

New Confucianism, Science and the Future of the Environment

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It is argued in this article that the dialogue between science and humanities is not just an option, but rather a necessary act. In China, New Confucianism has accomplished its creative transformation through its dialogue with science, and the development of science and technology has also benefited from humanities – New Confucianism included. In the global confrontation of growing environmental crisis, science alone cannot solve all the problems. What kind of role can New Confucianism play along with science in addressing the environmental issues? How will a re-interpretation of *tianrenheyi* (unity of man and nature), which is a core Confucian concept, contribute to the critique of anthropocentrism and the cross-cultural reformation of ecological thought? Bearing in mind both the cosmopolitan consciousness and the eco-environmental sensibility, a New Confucian ecological humanism is proposed and analysed in response to the global environmental problem.

1. Introduction

One of the major challenges in the twenty-first century is the growing environmental crisis. ‘The modern science that originated in the West has both greatly empowered human beings and brought us a new existential crisis.’¹ Will the development of science and technology alone be able to solve the problem? Or is it better to integrate the achievements of both science and humanities to find a more efficient and long-lasting solution to the problem? As more and more people become suspicious of the former, the latter seems to have gradually won favour with the majority. However, the lack of dialogue between science and humanities has created difficulties. As C.P. Snow famously stated, science and humanities became ‘two cultures’ in modern times.

Literary intellectuals at one pole – at the other scientists, and at the most representative, the physical scientists. Between the two a gulf of mutual incomprehension – sometimes (particularly among the young) hostility and dislike, but most of all lack of understanding. They have a curious distorted image of each other.²

The dichotomy between the sciences and the humanities is, to a large extent, a product of Western modernity, for which technological rationality and humanism are essential. In modern society, people have possessed more and more advanced technology, which satisfies their desire for wealth and pleasure. However, as human beings always crave more, their pursuit of new technology never ends. During this process, nature has been further alienated, and the significance of spirituality underestimated. Consequently, science and humanities have grown apart from each other, which accounts for the environmental crisis.

Since the end of the twentieth century, there have been rigorous and urgent calls for dialogue and cooperation between science and humanities in the global confrontation of the environmental crisis.

Scientists, historians, indeed scholars from all the academic disciplines, and from all the various countries too, ought to come together and find pathways across the levees of specialization that divide us, to become aware of our shared life in nature. We ought to do this not only for our own enlightenment as scholars and intellectuals, but also for the good of the earth and all its inhabitants.³

If the dialogue between science and humanities has become inevitable, or rather a desirable alternative to solve the global environmental problem, what kind of role can traditional Chinese philosophy and culture play? In fact, this is one of the fundamental issues that contemporary New Confucianism has engaged with. To be more specific, the question to be addressed is: can there be an effective dialogue between New Confucianism and science, which will lead to the formation of a Confucian ecological humanism for the sake of dealing with the worldwide environmental crisis?

2. Reflections on Science in New Confucianism

In Chinese history, Confucianism for over 2000 years has played an important role in the imperial rule and the everyday life of the people, and from time to time it has undergone significant transformations and revitalizations. Over several dynasties, particularly the Song and the Ming, neo-Confucianism became a dominant school of thought or philosophy in China. Famous neo-Confucians such as Wang Yangming (1472–1529) were interested in the role of mind and heart in acquiring knowledge and wisdom, and the concept of *zhixingheyi* (unity of knowledge and action) became widespread and hugely influential. In the early twentieth century, New Confucianism came into being following the debate between conservatives and radicals around such issues as nationalization and westernization. Contemporary New Confucianism mainly refers to a movement promoted by prominent Chinese Confucians based in Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the United States since the 1980s.⁴ One of the major issues that have engaged contemporary New Confucians is how to rejuvenate Confucianism to better serve the interests of humanity and confront some major global problems. As the environmental crisis has turned into a huge challenge to the world in recent decades, New Confucians began to respond to it and have made

some significant progress so far. First and foremost, New Confucianism has undergone an important transformation in its relationship to science. Traditionally, Confucianism mostly provided knowledge of governance and social life, and was considered to be indifferent to science. Whether this is actually true or not has been a hotly debated topic in China for the last century. There have been at least three major questions in recent discussions on science in New Confucianism: is Confucianism really inimical to science? Can Confucianism contribute to the development of science? And, how can New Confucianism benefit from its dialogue with science?

