

COMPANIONSHIP WITH NATURE IN ASIAN TRADITIONS: A RESOURCE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

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Abstract: What is the meaning of ‘nature’ in Asian cultures? How do Asian people perceive their relations to nature? What types of environmental ethics do Asian cultures exhibit? This paper considers these questions in two major Asian traditions, Indian and Chinese. It points out that the concept of nature has played a crucial role in Asian people’s lifestyles, beliefs, and ethical thinking. To them, nature is seen not merely as a means of livelihood, but rather the fountain of harmony, spirituality, and inspiration. The paper examines whether Asian environmental ethics is anthropocentric or nonanthropocentric. It concludes that, despite some limitations, Asian traditions nourish an alternative environmental ethic, which is a companionship with nature, and should be granted as a valuable resource for environmental education.

Keywords: Asian cultural traditions, environmental values, environmental education, ethics, human-nature relationship

INTRODUCTION

Environmental ethics is defined as a branch of ethics which deals with the human-nature relation from a normative perspective. In other words, environmental ethics provides us some guidelines about how we should *relate* with nature or how we should *behave* with nature. Valuing nature is one of the major issues in environmental ethics. Indeed, “how should we value nature?” is the most important question in environmental ethics. When we value nature from the perspective of human beings, i.e. everything in nature is valuable only in relation to the benefit it brings to human beings, this valuation is known as anthropocentric or human-centric environmental ethics. In contrast, when we value nature from the perspective of other natural elements i.e. everything in nature is *equally* valuable irrespective of the benefit to human beings, this valuation is known as nonanthropocentric

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environmental ethics. All cultural traditions reflect their own human-nature relation and may broadly be categorized as either anthropocentric or nonanthropocentric.

Recent environmental philosophers have pointed out that our present attitude toward nature is not appropriate since it endorses a human-centric environmental ethics. Without correcting this dominating attitude toward nature a harmonious co-existence with non-human natural elements would be challenging according to them. Therefore, they suggest recognizing 'ecological wisdom' found in the different cultural traditions. Two famous comparative environmental philosophers, J. Baird Callicott and Roger T. Ames, have already addressed the possibility that Asian cultural traditions may provide important 'conceptual resources' for an adequate environmental ethics. However, little attention has been paid to articulating these conceptual resources so far.

In this paper, I demonstrate the human-nature relation in the Asian cultural traditions. As Asian cultures are diverse and heterogeneous, I focus on two major cultural traditions, namely, Indian and Chinese. Then, I have examined whether Asian cultural traditions subscribe to anthropocentrism or nonanthropocentrism. I argue that Asian traditions reflect a special kind of environmental ethic which is neither anthropocentric nor nonanthropocentric. This special kind of environmental ethic is most likely place-based and kin-centric. Finally, I evaluate the significance of Asian environmental ethics as an alternative approach in environmental ethical thinking.

CULTURE, TRADITION, AND THE HUMAN-NATURE RELATION

Traditions are those customs, practices, rituals, attitudes to life, attitudes toward nature, and perceptions of life on this Earth and beyond, followed by mankind for centuries. People usually do not want to break traditions since breaking traditions sometimes may have a negative impact, and destroy the existing harmony. Instead of losing traditions, mankind preserves them for generations. Whether following traditions is always correct depends on the available knowledge, science and technology, literature, arts, philosophy, and value axioms. The most natural way for any tradition to survive is through culture.

However, the interrelation between nature, culture, and human beings, may not be articulated as simple. Perhaps, this relation is much deeper, and the culture of cultivation has been seen as the root cause of

human-nature separation. With agriculture human beings started their dominion over nature. Toadvine writes it in a very interesting way: "...cultivation is the first and essential step toward civilization, the fundamental human manipulation of nature that makes all later technological and social development possible...Agriculture is at the edge-the margin, the barbarian frontier-of culture" (Toadvine 2007, 209).

Toadvine's comments clearly show that culture as human civilization has manipulated nature in a most vulnerable way. Another important issue which implied in Toadvine's statement is that the culture of cultivation establishes a "boundary" line or a "dividing" line between human and nature. Oelschlaeger calls it "the Great Divide". He writes, "Clearly, boundaries exist. The Great Divide is a deeply entrenched reality. But *why? I believe it is possible to seek the origin of the Great Divide in the proclivity of humankind to separate itself from nature*" (Oelschlaeger 2007, 4-5). There is probably no way to ignore the fact that we experience many boundaries in our lives as nicely pointed out by Brown, "the shell of an egg, our own skin, or the ecotone where the forest ends and the prairie begins" (Brown 2007, ix).

