

# CHINESE CULTURAL LANDSCAPES: FROM THE IDEAL OF A BALANCED BOND BETWEEN HUMANS AND NATURE TO ECOLOGICAL FORMS OF LIFE

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**Keywords:** Cultural landscape protection. Environmental philosophy. Taoist philosophical thought. Unity of heaven and man.

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**Résumé:** Jusqu'à présent, le développement humain a eu pour corolaire la destruction des paysages culturels. Avec le développement de la civilisation industrielle, les gens ne profitent pas seulement du bonheur qu'elle leur apporte, mais sont également confrontés à divers problèmes liés aux paysages culturels. La philosophie de l'environnement est une philosophie moderne qui considère la relation entre l'homme et la nature comme une question fondamentale, et qui met l'accent sur la protection des paysages culturels. L'analyse de la philosophie environnementale de la Chine ancienne montre que les anciens penseurs se souciaient de tout ce qui se trouve au ciel et sur la terre et qu'ils exploraient en profondeur des questions telles que le développement harmonieux entre l'homme et la nature, offrant ainsi une nouvelle approche de la protection des paysages culturels chinois. Prenant l'exemple de la philosophie environnementale taoïste, cet article propose une analyse préliminaire de la définition des paysages culturels, du développement de la philosophie environnementale et de la philosophie environnementale taoïste. Partant de là, il explore le rôle de la philosophie environnementale telle que "l'unité du ciel et de l'homme" dans la construction de la civilisation écologique, apportant ainsi de nouvelles idées pour la protection des paysages culturels.

**Mots-clés:** Protection des paysages culturels. Philosophie de l'environnement. Pensée philosophique taoïste. L'unité du ciel et de l'homme.

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# CHINESE CULTURAL LANDSCAPES: FROM THE IDEAL OF A BALANCED BOND BETWEEN HUMANS AND NATURE TO ECOLOGICAL FORMS OF LIFE<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** Thus far, human development has been achieved at the cost of the destruction of cultural landscapes. With advent of industrial civilization, people have gained happiness and conveniences, but also confronted various cultural landscape predicaments. Environmental philosophy, a contemporary philosophy that regards the relationship between humans and nature as a fundamental issue, has focused on the protection of cultural landscapes. An analysis of ancient Chinese environmental philosophy demonstrates that ancient thinkers cared about everything in heaven and earth, and explored issues, such as a harmonious development between humans and nature, offering a novel approach to the preservation of Chinese cultural landscapes. Using Taoist environmental philosophy as an exemplar, this article provides a preliminary analysis of the definition of cultural landscapes, development of environmental philosophy and Taoist environmental philosophy. Building upon this foundation, it explores the role of environmental philosophies, such as “unity of heaven and man” in construction of ecological civilization, providing fresh perspectives for cultural landscape conservation.

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## INTRODUCTION

China’s cultural landscapes are refined by the mutual assimilation and integration of art from diverse ethnic groups and regions during the long-term course of ethnic development. Chinese cultural landscape art embodies elements and cultural remains from different regions, ethnic groups and historical eras, forming a product of multicultural integration. “Old things” refer to various traditional practices, values, techniques and knowledge contained in traditional Chinese agricultural culture. The process of industrialization and urban expansion has led to the exploitation of natural resources by humans, giving rise to a series of environmental and cultural landscape complications. These problems have gravely affected the growth and sustainability of cultural landscapes, jeopardizing cultural and historical inheritance. Consequently, people have re-evaluated the methods employed in safeguarding cultural landscapes.

While people often rely on technological advancements, scientific methods are grounded in objective existence and do not address predicaments fundamentally. On the other

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hand, the method of environmental philosophy is rooted in analyzing the ethical relationship between humans and nature, the placement of value in nature and the consequent human behavior towards nature. To inspect the bond between cultural landscapes and philosophy, one must delve significantly into the value-driving force of environmental philosophy, analyzing its influence and ramifications. Education and publicity activities can be carried out to raise people's awareness and importance of environmental and cultural protection. They can formulate and implement laws and regulations to protect and manage important cultural landscape resources. It is possible to strengthen interdisciplinary cooperation, encourage communication and cooperation among scholars, researchers and decision-makers, and promote sustainable development practices. Through these efforts, we can help bridge the gap between concepts and practices, and promote the better integration of cultural landscape protection and sustainable development goals into real society.

