao* or Nature, and all things on Earth, *i.e.* life and man, instead of the relationship between the noumenon and phenomenon. The second is that the living philosophy is a philosophy of “life” instead of a mechanistic philosophy. “Living” refers not only to life, but also the creation of life. Nature is an organism of life, not only having life, but also bearing the ability to create life. “The prevalence of the natural law” and “endless life in succession” in Chinese philosophy refer to the intrinsic vitality of nature which can unceasingly create new life, as well as the significance and value of nature. The third is that the living philosophy is a kind of eco-philosophy. It puts emphasis on the harmony

between man and nature considering the meaning of life, believing that man and nature are a community of life, that man cannot live without nature, and nature also needs man to fulfill its value. Nature is the source of man's value and at the same time, man is the implementer of the value of nature. Therefore, the relationship between man and nature is a relationship related to value, rather than a cognitive one, unitarian rather than dualistic (pp. 4–6).

The research on Chinese eco-philosophy which is rooted in the tradition of Chinese philosophy has contributed to the integration of the philosophy of the new era and gained great incentives while serving Chinese ecological civilization construction.

2.3 The theoretical construction of Chinese Eco-philosophy

Being a world view regarding “man–society–nature” as an organic whole of life, eco-philosophy asserts that the world should be perceived from a holistic ecological point of view, based on the viewpoint of unity between man and nature, a global ecological civilization should be built through the reconciliation between man and man, and man and nature. This is a transformation in relation to the paradigm of philosophy. The theoretical construction of Chinese eco-philosophy mainly involves the construction of its world view, epistemology, methodology, and axiology.

2.3.1 Construction of the world view of eco-philosophy

Modern philosophy believes that the world is of matter and matter is primary while the mind is secondary, which is the essential problem with philosophical world views. Eco-philosophy, with the relationship between man and nature being its basic focus, and harmony between man and nature being its primary aim, is a holistic philosophical world view. Its primary point is that the world is a complex “man–society–nature” ecosystem, an organic whole of life. This is the essence of Eco-philosophy. The

world, as a living community of life, exists and works in the form of an integral whole. Here, the whole is more important than the parts, for the dynamics of life comes from the whole rather than the parts. It is the whole that determines the parts. The whole is the substances for life to exist, develop, evolve and create. It is the form of the realization of all things. Therefore, it proposes to give up the distinction from the primary and the secondary, rejects center and centrism, and establishes its ideas on harmonious development. The relationship and dynamics of things are more important than their structures. Although the organic world is composed of parts, and has a specific structure and function, it is dynamic, and the “relation” within the interconnections and interactions is more important than the structure. Thus, eco-philosophy rejects the philosophy of struggles and is mainly characterized by harmony in pursuit of the harmonious development between man and nature.

2.3.2 Construction of the epistemology of Eco-philosophy

Modern philosophy believes that cognition is the reflection of the subject (man) on the objective world (object), and thus is called the theory of reflection. According to eco-philosophy, cognition is the appreciation of the subject for its concerned object. Because of the infinite diversity of the objects in the world, the subject of cognition can only appreciate the objects they are concerned about, thus cognition is not a passive reflection on objects, but an active choice of which objects to learn about and appreciate.

According to ecological epistemology, the world is “value-able.” In 1994, Holmes Rolston, a famous American philosopher put forward in his work *Value in Nature and the Nature of Value* the concept that all living things “have the ability of value judgment” (or they are value-able). In his viewpoint, an evaluator is a being that can defend a certain value and living

beings on Earth can be divided into groups of various levels that will face many alternatives and must make an option to defend their values so that they gradually become “value-able.”

The “value-able” subject refers to humans who are capable of judgment—animals and plants—biological species—ecosystem—nature, which are series of live beings “that can be evaluated.” Rolston (1999) observed, “it is subjective and philosophically ignorant and even very dangerous if there is any species who still conceive themselves as supreme and sovereign and judges everything else according to their use in this era of ecological crisis. Such philosophers must have been living in an unexamined world, so they themselves and their followers live an unworthy life, for they fail to see the value-able world in which they are living.”

