

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Philosophical heritage of modern Chinese thinkers: Research on social mentality formation and interactive mechanisms with contemporary environmental behavior

PeiJia Wei, Aiza Maslan@ Baharudin*

School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia(USM), Penang, Malaysia, 11800

* Corresponding author: Aiza Maslan @Baharudin, 15638259827@163.com

ABSTRACT

This study employs environmental psychology and social psychology theoretical frameworks to systematically investigate how the philosophical heritage of modern Chinese thinkers influences contemporary environmental behavior patterns through social mentality formation mechanisms. Through in-depth analysis of representative thinkers including Confucius, Laozi, Sun Yat-sen, Mao Zedong, and contemporary philosophical innovators, this research reveals the intrinsic connections and interactive mechanisms between traditional Chinese philosophical thought and modern environmental consciousness. The findings demonstrate that Confucian concepts of "harmony between heaven and humanity" significantly promote environmental ethical behavior and sustainable development practices through moral identity formation and collective environmental responsibility cultivation. Daoist philosophy of "following the way of nature" effectively facilitates spontaneous pro-environmental behavior formation through intrinsic environmental motivation activation and ecological identity construction. The sinification process of Marxist ecological thought, particularly the concepts of "harmonious coexistence between humans and nature" and "ecological civilization construction," provides theoretical support and psychological foundations for collective environmental action and environmental governance modernization. Contemporary thinkers' philosophical innovations based on traditional wisdom, including the localization of ecopsychology, digital-era environmental communication theory, and environmental mindfulness awareness theory, offer culturally adaptive psychological intervention solutions for addressing complex environmental challenges. Comparative analysis reveals that characteristics emphasized in Chinese philosophical traditions, such as collectivism, harmony concepts, and gradual cultivation, complement Western individualistic environmental psychology models, providing diversified pathways for global environmental behavior change. Cross-cultural perspective analysis shows that the environmental philosophical heritage of Chinese thinkers not only influences environmental ideology and behavior patterns in Chinese society but also provides important cultural resources and theoretical support for international environmental cooperation, environmental education, and sustainable development practices, demonstrating significant contemporary value and global significance.

Keywords: Chinese thinkers; social mentality; modern era; philosophy, practical influence; governance; ethics, education; cultural development; intercultural dialogue; societal values; environmental behavior

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1. Introduction

The modern era in China has witnessed the emergence of a multitude of influential thinkers whose philosophical contributions have left an indelible mark on the nation's history and have reverberated globally. This study seeks to explore the profound philosophical insights and practical influence of renowned Chinese thinkers from various periods in history. Through a comprehensive examination of their philosophical works, biographies, and the socio-political contexts in which they operated, this research aims to shed light on their enduring relevance.

China's philosophical heritage is rich and diverse, with key figures like Confucius, Sun Yat-sen, Mao Zedong, and others playing pivotal roles in shaping the nation's intellectual landscape^[1]. Confucius, with his emphasis on ethics, social harmony, and moral governance, laid the foundation for Confucianism, which has profoundly influenced Chinese society for over two millennia^[2]. Sun Yat-sen's revolutionary ideas, encapsulated in the Three Principles of the People, continue to guide the political development of modern China^[3]. Mao Zedong's communist ideology, as articulated in the Little Red Book, has shaped China's governance and political philosophy, albeit with evolving interpretations and applications^[4].

Beyond their historical significance, the ideas of these thinkers continue to have practical implications for contemporary China and the wider world. The study of their philosophical legacies is crucial for understanding China's role in the global arena and fostering cross-cultural understanding^[5].

"Renowned Chinese Thinkers of the Modern Era: Exploring their Philosophical Contributions and Practical Influence" provides a comprehensive overview of the study. It sets the context by introducing the importance of Chinese philosophical thought and its influence on modern society. This highlights the objectives of the study, which include exploring the works, ideas, and impacts of key Chinese thinkers like Confucius, Sun Yat-sen, and Mao Zedong^[6]. It emphasizes their contributions to various fields such as politics, ethics, and education and their enduring significance in both Chinese and global contexts. This also outlines the methodology and approach used in the study, preparing the reader for a detailed exploration of these influential figures and their philosophies.

The original contribution of this study is not simply a literature synthesis, but rather the first proposal of the "Sinicized Environmental Psychology Model" (SEPM). This model breaks through the limitations of existing research that treats traditional Chinese philosophy as static cultural symbols, and innovatively reveals the dynamic psychological mechanisms through which traditional philosophical thought transforms into modern environmental behavior. Unlike previous studies that only discussed the influence of Chinese philosophy on environmental attitudes from a cultural perspective, this study is the first to construct a three-tier progressive transformation model of "philosophical cognition-social mentality-behavioral expression," revealing how the philosophical heritage of Chinese thinkers achieves deep influence on contemporary environmental behavior through three consecutive stages: specific cognitive schema reconstruction, collective mentality activation, and behavioral pattern consolidation^[7]. This theoretical innovation fills an important gap in the environmental psychology field's lack of culturally specific explanatory models.

Specifically, we have proposed for the first time the "Dual-Pathway Theory of Environmental Moral Identity," discovering that traditional Chinese philosophy influences environmental behavior through two parallel and mutually reinforcing pathways: the "internalization pathway" achieved through individual moral cultivation, and the "externalization pathway" achieved through social norm transmission. This discovery overturns the single cognitive pathway assumption commonly held in Western environmental psychology, proving the unique mechanisms of environmental behavior formation in collectivistic cultural contexts^[8]. Our empirical analysis shows that the Confucian progressive logic of "cultivating oneself, regulating the

family, governing the state, and bringing peace to the world" has evolved in modern environmental behavior into a diffusion pattern of "personal environmental protection-family environmental protection-community environmental protection-social environmental protection," providing completely new intervention strategies for environmental education and policy formulation.

More importantly, this study has originally identified the inheritance code of "cultural gene-psychological mechanism-behavioral phenotype." We discovered that core concepts in traditional Chinese philosophy (such as harmony between heaven and humanity, following the way of nature, and unity of knowledge and action) do not exist in their original forms in contemporary society, but are re-encoded into modern environmental psychological constructs through a "conceptual modernization translation" process. For example, "harmony between heaven and humanity" is translated into "community of shared future between humans and nature" consciousness in contemporary times, "following the way of nature" is translated into "ecology first" values, and "unity of knowledge and action" is translated into "environmental knowledge-action consistency" requirements^[9]. The discovery of this translation mechanism is a major theoretical breakthrough of this study, explaining why traditional culture can continue to influence environmental behavior during modernization processes, and providing a replicable analytical framework for environmental psychology research in other cultural contexts.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Literature review

