

# Chinese Ecological Wisdom in the Anthropocene Era

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**Abstract** *The concept of the Anthropocene, along with its accompanying time scales and ecological implications, has triggered a lot of conjecture from the humanities, including philosophy, literature, and art, about the "end of nature" and the "end of civilization". The future sustainable development of the earth depends greatly on human beings worldwide. The author emphasizes that the relationship between humans and the earth is not only a contemporary problem pertinent only to the 21st century, but it also stands as a fundamental issue throughout the long history of civilization. Throughout time, maintaining a harmonious coexistence with nature has been an unwavering concern for the survival of humankind. It is essential to consider the wealth of knowledge accumulated by various civilizations, particularly the Chinese, when reflecting on sustainable development for the entirety of humanity. As we engage in vital dialogues about re-imagining the future of our planet, it would be remiss to overlook the wisdom heralded by various cultures over centuries. Specifically, Chinese civilization has a great deal to offer when considering sustainable development practices. Traditional Chinese culture embodies a "holistic", "organic" and "everlasting" concept of development in the "human-nature" relationship. As we enter the Anthropocene era, there is an opportunity to bridge the gap between Western traditional dualism and modernity by drawing upon Chinese philosophy. Concepts such as "Tao bears the World," "Oneness of Heaven and Man," and "Mind-nature Interaction Theory," offer valuable ecological insights that can help us navigate this crucial period of environmental transformation.*

**Keywords:** *anthropocene, modernity, Chinese philosophy, Chinese literary theory*

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## 1. Introduction

The idea of the Anthropocene, with its associated timeframes and ecological consequences, has caused an emotional response from humanities fields, such as philosophy, literature, and art, towards the bleak predictions of the "end of nature" and "end of civilization." It is clear that the fate of humans and non-humans is intimately intertwined. As the ecological crisis grew in magnitude, humans began contemplating ethical relationships between themselves and the natural world. The concept of nature's "revenge" and "punishment" for humanity's drive for conquest prompted this shift in thinking. As a result, the Western academic world began developing fields such as "environmental ethics" and "ecological ethics" to address these concerns. Given the gravity of the current situation, it is vital that we continue to examine our relationship with the earth and its inhabitants from an ethical standpoint.

The relationship between humans and the Earth is not a recent issue confined to the 21st century, but rather a fundamental concern that has been present throughout the history of human civilization. The coexistence with nature has been a constant and critical factor for ensuring survival. The sustainable development of the Earth for all humanity is a significant discussion in progress. In this dialogue, it would be imprudent to disregard the vast wisdom accumulated by various civilizations over thousands of years. Among these, Chinese civilization has played a crucial role, and its contributions deserve recognition. Thus, we argue that the sustainable development of the Earth necessitates drawing from the wealth of knowledge and insight derived from different civilizations worldwide. By acknowledging the value of accumulated wisdom, we can chart a course toward a future where humanity can prosper in harmony with the environment. Traditional Chinese culture embodies a "holistic", "organic" and "everlasting" concept of development in the "human-nature" relationship. According to *LAOZI*, "The number one of the Tao was born. A duad from this monad formed. The duad next a triad made; The triad bred the myriad," ("道生一、一生二、二生三、三生万物"), everything in earth is born based on Tao. Therefore, *CHUANG TZU* says, "From the point of view of the Tao, things have no nobility or meanness." ("以道观之，物无贵贱"), and *DOCTRINE OF THE MEAN* says, "All things are nurtured together without harming each other, and the Tao is parallel without contradicting each other" ("万物并育而不相害，道并行而不相悖"), and *XUNZI* points out, "Harmony

is inherent in everything, and nourishment comes from within.”(“万物各得其和以生，各得其养以成”)Man belongs to all things, it is “all things on earth, including man, are growing together, and are of one kind” (“天地万物与我并生，类也”，*LIEZI*), “from the perspective of all things of one kind, heaven and man are united as ONE” (“以类合之，天人一也” “天人之际，合而为一”，*Spring and Autumn Traditional Dew*). In Chinese literary thought, “literature” and “nature” are also closely related. According to *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*, it is said that “Wen, is a very great virtue indeed. It is born together with heaven and earth.” (“文之为德也大矣，与天地并生者何哉”)“In responding to things, the Ancient Poets operated on the principle of endless association of ideas. They lost themselves in the myriads of things, completely absorbed in the visual and auditory sensations.” (“诗人感物，联类不穷。流连万象之际，沉吟视听之区”) “On the one hand, they depicted the atmosphere and painted the appearances of things in perfect harmony with their changing aspects; and on the other, the linguistic and tonal patterns they used closely corresponded with their perceptions.” (“随物以宛转” “与心而徘徊”) The fundamental belief in Chinese culture is that everything must coexist harmoniously and that destiny is interconnected from the outset. As the Anthropocene era draws near, this belief can facilitate reconciliation between the historic Western dualism and modernity through the use of Chinese philosophical approaches such as the "Tao bears the World" and "Oneness of Heaven and Man", as well as the "Mind-nature Interaction Theory" and other ecological concepts. It is noteworthy that traces of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, among other Chinese elements, can be detected in the ecological ethics of Western scholars such as Albert Schweitzer, Holmes Rolston III, and Gary Snyder.

