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The Comparative Study of Taoist Ecological Ideology and Western Environmental Ethics

道家生態思想與西方環境倫理比較研究

A dissertation submitted to the University of Wales Trinity Saint

David

In fulfilment of the requirements for BA (Hons) in Sinology Degree

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Abstract

The study of Taoist ecological ideology is the product of the combination of the modern transformation of Chinese traditional culture and the construction of ecological civilization, and the environmental ethics thought is the product of human's reflection on the moral relationship between humans and nature. The environmental ethics contained in Taoism has a significant enlightening effect on the healthy development of Environmental ethics. The environmental ethics born in the West has become the ideological guidance for establishing international environmental ethics under ecological crisis and globalization. The comparative study can promote the development of the two.

In the comparative study of Taoist ecological thought and environmental ethics thought, according to the basic elements of ethics, it can be divided into comparing natural value, comparing moral rights, and comparing moral obligations. First of all, the comparison of natural value is mainly divided into the Taoist value of “the Use of the Useless” and the western environmental ethics on intrinsic value, and the Taoist ecological holism and Ecocentrism. Secondly, the comparison between the Taoist thought of “Advice to be kind, Respect for life” and the theory of natural rights in Environmental ethics, as well as the comparison between the Taoist thought and the western Environmental ethics on human's natural rights, constitutes the comparison of moral rights. Finally, the comparison of moral obligation focuses on the attribution of Taoist anthropocentrism.

In practice, classical Taoism and medieval Taoism also show rich environmental ethics. Taoist philosophy standardizes people's moral practice utilizing ideological guidance, which constitutes the norms in the process of environmental ethics practice by “Knowing to stop” and “Returning to simplicity,” “Being humble,” and “Not arguing.” Taoism as a religion has a realistic symbol; the environmental ethics itself is practical; according to the different ways of practice, concrete can be reflected by the temple environmental protection ritual environmental protection.

Key Words: Classical Taoism, Medieval Taoism, Environmental Ethics, Ecology, Comparison

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1 Introduction

1.1 Research Purpose and Significance

Since humankind entered the era of industrial civilization, the environmental crisis has become increasingly severe, the social, environmental protection movement has risen, people's awareness of environmental protection has increased, and the green development policies of various countries have become more and more sound. In addition, the COVID-19 epidemic that swept the world in the past two years made all humanity deeply appreciate the powerful forces of nature and begin to re-examine the role orientation of human beings in nature. There has been a trend of naturalism in domestic academic circles for a long time. In recent years, scholars and experts from all walks of life have turned their attention to issues related to environmental protection and tried to do related research by linking them with their professional fields, including Taoism, Taoism, and other traditional cultural researchers. In responding to the policies of the national ecological civilization construction and sustainable development concept, we actively carry out creative transformation and innovative development of the theoretical ideas of traditional culture. At the same time, environmental ethics, which takes the moral relationship between man and nature as the philosophical thinking object, has also been introduced into China from the West and is gradually developing towards environmental ethics with Chinese characteristics. The purpose of this paper is to study the traditional Taoism and Taoist thoughts and at the same time try to build a closer theoretical connection with environmental ethics strengthen the cultural influence and value significance of Taoism and Taoism, so that

environmental ethics can be better based on China and inspire people to think about the moral relationship between man and nature.

1.2 Research Objects

This study is an interdisciplinary comparative study, so many research objects and concepts are involved. As a result of this explained, Taoism and Taoism are the primary research objects of this article, among which Taoist philosophy is the main one, supplemented by religious philosophy and practical ideas in Taoism, and they are jointly compared with environmental ethics. Therefore, when discussing in this article, they are generally referred to as “Taoism,” and if they need to be specifically discussed, they are divided into “Taoism” and “Taoism” for parallel. In addition, as the research object, environmental ethics specifically refers to the ideas in western environmental ethics in this study, rather than the discipline of environmental ethics. To contrast more vivid and practical, western environmental ethics theory is representative.

1.3 Literature Reviews

In the domestic academic research on Taoism and Taoist ecological thought, since the 1990s, after nearly 30 years of development, a large number of academic achievements have emerged. The presentation and expansion of new concepts of Taoism gave birth to the exploration of new elements of Taoist culture in academic circles, including the role of Taoism in the construction of ecological civilization. Yin Zhihua analyzed the environmental ethics thoughts of Taoism, such as “everything is

tangible and contains Tao,” conforming to nature, valuing life, and abstaining from killing, and mentioned the specific provisions on environmental protection in Taoist precepts. In *Taoist Ecological Ethics and Its Practical Significance* (2002),¹ Mr. Qing Xitai officially took the environmental ethics thought in Taoist culture as the first research object and successively discussed the starting point of Taoist ecological ethics “harmony between man and nature,” the core of “Taoism and nature,” the principle of “mutual support and mutual support” and the purpose of “contentment,” which made the Taoist ecological ethics thought be displayed. Tian Haijian analyzed the possibility and limitation of the connection between Taoism and Taoist environmental ethics and modern environmental ethics in “Enlightenment of Taoist ecological ethics to the construction of contemporary ecological philosophy” (2004)², which promoted the research on the combination of Taoism and environmental ethics. Professor Le Aiguo summed up the essential issue of Taoist ecological ethics in *Taoist Ecological Ethics and Its Modern Significance* (2010)³: the philosophical basis of the relationship between man and nature, that is, the environmental ethics of equality of all things, natural inaction, and harmony between man and nature. He also published two articles on Taoist ecological thoughts, *An Analysis of Ecological Ethics in Taoist*

¹ Yang Tongjin 楊通進 *zouxian shenceng huanbao* 走向深層的環保[Towards Deep Environmental Protection] , (Chengdu: Sichuan people's publishing house) .

