CONFUCIAN COSMOLOGY and ECOLOGICAL ETHICS:  
QI, LI, and the ROLE of the HUMAN  

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In our search for more comprehensive and global ethics to meet the critical challenges of our contemporary situation, the world's religions are emerging as major reservoirs of depth and insight, particularly with regard to the pressing environmental crisis of our times. While the scale and scope of the crisis are being debated, few people would deny the seriousness of what we are facing as a planetary community immersed in unsustainable practices of production, consumption, and development. Clearly the world's religions have some important correctives to offer in this respect.

There is a growing realization that attitudinal changes toward nature will be essential for creating sustainable societies, in addition to new scientific and economic approaches to our environmental problems. Humans will not preserve what they do not respect. What is currently lacking is a moral basis for changing our exploitative attitudes toward nature. We have laws against homicide but not against geocide or biocide. Thus, we are without a sufficiently broad environmental ethics to alter our consciousness about the earth and our life on it. Consequently what should concern us is this: to what extent can the religious traditions of the world provide us with ethical resources and cosmological perspectives that can help us deal with these pressing environmental issues? What insights from the world religions might be brought to bear on the re-envisioning of the role of the human in relation to the natural world that could be the basis for needed attitudinal change?

The dynamic and holistic perspective of the Confucian worldview may have significant contributions to make in this regard, enlarging our sense of ethical terrain
and moral concerns and providing a rich source for rethinking our own relationship
with nature and the meaning of virtue in light of the environmental crisis we are
facing. Confucianism’s organic holisms can give us a special appreciation for the
interconnectedness of all life forms and renew our sense of the sacredness of this
intricate web of life. Moreover, the Confucian understanding of the dynamic vitalism
underlying cosmic processes offers us a basis for reverencing nature. From a
Confucian perspective, nature cannot be thought of as being composed of inert, dead
matter. Rather, all life forms share the element of qi or material force. This shared
psycho-physical entity becomes the basis for establishing a reciprocity between the
human and non-human worlds.

In this same vein, in terms of self-cultivation and the nurturing of virtue the
Confucian tradition provides a broad framework for harmonizing human life with the
natural world in its doctrine of the human as a child of heaven and earth, as well as in
its understanding of virtues as having both a cosmological and a personal component.
Thus nature and virtue, cosmology and ethics, knowledge and action are intimately
linked for the Confucians in China, Korea and Japan. This chapter will give a broad
outline of the development of the Confucian tradition and then concentrate on three
major themes of qi, li, and the role of the human and their implications for ecological
ethics.

OVERVIEW OF THE CONFUCIAN TRADITION
The Confucian tradition embraces the diverse forms of Confucianism in China,
Korea, Japan, Vietnam, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore. To see Confucianism as
a singular tradition is problematic due to its geographic spread, its historical
development, and its varied expressions ranging from local and familial Confucianism to Imperial State Confucianism.

Originating in the first millennium BCE in China, the tradition includes the transmission of Confucianism to different East Asian cultural and geographical contexts and its resulting transformations. In accounting for its spread and its appeal, one can point to the spiritual dynamics of the tradition and examine the ways in which it interacted with native traditions in China and across East Asia. For example, Confucianism intermingled with Daoism and Buddhism in China, with shamanism in Korea, and with Shinto in Japan. Such borrowing between and creative interaction among religious traditions in East Asia needs to be more fully studied. Indeed, the so-called unity and syncretism of the traditions of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism in China should be noted, especially in the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) periods.

While acknowledging this vital cross-fertilization of religions in East Asia, we can also identify three major historical periods of Confucian thought from its beginnings to the present. The first stage is that of classical Confucianism from the sixth century BCE to the tenth century CE. This is the period of the rise of the early Confucian thinkers, namely Confucius and Mencius. It is also when Confucianism becomes state orthodoxy under the Han empire (202 BCE-220 CE) and begins to spread across East Asia. The second period is the Neo-Confucian era from the eleventh to the early twentieth century. This includes the great synthesis of Zhu Xi in the eleventh century and the important contributions of Wang Yangming in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The final period is that of New Confucianism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries which Tu Weiming has called the "Third Epoch
of Confucian Humanism." In this era there has been a revival of Confucianism under the leadership of scholars who came to Taiwan and Hong Kong after Mao took power in 1949. Fifty years later in October 1999 two major conferences were held by the International Confucian Society in Beijing and in Confucius' birthplace, Qufu, to explore the future of the Confucian Way. These conferences marked the 2540 anniversary of Confucius' birth.

