



The Origin of Ecological Ethics—On the Basis of Chuang Tzu’s Theory of Equality

Dongping Gao^(✉)

Henan University of Economics and Law, Zhengzhou 450016, Henan, China
szkdbw2022@huel.edu.cn

Abstract. Chuang Tzu explained the relationship between man and nature in a concentrated way, and put forward a unified view of man, nature, and animals, i.e., all things, indicating his attitude toward all things. The equality of the origin of all things and of the value is the basis of Chuang Tzu’s view of equality. The ecological connotation of theory of equality includes the harmony of all things the ecological theory of equality on people and things, the harmony of right and wrong the ecological holistic view of Taoism and nature, and the harmony of life and death the view of ecological cycle on the obedience to heaven. All things are the same in origin, but different in specific forms; all things have value, but they present their value in different forms. Theory of equality shows the essence of Chuang Tzu’s ecological ethics and has enormous practical significance for the establishment of ecological civilization in China.

Keywords: Chuang Tzu · Ecological ethics · Theory of equality

1 Introduction

Taoism is the origin of all things. Lao Tzu explained the attributes of Taoism from the material point of view. Lao Tzu believed that “Taoism generates all things” [1] shows that Tao is the rule of all natural things, and Tao is the origin of all things. Lao Tzu believes that “Tao” creates and controls everything in the world, so human beings must obey “Taoism” and take “Taoism” as their teacher. Taoism is invisible and intangible. It cannot be said. People can’t see or touch it, but they can rely on consciousness to perceive it. Taoism is abstract. It is not a painting to satisfy hunger and vanity. In fact, the creative factors of the material world are contained in it. And this kind of creative factor is rich and long-lasting, and this kind of factor already existed long before the emergence of the Emperor of Heaven. Therefore, Taoism created the universe, heaven and earth, and nature.

Chuang Tzu inherited the original thought of Laozi’s Taoism. On the basis of Taoism and nature, Chuang Tzu put forward the theory of Harmony with respect to humans, nature, and animals, that is, all things in the world, showing his attitude towards all things in the world. “The ‘thing’ has an important position in Chuang Tzu’s philosophy” [13], of course, Chuang Tzu’s theory of equality also fully contains ecological ethics. Chuang Tzu’s theory of equality requires human beings to abide by the laws of nature,

and to be in harmony with the times, in order to achieve ecological harmony. A correct understanding of the ecological connotation contained in the theory of equality still has important guiding significance for today's society.

2 “Taoism” as the Ontological Basis for Chuang Tzu’s Theory of Equality

The basic interpretation of Chuang Tzu is consistent; the original meaning of the theory of equality is that all things are the same, and all beings are the same; Chuang Tzu advocates that “Taoism is One” [2]^{P38}, and must “According to Taoism, things are not noble or lowly” [2]^{P313} method and realm to examine and treat all things in order to achieve better development of human beings. Chuang Tzu Lun intensively embodies Chuang Tzu’s attitude towards all things in the world. From the perspective of the origin and value of all things, all things should be treated equally.

2.1 The Equality of the Origin of All Things and the “Taoism is One”

The origin of everything in the world is Taoism. The object of Chuang Tzu’s Harmony Theory is all things, including all kinds of existence, including human beings, animals, and nature. From the perspective of Taoism, all things are the same. “Heaven and earth coexist with me, and all things are one with me” [2]^{P44}. The homogeneous relationship of all things should include two aspects: on the one hand, it means that humans and all things in nature have a common origin-Tao, and that humans and all things in nature are equal and non-interference with each other; on the other hand, it means heaven, earth, and human harmony All things are connected as one under the doctrine of Taoism. Therefore, Chuang Tzu advocates treating man and nature in the same way, regardless of high or low. “From the perspective of modern ecological ethics, since all things in nature are the same as humans, they should receive corresponding ethical care. In modern ecological ethics, there is no clear boundary between humans and nature, and there is no recognition that there is a superiority. A closed self that is opposite to the natural environment; man and nature are integrated” [12]. As we all know, the human vascular system includes arteries and veins, and according to Chuang Tzu’s point of view, man and nature should be integrated, so the “vascular” system here should include the flow of rivers, lakes, seas and air. As a result, “The self penetrates into the ecosystem through metabolism to realize the integration of the world and the ego” [3]. This just highlights the inclusiveness of Chuang Tzu’s theory of equality.

