

Promote the Realization of “Rio” Guiding Ideology with Ecological Economics Theory

Wang Songpei Li Maoxu
(wangsongpei@yahoo.com.cn)

Abstract

New ecological era requires solving the contradiction between developing economy and protecting environment, and establishing the society characterized by “coordination between ecology and economy”. 1972 UN held the Conference on Human Environment, called on people to protect the environment. But the environment problem has not been solved. 1992 UN held the “Rio” Conference on Environment and Development, proposed to combine “Environment and Development” closely (actually also means combine the ecology and economy closely), and proposed the “sustainable development” ideology as the correct guideline. As a result, it also put the developing “Green Economy” as the correct direction. However, 20 years after the Rio conference until now, people’s awareness still trapped in the idea of “protecting the environment for the purpose of protecting the environment only”, the green economy is still failed to develop well, and the environment is failed to be protected too. Face to this situation, China’s environment protection officials raised the opinion of “transformation” of environment protection. The major content is to realize the “Three Transformations”: (1) transforming from preferring economy growth to environment protection to pay attention to both environment protection and economy development; (2) transforming from environment protection falling behind economy development to develop environment protection and economy development into synchronization, (3) transforming from mainly using administrative measures to protect environment to comprehensively using economic, legal, technological and necessary administrative measures to solve environment problems. The author’s opinion is that the environment protection transformation is essentially the requirement of following the direction of “sustainable development” raised by “Rio” conference exactly. For this, the following three view points under the guidance of ecological economics theory should be set up: (1) the essence of environmental problem is economic problem, (2) the task of developing economy and protecting environment can not be separated, (3) integrating environment protection into economic development. Thus we can establish the “market economy mechanism”, “mainly using administrative measures to protect environment to mainly using economic measures to solve environment problems” will be definitely feasible. When we put developing and protecting as mutual task for each economy department, and not separated the two, “pay attention to both environment protection and economy development” equally will become reality for sure. And when we put environmental protection into economic development, “to develop environment protection and economic development into synchronization” will also be realized naturally, the serious and long time passive situation of “damaging first and treatment later” can also be reversed. Thus the contradiction between ecology and economy can be solved, the difficulty of environment

protection can be solved, and the requirement of developing green economy under the “sustainable development” guiding principle suggested in the “Rio” conference will also be able to do undoubtedly.

Key words Ecological economics theory “Rio” conference guiding ideology
Ecological Era green economy

1. Ecological Era guiding the direction of developing green economy

Developing green economy is the demand of the new age. The development of human society has gone through agricultural era and industrial era, from the inadequacy of production to the prosperity of materials and the significant improvement of people’s living standards. However, due to the lack of coordination between ecology and economy as the guideline, the normal operation of nature’s ecological system has been damaged, thus the sustainable development of economy is hindered. This situation had been displayed clearly at the end of 1960s. People had witnessed that the five ecological economic problems of worldwide population, food, resources, energy and environment had arose everywhere because of the increasing damages to the ecological environment. The situation that the development of human society had been hindered raises people’s concerns and thus more and more efforts had been made to find the solutions to solve this problem.

History always moves forward, the industrial era will inevitably transform to the new ecological era. This transition is in accordance with the need of human society development. The new ecological era emerged to solve the contradiction between ecology and economy in industrial era, just the same as the industrial era emerged to satisfy the need of the production inadequacy of the agricultural era, it aims to establish a society, characterized by “the coordination between ecology and economy”, so that people develop economy no longer at the expense of destroying natural ecology. This “ecology and economy coordinative” economy actually is exactly the “Green Economy” which people are talking about nowadays and commonly aspiring to, though people have not used this term for a long time.

“Ecological Economy” has the same meaning with “Green Economy” in China. In my point of view, the essence of “Green Economy” is “Ecological Economy”. The term of “Ecological Economy” usually has the following three kinds of meaning in China:

1. It is a new guiding ideology, as the “coordination between ecology and economy” guideline, to realize the social and economic sustainable development under its guidance.
2. It is a new type of economy, as establishing the “ecology and economy

coordinative” economy and enterprises.

3. It is a new branch of Economics, as the “Ecological Economics”. It is combined by ecology and economics, and thus follows the objective laws of both ecological laws and economic laws. Its foundation provides theory guidance for the establishment of the guiding ideology of “coordination between ecology and economy” and the “ecology and economy coordinative” economy.

In China, the research of ecological economics helps people acknowledge the emergence of ecological era and the certainty of human society going to the direction of sustainable development. The guiding ideology of “coordination between ecology and economy” established under its guidance will further turn help people successfully setting up lots of “ecology and economy coordinative” enterprises, also called the “Green Enterprises”, and also promotes the development of the whole “Green Economy”. Developing the “Green Economy” is the inevitable path China will follow, and also the common path all the countries in the world will inevitably follow.

2. 20 years before the “Rio”: Finding the Path of Solution

Ever since 1970s, people had been looking for the solutions to solve the problems of contemporary economic and social development, and thus triggered the worldwide Environmental and Development Movement lasting about 40 years till now.

