

## *Original Paper*

# The Ecological Concept of "Unity of Heaven and Man, Coexistence of All Things": Its Rich Connotations, Contemporary Value, and Practical Pathways

Jiangping Zhou

Xi'an University of Science and Technology, Shaanxi 710600, China

### **Abstract**

*The ancient Chinese ecological concept of "Unity of Heaven and Man, Coexistence of All Things" emphasizes the harmonious coexistence of humans and nature, serving as a fundamental perspective in Chinese culture for understanding the world. This concept embodies deep ecological values and provides valuable ideological resources and practical directions for modern ecological civilization construction and sustainable development goals. This paper first traces the historical context of the concept and expounds on its ideological connotations; then, it analyzes the value of this concept in contemporary society, particularly in areas such as environmental protection and the green economy; finally, it proposes a series of practical pathways, such as policy development, technological innovation, and public education, aiming to fully leverage the concept in promoting the harmonious coexistence of humans and nature in modern society.*

### **Keywords**

*Unity of Heaven and Man, Coexistence of All Things, Ecological Civilization Construction*

## **1. The Rich Connotations of the Ecological Concept of "Unity of Heaven and Man, Coexistence of All Things"**

The ecological concept of "Unity of Heaven and Man, Coexistence of All Things" is not only a vital part of Chinese traditional culture but also a valuable spiritual heritage to promote ecological civilization construction and achieve harmonious coexistence between humans and nature. It contains profound connotations and deep philosophical essence.

### **(1) The Rich Connotations of the "Unity of Heaven and Man" Thought**

The idea of "Unity of Heaven and Man" can be traced back to the pre-Qin period. "Heaven" refers not only to the natural world or weather phenomena but also to the highest principles and order of the universe, the "Dao." "Man" refers to all life forms, particularly human emotions, will, and consciousness.

### 1. Harmony between Humans and Nature

Chinese Academy of Sciences academician Qian Xuesen mentioned: "'Unity of Heaven and Man' is the most distinctive and crucial basic principle in Eastern philosophy..." The essence of "Unity of Heaven and Man" reveals the coherence and interconnectedness between the natural world and human society. It emphasizes that humans are an inseparable part of the vast world, a key component in the ecosystem. Humans, the earth, and the heavens are all composed of the same elements, and through the exchange of energy and matter, they form an organic whole. Humans cannot live independently from this organic system.

### 2. Consistency of the Laws of the Universe and Human Activities

"Heaven" in "Unity of Heaven and Man" has multiple meanings: it refers to the natural universe, including phenomena like the changing of seasons, as well as the fundamental principles or laws of the universe. "Man" not only refers to individuals but also to human society and its activities. "Unity of Heaven and Man" stresses that human behavior and intrinsic attributes must align with the laws governing the natural world. Both should follow the same principles. People must adapt to external changes while maintaining inner calm, achieving harmony with nature.

### (2) The Rich Connotations of the "Coexistence of All Things" Thought

"Coexistence of All Things" states: "All things grow together without harm, and the Dao runs simultaneously without contradiction." The concept of "Coexistence of All Things" not only reveals ancient people's deep understanding of biodiversity and ecological protection but also reflects the ecological vision of the harmonious coexistence and mutual prosperity of all things under the "Unity of Heaven and Man" thought.

### 1. Symbiosis and Coexistence of Natural Beings

"Coexistence of All Things" means that all things in the natural world have their space to live and develop, and they jointly maintain ecological balance. The core of this idea is biodiversity and the integrity of ecosystems. The natural world is a complex system composed of countless species, each interdependent and working together to maintain ecological balance.

### 2. Harmonious Coexistence in Human Society

The ecological concept of "Coexistence of All Things" extends to harmonious interpersonal relationships, respect for cultural diversity, and the pursuit of social equity. It signifies that different ideas, cultures, and viewpoints can coexist as long as they mutually respect and tolerate each other, avoiding conflicts and contradictions.

### (3) The Internal Connection Between "Unity of Heaven and Man" and "Coexistence of All Things"

Although "Unity of Heaven and Man" and "Coexistence of All Things" focus on different aspects, they are deeply connected at a fundamental level. Together, they form an essential concept of harmonious coexistence between humans and nature in Chinese traditional culture.

