

Protection of Nature – Protection of Culture: On the Significance of the Chinese Understanding of Technology in the Context of the International Discussion on Environment

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Abstract: *Living in the Anthropocene, we have new possibilities to make use of technology. Studying ancient Chinese philosophy, we learn that the essence of technology can be characterized by the concept of an ongoing dynamic process between human beings and nature. All human activities are already part of nature: what we do, inevitably affects nature and nature correspondingly always affects us in turn. It has to be realized that the “ten thousand things,” the things of the world, are not only a “standing reserve” to be exploited by man. Instead, cooperation between man and nature has to be taken as a holistic, dynamic process.*

Due to the technological and scientific development in the Anthropocene, in the 21st century, technology is expected as a means to overcome the ecological violence of man during the Holocene. Ancient Chinese philosophers would say that the evolution and procreation of heaven and earth have to be assisted. From them we also could get to know that a narrow anthropocentrism will lead to much unhappiness, quarrelling and disharmony. It may even bring disaster upon the whole population of the world. The first step to overcome any kind of narrow anthropocentrism would be to learn from the historical truth that nature has already been formed by different technologies and strategies of power (bio-power) over centuries. The second step would be to develop a new understanding of technology, based on the idea of a way of living in harmony between man and nature which is already the second or, as some would say, the third nature.

But, technology is not pure. Caused by the growing competition between nations, in the present international setting it is very political. We have to keep in mind that the search for better technology is not only justified by the desire to understand the truth. It is pushed by the de-

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sire to be in control, in control of the single subject, the whole society, the whole world, all of nature, in so far as it is of use for man because of strategical reasons. We have to accept that technology is not only for technology's sake. It does not only enter the realm of the political, but it is political itself.

Will it be possible to overcome the still prevalent, narrow anthropocentrism? Hopefully yes! But technology will play a crucial role in that process. Our hope is that the opposition of man and nature and the opposition of natural and cultural sciences have lost their meaning in the Anthropocene.

Technology has always been an inescapable part of life. In the present circumstances the term of the “Anthropocene” sends the message that technology is having undeniable impacts on the environment on the scale of the planet as a whole, so much so that even a new geological epoch has begun and an old epoch, the epoch of the Holocene, which lasted for 12,000 years, has gone. Only some weeks ago Martin Head, a geologist, described that process and its results with the following words: “We have talked to the earth, and now the earth responds to us.”¹ Besides many other meanings the term of the “Anthropocene” includes the insight that mankind has caused mass extinctions of plants, animal species, polluted the oceans and altered the atmosphere during its “talk” to the earth, as Martin Head has put it. The “response” of the earth is, among other things, the climate change, articulating itself in flooded coastal areas, droughts, wars and migration. This fundamental violence is done by man under the banner of scientific and technological progress. Science and technology may count as the greatest mythological beliefs of our time. In China today “Scientific Socialism” is propagated and put into political practice. According to my opinion, which is in line with Martin Heidegger, we have to grasp this unsettling essence of modern metaphysics and strive to overcome it by returning human existence (“Dasein”) to its origin in the world.

Under the premises of the Anthropocene, not only the natural sciences, but also the humanities have to look for new ways to define themselves. By doing so, they cannot escape the crucial question whether the opposition of man and nature on the one and the opposition of natural and cultural sciences on the other side have not lost their original meaning in the new epoch? How to uphold these oppositions in a world where we cannot find a place which does not show ecological footprints of human beings? Man and nature cannot be separated from each other anymore, as they are parts of a dynamic process which does not distinguish between them. With respect to the question about individuals living a life of appropriateness and establishing their destiny, we also have to ask if the concept of naturalness, as it has been formulated in the book *Laozi* 老子 for example, is still able to provide cultural guidance. How can we define what is ethically right or wrong within processual orders, happening between nature and man? We might oppose genetically modified organisms in industrial food production because we see them as doing fundamental violence to the fabric of nature and humanity. However, another group of

1 Jörg Häntzschel, “Menschengewalt. In Berlin trafen sich Wissenschaftler, um nachzuweisen, dass das Zeitalter des ‘Anthropozän’ angebrochen ist,” in: *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, June 1–2, 2019.

people may claim that genetically modified organisms in industrial food production are good because they allow a larger human population to be fed. What is ethically right and what is ethically wrong?

