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## Chinese ecological discourse: a Confucian–Daoist inquiry

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### ABSTRACT

Ecological discourse, as object of ecolinguistics and cultural discourse studies, has far-reaching implications for fostering human beings' ecological consciousness. However, European ecological discourse is inapt for promoting ecological consciousness due to its roots in critical discourse, Eurocentralization and Cartesianism. This paper aims to pursue a Confucian–Daoist inquiry to Chinese ecological discourse concerning its Confucian–Daoist dimensions in Chinese discursive, cultural and philosophical traditions. This Confucian–Daoist inquiry can be conducted in three parts: a conceptual inquiry into Chinese ecological discourse, a comparative inquiry into Sino-European ecological discourses and a constructive inquiry into a harmonious discourse based on hamosophy. This approach has an important twofold role: first, it can offer profound discursive and spiritual recourses for fostering ecological consciousness in addressing the global ecological crisis. Second, and more importantly, it can help European ecological discourse transcend the negative influences from its roots, which may underplay its role in ecological consciousness. By so doing, an intercultural dialogue for a harmonious world can arise for mutually dealing with ecological problems.

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## 1. Introduction

The last decade has witnessed the flourishing of cultural discourse studies in constructing east paradigms of discourse analysis (Shi-xu 2009) in response to globalization and west centrism in scholarship (Shi-xu 2015). This emerging paradigm is significant in that it can not only offer methodological strategies for such profound issues as discursive ethnocentrism, but more importantly, grant importance to its role in establishing discursive dialogues in transcending dichotomies (Wodak 2016) and bridging frameworks in cross-cultural communication (Gee 2016). Under such a general framework of cultural discourse studies, ecological discourse, as object of ecolinguistics and cultural discourse studies, can extend the mission of establishing an intercultural dialogue between the east and the west in fostering human beings' ecological consciousness.

Given the complexity of ecological crisis as a miscellaneous challenge and the importance of an intercultural dialogue (Demenchonok 2014; Shi-xu 2014) for the mutual understanding in an effort to create a harmonious world in addressing the ecological crisis,

voices of ecological discourse stand out due to the global consensus that it concerns itself with the profound impact it can play in the interaction between discourse and the world (see Fill 2010) and thus contribute to an ecological understanding of discourse, ecology, mind and the world.

## 2. Definitions

Before we come to the further discussion of the paper, it may be helpful to define briefly what we mean by a cluster of terms involved, 'discourse', 'Chinese discourse', 'ecological discourse', 'European ecological discourse' and 'Chinese ecological discourse'.

Discourse, in its broad sense, can be defined as 'human social cultural events and activities' (Shi-xu 2014, 2). Specifically, Chinese discourse can be interpreted as 'a complete set of interlocking components of a research system or paradigm: philosophy, theory, methodology and issues of enquiry' (Shi-xu 2014, 2). Extending such notions of discourse and Chinese discourse, ecological discourse, in this paper, can be defined as the ecological analysis of all discursive forms (Xin and Huang 2013; Alexander and Stibbe 2014; Huang 2016a). Or in other words, ecological discourse finds itself in human ecological events, especially ecological crisis in ecological communication, which can be exposed to human beings' ecological consciousness. Among the various strands in the global context, European ecological discourse and its Chinese counterpart stand out.

European ecological discourse can be understood as 'a central approach in the discipline of ecolinguistics' (Alexander and Stibbe 2014, 104). For the flourishing of this new discursive paradigm has first emerged in Europe and North America, and gone through three waves (Zhou 2017), i.e. the orthodox wave, the diverse wave and the emerging integrational wave. However, as will be discussed in detail below, this thriving field is being greatly influenced by Cartesian linguistics (Chomsky 1966; Hu and Ye 2010) and facing the irreconcilable dilemma of the over-affiliation to critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 2010; Steffensen and Fill 2014), particularly the orthodox wave within the European context. And this can be largely due to its Cartesian approach, or the Cartesian dimensions, as discussed below, with the three basic axioms of language as human specificity, separation of mind and body, and mind as immaterial thinking substance (Hu and Ye 2010, 18–19). Consequently, all those axioms European ecological discourse has lived by for three decades ignore the interconnections between discourse, human, and world, and can by all means undermine its role in promoting human beings' ecological consciousness.

Chinese ecological discourse can be perceived as one eastern eco-discursive paradigm that seeks to solve ecological problems and the possible social and cultural consequences with three approaches, namely the natural approach (e.g. Li 1991), the social approach (e.g. Feng 2007a, 2007b, 2013), and the systemic-functional approach (Huang 2016a, 2016b).<sup>1</sup> Above all, it builds on Chinese cultural and philosophical traditions and concerns itself with the significant mission of building a harmonious society and constructing Chinese ecological civilization, as we define it 'the Confucian approach'. However, ecological discourse in the eastern context (e.g. China and Korea) is still at the disadvantage of international underestimation and underexploration. The crux of the matter is to build up an intercultural dialogue between European and Chinese ecological discourse in a joint effort to fulfilling the far-reaching role of ecological harmonious discourse. Our argument is that harmonious, multicultural, and non-reductionist traditions embodied in the

Confucian dimensions of Chinese ecological discourse can position itself in a preferable position in dealing with such ecological events as ecological crisis and ecological consciousness.

