



THE ENLIGHTENMENT OF CHINESE PHILOSOPHY TO THE CONSTRUCTION OF CONTEMPORARY ECOLOGICAL CIVILIZATION


Ziyu Zhang

School of Marxism, Zhejiang University of Technology, Hangzhou 310014 – China.

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-9055-630X> |  Ziyu121Zhang@outlook.com

Xinyue Xu

School of Marxism, Zhejiang University of Technology, Hangzhou 310014 – China.

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-1307-0369> |  xinyuex1023@126.com

ZHANG, Ziyu; XU, Xinyue The enlightenment of Chinese philosophy to the construction of contemporary ecological civilization. *Trans/Form/Ação: Unesp journal of philosophy, Marília*, v. 47, n. 4, “Eastern thought”, e0240070, 2024.

Abstract: Chinese philosophy is a philosophy of ecology. The basic problem of Chinese philosophy is the relationship between heaven and man, that is, the relationship between nature and man. This is evident in the main schools of Chinese philosophy, such as Confucianism and Taoism. A correct understanding and evaluation of Chinese ecological philosophy has important practical significance for us to reflect on the ecological imbalance and environmental deterioration caused by the industrial civilization, created under the guidance of the mechanical concept of nature and anthropocentrism, and to re-examine the way of human existence, development, thinking and values. This paper aims to explore the elements of eco-philosophy in Chinese philosophy and analyze its influence on the concept, value and practice of ecological civilization.


Keywords: Chinese philosophy. Confucianism. Taoism. Ecological civilization.

ZHANG, Ziyu; XU, Xinyue La ilustración de la filosofía china para la construcción de la civilización ecológica contemporánea. *Trans/Form/Ação: revista de filosofía da Unesp, Marília*, v. 47, n. 4, “Eastern thought”, e0240070, 2024.

Resumen: La filosofía China es una filosofía de la ecología. El problema fundamental de la filosofía China es la relación entre el cielo y el hombre, es decir, la relación entre la naturaleza y el hombre. Esto es evidente en las principales escuelas de la filosofía China, como el confucianismo y el taoísmo. Una correcta comprensión y evaluación de la filosofía ecológica China tiene un importante significado práctico para nosotros para reflexionar sobre el desequilibrio ecológico y el deterioro ambiental causado por la civilización industrial creada bajo la guía del concepto mecánico de naturaleza y antropocentrismo, y para reexaminar la forma de la existencia humana, el desarrollo, el pensamiento y los valores. Este artículo tiene como objetivo explorar los elementos de la eco-filosofía en la filosofía China y analizar su influencia en el concepto, el valor y la práctica de la civilización ecológica.

Palabras clave: Filosofía China. Confucianismo. Taoísmo. Civilización ecológica.

Received: 30/05/2023 | Approved: 01/08/2023 | Published: 25/01/2024

 <https://doi.org/10.1590/0101-3173.2024.v47.n4.e0240070>



This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License.

THE ENLIGHTENMENT OF CHINESE PHILOSOPHY TO THE CONSTRUCTION OF CONTEMPORARY ECOLOGICAL CIVILIZATION

Ziyu Zhang¹

Xinyue Xu²

Abstract: Chinese philosophy is a philosophy of ecology. The basic problem of Chinese philosophy is the relationship between heaven and man, that is, the relationship between nature and man. This is evident in the main schools of Chinese philosophy, such as Confucianism and Taoism. A correct understanding and evaluation of Chinese ecological philosophy has important practical significance for us to reflect on the ecological imbalance and environmental deterioration caused by the industrial civilization, created under the guidance of the mechanical concept of nature and anthropocentrism, and to re-examine the way of human existence, development, thinking and values. This paper aims to explore the elements of eco-philosophy in Chinese philosophy and analyze its influence on the concept, value and practice of ecological civilization.

Keywords: Chinese philosophy. Confucianism. Taoism. Ecological civilization.

