

A Comparative Study of the Relationship between Man and Nature in Chinese and Western Worldview

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Abstract: Worldview is the foundation of people's way of thinking and outlook on life. It plays an important role in intercultural communication in a variety of subtle and inconspicuous ways. This paper intends to compare the differences between the relationship of man and nature in the Chinese and Western worldviews from a philosophical point of view, to trigger people's reflection on ecological problems, and to reveal the reasons for the conflicts of values among people with different cultural backgrounds in the process of the intercultural communication, so as to promote the smooth progress of intercultural communication.

1. Introduction

Intercultural communication refers to the process of information sharing between information senders and information recipients from different cultural backgrounds. Intercultural communication as a special form of communication, the most prominent characteristic is that cross-cultural communication has the nationality, that is, the two sides of intercultural communication often come from different nationalities or different countries. And the similarities and differences of cognitive systems, social organizations, material products, language symbols and non-language symbol systems in their respective cultures are confused, and the differences in cultural sharing are obvious and inevitable. Moreover, the conflicts in intercultural communication are not only numerous, but also difficult to solve. Cultural conflicts between countries will lead to political conflicts, and the conflicts in cross-cultural communication at the individual level may lead to "cultural shock". The success or failure of intercultural communication is affected by cultural differences. Culture is a multi-level system: cultural system, cultural activities, and cultural core. The core of culture includes ways of thinking, values, worldviews, beliefs and so on. The core of culture determines the outer system of culture to a large extent, and it also dominates the success or failure of communication in cross-cultural communication. It is the root of many superficial cultural differences. Therefore, this paper will analyze the differences in the relationship of man and nature between Chinese and Western worldviews and their impact on the intercultural communication from the perspective of philosophy.

2. Worldview

The definition of worldview varies from scholar to scholar. Anthropologists Spradley and McCurdy (1980) define worldview as the way people characteristically look out on the universe. Samovar, Porter, and McDaniel (2007) report a more inclusive view: that worldview is culture's orientation to supernatural, human, and natural entities in the cosmological universe and other philosophical issues influencing how its members see the world. Klopff and McCroskey (2007) also offer an inclusive perspective in their definition of worldview:

“Worldview is a set of interrelated assumptions and beliefs about the nature of reality, the organization of the universe, the purposes of human life, God, and other philosophical matters that are concerned with the concept of being. Worldview relates to a culture's orientations toward ontological matters or the nature of being and serves to explain how and why things got to be as they are and why they continue that way.”

To put it simply, worldview is a culture's orientation toward God, humanity, nature, questions of existence, the universe and cosmos, life, death, sickness, and other philosophical issues that influence how its members perceive their world.

Dodd (1987) categorizes worldview elements into nine groups (Shame vs. Guilt;

Task vs. People; Secular vs. Spiritual; Dead vs. Living; Human vs. Nature; Doing vs. Being; Linear vs. Cyclical; Fatalism vs. Control.), most of which tend to stereotypically contrast the East and the West. One group he mentioned is Human vs. Nature: Humans are either subject to nature, in harmony with nature, or should control nature. The East favors harmony with nature while the West controls and dominates nature.

The central question concerning worldview is the perception of the universe. Is the universe created by a divine power? What is man's position in the universe? What is man's relationship with nature? On the last question, there are usually two types of relations between humans and nature: mastery over nature and harmony with nature.

3. Comparison of the Relationship between Man and Nature in China and the West

Clark (1998) warns us that environmental destruction is speedily accelerating in many parts of the world. At the local level, the loss of forests, soil erosion, and overdrafts of ground water are common occurrences. At the national level, increased yields of timber and food crops are now unsustainable. At the international level, people worldwide are mining natural resources, particularly fossil fuels. Human-induced global warming, overgrazing, and deforestation are compounding large-scale droughts, famines, storms, and floods. Pollution issues are multiplying as waters are poisoned, as forests, rivers, and lakes are decimated by acid rain, and as cities worldwide suffer from foul air.

Today's environmental state suggests that harmony is absent, control is not working, and consequently humans will soon be subject to total natural disaster. Worldviews are thus colliding as we communicate [more and more closely] about environmental issues with our fellow humans throughout the world.