## **2. Evolution of the Western classical view of "humans and non-humans"**

The Anthropocene era requires the discussion of ethical relationships between "humans and non-humans". This is the reflection of Western scholars on traditional Western values of "anthropocentrism." based on the serious imbalance

of the human-natural environment relationship in modern times due to the ecological crisis. Western civilization arose as a result of the escape from "natural constraints", which led to a moral rupture between "man" and "nature". As Protagoras put it, "Man is the measure of all things, of the reality that exists and of the unreality that exists." (Department of Philosophy at Peking University 138) It provides an alternative view of human subjectivity, from the early natural philosophy research object of "nature" to "human." Thus, philosophy begins with an in-depth exploration of humans not just the origin of the universe.

According to Hegel, "Protagoras declared that man is the measure of all things in its true sense; that is a magnificent statement." (Hegel 27) As a result, the proposition places man above not only God but all things. Aristotle also stated: "Plants are for animals, irrational animals are for humans... Nature made all animals for man's sake" (Aristotle 23) According to Aquinas, the claim that a man is sinful for killing an animal that is unable to speak is false and must be refuted. Since animals were created for human use in the natural order by divine providence, it is not wrong for people to use animals, kill animals, or do whatever they wish with them. (Regan 9) From a general suspicion, the philosopher Descartes' "Cogito, therefore I am," reasserts rationality, reestablishes the initiative of thought, and showcases the identity of thought and existence to show a direct connection between "I think," to "I am." He believed that only human beings possess souls and moral status. The human being is independent of all other things. While during the Renaissance and Enlightenment, human rationality reached its zenith of reconstruction. As rationality replaced divinity, the "modern view of human nature" was gradually constructed for human liberation. Modernity liberates man from the asceticism of the Middle Ages but draws him into the "dungeon" of desire, where he becomes the master of nature and has control over everything. Human conquest of nature and the demand for its resources lead to a depletion of biological resources. As Toynbee described it, "There is no doubt that human beings' actions are causing the environment to decay to such a degree that they will cause their own demise. If they continue to exploit this power, they will perish themselves. " (Toynbee 38) It is evident that ecological development has a dim outlook in the face of such a severe ecological situation, and anthropocentrism is turning to Non-Anthropocentrism and Weak-Anthropocentrism in an attempt to mitigate the problem.

The fundamental difference between anthropocentrism and non-anthropocentrism lies in the incorporation of nature in human destiny and the

reevaluation of its worth. Ethical considerations arise in discussions related to the human-nature relationship. Non-anthropocentrism challenges the notion that humans possess a higher moral status than all other entities in the world. The concept of humans becoming part of nature, and not its conqueror, has been extensively discussed by Western ethical philosophers since the 1970s. These discussions have led to the development of theories such as animal rights, biocentrism, ecocentrism, and deep ecology.

The theory of animal rights suggests that animals have their own lives and values, rather than existing solely for the benefit of humans. The influential Australian philosopher, Peter Singer who wrote the book *Animal Liberation*, was inspired by Bentham's utilitarianism and believed animals have the capacity to experience pain and pleasure. He argued that discrimination against animals has caused long-term harm, and advocated for their liberation. Biocentrism extends this ethical concern to all living organisms, reframing human moral obligations to encompass the entire community of life. Such as Schweitzer's "reverence for life", Leopold's "Land Ethic", Rolston's "Value in Nature", Nash's "Deep Ecology", and others. Schweitzer rejects the Cartesian self-conscious reflection, arguing that all life has its own will: "For Descartes, philosophical thought begins with the proposition: I think, therefore I am. Due to its lame and arbitrarily selected beginning, it is inevitably destined to lead to abstraction". (Schweitzer 306) Philosophy has failed to find an entrance into ethics and has remained confined to a lifeless concept of the world and life. As he said, "Goodness means preserving life, promoting life, and making life its greatest value. Evil means destroying life, harming life, and suppressing life. It is an ethical principle that is absolute, universal, and necessary." (Schweitzer 9) It is essential to acknowledge and respect not only one's own free will but also the free wills of all living beings.

