
Chinese Views on Nature

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1. Summary

The People's Republic of China (referred to as China), is located in Eastern Eurasia, on the Pacific West Coast. Geographically speaking, nature has played a significant role in Chinese culture through its long history. China is filled with various kinds of natural resources. This paper explores some worldviews of nature from Chinese perspectives, particularly from traditional Chinese views on nature.

2. Introduction to China and Traditional Chinese Cultural Influences on Ethics

China (known as "*Zhong Guo*" in Chinese) is the world's most-populous country with a population of over 1.3 billion in 2010 (2011 Sixth Chinese national census major data communiqué) accounting for approximately 19% of the world population. China has one of the largest areas for a single country, covering about 9.6 million square kilometers and borders 14 countries.

2.1 *The Origins of "Zhong Guo" and its Ethics Value*

The word "China" means literally the "central state". According to the "*Ci Yuan*" (also known as "*Chinese Etymology Dictionary*"), in ancient times, the Chinese Huaxia group established their state in the Yellow River Basin area. They thought the state is located in the center of the world, thus, they called it as "*Zhong Guo*". Meanwhile, other places around China are called as "*Si Fang*" (four directions of north, south, west and east). It is also recognized as the origin of Tributary System (known as "*Sino-centric sphere of order*") in the ancient China.



The word "*Zhong*" (literally meaning centre or mean) plays an important role throughout Chinese history, cultural and ethics development. Confucius pointed out in his "Doctrine of the Mean" that "*Zhong*" is denoted as the correct course to be pursued by all under heaven, requiring people to be impartial on their way of life. Based on the viewpoint and extension of "*the Chinese ancient theory of the Five Elements*" (a material view of materialism), "*Zhong*" corresponds to "earth" and it is symbolized by the colour "yellow". It seems to be taken for granted to call the country of people with yellow skins as Chinese.

2.2 *Traditional Chinese Cultural Influence on Ethics*

Ethics focuses on the relationships between people and country, people and nature, people and society, and people and people. As ethics reflects the value orientation of

people, thus, ethics contains values of people. The essence of Traditional Chinese culture concentrates on the "*Three Cardinal Principles and Five Constant Virtues*" Confucius--"ruler guides subject, father guides son, and husband guides wife" and "benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and fidelity", which has a far-reaching influence on the formation and development of traditional Chinese morality. It helped coordinate the interpersonal relationship in the ancient Chinese society which is with the disparity of power, as well as construct the required communication orders in the feudal period. Due to the continuous consolidation and intensification by the generations of rulers, those traditional Chinese cultural essence has formed to a leading system of values guiding Chinese ethic views. As a result, Chinese civilization, with its social moral standards ranks the forefront of the whole

3. The Broader Outlook of the Environmental Concepts within the Chinese Tradition

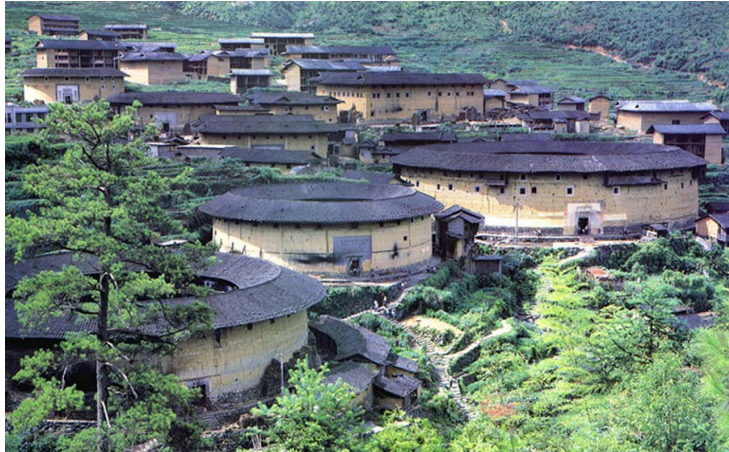
3.1. Anthropocentrism

Since Ancient times, Chinese people have paid great attention on the "human being" as the principle factor in the interaction between nature and environment. Anthropocentrism is an ethical term highlighting the views of human beings. It is the origins of human rights protections. However, with the economic development and social change, anthropocentrism in China has evolved from a traditional view to a scientific view (also known as "post-anthropocentrism") in environmental aspect.

