

Welcome to Turning Conscience Into Action, the Earth Charter podcast. Join Mirian Vilela, Earth Charter International Executive Director, in her fascinating conversations with great thinkers, scholars and activists from around the world who are working in the fields of sustainability, ethics, education and social transformation. Our purpose is to generate new insights on how to face current global challenges and inspire informed action.

So welcome to our Earth Charter podcast, Turning Conscience Into Action.

Today we have the pleasure of having a conversation with Professor Tuwei Ming. Tuwei Ming is one of the most famous Chinese Confucian thinkers of the 20th and 21st century. He has decades of study and teaching at Harvard, Princeton, and the University of California. He is Professor Emeritus and Senior Fellow of Asian Center at Harvard University and Chair Professor of Humanities and Founding Director of the Institute of Advanced Humanistic Studies at Peking University. Tuwei Ming's writings about Confucianism have served to make links between the Western philosophy and religion studies in the world of modern Confucianism from Confucian thought.

Welcome Professor Tuwei Ming to our Earth Charter podcast and thank you so much for joining us today. When I first met you in an Earth Charter drafting committee meeting around 1997, I remember vividly you explained to our group about the idea of community and in tech connection using bamboo as an example. It was of course very interesting because you were pointing to how it's intertwined in its roots and above. With this illustration you were making an analogy to the Asian culture and the Confucian perspective of learning and living as a community act.

I'd like to ask if you could share with us and expand a little bit more on this. Yes, there's a great deal of emphasis on the importance of community. Community is a fiduciary community, meaning a community united by people in trust. And that friendship of course is part of it, but the family is also an integral part of this idea. Therefore, a person is always understood as a center of relationships, both as a center but also as a relationship. So interconnectedness at various levels in the classical learning of the idea, the regulation of the family is the basis of universal peace in the world.

And harmony in the family is the basis for human flourishing as individuals. So this interconnectedness at the basic level of human relatedness, but more than that extending to the humanity as a whole. So an ancient Chinese saying, Zhang Zai, heaven is my father, earth is my mother, even such a small creature as I, is in an intimate unity with them. I regard all as my family. I regarded every human being as a brother and sister. Or my community is an integral part of me and I always understand myself in relationship to others.

But at the same time, a creative understanding of person, the dignity, the respectfulness, the sense of the self as a center. Therefore, it is not isolated individualism, nor is it simply a collection of people. It's both communal and individual. It's very nice and beautiful actually to envision the self always in connection with others. Yes. So around that time, I also listened to you explaining the Confucian view of human flourishing. Yes. It involves four dimensions of our relationship, the self, the self with the community, but also the self

with the earth and heaven, which offered a significant contribution to the earthshatter drafting process.

Could you explain that Confucian view of human flourishing to us? Yes. And human being as understood as a center of relationships is communal. And since it's communal, it's interconnected. There's various ways of bonding, not just in the family, but in the neighborhood, in the village, in the urban center as well as the world. Therefore, to form one person, to form one body with heaven and earth and there are things. It's an ideal of unity between the human, that's individual and the community as a whole.

Therefore, the so-called three talents, three major cardinal relationships, heaven, earth and human are connected as a defining way of looking at a person in communication in the relationship with others. So you are one of the greatest Confucianism philosophy scholars of our times. Can you share with us a few of the key ideas of that philosophy, the Confucianism philosophy? As a center of relationships, it relates a person to other persons, basically through sympathetic understanding. That's the idea of mutual flourishing.

So it's a sympathetic connection. But not only sympathetic connection, there's also sense of rightness, sense of the correct way. And there's the idea of ritual, idea of respectfulness for others. And there's wisdom, not just the wisdom of understanding the world, but the wisdom of understanding people and understanding human relatedness. And at the same time, there's a sense of trust. So the idea of Confucianism as a network of relationships is based upon some of the core values, the core values such as sympathy.

Sometimes sympathies understood, not a sense of feeling for others, but a sense of interconnectedness, which not only other human beings, but hopefully other beings, animals, the world and beyond. So perform one body with heaven and earth and various things is the idea of a person and the person in communication with other people and the person in communication, in connection, in community with the ever expanding network of relatedness. So there's much we need to learn to help us expand our sense of self that we are only self when we are in relatedness with others.

Yeah, that's one of the reasons why there's a great emphasis on self-cultivation to understand the self, the heart of the self, the core of the self is the sense of personal dignity and a person of sympathetic understanding and communication with others. And this one and other in between, but at the same time one and many. So the idea of self-cultivation is to cultivate the concrete self, concrete person here and now, not simply abstract idea, concrete living, concrete experiencing and sometime interacting with others in a dynamic unfolding way rather than in an enclosed manner.

