

# An Analysis of Confucianism Ecological View and its Influence on the Design of Chinese Classical Gardens

Yu Tian <sup>1, a</sup> and Li Guo <sup>2, b\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Xuzhou University of Technology, China

<sup>2</sup>Xuzhou University of Technology, China

<sup>a</sup>501895364@qq.com; <sup>b</sup>651230880@qq.com

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**Abstract.** The design of Chinese classical gardens are deeply influenced by the Confucian ecological concept. The elaboration of the Confucian ecological concept leads to the thinking of the influence of the Confucian ecological concept on the design of classical gardens, in order to throw a brick to attract jade, provide design basis and reference materials for modern gardens, and thus contribute to the construction of ecological civilization of the national society. By studying the philosophical basis and contents of the Confucian ecological concept, this paper explores the impact on Chinese classical gardens. ① Confucianism's thought of "helping breeding", and the thought of "comparing moral standard", the establishment of the view of landscape in garden designing; ② "the benevolence for an organic whole" and the natural style garden that "done by man, as if since it is made"; ③ take "frugality" as virtue and the simple and deep style of the literati garden. The Confucian ecological concept is embodied in the temperament, elegant style and artistic conception of Chinese classical gardens. Looking forward to contemporary design, only by restoring the ancient oriental wisdom, can we create a series of garden design exquisite works which can reflect the spirit of regional culture and the harmony of all things.

## Introduction

The Confucianism is one of China's main traditional cultural. It has proposed the rich ideology to develop, use and protect the natural environment, which contains traditional Chinese ecology ethics. And the details are to be being benevolent to all creatures on earth, oneness of heaven and man, limited use of the nature but not destroying them, etc. The Confucianism ecological view has good promotion on the current social ecological civilization. The design of Chinese classical gardens is deeply influenced by the Confucian ecological concept. The elaboration of the Confucian ecological concept leads to the thinking of the influence of the Confucian ecological concept on the design of classical gardens, in order to throw a brick to attract jade, provide design basis and reference materials for modern gardens, and thus contribute to the construction of ecological civilization of the national society.

## Body

**The concept that heaven and men are united as one is the philosophy base of Confucian ecological thought.** The oneness of heaven and man concept is Chinese traditional cultural subject and the basic character, also the great support of Chinese traditional ideology. It is so deeply rooted in Chinese traditional culture that it has great influence not only in the Book of Changes as the start of philosophy but also in the various schools of thinkers in the pre-Qing periods. And the oneness of heaven and man concept is the core in the Chinese ecological ethics.

The oneness concept from Confucianism is based on the ethics itself, the heaven is the primitive of the moral concept while the humanity is the heaven's law, and the people have the natural benevolence and morality principle in their minds. In The Book of Changes, heaven, it says: "The people should conform to the laws of the nature and live in harmony with it." While here, the harmony is related to the morality. In The Book of Changes, it also says: "One man with noble character should keep going like the heaven, he should never give in, and if you are this kind of man,

you should be as generous as the earth and bear everything." Confucius said: "The heaven is the most powerful one, and the Emperor Yao is only next to it." In the Analects of Confucius, Tiber the Eighth, it says that the Emperor of Yao is a good king because he is so moral, he can follow the standard as the heaven does, so he's as great and powerful as the heaven. The Emperor, master and the noble man can be harmony with the heaven, so that they're constantly striving themselves for improvement, they are generous and conforming to the heaven. This is the common morality for the master and the heaven, also the format of the oneness of the heaven and man. This kind of morality is the extended meaning of the thought of "comparing moral standard". The humans are fooled when they have hidden their morality nature when they are influenced by so many interests. As a result, we need to explore the truth of things to correct our behaviors, get rid of our desires, fulfill the moral principles, and change the "base person into a noble one" so as to achieve the state of "follow the heart's desire without overstepping the line at seventy," and this is also the so-called "the morality of the noble man."

