

## The Dialectic Dimension of Ecological Cultural View in the Context of Marxist Theory

ZHANG Lin<sup>[a],\*</sup>

<sup>[a]</sup>School of Marxism, Xinxiang Medical University, Xinxiang, China.  
\*Corresponding author.

**Supported by** a grant from the General Project of Humanities and Social Science Research in Colleges and Universities in Henan Province (No. 2022-ZZJH-546).

Received 17 October 2021; accepted 6 December 2021  
Published online 26 December 2021

### Abstract

Ecological culture is the basic cultural view on the traces left by people in production and life practice in order to maintain the benign living state of biology. From the evolutionary history of western ecological culture, the view of ecological culture has experienced a transition from the anthropocentrism of “everything is for me”, which demands and destroys nature infinitely, to the non-anthropocentrism of ecological culture which shows moral concern to nature. However, there are metaphysical limitations in these two forms of ecological cultural views. The Marxist ecological culture discussed in this paper is a cultural concept of the way of human beings getting along with nature put forward by Marx and Engels using the principles and methods of Marxist theory. It has abundant dialectic thoughts and plays an important enlightening role in sublating the ecological culture of anthropocentrism and non-anthropocentrism. This paper tries to clarify the dialectics of Marxist views of ecological culture from the perspective of dialectics and the huge system of Marxist theory. The first part is the dialectic of object activity: the turn of ecological culture in environmental philosophy. This is followed by the dialectics of self-consciousness: the links of environmental philosophy and eco-cultural development. The third part is the negative dialectic: the transcendence of environmental philosophy and ecological culture. The last part evaluates and summarizes the theoretical value of dialectics of Marxist views of ecological culture.

**Key words:** View of ecological culture; Anthropocentrism; Non-anthropocentrism; Dialectics; Marxist theory

Zhang, L. (2021). The Dialectic Dimension of Ecological Cultural View in the Context of Marxist Theory. *Cross-Cultural Communication*, 17(4), 16-21. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/ccc/article/view/12354>  
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/12354>

### INTRODUCTION

The term “ecological culture” was first put forward by Aurelio Peccei, founder of Club of Rome, in his article entitled “Global Issues and Human Choices in the 21st Century”. Since the middle and late 20th century, the increasingly serious global ecological crisis has sounded the alarm to mankind. Both developed and developing countries have realized the threat of environmental deterioration to human existence, they have reflected on human behavior from the cultural level and taken various measures to arouse people’s awakening, so as to form a new ecological culture that tries to overcome anthropocentrism and advocate the harmonious coexistence of human and nature. The view of ecological culture is the choice of helping human being and a cultural revolution in line with the requirements of the times. It emphasizes the harmonious development between human and nature as its purpose and purport, and is a crucial criterion for the evolution and development of human culture. In the West, as the ecologist movement flourished, A group of deeply concerned ecological philosophers and ethicists such as Peter Albert David Singer, Albert Schweitzer, Aldo Leopold, Holmes Rolston, Arne Naess and Henry David Thoreau, etc, integrated ecological concerns into philosophical and ethical cultural thinking, and reflected on and doubted the anthropocentrism concept of ecological culture in modern western rational culture, and put forward the non-anthropocentrism of ecological culture, such as animal liberation theory, biocentrism, ecocentrism and deep ecology respectively. In addition, There are also a number of western ecological

