

Increasing Conscience about the Need to Protect the Natural World in an Giang Today

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Abstract

Nature, people and civilization are timeless issues. The environmental field is currently dealing with a number of hot and time-sensitive concerns. In the current socioeconomic development situation in Vietnam, the Marxist perspective on the interaction between humans and nature is extremely methodologically significant. It not only provides us with a theoretical foundation for believing in human capabilities, but it also helps us identify a realistic way for humans to live in harmony and unity with nature during the development process. An Giang is a Mekong Delta province with a strong economic growth potential. Environmental protection still has significant limits that must be addressed as it grows. As a result, based on intriguing Marxist perspectives on the demonstrated relationship between persons, society, and nature, this paper suggests essential measures to foster economic integration while also protecting the natural environment in An Giang today.

Keywords: Vietnam, An Giang Province, Mekong Delta, Socioeconomic Development, Economic Integration.

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I. INTRODUCTION

An Giang, with its good natural circumstances, natural resources, and territorial distribution, has a high potential for economic development, particularly in agriculture, fisheries, border gate economy, processing industry, construction material production, and tourism services. An Giang's economy has recently experienced significant growth, as well as increased environmental pressures. According to the 10th An Giang Provincial Party Congress, term 2015-2020, the average economic growth rate for 5 years (2011-2015) reached 8.63% and the average GRDP growth target (2016-2020) is 6.5%-7%; GRDP per capita in 2020 is about 2,652 USD-2,718 USD/person/year. In 2024, GRDP is estimated to reach 7.16%, and GRDP per capita is 66.24 million VND/year. With a population of 1,938,198 people as of June 30, 2024. To develop all potentials, especially rice, fish, and vegetables and to protect and minimize adverse impacts on the natural environment, An Giang needs to place economic growth in interaction with other countries, regions, and especially the Mekong Delta region.

II. CONTENT:

1. Marxist perspectives on the interplay between humanity, society, and the natural environment.

The strong development of the scientific and technological revolution along with the industrialization

process over the past three centuries has been rapidly and profoundly changing not only the face of society and humanity but also the natural environment. These changes have pushed modern civilization to progress faster than any previous historical period. However, it is also revealing all the fierce contradictions that cannot be reconciled between the progress of science, engineering and technology and the protection of natural conditions necessary for the existence and development of human society.

The current state of the global ecological environment, which includes environmental pollution, local ecological crises, the depletion of natural resources, and the threat of a global ecological crisis, is forcing humanity to choose between finding ways to live in true harmony with nature and preserving society's continued development or standing by and watching for destruction. Although this is a highly urgent problem, it is also a very complicated theoretical and practical one. Marxism-Leninism examined humanity and nature as an organic whole, grounded in the material unity of the world.

In his work *Anti-Duhring*, F. Engels affirmed, "The unity of the world does not lie in its existence, although existence is the premise of its unity, because

before the world can be a unity, the world must first exist. The real unity of the world lies in its materiality, and this materiality is proven not by a few clever words of a magician but by a long and difficult development of philosophy and natural science" (C. Marx and F. Engels, 1994, Complete Works, volume 20, p. p.67). The world is diverse and complex, made up of many elements, but in the end the three basic elements—nature, humans and human society—these three elements are unified in a system of "Nature—Humans—Society" because they are all different forms, states, characteristics and different relationships of matter in motion. All processes occurring in nature, in society and in humans are subject to certain universal laws. The operation of those laws connects the elements of the world into a unified whole, always moving and developing continuously in space and time. Marxism-Leninism studied man and nature in organic unity, the basis of which is the material unity of the world.

In the interaction between society and nature, natural factors have a great influence on the existence and development of society, while social factors play an increasingly important role in the transformation and development of nature.

1.1. The role of nature for humans and society

1.1.1. The concept of natural environment

The environment includes natural elements and man-made material elements that are closely related to each other, surrounding humans and affecting the life, production, existence and development of humans and nature. The natural environment (also known as the ecological environment, natural environment) is a set of natural geographical conditions of a territory and has a direct impact on the living standards of the population and economic indicators in that territory. (Vietnamese Encyclopedia, 2002, volume 2, p. 940).