**To be friendly to the people, and love all the creatures, "gain benevolence when to seek it".** In Confucianism, it emphasizes "the benevolence for an organic whole", advocating that "benevolence to all", we should respect all the things, care all the creatures and achieve the morality. The "benevolence" is the virtue and the moral at highest level. In Analects of Confucius, Yan Yuan the Thirteenth, we can find that the benevolence means to love people. Confucius started with "benevolence", and advocated to love everything and paid close attention to the relationship between the human and the nature. He also advocated that we should give benevolence to the nature and love the nature. In Analects of Confucius, Yong Ye the Sixth, he said that "the wise find pleasure in water, and the virtuous find pleasure in hills," advocating that people should love the nature and love all the creatures. Mencius put forward clearly that "we should show affection to the universe, then to the universe." In the Mencius' Thought, thinking. Here, the affection to the family is the starting point of benevolence. And we should love our family first, then love the common people and everything, so that it has constituted the "order of love." This kind of benevolence theory, which is from near to the distant, the humans to the things, has reflected the broadness of benevolence and love. So that we can achieve the state of loving all the live and inanimate, and this is the art of benevolence. Undoubtedly, the psychological effect of "benevolence" is to exert human's "compassion" to the utmost, that's to say, it is to "expand" the seed of "benevolence." So that it will be implemented in people's daily life, and that's what a noble man must do when he treats others in the principle of "love the people then to everything" as he is sincere, honest to be regulating his family and governing the world. Besides, in Mencius' thought, he said that "all things under heaven are prepared for me", which also shows the integrity ideology of the life. And Mencius also said that all the things, moralities and reasons were contained in my nature, and as we thought about so, we would be no happier than this when we had the corresponding morality with these truths. In his Mencius' Thought, thinking, it says that we are closely connected with everything, and it lives in our feelings, we can only feel the harmony of the life and the happiness when we are connected to the nature if we "expand" our affection and open our mind, so that we can achieve the great state of sound of nature resonating,

**Confucianism's thought of "helping breeding" and to know the meaning of life.** In Confucian thought, it explains the creature of the nature, mentions the thought of "helping breeding and so that we can know the meaning of life. The universe is filled with creatures and has its law. And this law affects that the world will not stop changing and will follow this rule, while everything in the world will exist in the long process<sup>[1]</sup>. So, how about the humans since everything in the world follows the rule? Though the human is part of the nature, they are subjective and initiative since they can know the meaning of life, which is the most important part for them. Regarding the relationship between the human and the universe change and feeding, it has been mentioned in the Book of Changes, saying that the greatest morality between heaven and earth was to cherish life, in the Treatise, first part, it said that the noble person had the same morality as the heaven did, while in Qian Gua's Classic Chinese, it also talked about this and said that to have the same morality with the heaven to change and help the world. Wang Fuzhi also discussed this in his Spring and Autumn, prosperity,

and said that there was some relationship between human and heaven, they were related to each other. While the natural morality would benefit them to be successful. In this sense, the heaven, earth and the human were closely connected, and this is the systematic prospective of holism among them in Confucian thought.

In the Doctrine of Mean, it states clearly that the foundation to be a sage is to be "honest", so that they can know the meaning of life. "Only those who are so sincere can give full play to his nature, in this case, the human will show his character and the things will show the nature. Then they can know the meaning of life, which will help them have the same morality as the heaven does." In this sentence, it talked about the essence of the position for the human in the universe as well as the relationship between the things according to the Confucianism. The natural instinct is that everything should be with sincerity and honesty. Sincerity, as the fundamental sign of the morality of the heaven and earth, is the natural law and the heavenly virtue. The natural law is real and it lies in the nature of the universe and the humans. If the humans are sincere enough, they will have the same morality as the heaven does. In the Doctrine of Mean, it says: "If everything is growing together but not hurting each other, the world will be better." And this sentence has the conclusion about the knowing of the nature as well as the relationship between the humans and the nature. There's conflict and competition in the nature, but in the whole evolution, it is in good harmony and order, everything has the right to exist and the value, and they should not be hurt or hurt others without conflict. The nature is great because of the humans, and it is the human that create the aim of the nature. The people can feel the preciousness of life because of themselves, they are honest and know the reason, reasonable and they will be honest, so that they will show their nature of human, and the nature of everything. As a result, the humans are superior to everything in the universe, and they shared the same name with the heaven and the earth. Humans in the universe can help to grow everything there, and promote them smoothly<sup>[2]</sup>. The relationship with heaven and earth is a harmonious one of mutual benefit and interdependence. So, we can imagine that how can we make it? The answer is that we should make progress and work hard just like the heaven, , and we should also be with virtue, kind and generous to everything. Meanwhile, it also means that one man can only be honest and kind enough when they reach high level, which can highlight the Confucian thought of benevolent people. People can know the changes and the growing of the world because they are sincere, so that they can realize the humanity and make everything live peacefully, which can help them enforce the justice on behalf of heaven. The sage sovereign can model himself on the heaven to be with virtue since it is noble enough. The king is also called the son of heaven, as a result, he has to set good example for the people so that he can rule over the empire. And what he has to do is to "set up a spiritual value system with the core value of 'benevolence and filial piety', and choose the right direction of fate for the public and establish the meaning of life.", and he has to participate the breeding and evolution of everything, to maintain the diversity of the nature, promote the growing and prosperity of them so as to achieve the harmony of the human and the nature.