Marxists with a sense of anxiety, such as The Canadian scholar William Leiss and Ben Agger, and the American scholars John Bellamy Foster and James O'Connor and David Pepper, a British scholar, have studied Marx's ecological cultural thought. Therefore, the study of ecological culture has gradually become prominent in the field of western philosophy. Compared with the research of the western ecological culture, the academic achievements of Chinese ecological culture include traditional ecological culture in ancient Chinese and ecological culture research guided by Marxist theory. The representative results are mainly achieved by the following scholars, such as Yang Tongjin, who wrote the book called *Environmental Ethics: Global Discourse, Chinese Perspective* (2007), Sun Daojin published his books, *Including Studies on Marxist Environmental Philosophy* (2008) and *Ecological Culture Popular Reader* (2016), Yu Mouchang published *Environmental Philosophy: the Theoretical Basis of Ecological Civilization* (2010), Chen Hongbing wrote the book called *Ecological Culture and Paradigm Transformation* (2013). And another famous scholars are Jiang Zehui, who wrote *Mainstream Culture in the Era of Ecological Civilization: General Research on Chinese Ecological Culture System* (2013), and Ye Ping, who wrote *Philosophical and Ethical Research on Environmental Science and Its Special Objects* (2014), etc.. The view of ecological culture in the context of Marxist theory has abundant dialectic thoughts. These dialectic thoughts are embodied in dialectics of object activity, dialectics of self-consciousness and negative dialectics. In addition, these dialectic thoughts can provide important epistemological and methodological guidance for ecological culture of western anthropocentrism and non-anthropocentrism to get out of the theoretical dilemma. Therefore, it is necessary to explore these dialectic thoughts in Marxist view of ecological culture.

---

## **1. DIALECTICS OF OBJECT ACTIVITY: THE ECOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL TURN OF ENVIRONMENTAL PHILOSOPHY**

---

As we know, the view of universal connection and that of change and development are the two general characteristics of Marxist materialist dialectics. These two general characteristics run through nature, human spirit world and human society, thus generating dialectic of object activity. So far, this dialectic is the most objective, comprehensive, rich and "absolute" guiding science. It "must" and "should" become the general epistemological principle of human thinking. Engels said: "The law of dialectics is the real development law of nature, so it is also effective for theoretical nature research." (Engels, 1995, p.311) Therefore, it is also suitable for the

current study of environmental philosophy and ecological culture.

The dialectic of Marxist object activity requires us to treat all species and things in nature and the dialectical relationship between these species and things and our human existence in the way of ecological thinking, that is, holistic thinking. This point has revolutionary enlightenment to our environmental philosophy and construction of ecological culture. Because, the dialectics of Marxism objective activity treats nature from the perspective of connection, and uses the discourse representation of environmental philosophy and ecological culture to establish the awareness of nature's systematicness, integrity, organic and complexity, and regard nature as an ecological community. Human beings and all non-human beings in nature should treat each other wholeheartedly and share life and death; The representation with the words is to sublimate the "out of date, old" mechanistic view of nature of anthropocentrism, thoroughly eliminate anthropocentrism's unrequited love on axiology and the arbitrariness, instant success on methodology, and sets up the "ecology" after the ecological view of nature, so that human beings can live in the cultural and the natural community.

On the point of connection, Marxist dialectics of object activity sees not only the connections in nature, but also the connections between nature and society, as well as the connections between people within society. For environmental philosophy and ecological culture, the dialectic of Marxist object activity applies this view of universal connection to transform society and promote the improvement of environmental quality. Because, the disharmony of the relationship between human and nature and the destruction of the environment will often affect the relationship between people and society. In terms of philosophical ontology, epistemology and methodology, the dialectics of Marxist objective activities can not only make up for the defects of the anthropocentric mechanistic view of nature that separates the relationship between nature and society and between people, but also improve the view of Aldo Leopold, an American environmental philosopher, who views man's ethical relationship with nature in isolation from social relations. In solving ecological problems, it points out a way out of the maze to truly understand nature and society.

---

## **2. DIALECTICS OF SELF- CONSCIOUSNESS: THE LINK OF ENVIRONMENTAL PHILOSOPHY AND ECOLOGICAL CULTURE DEVELOPMENT**

---

From the perspective of western environmental philosophy and ecological culture evolution, anthropocentrism, as a cultural concept, has its rationality in the specific

historical stage of human cultural evolution. However, with the deterioration of ecology and the aggravation of the crisis of human existence, the transformation from cultural view of anthropocentrism to cultural view of non-anthropocentrism shows that the object of human morality care has undergone fundamental changes, in line with the development of human nature and human self-transcendence. It has the inevitability of cultural evolution(Zheng,2005). However, from the current situation of the development of ecological culture, ecological concept of anthropocentrism and Non-anthropocentrism is still in a continuous and fierce debate, and there are both cultural disapproval. Therefore, introducing Marxist materialist dialectics for realizing the high consciousness of dialectics is an important way to make up for their own theoretical extremes.

