



## Theoretical Analysis of “Eco-Man” in Sight of Ecological Civilization

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### Abstract

The emergence of a new sort of civilization—ecological civilization, is definitely becoming the historical inevitability symbolizing that human beings have stepped into the era of ecological civilization. As a totally brand new type of civilization, ecological civilization is also in need of a new subject carrier—eco-man. Consequently, the development of ecological civilization is accelerating the establishment of the new type eco-man with personality model. This paper defines the concept and characteristics of “eco-man”. The settlement of “eco-man” theory has significant theoretical importance and practical meaning, and it’s especially important and urgent to establish “eco-man” in face of current situation.

**Key words:** Ecological civilization; Eco-man; Rational man; Rational eco-man

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### INTRODUCTION

In industrial society era, the great progress made by scientific technology improves the mode of production

significantly, facilitates the development of productivity, elevates labor productivity, acquires unprecedented material wealthy, and greatly improves human’s material and cultural life, as well as gains achievement striking the attention of the world. Meanwhile, ecological damage phenomenon is increasingly severe. Resources shortage, environment pollution, water and soil loss, species extinction, and the flood, typhoon, tsunami, Iran great earthquake, Wenchuan great earthquake, Zhouqu heavy rain and debris flow etc. happening all over the world, all of these natural disasters arising suddenly are caused by human’s behaviors of “dominating nature, conquering nature, plundering nature”. Therefore, the essential reasons accounting for the severe destruction of ecological environment lie on humans, and their anomaly of ecological view, as well as ecological environment consciousness. In industrial civilization age, people held that humans were the “master of all living things” and “lawmakers in the nature world”. Consequently, humans did not take any consequence of their behavior into consideration, looked down upon and violated natural laws, leading humans to be trapped in the predicament of ecological crisis. All of these indicated that the industrial civilization and its standard of humanity were both not in accordance with development of era. The history called on the arrival of a new civilization era to determine new personality pattern. For the purpose of solving the “three biggest crisis”—life crisis, survival crisis and civilization crisis, it required a change in the civilization of contemporary people. Thus, the emergence of a new sort of civilization—ecological civilization, was definitely becoming the historical inevitability symbolizing that human beings have stepped into the era of ecological civilization. As a totally brand new type of civilization, ecological civilization is also in need of a new subject carrier—eco-man. Accordingly, in order to establish ecological civilization, eco-man must be established. What is an eco-man? What are the characteristics of an eco-man, and how to create eco-man?

These are the important contents that will be explored in this paper.

## 1. CONNOTATION OF “ECO-MAN”

Marxism divided the progress and development of human history into five periods: primitive society, slave society, feudal society, capitalist society, socialist society and communist society form, and put forward human rational theoretical hypothesis that humans could be divided into four groups in succession as “primitive human, moral human, economic human and ecological human” according to the different roles humans played in social economic life. But these were a sort of theoretical pattern, a characteristic abstract hypothesis, and actually were an investigation from different angles of an individual’s thought and behavior.

Concerning the theoretical connotation of eco-man, different researchers provide diverse definitions, and some representative ones are as following: some scholars hold that eco-man, compared to “economic man”, is a theoretical set more suitable for human nature, because the latter appeared in the industrial civilization era. They were the outcome of commodity economy, and all their behaviors and motivations were all for pursuit of their own profits. In sight of economic man, it was humans that were the “master of all living things” and “lawmakers in the nature world”. Dominated by this idea, they did not take any consequence of their behavior into consideration, and violated natural laws, harmed benefits of others, society and descendants, leading humans to be trapped in the predicament of ecological crisis. However, “eco-men” came into being in ecological civilization era. They considered human’s ecological morality, responsibility and obligation to others or other living things, rather than barely pursued the economic profit maximization. Some scholars thought that ecological men referred to those who had ecological ethical quality and ecological environment awareness. They held harmonious conception of nature, and pursued the harmonious development of humans, nature and society with ecological principles as the criterion, truly achieving “integration of nature and humans.” (Zhang, 2007) Some other scholars defined “ecological men” as those individuals or groups who had ecological awareness, and were able to respect natural ecological laws, restrain individual and collective behaviors during economic and social activities, so as to realize the commensalism of humans and nature, and sustainable development of economy and society. “Eco men” can refer to nations, or governments, enterprises as well as individuals (Li, 2008).

