

# Exploration of the Natural View and Cosmology in Ancient Chinese Philosophical Thought

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**Abstract:** This article mainly explores the guiding significance of ancient Chinese views on nature and cosmology for modern ecological ethics, scientific research, and the harmonious coexistence between humans and nature. The article systematically sorts out the natural views and cosmology in ancient Chinese philosophy, and comprehensively analyzes their modern significance in combination with the actual needs of contemporary society. Research has shown that the ancient Chinese concept of nature, especially the idea of "harmony between man and nature", provides important insights for the construction of modern ecological ethics, emphasizing that humans should follow and respect nature. Meanwhile, the holistic view and dynamic thinking in ancient cosmology have a positive impact on contemporary scientific research, providing new perspectives and methods for the study of complex systems. In addition, this article finds that these ancient philosophical ideas can promote harmonious coexistence between humans and nature in practical applications, providing strong support for the construction of modern ecological civilization. By deeply exploring and inheriting these valuable philosophical ideas, new ideas and methods can be provided for the construction of ecological civilization, scientific research, and the construction of a harmonious relationship between humans and nature.

## 1. Introduction

In the long history, China's ancient philosophy gave birth to a rich view of nature and cosmology, which not only profoundly influenced the culture, science and daily life of ancient China, but also played an important role in oriental philosophy [1]. Exploring these natural views and cosmology will not only help us to understand the world outlook and values of ancient China more deeply, but also provide valuable ideological resources and philosophical enlightenment for modern society [2]. Especially at the moment when environmental problems and the relationship between human beings and nature are becoming increasingly tense, it is of great practical significance to review and excavate these ancient wisdom for finding a way to live in harmony with nature [3].

In recent years, the view of nature and cosmology in China's ancient philosophy have gradually become the focus of academic research. Many scholars have conducted in-depth discussions on these philosophical thoughts from different angles, involving the unity of heaven and man, yin and yang and five elements, and Taoism's inaction [4]. These studies not only enrich our understanding of ancient China's philosophy, but also provide a new theoretical perspective for modern environmental ethics, ecological philosophy and other fields. However, the current research focuses on a particular school or a certain period of philosophical thought, and it is still insufficient to sort out and compare the whole.

This study will dig deep into and sort out the descriptions and expositions of the view of nature and cosmology in ancient literature, and at the same time, combine the historical background and social environment to make a deep discussion on the formation and development of ancient philosophical thoughts.

## 2. Philosophical foundation of China's ancient view of nature and cosmology

Ancient Chinese philosophical thought has a long and profound history, containing rich views on

nature and cosmology. These ideas not only reflect the fundamental views of ancient Chinese people on the world, but also guide their way of life and behavior [5]. From early Confucianism and Taoism to later Legalism, Mohism, and other schools of thought, each school has its own unique philosophical system and worldview.

"The unity of heaven and man" is a core concept in ancient Chinese philosophy, which emphasizes the harmonious unity between humans and nature. Under this philosophy, humans are seen as a part of nature and should conform to and respect nature. This kind of thinking has been deeply reflected in the fields of literature, art, and science in ancient China, and is also an important philosophical foundation for ancient Chinese views on nature and cosmology [6].

The theory of Yin Yang and Five Elements is another major pillar of ancient Chinese philosophy, which attributes all things in nature to the mutual generation and restraint relationship between the Yin Yang poles and the Five Elements (metal, wood, water, fire, and earth). This theory has had a profound impact on the fields of medicine, agriculture, architecture, and more in ancient China, and has also provided a unique theoretical perspective for natural views and cosmology.[7]

Taoism, Confucianism, and Legalism are the three mainstream schools of ancient Chinese philosophy, each with its own unique understanding of nature and the universe, as shown in Figure 1.

