The Ecological Crisis of *Ship Breaker* and the Chinese Solution

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**How to cite this paper:** Yanan Shi. (2024) The Ecological Crisis of *Ship Breaker* and the Chinese Solution. *Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Science*, 8(6), 1360-1364. DOI: 10.26855/jhass.2024.06.008

**Received:** April 30, 2024  
**Accepted:** May 29, 2024  
**Published:** June 28, 2024

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**Abstract**

American author Paul Bacigalupi’s work *Ship Breaker* won the Printz Literary Prize in one fell swoop. The book is rampant with the embodiment and proof of ecological consciousness. The text of *Ship Breaker* presents an ecological imbalance in terms of natural ecology, social ecology, and spiritual ecology, as well as a critique of industrial civilisation, which together form a shapely eco-literary landscape. The author takes Richard Lopez’s spiritual transformation as a perfect embodiment of a spiritual ecological crisis, and at the same time expresses the difficulty of surviving spiritual beliefs in a social-ecological crisis. This paper will further explore the writer Paul Bacigalupi’s ecological humanism from the relationship between human and nature, human and society, and human and self. Paul Bacigalupi argues that the main root cause of the spiritual and ecological crisis is the Western capitalist civilisation and system, and combines this with the community of human destiny to show the Chinese solution to ecologically sustainable development.

**Keywords**

Paul Bacigalupi, *Ship Breaker*, ecological crisis, Chinese solution

**Introduction**

The Shipbreaker is one of the literary works of Paul Bacigalupi, a new American science fiction writer, which has received wide attention from scholars both at home and abroad despite the short period of its publication. The book mainly tells a series of brutal adventures of the main character Naylor as a shipbreaker who stumbles upon a treasure ship and a young girl. The text contains a lot of descriptions of the ecological environment, showing that industrial civilisation and the vigorous development of science and technology, and commerce have brought to human beings a serious imbalance in the natural ecology, mutual distrust and indifference among people in the social ecology, and the disintegration of the personal spiritual world in the spiritual ecology, and at the same time it is also a high degree of critique of capitalism and industrial civilisation. Lu Shuyuan points out that “the trichotomy of spiritual ecology, social ecology, and natural ecology is not to separate the three, but precisely to examine in depth their positions, attributes, functions, values, and interactions among the three in the organic whole of the earth’s biosphere” (Lu Shuyuan, 2021). This paper will study the spiritual view of ecology in *Ship Breaker*, and while studying this work from an ecological perspective, it will show the Chinese solution to modern global problems, focusing on the value dimension, and using the community of human destiny to build a world of enduring peace, common prosperity, openness and inclusiveness, universal security, cleanliness and beauty (Bacigalupi, 2021).
1. Ecospirituality: Imbalance and Disillusionment

1.1 Natural-ecological Crisis

Paul Bacigalupi’s description of the period is the era of the emergence of capitalist industrial civilisation, which continued to extract rich natural resources from nature, causing a huge impact on the natural ecology of the time. In describing the natural environment, the author depicts the impact and decaying condition of the natural environment under capitalism. As shipbreaking workers on board, in order to meet the requirements of their superiors, they need to be as busy as ants in their nests every day, stripping and dragging all the usable materials from the ship to the beach, and finally sending them to the recycling furnace for forging. They had to work with masks on for their labour operations. Nature has been infested with sea water by man’s wanton destruction, With the massive development of capitalist industrial technology, coal, petrol, and other fuels are destroying the natural ecology everywhere, the original “sea water” no longer exists, and the image of “sea water” is gradually dimming in people’s minds, and the image of nature is changing under the destruction of human beings. At the same time, the hostility of human beings towards nature is only increasing, and the idea of anthropocentrism is beginning to take root, and eventually the destruction of nature will once again backfire on human beings themselves.

“Black smoke from furnaces”, “fumes from oil storage tanks”, “storms”, “the smell of coal”, “corpses all over”, and so on, which may be the tragic situation of the wanton destruction of nature, but also nature’s warning to human beings themselves. “Shipbreaking” also serves as a metaphor for modernity, not only causing endless ecological disasters to nature but also making issues of hierarchy and identity increasingly prominent. Under industrial socialisation, the natural ecology has been devastated, and the natural paradise has turned into a grave, singing an elegy for mankind. Natural ecology is a rich source of good spirituality for human beings, and we should correctly recognise the relationship between nature and human beings and seek harmonious coexistence between human beings and nature.

1.2 Social-ecological Crisis

The first is the distortion and deterioration of interpersonal relationships during the social and ecological crisis. When fellow worker Sloss discovers that Naylor has fallen into the tank, Naylor’s life hangs in the balance, and if he doesn’t pay attention, he will drown in the foul-smelling, slimy pool of oil, but for Sloss, this is indeed a great opportunity for profit in front of her, and if she alone keeps the oil for herself, she will enjoy endless wealth, and no one will care about Naylor’s life. At the same time, this also reflects Paul Bacigalupi’s concern for humanism, satirising the fact that under the oppression of capitalism, the hearts of the lower class of human beings are being distorted, and the trust and understanding between people are being deconstructed, announcing a serious imbalance in the ecology of the society.