### **2.1 Sublate the Rational Ontology of Ecological Culture View of Anthropocentrism With Dialectics of Self-consciousness**

As an ecological cultural concept or thinking mode of human beings, anthropocentrism truly reflects the cognition of human beings to nature and themselves in their specific stage of survival and development, and also reflects the urgent need of human beings' survival and development in biological or organic sense. It provides the necessary conditions and lays the necessary foundation for the existence and development of human being as a real cultural existence or human being, and has certain rationality. However, anthropocentrism shows that human beings are understood as the existence of general species. It forgets the self-perfection and completion of human beings and fails to see all the cultural missions that human beings need to practice and complete in their own evolution.

In addition, the axiology and methodology of ecological culture of anthropocentrism are all based on rationality, especially the ontology of scientific rationality. In essence, this rational ontology is like Hegel's "put the cart before the horse" idealism. This ontological reason is at first far away from dialectics and becomes "absolute" similar to God. Therefore, in order to eliminate its own harm, the concept of ecological culture of anthropocentrism must realize the high consciousness of dialectics rationally, and govern reason by nature rather than govern nature by reason.

Furthermore, ecological culture of anthropocentrism excessively advocates the authority of scientific reason, and uses it as a weapon to conquer and transform nature immoderately. In fact, scientific reason is not always scientific, and it naturally contains elements of error. Therefore, scientific reason has relativity, which is rooted in its mechanical mode of thinking and the lack of dialectical mode of thinking. The concept of ecological culture of anthropocentrism advocates scientific rationality, which itself is non-scientific and

irrational. Only by realizing the high consciousness of Marxist dialectics, can ecological culture view of the anthropocentrism treat rationality rationally and science scientifically in the practice of dealing with the relationship between human and nature.

### **2.2 Correcting the Anti-rationalism of Non-anthropocentric Ecological Culture With Dialectics of Self-consciousness**

Philosophy is the essence of the spirit of the times. The "environmental and ecological turn" of modern philosophy requires us to start thinking about man's existence as a human being. The way of man's self-determined existence is leading us to think about the nature of man. Therefore, the emergence of non-anthropocentrism as a cultural concept adapted to this philosophical shift is a natural thing in cultural evolution(Zheng,2005,p.62). In non-anthropocentric view, people are no longer just the presence in sense of the biology or organism, one must also consider how to carry out activities of survival practice in a manner consistent with the essence of man. This is the essential requirement of non-anthropocentric ecological culture.

However, on the issue of how to treat human rationality, especially scientific rationality, non anthropocentrism also left Marxist dialectics and went to another extreme, that is, denying the possibility of grasping the world with scientific rationality and its way of thinking (Sun,2008). The non-anthropocentrism view of ecological culture only sees the relativity of scientific reason to grasp the world, but does not see the absoluteness of human cognition of the world. In the development of scientific theory, it seems to forget that the development law of natural science is discontinuity in continuity and continuity in discontinuity, and the dialectical unity of continuity and discontinuity. Therefore, the philosophical epistemology or scientific view of non-anthropocentric ecological culture is not so much modern as atavistic. It is a regression to Hume and New Kantianism in philosophical epistemology, and it is a "shy way" to enjoy the happiness brought by science while rejecting science. In addition, in philosophical ontology, the anti-rationalism of ecological culture view of non-anthropocentrism also has its own logical paradox that It's hard to justify: On the one hand, it vigorously promotes the modernity and development of science and advocates that the mechanical and conservative nature of modern science should be dispelled by the latest scientific achievements such as system theory, nonlinear scientific theory and self-organization theory. On the other hand, it also dogmatizes or solidifies these latest scientific achievements. Therefore, the non-anthropocentric view of ecological culture, while dialectically treating scientific reason, has retreated into the dilemma of metaphysics(Sun, 2008). Engels pointed out that there is nothing final, absolute or sacred in dialectical philosophy.

Therefore, the conscious dialectics of Marxism can correct the anti-rationalism of ecological culture view of non-anthropocentrism.