On the above account, the Cartesian approach to European ecological discourse can be compared with the Confucian approach to Chinese ecological discourse in terms of their discursive, cultural and philosophical traditions, as discussed further below.

But first and foremost, it may be insightful to go through what makes a Confucian–Daoist inquiry and its preponderance in such an ecological dialogue.

### 3. A Confucian–Daoist inquiry into Chinese ecological discourse: a prospective alternative out

In this paper, we propose a Confucian–Daoist inquiry into Chinese ecological discourse as a means for an intercultural dialogue between the east and the west. There come three crucial questions: Why do we propose such a philosophical inquiry to Chinese ecological discourse? What constitutes a Confucian–Daoist inquiry? In so doing, how do we adopt this Confucian–Daoist inquiry?

What differences can such an inquiry make for the future development of ecological discourse in the global context? The best answer to the question can be attributed to the following three axioms: (1) the increasing recognition of the alliance of Confucianism, Daoism and ecology in solving ecological problems and promoting ecological harmony; (2) the philosophical disadvantage in which the Cartesian dimensions of European ecological discourse are involved; and (3) the ecological solicitude in Confucianism and Daoism in which Chinese ecological discourse can find the Confucian–Daoist dimensions. Specifically, Confucianism and Daoism can provide rich spiritual and philosophical recourses and conceptual tools for rethinking current ecological problems (Tucker and Berthrong 1998; Girardot et al. 2001; Callicott and James 2015). Moreover, the ‘divided natures’ of Cartesian views under the mask of scientific pursuit of human civilization (Whiteside 2002) that European ecological discourse turns to has put itself onto an increasing disadvantage of philosophical disharmony. And, the Confucian–Daoist thoughts, *tianrenheyi* (天人合一) in particular, found in Chinese ecological discourse can be a positive response to the ‘ecological turn in new Confucian humanism’ (Tu 2001; Brasovan 2016), as a means to coping with anthropocentrism.

There is a strong consensus among current ecological fields that ecology should be synthesized to entail ethics of values about nature, independent of its Cartesian division between subject and object for scientific inquiry (Keller and Frank 2000). One corollary to this claim is that such a novel inquiry can offer unneglectable ecological significances for an intercultural dialogue between Chinese ecological discourse and its European counterpart, and further a synthesis of Sino-European ecological discourse for a harmonious agenda in solving ecological problems efficiently and effectively.

Now it comes to the question of what constitutes a Confucian–Daoist inquiry. The focus here is concerned with the question of under what principles such an inquiry proceeds. Such a Confucian–Daoist inquiry can be defined as a cultural and philosophical reexamination and reinterpretation of Chinese ecological discourse, by the twofold linkage (1) between Confucian–Daoist notions with Chinese eco-discursive notions<sup>2</sup> on the one hand and (2) between Chinese ecological discourse and its European counterpart on the other hand. Although Confucianism and Daoism are different doctrines and have

their own natures (which can be clearly distinguished from each other in a scholarly way), we focus on their common characteristics with regard to the ecological and harmonious dimensions (Qiao 2013), since we are more interested in their common ecological and harmonious assumptions and traditions. By 'Confucian–Daoist' we mean Confucian and Daoist traditions in a cultural sense, Confucian–Daoist worldview (i.e. their notions of the world, nature, mind, and human) in a philosophical sense, and the relevant Confucian–Daoist concepts. By 'inquiry' we mean a threefold perspective, a conceptual inquiry, or the conceptualization of Confucian–Daoist dimensions of Chinese ecological discourse, a comparative inquiry, or the comparison between Confucian–Daoist dimensions of Chinese ecological discourse and Cartesian dimensions of its European counterpart, and finally, also most importantly, a constructive inquiry, or the construction of a harmonious discourse based on harmonosphy.

Then how is such an inquiry conducted? We maintain that two strategies of language appropriateness and strangification (Shen 2013) are useful in the discussion of this Confucian–Daoist inquiry.

First, language appropriation means learning the language or discourse of other philosophical traditions. From early childhood, learning language leads to the construction and understanding of meaningful worlds. As Wittgenstein says, different language games correspond to different life-forms, therefore the appropriation of other's language would give us access to the life-form implied in that specific language. By appropriating the different languages of different cultural/philosophical/religious traditions, we can enter into the different life-worlds of many others and thereby enrich the construction of our own world.

By the second strategy, *waitui* 外推 (strangification), I mean the act of going beyond oneself to many others, from those with whom one is familiar to strangers, from one's cultural/philosophical world to many others' cultural/philosophical worlds. Strangification could be practiced on three levels: linguistic, pragmatic and ontological ... Upon them, I conceive "dialogue" as a process of mutual strangification. (Shen 2013, 15)

In the light of these two guiding strategies, each inquiry has its own working definition and inquiring procedure, which constitutes a systematic account of a Confucian–Daoist inquiry on the whole. Based on a brief review of ecological discourse in an international context, we suggest a conceptual inquiry into Chinese ecological discourse, and the premise for this conceptual inquiry is that Chinese ecological discourse can be traced back to its Confucian–Daoist roots and traditions. Then, we shall compare Chinese and European ecological discourse in terms of their discursive, cultural and philosophical traditions. We argue that Confucian–Daoist dimensions of Chinese ecological discourse can help its European counterpart go beyond the limited or negative influences of Cartesian dimensions. It is against this conceptualization and comparison that we propose to construct a harmonious discourse for helping ecological discourse studies break through the dilemma. We shall then conclude that such a Confucian–Daoist account has ecological implications for an intercultural dialogue between the east and the west in remodeling human beings' ecological consciousness.

