

# The Development of Lu Shuyuan's Spiritual Ecology Theory

Xinghuan Li<sup>1</sup>, Zhenhua Lyu<sup>1\*</sup><sup>1</sup>Department of Foreign Studies, North China Electric Power University, Baoding, Hebei, P. R. ChinaDOI: [10.36348/sijll.2022.v05i12.006](https://doi.org/10.36348/sijll.2022.v05i12.006)

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\*Corresponding author: Zhenhua Lyu

Department of Foreign Studies, North China Electric Power University, Baoding, Hebei, P. R. China

## Abstract

This paper provides an overview of the development of Lu Shuyuan's spiritual ecology theory and explains the key concepts of the theory.

**Keywords:** Lu Shuyuan; spiritual ecology theory.

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## INTRODUCTION

Lu Shuyuan's spiritual ecology theory drew from both Western eco-criticism and Chinese Taoism. On the basis of a large number of Western and Chinese philosophical studies, he summed up predecessors' thoughts and put forward his own spiritual ecology theory.

First of all, Lu Shuyuan's theory is deeply influenced by western thoughts. The study of "spiritual ecology" is inseparable from the exploration of "ecology". The term "ecology" is generally believed to be first coined by German zoologist Ernst Haeckel in 1866. Professor Zhang Ting of Wuhan University introduced this concept to China. Next it is inseparable from the exploration of "ecological criticism". Hu Zhihong (2005) pointed out that the concept of "anthropocentrism", a human-centered point of view, came into existence during the time from the 14th century to the 17th century driven by the Enlightenment and the Renaissance. Consequently human beings' spiritual ecology began to lose balance which had a negative impact on the development of the environment. In this historical context, a voice advocating an "ecology-centered approach" emerged. Liu Han (2016) stated that American ecological critic William Rueckert put forward the concept of "ecological criticism" in the field of literature in *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Eco-criticism* (1978) and theories about spiritual ecology emerged gradually. Secondly, Lu Shuyuan's theory is also profoundly influenced by ancient Chinese philosophy. Laozi advocated the philosophical concepts such as "Unity of Heaven and Humanity" and "Imitation of Nature", which emphasizes the harmony

between nature and people. The philosophical works of Mencius and Chuang Tzu contributed to the development of spiritual ecology theory as well.

Lu Shuyuan's theoretical research of ecology theory started from the end of the 1980s. He keenly sensed that the spiritual ecology of Chinese people was deteriorating because of the drastic social changes in every aspect as a result of the implementation of reform and opening up policy, so he immediately started his research, shifting his research focus from the study of literary psychology to ecological criticism, proposing that the development and research of ecological criticism should be combined with multiple disciplines.

In 1989, Lu Shuyuan formally proposed the term "spiritual ecology" and received recognition unanimously from the academic circles. Then, professor Lu Shuyuan (2000:136) explored the meaning "spirit" based on Chinese culture and defined it in the *Ecological Literature and Art*. He stated that the spirit is tangible and the human is the carrier of spiritual existence in Chinese philosophy. People's desires, thoughts, needs, values, and moral concepts embody the spirit, and literature and art are the external embodiment of spirit. At the same time, Lu Shuyuan deepened the understanding of the concept "ecology". He believed that "ecology" not only referred to the living environment of human beings but also should include "social ecology" and "spiritual ecology", namely the ecological "tripartite rule" (Lu Shuyuan, 2000). The three aspects are interrelated and interacted with each other. By that time, Lu Shuyuan's theoretical basis has been fully mature.

Having a solid theoretical foundation, Lu Shuyuan (2000:148) made a precise definition of spiritual ecology theory. "This is a discipline that studies the mutual relationship between spiritual beings and their living environment (including the natural environment, social environment, and cultural environment). It is related to the healthy growth of spiritual subjects on the one hand, and the balance, stability, and evolution of an ecosystem under the coordination of spiritual variables on the other hand." According to the above-mentioned definition, spiritual ecology theory can be understood from four aspects. Firstly, from the perspective of research object, human beings and their spiritual world were the most important research object, including core values, emotions, aesthetics and other feelings only possessed by spiritual subjects. Secondly, from the perspective of research content, it explores interrelationship between the spiritual subjects and their inner spiritual world. For instance, how the social ecology influences human beings' spiritual ecology. Thirdly, from the perspective of research motive, people's behaviors are not only affected by the external social environment but also by their internal consciousness and thinking. People's psychological health is related to their growth, society's stable development, and the stability of the earth's ecosystem. Lastly, from the perspective of research significance, grasping the relationship between internal spiritual ecology and external ecological environment can arouse the spiritual subject's attention to their inner consciousness so as to reconstruct the spiritual world and improve the social and ecological environment.

Besides the basic theory, Lu Shuyuan further improved the theory through his continuous research and thinking. He pointed out that the ecological crisis is not only a problem of the ecological circle but also a problem of the spiritual circle of human beings. (Lu Shuyuan, 2002) Causes of today's spiritual imbalance lie in the rapid development of the economy, the increase of people's material desire, the progress of vulgarization, and the decline of art and morality. Moreover, he indicated that the whole human race still face many problems from the external environment, such as Western hegemony, colonial expansion, social oppression, and women's lack of right to freedom of expression. Social problems will eventually lead to severe natural problems if human thought does not change and the spirit does not improve,

Thus, Lu Shuyuan provided the following corresponding suggestions. First, we should improve our morality and develop empathy with others. Then it's also necessary for modern people to reduce dependence on internet and enhance our interpersonal skills in the real world, so as to continuously improve ourselves and achieve harmonious development with the external environment. Eventually the healthy development of spirit will help to restore the earth's ecology (Lu Shuyuan, 2021). The construction of Lu

Shuyuan's spiritual ecology theory fills the gap in this field in China and enriches and develops the local discipline of eco-criticism.

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