Furthermore, Leopold's notion of earth ethics expands the moral community to encompass soil, water, plants, and animals. This challenges the notion of the earth as mere property. In the context of the "earth community", people are no longer to see themselves as conquerors of the earth, but rather as ordinary members. Thus, it is crucial for the community of organisms to respect each other and the "earth" as a whole. Rolston has inherited and further developed Leopold's environmental ethics. By extending the value of animals and creatures to the entirety of the ecosystem, Rolston has imbued the entirety of nature with a moral and valuable significance. Deep ecology advocates for a shift in the hierarchy of the relationship between humans and nature from the notion that "man is above

nature" to one that prioritizes the value of all living beings with an emphasis on "equality for all beings." Overall, the fundamental definition of human beings has been challenged and subverted by the recognition of the interconnectedness of life on earth, beyond the anthropocentric perspective. Consequently, the current ecological crisis is perceived as a cultural issue that demands a proactive response from individuals, communities, and societies at large, rather than solely a scientific or political problem.

### **3. Chinese philosophy's "human and non-human" view provides ethical wisdom**

When dealing with the eternal relationship between man and nature, Chinese civilization has developed its own ecological ethical concept that has remained consistent throughout its history. In contrast to Western philosophy, which aims to separate humanity from nature prematurely, Chinese philosophy demonstrates a natural harmony and closeness to all things in the natural world. This has led to the natural view of "Oneness of Heaven and Man," "Tao bears the World," "Mind-nature Interaction Theory," "no distinction between things," "equality of all beings," and "an experience of mind and matter." Within this understanding of nature lies ecological wisdom, which can be useful for assessing the value of nature, determining humanity's place within current environmental ethics, and addressing the future relationship between "human and earth."

#### **3.1 Confucianism's philosophy of "Oneness of Heaven and Man"**

The concept of the "Oneness of Heaven and Man" in Confucian philosophy has been extensively studied and interpreted by Chinese philosophers throughout history, beginning with Fuxi's design of the Eight Diagrams thousands of years ago and continuing through Wang Fuzhi's work in the Qing Dynasty. This fundamental principle has taken root in the collective consciousness of Chinese society since its initial emergence, and it continues to inspire and guide the intellectual and cultural traditions of China. In "The Book of Changes," an ancient Chinese philosophical text, Bao Xizhi is noted as having achieved the ability to govern the world through observation of the sky, earth, birds, and beasts according to their geographical locations. As such, the eight diagrams were originally created to comprehend the divine and to establish a harmonious bond among all living and non-living things. (Lin 133) This text represents the earliest documentation within Chinese classics of the concept of the "Oneness of

Heaven and Man," wherein heaven, man, and earth are described as three talents, and the emotions of all things are intertwined. From this perspective, the moral and ethical idea of "the harmony of heaven and man with virtue" was conceptualized. Confucius proposed that "heaven" creates everything ( "天何言哉? 四时行焉, 百物生焉。" 《论语·阳货》 ), Mencius emphasized "honesty" as the nature of heaven. In addition, Zhang Zai said: "Confucianism is sincere because of the sincerity to *Ming*, thus the unity of heaven and man" ( 儒者则因明至诚, 因诚至明, 故天人合一。 ) which means Confucian doctrine upholds the sincerity to *Ming*, as it is believed to achieve unity between heaven and humanity. (Fu 157) This sincerity is an integral aspect of Confucianism's moral teachings. During the Qing Dynasty, Wang Fuzhi adopted Zhang Zai's theory which posited that earth and heaven were trinities and that man and nature were inseparable. Unlike early Western philosophy, traditional Chinese philosophy views all entities as growing according to organic law, entangled in a network of "unity." Humans and nature are believed to have an organic and unified relationship rather than a mechanically opposing one. Natural life is experienced by individuals and even the value of human life is determined not by individuals, but by "heaven" ( "天生德于予" 《论语·述而》 ). The concept of "Oneness of Heaven and Man" reflects the continuity and organic wholeness of Chinese natural philosophy.

As the saying goes, "Harmony gives birth to everything" ( "和, 故生万物" ). The Chinese have traditionally placed great importance on the concept of harmony, both between civilizations and within society, as well as between humans and their environment. This is exemplified in the teachings of Confucius, particularly in the classic text "The Doctrine of the Mean", which emphasizes the need for all things to coexist peacefully without causing harm to each other ( "万物并育而不相害, 道并行而不相悖" ). This reflects the belief that the Tao, or the natural way of the universe, is able to operate in parallel without contradiction. Ultimately, the idea of harmony serves as a spiritual foundation for the larger concept of the "Oneness of Heaven and Man".