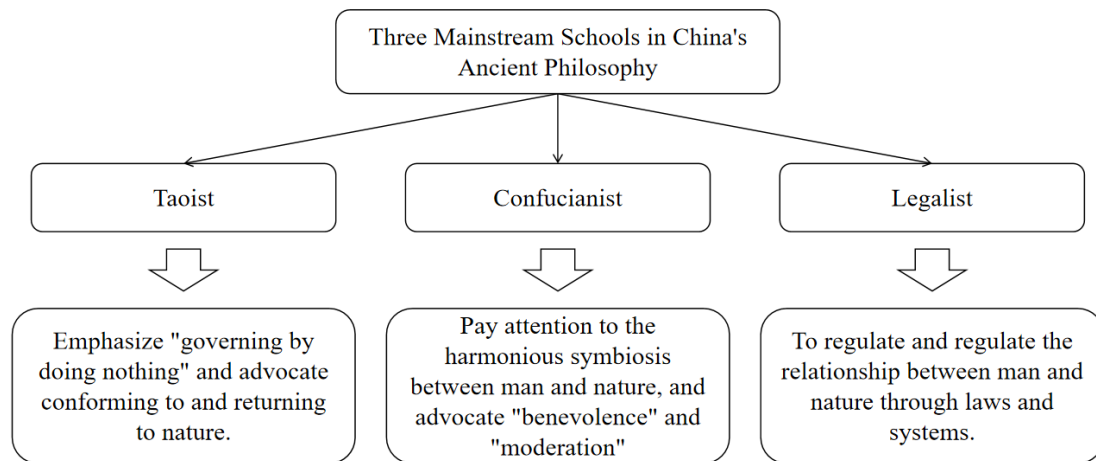


Fig. 1 The natural views of the three mainstream schools

Taoism emphasizes "governing by inaction" and advocates conforming to and returning to nature; Confucianism places greater emphasis on the harmonious coexistence between humans and nature, advocating for "benevolence" and "moderation"; Legalism tends to regulate and regulate the relationship between humans and nature through laws and systems. By comparing the natural views of these three schools of thought, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the natural views and cosmology in ancient Chinese philosophy.[8]

### 3. The embodiment of the view of nature in China's ancient philosophy

#### 3.1. The definition of nature and its position in China's philosophy

In ancient Chinese philosophy, the concept of "nature" has profound and broad implications. It not only refers to all things in nature, but also represents a true and spontaneous state. In Chinese philosophy, nature is often associated with the Tao and is regarded as the most essential and primitive law in the universe. The status of nature is crucial because it is the foundation of human survival and development, as well as the starting point for human thinking and understanding of the world.

#### 3.2. The thought of conforming to nature and governing by doing nothing

Adapting to nature is an important concept in ancient Chinese philosophy, which emphasizes that humans should follow the laws and rhythms of nature and not go against its nature. Related to this is the idea of "governing by doing nothing", especially in Taoist philosophy, which has been

fully reflected. Rule by inaction does not mean true inaction, but rather refraining from forceful intervention and allowing things to develop according to their own laws. This kind of thinking reflects a profound insight into nature and human society, as well as the pursuit of harmony and balance.

### 3.3. The relationship between natural laws and human social order

In China's ancient philosophy, there is a close relationship between the laws of nature and human social order. Many philosophers believe that the order of human society should follow the laws of nature to achieve harmony and stability. The corresponding relationship between natural laws and Confucian "rites" is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Correspondence between natural laws and Confucian "rites"

Natural laws or phenomena	The Corresponding Norms of Confucian "Rites"	Purpose and significance
The orderly operation of heaven and earth	Order between monarchs and officials, distinguished by hierarchy	Maintaining social stability, ensuring that everyone is in their respective positions and fulfilling their responsibilities
Seasonal alternation	Funeral etiquette (such as a three-year funeral)	It reflects respect and remembrance for the deceased, and also conforms to the natural laws of the life cycle
Yin Yang balance	Men and women are different, the way to a married couple	Maintain family harmony, with men and women fulfilling their respective roles and working together to maintain family stability
The regular operation of the sun, moon, and stars	Time regulations for court meetings, sacrifices, and other ceremonies	Following the natural rhythm and keeping pace with the natural rhythm to show reverence for heaven and earth
All things grow and multiply	Filial Piety and Family Continuation	Emphasize the reproduction of children and grandchildren, inherit the family bloodline, and echo the endless growth of nature
Water seeks its own level.	Humility and courtesy, respecting the elderly and caring for the young	Advocating humility, respecting elders, caring for the weak, and forming harmonious interpersonal relationships
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Table 1 briefly shows the connection between natural laws and human social order in ancient Chinese philosophy, especially how Confucianism imitates and applies natural laws through "ritual" to achieve social harmony and stability. These norms not only reflect respect and compliance with natural laws, but also incorporate profound humanistic care and moral education. By following the laws of nature, human society can establish a social order that is both in line with the Heavenly Way and adapted to human nature.