Clark (1989) points a finger at the Western worldview, placing blame for contemporary environmental conditions directly on the West. Although major polluters, soil erosion and deforestation are common in the east as well, Clark believes it is the Western nature-controlling worldview that is destroying the environment. She suggests that the Western worldview lacks proper values and goals, and has grown obsolete. All worldviews, she claims, require adjustment if humans are to survive. However, the most in need of critically rethinking and redoing is that of western civilization, whose huge military, science and technology, economic strength and hegemony are increasingly impacting the whole world. All worldviews require some degree of

adjustment if the species is to survive. Tracing the beliefs and assumptions underlying them is the first step in making social change possible. This first step is one that students of intercultural communication can undertake, learning to understand the differences in worldview globally, and to comprehend the beliefs and assumptions on which they are based.

Next, we will talk about the differences in the relationship between man and nature in the Chinese and Western worldviews, so that people can understand the different cultures and then hold the attitude of open and inclusive attitude towards diverse cultures.

3.1 The Relationship between Man and Nature in China

The Chinese civilization and culture are broad and profound. The Chinese philosophers' thinking on the relationship between man and nature can be summarized in two levels, that is to say, Tao models itself after nature and harmony between man and nature. The former emphasizes human's respect and understanding of the laws of nature, and the latter emphasizes the highest state of harmony between man and nature on the basis of understanding the laws of nature.

3.1.1 Tao Models Itself after Nature

Taoists have a very deep understanding of nature. They believe that human beings should respect the objectivity of the laws of nature, conform to nature, and carry out governing by doing nothing that goes against nature, so as to realize the harmonious coexistence between human beings and nature. "Tao", the core concept in Taoist philosophy, refers to the root and foundation of all things in the world, which existed before all things in the world. The ancient Chinese proposition "Tao consists of Yin and Yang" initiated the notion of Tao. Lao Tzu, who lived 500 years before Christ, developed this concept. He said, "Tao gave birth to the One, the One gave birth successively to two things, three things, up to ten thousand. These ten thousand creatures cannot turn their backs to the shade (Yin) without having the sun (Yang) on their bellies, and it is on this blending of the breaths (both Yin and Yang) that their harmony depends." Therefore, judging from the occurrence of all things in heaven and earth, they are derived from the same Tao. Lao Tzu argued: "Human follows the earth, the earth follows heaven, heaven follows Tao, and Tao follows nature." Taoism logically concluded that people should follow nature in their practical activities instead of artificially imposing interference. It advocates that human beings should adopt the attitude of "Wu Wei (Its ideology is based on obeying natural rules and respecting objective facts, as a progress and state to achieve governance.)" in nature. However, almost people usually consider it as inaction, namely do nothing at willing. From my individual perspective, this conclusion is incorrect. "Wu Wei" is not a negative exclusion, but refers to those behaviors that violate nature and arbitrarily impose willfulness. The development of human beings can not leave the laws of nature, can not violate and ignore the laws of nature and act in anger, let alone destroy nature and do whatever you want.

3.1.2 Harmony between Man and Nature

"Harmony between Man and Nature" is an incisive summary of the thought of harmony between man and nature in Chinese traditional culture. As early as the pre-Qin period, Taoism believed that "Heaven and the earth live together with me, and the myriad things and I are one." It means that there is no difference between man and nature. It is a relationship of mutual equality and should be treated as equals. Tao is the foundation of all things, derived from heaven and earth, and is the total source of all things in the universe. "Heaven" "earth" "man" and other things that come from "Tao" have no distinction between superiors and inferiors. They are equal. Only by maintaining a state of harmony can all things come into being and coexist. Therefore, Taoism advocates man and nature should live in harmony, and elaborates the idea of "Harmony between Man and Nature". This

thought emphasizes the objectivity of nature, and people should understand the nature and laws and conform to the laws of nature. In order to achieve the harmony between man and nature, it is necessary to strengthen personal cultivation to achieve it. Confucius said, “From the emperor to the common people, self-cultivation is the basis”. Emphasize self-cultivation as the foundation. Through personal self-cultivation to achieve the state of “harmony between man and nature”, and finally promote the harmony between man and nature.

For example, in modern times, Chinese believe that human beings should be in harmony with nature, which is revealed from Chinese gardens. The gardens reveal Chinese social attitudes about the relationship between humans and nature. Pavilions, paved pathways, and other structures are integrated with the natural features of water, trees and rocks, which vividly shows a harmonious scenery of man and nature.