Secondly, women in the lower class are especially pitiful, some women as prostitutes can only be reduced to the tools of the upper-class men, in order to get their reward money, talking, laughing, and using some provocative words, to get the approval of men, and these women are in the darkness, but they are called “bitch” by the other workers. Under such a cruel social and ecological crisis, women have no right to speak, but only to be insulted and disrespected, and the phenomenon of mutual mistrust and lack of understanding among people is gradually intensifying, and social indifference and social and ecological crises continue to intensify.

Finally, there is the discord of the family in the context of the socio-ecological crisis. Since the death of her mother, the protagonist Naylor has been living with her father, Richard Lopez, but the family situation is not as harmonious as one would expect; Naylor shows “caution” towards her father, fearing that he will make her father angry, and Naylor wants to run away from her father, who makes her insecure and fearful. Naylor wants to leave the family, to be warm and free, and to live with trustworthy people like Pima and Sadra. As can be seen, the cold family atmosphere shuts Naylor out and causes him a great deal of pain. Under the natural ecological crisis of gradual decay, the disharmony and mistrust between people within the family is gradually being intensified.

1.3 Spiritual-ecological Crisis

With the capitalist’s frenzied plundering of nature, there is also, to some extent, a degree of threat to the spirit of mankind itself. The contrasting portrayal of Richard Lopez, the father of the protagonist Naylor in The Shipbreaker, is worth exploring. In Naylor’s childhood memories, Richard Lopez is a warm and considerate father who does not...
make Naylor feel scared, but this only exists in Naylor’s childhood memories. However, he is now a “demon”, a “thin-boned”, “energetic”, “murderous” father, who drinks and takes drugs every day to maintain a state of mind that is in keeping with the environment in which he lives, a “shanty” nestled on the edge of the jungle surrounded by kudzu and cypress trees, wrapped in palm fronds, with a bamboo skeleton and a tinplate roof. “My father made special markings on the tin to ensure that no one would take it away as scrap during the day when no one was home.” The spiritual condition brought to Richard Lopez by such a living environment is precarious, and he himself is in a kind of lost, chaotic bottomless pit in the natural ecology and social ecology destroyed by human beings, the spiritual world is empty and despairing, and his spiritual beliefs are lost. The natural ecology and spiritual ecology echo each other, and this spiritual sickness precisely reflects the physical sickness of the “nobody” in this environment, and in the age of industrial technology, the spiritual faith seems to have disappeared. The author takes Richard Lopez’s spiritual transformation as a perfect embodiment of a spiritual ecological crisis, and at the same time expresses the difficulty of surviving spiritual beliefs in a social-ecological crisis.

Not only is Richard Lopez’s spiritual world disintegrating, but the inner self of shipbreaker Sloss is also twisted and deformed under the alienated natural and social ecology. As a fellow worker of the shipbreaker Naylor, Sloss is also faced with the dilemma and oppression of survival. If his body weight is not up to standard, he will be eliminated from the team of shipbreakers, and they, as the “nobody” at the bottom of the hierarchy, can only live on a meager existence every day. When Rose sees the huge oil storage tanks, which is how exciting wealth ah, although in front of Naylor’s life is at stake, Rose is here to show silence and hesitation. The brutal existential crisis has made people’s looks blank and their thoughts numb. Under the poor natural ecology and cruel social ecology, Sloss’s behaviour shows us the collapse of spiritual beliefs and the distortion of personalities when the “nobody” faces the existential crisis, which ultimately leads to the crisis of spiritual ecology. At the same time, the author also injects the natural ecology, social ecology, and spiritual ecology into the book “The Shipbreaker” as an undercurrent.

2. Ecological Enlightenment: The Ecological Dream of Green Water and Mountains

Paul Bacigalupi was a guest in China at an early age, and his work has a strong oriental background. As a result, the issue of environmental and ecological crisis appears heavily in his work, and with it the rapid rise of climate fiction, in which the author expresses his dissatisfaction and warnings against Western ecological governance by describing the catastrophe of ecological change in the future. In many of his works, he writes about China’s ecology in opposition to the West, forming a stark, idealised image of the Other, but at the same time the author, Bacigalupi, takes the position of the Other, hoping that the West will learn from China and become the guardian, solver and bystander of the ecological environment. The Other Imagination in the Dark Anthropocene: Chinese Writing in Bachigalupi’s Climate Novel The Water Knife. Bacigalupi came to China as a corporate consultant in 1994, and China in the 1990s was a period of rapid development of the economic system and science and technology, which made him a witness to China’s rapid development. At the same time, the United States is in a financial crisis intensified development, uneven and insufficient development between the states, and racial discrimination is becoming more and more serious. Therefore, the author’s depiction of China’s “other” is also a reference to the dissimilarity of American development. China’s rapid development has caused a crisis in the United States, which is not only the author’s scrutiny and imagination of China, but also his self-examination of the United States as well as ecological reflection (Meng Hua, 2001).

