



COMMENT ON “THE ENLIGHTENMENT OF CHINESE PHILOSOPHY TO THE CONSTRUCTION OF CONTEMPORARY ECOLOGICAL CIVILIZATION”


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COMMENT ON “THE ENLIGHTENMENT OF CHINESE PHILOSOPHY TO THE CONSTRUCTION OF CONTEMPORARY ECOLOGICAL CIVILIZATION”

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The ecological environment issue is a long-standing problem, and Chinese philosophy may, indeed, help solve it because of its particularity. As Zhang and Xu (2024) mentioned, Chinese philosophy is an ecological philosophy, and Chinese philosophy is inseparable from the discussion of the relationship between nature and human beings from beginning to end.

Since the traditional Chinese society’s economic form is based on self-sufficient agricultural economy, the quality of the ecological environment is directly related to people’s lives and the country’s rise and fall. Maintaining the harmony and stability of the ecological system has become an important task in ancient social management and is also a matter of great concern to the public. This is the social and historical background for the emergence of traditional ecological ethics. Thinking about the relationship between man and nature began to emerge in the Xia, Shang and Zhou Dynasties, gradually took shape in the era of hundreds of schools of thought and was further developed and improved in the Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties.

The foundation of Confucian ecological ethics is the concept of the unity of nature and man. The concept of the unity of nature and man is the basic starting point for Confucianism in dealing with the relationship between man and nature. It emphasizes that the relationship between man and nature is harmonious and unified. They coexist in the

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same world. The harmony between the two is a prerequisite for each other's survival and development. This concept of the unity of nature and man bears traces of primitive society's lack of distinction between subject and object. However, compared with the dualistic value concept of subject and object, the concept of the unity of nature and man is of great value to the modern society's development.

During the development period of Neo-Confucianism in the Song and Ming Dynasties, due to the penetration of Buddhist thought, the ideas of the same origin between humans and all things, and the equality of all living beings began to penetrate into Confucian thought. Cheng Hao, one of the Five Sons of the Northern Song Dynasty, once clearly pointed out that the root of the spirit of benevolence is to regard all things in the world as a whole. All things in the world are closely related to oneself. Only by treating all things in the world, as oneself, can one go deep into the world's existence. Luo Qinren, a thinker in the Ming Dynasty, emphasized that all things fill the world, and humans are just one thing among all things. Just like what is said in the *Book of Changes*, humans, heaven, earth and all things follow their own nature. People and things are actually products of heaven and earth, and they are the same.

Objectively speaking, the Confucian thought of the unity of nature and man has no direct relationship with the ecological dilemma. It mainly serves the construction of Confucian social ethics and morality. However, this theory can connect the natural world with human society and explore the common laws among all things in the world. The avenue of heaven and earth should be consistent with the human society's laws, and all things in the world should live in harmony. This idea has positive significance in elaborating on the harmony between man and nature, the importance of the unity of nature and society, and the importance of safeguarding ecological security. It reminds human beings not to be in opposition to nature, but to actively conform to the nature of all things in the world, adapt to the rules of survival of all things and be able to meet their own needs. It can be seen that Confucianism emphasizes the implementation of the spirit of benevolence into the existence of all things in nature, including the existence of living entities and non-living entities.

The most abundant ecological thought, in ancient China, is undoubtedly Taoism. Taoism ecological thought, as a local cultural resource, originated from the ancestors' understanding of nature. It was philosophically abstracted from the interaction between man and nature, defined as "Tao", and built a complete ideological system of the relationship between heaven and man based on Tao. In the construction of this philosophical system, the "Taoism" ideological system was formed. In essence, like Confucianism, Taoism did not form a complete set of ecological thoughts, and the factors of its ecological thoughts were contained in the understanding of Taoism about the relationship between heaven and man. Taoism believes that everything in heaven and earth is produced by "Tao" and develops according to

the laws of “Tao”. Lao Tzu said that two in one, three in two, three in all. Thinking that “Tao” existed before the creation of heaven and earth, Lao Tzu named the law of heaven and earth operation as “Tao”, and used “Tao” as the standard to examine other things. Taoism believes that all things, in the universe, are unified in “Tao”, and “Tao” itself contains all things, so Taoism thoughts focus on “Tao” thinking. Tao is difficult to be perceived by experience, and Lao Tzu describes it in *Tao Te Ching* as an existence that cannot be expressed and perceived.

In the process of explaining “Tao”, Chuang Tzu made a breakthrough to Lao Tzu’s thought. Chuang Tzu, however, did not think that “Tao” was imperceptible. He believed that “Tao” was ubiquitous in everything and people could perceive “Tao” in their daily lives and could perceive the existence of “Tao” through their own activities. This also communicates the relationship between people and all things and narrows the relationship between people-Tao and things-Tao. Man and nature are derived from Tao and, therefore, follow the basic principles of Tao.

Confucianism advocates “the unity of nature and man” and Taoism also advocates “the unity of nature and man”, but there are certain differences between them. The Taoist concept of “nature” has two meanings: first, it refers to the natural heaven, that is, the natural entity other than man himself, with objectivity; second, it refers to the original state presented by the creation of heaven and earth at the beginning of derivation, which is heaven in the abstract sense. In Chuang Tzu’s view, heaven and earth are born together with humans, and all things are one with humans. The “heaven” mentioned here is a state in which all things are in chaos. When discussing the relationship between man and nature, Taoism puts man and nature on the same level, unlike the relative imbalance of the Confucian relationship between heaven and man. But Confucianism pays more attention to the human side. According to Taoism, man and nature are in the same relationship. Taoism has “three talents”, that is, heaven, earth and man constitute “three talents”. The three constitute a complete system to unify the relationship between man and nature. Taoism advocates that all things are equal, there is no difference between man and nature, and nature should be treated equally. “The unity of nature and man” is a chaotic holistic view. Taoism does not advocate a subtle study of the relationship between man and nature, but only needs to maintain a relatively vague overall concept of it. The nature’s existence is its true state, and the best state for man should be to participate in it as little as possible and mark it with artificial marks as little as possible. This is the overall concept of the Taoist concept of “the unity of nature and man”. To some extent, we can think that Taoism philosophy is closer to modern ecological ethics philosophy than Confucianism philosophy.

Zhang and Xu (2024) put forward a lot of useful suggestions on the problem of natural dilemma. To solve the human beings’ ecological dilemma, we should also deeply consider the influence of industrial civilization on human existence and deeply reflect on the

thinking mode of subject-object dichotomy in traditional philosophy. From the perspective of the development of human cognitive ability, the primitive society's development, from which subject and object were indistinguishable to the later industrial society, in which subject and object were divided, is the performance of human progress. Without the emergence of the dichotomy of subject and object, modern science could not have been established, and the great increase in human material wealth would not have been possible. At the same time, we should also dialectically recognize that the excessive exaltation of the subject-object dichotomy damages the ecological environment of human existence and isolates the natural world that should be integrated with human beings, which is harmful to the nature and human beings themselves. We should dialectically look at the dual thinking mode of subject and object, take the ecological thought of Taoism and Confucianism as reference, understand the relationship between man and nature in a more organic and dialectical way, and transcend the bondage of anthropocentrism to man.

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