### 1. Philosophical Consistency

Both "Unity of Heaven and Man" and "Coexistence of All Things" share the philosophical foundation

of the "Dao." They believe that there is a universal natural law that applies to all beings in the universe. Both humans and other life forms should follow this law to achieve the best living conditions.

## 2. Practical Complementarity

"Unity of Heaven and Man" focuses on guiding individuals to achieve harmony at both the personal and societal levels through internal cultivation and external behavioral adjustments, providing moral guidance for "Coexistence of All Things." In contrast, "Coexistence of All Things" focuses on practical measures for natural ecological protection, encouraging behaviors that promote ecological balance in everyday life, thus achieving the symbiosis and mutual prosperity of humans and nature.

## 3. Cultural Resonance

Both concepts emphasize respect for life, the pursuit of peace, and a focus on sustainable development. They advocate a life beyond narrow self-interest, striving for a harmonious existence. In such a cultural atmosphere, positive interactions between humans and nature, as well as between individuals, are formed, ultimately contributing to the progress of social civilization and the protection of the natural ecology.

## 2. The Contemporary Value of the Ecological Concept of "Unity of Heaven and Man, Coexistence of All Things"

The ecological concept of "Unity of Heaven and Man, Coexistence of All Things," as a core idea of Chinese traditional culture, holds profound contemporary value. It emphasizes harmonious coexistence between humans and nature, providing a vital ideological foundation and action guide for the construction of ecological civilization in the new era.

### (1) Promoting Ecological Civilization Construction in the New Era

The idea of "Unity of Heaven and Man, Coexistence of All Things" emphasizes the relationship of harmonious coexistence between humans and nature. This concept provides a significant ideological foundation for ecological civilization construction, advocating respect, compliance with, and protection of nature.

## 1. Empowering Rural Revitalization and Urban-Rural Integration

The concept of "Unity of Heaven and Man, Coexistence of All Things" supports national rural revitalization efforts and offers clearer substantive directions. It promotes ecological protection and environmental restoration, helping in the development of poverty alleviation efforts and increasing farmers' incomes. Additionally, this concept has led to the emergence of many new eco-friendly rural industries, gradually narrowing the urban-rural gap and promoting urban-rural integration.

## 2. Promoting Harmony between Humans and Nature

The concept advocates respect for nature, compliance with nature, and protection of nature, thereby facilitating the harmonious coexistence of humans and nature. This has provided vital theoretical guidance and practical pathways for ecological civilization construction, leading to significant achievements in the transition from theory to practice.

## (2) Providing a Valuable Cultural Foundation for Chinese Ecological Concepts

The ecological idea of "Unity of Heaven and Man, Coexistence of All Things" is woven into the development of ecological thought with Chinese characteristics. It reflects the deep respect the Chinese nation holds for the natural world and has flourished in the context of ecological civilization construction in the new era.

### 1. An Important Part of Ecological Thought with Chinese Characteristics

The idea of "Unity of Heaven and Man, Coexistence of All Things" deeply embodies the wisdom of harmonious coexistence between humans and nature. It emphasizes the need to respect, comply with, and protect nature in the course of economic and social development, avoiding the old development model of "pollute first, clean up later," and instead promoting a development path that balances production, prosperity, and ecological health.

### 2. Driving Theoretical Innovation in Ecological Concepts

The ecological concept of "Unity of Heaven and Man, Coexistence of All Things" has continued to evolve in the new era, injecting vitality into ecological civilization theory. It advocates the combination of respecting nature, complying with nature, and protecting nature, offering a solid theoretical foundation for the construction of a shared human-nature life community.

## (3) Contribution to the Continuity and Innovation of Chinese Civilization

The concept of "Unity of Heaven and Man, Coexistence of All Things" is not only a gem in the long history of Chinese civilization but also an essential part of its spiritual core. It plays a crucial role in the continuity and innovation of Chinese culture.

### 1. Continuity: Transmission and Continuation of Cultural Genes

This concept has been central to the continuity of Chinese civilization. It connects the past, present, and future, enabling Chinese culture to maintain its unique continuity across time and space.

