

Haewon-sangsaeng, Chinese Harmonism and Ecological Civilization



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Original Articles

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Abstract

Haewon-sangsaeng is a key idea of Daeseon Jinrihoe, which, as Professor Bae Kyuhan points out, "... has broad applications." Haewon-sangsaeng is not only congenial to Chinese Harmonism, but it also enriches this concept. However, many scholars understand Haewon-sangsaeng in a relatively narrow scope. For them, Haewon-sangsaeng is confined to pertaining only to human relationships. For example, Don Baker, the author of *Korean Spirituality*, states that "Haewon means relieving the resentment human beings past and present have felt because they were treated unfairly". Sangsaeng refers to "a spirit of mutual aid and cooperation" rather than "the spirit of competition and conflict that has dominated the human community up to the present day". This article argues that Haewon-sangsaeng not only has religio-ethical implications, but ecological implications as well. Specifically, it has relevance for the goal of creating an ecological civilization that aims at the harmony of humans and nature. In other words, Haewon-sangsaeng can be both "expanded for the global peace and the harmony of all humanity" and can be expanded for healing the relationship between humans and nature, including human beings and viruses. In order not to risk being "the first Earth species knowingly to choose self-extinction", an Ecological Civilization is urgently needed before it's too late. Along with Chinese Harmonism, Haewon-sangsaeng can make great contributions to the cause of ecological civilization by transcending anthropocentrism, individualism, and the worship of competition as root causes of the predicaments faced by modern civilization.

Keywords: Haewon-sangsaeng; Daeseon Jinrihoe;
Chinese Harmonism; Ecological Civilization

I. How should we understand Haewon-sangsaeng?

Haewon-sangsaeng has been conceived of as a key idea of Daesoon Jinrihoe, an indigenously new Korean religion. According to *The Canonical Scripture*, Haewon-sangsaeng refers to “Resolution of Grievances for Mutual Beneficence (解冤相生)” (*Progress of order* 2, 32), or “resolve our grievances (haewon) and reciprocate love (sangsaeng) to one another” as Professor Jay McDaniel put it (McDaniel 2022), whose aim is to promote the Betterment of Others and to Achieve Eternal Harmony with One Another.

Haewon-sangsaeng can be understood “... as representative thought regarding peace in Korean new religions” (Bae 2018). As a matter of fact, in some sense, many ideas of Daesoon Jinrihoe, such as the messianic vision, the concept of chosenness, the earthly paradise, and its eschatological beliefs are closely related to the doctrine of Haewon-sangsaeng (Jin 2007). Also, Haewon-sangsaeng thought “... penetrated through the whole life of Kang Jeungsan” (Park 2016), who established the tradition leading to present-day Daesoon Jinrihoe.

Although the concept of Haewon-sangsaeng is important in Daesoon Jinrihoe and “... has broad applications...” (Bae 2018) as Professor Bae Kyu-han points out, many scholars understand Haewon-sangsaeng in a relatively narrow scope. To them, Haewon-sangsaeng is confined only to pertaining to human relationships. For example, Don Baker, the author of *Korean Spirituality*, states that “Haewon means relieving the resentment human beings past and present have felt because they were treated unfairly.” Sangsaeng refers to “a spirit of mutual aid and cooperation” rather than “the spirit of competition and conflict that has dominated the human community up to the present day” (Baker 2008, 88).

There is little doubt that Haewon-sangsaeng can be applied to engendering “... the global peace and the harmony of all humanity” (Bae 2018), it can play an instrumental role in creating harmony among human beings. However, it is unwise to limit the applications of Haewon-sangsaeng strictly to the context of human relationships since it is a versatile idea that can be expanded to affect the relationship between humans and nature. In other words, it is not only for the common good of human life, it is for the common good of all life, “... the Resolution of Grievances for the Mutual Beneficence of all life” (Lee 2010), including the well-being of entire ecologies. In Maria Park’s words, “Sangsaeng happens not only between people, but also between humans and nature, between nature and nature” (Park 2016). This means that Haewon-sangsaeng not only “... has religio-ethical implications” (Huang 2021), but has ecological implications as well.

In addition, the author tends to argue that “Sangsaeng” has another important meaning. Namely, “Sangsaeng” indicates not only “mutual beneficence”, but also mutual engendering, mutual becoming, mutual growth, and mutual fulfillment, or helping each

other succeed or making others prosperous. Because in the Chinese language, “生” (saeng / sheng) is a hieroglyph. In Oracle and Jinwen, the character resembles a plant growing on the ground.

According to *Shuowen Jiezi*, an ancient Chinese dictionary by Xu Shen from the Han dynasty, the character “生” is composed of two parts: the lower part and the upper part, with the lower part representing “soil”, and the upper part representing the plant breaking through the soil, with the entire character ultimately meaning “to grow” or “to produce”.

It is worth mentioning that “生” is a verb in the Chinese language. As a matter of fact, “In Chinese there is no sharp distinction between nouns and verbs” (Wang 2012, 178). Regarding “生” as a verb empowers the concept of Haewon-sangsaeng and attributes a dynamic dimension to it.

II. The Convergence between Haewon-sangsaeng and Chinese Harmonism

It is abundantly apparent that Haewon-sangsaeng is congenial to Chinese Harmonism because Haewon-sangsaeng is likewise oriented towards harmony, and emphasizes the primacy of harmony.