**The prohibition and opening to kill the animals according to the seasons.** We can summarize Confucianism's thought of code of conduct for ecological ethics as "seasonal prohibition". That's to say, we have to respect the nature law, pay attention to the connection and restriction among the creatures, so that we will not kill their lives, nor cut off their growth. In Confucianism's thought, it just requires people to conform to the law of biological propagation and growth as they are using the natural resources in the aspect of the sustainable production and living resources based on the knowledge of the connection between the biology and the environment, we need to "get them at the proper time", so that we can develop and use the natural resources<sup>[3]</sup>.

Confucius loved the creatures, and he would "never eat those grains, fruits or vegetables at the improper time", which was mentioned in Analects of Confucius, Xiang Dang. It was recorded that, Zeng Zi thought: "It's better to cut off the trees and kill the animals concerning the season." While Confucius said: "It's impiety to cut off the trees and kill the animals at the wrong season." In the Book of Rites, Confucius applied this ethical behavior to the creatures, thinking that it was impiety and mutilation to cut the trees or kill all kinds of things in nature at improper season, and he opposed this kind of behavior, advocated "not to hunt and not to kill all the animals." "Confucius only fishes

instead of using big nets, he only shoots birds but will never kill those who rest in their nests." And in Analects of Confucius, it also proposes like this. And all of these shows that Confucius has raised the level of moral behavior to protect the environment, advocating not to kill all the animals, but just give them a chance to live.

People can only get the balanced biological chain when they respect and protect the environmental resources, have moderate use of resources rather than "drain the water to get all the fish." And this thought also applies to the plants and the animals too. And Mencius also said: "Everything will grow if they are maintained well enough, they will die if they are not protected." In Mencius. Words to the People, it says "Everything will exist and live in harmony." And it is the result for the heaven and the human to live and die in harmony, which is the real ecological harmony.

**The impact on the chinese classic garden design from the Confucius ecological view.** Currently, it has become our common sense for the society to build up the ecological culture. And the Confucian simple concept of holistic thought, which advocates the oneness of human and the nature, opposes the division and opposition as well as to encourage the frugality and contentment consumption, has provided references for theoretical thinking to establish the sustainable strategy. And the Confucian though has also given good reference for us to solve the urgent issue of environment pollution and ecological damage, so that it will be helpful to improve the whole level to build up the Chinese ecological culture and realize the policy of governing for the national sustainable development. In the current age, we need to draw the experience of the tradition to design the gardens so as to promote the building up of the national social ecological culture. So, the question is, how many aspects does the Confucian ecological view affect the Chinese classic garden design? Actually, the effect is serious, and it shows in three aspects are as bellows:

**The establishment of Confucianism's thought of "helping breeding", thought of "comparing moral standard" from the garden as well as the landscape view.** The Confucian ecological view is based on the "helping breeding" and the thought as oneness of heaven and man. It regards that to respect the nature is to respect the humans themselves, to cherish others is to cherish themselves. As described in the Book of Change, it has already regarded as "helping breeding" (to respect the lives, keep life long and maintain the life) as the great morality, and "the greatest virtue of heaven and earth is to provide a living environment for the universe and mankind." From Yi Chuan copulative. Later, those Confucian philosophers all changed their experience towards their own life into sympathizing with others' lives, so as to show their great respect towards the universe.