2.3.3 Construction of the methodology of Eco-philosophy

Eco-philosophy assumes the ecosystem is an integral whole and employs it to learn and interpret life-related phenomena and their development to discover and reveal the interconnections and laws among things so that problems in relations to the live beings can better be understood and solved. This ecosystem holism involves the following viewpoints: All factors within the ecosystem are interconnected and interact with each other; the matters of the ecosystem are in their continuous circulation, transformation and regeneration; the material input and output in relation to the ecosystem are in equilibrium. These are ecologically holistic approaches. In the construction of an ecological civilization, they are employed in ecological designing, including the ecological designing of eco-politics, eco-economy, and eco-culture. The ecological methodology is of great universal significance. It follows ecological design to build an ecological civilization and create a new era for mankind, having initiated a great practice for our

species.

2.3.4 Construction of the axiology of Eco-philosophy

The system of modern philosophy is based of ontology, epistemology, and methodology, but axiology is not included. So, the introduction of “axiology” is an important manifestation that philosophy has started to evolve which is a great achievement. Rolston put forward in his book *Philosophy Gone Wild* (1986) “the value of nature.” He (2000) believes that to confirm the value of the wilderness is an embodiment of the “wild turn,” but here, “the wilderness” cannot turn itself and there is no such “turn” involved for it has always been in existence, ready for development and changes. So, the “turn” here means the turn of man’s notion, a philosophical “turn.”

In 1985, I put forward the concept of “ecological value,” believing that both natural and environmental resources have economic values which are terms of economic conception. And then, in March of 1993 at a symposium for “The Theory and Practice of Mineral-Exploration Philosophy,” one of the Chinese Social Sciences fund projects chaired by Professor Zhu Xun, I proposed to add “axiology of mineral-exploration philosophy” as an independent part of the study apart from the five included parts; ontology, epistemology, methodology, decision-making theory and subject theory. This proposition was adopted, and I was appointed to take charge of it and “Axiology of Mineral-Exploration Philosophy” was arranged as Chapter Four of the final work of the project. This is the first time it was formally included in the philosophical system (Zhu, 1995, pp. 94–117).

Life and nature are valuable. On the one hand, they are valuable for the survival, development and enjoyment of mankind, an external value; and on the other hand, they exist in accordance with the ecological law, which is considered an internal value.

To confirm the value of life and nature is the most important function for eco-philosophy to preform to become a new philosophical paradigm, a great progress achieved in the development of philosophy.

3. Eco-philosophy being the theoretical foundation of ecological civilization construction

As for the modern philosophy of subject-object dichotomy which is about man and nature, its form of realization is “anthropocentrism.” The ecological relationship between man and nature is presented in a form of man’s dominating nature; while the social relationship between man and man is presented in a form of “the ruler’s dominating society.” As for the theoretical foundation of industrial civilization, modern philosophy is the theoretical source of the great achievements of industrial civilization as well as the theoretical source of its problems which, in the ecological relationship between man and nature, is embodied by the global ecological crisis represented by economic crisis, ecological destruction, and resource shortages, and in the social relationships between man and man, manifested by the global social crisis represented by economic crises and other social problems. Compared with modern philosophy, eco-philosophy is realized in the form of “harmony between man and nature” which has gone beyond “anthropocentrism” to accomplish “two reconciliations,” that is, the ecological reconciliation between man and nature and the reconciliation between man and man.

3.1 The basic problem of eco-philosophy: Harmony between man and nature

According to eco-philosophy, the two basic problems or contradictions in human society are the social contradictions between man and man, and the ecological contradictions between man and nature, which serve as the driving force to promote social

development and progress. In the modern world, all the achievements as well as the problems related to industrial civilization are the result of the two contradictions, which, nowadays, have developed from opposition and confrontation to serious conflict and crisis, posing a great challenge to the sustainable survival of mankind and indicating the arrival of a fundamental change in the world, for only through a fundamental change can the two basic social contradictions be solved. This justifies the transformation from an industrial civilized society to an ecological civilized society: the realization of the two reconciliations with the social one between man and man, and the ecological one between man and nature. This is the correct goal for human society, and “harmony between man and nature” is the correct theoretical foundation of an ecological civilization.