1.1.2. The role of nature for humans and society

Nature, in its broadest definition, is the entire objectively existing material world that has undergone a protracted process of development. The most essential resources for human life and productivity are found in nature. Humans must depend on the natural conditions that allow for production and living in order to survive and grow. Without the natural world, people are unable to produce anything, according to C. Marx.

In most of the works marking the formation of their philosophical principles, C. Marx and F. Engels both mentioned the dialectical relationship between nature, humans and society. C. Marx wrote, "Nature is the inorganic body of humans... Humans live on nature... Human material and spiritual life is closely related to nature." (C. Marx, 1994, C. Marx - F. Engels Complete Works, volume 1, pp. 91, 92).

Society is made up of all the ties between people, and humans are a part of the natural environment.

C. Marx and F. Engels stated in their book *German Ideology* that history may be separated into two categories: human history and natural history. These two elements are interdependent; as long as humans are around, their past and the natural past will influence one another. (C. Marx - F. Engels Complete Works, volume 20, p. 25; F. Engels, 1994).

They believe that acts of destroying nature, breaking the balance and harmony between nature and humans and society, are synonymous with destroying human life itself. Because humans are the product of the development of nature. Humans and human society cannot exist outside of nature: "To say that the physical and spiritual life of humans is linked to the natural world, to say so simply means that the natural world is linked to the natural world, because humans are a part of the natural world." (C. Marx, 2000, C. C. Marx - Engels Complete Works, volume 42, p. p.135).

Nature also plays an important role in the organization and division of labor and the distribution of productive forces in society. Therefore, nature can have favorable or unfavorable impacts on the production process and labor productivity and can promote or hinder the development of society.

Figuratively speaking, nature is both a home, a factory, a great laboratory, and a giant container for human and social waste. However, that role is historically specific, meaning that it changes with the development of society. Nature is the living environment of humans and human society; this role of nature cannot be changed and will never be lost, no matter how much society develops. Only nature can provide all the necessary conditions for human life, such as water, light, air, food, etc., and the necessary conditions for the existence and development of society, such as raw materials, resources, minerals, etc. "The worker cannot create anything without the natural world... without the visible world outside. That is the material in which his labor acts, from which and thanks to which his labor produces products." (C. Marx & F. Engels, 1980, Selected Works, volume 1, p.112).

Nowadays, with modern science, engineering and technology, people can produce and manufacture new materials that are not available in nature. However, in the end, the components that make up those materials all come from nature. Therefore, nature is always the condition, the premise for the existence and development of society and humans.

Thus, nature is the living environment of humans and human society, the first, constant and inevitable condition of the process of producing material wealth, one of the most basic elements of social existence. Even if society reaches the highest level of development, humans can never abandon their natural living environment. On the contrary, the more developed

society is, the more humans need nature, the more closely attached to nature. Because the inherent components of nature are not only necessary elements for human life but also endless resources for the development of society if humans know how to exploit and use them wisely and reasonably.

1.2. The role of humans and society towards nature

Humans are not only products of nature, but more than that, humans are also the highest product of material evolution. In the process of formation and development, thanks to labor and language, humans gradually become self-conscious, thus gradually separating themselves from the animal world and, together with the natural environment, humans also create for themselves a new living environment—the social environment. "Labor is first of all a process between humans and nature, a process in which, through their own activities, humans mediate, regulate and control the metabolism between themselves and nature." (C. Marx, 1993, C. C. Marx - F. Engels Complete Works, volume 23, p.266).

To produce material things, humans must relate to nature. F. Engels wrote in *Dialectics of Nature*, "Animals also change the external natural world through their activities like humans, but to a lesser extent, and as we have seen, the changes that animals have caused in their surrounding environment have reacted and caused them to change accordingly." (F. Engels, 1994, C. Marx - F. Engels Complete Works, volume 20, pp. 651, 652).

In order to establish material conditions for human life and development, humans actively perceive and alter nature through practical activities, in addition to obeying it. This promotes societal progress. The natural environment is increasingly subjugated by humans as they intentionally alter it.