3.1.1 Traditional Chinese Anthropocentrism--Relationship between Humans and Nature

Agrarian culture has played an important role in the Chinese history, it is developed based on water from solely relying on the natural water resources to positively transforming and utilizing for productivity, reflecting on the development of Chinese civilization process. Chinese people have a long and glorious traditions of controls of water with fighting-flood spirit. One of the famous national heroes is Dayu who kept working at fighting flooding by the easing way.

Due to his success in controlling flooding, he became the first emperor of Xia Dynasty (it is the first hereditary dynasty in Chinese historical records). He himself became the symbol of generous kindness, vital wisdom and great braveness, which encouraged the ancient Chinese to explore and conquer the nature by the stint of hard work, persistence and commitment. The cultural and ethics background of the Dayu spirit is "man is an integral part of nature" (union of nature and man / communion with nature) and " man can conquer nature".



Moreover, many Chinese traditional architectures evoke the communion with nature as the basis of site selection and residence planning. The construction of well-known South China classical gardens follow the unshakeable principle of "the harmony between people and

nature". Tulou, the unique residential architecture of Fujian Province was included on the UNESCO's World Heritage List, usually has residences consisting of packed earth on the outer wall and a wooden internal framework. The buildings are nestled among hills and streams, reflecting Chinese traditional architectural designs and the close relationship between humans and nature.

3.1.2 Sustainable Chinese Anthropocentrism--Scientific Outlook on Development

As a view of ethical value, anthropocentrism has made great contributions for the existence and development of human beings, and is bound to be in hot water for its immanent shortcoming. With the rapid industrial development, the resource consumption and offal discharge are correspondingly increasing. Those disastrous results have influence the life and health of human beings even threatening the survival of next generation. Thus, the scientific outlook on development was promoted by the Chinese government.

The core idea of the outlook--"putting people first" is similar to anthropocentrism in position but different in nature. Compared to the empty and absurd quality of anthropocentrism, "putting people first" emphasized on the practicality, relativity, adaptability of development with a more scientific view. It is now playing a leading role in promoting the harmony and sustainable development in Chinese human society by advocating environmental protection, new energy projects and green jobs growth.

3.2. Biocentrism

Biocentrism requires human beings to respect other creatures as important as themselves. In fact, biocentrism is a new term to China. Nowadays, people start to use it more frequently as an ethic illustration of the significance in the natural environment. Biocentrism is often related with biodiversity in China based on the purpose of supporting forest protection, balancing the ecology system and alleviating the damage from global warming.

One of the effective measures based on the biocentrism is to protect and research on the endangered species. Unlike other wools, which can be sheared off an animal, the wool of a Tibetan Antelope can only be obtained by killing the animal, thus, the poachers often shoot whole herds of antelopes at a time in the midnight, leaving only the babies, whose wool is not worth so much. The Tibetan antelopes have become seriously endangered. Many Chinese started to notice this issue and organized volunteer groups to protect these Tibetan antelopes. Some of the volunteers have given their lives to save the antelopes by fighting with those poachers and bad weather. In order to improve their birth rate and maintain the stable number of antelopes, both the Central government and the local government, along with civilian efforts have put lots of energy, resources and manpower in saving the lives of antelopes. As a great success, the endangered Tibetan antelopes have tripled in number in 2010.

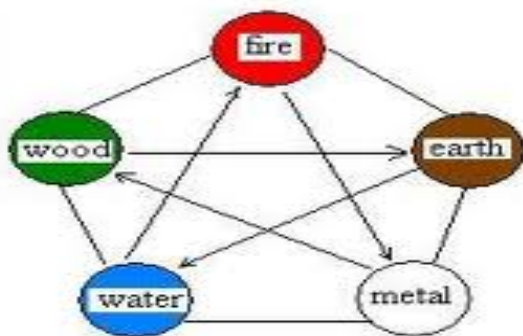


3.3 Ecocentrism:

Similar to biocentrism, ecocentrism focuses on the importance of nature but with more emphasis on the whole ecological system. Chinese people view the whole ecosystem as a natural system which is based on the mutual-interaction of heaven and earth. Thus, they started to explore natural phenomena and to apply in practice.

3.3.1 Wu Xing and Yin Yang

The system of *Wu Xing* (also known as the "Five Movements") include wood, fire, earth, metal and water. Ancient Chinese people consider the system of *Wu Xing* as a device by describing the interactions and relationships between natural phenomena and different phases of natural elements. The system is divided into two movement cycles, one is a generating cycle (also known as "mother-son" relationship in the book of "*Classic of Questioning*") and the other is overcoming cycle.