² Chen Guying 陳鼓應 *zhuangzi jinzhu jinyi* 莊子今注今譯[Zhuangzi's Annotation and Translation] , (Beijing: Commercial Press).

³ Feng Youlan 馮友蘭 *zhongguo zhexue jianshi* 中國哲學簡史[A Brief History of Chinese Philosophy] , (Chongqing: Chongqing Publishing House).

Advice for Good (2004) ⁴and Taoist Ecological Ethics: Life as the Center, respectively, to explain the ecological ethics value of Taoism from the life feelings and the moral concept of equality of life embodied in the moral education book with theological characteristics-advice for good, and published the book Taoist Ecology in 2005, which is a study of Taoist thoughts from the perspective of modern ecology. Since then, research has turned to ecological thought in Taoist practice. Mao Liya explored the ecological ethics connotation of Taoism and its modern value from the environmental protection practices and teachings and precepts of Taoism and formally introduced the study of ecological wisdom of Taoism into practice. Jiang Chaojun's Study on Ecological Ethics in Taoist Disciplines (2011)⁵ made a more explicit study on the ecological ethics in Taoist Disciplines and concluded that “abstaining from killing and protecting students” is the core moral requirement of Taoist Disciplines and rules on the relationship between man and nature.

In addition, with the deepening of the research, a large number of researches have been made on the environmental ethics of Laozi or Zhuangzi, such as Zhang Changhong's Modern Enlightenment of Laozi's Ecological Ethics, Wang Sufen's Ecological Interpretation of Zhuangzi's Man, and Heaven, and Li Zhengang's Zhuangzi's Tao and Modern Ecological Reflection, etc. However, there are few

⁴ Wang Yaoxian 王耀先 *huanjing lunlixue* 環境倫理學[Environmental Ethics] , (Beijing: Higher Education Press).

⁵ Wang Sufen 王素芬 *shunwuziran shengtai yujingxiade zhuangxue yanjiu* 順物自然——生態語境下的莊學研究[Conforming to Nature -- a Study of Zhuang Studies in the Ecological Context] , (Beijing: Beijing People's publishing house).

monographs devoted to Taoist environmental ethics in China. Although the research of Taoist environmental ethics in China lags behind Taoism slightly, Taoism has received more attention in recent years because of its religious form and practicality. Therefore, at present, most of the academic monographs focus on Taoism and Taoism, such as *Clothing for Everything: Taoist Ecological Culture Theory* by Li Yuanguo and Chen Yun, *Taoist Taoism and Ecological Civilization* by Liu Gusheng, or specialize in Taoist environmental ethics, such as *Taoist Ecology* (Le Aiguo, 2004) ⁶ and *Research on Taoist Ecological Thought* (Chen Xia, Chen Yun, Chen Jie, etc.

Environmental ethics originated and developed in the West. With the enlightenment of modern environmental awareness, more and more philosophers and scholars focusing on natural research began to think deeply about the moral essence between man and nature. The development of applied ethics gradually developed and integrated into environmental ethics. In the West, environmental ethics is represented by traditional schools: animal rights theory, bio-centrism, ecocentrism, deep ecology, modern anthropocentrism, etc., focusing on topics such as natural value, natural rights, environmental moral obligations, and environmental moral norms, etc., and expanding traditional ethics to nature. The main viewpoints are as follows: Tom Regan's animal rights theory holds that animals also have the interesting tendency of seeking pleasure and avoiding suffering, and people should respect the rights of animals; Albert Schweitzer, the centrist of biology, advocates moral care and awe for all living things,

⁶ Chen Guying 陳鼓應 *zhuangzi jinzhu jinyi* 莊子今注今譯[Zhuangzi's Annotation and Translation] , (Beijing: Commercial Press).

not just people or animals; Eco-centrism, represented by Aldo Leopold's "Earth Ethics," advocates the nature protection for the community composed of people, creatures and the earth. Arne Naess, the founder of deep ecology, put forward the environmental ethics principles of "ecological center egalitarianism" and "self-realization theory" and believed that the ecosystem has intrinsic value, and people who are part of the ecosystem should be responsible for the intrinsic value of the whole. Bryan Norton extended the traditional anthropocentrism with a new moral standpoint and pointed out the modern anthropocentrism with rational will as reference.