So this interaction indicates a human being is always in the process of becoming human being. It's not simply a human being is a being, human being is becoming and always in the becoming process, the human beings discover himself or self and through self-discovery, through understanding of others that one connects to an ever expanding work of relationships.

Let's talk about a Confucian moral education. What's the purpose of that? You wrote an article for us over 10 years ago on ecological implications of Confucian humanism. In that article you said that the primary purpose of Confucianism moral education is character building. Can you explain to us or share with us what does that mean? It's an idea of forming a character. A person is a person with a character with a particular unique feature of human version so you can help others to establish themselves.

You should help yourself to establish yourself but you help others as well. This self-regard and other regard forms a unity of interaction of becoming. So to become a person is the most important project of being Confucian. Most recently in Beijing, the World Congress philosophy, perhaps the largest ever held in human history, more than 7,000 participants and the title of the home conference for all seven is learning to be human. Learning to be human in the sense of one's relationship to heaven, to earth, to culture, to tradition, to other human beings, other beings.

And this notion of interconnectedness continues to flourish as a person becomes aware of his or the connectedness. And this process of becoming is an infinite process. Therefore Confucius disciple Tsu Tsu Xia or regarded relating to others is a way of cultivating oneself. And one of his great disciples talked about the difficulty of learning to be human. And in fact it says learning to be human carries a heavy burden and carries a long road. If you regard yourself, regard humanity as your inner purpose of being human, how can you say that it is not heavy? But you're always trying to learn to be human and you learn until you reach the old age, reach death. So the road is long. The whole process is long and the burden is heavy.

And at the same time there's also the notion that a true person is able to establish the heart of heaven and earth, not the heart of human being alone. Therefore to form a trinity with heaven and earth. But also to establish a way of flourishing for all human beings. One is an example not only to oneself, one community, one community, but to human beings past and present and future. Therefore the notion about a human being, a historical being, a communal being, but continuously flourishing as a social being. And this purpose of a learned person is to how one learns oneself to become a person. But how through learning, when they're able to continue the uninterrupted past or the past.

In other words, this way of learning to be human is historically said here is different. It was meaningful in ancient times. It continues to be meaningful now. So not only to help people to become exemplars of themselves, to continue this continued learning of the past and to open up world of peace, world of universal peace throughout generations. For generations, generations. So it's both very expensive, but at the same time with the depth of humanity. This is the reason human beings should try to build their own character, character as an exemplar of how to be flourishing human being.

You're seeing an exemplar, right? Yes. So the purpose, we can in a nutshell, we can understand from this that the purpose of Confucian moral education is a non-going and never-ending process of learning how to become human. Yes. In relation to others. Yes. And the most core, most significant core value in Confucian repertoire of cultivating virtue is humanity. Ren, which means humanity, how to be fully human, human flourishing, means not only you are an expert in one particular area, you learn to broaden your mind,

to unite yourself with an ever-expanding work of people. And you are a human being because as a central relationships, you are always in the process of living, caring, caring, forward, struggling, developing. And this dynamic process of continuous self-unfolding is the idea of learning to be human.

Beautiful. So in hearing you, I also hear a lot of the ideas that are articulated in the earth's chatter. And I have been saying this for two decades about one of the purposes of the earth's chatter is to help us expand our consciousness in terms of how we relate to ourselves and to others in a very broad sense. So let's think a little bit about the relationship between Confucianism and the earth's chatter. And if you could share with us what are the similarities you'll find between key ideas of Confucianism and the earth's chatter, what is this bridge? Even the relationship between Confucianism and other teaching? In the earth's chatter.

Or the whole notion about the earth as an integral part of the person. In other words, we do not consider earth as the other. We consider earth as part of us. And therefore, this is the idea, this instruction for practical living. And that instruction for practical living is to be the life of a person who is worth living. And therefore, the person becomes not only part of other people, but also as part of the earth. That's why these four dimensions of heaven, earth, and individual and community, and these are ways of relating yourself to other dimensions of human experience. And that dimension puts a great emphasis on harmony, on not sameness, not uniformity, but harmony, harmony with diversity.

Harmony is harmonizing different voices, harmonizing different sounds. And so it is a symphony structure. It is not simply an isolated tune. So this notion of a person as an integral part of a large universe that shares the sound of other human beings, the sound of earth, the sound of the nation. Now, here in you, I can see how significantly your thoughts were contributing to the earth's chatter. And now you see a lot of relationship between the ideas that are articulated in their chatter and confusion.