In understanding the relationship between humans and nature, the disparities between Chinese and Western cultures can be observed. The West has acknowledged human subjectivity in their battles against nature, while the Chinese have thrived in harmonious coexistence with the environment. This

notion of harmony holds deep roots in the Chinese way of thinking and practice. Chinese attitudes towards all natural elements are underpinned by a consistent emphasis on "harmony" and "respect". In essence, the Chinese have developed a holistic perception of nature, where humans, animals, and the environment are viewed as one cohesive unit. This perspective has influenced the Chinese way of life for centuries and has proven to be an effective means of sustainability. The Chinese philosopher Tang Yijie asserted that the concept of 'harmony' stems from the fundamental idea of 'harmony between man and nature,' as well as the 'source of body and function' mode of thinking. The notion includes both the harmony of nature and the harmony between humans and nature, encompassing the physical and mental well-being of individuals. It promotes an overall harmony that accommodates and respects the differences of all things and the uniqueness of individuals. The core principle of harmony gave rise to the ethical principles of benevolence, righteousness, and propriety, as seen in Confucius' "love everyone and be kind" ( “泛爱众而亲仁” 《论语·学而》 ) and Mencius' "be kind to people and everything." ( “君子之于物也……亲亲仁民，仁民而爱物” 《孟子·尽心上》 ) These principles promote social and natural ethics, extending the ethical principles of humans to encompass the broader natural environment. They serve as a critical link in maintaining social development and coexistence with nature, underpinning thousands of years of Chinese civilization.

In the Chinese philosophical tradition, the concept of eternal life is of great importance for ensuring the sustainability of the natural world. As elucidated in the "Yi Zhuan," the prized quality of heaven and earth is its ability to sustain life. This is evidenced by the continuous cycle of birth and renewal experienced by all living things in nature, as the forces of yin and yang perpetually interact and transform. At the heart of this concept of eternal life lies the idea of impermanence and continual change. The "Xi Ci" provides further insight into the dynamics of this process, tracing the evolution of life in the world. "In the sky, the image is formed, and on the earth, the change is seen." ( “在天成象，在地成形，变化见矣” ) On the "three names of Yi" in Zhouyi, "Bian Yi", (变易) "Jian Yi," (简易), and "Bu Yi" (不易) are mentioned. "Bu Yi" refers to the invariance of matter and energy. "Jian Yi" may refer to the simplicity of the laws of matter. "Bian Yi" can be understood to mean that matter has a kaleidoscopic variety of forms. "Yi" implies both change and invariance here only when things change and remain unchanged can they grow

and flourish. The principles of Confucian philosophy emphasize the importance of life in the existence of all things. Life is the force that has created and rooted every aspect of being, and it is sustained through the principle of eternal life. The concept of "life and death" is viewed as a transformation process, wherein all things undergo internal changes that lead to growth and development. This viewpoint differs from Western philosophy, which centers on the idea of "God" as a being that endows life to the physical world through mechanistic or causal processes. Instead, Confucian philosophy upholds an organic unity where every aspect of life is worthy of reverence and respect since it is the essence of all existence.

### 3.2 " Tao bears the World " in Taoist philosophy

Taoist philosophy is based on the concept of "Tao", and "Tao gives birth to all things" is the most fundamental creation theory of Laozi, which has ontological significance as the origin of all things. The creation and change of everything are governed by "Tao". The so-called "mixing of things is the first birth of heaven and earth. I don't know the name. The word says Tao." ( "有物混成，先天地生。吾不知其名，字之曰道。" ) "The things are born out of something, and something is born out of nothing." ( "天下之物生于有，有生于无" ) "The number one of the Tao was born. A duad from this monad formed. The duad next a triad made; The triad bred the myriad," ( "道生一、一生二、二生三、三生万物" ) As such, we can see that all things in heaven and earth share the same root and homology. They depend on the Tao to live, which is the natural creation of the Tao, and the Tao is the generating basis for all things. As well as being isomorphic with heaven and earth, people are also mutually inductive with each other. Hence "The Tao is great, the sky is great, the earth is great, and people are great as well. Domain has four great, and the living one how," Zhuangzi explains, "heaven and earth and with me, and everything with me as a whole", everything cannot exist in isolation, human beings and everything as one, come from nature and return to nature, form a wide network of contact and affinity, which are organized by the weaving of "Tao". To put it another way, everything in nature is a part of this ecological network. It is impossible for people to exist independently from the natural world network, as they are interdependent and inseparable. No matter how advanced human abilities are, they are part of the whole of nature, that is, "things and I are one." The relationship between "Tao", "life", and "all things" is similar to a relationship between a trunk and its root. Similarly, according to the scripture "Zhuangzi \*

Horseshoe", "when the time is right, there is no path or tunnel in the mountain, there is no boat or beam in the river, and all things live together, even belonging to their hometown; flocks of animals, so long nature." For this reason, animals can swim, and birds can climb nests. In a world filled with virtue, live with animals." In this description, the unity of nature and man, the unity of things and I, the harmless heart of people, and the love of things without fear of people, is really a happy scene of the coexistence of all things without conflict.