This acknowledged founder of the Confucian tradition was known as the sage-teacher Kongzi (551-479 BCE). His name was Latinized by the Jesuit missionaries as Confucius. Born into a time of rapid social change, Confucius devoted his life to reestablishing order through rectification of the individual and the state. This involved a program embracing both political and religious components. As a creative transmitter of earlier Chinese traditions, Confucius, according to legend, compiled the Appendices to the Classic of Changes and compiled the other Classics, namely, the Classic of Documents, Odes, Rites, and the Spring and Autumn Annals.

The principal sayings and teachings of Confucius are contained in his conversations recorded in the Analects. Here he emphasized the cultivation of moral virtues, especially humaneness (ren), and the practice of civility or ritual decorum (li). Virtue and civility were exemplified by the noble person (junzi) particularly within the five relations, namely, between ruler and minister, parent and child, husband and wife, older and younger siblings, and friend and friend. The essence of Confucian thinking was that to establish order in the society one had to begin with harmony, filiality, and decorum in the family. Then, like concentric circles, the effect of virtue would reach outward to the society. Likewise, if the ruler was moral, it would have a "rippling down" effect on the rest of the society.
At the heart of this classical Confucian worldview was a profound commitment to humaneness and civility. These two virtues defined the means of human relatedness as a spiritual path. Through civility, specifically filiality, one could repay the gifts of life both to one's parents and ancestors and to the whole natural world. Through humaneness one could extend this sensibility to other humans and to all living things. In doing so one became more fully human. The root of practicing humaneness was considered to be filial relations and its extension from one's family and ancestors to the human family and to the cosmic family was the means whereby these primary biological ties provided a person with the roots, trunks and branches of an interconnected spiritual path. The personal and the cosmic were joined in the stream of filiality. From the lineages of ancestors to future progeny an intergenerational spirituality and ethics arose. Through one's parents and ancestors one became part of human life. Reverence and reciprocity was considered a natural response to this gift of life. Analogously, through reverence for Heaven and Earth as the great parents of all life, one realized one's full cosmological being. Great sacrifices were made for the family and utmost loyalties were required in this spiritual path.\textsuperscript{7}

Confucian thought was further developed in the writings of Mencius (385?-312? BCE) and Xunzi (310?-219? BCE) who debated whether human nature was intrinsically good or evil. Mencius' argument on the inherent goodness of human nature gained dominance among Confucian thinkers and gave an optimistic flavor to Confucian educational philosophy and political theory. This perspective influenced the spiritual aspects of the tradition as well because self-cultivation was seen as a natural means of uncovering this innate good nature. Mencius contributed an
understanding of the process of discipline of self-cultivation. He did this by identifying the innate seeds of virtues in the human and suggesting ways in which they could be cultivated toward their full realization as virtues.

Confucianism culminated in a Neo-Confucian revival in the eleventh and twelfth centuries which resulted in a new synthesis of the earlier teachings. The major Neo-Confucian thinker, Zhu Xi (1130-1200), designated four texts as containing the central ideas of Confucian thought. These were two chapters from the *Classic of Rites*, namely, the *Great Learning* and the *Mean*, as well as the *Analects* and the *Mencius*. He elevated these Four Books to a position of prime importance over the Five Classics mentioned earlier. These texts and Zhu Xi's commentaries on them became, in 1315, the basis of the Chinese civil service examination system which endured for nearly six hundred years until 1905. Every prospective government official had to take the civil service exams based on Zhu Xi's commentaries on the Four Books. The idea was to provide educated, moral officials for the large government bureaucracy which ruled China. The influence, then, of Neo-Confucian thought on government, education, and social values was extensive.