Scholars have investigated the understanding and practice of heritage protection and heritage tourism responsibilities from the multiple stakeholders' standpoint, using, as an example, China's exceptional world heritage: the Cultural Landscape of Honghe Hani Rice Terraces. The local villagers, who are predominantly ethnic minorities, safeguard the heritage landscape of this protected site through their traditional religious and cultural practices. In recent years, there has been a rise in conflicts due to the inequality between their responsibility to maintain cultural landscapes and their capacity to benefit from the tourism industry and receive compensation (Gao; Lin; Zhang, 2021, p. 193; Vesely, 2020, p. 681). In an effort to consolidate various research perspectives in the current state of intangible cultural landscapes, scholars have conducted comprehensive analyses of systematic landscape compositions of intangible cultural forms in China's agricultural cultural heritage and endeavored to identify new value references and characteristics from old sources. Moreover, by examining and elucidating the development and emergent concepts of diverse aspects of the local environment from the point of view of humanistic agricultural thought, one can observe the industrial forms of intangible cultural landscapes that are connected to them (Wang, 2021, p. 102).

The development of scenic sites in China illustrates the typical attributes of the interactive cultural landscape between humans and nature under the framework of Chinese civilization. Understanding the characteristics of scenic spots and, effectively, safeguarding and managing cultural landscapes can benefit the current practice of protecting and managing scenic sites in China. Based on the academic concept of cultural landscapes, scholars have analyzed the historical evolution of scenic sites in Chinese civilization and typified various forms of human-land relationships. By doing so, they aim to provide insights and inspiration for the protection and management of scenic spots in China (Zhang; Liu, 2018, p. 109). Under the cultural context of the Chinese Bronze Age, bronze ware differed in not only style and type, but also played varying roles in the early countries' formation and in the social

development. Although different regions possess distinct cultural origins and characteristics, they communicate and influence each other continuously, creating a vibrant cultural landscape of the Chinese Bronze Age (Shi, 2019, p. 81).

Western landscape imagery is closely tied to China's cultural landscape. From the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment, China's political, economic, social and cultural historical background, as well as the cultural spirit reflected therein, conformed to Europe's social development and cultural spirit, contributing to the formation of China's ideal and beautiful image in the West (Chaojun, 2020, p. 89).

Cultural landscapes are not merely a matter of scenery. They have a direct impact on human survival, development and value systems. Due to human activities or natural causes, the human cultural landscape environment has been subject to severe damage, leading to increasingly critical cultural landscape problems that afflict contemporary society (Zhou, 2021, p. 91). Environmental philosophy is an emerging concept in the realm of Chinese cultural landscapes that has gradually garnered attention because of its emphasis on ecological issues. Environmental philosophy enables individuals to better comprehend the relationship between humans and cultural landscapes, and also assists them in managing cultural landscape predicaments. Reflecting on philosophical perspectives on cultural landscapes can encourage the interdisciplinary development of cultural landscapes towards multifunctional cultural landscapes and deepen communication and collaboration between cultural landscapes and environmental philosophy (Zhao; Harvey; Gao, 2020, p. 300).

Therefore, pondering environmental philosophy on cultural landscapes is an effective approach to safeguarding cultural landscapes. Chinese traditional philosophy includes Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism and other schools of thought, covering a wealth of Ecosophy and Environmental ethics. For example, Confucianism emphasizes the harmonious relationship between humans and nature; Taoism pursues the nature's rule through inaction; Buddhism emphasizes all living beings' equality and compassion. These ideas have a positive enlightening effect on shaping the relationship between humans and the environment, and achieving sustainable development.

## **1 CULTURAL LANDSCAPE PROTECTION**

### **1.1 DEVELOPMENT STAGES OF CULTURAL LANDSCAPE PROTECTION UNDER ENVIRONMENTAL PHILOSOPHY**

In contemporary times, the issue of cultural landscape protection has increasingly gained prominence, elevating environmental philosophy from the periphery to the center of philosophical discourse. People expect the field of environmental philosophy to offer theoretical guidance for the practice of cultural landscape protection. Building upon this, a

concept of safeguarding landscapes and fostering a positive social atmosphere has emerged to facilitate the protection and governance of cultural landscapes (Liu, 2009, p. 114). Despite variations in ecological and environmental conditions, governance capabilities and systems across the globe, people's environmental philosophy underscores "Chinese characteristics" in the development process. Nonetheless, there is a shared recognition that the Earth serves as a common home for the humanity's survival. Every effort made towards improving the ecological environment constitutes a contribution towards protecting this shared home. Many countries exhibit an open, trusting and cooperative attitude, and endeavor to build a community with a shared future for mankind. The development of environmental philosophy cannot be limited to strict confinement to one nation or place. Rather, it must adopt a global outlook and integrate the accomplishments of environmental philosophy across time and countries.