In today's discourse, science usually refers to natural science, and the Western definition of science or rather natural science has prevailed around the world, regardless of cultural differences. Some scholars both in China and abroad maintain that there was no science according to the Western definition in ancient China. In his controversial essay 'Why China has no science' (1922), Feng Youlan (1895–1990) says: 'what keeps China back is that she has no science'.⁵ Instead, John Needham, author of the *Science and Civilisation in China* series, argues that there was science in ancient China. In his books, Needham makes use of the categories of twentieth-century science in the West to narrate the history of science in China. Although Needham's approach to the history of Chinese science is apparently western-centric, he contributed to a more favourable representation and reception of Chinese science in the West, since at his time even great minds in Europe doubted 'whether Chinese culture had even had any science'.⁶ The so-called 'Needham problem' about the history of Chinese science has triggered a long-lasting debate both in and outside of China. In his recent, and widely discussed book *Shenme Shi Kexue* (What Is Science), Wu Guosheng is critical of Needham and thinks that the latter confused science with technology. In Wu's opinion, there was science in ancient China, but it was limited to natural history. Therefore, he claims that the science in ancient China was different from that in ancient Greece, and that the latter was more concerned with reason (Ref. 1, pp. 282–302).

It is undeniable that China once lagged behind in modern science, which resulted in its poverty and national humiliation for more than a century, from the mid-nineteenth century on. Why didn't modern science develop in China? One of the explanations is that Confucianism was inimical to science. Needham, for example, was also curious about why modern science had developed only in Europe and not in China, and he thought that Confucianism, rather than in science, was interested in problems of ethics and society. In 'Neo-Confucianism and Chinese Scientific Thought,' Wing-Tsit Chan says, 'It was this preoccupation with human affairs that prevented the neo-Confucian doctrine of investigation of things from developing natural science, although it considered nature as well as man as an object of study.' Using Wang Yangming, a master of Neo-Confucianism, as an example, he argues that for Wang, 'Li [Principle] was not in things but in our mind'.⁷

The first round of widescale discussions on science and Chinese philosophy took place during the May 4th period (1919). The radicals of the May 4 movement thought that Confucianism did not take nature as its object of investigation, which left China weak in science especially in modern times, due to which the country became

backward and poor. Therefore, the most urgent thing to do in China then was to develop its science and adopt the notion of a sort of ‘overall westernization’. This gave rise to the trend of scientism, for which the development of science in China could only happen at the sacrifice of Confucianism. ‘In scientism or the trend of westernization, Confucianism and science are oppositional to each other.’⁸

Scientism is not scientific. Overrun by technological rationality, it brings about both advances in science and its degradation, in that technology also creates problems, such as the environmental crisis today. What’s worse, scientism stubbornly believes that the environmental problems will be solved by more advanced technology, and ignores the value of the humanities. This ideology of scientism is dangerous. It was in the process of cleansing scientism that Confucianism was re-interpreted, and its relationship to science re-defined, especially in contemporary New Confucianism.

Most New Confucians would admit that some of the Confucian doctrines are detrimental to science, but there has been an even greater consensus among them that Confucianism is in essence not inimical to science, but rather favourable to it. Qian Mu, a New Confucian master based in Taiwan, summarizes the positive effects of Confucianism on science from three perspectives. First, in ancient times, Confucians were materialistic and craved a better understanding of nature. Second, those ancient Confucians were curious about what they did not know, which was similar to the scientific spirit in the West. Third, Confucianism is useful for the humanistic training of the scientists in that Confucians pay attention to their spiritual cultivation. If science is only concerned with its function and pragmatism, there won’t be any smooth development of science.⁹ At the beginning of the twenty-first century, there took place a spiritual turn of science. Among the top scientists in the world, there has been a new understanding of the value of the humanities.