Efforts can be achieved, and the concept of isolation between man and nature in western culture is unacceptable [1].⁷ Roger T. Ames, an American sinologist, thinks that Taoism will be the key to solving the problem of environmental ethics, and Fei Zhengqing, an American historian, thinks that Taoism's thought about man and nature is the most rational and harmonious. Thirdly, Australian environmental philosophers Selfan and Bennett, in their book *Taoism and Deep Ecology*, think that Taoism can provide many ideological resources for deep ecology, thus greatly enriching the theory of deep ecology. American environmental ethicist Callicott called Taoism "the deep ecology of East Asia" and believed that Taoism's "conformity to nature" was closely related to the natural intrinsic value theory of environmental ethics⁸. Passmore, an Australian environmental ethicist, believes that the ecological wisdom of Chinese Taoism will prevent environmental damage and harm western culture. Rolston, an

⁷ Lynn. W., 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis', *Science*, Vol 155 (1967).

⁸ Lovelock. J. Gaia, *A New look at Life on Earth*. Oxford.

American environmental ethicist, pointed out in a neutral position that although Taoism provided valuable theoretical resources to various fields such as western science or ecology, the different discourse systems between the East and the West might make the wrong application of Taoism in western civilization, and only regarded Taoism as inspiration and reference. It is worth mentioning that Taoism and Ecology, the proceedings of the International Conference on Taoism and Ecology (1988)⁹ held by Harvard University, is a concentrated exchange of views of international academic circles, which is of great significance to the study of Taoist environmental ethics in China and the West.

Generally speaking, the study of Taoism and Taoist ecological ethics in China mainly stays in the basic theory¹⁰. Foreign scholars' research on Taoist ecological thought mostly focuses on some basic concepts and then tries to use them to deal with the current ecological crisis by changing the existing ecological concepts of human beings. Specifically, the research on Taoism is mostly combined with other cultural forms, such as Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, or turned to more specific research: the ecological thought research of Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi. At first, the research on Taoist ecological thought relied on the theoretical nature of Taoism, focusing on the philosophical and theological theories in Taoist teachings. Later, after many scholars paid attention to practical research, the characteristics of Taoism as a realistic religion were revealed, and “Taoist ecology” was gradually established.

⁹ Regan. T., *The Case for Animal Rights*. Routledge.

¹⁰ Lovelock. J. Gaia, *A New look at Life on Earth*. Oxford.

However, Taoism and Taoist ecological thought research are mostly interpreted from environmental philosophy rather than the specific perspective of environmental ethics¹¹. At the same time, there is also a lack of comparative study between Taoism, Taoism, and modern environmental ethics, which makes it difficult to grasp Taoism and Taoist environmental ethics. Based on this research situation, this paper makes a comparative study of Taoism and environmental ethics and tries to make up for this gap¹².

1.4 Research Methods and Ideas

The research methods of this paper mainly include literature research, conceptual analysis, and comparative research. First of all, I am familiar with Taoism and Taoist classics such as Laozi, Zhuangzi, and Taiping Classic, and collect and study all kinds of related research works to fully understand the theoretical research results of Taoism and Taoist ecological thoughts. At the same time, the basic ideas and concepts of western environmental ethics are sorted out and analyzed through previous academic monographs. On this basis, a comparative study is made between them from a unique perspective.

The specific research ideas of this paper are as follows: Taking Taoism and Western environmental ethics as the research objects, through the method of

¹¹ Wang Sufen 王素芬 *shunwuziran shengtai yujingxiade zhuangxue yanjiu* 順物自然——生態語境下的莊學研究[Conforming to Nature -- a Study of Zhuang Studies in the Ecological Context] , (Beijing: Beijing People's publishing house).

¹² Yang Tongjin 楊通進 *zouxian shenceng huanbao* 走向深層的環保[Towards Deep Environmental Protection] , (Chengdu: Sichuan people's publishing house)

combining literature research, theoretical research, and comparative research, this paper tries to start with the introduction of the development of environmental ethics at home and abroad and discusses the philosophical basis of “harmony between man and nature” and “respecting Taoism and virtue” in Taoist ecological thought, focusing on the theoretical comparative study of Taoism and environmental ethics from the aspects of natural value, moral rights, and subject obligations, and explaining the practice of Taoism.

2 The Philosophical Basis of Taoist Ecological Thought

2.1 Concepts of “Heaven” and “Man” in Taoism

The ancient discussion on the relationship between heaven and man did not start from the point of view of the unity of heaven and man at the beginning, but it took a long time to gradually form the overall tone of “the unity of heaven and man” in Chinese philosophy¹³. The historical origin of the discussion on the relationship between heaven and man begins with the connotation of the categories of “heaven” and “man” in ancient China. About “human,” there is not much difference between ancient and modern concepts. It is only necessary to distinguish the whole person from the person in connotation. As for the concept of “heaven,” it has many different meanings because of its special cultural status. We now regard it as the “heaven” of

¹³ Zhou Guoping 周國平 *shijie huanjing zhexue* 世界環境哲學[World Environmental Philosophy] , (Beijing: China Forestry Press).

nature, and in the past, it was also regarded as the master with the meaning of personality gods and a summary of the operation law of all things.