#### 4. Ecological discourse: a historical review

Ecological discourse, as an important part of ecolinguistics and cultural discourse studies, investigates discourse, ecology, the world, and the interaction among them. Various

interpretations of those four core elements in ecological discourse contribute to a diverse array of eco-discursive strands. The last four decades have witnessed three waves of ecological discourse in an international context, namely the orthodox wave, the diverse wave, and the emerging integrational wave (Zhou 2017). Different strands draw on disparate theories and adopt a wide range of discursive methods to analyze a variety of ecological discourses or texts.

The first wave is called 'orthodox' in that it derives from critical ecolinguistics, which has its roots in the orthodoxy of critical discourse analysis and systemic-functional linguistics (Halliday 1985; Fill 2001; Fairclough 2010; Steffensen and Fill 2014); further, it mainly draws on the framework of critical discourse analysis, which makes it work as the critical extension of it. Accordingly, there are two parts in this wave, the system-critical part and the text-critical part (Fill 2001). The former focuses on the linguistic problems, while the latter focuses on the environmental problems. Further, several categories of ecological texts are centered in this wave. For the system-critical part, analysts deal with the metaphorically ecological and non-ecological elements in the language system in a grammatical sense (Halliday 1985, 1990), and also a shift from linguistic grammar to 'green grammar' (Goatly 1996) therein. For the text-critical part, analysts are engaged in the non-metaphorical analysis of environmental discourses under the umbrella term of 'green-speak' (Harré et al. 1999).

The second diverse wave comes with the blooming of ecological discourse in Europe and non-European areas such as China and Korea. The diversity is reflected not only in terms of a wide range of approaches and research groups involved, but also in discursive settings of practices. Chinese ecological discourse, as mentioned above, is a case in point. Different research groups are established, such as the International Ecolinguistics Association (<http://ecolinguistics-association.org>) (headed by Arran Stibbe in Great Britain), and in the Chinese context the Center for Ecolinguistics (headed by Huang Guowen at South China Agricultural University), and the China Association of Ecolinguistics (headed by He Wei at Beijing Foreign Studies University).

There is an emerging wave of integration in ecological discourse in the global context with the following three explicit inclinations: (1) the initial integrational inclination by Harris (2001); (2) an increasing interest in Confucian and Daoist thinking in European and Korean ecological discourse; and (3) the dialectical inclination to mutual discursive dialogues, including dialectical approach by Bang and Døør (2007) and Stibbe's ecosophy (Stibbe 2012, 2015).

## 5. Chinese ecological discourse: a conceptual inquiry

By a conceptual inquiry, it is meant that a conceptualization of Confucian–Daoist dimensions of Chinese ecological discourse, namely metaphysical, aesthetic, moral, and social dimensions, by figuring out the linkage between Confucian–Daoist concepts with Chinese eco-discursive concepts. This inquiry is important in two senses. First and foremost, it is based on the key premise that Chinese ecological discourse can be traced back to its Confucian–Daoist roots and traditions. In this light, it is the first step toward the construction of harmonious discourse.

Then, intertextuality (Shen 2013) is instrumental in the conceptualization of those Confucian–Daoist dimensions. Accordingly, we put forward a four-step conceptual procedure.

**Table 1.** Confucian–Daoist dimensions of Chinese ecological discourse.

Confucian–Daoist dimensions	Confucian–Daoist concepts	Chinese ecological discourse			Ecological premises: common grounds	Ecological significances
		Approaches	Discursive concepts			
Metaphysical dimension	<i>qi</i>  <i>yin-yang</i>	Natural approach	Interflow of material and energy within language ecosystem Ecological movements of language		Triadic harmony	Metaphysical value
Aesthetic dimension	<i>yue</i> <i>qing</i>		Aesthetic ecology of language		Aesthetic harmony between mind and the world	Aesthetic value
Moral dimension	<i>yi</i> <i>wuwei</i>	Systemic-functional approach	Social responsibility	Moral vision Moral action	Moral/ethical harmony	Moral value
Social dimension	<i>li</i>	Social approach	Language policy		Social harmony Interpersonal harmony	Social value

First, ecology-oriented Confucian–Daoist notions and concepts from Confucian and Daoist doctrines are selected and utilized. Then, those notions and concepts can find their expressions in the specific Chinese eco-discursive concepts and other philosophical texts. After that, their ‘hidden’ or underlying consistencies in ecological concerns are identified, and thus bridges or connections between those Confucian–Daoist notions and eco-discursive notions are established. Finally, ecological significances from those Confucian–Daoist interrelations will take shape. Then, what Confucian–Daoist concepts can be best manifested in relation to Chinese eco-discursive ones? In what ecological premise will they show such an agreement? What ecological values can such Confucian–Daoist dimensions assign to Chinese ecological discourse? To answer these three questions, we now turn to four Confucian–Daoist dimensions of Chinese ecological discourse, respectively (see Table 1).