INTRODUCTION

The agricultural civilization and the industrial one that mankind has experienced are all at the expense of the natural environment. The great destruction of the ecological balance has plunged mankind into a deep crisis of survival. The ecological environment problem has become one of the core problems affecting human survival and development. The emergence of environmental problems has aroused deep reflection of human beings. More and more modern scholars have turned their attention to traditional Chinese philosophy, trying to find ways to alleviate the ecological crisis, break the moral dilemma and build an ecological civilization. German scholar Max Weber mentioned the natural value orientation of Chinese culture in his book *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism*. He believes that this orientation is suitable for contemporary environmental protection and social development, so it is reasonable (Max, 2010, p. 55). Joseph Needham, a well-known expert on the history of Chinese science and technology, believes that traditional Chinese ecological wisdom has always pursued the man and nature's unity, which is very different from the traditional

¹ School of Marxism, Zhejiang University of Technology, Hangzhou 310014 – China. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-9055-630X>. E-mail: Ziyu121Zhang@outlook.com.

² School of Marxism, Zhejiang University of Technology, Hangzhou 310014 – China. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-1307-0369>. E-mail: xinyuex1023@126.com.

Western ecological value concept of conquering nature. Among them, Taoism, which advocates natural inaction, takes the man and nature's harmonious coexistence as its ideal state. It is precisely the best policy that is really beneficial to the human beings' sustainable development. American scholar Du Weiming also points out that "[...] anthropocentrism, which conquered nature since the enlightenment, is no longer the outstanding manifestation of scientific rationality. On the contrary, in Chinese philosophy, how to maintain a lasting harmonious relationship between man and nature is the way to survive" (Lin, 2015, p. 169). Karl-Heinz Pohl, a German sinologist, believes that the unique ecological wisdom of pursuing harmonious coexistence between man and nature, in Chinese traditional culture, has the value and significance of influencing the world, especially the overall concept of "unity of man and nature" (Wu, 2023, p. 307), which plays a crucial role in solving the ecological ethical problems between man and nature. Perhaps it can help human beings reverse the ecological ethical dilemma faced by today's society.

To sum up, the ecological ethics in ancient Chinese philosophy centered on how to position and how to get along with each other between man and nature, advocating such values as equality of all things, universal love for all beings, the man and nature's unity, and advocating harmonious coexistence and sustainable development between human and nature. It not only provided a lot of specific theoretical guidance for ancient Chinese ancestors in the process of understanding and transforming the world, but also provided a reference for contemporary people to repeatedly test, update and improve their own theoretical system. This paper will sort out and analyze the content of ecological philosophy in Chinese philosophy and reflect on its enlightenment and significance to the construction of contemporary ecological civilization.

1 ECOLOGICAL ETHICS IN TAOIST PHILOSOPHY

Taoist philosophy originated in the pre-Qin period. Different from Western philosophy of the same period, Taoist philosophy did not explore what the world was composed of, but explored the concept of laws that created and constituted the world. This concept was also called "Tao" in Taoist philosophy. The "Tao" in Laozi's words not only represents the nature's laws, but also represents the basis for the creation and continuous operation and change of all things in the world, and also represents the origin of the universe's formation.

From the perspective of the creation of all things,

[...] the Tao is unique in that it contains *Yin* and *Yang*, the two forms of *Qi* which intersect to form a state of uniformity in which all things arise. All things in the shade to the sun, and in the *Yin* and *Yang* of the two *Qi* mutual agitation into a new harmonious body. (Laozi, 2021, p. 51).

The total root of the human beings' generation and growth and all things is Tao, so human beings and all things should be consistent in nature. From the perspective of the evolution of all things, it is "[...] man must follow the laws and characteristics of the earth. The principle of the earth is to obey the heaven. The heaven takes the Tao as the basis for its operation and the Tao follows the laws of nature" (Laozi, 2021, p. 34). Everything in the world is always in a state of being interconnected and imitating each other. The ultimate basis for its changes and development is the Tao itself, and the movement and changes of the Tao are always natural. The existence and changes of the Tao have always maintained the characteristics of being "[...] independent of any external forces and never cease to run, cycle and never wear out" (Laozi, 2021, p. 33). Therefore, all things in the world that are born from Tao and follow Tao should always follow a specific order of existence and the law of movement. The existence and operation of "the net of Heaven" are realized and maintained by these two cosmic principles. This is the holistic view of the universe contained in Taoist ecological ethics (Wang, 2017, p. 48-53).