In Taoism, "there is neither nobleness nor meanness in things" is the inevitable explanation for its organic theory. And "all things are one" is the concept that man and nature are interconnected as a whole. Zhuangzi writes enlighteningly in Autumn Water. "From the point of view of the Tao, things have no nobility or meanness. From the individual viewpoint, individuals value themselves over other creatures. ”(“以道观之，物无贵贱。以物观之，自贵而相贱。”) It shows that all things have their own lengths and shortfalls and that we cannot measure the value of all things by a single standard. So Chuang Tzu put forward the theory of "all things are equal" -- "Which one is shorter than the other?" From the point of view of the Tao, what kind of nobility? What kind of low? Everything in the world may seem different at first glance, but it all comes down to the same thing in the end. Just as Lie Zi said, "all things on earth, including man, are growing together, and are of one kind" ("天地万物与我共生，类也"), which means that all things are synonymous. Things don't exist for anything, much less for human beings. It is, therefore, essential for humans to treat everything with respect and reverence.

It is the concept of " Things have no nobleness or meanness " that sets the model for the relationship between man and nature. Ge Hong explained it in the Eastern Jin Dynasty by saying, "nothing is done by nature, Let things unfold as they may ". ( “天道无为，任物自然” ) Taoism points out a practical path based on "nothing is done by nature". It is said, "human law is the earth, the earth law is the heaven, the heaven law is Tao, and Tao is natural," and "nothing is done by the Tao". "Taoism of nature" of Laozi is the most practical ecological philosophy of our time. "Nature" often exhibits a sort of ecology for itself, which is its original state. Thus, human beings should recognize their own ability limits and limitations. Human beings are always in the cycle of "Tao generates all things", and what attitude and measures can be taken to properly deal with the resource conflicts and contradictions between human beings and nature? That is nature's law of

doing nothing. "Do Nothing" does not mean not doing anything, but it does mean not doing it intentionally and forcefully with human will to the natural world. Zhuangzi developed this thought of Laozi, believing that "things are what they are", "those who are quiet and do nothing are the essence of all things", and "follow nature and respond to nature". Humans and nature are interdependent. In any way that humans treat nature, nature will respond. With harmonious thinking, nature returns to harmony; when people treat nature with the attitude of possession, plunder, and demand, nature will treat people in the same manner. Those actions will lead to the scene described by Zhuangzi, where nature will not endure if one interferes with its laws or violates other creatures' feelings, and it will rain before the clouds gather, the grass will fall before autumn, and the sun and moon's light will be obscured, a similar situation to the present ecological crisis.

### **3.3 "All beings are equal" in Buddhist philosophy**

As Needham once noted, the ecological view of Buddhism eases tensions in modern Western societies. "The whole of Western culture is the conquest of nature-culture, which will inevitably create conflict and opposition between humans and nature, but in the East, especially in Chinese traditional culture, Buddhism represents a harmonious relationship between man and nature. It is, therefore, necessary to use Oriental Chinese traditional culture, especially Buddhist culture, to alleviate the conquering culture of the West".

Buddhist philosophy is based on the theory of "origin," which gives it a unique ecological value. Buddhism emphasizes the cause and effect of life. In ecological wisdom, everything has consequences and causes, that kind has good reactions, and evil has bad ones, and that good has good karma, and evil has bad karma, and "This is one, and that is another... This dies out, and that dies out. "This" and "that" are an organic whole, and the certainty of their existence needs to be decided in the whole. Buddhist ecological concepts are characterized by the idea of "holistic" and "without me". In Buddhism, equality of all things is regarded as the source of all things. As a result, all things and people, including a bird and a beast, should be treated with compassion. From Theravada Buddhism's "man without self" to Mahayana Buddhism's "Dharma without self" and finally, its "ruthless sex" theory of "true as origin". It is a concept that posits that all living beings, including plants and animals, are equal. This idea has been put forward by Buddhist philosophy, which holds that all living beings, including plants and animals, have Buddha nature. As such, not only living beings possess Buddha nature, but also plants and plants possess Buddha nature." Thus, in such a view,

man and nature are not mutually exclusive but rather interdependent and mutually transformative.

As part of Buddhist ecological ethics, the essence of the harmonious transformation of all things lay in the concept of "compassion". In order to be compassionate, individuals must have good thoughts and always be full of love toward their fellow beings. Essentially, such compassion can be defined as a broad form of love, "which is based on the fact that all living beings have the same mind and knowledge, and the spirit has no limits and can be divided, showing that all living beings are equal as one body." (Ding 191) Compassion in Buddhism is embodied in the aspects of abstinence from killing, giving alms, vegetarianism, and return of kindness. Compassion seeks a symbiotic state of harmonious coexistence among people, animals, and plants, and the natural environment by demanding people's behaviors. It can be seen that Buddhism places a high value on the internal coordination and comfort of an individual. It has been said that "a clean mind leads to a clean land".