From a philosophical perspective, environmental philosophy centers on environmental issues and, more importantly, the relationship between humans and nature. At its core is a need to assimilate the nutrients of traditional Chinese philosophy alongside the developmental experience of Western environmental philosophy. It also entails a thorough comprehension of Marx's ecological philosophy to strive for breakthroughs in content system completeness, theoretical depth, philosophical heights and application breadth, culminating in the establishment of a global environmental philosophy system that is oriented towards the new era.

The center of environmental philosophy and cultural landscape protection is centered around the relationship between humans and nature. On this basis, the protection process of Chinese cultural landscapes is reviewed and summarized into four stages.

#### (1) Wilderness protection - the rise of environmental movements

The environmental philosophy of this period is characterized by a reflection on traditional anthropocentrism in the West, with a focus on the nature's inherent values, the advocacy of nature's supremacy, the nature's preservation in its "pure" state and the humans' exclusion from the natural world. In response to these ideals, several movements have emerged, including wilderness protection, animal rights, animal liberation and reservoir development. However, the model of wilderness protection has pivoted Western philosophy from extreme human supremacy to extreme nature supremacy, sparking significant conflict between humans and nature. Moreover, the separation of nature and culture within the World Heritage Convention has a discernible Western cultural tint.

#### (2) Struggle between culture and the wilderness

The wilderness movement has resulted in the displacement of a significant number of indigenous residents living in close proximity to mountains and rivers, culminating in

serious social problems and cultural crises. The notion of wilderness in the West has been subjected to criticism from the vantage points of cultural history and evolutionary theory, where it is regarded as a tool of patriarchy, racialism and colonialism. The idea of wilderness, as a disconnect between humans and nature, is a negation of the nature's evolution and history, mandating a reflection on whether to protect the wilderness or the nature's wildness. Critiques of philosophy assert a need for cultural and human rights equivalence, coupled with the exploration of natural values and their generation and cognitive construction within a multicultural system. Such an endeavor contributes towards the establishment of a perspective on nature that accounts for cultural differences and social constructiveness.

### (3) Decline of wilderness and rise of cultural landscapes

From the perspective of cultural differences, the core issues of environmental ethics play a crucial role. Recognizing the ethical, cultural diversity and constructiveness nature of natural values establishes a means of communication between nature and culture. As international conservation trends continue to evolve, there is an increasing linkage between culture and nature. Consequently, world heritage sites have emerged as a prime beneficiary.

### (4) Global shared responsibility and sustainable development

The fourth stage can be called global shared responsibility and sustainable development. With the acceleration of globalization and the rise of ecological civilization concepts, China and other countries have begun to pay more attention to the concept of global shared responsibility and sustainable development in cultural landscape protection.

At this stage, China actively participates in international cooperation, strengthens exchanges and cooperation with other countries and international organizations in the world, and promotes the global governance of cultural landscape protection and the realization of Sustainable Development Goals. For China, this not only means grasping the relationship between contemporary human society and nature, but also means inheriting traditional culture, innovating and promoting the organic combination of economic development and environmental protection. In terms of sustainable development, China has taken a series of measures to balance economic development and environmental protection, and promote green development and ecological civilization construction. This includes measures, such as strengthening environmental regulation and promoting the use of renewable energy, circular economy and low-carbon development.

As philosophy and practice continue to deepen and evolve, environmental philosophy has transitioned towards a more diverse, integrated and holistic understanding and application. The relationship between people and nature has emerged as a global concern, garnering significant attention. Several aspects have been underscored in this regard. For instance, ecological cultural diversity is integral to realizing sustainable development. On this

premise, a resource protection and management model, rooted in cultural landscapes, has been advocated. The conservation of local landscapes has been included as part of the cultural heritage protection ambit, with cultural heritage protection and sustainable development deemed mutually interdependent and indissoluble.