Taoism's "heaven" is referred to as the morality of human society and the laws of all things. As the founder of Taoism, Laozi's "Heaven" has eliminated the ancient personality divinity, preferring a kind of natural "Heaven" under the control of "Tao," "Man, earth, heaven, heaven, Taoism and nature".¹⁴ Thus, heaven acts on people in the form of "Heaven" and "Nature" First of all, wearing a bullnose means "people", and "heaven" is the nature of nature; Being human is the conduct of doing nothing: "Being the ruler of the ancient world, doing nothing is just a virtue," "Doing nothing is called heaven"¹⁵. Taoism deeply influenced Neo-Confucianism in the Song and Ming Dynasties on the relationship between heaven and man ontology. Based on Mencius' theory of mind and nature, Zhang Zai and Er Cheng absorbed the moral and regular explanation of "heaven" from Laozi and Zhuangzi, expanded the meaning of "heaven" more richly and connected with human nature more closely. In ancient times, the discussion on the relationship between heaven and man started a long time ago, and it has always been an important topic for ancient thinkers to discuss. According to the different understanding of "heaven" and the influence of their respective philosophical systems, there are differences in their views on heaven and man, which can be roughly divided into three categories: Dong Zhongshu's view on heaven and

¹⁴ Yang Tongjin 楊通進 *zouxiang shenceng huanbao* 走向深層的環保[Towards Deep Environmental Protection], (Chengdu: Sichuan people's publishing house) .

¹⁵ Lou Yulie 樓宇烈 *zouxiang shenceng huanbao Wangbi jijiaoshi* 王弼集校釋[Wang Bi Proofreading and Interpretation], (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company) .

man represented by “the induction of heaven and man,” which regards natural phenomena of “heaven,” human physiology and activities as the will of “heaven,” and

“The difference between heaven and man” is a common viewpoint of thinkers with a materialist view of nature. In this process, the materiality of “Heaven” and “Man” is usually placed in the noumenon position. For example, Wang Chong attributed both to the result of the operation of “Qi.” Although Xunzi did not put forward the original theory of Qi, he also criticized the will and dominance of “Heaven” and acknowledged the regularity of nature, and people should exert their subjective initiative according to the law, that is, “making the destiny for use,” and Liu Yuxi was absorbing it. It can be seen that the focus of the view of heaven and man based on natural materialism lies in the distinction between “heaven” and “man” and the adaptation of “man” to “heaven.” Corresponding to its view of “Heaven,” Taoism holds the view of “the unity of heaven and man,” which is also the main argument of the view of heaven and man in ancient China and the core concept of traditional culture. Taoism's thought of “the unity of heaven and man,” which originated from Laozi and formed in Zhuangzi, is a view of heaven and man with “Tao” as the overall control, nature as the principle, heaven, man and Tao as a whole, in other words, “the unity of heaven and man.” Laozi was the earliest thinker who attributed the relationship between heaven and man to harmony. He said, “The Tao is big, the sky is big, the earth is big, and the man is big”¹⁶. People, heaven, earth, and Tao are juxtaposed, and

¹⁶ Feng Youlan 馮友蘭 *zhongguo zhexue jianshi* 中國哲學簡史[A Brief History of Chinese Philosophy], (Chongqing: Chongqing Publishing House).

the harmonious unity of people and heaven lies in nature's inaction to Tao. Both natural heaven and human embody the highest natural law, and they should also abide by the principles of Tao, namely, humanity and heaven. From Laozi to Zhuangzi, because the connotation of “heaven” has been extended, it not only includes the natural heaven referred to by Laozi but also represents “Tao,” so Zhuangzi's “harmony between man and nature” also has richer content. On the one hand, compared with Laozi, Zhuangzi raised the status of heaven even more, and in the process of “the unity of heaven and man,” he emphasized the “catering” of “people” to “heaven”: “Some people, heaven also; There are days, and there are days. Man can't have a sky, and nature is also “¹⁷, thus emphasizing the concept of” man and heaven “as one of nature and man; On the other hand, they are often compared, which further highlights the distinction between “heaven” and “people,” such as “harmony with people means people's happiness; Being in harmony with heaven is called “happiness in heaven”¹⁸, although there is an element of excessive suppression of human's natural position, it reflects that “heaven” and “human” have reached a harmonious state in opposition and unity.

2.2 Value the Morality and Virtue

Taoism, with Laozi and Zhuangzi as its core, always puts “Tao” and “virtue” in the first place in theory. The noumenon world established by both “Tao” and “virtue”

¹⁷ Chen Guying 陳鼓應 *Laozi jinzhuyi* 老子今注今譯[Laozi's Annotation and Translation] , (Beijing: Commercial Press).

¹⁸ Wangbo 王博 *zhuangzi zhixue* 莊子哲學[Zhuangzi Philosophy] , (Beijing: Peking University Press).

constitutes the fundamental premise of Taoism and is also the philosophical foundation of Taoist environmental ethics.

