

## The Humanistic Concern and Its Socio-Spatial Distribution of Modern Environmental Ethic

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### Abstract

The global ecological crisis of twenty-first Century has sounded the alarm for human beings. The developed area as well as developing country realized that eco-environment deterioration would take a deadly toll from us. Therefore, they made various laws and regulations to protect the ecological environment and natural resources, and also began to seek for a unity where human can live in harmony with nature. Under this circumstance, environmental ethics, which refers to the ethic relationship between people and the ecological environment, emerge as the times require. As based on axiology, the environmental ethics research carries a mission to affirm intrinsic value of human and transformation value of nature equally. Whereas man has the moral obligation to care about the nature which is an indispensable member of the life union, the intrinsic value of human is nontransferable and also unnecessary. We are not supposed to marginalize the ethics concern of human just because we are conscious of care for nature. Therefore, this study tried to illuminate the essence of the humanistic concern and its socio-spatial distribution of modern environmental ethic. Then the study analyzed the necessity of humanistic concern in environmental ethic research, and draw our attention that how important to pay attention to the socio-spatial distribution of ethic concern. Finally, the paper discussed two kinds of theories and realistic paths of ethic concern in specific environmental practice.

**Key words:** Environmental ethics; Humanistic concern; Social space; Ecological care

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### INTRODUCTION

Ethics concern on human relation to nature, where people are considered as moral agents due to their conscience. In a harmonious social community with environmental ethic, resources and other animals provided by nature must be explored and managed in a wise and sustainable way (Retnowati et al., 2014, p.785). As we have already known, the most important and basic issues in environmental ethics are the relationship of human and non-human existence (nature or ecosystem). Therefore, both “human” and “nature” have equal ontological status in environmental ethics. Although Nature centralism environmental ethicists approve of the “moral expansionism” comprehension of environmental ethic, which provides us a theory that the innovation of environmental ethics is the extension of the traditional ethical boundaries (Zhang, 2014). The moral expansion prevailing in environmental ethics seems to be unjustifiable as its specificity would be exaggerated, thus leading to a complete misunderstanding of the nature of environmental ethics. Essentially speaking, environmental problems are results of the conflicts of interest between social groups. Therefore, environmental ethics have not completely gone beyond the scope of traditional ethics (LI, 2013). Correspondingly, the humanistic concern is crucial in environmental ethic research. The modern environmental ethic research has turned its face from

humanistic concern to ecological concern, which may mislead us to “Natural Standard Theory” and “Man Absence”.

## 1. THE HUMANISTIC CONCERN AND ITS SOCIO-SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION

Before come to the core point, we should have a clear understanding of humanistic concern of modern environmental ethic, and show great concern for socio-spatial distribution of environmental problems, which are deeply involved in environmental justice issues.

Humanistic concern of modern environmental ethic have two theoretical dimensions at least. Firstly, the intrinsic value of man has to be acknowledged because of the non-bridging distinction between the human and nature. According to Marxist philosophy theory, the essential differences between man and animal lie in the manufacture and use of tools, in which unique human consciousness occurs. It is the social relations that determine the human nature. Therefore, the intrinsic value of man lies in its social attributes, which distinguish human from the animals in nature. Secondly, human’s activities make man a unique existence. The power of human practice absolutely can ruin the ecosystem and therefore contribute to global environmental change. However, it is also can promote ecological restoration. The cancellation of human subjectivity means eliminating the operative ability in both ecology destroying and ecology protecting practice, which may lead to nihilism standpoint. This would be good for nothing in deed. Generally speaking, as the irreplaceable role of the human plays in life community, humanistic concern of modern environmental ethic is necessary and even essential to sustainable development, as well as environmental protection.