### 5.1. Metaphysical dimension

Metaphysical dimension can be perceived as the metaphysical or cosmological manifestations of Confucian–Daoist concepts of *qi* (气) and *yin-yang* (阴阳) encompassed in two eco-discursive concepts of (1) the interflow of material and energy within the language ecosystem (生态语言系统的物质能量互流) (Li 1991) and (2) the ecological movements of language (语言的生态运动) (Li 1991) by the natural approach in Chinese ecological discourse. Then what are their specific meanings respectively?

*Qi* means ‘a kind of vital breath-like matter energy which is the most fundamental stuff of everything’ (Mou 2008, 118). The essential notion in the philosophy of *qi* is that the cosmos is perceived as an organismic life process driven by *qi*, and thus matter/material cannot be separate from mind/energy. The interpretation of *liqi* (理气) by Needham (1956) is the typical account in this regard of organism philosophy.<sup>3</sup> *Qi* has two vital forces of *yin* and *yang*. *Yinyang*, in its broad sense, means ‘the unity of two, mutually opposed but correlative and complementary forces that are considered to exist within anything in the universe’ (Mou 2008, 118).

The interflow of material and energy within the language ecosystem, according to Li (1991), is largely dependent on the interplay between the material flow, the energy



flow and the information flow, either unidirectional or bidirectional (Li 1991, 49). This self-generating process in the language ecosystem is realized by the ecological movements of language, which is defined as 'the widely connected, interactional and purposeful movement influenced either internally by linguistic elements or externally by other languages within the whole language ecosystem' (Li 1991, 189). Specifically, seven types of ecological movement of language are involved in the form of two counterpoints. Take the type of opposition and complementation (对立与互补) as an example. It is argued that every linguistic element in the language ecosystem opposes to each other due to their unique linguistic features. However, such an opposition from each linguistic element leads to the dynamic evolution of the language ecosystem and ends in the situation of complimentary distribution in the language ecosystem to some extent.

It can be inferred from the above definitions and interpretations that two metaphysical linkages can be discovered and two ecological premises can be presented: the first linkage between *qi* and the interflow of material and energy within the language ecosystem, and the second linkage between *yin-yang* and the ecological movements of language. The first linkage shows the common philosophical and metaphorical acknowledgement (which is about the first ecological premise that matter/material is indispensable to mind/energy) and thus cannot be reducible to either party. Further, the second linkage favors the shared approval to the interconnection between different parts in the united whole.

These two linkages, together with those two ecological premises, can bestow a metaphysical value of triadic harmony to Chinese ecological discourse in a sense that it highlights three key components in this harmony, Heaven, Earth, and Humanity and emphasizes each role in forming the overall state of cosmological harmony.

## 5.2. Aesthetic dimension

In broad terms, the aesthetic dimension can be described as the tight coupling of Confucian–Daoist concepts of *yue* (music 乐) and *qing* (humanistic emotion 情), and the aesthetic ecology of Chinese discourse (汉语的审美生态) (Li 1991) raised by the natural approach in Chinese ecological discourse.

*Yue*, in a Confucian sense, is endowed with the double pronunciations *yue/le*<sup>4</sup> and the double meanings of music and pleasure (Liu 2014, 227). This implies that music and poetry are not just a complex of musical scores and poetic lines on their own. Confucianism treats the idea of musical activities as an important means for the cultivation of *qing* with internal moral teaching and the realization of a harmonious society.<sup>5</sup> Then, it comes to aesthetic ecology of Chinese discourse.

Aesthetic ecology of Chinese discourse can be realized through three levels: aesthetic ecology at the level of phonetics, of semantics, and of grammar (语音的审美生态, 语义的审美生态, 语法的审美生态) (Li 1991). Firstly, aesthetic ecology of phonetics can be characterized into two phonetic structures: one of onomatopoeia in some classic ancient Chinese works, and the other of suffixation of a non-syllabic 'r' to nouns and verbs (*erhuayin* 儿化音) in Beijing Dialect. Secondly, it can be achieved in the two semantic meanings conveyed in ancient Chinese poetry: the natural meaning of some natural phenomena such as seasons and weathers in the poems; and the aesthetic meaning those natural phenomena transmit, in correspondence with the contemporary social



background. Lastly, it can be fulfilled by changing some Chinese syntactic patterns like subject-predicate inversion in a Chinese text.

It can be assumed that one aesthetic linkage of *yue*, *qing* and aesthetic ecology of Chinese ecological discourse comes into being due to the ecological premise which is concerned with the integration of traditional Chinese aesthetic mentality with the aesthetic varieties of discursive structures in the specific ecological environment. This aesthetic integration forms a significant aesthetic communication between writers (e.g. poets and novelists) and readers in Chinese ecological discourse, which in turn can be attributed to the Confucian–Daoist aesthetics of virtue; that is, ‘the crafting of a good and beautiful soul, a unique gem among other gems’ (Gier 2001, 300). Therefore, *qing* has the dual meaning of feeling and situation to demonstrate the conceptual-linguistic integration of persons and their environments.