3.2 The Relation between Man and Nature in the West

In ancient China, due to the influence of Confucian culture for a long time, the understanding of the relationship between man and nature showed the characteristics of homogeneity and continuity in general. Compared with China, the understanding of the relationship between man and nature in the West is more rational. It is mainly manifested in their theological view of nature and the concept of the separation of man and nature.

3.2.1 Theological View of Nature

In the Western Middle Ages, Christianity was dominant, and the whole society was shrouded in a powerful theocracy. Because Christianity focuses on the afterlife and the salvation of the soul, the subjectivity of man is suppressed when he separates himself from the worldly life. People are enlightened by Christianity, believing that God is the infinite, omnipotent and omniscient. He creates the world out of nothingness, and all natural things are merely the creations of God. They have no reason for their own existence, but are born out of necessity. In the theological view of nature, there is inequality between God and man and nature, meanwhile, man and nature are also separated from each other. Although there is equality between man and nature in the name of God, this equality is the equality in the power authorized by God to man to manage nature. The relationship between man and nature is unequal from the beginning in terms of doctrine. In Christianity, the characteristics of “anthropocentrism” are very obvious. Humans and other creatures can live in harmony, but they are not entirely equal. The *Bible·Genesis*, clearly stated that God created men for the purpose of “making them manage the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, the livestock on the earth and all insects”. It can be seen from this argument that human beings are the managers and users of nature, and they are in a special position under God and above all things. Many chapters in the Bible reveal this idea. Under the rule of theological view of nature, man and nature are divided, and man is in a higher position than nature. This kind of thinking later provided a legitimate justification for Westerners to conquer nature.

3.2.2 Separation of Man and Nature

The western worldview of “separation of man and nature” regards the world as a mechanical combination of many independent objects, each of which can exist independently of the whole and other objects. In this universe formed by the mechanical combination of everything, nature is at the bottom of the whole world, and man is superior than nature and he is the master of nature. In the eyes of westerners, man is separated from nature, he has the absolute domination and ruling power over nature. Therefore, it is emphasized that man should conquer and transform nature by virtue of his own wisdom and scientific power. The American mode of living, for example, is characterized

by confrontation with the exploitation of the external world. The conquest of natural conditions is the dominant assumption in the United States. The American's relationship with nature is called a "master-slave" relationship. As masters of nature, humans are encouraged to control it and exploit it in any way they choose. To master the natural world, people need to study and exploit it to figure out how it works. This attitude of looking at the natural world as an object has contributed to the development of Western science.

Examples of this cultural belief can be found in news reports whenever a natural disaster occurs in the United States. For instance, when Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans and elsewhere along the Gulf Coast in August 2005 and nearly two thousand individuals died in the subsequent flooding, people were outraged that the flood protection and levee systems could be so unsafe. The assumption in these pronouncements was that the consequences of natural forces such as hurricanes could have been prevented simply by using better technology and by reinforcing the levees and other structures to withstand the forces of nature.

4. Similarities between Chinese and Western Views of Man and Nature

Although there are differences in ideas between Chinese and western people, the common stage of human development also makes people in the East and West have common characteristics in the relationship between man and nature, as well as a series of concepts around this relationship.

On the relationship between man and nature, both China and the West have emphasized the idea that man is a part of nature. It is an important task for ancient Chinese and western thinkers to think about the relationship between man and nature and to seek the origin of mankind. The idea that "Tao gave birth to the One, the One gave birth successively to two things, three things, up to ten thousand" is to unify all kinds of things in the universe with "Tao", which is the origin of the universe and the foundation of all things. "When the absoluteness and ultimate nature of 'Tao' and 'The One' are confirmed, people in turn regard it as a definite and self-evident empirical basis or rational basis, and place the space-time phenomena measured, experienced and perceived in the past under this 'Tao', and conclude that the harmonious and perfect natural order is the wordless self-transformation of Tao". Thus, man naturally becomes a part of nature. The ancient Greeks also had the same idea as Chinese thinkers that man was a part of nature. For example, when the Milesian School sought the origin of the universe, it got rid of the religious ideas in ancient times and looked for the origin from the nature. For example, Thales believed that the origin of the world was "water", while Anaximenes believed that the gas was the origin of all things. Another example, Heraclitus, also believed that "fire" was the origin or basis of all things. As Aristotle said, "Most of the earliest philosophers merely regard the material origin as the origin of everything".