### 2. Innovation: Ecological Practices in Line with Modernity

The idea of "Unity of Heaven and Man, Coexistence of All Things" continues to evolve with the times, offering new approaches and solutions for the future. Since the reform and opening up, especially after the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, China has proposed several forward-looking ecological concepts, reflecting innovation within the continuity of traditional culture.

## **3. The Practical Path of Promoting "Unity of Heaven and Man, Coexistence of All Things" in the Contemporary Context**

The promotion of the ecological concept of "Unity of Heaven and Man, Coexistence of All Things" requires a clear understanding of its practical pathways. The implementation of these pathways involves a combination of policy, technological, and educational measures that reflect the core values of the concept.

### (1) Policy Measures

The first step in implementing the concept of "Unity of Heaven and Man, Coexistence of All Things" is

to strengthen policy support. These include:

1. Improved Ecological Regulations

Governments should strengthen laws and regulations related to environmental protection and sustainability, ensuring that businesses and individuals follow principles of ecological balance and sustainability.

2. Promotion of Green Economy

The transition from traditional industrial models to green, low-carbon models should be supported through policies that incentivize green technologies, eco-friendly industries, and energy conservation.

(2) Technological Innovation

Technological innovation is essential for realizing the ecological concept of "Unity of Heaven and Man, Coexistence of All Things" in practice. Specific efforts should include:

1. Green Technologies

The development and promotion of green technologies such as renewable energy, energy-efficient technologies, and sustainable agricultural practices should be encouraged.

2. Ecological Restoration Technologies

Advances in ecological restoration, such as the restoration of damaged ecosystems, water resources, and biodiversity, should be prioritized.

(3) Public Education and Awareness

Public awareness and education are vital in spreading the concept of "Unity of Heaven and Man, Coexistence of All Things." Efforts should include:

1. Environmental Education

Schools, universities, and communities should prioritize teaching environmental protection, sustainability, and the importance of maintaining ecological balance.

2. Public Engagement Campaigns

Nationwide campaigns should be initiated to raise awareness of the importance of ecological protection and to encourage individual and community action in daily life to support a sustainable future.

#### 4. Conclusion

The ecological concept of "Unity of Heaven and Man, Coexistence of All Things" is a fundamental part of Chinese civilization. It emphasizes the harmonious coexistence of humans and nature and offers a rich philosophical, cultural, and practical resource for the construction of ecological civilization in the modern era. By actively promoting this concept through policies, technological innovations, and public education, we can create a more sustainable, harmonious, and prosperous future for both humans and nature.

## References

- Central Compilation & Translation Bureau. *Excerpts from Xi Jinping's Discussions on Socialist Ecological Civilization Construction*. Beijing: Central Compilation & Translation Press, 2017.
- Fang Keli. (2003). Unity of Heaven and Man and Ancient Chinese Ecological Wisdom. *Social Sciences Frontline*, 2003(06).
- Hu Jintao. (2012). Resolutely Advancing on the Road of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics to Build a Well-off Society in an All-round Way—Report at the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China. *People's Daily*, November 18, 2012, p. 1.
- Lu Feng, & Lei Aimin. (2018). Ancient Chinese Ecological Wisdom. *Green China*, 2018(03).
- Meng Peiyuan. (2004). *Man and Nature: The Ecological View in Chinese Philosophy*. Beijing: People's Publishing House, pp. 128-133.
- Qian Xuesen. (2006). *Research on the Open Complex Giant System Theory*. Master's Thesis, Central Party School of the Communist Party of China, 2006, p. 32.
- Shang Chenguang. (2019). *Research on the Value Orientation and Contemporary Attributes of Ecological Culture*. Master's Thesis, Central Party School of the Communist Party of China, 2019.
- Tao Tingting. (2017). *Research on Ecological Civilization Construction Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China*. Master's Thesis, Guizhou University.
- Xi Jinping. (2018). Speech at the National Conference on Ecological Environmental Protection. *Current Affairs Report* (Party Committee Central Group Learning), 2018(04).
- Xi Jinping. (2019). Promoting the Advancement of Ecological Civilization Construction in China. *Qiushi*, 2019(3).
- Zhang Yunfei. (2019). *Unity of Heaven and Man: Confucian and Daoist Philosophy and Ecological Civilization*. Beijing: China Forestry Publishing House.