

The dialectical relationship between ecofeminism and ecology: Theoretical framework and practical exploration

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ABSTRACT

Ecofeminism is an interdisciplinary framework linking gender inequality to ecological destruction, highlighting the interaction between gender oppression and environmental crisis. As global environmental issues intensify, ecofeminism offers a comprehensive perspective that integrates gender into environmental research. This article reviews ecofeminism's theoretical foundations, core views, and historical development, focusing on its critique of traditional ecology and the gender limitations in feminism. It analyzes how ecofeminism intersects with ecological theory, emphasizing gender, social class, and ecological issues. Through case studies of scholars like Vandana Shiva, the paper explores ecofeminism's role in global environmental protection, gender justice, and ecological restoration, particularly in the Global South. The conclusion argues that ecofeminism challenges traditional ecological frameworks and provides new directions for environmental policy and sustainable development, promoting both gender equality and ecological justice. Future research should prioritize interdisciplinary collaboration, integrating gender, social structure, and ecology to address the global environmental crisis.

KEYWORDS

Ecofeminism, ecology; gender perspective; environmental protection; dialectical relationship

1 Introduction

With the intensification of the global environmental crisis, the attention of the academic community to ecological research has gradually shifted to more diversified perspectives. Ecofeminism, as a new interdisciplinary field, puts forward the theoretical framework of the close relationship between gender and ecology. It criticizes the limitations of traditional ecology that ignore gender factors and highlights the close link between gender inequality and ecological destruction. This paper aims to explore the interaction between ecofeminists and ecology, reveal the dialectical relationship between the two, and provide new ideas for environmental protection.

2 Theoretical background and core views of ecofeminism

Ecofeminism, as an interdisciplinary system of thought, combines feminism, environmentalism and social theory to emphasize the complex interweaving of gender, environment and social inequality. Since the 1970s, ecofeminists have gradually formed and grown, not only challenging the limitations of traditional ecology and feminism, but also providing a gender-sensitive analytical framework for global environmental issues. The basic idea of ecofeminists is that women in society tend to have closer ties to the natural world, and that ecological destruction often exacerbates this gender inequality. This article will explore in depth the theoretical foundations of ecofeminism and its core ideas, especially its critical contributions to environmental science and social structures.

2.1 Origin and development of ecofeminism

The origins of ecofeminism can be traced to the intersection of the feminist and environmental movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Early ecological theories often took an anthropocentric stance, ignoring the impact of social structures, especially gender and class differences, on the environmental crisis. At the same time, many feminists, when reflecting on women's social status, recognize the similarities between gender oppression and ecological exploitation. Ecofeminists of this era reveal the limitations of traditional environmentalism and feminism through a critical perspective, especially on the relationship between gender equality and environmental justice, and propose a more inclusive theoretical framework (Bacchi, 2005).

2.2 Core views of ecofeminism

2.2.1 The core ideas of ecofeminism focus on the following aspects

The interweaving of gender and nature. One of the core ideas of ecofeminism is the interweaving of women and nature. Traditionally, women have been seen in many cultures as representatives of nature, taking on reproductive,

nurturing and environmental stewardship roles. Therefore, women's physiological and social roles are often closely linked to the management of natural resources. This connection has historically been suppressed by the male-dominated culture, forming a phenomenon of dual oppression of "nature" and "women". In her book *The Death of Nature*, Caroline Merchant (1980) argues that the homology of women and nature exists not only in Western culture, but globally, women's relationship with nature is ignored or exploited by the same masculine forces.

2.2.2 The connection between the female body and the environment

Ecofeminists believe that the existence of the female body itself is closely related to the resource utilization and management of the natural environment. For example, women are often the main water providers in households, food producers and managers of natural resources. In the global South, especially in poor areas, women are more dependent on natural resources and often need to interact with nature continuously for the survival of their families. However, environmental damage (such as water pollution and soil degradation) directly affects the quality of life of women, especially in the fields of agriculture, water and energy.

2.2.3 The link between ecological oppression and social inequality

Ecofeminism specifically emphasizes that ecological destruction is not only an environmental problem, but is also closely linked to social inequality, gender oppression, racial discrimination, and economic exploitation. Environmental issues tend to exacerbate inequalities in society, especially along gender and class lines. Women in developing countries are often among the most vulnerable to environmental degradation. For example, the impact of climate change on agriculture often makes women in poor areas more vulnerable, facing not only livelihood problems, but also a greater share of social responsibilities (e.g. caring for family members, managing water resources, etc.). Ecofeminism therefore advocates the integration of gender, equity and environmental protection into more inclusive solutions.