Although different scholars give different definitions to the concept of “eco-men”, but all of those definitions include three important characteristics: the first is ecological world view, the second is sustainable economic development view, and the third is simple and proper

scientific consumption view. Consequently, the concept of eco-men can be summarized as those who possessed ecological ethical quality and ecological environment awareness, and were good at dealing with relationships between them and nature, others and themselves, also were able to exert human’s subjective initiative, establish righteous natural values on the basis of respecting natural ecological laws during economic and social activities, as well as got along with nature harmoniously, friendly and equally, finally realizing the compromise between human and nature, human and society. The basic characteristics of eco-men can be summarized as integrality, equality, concordance and reflectivity.

## 2. THE PROFOUND PRACTICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF PROPOSAL OF “ECO-MAN” THEORY

Currently, the development form of human civilization is in accelerating conversion from industrial civilization to ecological civilization, and the type of human’s existence also converts from “economic man” to “ecological man” more fast. Compared with “economic man”, “ecological man” is a theoretical hypothesis more suitable for human nature, containing very important theoretical values and practical significance.

### 2.1 The Proposal of “Eco-Man” Theory Is Beneficial to Full Implementation of Scientific Outlook on Development

Third Plenary Session of the 16th Central Committee of the CCP clearly put forward the scientific development perspective that “to adhere to the people-oriented, set up the comprehensive, coordinated and sustainable development view, promote the economic, social and all-round development of human being”. Thereinto, “people-oriented” reflects the basic value orientation of our contemporary social development. Human’s development is the fundamental objective of social development, and how does an individual develop and what is the direction of development? What principle shall be followed? Concerning all of these questions, the proposal of “eco-man” theory shows the developing direction for human’s development. Eco-men have harmonious nature views, and pursue sustainable development of society and resources with ecological principle as the criterion, which is exactly the specific embodiment of implementation of Scientific Outlook on Development.

### 2.2 The Proposal of “Eco-Man” Theory Is Beneficial to Solve the Relation Issue Between Humans and Nature

The series of ecological environment problems happening at present are all on account of human’s behaviors that lack ecological awareness. Human’s behaviors are dominated by awareness and ideas. The fundamental

problems of ecological crisis lie on human’s lack of ecological view. They carry out predatory operation to resources, and satisfy the material greed of contemporary people furthest without taking benefits of decedents into account, finally resulting in the imbalanced relationship between humans and nature, and severe destruction of ecological balance. However, the values of eco-men are a sort of comprehensive value and ecological economic values—“nature—economy—society”. All activities of human beings shall comply with the overall benefits of combined system “nature—economy—society”, not only satisfying the coordinated development between humans and nature, but also meeting material demands, mental demands and ecological demands of humans. “Eco-men” insist a nature view that humans and earth are harmonious, and a sustainable development view. They demand that humans should satisfy their need of material goods for survival on condition that not harming natural ecological system, and we shall seek the interactive balance and coordinated development of nature, society and ecology, so that it has important practical significance.

### **2.3 The Proposal of “Eco-Man” Theory Is Beneficial to Guide People to Realize Their Integrated Development**

What is people’s integrated development? It depends on the harmony between people and themselves, people and people, and people and society, but after all, it depends on the harmony between people and nature. Coordinate the relationship between people and nature in order to make people and nature staying in a harmonious and symbiotic organism. The realization of the harmony and unification of people and nature is not only the objective basis for the realization of sustainable development of nature and people, but also the necessary condition to improve people’s living quality and realize people’s integrated development. The humanity hypothesis of “eco-man” theory is the much more specific description of humanity that emphasizes “harmony of people and nature”, “social equity and justice”, “complying with principles of humanism and trans-Utilitarianism”, and “emphasis of the satisfaction of people’s integrated demands including ecological demands” as well as “realization of liberation of nature and integrated liberation of people” etc., which provides a brand new direction of thinking to people in order to guide them to realize integrated development.

### **2.4 The Proposal of “Eco-Man” Theory Further Accelerates the Pace of Ecological Civilization Construction**

The Seventeenth National Congress put forward the idea of ecological civilization for the first time, which aimed at respecting and preserving ecological environment, and was based on sustainable development, as well as took the continuous development as key point. This civilization attached more importance to people’s self-awareness and self-discipline, and the mutual co-existence, promotion

and integration. In addition, it closely connected ecological civilization construction and recycling economy as well as construction of resource-saving and environment friendly society together, emphasizing “to construct ecological civilization, and basically form the industrial structure, growth pattern, and consumption pattern that saved energy and resources, and protect ecological environment” (Hu, 2007, October 15). This facilitated traditional ways of living and production of people to have a significant change, including the management and transformation of industrial departments of high consumption and high pollution; the active development of high and new technology industry and green industry; enhancement of management and supervision on environmental quality; reinforcement of protection of natural ecological system and recovering of ecological system. All of these were just the value orientation of eco-men. Consequently, the proposal of “eco-man” theory further accelerated the pace of ecological civilization construction.