In addition to emphasizing that man is a part of nature, Chinese and western thinkers emphasized the separation of man and nature to highlight man's subjective status, which is another aspect of the relation between man and nature. As mentioned above, although ancient Chinese and western thinkers all emphasized the idea that man is the part of nature, with the development of the times and the deepening of their ideological understanding, their ideological concept has also changed to some extent, which is embodied in the separation between man and nature. And turn more attention to people's own ideas. In ancient China, since the pre-Qin period, the positions of "man" and "nature" in the relationship between man and nature have been changing constantly. "The original religious belief—only ghosts and gods are exclusive --- the gods and the people are raised together --- Gods have their share of their lives --- human affairs are valued, the ghosts and gods are ignored --- the heavens and man are divided --- people-oriented". Consistent with the above ideas, while emphasizing that man is a part of nature, ancient western thinkers also paid attention to the dominant position of man in this relationship, and turned the research focus to the subject man

himself. Since modern times especially, the shift in western philosophy focusing on the study of epistemology clearly illustrates this point. The difference is that ancient China did not completely cut off the connection between man and nature when it emphasized the dominant position of man. In other words, extracting people from nature is more to highlight the self-improvement problem of people in the real society. The purpose of this relationship between man and nature is to emphasize the harmony of man himself, as well as the harmony between man and man, man and society, man and nature. However, in ancient times, Westerners went further and thought more thoroughly when emphasizing the dominant position of human being. The concepts of ancient Chinese and western thinkers about the relationship between man and nature are fully expressed in the mythological works, which describe the struggle between man and nature. In other words, the force of nature in the stories is often very great, but due to the wit, courage and tenacious struggle of man, the nature is finally defeated. It also reflects the consistency of the relationship between man and nature in ancient China and the West.

The relationship between contemporary Chinese and western people and nature also has a common feature: they all pay attention to the protection of ecology. In China, Man and nature form a community of life. As human beings, we must respect nature, follow its ways, and protect it. Only by observing the laws of nature can mankind avoid costly blunders in its exploitation. Any harm we inflict on nature will eventually return to haunt us. This is a reality we have to face. As the Chinese president Xi Jinping pointed out in his report to the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC), “ What we are doing today to build an ecological civilization will benefit generations to come. We should have a strong commitment to socialist ecological civilization and work to develop a new model of modernization with humans developing in harmony with nature. We must do our generation’s share to protect the environment.” However, when modern westerners are confronted with all kinds of retaliation from nature, they have to start to reflect and try to build a harmonious coexistence earth between man and nature. As a result, many values and theories about environmental protection have been put forward in western society. For example, the Greens has put forward the slogan of “ecology comes before everything”. They regard the natural ecosystem and the human social system as an interactive and interdependent unity, and make an appeal for environmental protection to all mankind. Ecological socialism is committed to the combination of ecological principles and socialism, holds that green society is the essential feature of socialism, tries to transcend contemporary capitalism and the existing socialist model, and constructs a new socialist model in which man and nature develop harmoniously, etc. In addition, many thinkers also proposed to seek the meaning of life and the true meaning of the universe in the ancient Oriental culture, so as to realize the transformation of human beings from fighting against nature to the harmony with nature.

5. Conclusion

The difference of worldview is one of the most important factors affecting intercultural communication. Worldview is the basis of people’s way of thinking and outlook on life. Worldview determines people’s way of thinking and outlook on life, and indirectly affects intercultural communication through the latter. Each communicator often unconsciously assumes that the other person observes the world just like himself. Therefore, when they find that the worldview of the other side is different from their own, they often reject it instinctively, which makes it difficult for cross-cultural communication to proceed smoothly. Human beings originate from nature and live in nature. Human and nature are an inseparable organic whole, and it is the responsibility of human beings to live in harmony with nature. Facing today’s diversified world, when we communicate with people from different countries, different nationalities and different

cultural backgrounds on the topic of man and nature, some conceptual conflicts will inevitably arise, but the ultimate goal of everyone is the same, that is, to follow the laws of nature, develop in harmony with nature and jointly maintain our ecological home.

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