It seems that we inevitably fall into a kind of relativism regarding controversial issues like these. Values, judgments and appraisals are often attached to certain particular standpoints. This leads to a confrontation between various opposites: between objects and the self, being and non-being, difficulty and ease, good and evil and, last but not least, because of this kind of thinking in dichotomies, to a misleading human approach to nature. In fact, the relationship between humanity and nature is at the heart of ontologies of all philosophical interrogations, albeit expressed differently in different historical epochs and cultural contexts. In ancient Chinese philosophy human essence is defined through relationship, and it is through the employment of such reasoning that one could attain access to the supernatural which is permeating the whole of nature. But if the relationship between human beings and the world is cut off, the atomization of individuals and the fragmentation of the natural world take place. Mankind is then nothing more than the dominator of nature, understanding that the world is created for its use – be it as a tourist destination or a place of economic exploitation. Under these premises man is the subject, the “measure of all things;” he is privileged and the keeper of nature.

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Could ancient Chinese philosophy help us to overcome these predicaments, which are caused by a very harmful opposition of man and nature and by some kind of blindness towards the fact that human beings are not the masters of nature, nor can they exist independently of it? Does not ancient Chinese philosophy tell us that human beings and nature are interdependent, improving one another, getting along well with each other and integrating? To remember, the book *Laozi* explicitly points out that a human being should hold a respectful attitude towards heaven, the *dao* 道, and naturalness, and respect the laws of nature; humans in conformity with the *dao* should not violate natural laws, they should follow them instead. Only in this way can they achieve oneness between man and nature and apply their technical skills in the right and not in a destructive way – which is one of the core ideas of Daoism and, as I would like to state, of Chinese culture. It permeates the arts of painting, calligraphy, Chinese craftsmanship and so on in general. Technology plays an important role; according to Chinese philosophy not as a tool of violence, but as a tool of human experience (some may call “wisdom”) which unfolds its effects in the very process of living. The human person and the world are one ongoing process. Because there is no dichotomy between nature and nurture, between social and biological issues, there is also no antagonism between the realms of technology and ecology. “The problem is how human growth can unfold with the rhythm of nature.”²

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The present government of the People’s Republic of China is running a plan, unveiled four years ago in May 2015, called “Made in China 2025.” As China revved up its manufactur-

2 Liu Jing, “Growth, Experience and Nature in Dewey’s Philosophy and Chinese Philosophy,” in: *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* 12 (March 2017) 1, pp. 90-103. Quotation on p. 96.

ing machine to power growth over the years, officials were willing to tolerate some of the downside of scrap, namely the pollution of local soil and rivers by low-end-recycling practices. Further on, since the 1990s, the world has shipped its waste paper, discarded plastic and unwanted metals to China, where they have been destined to be used as raw materials to help power the country's export-driven manufacturing boom. In 2016, China imported about \$ 18 million worth of what the government calls solid waste. But the situation has changed. China does not want to be the rest of the world's trash can anymore. It started its regulatory fight against imported garbage in 2013, when a flurry of port inspections forced overseas recyclers to clean up their operations and invest in new waste-sorting technologies.³ Among other things "Made in China 2025" means that the People's Republic of China should no longer make such environmental sacrifices. Pollution figures strongly into the broader debate over the cost of growth in China. If successful, the antipollution campaign could produce bluer skies and cleaner water across the country. And, not to forget: Following the guidelines of Scientific Socialism the Chinese government has designs to dominate cutting-edge technologies like artificial intelligence. It is enlisting some of the world's biggest technology players in its push.