In New Confucianism, nature is not just an object of study, but essential to our knowing of ourselves. Tu Weiming says,

scientists are no pure observers, they also have to be participants, even creators. Without participation, research is impossible. ... But could nature, quite to the contrary, not be regarded as a plentiful communion of subjects, a common existence that has a physical one? This sort of non-extrinsic, non-objective thinking regards nature as an indispensable tendency in the process of self-realization of scientists. Is this not called subjectivism, or idealism? It certainly deserves consideration.¹⁰

Confucianism, which is mainly concerned with the relationship between Heaven, Earth and man, can provide a reference or intellectual inspiration to scientific reason. In his comment on the cosmic view of Neo-Confucians, such as Wang Yangming, Tu Weiming says, ‘A scientist can be a qualified scientist even when he accepts the notion of Wang Yangming that everything is an integrated whole. Furthermore, if he applies that concept in his research he can become a great scientist’ (Ref. 10, p. 294).

In addition, Confucianism provides opportunities for scientists to reflect on science itself, especially the blind spots in its development. ‘Materialism, decisionism, essentialism and fundamentalism are all subject to serious criticism. As a matter of fact, the space to rethink natural science from the point of the humanities has already opened up’ (Ref. 10, p. 295). In China, there have been some misconceptions among

natural scientists and social scientists about the value of the humanities. However, the impact of the humanities on their research has been undeniable. It has become widely accepted that the development of science and that of the humanities should be interrelated, and mutually supportive.

Among some New Confucians, there used to be an old-fashioned notion that ‘Confucianism should be the corpus, science the application’, which is similar to the debate around the borrowing of Western knowledge in the early twentieth century, namely, ‘Chinese corpus, Western application’. Contemporary New Confucians instead think that scientific reason is of great value for the transformation of Confucianism.

The fundamental principle of contemporary New Confucianism lies in that we should start with acknowledging the necessity and legitimacy of scientific reason and proceed to emphasize the fact that science and democracy are the internal demands within Confucianism for new developments.¹¹

In the future, we must integrate science into the development of Confucianism.

New Confucianism has developed sophisticated ideas about the role of science in the making of one’s subjective self. In *Xianxiang yu Wu Zishen* (Appearance Thing-in-Itself), Mou Zongsan says,

outwardly speaking, since people are human yet sage and also sage whilst human (or likewise humans yet buddhas and buddhas whilst human), scientific knowledge is necessary in principle and is also possible, for otherwise they would be impaired with respect to their duties as humans.¹²

For Mou, science also plays an important role in the process of self-negation, through which people accomplish their understanding and are able to solve real problems in the world. Contemporary New Confucians such as Mou stress the value of science and see it as a necessary path in their spiritual pursuit.

To sum up, Confucianism and traditional Chinese philosophy are not inimical to science, but rather have become conducive to scientific developments. With the help of traditional cultural wisdom, science can better serve the interests of humankind. In the meantime, Confucianism becomes renewed by incorporating scientific reason. However, the success of Confucian transformation still depends on whether or not it can be of practical use. An important issue confronting the third and fourth generations of New Confucians is: will they ‘be able to move out of modern life that will have real appeal to modern and East Asian peoples’ (Ref. 4, p. 73). When dealing with the global environmental crisis today, New Confucians almost unanimously refer to a Confucian core concept ‘*tianrenheyi*’ (unity of man and nature). What they have been trying to find out is: will the re-interpretations of *tianrenheyi* contribute to solving the environmental crisis?