In the Stone Age, humans lived by gathering and hunting in a state of complete dependence on nature, with extremely low productivity, so humans did not have any impact or damage on the natural environment. For a very long time, humans considered nature to be the master, the force that decided their destiny. By the Bronze and Iron Ages, humans knew how to burn fields, cultivate fields, clear forests and reclaim land, and to some extent destroyed the natural environment. Since the 1950s, the modern scientific and technological revolution broke out, and until today, with the 4.0 industrial revolution, it is a combination of technology in the fields of physics, digitalization, and biology, with technological breakthroughs related to Internet connection, cloud computing, 3D printing, sensor technology, virtual reality... Humans rely on that great "power" to control nature and transform nature. From there, humans created material civilization and spiritual civilization.

The world's population explosion, the overestimation of human power in transforming and conquering nature, and the "worship" of science and technology are the causes of the depletion of natural resources. This has resulted in increasingly severe environmental pollution, which is causing ecological imbalance, destroying living space, and certainly threatening the economy. People are so enamored with winning and controlling nature that they fail to realize that every time they triumph over it, nature retaliates and punishes them. In his book *Dialectics of Nature*, F. Engels stated: "We shouldn't take our triumphs over nature for granted. Because nature exacts punishment on us whenever we triumph. Indeed, every win first yields the outcomes we had hoped for, but in the second and third turns, it has very new and unexpected consequences that frequently negate the first outcomes. (C. Marx - F. Engels Complete Works, volume 20, p. 654) Engels, F. (1994).

Engels also emphasized that human activities have rapidly transformed the natural environment and posed threats to human existence. He wrote: "These events remind us at every moment that we do not in any sense rule over nature as a conqueror rules over a foreign people, or as someone existing outside of nature. On the contrary, we ourselves—in our flesh, blood, and mind—belong to nature; we exist within it. Our capacity to dominate nature lies solely in the fact that, unlike other living beings, we are able to recognize its laws and apply them accurately." (Engels, 1994, *Karl Marx – Friedrich Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 20, p. 655). Therefore, for sustainable development to be achieved, humanity must not disrupt the equilibrium of the natural–social system.

Thus, nature and society are both unified and mutually determined. This mutual determination is manifested in the fact that, on the one hand, nature constitutes the very body of human beings and provides the material basis for human life; on the other hand, the relationship between humans and nature is closely dependent on the level of social development. Nature and society are dialectically unified, together forming the living environment of humankind.

Human beings are dynamic agents who, while subject to nature, also possess the capacity to understand and transform it in order to generate material wealth for the survival and development of human society. In *Dialectics of Nature*, Engels wrote: "We exist within nature, and all our domination over nature consists in the fact that, unlike all other living beings, we are able to recognize its laws and apply them accurately." (Engels, 1994, *Karl Marx – Friedrich Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 20, p. 655).

Human interaction with nature is not carried out blindly, but rather with calculation and planning, directed toward specific purposes. This demonstrates that, along with the progress of history, humanity

increasingly affirms its role as a subject in relation to nature, fully capable of assessing the long-term consequences of its practical activities and of addressing those consequences. When humans act upon nature in accordance with its inherent laws, they create a “second nature” that harmonizes with the development of society. Conversely, if humans disregard these laws and merely exploit and appropriate what already exists in nature, the impoverishment of nature and the disruption of the natural–social system’s balance become inevitable.

Only by mastering the laws of society and applying them thoroughly can human beings correctly determine the objectives of the production process and consciously choose appropriate tools and means to achieve those objectives, thereby ensuring the sustainable development of society in a harmonious relationship among nature, society, and humanity.

Therefore, in order to safeguard the natural environment for their own existence and development, humans must firmly grasp the laws of nature and society, and rationally regulate the preservation, exploitation, utilization, and regeneration of natural resources so as to maintain the balance of the natural–social system.

Thus, both practice and science confirm the Marxist perspective, which enables us to understand and optimally address the relationship between humanity and nature.

An early recognition of the enduring value and vitality of the Marxist perspective on the relationship between humanity and nature has shaped the policies of the Communist Party and the State of Vietnam, which emphasize that economic growth must be combined with environmental protection. The 12th National Congress further developed the views of previous Congresses and identified fundamental directions for environmental protection: “Efficient exploitation, use, and management of natural resources; environmental protection; proactive prevention of natural disasters; and active response to climate change” (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2016, p. 78). To effectively safeguard the environment, it stressed the need to “improve the legal system, issue sufficiently strong sanctions to protect the environment, and prevent and handle violations in accordance with the law in order to put an end to environmental pollution... fundamentally overcoming the situation of environmental degradation” (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2016, p. 144). At the 13th National Congress, a new point was added, elevating environmental protection to a core dimension of the relationship between economic growth, cultural development, social progress and equity, and environmental sustainability (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021, Vol. 1, p. 119).