What is more, facing the interactive and complex factors in environment problems, it is crucial to analyze the socio-spatial distribution of ethic concern because of the different reality such as social economic status, political systems, cultural tradition and civilization degree, which can make us act in accordance with specific conditions when deal with environmental problems. To be more exact, the socio-spatial distribution of ethic concern means the special care in ecological compensation, environmental policy making and ideological education on the basis of the socio-spatial distribution of human social status. The socio-spatial distribution of environmental ethic concern is also a guarantee of human personalization and cultural diversity, which could contribute to social fairness and environmental justice. In this domain of discourse, people are generally divided into two groups: environmental advantaged group and environmental vulnerable group. Analyzing the imbalance of social environmental group and finding the practice approach to the coordination of them would be key areas of socio-spatial distribution research in environmental ethics.

## 2. THE NECESSITY OF HUMAN CONCERN IN ENVIRONMENTAL ETHIC

Obviously, whether anthropocentrism or non-anthropocentrism, both of the schools have to recognize that human beings and nature share the equal ontology status and the fire right to survive although the magnitude and the inherence speciality of their acting force in the life community is very different. Therefore, in the background of ecological civilization construction, it is essential to give the deep-rooted reason of emphasizing the humanistic concern of modern environmental ethics in order to beyond and integrate anthropocentrism or non-anthropocentrism.

### 2.1 Form “Rational Man” to “Ecological Man”

Rational man and ecological man (Eco-man) is the dual character of human, just as the opposite sides of a single coin. The idea of rational man is rooted in the industrial civilization ages owing to the social need to increase the productivity. The hypothesis of rational man means the economic body whose activities are calculating and full of ration with the only goal to maximize its own economic benefits. While the “ecological man” is a conception that different from Adam Smith’s “economic man” and “moral man”. Some scholars hold that eco-man, compared to “economic man”, is a theoretical set more suitable for human nature. Other scholars think that ecological men referred to those who have ecological ethical quality and ecological environment awareness. They hold harmonious conception of nature, and pursue the harmonious development of human (Li et al., 2014, p.72). As the bionomic paradigm transformation becomes a trend in various research areas, it is necessary to make connotation of eco-man clear. Ecological man is a hypothesis and desire that human could establish not only a symbiotic relationship with nature, but also find the appropriate way to live in harmony with others, and what is more, try to pursue perfection of themselves. Actually, human has turned her back on “Rational Man”.

The turning from the rational man to ecological man indicates the awareness of human’s self-consciousness. The idea of ecological man implies the harmonious development of economy and environment, and it also shows the historic necessity of human liberation. Consequently, humanistic concern research is an internal requirement of environmental ethics.

### 2.2 Ultimate Goal: “Free Man”

According to the theory of Marxism, the trend of social development is to realize the comprehensive and free development of humankind. The union of the free man is a basic organizational principle of future society. This analysis implies that the free man is the ultimate goal of human development. It is further the reconciliation of rational man and ecological man. Although the interpretation of man is premised on the basis of the relationship of human and nature, the reconciliation of

human and nature depends on the reconciliation of Man himself, which refers to the harmonious social relationship between people, and also provides the social condition for us to live in Harmony with Nature.

Well, what is the “free man” and how would the “free man” effects the humanistic concern and its socio-spatial distribution of modern environmental ethic? To answer those questions, it is necessary to comprehend the nature of “free” and then detach the intrinsic characteristic of a free man from other influencing factor. According to Marx’s philosophy theory, “Free” is the nature of mankind. As opposed to abstraction, it is existing in historical movement in reality. What is more, two important dimensions of “free man” are naturality and sociality. Emphasizing one characteristic at the expense of the other could in turn restrict or even destroy the productivity and the whole society’s health and sustainable development. Human should take nature as the foundation, while nature must take human as the guidance. Human and nature are an organic combination or a dialectical unification. Nonetheless, from the fundamental, only human can be the transformation and protection subject of this world. Accordingly, ultimate goal of a free man has already contained the reconciliation of human and nature when relentlessly pursue the comprehensive development of humankind.

In response to era spirit of ecological civilization in the twenty-first century, we are supposed to pursue the basic goal of ecological man and the further idea of a free man. The humanistic concern of environmental ethics should not step out of the historical stage.