What is Chinese Harmonism? Chinese Harmonism is a uniquely harmony-oriented Chinese approach to the relationships between different cultures, religions, and people. The key features of Chinese harmonism are the primacy of its namesake of harmony, peaceful co-existence, mutual transformation, openness to change, and the affirmation of life. All of these concepts are closely related to each other and together they constitute the basic theoretical contents of Chinese harmonism. Among them, without a doubt, the concept of harmony is a key constituent underlying this way of thinking.

Although different Chinese religions have their own respective emphases, all of them recognize the primacy of harmony. Harmony, in Chinese tradition, pervades the cosmos and is a central goal of all personal, social, political, and religious relationships. Even today, the Chinese government also regards building a “Harmonious Society” as one of its national goals (Center for Strategic and International Studies 2005).

To a large extent, harmony can be regarded as a “deeper faith” in Whitehead’s sense, which means “the trust that the ultimate natures of things lie together in a harmony which excludes mere arbitrariness” (Whitehead 1967, 18).¹ In China, the sages are always open to harmonious engagement and thus exhibit this faith. For Confucius, “achieving harmony (和) is the most valuable function of observing ritual propriety (li)” (Confucius 1998, 74). Therefore, “at the core of the classical Chinese worldview is the cultivation of harmony” (Ames 1993, 62). According to Chinese harmonism, harmony is a verb, it is productive. Everything is conceived as being derived from the state of harmony. In the words of Shi Bo (史伯, 551-475 BCE), “It is harmony which generates

things” (國語, *Guoyu* 1980, 8). It is crucial to note that harmony is different from sameness. Sameness is destructive; “harmony is constructive” (Wang 2012, 189).

Harmony has been highly cherished even in Chinese folk culture. That is why Confucius’ saying “Harmony is most precious (和为贵)” is among the most important principles in Chinese society. This explains why, for example, the phrase “It is better for foes to be reconciled than to contend with each other (冤家宜解不宜结)” is a popular proverb in Chinese folk culture. There is a deep convergence between the leitmotif embodied in the above-mentioned sayings and Daesoon’s Haewon-sangsaeng. How are we to resolve grievances? The answer offered by Mozi (墨子, c. 470 BC – c. 391 BC), a Chinese philosopher who founded the school of Mohism during the Hundred Schools of Thought period (early portion of the Warring States period of c.475–221 BC), was “Regarding others’ countries as your own countries; Regarding others’ homes as your homes; Regarding others’ bodies as your bodies” (Mozi 2014, 60).

If one wishes to survive and succeed, it is imperative to resolve any outstanding grievances with others, one must preserve a harmonious relationship with other people and beings, including nature. “In Chinese harmonism, this emphasis on an appropriate harmony includes harmony among people and between people and nature” (Wang 2012, 190). The famed Chinese idea of “Harmony with nature (天人合一)” fully represents such an idea.

It is this characteristic emphasis on harmony that explains why Alfred North Whitehead’s process philosophy has been well received in China (Todd 2008). Like traditional Chinese philosophy, Whitehead’s process philosophy also holds harmony to be a priority.

Whitehead’s philosophy has been studied in China since the 1920s and 1930s (Wang 2014), and “many scholars inside and outside of China believe that his thought resembles Chinese ways of thinking more than Western ways in many regards” (McDaniel, 2022). Indeed, Whitehead himself believed that, in certain respects, his philosophy shared more in common with Chinese philosophy in its tone and substance. In his magnum opus *Process and Reality*, Whitehead claimed that his philosophy of organism seemed to “approximate more to some strains of Indian, or Chinese, thought, than to Western Asiatic or European thought” (Whitehead 1978, 7).

For Whiteheadian process philosopher Jay MacDaniel, one can find the ethos of harmony in both Chinese Daoism and Chinese Buddhism. “Philosophical Daoism speaks of the universe as a flowing process of which humans are an integral part and encourages them to dwell in harmony with the larger whole” (McDaniel 2008). At the same time, “Chinese Buddhism in the Hua Yen tradition gives us the image of a universe in which every entity is present in every other entity in a network of inter-existence or inter-being” (McDaniel 2008).

Today China has an urgent need for harmony as it faces many serious elements of discord that have emerged in the decades since China opened its doors and experienced

modernization and Westernization over the past 40 years. Professor Lang Ye, former chair of the philosophy department at Peking University summarizes these discords as the following three imbalances: “One is the imbalance between humans’ material life and spiritual life, one is the imbalance of humans’ inner life, and one is the imbalance of humans’ relationship with nature.” (Ye 1995)

Whiteheadian Process philosophy can help China revalue its traditions, especially, its harmonist tradition, in order to ameliorate these discords. That explains why process thought is so welcome in China today. The fact that the establishment of more than 30 process studies centers in China, the publication of hundreds of articles on process thought, and the translation and publication of almost all of Whitehead’s books and many other books on process philosophy in China prove “the deep and extensive influence” of Whitehead in China (Yang 2010). In a survey conducted by the People Forum Poll Research Center about “The Most Valuable Theoretical Point of View in 2012”, the following point of view of Professor Yijie Tang of Peking University, a top philosopher in the field of Chinese philosophy, was selected as the top one:

In the end of the last century, Constructive Postmodernism based on process philosophy proposed integrating the achievements of the first Enlightenment and Postmodernism, and called for the Second Enlightenment. The two broadly influential movements in China today: 1) “The zeal for traditional culture”; and 2) “Constructive Postmodernism.” If these two trends can be combined organically under the guidance of Marxism, not only take root in China, but further develop so that with comparative ease, China can complete its “First Enlightenment” in realizing its modernization, and also very quickly enter into the “Second Enlightenment” and become the standard-bearer of a postmodern society (Tang 2011a).