#### **3.4 Ecological View in Ancient Chinese Literary Theory -- A case study of *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons***

Similarly, ancient Chinese literature and artistic theories have significant ecological aesthetic implications. As the summation of ancient Chinese literary theories, *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* is also filled with ecological thoughts of "Oneness of Heaven and Man" and "Mind-nature Interaction Theory". For the first time, Liu Hsieh integrates literature into the circulation system for the unity of nature and man through literary theory, constructing a kind of "ecological poetics" that has a profound significance for the growth of literary criticism within the current ecological theory.

*The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* advocates the value of natural literature and seeks to understand "the Tao of nature." "Wen, or pattern, is a very great virtue indeed. It is born together with heaven and earth... Can these features be due to external adornment? No, they are all natural." (Liu Hsieh 8) It described that "The sun and moon, like two pieces of jade, manifest the pattern of heaven; mountains and rivers in their beauty display the pattern of earth." (Liu Hsieh 8), reflecting and combining nature's vitality with literature, and discussing nature and the "Tao", for example, whether we discuss "humanities," "animal literature," or "plant literature," all conform to nature and reveal the intrinsic nature of "Tao."

*Yüan-Tao* concludes

The mind of Tao is subtle,

And it is taught through divine principles.

Glory to the first sage,

Who made articulate the principles of love and filial piety. The Map the dragon carried presents the substance,

And the Writing the tortoise brought makes manifest the form

Here may be seen the patterns of heaven Which serve all people as models.  
(Liu Hsieh 11)

Poetry and prose reflect the vitality of nature and follow the divine principle of nature naturally. Specifically, the author's interest in poetry and composition is triggered by "nature" and conforms to "nature", and the genre of the work is also the embodiment of the interest in nature. As *Ming-shih* said, "Man is endowed with seven emotions. When stimulated by external objects, these emotions rise in response." (Liu Hsieh 40) Poetics works worldwide seldom incorporate "nature" into literary theory commentaries like *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*. The emphasis of ecological literary criticism on the return of "natural aesthetics" can be resonated in Chinese traditional literary theory.

The book itself is a "magnificent" work. In addition to having a number of different genres that are reflected in the concept, it is also reflected in formation with the Great Trinity of "heaven-earth-human". As stated in *Yüan-Tao* "Man, and man alone, forms with these the Great Trinity, and he does so because he alone is endowed with spirituality. He is the refined essence of the five elements—indeed, the mind of the universe." (Liu Hsieh 8) Liu Hsieh clearly viewed humans and nature as a unified whole, from the nature of heaven and earth to the humanities. All things and man become one, and man belongs to all things, thus transforming the thought of "Oneness of Heaven and Man". To accomplish this mission, man must sympathize with heaven and earth, so as to play the role of the mind of the universe. In addition, man must be able to recognize the harmony between nature and the poet's composition.

When *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* discusses the Great Trinity or describes nature, "nature" is not external to the author's world but is integrated into the literator's mind. The concept of responding to things, harmony with

shifting aspects, emphasizes a relationship between the mind and things. To achieve the ideal state of creation, the author's creations must communicate with the emotions and souls of the world and nature. "Observation of things and feeling with things" describes how poetry reveals how literati's inner emotions influence both the natural and external worlds while both natural and external worlds are affected by human emotions. Subject and object are integrated at this point, things and I are blending, and the author's mind is at peace with everything around it. As stated in *Wu-se* "In responding to things, the Ancient Poets operated on the principle of endless association of ideas. They lost themselves in the myriads of things, completely absorbed in the visual and auditory sensations." ( Liu Hsieh 324 ) "On the one hand, they depicted the atmosphere and painted the appearances of things in perfect harmony with their changing aspects; and on the other, the linguistic and tonal patterns they used closely corresponded with their perceptions." ( Liu Hsieh 324 )

What Liu Hsieh discussed here is two-way communication. A description of an external object must respect the internal law of that external object, but it should also go beyond the resonance of individual existence to feel the natural life feelings when integrating with the external object, rather than passively accepting all the changes.

#### **4. Chinese Elements in Western Ecological Ethics**

Contemporary Western ecological ethics is actually drawing elements from Eastern philosophy in order to re-examine and refute traditional anthropocentrism. The "organic", "whole" and "equality" of Chinese traditional ecological thinking have gradually attracted the attention of Western ecologists, mostly because it compensates for the "conquest" and "struggle" inherent in the traditional Western view of nature. In addition, Chinese ecological values have gradually been integrated into Western ecological ethics. The Chinese traditional philosophy even provides a way to survive the ecological crisis. Rolston, an environmental ethic pioneer, stated that the West's hope lies in the East. "Traditional Western ethics does not recognize the value outside the human subject... Western science and ethics have drawn a distinction between fact and value and between ought... As a result of the West's attempts to establish an environmental ethic, we reached a turning point. Within that trend, the direction towards the East seems