### **2.3 Imbalance of Social Environmental Groups**

Environment ethics should include three dimensions. It is the “Inter-specie ethics”, “Inter-generation ethics” and “Intra-generation ethics” (Yang, 2007). As a whole, the practical ability of the environment and the tolerance capacity from environmental disaster would be different in contemporary and future generations, as well as developed regions and developing countries, resulting in socio-spatial distribution of humanistic concern in environmental ethics. Basically, people who have lower social and economic status are more likely to be exposed to environmental risk such as transferred harmful artificial compounds, water pollution and so on. The imbalance of social environmental groups has become an important factor for promoting the development of the environmental justice movement.

Some scholars conducted a survey of municipal domestic waste treatment in Peking, Chungking and Xiamen, People’s Republic of china. The result suggests the socio-spatial distribution of environmental retaliation was affected by social factors such as educational background, wage level, census register property and so on (Gong, 2014, p.49). With constant promotion of globalization, this imbalance of social environmental groups causes people’s attention gradually. We began to

value the sustainable development, environmental justice and ecological restoration, which is a sign of humanistic concern and its socio-spatial distribution in modern environmental ethics.

## **3. THE REALISTIC PATHS OF DIVERSE HUMANISTIC CONCERN**

Although it is a difficult task to approach humanistic concern in modern environmental ethics theoretically, we can still find our way to our goals though the countermeasures research on socio-spatial distribution of environmental global environmental crisis. There are two realistic paths as follows:

### **3.1 Human Practical Ability of Ecological Restoration: Green Technologies and Public Participation in the Environmental Protection (PPEP)**

Human practical ability of ecological restoration should be inspired in the environmental practices, which is a conclusive evidence for the humanistic care of environmental ethics.

Firstly, science and technology invented by human is the biggest motivation for ecological restoration. The new developments in environmental technology and engineering recent years contribute to some significant breakthrough in environmental conservation and environmental restoration, such as Bio pile technology, which has been applied in ecological restoration of petroleum contaminated soils. Some scholars blame technology for causing serious ecological crisis and other environmental problems. They appear to get rid of technology and “return to the primitive ecology” or “back to a deeper past” (Drenthen et al., 2013). However, it is against human civilization and social advancement. Science and technology as a part of the productive forces, is also the technical construction of man’s essential power, characterizing the breadth and depth of our practical ability for environmental transformation (Chen, 2011, p.72). Obviously, the development of green technologies is essential to humanistic care of environmental ethics. Specifically speaking, we need to encourage investment in high-technology industries such as clean energy and environmental technology.

Secondly, although the subject of environmental justice is concrete and different, classified by his or her social background (especially the economic status), the equal rights of environmental participation should be ensured undoubtedly. This requires arousing people’s awareness of green economic construction, environmental pollution assessment, environmental policy supervision, ecological restoration and maintenance and ecological culture popularization. What is more, the national legislation should orient itself to guarantee the right of information, participation, expression and supervision in

environmental conservation. In operation, we should insist on human-concerned management and the sustainable development principle in economic construction, policy guidance and public opinion direction.

In April 2012, China Environmental Remediation Industry Alliance was brought into existence to promote the sustainable development of China's environmental remediation industry and change the status quo of weak technical ability and many other problems in soil and groundwater remediation industry in China. Its own mixed members come from governmental agencies, scientific research institutes, companies of all sort and other environmental restoration industries related to voluntary composition. The purpose of this organization is to build a communication platform for environmental restoration industry and ecological culture, jointly exploring the development and innovation of the industry's development model and strategy, and ultimately promoting the development of Chinese characteristics environmental rehabilitation. Thus far, the organization plays an important role in the field of ecological restoration, and it is a representative case for public participation in the environmental protection (PPEP), which show respect for human essential power and the humanistic concern of modern environmental ethic despite of its socio-spatial distribution.