"Made in China 2025" is very ambitious. It means a national industrial policy that aims to project a new type of global might and influence. According to my opinion, there is a common idea, shared by modern and traditional China. It lies in the fact that both focus on the interaction between human persons in community and the natural world so as to formulate a dynamic life philosophy or, as I would say, following the German philosopher Günter Wohlfart, an ethical system without morality.⁴ But in this system there exists a dilemma: The dilemma "between unbalanced and inadequate development and the people's ever-growing needs for a better life," as President Xi Jinping stated in 2017.⁵ Ecological consciousness and ethics without morality, can they work well together?

Remarks on the Concept of Nature in Traditional China⁶

The conventional term in Chinese philosophy for nature is *ziran* 自然. In general it is associated with Daoism. In the books *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* 庄子 nature represents a certain desirable state beyond the realms of civilization and social norms. The followers of Daoism dissociate themselves from the followers of Confucianism. They are dreaming of a prehistoric period. Thanks to the natural living conditions at that time, human beings had, so the assumption, supernatural capabilities at their disposal. Through Neo-Confucianism the relationship between Daoism and Confucianism entered into a new stage at

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- 3 Mike Ives, "China Does Not Want to Be the World's Garbage Dump Anymore," in: *The New York Times International Weekly*, December 15, 2017.
- 4 Günter Wohlfart, *Die Kunst des Lebens und andere Künste. Scurrile Skizzen zu einem eurodaoistischen Ethos ohne Moral*, Berlin: Parerga 2005.
- 5 Keith Bradsher, "Harder Line on Pollution. Could China Slow Down China," in: *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, November 10, 2017.
- 6 Based on the book Heinrich Geiger, *Den Duft hören. Natur, Naturbegriff und Umweltverhalten in China*, Berlin: Matthes & Seitz 2019.

the end of the first millennium A.D. At the same time, *The Book of Changes* (*Yijing* 易经) began to play a new and far-reaching role.

Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤 (1017–1073) is generally called the pioneer of Neo-Confucianism. Being an outgrowth of ancient Confucianism, modified by Daoism and Buddhism, Neo-Confucianism thrived from the twelfth to the sixteenth century. Zhou laid the pattern of metaphysics and ethics for later Neo-Confucianism in his works *An Explanation of the Diagram of the Great Universe* (*Taiji tu shuo* 太极图说) and *Penetrating the Book of Changes* (*Tong shu* 通书). His *Taiji tu shuo* is not like any diagram of the Daoists. It is closer to *The Book of Changes* rather than to the books *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* of Daoism. Zhou Dunyi based his entire philosophy on *The Book of Changes* and, as such, used this classic for his own “rational philosophy.”⁷ Following *The Book of Changes*, the two complementary ethical formulae, seriousness (*cheng* 誠) to straighten the internal life and righteousness (*yi* 義) to square the external life, became the keystones in the method of moral cultivation of many Neo-Confucianists.

From the writings of Zhou Dunyi we may see that at the latest since the formation of Neo-Confucianism, this means from the beginning of the second millennium A.D., *The Book of Changes* had been very crucial again in a specific way for the understanding of the harmony between heaven (*tian* 天), earth (*di* 地) and men (*ren* 人). Zhou Dunyi assimilated the Daoist element of Non-Being to Confucian thought, but in so doing, he discarded the fantasy and mysticism of Daoism. In the following, nature was conceived as a part of a reality, which can be regulated. It was understood among other things as a functioning whole, be it a landscape with thousands of traces of *qi* 气 or a city with thousands of roads. Now, in the 21st century, not only a few are convinced that, following *The Book of Changes*, you even may discover the laws of nature in the stock-market. According to my own opinion, this is a late result of Neo-Confucianism, using *The Book of Changes* for its “rational philosophy.”

Culture and Nature⁸

In the history of Chinese thought nature is not opposed to culture or the world of man. *The Book of Changes*, which is characterized by the impact of different traditions of thought, shows that well.