The Government’s standpoint on environmental protection, as defined in the National Environmental Protection Strategy to 2030 with a vision

to 2050, is that: environmental protection is the responsibility of the entire political system and of society as a whole; environmental protection must place the health of the people as the highest priority. The strategy emphasizes proactive prevention and control of pollution, with a focus on addressing urgent and critical environmental issues, remediating pollution and degradation, improving environmental quality, and integrating nature conservation and biodiversity preservation, thereby contributing to climate change adaptation.

This issue has consistently been a matter of concern for the Party Committee of An Giang Province. According to the Resolution of the 11th Provincial Party Congress, it was emphasized: “Enhance the efficiency of management, exploitation, use, and protection of natural resources and the environment. Take proactive measures in disaster prevention, climate change adaptation, and riverbank erosion control.” In practice, environmental protection efforts in An Giang have achieved significant results, contributing to the realization of the development vision set forth by the Provincial Party Committee in its overarching objectives: strengthening the leadership capacity of the Party Committee and the governance effectiveness of local authorities; promoting democracy and discipline; fully leveraging the province’s comparative advantages in regional linkages and international integration; and ensuring balanced development between the economy, socio-cultural progress, environmental protection, and improved quality of life for the people.

2. Some fundamental solutions for promoting economic growth in association with environmental protection in an Giang at present.

In the coming time to further promote the province’s advantages and potential—particularly its strengths in rice cultivation, aquaculture, and vegetable production—while minimizing adverse impacts on the natural environment during the process of economic growth, it is necessary to implement a number of feasible solutions.

Firstly, implementing laws and development plans.

It is necessary to perfect the legal system to promote economic growth associated with environmental protection, especially in the context of Vietnam’s integration into the world economy. An Giang’s location in the Mekong Delta region is closely linked to the Mekong River water body, so it is necessary to pay attention to fully implementing international legal documents on resources, assets, and resources such as the Mekong local contract and regulations on international water use. Applying models for treating solid waste, domestic wastewater, and waste of all kinds, including soil and air environments... to achieve efficiency and suitability with local situations on a province-wide scale. Establishments and sectors need to pay attention to building a map in their responsible field and always be

ready to warn and propagate through mass media, seminars, agricultural extension, and use of administrative documents.

Socio-economic development planning for agriculture, industry, tourism, and technical infrastructure development planning must be closely linked with environmental protection to ensure harmony between the artificial environment and the natural environment and preserve biodiversity in An Giang.

Secondly, Science and Technology solutions.

In the framework of the fourth industrial revolution, advance science, technology, and innovation to produce innovations in productivity, quality, efficiency, and competitiveness. Encourage the growth of e-commerce, the digital economy, the circular economy, and the green economy. Research, application, and transfer of science and technology are crucial to enhancing environmental protection and fostering sustainable economic growth. There should be mechanisms and policies to encourage organizations and individuals to participate in research activities and quickly and effectively apply new achievements in production as well as new achievements in environmental protection to meet the needs of improving air, water, solid waste, and environmental sanitation quality. Regularly open science and technology training courses for all people, helping them improve their self-management ability, apply technological solutions to reduce pollution, invest in new technology and equipment, and implement clean production solutions from the provincial, district, commune to hamlet levels. The Department of Science and Technology further promotes coordination with research institutes, universities, and centers for scientific application, research, and technology transfer in the region and internationally.

Thirdly, Financial Solutions.

Sustainable economic growth that ensures the rational and efficient use of natural resources while meeting environmental standards requires substantial financial resources. The State should introduce preferential policies and incentives for credit access to support investment in infrastructure and technology that serve both economic growth and environmental protection. At the same time, individuals, enterprises, and households need to take a more proactive role in seeking funding from domestic and international economic organizations. Consequently, financial resources for investment in this field will become more socialized, capital mobilization capacity will be enhanced, and pressure on the state budget will be reduced.