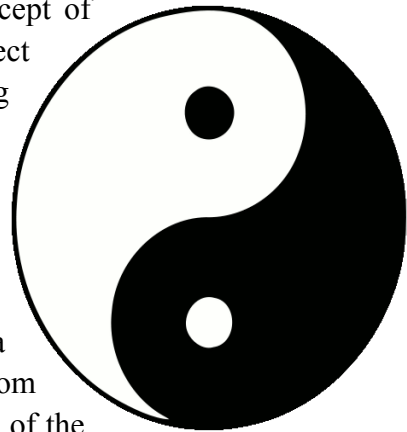


In the generating circle, the five elements feed off each other and have mutual development, wood feeds fire, fire creates earth, earth bears metal, metal carries water and water nourishes wood; While in the overcoming circle, these five elements have mutual

restraints, wood parts earth, metal chops wood, fire melts wood, water quenches fire and earth absorbs water.¹ The system of *Wu Xing* with its regulations has had great influence on *Fengshui*, astrology, traditional Chinese medicine, music, military strategy, material arts and even in matchmaking of ancient Chinese marriage. For instance, In traditional Chinese medicine, the system of *Wu Xing* is used to illustrate the relationship between the physiology and pathology of the human body and the natural environment as the visceral organs, other organs and tissues have similar properties to the five elements; they interact physiologically and pathologically as the five elements do².

The system of *Yin Yang* (literally for shadow and light) is originated from the natural view of ancient Chinese people. With the evolvement of human society, people have gradually recognized various interrelated and inter-opposed natural phenomena, such as heaven and earth, sun and moon, day and night, male and female and others. Thus, they concluded the concept of Yin Yang by using philosophical means. In *Taoist* philosophy, *Yin Yang* (dark and light) becomes sensible from an initial quiescence or emptiness and continues moving until quiescence is reached again. *Yin* and *Yang* are always on the opposite side of each other but with equal qualities. For example, the movement of water raising waves and lower after throwing a stone in a calm pool is a example to explain Yin and Yang for the alternation of high and low water points.

Yin Yang, a unity of opposites is the general principle of the development of the material world. The couple of this contrary forces are interconnected and interdependent in the natural world. Moreover, the property stipulation of *Yin Yang* is used to both describe the two opposite aspects in the same unity and represent the certain properties of the two opposing aspects. The concept of *Yin Yang* has already been spilled over into the every aspect of Chinese traditional culture and habits, including religions, philosophy, calendar, traditional Chinese medicine, Chinese material arts, architecture, Kan Yu, divination and *Chi Kung* (also known as *Qigong*, it is the art of harnessing the force that is said to give nature its pattern with the aim of keeping health). *Tai jiquan*, with the application of Yin Yang balancing principles, is a unique form of Chinese material art by training people from a state of movement towards a state of stillness³. "In terms of the art of attack and defense then, in the context of the changes of full and empty, one is constantly internally latent, not outwardly expressive, as if the Yin and Yang of Taiji have not yet divided apart."⁴ Chinese people believe that Yin and Yang represent negative and positive *Qi* respectively. In the ethics of Confucianism, most notably in



¹ Youlan, Feng (Yu-lan Fung), A History of Chinese Philosophy

² Traditional Chinese Medicine Information Page _

³ Zongyue ,Wang, Theory of Tai Jiquan, Ming Dynasty

⁴ Woolidge,Doug,1997,T'AI CHI, The International Magazine of T'ai Chi Ch'uan

the philosophy of *Dong Zhongshu* (2nd Century BC) a moral dimension is attached to the idea of Yin Yang.⁵

3.3.2 The Ba Gua

The *Ba Gua* is set of eight diagrams with symbolic meaning, it is regarded as the combination and extension of the system of Wu Xing and the concept of Yin Yang. The range of eight interrelated concepts consists three lines, each line either "broken" or "unbroken," representing Yin and Yang separately.



It is said that the invention of the Ba Gua should be attributed to Fu Xi (one of the Three Sovereigns of ancient China, another two are Shen Nong and Yellow Emperor during the period circa 2500 BC to 2100 BC). The eight diagrams are Kun (Earth), Zhen (Lightning), Li (Fire), Dui (Lake/Marsh), Qian (Heaven), Xun (Wind), Kan (Water) and Gen (Mountain). The ancient Chinese classic "I Ching" consists of the 64 possible pairs of trigrams (also called

as "hexagrams") by different collocation of the eight diagrams. Those 64 pairs of trigrams symbolize all kinds of natural and personnel phenomena. The Ba Gua is an essential tool in the majority of Feng Shui schools. The *Ba Gua* used in Fengshui can appear in two different versions: the *Earlier Heaven Ba Gua*, used for burial sites and the *Later Heaven Ba Gua*, used for the residences. The "*Human Body Ba Gua Map*" is created by the modern Chinese people in 1990s based on the rules of the *Ba Gua*. It combines the celestial rules with the meridians and collaterals of human body and healthy diet as well, reflecting a united whole formed by human beings and cosmos.