Nonetheless, there are some other boundaries created by human beings themselves; for instance, the technological boundary. Technologies are vital components of our present culture. By technology we separated ourselves from nature since only we are able to invent and use it towards other fellow creatures, such as animals and plants. We very often use words like "high tech society", "technologically advanced societies", "skilled technology operator", and "computer technician" to show the boundary. Interestingly, scholars are not sure whether boundaries are realities or mere fictions. Callicott asks: "Or are all such putative boundaries between people and nature only obsolete theological and philosophical fictions?—in which case man is a part of nature" (Callicott 2007, 21). *All* theological endeavors may not encourage maintaining boundaries. However, there is some usefulness in maintaining boundaries. For example, conservationists need to know what they should conserve for a harmonious environment.

Meanwhile, there are arguments for and against human-nature boundaries. Each cultural tradition exposes a distinct type of human-nature relation. This is because cultural traditions celebrate and emphasize values which are unique according to them. A key

environmental philosopher, Hargrove, writes, "...we can say that the simple fact that seventeenth-and eighteenth-century Europeans knew that people in other parts of the world aesthetically enjoyed nature paved the way for similar values to emerge in Europe" (Hargrove 1989, xviii-xix). Obviously, Hargrove's remark does not mean that Europeans lack an aesthetic sense of nature prior to the seventeenth century. But rather, at that time they started to value nature aesthetically apart from its mere economic value.

HUMAN-NATURE RELATION IN ASIAN CULTURAL TRADITIONS

In this section, we will concentrate on some interesting questions. Firstly, what is the meaning of 'nature' in Asian cultures? Secondly, what values do Asian cultures reflect? Finally, how do Asian people perceive their relations to nature? According to Callicott and Ames, "One clear way that the East can help the West to understand and value nature is...the nature of nature and who we human beings are in relation to it." (Callicott and Ames 1989, 16). Callicott and Ames have rightly hinted that the underlying worldview of any tradition is vital to grasping its teachings and knowledge which might be helpful for other traditions. In order to understand the Asian worldview, some key ideas need to be discussed. The first and most important among them is the conception of God. Unlike Western traditions, God and nature can be identified in some Asian traditions. God is not He who created human beings in His 'own image' and ordered to 'replenish' and 'subdue' nature in accordance with their benefit.

Rather, God is the Ultimate Reality who is not separate from nature and human beings were created by the same primal elements as other natural elements were created. One who wants to get salvation should maintain a respectful relation with other fellow members in nature instead of exploiting them. Indeed, all natural elements are brothers and sisters of human beings and nature is just an extended family. Other cultural traditions in Asia which do not share this view hold that human beings must continue a balance with nature in order to attain individual, social, and political harmony, even though there is no God, or God and nature are not identified.

This Human-nature relation can be seen as distinct and unfit for the *rationalistic enterprise* of the West where philosophy and religion are separate. The reason for the distinctiveness is simple, "Because philosophy is seen to be relevant to overcoming suffering and

improving the quality of human life, there are no rigid distinctions between philosophy and religion in Asian thought” (Koller and Koller 1998, xvii). This unique blend of nature, religion, life, and philosophy provides us an insightful worldview which may not be purely rational, argumentative, hardcore theoretical, and logically sound in the sense of Western traditions. However, Asian modes of thought reflect a different image of human-nature relation (Talukder 2010, 86). While there are considerable differences among Asian cultural traditions, there are also commonalities. The two major traditions in Asia, Indian and Chinese traditions, characterize nature as one single family. Bearing in mind all of these aspects, we will explore Indian and Chinese cultural traditions in detail. Nature as extended family and how to achieve harmony within this extended family will be our focus.

I. Indian Culture: Deutsch writes, “Nature can become value-laden, it seems to me, only from a spiritual perspective which sees nature either as a manifestation of spiritual being or, Advaitic-wise, as an appearance grounded in a spiritual reality” (Deutsch 1989, 264). As Deutsch observes, nature means spirituality in Indian culture. Everything in nature, including animals, trees, plants, air, rivers, and water, is sacred. The distinction between the material world and the living world has hardly appeared in these traditions. Chattopadhyaya mentions, “In the different forms of Indian naturalism, both orthodox and heterodox, there is an intimate relation between the living world, the mental world and the natural world. All forms of life and consciousness are shaped by nature” (Chattopadhyaya 2003, 158). Consciousness cannot only belong to living things; it can be discovered in each and every element in nature, since nature itself is God’s body according to Indian traditions. One notable example of sacredness in nature is the river *Ganga* (or Ganges). Coward writes, “Rivers too are seen to be sacred, especially the Ganges. Hindu mythology describes the Ganges as a great goddess that originates in heaven and flows down to earth giving both food and purification” (Coward 2003, 412).