3. Contemporary Interpretations of *Tianrenheyi*

Generally speaking, the concept of *tianrenheyi* can be traced back to Mencius and Chuang-tzu more than 2000 years ago. Dong Zhongshu in the Han dynasty was a key

figure in further elaborating on *tianrenheyi*, which later, during and after the Song Dynasty, became a dominant concept of Neo-Confucianism. After the founding of New China in 1949, the idea of *tianrenheyi* did not win the favour of the revolutionary masses because, in the mainstream ideology, heroism and collectivism were advocated. What men can do became emphasized in opposition to the limits of nature, which broke the natural law and resulted in a nationwide famine in the early 1960s, killing hundreds and thousands of people mainly in the countryside. Because of that human tragedy, the Chinese people learned a bitter lesson about the power of nature. After 1978, the economic reform and opening-up policy was adopted, and there has been rapid social and economic progress ever since. Yet, while the economy has greatly improved, China has fallen into an unprecedented environmental crisis.

As a core concept of Confucianism and traditional Chinese culture, *tianrenheyi* probes into the fundamental and changing relationship between man and nature.

Owing to its functional indication and dynamic character, the polysemy of the concept [*tianrenheyi*] is apt to be extended along with the passage of time and according to the current situation or sociocultural context... This has become an open-ended activity, inviting and involving a second reflection, transcultural exposition, and even creative transformation due to its hidden universality for the common good.¹³

In traditional Chinese culture, heaven was worshipped as a supernatural force that impacted the lives of human beings. For many Neo-Confucians, *tian* (Heaven), *di* (Earth) and *ren* (man) are indivisible. Cheng Hao says, 'Man and Heaven and Earth are one thing'.¹⁴ In his concept 'wanwuyiti' (the unity of all things and events), Wang Yangming proposes that heaven, earth, the myriad things, and man actually form one body. Since the 1990s, *tianrenheyi* has been further discussed by leading scholars of New Confucianism such as Qian Mu, Ji Xianlin, Tang Yijie and Tu Weiming.

In his article '*Tianrenheyi* lun: zhongguo wenhua dui renlei weilai ke you de gongxian' (The concept of the unity of man and nature: on the contribution of Chinese culture to the future of mankind), published in 1991, shortly before his death, Qian Mu considered the Chinese concept of *tianrenheyi* as one of the greatest achievements of Chinese culture:

So, Chinese ancients believed that all human cultural development followed the way of heaven. If one turned his back on heavenly will, then there was no human culture to speak of. The notion of the unity of 'heavenly will' and 'human life' was understood early on in the history of ancient China. To my mind the idea of *tianrenheyi* is the most ancient proposition emerging from classical Chinese culture, and the one that makes the greatest contribution.¹⁵

In contrast, he thinks that in the West man and nature were usually represented as separate. In the face of the global environmental crisis, Qian Mu thinks that this Chinese conception of *tianrenheyi* should be reconsidered for the benefit of both Earth and humanity.

Qian Mu's article caught the attention of Ji Xianlin, another leading scholar in traditional Chinese thought and culture. Echoing Qian Mu's enthusiasm for the

universal significance of the notion *tianrenheyi*, Ji Xianlin further elaborates on the idea of heaven and on the relationship between man and nature in oriental philosophy. Ji thinks that 'heaven is nature, so the relationship between heaven and human is actually that between nature and man' (Ref. 15, pp. 1, 14). For Ji Xianlin, the attitude towards nature in the traditional Oriental culture is to make friends with it, to know it, and to have a better understanding of it. It is on this basis that people would try to get what they want and need. Thus, the concept of *tianrenheyi* was gradually formulated in philosophy and then further developed. It needs to be pointed out that for Ji Xianlin, 'man and nature form a whole unity, with animals also included in it' (Ref. 15, p. 15).

Tang Yijie, another well-known contemporary philosopher, thinks that in Chinese history 'heaven' has at least the following three important meanings. First, the heaven that governs or dominates, usually personified as god(s). Second, heaven referring to nature. Third, the heaven of reason, which is usually transcendental and has moral implications. The idea of heaven as nature is relevant to a new configuration of the relationship between man and nature. His comment on the reason why *tianrenheyi* has caught wide attention: 'I think this is due to the worsening crisis of the environment. The advance of science has benefited people, but it may also bring damage to the life of humans'.¹⁶ He further elaborates on *tianrenhenyi* from the following perspectives: First, nature and man are not oppositional, but rather integrated, with man a part of nature. Any destruction of nature will endanger the life of people. Thus, we should not only know nature but also worship heaven. The concept of conquering nature through the employment of science is an example of scientism. Second, human and heaven do not just form an outer relationship. On the contrary, they are intricately related to each other. Humans are not just concerned with themselves, but also the world they live in. Third, both heaven and man are benevolent. Heaven nurtures the growth of all things on the earth, and human beings are by nature kind. Fourth, human and heaven should exist together, through which people realize their own transcendence.