In a word, such an aesthetic linkage can provide a value of aesthetic harmony to Chinese ecological discourse that can in large measures make a value-laden difference to other life forms as well as the world.<sup>6</sup>

### 5.3. Moral dimension

The term ‘moral dimension’ refers to a joint connection between Confucian–Daoist concepts of *yi* (义) and *wuwei* (无为), as well as moral vision and moral action under the umbrella term of social accountability (社会责任) advocated by the systemic-functional approach (Halliday 1985; Huang 2016a) in Chinese ecological discourse.

*Yi* means ‘the morality of righteousness, the right, or the appropriate’ (Mou 2008, 174). And it is closely related to *wuwei*, which encompasses the basic notions of (1) not doing things that are against being natural or beyond natural limitation and (2) restricting one’s activities to what is natural and acting in a natural (effortless or spontaneous) way (Mou 2008, 161).

The proposition of social accountability urges Chinese eco-discursive analysts to ‘think and act ecolinguistically’ (Huang 2016a). On the one hand, they should take a moral vision to figure out what contributions they can make for the environment and the society; on the other hand, they should follow the Confucian–Daoist doctrine of *wuwei* and take moral actions to reflect the possible consequences their actions may bring to the world. Both of the above two can be realized in the fulfillment of their moral obligations during the discursive practices. Accordingly, beneficial discourse should be praised, encouraged and promoted; destructive discourse should be criticized and resisted (Stibbe 2015), and this thus can foster human’s ecological consciousness (Huang 2016b).

In a word, social accountability by the systemic-functional approach is in nature a moral complex of moral appeal, moral awareness, and moral behavior. It focuses not only on the social forces of struggles and conflicts, but more on the moral forces of persuasion and probation. Such a dual linkage between *yi* and moral vision on the one hand, and *wuwei* and moral action on the other hand highlights the ecological premise that moral responsibility should be taken as the priority in the discursive practices and be undertaken by moral actions, and thus can offer a value of moral harmony between moral vision, moral action, and moral obligations to Chinese ecological discourse.

### 5.4. Social dimension

Social dimension is generally understood to mean tight interrelation between Confucian–Daoist concepts of *li* (礼) and *ren* (仁)<sup>7</sup> with language policy and linguistic harmony (语言和谐) by the social approach in Chinese ecological discourse.

*Li* indicates ‘rites, propriety, ceremony and, in some accounts, conventions in general, including mores’ (Mou 2008, 83), and covers various Confucian–Daoist social and moral practices. Therefore, *li* is helpful in constructing a harmonious society because the advocacy of *li* is indispensable to the equal treatment of each party involved in the construction in a moral sense. And, *ren* can be loosely described as ‘a fundamental moral sensibility which consists in appreciation of and reverence for fundamental human value’ (Mou 2008, 124). In this sense, *ren* highly values interpersonal harmony in the social context.

When it comes to language policy, the social approach holds that language policy, as part of language planning, plays an important role in maintaining linguistic harmony and constructing a harmonious society (Feng 2013). Then, linguistic harmony is probed in an all-rounded way in view of the relationship between languages, nature, the society, interpersonal relationship, and so on. In that way linguistic inequality, improper language attitudes (for example, language jealousy and language priority), and inappropriate language policies should be eliminated in order to maintain language harmonization. Specifically, linguistic harmony can be achieved by phonetic harmony (语音和谐) (Feng 2007a) and grammatical harmony (语法和谐) (Feng 2007b). Phonetic harmony is related to the syllables, the rhymes, and the level and oblique tones of Chinese language. Grammatical harmony mainly deals with clause/sentence patterns and the text structures of the Chinese language.

It can be argued that the two linkages indicate two relationships: the first linkage of *li* and language policy and the second linkage of *ren* and linguistic harmony. The first linkage presents the ecological premise that a harmonious society is of great importance, and both in a social sense and in a discursive sense; each party involved should be treated equally in the construction of such an ideal society. The second linkage has in common the recognition that, in the Confucian–Daoist view, harmonious interpersonal relationship exerts a positive influence in dealing with social disharmonies and social conflicts, which may accelerate the deterioration of the cosmological degradation, and vice versa. Those two linkages in effect can demonstrate a dual value of social harmony and interpersonal harmony to Chinese ecological discourse.

In summary, such Confucian–Daoist formulation of Chinese ecological discourse can grant multiple philosophical values to Chinese ecological discourse, and promise the cultural and philosophical resources that contribute to the future development of ecological discourse in the global context.

## 6. Chinese and European ecological discourse: a comparative inquiry

A comparative inquiry in this discussion can be interpreted as the cultural and philosophical comparison between Confucian–Daoist dimensions of Chinese ecological discourse and Cartesian dimensions of its European counterpart. This comparative inquiry is based on the key premise of viewing ecological discourse as being interrelated to its discursive traditions, cultural traditions, and also its philosophical traditions.