Zhu Xi's synthesis of Neo-Confucianism was recorded in his classic anthology, *Reflections on Things at Hand* (*Jinsilu*). In this work, he provided, for the first time, a comprehensive metaphysical basis for Confucian thought and practice. In response to the Buddhists' metaphysics of emptiness and their perceived tendency towards withdrawal from the world in meditative practices, Zhu formulated a this-worldly spirituality based on a balance of cosmological orientation, ethical and ritual practices, scholarly reflection, and political participation. The aim was to balance inner cultivation with outward investigation of things.
Unlike the Buddhists who saw the world of change as the source of suffering, Zhu Xi, and the Neo-Confucians after him, affirmed change as the source of transformation in both the cosmos and the person. Thus Neo-Confucian spiritual discipline involved cultivating one's moral nature so as to bring it into harmony with the larger pattern of change in the cosmos. Each moral virtue had its cosmological component. For example, the central virtue of humaneness was seen as the source of fecundity and growth in both the individual and the cosmos. By practicing humaneness, one could effect the transformation of things in oneself, in society, and in the cosmos. In so doing, one's deeper identity with reality was recognized as forming one body with all things. As the Mean stated it: "…being able to assist in the transforming and nourishing powers of Heaven and Earth, one can form a triad with Heaven and Earth" (chapter 22).

To realize this cosmological identification, a rigorous spiritual practice was needed. This involved a development of poles present in earlier Confucian thought, namely, a balancing of religious reverence with an ethical integrity and ritual propriety manifested in daily life. For Zhu Xi and later Neo-Confucians such spiritual practices were a central concern. Thus interior meditation became known as "quiet sitting," "abiding in reverence," or "rectifying the mind." Moral self-discipline was known as "making the will sincere," "controlling the desires," and "investigating principle." 8 All of this was expressed in ritual decorum.

Through conscientious spiritual effort and study one could become a noble person (junzi) or even a sage who was able to participate in society and politics most effectively. While in the earlier Confucian view the emphasis was on the ruler as the prime moral leader of the society, in Neo-Confucian thought this duty was extended
To all people, with a particular responsibility placed on teachers and government officials. While ritual was primary in earlier Confucianism, spiritual discipline became even more significant in Neo-Confucian practice. In both the early and later tradition, major emphasis was placed on mutual respect and reciprocity in basic human relations.

With this basic understanding of Confucian tradition, let us now turn to a deeper exploration of the concepts of *qi* and *li* and Confucian understandings of the role of the human, in order to more fully consider the possible implications of Confucian cosmology for environmental ethics.

**QI**

The Chinese have a term to describe the vibrancy and aliveness of the universe. This is *qi* which is translated in a variety of ways in the Classical Confucian tradition as spirit, air, or breath, and later in the Neo-Confucian tradition as material force, matter energy, vital force. It describes the realization that the universe is alive with vitality and resonates with life. What is especially remarkable about this ancient and enduring realization of the Chinese people is that *qi* is a unified field embracing both matter and energy. It is thus a matrix containing both material and spiritual life from the smallest particle to the largest visible reality. *Qi* courses through the universe from the constituent particles of matter to mountains and rocks, plants and trees, animals and birds, fish and insects. All the elements--air, earth, fire, and water--are composed of *qi*. We humans, too, are alive with *qi*. It makes up our body and spirit as one integrated whole, and it activates our mind-and-heart which is a single unified reality in Chinese thought.
In other words, *qi* courses though nature, fills the elements of reality, and dynamizes our human body-mind. It is the single unifying force of all that is. It does not posit a dichotomy between nature and spirit, body and mind, matter and energy. *Qi* is one united, dynamic whole--the vital reality of the entire universe.

The implications of this unified view of reality become apparent to us rather quickly. One wants to know and experience this *qi* more fully. This is why most of the martial arts and exercises like *taiqi* aim to cultivate and deepen *qi*. Humans for all their blindness are intelligent enough to want to taste and savour this marvelous aliveness of the universe. They want to harmonize their most basic physical processes with *qi-*thus the dynamic coordination of breath and movement is at the heart of the Chinese physical arts. And arts they are--this is not just a physical toning of the body or building up of muscles. This is a spiritual exercise filled with potency for health of mind and body--a coordinated and aesthetically pleasing dance of the human system in and through the sea of *qi*.