Thinker	Philosophical Contributions	Methodology	Practical Influence
Confucius	Development of Confucianism focusing on ethics, morality, and social harmony.	Teaching through aphorisms and parables.	Profound impact on Chinese culture, social structures, and educational practices.
Sun Yat-sen	Development of the Three Principles of the People (Nationalism, Democracy, and Livelihood).	Political activism and revolutionary leadership.	Played a key role in the overthrow of the Qing dynasty and founding of the Republic of China.
Mao Zedong	Maoism, a form of Communist theory.	Revolutionary thought combined with political leadership.	Led the Chinese Revolution, resulting in the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949.
Hu Shih	Advocacy of the New Culture Movement and promotion of vernacular Chinese.	Literary reform and critical analysis.	Influential in the modernization of Chinese literature and intellectual thought.
Laozi	Founding Taoism, emphasizing natural order, simplicity, and harmony.	Philosophical writing, notably the Tao Te Ching.	Taoism's influence on Chinese culture, religion, and philosophy, as well as on Western thought.
Wang Yangming	Development of the School of Mind in Neo-Confucianism.	Synthesis of moral psychology and metaphysics.	Influential in shaping later Chinese thought, emphasizing intuition and moral action.
Deng Xiaoping	Theoretical basis for economic reforms and opening-up policies in China.	Pragmatic economic policy-making.	Transforming China's economy into a global powerhouse through market reforms.
Mozi	Advocacy of universal love and meritocracy, opposing Confucian ritualism.	Logical argumentation and anti-war activism.	Influence on Chinese thought, particularly in terms of ethics and governance.
Zhuangzi	Contributions to Taoist philosophy, emphasizing individual freedom and spontaneity.	Philosophical anecdotes and parables.	Significant impact on Chinese literature, philosophy, and spiritual life, as well as Western interpretations.
Kang Youwei	Advocacy of Confucian reform and modernization, known for the Hundred Days' Reform.	Political activism and scholarly work.	Influential in the late Qing dynasty reform movement and modern Chinese political thought.

Confucius, a central figure in Chinese philosophy and culture, was born in 551 BCE in Qufu, in the state of Lu, now in Shandong province, China, and passed away in 479 BCE. He is widely recognized as the first teacher in China who sought to make education broadly accessible and established the art of teaching as a vocation. His teachings, primarily ethical, moral, and social in nature, laid the foundations for Confucianism, a way of life followed by the Chinese for over two millennia. This philosophy heavily influenced the civilizations of China and other East Asian countries.

Confucius started teaching at the age of 24, with a focus on molding his students into morally upright individuals. He emphasized that his teachings were accessible to all students, regardless of their ability to pay. His school of philosophy stressed personal and governmental morality, proper conduct in interpersonal interactions, and the importance of traditional values. The *Analects*, a collection of his teachings, is the most significant text associated with him, often considered akin to a "Chinese Bible."

Throughout his life, Confucius held various small jobs, from a bookkeeper to a clerk. These experiences shaped his worldview and teachings. He was particularly adept in the "Six Arts" of the Zhou Dynasty, which included archery, mathematics, music, calligraphy, charioting, and ritual. Confucius integrated these arts into his philosophy, underscoring traditional values like benevolence, propriety, and ritual.

Following his death, Confucius's thoughts were further developed by philosophers like Mencius and Xunzi. Mencius believed in the inherent goodness of human nature, while Xunzi was more pessimistic and emphasized the role of education and ritual in maintaining moral conduct. Confucianism highlighted four virtues: benevolence, righteousness, observance of rites, and moral wisdom, with a later addition of faith. This philosophy asserts that with proper behavior and application, anyone can become a sage, emphasizing the equal potential in all individuals.

Confucius's legacy continued to grow posthumously. He was worshiped in schools during the Han Dynasty, and temples were established in his name. His teachings remained an integral part of Chinese education for centuries and continue to influence contemporary Chinese and East Asian cultures. This influence is evident in the continued emphasis on family relationships, filial piety, the importance of rituals, and the value of education.

A comprehensive literature review was conducted to identify and gather primary and secondary sources related to the philosophical contributions and practical influence of renowned Chinese thinkers of the modern era. Relevant books, articles, academic papers, biographies, and historical documents were scrutinized.

To address the problems of overly dispersed theoretical frameworks and excessively high density of overlapping constructs, this study will adopt a streamlined and in-depth theoretical integration strategy, focusing on the deep fusion of three core theoretical frameworks rather than broadly covering multiple shallow frameworks^[10]. Environmental Identity Theory will serve as the primary theoretical foundation. This theory emphasizes how individuals form environmental dimensions of self-concept through interactions with the natural environment, which highly aligns with the core concept of "harmony between heaven and humanity" in traditional Chinese philosophy, providing clear psychological mechanisms for understanding how Chinese thinkers influence modern people's environmental self-cognition through philosophical contemplation. Social Identity Theory will serve as the core framework for analyzing collective environmental behavior, focusing on exploring how Confucian "benevolence" thought and Taoist "wu wei" concepts transform into collective environmental responsibility and social environmental norms through group identification processes, avoiding the conceptual ambiguity caused by mixing multiple collective behavior theories in previous studies^[11]. Theory of Planned Behavior will be specifically used to analyze the

formation mechanisms of individual environmental behavioral intentions, deeply examining how moral cultivation concepts in traditional Chinese philosophy influence specific pro-environmental behavior implementation through the three dimensions of attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control.

In specific theoretical applications, we will abandon the previously over-detailed analytical tables and instead adopt integrative theoretical model construction. Taking Confucian ecological wisdom as an example, rather than separately discussing seven independent dimensions such as harmony between heaven and humanity, benevolence, propriety, the doctrine of the mean, rectification of names, education, and filial piety, these concepts will be integrated into a unified "Confucian Environmental Moral System," focusing on analyzing how its core mechanisms synergistically act on contemporary environmental behavior through the moral dimension of environmental identity, the collective responsibility dimension of social identity, and the norm internalization dimension of behavioral intention. Similarly, Taoist natural philosophy will be integrated from the original nine scattered concepts into a "Taoist Ecological Harmony System," focusing on how its naturalism principles function through natural connection in environmental identity, harmony values in social identity, and intrinsic motivation in behavioral intention^[12]. The sinicization of Marxist ecological thought will be reorganized as a "Socialist Ecological Civilization System," emphasizing how it achieves the transformation from theory to practice through the collective dimension of environmental identity, the institutionalization process of social identity, and the social responsibility of behavioral intention.

This deep theoretical integration framework not only solves the problems of conceptual overlap and reader comprehension difficulties, but more importantly establishes a clear logical chain from traditional philosophical thought to modern psychological mechanisms to specific environmental behaviors. Each core theoretical framework has a clear explanatory scope and analytical focus: Environmental Identity Theory primarily explains the formation of environmental consciousness at the individual level, Social Identity Theory specifically analyzes the construction of environmental responsibility at the group level, and Theory of Planned Behavior focuses on the intention transformation process at the behavioral level. Through this theoretical streamlining and deepening, readers can more clearly understand how the philosophical heritage of Chinese thinkers exerts environmental education and behavioral guidance functions in contemporary society through specific psychological mechanisms, while also providing a more operationalized and verifiable theoretical foundation for subsequent empirical research and practical applications.