The interpretation of Taoist philosophy on "Tao" establishes the foundation of its worldview. This interpretation negates the idea of separation between man and the world, jumps out of the understanding of anthropocentrism, and affirms the relationship between man and nature (Huang, 2020). On this basis, Taoist philosophy continued to explore the attributes of "Tao", and uses "[...] the movement of the Tao by contraries proceeds; and weakness marks the course of Tao's mighty deeds" (Laozi, 2021, p. 49) as the most fundamental answer to the nature's law. This is also part of Taoist philosophy that truly falls into the human world after determining the understanding of the world and affirming the attribute of "Tao".

"The movement of the Tao by contraries proceeds; and weakness marks the course of Tao's mighty deed" (Laozi, 2021, p. 49) is similar to the paradoxical logic in dialectics. In *Lao Zi*, the description of this concept is "[...] gradually, far away and then reverse". It means that if anything goes to extremes gradually, then these things will turn into their opposite. Applying this principle to contemporary ecological ethics issues means that natural resources should not be exploited excessively and endlessly. Excessiveness will lead to nature changing from helping human development to restraining human development (Xu, 2015, p. 49-51). Therefore, the development of natural resources should be mastered within a degree, and harmonious coexistence with nature is the human society's development road. At the same time, the law of the development of "[...] the movement of the Tao by contraries proceeds; and weakness marks the course of Tao's mighty deed" extends to "with all the doing in the way of the sage he does not strive" (Laozi, 2021, p. 90). The nature of anything cannot be developed to extremes, otherwise, it will lead to opposite changes. Therefore, you must understand the concept of moderation and contentment, not rush for quick success and instant benefit, and must not be satisfied with greed. Only when the behavior is within

the “degree” of all things, harmonious progress can be made. This concept of harmonious development coincides with the contemporary concept of sustainable development. No drain should be done to fish, as no killing of the goose that lays the golden egg and no predatory exploitation of the natural environment. This is the most essential understanding of the natural ecological law in Taoist philosophy, and also the most basic element of harmonious development (Han, 2013, p. 111).

Another representative figure of Taoist philosophy is Zhuangzi, who believes that the human beings’ life and death and the existence and death of things are just the transformations of one *Qi*, and all things are born and returned to one body with the same *Qi*. Therefore, human beings and other species are unified in essence, so Zhuangzi advocates the ecological wholeness concept of “[...] heaven and earth co-exist with me, and all things are one with me” (Zhuangzi, 2018, p. 52). If human beings want to achieve the state of “unity with nature”, they must conform to nature and give up human subjectivity in the process of developing symbiosis with nature. In *The Tree on the Mountain*, Zhuangzi answered the question “what is the unity of man and nature?”, and believed that “nature” and “man” can actually be harmoniously unified. Zhuangzi believes that the human beings’ emergence is derived from the nature’s evolution. As a nature’s member, human beings must always adhere to their inherent natural nature just like the universe. Even if human beings have their own particularity and no longer easily reveal their natural nature, they must always live and die with the nature’s evolution. But Zhuang Zi also pointed out that human beings also possess their own unique independent thought and subjective initiative, which is the human beings’ particularity and why they are different from other creatures. In addition, although Zhuang Zi admitted the objectivity of “[...] the connection between nature and man” (Zhuangzi, 2018, p. 54), he also noticed the opposite relationship between man and nature. When dealing with the contradictory relationship between man and nature, Zhuang Zi advocated respecting nature and suppressing man. Since man is a nature’s part, he should take the ideal state of “being one with heaven” as the ultimate pursuit. In order to realize the harmonious state of “being one with heaven”, man must remove humanness while maintaining the natural nature and realize “returning to nature” as Lao Zi said.

The ecological equality concept of “no distinction between high and low” is one of the core values advocated by Taoism. Lao Zi believes that “[...] the Tao is big, the sky is big, the earth is big, and man is also big. There are four big things in the domain, and people live in one of them” (Laozi, 2021, p. 34). Humans are only one of the “four big” in the universe, and everything in the universe is equal and important. There is no distinction between high and low. Since human beings are equal to all things in the universe, all things in the universe should be equally noble and important as human beings. The “Four Big Ones” in the universe always participate in the evolution of the entire universe with equal identities and values. Therefore, it is not only necessary to pay attention to ethics and morality when dealing with

the relationship between people, but also to pay attention to ethics and morality when people get along with the world. Human beings should treat all things in the world with compassion and care, respect and love all life. And only by following the law of development of all things in the world, resolving the man-made contradiction between man and all things, and perfecting the ethical relationship between man and nature, we can realize the unity between man and all things.