The second constituent part of Chinese harmonism is open-mindedness. In order to realize harmony, an open-minded attitude is necessary. This refers to an attitude of respect for others and a willingness to learn from others, which is intended to inspire both parties of a dialogue on how to learn the most important things of the opposite party without abandoning their own core concerns. Traditional Chinese culture provides an excellent sample of ideas in this regard. In the view of the renowned process philosopher John B. Cobb Jr, a pioneer in the contemporary West of promoting religious dialogue, the fact that traditional Chinese Confucianism and Taoism existed together peacefully is a concrete historical example of the inclusiveness and openness of Chinese harmonism. As stated by Cobb, “Buddhism, Confucians, Taoists, and others have lived side by side” (Cobb 2006, 19). Peaceful coexistence is indeed immensely important. One of the ultimate aims of Chinese religions is peaceful coexistence. “At the

heart of Chinese Harmonism is this practice of peaceful coexistence among people of different religions, even if they have problems with those other traditions” (Wang 2012, 172). Additionally, the concept of creative transformation is also particularly important. “Cobb showed how deep commitment to one’s own tradition, when understood as requiring dialogical openness to other traditions, can lead to a surprising transformation of everyone involved” (Cobb 1999, 2).

The third important component of Chinese harmonism is its emphasis on life affirmation. Why do Chinese place harmony in such high priority? Why has harmony played such a critical role in Chinese culture? Because everything is ultimately derived from the state of harmony and harmony can create life. According to *Zhou Yi* (also called *Yi Jing or Book of Changes*), the oldest of the classical Chinese texts, “The Great Virtue of Heaven and Earth is creating life (天地之大德曰生)” (Liu 2019, 453). It is again worth mentioning that “生 (sheng)” is both a noun and a verb in Chinese language. As a noun it means “life”, and as a verb, it means “to create.” “Sheng sheng” thus means “to create life” (Cheng 2022).

Harmony is inextricably tied to life. It is harmony that is itself capable of creating life, giving life, helping life, and nourishing life. It is harmony that can sustain and contribute to life. It increases, but does not decrease, life. It is harmony that makes others’ lives become exuberant, and be more fully alive. It helps, nurses, and fortifies the vitality of life. In this sense, Chinese harmonism is life-oriented and it is a life-affirmative harmonism. In the words of Hungarian scholar Attila Grandpierre, “We may regard Chinese Harmonism as organic or life centered harmonism” (Attila 2021).

As clearly seen from the discussion above on both Haewon-sangsaeng and Chinese harmonism, it is not difficult to find that Haewon-sangsaeng is interrelated with Chinese harmonism. As David Kim pointed out, “The view of the Haewon-sangsaeng is supposed to be related to the In-pi-cheon-ha (仁被天下, benevolence spreading throughout the world) that if one wants to achieve a goal one should also cooperate with another to achieve the friend's goal” (Kim 2020, 201). As a result of this interrelatedness, there are deep doctrinal convergences between Haewon-sangsaeng and Chinese harmonism.

First of all, both emphasize the primacy of harmony. One of the main purposes of Haewon is to achieve harmony. This is why Myung Woo identifies “Haewon-sangsaeng” with harmony itself. For Woo, “Haewon-sangsaeng” is equivalent to “Living in Harmony” (Woo 2012). It is impossible to reach a state of harmony if there are grievances serving as obstacles in the way of developing a harmonious relationship. In order to achieve harmony, these grievances must be resolved. Therefore, harmony as both a drive and purpose play a paramount role in the doctrine of Haewon-sangsaeng.

Secondly, both Chinese harmonism and Haewon-sangsaeng are life-affirmative. Like Chinese harmonism, the doctrine of Haewon-sangsaeng is also an effort to alleviate suffering, a way of coordinating life to life and “enabling each individual life to flourish”

(Lubarsky 2019). It is directed toward increasing and intensifying value and life. In fact, some scholars of the Korean have recognized the life-affirmative nature of Haewon-sangsaeng. For example, Park Sam-kyung argues that “sangsaeng” means “life-sharing” (Park 2012). To Maria Park, “sangsaeng” can “contribute values and respect to life” (Park 2016). It can enable those who have been treated unfairly to freely and fully engage with life.

III. The Meaning of Haewon-sangsaeng and Chinese Harmonism for creating an Ecological Civilization

Considering the deep doctrinal convergences between Chinese harmonism and Haewon-sangsaeng, when taken together they can make enormous contributions to laying the philosophical foundations for an ecological civilization. The wisdom in both Haewon-sangsaeng and Chinese harmonism provides very valuable insights that an ecological civilization needs. As Kyu-han Bae stated in his noted article, “Haewon-sangsaeng Thought for the Future of Humanity and World”, “Haewon-sangsaeng has values and meanings in terms of principles, laws, ethics, and ideology all of which are commonly connected to Injon (Human Nobility), Sangsaeng, peace, harmony, the Later world, and paradise. This indicates that its value for the future of humanity and world is deeper and wider than its mere etymological meaning” (Bae 2018). For Professor Bae, “the principle of Haewon-sangsaeng has a motivative power, through the Reordering Works of the Universe, which can transform the future of humanity and the world” (Bae 2018). Ecological civilization is exactly the type of civilization which undertakes the noble work of transforming the future of humanity and the world.