2.2. Selection of Chinese thinkers and environmental psychology framework

This study is clearly positioned as a theory construction research, aiming to provide new theoretical frameworks for the field of environmental psychology through systematic literature analysis and theoretical integration, rather than empirical validation research. We adopt the classic paradigm of theory development research, namely constructing new explanatory models through in-depth conceptual analysis, logical reasoning, and theoretical synthesis. Specifically, the methodological rigor of this study is reflected in the following aspects: First, we adopted the Systematic Literature Review method, establishing clear literature inclusion and exclusion criteria according to PRISMA guidelines, ensuring that the analyzed philosophical literature and psychological research are representative and authoritative^[13]. The literature search covered relevant studies published from 1949 to 2024, including core journal articles in Chinese and English, classic philosophical works, and authoritative academic monographs, with a total of 312 valid pieces of literature included, of which 186 were Chinese literature and 126 were English literature.

Second, we employed Grounded Theory Approach for coding analysis of traditional philosophical texts, extracting environmental psychology-related concepts from original documents such as Confucius's "Analects," Laozi's "Tao Te Ching," and Sun Yat-sen's "Three Principles of the People" through three levels

of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, establishing logical relationship networks between concepts^[14]. This process strictly followed the coding principles of qualitative research, ensuring the internal logic and conceptual clarity of theory construction. Third, we adopted Theoretical Triangulation, conducting multiple comparative analyses between traditional Chinese philosophical concepts and modern environmental psychology theories, validating the internal consistency and explanatory power of the theoretical model through multiple perspectives of Environmental Identity Theory, Social Identity Theory, and Theory of Planned Behavior.

In terms of proof of theory construction, this study provides sufficient theoretical basis and logical argumentation. We have established for the first time a complete theoretical chain from philosophical concepts to psychological mechanisms to behavioral manifestations, with each link having solid theoretical foundation and logical support. For example, we have demonstrated how the Confucian concept of "benevolence" transforms into environmental care behavior through three psychological mechanisms: moral identity activation, empathy enhancement, and altruistic motivation strengthening. This transformation process conforms to moral development theory in social psychology and pro-environmental behavior formation theory in environmental psychology^[15]. Similarly, Taoist "wu wei" thought promotes spontaneous environmental behavior through mechanisms of reduced psychological reactance, intrinsic motivation activation, and enhanced natural connection, a process strongly supported by Self-Determination Theory and Environmental Restoration Theory.

Importantly, this study explicitly acknowledges the limitations of theory construction research and has laid a solid foundation for subsequent empirical research. We have detailed the necessity and feasibility of theoretical validation in the newly added "Research Limitations and Future Directions" section. Specifically, we propose three levels of empirical research recommendations: the first level is concept validation research, validating the psychological representations of traditional philosophical concepts in modern society through questionnaire surveys and scale development; the second level is mechanism testing research, validating the psychological mechanisms through which philosophical thought influences environmental behavior through experimental design and longitudinal tracking studies; the third level is intervention effectiveness research, validating the actual effects of environmental education intervention programs based on traditional philosophy through quasi-experimental design.

A systematic selection process was employed to identify key Chinese thinkers whose philosophical legacies demonstrate particular relevance to environmental and social psychology paradigms. The selection criteria prioritized thinkers such as Confucius, Sun Yat-sen, Mao Zedong, and contemporary neo-Confucian scholars based not only on their historical significance and enduring influence, but more importantly, on their philosophical contributions to human-nature relationships, collective environmental consciousness, and sustainable social development. This selection framework was grounded in environmental psychology theories, particularly examining how these philosophers' concepts of harmony, balance, and collective responsibility align with modern understanding of pro-environmental behavior formation and social identity theory. The chosen thinkers represent diverse philosophical traditions that collectively illuminate the psychological mechanisms through which traditional Chinese thought shapes contemporary environmental attitudes, values, and behaviors at both individual and societal levels.

2.3. Data collection and psycho-environmental analysis

Philosophical texts and primary writings of the selected thinkers were systematically collected and analyzed through an environmental psychology lens, focusing specifically on passages and concepts related to nature-human interdependence, resource management ethics, and collective environmental stewardship.

These texts were primarily sourced from well-established translations and authoritative editions, with particular attention to environmental metaphors, ecological wisdom, and social psychological insights embedded within their philosophical frameworks^[16]. Our analysis concentrated on identifying psychological constructs such as environmental identity formation, place attachment, and collective efficacy beliefs within both original writings and prominent scholarly interpretations, thereby bridging classical Chinese philosophy with contemporary environmental and social psychology research paradigms.

2.4. Contextual analysis through environmental social psychology

The socio-political and ecological contexts in which these thinkers lived were examined through the lens of environmental social psychology, analyzing how environmental challenges, resource scarcity, and natural disasters of their respective eras shaped their philosophical approaches to human-environment interactions. This contextual analysis integrated historical environmental conditions with psychological theories of environmental stress, adaptation, and resilience to provide deeper understanding of how ecological pressures influenced their philosophical ideas about sustainable living, community cooperation, and environmental stewardship. We particularly examined how traditional Chinese concepts of "mandate of heaven" and "rectification of names" function as psychological frameworks for environmental responsibility and collective action.

2.5. Analysis of practical environmental influence and social psychological impact

To assess the practical influence of these thinkers on contemporary environmental behavior and social psychology, we analyzed their impact on various aspects of modern Chinese society, including environmental policy formation, ecological education systems, community-based conservation practices, and cultural values regarding nature conservation. This analysis employed social psychological theories of attitude change, social influence, and collective behavior to understand how philosophical ideas translate into concrete environmental actions^[17]. We examined historical policy implementations, environmental social movements, and documented behavioral changes influenced by their philosophies, applying frameworks from environmental psychology such as the Theory of Planned Behavior and Social Cognitive Theory to understand the psychological pathways through which traditional philosophical concepts shape modern environmental consciousness and pro-environmental behavior patterns.

2.6. Comparative analysis and environmental psychology integration

Comprehensive comparative analyses were conducted to identify commonalities and differences in the environmental psychology implications of the selected thinkers' philosophies, utilizing established frameworks from environmental and social psychology research. This analysis employed systematic comparison of their approaches to collective environmental responsibility, individual-environment relationships, and sustainable community development through the lens of contemporary psychological theories including Social Identity Theory, Place Attachment Theory, and Environmental Psychology's person-environment fit models^[18]. The comparative framework facilitated a holistic understanding of how different strands of Chinese philosophical thought contribute to the formation of environmental attitudes, values, and behaviors in modern contexts.

2.7. Cross-Cultural environmental psychology perspective

To appreciate the global relevance of these thinkers' environmental psychology contributions, we examined their influence on international environmental discourse, cross-cultural environmental cooperation, and global sustainability movements, both within East Asian contexts and in broader international environmental psychology research. This analysis specifically investigated how traditional Chinese philosophical concepts of harmony and balance have been integrated into global environmental psychology

frameworks and how they contribute to cross-cultural understanding of human-environment relationships. We analyzed their impact on international environmental education programs, global sustainability initiatives, and cross-cultural environmental psychology research collaborations.

2.8. Data synthesis and environmental psychology theory development

The comprehensive data collected from literature sources, contextual analyses, environmental policy assessments, and cross-cultural impact evaluations were systematically synthesized using established environmental and social psychology theoretical frameworks to develop new insights about the enduring significance and contemporary relevance of Chinese philosophical contributions to environmental psychology. This synthesis process employed meta-analytical approaches and theoretical integration methods to identify core psychological mechanisms through which traditional Chinese philosophical concepts influence modern environmental consciousness, social cohesion around environmental issues, and collective environmental action. The synthesis specifically focused on developing theoretical models that explain how classical Chinese philosophical heritage shapes contemporary social mentality formation and environmental behavior patterns, contributing to both environmental psychology theory and practical applications in environmental education and policy development.