At first, there was a huge debate on the future development prospects of human society between the Pessimists view represented by “The Club of Rome” and the Optimists view represented by some famous Americans such as Herman Kahn and Julian Simon. This is the Public Opinion Preparatory Stage of The World Environmental and Development Movement. The two sides fiercely debated for ten years with sharp opposite views. And there was a certain degree of proximity on the issue of the world economy and society can continuing develops. The historical contribution of this debate is it raised people’s universal concern and deep thinking on the issues of human society’s future development prospects, and thus encouraging people to looking for the new path of world economic and social continuing development.

After that, UN held the Conference on Human Environment in Stockholm, Sweden in June, 1972, called on people take actions to protect the environment. It aimed to stop the plight of economic and social unable to continuing develop caused by environmental damages. The historical meaning of this initiative is it converted the awareness of finding the solutions to the contemporary major problems into actions protecting the ecological environment. And thus guided the World Environment and Development Movement into the real action stage.

In the early 1970s, the ideas and actions of looking for the new path of world economic and social development are positive. However, the understanding of the reason and essence of the hindering world economic and social development were still limited. Their understanding usually based on only the superficial phenomenon that the ecological environment was severely damaged then, and not able to realize the

essence of the economic development problems. And still put the focal point of solution finding simply on the ecological environment protection as a result. So, after 20 years of environment protection practice, this serious problem of the world still remains unsolved.

3. The “Rio” conference: Pointing out the path of Green

Economy development

The World Environmental and Development Movement kept moving forward after the UN conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972. Governments around the world actively responded to the UN conference's call for protecting the ecological environment and people around the world also actively participated in environment protection. Governments and people around the world did a lot of environment protection work during the 20 years long practice after the conference. But the world wide ecology damages did not stop and the living environment of human beings is still deteriorating. This arouse a rethinking about the simply environment protection solution path. And thus UN specifically established the World Commission on Environment and Development, which brought forward the famous research report: *Our Common Future* and stressed the “development” and “environment” can not be separated after deep investigation and research into reality and also raised the idea of “sustainable development” .On the basis of these sufficient preparation, and just after 20 years of UN conference on the Human Environment, UN held the Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in June, 1992, discussed more deeply on the issue of human society development path seeking.

One significant characteristic and advance of this UN Conference is to point out that environment protection and human economic and social development are closely related and cannot be separated. It is clear in the 20 years' practice, that from protect environment to protect the environment is unable to protect the environment. So the conference clearly proposed to combine “Environment and Development” closely (actually also means combine the ecology and economy closely), and thus also named the conference as the “Environment and Development” conference, and proposed to use “sustainable development” as the common and correct guideline of world economic and social development. As a result, it also put the developing “Green Economy” (also the “ecology and economy coordinative economy”) as the correct direction on the agenda of world economic and social development. And this also helps to promote World Environmental and Development Movement to enter the new stage: “Integrating Actions of Environment and Development”.

From this, people have realized it is a huge breakthrough that from awareness to actions, from “environment protection” to “Environment and Development Integration” to developing green economy on the awareness and actions of ecological environment protection from the 30 years practice on World Environment and Development Movement. Meanwhile, the process of establishing the important

guiding ideology of “environment and development integration” (also “ecology and economy integration”) is also the process of breeding and formation of the world new branch of Ecological Economics. The 1992 UN Rio Conference is an important milestone featuring human society development started entering the new ecological era, and also the milestone of world economy development entering new sustainable development stage. It is not coincidence that World Environment and Development Movement, the guiding ideology of sustainable development and ecological economics as new branch theory emerged at the same time when human society entering the new ecological era. These three has been doing great contributions from each own perspective to promote green economy development and realize the sustainable development of world economy.

4. 20 years after the “Rio”: Green economy not realized yet

The 1992 UN “Environment and Development” Conference corrected people’s awareness deviation of “protecting the ecological environment for the purpose of protecting the ecological environment only” and made clear that “environment protection must be combined with economy development”, and established the “sustainable development” as guiding ideology from promoting green economy development. The guiding ideology of “sustainable development” established is correct and clear. However, people’s awareness cannot keep up with it, and still trapped in the idea of “protecting the ecological environment for the purpose of protecting the ecological environment only” Thus the issue of promoting green economy is failed to be solved so far. The situation in China is also like that.