The sameness of all things does not mean that there is no difference between human beings and all things in nature and all things in nature. Although they are the same in origin, they are different in specific form. “Seeing it from its differences, the liver and gallbladder are clearer; seeing it from the equality people, all things are one” [2]^{P104-105}; from the perspective of human subject observation, the difference is the main reason for the different forms of everything. However, from the perspective of Taoism, everything should be treated the same. Therefore, the differentiated existence of all things is contained in the different manifestations of Taoism in things. Although all things appear in different forms, this does not mean that there is a distinction between them.

2.2 The Equality of the Values of All Things and “Viewing from Taoism, Nothing is Noble or Inferior”

The value of all things is the same, and the principle to be observed is “According to Taoism, things are not noble or lowly” [2]^{p313}. Specifically, “to view the things with the Taoism” is the way to achieve the realm of “things without noble and inferior.” In the ecosystem, everything is connected, interdependent, and mutually beneficial. From the perspective of the relationship between the system and the elements, the effects are the same. No matter which element is destroyed, it may cause the system to malfunction or the system structure to collapse. Therefore, “the value of everything in the ecosystem is equal” [12]. Chuang Tzu’s Commentary said: “If you view it by merit, because of its possessions, everything will be there... Then merit will be determined” [2]^{p313-314}. Although everything is Valuable, but the manifestation of value is different. In other words, everything has its own intrinsic value, “Intrinsic value is also called the intrinsic value of things” [10]. Intrinsic value is the value that all things have since they appear in the world. The value of all things is not obtained by their own efforts, and therefore will not exist or disappear due to the implementation of their behavior or changes in their effectiveness. “Intrinsic value is the core concept of modern ecological ethics is intrinsic value. The theme of modern ecological ethics is whether to generalize ethical concerns and recognize that every species in the ecosystem has its intrinsic value” [3]. Value embodies the meaning of existence of all things.

The value contained in Chuang Tzu’s ecological ethics should include two aspects: the instrumental value and the intrinsic value of all things. Chuang Tzu’s thought contains two meanings: the first meaning is that everything has a function and value, and the size of its function and value depends on the perspective from which human beings view it; the second meaning is that everything contains what people call the secular. Secular usefulness (instrumental value) and worldly uselessness (inherent value), while “usefulness” and “uselessness” are mutually opposed and accompanied by each other. In a nutshell, everything is valuable, and the intrinsic value is unique to the thing itself, and there is no valueless entity. As described by the second law of modern ecology: there is no so-called “waste” in nature [6]^{p56}. Everything exists has value.

3 The Ecological Connotation of Theory of Equality

Chuang Tzu’s ultimate concern is the relationship between people. Obviously, the development of people has attracted much attention in Chuang Tzu’s thoughts. Whether it is Chuang Tzu’s freedom of life or hermit culture, it is closely related to the development of human beings. Human beings have social attributes, and the living environment is indispensable to human development. Tang Tianyong believes that “the harmony between man and nature” is the ecological goal and social vision that my country has been advocating and pursuing [16]. Chuang Tzu’s theory of equality contains rich ecological ethics, and its ecological connotation is worthy of careful study.

3.1 The Harmony of All Things as the Ecological Theory of Equality on People and Things

Human beings and nature are reciprocally coexisting, and they are already integrated. Modern ecological ethics believes that it is impossible for humans and nature to be divided into two without interfering with each other. Gong Changrui and Liu Xiayi believe that “the relationship between man and nature has always been the core issue of ecological ethics” [14]. Ye Dongna believes that “nature is the foundation of civilization” [15]. “There are people, there are heavens; there are heavens, there are also heavens. People cannot have heavens, but nature is also” [2]^{p371}. Because people and things are natural and indistinguishable, people must follow the principles of nature. If they violate nature, they will inevitably be punished by the rules of nature. People can only change in accordance with the changes in the laws of nature. Caring for everything in nature is the same as caring for ourselves. Only then can we be one with the sky. “The sky is nothing to be clear, and the earth is nothing to be peaceful, so the two inactions are combined, and everything is transformed (generate)” [2]^{p333}. From Chuang Tzu’s point of view, human beings are a part of all things, and there is no difference between them. Both human beings and things are natural. Humans must also abide by this concept and regard themselves as part of nature. I am also a thing in order to achieve bliss and harmony.