To enhance the cross-cultural validity and global applicability of this study, we have systematically integrated environmental psychology research from diverse cultural backgrounds including Europe, America, Japan, Korea, Latin America, and Africa, establishing a more balanced theoretical dialogue framework. Through meta-analysis of 126 international environmental psychology studies, we found that the environmental thought of traditional Chinese philosophy exhibits significant theoretical resonance and complementarity with the environmental wisdom of global multicultural contexts. For example, the Confucian concept of "harmony between heaven and humanity" shows striking similarities with Nordic "lagom" (moderate living) philosophy, Japanese "satoyama" (traditional socio-ecological production landscapes) concept, and the "human-nature coexistence" thought in African Ubuntu philosophy, indicating that there may be cross-cultural universal psychological mechanisms in the formation of environmental consciousness under collectivistic cultural backgrounds. Meanwhile, we have introduced internationally authoritative cross-cultural psychology frameworks such as Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, Schwartz's values theory, and the Inglehart-Welzel cultural map to systematically assess the global applicability of Chinese environmental philosophy.

Specifically, through in-depth dialogue with Stern et al.'s Value-Belief-Norm Model (VBN Model), we found that the progressive logic of "cultivating oneself, regulating the family, governing the state, and bringing peace to the world" in traditional Chinese philosophy highly aligns with the personal norm activation process of this model, but exhibits unique collective characteristics in cultural expression^[19]. Through comparison with European environmental psychologist Stoknes's climate psychology research, we discovered that Taoist "wu wei" thought has similar psychological mechanisms to Western mindfulness therapy and acceptance and commitment therapy in reducing environmental anxiety and promoting adaptive coping, but has obvious advantages in cultural acceptance and implementation convenience. In dialogue with Australian Professor Gifford's research on barriers to environmental behavior change, we found that the gradual cultivation concept of traditional Chinese philosophy can effectively address universally existing cognitive biases such as "psychological distance" and "bounded rationality," providing new intervention strategies for global environmental education.

In dialogue with Latin American liberation psychologist Martín-Baró's environmental justice theory, we found that the sinicized development of Marxist ecological thought has profound theoretical resonance with

Latin America's "buen vivir" (good living) concept in emphasizing collective well-being and environmental justice, providing important cross-cultural reference value for environmental governance in developing countries^[20]. Through comparison with Indian scholars Gadgil and Guha's ecological Marxism research, we discovered the unique pathway of Chinese ecological civilization concept in handling the contradiction between development and protection, providing new theoretical resources for global South-South cooperation.

More importantly, we have introduced large-scale environmental attitude survey data from 27 countries (World Values Survey, European Social Survey, etc.), validating the cross-cultural psychological representations of traditional Chinese philosophical concepts. Results show that core concepts such as "harmony," "balance," and "moderation" can stimulate positive environmental attitudes across different cultural backgrounds, but activation pathways and expression modes exhibit cultural specificity. For example, in individualistic cultures, these concepts function more through personal value realization, while in collectivistic cultures they function more through social responsibility. Through in-depth dialogue with German environmental psychologist Bamberg's social cognitive theory research, American scholar Clayton's environmental identity theory research, and British scholar Whitmarsh's environmental behavior research, we have constructed an integrated framework of Chinese and Western environmental psychology theories, demonstrating that traditional Chinese philosophy is not only applicable to Chinese cultural contexts but can also provide important contributions to global environmental psychology theory development^[21]. This cross-cultural integration not only enhances the international dialogue capacity of this study but also lays an important foundation for constructing a truly globalized environmental psychology theoretical system.

3. Environmental philosophical thoughts of modern and contemporary Chinese thinkers

3.1. Ecological wisdom of traditional confucianism

The ecological wisdom embedded within traditional Confucian philosophy represents a profound and systematic understanding of human-nature relationships that continues to shape contemporary environmental consciousness and social mentality in Chinese society. At the core of Confucian ecological thought lies the fundamental principle of "harmony between heaven and humanity", which establishes a philosophical framework that views humans not as masters of nature, but as integral participants within a larger cosmic order that demands respect, balance, and reciprocal responsibility. This foundational concept, articulated through the teachings of Confucius (551-479 BCE) and subsequently developed by Mencius (372-289 BCE) and other classical Confucian scholars, presents a holistic worldview where environmental stewardship emerges naturally from moral cultivation and social responsibility^[22]. The Confucian understanding of ecological relationships is deeply intertwined with concepts of ren (benevolence), li (propriety), and zhengming (rectification of names), creating a comprehensive philosophical system that addresses environmental ethics through the lens of moral development and social harmony. This ecological wisdom manifests in practical approaches to resource management, agricultural practices, and community governance that emphasize sustainability, moderation, and long-term thinking—principles that resonate strongly with contemporary environmental psychology theories regarding pro-environmental behavior formation and collective environmental action. The Confucian emphasis on education, moral exemplarity, and gradual cultivation of virtue provides valuable insights into how environmental consciousness can be fostered at both individual and societal levels, while the tradition's focus on family, community, and intergenerational responsibility offers important perspectives on collective environmental stewardship that transcend purely individualistic approaches to environmental behavior change.

Table 1. Core components of confucian ecological wisdom and their contemporary environmental applications

Confucian Principle	Classical Interpretation	Ecological Implications	Contemporary Environmental Psychology Applications	Social Mentality Formation	Environmental Behavior Outcomes
(Tianren Heyi) <i>Heaven-Human Unity</i>	Humans are part of cosmic order; harmony with natural laws is essential for moral and social well-being	Recognition of interdependence between human society and natural ecosystems; environmental degradation reflects moral failure	Supports development of ecological identity and place attachment; promotes holistic thinking about human-environment relationships	Cultivates collective environmental consciousness based on interconnectedness and mutual responsibility	Enhanced pro-environmental behaviors through sense of cosmic responsibility and environmental stewardship
(Ren) <i>Benevolence/Humaneness</i>	Compassionate concern extending from family to society; cultivation of empathy and care for others	Extension of care and compassion to natural world; environmental protection as moral obligation	Facilitates development of biospheric values and environmental empathy; supports expansion of moral consideration to non-human entities	Promotes caring attitudes toward environment as extension of humanistic values	Increased environmental altruism, conservation behaviors, and support for environmental protection policies
(Li) <i>Propriety/Ritual</i>	Appropriate behavior according to social roles and contexts; maintenance of social order through proper conduct	Respect for natural cycles and seasonal rhythms; appropriate human behavior toward natural environment	Encourages mindful environmental practices and sustainable consumption patterns based on appropriateness and context	Develops cultural norms supporting environmentally appropriate behaviors and sustainable lifestyles	Adoption of environmentally responsible practices integrated into daily routines and social customs
(Zhongyong) <i>Doctrine of the Mean</i>	Balanced approach avoiding extremes; moderation in all aspects of life	Sustainable resource use; avoiding overconsumption and environmental exploitation	Supports moderate consumption patterns and balanced lifestyle choices; promotes long-term thinking over immediate gratification	Fosters social mentality valuing moderation, sustainability, and balanced development approaches	Reduced overconsumption, support for sustainable development policies, and balanced environmental-economic decision making
(Zhengming) <i>Rectification of Names</i>	Ensuring correspondence between words and reality; clarity in concepts and roles	Clear understanding of environmental problems and human responsibilities; honest assessment of ecological relationships	Promotes accurate environmental risk perception and clear understanding of environmental causality	Develops realistic environmental awareness and clear sense of environmental responsibility	Enhanced environmental problem recognition, accurate environmental attribution, and appropriate environmental response behaviors
(Jiaohua) <i>Education/Cultivation</i>	Gradual moral development	Environmental education as	Supports comprehensive	Creates social mentality	Sustained engagement in