What is Ecological Civilization? Why do we need it? Ecological Civilization is the transcendence of industrial civilization, which aims not only at effecting harmony among human beings, but also focuses on the dynamic harmony between human beings and nature. The idea of Ecological Civilization is not just icing on a cake, it is necessary for the survival of humanity at large. Because as a matter of fact, “current civilization is running at 40% above its sustainable capacity. We’re rapidly depleting the earth’s forests, animals, insects, fish, freshwater, even the topsoil we require to grow our crops” (Lent 2018). The world is unmistakably headed toward catastrophe. In the words of David Korten, the founder and president of the Living Economies Forum, and a full member of the Club of Rome, “We have arrived at a defining moment in the human experience. Either we find our common path to an Ecological Civilization that meets the essential material needs of Earth’s human population in a balanced relationship with Earth’s natural systems, or we risk being the first Earth species knowingly to choose self-extinction” (Korten 2020).

Since what we are facing is an unprecedented crisis, tinkering with the dogmas of past civilizations will not solve the problem. A fundamental awakening is needed. As John Cobb pointed out, “Many who now talk about moving toward an ecological civilization retain

features of modernity that in fact prevent them from moving very far. Too often, affirming an ecological civilization means little more than being ecologically sensitive. In fact, ecological civilization calls for profound changes and significant sacrifices” (Cobb 2015). In this sense, Ecological Civilization is “a great and all-round transformation” (Fan 2020). It is not only necessary to transform our current economic system, namely, restructure the fundamentals of our global cultural/economic system to “cultivate an ecological civilization: one that prioritizes the health of living systems over short-term wealth production” (Lent 2018), but also to transform our models of economic development, our way of living, our way of consumption, our way of production, our dietary habits, our education system, and, more importantly, transform the modern way of thinking and our modernist worldviews. These modernist paradigms become obstacles to the development of ecological civilization. In order to realize ecological civilization, these obstacles must be removed, as Professor Xiangzhan Cheng of Shandong University argued, “The prerequisite for establishing eco-civilization is a forceful critique of the numerous and varied malpractices of modern civilization and its philosophical presuppositions” (Cheng 2022). The philosophical presuppositions that must be overcome include, but are not limited to anthropocentrism, worship of struggle, dualism, and individualism. These are also among the root causes of the crisis facing modern civilization. Overcoming them is imperative if humankind wishes to survive. In concrete terms, what kind of role can Haewon-sangsaeng and Chinese harmonism play in the fight to create an ecological civilization?

Firstly, Haewon-sangsaeng and Chinese harmonism can help transcend anthropocentrism. Anthropocentrism is a worldview which believes that human beings are the central or most important entity in the universe. “Just as God was once absolute existence, now humankind is, on earth, the absolute form of existence. It is a hierarchy, an anthropocentrism, which places human life at the center and all other life on the periphery” (Kisho 1994, 188). The term “anthropocentrism”, can be used interchangeably with human-centrism, according to which, “Human desires and satisfactions were the only ones that had to be considered in deciding the way to treat nature” (Griffin 1988, 146). This not only implies an exploitative ethic: There is no sentience and intrinsic value in nature that are worth being considered, but also expresses “a modern conceit that the world’s worth is a matter of human judgment” (Lubarsky 2012). It is such a thinking that “turns nonhuman life into objects for our enjoyment—and for our use and abuse” (Lubarsky 2012). Also, it is such a mode of thinking that has resulted in the severe ecological crisis we are facing today and eventually led us to the edge of “the environmental cliff” (Tang 2016).

In the words of Professor Sandra Lubarsky, “we imply that all life on earth is for the purpose of serving human life. The result is a relationship with the world that is destroying the world” (Lubarsky 2012). For the sake of the survival of both the earth and humankind itself, the anthropocentric attitude must be abandoned. The most

instrumental tool to overcome this self-destructive pathology of modern civilization is ecological consciousness, which regards humans as part of nature, as parcel of a larger web of life that has beauty and intrinsic worth. Nature is viewed “as a living organism or as supportive of numerous living organisms” (Cobb 2010, 145) which have their own value. Nature is not something outside of us. Nature is us, and we are all nature. Therefore, we should care about and respect nature, because nature not only nourishes our body, but our feeling and our soul. It not only sustains our physical life, but our spiritual one as well. Accordingly, “Our ideal should be not to conquer nature, not to hunt our fellow animals, but to live as part of nature, in accordance with its rules” (Kisho 1994, 172). Humankind should not be regarded as the center of all of creation, instead, “Humankind and Nature should be conceived of a life community with shared destiny” (Tang 2011b, 4).

It is ecological consciousness that makes us truly realize that no one is an island, all things are interrelated. Interdependence is the true picture of reality. In Marjorie Suchocki’s words, “Interdependence is the very stuff of life” (Suchocki 1999, 69). We are not accidentally interdependent, but necessarily so. In the beautiful expression of Dr Vandana Shiva, a world-renowned environmental thinker and activist, and the recipient of the 2022 “John Cobb Common Good Award”, “All beings are our relatives. There are no strangers, no enemies, no hierarchies, no superiority and inferiority. Oneness is the path to sustainability and justice, to non-violence, peace and harmony” (Shiva 2022).

The term “interdependence” can to some extent be used interchangeably with “symbiosis”, referring to the conviction that “all existence — human beings, plants, animals, and minerals — is not only living but, at the same time, being given life by the rest of existence. Inorganic matter such as minerals are crucial for human life, and if even one vital mineral is lacking, we cannot survive. Human beings live and are kept alive through their coexistence with animals, plants and minerals” (Kisho 1994, 260-261). The philosophy of symbiosis teaches us that “We are kept alive by other forms of life” (Kisho 1994, 188).

