

Research on E.M. Forster's Novels from the Perspective of Ecological Consciousness

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Abstract: The ecological crisis attaches a major challenge to human society, urging us to establish and implement the concept of an ecological community with a shared future in the context of globalization. Besides, it also promotes shared responsibility for global ecological governance. Based on ecocritical theory, this study takes E.M. Forster's novels as its research subject. Through a systematic analysis of the ecological consciousness and ecological elements contained in the texts, it delves into the underlying ideology of ecological harmony. The research aims to reveal Forster's reflections on the tripartite ecological relationships among nature, society, and the human spirit, thereby offering literary insights with practical significance for contemporary ecological civilization construction.

Keywords: Ecological Consciousness; E.M. Forster's Novels; Ecological Community with a Shared Future; Ecocriticism

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1. Introduction

Edward Morgan Forster (1879–1970), as a prominent representative of British modernist literature, has earned widespread admiration for the profound characterization and masterful narrative artistry style in his novels. While appreciating the plots of his works, readers can also perceive rich philosophical implications and spiritual connotations within them. It is precisely for this reason that Forster's literary creations have long attracted scholarly attention sustainably in the realms of ethics, society, culture, and religion. In recent years, with the vigorous development of ecocritical theory, researchers have begun to turn their attention to the natural perspectives, ecological consciousness, and humanistic concerns embedded in his works, attempting to reinterpret Forster's literary world from an ecological perspective. Ecocriticism emphasizes the intrinsic connections between literature and the natural environment. Besides, it also illustrates the relationship with ecological ethics and human living conditions. Forster's novels provide sufficient textual evidence for this theoretical approach, based on their delicate depictions of natural landscapes, implicit critiques of industrialization, and persistent attention to spiritual ecology.

A survey of domestic and international research on Forster's novels reveals that foreign scholars often approach his works from perspectives such as political and social aesthetics, comparative literary influence, and feminist ecocriticism so that they can delve deeply into the social significance embodied in his writings. For instance, Bin Bilal, Maaz (2025) utilized unpublished correspondence archives between Forster and Forrest Reid, alongside their published works, to explore Forster's political and social aesthetics in representing male-male relationships.^[1] Kantor, Roanne L. (2024) analyzed the literary careers and networks of Forster and George Orwell, revealing the critical role of defamatory libel in the censorship of anti-

colonial texts in the early twentieth century.^[2] Additionally, Dongyan Jiang (2020) interpreted the female characters in Forster's novels from a feminist perspective, pointing out the writer's contradictory attitude toward women—both respectful and sympathetic, yet implicitly discriminatory.^[3]

In recent years, domestic research has also shown a gradual shift toward ecological themes. Wen Rong (2019), in "The Book of 'Finding Home'", proposed that Forster employed the imagery of "home" to express an ideal of community harmony between humans and nature.^[4] Wang Yanli and Liu Zhiguo (2023) described the contradictions, estrangements and conflicts between the middle-class people in England during the early period of the modern society, and revealed the spiritual-ecological predicaments that people encounter in the paper of *Ruminations* on the spiritual-ecological predicaments of the characters in *Howards End*.^[5] Wen Rong (2025), through the paper of *A Room with a View: Love Narration, Lifestyle and Aesthetic Taste*, explored the alienation of taste among the middle class and highlighted Forster's concern for individual refinement and community shaping. Overall, existing studies have primarily focused on ecological or community themes within specific texts, lacking a systematic and holistic perspective.^[6] This paper aims to adopt the comprehensive perspective of ecological consciousness to conduct an integrated examination of several representative novels written by Forster. It seeks to delve deeply into the ecological ideas embedded in these works and attempts to establish a dialogue between these special novels and contemporary issues of ecological and environmental protection. With the help of this approach, the study aims to further expand the ecological dimension of Forster research and provide new pathways for understanding the ideological depth of his literary creations.