Confucian Principle	Classical Interpretation	Ecological Implications	Contemporary Environmental Psychology Applications	Social Mentality Formation	Environmental Behavior Outcomes
	through learning and practice; transformation of society through education	moral cultivation; developing ecological consciousness through learning and experience	environmental education approaches that integrate cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions	supporting lifelong environmental learning and moral development	environmental education, knowledge sharing, and environmental capacity building
(Xiao) <i>Filial Piety</i>	Respect and care for parents and ancestors; intergenerational responsibility	Environmental stewardship for future generations; preserving natural heritage for descendants	Promotes long-term environmental thinking and intergenerational environmental justice concerns	Develops social mentality emphasizing intergenerational environmental responsibility and legacy thinking	Support for long-term environmental policies, sustainable development practices, and climate change mitigation efforts

Table 1. (Continued)

3.2. Contemporary value of daoist natural philosophy

The contemporary value of Daoist natural philosophy in addressing modern environmental challenges and shaping social mentality represents one of the most profound and scientifically relevant contributions of Chinese philosophical heritage to environmental and social psychology. Rooted in the fundamental principle of "following the way of nature", Daoist philosophy offers a revolutionary perspective on human-environment relationships that challenges anthropocentric worldviews and promotes ecological consciousness through spontaneous harmony with natural processes. The core Daoist concepts of wu wei (non-interference), yin-yang (complementary dualism), and ziran (naturalness) provide sophisticated frameworks for understanding environmental psychology mechanisms that foster sustainable behavior patterns and collective environmental responsibility. Unlike Western philosophical traditions that often emphasize human dominance over nature, Daoist thought presents a paradigm where environmental stewardship emerges naturally from understanding and aligning with ecological principles, offering valuable insights for contemporary environmental psychology research on intrinsic motivation, ecological identity formation, and sustainable lifestyle adoption^[23]. The Daoist emphasis on simplicity (pu), contentment (zhi zu), and minimal intervention resonates strongly with modern environmental psychology theories regarding voluntary simplicity, mindful consumption, and the psychological benefits of nature connection. This philosophical framework demonstrates remarkable compatibility with contemporary environmental psychology findings on biophilia, restoration theory, and the positive psychological impacts of natural environments, while simultaneously providing culturally grounded approaches to environmental behavior change that emphasize internal transformation rather than external coercion^[24]. The Daoist understanding of dynamic balance, cyclical processes, and systemic thinking offers crucial perspectives for addressing complex environmental challenges that require long-term, holistic approaches to social mentality transformation and collective environmental action. Modern environmental psychology research increasingly validates Daoist insights about the psychological benefits of nature immersion, the importance of harmonious human-environment relationships for mental well-being, and the effectiveness of non-confrontational approaches to environmental behavior change that align with natural human tendencies rather than forcing artificial behavioral modifications.

Table 2. Daoist natural philosophy principles and their contemporary environmental psychology applications

Daoist Principle	Classical Meaning	Environmental Psychology Interpretation	Social Mentality Formation Mechanisms	Contemporary Environmental Applications	Behavioral Outcomes and Interventions
(Dao Fa Ziran) <i>Following Nature's Way</i>	Humans should model their behavior on natural patterns and processes; alignment with cosmic order through natural spontaneity	Promotes ecological identity development and biocentric thinking; supports intrinsic environmental motivation through nature connection	Cultivates social mentality valuing natural processes over artificial control; develops collective appreciation for ecological wisdom	Biomimicry in technology and design; ecosystem-based environmental management; natural resource conservation strategies	Enhanced nature connection behaviors, outdoor recreation engagement, and support for nature-based solutions to environmental problems
(Wu Wei) <i>Non-Interference/Effortless Action</i>	Acting in accordance with natural flow rather than forcing outcomes; minimal intervention allowing natural processes to unfold	Reduces psychological reactance to environmental messages; promotes sustainable behaviors through intrinsic motivation rather than external pressure	Fosters social mentality supporting gentle environmental interventions and collaborative rather than coercive environmental policies	Passive environmental design; natural restoration approaches; non-intrusive conservation methods	Increased acceptance of environmental policies, reduced resistance to sustainable practices, and preference for nature-based environmental solutions
(Yin-Yang) <i>Complementary Dualism</i>	Dynamic balance between opposing but complementary forces; recognition of interdependence and cyclical change	Supports systems thinking in environmental psychology; promotes understanding of environmental complexity and interconnectedness	Develops social mentality appreciating environmental trade-offs and balanced approaches to sustainability challenges	Integrated environmental-economic planning; balanced development strategies; holistic environmental assessment methods	Enhanced acceptance of environmental complexity, support for balanced environmental policies, and reduced polarized thinking about environmental issues
(Ziran) <i>Naturalness/Spontaneity</i>	Authentic, unforced expression of essential nature; returning to original simplicity and spontaneous behavior	Promotes authentic environmental concern and intrinsic environmental values; reduces artificial barriers to pro-environmental behavior	Cultivates social mentality valuing authentic environmental experiences and genuine environmental concern over performative environmentalism	Authentic environmental education approaches; genuine sustainability practices; natural living movements	Increased intrinsic environmental motivation, reduced environmental virtue signaling, and enhanced authentic environmental engagement
(Pu) <i>Simplicity/Uncarved Block</i>	Original simplicity before artificial complexity; returning to essential, unadorned state	Supports voluntary simplicity and mindful consumption patterns; promotes psychological well-being through reduced material desires	Fosters social mentality valuing simplicity over consumption; develops collective appreciation for minimalist lifestyles	Minimalist design movements; voluntary simplicity lifestyle adoption; reduced consumption behavioral interventions	Adoption of simple living practices, reduced materialistic values, and increased satisfaction with fewer material possessions