### **3.2 The Coordination of Social Environmental Groups**

Because of the distinctions of social status, people play a different role in environmental issues as a dominator, a passive, or a bystander. As a result, the actual affordability of environmental hazards would be varied from one social group to another. This requires more humanistic care of environmental ethics and the sometime more attention to the socio-spatial distribution of environmental risk. Therefore, the most rational option is to make a balance of rights and responsibility of social environmental groups.

Social environmental groups may be an individual or a family, a company or a community, even a country or a nation. However, it can be divided into two opposite categories according to its social status. The first category is environmentally advantaged group, which has many more chances to influence on enactment of the regulations and administrative plan. They always have a certain social status with high-income, and may lead the life style and consumer trends within a certain range. Some of them even become actual regular constitutor of a certain industry, which make them the dominator of zoology encircles as well as the environmental issues. The second category is the environment vulnerable group. People from this group are the absence of environmental awareness and self-protection awareness. They always live in poor conditions with low income and have a low educational level because of congenital or acquired

conditions. Their environmental rights and ecological benefits cannot be guaranteed. Furthermore, they are often powerless to fight back others' environmental violations (Tao, 2009).

Based on the above discussion, it is not difficult to find that maintaining the interest balance of the environmental advantaged groups and the environmental vulnerable groups is an important guarantee to coordinate the social-spatial distribution of environmental ethics. And it also shows the respect for each person's equal environmental rights. There are at least two approaches to coordinate the social environmental groups:

The first way is to improve the ecological compensation mechanism and formulate environmental justice policy, which aims to protect the environment and make sustainable use of ecosystem services. To promote the harmonious development between man and nature, governments take advantage of this environmental economic policy to coordinate the relevant interests of social environmental groups corresponding to the value of ecosystem services and the cost of ecological conservation. The ecological compensation mechanism can focus on regional ecological protection and environmental pollution control and distinguish the damaged parties from destroyers on environmental issues. It co-exist with "Polluter pays principle (PPP)", which requires that the costs of pollution be borne by those who cause it. In recent study on the establishment of a multi-level ecological compensation mechanism, the horizontal ecological compensation system can orient itself to the interests of the regional environmental groups, hoping to reach a balance condition. Well, as an important part, vertical ecological compensation system research has also been recognized by the government and the society.

The second way is to foster ecological cultural personality. Ecological culture is the survival mode of distinct ethnic groups in special ecological environment. It also emphasizes the unique characteristics of the national culture, which is formed by the specific ecological environment. As the human beings and non-human beings share the ecosystem as their external environment, once there is a human being, there will inevitably be ecological culture. Thus, to emphasize and practice inherent value of human and humanistic concern, we should pay more attention to the ecological culture and its personality. It is important and urgent task to develop a diversified way to form ecological personality during the ecological literacy. There may be a feasible approach to vital clue as to cultivate human' ecological cognition of the relationship of human and nature, the idea of ecological ethics, and sense of ecological aesthetics based on the diversified ecological environment and the socio-spatial distribution of social environmental groups. In a word, no cultural diversification, there is no good cycle of the environment.

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## CONCLUSION

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In summary, human has realized the interactive relationship with nature and adjusted their way of thinking and behavior to adapt to nature changes in time, which is an inevitable requirement of time spirit in the 21st century. However, Bing urged to respect and protect nature does not mean there would be necessary to transfer their intrinsic value. It is a truth that there would be no liberation of nature without the liberation of human. Human' full developments are also the zeitgeist of harmonious society. This is the entrance path of humanistic concern in environmental ethic research. As it is discussed in the practical context, we still have to deal with the problems of the socio-spatial distribution on of environmental risk, which calls for more attention to diverse ethic concern for different environmental groups. Based on the above theoretical analysis we present some proposals on practicing diverse humanistic concern, including the development and application of green technologies, the mechanism establishment of public participation, improving the ecological compensation mechanism, formulate environmental justice policy and fostering ecological cultural personality. Through these specific measures, we try hard to inspire people's practical ability of ecological restoration, and also hope to maintain the interest balance of the environmental groups, with the ultimate goal of the harmonious society.

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