3.4 Cosmocentrism and the Development of Traditional Chinese Views on the roles of Nature

Cosmocentrism is another way of viewing the universal system with the purpose of natural and ecological protection. Unlike the current western world's focus on the relationship between the material world and humans, the prevalent central theme of traditional Chinese philosophy is the relationship between nature and humans. Thus, "Oneness with nature" has become the essential featured spirit of Chinese philosophy by requiring people to keep harmony and unity with nature⁶ within cosmocentrism sense.

Historically, the development of Chinese views on the roles of nature has experienced

⁵ Rodney Leon ,Taylor, Howard Yuen Fung Choy, *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Confucianism*,

⁶ Feng, Han, *The Chinese Views on Nature: Tourism in China's Scenic and Historic Interests Area*

a changing process from taking nature as the external world to integrating nature as the inner world. In other words, Chinese views on nature have become more mature by understanding it more deeply with more subjective minds.

From the *Warring state period* (403-475 BC) to *Wei and Jin Dynasty* (220-589 AD), people tended to take nature as a wonderful place (external world) for entertainment and relieving worries by leisure walking. Some of them took nature as a shielding place for salvation from the earthly affairs and troubles. They preferred to live idly like the clouds and wild cranes. Those Chinese landscape poems of that period particularly stressed the beautiful scenery as poets selected mountains and waters to drown their worries. Moreover, Shanshui poem has become prevalent by viewing it as an independent aesthetic object.⁷

Nevertheless, after the *Tang dynasty* (618-907 AD), the subjectivity of nature was gradually constructed and enhanced. According to book of Kubin (1990), "Real happiness belongs to culturalised nature. Nature can only present its reality (beauty) through culture, [because for the Chinese], wild nature and cultural nature can't be appreciated at the same time since they are separate and have mutual restriction⁸. He also added that "cultural nature was more preferred"⁹. The construction of Chinese landscape gardens is the combination of landscape paintings, literature and their related theories, the meaning of these gardens are more than their elegant appearance. Scholars became more subjectively engaged in designing and decorating these gardens based on their construction of the ideal life for spiritual pursuits.

4. China's Views on Human–Environment Relationship

The Human-Environment relationship has been a hot topic for Chinese people since ancient times. With the evolution of social changes, Chinese people have increasingly recognized the importance of environment both to their life and social development. They have been trying various ways to looking for the origin of nature and regular changes of universe.

4.1. Symbiotic

The symbiotic in China mainly comes from the category of ancient Chinese ecological aesthetics which regards the relationship between man and nature, man and environment as research object. It refers to the harmony and sustainability of mutual relationship between man and nature--mutual improvement and grow together. It deeply elucidates the traditional Chinese "Views on the Occurrence of Life". "*Zhou Yi (the Book of Change)*" is widely recognized as the major source of Chinese civilization, holds in store rich and deep harmonious ideas, exerting a profound influence on the evolution of Chinese civilization. In this book, it is said that "Producing and reproducing (creativity)" is not only a philosophical exposition of the

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Kubin,W. , 1990, Nature Perspective in Chinese Literature

⁹ Ibid

cosmic state, but also the inherent nature of the "change" itself. In other words, ancient Chinese view the "life" is the best interest man can get. "*Yuan Heng Li Zhen*" is the humanistic spirit embodied in "*Zhou Yi*", which represents the best pattern of man life. Here, "*Yuan*" means motives and drive; "*Heng*" is communication and resources consolidation; "*Li*" emphasizes on the satisfaction of both material and spirit; "*Zhen*" equals to perseverance and sincerity. They are the embodiment of wisdom on classical ecological aesthetics which brings success about the value of aesthetics and ethics

4.2. Integrationist

Integrationist usually refers to anti-racism. However, integrationist in the relationship between human and environment means a more inclusive and sustainable-development system. People have a closer relationship with nature and seeking their values of life based on nature, which reflects other factors in society.