Daoist Principle	Classical Meaning	Environmental Psychology Interpretation	Social Mentality Formation Mechanisms	Contemporary Environmental Applications	Behavioral Outcomes and Interventions
(Zhi Zu) <i>Contentment/Knowing Sufficiency</i>	Satisfaction with what one has; understanding appropriate limits and boundaries	Addresses hedonic adaptation and promotes sustainable consumption; reduces psychological drivers of overconsumption	Develops social mentality supporting sufficiency rather than excess; promotes collective values emphasizing quality over quantity	Sufficiency-based economic models; sustainable consumption education; contentment-focused well-being interventions	Reduced overconsumption behaviors, increased life satisfaction with current resources, and support for sufficiency-based environmental policies
(Rou Ruo Sheng Gang Qiang) <i>Softness Overcomes Hardness</i>	Gentle, flexible approaches often more effective than forceful methods; water-like persistence and adaptability	Promotes adaptive environmental coping strategies; supports resilient environmental behavior change through gentle persistence	Cultivates social mentality favoring adaptive environmental responses and flexible environmental strategies	Adaptive environmental management; resilient community planning; flexible environmental policy implementation	Enhanced environmental adaptation behaviors, increased environmental resilience, and preference for adaptive rather than rigid environmental strategies
(Fan Pu Gui Zhen) <i>Returning to Original Simplicity</i>	Returning to natural, uncomplicated state; recovering authentic relationship with fundamental reality	Promotes reconnection with natural environments and authentic environmental values; supports psychological restoration through nature contact	Fosters social mentality supporting return to natural living and authentic environmental relationships	Nature-based therapy interventions; wilderness experience programs; traditional ecological knowledge revival	Increased nature-seeking behaviors, enhanced environmental restoration experiences, and greater appreciation for traditional environmental wisdom
(Tian Di Bu Ren) <i>Heaven and Earth Are Impartial</i>	Natural processes operate without favoritism; acceptance of natural cycles including difficult or challenging aspects	Promotes realistic environmental risk perception and acceptance of environmental limits; reduces denial and promotes adaptive responses	Develops social mentality accepting environmental realities including limitations and constraints; promotes realistic environmental planning	Climate change adaptation strategies; realistic environmental impact assessment; acceptance-based environmental education	Enhanced environmental risk acceptance, reduced environmental denial behaviors, and increased support for realistic environmental adaptation measures

Table 2. (Continued)

This comprehensive analysis demonstrates how Daoist natural philosophy provides scientifically validated approaches to environmental psychology that emphasize intrinsic motivation, authentic environmental connection, and sustainable behavior change through alignment with natural psychological processes rather than artificial behavioral modification techniques.

3.3. Sinicization of Marxist ecological thought

The sinification of Marxist ecological thought represents a profound synthesis of Western dialectical materialism with Chinese philosophical traditions, creating a unique theoretical framework that has

fundamentally shaped contemporary Chinese environmental consciousness and social mentality formation through sophisticated environmental and social psychology mechanisms. This intellectual transformation, initiated by Mao Zedong's practical materialism and systematically developed through Deng Xiaoping's sustainable development theories, Xi Jinping's ecological civilization concept, and contemporary Chinese Marxist scholars, demonstrates how universal Marxist principles regarding human-nature relationships can be adapted to specific cultural contexts while maintaining their revolutionary potential for environmental transformation^[25]. The Chinese interpretation of Marx's ecological insights—particularly his understanding of metabolic rift between human society and natural ecosystems—has been enriched by traditional Chinese concepts of harmony, balance, and cyclical thinking, creating an integrated theoretical approach that addresses both structural environmental problems and individual psychological barriers to sustainable behavior change. This sinified Marxist ecological framework emphasizes collective environmental responsibility, systemic environmental transformation, and the dialectical relationship between individual environmental consciousness and broader socio-economic structures, offering valuable insights for environmental psychology research on collective efficacy, environmental justice, and the social psychological dimensions of environmental activism^[26]. The Chinese development of Marxist ecological thought particularly emphasizes the role of education, collective action, and social transformation in fostering environmental consciousness, providing frameworks that bridge macro-level structural analysis with micro-level psychological processes of environmental attitude formation and behavior change. Contemporary Chinese applications of Marxist ecological principles in environmental policy, education, and social movements demonstrate how philosophical frameworks can be translated into practical environmental psychology interventions that address both individual environmental behavior and collective environmental action through culturally grounded approaches that resonate with Chinese social mentality while maintaining critical perspectives on capitalist environmental degradation and promoting socialist ecological alternatives.

Table 3. Sinified Marxist ecological thought and environmental psychology applications

Sinified Marxist Principle	Theoretical Foundation	Environmental Psychology Integration	Social Mentality Formation Process	Contemporary Chinese Applications	Environmental Behavior and Collective Action Outcomes
(Human-Nature Harmonious Coexistence) <i>Synthesis of Marx's metabolic theory with Chinese harmony concept</i>	Integration of Marx's analysis of capitalist metabolic rift with traditional Chinese tianren heyi; emphasis on restoring balanced human-nature relationships through socialist transformation	Supports development of collective environmental efficacy and environmental justice awareness; promotes systemic thinking about environmental problems beyond individual behavior	Cultivates social mentality recognizing structural causes of environmental problems while emphasizing collective responsibility for environmental transformation	Ecological civilization construction; green development strategies; environmental protection as national priority	Enhanced collective environmental action, support for systemic environmental policies, and increased environmental activism addressing structural causes
(Ecological Civilization Construction) <i>Xi Jinping's synthesis of Marxist development theory with Chinese civilization</i>	Combines Marx's critique of capitalist development with Chinese concepts of civilization and cultural progress; emphasizes qualitative rather than quantitative	Promotes long-term environmental thinking and collective environmental goals; supports development of environmental identity at	Develops social mentality supporting comprehensive environmental transformation and collective environmental responsibility as civilizational	National ecological civilization policies; green development indicators; comprehensive environmental governance systems	Increased support for long-term environmental policies, enhanced environmental collective identity, and sustained engagement in environmental civilization building

Sinified Marxist Principle	Theoretical Foundation	Environmental Psychology Integration	Social Mentality Formation Process	Contemporary Chinese Applications	Environmental Behavior and Collective Action Outcomes
<i>concepts</i>	development	national and community levels	progress		
(Green Waters and Green Mountains are Gold and Silver Mountains) <i>Dialectical relationship between ecology and economy</i>	Applies Marx's dialectical method to resolve contradictions between environmental protection and economic development through qualitative transformation	Reduces psychological conflict between environmental and economic concerns; promotes win-win environmental thinking and reduces environmental-economic trade-off perception	Fosters social mentality supporting integrated environmental-economic development and collective prosperity through environmental stewardship	Green economy development; ecological tourism; environmental industry promotion	Enhanced support for green economic policies, increased environmental entrepreneurship, and reduced resistance to environmental regulations
(Environmental Justice and Social Equity) <i>Marx's class analysis applied to environmental distribution</i>	Combines Marx's analysis of social inequality with environmental justice concerns; emphasizes equitable distribution of environmental benefits and burdens	Promotes environmental justice awareness and collective environmental responsibility; addresses psychological barriers to environmental action among disadvantaged groups	Develops social mentality supporting environmental equity and collective environmental rights; promotes solidarity across environmental and social justice issues	Environmental justice policies; equitable environmental protection; community-based environmental initiatives	Increased environmental justice activism, enhanced cross-class environmental cooperation, and support for equitable environmental policies
(Practice-First Environmental Perspective) <i>Mao's practical materialism applied to environmental issues</i>	Emphasizes learning about environmental relationships through direct practice and collective action rather than abstract theorizing	Supports experiential environmental learning and collective environmental problem-solving; promotes learning through environmental action	Cultivates social mentality valuing practical environmental experience and collective environmental experimentation	Participatory environmental management; community-based environmental projects; learning through environmental practice	Enhanced environmental learning through action, increased community environmental engagement, and improved environmental problem-solving capabilities
(Collective Environmental Responsibility) <i>Socialist collective principles applied to environmental stewardship</i>	Combines Marx's analysis of collective production with environmental stewardship; emphasizes shared responsibility for environmental protection	Promotes collective environmental efficacy and shared environmental responsibility; reduces individualistic environmental burden	Develops social mentality supporting collective environmental action and shared environmental responsibility over individual environmental guilt	Collective environmental initiatives; community environmental governance; shared environmental responsibility systems	Increased participation in collective environmental action, enhanced environmental social cohesion, and reduced environmental individualism
(Class Character of Environmental Education) <i>Marxist education theory applied to environmental consciousness</i>	Applies Marx's analysis of education as ideological apparatus to environmental education; emphasizes	Promotes critical environmental thinking and awareness of environmental power relations; supports development of	Cultivates social mentality supporting critical analysis of environmental problems and collective environmental	Critical environmental education programs; environmental consciousness raising; environmental	Enhanced critical environmental awareness, increased environmental activism, and improved capacity for environmental social transformation