In Indian culture, the purification of devotees can be attained by performing some rituals on the river *Ganga*. *Arati* is the most remarkable of these, “Devotees perform *arati* by waving an oil lamp in front of *Ganga* while standing on the riverbank. The sounds of bells, gongs, drums, and conch shells play a prominent role in the ritual” (Allay 1988, 301). Note that in the process of purifying, the devotees

need to be identified with the river *Ganga*, and realize their relationship with nature through worship. Numerous rituals are performed in Indian cultural ceremonies. However, most of the ceremonies are inherently related to the reverence for nature.

Two natural elements are common in almost all the religio-cultural ceremonies in India: *Durbha* grass and the *Tulsi* plant. Banerjee writes, "By offering grass as a sacrifice on that day immortality and blessedness for ten ancestors may be secured; and another result is that one's posterity increases and multiplies like the "*durbha*" grass itself, which is one of the most prolific members of the vegetation kingdom" (Banerjee 1979, 146). On the *Tulsi* plant he comments, "The *Tulsi* plant is found in every Hindu home...Hindu Brahmins consider it to be the wife of Lord Vishnu, and revere it accordingly. "Nothing on earth can equal the virtues of *Tulsi*"; they say" (Ibid, 146).

Banerjee's comments indicate that Indian traditions invoke one single message to the whole world, as clearly stated in Koller's words, "...the Indian tradition, from Vedic times to the present, views human beings as an integral part of the grand unity of organic existence that extends from the highest gods all the way to the lowliest plant life" (Koller 1999, 279). So, the message is the 'cosmic unity' between all creatures whether living or nonliving. The Western dualism, mind and body, or living and nonliving, disappears in the Indian worldview. Indian perception of the human-nature relation is thus simple and perfectly summarized by Dwivedi, "...every entity and living organism is part of one large extended family system (*kutumba*) presided over by the eternal Mother Earth, Devi Vasundhara. The development of humanity from creation until now has taken place nowhere else but on Earth. Our relationship with Earth, from birth to death, is like that of children and their mother" (Dwivedi 2000, 9).

Therefore, the relation between humans and nature in Indian cultural traditions is that humans are children and nature is their Mother. In other words, human beings are supposed to maintain a 'kinship' relation with nature. This view is also manifested in several empirical studies. For example, Good mentions, "Yet the empirical evidence for Indian and Sri Lankan Tamils, at any rate, is that most people do not habitually speak about kinship in term of blood, let alone 'substance', and may even, as I found, deny its relevance when the question is explicitly put to them" (Good 2000, 326).

Sometimes, indigenous people in rural parts of India establish kinship relation with natural entities to get rid of their sufferings. A

woman from the city of Madurai, Southern India, illustrates the wedding ceremony between a young man and a tree in this way: “So, we arrange the marriage of that person to a tree, and then we pray that the tree will take on the burdens of that human being and therefore release that person from the suffering. Then the human person is free to marry someone else. Usually it works out that way” (Nagarajan 2000, 457).

So, Indian cultural traditions conceive the human-nature relation in the same way such that humans relate with their family members. In this worldview, nature is a joint family which is undivided and interrelated. It is worth noting that the Indian concept of a joint family is much broader than the Western one. Banerjee when commenting on Hindu joint family writes, “A joint family means that all the members of the family live together in the same house. The family does not consist of parents and children only. Presumably there is no limit to its size” (Banerjee 1979, 144).

II. Chinese culture: The Chinese culture inherited a kind of cosmology where there is no “Creator” or “God”. Nature itself is not regarded as the Creator. Rather, the Chinese worldview holds that nature is continuous, dynamic, and self-generating. All physical elements in nature are denoted “Heaven” and nature is seen as an interaction of Heaven and Earth. All living and nonliving elements in nature are created by an organic process. According to Julia Tao, “...the Chinese have a conception of nature as an organic process, a spontaneously self-generating life force. This life force possesses continuity, wholeness and dynamism. Nature is life-giving, it gives rise to the life, flourishing and development of the myriad creatures” (Tao 2005, 71).