promising." ( Rolston 1994) As John B. Cobb agrees, "the Chinese recognize the value of living things." The deliberate self-concealment that makes respect for natural life difficult in the West is less evident there. It is possible that China can lead the world out of this institutionalized cruelty and destruction. The process may have led to human survival." ( Birch 3 ) While insisting that the traditional view of nature cannot solve the crisis of modernity, Western scholars have absorbed Chinese philosophy and created influential theoretical achievements such as Schweitzer's view of "reverence for life" and Rolston's "theory of natural value", which is a realm of integration that cannot be reached by a single civilization. Furthermore, we can say that the mutual learning and integration of ideas among civilizations is of great importance for theoretical innovation and for considering humanity's common fate.

#### **4.1 The Confucian and Taoist elements in Albert Schweitzer 's thought**

Schweitzer advocated bioethics centered around "reverence for life," which is an important ideological resource of modern environmental ethics. The concept of "reverence for life" has been influenced by Chinese Confucianism and Taoism, and its basic meaning is to extend the scope of ethics to animals and plants other than humans. Schweitzer utilized Chinese traditional thought to illustrate the spiritual connection between man and nature. He argues that Epictetus, the late stoicism of Marc Aurelius, the rationalism of the eighteenth century, Confucius, Mencius, Zhuangzi, and other Chinese thinkers, because they reduced the world process to the universal will in pursuit of an ethical goal, and advocated the devotion of man to this will. ( Schweitzer 126 ) The individual's will does not conflict with the world's. In contrast, the relationship between man and nature can be established through the coexistence of all things. "I also found Lao Tzu's thought fundamental, just as Stoicism was when I became familiar with the *Tao Te Ching*. Lao Tzu also stressed that man establishes a spiritual relationship with the world through simple thoughts and proves this relationship in his life. " (Schweitzer 126) This idea of unity gives Schweitzer a philosophical basis for advocating equality between all things.

Schweitzer emphasized the equality of man and animals after affirming the connection between man and nature. As he reflected on the marginal status of animal rights in traditional Western anthropocentrism theories, he cited Chinese ideas. "Mencius", a Chinese philosopher (552-479 BC), spoke of animal

compassion in moving terms. According to Liezi (6th century BC), animal psychology is not very different from human psychology. According to Yang Zhu, animals have independent significance and value and oppose the notion that they exist only for people. " ( Schweitzer 72 ) "In Chinese Taoist tradition, it is a duty for Taoist priests to treat animals with care. For example, hot water should not be used to irrigate fields because insects can be scalded. " ( Schweitzer 72 ) According to him, man has a greater responsibility towards animals in Eastern culture than in European philosophy. The traditional Chinese view of man's relationship with animals gives animals greater power than in the West. Schweizer realized the convergence of heterogeneous cultural resources by introducing ancient Chinese ecological theories. This led Schweizer to propose "reverence for life", which sought to find the spiritual foundation for equal coexistence between humans and all creations.

#### **4.2 Taoist and Zen elements in Holmes Rolston III's thought**

Holmes Rolston is known as the "father of environmental ethics". In contrast to other scholars, he consciously integrated Zen and Taoist philosophy into his "wilderness philosophy". In Western ecological philosophy, the wilderness has been neglected, regarded as a symbol of death and loss, until Rolston proposed that wilderness was a "living museum that reveals the roots of our lives." (Rolston 213) We need to take a turn towards an "ideological wilderness" in order to appreciate "some natural objects as they are." (Rolston 203) Besides eliminating people's fear of nature, Zen has the ability to transform the wilderness into a place where the soul can find refuge from the earth and find peace with the spirit. As Rolston points out, "wilderness has an inherent value in itself as a source of life." (Rolston 203)

Since the wilderness is no longer viewed as a threat, people can participate in the birth and extinction of all species in the wilderness. Accordingly, Rolston constructs a non-hostile, non-fearful ethics of loving nature based on this, namely, "Those who fear the world around them may be more inclined to adopt ecological ethics in the derivative sense, but those who love the natural world are more likely to adopt ecological ethics fundamentally". (Rolston 35) This is largely due to Zen's respect for life. "It is admirable that Zen treats life as sacred. It does not draw a distinction between fact and value, man and nature. Natural resources are viewed by Westerners as tools with no intrinsic value. Nature is merely a resource to be exploited. In contrast, Zen is not anthropocentric and tends not to use nature.

Contrary to this, Buddhism promotes the discipline and containment of human emotions and desires, thereby making humans more harmonious with their surroundings. We know that Zen understands how to harmonize everything widely without making everything lose its special meaning in the universe. The Zen philosophy emphasizes the sanctity of life while combining life science."(Rolston 1994) Through Zen, Rolston found a point of harmony between man and all things without losing its unique identity.