Zhuangzi also emphasized that all things are always equal, and bluntly said, “[...] from the point of view of Tao, there is no high or low in things”, and “[...] all things are equal, which one is short and which one is long?” (Chen, 2016, 46). As an integral part of all things in the world, human beings are essentially consistent with all things in it. As far as the human beings’ essence and of all things is concerned, that is, at the level of Tao, there is always an equal relationship between human beings and all things in nature. There is no distinction between noble and base, high and low. Therefore, people and all things should respect and love each other’s existence and value, and we must not rely on our own opinions and observe from the perspective of all things themselves. “From the perspective of all things themselves, each is valuable and others are cheap. From a secular point of view, high or low does not lie in things themselves” (Zhuangzi, 2018, p. 88). If people and all things ignore each other or despise each other, it will inevitably cause endless disputes and disasters, and will inevitably destroy the entire natural world. The ecological balance of Tao will eventually damage the real appearance and overall value of Tao in the real world (Yu, 2020, p. 9).

Zhuangzi attributed human greed and reckless behavior in real activities to the crime of “cunning and deceit” and believed that man wantonly plundered and trampled on nature for their own utility and needs. “If the bows, crossbows, bird nets, arrows, and traps are cleverer, the birds will only disturb the air; if the hook baits, fishing nets, and fish cages are cleverer, the fish will only swim in the water; wooden fences, animal pens, animal nets, etc. are cleverer, then the wild animals will only scurry in the grass” (Zhuangzi, 2018, p. 72). The end result will not only destroy nature and all things, but also not conducive to the human beings’ existence and development. Therefore, Zhuangzi emphasized that “Respecting life will despise glory and wealth”. In order to realize “not to hurt everything”, human beings must reduce their own utilitarianism, control their own desires, take the idea of “unity of things and oneself” as the value orientation, and treat all things in the same way as the heaven and earth. “The so-called profound virtues are often to nurture and cultivate all things without taking them as their own, and at the same time, not to be superior to all things because of their meritorious service and not to dominate all things because they are the best of all things” (Laozi, 2021, p. 60). Zhuangzi’s ecological protection concept of “natural inaction” and “not to hurt everything” aims to realize the concept of equality of all things in concrete practical activities, so as to realize the ideal state of harmonious coexistence between man and nature (Chen, 2015, p. 36).

2 ECOLOGICAL ETHICS IN CONFUCIAN PHILOSOPHY

2.1 THE BEGINNING OF PRE-QIN CONFUCIAN ECOLOGICAL ETHICS

Confucianism, which pursues moral idealism, always regards harmony and co-existence between man and nature as the moral ideal it pursues when dealing with the relationship between man and nature, and thus develops the concept of “unity of man and nature” and “unity of all things”. In the view of Confucianism, nature is a huge organic whole, which is the ontology of all things in the world. Heaven and man exist in nature, and man and nature are a harmonious and unified whole, which are interrelated and interdependent (Yuan, 2010, p. 125-127).

The idea of “unity of man and nature” originated from Confucius. Although he did not explicitly put forward the theory of “unity of man and nature”, it was reflected in his thought. *The Analects of Confucius* recorded Confucius’ words, “[...] did the heaven say something? The four seasons run as usual, and all things grow as usual. Did the heaven say anything?” (Confucius, 2018, p. 25). “Heaven” here means nature. Confucius advocated that “heaven” is the origin of all things and phenomena, and that the change of seasons and the growth of all things are the result of the nature’s objective existence. Like everything in nature, human beings are an important nature’s part. All human production and life practices cannot escape the constraints of natural laws. Confucius believed that “heaven” is the ruler, and heaven and fate are one. Confucius pointed out: “A man has no way of becoming a gentleman unless he understands destiny” (Confucius, 2018, p. 29). The “destiny” here means the heaven’s destiny. Confucius believes that knowing the destiny, that is, knowing the objective natural laws is the morality that a gentleman should have, and human beings should know and master the natural laws.