Nature is ever changing, dynamic, and spontaneous, and beyond the control of human beings. Human beings can only interrupt it if they want to control nature. Nature was perfectly balanced when it was first evolved. In order to be wise (or a sage) human beings do not need to worship nature. All they need is to cultivate their inner virtues and benevolence. Any act which interrupts natural balance is the destruction of harmony. So, human beings must practice moral cultivation. Confucius or Kongzi, the most influential thinker in Chinese traditions, persistently recommended moral cultivation for the essential harmony in personal, family, social, and political lives. Cecilia Wee’s insightful comments should be worth noting here, “...Confucius emphasized the moral cultivation of each human being.

Such moral cultivation was to be achieved through the practice of rites, and through recognition of the appropriate relations that obtain between oneself and others in society” (Wee 2009, 361). In fact, moral cultivation makes one the true human being in the Confucian sense. This is reflected in Tucker’s words, “Thus to become fully human one must nurture (*yang*) and preserve (*ts’un*), namely cultivate, the heavenly principle of one’s mind and heart” (Tucker 2001, 136).

In the *Doctrine of the Mean (Chung-Yung)*, the great Confucian scholar Mencius writes, “Equilibrium is the great foundation of the world, and harmony its universal path. When equilibrium and harmony are realized to the highest degree, heaven and earth will attain their proper order and all things will flourish” (cited: Tucker 2001, 136). Before answering what the way of achieving harmony is we should know the notion of human being. It is important to mention that human beings are not merely rational, social, and political beings in Confucian traditions. Weiming writes, “Learning to be human in the Confucian spirit is to engage oneself in a ceaseless, unending process of creative self-transformation...This involves four inseparable dimensions—self, community, nature, and the transcendent” (Weiming 1998, 13-14).

As Weiming points out, a human being is a transformed being who finds themselves inseparable from their natural community. In another paper, he has illustrated the Confucian vision of human beings more clearly, “Actually, we are an integral part of this function; we are ourselves the result of this moving power of *Ch’i*. Like mountains and rivers, we are legitimate beings in this great transformation” (Weiming 1998, 113).

This cosmic unity is also predictable in the Daoist great book, the *Tao Te Ching*, “The nameless [wu-ming] is the origin of heaven and earth. The named [yu-ming] is the mother of the Ten Thousand Things [the phenomenal world]” (Girardot 1983, 51). Soon after it says, “All the Ten Thousand Things are that which were created from the Great Unity; And are transformed by *yin* and *yang*” (ibid, 55). Of course, whether there are ten thousand things in the phenomenal world might be arguable but the sense is simply that there is a Great Unity and all natural elements are interrelated with each other. The word “mother” obviously indicates a family relation among them.

The Neo-Confucian founding father Zhang Zai summarizes the Confucian vision of nature by some classic words, “Heaven is my father and earth is my mother, and even such a small creature as I find

an intimate place in their midst. Therefore that which extends throughout the universe...I consider as my nature” (Taylor 1998, 48).

How should one behave with his or her family members? What values are vital in this relationship? It seems to me that one ancient myth from Chinese traditions would be enough to answer these questions. The myth is about ‘filial piety’ which was first introduced by Confucian thinker Mencius. It is still a basic text for elementary students in China and some other neighboring countries. The central character in the myth is Hibiscus (Shun), a filial son. Although his stepmother and her son wanted to kill Hibiscus through his father (Gu Sou) who ordered him to perform certain life threatening acts the life of Hibiscus was saved. The father is characterized here as a Blind Man while he was not actually blind. The word ‘Blind’ signifies his moral blindness since he knowingly wanted to kill his own son to satisfy his wife’s greed for Hibiscus’s property. Despite his life being under threat three times, Hibiscus was absolutely obedient to his father. The moral of the myth is filial duty and it ends with some novel words: “Hibiscus once again served under the Blind Man and he loved his younger brother Elephant, and looked after him devotedly” (Birrell 2000, 40).

This myth implies that human beings have a duty to cultivate appropriate relationships with their parents, brothers, and sisters. The basis of these relationships is respectful behavior, sympathy, and love for others. Harmony in the family appears as the key concept in Confucian traditions. Slote remarkably notices the psycho cultural impact of the Confucian family and says, “The result is that the burden of proper conduct weighs heavily upon everyone. If one acts improperly, there is collective loss of face: the child because his or her misconduct is not only personal matter, but reflects upon all” (Slote 1998, 44).