The Four Great Chinese classical novels are the precious cultural heritage left by ancient Chinese, which still have profound influence for the current whole Chinese-speaking world. The authors combined some traditional Chinese views on nature with religion, political and moral elements. The fantastic stories in those four novels have provided us a clear image of the traditional Chinese culture, society, ethics, history, geography, psychology and other aspects.

In the book of "A Journey to the West", Monkey King, Pigsy and Friar Sand are the three protectors for Tripitaka to retrieve original Buddhist scriptures for China (Tang Dynasty) by preventing various monsters and demons who try to obtain immortality by eating Tripitaka's flesh. The story has a strong background in Chinese folk religion, Chinese mythology and



value systems based on the evolution of the natural world; the pantheon of Taoist immortals and Buddhist bodhisattvas is still reflective of some Chinese religious beliefs today. Enduringly popular, the tale is at once an adventure story, a spring of spiritual insight, and an extended allegory in which the group of pilgrims journeying toward India represents individuals journeying towards enlightenment.¹⁰

4.3. Apocalyptic

Apocalyptic focuses on a revelation or prophecy. For Chinese people, the changes of nature and ecological environment are closely related to their life and prosperity for

¹⁰ S. Ropp, Paul, 1990, The Distinctive Art of Chinese Fiction, Heritage of China: Contemporary Perspectives on Chinese Civilization

generations. *Fengshui*, with the quality of apocalyptic, is regarded as a popular and traditional Chinese geomancy system (although it was suppressed for political reasons during the Chinese Revolution in 1960s). The proper term of *Fengshui* is *Kan Yu*, *Kan* means the theory of cosmology and *Yu* means the theory of terrestrial. In the past, *Fengshui* was widely and frequently used to orient the land position for building palace, dwelling, villages and tombs, especially for those imperial family, upper class and landowners by exploring an auspicious manner. The core idea of *Fengshui* is the harmony between nature and human beings.

The basic principle of *Fengshui* is to identify the loci of *Qi* flow on and under the ground and also compute the strength of *Qi* in term of time.¹¹ *Qi* is an abstract term in the Chinese culture, it refers to an active principle forming part of living thing, which can be also translated a life energy. The philosophical conceptions of *Qi* from the earliest records of Chinese philosophy (4th century BC) by Mencius correspond to Western notions of humours and the ancient Hindu yogic concept of prana, meaning "life force" in *Sanskrit*.¹² When Mencius talks about *Qi*, he regards *Qi* as the vital energy or the material force of the human body. He goes on to say *Qi* fills the space between Heaven and Earth and unites with rightness and the *Taoism* (*Yin Qi* comes from Heaven and the *Yang Qi* comes from Earth).



It may expand or contract based on right or wrong actions and performance themselves. The vital energy of a person can be vast and overflowing (noble spirit) through his righteous actions. "Your resolution is the commander of the *Qi*. *Qi* is that which fills up the body. When your resolution is fixed somewhere, the *Qi* sets up camp there". Hence, it is said, "Maintain your resolution. Do not injure the *Qi*". *Qi* is a vast resources or moral goodness encouraging people follow the right way of pursuing for good.

4.4. Managerial

The relationship between human and environment is always complicated. Humans rely on nature to live, and natural environment depends on the management of human to survive. However, because of the elusive quality of nature, the management of humans usually can be divided into two kinds. One is to overcome and combat with the great power of nature, the other is to take advantage of nature as resources of their life with their hope and best wishes.

4.4.1 Chinese Mythology

¹¹ Thomas Wai-pang Lee, *Kan Yu (Feng Shui)*,

¹² Avari, Burjor, 2007, India: The Ancient Past

Chinese mythology is a cherished collection of cultural views, folk-tales religions and history by inheriting to the generations in the form of oral and written tradition. It mainly focus on seeking the origins of human beings, other living things and creation myths. Chinese mythology and legends are deeply involved with the curiosity of ancient people in exploring the secrets of natural development, also with their wishes for better life, and their strong desire of struggling for the conquest of nature.

Pangu was claimed to be the first time sentient being and creator of human beings, as well as the one who makes the heaven and the earth, while other mythological stories believe that Nuwa molded humans from clay for companionship. The two typical mythological characters for fighting with nature are Kua Fu and Hou Yi. Kua Fu kept running by following the Sun from the East to the West, draining all rivers and lakes crossing his path as sources of water to quench his burning thirst as he closed in on the star. Hou Yi, a strong archer saved the earth by shooting down nine of the ten suns (it is said from myths that there were ten suns existing together in the ancient period of China). The legend of " Jin Wei fills up the Sea" is another good example reflecting mankind's incessant struggle against nature. Jin Wei (a little bird is the incarnation of Yan Di's daughter who was drowned when she was swimming) determined to fill up the sea by constantly throwing gravels. It is now used as a idiom to describe people who are firm and indomitable and will not stop until they reach their goal.