There is a great deal of rich resources present in both Daeseon Jinrihoe and Chinese harmonism with which to deconstruct anthropocentrism in terms of ecological consciousness, interdependence, and symbiosis. In the Daeseon tradition, the Supreme Sangje used to say to Kim Hyeong-Ryeol: “In the Former World, as all creations were ruled by mutual contention (相剋, sanggeuk), grievances and grudges have been accumulating, condensing, and filing up the Three Realms. Heaven and Earth, losing the constant Dao, are overwhelmed with all kinds of disasters and calamities, and the world has fallen into wretchedness. To save all the people in the world, I will resolve the grievances and grudges accumulated from time immemorial by recalibrating the Degree Number of Heaven and Earth, harmonizing divine beings, and establishing the Later World’s paradisiacal land of immortals which will be based on the principle of mutual

beneficence (相生, *sangsaeng*). The grievances must be resolved by the Dao of gods in every small and large matter” (*Reordering Works* 1: 3). The core of the scripture is “what we do is to promote the betterment of others” (Kim 2020, 203).

Here the others should include other forms of life on the earth. This means that when Daesoon stresses the importance of the harmonious relationship, it also includes the harmonious relationship between human beings and nature. Bringing peace and harmony between the human and the natural worlds should be the inner pursuit of Daesoon (Kim 2020, 201). This explains Jeungsan’s affection shown for nature and its creatures in his Chinese poems: 驱情万里山河友, 供德千门日月妻 (Park 2016).

According to Whitehead, a founder of constructive Postmodernism, or process philosophy, the true religion – the religion of shared humanity – shares a commitment to the well-being of life itself. Religion at its best is “World-Loyalty”, in which the human spirit has merged its individual claim with that of the objective universe (Whitehead 1960, 59).

In Chinese tradition, 天人合一 (“Harmony with nature” or “Oneness of Nature and Humans”) has been the Chinese people’s ultimate pursuit. Achieving such harmony has been a leitmotif throughout the whole of Chinese culture. This also partly explains why the Chinese government pays an ever-increasing amount of attention to ecological issues and has even written “ecological civilization” into not only the Party’s constitution, but into China’s national constitution as well (Hanson 2019).

The famous saying by Zhuangzi (c. 369 BC – c. 286 BC), the pivotal figure in Classical Philosophical Daoism, “天地与我并生, 而万物与我为一 (The nature lives with me in symbiosis, and all things are one with me)” (Guo 2012, 85) can be conceived as one of the earliest expressions of the Chinese idea of “天人合一”. It not only represented an anti-humancentrist stance, but also “an equity consciousness of humans and nature” (Fan 1997, 75).

In Zhuangzi, like human beings, ten thousand things are also ecological subjects. Both human beings and ten thousand things are equal in value. That explains why so many animals, plants and other lifeforms appeared in his book, *Zhuangzi* and became the protagonist he valued and appreciated. A study shows that “There are 22 species of flying birds, 15 species of aquatic creatures, 32 species of terrestrial creatures, 18 species of birds, 37 species of plants, and 32 species of inanimate species appeared in the book *Zhuangzi*” (Liu 1996). In some sense, Zhuangzi can be regarded as a pioneer of deep ecology. Now we understand why David Hall, a celebrated American comparative philosopher, claimed that “classical Chinese thought, particularly some specific Taoist and Confucian ideas, is ‘postmodern’ in the real sense” (Hall 1996, 698-710).

The idea of “民胞物与” exemplified in his most celebrated work, the *Ximing (Western Inscription)* of Zhang Zai (张载, 1020–1077), a leading figure in Neo-Confucianism, beautifully also reflects the Chinese idea of “天人合一”.

Heaven is my father and earth is my mother, and I, a small child, find myself placed intimately between them.

What fills the universe

I regard as my body; what directs the universe I regard as my nature.

All people are my brothers and sisters;

All things are my companions. (Wang 1982, 353-354)

To Wang Yangming (1472–1529), widely acknowledged as the most influential Confucian philosopher of the Ming dynasty of China, “仁者以天地万物为一体 (The humane take the myriad things between heaven and earth as one)” (Wang 1982, 112). Accordingly, the whole world is regarded as a family. If we harm others, that means we harm ourselves. Likewise, “If we humanity do not fail nature, nature will not fail us” (Xinhua 2021). As a consequence of this consciousness of oneness, it is everyone’s responsibility to take care of our mother earth.

In addition, reestablishing the relationship between humans and nature by transcending anthropocentrism also includes rethinking of the nature of viruses. Both Haewon-sangsaeng and Chinese harmonism can help us resolve the grievances between humans and viruses. That requires us to “respect viruses, treat viruses nicely, and co-exist with viruses”, rather than “to kill viruses at all costs” (Tang 2022). The word “respect” in this context means knowing that the existence of other beings is as precious as much as our lives are. New research in biology tells us to treat viruses “as intimate partners” (Roossinck 2017) instead of treating them as enemies. From this viewpoint, “coronavirus is a courier rather an enemy” (Fan 2020). As a courier, its mission is to persuade humans to slow down. “It reminds us that nature is crucial to humans’ lives and livelihoods” (Fan 2020).