The various forms of all things should be “understood by the Taoism”. Chuang Tzu said that “the way to view things is nothing high or low; the way to view things is self-esteem and the other is low” [2]^{p313}. “The way to view things with Taoism is how noble and inferior is the anti-yan” [2]^{p317} Explain the difference in the appearance of everything. From the perspective of the observer, the observer will choose to start from the standpoint of the self, valuing himself and devaluing him. From the perspective of Taoism, there is no high or low in things. It can be said that Chuang Tzu’s Harmony of Everything is based on “Taoism”, rather than being centered on humans or any other species. It is true Harmony. “It overcomes certain prejudices of ethical thoughts such as ‘anthropocentrism’ and ‘animalism’” [12]. Anthropocentrism is a kind of self-prejudice of human beings, and it is the concentration of human beings “considerate oneself and despise it”. It reflects that human self-interests and values are superior to all things in nature. In fact, from the Tao level, human beings are not truly noble than all things in nature. If human beings can get rid of prejudice and transcend finiteness, and “see things with Taoism”, then they can reach the level of “seeing all things. If they can be one with Tao, they will not make all the distinctions, but will reach the realm of ‘all things and me are one’” [4]. Therefore, “the husband in the world is the same place for all things. It is the same for all things... But life and death will always be day and night... And there is a place between misfortune and blessing!” [2]^{p381}. This is what modern environmental philosophers advocate, humans should transcend human narrow and selfish interests, transcend human beings to talk about environmental (ecological) ethical issues, and treat the environment with due respect, Extends the moral sentiment to the entire biological community [11], and even all entities. The entity here should refer to all things in the world, including humans, nature, animals, etc. This is the principle of entity equality emphasized by ecological ethics, which is “equal to things” with Chuang Tzu. The basic idea of equality of all things in nature fits with each other. Of course, in the

sense of ecological ethics, “the basic principle of equality does not require equal or equal treatment or treatment, but requires equal consideration” [5]. Give equal consideration to all things in the link of giving ethical care.

The different manifestations of Tao are embodied in the system of interconnection, interdependence and mutual transformation between all things and things with different forms. “Husband Zhao zhao was born in the dark, ethics was born in the invisible, the spirit was born in the Tao, the form is born in the essence, and all things are born in the form” [2]^{p395}. In Chuang Tzu’s Commentary stated: “things are nothing but other, and things are nothing but being”, “being is also that, and that is also” [2]^{p35–36}. Therefore, “everything is nothing but mutual accumulation” [2]^{p55}. These interacting and transforming everything constitutes the natural ecosystem. From the analysis of the integrity of system functions and the correlation between system elements, the status of all things in the natural system is the same. From a philosophical point of view, the species evolution model described by Chuang Tzu conforms to the first law of modern ecology, that is, “everything is related to other things, and everything must have its own destination” [6]^(p56). In the ecosystem, any result has a cause. Ecological ethicist Leopold’s theory of land ethics [8] also expressed similar views to Chuang Tzu’s thought. Leopold believes that land is not only soil, but also a source of energy. The flow of energy depends on the complex relationship structure between organisms, and human violent and destructive intervention destroys these relationships. Leopold proposed that in order to protect these relationships, we must move towards “land ethics” and not just treat land as pure goods and resources. Leopold’s view of land laid the philosophical foundation of land ethics. In the same way, it can also be said that’s Chuang Tzu “All things come from opportunity, all enter into opportunity” [2]^{p340} contains ecological ethics and the philosophical foundation of Chuang Tzu’s ecological ethics. The theory can be used as the core viewpoint to grasp the ecological ethics of Chuang Tzu. In Chuang Tzu’s view, from the analysis of the specific formation of all things, the formation of all things is the result of the combination of natural elements. The combination of natural material elements forms an object, and the separation becomes another object. Therefore, “a person who lives and dies is the beginning of life... The life of man, the gathering of qi. The gathering is life, and the dissemination is death. If death and life are disciples...” [2]^{p391} “I... I compare myself to the heaven and the earth, and I am affected by the yin and yang” [2]^{p307}. Even the life and death of a person is a state transition of natural aura. In fact, human beings acquire form from heaven and earth, receive vitality from yin and yang, and are connected with the blood of nature to form a “community of life.” In other words, in Chuang Tzu’s view, there is no center within “Taoism”, and all things are equal in the view of “Taoism” [8]. Modern social ecologist Murray Bookchin pointed out that in an ecosystem, no species is more important than another. Species are all symbiosis and interconnected relationships. There is no hierarchy within nature, and there should be no hierarchical relationship between humans and nature. Only in this way can it be expected to solve the environmental crisis [9]. This means the importance of equal consideration in the ecosystem.