The thought of "comparing moral standard" is to attach the moral concept such as benevolence, righteousness, courtesy, wisdom and trust to the natural scenic so as to experience the morality in the landscape. Or, it connects the natural shape, property with human inner morality. Actually, the rationale and orientation of this aesthetic essence of the thought of "comparing moral standard" is just the appreciation of personality. This kind of thought has been fully reflected in plant disposition in Chinese traditional garden design. When it is in details, it can be found that it pays more attention on the individual beauty of the plant, and will compare the structure, position and resonance with the human's essence force with them<sup>[4]</sup>. That's to say, it can be compared with those with noble character, so that we can feel the beauty of the character when we enjoy the landscape plants. For example, those sentences of "sparse shadows reflect horizontally and tiltly in the clear and shallow water." Which describes the plum blossom, the "tall, modest, and gentle" bamboo, orchid-in-deep-valley which is beautiful, fresh and fragrant. They are all good plants that can be compared with good morality, which has been given the connotation of culture that has constitutes the specific traditional aesthetic way in the garden landscape creation arts.

The thought of "comparing moral standard", which is the nature view of combination of beauty and perfection as well as the theory of "humanization of nature" inspires the people to respect the natural landscape, as a result, people payed attention on the building of mountain and water when the classic gardens were started, which sets up the base of landscape development direction. The so-called "merciful people are fond of mountains" uses the clean running water to symbolize the wisdom of the humans, while the steady of the mountain stands for the benevolent people's quality. It

expresses people's awareness of the beauty of nature, environment and ecology, also sets up the landscape aesthetic concept, which also establishes the foundation for Chinese classical gardens to be landscapes with mountains and waters as the main character. One of the main sources of Chinese classic garden-platform, is based on the mountain as the example, as the Confucian's thought as well as the Chinese classic garden develops, those literati began to compare the aesthetic consciousness of the thought of "comparing moral standard" with the garden landscape, they would show their feelings by describing the landscape, for example, the main model of "one pool and three mountains" in Emperor garden as well as the "surrounding mountains and embracing waters" from Liang Yue.

**The Confucian thought of "the benevolence for an organic whole" as well as the natural garden model of "Done by man, as if since it is made".** The Confucian thought emphasizes "to love people and everything", the people and the nature are in harmony, while at the same time, it also admits the subjectivity of the humans to make it prominent, and that's how it distinguishes the non-anthropocentrism. The humans are the intelligence parts of the universe in terms of life, and they are not superior to others while all are equal, however, humans can realize their personality and live by themselves with their own characters. They can achieve subjectivity, promote, "customize" and "help" the nature to complete the meaning of life, which also helps to complete the aim of life too. As a result, the humans are the most important with position and function in the Confucian thought philosophy, they are the moral subjectivity, also the promotion and realization of the intrinsic value. Firstly, we need to be honest and sincere to cultivate their moral characters, so that they can be with morality and become benevolent people, when you are "open-minded to others, they will also be open-minded to you", so that govern the country and make the world peaceful, which will achieve the grand state of "the benevolence for an organic whole". Or that's to say, to improve yourself through cultivating your minds, change yourself and others, to be honest with sincerity and integrity as Confucian's thought described, so that they can deal with the relationship with the humans and the society as well as with the nature. So, the Confucian ecological thought helps people to forget their own interest to cultivate themselves, manage the family and govern the country in the way to cultivate their minds of their own will, so that everything in the universe will grow in prosperity to achieve harmony and accomplish the great cause of "leveling the whole world." This is the sharp contrast with western culture's emphasis on conquering nature, the opposition between the human and nature, etc. while at the same time, it forces the people to obey the rules by laws in the modern society, which is much wiser than to achieve the saving and environmental resource protection goal.