Secondly, in close relation to the above, Haewon-sangsaeng and Chinese harmonism can help us overcome the impediments brought about by modern individualism. Individualism is a philosophical outlook that adheres to the idea of the independence of individuals, emphasizes the interests of the individual, and claims that individual freedom ought to be paramount. Society as a whole is viewed by individualists “as an aggregate of such individuals” (Daly and Cobb 1994, 159).

Although no one denies that there is considerable value in individualism and individuals, such as the affirmation of individual freedom, dignity, and creativity, there are fatal defects in the individualist ideology. According to the analysis of Alexis de Tocqueville, the author of the notable treatise *Democracy in America*, individualism, characteristic of modern democracy, is an erroneous theoretical doctrine. At first, it “only saps the virtues of public life; but in the long run it attacks and destroys all others and is at length absorbed in downright selfishness” (Tocqueville 2000, 483). Therefore, individualism can hardly absolve itself from contributing to the severe social, moral, and ecological crises of modern civilization. In Korean philosopher Tae-Chang Kim’s

opinion, “Individualism has become the root cause of various problems of modern society” (Kim 1996). It is not only the culprit in the crime of “the destruction of small, intimate, organic communities and institutions” (Griffin 1988, 8), but is also responsible for the ecological crisis facing us today.

From a constructive postmodern perspective, treating the individual as a completely independent, self-contained substance is a gross distortion of reality. Because there is no such individual in the real world. Human beings are fundamentally social. “Each human being is constituted by relationships to others” (Daly and Cobb 1994, 164). The field of contemporary biology also supports this point of view. According to Lynn Margulis, a world-renowned evolutionary biologist who is the primary modern proponent of the significance of symbiosis in evolution, “There have never been individuals”. Furthermore, “it is significant. For animals, as well as plants, there have never been individuals. This new paradigm for biology asks new questions and seeks new relationships among the different living entities on Earth. We are all lichens” (Gilbert, 2012). Consequently, the picture provided by the ideology of individualism regarding the relationship between individuals and their communities is doomed to be a misrepresentation. More importantly, the characteristic individualist emphasis on the primacy of the individual is necessarily based on belittling or devaluing the importance of community. This means “Won” [(冤): grudge, grievance, resentment, hatred] was planted here in the context of Daesoon. Therefore, the resolution of Grievances (Haewon) becomes an absolute must in order to realize a harmonious society, which itself is a prerequisite for an ecological civilization. It is impossible for a society in which people form grudges against others to create an ecological civilization since “the Resolution of Grievances (Haewon) and the Mutual Beneficence of All Life (Sangsaeng) are inter-related to one another in the sense that without Haewon there is no Sangsaeng, or vice versa” (Lee 2010).

There is a multitude of highly-applicable resources in the Daesoon Tradition with which to riposte against radical individualism. Daesoon Thought posits that “humans cannot live or survive without relations to the following: personally, family members, socially, friends, colleagues, superiors, and subordinates, racially, blacks, whites, and browns, ecologically, nature and environment, religiously, gods and fellow men and women. Without exception people are not happy unless and until all those needs will be met” (Lee 2010). According to Professor Gyungwon Lee, a long serving professor of Daejin University, this is the way one becomes good and attains happiness. “I am always fundamentally connected to others, and as such, I should recognize that promoting the betterment of others is a path that also promotes my own betterment” (Lee 2010). This explains why Daesoon encourages people to actively help other people and work towards their betterment because everyone is connected to all phenomena and events in the human realm and to all human interactions as well. “The Daesoon Truth intends to resolve all relational problems in terms of the concept of Haewon-sangsaeng

that stands for the value of inter-relations in making peace, harmony, cooperation, and coexistence among all beings” (Lee 2010). It is clear that there is no room for individualism in Daesoon philosophy.

Chinese harmonism can also make a great contribution in countering individualism. In Chinese culture, individuals are always relational beings since, at its root, Chinese thinking is a “correlative thinking” (Ames 2011, 41). The character for core idea of Confucianism “仁 (Ren)” is constituted by “亻” (also Ren) meaning “person”, and “二 (Er)” which represents the number two. According to Professor Roger Ames, a world-renowned comparative philosopher, we must acknowledge the primacy of vital relationality in Chinese culture in order to understand “the twoness”: it is the vital relationality that “makes all things including human persons uniquely one and focally many at the same time. No one does anything by themselves” (Ames 2021, 73). This initially attributes a relational implication to *Ren* (仁). Being a human virtuosity, *Ren*(仁) only “can be achieved in our roles and relations through the emulation of moral exemplars”(Ames 2020), as Ames interpreted. Ames believes that the Chinese self is always relational, he calls it “organismic self”. According to his researches, early Confucian texts, notably the Analects, present a relational view of self, together with relational virtues, ethics, etc. (Thompson 2017). Roger Ames argues that in an age beset by the ideology of individualism, “the Confucian conception of a relationally constituted, interdependent human ‘becoming’ as an alternative to the pervasive conception of the liberal, free, autonomous, rational person is perhaps its most important contribution to a changing world cultural order” (Ames 2020).

The Chinese emphasis on the primacy of vital relationality is also reflected in language if we believe that one’s worldview is inseparably connected with the language they speak. As mentioned before, almost every term in the Chinese language can be a verb. All of the core ideas in Chinese culture, like 仁, 义, 礼, 智, and 信 can play the role of a verb, all of them are relational or “transactional and collaborative” in the words of Roger Ames:

The vocabulary is transactional and collaborative: ‘divinity and humanity’ (tianren 天人), ‘the heavens and the earth’ (tiandi 天地), ‘forming and functioning’ (tiyong 體用), ‘flux and persistence’ (biantong 變通), ‘the furthest reaches and beyond’ (taiji/wuji 太極無極), the yin and the yang 陰陽, ‘this particular focus and its field’ (daode 道德), ‘configuring and vital energy’ (liqi 理氣), ‘determinacy and indeterminacy’ (wuyou 無有), and so on. No term can stand alone as an independent, determinative principle. There can be no superordinate and independent ‘one’ in this ecological cosmology (Ames 2011,72).