“Harmony between man and nature” is a Marxist historical view and a Marxist philosophical outlook as well. Marxism has always opposed “the contradiction between nature and history,” and advocated “the unity of man and nature.” Marx and Engels pointed out “For practical materialists, i.e. communists, all problems are to revolutionize the world...in particular, the harmony between man and nature” (p. 38). This historic mission “to revolutionize the world” is to promote the two great changes of the world. They said, “The great changes confronting this century are reconciliation between man and nature and reconciliation between man and man” (Marx & Engels, 1963, p. 603).

According to Marxism, man and nature are inseparable. Being interdependent, interconnected and interacting with each other, they are an organic integral whole as a community of life and destiny. On the one hand, nature plays an important role in social history. However, nature cannot be divorced from human beings, and the present state of nature cannot exist without man, for real nature is a natural

world of anthropology, and a natural world without human beings is non-understandable. On the other hand, man and society are the subjects that create history, but similarly, man creates the world based on nature rather than on men themselves, and there is no man who is separated from nature. Man and society separated from each other turn out to be only an abstract rather than a real world.

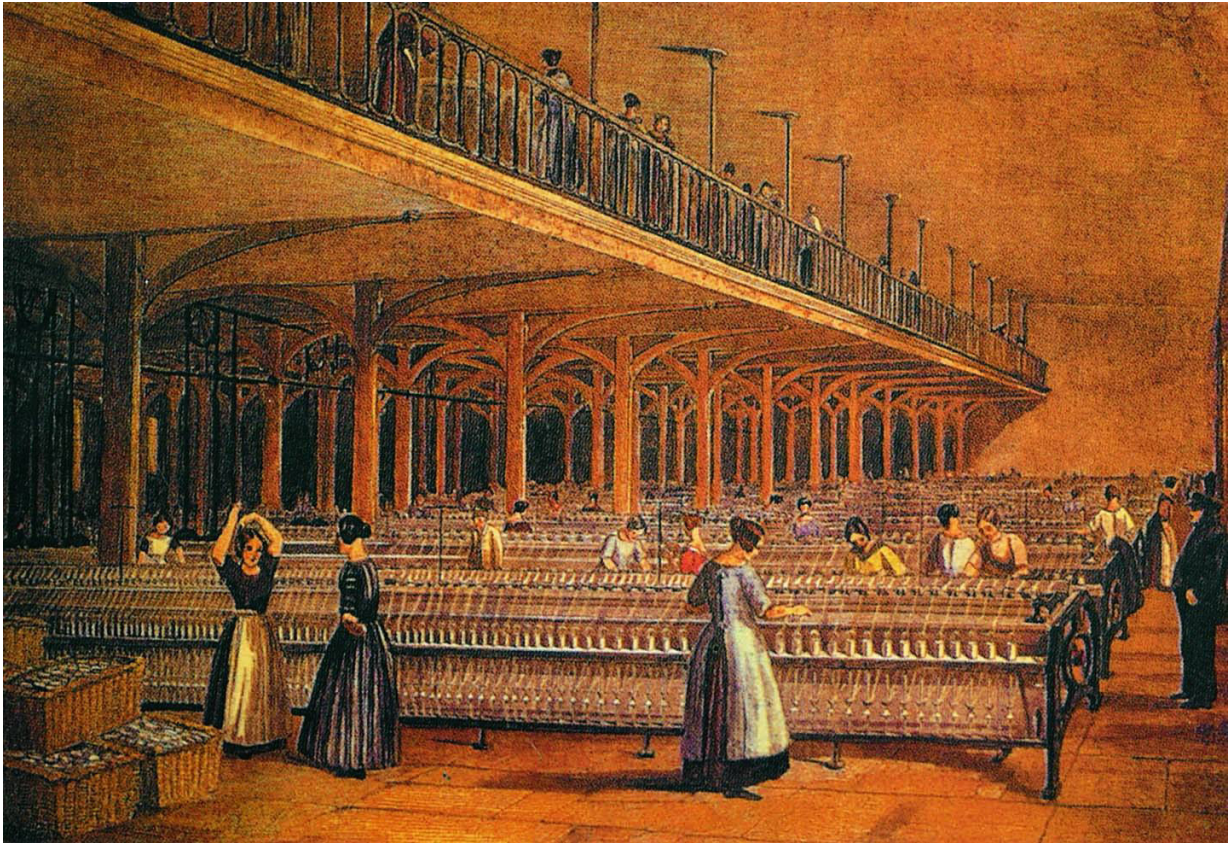
The real world is one in which man and nature interact with each other. It is not a simple addition of the human world to the natural world, but an integral whole of their interactions. As a whole part of the two, the real world has a characteristic that cannot be found in its two component parts but found generated from their interaction.

