RESEARCH ARTICLE

SOLVING ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS IS CHANGING CULTURAL PERCEPTION TOWARD ENVIRONMENT

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This paper argues that solving environmental problems is complex because it is not a matter of introducing strict laws on environment. Laws will be always considered as an external burden to be followed. People's environmental awareness must be roused because the environmental problem is coming from the mind which has been shaped by the culture. Therefore, it is not a question of laws but more than this, it is about cultural awareness that has influenced the attitude and behavior of people toward environment. Changing cultural perceptions is one fundamental option in solving the environmental problems.

INTRODUCTION

Environmental problems have become a serious concern for all human being on the planet. Why is it becoming serious concern? People we have seen the connection between the environmental problem and quality of human life. The condition of the environment affects human life. One of the immediate effects of environmental problem is climate change. It is one of the biggest crises facing humanity today. It is not a small issue but a serious issue that threatens human life. The climate change is clearly seen in the change of temperature as compared to 1850 when temperature was recorded and now it is about one degree Celsius hotter than it was in 1850 and 1900 (Wired, 2018). Many activities or programs are initiated or introduced by the government and non-government agencies in order to address the climate change, to prevent further deterioration of the climate. Projects on tree planting, waste management, recycling and solar power have been introduced. However, these activities are not common yet, in the sense that not all people are planting trees, implementing proper waste management, recycling and having a solar energy, but they are

using ordinary fossil oil, and people in other parts of the world are still cutting trees and mining. Concern and awareness of the danger of climate change seem not a common concern and not all people realize the negative effect of climate change. There is a need to inform the young people about the danger of climate change (Potenza, 2018). It is true that many activities and programs related to environmental protections have been done, however many of those activities are curative but not preventive. Preventive measures are necessary however those must go beyond environmental laws and projects only. To state the fact, environmental education must be considered of greatest urgency. The focus of environmental education should emphasize the balance concept of nature which is rooted in the culture. Hopefully such education will lead to the change of perception toward the environment and ultimately change of behavior toward the environment. The concern for the environment and concern for quality of life are main factors why the researcher takes his time to write this paper. The paper would like to prove that cultural perception matters to environmental problems.

Cultural Perception and Human Behaviors: After birth, a person is raised in the society. Culture of the society is playing important role in the process of his/her human development. Though at the early age he/she may not be affected so much by the culture but once he/she is integrated into the society, he/she

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must live in line with the culture of society. His/her behavior should follow the prescribed code of conduct of the society (Lee, 2017). The behavior of a person can tell many hidden things because through his/her behavior people can see or tell what his culture is. The behavior is a manifestation of culture. Therefore what I mean with the culture is the way he/she thinks, looks, beliefs or perceives about things. Thus, culture affects the attitude and attitude affects the behavior. What he/she believes, thinks or perceives, naturally it becomes his/her attitude toward the world or things or environment. Thus, attitude and behavior do not operate independently but it is formed and influenced by the existing culture. Amstrong (1996) in his examination of the cultural variables suggests that there is a relationship between cultural dimensions such as Uncertainty Avoidance and Individualism as prescribed by Hofstede's cultural dimensions and ethical perceptions. This finding supports the hypothetical linkage between the cultural environment perception and the perceived ethical problem variables posited in Hunt and Vitell's (1986) General Theory of Marketing Ethics. Such study only to prove that there is relationship between culture and attitude and behavior of a person toward anything. Culture affects the way people view and behave ethically.

The influence of culture is not only limited to individual behavior but even organizational behavior or society. In functionalist thinking, culture is considered as a component of an integrated social system which promotes the effectiveness of the organization and the well-being of all its stakeholders. Culture refers to the assumptions, beliefs, goals, knowledge and values that are shared by members of the society or the organization. British anthropologist Tylor (1874) attempted to define culture as inclusively as possible. Tylor (1874) described culture in the following way: "Culture or civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society". Culture represents the high-information "ideal factors" in a system that exerts significant and partly independent influence on human events or human behaviors. When an individual is faced with an ethical dilemma, his or her value system will color the perception of the ethical ramifications of the situation (Racelis, 2009). Such argument strengthens the position of culture to influence the behavior of a person toward other people, things or environment. In this case, culture matter much on the way how human behaves.