The above analysis implies that the way of achieving harmony is to act in accordance with an emotional bondage to natural elements. However, it may not mean “following nature”. It simply means humans should act as they act with their family members.

IS ASIAN ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS ANTHROPOCENTRIC OR NONANTHROPOCENTRIC?

Although environmental ethics emerged as a distinct branch of ethical study in the 1970s more and more sub-divisions have developed. Philosophers have already addressed two sharp distinctions in environmental ethical theories: anthropocentric and

nonanthropocentric. Prior to examining which kind of environmental ethics Asian traditions have defended we must specify what exactly is meant by Asian environmental ethics. Asian environmental ethics would refer to those ethical principles which people in Asia generally follow to relate with nature. Of course, being the largest continent on Earth, Asia is diverse, and as such a single type of ethics may not be dominating here. But the two cultural traditions, that we have discussed, are influential and may represent a considerable view of Asian environmental ethics. People's perceptions of human-nature relation are not so different in these two cultures. Perhaps, they follow a similar kind of environmental ethics as their guidelines of human-nature relation. This environmental ethics is similar to some other parts of Asia (e.g. Thailand, Korea, Taiwan, and Nepal) but distinct from traditional subdivisions of anthropocentric and nonanthropocentric ethics in the West, as we describe below.

Anthropocentric environmental ethics holds that "...humans inhabit a special position at the very top of the natural order, just shy of divinity, is the notion of a firm ontological divide between human and nonhuman nature (metaphysical dualism). This divide is expressed by such familiar dualism as culture/nature and mind/body or soul/body" (Keller 2010, 59). There are different types of anthropocentrism (e.g. ontological, epistemological), however, the main idea in anthropocentrism is the *ontological division* between human beings and the rest of the nature. A clear "boundary" or the "Great Divide" can be implied in anthropocentric environmental ethics. The ethical principles applicable to human beings should not be applied to other natural elements according to this view. A clearer version of anthropocentrism from ontological point of view is presented in the *Encyclopedia of Environmental Ethics and Philosophy*, "As an ontological view, anthropocentrism refers to the position...in which humans are seen as the center of the universe or the ends of creation" (Minteer 2009, 58).

The nonanthropocentric environmental ethics, on the other hand, would be just the opposite of anthropocentrism, i.e. it would consider nature "as a whole". In other words, nonanthropocentric environmental ethics does not make any firm ontological division between human beings and rest of the natural world. Most importantly, nonanthropocentric environmental ethics intends to value nature without providing any "special" status to human beings.

If this distinction is correct, then immediately one could say that Asian environmental ethics is anthropocentric. The most vivid example for this claim is Confucian traditions which are all about the moral cultivation of human beings. How human beings could be a morally distinct species from other species, and could lead a harmonious life were the basic problems of Confucius. Indeed, he wanted to remove chaos in human societies in order to establish peace and harmony.

However, this line of thinking is surely misleading and inconsistent. The reason is that Confucius scholars believe that the Earth was balanced at the beginning. Human beings must maintain the natural harmony through the balance of *li* and *chi*. Once the harmony of nature is destroyed all the institution will collapse. The deviation of morality is seen as a deviation of balanced nature. Moreover, there is no ontological division between human beings and nature. Those who fail to achieve balance in nature will fail to achieve it in their personal, social, and political lives. In the *Analects* of Confucius Yu Tzu says, "Among the functions of propriety (*li*) the most valuable is that it establishes harmony...It is the guiding principle of all things great and small. If things go amiss, and you, understanding harmony, try to achieve it without regulating it by the rules of propriety, they will still go amiss" (Chan 1973, 21). So, neither are human beings allowed to regulate nature nor do they have any higher type of propriety (*li*) than other natural elements which would rank them higher. Instead of just holding continuity in nature, the Confucian traditions maintain an intimate kinship relation with other fellow members which needs to be considered.

Similarly, others could evidently say that Indian cultures exhibit a nonanthropocentric environmental ethics since everything in nature is included in the Supreme *Atman* and so all types of divisions disappear. However, the Supreme *Atman* or Self appears as a cosmic hierarchical person since natural elements are seen as different parts of His body and thus anthropocentrism cannot be fully avoided in the Indian traditions. But this line of thinking is inappropriate too because ultimately *Atman*, nature, and human beings are identified with single cosmic unity where the kinship relation among them is predominant.