The relationship between man and nature exists in a certain social form developed during a specific period and it varies depending on the form. This is a social historical connection which, at the same time, has got developed and realized in the form of human labor, a medium to change, develop and use the nature in a specific natural environment. So, this is another kind of natural historical connection. Therefore, our view of history must be grounded in the interactions between man and nature in learning and interpreting the world (Yu, 1992). The world should be understood from practice. Based on their historical investigation into the relationships between man and nature, Marx and Engels drew the historical conclusion of “harmony between man and nature.” That is why it has become the basic viewpoint of eco-philosophy.

3.2 Eco-philosophy helping to form the core values of ecological civilization

Human societies have developed under the guidance of the core values of each society. There were once only two basic civilizations in mankind's history: agricultural civilization and industrial civilization. The development of each, were spurred by the core values of each society.

Take Chinese civilization as an example. “The three cardinal guides and the five constant virtues” is the core value of Chinese agricultural civilized society. “The three cardinal guides” refers to the rulers guiding their subjects, fathers guiding sons, and husbands guiding wives; “the five constant virtues” refers to benevolence, righteousness, manners, wisdom and sincerity. The original source of this value was found in the *Book of Changes*, “Understand the relationship between your majesty and your people in order to learn about different hierarchy of society, and learn about different hierarchy of society in order to be educated with manners and virtues.” The Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period saw both the emergence of many different thoughts that were contending for attention and acceptance as the basis for the development of philosophy, literature and science. This great development and prosperity of culture facilitated the formulation of the core values in the civilized agricultural society. For example, Confucius stressed the idea that “There is government, when the prince is prince, and the minister is minister; when the father is father, and the son is son.” Han Feizi pointed out that it was “the *Dao* of the world for an official to serve his emperor, for a wife to serve her husband, and for a son to serve his father.” This is the earliest formulation of the “three cardinal guides.” In the Han Dynasty, Dong Zhongshu made it clear that “an emperor should guide his subjects, a father should guide his son, and a husband should guide his wife.” He also put forward “the five constant virtues” by adding “sincerity” to Mencius’ “benevolence, righteousness, manners, and wisdom.” It was during the Song Dynasty that Zhu Xi first put “the three cardinal guides” and “the five constant virtues” together. As the core values of the agricultural civilized society, “the three cardinal guides and the five constant virtues” guided the Chinese society to develop at a



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rapid and steady pace, so that Chinese culture could stretch for more than five thousand years, which has no precedent in the history of mankind.

In the eighteenth Century, beginning with the British Industrial Revolution, the industrial civilization accomplished the highest achievements in western developed countries, resulting from the guidance of the core values of the industrial civilized society, anthropocentrism, which is a man-centered view with its essence being that all should serve for man's benefit and all should act in the interests of man. However, throughout the era of industrial civilization, the anthropocentrism-dominated values had never guided and did not guide human behavior in the "overall interests

of the whole of mankind," and it even neglected the impact of man's activities on the natural environment. In practice, it was based only on the "individual (or the few)" standard and worked only in the interests of "individuals (or the few)." The activities of an individual or a family started only from the interests of the individual or the family; the activities of an enterprise started only from the interests of the enterprise; the activities of a class started from the interests of the class; the activities of a nation or a country started from the interests of the nation or the country. It took no account of other factors, other people, future generations, and even life and nature. Therefore, its essential nature was not "anthropocentric," but "individual-centered."

Individualism is the world view of modernism and the philosophical foundation of all human actions in the age of industrial civilization. Nowadays, the value diplomacy promoted in developed countries is politically about democracy, freedom and human rights, which are philosophically included in individualism. The core values of society should be defined at the philosophical level, so the core values of society in the era of industrial civilization are anthropocentrism (Yu, 2014).