4.4.2 Funeral Customs

Besides the normal burial and funeral practices of traditional burial and cremation practices in China, hanging coffins (also known as suspended coffins) are known to be an ancient funeral custom of some minority groups, especially the Bo people of Southern China.

These hanging coffins are found to be placed mostly in caves in the face of cliffs, and there are still some coffins that lie on natural rock projections on mountain faces. We now have various explanations of reasoning for the source of hanging coffins, but one thing common that the tradition was formed based on natural view of Chinese people at that time. As caves played an important role in the daily life of those minority group people, the special burial mean was a reflection of their living in caves. It was also said that the hanging coffins could prevent bodies from being taken by beasts and also bless the soul eternally¹³ since many ancient Chinese people viewed the high mountains and lofty hills as the nearest place to reach the heaven and gods.

Others also argued that we may link it with the idea of procreation adoration as we found in the literature of some Chinese



¹³ Chinaculture.org., The Hanging Coffin

minority groups, those people believed that rocks could protect them by maintaining flourishing population. In the *Taiping yulan* (also known as the Imperial overview from the Taiping reign [AD 976-983]), the first well-known large encyclopedia of ancient China, we found it is recorded that there was a "child rock" and some minority people thought it was efficacious as they had already fulfilled their wish of longing for a child.

4.5. Apathetic

Being apathetic means lacking of emotion or concerns. In China, due to the influence of industrialization, improper use and other man-made activities, water and soil loss aggravates gradually, particularly in the west China. It has broken the west seriously original frail ecosystem and restricted the local economy development. Desertification and pollution have triggered a grave degradation of soil in much of the national territory. The negative effects of climate change has made China more vulnerable to damage caused by rising sea levels, drought, flooding, tropical cyclones, sand storms, and heat waves. These are the results of people's destruction on earth and their irrational use and transformation of nature, and the punishment of their apathetic attitude towards environmental and biodiversity protection.

4.6. Animistic

Animism is focused on the existence of non-human "spiritual beings". Animism entailed worship of ancestors and spirit worship, it can be commonly found in the Chinese religions, myths, legends and funeral customs of minority groups in ancient China. Spiritual power plays an indispensable role in the traditional Chinese culture and religion development.

4.6.1 Taoism

Taoism (also known as *Daoism*) is a special religion in China focusing living harmony with the Tao (literally for way/principle, especially for the principles of existing things). The development of Taoism could be trace back to the primitive time of ancient China, the hominids believed that inanimate objects also had human qualities (theory of animism) by seeking the protection of nature. In turn, they highly respected nature, soul and their ancestors. With the development of Chinese history, they started to uphold a supreme belief in heaven by linking their ancestors with god. Those ancient wise men began to think of the meaning of life. "*Tao Te Ching*", attributed to Lao Tzu, is a milestone of Taoism. It mainly emphasizes on achieving ecstasy, longevity or immortality by means of a variety of divination and exorcism rituals, and practices. It recalls people to cherish their life and protect natural environment by pursuing the aim of the harmony between people and human beings and breaking the shackles of life. It synthesized the concept of Yin Yang and the system of *Wu Xing*. *Taoism* agreed with the philosophic idea of Zhuang Tzuthat *Wu Wei* (literally for non-action, in the *Tao Te Ching*, Lao Tzu explains that beings or phenomena that are wholly in harmony with the Tao behave in a completely natural, uncontrived way) is significant for self-cultivation and behavior-control, extending to

the meaning of naturalness, simplicity and spontaneity, along with the Three Treasures for compassion, moderation, and humility.¹⁴

4.6.2 Chinese Buddhism

Similar to Buddhism in other Asian countries, the core concepts of Chinese Buddhism are Samsara (the cycle of birth and death by repeating the process of alternatives of pleasure and suffering); Karma (the driving force for Samsara, retribution for sin); Rebirth (a succession of life by transmigrating or incarnating from one existence to the next). Before Buddhism was introduced to ancient China, we had already had some widely-spread proverbs or saying concerning the mutual relationship among mental intent, action and result, such as "The more you give, the more you get. As you sow, so shall you reap"; "One good return deserves another. It will be earned at its time". Big differences with the Karma in Buddhism is that Chinese traditional views are not involved with Samsara, and Chinese people think the reward and the punishment for good and bad is wielded by the power of Earth instead of stewing in his own juice.