One way to visualize *qi* is a vast ocean of energy, an infinite source of vibrant potency, a resonating field of dynamic power--*in* matter itself not separate from it. For *qi* once again is matter-energy, material force. This is the important contribution of Chinese thought to world philosophy. It is an insight and realization of particular significance for our contemporary world which has been broken apart by our Enlightenment separation of matter and spirit, of body and soul, of nature and life.

The news is this from the perspective of *qi*--the world is alive with a depth of mystery, complexity, and vibrancy that we can only begin to taste and never fully exhaust. The sensual world *is* the spiritual world from the perspective of *qi*. The dynamism of each particular reality begins to present itself to us--the oak tree in our
yard radiates an untold energy, the snow covered mountains in the distance are redolent with silent qi, the rivers coursing to the ocean are filled with the buoyancy of qi.

One of the earliest Confucian writers, Mencius, speaks of the great flood-like qi. This is what I am evoking here. We are flooded, surrounded, inundated by qi. We walk around completely unconscious most of the time that this ocean of energy is here--sustaining us, nourishing us, and enlivening us. Qi is the gift of the universe--the endlessly fecund life source unfolding before us and around us in a daily miracle of hidden joy. It is the restorative laughter of the universe inviting us into its endless mystery.

As we return to the Chinese sources to sift through the texts and commentaries to learn more about what becomes apparent is that the notion of qi is not constant but evolving. It is rather a multivalent reality that begins to reveal something of its shape and function only when seen from a variety of perspectives and texts.

In the classical Confucian tradition qi tends to refer more generally to the spirit which animates the universe, the breath which enlivens humans, and the air that connects all things. Even from its earliest articulation, however, it would be fair to say qi was never seen as an entity apart from matter. Rather, it is embedded in the natural and the human world. It animates and nourishes nature and humans. Indeed, the very Chinese character itself is said to represent the steam rising from rice, suggesting the nourishing and transforming power of qi. Like food, qi maintains life and human energy. Benjamin Schwartz observes, "The image of food even suggests the interchange of energy and substance between humans and their surrounding
environment.” The idea of qi as having the properties of condensation and rarefaction like steam suggests the same.

As the later Han and Neo-Confucians began to articulate their cosmological understandings, the unity of qi as matter-energy became more evident. Dong Zhongshu, the leading Han Confucian, described qi as a "limpid colorless substance" which fills the universe "surrounds man as water surrounds a fish" and unites all creation. The Neo-Confucians, however, developed the notion of qi to refer to the substance and essence of all life. It pervades and animates the universe as both matter and energy.

For the Neo-Confucian, Zhang Zai, the vibrancy of material force originates in the Great Vacuity which contains the primal, undifferentiated material force. As it integrates and disintegrates it participates in the Great Harmony of activity and tranquillity. This perspective affirms the unified and real processes of change, not seeing them as illusory as the Buddhists might nor as a product of a dichotomy between non-being and being as the Daoists would. There is instead a dynamic unity of qi as seen in its operations as substance emerging in the Great Vacuity and as function operating in the Great Harmony.

LI

Li is the inner ordering principle of reality that is embedded in the heart of qi. The Chinese character for li suggests working on the veins in jade which one needs to discover and carve adeptly. Li is comparable to a logos principle whereby all of reality is imprinted with structure and intelligibility. It is both pattern and potential pattern and thus gives reality its intricacy of design as well as its thrust toward directionality and purpose. It is a revealing and concealing sensibility for human
consciousness. We seek to find its mark, its imprint in the flow of the natural world around us as well as in the unfolding of our lives. As Thomas Berry says so often, we have become autistic to perceiving this vast intelligibility of the universe and thus have become ungrounded and rudderless, locked in our own self-referential cages.