Therefore, it is abundantly clear that there is no room for a Westernized independent, self-contained, autonomous individual in Chinese culture. For Chinese people, the meaning of life can be manifested only through peacefully co-existing with others, through helping others, giving life to others, and accomplishing things with others.

Both Daesoon and Chinese harmonism are reminiscent of Whitehead's definition of true religion: the true religion must "direct people to the end of stretching individual interest beyond its self-defeating particularity" (Whitehead 1978, 15). True religion as well as true philosophy encourage people to broaden their sympathies, thereby enlarging their interest, eventually merging their "individual claim with that of the objective universe" (Whitehead 1960, 59). This can be regarded as another expression of the realm of oneness of humans and nature. Ecological civilization is in dire need of such a spirituality.

Thirdly, Haewon-sangsaeng and Chinese harmonism can help deconstruct the modern worship of competition. According to Daesoon, all phenomena and events in the universe, including humans, harbor their own "Won". These "Won" have all arisen from antagonistic relationships characterized by mutual contention. Many factors have contributed to the existence of these Won, and the excessive worship of competition prevalent in the modern world is among them. The fixation on competition is partly responsible for these Won since it causes and strengthens the antagonistic relationships by poisoning the harmonious ones.

Competition has existed in human society since ancient times, but worshipping competition is very much a unique phenomenon that has only arisen in modern civilization. According to Whitehead, "The watchwords of the nineteenth century have been, struggle for existence, competition, class warfare, commercial antagonism between nations, military warfare. The struggle for existence has been construed into a gospel of hate" (Whitehead 1925, 265). The worship of competition has reached its limit in America. The well-known adage of the professional football coach Vince Lombardi, "Winning isn't everything, it's the only thing" (Kohn 1992, 3), very pointedly expresses some Americans' obsession with competition. For Paul Wachtel, the author of *The Poverty of Affluence: A psychological portrait of the American way of life*, the concept of competition is so widespread in American society that competition can be regarded as America's "official state religion" (Wachtel 1983, 284).

In the analysis of Alfie Kohn, a renowned critic of the worship of competition, competition is not only the basis of the American economic system, but also pervades into the American education system, leisure time, and even family life. "We treat others as obstacles to our success. We judge ourselves in relation to others. We feel good when our competitors fail" (Kohn 1992, 2). Such a culture is destined to poison the relationship among its people and would become an immense obstacle to ecological civilization. In order to create an ecological civilization, the devotion to competition

must be replaced with a spirit of cooperation. Both Haewon-sangsaeng and Chinese harmonism contain invaluable wisdom to deconstruct this worship of competition.

As Pochi Huang points out, “Haewon-sangsaeng, as a religio-ethical ideal, brings out an amicable and harmonious relationship among myriad beings in the cosmos” (Huang 2021). It teaches people to “live *sangsaeng* lives—lives characterized by a spirit of mutual aid and cooperation rather than by the spirit of competition and conflict that has dominated the human community up to the present day. . . . Together haewon and *sangsaeng* tell us to stop trying to gain personal benefit at the expense of others and instead to put others’ interests before our own. By doing so, we will not only avoid creating new resentments; we will create new relationships of love and trust that will erase the old feelings of resentment and anger” (Baker 2008, 88).

The Chinese harmonist emphasis on the primacy of harmony preconceives the rejection of competition and instead the embrace of cooperation. When Chinese speak of “和实生物 (It is harmony which generates things)”, the concept of harmony (和) already denotes cooperation. This is apparent due to the same pronunciation (He) which they share. On the contrary, the state of strife and discord does not possess the creative power of harmony. It is the road that leads to destruction. In the words of Xunzi (310–218 BCE), one of the three great Confucian thinkers of the Chinese classical period along with Confucius and Mencius, “Division leads to rivalry, which leads to chaos, which leads to a dead end” (Xun 1997, 40). Harmony is regarded by Chinese people as a genuine, creative state among the myriad things between heaven and earth. The world remains full of vigor, variety and beauty in virtue of harmony.

Following the same train of thought, “生生” [shengsheng (create life)] as “the *Great Virtue* of Heaven and Earth (天地之大德)” also preconceive the necessity of harmony and cooperation because it is impossible to create life without cooperation. According to *Liji*, (礼记, “Record of Rites”), one of the Five Classics (五经) of Chinese Confucian literature, “It is harmony that creates the myriad things” (*Liji* 1987, 208).

It is for this same reason, contemporary Chinese scholar Dr. Meijun Fan proposed a new phrase, “Survival of the Harmonious” to replace the prevailing one, “Survival of the fittest”, through which she wishes to emphasize that “Only in harmonious relationship can life survive and thrive” (Fan and Wang 2012). In the exquisite expression of late Dr. Ho Mae-Wan, a Chinese geneticist, “All beings are mutually entangled and mutually constitutive. Thus, harming others effectively harms ourselves, and the best way to benefit oneself may be to benefit others” (Hunt 2013).