### **2.3. Realize the Integration of Naturalism and Humanitarian Culture With Dialectics of Self-consciousness**

From the above analysis, we can see that in terms of the relationship between human and nature, the ecological culture of anthropocentrism is guided by scientific rationality and advocates man controlling nature, while the ecological culture of non-anthropocentrism is guided by modern science such as system theory and self-organization theory and advocates nature controlling man. The former corresponds to “humanitarianism”, the latter to “naturalism”. Therefore, in essence, the opposition between these two ecological cultural views is the modernity extension of the opposition between humanitarianism and naturalism.

Naturalism and humanitarianism, as philosophies, both take man’s object activity as their driving force. The opposition between naturalism and humanitarianism originates from man’s object activities and practice or labor. In the same way, their transition from opposition to unity must depend on the objective activities of human beings and the liberation of labor. As completed naturalism = humanitarianism, and as completed humanitarianism = naturalism, it is the real solution of the contradiction between man and nature and between man and man(Marx,2000). Using the core or essence of Marxist dialectics, the law of the unity of opposites, Marxist , guided by dialectics of self-consciousness , ingeniously found the key to understand unity of opposites between naturalism and humanitarian, and provides a good opportunity for Overcoming and retaining ecological culture of anthropocentrism and non-human centralism themselves.

First of all, for non-anthropocentric ecological culture, it advocates the ontology of “wilderness” view of nature, the epistemology of “ecological paradigm”, the methodology of “reverence for life” and the “intrinsic value theory” of nature, these philosophical theories has the significance of “meta-theory”. However, it must not exaggerate naturalism and deny humanism on the grounds of nature’s autonomy and systematization, because from the perspective of Marxist dialectics, dialectics is ultimately a dialectic of human, object activity or practice. This dialectic has consistently rejected to only focus on the abstract nature, which has nothing to do with man. on the contrary, it need to pay attention to “ the human world “. This is the noble mission of philosophy. At present, although there is an objective causal link between the abuse of human rationality, ecological deterioration and environmental destruction, we should never completely deny human rationality and humanitarianism, and rebuild the harmonious relationship between man and nature on the basis of rationality and scientific practice.

Secondly, as far as ecological culture of anthropocentrism is concerned, rationalism and humanitarianism must be established on the premise of objective naturalism, such as the systematicness, wholeness and otherness of nature. Although scientific rationality is scientific in a certain period when human’s survival ability is still relatively weak and living conditions are still relatively bad, it does not mean that it has permanent rationality. Practice prescribes “reason legislates for nature” and has its own reasons for the times and conditions in which it occurs. However, as human rational behavior has constituted a great damage to the natural environment, when the ecological crisis is increasingly serious, it becomes obsolete and has no reason for existence value; It has to accept the criticism and accusation of naturalism, get rid of the mechanical and metaphysics of modern science, and dialectically and organically combine scientific reason and human reason with the systematic integrity and uniqueness of nature, so as to truly deal with the relationship between man and nature scientifically and rationally.

## **3. NEGATIVE DIALECTICS: THE TRANSCENDENCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL PHILOSOPHY AND ECOLOGICAL CULTURE ITSELF**

It is the core purport of Marxist “negative dialectics” to view itself and its opposite in a negative way. Engels once pointed out: “Dialectics..... besides ‘ either this or that’, acknowledge’ this and that ‘ at a proper place.” ( Engels, 1995, p.318) “ Everything has a good side and a bad side, the good side should be absorbed, while the bad side should be discarded. .... In this sense everything, every person, every theory is almost as good and bad as anything else, and from this point of view it is folly to rush to affirm or deny this thing or that thing.”(Engels, 1995, p.251) The ecological culture of western anthropocentrism and that of non-anthropocentrism are mutually objects, mirror and define each other. There is no doubt that they definitely belong to the members of the philosophical family. Therefore, using the logical characteristics of “affirmation is negation” and “this and that” of Marxist negative dialectics to look at these two ecological cultures themselves and their opposites has profound enlightenment and reference significance for us to dialectically deal with the relationship between the two and realize the transcendence of environmental philosophy and ecological culture itself.