It is, however, the universe which is calling to be read and to be heard in the deep patterning of its particularities. The beauty of *li* is that it brings us into contact with the myriad forms of life, the 10,000 things as the Chinese say, with a penetrating clarity. This is because *li* is both normative principle and intelligible pattern. As pattern it gives us entry into understanding nature and its complex workings. As principle it gives us a grounding for a morality that arises from the very structure of life itself. The moral dimensions of the universe are in the depths of matter revealing itself to us as *li*.

*Li* is principle and pattern--both a moral and a natural entity bringing together our profound embeddedness in a universe of meaning and mystery. The allure of the universe lies in seeing and experiencing that meaning and mystery before us, behind us, and all around us. We are drawn forth into a sense of the breadth and depth of *li* as manifest in the phenomenal world in great diversity and particularity. All of this breadth and depth of inner ordering is gathered up in the Great Ultimate (*taiji*)--that which contains and shapes and generates all principles and patterns in the universe.

As one of the principal Neo-Confucian thinkers, Zhu Xi (1130-1200) says, "The Supreme Ultimate is merely the principle of Heaven-and-Earth, and the myriad things." Another leading Neo-Confucian, Cheng Yi (1033-1107) says, "Principle is one (in the Great Ultimate); its manifestations are many (in the world)." They use the analogy of the moon shining in the water in the irrigated rice fields on a terraced
mountain side. There are many moons which are reflected but only one full moon in the sky. Taiji is like this full moon. It is translated as the Great Ultimate or the Supreme Ultimate. It refers to a pole star—guiding, illuminating and alluring. For the Cheng brothers *li* was like a genetic coding and thus identified with the creative life principle (*shengsheng*).

The creative dynamics of this great container of principles are cosmological, namely there is an interaction of non-being and being or the unmanifest and the manifest. This is seen in the interaction of the *wuji* (Non-ultimate) and the *taiji* (Great Ultimate). Some of the most interesting arguments and discussions in Chinese thought have arisen among thinkers who are commenting on this complex interaction.

Some would say that the Daoists want to maintain a dichotomy between non-being and being, emphasizing the dynamic creativity of non-being as the source of all life. Others would say the Buddhists want to maintain the ultimate emptiness of non-being and the illusory quality of being. The Neo-Confucians struggled to assert the importance of the dynamic continuity between these two forces (non-being and being). Indeed, they would maintain that the very creativity of the universe is revealed in this dialectical interaction. The complementarity of these creative forces is at the heart of all cosmological processes for the Confucians. The vast changes and transformations of nature in the endless flow of *qi* becomes clear in this interaction. That is because all reality, namely all *qi*, is imprinted with *li*. Discovering this patterning in the fluid material force of the universe is the challenge for humans.

As *li* is unveiled humans can discern the appropriate patterning for both their individual and their collective lives. The universe unfolds according to these patterns of deep structure embedded in reality. Social systems are established according to
these patterns, agriculture is conducted in harmony with these patterns, politics functions in relation to these patterns, and individuals cultivate themselves in response to these patterns.

THE ROLE OF THE HUMAN

For the Neo-Confucians humans receive li from heaven. Their heavenly endowed nature is thus linked to the patterning throughout the universe. By the same token, humans are composed of qi the same dynamic substance that makes up the universe.

Humans are thus imprinted with unique and differentiated li embedded in qi, the material force of their own mind-body. Li guarantees the special and different qualities of each human being while qi establishes the material and spiritual grounds for subjectivity, thus uniting humans with one another and with the vast world of nature. In other words, qi as vital force is the interiority of matter, providing the matrix for communion and exchange of energy between all life forms.