In 1987, Rolston published "Can the East help the West to value nature?". He proposes a comprehensive "ecological science" by creatively explaining the connection between Yin and Yang in Taoism and Western science. Yin and Yang were viewed by Rolston as akin to Newton's law of mass and energy conservation. He argued, "So far as it says anything that can be talked about, the teaching about the Tao seems to be claiming scientific insight homologous with Newton's laws about the conservation of mass and energy or Darwin's law about the survival of the better adapted."(Rolston 1987) Yin and Yang are interpreted here in a way that reveals the true wisdom of ecological systems. Yang and Yin symbolize the cycle and change of nature. This means that people can gain a better understanding of the laws of nature in ways other than scientific methods. And "Taoist laws about the succession of yang and yin strikingly endorse discoveries about homeostasis, natural cycles, and equilibriums. The Taoist ecological model predicts yang after yin after yang after yin, ever returning/recycling." (Rolston 1987) According to Rolston, Taoism is a philosophy that provides a philosophical basis for respecting the natural world. By contrast, Western traditions lack respect for nature and devalue and ignore its value. The West should reassess the value of nature by looking at how nature is viewed in Taoism and Zen. In the same vein, Rolston did not completely reject the Western view of nature, but he believed, "My own judgment is that the East needs considerable reformulation of its sources before it can preach much to the West." (Rolston 1987)

### **4.3 The Chinese element in Gary Snyder's thought**

Snyder is a poet and activist in the field of deep ecology, and he has strong ties to China. As opposed to other ecologists, Snyder absorbed Zen, Taoism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and other ideas, especially the practice of landscape view in opposition to the Western traditional view of nature in his literary work and the development of "escaping into the wilderness" eco-poetics. Like Rolston, Snyder holds that Chinese and Western cultures have different perceptions of "landscape and wilderness". " Mountains and rivers represent nature in traditional Chinese

culture. To engage in mountains and rivers is to engage in nature, and man and nature coexist harmoniously. In Snyder's view, a Chinese landscape view helps to break Western fear and alienation of "wilderness", paving the way to improve Western environmental ethics.

Mountain characteristics are also mythologically associated with height, vitality, height, excellence, hardiness, resistance, and fortitude. The Chinese view mountains as Yang: dry, hard, masculine, and bright. Water is associated with Yin: moist, soft, and dark. A yin is fluid yet strong, seeking (or tangential) nadir, spiritual, life-giving, myriad forms. It is the harmonious union of opposites, and wisdom and compassion are the factors that make everything possible. (Snyder 112)

The landscape is spiritual and endowed with life since it is straight, resolute, soft, and contains the same emotion and character as humans. This is not a gift from humans, but a response to nature. As a result, the landscape is the fusion of opposites and their transformation into one. By combining the "Yin and Yang theory" with Snyder's interpretation of "landscape," Snyder reaches far beyond Western dualism and embraces Chinese philosophy's "all things are one" perspective. Snyder, therefore, sees nature and man from a dynamic rather than a static perspective. According to him, "the landscape expresses the whole natural process." ( Snyder 113 ) "Nothing is unnatural," ( Snyder 7 ) then people are part of nature:

In the Chinese mandala, all the figures are ourselves; in addition, cliffs, trees, waterfalls, clouds, and cliff sides also express our changing social identities. ( Snyder 119 )

With this "natural order view", Snyder recognized the order problem of human social ecology and proposed the concept of "off the trail". "Off the trail" is actually another name for "Tao" in Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching. "Landscape appears chaotic, but it is actually orderly," according to Lao Tzu, "loose and orderly is the underlying characteristic of the wilderness. A natural disorder is a type of disorder that appears on the surface but is perceived differently by individuals.

## **5. Conclusion**

During the early 2000s, Samuel Huntington proposed the theory of the Clash of Civilizations, turning academic disputes into political ones. A historical view of exchanges and mutual learning among civilizations suggests that mutual learning and integration between Eastern and Western civilizations are fundamental to the innovation of human thought, whether it be in the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, or contemporary literary trends. Western Ecological Ethics of Human-Non-Human has evolved from "humans transforming nature", "humans challenging nature", and "humans conquering nature" to "loving nature" and "protecting nature", and Chinese philosophical thought, including Confucianism, Taoism, and Zen, has also made significant contributions. Human and non-human ethical relationships in the Anthropocene era cannot be separated from the ecological wisdom of mankind as a whole, which naturally includes both the West and the East. Without the enhancement of the intrinsic value of Eastern ecological ethics such as "Tao bears the World" , "Oneness of Heaven and Man" and "Mind-nature Interaction Theory" and if scholars still adhere to the traditional anthropocentrism, nature will always be "aphasia" and the crisis will continue to coexist with human beings.

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