Now, when human beings are developing an ecologically civilized society, eco-philosophy has promoted the formation of the core values of the ecological civilization, which is an important manifestation of its significance.

Philosophically, the core values of an ecologically civilized society are defined as “harmony between man and nature.” In the middle of the twentieth Century, the global ecological crises manifested by environmental pollution, ecological destruction and resource shortages led to great changes in world history. This is a great era of positive social changes guided by a new culture of mankind, an ecological culture, with an eco-philosophy, eco-politics, eco-Marxism, eco-ethics, eco-economics, eco-law, eco-literature, eco-feminism and eco-theology, which have been created by scientists after studying the environmental problems in search of a solution to the ecological crises. The different schools of the ecological culture unanimously criticize and surpass the man-nature philosophy of subject-object dichotomy, and they also transcend reductionist thinking and advocate for the values of “harmony between man and nature.” This is an important step in the formation of the core values of ecological civilization.

We can learn from the history of human societies that the core values of a civilized society are always in a process of development and different civilizations will develop different social core values.

However, the core values are both of inheritance and universality. For instance, the “benevolence, righteousness, manners, wisdom and sincerity” of civilized agricultural society and the “democracy, freedom and human rights” of civilized industrial society will be contained in new established values. The eco-philosophy will promote the formation of core values of the civilized ecological society in the era of ecological civilization and play a role in the great practice of building a new culture and a new society of ecological civilization to promote the development and progress of the society. Of course, it will take a long time to accomplish this process.

4. China taking the lead in building an ecological civilization in the world

By the middle of the 20th century, the industrial civilization had achieved its biggest accomplishments, and the growth rate in the industrial economy, population and high-level expenditures in developed countries had reached their maximum. Yet, along with the outcomes of these achievements were environmental pollution and ecological destruction that turned out to be a global problem the first time as well as the first occurrences of resource shortages and the problems of an aging population, which has been followed by economic and social crises. Under the circumstances of these continuing threats crises posed to human survival, western developed countries saw the emergence of a vigorous environmental movement and the growing support for an ecological culture, which indicated the beginning of a move from industrial civilization to ecological civilization. However, the fact shows that developed countries were not the first to see the rise of ecological civilization for they had lost the opportunity to take the driver’s seat in social change because of the inertia of industrial civilization. Instead, it was

China that took the lead on the road to ecological civilization construction.

Since the reform and opening up, China has seen rapid economic development rising to soon be the largest industrial country in the world. It is really a world miracle for a large country to keep to its speedy economic growth even at a rate above double digits within thirty years, but of course, this has also brought out problems like over-consumption of energy and resources, serious environmental pollution and ecological destruction, which have already become a severe restriction factor for further economic development. Meanwhile, the entanglements with various social and livelihood problems have further complicated these problems, creating serious challenges to social development. Furthermore, the complexity of China's present situation has no parallel in world history. There is no model that China can study to solve its current problems. Therefore, developing a fix requires China to rely on its own experience and discover its own solution. It is China's unique mission to build an ecological civilization (Yu, 2013).

The report delivered at the 19th National

Congress of the CPC points out that China has "made notable progress in building an ecological civilization" and that "China has become an important participant, contributor, and torchbearer in the global endeavor for ecological civilization" (Xi, 2017, PP. 5–6). At the same time, it also emphasizes, "We should have a strong commitment to socialist ecological civilization and work to develop a new model of modernization with humans developing in harmony with nature" (p. 52), "building an ecological civilization is vital to sustain the Chinese nation's development" (p. 23).

The ancient civilization of China is an agricultural civilization. Having never stopped its five thousand years' of continuous development, China's civilization has achieved its greatest accomplishment and perfection, amounting to its historical height and the highest level in the world, a glory of the Chinese road which, after accomplishing its ancient and modern stages, is currently moving for a new era. Now, building the "Chinese road" to an ecological civilization has already begun, and this is another great contribution of the Chinese nation to human.

(Translator: Guo Li; Editor: Yan Yuting)

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