Outside of one's own. Broadened humanity. Therefore, the highest value in learning to be human is to try to engage one's humanity with all other forms of humanity. It's pluralistic. It's multidimensional. It is not sameness. It is pluralism. And it is harmony. It is communication. It's a musical instrumentality. In other words, try to listen to the voices of others. Because a person is always a center of relationships. And that sense of resonance between oneself and other human beings and even nature as a whole becomes defining characteristic of the conclusion learning, which is very closely linked with our whole idea of regarding earth as an integral part of a person. As we form one body with heaven and earth and various things.

And therefore, the confusion idea is not anthropocentric. It is not simply anthropological. It is anthropocosmic. It is anthropoconthology. In the sense that the communication of the person always in the process of growth is based on the faith of human goodness, human sense of participation, human sense of ever expanding community. And this continuous interaction forms a community. And the community is a community of trust, of community of respect. But also it's a community that helps other communities to flourish. So to be a part of a fiduciary community is to be fully human. And therefore, this whole idea of

trying to explain the human possibility from the self to the family, to the world and beyond.

Can you comment on the synergies and differences among the traditional Chinese philosophies of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism? Yes. We call the three teachings as the three integral part. Confucianism, of course, is learning to be human, broadly defined. But Taoism also learns to be free, to be open, to be flexible, not to be egocentric, to be totally overwhelmed by one's egoistic ideas. And Buddhism is a quest for intercommunication between the person and the universe and the world. And the highest idea in Buddhism is compassion. Compassion is like compassion that resonates outside. It is a vibrant communication with an ever-expanding network of people. And this notion of Confucianism, trying to cultivate oneself, serve the family, try to develop a source of governance of order.

And Taoism, to give expression towards inner freedom and Buddhism, to show one's compassion and one's sense of nonviolence, one's sense of emptiness in the largest harmony of all things. But nothing is reduced to sameness. Everything is different. And yet each and every different thing contributes to the totality of society. So these are three teachings, three ways of relating to one another form a basis of the path of harmony, dignity of the person. And that the three teachings are often in competition, but they are more than in ordinary situation, form a kind of three guidance for the person, for society, and for the community. And therefore, to be a Confucian is sometimes also to be an artist, to be able to learn to free, to be a broad-minded Buddhist, to have compassion for the whole world.

And it is not simply related to one's own creed or one's own faith. Narrowly defined is broad-minded. It's broad-minded because the row is long, it's forever and heavy, which is the embodiment of humanity in oneself. It's heavy burden and heavy burden. It's also a way of self-flavoration and self-development.

Now, if you look at the ancient Chinese belief system and the modern society, how some of these key ideas coming from the ancient Chinese belief system can help us rethink the human-verse relation or even better, understand and address some of the current social and environmental challenges of our times. Especially, I would say, in informing the quest for contributing to collective efforts of building a necological civilization now that there's so much talk about the need to contribute towards a necological civilization. How can we make this bridge in which the ancient Chinese belief system can form?

If you look at the world itself as a harmonization of all kinds of positive and creative energy, the universe is self-generating, self-creating universe. And this self-generating, it also benefits all other beings. And so the community that is one is a community that harmonizes difference and yet allows different paths, different ways of flourishing. And human flourishing means one's ability to go beyond simply one particular mode of being human. There are numerous modes and numerous compassion, numerous communication and numerous sympathy that one would have to cultivate.

Now, since the success of industrialization and success of some great values in human rights, in human interaction, and this is also a great deal of need to recover, to retrieve the

various values that have been sustained, sustainable for the human community as a whole, ever since the archaic time. And in fact, one great contribution of the Earth Charter is to recognize the indigenous people and how indigenous peoples communicate with the world with heart, with feeling, with communication, with communication, and how the person is an integral part of a much larger world. And that integral part forms one body with heaven and earth and the mirror things.

And therefore, you always look at human as the great capitalized notion of we, of us, of the continuous presence of the various kinds of values from very different cultures. So the model of civilization has created numerous possibilities for human flourishing, especially in the materialistic world. But spiritually, how they are interconnectedness of the person to others and to the world helps the flourishing of the person defines the broad path of human being. Human being needs a very broad path. That's why Tzensu, a Confucius disciple, says the person has to be broad minded and resolute because the self-assigned responsibility is not simply to develop oneself, develop one community, but also to develop the world, to develop the universe.