Proactively coordinate and strengthen linkages with provinces in the Mekong Delta to promote regional transportation development, manage and utilize water resources, and expand markets for sectors with

comparative advantages such as rice, paddy, and aquaculture, in accordance with the overall planning. At the same time, foster partnerships with universities to train a highly skilled workforce, and attract intellectuals to work in the province through appropriate preferential and incentive policies, along with a favorable and well-suited working environment.

Impose strict financial sanctions on violations of environmental quality standards in production and business activities, thereby contributing to enhancing the sustainability of the economy and strengthening the effectiveness of legal enforcement in governance.

Fourthly, human resource solution.

Among all the resources that meet the requirements of development—such as modern technical infrastructure, capital, and the necessary material facilities to improve productivity, quality, and production efficiency—the training of human resources holds the most important role in the process of industrialization and modernization of the country. The agricultural sector, in particular, is in urgent need of an abundant labor force with sufficient professional competence in research and in the application of new technologies in production as well as in environmental protection in the period of global economic integration.

To supply such human resources, it is essential to further strengthen training efforts: sectoral managers who are proficient in professional knowledge; enterprise managers who are competent, highly responsible, ethical, dynamic, and possess deep expertise and leadership capacity to develop enterprises with strong, efficient business operations; scientific staff who are skilled in research, capable of acquiring and applying scientific and technological advances and modern technologies from around the world in many fields; and skilled workers with high professional qualifications to meet the ever-increasing demands of work.

In addition, it is necessary to train inspectors and supervisors in the field of environmental protection; to educate and develop human resources with a solid understanding of laws in production, business, and environmental protection, particularly in the context of global integration. Special attention should also be given to organizing numerous long-term and short-term training and refresher courses for fishermen and farmers, thereby enabling them to advance to higher levels in production as well as in environmental protection.

Fifthly, Socialization of Environmental Protection.

The socialization of environmental protection is a solution of profound and practical significance within the community. It is essential to encourage individuals to voluntarily regard environmental protection as their own responsibility, rather than that of others, and not to shift such responsibility solely onto the State. To achieve this, it is necessary to strengthen education and disseminate

legal provisions on environmental protection, thereby transforming public awareness and actions. Environmental protection should be perceived as an endeavor directly associated with each individual's tangible interests and well-being.

Strengthening the dissemination and education of environmental protection laws for young people and adolescents through mass media (television, radio, newspapers, community broadcasting, etc.) is crucial. Special emphasis should be placed on communication via television and radio. Importantly, the content must be concise and coherent, while the presentation should be vivid, engaging, diverse, and flexible, tailored to the psychology and cultural practices of the people of An Giang. At the same time, propaganda through posters, slogans, leaflets, and illustrative campaigns also plays a significant role. Communities should be organized to study and discuss environmental protection, particularly focusing on concrete measures. Environmental education should be integrated into schools and institutions, as these are the agents actively implementing environmental protection both in the present and the future. It is essential to instill environmental awareness among students, making environmental protection a criterion in evaluating their ethics and civilized lifestyles. Alongside schools and society, environmental education within families plays a vital role, especially for children and adolescents. Adults in the family must set an example by practicing environmentally responsible behaviors, from the household level to the wider community around them.

III. CONCLUSION

Nature is the living environment of human beings and human society. It constitutes the primary, constant, and indispensable condition for the process of producing material wealth. Nature is also one of the most fundamental elements of social existence. Regardless of the highest level of social development, humankind can never abandon its natural living environment. On the contrary, the more society develops, the greater the human dependence on nature becomes, and the stronger the bond between humanity and nature grows.

In the current context of socio-economic development in Vietnam in general, and An Giang in

particular, the Marxist perspective on the relationship between human beings and nature holds profound methodological significance for fostering a harmonious coexistence with nature throughout the development process. Therefore, in the coming period, feasible solutions for the protection of the natural environment must be sustained and implemented in a more effective and comprehensive manner. Beyond the aforementioned measures, there remain many other solutions and solution groups that organizations and individuals should continuously innovate and adapt to practical circumstances. Such creativity will contribute to enhancing environmental protection in tandem with economic growth in An Giang at present and in the future.

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