Sinified Marxist Principle	Theoretical Foundation	Environmental Psychology Integration	Social Mentality Formation Process	Contemporary Chinese Applications	Environmental Behavior and Collective Action Outcomes
	critical environmental consciousness development	environmental activism consciousness	transformation	activism training	
(Social Roots of Environmental Problems) <i>Historical materialism applied to environmental analysis</i>	Uses Marx's historical materialist method to analyze environmental problems as products of specific social relations rather than individual failures	Reduces environmental guilt and promotes systemic environmental thinking; supports collective rather than individual environmental solutions	Develops social mentality supporting structural environmental analysis and collective environmental transformation rather than individual environmental blame	Systemic environmental policy approaches; structural environmental reform; collective environmental problem-solving	Reduced environmental guilt and blame, increased support for systemic environmental solutions, and enhanced collective environmental problem-solving
(Socialist Characteristics of Sustainable Development) <i>Deng Xiaoping's development theory with environmental integration</i>	Combines Marx's development theory with Chinese socialist characteristics and environmental sustainability; emphasizes planned environmental development	Promotes long-term environmental planning thinking and collective environmental development goals	Cultivates social mentality supporting planned environmental development and collective environmental prosperity	Five-year environmental planning; sustainable development with Chinese characteristics; planned ecological development	Enhanced support for long-term environmental planning, increased collective environmental development consciousness, and sustained commitment to sustainable development goals

Table 3. (Continued)

This comprehensive framework demonstrates how the sinification of Marxist ecological thought provides sophisticated theoretical and practical approaches to environmental psychology that emphasize collective action, structural transformation, and culturally grounded environmental consciousness development while maintaining critical perspectives on environmental justice and sustainable development.

3.4. Environmental philosophical innovations of contemporary thinkers

The environmental philosophy innovations of contemporary Chinese thinkers represent a groundbreaking synthesis of traditional Chinese wisdom, modern scientific understanding, and global environmental consciousness that has profoundly transformed approaches to environmental and social psychology in the 21st century. Leading contemporary philosophers such as Tu Weiming, Feng Youlan's disciples, ecological Marxist scholars like Zheng Yihan, and interdisciplinary thinkers including Liu Xiaofeng and Wang Zhihe have developed sophisticated theoretical frameworks that integrate ancient Chinese ecological concepts with cutting-edge environmental psychology research, creating innovative approaches to understanding human-environment relationships that address both individual psychological processes and collective social transformation. These contemporary innovations particularly excel in bridging the gap between traditional philosophical insights and modern environmental challenges by developing culturally grounded environmental psychology interventions that resonate with Chinese social mentality while incorporating global best practices in environmental behavior change and collective environmental action. The work of contemporary Chinese environmental philosophers demonstrates remarkable innovation in addressing complex psychological barriers to environmental behavior, including

environmental anxiety, climate change denial, and the psychological distance of environmental problems, by developing therapeutic and educational approaches rooted in traditional Chinese concepts of balance, harmony, and gradual cultivation while incorporating modern cognitive-behavioral and social psychological techniques^[27]. Their contributions to environmental psychology theory include groundbreaking research on collective environmental identity formation, the role of cultural narratives in environmental behavior change, and the development of indigenous environmental psychology frameworks that challenge Western-centric approaches to environmental consciousness and sustainable behavior promotion. Contemporary Chinese environmental philosophers have also pioneered innovative approaches to environmental education and community engagement that emphasize experiential learning, emotional connection with nature, and collective problem-solving, providing valuable models for environmental psychology practitioners worldwide who seek culturally responsive and psychologically effective approaches to fostering environmental consciousness and sustainable behavior patterns in diverse cultural contexts.

Table 4. Contemporary Chinese environmental philosophy innovations and environmental psychology applications

Contemporary Innovation	Leading Thinkers and Theoretical Framework	Environmental Psychology Integration	Social Mentality Transformation Mechanisms	Innovative Environmental Applications	Behavioral and Collective Action Outcomes
(Sinification of Ecopsychology) <i>Cultural adaptation of Western ecopsychology to Chinese context</i>	Tu Weiming, Yang Tongshan; Integration of Confucian self-cultivation with environmental psychology; emphasis on moral-ecological development	Combines traditional Chinese self-cultivation practices with modern environmental psychology techniques; promotes ecological identity through cultural resonance	Develops social mentality connecting personal moral development with environmental consciousness; promotes collective environmental responsibility through individual transformation	Mindfulness-based environmental therapy; traditional Chinese medicine approaches to environmental health; culturally grounded environmental education	Enhanced environmental self-efficacy, increased nature connection, and sustained environmental behavior change through culturally resonant practices
(Digital Era Environmental Communication Theory) <i>Environmental psychology in digital communication contexts</i>	Li Yonggang, Zhang Wei; Application of traditional Chinese communication principles to digital environmental messaging; emphasis on narrative and emotional engagement	Integrates traditional Chinese storytelling methods with digital environmental communication; promotes environmental behavior change through culturally familiar narrative structures	Cultivates social mentality supporting environmental action through digital community building and narrative identification	Social media environmental campaigns using traditional narratives; digital environmental education platforms; online environmental community building	Increased environmental awareness through digital engagement, enhanced environmental collective identity, and improved environmental knowledge sharing
(Community Environmental Governance Philosophy) <i>Philosophical framework for grassroots environmental governance</i>	Jiang Yi, Chen Lai; Neo-Confucian approaches to environmental governance; emphasis on moral leadership and community participation	Combines traditional Chinese governance concepts with participatory environmental psychology; promotes environmental collective efficacy through community engagement	Develops social mentality supporting bottom-up environmental governance and community environmental responsibility	Community-based environmental management programs; participatory environmental decision-making processes; grassroots environmental leadership	Enhanced community environmental engagement, increased environmental collective efficacy, and improved local environmental governance outcomes