2. Ecological Consciousness in Forster's Novels

2.1 Consciousness of Ecological Critique

Anthropocentrism regards humans as the highest form of natural existence, granting them so-called "justification" for wantonly harming and polluting the environment. With the influence of this ideology, humanity has inflicted severe damage upon nature. The rapid development of industrial civilization has further intensified ecological imbalance, ultimately posing great threats to human survival and development.^[7] Forster criticizes this thought explicitly and seeks to correct such misguided perceptions fundamentally. Grounded in an ecological and naturalistic perspective, he strongly denounces and protests against the behaviors driven by anthropocentrism. It shows that Forster especially advocates that humans should protect, respect, and revere nature. In his novel *A Passage to India*, Forster regards the sky as the sovereign of all things. Though the sky is endowed with the title of "sovereign," its power is portrayed as restrained and limited—"only slightly helping the flowers to bloom." Yet, even with this modest capacity, it still benefits all things in a subtle and enduring manner. Through this imagery, Forster implies that the true governing force belongs to nature itself. Humans are merely a part of the nature. We should coexist with nature with a heart of reverence and respect, avoid intruding the nature excessively and further reduce harmful impact on it, thereby preserving the overall balance and sustainability of the ecosystem.

2.2 Consciousness of Ecological Praise

Descriptions of nature in Forster's novels consistently evoke a sense of freshness and warmth. His novels are filled with heartfelt praise for ecology and nature, which shows he adheres to the ecological philosophy of "returning to nature". In his novels, nature is personified and he infuses it with his personal affection, thereby adopting a more transcendent perspective to satirize people who destroy the contemporary environment. At the same time, through his textual constructions, Forster seeks to awaken emotional resonance between nature and readers by presenting beautiful natural imagery and ecological transformations. As a result, the relationship between humans and nature in his novels is endowed with rich and complex emotional dimensions.

For instance, in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, Forster dedicates considerable details to depicting the scenery of a small mountain town in Italy—"rolling seas of green olive groves" and "sky as clear and blue as washed water." By combining reality with poetic imagination, he describes a serene and beautiful natural landscape for readers. His intention is just to utilize such pure and splendid scenery to arouse people's consciousness of cherishing and loving nature, thereby inspiring a strong desire to protect nature.

3. Ecological Elements in Forster's Novels

3.1 Natural Ecology

There are a lot of ecological elements in Forster's novels. This fully demonstrates his love and appreciation for the beautiful natural environment and his longing for the pristine natural ecosystems. Moreover, he strongly advocates that humans should conform to natural laws and live in harmony with nature harmoniously. When depicting natural environments, Forster often adopts vivid, lively language or personification, making the scenes come to life and the effect is remarkable. For example, in *The Longest Journey*, he describes the sky as "azure blue" and the earth as "damp brown", making the essence of natural ecology vividly portrayed on the book. In *Howards End*, he adopts the words "intoxicatingly fragrant" to praise wild roses and even use the sentence "hanging down to form garlands...with a unique charm, delicate and graceful." to describe its beautiful flowers. These meticulous and memorable descriptions clearly reveal Forster's profound attachment and longing for the natural environment.

Forster's novels were mainly written during the Second Industrial Revolution. At that time, humanity was enjoying the convenience brought by industrial development and actively embracing the wave of industrialization. Although the environmental pollution caused by industry gradually began to emerge, it was largely ignored as humans became engrossed in the benefits of technological progress. This relentless pursuit of profit led to the continuous deterioration of the natural environment, which further aggravated the conflict between ecological preservation and industrial development. Forster's novels profoundly unveil this conflict between humans and nature. For instance, in *Howards End*, he describes the roads as "endless" and filled with "the odor of motorcar exhaust."^[8] This depiction evokes images of London, known as the "Foggy City", where vehicle exhaust severely polluted the air, becoming "increasingly pungent" and making it "hard to breathe." Nature also withered in such an environment: "leaves drifted down one by one, and the sun grew increasingly blurred in the smoky haze." The harm inflicted by human beings on nature ultimately recoiled upon humanity itself. Diverse harms include that rivers became polluted, the air deteriorated, the land turned barren and so on. All of these highlight the destructive impact of industrial civilization on nature and its negative consequences for the quality of human life.

Reflecting on the natural ecology portrayed in Forster's works, we can draw connections to the global environmental crisis faced with us today. The negative effects of environmental pollution have permeated into various aspects of human development: intensifying greenhouse effects, energy depletion, ozone layer depletion, and other issues. These indicate that the ecological environment is in a precarious state, which becomes a critical challenge that all of humanity have to confront collectively.