## 1.2 SIGNIFICANCE OF CULTURAL LANDSCAPE PROTECTION

As urbanization accelerates in China, protecting cultural landscapes has become an inevitable trend. Cultural landscapes serve as unique cultural symbols of a region, providing sustenance to the national spirit while constituting the key to the economic development of a region. Next, the importance of cultural landscape protection is discussed.

### (1) Inheriting culture

Protecting cultural landscapes facilitates their inheritance and promotion (Zhou, 2022, p. 1). Cultural landscapes represent the accumulation of ethnic history and culture, and constitute a precious cultural heritage. Inheriting and promoting cultural landscapes enables the maintenance of complete historical memory and the creation of new cultural elements that infuse local culture with greater significance (Jane; Katie, 2020, p. 265). Any place can be regarded as a cultural palace, shining with brilliant cultural light and bearing profound cultural accumulation and infinite cultural roots. Taoism and Mohism+ are two important schools of ancient Chinese philosophical thought, with some similarities and differences in their viewpoints. Through these historical and cultural landscapes, we can traverse the time and space tunnel of history to gain a lucid understanding of the cultural backdrop and social status of that era, enabling China's long-standing historical and cultural heritage to endure interminably.

Protecting cultural landscapes can enhance the local residents' sense of national honor and identity (Zhou, 2022, p. 16). The process of unearthing and bequeathing cultural landscapes provides people with a deeper appreciation and affection for their culture and nation. In this process, the citizens' pride and identification gradually increase, which in turn energize citizens to inherit and promote their own culture, while creating a healthier living environment.

### (2) Income-generating economy

The protection and utilization of historical and cultural landscapes involve leveraging the "culture+" and "+culture" platform to develop tourism resources and boost the tourism industry. This strategy can result in significant economic benefits for society and its people, promoting robust growth and effective income increases in the local economy while substantially improving living standards (Portnova, 2021, p. 236). Scenery and

cultural landscapes serve as cultural symbols with unique regional characteristics that are capable of attracting numerous tourists. *The Spring and Autumn Annals* is an important book written by Dong Zhongshu, a famous Confucian scholar in the Eastern Han Dynasty. Dong Zhongshu (179-104 BC) was a Confucian scholar in the early Han Dynasty. He put forward the concept of unity of heaven and humanity in Confucianism. Protecting these landscapes can enhance tourism revenue and stimulate the economy. Simultaneously, such protection can heighten regional awareness, improve regional tourism competitiveness, and promote cultural exchange and understanding.

### (3) Promoting social harmony

Cultural landscapes serve as indispensable elements of human sustenance and nourish the human soul. Their destruction or loss leads to a sense of loss that stymies the society's harmonious development (Leach, 2021, p. 251). Preserving such landscapes creates a unique cultural atmosphere, nurturing local residents' cultural imagination and thereby accomplishing cultural legacy and social harmony. Confronted with formidable environmental pressures, industries that cause pollution struggle to survive. The advancement of cultural tourism, a crucial tertiary industry, represents the path to future development. Additionally, its effective development and utilization not only generate significant economic earnings, but also play a favorable role in preserving the ecological environment. Consequently, cultural development has evolved into a fundamental approach to promoting economic growth in China, receiving significant attention and support.

Harmony spirit contained in unity of heaven and humanity:

The concept of unity of heaven and humanity emphasizes the harmony between human and nature. It means that people should conform to the nature's laws, coordinate with nature, and pursue harmony and balance inside and outside. This harmonious spirit believes that humans cannot detach themselves from natural existence, but should live and develop together with nature. By living in harmony with nature, people can achieve physical and mental balance, social stability and sustainable environmental development.

The equal value implied in unity of heaven and humanity:

The equal value, in the concept of unity of heaven and humanity, is reflected in the emphasis on the equal relationship between man and nature. It believes that humans and all things in nature are equally important components, and there is no distinction between good and bad. This kind of equal values treats all kinds of life forms and natural resources in the nature, and advocates that human beings treat nature with equal, respectful and modest attitude, and avoid over exploitation.

