

Imagining an Ecological Civilization in Modern China

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Passages from China's foundational texts cited by environmentalists in China:

1. "Heaven and humankind are one" 天人合一 (Confucian and Daoist texts)
2. "Do not interfere with the farming seasons and the crops will be more than can be consumed; do not let finely meshed nets be cast in ponds and lakes and the fish will be more than can be consumed; let axes enter the mountain groves only at the appropriate times and the timber will be more than can be used." (Mencius 4th c BC, translation from Gardner, p. 54)
3. "Man models himself on earth, earth on heaven, heaven on the way, and the way on that which is naturally so." (*Daodejing* 3rd c. BC, translation from Lau, p. 82)
4. "He who is most perfectly *cheng* (truthful) is able to give full realization to his human nature; able to give full realization to his human nature, he is then able to give full realization to the human nature of others; able to give full realization to the human nature of others, he is then able to give full realization to the nature of other creatures; able to give full realization to the nature of other creatures, he can then assist in the transformative and nourishing process of heaven and earth. If he can assist in the transformative and nourishing processes of heaven and earth, he can then form a trinity with heaven and earth." (*Doctrine of the Mean* ch. 22, 2nd c. BC?; translation from Gardner, p. 124)
5. Heaven is my father and earth is my mother, and even such a small creature as I finds an intimate place in their midst. Therefore, that which fills the universe I regard as my body and that which directs the universe I consider as my nature. All people are my brothers and sisters, and all things are my companions. (Zhang Zai, 11th c; translation from Chan, p. 497)
6. The great man regards heaven and earth and the myriad things as one body. He regards the world as one family and the country as one person....When we see a child about to fall into a well, we cannot help a feeling of alarm and commiseration. This shows that his humanity forms one body with the child. It may be objected that the child belongs to the same species. Again, when we observe the pitiful cries and frightened appearances of birds and animals about the slaughtered, we cannot help feeling an "inability to bear" their suffering. This shows that our humanity forms one body with birds and animals. It may be objected that birds and animals are sentient beings as we are. But when we see plants broken and destroyed, we cannot help a feeling of pity. This shows that our humanity forms one body with plants. It may be said that plants are living things as we are. Yet even when we see tiles and stones shattered and crushed, we cannot help a feeling of regret. This shows that our humanity forms one body with tiles and stones. (Wang Yangming 15th-16th c., translation from Roetz, pp. 24-25.)

Pan Yue, Vice Minister of Environmental Protection ("Ecological Wisdom of the Ages," 2011)

- China is unique and its most extraordinary characteristic is that, for thousands of years, it has maintained a nation state united by roots, language, and ethnicity. This was possible only because of the deep ecological wisdom contained within the country's cultural ideals. This wisdom permeates China's ethics and institutions, is practiced in its way of life and perpetuated by its historical traditions.
- One of the core principles of traditional Chinese culture is that of harmony between humans and nature. Different philosophies all emphasize the political wisdom of a balanced environment. Whether it is the Confucian idea of humans and nature becoming one, the Daoist view of the Dao reflecting nature, or the Buddhist belief that all living things are equal, Chinese philosophy has helped our culture to survive for thousands of years. It can be a powerful weapon in preventing an environmental crisis and building a harmonious society.