Constructive Postmodern philosophy also shows that “... cooperation is more basic in the nature of things than competition” (Griffin 1988, 146). In *Science and the Modern World*, Whitehead offers an excellent example to prove this point:

A single tree by itself is dependent upon all the adverse chances of shifting circumstances. The wind stunts it: the variations in temperature check its

foliage: the rains denude its soil: its leaves are blown away and are lost for the purpose of fertilization. You may obtain individual specimens of line trees either in exceptional circumstances, or where human cultivation had intervened. But in nature the normal way in which trees flourish is by their association in a forest. Each tree may lose something of its individual perfection of growth, but they mutually assist each other in preserving the conditions of survival. The soil is preserved and shaded; and the microbes necessary for its fertility are neither scorched, nor frozen, nor washed away. A forest is the triumph of the organization of mutually dependent species (Whitehead 1967, 289).

For Constructive Postmodern philosophers, competition does exist, but it is derivative and secondary. “To have a postmodern consciousness is to see and feel the primacy of cooperation, mutual assistance, and noncoercive relations” (Griffin 1988, 146). In facing the severe ecological crisis of the twenty first century, Dr. Cobb stresses that “Societies in which people love each other and the other creatures with which they live may survive” (Cobb 2021, xi).

IV. Concluding Remarks

As a path forward that may be “the only true hope for our descendants to thrive on Earth into the distant future” (Lent 2018), “Ecological civilization represents the development trend of human civilization” (Xinhua 2021). However, as an unprecedented great project, the arduousness of creating an Ecological civilization is also unprecedented. It not only requires all excellent traditions to work together to contribute their forms of wisdom to “resolve the grievances” (Haewon) of both people and nature in order to create this new civilization, but it also requires people all over the world to work together to put this idea into practice. Fortunately, more and more people and nations in the world have realized how urgent and how important it is to put an end to modern industrial civilization and create a wholly new civilization, an ecological civilization.

In China, President Xi Jinping has declared ecological civilization to be a central part of his long-term vision for the country (Lent 2018). Accordingly, ecological civilization is written in both the Party’s constitution and China’s national constitution. “In Bolivia and Ecuador, the related values of *buenvivir* and *sumakkausay* (‘good living’) are written into their respective national constitutions, and in Africa the concept of *ubuntu* (‘I am because we are’) is a widely-discussed principle of human relations. In Europe, hundreds of scientists, politicians, and policy-makers recently co-authored a call for the EU to plan for a sustainable future in which human and ecological wellbeing is prioritized over GDP” (Lent 2018).

In the United States, the annual Claremont International Forum on Ecological Civilization which the Institute for the Postmodern Development of China and our partners Chinese and non-Chinese co-sponsored has been held 15 times. Thus far, thousands of environmentalists, scholars, and government officials have participated in this forum and the forum has reached out to more than 12 million people. Also, I am very excited to witness that more and more Korean people have participated in this great movement of creating an ecological civilization. Under the leadership of Dr. Gunna Jung, Professor of Economics at Hanshin University, Dr. Yunjeong Han, Director of Ecological Civilization in Korea Project, and Ms. Kumsil Kang, head of the People for Earth Forum and former Minister of Justice of South Korea, the following conferences on ecological civilization were held: The “1st International Conference on Green Transition toward Ecological Civilization: A Korea-US Dialogue”(2017), “Ecological Transformation on the Korean Peninsula and East Asia conference” (Paju, 2018), “International Forum on Ecological Urban Regeneration in Northeast Seoul” (2018), and the “Ecological Civilization in Korea Conference: Ecological Transition, from Philosophy to Policy” (2019). At Paju Forum, a Declaration named “Paju Declaration” was issued. The Declaration consisted of a preamble and 10 agendas:

1. The Worldview of Ecological Civilization
2. Responsibility as Global Citizens
3. Establishing an Ecological Economy and Systems of Collaboration
4. Resetting the Ecological Path of Science and Technology
5. The Value of Earth Jurisprudence and the Need for Global Governance
6. Revolutionary Transformation of Educational Institutions
7. Ecological Transition on the Korean Peninsula and a Global-scale Campaign
8. The Constant Maturation Process of Self-reflection
9. Urging Future Generations to Participate
10. Creative Organizations and an Ecological Network. (Han 2018)

There was another important eco-forum held in 2019 in Korea, the “Yeoju Eco-Forum: Interfaith Dialogue for Ecological Civilization” sponsored by Daeseon Jinrihoe. This was the first conference in the world that dedicated interfaith dialogue to ecological civilization. Some 500 leaders and top scholars from various traditions and faiths, all committed to the goal of ecological civilization, participated in this historical event. That explained why Dr. John Cobb, a pioneer in promoting both interfaith dialogue and Green GDP in the West felt so excited about the forum. He regarded the Yeoju Eco-Forum as “... a breakthrough in creating an ecological civilization.” (Wang 2021) In 2021, the Jeju Forum on Ecological Civilization was successfully held in spite of the

global pandemic. We hope more and more people can participate in this great work. Chinese people like to say “人心齐，泰山移 (The people all working with one will can move Mount Tai)”. I am confident that when people all over the world act with one mind, we can make the impossible possible, by developing an ecological civilization.

Conflict of Interest

Zhihe Wang has been on the Editorial Board of *JDTREA* since July 2021 but had no role in the decision to publish this article. No potential conflict of interest relevant to this article was reported.

Notes

- ¹ This quote is inspired by Dr. George Derfer who has been exploring the concept of deeper faith by Whitehead.

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