## **3. BASIC APPROACHES TO CREATE “ECO-MAN” THEORY**

It is the basic requirement of eco-man to respect intrinsic value of life and ecology, treat things with integrated and systematic vision, and deal with all things in a complicated ecological system. This represents the ethic spirit sharing weal or woe between people and people, people and society, people and nature, as well as the survival wisdom of coordinated evolution. Also, it endows contemporary people with the new connotation with era characteristics. Accordingly, scientific ecological world view, values and moral view are required to be established in order to determine the personality establishment and thought pattern of eco-man.

### **3.1 To Establish Scientific Ecological World View**

The exploration of human’s thought development process had undergone the conversion of philosophical world view that is respectively traditional world view, contemporary world view, ecological philosophy, and organism world view. The main points of views of ecological philosophy and organism world view are: Firstly, the world is a complicated ecological system—“humans-society—nature”, and a lively organic integrity. It highlights that human is the subject, while life and the natural world are also subjects, cognitive subjects and subjects of value. Secondly, the integrity is far more important than the part in the relationship between these both two. The dynamics of things come from the integrity instead of the part, namely it is not the part that decides the integrity, but the integrity decides the part. Thirdly, the views of ecology-first system theory abandon previous mechanism world view and thought pattern. This theory shall be used to deal with the relationship between people and nature, economy, society. It believes that human and his society,

as an organic part of ecological system matrix, all of its activities for purpose of survival and development are bound to be bind by natural ecological system. Humans cannot survive without the positive energy conversion and exchange, as well as information communication and interaction of the natural ecological system.

### 3.2 To Establish Scientific Ecological Value

The traditional value is the value of anthropocentrism , which holds that humans are the center of the universe (world), thus all things are measured by humans, all things serve for benefits of humans and all things start from the interests of humans. Individualism is the world view of contemporary society, therefore, people abuse the nature to satisfy their own needs, and only declare nature's value to themselves and their rights to take advantage of the nature, while deny the own value of nature itself, resulting in the pungent contradictions between people and the nature. In order to make the society and resources development towards a healthy and sustainable way, people have to break away from the value that is dominant in the traditional development pattern, and re-establish a brand new value—scientific ecological value. This scientific ecological value has broken away from the anthropocentrism centered on the interests of humans, and recognizes that the humans and nature have shaped an inseparable organic integrity. In addition to the acknowledge of the value of all human beings, it also affirms the value of life and the natural world as well. The connotation and characteristics of scientific ecological value should include following aspects: first of all, the diversity of creatures on earth, ecology and environment is sacred and inviolable; secondly, the harmony of humans and the nature is the fundamental condition for survival and development of humans; thirdly, the essence of protecting ecology and the environment is to realize sustainable development. The scientific ecological value has important meaning in terms of dealing with the relationship between humans and nature correctly, and protecting our living environment on the basis of respecting and love the nature, also could provide constant and permanent power for the sustainable development of society.

### 3.3 To Establish Ecological Ethic Morality

The ecological ethic morality is concerning the moral awareness of human's behaviors to treat animals, vegetables, microorganism on earth, and other things in the ecological system and the natural world. Its essence is to break away from the narrow anthropocentrism, and expand the range of moral care from humans only to the field of relationship between humans and nature, as well as advocate people to approach and love the nature with heart, and blend in the nature. It's not only the expansion of human's moral activities, but also the changes of human's moral rules, moral standards, moral realm and moral objectives. The determination of human's new

responsibility is also the confirmation of value of life and the natural world. It attaches importance to fulfilling the responsibility and obligations to life and the nature, which are an elevation of human's moral realm. We shall cultivate and carry forward ecological ethic morality, enhance the idea of harmony between humans and nature, ecological ethic moral awareness among the whole people, and establish human's sense of moral obligation to the nature, in order to cultivate good ecological virtues; establish the moral sentiments of worshiping the nature and loving the ecology; arise the moral consciousness to care for creatures and treat lives well.