And it is in this sense, the Earth Charter realizes that the existence of the human only a fraction of the time of the Earth and of course also a fraction of the time of the cosmos. Therefore, the story of the Earth is the story of human flourishing. It is also the story of how human beings gradually become interconnected with with their heart, with the universe, ever expanding with the universe and how to have this broad-minded compassion to communicate with an ever-expanding world. Therefore, the Earth has the great work and it's the common enterprise, the communal enterprise. And it is the joint venture, the continuous flourishing of human self-understanding and human contribution to the flourishing of other human beings or to the flourishing of the cosmos.

So it seems that modern society to a certain extent have somewhat forgotten some of these key values that we can find in ancient Chinese belief systems that they need to resuscitate in the consciousness of the current modern society. Is that right? Yes, we are in the actual age, like kiosk is notion, and so great religions flourished. And therefore our purpose is to see many more great religious traditions continue. And that collaboration and continuation of human flourishing of the human quest for excellence, not just excellence in terms of art and literature, philosophy and excellence in all dimensions of human experience.

And that idea of human handedness, which is the core of the cosmos, which is the core of human creativity, we come into existence because the great creativity of the earth, the great creativity of our relationship to an ever expanding network.

And we feel grown find to be an integral part of a larger universe. And we find that our participation in this great project of flourishing is never centered on a history for a short period of time. It is forever and it is forever the continuity on the continuous vitality and creativity of the human world. Great, thank you. You have affirmed in the past that Confucianism can learn something from the Western modernity in vice versa without losing its own heritage. Can you explain what you mean by Western East modernity learning? Sure. I think ever since we're in this XAOA age and in this XAOA age and the Earth Charter is a new chapter of learning to be human.

It's a new vision of what human being ought to be. And this Charter, this idea, this ecological vision helps human being, indigenous peoples, human beings of various kinds of religious traditions and human beings of various kinds of talents in art and literature and science and philosophy. Realize that the path in front of us is a very broad, open-minded and also help us to assert our effort in such a way that we do not not only contribute to an ever expanding network of human creativity, but it is also our sense of being connected closely to an ever expanding world. And that ever expanding world itself is unity without discrimination. It is diversity with the flourishing of all kinds of human excidences.

And this rich and flourishing world, which is the vision of the United Earth Charter, is to say there's a new way of learning to be human and new vision of human self-realization and self-cultivation. Okay, so we are coming to the last question of our conversation today. And I know that over the years you have engaged in numerous civilizational dialogues, believing that different cultures can learn from each other and develop a global ethic or a North ethic. This is important, particularly in the current context where we are in such an urgent need of envisioning and building an ecological civilization.

And sometimes having to find ways to address this emergent nationalism. This is of course linked to a kind of new, extra age, as you call. What can you share some thoughts on this ongoing and even more now, so the urgent need to engage in civilizational dialogue? Yes, I think civilizational dialogue is a new way of learning to be human.

The dialogical way, it's not just dialectic, it's not just conflict, just tension. It's a dialogical way of enriching oneself by broadening one's vision and broadening one's horizon and to engage in ever-expanding network of relationships. So everything is so inclusive that it gives one a sense of courage and also a sense of faith. Courage, in a sense, despite various kinds of miserable conditions we have to overcome, we know that it's not simply overcoming the difficulty, it's allowing the creative center the possibility of flourishing, of various kinds of values in society that enable the human community since its existence to become enriched and also at the same time to make it deeper, self-reflective and broadly aware of the human connectedness. It's really privileged but it's also an obligation.

Therefore, the burden of being human is, in this conditional sense, heavy and low and heavy and low and in the sense it's beneficial for all parties concerned. It's two dialogical relationships, dialogical encountering of other traditions through learning, through perpetual learning that we become aware of who we are.

So learning to be human with emphasis on learning, which means expanding at the same time, each and every human being is a receptor, is a recipient of a great gift of the great cosmos that forms the human community as a whole. Thank you so much. So learning this ongoing quest of learning to be human and looking at life through different traditions, traditional systems and values, it's a key for civilization, civilizational dialogue. Yes. Great. Thank you so much, Professor Tuwinging, for sharing with us your wisdom, your experience, your knowledge, this deeply value. I really value that so much. We are very much in need of dialogical partners.

We are very much in need of bridges and those have, I view, able to build bridges over the years, cross cultures, cross all kinds of human constraints so that we are a part of a flourishing community with a very proud sense of being human at the same time or being an integral part of ever expanding human network. Thank you very much for this opportunity.

Thank you so much.

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