As for “Tao,” it is not only the core of Taoism and Taoism named after it but also an important concept of Chinese philosophy. Whether it is pre-Qin Taoism or Taoism system, “Tao” has the characteristics of origin and ontology. The word “Tao” has a long history as an abstract concept, such as Fang Zhaohui's test: “If we look at the origin of the word, we find that in early documents such as the pre-Qin Dynasty, one of the original words of “Tao” was “guide”, and its original meaning was “guide people,” but there was no obvious “transcendental” connotation in the word, and the metaphysical noumenon meaning of “Tao” started from Laozi. “Tao” is before the existence of heaven and earth, which embodies the original characteristics of “Tao.” On the other hand, the abstract Tao also shows certain ontological characteristics in Laozi, such as “opposing the movement of Tao, using it for the weak”¹⁹, “Tao is the master of all things”, and “Tao” is not only the sum of laws of nature but also the master of them. Later, Zhuangzi inherited Laozi's view of “Tao” and put the characteristics of “Tao” more towards regularity and transcendence, and weakened the role of “Tao” as the origin.

The word “de” also had an original abstract meaning before Laozi endowed it with a unique Taoist connotation. In the discourse of Laozi and Zhuangzi, compared with the grandeur and transcendence of Tao, the ontological meaning covered by

¹⁹ Chen Guying 陳鼓應 *Laozi jinzhu jinyi* 老子今注今譯[Laozi's Annotation and Translation] , (Beijing: Commercial Press).

virtue is more realistic. There are 45 words and phrases about “virtue” in Laozi, such as “the content of Confucius and virtue, the only way to obey”, “virtue” is an abstract attribute derived from “Tao,” and “Tao” and “virtue” have a concrete relationship. Wang Bi's interpretation of “virtue”: “virtue, you get it,” “Why do you get it? By the Tao. “ Modern Chen Guying thinks: “The function of things embodied in ' Tao' is called' virtue’”²⁰. “Morality” has become a necessary factor in the process of Tao falling to the form. Based on this, it has different properties and contents when combined with specific people and things. When Tao exists in things, it shows the nature of natural things. When it exists in human beings, human nature shows human virtue. Of course, regardless of Laozi's or Zhuangzi's “virtue,” whether it is “human virtue” or “material virtue,” it is always necessary to follow the Tao and conform to nature. Therefore, compared with the supremacy of “Tao,” “virtue” connects people and things more realistically, and the inherent values brought by its natural nature are also the focus of environmental ethics.

Specifically, “Tao gives birth to everything,” “Tao follows nature,” and “Tao” from “virtue” constitute the ecological connotation of Taoism “respecting Tao and valuing virtue .” Tao” is undoubtedly the core category in the Taoist and Taoist conceptual world, and the way that “Tao” concretely shows its core control function is “living” all things. In the whole abstract process of Tao's “life” of all things, it gives full play to its origin and ontological attributes in the Taoist philosophical thought system, thus showing the ecological implication contained in Taoist thought. First of

²⁰ Wangbo 王博 *zhuangzi zhexue* 莊子哲學[Zhuangzi Philosophy] , (Beijing: Peking University Press).

all, “Tao” is the only source of all things, and it is transformed into concrete things in no particular order. In the Taoist ideological system, elements such as “Qi,” “Qi,” and so on are often used as the physical referents of “Tao” to achieve “all things.” Since then, it has shown that people are of the same origin and intimacy with all things. Laozi’s “Tao gives birth to everything” is described as an abstract process of “being lonely and lonely, being independent without changing, walking around without danger”. Although Zhuangzi pays attention to the spiritual pursuit of the realm of “Tao,” his “Tao” also plays the role of the origin of everything. It can be seen from the above that “Tao gives birth to all things” shows the ecological view that Taoist people and natural objects have the same root and homology. Since things and people are on the same road, they should not hurt each other, especially human beings with subjective initiative. Based on the philosophy of “Tao gives birth to all things,” Taoism has formed the ecological, holistic view of “Heaven, Earth, and Man” under Tao, warning people that the plunder and destruction of nature will inevitably endanger people’s survival, which is of great significance for environmental protection.

As an entry, “Nature” does not frequently appear in Laozi and Zhuangzi, but it is often discussed with other core concepts such as Tao, everything, heaven, and earth, which shows its importance. The word “nature,” like “Tao” and “virtue,” has already appeared in ancient culture, but as a specific philosophical concept, it began in Laozi. The most fundamental words about the meaning of “nature” in Laozi are: “Man rules the land, the land rules the heaven, the heaven rules the road, and the road rules the nature.” From Laozi’s cosmological point of view, “nature” is one of the properties of

“Tao .”From this point of view, its theoretical position is no less than that of “Tao,” and Zhuangzi also said: “Since the root of this world, there is no heaven and earth, and it has been fixed since ancient times”²¹. Therefore, as far as “Tao” is concerned, whether it is its existence or the way of transforming everything,

For people, “nature” also means the spiritual pursuit of life, and the way to realize “nature” lies in “assisting the nature of all things but not daring to do it,” that is, “doing nothing .”People live by the principle of doing nothing and abiding by the Tao and conform to all things in nature. “Taoism is natural” asks people to restrain their desires, regulate their behavior, and not interfere with foreign things. Generally speaking, “Tao follows nature” can be interpreted as: “Tao” does not depend on the existence of all things, but takes “nature” as its essence, and changes all things without interference, so that all things are born with “virtue” and exist and develop according to their nature. Based on this primitive theory, Taoism has formed an ecological view of respecting everything and a natural attitude of treating things with “inaction .”On the theoretical level of environmental ethics, “Taoism and Nature” is not only the conscious awareness of equality of all things but also the environmental protection methodology of respecting and protecting nature with a responsible attitude of “not acting recklessly.”