Since its very origin *The Book of Changes* consisted of the so-called eight Trigrams (*ba gua* 八卦, i.e., figures composed of three lines each), being then the name symbols for eight worldly natural objects or phenomena, such as Heaven, Earth, Thunder, Winds, Fire, Water, Mountains and Marshes. From those eight symbols they were extended to sixty four combinations of two combined Trigrams, called sixty four Hexagrams (*liushisi gua* 六十四卦, i.e., figures composed of now six lines each). Traditionally the invention of the eight Trigrams is ascribed to the mythical ruler Fu Xi 伏羲. King Wen 周文王 of the Zhou-Dy-

7 Chan Wing-Tsit (transl./comp.), *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1969 (fourth printing 1973), p. 460.

8 Based on the book Heinrich Geiger, *Den Duft hören. Natur, Naturbegriff und Umweltverhalten in China*, Berlin: Matthes & Seitz 2019.

nasty (approx. 1100–256 B.C.) is said to have doubled the Trigrams to Hexagrams and was the first to arrange them. But actually *The Book of Changes* has been accomplished by many people with generations of efforts. Different parts of it have been compiled over a long period by different groups of persons. The final shape must have evolved during the Warring States period (441–221 B.C.). During the last two centuries B.C., when cosmological speculations prevailed, there were four different traditions of the *Yijing* for which professorships were established. The versions of Meng Xi 孟喜 (approx. 1st century B.C., exact life data unknown) and Jing Fang 京房 (78–37 B.C.) soon dominated over the others, but were themselves, at the end of the Eastern Han-Dynasty (25–220 A.D.), overshadowed by the versions commented by Zheng Xuan 郑玄 (127–200 A.D.) and Wang Bi 王弼 (226–249 A.D.). Matters of dispute are the actual dates of the completion of the *Yijing* commentaries. Feng Youlan 冯友兰 (Fung Yulan), for example, dates the commentaries as late as the Western Han-Dynasty (206 B.C. – 9 A.D.).⁹ The *Ten Wing Commentaries* (*Shi yi* 十翼) which interpret the Hexagrams and their statements in a lexicological, symbolistic and philosophical way should be considered products of that time.

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Talking about *The Book of Changes*, we may presume that the text describes an ancient system of cosmology and philosophy which underwent a process of reinterpretation by Neo-Confucianism. In its early times it was used as an official book of divination by ancient rulers. Later on its meaning was applied in geomancy as corresponding to points of the compass. But, despite that fact, one should not forget its heterogeneity. At the time of the classical philosophers in around 500 B.C., after the Zhou-State weakened and China moved in to the Spring and Autumn Period (770–481 B.C.), *The Book of Changes* began to show traces of different schools which utilized the material of the same to be interpreted into their own system of thought. Confucian influence played a great role, but also Daoism and the Yin-Yang school. As Burton Watson in his book *Early Chinese Literature* explains,

*it thus provided an opportunity for scholars with a more metaphysical and transcendental bent of mind to indulge their tastes without going outside the realm of the Five Classics, and the endless volumes of commentary on the hidden meaning of the Changes are the result. Had there been no such text in the Confucian canon, it is likely that such men would have abandoned Confucianism entirely in favour of the Daoists, who from the beginning interested themselves in mystical and cosmological speculation. It was probably to preclude just such an eventuality that the early Confucian scholars took over The Book of Changes and made it part of their literature.*¹⁰

Starting from the 10th century A.D., the Neo-Confucian school understood the “father of all classics and source of a hundred schools of thought” in a more moralistic and, as pointed out above, functional manner.

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9 Fung Yulan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, transl. by Derk Bodde, 2 vols., Princeton: Princeton University Press 1952/3, pp. 381-382.