3.2 Social Ecology

In terms of social ecology, Forster advocates for harmonious coexistence among people and the establishment of stable and amicable relationships. Influenced by the social realities of his own era as well as the historical background depicted in his works, Forster held deep-seated aspirations and expectations for a social ecology characterized by ethnic equality and interpersonal harmony. However, in reality, conflicts and tensions persist across different ethnic groups and nations. For instance, in the novel named as *A Room with a View*, the author, Forster, metaphorically compares Miss Lavish to Italy and Miss Bartlett to Britain. Through the description of their dialogues, actions, and conflicts, the novel metaphorically explores the relationship between Italy and Britain, which can fully exposes the hypocrisy and inherent pretense in interactions between different civilizations and nations. The "Italian" perceives the "British" as overly arrogant and intends to issue a warning, while the "British" regard Italians as akin to "water with a sour taste". This reveals that the people living in the era is more ignorance than rich knowledge. The contradictions between the two groups of people highlight significant differences in national ideologies and the distinct conflicts between nations.^[9]

In the novel, *A Passage to India*, Forster profoundly illustrates ethnic contradictions and emphasizes the deep-seated divisions between colonizers and the colonized. The character Ronny serves as a representative example. On the one hand, he maintains a reverent and respectful attitude toward his superiors. On the other hand, he shows severe bureaucratic tendencies and British arrogance when dealing with Indians. This portrayal reflects the profoundly unequal relationship between colonizers and the colonized, as well as the pervasive influence of colonialism. Through such depictions, Forster expresses his anti-colonialist

stance and attitude. At the same time, he also offers an objective perspective on the actual development of India at the time. Furthermore, by depicting friendships and conflicts among characters from different nations, he conveys his yearning and pursuit for a harmonious and stable social ecology.

The construction of social ecology significantly impacts national stability and ethnic development. By applying Forster's perspectives on social ecology to modern societal development, it becomes apparent that conflicts and tensions still exist among various nations and ethnic groups today. Interpersonal relationships remain unstable, making international and inter-ethnic relations precarious. Therefore, greater efforts are required to maintain and nurture these relationships, ultimately aiming to build a stable and harmonious social ecological environment.

3.3 Spiritual Ecology

From the perspective of spiritual ecology, Forster pursues a state of inner harmony. He advocates that humans should maintain a balanced relationship between humans and their living environment, social surroundings, and cultural context. This illustrates that he seeks to stabilize the psychological state of individuals, thereby fostering a healthy and dynamic spiritual ecological environment. In his novels, Forster depicts various types of spiritual ecological dilemmas. For instance, in describing Adela's journey to India, her initial high expectations gradually give way to profound disappointment. During this process, her perception of Ronny also shifts, as she comes to see him as arrogant and emotionally detached due to his prolonged stay in India. Influenced by the stark contrast between ideals and reality, Adela experiences a psychological breakdown, falsely accusing Aziz. This drives her further into a state of "apathy and cynicism," reinforcing her belief in the cultural superiority of the British and perpetuating her pride and prejudice. Ultimately, this exacerbates the irreconcilable conflicts between the British and Indians regarding ethnic and colonial issues. Throughout this process, the spiritual well-being of people from both nations is severely affected, and even becomes increasingly distorted and depleted, which leads to manifesting various degrees of spiritual ecological crisis.^[10]

To get rid of such spiritual ecological crisis, human beings have to rely on the power of nature to reconnect with the real self and achieve inner harmony. Only in this way, can people hold meaningful communication with each other better so as to cope with the challenges which maybe happen in both social and natural ecosystems. The pursuit for freedom and spiritual ecological harmony is an innate human instinct. When spiritual ecology is fully satisfied, it is natural that people can create a more advanced form of social civilization. However, when influenced by factors such as culture and interpersonal communication in society, their spiritual ecology is also prone to be affected to a certain extent. In the pursuit of harmony between humans and themselves, it is necessary for human beings to truly recognize and understand themselves, and by cultivating a state of self-harmony, we can improve the spiritual ecological environment.

4. The Ideological Enlightenment of Forster's Novels from the Perspective of Ecological Consciousness

The world depicted in Forster's novels is a reflection of the era in which he lived. The dawn of industrial civilization fueled human ambition and self-confidence, leading people to believe they had become the masters of nature and to reap immense profits through environmental exploitation. Forster regarded it to be a form of self-deception. Environmental pollution became worse and worse as humans utilized industrial technology without restraint to gain benefits and convenience. This not only caused once-beautiful landscapes to vanish but also made it increasingly difficult for people to breathe. Meanwhile, with the expansion of human ambition, interpersonal relationships have become increasingly cold and indifferent. Genuine emotions gradually faded away and was replaced by the pursuit for material interests and deception.