**Table 2.** Chinese and European ecological discourse: a comparative inquiry.

Discursive traditions: basic notions		Philosophical traditions					
		Cultural traditions			Worldviews	Mind–body relation	Final justification
Chinese ecological discourse	Moral discourse	Harmonization	Multiculturalism: other-orientation	Holistic thinking	Confucianism and Daoism: inclusive anthropocosmism	Harmony	Ecological legitimacies
European ecological discourse	Science discourse	Eurocentralization	Mono-culturalism: self-orientation	Dualistic thinking	Cartesianism: exclusive anthropocentrism	Dichotomy	Ecological fallacies

And in so doing, we assume that this inquiry matters in that it can offer an alternative approach, which may help European ecological discourse discard the eco-discursive fallacies, transcend the negative influences of the current dilemma by its dubious position, and further devote itself to an intercultural dialogue in enhancing ecological consciousness. This comparative inquiry is done by comparing three categories of their discursive traditions, cultural traditions, and most importantly, philosophical traditions. Here, the words ‘comparative’, ‘compare’, and ‘comparison’ are used to seek the universally dialectical interplay or possibilities of complementarity between those discursive, cultural, and philosophical differences for laying the foundations for constructing a harmonious discourse (see Table 2).

**6.1. Discursive traditions**

Discursive traditions are used here to refer to linguistic theories that Chinese and European ecological discourses reflect and the basic assumptions about discourse, nature, ecology, mind, and the world.<sup>8</sup> We start with European ecological discourse. As Steffensen and Fill (2014, 10) summarize, ‘a considerable number of eco-critical ecolinguists draw on Critical Discourse Analysis’. As indicated in the historical review in Section 4, the orthodox wave can still find its residual effects in the current European eco-discursive circles. Basically, the orthodox eco-discursive analysts hold the following basic assumptions: (1) discourse is rectified as the abstract object and the central focus of discursive practices, and there is no distinction between discourse and non-discourse, or discursive form and discursive behavior; (2) discourse is not of nature, but about nature, that is, discourse is absolutely separate from nature, ecology, and the world; (3) in this view, mind is seen as being separate from body, and nature is viewed as being separate from culture. It is self-evident that European ecological discourse holds a reducible view on discourse, and this thus falls into what Harris calls ‘the discourse of science’ (Harris 2001), which is concerned with the basic position of value-free and non-moral scientific pursuit.

By contrast, Chinese ecological discourse inherits Chinese linguistic traditions and holds different assumptions: (1) discourse is understood as an interrelated concept in discursive practices, and there is a close connection between discourse and non-discourse, for example, the Confucian concepts of *zhixingheyi* (知行合一) and *tianrenheyi* (天人合一); (2) discourse is not about nature, but part of nature, and further a bridge between nature and human beings, ecology, and the world; (3) mind is seen as being in harmony with body, and it is the same with nature and culture. Chinese ecological discourse maintains

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a non-reducible or interrelated view on discourse, and this thus falls into Harris's category of 'the discourse of morals' (Harris 2001), i.e. the point of departure of value-oriented and moral pursuit.

The greatest discrepancy between Chinese and European discursive traditions lies in the essential dispute of whether or not discursive form and discursive behavior should be valued equally and closely. Those discursive traditions may in part derive from their cultural traditions and philosophical traditions both parties rest on.

## 6.2. Cultural traditions

The reducible and abstract European discursive traditions can be caused by European cultural tradition of Eurocentralization, with specific manifestations of mono-culturalism, self-orientation, and dualistic thinking. Cultural traditions that European ecological discourse lives by are largely Eurocentric, which can find their expressions in the monocultural ideology. Specifically, such cultural traditions stick to the blind worship of European Cartesian scholarship and cultural monologue, instead of shifting its attention to other cultures or other possible intercultural dialogues. It is also where the problem of dubious position of European ecological discourse, the orthodox wave in particular, lies in. Consequently, unequal self-orientation and dualistic thinking extend into eco-discursive practices, in the form of discourse-centric theories and practices mentioned above.

By contrast, the non-reducible Chinese discursive traditions can result from cultural traditions of harmonization, multiculturalism, other-orientation, and holistic thinking in particular. Harmonization implies that Chinese ecological discourse is in a cultural sense, harmony-oriented. On the one hand, the relationship between nature and culture is highlighted; on the other hand, it acknowledges equal importance of each party involved, puts great emphasis on others' well-being as well as one's own, and therefore every part in this multicultural context is deemed as a united whole.

The crux of the dispute between Chinese and European cultural traditions depends on the debate between Confucian–Daoist and Cartesian traditions in a philosophical sense, including the basic issues of worldviews and mind–body relations.

## 6.3. Philosophical traditions

Confucianism is in essence inclusive and anthropocosmic (Tu 1993). And, the same is true with Daoism. By 'inclusive', it means that the myriad things exist in the harmony of mind and body with its unique values, whether they are life forms including human beings or other non-life forms. By 'anthropocosmic', it means that nature cannot be reduced to the material resources of the so-called human civilization and equally mind cannot be reduced to the abstract form which is separate from body. Consequently, Chinese ecological discourse adheres to interconnectional inclusivism in their discursive practices. It believes that discourse, ecology, and the world are interrelated to each other as a complex whole. This basic belief of inclusivism and anthropocosmism is also manifested as natural non-reductionism in some core concepts such as ecological movements of discourse, social responsibility, and aesthetics of communication in Chinese ecological discourse, as mentioned above.