Those core concepts can be frequently found in classic Chinese literature. In the book the "Dream of Red Mansions" (also known as "the story of stone"), the story starts from the sentient stone which was abandoned by the goddess Nuwa (she used the stone to mend the heavens). The stone was given a chance to learn from the human life and mortal realm, and it was reincarnated to become an amorous adolescent male heir(he was given the name of Baoyu as he was born with a magic piece of "jade" in his mouth). He falls in love with his sickly cousin Lin Daiyu who finally died of grief and despair. In fact, Daiyu is the reincarnation of a flower from the frame story, and the purpose of her mortal birth is to repay Baoyu with tears for watering her in her previous incarnation.

The idea of Chan (also known as Zen, mediation) in Buddhism was deeply influenced by Taoism in China. As what Goddard called that Chan was a "natural evolution of Buddhism under Taoist conditions."¹⁵ Not only Taoist terminology, but also neo-Taoist concepts were taken over in Chinese Buddhism.¹⁶ Concepts such as "Ti-yung" (Essence and Function) and "Li-shih" (Noumenon and Phenomenon) were first taken over by Hua-yen Buddhism, which had consequent impacts on Chan. On the other hand, Taoists at first misunderstood sunyata to be akin to the Taoist non-being.¹⁷

4.6.3 Water Culture

Chinese civilization is one of the oldest civilization in the world. Dating from the Yellow Emperor times, China has had about 5000 years of recorded history. The

¹⁴ Lao Tzu,1993 Tao Te Ching, translated by Livia Kohn

¹⁵ Goddard, Dwight ,2007, History of Ch'an Buddhism Previous to the times of Hui-neng (Wie-lang)

¹⁶ Suzuki, D.T. ,1935, Manual of Zen Buddhism

¹⁷ Ibid

direct origin of Chinese culture is the Yellow River Civilization and the Yangtze River Civilization, which also has profound impacts on the surrounding countries in East Asia.

Chinese people view water as a symbol of life, particularly in their emotive life. In the eyes of literature, water is related with both happiness and frustration. In some literary works, water also symbolizes power and passion. Chinese writers have been making use of the moral of water to express their ambitions and sentiments. *Qu yuan*, a famous patriotic poet in the Warring States periods chose to drown himself in a river in order to affirm his unyielding faith for "everyone is filthy whereas I am pure; everyone is drunk whereas I am sober." Others such as Confucius sighed that "time flies quickly as like a great river flowing away day and night" to warn us that we should appreciate what we have now. "The great liberality and wonderful tolerance of the vast sea" was raised by *Lin Zexu*, a well-known politician in the Qing Dynasty, he always reminded himself to keep up with the competition by widely solicited opinions.

Many ancient Chinese philosophers also summarized the way of being a human by taking water as a metaphor in his masterpiece of "Tao Te Ching", "Water benefits everything without evoking conflicts or resistance" was said by Lao Tzu. It means that the highest level of goodness is just like the moral character of water which moistens everything on earth without any conflict. People should act as pure and tolerant as water.

4.7 Others

4.7.1 Zoomorphism

The Chinese dragon is one of the most important mythical creatures in Chinese mythology. They are huge with strong power and divinity. They are believed to have the supreme capability of controlling all waters. The creation of clouds is because of their breath. Praying for rain with dragon was an important component of the folk-customs from ancient Chinese. They fully respected dragons as their worship. In the feudal era of ancient China, the figure / image of the Chinese dragon is used to symbolize the royalty. Thus, the ancient Chinese emperors thought they were the "true sons of the dragon" with the only privileges of dressing in robes and sleeping on dragon bed (some also thought they were the only one who could use the color of bright yellow) . However, in the modern days, due to unique forms of the Chinese dragon with its incredible potential, Chinese people sometimes use the term "Descendants of the Dragon" as a sign of their ethnic identity.



The well-known and highly respected dragon is one of the most popular symbols in *Fengshui*. It is one of the four celestial animals, and also part of the Zodiac cycle. In the ancient China, emperors focused a lot on *Fengshui* masters by seeking an auspicious location for the construction of his tomb.¹⁸ One of important bases for tomb sitting is the *Longmai* (dragon arteries) which should be surrounded and protected by mountains and water. In

fact, in the views of *Fengshui* masters, *Longmai* is not a issue related with human habitation, it is matter of good or ill luck as well as ups and downs of a whole family and a dynasty. Besides, people keep the dragon item at their home with beliefs that dragon creature has many powers, especially in creating the balance.