### **3.1 Ecological Culture of Non-anthropocentrism: the “Object” Intuition of Ecological Culture of Anthropocentrism**

In The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, Marx systematically clarified the reciprocal symbiosis

between things and their objects. Marx pointed out that the essence of things is hidden in and expressed through its objects. It is this kind of objective relation that things can externalize their essence and confirm their essential power through objects. "The uniqueness of each essential power is precisely the unique essence of this essential power, and hence its unique mode of objectification, its object, its reality, its living being." (Marx, 2000)

Ecological culture of non-anthropocentrism and that of anthropocentrism, as the internal opposite "poles" of ecological ethics, are mutual objects and mutual provisions, and their essential connotations are hidden in each other and expressed through each other. Therefore, the ecological culture of non-anthropocentrism is exactly the "realistic affirmation mode" and "needed object" of the ecological culture of anthropocentrism, and the "indispensable and important object" to express and confirm the essence connotation of the ecological culture of anthropocentrism. As the ecological culture of anthropocentrism with humanity, emotion, vitality, sensibility and object, it has realistic and perceptual objects, that is, ecological culture of non-anthropocentrism; In other words, the ecological culture of anthropocentrism can only show its own life through such ecological culture of non-anthropocentrism as the object. Therefore, the relationship between the two is like that between "the plant "and" the sun".

The ecological culture of Non-anthropocentrism is a unique way of objectification of ecological culture of anthropocentrism. Marxist negative dialectics tells us: "If an existence is not the object of another existence, it must be premised that there is no object existence. As long as I have an object, that object takes me as an object. But the non-objective being is a kind of non-realistic, non-perceptual, only ideological, that is, only imagined existence, and is abstract thing." (Marx, 2000) Based on this, we believe that if there is no ecological culture of non-anthropocentrism as the object of ecological culture of anthropocentrism, then the ecological culture of anthropocentrism loses the basis for the existence of objects, it also doesn't exist. From the history and reality of western ecological culture, although anthropocentrism ecological culture and non-anthropocentrism ecological culture are incompatible and diametrically opposed, non-anthropocentrism is precisely the object required by anthropocentrism and an indispensable and important object to confirm the essential connotation of anthropocentrism ecological culture. At the same time, anthropocentrism ecological culture is presented through the condemnation, reflection and criticism of non-anthropocentrism ecological culture.

### **3.2 Decentralization: the Rational Externalization and Practical Approach of Ecological Culture of Anthropocentrism**

Negative dialectics of Marxism believes that we should must regard the ecological culture of non-

anthropocentrism as the object in order to understand and prove ecological culture of anthropocentrism, in the same way, If we want to prove that the "reality" and "sensibility" of the "people" in ecological culture of the anthropocentrism and observe directly the power of the "people", we must also be with nature as an object. Further speaking, treating and caring for nature by non-anthropocentric means is an important method to confirm and embody the "central" status of human beings. To put it simply, the decentralization of human beings is the form of scientific externalization and practice path of the centralization of human beings.

Decentralization is the prerequisite of human centralization. First of all, the decentralization of man is the logical premise of the centralization of man, which is determined by the symbiotic relationship between man as the center and nature as the environment. Since the 20th century, the brutal facts of many major ecological disasters have repeatedly proved that humans at the center are just a common "knot" in the network of global ecosystem. Any "destruction" of non-human factors in the network of global ecosystem may break the ecological balance, produce "butterfly effect", bring disaster to human beings, and make human's "central" position completely "marginalized", resulting in the loss of human subjectivity. Therefore, the manifestation of "central" status of human must depend on the prosperity of non-human factors in the environment to achieve. To seek the centralization of human beings without regard to the ecological environment of non-human is nothing but a sign of amorous self-importance and an illusion or mirror image created by human beings(Sun, 2009,p.46). This shows that ecological culture of anthropocentrism must be based on ecological culture of non-anthropocentrism to become a "living" "ism".