On the other hand, Confucius’ thought of “knowing the destiny” also advocates that human beings respect and obey nature. In dealing with the relationship between man and nature, we should abandon the state of conflict and struggle with each other, and strive to achieve a harmonious coexistence between man and nature. Only in this way, human beings cannot violate the objective laws of the development of things in nature and act recklessly (Lin, 2016, p. 3-17). The contribution of Confucius’ view of destiny lies in that he uncovered the mysterious cloak of the traditional concept of destiny. His view of destiny retains the ideological form of the traditional concept of destiny, so he talks about “fear of destiny”. However, the essence of his view of destiny is to emphasize the need to better handle human affairs under the heaven’s guidance, that is, to know “destiny” so as to “[...] perform human affairs”, and he advocated the development of people’s subjective initiative (Confucius, 2018, p. 39). Therefore, Confucius’ view of destiny is actually the source of the Confucian thought of “the unity of man and nature”.

Confucianism believes that in the objective sense of existence, human beings and all things in nature have the same root and origin, and they are all transformed by the interaction of *Yin* and *Yang* between heaven and earth, which is what Zhang Zai, a Confucian of the Song Dynasty, said: “The floating clouds are chaotic. Together, there is the essence of things, and the people and objects produced in this way will be very different” (Zhang, 2000, p. 43). In other words, it is precisely because the heaven and the earth are actually “flowing through one *Qi*”, that all things in the universe can communicate as one. In addition, Confucianism believes that “life is endlessly changing, the cycle goes back and forth, and innovation is the origin of everything”. Life is endlessly changing and moving forward. It is the heaven’s nature to conceive life. “Heaven” represents nature, and “endless change” is a dynamic process of continuous creation, vitality and organic harmony between man and nature. Without this process, “change” would lose its meaning of existence.

The *Book of Changes* describes the creation of all things as “[...] great ah, Qian Yuan! All things begin with you” and “the thickest earth grows all things” (Li, 2018, p. 96). Here, the heaven is recorded as *Qian*, and the earth is recorded as *Kun*. “The beginning of all things” means that the life of all things comes from the heaven, and the heaven is the life’s origin. “The thickest earth grows all things” means that the life of all things is generated from the earth, and life comes from heaven and is generated on the earth. The *Book of Changes* compares heaven and earth to parents, “*Qian* is the heaven, so it is called the father. *Kun* is the earth, so it is called the mother.” *Qian* is the heaven, and it belongs to *Yang*, so it means the father. *Kun* is the earth, and the earth belongs to *Yin*, so it means mother. The commonality among *Qian Kun*, heaven, earth and parents is that they can create life, which is “endless change”. Here, the heaven and earth, with the meaning of parents, are not gods, but the real world that uses life as a function to show its existence. Heaven and earth are a natural world, including the operation of the four seasons and the growth of all things, and nature is the highest existence. Human beings and all things in the world are nature’s products. Heaven is the natural world in which “endless change” is the function and existence, which shows that nature is a natural world with the life’s meaning, and it is the whole life itself (Hu, 2023, p. 12).

2.2 THE DEVELOPMENT OF CONFUCIAN ECOLOGICAL ETHICS IN SONG AND MING DYNASTIES

In the philosophy of the Song and Ming Dynasties, Zhang Zai put forward for the first time the important proposition of “unity of man and nature”, which further established the man and nature’s legitimacy as a moral community. With the cosmological ontology view of *Qi* monism, he clarifies that all things in the world (including human beings) are formed by the aggregation of *Qi*, and all things are formed when *Qi* gathers, and everything returns to the void when *Qi* disperses. For example, “Gas aggregates and disperses in the universe,

just like ice melts. It is the same as being in water, knowing that emptiness is *Qi*, and there is no absolute emptiness in the world” (Su, 2016). Therefore, the noumenal function of *Qi* to produce all things expresses the human beings’ common origin and of all things in nature, and illustrates the ecological origin meaning of the unity of all things. Wang Yangming further believed that man and all living things together formed a “unity of all things” created by the combination of “[...] children (human), animals (animals), vegetation (plants) and tiles (inanimate natural objects)”. He said: “Man is the heart of heaven and earth. All things in heaven and earth are one with me” (Zhang, 2000, p. 52).