## 2 ENVIRONMENTAL PHILOSOPHY OF CULTURAL LANDSCAPE PROTECTION

### 2.1 TAOIST ENVIRONMENTAL PHILOSOPHY

According to Laozi's philosophy, the "Way of Heaven" embodies balance and harmony. As Laozi famously states, "[...] the Dao is always obedient to nature and does nothing, but there is nothing that it does not do" (Wong, 2017, p. 503). "Inaction", in this context, does not denote inaction, but rather denotes the emphasis on adjusting ourselves to natural laws, rather than imposing our own will on others (Wong, 2017, p. 520; Levman, 2013, p. 145). The principle of "inaction" represents a form of acting that aligns with natural laws. Concepts in environmental philosophy, such as "Unity of Heaven and humanity", played an important role in the discussion (Cheng, 2013, p. 234; Jones, 2021, p. 43).

This concept emphasizes the harmonious unity between humans and nature, promoting the humans' coordinated development and the one of environment. By advocating the equal relationship and respect attitude between human and nature, environmental philosophy reminds us to respect nature, protect the environment and achieve sustainable development. This ideology has played a positive guiding role in shaping our understanding and actions towards the environment, helping to build a more harmonious and balanced relationship between human and nature. Similarly, Zhuangzi emphasizes that human action should adhere to natural laws, including those of time, season and the growth of all things. This philosophy is based on the concept of "heavenly joy" and emphasizes the principles of "inaction".

Thus, only through compliance with the laws of the "Dao", can one expand their practical scope and depth in the production of human material resources and the creation of spiritual culture, achieving authentic free development. The Taoist principle of "the Way of Neutrality" is precisely what humans require to facilitate this development. Ancient Eastern philosophies, such as Chinese Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism, emphasized the harmonious coexistence of man and nature, and the idea of the unity of heaven and man. Western environmental ethics and ecological philosophy focus on the ethical relationship between human beings and nature, and put forward the concepts of ecological morality and environmental rights. At the same time, aboriginal cultures around the world also have a unique concept of environmental philosophy, which regards nature as a sacred and balanced existence.

The notion of "harmony in the middle" requires individuals to obey natural laws, promote all living things and not rely solely on their individual capabilities to seek rewards. Successes are acknowledged, but individuals do not falsely claim credit. When preserving cultural landscapes, it is vital to understand the interdependent relationship between human beings and nature. Although the wilderness-protected mode may emphasize the importance

of nature protection, it does not necessarily change Western philosophy from the extreme of human supremacy to the extreme of nature supremacy. In fact, this protected mode is usually used to protect the natural environment from excessive interference of human activities to achieve nature's balance and sustainable development. It emphasizes the coordinated development between humans and nature, rather than the conflict between both ones.

A natural system is a composite whole consisting of various organic entities, which follow particular structural sequences and rules, and intersect with one another. They function as living and developmental spaces for all components within the system. Human beings are merely a subsystem of nature's ecological system. In essence, nature created human beings, endowing them with advanced cognitive abilities and subjective consciousness, offering inimitable resources for survival and growth. Therefore, in the context of nature, human beings must ensure their comprehensive consistent, and harmonious coexistence with the natural system's integrality and stability to thrive. It is crucial to transform our prior outlook on rights, adopting an emphasis on obligations and assume responsibility as humankind in the nature's community of nature.

This approach will enable us to achieve harmonious coexistence with nature, demonstrating genuine regard for nature and the imperative to return to a mode of existence that concedes to nature's requirements. Cultural landscapes are unique symbols that not only represent a nation's spiritual pursuit and identification, but also have important significance for the economic development of the region.

Taoism prescribes a state of tranquility and emptiness, while holding that the "Dao" represents the source of life and the driving force behind the integration of all things. In other words, everything in this world emanates from the "Dao". The "Dao" encompasses everything, recognizing that ethics and ecological ethics between individuals are indicative of their value systems. Individuals ought to accept all of nature's creations as one, rather than decimate the Lebensraum of living things for personal gain.

With the increasing strengths of human civilization, humanity has extended its reach into the globe's all corners. However, humans require Lebensraum, which demands that other life forms also need adequate space for development. Laozi stresses that "Dao follows nature" (Wen; Akina, 2012, p. 4). The "Dao" is the world's core, highlighting the need for humans to utilize it as a touchstone to return to nature's essence. Only then can the cycle of life perpetuate and continue to flourish.

## 2.2 SIGNIFICANCE OF TAOIST ENVIRONMENTAL PHILOSOPHY IN LANDSCAPE PROTECTION

As cultural landscape preservation emerges as a pressing global issue, environmental philosophy gains broader attention worldwide, and sustainable development takes center

stage as a crucial strategic priority for China. Consequently, it is of vital significance to develop and expound on Taoist environmental philosophy, given its constructive implications for protecting and sustainably developing Chinese cultural landscapes (Wei; Pan; Liu, 2020, p. 782). People should accept all rivers connected to the sea and not destroy natural habitats.