By contrast, in the sense of Cartesianism, the world is perceived as exclusive and anthropocentric. By 'exclusive', it means that the world is seen as a rationally predefined and sophisticated machine, which is exclusive of others in the world. By 'anthropocentric', it follows the dichotomy of spirit and matter.<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, everything in the world is made up of separate value-free parts. This belief is found explicitly in the discursive practices of European ecological discourse. According to this account, segmentational exclusivism in European ecological discourse views discourse, ecology, and the world as just separate parts, and there is no close connection among them. And all it does can be interpreted as the extension of critical discourse analysis, and this thus ignores the interdependence between the myriad things, including the discursive forms. Obviously, this is not helpful in fostering ecological consciousness.

Due to their disparate discursive, cultural, and philosophical traditions, Chinese ecological discourse and European ecological discourse show different discursive orientations in their practices: the former develops toward Confucian–Daoist harmony, while the latter heads toward Cartesian dichotomy.

## 6.4. Final justifications

### 6.4.1. Ecological fallacies

In the light of such a comparative inquiry, we maintain that European ecological discourse draws largely on the ecological fallacies: (1) European ecological discourse adopts methodological and ideological principles of critical discourse analysis; (2) theoretically, ecological discourse, as representation of the world, is nothing but the abstract discursive form; (3) as a consequence of these fallacies, discourse is separate from the world; and practically, mind is interpreted as separate from body in the discursive practices; it is the same with nature and culture hidden in lines of texts and words in daily communication. These ecological fallacies can find their roots in the Cartesian version of discursive, cultural, and philosophical traditions; and thus can undermine the role of European ecological discourse in solving ecological problems.

### 6.4.2. Ecological legitimacies

It is argued that Chinese ecological discourse bases itself on the following ecological legitimacies: (1) basically, Chinese ecological discourse can find their roots and traditions in Confucianism and Daoism in the manifestations of Confucian–Daoist dimensions; (2) those four Confucian–Daoist dimensions (see Section 5) can contribute to ecological values, and thus grant ecological significances to Chinese ecological discourse, namely metaphysical harmony, aesthetic harmony, moral harmony, and social harmony; (3) each ecological value has its bound relations to specific discursive practices and in turn can exert a profoundly positive role in the improvement of ecological consciousness; (4) the significance of this discourse harmony lies in the assumption that it can help people deal with the proper relationship between human beings and the world, which is obviously different from its European counterpart.

Final justifications of this comparative inquiry can be summarized as: (1) European ecological discourse, the orthodox wave in particular, is facing the irresistible dilemma of dubious position due to its overwhelming and outdated supposition to Cartesian version of discursive, cultural, and philosophical traditions, and thus underestimating

the role of an intercultural dialogue in the future development of ecological discourse studies and fostering ecological consciousness; (2) Confucian–Daoist dimensions of Chinese ecological discourse can grant ecological values to not only the field itself, but, more importantly, also suggest that its European counterpart go beyond the negative influences of Cartesian dimensions, and this thus can offer an intercultural dialogue to jointly foster ecological consciousness, due to spiritual resources that Confucian–Daoist ecological thoughts can provide.

## 7. Toward a harmonious discourse: a constructive inquiry

The previous two inquiries offer the conceptualization and comparison concerning Chinese ecological discourse and its European counterpart. A more comprehensive study would include not only those critical questions and possible alternatives that arise therein, but more importantly, a new harmonious framework that can embrace important insights from the first two inquiries. Then how do those two inquiries relate themselves to a constructive inquiry into a harmonious discourse? The term ‘a constructive inquiry into a harmonious discourse’ embodies a multitude of concepts, including ‘harmosophy’, ‘harmonious dialogue’, and ‘harmonious discourse’.

We coin the term ‘harmosophy’ (i.e. harmonious ecological philosophy) to refer to the integration of Confucian–Daoist harmony and other ecology-friendly traditions of philosophy. Specifically, this harmonious philosophy that harmonious discourse bases itself on not only takes Confucian–Daoist harmony as its central philosophical orientation, but also draws on other eco-discursive strands. This integration does not occur in a vacuum, but originates from the emerging wave of integration in ecological discourse in the global context. Given the initial integrational inclination by Harris (2001), there is an increasing interest in Confucian and Daoist thinking in European and Korean ecological discourse (e.g. Bang and Døør 2007; Sea-Jeong 2011; Won-Sik 2011). And ‘ecosophy’ (Naess 1995; Stibbe 2012, 2015) is a case in point. This ecological philosophy can offer important implications for valuing animals, human beings, and other life forms ecologically (Zhou 2016, 2017; Huang 2016c; Zhao and Huang 2017). All those tendencies lay a solid foundation for the construction of a harmonious discourse. Therefore, such a philosophical integration is not a simple mixture of two philosophical traditions, but a potential unity of optimization for the harmonious dialogue in an attempt to rethink the harmonious relationship among discourse, ecology, nature, mind, and the world.

Then what makes ‘a harmonious dialogue’? We think it should be made clear of what a harmonious dialogue is not. A harmonious dialogue is first of all not a hegemonic one in that it strongly opposes to any hegemony under the guise of the eco-discursive forms. It advocates a multicultural dialogue where each party involved can interact and learn from each other in an equal context. In this sense, it is a holistic dialogue that strives for the ecological harmony which takes the well-being of all life forms at its paramount consideration. The translation and publication of Stibbe’s *Ecolinguistics: Language, Ecology and the Stories We Live by* in China has set a good example for such a dialogue (Chen et al. 2018). Then, a harmonious discourse is regarded as a complex of harmonious views on discourse, mind, and the world, which integrates metaphysical, aesthetic, moral, and social values into the future eco-discursive studies.