Tu Weiming calls *tianrenheyi* an 'organismic unity' (*yujide tongyixing*).¹⁷ The unity in *tianrenheyi* is not a static being, but a dynamic process. On the one hand, it needs to be contextualized as to when and where it takes place and who is acting. It is subjective because *tianrenheyi* cannot happen without the participation of the subject. On the other hand, *tianrenheyi* should not be restricted to any individuals but rather transcend their narrow-mindedness. Wang Yangming makes a distinction between *xiaoren* (ordinary man) and *daren* (great man). In contrast with the egocentric outlook of *xiaoren*, *daren* considers the interest of the world. Everyone has the potential to become a *daren*. Tu Weiming comments:

Yang-ming's 'great man' (*ta-jen*) [*daren*] in the present context can very well be rendered as the most authentic, genuine, and sincere man. Such a man is neither fated to be extraordinary nor blessed with some superhuman quality. Essentially he is a common man, living in the everyday world in Heidegger's sense of 'being there'. But he is truthful to his basic 'design' by continuously experiencing and affirming the real humanity that is in him.¹⁸

The Confucian ideal of nature and man is fully reflected in ‘Hengqu four propositions’, first proposed by Zhang Zai, then collected by Zhu Xi into *Jinsilu* (Reflections on Things at Hand), and modified as

Make up your mind for the sake of Heaven and Earth. Establish the Way for the sake of living men. Continue the learning that has been interrupted for the sake of past sages. And inaugurate great peace for the sake of the next ten thousand generations.¹⁹

The highest goal for *tianrenheyi* is to bring peace and security to the generations to come, and serve the continuous development of global society. In the epoch of global environmental crisis, it should guide our thoughts and actions. Therefore, in opposition to anthropocentrism, Tu Weiming proposes a new concept called ‘anthropocosmic vision’ (Ref. 10, p. 284). According to Tu, man is an observer, participant and co-creator of the world, in which humans and heaven are dependent on each other. Tu warns people to be mindful of the blind spots of ‘scientific humanism’, including the attitude of conquering nature. Ultimately, *tianrenheyi* denotes a spiritual experience. As Tang Junyi has argued, ‘spirituality in a Chinese context is not confined to religious activities but comprises among others moral, artistic, and intellectual activities’ (Ref. 14, p. 203). The spirit of *tianrenheyi* enables a reimagining of a global community rooted in a planetary sense of the world.

So far, it is possible to reach the conclusion that the relationship between heaven and humankind has been continuously redefined according to current social and cultural needs, especially by leading Confucian scholars. In the face of the worsening ecological problems, some New Confucians read the messages of theirs and their contemporaries’ into the old concept *Tianrenheyi*. It cannot directly solve the environmental problems, but it can change the mindset and the behaviour of people, which will have long-lasting effects.

4. Toward a New Confucian Ecological Humanism

It has been argued that *tianrenheyi* contributes to a greater awareness of the planet as an organic whole, in which humankind, non-human beings and nature are dependent on one another. No part of the world is a separate island, and ‘sustainable development’ will benefit both human society and the future of the environment. Based on the Confucian reflections on science and the recent interpretations of *tianrenheyi*, a proposal about a New Confucian ecological humanism will be made and discussed around the following questions: to what extent is New Confucianism anti-anthropocentric? What kind of role can New Confucianism play in connecting humanities and science? And, is it possible for New Confucianism to transcend cultural boundaries?