2.2.4 Critical theory: Opposing gender blind spots in anthropocentrism and environmentalism

Ecofeminists critique traditional environmentalism, arguing that many mainstream environmentalist theories ignore gender factors. Although many environmental protection movements emphasize the conservation of natural resources and the stability of ecosystems, they often fail to take into account the role and needs of women in environmental management. Plumwood (1993) argued in her book *Women and the Domination of Nature* that "anthropocentrism" in traditional environmental studies ignored the intrinsic value of nature and, in many cases, ran parallel with patriarchal culture, resulting in the dual oppression of women and nature.

2.3 Key scholars and theoretical contributions of ecofeminism

The theoretical framework of ecofeminism builds on the theoretical contributions of several key scholars. Scholars such as Vandana Shiva, Carolyn Merchant, Val Plumwood, and Maria Mies have played important roles in the development of ecofeminists theory.

Vandana Shiva: Vandana Shiva is a leading scholar in the field of ecofeminism, emphasizing the interrelationship between environmental destruction and women's oppression, especially in the global South. She argues that the "green Revolution" in the West has not only destroyed the natural environment, but also increased women's poverty and dependency. Her book, *Keeping Alive*, explores gender issues in the global agricultural system, advocating for the restoration of local agriculture and emphasizing the central role of women in agricultural production.

Carolyn Merchant: Carolyn Merchant, one of the founding figures of ecofeminism, argues in her book *The Death of Nature* that the Western scientific revolution's view of nature as an object to be conquered is consistent with patriarchal values. She believes that women's "homology" with nature has been suppressed by historical technological progress and capitalist culture, and that this relationship must be restored through an ecofeminist perspective.

Val Plumwood: Val Plumwood presents a profound critique of anthropocentrism, arguing that the traditional concept of human superiority in ecology needs to be challenged by ecofeminism. Her work emphasizes the shift from ecology to ethics, advocating "ecocentrism" instead of anthropocentrism, focusing on the interweaving of ecological balance and social factors such as gender and culture. Ecofeminism is not only a theoretical framework, but also has important practical significance.

Ecofeminists practices in the Global South, such as Vandana Shiva's Seed Guardians movement, demonstrate how the dual goals of ecological restoration and gender justice in agriculture and resource management can be achieved through women's participation and leadership. This practice offers a new perspective on ecology and advances gender equality and environmental justice in tandem.

3 The dialectical relationship between ecofeminism and ecology

Ecofeminism has a close relationship with traditional ecology, but it also shows dialectical tension. While introducing gender, social class and cultural factors, ecofeminists criticized the basic assumptions of ecology and proposed a new analytical framework on this basis. This theory not only challenges the limitations of traditional ecology, especially in ignoring social structure and gender factors, but also provides a more multidimensional perspective and more inclusive solutions for the future development of ecology. This paper will discuss how ecofeminism and ecology show dialectical interaction process through contrast, criticism and complement, and reveal its theoretical innovation and practical significance.

3.1 Ecofeminism's criticism of traditional ecology

Traditional ecology usually adheres to a nature-human dichotomy mode of thinking, emphasizing the separation of nature and human society, and advocating that ecological protection and environmental sustainability should not be interfered by social and gender factors. This way of thinking, derived from the rationalist tradition of modern science, was widely used in the environmental protection movement of the late 20th century. However, this single environmental academic framework often ignores the profound impact of gender and social structure on environmental issues.

Ecofeminism provides a powerful critique of this point. It believes that traditional ecology treats "nature" as an object in many cases, ignoring the close connection between nature and social, gender and other factors. For example, many environmental problems (e. g., climate change, resource depletion) are not purely natural problems, but complex problems influenced by social structures and gender relations. Ecofeminism, therefore, emphasizes that the fundamental limitations of traditional ecology lie in its "environmental naturalization" approach, which focuses too much on changes in the physical environment and ignores the social and gender inequalities behind environmental problems.

From this perspective, ecofeminism calls for environmental issues to be viewed as social issues, emphasizing the role of social factors such as gender, race and class in exacerbating environmental degradation. It pointed out that the generation and solution of environmental problems not only need to repair the natural ecology, but also need to consider the importance of social equity, especially gender equality in solving environmental problems. Val Plumwood (1993) clearly pointed out in her book *Women and the Domination of Nature* that the anthropocentric stance in traditional ecology ignored the role and importance of women in resource management, resulting in the neglect of women and their needs in environmental policies and practices.