10 Burton Watson, *Early Chinese Literature*, New York – London: Columbia University Press 1962, p. 153.

In the *The Book of Changes* there is no real line between culture and nature, they are inseparable from each other. Studying nature means a communication within an overall context, to which we human beings belong. In their encounter with nature human beings reflect the basis of their own existence. They face, so to speak, relations all the way down, and all the way up and all the way out, which they have to consider. The Hexagrams of the *The Book of Changes* prove that there are no terms of relations which are not simply clusters of further relations. For the sake of an unrestricted understanding of the concept of nature as it is represented by *The Book of Changes* we have to keep that in mind. As it deals with Tri- and Hexagramms we have to understand the reader of *The Book of Changes*, following Charles Sanders Peirce, as someone “who knows no more recondite reality than that which is represented in a true representation.”¹¹ But this is, thanks to the deep meaning of the Tri- and Hexagrams in *The Book of Changes*, the reality of the whole universe, comprising heaven (*tian*), earth (*di*) and men (*ren*).

The concrete never satisfies the mind: Even though numerous physical models have been constructed and a multitude of mathematical models have been formulated, through the history of *The Book of Changes* we may learn that the mental experiments still continue. The hermeneutic of this classical book is justified by the idea of “second nature” (John McDowell, born 1942, *Mind and World*, Harvard University Press 1996) which is based on the capacity of human beings as potentially rational and dialogical, responsive to “*Bildung*” (education or, better, formation). It is not only justified by the insight into nature itself or what we may call “first nature” and laws which may be explained by knowledge of fact. The textual tradition of the Chinese classics as it was shaped by Neo-Confucianism shows that we cannot leave our own horizon, as the effective history of a continuing tradition depends on constantly new assimilations and interpretations.

The Concepts of *ziran*, *tian* and *xing*¹²

For a genuine understanding of the concept of nature in China studies on *ziran* 自然 are not enough. To show it in all its diversity and depth, explanations on *tian* 天 and *xing* 性 have to be included. In that context I will not talk about the concept of *qi* 气 which was used as early as the Western Zhou-Dynasty (app. 1100–771 B.C.) in the meaning of nature.

Ziran 自然

We come across the term *ziran* from the 4th century B.C. amongst others in the Mohist canon. In the book *Daodejing* 道德经 (English: *True Classic of the Way and the Power*) the term *ziran* is used as an expression for something which cannot be named and realizes the utmost in itself. Also Wang Bi defines *ziran* in a very general way: according to him *ziran* should be understood as something which is empty or non-existent and comes into

11 Martin Krampen et al. (ed.), *Die Welt als Zeichen. Klassiker der modernen Semiotik*, Berlin: Severin und Siedler 1981, p. 38.

12 Based on the book Heinrich Geiger, *Den Duft hören. Natur, Naturbegriff und Umweltverhalten in China*, Berlin: Matthes & Seitz 2019.

being through action or motion. The passage from potentiality to actuality is important. Therefore in ancient Chinese philosophy the concept of *ziran* gets its meaning on the one hand as a universal notion within an ontological model. On the other hand it is referred to in a significant manner as a human ability to fully merge with the *dao*, to get into oneness with the ten thousands things (*wan wu* 万物).

The character for *ziran* consists of two parts: *zi* 自, which is to be meant as “self,” and *ran* 然, which is joined to it, again consists of three component parts: right the radical “dog,” left the radical “flesh” and below them the radical for “fire.” *Ran* has been used in its etymological meaning of “burning” up to the Han-period (206 B.C. – 220 A.D.). However, we face many difficulties and fundamental philosophical problems in the act of translating *ziran*. A dependence of this core concept of East-Asian thinking on Western concepts should be avoided.

Within the concept of *ziran*, nature is respected as a dynamic, self-regulatory essential form. First and foremost, it is understood as a rational, systematic arrangement, as is the case in *The Book of Changes*. Hence the meaning of nature (*ziran*) has not necessarily to be derived from the love for nature, but from the perspective of reflective human beings who are concerned about their own existence. This is an important difference between Chinese and Western culture which should be considered when we talk about environmental issues, too. Love for nature or unity with nature under the premise that it cannot be separated from man – this means two different relational settings of nature and man.