Confronted with this reality, Forster expressed bewilderment and confusion, yet this also ignited his longing for nature. He yearned for nature, society, and human spiritual emotions to return to their original state within a natural ecological environment. Forster believed that nature should be the subject, while humans, as integral components of nature, ought to adapt to natural changes and proactively transform this inappropriate consciousness. Only in this way, can more positive outcomes be achieved in environmental protection and ecological governance.

Based on this analysis, it can be observed that the ecological consciousness depicted in Forster's works aligns with the concept of building an "ecological community with a shared future" in modern development. To confront ecological crisis,

more attention should be paid to the dynamics of ecological changes. In addition, we also have to focus on the fundamental relationship between humans and nature. Changing human perspectives is essential to drive collective global efforts in addressing ecological and environmental challenges, which contributes to advance toward a new stage of development.

The theory of a global community with a shared future assumes that nature is the mother of all life, which resonates with the idea of “nature as the master” in Forster’s novels and echoes Marx’s perspective on the “primacy of nature”. As the nurturing source, nature provides humanity with the resources necessary for life and fosters continuous development. However, humans have recklessly destroyed nature, and in the process, they inevitably face its retribution. In Forster’s narratives, humans suffer the consequences of environmental destruction. Similarly, in the real world, humanity must soberly recognize that unrestrained exploitation inevitably leads to grave dangers. Therefore, in the construction of ecological civilization in the new era, all countries should take the lead, deeply understand the relationship between human survival and ecological changes, and formulate ecological civilization development strategies aimed at promoting ecological harmony. This will lay a solid foundation for strengthening natural ecological conservation in the future.

The harmonious development of man and nature is the primary prerequisite for building a community with a shared future for mankind. This is consistent with the underlying philosophy contained in Forster’s novels, where he similarly regards landscapes and other elements of the natural environment—just like humans—as interdependent components of nature. Nature provides the material foundation for human survival and development, and only when the extent of human exploitation and utilization is in accordance with the capacity of the natural regeneration, can we promote the sustainable development of social ecology. In the novel named as *A Room with a View*, through the portrayal of Lucy, Forster further illustrates that human growth requires sufficient closeness to nature, appreciation of nature, and return to nature. It is under the influence of nature that the individuals achieve harmonious development in mental state, thereby continuously improving their own spiritual ecological environment. Thus, correctly handling the relationship between humans and nature is precisely the path through which humans seek and return to nature. Only by adhering to the concept of an ecological community with a shared future, can humanity realize that harming nature is equivalent to harming itself. Consequently, in the process of practical development, humanity will choose these approaches that cause less pollution and impact, which can contribute to reducing ecological damage, addressing ecological crises, and ultimately constructing a new ecological environment.

By integrating the concept of an ecological community with a shared future and Foster’s ideas, recommendations are put forward for the current ecological environment construction and development. First and foremost, in practical development, the principle of ecological primacy have to be upheld. Nature should be regarded as the subject, with humans as a part of nature. Only when the natural environment maintains a sound state of development can humanity achieve scientific, stable progress and enhancement. What’s more, efforts in ecological and environmental protection should be intensified. Exchanging environmental well-being for economic gains ought to be avoided, and it should be recognized that protecting the environment is tantamount to safeguarding human survival and reproduction. To ensure the sustainable development of humanity, environmental conservation had better be strengthened to foster harmonious coexistence between natural ecology and social ecology. Last but not least, the value of ecological principles should be actively implemented to maintain a harmonious state of human spiritual ecology. By consistently adhering to policies related to ecological development, humanity can be guided to return to a natural ecological environment, achieve a state of spiritual self-consistency, and thereby preserve social stability and harmony.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, through an deep analysis of Forster’s literary ideas, it becomes apparent that his works contain rich ecological consciousness. By meticulously depicting natural environment and the fates of different characters, Forster profoundly expresses reverence and attachment to natural ecology. What’s more, he also clearly conveys a deep yearning for a harmonious, equitable, and sustainable social ecology. Taking this as a focal point, we conduct in-deep analysis to explore its relationship with “the ecological community with a shared future”, hoping to expand the ecological dimension of literary studies and provide valuable insights for China’s ecological civilization construction work in our country.

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Conflict of Interests

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