After took part in the UN conference on the Human Environment, China began to pay great attention to environment protection. In the 40 years, institutions have been expanded rapidly, investment has increased, environment protection work has been carried out and huge achievements have been made. However, there are still many difficulties in environment protection in China now and the green economy is not able to develop fast. Just as the officials of Ministry of Environment Protection (MEP) estimated: “Each strong promotion by local government for the high economy growth rate results in environmental crisis, and right after that comes time and time again the thunder storm like national environmental remediation campaigns, such reciprocation resulted in the bad circulation of economy growth and environmental remediation, ups and down of economic development, people’s health threatened and MEP staff worn out”¹

In order to cope with this difficulty and passive situation of China’s environment protection, they already pointed out that Chinese environmental protection needs transformation. The major content is to realize the “Three Transformations”: (1) transforming from preferring economy growth to environment protection to pay attention to both environment protection and economy development; (2) transforming from environment protection falling behind economy development to develop

¹Quoted from: "Environmental Policy Transformation is of Great Significance.",<http://www.douban.com> 2008-03-01

environment protection and economy development equally, (3) transforming from mainly using administrative measures to protect environment to comprehensively using economic, legal, technological and necessary administrative measures to solve environment problems. In common environment protection work, the “Three Transformations” need to be emphasized: (1)from mainly relying on administrative forces to promote to transformation of more use of market forces; (2)from passive response to active prevention and control transformation; (3)from the “storm frequency scraping” to the transformation of the system construction. However, in practice there has not been obvious result; serious damage to China's ecological environment, the trend is not reversed; the country's green economy is still not developed.

5. Using ecological economics theory to guide the development of Green Economy

It is the theme of ecological era to deal well with the relationship between economy development and environment protection. The tendency of focusing only on developing economy and ignore protecting environment in a long time in the past is wrong. The tendency of “protecting the environment for the purpose of protecting the environment only” nowadays and restraining economy development is also wrong. 20 years after the guiding ideology of “sustainable development” was proposed on “Rio” conference, China’s green economy still does not develop rapidly, and even worse environment protection trapped in difficult situation. The fundamental reason for this is the relationship between economic development and environmental protection is not well dealt with. And this problem needs to be solved by using the theory of Ecological Economics.

China’s Ecological Economics theory believes that, Ecological Economics is an interdisciplinary science comprised of Ecology and Economics, and it is a sub branch of Economics. Its basic characteristic is the “coordination between economy and ecology”, its aim is to promote economy sustainable development. To use Ecological Economics theory to guide these important realistic problems now, I believe it’s necessary to establish the following three viewpoints:

1. The essence of environmental problems is economic problems

In practical economy, what people see is environmental problems, most of them are caused by economy development except for the natural cause like volcano, earth quake and tsunami, so the solution must also come from the economy development. As far as the measures of China’s “environment protection transformation” are concerned, one of the “three transformations” is “transform from mainly using administrative measures to protect environment to comprehensively using economic, legal, technological and necessary administrative measures to solve environment problems”. After understanding “the essence of environmental problems is economic problems”, we can establish the “market economy mechanism”, “Mainly using administrative measures to protect environment to comprehensively using economic,

technological, legal, necessary administrative measures, and the economic measure mainly to solve environment problems” will be definitely feasible.

2. The task of developing economy and protecting environment can not be separated

The main task of human society is developing economy, but we must pay attention to protecting environment at the same time. Based on this I propose to establish the general guiding principle of economic development of “Economy is the dominance, Ecology is the foundation”, which points out that developing economy is the main task, but the environment must be protected, and these two can not be separated. So in real work, it should regulate that each economy department is responsible for the mutual task of developing economy and protecting environment, the task of developing and protecting can not be separated. Which means this situation cannot happen: on one side, each economy department only focus on developing economy and “setting fire” everywhere to damage environment, on the other side environment protection departments work as “fire brigade”, “extinguishing fire” everyday to protect environment. The results of this situation are neither can the economy better developed, nor can the environment better protected.

Again as far as the measures of China’s “environment protection transformation” are concerned, another transformation is “transform from preferring economy growth to environment protection to pay attention to both environment protection and economy development”. When we put developing and protecting as mutual task for each economy department “developers”, and not separated the two, “pay attention to both environment protection and economy development” will become reality for sure. And meanwhile the environment protection departments’ work like planning, organizing, guiding, supervising and implementing major programs etc. will become easier.

3. Integrating environmental protection into economic development

The environmental protection path in the last 40 years is a “damage first, remediation later” path, the environmental problems has not been solved all along and becoming even worse. Under the guidance of Ecological Economics theory, I propose to establish the new resources utilization guideline as: “protecting in the process of utilization and utilizing in the process of protection”, integrating the protection of the resources into its utilization, make sure it is protected at the same time with the utilization, so that to prevent people’s damage to the ecological environment from happening (e.g.: China’s emphasis on “circular economy” now is just the same method). The author proposed this viewpoint in the year 1989, and then it’s adopted by Chinese leaders like President Jiang Zemin in their important speeches for directing work. And it has been widely used in the practice of economy development and environment protection.

Again as far as the China’s “environment protection transformation” are concerned, another transformation is “transforming from environment protection lagging behind economic development to develop environment protection and economic development into synchronization”. If the proposal of “integrating environment protection into economic development” is achieved, “developing environment protection and

economic development into synchronization” will also be realized naturally, and the serious and long time passive situation of “damaging first and treatment later” can also be reversed. The requirement of developing green economy under the “sustainable development” guiding principle suggested in the “Rio” conference will also must be able to do undoubtedly.