4.7.2 Totemism

Totemism is a complex of varied ideas and ways of behavior based on a worldview drawn from nature. In fact, *Totemism* is closely related with traditional Chinese philosophy. Each minority ethnic group in China has its own unique *Totemism*. The origin of Chinese character stemmed from *Totemism* with profound influence not only in China itself, but also in other East Asia countries.



Hieroglyphics is the original way of creating characters by designating or pertaining to a pictographic script, in which many of the symbols are conventionalized, recognizable pictures of the things represented. Modern Chinese characters are originated from the Oracle Bone Script (the writing of ancient Chinese

characters which were found in oracle bonds in Bronze Age China for the use of pyromantic divination records). The Oracle Bone Script is a typical example of hieroglyphics. For instance, the pictographic Chinese character "*Yue*"(moon) is similar to the shape of crescent moon, while "*Men*" (door) referred to the shape of the right door and left door opening.

The *Dongba* Script and *Shui* Script in China have already been proven to be the only two hieroglyphic systems in existence with which people are still using in the world. These two hieroglyphics in China are like living fossils due to development history of more than 1000 years, although both of them are now facing the danger of extinction.

¹⁸ Youlan, Feng (Yu-lan Fung), A History of Chinese Philosophy

The *Dongba* Script is used by the Naxi people (a minority group in Southern China). *Dongba* is largely a mnemonic system, and cannot by itself represent the *Naxi* language; different authors may use the same glyphs with different meanings, and it may be supplemented with the *geba* syllabary for clarification. The *Dongba* script has 2223 individual characters and abundant words to express some fine emotions and record complex matters¹⁹.

The *Shui* Script is used by *Shui* people (a minority group in Gui Zhou province in China). Currently, only shamans are known to be familiar with it for the purpose of geomancy and divination. However, in the past, the *Shui* Script was more often used to record astronomy, geography, religion, folk-customs and other cultural information of *Shui* people²⁰. Some of these characters are pictorial representations, such as of a bird or a fish, and a few are schematic representations of a characteristic quality, such as a snail represented by a drawing of an inward curving spiral²¹.

5. Conclusions

Based on the above, traditional Chinese views on nature are characterized with anthropocentrism in which humans are the centre through an exclusively human perspective. We pursue for the harmonious unity of heaven, justice and humanity. Its value dimension covers from the natural laws to deserved natural ethics by focusing on ethical civilization, but without the basis of scientific technology. In general, with a sense of humanity, the traditional Chinese views on nature is built upon the exploration on the inner world of humans but with less focus on truly reading and transforming nature.

However, with the improvement of social productivity and increasing the importance of sustainability, modern Chinese have started to think about ecological improvement and environment protection. Anthropocentrism no longer applies in China in dealing with the relationship between humans and nature. Instead, eco-centrism becomes dominant in modern China. Contrary to anthropocentrism, ecocentrism concentrates on the positive coexistence and interactions between humans and nature, as well as life and environment. It will be helpful in practice for Chinese to solve some emerging environmental problems.

Chinese government has already listed "ecological civilization" as one priority in social construction. To realize the ecological civilization with Chinese characteristics, Chinese have put "people-oriented" as the fundamental principle. The principle of "people-oriented" with emphasis on serving for people, is completely different from the anthropocentrism. More than the meaning of theoretical analysis on ethics, the "people-oriented" is more practical and it can be viewed as a part of non-anthropocentrism.

¹⁹ Richard S., Cook, Naxi Pictographic and Syllabographic Scripts: Research notes toward a Unicode encoding of Naxi

²⁰ Books in rare ancient characters of Shui group retrieved., April 1, 2004

²¹ Wei, James, and Jerold A., Edmondson ,2008 ,Sui , Diller, Anthony

China has been investing a lot on promoting the construction of natural reserves and important ecological function reserves of various kinds and different levels. Modern Chinese have recognized the importance of functional area divisions and regional ecological security based on the facts of frequent natural disasters in the past decades. Inspired by the sustainability and potential development of "green industry". Chinese have noticed opportunities of developing its own ecological economy. In respect to biodiversity and ecological protection of resources exploitation, industries such as new energy sources, new materials, energy conservation, environmental protection, biomedicine, information networks, and high-end manufacturing have been continuously increasing. Thus, Chinese people's life style and consumption style have been gradually changed corresponding to the sustainability of egocentrism-loaded development path.

6.References

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