Therefore, this analysis leads us to consider that Asian environmental ethics is neither anthropocentric nor nonanthropocentric. We may call it place-based and "kin-centric" because kinship relation not only implies equality or ontological

continuity but also ensure an *emotional* bond with place in addition to mutual respect. This emotional bond must not be overlooked.

COMPANIONSHIP AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Environmental education is a necessity for contemporary cosmopolitan society. An environmentally sustainable neighborhood can bring greater benefit for pursuit of knowledge and creation. Sustainable development is often hard to see absent in our curriculum. In other words, sustainable development is a dominating trend in environmental education. However, an ethical struggle seems became central to environmental educationist. The struggle is that how we could reduce theoretical disagreement between anthropocentrism and nonanthropocentrism. Once reduced, this can provide a basis for appropriate worldview to be conceived. In my view, the first attempt to reduce the struggle should be a metaphysical paradigm shift.

Bonnett has suggested this paradigm shift just as a frame of mind, “Thus, in educational terms, sensing nature as the self-arising and understanding our relationship with it will require a broad and rich curriculum in which a receptive-responsive rather than rational-assertive thinking holds sway” (Bonnett 2004, 138). In a similar manner, Gottlieb argues for a *different* path, “Many of us in higher education are seeking a different path. We believe that it is possible to connect our bodies and our minds, our intellects and our emotions, our analytical intelligence and our spiritual hopes, a theoretical account of the crisis with an experience of its meaning” (Gottlieb 2006, 214-215).

Both of these comments imply that we need a deeper metaphysics for overcoming the global ecological crisis. This metaphysics is fundamentally different from the established one—where human beings are separate from nature. A companionship with nature demonstrates a higher mental capacity to view nature differently which is more intimate, emotional, and place-based. Asian cultural traditions bear thousands year old eco-wisdom and a rich trend of companionship with nature. The best way to transfer these to other parts of the Earth is education. However, education has to be realistic rather than idealistic or merely spiritual. Curry notes, “The ideal situation, of course—actually, the most realistic one, properly speaking—would be for education for all and at all levels to cultivate and honour ecological intelligence” (Curry 2011, 171).

I admit that there might have a few drawbacks in educating Asian environmental wisdom. In particular, this might be incompatible with

Western attitude. Contemporary environmental philosopher, Holmes Rolston III, summarizes, “The Eastern views offered are typically both old and religious. The Western problem is recent and (para) scientific” (Rolston III 1987, 172). His remarks highlight two points, firstly, Asian environmental values are old enough and cannot be incorporated in a scientific culture. Secondly, Asian environmental principles are based on sacredness in nature—a completely religious idea, and as such, scientific culture cannot accept it. However, both of these claims are only *partially* valid.

The former claim implies that old values are supposed to be abandoned and scientific values should be promoted. Nonetheless, we always do not follow this view consistently. For example, neighborhood is an old value but even today we practice it as valuable for a harmonious co-existence in the East and in the West. Intimacy is another value which we practice not merely in families, but also in at offices, in groups, and sometimes in the global context. Asian environmental ethics shows a more intimate relation with natural entities. As the circle of morality is currently expanding, and it seems consistent rather than contrary to scientific culture, the first claim is inappropriate. The problem is not that Asian environmental values are old but rather they have not yet been included in the mainstream ethics.

The latter claim holds that sacredness is inseparable from religion, in other words, religion and sacredness are identified. This is not an appropriate view as well. The reason is that sacredness need not necessarily be a religious concept. Many nonreligious scientists believe in sacred nature (Dawkins 2004, 136). This identification could be seen as similar to an identification of community and human beings. Most of us think that when we talk about community we are talking about human community. However, community may be applicable to apes, fishes, birds, eventually to all animal and living species. Perhaps, the advancement of science and technology has made us habituated to consider this concept beyond the circle of human species. For instance, very often we use the term “biotic community” and “ecological community”.

CONCLUSION

The global environmental crisis is not limited to any particular traditions or culture. There is probably no way to overcome the environmental threat until we value the environment from a broader perspective. This paper showed that how cultural traditions may

influence the human-nature relation. It analyzed two major Asian cultural traditions, Indian and Chinese. Although there are considerable differences between them, this paper argues that both cultural traditions reflect a companionship with nature which is neither anthropocentric nor nonanthropocentric. This kin-centric environmental ethics maintains an emotional bond with place, despite respecting nature. Nonetheless, more attempts are needed to overcome some of its drawbacks. Then, it could be a strong candidate for comprehensive environmental ethic. Companionship with nature therefore should be granted as a valuable resource for environmental education.

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