So, the Chinese classic garden design follows the natural style, that's to say, it has free but unique planning design and focuses on the natural beauty, which is the imitative to constitute the natural scenic law<sup>[5]</sup>, and it's not just like the western gardens which pay more attention to the laws and rules with clear axis guidance and geometric pattern organization, according to those laws and rules, everything is included in the strict geometric constraints, and even the plants as well as the tress have been controlled in the form of architectures<sup>[6]</sup>, so as to show a certain kind of natural and rational nature in good order for the greatness of the human power. However, it is quite impossible for the existence of the design styles of for the unnatural design styles which is contrary to the law of life due to Confucian's concept of "to be friendly to the people, and love all the creatures", and that's why we can never find those design styles which are "green carvings" and "springs" which always appear in the westerns. For the green carvings, they are created by trimmed plants into geometric rules or other special shapes while the spring design shows the amazing artificial beauty which is of natural opposition since the water will spray by pressure. And this is essentially doomed to the difference between the classic and western gardens, the classic garden design is developing in the direction of landscape garden and this main thread has never changed since the pre Qi era to the late Qing dynasty.

The Confucian concept of "coiling spoon water" has affected the classic garden further and forms the aesthetic way of "to see a world in a grain of sand", and this is one of the refined and typical natural methods so as to achieve the garden design purpose of "done by man, as if since it is made." In the Doctrine of Mean, it says: "as we can see the Fushan mountain today, there are so many vast stones, grasses and trees are growing, animals are living, that's good place of treasures, now there's

so much water while there are so many tortoises and flood dragons, which represent the good fortune." As the concept of "coiling spoon water" has been proposed, it has changed the concept meaning of the natural aesthetic objects in gardens fundamentally, the simple reappearing and imitation of the "original mountains and water" from the original thinking model, instead, it has made it typicality through summarizing and refining as well as re-creation so as to achieve the imitation effect. And it is also the concept of "to see a world in a grain of sand", as a result, the Chinese classic garden enjoys the good reputation of "real forest." So, the Chinese classic garden design aims to create the refined and typical nature, and that's why it's called "make it natural by the humans", or the garden design model of "done by man, as if since it is made."

**The style characters of the Confucian thought of "frugality" and the suppleness of "literati landscape".** The Confucian advocates frugality as virtue, and it proposes frugality and opposes luxury, but this does not mean that we lack the materials for life, but we need to realize the pursuit of the state for life value so as to achieve the mutual complementary of people's minds and the heaven. As a result, the Confucian ecological thought has active promotion advocating a simple lifestyle centered on improving the life quality and achieves the lasting harmony between the human and the nature when it promotes the protection and utilization of the urban ecological resources .

Similarly, the Chinese classic garden design shows the spiritual pursuit of the literati and their spirits as the design connotation. The Chinese literati, or the literati class were deeply impacted by Confucianism, which can be found from the four characters to be simple, sparse, elegant and natural. Especially when we talk about to be simple, since it provides simple landscape but meaningful, and that's also the refining and generalization for the nature. The conciseness is also the common fashion of the garden art. For the consideration of the elements of mountain shape, water, flowers and trees as well as buildings, it doesn't pursuit the varieties, the abused skills of designs nor it will divide the scenic areas or spots. Instead, it appears to be so many with so few. The garden buildings are always characterized with white wall and black tiles, while the garden is so elegant, simple but not luxury in order to reflect the civilian interest. So, why did the royal garden with wide area, large scale and good location learn from the private gardens over the past 2,000 years and why did it absorb fresh nutrition from them? The primary cause is that the Chinese classic gardens are evaluated by the standard of literati gardens and to see whether it has the character of literati garden, as a result, they were built not following the design to be luxury, beautiful, extravagant, colorfully and dazzling embellished. And that's why we always find the classic gardens with the spirit, white walls and black tiles while the water and the mountains show the simple artistic conception and broad-minded ideas for us.

## Conclusion

The Confucian ecological view has close connection with the classic garden design ideas, we can find this view everywhere in the landscape of Chinese gardens, which is so elegant. Since the Confucian ecological view emphasizes the internal relationships between the human and the nature, the human subjectivity as well as the common prosperity of everything, it also provides the reason why we have to think about the current social ecological crisis and its sharp deterioration. We can draw lessons from the Confucian ecological view since it has objective impact on the current social ecological resource protection and usage, as well as the promotion of the social ecological culture establishment. In view of the current design, we can only develop and create the series of landscape designs which can embody the spirit of regional culture and harmony of everything when we pick up the wisdom from the ancient orient, learn from the traditional garden landscape design, build up the ecological culture and rebuild the national self-confidence. Now, we have a long way to go as garden designers.

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