Zhu Xi extensively absorbed Zhang Zai’s, Zhou Dunyi’s and other Neo-Confucianists’ ideological nourishment in the Northern Song Dynasty, and he became a master of Neo-Confucianism. His theories constructed a large-scale and sophisticated ideological system. In his view, the universe, heaven and earth, as life forms, all have hearts. For example, the living beings’s hearts is the heaven’s and earth’s heart. Regarding this, Zhu Xi once mentioned that “From ancient times to the present, life is endless, and human beings take the heart of this creature as their heart” (Yu, 2017, p. 65). He believes that the reason why the heaven’s and earth’s heart is the living things’ heart is mainly because the sky surrounds the earth, and living things exist as hearts within the heaven and the earth. Creatures keep their hearts beating at any time and live endlessly, and the world is endless because of the creatures’ endless life. Therefore, he further believes that the heaven’s and earth’s heart can permeate all things. If people get the heart of all things, the heart of all things will be expressed as the human heart, and if the plants, trees and animals get it, it will be transformed into the hearts of plants, trees and the animals’ ones. The heaven’s and earth’s heart remains the same, and there is only one, which can nourish all things to grow endlessly. No matter it is supplied to any object, it can guarantee the survival of the object. He defines this as “benevolence” and points out that only “benevolence” can nourish “heart” (Zou, 2004, p. 55).

According to Zhu Xi’s theory of ecological philosophy, the reason why the heaven’s and earth’s creatures are endless is they have the creatures’ heart. In this way, Zhu Xi pointed out that “[...] people have the heart of the creatures of heaven and earth as their heart, so they have the heart of intolerance and the inherent life principle of all things in the world is benevolence” (Fan, 1985, p. 35). In fact, in real life, everything in the world has no heart, and Zhu Xi endowed it with a heart from the perspective of ecological philosophy, that is, “benevolence”. To interpret “benevolence” with “the inherent life principle of all things in the world”, then “the inherent life principle of all things in the world” cannot be limited to the heaven’s and earth’s laws, but it needs to be expanded into the great goodness of the moral category, that is, the great virtue. This transformation process is actually the process of nurturing the heaven’s and the earth’s creatures. From this, Zhu Xi proposed that “[...] benevolence is the inherent life principle of all things in the world, and the ‘endless change’ in nature. It is the only thing that runs continuously, so it is called the heart” (Chen, 2020,

p. 113). It can be seen that, according to the requirements of Zhu Xi's ecological philosophy, since the "the inherent life principle of all things in the world" is regarded as the rule of Tao and, as a universal law and an inevitability existing in the universe, it can continuously give birth to endless benevolence, human beings must take the initiative to participate in the life's cycle. The same is true for the humanity's way and the heaven's one, which cannot damage or hinder the operation process of the inherent life principle of all things in the world.

In this way, the creatures' hearts in heaven and earth are endless, so all natural things in the universe are constantly growing in the process of "endless changing". At the same time, all things also have vitality, and their vitality is also the embodiment of the heaven's heart. This is what is said in *Benevolence*, "[...] the heart of man comes from the heart of heaven and earth" (Chen, 2020, p. 136). The significance of Zhu Zi's statement is that the traditional Confucianism puts the heaven's, earth's and creatures' heart into the nature of all things. The purpose of all things in nature together embodies the universe's purpose, and the growth of all things embodies the process of the universe's development. The meaning of benevolence embodied in the theory of the heaven's and earth's heart can also be combined with Zhu Zi's thoughts on *Li* and *Qi*. The heaven and the earth are originally one *Qi*. *Qi* has the function of movement, so it must be expressed as the mutual pushing of *Yin* and *Yang*. Therefore, the nature of *Qi* has the characteristics of endless generation and non-stop. The biological function of the heaven's and earth's heart can be popularized in the life process of all things.