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## CONCLUSION

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It's far from sufficient to create eco-men just based on the conversion of human concepts. Joint effort of the country, society and education departments is also in need to play its resultant role. The main measures are as following: give full play to government's role in the establishment of ecological civilization, and create good institutional environment; exert the effect of education, and popularize ecological civilization knowledge among the whole society, advocate ecologically civilized life style, as well as establish awareness of ecological civilization.

a) Enhance the education of ecologically scientific consumption. Marx's dialectical relationship between production and consumption is that the objective of production is to consume, and consumption will facilitate the development of production in return. We can infer from it that consumption is the powerful impetus of economic development. Scientific and reasonable consumption could facilitate the fast development of economy, while the excessive, luxurious and prodigal consumption would impede the economic development, so those shall be abandoned. The *China's Agenda 21* white paper points out that, "China cannot repeat the development pattern of industrialized countries to exchange high speed economic development and high consumption life style with high consumption of resources, and high pollution of environment", but to "gradually form a living system of low consumption in accordance with our own national situation". It is a profound reform on ideology and living habits to replace excessive and luxurious consumption with reasonable and proper consumption. It is a long term and formidable task to promote reasonable and appropriate consumption among the whole people. Consequently, our countermeasures aiming at the promotion of reasonable and proper consumption pattern are as following: first of all, traditional consumption way shall be changed and correct consumption concept should be established; secondly, actively promote and establish a sustainable consumption pattern that meets the needs of era—green consumption pattern. Its connotation encourages human's mentality and behavior of consumption to advocate the

nature and pursue simpleness, convenience, thrift and a sort of healthy life style. Advocate no- nuisance, low cost, and less pollution; thirdly, enhance the consensus publicity and inspection, and turn scientific, reasonable and civilized consumption into conscious actions of people. Utilize newspapers, journals, broadcast, TV and other news consensus systems to promote scientific, reasonable and civilized consumption view. Fourthly, comprehensively use finance and taxation, price and other economical methods and legal methods to facilitate scientific consumption, suppress luxury and waste. Adopt economic methods to suppress luxury and waste phenomenon in the field of consumption. For example, utilize the function of taxation "adjusting consumption structure" to restrict luxury consumption.

b) To establish ecologically civilized laws and regulations system. It is not sufficient to create eco-men just relying on human's conversion of ideas. Grand adjustment in systems must be made to give full play to government's role in ecological civilization establishment, and create good system environment.

First of all, establish an effective mechanism for ecological compensation. It's one of the most important and fundamental systems to reverse the tendency of ecological degradation and resources waste in our country, and establish ecological civilization. In accordance with the principle "those who develop protect, those who destroy retrieve, those who benefit compensate", utilize economic methods such as price, tax, finance, credit and loan, charge and insurance to change the present situation of low-price resources and priceless environment, so that form a scientific and reasonable compensation mechanism for resources and environment.

Secondly, accelerate the establishment and improvement of ecological legal regulation system to regulate the harmonious relationship between humans and the nature, so as to realize the sustainable development of economic society. An improved of ecological legal system is not only the symbol of ecological civilization, but also the last protect screen of ecological protection. Legal system is the outcome of civilization, which symbolizes to what extent civilization has progressed. Its effect is to use rigid system to bind human's uncivilized behaviors, punish the behaviors harming civilization, implement system that pursues environmental liability strictly, especially the criminal liability, and strengthen the effort to punish enterprises discharging pollution that exceeds standard illegally, as well as punish severely environmental unlawful act. Meanwhile, amend supplemental regulations and laws concerning environmental protection, determine and define environmental property rights, and establish

special environment and resources management agencies that are independent and not restricted by administrative districts, as well as overcome the "regional protectionism" behavior in ecological management (Xiao, 2007, October 19).

Lastly, enhance ecological green education. The change of human's world view and value, and change of social living mode and living style, is bound to require the change of education mode—taking the green education mode, and creating ecologically civilized education mode. Green education should take protecting the earth and harmonious development of humans and the nature as value of education, including teaching objectives, teaching concept and teaching content—courses, professions and degree setting, teaching methods, thought pattern all should embody this value orientation. The essence of green education is a change of teaching mode or teaching direction, aiming at cultivating a generation of new type talents who possess green thought and new thought patterns, and master real high technology (green technology). They master the new high technology knowledge that is beneficial to environmental protection, which will create and develop "green technology" (eco process), facilitate social "green production", develop recycling economy and establish ecological civilization; it will also promote the change of development model of science and technology, facilitate the mutual permeation and unification of natural science, technical science, and social sciences, and promote the healthy development, prosperity, and progress of scientific technology, as well as benefit the harmonious development of humans and society, humans and natural ecology (Yu, 2010, p.45).

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