Another important factor of human behavior is their "core faith". This faith can be through religion, philosophy and culture or personal belief and often affects the way a person can behave. Many people belief some sort of belief in a higher power, which makes religion a large importance in society (Nones, 2012). It is only natural for something that plays such a large role in society to have an effect on human behavior (Spilka, 1996) Morals are another factor of core faith that affects the way a person behaves. Emotions connected to morals including shame, pride, and discomfort and these can change the way a person acts. Most importantly, shame and guilt have a large impact on behavior (Tangney, 2007).Lastly, culture highly affects human behavior. The beliefs of certain cultures are taught to children from such a young age that they are greatly affected as they grow up. These beliefs are taken into consideration throughout daily life, which leads to people from different cultures acting differently.

These differences are able to alter the way different cultures and areas of the world interact and act (Triandis, 1994). Culture does not only affect the belief and values of people but it also affects their attitude. It appears to be seen as the culture affects the attitude and attitude affects the behavior of a person.   An attitude is an expression of favor or disfavor toward a person, place, thing, or event (Wyer, 1965). In this case, attitude does not only affect the behavior of a person to another person but it can also affect his/her behavior toward things or environment. The interesting thing about an attitude and human beings is that it alters between each individual. Everyone has a different attitude towards different things. A main factor that determines attitude is likes and dislikes. The more one likes something or someone the more one is willing to open up and accept what they have to offer. When one doesn't like something, one is more likely to get defensive and shut down. An example of how one's attitude affects one's human behavior could be as simple as taking a child to the park or to the doctor. Children know they have fun at the park so their attitude becomes willing and positive, but when a doctor is mentioned, they shut down and become upset with the thought of pain. Attitudes can sculpt personalities and the way people view who we are. People with similar attitudes tend to stick together as interests and hobbies are common.

This does not mean that people with such attitudes do not interact, because they do. What it means is that specific attitudes can bring people together (e.g., religious groups). Attitudes have a lot to do with the mind which highly relates to human behavior. The way a human will behave depends a lot on how they look at the situation and what they expect to gain from it, (Kecmanovic, 1969). Positive attitudes are better than negative ones as negativity can bring on negative emotions that most of the time can be avoided. It is up to humans to make sure their attitudes positively reflect the behaviors they want to show. This can be done by assessing their attitudes and properly presenting them in society. Given the above presentation, now we can argue that attitude and behaviors are parts of culture. The views and behaviors are shaped by culture (Thayer School of Engineering at Dartmouth, n.d). Change in attitude and behavior or belief or values require change in culture. Culture change is difficult.

Culture change requires people to change their attitude and behaviors. It is often difficult for people to unlearn their old way of doing things, and to start performing the new behaviors consistently. However, it does not mean to say that culture cannot be changed; it can be changed if members of society are willing to change their attitude and behaviors, belief and values. A closer look at instinct driven behavior might help us understand this viewpoint better. For this, we can look at animal behavior, which is mostly controlled by instinct. In the case of humans, they can choose to ignore even such basic instincts, and put more thought and analysis in their behavior. They can also choose to do things in radically different ways. In this understanding, culture can be changed if people want to. In relation to environmental problem, environmental problem is seen as behavioral problem because it is caused by human behavior. Thus, it is a cultural problem. Since problem is rooted in the culture that affects the attitude and behavior, then solving environmental problem requires changing of culture. Changing culture means changing the way we view, value, perceive environment or nature. Negative culture toward environment must be changed into positive culture toward environment. It is an ethical issue.

Solving Environmental Problems is A Cultural Perception Change: As I have mentioned earlier that environmental problems is caused by human behavior. Such human behavior is influenced by the culture which in turn affects the attitude of man on how they view environment and finally such view affects their behavior toward environment. Different cultures have different perception toward the environment (McGlen, 1979). Consequently, the solution to the environmental problems must be radical change in cultural perceptions toward the environment. Old ways of perceiving environment as merely instruments to human welfare must be revisited or changed. Without changing cultural perceptions, then no amount of laws that prohibits behavior, definitely environmental problems will continue. Local perceptions toward the environment which is rooted in the culture must be reviewed (Pyhala, et.al, 2016). The researcher proposes the following recommendation on how to solve environmental problems:

Catechism or Education of New way of Understanding the bible, Genesis, 1:27-31: It is time to say "mea culpa". I say "mea culpa" directly means that I acknowledge I have done wrong and I have to confess that is my sin. My sin is that I have seen nature in its instrumental values, not in its intrinsic value. I have taken the genesis message as domination, not as a steward. Understanding the environment in its instrumental value has been used by the Capitalists to justify their manipulation to the environment and it is originated from the Bible, particularly in the book of Genesis. Some philosopher's views were also originated from bible. For example, Aristotle (Politics, Bk. 1, Ch. 8) maintains that "nature has made all things specifically for the sake of man" and that the value of nonhuman things in nature is merely instrumental. Generally, anthropocentric positions find it problematic to articulate what is wrong with the cruel treatment of nonhuman animals, except to the extent that such treatment may lead to bad consequences for human beings. Immanuel Kant (1963) on "Duties to Animals and Spirits", for instance, suggests that cruelty towards a dog might encourage a person to develop a character which would be desensitized to cruelty towards humans. From this standpoint, cruelty towards nonhuman animals would be instrumentally, rather than intrinsically, wrong. Likewise, anthropocentrism often recognizes some non-intrinsic wrongness of anthropogenic (i.e. human-caused) environmental devastation. Such destruction might damage the well-being of human beings now and in the future, since our well-being is essentially dependent on a sustainable environment (Passmore 1974, Bookchin 1990, Norton, Hutchins, Stevens, and Maple (eds.) 1995).

The destruction of environment would tell us that human beings have taken Gen 1; 27-31 as an instruction of an absolute power to use and misuse or to exploit when God tells us to have dominion over the animals and to fill the earth and subdue it. Such situation has been lamented by Pope Benedict XVI when he said that God's original command to have dominion over the earth has been sorely corrupted. He further said that the task of "subduing" was never intended as an order to enslave it but rather as a task of being guardians of Creation and developing its gifts, of actively collaborating in God's work ourselves (Benedict, 2008). Previous Pope, Paul II (1987) in his Sollicitudo Rei Socialis reminds us about our understanding of the dominion granted by God. The dominion granted to man by God is not an absolute power or a complete freedom to use and misuse or to dispose of things as one

pleases. The limitation imposed from the beginning by the Creator expressed symbolically by the prohibition "not to eat the fruit of the tree, for the day you eat of it, you will die (Gen. 2:17). John Paul II (2001) continued to emphasize that our respect for creation stem from respect for human life and dignity. Thus all human beings should realize their specific responsibility to care for the nature. Each person should recognize that the world is created by God and we are steward of the nature. We must be responsible stewards of God's creation. Humans are to use the earth, not to abuse it and in doing so become co-creators with God in the process of the formation of a new heaven and new earth. In Gen, 2: 15, it says, "Yahweh God took man and placed him in the Garden of Eden to till it and take care of it". Such instruction indicates that dominion of human being over the earth is not absolute but co- creator and stewards.

Adopting Eastern Views on Man and Nature: Eastern philosophy of man views men not in isolation of the universe. Man is part of the greater reality. If on one hand, the western look at man as individual who is independent from society or separate individual on the other hand the Eastern look at man as part of something greater. He is a part of a bigger part. Living wisely means an individual finds his true place in that greater reality and conforms to it. The greater reality is not only referring to society or environment but the divine reality. He seeks to lose himself in that greater reality and such reality is divine reality which is called Brahman. Brahman is the origin and support of the phenomenal universe. Brahman is sometimes referred to as the Absolute or Godhead which is the Divine Ground of all being. Brahman is the only thing which is truly real and everything else is only real to the extent that is part of Brahman. Brahman is just like a great sea and other being in the world are just a drop of water into that sea. Such drops do not have distinct individual existence but exist as drops of water in a great sea. They are elements of something greater. It is the reality of all realities, the soul of all souls, one without a second, the constant witness of the changing phenomena of the universe (Adiswarananda, 2012.). Adopting such view on man and nature, it tells us that man is not a subject and the world is object to be used but both subject. The relationship between man and nature must be between subject and subject. Nature and man are one. Both are part of the greater reality which is Brahman. In this case, man and nature are divine in nature because both are part of such greater reality which is Brahman. Man gets its meaning by living in harmony with such greater reality.

New Way of Building a Relationship with the Nature: We might be familiar with the idea of Martin Buber. Martin Buber argued that all real living is meeting. In the meeting, there is always a relation and this relation is not only man to man but man to the world and to God. How we can open ourselves to the world, to others and to God. Therefore he proposed a kind relationship which is I-You and I-It relationship. But one kind of these relationships is not really intended for one or the other. It depends on how we relate ourselves to others, to the world and to God. I-You (Thou) or Ich-Du relationship. I- You (Thou) relationship is a relationship between man and man or subject to subject (Buber, 1965). This is a genuine relationship because the objective of such relationship is not for the advantage of one party but it is mutual. We deal with the other as a subject or a person who is distinctive. Therefore, according to him, we take stand either to relate or not relate ourselves. We can take our place against whatever confronts us and address it