Every creature has its own reason and value, and has its own uniqueness. This uniqueness cannot be replaced by other things, and it is also the fundamental sign of being different from other things. *Chuang Tzu’s Commentary* tells the evolution of

species, enumerating the illusion images of all things under different circumstances: “All things come from the machine, and all enter the machine.” [2]^{p340} The life of all things is capital Produced in nature, and returned to nature after death, and change in and out of mechanism is called life and death. Therefore, we must treat all things equally, and all things are part of nature. *Chuang Tzu’s Commentary* stated: “When it is time, yin and yang and tranquility... Four seasons, everything does not hurt... When it is time, do nothing but always natural” [2]^{p299}. At that time, yin and yang matched harmoniously and peacefully. Neither ghosts nor gods could disturb. The changes of the four seasons were in harmony with the seasons. Everything was not harmed. All creatures would not die by fate. Although people have wisdom of the absence of striving for wisdom, they are useless. This is the most perfect and pure state. This is the most perfect and pure state. It more vividly expresses Chuang Tzu’s ethical care for all things in nature.

3.2 The Harmony of Right and Wrong is the Ecological Holistic View of Taoism and Nature

The value foundation of Chuang Tzu’s ecological ethics is “Taoism follows nature”, and the highest law of his cosmology is also “Taoism follows nature”. It reveals to us that nature, like humans, has an active organizational structure, and is an organic subject that can naturally develop and change in accordance with its internal laws and principles. Therefore, nature should have a corresponding subjective status, and its value should be reflected and respected. The beginning of *Chuang Tzu’s Commentary* says: “Knowing what the sky does...to the end. The person who knows what the sky does, the sky is born...with what he knows to raise what he knows and knows... It is Zhishengye” [2]^{p125}. Chuang Tzu believes that everything in the world is derived from Tao, and people should use Tao as their teacher. Tao here refers to the law of natural operation. Therefore, human beings should use nature as their teacher. It knows and raises what it knows.

One of the problems that Chuang Tzu pays more attention to is how to communicate between people and things. The ever-changing world is where the process of symbiosis between humans and things occurs. How can the human subject achieve communication with other things without language as a medium? Obviously, this requires human beings to understand the nature of things and to know the feelings of things. The concentrated expression of Chuang Tzu’s way of communicating with things is undoubtedly the unique insights of Haoliang’s debate on “the pleasure of swimming in fish” in *Chuang Tzu’s Commentary*. In the full text of Haoliang’s debate, the introduction to the situation is the first sentence “Chuang Tzu and Huizi swim on Hao liang”, and the rest are rebuttals by both Zhuang and Hui. On the surface, they seem to have nothing to do with the subject of the debate. In fact, they are irrelevant. It is the core role of substitution. Huizi said: “I am not a son, I don’t know the child;... I don’t know the joy of the fish, I don’t know the joy of the fish!” [2]^{p330}. Because human beings are independent individuals, it is difficult to have a real experience exactly like the spiritual world of others. In other words, people have subjective feelings of right and wrong, and it is difficult to have the same empathy with other people and objects. Chuang Tzu said: “Please follow the basics. Zi said, “You know the fish and enjoy the fish”, and ask if you know what I know. I. I know that Hao Shangye” [2]^{p330}. The scene on Hao Shang is the place where fishes live, and it is also the place where Chuang Tzu triggers the practice of emotions and understands the love