### 3.4. Analysis of natural images in ancient literary works

The literary works of ancient China are filled with rich natural imagery, which not only beautifies the literary works but also carries profound philosophical significance, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Natural images in China's ancient literary works

Natural imagery	Examples of literary works	Symbolic Meaning/Philosophy of Life
Landscape	"Landscape Poetry" (such as Wang Wei's works)	Landscape is often used to symbolize a transcendent state of mind, pursuing spiritual freedom and tranquility, and reflecting the harmonious integration between humans and nature.
Flowers and birds	"Flower and Bird Painting" (such as Song Dynasty flower and bird painting)	Flowers and birds represent the beauty and fragility of life, as well as the flow of time. They symbolize the longing for a better life and the vitality of nature.
Scene	"Silent Night Thoughts" (Li Bai)	The wind and moon are often used to depict the tranquility and beauty of the night, symbolizing the poet's inner loneliness and longing for the distance, while also reflecting the emotional bond between humans and nature.
Chinese plum	"Song Of Divination: Ode to Plum Blossoms" (Lu You)	The plum blossom blooms proudly in the harsh cold, symbolizing the spirit of perseverance and perseverance, and reflecting the courage of people to fight against harsh environments.
Pine	Qingsong (Chen Yi)	The evergreen pine tree symbolizes the qualities of perseverance and eternal unchangeability, reflecting people's pursuit of loyalty and firm faith.

Table 2 illustrates the natural imagery in ancient Chinese literary works, as well as the symbolic significance and philosophy of life they carry, through examples. These natural images not only beautify literary works, but also profoundly reflect the natural view in ancient Chinese philosophy and the relationship between humans and nature. By analyzing these natural images, we can gain a deeper understanding of the natural view in ancient Chinese philosophy and the relationship between humans and nature.

#### 4. The construction of cosmology in ancient Chinese philosophy

Ancient Chinese philosophy has unique insights into the origin and structure of the universe. Different schools of thought have proposed different theories, such as the Taoist viewpoint that "the Tao generates one, one generates two, two generates three, and three generates all things", explaining the evolution process of the universe from intangible to tangible, and from simple to complex. These concepts not only reveal the ancient people's exploration of the essence of the universe, but also reflect their profound thinking about life and existence.

The theory of "round sky and square earth" is a simple understanding of the shape of the universe in ancient China. It believed that the sky was circular and the earth was square. This concept has a profound influence in ancient Chinese culture, not only reflected in architecture, art, and other aspects, but also reflected the ancient people's pursuit of cosmic order and harmonious beauty [9]. Meanwhile, ancient philosophers also attempted to construct various cosmic models to explain the operation of celestial bodies and the structure of the universe.

In ancient Chinese philosophy, time and space were two indispensable dimensions of cosmology. Philosophers have delved into the passage of time and the infinite nature of space, attempting to reveal their roles and meanings in the universe. These explorations not only enrich our understanding of the universe, but also inspire future generations to further contemplate the essence of time and space.

The cosmology of ancient China had a profound impact on scientific cognition at that time. It not only provided a theoretical basis for ancient natural sciences such as astronomy and geography, but also stimulated people's desire to explore the unknown world. At the same time, certain concepts in cosmology also influenced ancient technological inventions and practical activities, such as the invention of the compass, which was closely related to the ancient people's understanding of the magnetic field of heaven and earth.

## 5. Conclusions

After in-depth exploration of the natural view and cosmology in ancient Chinese philosophy, it is not difficult to find that these ancient philosophical ideas are not only historical heritage, but also a treasure trove of wisdom that has a profound impact on future generations. These ideas emphasize the harmonious relationship between humans and nature, advocate the concept of respecting and conforming to nature, not only providing a guide for ancient people's lives, but also providing important theoretical support for modern ecological ethics and environmental protection.

The natural view and cosmology of ancient China, with its unique perspective and methodology, deeply analyzed the essence of the natural world and the universe. These ideas not only played a guiding role in people's lives and thinking at that time, but also had a profound impact on multiple fields such as philosophy, science, and culture in later generations. Especially in the context of increasingly serious environmental problems today, these ideas are even more precious, providing us with a philosophical foundation for harmonious coexistence with nature.

Overall, the natural view and cosmology in ancient Chinese philosophy are treasures in the treasure trove of human thought, and their importance and profound influence on future generations cannot be ignored. Through continuous research and exploration, we have reason to believe that these ancient philosophical ideas will continue to shine and provide an inexhaustible source of wisdom for the harmonious coexistence between humans and nature in the future.

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