as you or we can take ourselves apart from it and view it as an object (it). In this case, there is possibility that relationship (I-You) which is supposed to be a genuine relationship and only between subject to subject or man to man can turn into a manipulative relationship which is I-It relationship. In this case the purpose of going into building relationship or dialogue is only for self-interest. While I-It relationships is a relationship between subject and object. But this relationship can be used in human relationship. In the I-It relationship, the subject is in the position to use, manipulate, and control the other. The other is used as an object. In this case one is being used by the other for his self-interest. There is no mutual benefit in this kind of relationship. In terms of relationship of man nature, it simply people accept that it is I-It relationship. Man is simply using the nature as object of manipulation for his self-interest. New way of building relationship with nature must be a relationship of I-You. Nature must be seen as subject, as an independent and distinctive from human. Thus the relationship between man and nature must be a relation of subject to subject, both are equal. Not only that nature and man are both the creation of God but both relationships benefit each other. Nature benefits from man and man benefit from nature. Therefore relationship with the nature must be mutual relationship. Man takes care of the nature as mandated by God and nature gives life to man. Man has to respect nature because the natural environment and/or its various contents have certain values in their own right so that these values ought to be respected and protected in any case. The manipulative relationship which only benefits one side can produce disaster on the part of human being.

Nature should not be viewed as instrument or pure object: Western philosophers have seen nature or environment as a separate entity from man. Unlike the Eastern philosophers view nature and human being as one. Both are pare part of greater reality. As a consequence of that concept, people maintain harmony and respect toward the environment. In this case, it emphasizes more on intrinsic value than instrumental value. People respect nature because they have their own value in themselves regardless of whether they are useful or not to other ends. Because the intrinsically valuable is that which is good as an end in itself, it is commonly agreed that something's possession of intrinsic value generates a prima facie direct moral duty on the part of moral agents to protect it or at least refrain from damaging it (O'Neil 1992 &Jameson 2002).

As a consequence of Western views are looking at environment as an object to be used, to be manipulated for human interest. The reflection of Western view of environment can be found in their literature on environmental ethics in which they emphasize the *instrumental value of nature.* Instrumental value of environment is the value of things as *means* to further some other ends. For instance, certain fruits have instrumental value for bats who feed on them, since feeding on the fruits is a means to survival for the bats. However, it is not widely agreed that fruits have value as ends in themselves (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2008). Another example, a certain wild plant may have instrumental value because it provides the ingredients for some medicine or as an aesthetic object for human observers. Many traditional western ethical perspectives, however, are *anthropocentric or human-centered* in that either they assign intrinsic value to human beings alone (i.e., what we might call anthropocentric in a *strong* sense) or they assign a significantly greater amount of intrinsic value to human beings than to any nonhuman things such that the protection or promotion of human interests or well-being at the expense of nonhuman things turns out to be nearly always justified (i.e., what we might call anthropocentric in a *weak* sense) (Stanford Encyclopedia, 2008)

Consumerism: The question is what is wrong with consumerism? Consumerism is a social and economic order that encourages the purchase of goods and services in ever-greater amounts. In economics consumerism refers to economic policies placing emphasis on consumption. In an abstract sense, it is the consideration that the free choice of consumers should strongly orient the choice what is produced and how. In many critical contexts, *consumerism* is used to describe the tendency of people to identify strongly with products or services they consume, especially those with commercial brand names and perceived status-symbolism appeal, e.g. luxury car designer clothing or expensive jewelry. Consumerism can take extreme forms such that consumers sacrifice significant time and income not only to purchase but also to actively support a certain firm or brand (Eisingerich *et al.*, 2010). Definitely consumerism is good for the economy because economy is also depending on the consumption. The more people consume, the better the economy is. However, even though consumerism is not all bad but the effect of consumerism is great. Consumerism can have a great impact to the environment. All raw materials are taken from the environment and all the waste of unused materials are going back to the environment. The environment has to be destroyed in order to get the materials through mining activities or logging activities and waste will be thrown back to the environment. The immediate consequence is climate change. The ozone layer protects day-by-day due to pollution like nitrogen oxide, sulfur dioxide, lead, particular matter and carbon monoxide. Apart from the depletion of ozone layer, these emissions of gases also cause several health problems. Keeping a check on these emissions is the solution to protect the ozone layer (RahamGafar, 2012). Definitely, to solve environmental problem is to change lifestyle which is part of culture.

Conclusion

Environmental problem is a behavioral problem which is influenced by the existing culture. Definitely environmental problem is a cultural problem. Solving environmental disaster is not just a matter of introducing new laws on protecting environment but it is a change of culture which affects belief, attitude, values and behaviors of people. This is an area which environmentalists have not taken into consideration in their efforts to prevent environmental disasters. Thus, it is time to revisit the existing culture and old views on how people view environment or nature must be renewed or changed.

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