An ecological reflection on Western-style modernity often leads to a critique of anthropocentrism. On the one hand, the European Enlightenment is thought to prioritize man’s needs and desires. The problem, however, is that humanism treats the world as an object subject to man’s domination and consumption. The process of essentializing the world also restricts the free development of human beings themselves.

On the other hand, modern science in the West developed in line with applied instrumental rationality, that is, to overcome inconveniences by accessing material resources and to firmly establish and extend the power and domination of man over nature. Thus, there is a dilemma inherent in modern Western humanism. It promotes individual value and freedom. However, that freedom is obtained on the basis of the abandonment of faith and the neglect of the material world. In comparison, Confucianism is represented as a different model of ‘weak anthropocentrism’, which, according to Nicholas S. Brasovan, ‘postulates that undisturbed natural scenes and non-human animals may have moral, aesthetic, and religious value in addition to any value that they have as material resources.’²⁰ In this regard, New Confucianism, which may be reinterpreted from the perspective of ecological humanism, provides an alternative paradigm to anthropocentric environmental ethics.

Tu Weiming points out that to transcend anthropocentrism is both necessary and of great significance. Reflecting on the idea of breaking up boundaries and limitations in our life, he argues:

With regard to transcendence, simply put, if one is not able to transcend subjectivism one can also not complete oneself, subjectiveness is thus hard to make clear. If one does not go beyond familism and nepotism, one cannot perfect the family. If one does not go beyond narrow ethnic nationalism and regionalism, one cannot perfect the locality. If one does not go beyond narrow nationalism, one cannot have genuine patriotism. If one cannot transcend anthropocentrism, there is no way of achieving what one regards as man’s highest ideals. (Ref. 10, p. 279)

According to Tu Weiming, anthropocentrism has become a barrier for us to realize our potential in changing the world. The Confucian concept of the unity between Heaven, Earth and myriad things provides intellectual resources for reflecting on anthropocentrism. One important idea of *tianrenheyi* is that nature has its inner value, which does not depend on the perception of human beings. Thus, New Confucianism reiterates the necessity of worshipping heaven. What men can do is incomparable with the power of nature. The kind of damage that climate change has caused over the decades, for example, is already a severe alarm, especially in relation to anthropocentrism.

New Confucianism believes that the humanities and the sciences should work together to confront the environmental crisis. First, we should adopt a critical attitude toward instrumental rationality, which invokes a blind faith in technology. People tend to think that science and technology can solve all problems. If there are problems left unsolved or unsolvable for the moment, this is because technology is not advanced enough. This is the root of the ecological crisis. Now there are widespread anxieties about the potential harmful consequences of science and technology on the environment. ‘The whole question of human treatment of the natural world exemplifies the dialectic by which the extension of scientific control and an increasing anxiety about its effects are tied to each other’ (Ref. 2, p. lxiii). It has become clear that the development of science needs to happen in dialogue with the humanities, for which *tianrenheyi* provides us with some inspiration.

By virtue of the naturalization of humanity, one could possibly turn back to nature for ‘dwelling poetically’ in the world, and for emancipating oneself from the control of instrumental rationality, and from the alienation by material fetishism,

and from enslavement by the system of power, knowledge, language, and so forth. (Ref. 13, p. 51)

Second, it is also important to put the humanities in practice. Language and texts are not just descriptive but also performative. In Austin's speech act theory, language can act in that it has the power to change the reality.²¹ Likewise, literature and culture can become a dynamic process or event, in which new happenings occur and impact on the world.²² In *Qingnian Wang Yangming* (The Young Wang Yangming), Tu Weiming talks about Confucianism in action. As a representative of neo-Confucianism, Wang Yangming proposes the concept of 'the unity of knowledge and action', which is centred on the will of learning and the application of knowledge for solving real problems.²³ In 'Zhongguo gudai "tianrenheyi" sixiang yu dangdai shengtai wenhua jianshe' (The concept of 'the unity of man and nature' in ancient China and the contemporary construction of ecological culture), Zeng Fanren suggests that in our time it is of the utmost importance to really integrate man, nature, ecological concepts and the humanities in order to construct an ecological humanism as a way to deal with the environmental crisis.²⁴ In this regard, *tianrenheyi* is not just a concept and a theory, but also an act. It contributes to the development and application of science.²⁵ In the end, the unity of Confucianism and science will play an important role in improving our living conditions on this planet.