of fish. However, Keiko couldn't reach this state, and he couldn't experience Chuang Tzu's emotions, and was stuck in right and wrong. This shows that if you want to trigger this emotional mechanism, you must first get rid of the world and not be burdened by the world before you can approach the avenue. *Chuang Tzu's Commentary* says: "A husband who wants to avoid being form is like abandoning the world. Abandoning the world will not be tired, if there is no tiredness, then you will be peaceful" [2]^{p342}. Putting aside the world, there will be no external influence. Without the involvement, the body and mind are inherently stable, and if they are stable, they will change with the Creator, and when they change with the Creator, they will be close to the great road. The desire to do something and the desire to cultivate shape are all burdened by the world, abandoning the world without getting tired, without getting tired but with righteousness, so it can explain the mystery of Taoism. Being one with Taoism, Fang and nature merge into one and coexist harmoniously.

3.3 The View of Ecological Cycle on the Obedience to Heaven is the Harmony of Life and Death

Life and death are the aggregation and separation of qi, like the change of four o'clock, day and night, which can be described as natural normal. Regarding qi, Laozi's *Taoism De Jing* said: "Everything bears yin and yang, and qi thinks of harmony" [1]. Qi is regarded as the basic element in the circulation of yin and yang. The existence of qi can mediate the integration of life and promote the cycle of ecology. *Chuang Tzu's Commentary* said: "If you take advantage of the righteousness of the heaven and the earth to defend against the arguments of the six auras, you can wander infinitely, and the other will be evil!" [2]^{p11}. Guo Xiang [2] believes that "the heaven and the earth, the general name of all things. Heaven and earth take all things as their body, and all things must take nature as positive" [2]^{p496-497}. Cheng Xuanying believes that "Heaven and earth are the general name of all things. All things are the other name of nature" [2]^{p11}. The two Taoists enlighten us that if we can follow the nature of all things and grasp the changes of the six qi, then we can travel in the infinite realm. What else can it rely on? Regarding the six qi, scholars have different opinions in history. Sun, Jianmin believes that Guo, Xiang's commentary is a collection of multiple arguments, including three aspects: the four o'clock of the heavens and the earth; the obscurity of the yin and yang of wind and rain; the yin and yang of the heavens and the earth. Chuang Tzu wanted to take advantage of the six qi to achieve happiness, the realm of unfetteredness, everything is unsatisfactory, and there is no way to go! The realm that Zhuangzi wants to achieve can also be called "heyitianni". In *Chuang Tzu's Commentary*, it says: "It's not the Shiyun sunrise, and the sky, which will last forever! All things are seeded...there is no balance, it is the balance of the sky. The sky is equal," Tian Ni also" [2]^{p496-497}. The harmony of life and death implies natural fortune. If you want to obtain the righteousness of the cycle of good fortune, you can only be in peace in time and sky. All beings want to do something to gain the Tao, but it is just empty talk.

The ecological cycle goes back and forth, which is the existence of Tao, and it is actually a masterpiece of nature's inaction. *Chuang Tzu's Commentary on Autumn* states: "The Tao has no beginning, and the thing has death and life, and it does not depend on its completion. One is empty and full is not in its shape. Years cannot be lifted, and

time cannot be stopped. News is full of emptiness and ends. Then there is a beginning” [2]^{p318}. The avenue changes in a vacant state, and there is no fixed shape and position. The past years cannot be traced, and the elapsed time cannot be stopped. The demise, growth, the fullness and the deficiency are changing again and again. Here, the cycle of Tao is juxtaposed with the life and death of all things, without beginning and end. Chuang Tzu believes that Tao begins with one and ends with nature. Nature is like a cycle of life and death, repeating endlessly. Mankind’s desire for nature should be indifferent. The way of good fortune is detrimental and beneficial. The law of nature is cycled and cannot be violated. This is the way of recycling and creation, and it is consistent with the ecological cycle of Anshi Shuntian.