In summary, the Confucianists of the Song and Ming dynasties combined the Confucian thought of "benevolence" with the principle of "endless change", realized the cosmological ontology of "benevolence" and established the position of "benevolence" as the moral ontology. At this time, the "heart of heaven and earth" is no longer a pure "heart of nature", but a "heart of mind" with benevolence and kindness. Therefore, the ultimate purpose of the nature's "unity of all things" view is to "exhaust the nature to the point of life" and to integrate individual life with the universe. Confucianism regards "heaven" as an object of inner self-cultivation and external moral activities which are integrated with human beings. The thought of "People are my brothers and all things are my kinds" put forward by Zhang Zai more clearly expresses the proposition that man should establish a moral relationship with nature and deal with the relationship with the universe and nature morally.

3 REFLECTIONS AND ENLIGHTENMENT ON ECOLOGICAL PHILOSOPHY OF CONFUCIANISM AND TAOISM

The pursuit of sustainable development in modern society emphasizes the long-term coordinated development of the natural environment and natural resources. Sustainable development is, first of all, a sustainable development of the ecological environment. Confucian and Taoist ecological thoughts require humans to re-examine nature and its development laws,

and re-understand the value of all things in nature. Confucianism and Taoism advocate “take with restraint, use with restraint” and “know what to stop without disgrace”, and oppose the plundering of natural things. In terms of ecological and cultural thinking, it shows a kind of restraint on material enjoyment and rational use of natural resources. The rich connotation of sustainable development of Confucian and Taoist ecological thoughts will help promote the transformation of traditional production methods from extensive to economical, and form a sustainable ecological production method that is green, environmentally friendly and energy-saving. While meeting the needs of its own survival and development, it also ensures the survival and development of other species. Confucian and Taoist ecological thoughts are not only of great value in promoting the establishment of a good way of life and the fundamental transformation of the mode of production, but also an important ecological thought resource for the pursuit of sustainable development in modern society.

Compared with the West, most philosophers in traditional Chinese philosophy are writers, thinkers and educators rather than natural scientists. The literati quality, possessed by his literati status, inevitably makes his way of thinking different from the natural scientists’ one. Generally speaking, the character of science attaches importance to reality, while the character of literature attaches importance to artistic conception. Artistic conception means height, depth, universality and wholeness. The famous ancient Chinese philosophers, whether they are Confucius and Mencius, Lao Zhuang, Zhu Xi, etc., are mostly literati. And they must use their own thinking theories and thinking habits to construct their philosophical system. From today’s point of view, the Confucian thought of “the unity of man and nature” still has the characteristics of simplicity, intuition, and even guesswork. Its ethical thought is a philosophy of life that mainly expresses a big cosmology, and lacks norms for human behavior, while the “Tao” thought highly abstracts and mystifies the nature’s origin, which has a mystical color. It is no wonder that some scholars believe that the level of thinking theory of traditional Chinese philosophy in the early days, and even throughout ancient times, was in the stage of naive materialism and naive dialectics (Zou, 2004).

In addition, we must also consider whether primitive religious psychology will affect the ancient Chinese philosophers’ views. Chinese folk belief is a kind of pantheistic nature worship, and Chinese philosophy has advocated “pray for heaven” and “respect virtue” from the very beginning. Liu Zongyuan, a litterateur and philosopher in the Tang Dynasty, once said, “Those who are strong enough are judged by people, and those who are not strong enough are judged by gods” (Fan, 1985, p.146). When human beings have an insufficient understanding of nature and cannot control it, such as earthquake threats, droughts, floods and insect disasters, and other natural disasters that cannot be solved by human beings, people naturally feel panic and helplessness, and hope that there will be a kind of superhuman power to help human beings overcome disaster. Therefore, the “natural sky” will be deified

and worshipped. This kind of religious psychology and religious belief may have affected the degree to which ancient philosophers attached importance to the relationship with nature.