Paul Bacigalupi, as a science fiction writer and nature lover, has always been interested in the relationship between man and nature, and has always been concerned about the interaction between man and nature. In his works, the wanton destruction of the natural environment, extinction of resources, climate imbalance, and extreme situations can be seen everywhere. In Ship Breaker, the author does not directly give a direct solution to the ecological problem, but most intuitively shows the connection between ecological imbalance and human social development, as well as the relationship between ecological imbalance and the spiritual state of human beings, exposes the developed countries and regions ignore the actual situation of poor and backward regions, and exploits the impoverished areas with wantonness and violence, and criticises the destructive impacts of such violent plundering on the local ecology, as well as on the local residents and animals. As well as the destructive impact of such violent plundering on the local ecological environment and the local inhabitants and animals, the author does not put forward the solution directly, but side by side, he calls on human beings to seize the idea of the community of human destiny, and he urgently hopes that through the novel themed on the ecological destruction, he can make human beings realise that the homeland of human beings’ existence needs to be cared for and valued by human beings and that they need to re-examine the relationship between human beings and ecology, and provide a reference to the realisation of harmonious
coexistence of human beings, human beings, human beings and the society, and human beings and nature. The harmonious symbiosis between human beings, human beings and society, and human beings and nature, while also affirming China’s ecological solution strategies and programmes (DeLoughrey, 2011).

3. China’s Solution: Strengthening the Green Foundation and Depicting the Beauty of China

Ecological prosperity is the rise of civilisation, ecological decline is the decline of civilisation. The development of human society cannot be separated from the construction of ecological civilisation, since the 18th Party Congress, the Party Central Committee, at its core, has paid great attention to the construction of ecological civilisation, and has always adhered to the ideology of green development, which has been carried through the various fields and links of the cause of socialist modernisation in the new era. The value demands of the community of human destiny mainly include five aspects: political demands, economic demands, cultural demands, security demands, and ecological demands. Among them, the ecological demands are exactly what the author is pursuing—building a clean and beautiful world by adhering to green and low-carbon (Andrew Light & Holmes Rolston, 2022).

In today’s society, with the rapid development of the economy, the crisis of the ecological environment has become more and more prominent. This is not only a purely natural environmental problem, but also a problem of mankind’s relationship with nature. Anthropocentric thinking has filled the human brain, and human beings have begun to challenge nature, transform nature, and conquer nature, but this will endanger human beings themselves. Engels once said: “Let us not revel too much in our human victories over nature; for every such victory, nature will take revenge on us”. Today, taking the road of nature-respecting, green, and sustainable development has become the development consensus of all mankind. The concept of the community of human destiny put forward by the General Secretary insists on building a clean and beautiful world in a green and low-carbon way, firmly establishes the ecological consciousness of “green mountains are golden mountains”, and aims to advocate that human development activities must respect, adapt to and protect nature, promote green development, recycling development and low-carbon development, and form an environment-friendly production system that saves resources and protects the environment. The aim is to advocate that human development activities must respect nature, conform to nature, protect nature, promote green development, recycling development, and low-carbon development, form a production and living style that saves resources and protects the environment, and truly achieve harmony between human beings and nature. The ecological environment crisis is not only an individual problem but also a common problem faced by the whole of mankind. When there is a crisis in the ecological environment, no country can do it alone, and only when countries work together to deal with it together can the crisis be better solved. This is also a new development idea proposed by the General Secretary in the face of the crisis of globalization (Nixon, 2021).

General Secretary adheres to the worldview and methodology of keeping the right and innovating and embracing the world and proposes to promote the building of a community of human destiny in answering the questions of the world, the fingerprints of China. The fingerprints of the times, and the people’s questions, provide a rich and distinctive value appeal for China, as well as brand-new programmes and multi-faceted choices for the world, and value guidance for the various upcoming opportunities and challenges. Although the ecological and spiritual crisis revealed in Paul Bacigalupi’s work has not been implemented and solved in the West, the ecological crisis has been cleverly solved by the Chinese programme, taking the road of sustainable development, and the author, Paul Bacigalupi, calls on human beings to live in harmony with nature, overthrowing the idea of “anthropocentrism”, adjusting mainstream The author, Paolo Bacigalupi, calls on humanity to live in harmony with nature, to overthrow “anthropocentrism”, to adjust the dominant values and to save the missing faiths.

References