²¹ Le Aiguo 樂愛國 *dao jiao sheng taixue* 道教生態學[Patriotic Taoist Ecology] , (Beijing: Social Science Literature Press).

“Tao” and “De” are social-ethical norms from the perspective of Confucianism, while “Tao” and “De” in Taoist ideas are relatively focused on ontological significance, not concepts directly oriented to people.

Practically speaking, Taoism's “guiding the Tao with morality” can be used as an effective way to realize the harmony between man and nature. Its rationality lies in: the main reason for the conflict between man and nature lies in the wrong positioning of man's role and the lack of environmental morality. Marx's ecological view thinks that when people achieve all-around development, they realize the common development of man and nature because human beings realize all-around development on the premise of a comprehensive and correct grasp of the laws of nature. On the contrary, to achieve the reconciliation between man and nature, it is necessary to know nature, that is, to know and respect the nature of all things; On the other hand, people should also extend moral care to the natural environment. Only after the awareness of moral responsibility is formed can people take moral actions towards nature, which is also the “virtue” required in environmental protection. To sum up, the environmental ethics mentioned today can be regarded as one of the meanings of “virtue” in Taoism. According to “leading the way with virtue,” we should strengthen people's self-cultivation and the construction of environmental ethics so that people can conform to nature.

3 General situation of environmental ethics

The rise of western environmental ethics is accompanied by the aggravation of the ecological crisis and the growth of environmental science such as ecology.

However, the ethics between man and nature in western civilization has a longer historical origin, and finally created a discipline that focuses on environmental ethics as the philosophical thinking object, and then developed into various schools.

3.1 Development of Western Environmental Ethics

Western environmental ethics reflects the moral relationship between man and nature. Because of the historical environment, people in early society seldom looked at nature from the relationship between man and nature but simply explained nature or nature alone. This kind of earliest thinking about the environment also greatly influenced how Westerners think about nature in later generations. In other words, the ideological origin of environmental ethics comes from the view of nature in traditional western philosophy and religious culture.

The western philosophy tradition started from ancient Greek philosophy. In the ancient Greek period, the concept of “nature” meant the nature of things, and Aristotle made a special explanation of “nature .” He extended the connotation of “nature” to “the origin and reason of things' movement and change .” It can be seen that “nature” is more a way for ancient Greek philosophers to explain the principles and laws of the world origin. Correspondingly, in ancient Greece, the “nature” of modern people was called “world” or “universe .” Represented by Aristotle's view of nature, he believes that the study of nature must not be separated from the moving

things. The root of movement and change lies in the material cause, the form cause, the motive cause, and the purpose cause. These four causes are essentially a summary of classical Greek philosophy, in which the purpose cause has been paid special attention by himself. As a master of Greek philosophy, Aristotle believes that the existence and movement of things have a purpose orientation, which is subjective and different from later generations. It can be seen that in the philosophy of ancient Greece, everything in nature has self-worth and rationality of independent existence.

The history and civilization of the West are deeply influenced by religion, among which Christianity is undoubtedly the first belief in the West, which has influenced the spirit and thought of Westerners for thousands of years, and the ethical attitude of the relationship between man and nature directly determines the keynote of the natural view of the Western society. There are many views on environmental ethics in Christian doctrine, and with the change of secular social concepts, adjustments will be made in due course. Generally speaking, in Christian thought, the relationship between man and nature mainly focuses on three kinds of views (these three kinds of views are also the main discussion directions of later ecological theology/Christian greening), which can be summarized as a dualism between man and nature, equality theory and God's trust theory. Dualism holds that man and nature should not be equal in value, and the significance of nature being created by God is to serve humanity. This view is Christianity's most primitive ethical attitude towards the relationship between man and nature, which has exerted a major influence on western ethical thoughts. Perhaps it played a role in fueling the

emergence of anthropocentrism in the Renaissance and the formation of the modern mechanical world outlook. Equality theory and God's trust theory are the theories discovered in the development of modern ecological theology. Although their influence is less than a dichotomy, they play a positive role in the ecological turn of Christianity. Like Lynn White's point of view: Christianity declares that the domination of human beings over nature is the historical root of the current ecological crisis in the West.