Humans, then, are given a heavenly endowed nature which joins them to the great triad of Cosmos, Earth, and other humans. While this is a gift of the universe from birth, it is understood as something to be realized over a lifetime. This realization occurs through the process of self-cultivation which is at the heart of Confucian moral and spiritual practice. This process of actualization is not abstract or otherworldly but rather concerned with the process of becoming more fully human. In doing so one penetrates principle and perceives pattern amidst the flux of material force in ourselves and in the universe at large. The goal of our cultivation is to actualize and recognize the profound identity of ourselves with Cosmos, Earth, and the myriad things.
Because the qi that we are each given may vary in its purity or turbidity, cultivation is needed. Evil, imperfection, loss and suffering are thus part of the human condition. The Confucians, however, believe one’s heavenly endowed human nature is essentially good and thus perfectible. To illustrate this Mencius uses the example of a child about to fall into a well (Mencius II A 6). The instinct of any person is to save the child from harm, not for any exterior reasons but due to a naturally compassionate heart. The key to the goodness of human nature is a profound sympathy or empathy which all humans have. Indeed, affectivity is what distinguishes humans in the Confucian worldview. As Mencius says, “No one is devoid of a heart sensitive to the suffering of others” (Mencius II A 6). Because of this basic sympathy, Confucians affirm that at the level of our primary instincts we will tend toward the good. Mencius uses wonderfully evocative images from nature to illustrate this, like water flowing naturally down hill (Mencius VI A 2). Like wind blowing over grasses, people are inclined toward the good and respond to the good because they are imprinted with the good.

From these examples Mencius goes on to describe the basic seeds implanted in human nature which when cultivated become the key virtues for living a fully humane life. The seeds are compassion, shame, courtesy, and modesty, and a sense of right and wrong (Mencius II A 6, Mencius VI A 6). These seeds need to be watered and tended so they will grow and flourish into the primary Confucian virtues of humaneness, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom. The images used to describe the growth and cultivation of virtue are derived from the agricultural patterns and seasonal cycles of humans dependent on nature. Consequently, I am inclined to use
the metaphor of “botanical cultivation” when speaking of Confucian moral and spiritual practice.

The aim of such practice is to allow the seeds or tendencies of our deepest human spontaneities to be nourished and to flourish. Mencius suggests that this should be as clear as tending trees in one’s garden: “Even with a tong or a zi tree one or two spans thick, anyone wishing to keep it alive will know how it should be tended, yet when it comes to one’s own person, one does not know how to tend it. Surely one does not love one’s person any less than the tong or the zi” (Mencius VI A 13). In this same spirit there should develop a naturalness to our actions based on the rhythms of the cosmos itself. From seeds in the soil to seasons and their cycles, to the flow of rivers and the thrust of mountains, we are part of the rhythms of the universe and need to nourish our original nature.

If one develops these seeds, it is like “a fire starting up or a spring coming through.” The moral power that results from this cultivation of virtue is boundless: “When these (seeds) are fully developed, one can take under one’s protection the whole realm within the Four Seas, but if one fails to develop them, they will not be able even to serve one’s parents” (Mencius II A 6).

The key is to tend, to activate, and to align our deepest spontaneities with the dynamic patterns of change and continuity in nature. Thus self-cultivation needs to be an organic process. As Mencius suggests, we need to nourish our flood-like qi with integrity (Mencius II A 2) and recover our original mind-and-heart (Mencius VI A 11). However, this cannot be a forced or artificial process. Mencius uses the example of the man from Sung who planted rice seedlings. In his desire to see them grow quickly, he pulled at them too soon, and they withered. As Mencius observes, “There
are few people in the world who can resist the urge to help their rice plants grow.” (Menius II A 2) Others leave them unattended or do not bother to weed. How to nurture and nourish is the art of cultivation in both nature and in humans.

Mencius also uses the example of Ox Mountain where, due to deforestation and overgrazing, the mountain becomes denuded (Mencius VI A 8). Erosion sets in, and the ecosystem is destroyed. People are inclined to think this has always been the nature of the mountain. Improper cultivation of ourselves and of the land results in waste and loss. As Mencius says, if one is not restored by the natural rhythms of the day and night but dissipates one’s energies and becomes dissolute, people will think that dissolution is one’s essential nature. However, he insists that nourishment is the key: “Given the right nourishment there is nothing that will not grow, and deprived of it there is nothing that will not wither away” (Mencius VI A 8).

These examples are so simple, clear, and timeless. They are as appropriate for our day as for Mencius’ as their natural imagery restores us to the deeper rhythms of our being in the universe. For in this context, self-cultivation does not lead toward transcendent bliss or otherworldly salvation or even personal enlightenment. Rather, the goal is to move toward participation in the social, political, and cosmological order of things. The continuity of self, society, and cosmos is paramount in the Confucian worldview.