(1) The Taoist belief of “letting nature take its own course” has furnished crucial perspectives on addressing the humankind and nature’s integration. Based on the “World Charter of Nature”, the International Union for Conservation of Nature has formulated a moral principle aligned with that one of the United Nations General Assembly: “Humanity forms part of nature and thus is subject to eternal ecological laws like all other organisms in the world” (Padt; Sanchez, 2013, p. 265). These principles closely resemble those of Taoism more than two millennia ago. Therefore, it is of great importance to explore the environmental philosophical tenets of Taoism, harness, transform and incorporate them in establishing human conscientiousness toward cultural landscape conservation. Of course, traditional Chinese beliefs believe that equality between humans and nature is not absolute equality

(2) Contrary to Confucianism and Mohism, Taoism revolves around negation in terms of its ideology. Regarding the association between human beings and nature, Taoism holds that the “Heavenly Way of Nature” negates the God of Personality and the God of Domination. Humans must not presume themselves in inappropriate places. In terms of conduct, “Dao follows nature” and “natural inaction” are the fundamental principles. Taoism does not advocate for forcing an alteration of nature, but regards reverence for nature as supremely valuable. These concepts serve as a sobering agent for individuals who think they possess omnipotence. Deeply studying Taoist ideology facilitates comprehending nature and the world in which humans live with fresh insight. It proffers a positive effect in transforming individuals’ lifestyles, ecological views and fundamentally redefining the link between them and cultural landscapes.

(3) Both Taoism and Confucianism attach great importance to the “unity of heaven and man” relationship, which represents the interconnection between humankind and the universe. In comparison, Confucianism accentuates the inclination towards “controlling the destiny of heaven and using it”, with humans serving as the nature’s masters and rulers. Conversely, Taoism neither advocates using heaven to control humans nor opposes the idea of “using humans to destroy heaven”. They view the human body as small, fragile and limited by nature, while the human mind is free and unrestricted (Padt; Sanchez, 2013, p. 284; McCarthy, 2008, p. 115; Hodgson, 2015, p. 81).

Thus, in the presence of “heaven”, embracing natural inaction is the best approach. However, the human spirit and its level should be massive and transcendental. This introspection of human status in the cosmos and the emphasis on elevating the human

spiritual realm provide guidance when confronted with the contradiction between constrained cultural landscapes and unbridled human strivings.

### 2.3 CULTURAL LANDSCAPE PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL PHILOSOPHY OF “UNITY OF HEAVEN AND MAN”

The relationship between humans and heaven has been a source of controversy throughout ancient Chinese philosophy and has been appreciated by intellectuals throughout history. China has always been an agricultural nation, which is why people have paid particular attention to the relationship between humanity and nature, attaching great importance to the role of the natural environment in agricultural production. In earlier times, peculiar celestial events and transformations in the ecological environment not only had a considerable impact on agricultural production, but also had an enormous impact on the nation's prosperity.

The concept of the “unity of heaven and man” alludes to the harmonic and consolidated relationship between humankind and nature, rather than mutual conflict. This notion exhibits the broad and systematic views held by ancient people concerning the relationship between humanity and nature. In different eras, the specific tenets and expressions of this philosophy may vary. Nevertheless, people believe in the significant correlation between nature and human society. During the Han Dynasty, Confucianism was exclusively revered for governing the nation through the rule of law, and the Confucian system of “unity of heaven and man” received further recognition.

Some scholars contend that, in today's society, safeguarding cultural landscapes, the concept of the “unity of heaven and man” embodies the Confucian yearning and aspiration for balance between humankind and nature, highlighting the considerable ecological value that it embodies. Nonetheless, some people doubt the ecological value of the “unity of heaven and man”, asserting that China's Confucianism and cultural landscape lack environmental consciousness. In the beginning, Confucianism vouched for the “unity of heaven and man”, with a view to emphasize the concordance between humans and nature. It epitomizes the fundamental idea of environmental philosophy that unifies humankind and nature. Yu Mouchang postulates that the “unity of heaven and man” constitutes the bedrock of congruent unity between humans and nature in environmental philosophy (Padt; Sanchez, 2013, p. 286). The concept of “the unity of heaven and man”, which encapsulates the idea that nature is the genesis of all things, and humanity is a nature's integral constituent, is different from the notion of complete separation of subject and object in Western philosophy. Taoist environmental philosophy seeks to underscore the humans and nature's homogeneity, regarding “Dao follows nature” and “the unity of heaven and man” as the cornerstones of the association between humankind and nature. Laozi proposed examining the enigmas of all things worldwide from the perspective of “Dao” (Wen; Akina, 2012, p. 12).