The modern western thoughts on man and nature are rooted in the philosophical view of nature since Greece and the Christian view of environmental ethics. Under both, the western countries have moved towards the ethical situation of the opposition between man and nature in modern times. Although the civilization level and scientific and technological level have leaped this process, it has also led to today's grim environmental situation. However, both also have positive aspects of ecological friendliness in the historical process and theoretical development, which also laid the ideological foundation for the breeding and emergence of modern environmental ethics.

3.2 The Gestation of Environmental Ethics Thought

The gestation of environmental ethics thought has also gone through a long time, mainly divided into theoretical germination and social environment gestation. The two aspects may be interspersed in the historical process, but they impact environmental ethics according to the order from the former to the latter.

The first is theoretical preparation. Influenced by the earliest social-ecological consciousness and the long-standing need to expand the western concept of natural rights, the western ethics circle tries to extend the scope of ethical concern to the non-human world. The benevolent animal movement in Britain and America is regarded as the “enlightenment movement” of environmental ethics. The early British benevolent movement aimed at opposing the view of Descartes dualism that animals were regarded as machines, believing that cruelty to animals would make people cruel, and advocating that people who are the darling of God should care about these appendages created by God from the perspective of “God's trust theory .” America's benevolent movement is nearly one hundred years later than Britain's, but its criticism is stronger than Britain's. They think that rough treatment of animals will degrade people's moral level, which will lead to the degradation of human civilization in the long run; They also criticized the ethical concepts in theology, but unlike the position of British benevolence, they did not try to revise them, but firmly opposed the animal ethics in the Bible, and thought that people were not superior to other animals in a moral position, among which E.P.Evans was the representative. Although the early animal benevolence has a great inspiration to modern environmental ethics, it is undeniable that people's ethical concern for animals in this period is more from the standpoint of anthropocentrism, and in the later period, people tended to get rid of anthropocentrism, but they do not have a complete sense of value equality.

In addition, western utilitarianism, as an important theoretical basis of animal rights theory (liberation theory), also enlightens the breeding of environmental ethics. Utilitarianism was initiated by the British philosopher Jeremy Bentham. His utilitarianism focused on “the principle of maximum happiness” and believed that animals could feel pain and happiness; that is to say, when considering the total amount of pain and happiness, animals and people should be considered equally. Later, John Mill also advocated the popularization of legal rights to the animal kingdom. The above two utilitarianism thoughts directly influence the theory of Peter singer, the representative of animal liberation theory in environmental ethics, and the concept of equality and intrinsic value factors among them also enlighten the turn of western natural ethics.

However, modern western environmental thought began to sprout, mainly due to the modern western environmental protection movement. Since the 19th century, the western ecological crisis began to break out. At that time, the increasingly bad living environment aroused people's awakening of ecological consciousness. First, some people began to think about the root causes of the environmental crisis with anthropocentrism values, among which the 19th-century American resource protection movement was the most representative. This campaign is aimed at the lack of resources and biodiversity caused by the over-utilization of native resources in the United States since modern times. Later, a group of thinkers joined in this environmental protection movement, among which David Thoreau was the representative. His *Walden Lake* (1854) aroused people's natural feelings of nature

and became a model of harmony between man and nature. This example of arousing people's awareness of environmental protection in the form of natural literature also happened in the 1960s, one hundred years later, when a biologist named Rachel Carson published a book in which the phenomenon of humans using pesticides to destroy habitats was deeply exposed. This book is *Silent Spring*, and Carson and her works greatly promoted the wave of the modern environmental movement. To sum up, the natural spirit and appeal in the environmental protection movement provide an important social soil for the emergence of environmental ethics.

4 Comparative Theoretical Research

Value theory is an important topic of traditional ethics, and it is also the key object of theoretical research of environmental ethics. Among them is mainly natural value theory, that is, the value discussion of various natural objects in the ecosystem. Neither Taoism nor Taoism has consciously explored the value existing in nature, but it is not without thinking about it. Whether in Taoist classics or Taoist teachings, we can find the unique natural values of Taoists and Taoism, and there are many similarities and differences between them and western environmental ethics.

On the discussion of value theory, there are basic differences of opinion among ethical principles: the subjective and objective points of value judgment standards. In traditional western ethics, subjectivity is the standard of value judgment, the subject of value is only people, and people's interests are the purpose of all values.

After the rise of modern environmental ethics, the value orientation no longer belongs only to human beings. With the deepening of environmental ethics theory, axiology began to turn to natural value, and the standard of value became objective gradually. In environmental ethics, the category and scope of natural value develop synchronously with expanding people's concern for nature. According to this, the giver of natural value is the closest natural objects to humans, namely animals. Tom Reagan, the main advocate of animal rights theory, believes that the foundation of individual rights lies in the existence of self-worth. People have rights because they are the “subject of life,” and the conditions are feeling, memory and future consciousness, feeling pain and happiness, having preferences and expectations, and having the ability to realize their wishes²². He believes that some animals also have these characteristics, so animals are also the “subject of life,” and they also have the ability to be independent of others. He called it “inherent value,” so people should respect animals' right to live, not just treat them as tools.