Furthermore, the environmental crisis is a global issue, and the solution to it relies on the joint efforts of different nations and cultures around the world. However, to reach any consensus over the issue and take action together has never been an easy task. *Tianrenheyi*, I believe, can contribute to such a cross-cultural understanding.

In principle, 'the cosmic realm of being' is mainly preoccupied with the excellence (or virtue) of heaven-and-human oneness. Accordingly, the cosmic personality is capable of serving not only society and humankind but also the universe and all things in it. He or she is therefore willing to do whatever possible so as to retain all beings or things in their most proper positions. (Ref. 13, p. 253)

Thus, it may be argued that *tianrenheyi* has retained both a cosmopolitan consciousness and an eco-environmental sensibility.

For contemporary New Confucians, traditional Chinese thoughts, such as *tianrenheyi*, can provide useful insights and advice for the future development of the entire world. In 1997, Zheng Jiadong said:

Looking at the development of New Confucianism after the May Fourth period, it seems that its representatives have been more inclined to affirm the universal significance of Confucian thought. That is, regarding Confucian thought as 'the learning of the person, the mind, the nature, and conditioning circumstances (shen xin xing ming zhi xue)', they emphasized the widespread and ongoing value that Confucian thought had for humanity. (Quoted in Ref. 4, p. 32)

In ancient times, *tianxia* (world under heaven) referred to China, and now it means the world or the planet. There has been a fundamental transformation in contemporary New Confucianism, which itself is the result of multicultural and cross-disciplinary cooperation.

5. Conclusion

Contemporary New Confucianism has accomplished its creative transformation through dialogue with science. In the meantime, science and technology also benefit from Confucianism as well as from the humanities at large. That Confucianism and science have finally come together brings us hope for solving the difficult problem of worldwide environmental deterioration. For that purpose, this article makes a proposal about the New Confucian ecological humanism, which has the following features. First, it is anti-anthropocentric by emphasizing the inner value of nature and the unity of Heaven, Earth and man. The domination of man over nature and other kinds of animals, which has been the motivation of modern science and technology, is subject to critique. Second, it opposes the applied instrumental rationality and the outdated notion of science as omnipotent in China. It becomes widely acknowledged that the potential of science can be fully realized through its active engagement with the humanities. Third, it is cosmopolitan by transcending national and cultural boundaries. Neither Confucianism nor science are confined to any personal, regional or national interest, and now with the two being integrated as a whole, the future of humankind and environment will benefit.

In New Confucianism, the positive and negative aspects of science have been carefully examined. New Confucians have come to realize that science plays an indispensable role for the transformation of Confucianism in the twenty-first century. Through a dialogue between science and New Confucianism, new paradigms of knowledge will be generated for the good of humankind for many generations to come. When discussing the ‘five questions of 21st-century Confucianism’, Tu Weiming says that

All sciences dominate humanities. But in scientific circles a group of very prominent outstanding scientists believes in many places the thought gets more and more complex, and more and more resembles the humanities. No one knows how the 21st century is going to be, but at least there needs to be a dialogue. (Ref. 10, p. 290)

It is expected that the global environment will be better protected in the future through a combined effort of people across the visible and invisible boundaries that still exist today.

Finally, science and humanities are not as drastically different as people tend to think. The goal of both is to seek new ways to safeguard the freedom of people as well as the peace and harmony of the world. Thus, the dialogue of science and humanities is not just an option, but rather a necessity. It is, therefore, no wonder that interdisciplinarity has become an increasingly valuable approach in training and research. In addition, by connecting science and humanities, new possibilities are brought out for traditional cultural wisdom, such as Confucianism, to have a new life in accordance with the changing or changed world.

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