The core ideas of the Chinese concept of nature (*ziran*) may be found in *The Book of Changes*, as already pointed out above. According to the system of cosmology and philosophy, that is intrinsic to ancient Chinese cultural beliefs, every existence is a product of firm and yielding forces, it is at the same time a physical being as it is a force which interacts with other forces. From the third commentary of *The Book of Changes*, the *Great Commentary* (*Da zhuan* 大传) or, as it is also called, *About the Relationship of the Hexagrams* (*Xi ci zhuan* 系辞传), Section I, Chapter I, Paragraph 1 we can get an idea about the process of evolution of the universe from primordial chaos to ordered entity:

Heaven is high, the earth is low; thus the creative and the receptive are determined. In correspondence with this difference between low and high, inferior and superior places are established.

Movements and rest have their definite laws; according to these, firm and yielding lines are differentiated.

Events follow definite trends, each according to its nature. Things are distinguished from one another in definite classes. In this way good fortune and misfortune come about. In the heavens phenomena take form; on earth shapes take form. In this way change and transformation become manifest.¹³

Even though this comment is a product of the Han-Dynasty, it is evident that such a conception must go back much earlier. We learn that cosmic evolution proceeds in four stages. The very first is the setting of the value levels of heaven and earth, and those in between.

13 Richard Wilhelm, *The I Ching*, transl. by Cary Baynes, New York: Princeton University Press 1967, p. 280.

It is followed on the second stage by the differentiation of the firm and the yielding which is the precondition for the distribution of the two forces into different value levels on the third level. These value levels obey the rules that “similar things tend to group together” or “similar natures respond to each other.” On the fourth stage it comes to a formation of all the phenomena and things because they interact with each other and keep changing harmoniously due to a closed system of order.

Tian 天

“Heaven is high, the earth is low,” as we have heard from the *Great Commentary* of the *Yijing*. The term of “heaven,” in Chinese *tian*, already appears in the texts of the *Shujing* 书经. From the outer appearance *The Book of Documents*, as the *Shujing* is called in English, goes back to the period between the 20th to the 7th Century B.C. But in reality it may count as a compilation of texts from the 10th to the 6th Century B.C. Together with the *Shijing* 诗经, *The Book of Songs*, it belongs to the oldest traditions of China.

Since the term of “heaven” (*tian*) is not clearly explained by the *Shujing* or by the *Shijing*, it came to the fact that it had been identified in some cases by Western ideas in the meaning of a personal God. Reasons for that had been given particularly by paleographic analysis of the graphic character *tian* which clearly shows, as it was seen, a human figure with big head and distinctive limbs. However the definition of “deity” in the Christian meaning as creator of cosmos and the human beings, etc. is eliminated as possibility for the *Shujing* as well as for the *Shijing*, as the heaven in these texts does not act as a creator. Even though in the *Daodejing*, the book *Laozi*, cosmogonical reports can be proved, there is good reason to conclude that in classical Chinese texts, as there are the *Shujing*, the *Shijing* and the book *Laozi*, the idea of a deity in the sense of a creator God does not exist. *Tian* has to be understood as a term which is symbolizing the entity of ancestral spirits of a dynasty.

Wolfgang Bauer has explained on various occasions how heaven (*tian*) slowly lost its transcendent position during the Zhou-Dynasty.¹⁴ According to the German sinologist, in the course of that process the meaning of *tian* changed from a generic term for the entity of ancestral spirits of a dynasty finally into “nature.” *Tian*, the heaven, did not anymore, as it did before, look after the human beings, listen to them or speak to them. It appeared rather in a plethora of natural phenomena, from which the human beings had to draw their own lessons for concrete political decisions. This provided a very special historical background for the use of *The Book of Changes* as an official book of divination and geomancy.