Thus self-cultivation is always aimed at preparing the individual to contribute more fully to the needs of the contemporary world. And for the Confucians this implies a primacy of continual study and learning. Education is at the heart of self-cultivation. This is not simply book learning or scholarship for the sake of careerism. It is rather education--leading oneself out of oneself into the world at large. More
than anything, then, the role of the human is to discover one’s place in the larger community of life. And this community is one of ever expanding and intricately connected concentric circles of family, school, society, politics, nature, and the universe. We are embedded in a web of relationships and one fulfills one’s role by cultivating one’s inner spontaneities so that one can be more responsive to each of these layers of commitments.

For the Confucians this is all set within the context of an organic, dynamic, holistic universe that is alive with *qi* and imprinted with *li*. Thus finding one’s role is realizing how one completes the great triad of Heaven and Earth. As we rediscover our cosmological being in the macrocosm of things, our role in the microcosm of our daily lives will become more fulfilling, more joyful, more spontaneous. The pace and rhythm of our lives will be responsive to the rhythms of the day, the changes of the seasons, and the movements of the stars. The great continuity of our being with the being of the universe will enliven and enrich our activities. By attuning ourselves to the patterns of change and continuity in the natural world, we find our niche.

We thus take our place in the enormous expanse of the universe. We complete the great triad of Heaven and Earth and participate in the transforming and nourishing powers of all things. In so doing we will cultivate the land appropriately, nurture life forms for sustainability, regulate social relations adeptly and fairly, honor political commitments for the common good, and thus participate in the great transformation of things. This will be manifest as our own inner authenticity resonates with the authenticity of the universe itself.

This holistic and dynamic understanding of the world and the role of humans that we find in Confucianism could bring us far in the revisioning so necessary for
dealing with our current ecological crisis and is but one example of the potential
benefit of tapping the resources of the world religions in our endeavor to formulate a
more comprehensive and global ethics.

1 This has been one of the main objectives of the Harvard conference series and edited volumes on
Religions of the World and Ecology. See http://www.hds.harvard.edu/cswr/ecology and
http://environment.harvard.edu/religion
2 For example, in Japan Confucianism linked itself to Shinto during the seventeenth century, was
separated from it by the nativists of the eighteenth century, and was rejoined to Shinto again in the late
nineteenth century. Japanese Confucianism as a worldview and as a form of spiritual cultivation is still
part of many of the New Religions in Japan and deserves further study. See, for example, Helen
Hardacre's discussion of "The World View of the New Religions" in Kurozumikyo and the New
3 See Tu Weiming's article with this title in Confucianism: The Dynamics of Tradition, ed. Irene Eber
which separate out the Han, Tang, and later Qing Evidential Learning. See All Under Heaven
4 John Berthrong discusses these conferences in detail in Chapter 11 of Confucianism and Ecology
volume.
5 The following nine paragraphs have appeared in slightly different form in "An Ecological
Cosmology: The Confucian Philosophy of Material Force" in Christopher Chapple, ed., Ecological
Prospects: Scientific, Religious and Aesthetic Perspectives (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New
6 John Berthrong has translated li not only as ritual but as civility so as to encompass the area of
politics and human rights.
7 Likewise, often great distortions were demanded by parents or in-laws, and this dark side of
Confucianism was highlighted in the New Culture Movement of the twentieth century. See, for
example, the novel Family by Ba Jin.
8 For a discussion of Neo-Confucian spiritual practice, see Wm. Theodore de Bary, "Neo-Confucian
Cultivation and Enlightenment" in Wm. Theodore de Bary, ed, The Unfolding of Neo-Confucianism
9 Benjamin Schwartz, The World of Thought in Ancient China (Cambridge: Harvard University Press,
10 Wm. Theodore de Bary, Sources of Chinese Tradition (New York: Columbia University Press,
11 Ibid., p. 701-702.
12 In I-chuan wenji, (Collection of Literary Works by Cheng Yi) 5:12b.
13 Wm. Theodore de Bary, Sources of Chinese Tradition (New York: Columbia University Press,