Then what constructive principles can be adopted to analyze harmonious discourse? Basically, any discursive form of Eurocentralization, mono-culturalism, dualism, and above all, Cartesianism, should be countered with no hesitation or fluctuation; harmonious discourse can be analyzed with the assumption that both the implicit and the explicit dialectic among discourse, nature, mind, and the world may exist; and furthermore, harmonious discursive analysts should judge whether such discursive forms can have a positive effect on improving ecological consciousness. In that case, they should distinguish between genuine harmonious discourse and Cartesian discourse in the disguise of harmony.

Then what discursive themes and topics can be covered in this harmonious framework? In integrating European and Chinese eco-discursive frameworks which share the same non-Cartesian harmonosphy, several categories of topics can be covered. The first category includes discourses concerning animals, and Arran Stibbe offers seminal works in this category (e.g. Stibbe 2012, 2015). The second category concerns itself with the natural harmony, and Li Guozheng's *Ecolinguistic Study of Chinese Language* (《生态汉语学》) is a key text in this regard. The third category is involved in social harmony, which incorporates not only the concerns for dealing with social problems and conflicts, but also the positive resolutions to some typical social problems in the global context such as aging. This concern for social conflict was initially exemplified in the work undertaken by Chiu (2008), which suggests an alternative to countering gender injustice by turning to Confucian harmony like *yin-yang*. Another example of social problems like aging is, interestingly, Liang and Luo's study of harmonious aging by shifting gerontology discourse (2012). And a further category can be harmonious discourse concerning online communication. The evidence of this category can be clearly seen in the case of Cui's (2012) discussion of how one form of online disharmony, *shanzhai* (山寨), (i.e. a popular Chinese online buzzword, which means fake, or not original) affected people's power relationships. In a similar case, Victor Chung Kwong Ho (2011) compared how members of three communities maintained interpersonal harmony when threatening others' face by emails occurred. There are, of course, other themes and topics that can be investigated within the proposed harmonious framework, especially when it is applied to the context of developing countries such as China.

## 8. Conclusion

This paper proposes a threefold Confucian–Daoist inquiry into Chinese ecological discourse based on its ecological significance for the future development of ecological discourse studies, thereby facilitating an intercultural dialogue between the east and the west in an effort to synthesize the effort in improving ecological consciousness.

In this cultural and philosophical investigation, the aim was to construct a Chinese harmonious discourse approach based on the conceptualization of Confucian–Daoist dimensions of Chinese ecological discourse and the comparison with its European counterpart. The conceptual inquiry suggests that Chinese ecological discourse can be traced back to its Confucian–Daoist traditions, and the comparative inquiry shows that Confucian–Daoist dimensions of Chinese ecological discourse may imply that the European counterpart of the Chinese approach may be encouraged to learn from Confucian–Daoist ideas for ecological consciousness. And, the constructive



inquiry provides a new framework of harmonious discourse analysis based on harmoniosophy, in the form of a harmonious dialogue among discourse, ecology, nature, mind, and the world.

This tentative exploration of what counts as 'harmoniosophy', 'harmonious discourse', and 'harmonious dialogue' can be a fruitful area for further investigation in ecological and cultural discourse studies. In so doing, ecological discourse in the global context is likely to accomplish its mission of the 'ecological call' of world harmony in this blue planet.

## Notes

1. All the Chinese terms about Chinese ecological discourse are translated by the authors.
2. The Confucian–Daoist dimensions of Chinese ecological discourse can also find themselves in such Chinese classical canonical texts as *Lun Yu* (*The Analects of Confucius*, 《论语》), *Dao De Jing* (《道德经》) and *Yi Jing* (*The Book of Changes* 《易经》), as well as some other philosophical concepts. See Qiao (2013) for relevant comments.
3. For a further account, see Needham (1956).
4. As was commented by one of the reviewers, *yue/le* is concerned with the aesthetic paronomasia in Chinese language. For a further account of aesthetics of ecological linguistics, see Ames and Rosemont (1999).
5. As was pointed out by one of the reviewers, music and poetry are not just a complex of musical scores and poetic lines on their own. Confucianism treats the idea of musical activities as an important means for the cultivation of *qing* (humanistic emotion) with internal moral teaching and the realization of a harmonious society. For further reference of music and poetry in Chinese aesthetics, see Li and Samei (2010).
6. Analytically speaking, the platitudinous claim that the aim of Confucian aesthetic virtue at the crafting of a good and beautiful soul may be misleading, as Confucianism does not postulate the existence of a soul per se. The goal of aesthetic virtue is to cultivate oneself into a *junzi* (君子) and ideally a *shengren* (圣人).
7. As was suggested by one of the reviewers, textual analysis of how the semantic components of such terms as *ren*, *yi*, and *li* are used in context, for example, in *The Analects of Confucius*, would help strengthen the argument.
8. For some actual texts of Chinese ecological discourse, see Brasovan (2016); Tu (2001); Tucker and Berthrong (1998).
9. Keller and Frank (2000) spell out convincingly the potential pitfalls of Cartesian division in the name of scientific enterprises.

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