Hence, in Laozi's conception, "Dao" represents not only the genesis of everything but also signifies the laws controlling their operations. Simply put, "Dao follows nature". Confucianism was an important philosophical school in ancient China, represented by Confucius. Confucianism emphasizes the importance of etiquette, morality, family values and social order. Confucianism advocates achieving society and individuals' harmonious development by cultivating one's character, governing the country and balancing the world.

Mohism is another important school of thought in ancient China, represented by Mozi. The Mohist school focuses on fairness, universal love, nonviolence and opposes war and social injustice. They advocate a moral principle centered on love, advocating world peace and the humanity's common well-being.

Dong Zhongshu asserted that rulers ought to comply with the Heavenly Way, and the statutes and regulations promulgated should be consistent with the alterations in yin and yang, the changes in the four seasons and the five elements, aiming to establish a mutually beneficial coexistence between humans and nature. In the book *Spring and Autumn Fanlu Wang Dao*, the portrayal of the ancient society's flourishing periods reflects the yearning for an ideal society (Wen; Akina, 2012, p. 14; Wolford, 1993, p. 353). If an individual fails to observe the season and etiquette, it not only disrupts the social order but also impairs the ecological order of the Heavenly Way and the natural world's one. As such, social upheaval is frequently correlated to the nature's ecological balance. Dong Zhongshu maintained that human actions are intimately connected with the turmoil of heaven and earth.

Hence, all human deeds must observe the heaven's and earth's principles, yin and yang, and the five elements; otherwise, they are subject to divine chastisement. Dong Zhongshu's perception of the interaction between humans and heaven possesses a favorable ecological and environmental preservation philosophy, and its most salient attribute lies in its capacity to reveal the worth of cultural landscapes through various natural phenomena, such as auspicious signals and calamities.

### **3 PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTION ON THE UNITY OF HEAVEN AND MAN IN LANDSCAPE PROTECTION**

#### **3.1 HARMONIOUS SPIRIT CONTAINED IN THE UNITY OF HEAVEN AND MAN**

The harmony spirit inherent in the "unity of heaven and man" primarily resides in its advocacy for a harmonious coexistence between humans and nature rather than human-nature opposition, encapsulated in three dimensions. The first aspect pertains to the nature's harmony itself. In the *Book of Changes* and *The Qian Gua*, the adage "The changes in the Qian Dao lead to the normalization of one's life and the preservation of harmony, which is the benefit of chastity" signifies that, with the transformations in the Heavenly Dao, all things

have their own essence and conform to their own laws (Shen, 2013, p. 251). Only then can all things have their rightful place and appropriate conditions. The second aspect is the harmonious relationship between humans and nature. Similarly, Dong Zhongshu asserted, “Heaven, earth, and humans constitute the foundation of all things” (Wang, 2019, p. 161). “They are born and nurtured by the earth”. The third aspect concerns the harmony among people. For instance, Mencius opined, “Time is not as gracious as the earth, and the earth is not as gracious as harmony” things (Wang, 2019, p. 175). Only by according value to harmony can life be whole, and all things in the world endure eternally.

From this, it is evident that the “harmony” ideology, in the “unity of heaven and man”, not only elucidates the “harmony” within the natural system, but also provides a deeper interpretation of the “harmony” between humans and nature, and within humans. Only by harmonizing these three forces can the genuine “unity of heaven and man” be realized. The harmonious spirit inherent in the “unity of heaven and man” prompts individuals to attend to the harmony between nature itself, between humans and nature, and among humans.