Paul Taylor, the centrist of biology, extended the intrinsic value from animals to all organisms and took “life” as the only basis to judge the existence of self-value, holding that all living things, including human beings, have completely equal self-values, breaking the hierarchical value theory of animal rights theory. It also emphasizes that the innate value of something for its purpose is based on its interests (good of being) to form an ethical attitude of respecting nature.

²² *Taishang laojun shuo changqingjing jingzhu* 太上老君說常清淨經註[The Annotation of Taishang Laojun said Chang Qingjing] , (Daozang: Volume 17 Beijing: Cultural Relics Publishing House).

To sum up, the Taoist natural values represented by the concept of “useless use” are similar to the internal values rising in the West to a great extent, and they all advocate judging natural values from an objective angle. Taoism creates value objectivity through the function of “Tao”, while western environmental ethicists demonstrate objectivity through metaphysical analysis of value generation. Although Chinese and western discourse systems and ontological foundations are different, they have reached similarities in environmental ethics.

Because Taoism and western environmental ethicists hold the objective principle of value evaluation, it brings another common point: an equal value. From the perspective of Taoism, the objective primordial theory of “Tao gives birth to all things” gives natural things a natural basis for existence²³, that is, all things contain Tao, and if people and things are “viewed by Tao,” there is no distinction between high and low; Western theories, represented by Rolston's axiology, are based on the premise of recognizing and respecting the intrinsic value of organisms or ecosystems, and also advocate treating natural objects with an equal view. In addition, the creativity and root of “Tao” at the natural level are similar to Rolston's theory, which emphasizes that all objective values come from the creative activities of nature, as he said: “Nature is the real creator”²⁴.

²³ *Dongxuan lingbao liuzhai shizhi shengjijing* 洞玄靈寶六齋十直聖紀經[Dongxuan Lingbao Liuzhai Shizhi Holy Scripture] , (Daozang: Volume 28 Beijing: Cultural Relics Publishing House).

²⁴ Wang Ming 王明 *taipingjing hejiao* 太平經合校[The Annotation of Taiping Economic] , (Beijing: Social Science Literature Press).

Moreover, this view of equality is single moral reasoning. Although the conclusion that “people are equal” lacks the foundation of cultural care, this reasoning conclusion has opened a deeper gap between man and nature. Rather, the western view of nature has developed from “unequal opposition” to “equal opposition.”

5 Conclusion

The research object of this paper is the ecological thought of Taoism, and the environmental ethics thought based on western theories. Through the basic analysis of the two, it is preliminarily realized that the environmental ethics concept is based on the philosophy of “harmony between man and nature” and “respecting Taoism and respecting virtue” in Taoist ecological thought. Among them, the “harmony between man and nature” is synthesized from the dialectical relationship of “heaven to man” and “man to heaven,” which further gave birth to the weak anthropocentrism position and ecological, holistic concept of Taoism. Respect for Taoism and respect for morality is a core philosophical concept composed of three concepts: Taoism gives birth to everything, Taoism follows nature, and morality leads to Taoism. From this, we derive the value of equality of everything and the moral standpoint of treating natural rights concerning life, abstaining from killing, and following nature. Environmental ethics is a comprehensive theory that reflects on the relationship between human and environmental ethics, focusing on the intrinsic value of nature, the moral position of human beings in ecology, and the ecological, holistic view.

Through the comparative study of theories, it is concluded that both Taoism and environmental ethics recognize the intrinsic value and overall value of natural objects in the natural value theory, respect the survival right and development right of natural objects and the natural rights of human beings in the natural rights theory, emphasize the natural obligations of human beings in the moral obligation theory, and conclude that Taoism is weakened anthropocentrism. However, there are obvious differences in ideological essence, moral position, theoretical position, and ethical methods. Combined with the practical analysis, it is concluded that Taoism embodies certain practical guiding significance from the specific ethics of environmental ethics and the practice of environmental ethics.

To sum up, Taoism and Taoism have abundant ecological wisdom, and they are environmental ethics ideas based on rigorous philosophical thinking. More than that, the Taoist thought is analysed from the perspective of modern environmental ethics, and the environmental ethics contained in it also has bright modern color, many of which are enough to guide people in modern and future times, in China and even around the world to shape a healthy and harmonious environmental ethics system. Whether it is the moral cultivation of environmental ethics or moral norms, Taoist ecological thought can provide energy in the form of ideology.

Taoist and Taoism, born out of ancient society, have been tempered by history, not only play an important role in traditional culture but also guide Chinese people's thinking in words and deeds in the form of national concept, which has deeply influenced the nation and individuals, and even after thousands of years of

observation from new perspectives such as environmental ethics, it still has a powerful guiding role. Connecting and comparing Taoism with today's urgently-needed environmental ethics construction, excavating Taoism's ecological thoughts, and absorbing their correct environmental ethics ideas are innovative explanations of Taoism and a display of its modern significance. More importantly, using the existing local traditional ideas to provide theoretical inspiration and cultural support for the national environmental ethics construction will build the environmental ethics order in China and even the world in integrating Chinese and Western.

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