Secondly, the decentralization of human beings is the material basis of the decentralization of human beings, which is determined by the interdependent relationship between "I" and "object". Marx pointed out that nature is the inorganic body of man, and man is the organic body of nature. Therefore, man and nature have dialectical identity. This shows that, from the biological point of view, man and nature have the identity, man as the center must take nature as the premise and condition. At the same time, as the object of human activities, nature determines the reality and possibility of human being as the "center", and also determines the circumstances under which human being will become the "center". Therefore, decentralization is the best embodiment of human centralization. However, ecological culture of the extreme anthropocentrism unilaterally emphasizes the realization of human centralization by human centralization, and confirms human subjectivity by subjectivity madness, which is a typical metaphysics. The result: a "silent spring" and a "teetering earth." The epistemology that causes all this is rooted in the ignorance

of the systematicness, otherness, self-organization and nonlinearity of natural environment, and excessive worship of the rationality and “central” position of human. In fact, our human rationality also reflects the need for human decentralization.

Decentralization and centralization are both natural centralization in nature. Because, from the point of view of the composition of human body, human is a kind of “natural existence”, with Biological and kinetic characteristics. This means that the centralization of man is the centralization of nature; Nonhuman, on the other hand, is essentially natural. This means that the centralization of non-human is also the centralization of nature. This shows that from a higher level, anthropocentrism and non-anthropocentrism are “following the same path”. The negative dialectics of Marxism holds that man’s biological nature and affected nature and man’s initiative and subjectivity are opposites and unified. This unity of opposites determines that people must be able to dialectically deal with the relationship between “centralization” and “non-centralization”, so that they can achieve a high degree of organic coupling. That is to say, we must use non-centralization of human as a tool and means to achieve the goal of human centralization, to practice the purport of anthropocentrism. However, from the current situation of the development of western ecological culture, the root cause of the above-mentioned two ecological cultures is that they completely separate the biological nature from the affected nature and the subjectivity from the initiative, and only pay attention to the opposition between them, but ignore the unity between them. This metaphysical understanding of humanity is the epistemological root of the delay in dialogue and unity between the two schools of ecological culture. Therefore, only by overcoming metaphysics in environmental philosophy and ecological culture with Marxist negative dialectic view of human, can ecological culture of non-anthropocentrism be effectively integrated with ecological culture of anthropocentrism, and finally achieve self-transcendence.

---

## CONCLUSION

From the perspective of the development of ecological culture of human, anthropocentrism and non-

anthropocentrism have their own advantages and disadvantages. Dialectics of self-consciousness and negative dialectics of Marxism achieve the cultural practices of “no center of anthropocentrism” that “corroborate and practice anthropocentrism with non-anthropocentrism “; this kind of cultural practices with “no center of anthropocentrism” is determined by the biological and natural nature of man and the “field dependence” of human and nature, It also depends on human’s initiative, subjectivity and value, and value belonging to human. It not only downplays the self-centered consciousness, but also takes into account the harmony, beauty and stability of nature. It also “puts people first” and makes things close to people. Therefore, in essence, the cultural practice of Marxism is the practice of taking care of non-human beings to highlight human beings, the dialectical practice of integrating self-negation and affirmation, self and non-human and self and others, and the life moral practice of treating human beings well and helping the common people. This kind of cultural practice plays an important theoretical guiding role for us to overcome the confrontation and dilemma between anthropocentrism and non-anthropocentrism, which is also the significance for us to study the dialectic thought of Marxist view of ecological culture.

---

## REFERENCES

- Engels, F. (1995). , Exiles literature//*Selected Works of Marx and Engels* (Vol.3, 2nd ed., p.251). Beijiing: People’s Publishing House.
- Engels, F. (1995). Dialectics of nature // *Selected works of Marx and Engels* (Vol.4, 2nd ed., pp.311-318). Beijiing: People’s Publishing House.
- Marx, K. (2000). *Manuscript of economics and philosophy in 1844*. Beijing: People’s Publishing House.
- Sun, D. J. (2008). *Study on Marxist environmental philosophy*. Beijing: People’s Publishing House.
- Sun, D. J. (2009). The transcendence from negative dialectics to environmental ethics. *Journal of Yunnan Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)*, (1), 44-48.
- Zheng, H. Z. (2005). From anthropocentrism to non-anthropocentrism: A perspective of cultural evolution. *Journal of Henan University (Social Science Edition)*, (1), 58-63.