Xing 性

Besides and together with the terms *ziran* and *tian* the Chinese understanding of nature is closely related with the term *xing*, which I would translate as “human nature.” In classical

14 Wolfgang Bauer, “Gläubigkeit und Rationalität. Über das Verlassen von Göttern und Geistern in der zweiten Hälfte des ersten vorchristlichen Jahrtausends,” in: Kulturstiftung Ruhr, Essen (ed.), *Das alte China: Menschen und Götter im Reich der Mitte. 5000 v.Chr. – 220 nach Chr.*, München: Hirmer Verlag 1995, pp. 147-155.

Chinese philosophy the identification of *xing*, suggested by etymological word relatedness, with the “inherent” (*sheng* 生) is very common. In the meaning of “heavenly nature” the concept of *xing* is found in a text passage in *The Book of Documents* (*Shujing*). There it is mentioned as a reason for a lost battle and the relief of the Shang- (approx. 1600 – approx. 1100 B.C.) by the Zhou-Dynasty. It was argued that the last king of the Shang-Dynasty disrespected his “heavenly nature” (*xing*).

In the *Shujing* the will of heaven had been regarded as the crucial moment for the victory or rather the defeat of a dynasty, even though heaven itself did not execute it, but specific historical persons. Those who had been victorious had proved already that they are capable of implementing what is conceived as being in accordance with human nature (*xing*). This story tells us that according to the *Shujing* human nature (*xing*) is not really free in the modern sense of the word. It is bound by a contract, which emanates from the “will of heaven” (*tian ming* 天命) and requires its implementation by several means that we also know from the *Yijing*.

Closing Remarks

The concept of *tian* changed from “heaven” to “nature” in the meaning of natural phenomena within the last centuries B.C. And also the concept of *xing* underwent a transformation in the same direction. From the writings of Mengzi 孟子 (372–289 B.C.) and Xunzi 荀子 (298–238 B.C.) we know that during the 4th and 3rd century B.C. human nature was not seen any more within an order set by heaven. It was seen in the light of human nature itself which Mencius understood as good and Xunzi as bad. Mencius talked about the virtues of men, Xunzi about their sensual and instinctive nature which could be used for the sake of a harmonious state by the means of music and ritual.

These transformations have to be kept in mind when we speak about nature in China and its underlying cosmology which is also basic for *The Book of Changes*. We should learn from these transformations that the Chinese perception of nature comes along with a diverse history, which brought specific Confucian concepts into the vicinity of Daoism, especially at the time of the Western Han-Dynasty (206 B.C. – 9 A.D.), and again, together with some Buddhist impact, at the time of Song-Dynasty (960–1279 A.D.), based on the *The Book of Changes*.

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Now we are living in the epoch of the Anthropocene. After a break with its own tradition in the course of the 20th century, Daoism, Confucianism and Buddhism again play a certain role in the academic world of present day China. During the last decades, a whole range of discussions and mechanisms have evolved to address the loss of nature, environmental degradation and ecological corrosion. Along with an emphasis on these issues, there has been also an increasing focus on how to find an adequate response to what nowadays is seen as a global challenge in dealing with environmental degradation and ecological corrosion. Historically speaking, one could say that there has been worldwide an evolution from nature conservation education to environmental education to the

recent idea of education for sustainable development. But, Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato si'* goes a step further and speaks of an education in “integral ecology” that combines environmental, economic, social, cultural and spiritual ecologies in caring for our common home.¹⁵ If we want to tread along this line of thought, valuing non-European cultures and traditions in the care for our common home cannot be ignored. Pope Francis’ *Laudato Si'* is addressed to “every person on the planet,” with a stern warning of the dangerous changes the earth’s climate and ecosystems are undergoing.

From the above analyses and explanations, it becomes clear that it is a great challenge for environmental questions to find a respectful way to compare Western and non-European, in our case Chinese, traditions. It is challenging, yet crucial, not to distort non-European traditions by making them conform to Western traditions. They must be a part and parcel of creating a culture of care and raising global awareness for our common home. Not to forget: In Chinese culture nature has a lot to do with practice. That means: You can only protect nature, if you protect your own culture.

15 Pope Francis, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*, Vatican city 2015.