Achieving harmony with nature itself is the primary solution to contemporary cultural landscape issues (Sue; Abigail, 2019, p. 28). The natural world is a unified organic system, and the laws regulating the four seasons and the existence of all things are the laws of natural operation. Humans ought to abide by these laws to preserve the nature’s harmony itself. Preserving the nature’s harmony itself is the fundamental solution to this dilemma, as the disruption of nature’s harmony causes a catastrophic disaster for humans. Commencing with the relationship between humans and nature, it is imperative to strive towards achieving coordinated development between humans and nature to combat existing ecological issues. To achieve harmony between humans and nature is to demonstrate concern for both humans and nature, to foster collaboration between humans and nature, and to facilitate progress between living and non-living organisms.

Once again, harmony among humans should be taken as a guarantor. War is the most conspicuous manifestation of human contradictions. Humans engage in warfare to acquire resources and consume a colossal amount of rare assets through war, culminating in human fatalities.

### 3.2 EQUAL VALUE IMPLIED IN THE UNITY OF HEAVEN AND MAN

The concept of the “unity of heaven and man” embodies the principle of equal value between humans and nature, and the value concept of the “unity of heaven and man” is initially reflected in the accentuation of the nature’s value. The nature’s value transcends human requirements for material living. Nature itself is valuable, possessing values, such as “good health”, moral values and aesthetic ones. The value of “enhancing people’s living

conditions” alludes to the abundant daily necessities provided by nature for people’s living environment, which the “Yi Zhuan” denotes as the “[...] great virtue of heaven and earth, born every day” (Guarde, 2017, p. 651). Moral value denotes the relationship between natural scenery and human spirit and morality, utilizing natural scenery as a metaphor and symbolism for human morality, thus promoting human moral cultivation and enhancing human spiritual realm. This ideology is paramount in Chinese culture, apparent in works, such as Tao Qianzhi’s “Chrysanthemums” and Liu Zongyuan’s “Landscape Theory”, both of which aim to impart the spirit of nature onto people (Yan, 2020, p. 255). Aesthetic value refers to acknowledging nature as an object and comprehensively exploring the aesthetic values encapsulated within nature. However, in modern society, people often hone in on the nature’s economic value while disregarding other nature’s values.

The principle of equal value of the “unity of heaven and man” is also reflected in the idea of an equal relationship between humans and nature inherent in it. Zhuangzi echoes this belief when he says, “Heaven and earth coexist with me, and all things are one with me” (Jiang, 2022, p. 475). This statement implies that humans and heaven and earth are all interdependent and possess equal value. The equal value relationship between ecosystems and humans can only be attained by upholding these equivalent value connections. However, traditional Chinese beliefs stipulate that the equality between humans and nature is not absolute but should be prioritized and segmented into thickness, with humans holding a dominant position in this equal relationship. Wang Yangming offers unique perspectives on this issue. He advocates that, when conflicts arise in the distribution of resources, the focus should be on the family unit, prioritizing their care and well-being, followed by strangers, as well as birds, animals, flowers and trees. This urges people to recognize not only the right of human existence and development but also the nature’s right to exist and develop in human society, taking the human society’s development as the starting point and destination of the “human nature” community’s common development.

To establish the concept of equality between humans and nature, courage and self-awareness are necessary. As nature can only assume a subordinate position in the face of human ingenuity, maintaining equality between humans and nature ultimately falls on human shoulders to achieve. As a highly advanced organism, humans stand at a higher vantage point and possess greater foresight than other natural objects, exhibiting initiative and creativity. Therefore, in the relationship between humans and nature, humans are the active and dynamic party, and upholding equality, between humans and nature, ultimately rests on human efforts.

## CONCLUSIONS

In summary, this paper delves into environmental philosophy and its significance in safeguarding Chinese cultural landscapes. Environmental philosophical concepts, such as Taoist following nature and the “unity of heaven and man”, provide crucial perspectives that are relevant in the protection and preservation of cultural landscapes in contemporary society. In the process of safeguarding cultural landscapes, people should embrace Taoist environmental philosophy, cultivate their body and mind, and uphold harmonious unity between humans and nature. They should follow the laws of the “Dao” and those that conform to the “Dao”, thereby achieving balance between humans and nature. Based on the principle of harmony from the “Dao follows nature”, “inaction” does not imply doing anything altogether. “Inaction” is more about acting in accordance with the nature’s laws rather than arbitrary actions. The environmental philosophy of Taoism has tremendous guiding significance for the protection of Chinese cultural landscapes. Therefore, people should approach it with a dialectical perspective to better demonstrate its value in preserving Chinese cultural landscapes.

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