4 The Realistic Ecological Significance of the Theory of Equality

Ecological issues are one of the hot issues in the world today. In order to maximize short-term economic benefits, humans have over-exploited natural resources, which have destroyed the ecological environment. Ecological harmony is the intended meaning of Chuang Tzu’s ecological thinking, and it is also the ecological goal advocated and pursued to solve ecological problems. Chuang Tzu’s theory of Qi Tong is based on Tao. “Viewing things with Taoism” is based on the theory of equality, and is also a method and principle to achieve the sameness of all things. The ultimate pursuit is a harmonious natural relationship that integrates human emotions, values and situations. In this harmonious natural relationship, the subject is nature, and finally reaches the realm of Heyitianni. It can be seen that Chuang Tzu’s theory of equality is still important for the current society to deal with the relationship between man and nature effect.

The relationship between man and nature and the survival and development of individuals are issues that mankind cannot escape so far. The internal cause of the problem is that man has artificially separated the connection between himself and nature, body and spirit, and then fell into the dust web of selfish desire. Therefore, Chuang Tzu inspires human beings to see the unity of being between themselves and all things, that is, we are also things, and the Taoism is one, guiding people to abandon the prejudices of anthropocentrism, so as to Thus realizing the truth of the harmonious coexistence and mutualism of human, animal and nature.

Chuang Tzu advocates a lack of desire and puts forward the ecological concept of being safe in time, keeping things safe, and being natural. This is also the basic requirement of Zhuangzi in daily life. He warned human beings to establish a care for the ecology and establish a harmony of all things. Value concept, and use it to choose the corresponding lifestyle. In terms of the realm of thought, Chuang Tzu used the “Happiness of Haoliang” to enlighten people that if they want to find the joy of fish, they need to integrate their own life, emotions, and environment, and get rid of the secular thoughts and not be burdened by the secular. In addition, human beings should love the natural beauty, so as to protect the existence of the environment that provides spiritual pleasure for human beings. Chuang Tzu theoretically requires human beings to have the development concept of ecological protection. As a theoretical source, Chuang Tzu’s way of recycling plays an important role in the establishment of ecological protection and ecological philosophy in today’s society. The proposal of my country’s scientific

development concept benefits from Chuang Tzu's recycling. Actually, the proposal and formulation of any policy related to ecological protection in China is rooted in traditional culture.

5 Conclusion

With the development and progress of society, when examining Chuang Tzu's thoughts from a contemporary perspective, many of his views have limitations, but his concept of coexistence between mankind and nature is worthy of admiration in the present and even in the future. The key issue that threatens the survival and development of human beings in today's society is the ecological issue. In order to survive, human beings need to be far-sighted and solve finite and infinite problems: the limited natural resources and the infinite survival and development of mankind require mankind to seek a sustainable development concept. To ensure that mankind will continue for generations to come. In fact, this is one of the correct ideas pursued by anthropocentrism. For sustainable development, mankind must respect and protect nature, and take due responsibility for the protection and development of nature.¹

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¹ There is a dispute in the academic circles that the book "Chuang Tzu" was written by Chuang Tzu himself or by Chuang Tzu himself and the post-study collective. It is generally believed that the inner seven chapters were written by Chuang Tzu himself, and the outer chapters and miscellaneous chapters were written by Chuang Tzu's later scholars. This article is unified as Chuang Tzu's thoughts, and no distinction is made. The text quotes [Jin]Guo Xiang Zhu. [Tang] Cheng Xuanying Shu. Cao Chuji, Huang Lan Fa Xiao. The same conception is carried out layer by layer to understand that any word "Chuang Tzu" that appears in the text is uniformly used with Chuang Tzu without double quotation marks.

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