Chinese Culture and Ecological Theology

(An abstract)

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The current environmental problems are rooted in the abnormal relationship between human and nature. Our attitude towards nature determines how we treat nature. In the Chinese classics, one can find many teachings on environmental ethics. This paper is an attempt to investigate the environmental ethics embedded in the Chinese culture and how these can be applied in tackling contemporary environmental issues.

We present the environmental ethics of Taoism and Confucianism. Particular emphasis will be put on questions regarding the origin of the universe, the relationship between human and nature, as well as the responsibility of human to nature.

Taoism adopts an ecocentric approach towards human-nature relationship. According to Taoism, the origin of universe is from “Tao,” a nameless entity that is strongly associated with “nature.” We should live with a “non-controlling, non-manipulating and non-possessing” attitude toward nature. Human is not the centre of the universe. Zhuangzi considered human and other creatures as equals. They are not masters or servants, hosts or guests; instead, they are of equal status in the universe. All creatures are mutually dependent, interrelated and closely connected.

On the other hand, the environmental ethics of Confucianism is more anthropocentric. Heaven is regarded as the supreme
“authority” from which everything is originated. Human can communicate and participate in the process of creation if one could maintain a harmonious relationship with the “heaven.” Confucianism tends to place human above other creatures. It recommends the wise use of natural resources and a kind attitude towards nature, rather than indiscriminate exploitation of nature for the benefit of human being.

Taoism is very similar to the eco-centric approach in process theology, while Confucianism is closer to the Christian concept of stewardship. The main difference lies in the absence of a loving, unlimited Creator. Ever since the Reformation, environmental ethics have played a minor role in Christianity due to the doctrinal stress on *sola gratia, sola fide and sola scripture*. Nature has been left aside. This is especially true amongst Chinese Christians. In this respect, Chinese culture could enrich the development of eco-theology and eco-friendly practices.