CONCLUSIONS

Generally speaking, China's Confucianism and Taoism ecological ethics were born in a relatively backward period of agricultural civilization. Such an origin and developmental context have imbued it with certain limitations, particularly a tendency towards intuitive and empirical modes of thinking, precluding its elevation to the stature of rigorous scientific theory. Nevertheless, the profound and extensive ecological philosophies it encompasses remain undeniable. These tenets, proven to possess enduring contemporary relevance, offer a wealth of insights for the construction of an ecological civilization in today's society. When dealing with ecological ethics issues in today's society, we should uphold a dialectical view and critical inheritance attitude, put excellent Chinese Confucianism and Taoism ecological ethics thoughts into the practical activities of serving the past for the present, and combine the current changing actual ecology conditions to test, transform and innovate.

FUND PROJECT

National Social Science Fund youth project, Research on ecological justice concept, 19CKS033.

REFERENCES

- CHEN, G. **Zhuangzi's Annotated and Translated**. Revised Edition. Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2016.
- CHEN, R.J. **Zhuxi**. Shanghai: Orient Publishing Center. v. 7, p.113+136, 2020.
- CHEN, Y. Chinese Philosophical Basis and Enlightenment of Ecological Civilization Construction. **Theory Monthly**, v. 2015, n. 12, p. 36-40, 2015.
- CONFUCIUS. **The Analects of Confucius**. Annotated by Yang Bojun and Yang Fengbin. Changsha: Yuelu, 2018.
- FAN, Y. **Commentary on Liu Zongyuan's Philosophical Works**. Nanning: Guangxi People's, 1985.
- HAN, J. Taoist Ecological Philosophy Wisdom and Modern Ecological Civilization. **Seeker**, v. 253, n. 12, p. 111-113, 2013.
- HU, F. The Core Connotation of Ancient Chinese Confucian Ecological Philosophy and Its Contemporary Value. **Academic Exploration**, v. 2023, n. 01, p. 12-17, 2023.

- HUANG, C.X. On the Ecological Implications of Zhuangzi's Freedom Thought. **Studies in Dialectics of Nature**, v. 36, n. 02, p. 98-102, 2020.
- LAOZI. **Tao Te Ching**. Translated by An Lun. Shanghai: Shanghai Jiao Tong University Press, 2021.
- LI, X.; LI, S. **Zhouyi**. Edited by Zhi Xuzhong. Xi'an: Sanqin, 2018.
- LIN, M. H. Traditional Chinese Confucianism and Taoism and Current Environmental Education. **Environmental Ethics**, v. 38, n. 1, p. 3-17, 2016.
- LIN, X. Z. On the ecological dimension of inclusive humanism: A preliminary study of Tu Weiming's ecological ethics. **Journal of Central South University (Social Sciences)**, v. 21, p. 169-174, 2015.
- MAX, W. **Confucianism and Taoism**. Jiangsu: Jiangsu People's Publishing House, 2010.
- SU, S. **Zhengmeng**. Kaifeng: Henan University Press, 2016.
- WANG, X. The Endogenous Logic and Theoretical Dimensions of Taoist Ecological Philosophy in the Pre-Qin Period. **Theory Monthly**, v. 2017, n. 08, p. 48-53, 2017.
- WU, L. On the Dual Historical Framework of Marxist Ecological Philosophy. **Environmental Engineering**, v. 41, n. 02, p. 307-309, 2023.
- XU, L.; ZHAO, Y. Pre-Qin Taoist Ecological Philosophy and the Construction of Ecological Civilization. **Theoretical Horizon**, v.180, n. 02, p. 49-51, 2015.
- YU, H. **The Book of Changes**. Beijing: Hualing, 2017.
- YU, S. J.; SUN, Y. Nature and education in Eastern contexts: the thought on nature education of China's Pre-Qin Taoist Chuang Tzu. **Paedagogica Historica**, v. 56, n. 1-2, p. 9-21, 2020.
- YUAN, M. Chinese Philosophical Tradition and the Cultivation of Contemporary Ecological Ethics. **Seeker**, v. 2010, n. 06, p. 125-127, 2010.
- ZHANG, Z. **Zhang Zizhengmeng**. Annotated by Wang Fuzhi. Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Books, 2000.
- ZHUANGZI. **Zhuangzi**. Compiled by Jia Yun; edited by Zhi Xuzhong. Xi'an: Sanqin, 2018.
- ZOU, Y. The Ecological View of Chinese Philosophy. **Jiangxi Social Sciences**, v. 2004, n. 10, p. 55-58, 2004.