3.2 The contribution of ecofeminism to ecology

Although ecofeminism criticizes traditional ecology, it also provides a new theoretical perspective and analytical framework for the development of ecology. Ecofeminism emphasizes that environmental protection is not only the restoration of physical ecosystem, but also the reconstruction of social ethics. As a result, many of its concepts, such as "environmental justice," "ecological justice," and "gender-environment interweaving," lie beyond the reach of traditional theories of ecology.

3.2.1 Interweaving of gender and environment

Ecofeminism emphasizes that the relationship between gender and environment is not a simple intersection on the surface, but interweaving and influencing each other. Women, especially those living in the global South, are often the biggest victims of resource consumption and environmental destruction. In many areas, women are responsible for household water management, agricultural production and resource use, so they are far more dependent on environmental quality than men. At the same time, environmental degradation has a more direct and far-reaching impact on women's quality of life. For example, in the context of declining agricultural production due to climate change and increased droughts and floods, women not only have to take care of their families and communities, but also need to find living space in resource-poor environments. All this suggests that the solution to environmental problems needs a more nuanced gender perspective.

3.2.2 Social turn of ecology

Ecofeminists not only supplement the deficiency of traditional ecology from the perspective of gender, but also promote the social turn of ecology. It emphasizes that environmental and social issues are inseparable and that the environmental crisis can be effectively addressed only within the framework of social equity and gender justice. Ecofeminists propose that environmental "justice" not only refers to the fair distribution of resources, but also includes the impact of social structure on environmental protection. For example, areas with poverty, low levels of education, and

unequal social structures are often "hard hit" for environmental problems, as women in these areas are more vulnerable to resource depletion and environmental degradation. The social perspective of ecofeminism prompts ecology to re-examine the role of social structure in environmental change and promotes interdisciplinary research and practice.

3.2.3 Dual goals of ecological gender and ecological restoration

Ecofeminism especially emphasizes the dual goals of environmental restoration and gender justice, advocating ecological restoration through enhancing women's right to speak and participation in environmental governance. Women, especially those working in agriculture, forestry and water management, are often at the heart of ecosystem restoration. By increasing women's participation, gender inequality in society can be improved, and the sustainable development of the ecological environment can be effectively promoted.

3.3 The complementary role of ecofeminism in ecology

The dialectical relationship between ecofeminism and ecology is also reflected in its complementary role to ecology. Although traditional ecology can reveal the change of natural environment and the function of ecosystem, it often lacks in-depth discussion on how environmental change affects social structure and gender relations. Ecofeminism infuses sociology and culturology into ecology through the perspective of gender analysis, making it not only focus on the operation of ecosystem, but also pay attention to the interaction between ecosystem and social system.

3.4 Combination of ecofeminism and environmental policy

Ecofeminism not only provides theoretical support for ecology, but also promotes policy changes in practice. It has driven gender-sensitive environmental policies around the world, especially in developing countries. For example, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Women's International organizations are increasingly focusing on gender issues when formulating environmental policies, emphasizing women's participation in environmental governance. By empowering women to participate more, it not only improves the efficiency of environmental governance, but also promotes the realization of gender equality. On this basis, local agriculture and water resource management strategies proposed by ecofeminists such as Vandana Shiva have also gained widespread attention. She argues that by redesigning agricultural and resource management systems to give women farmers more control over their resources, environmental restoration and social progress can be achieved in the context of global warming and ecological degradation.

4 Ecofeminism's contribution to future ecology

Ecofeminism offers new directions for future ecological research, especially in promoting interdisciplinary research and inclusive policies. By integrating a gender perspective into ecology, scholars can more fully understand the root causes of ecological crises and propose more just and effective solutions. Ecofeminism emphasizes that environmental problems cannot be solved from a purely scientific perspective, but should take into account social, economic and cultural factors. This view has led ecologists to collaborate across disciplines with sociologists, political scientists, and feminist scholars to address environmental issues. Ecofeminism advocates the dual concern of gender and environmental issues, and believes that environmental protection and gender equality should be promoted simultaneously.

5 Conclusion

This paper discusses the dialectical relationship between ecofeminists and ecology, and analyzes their interweaving and influence in theory and practice. Ecofeminists offer a new perspective on ecology and promote integrated analysis of gender, environment and social justice. Future ecological research needs to further integrate gender perspectives to promote more equitable and sustainable global environmental governance.

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