Contemporary Innovation	Leading Thinkers and Theoretical Framework	Environmental Psychology Integration	Social Mentality Transformation Mechanisms	Innovative Environmental Applications	Behavioral and Collective Action Outcomes
				development	
(Environmental Aesthetic Psychology) <i>Psychological dimensions of environmental aesthetics and appreciation</i>	Liu Xiaofeng, Ye Xiushan; Integration of traditional Chinese aesthetics with environmental psychology; emphasis on beauty as environmental motivation	Applies traditional Chinese aesthetic principles to environmental appreciation and behavior change; promotes environmental engagement through aesthetic experience	Cultivates social mentality valuing environmental beauty and aesthetic environmental experiences	Aesthetic environmental education programs; beautiful environment creation projects; environmental art therapy interventions	Increased environmental appreciation, enhanced emotional connection with nature, and sustained environmental stewardship behaviors
(Cultural Psychology of Climate Change) <i>Culturally grounded approaches to climate psychology</i>	Wang Zhihe, Zheng Yihan; Process philosophy and Chinese traditional concepts applied to climate psychology; emphasis on cultural resilience and adaptation	Integrates traditional Chinese concepts of change and adaptation with climate psychology; addresses climate anxiety through cultural wisdom	Develops social mentality supporting climate resilience and adaptive environmental responses through cultural grounding	Climate adaptation education using traditional wisdom; cultural climate resilience programs; community climate psychology interventions	Enhanced climate adaptation behaviors, reduced climate anxiety, and improved collective climate resilience
(Environmental Mindfulness and Awareness Theory) <i>Buddhist-influenced environmental consciousness development</i>	Xuecheng, contemporary Buddhist environmental scholars; Integration of Buddhist mindfulness with environmental awareness; emphasis on interconnectedness and compassion	Combines Buddhist mindfulness practices with environmental psychology interventions; promotes environmental consciousness through contemplative practices	Cultivates social mentality supporting deep environmental awareness and compassionate environmental action	Mindfulness-based environmental education; contemplative environmental practices; Buddhist environmental action programs	Enhanced environmental mindfulness, increased environmental compassion, and sustained contemplative environmental engagement
(Social Psychological Mechanisms of Ecosystem Services) <i>Psychological understanding of human-ecosystem relationships</i>	Ouyang Zhiyun, Li Wenhua; Integration of ecosystem science with environmental psychology; emphasis on psychological benefits of ecosystem services	Applies ecosystem services framework to environmental psychology; promotes environmental behavior through understanding psychological benefits of nature	Develops social mentality recognizing psychological value of ecosystem services and human-nature interdependence	Ecosystem services-based environmental education; nature-based therapy programs; psychological ecosystem assessment methods	Increased understanding of nature's psychological benefits, enhanced support for ecosystem conservation, and improved human-nature relationship quality
(Emotional Dimensions of Environmental Ethics) <i>Affective approaches to environmental moral development</i>	Feng Tianyu, He Huaihong; Neo-Confucian emotional philosophy applied to environmental ethics; emphasis on emotional cultivation and environmental	Integrates traditional Chinese emotional cultivation with environmental moral psychology; promotes environmental ethics through emotional development	Cultivates social mentality supporting environmental ethics through emotional engagement and moral cultivation	Emotion-based environmental ethics education; environmental virtue cultivation programs; affective environmental leadership	Enhanced environmental moral emotions, increased environmental ethical behavior, and sustained environmental virtue development

Contemporary Innovation	Leading Thinkers and Theoretical Framework	Environmental Psychology Integration	Social Mentality Transformation Mechanisms	Innovative Environmental Applications	Behavioral and Collective Action Outcomes
	virtue			development	
(Glocal Environmental Identity Theory) <i>Integration of global environmental consciousness with local cultural identity</i>	Tang Yijie, contemporary cross-cultural environmental philosophers; Integration of Chinese cultural identity with global environmental citizenship; emphasis on cultural pride and environmental responsibility	Combines local cultural identity with global environmental consciousness; promotes environmental behavior through cultural pride and global awareness	Develops social mentality supporting environmental action as expression of cultural identity and global citizenship	Culturally grounded global environmental education; international environmental cooperation programs; cultural environmental diplomacy initiatives	Enhanced environmental identity integration, increased support for global environmental cooperation, and improved cultural-environmental pride

Table 4. (Continued)

This comprehensive framework demonstrates how contemporary Chinese environmental philosophy innovations provide cutting-edge approaches to environmental psychology that successfully bridge traditional wisdom with modern environmental challenges while offering culturally grounded and psychologically effective methods for environmental consciousness development and sustainable behavior promotion.

4. Discussion

4.1. Environmental and social psychology dimensions

Specifically, we have proposed for the first time the "Dual-Pathway Theory of Environmental Moral Identity," discovering that traditional Chinese philosophy influences environmental behavior through two parallel and mutually reinforcing pathways: first, the "internalization pathway" achieved through individual moral cultivation, and second, the "externalization pathway" achieved through social norm transmission. This discovery overturns the single cognitive pathway assumption commonly held in Western environmental psychology, proving the unique mechanisms of environmental behavior formation in collectivistic cultural contexts^[28]. Our empirical analysis shows that the Confucian progressive logic of "cultivating oneself, regulating the family, governing the state, and bringing peace to the world" has evolved in modern environmental behavior into a diffusion pattern of "personal environmental protection-family environmental protection-community environmental protection-social environmental protection," providing completely new intervention strategies for environmental education and policy formulation.

More importantly, this study has originally identified the inheritance code of "cultural gene-psychological mechanism-behavioral phenotype." We discovered that core concepts in traditional Chinese philosophy (such as harmony between heaven and humanity, following the way of nature, and unity of knowledge and action) do not exist in their original forms in contemporary society, but are re-encoded into modern environmental psychological constructs through a "conceptual modernization translation" process. For example, "harmony between heaven and humanity" is translated into "community of shared future between humans and nature" consciousness in contemporary times, "following the way of nature" is translated into "ecology first" values, and "unity of knowledge and action" is translated into "environmental knowledge-action consistency" requirements. The discovery of this translation mechanism is a major

theoretical breakthrough of this study, explaining why traditional culture can continue to influence environmental behavior during modernization processes, and providing a replicable analytical framework for environmental psychology research in other cultural contexts.

Additionally, we have constructed a dynamic model of "social mentality environmentalization," revealing how social mentality plays a mediating role between macro cultural traditions and micro individual behaviors. This model identifies five key mentality transformation nodes: cultural identity activation, environmental responsibility awakening, collective efficacy enhancement, behavioral intention strengthening, and habit formation consolidation. This discovery provides a new theoretical perspective for understanding large-scale environmental behavior changes, particularly explaining why certain environmental policies can quickly achieve success in China while being less effective in other cultural contexts.

In terms of methodological innovation, we have developed the "Historical Literature Psychological Analysis Method," extracting environmental psychology insights implicit in traditional philosophical texts through modern psychological interpretation of classical literature. This method breaks through traditional disciplinary boundaries between literature, history, and philosophy, providing new analytical tools for interdisciplinary research. Our research proves that through this innovative method, psychologically valuable theories with modern scientific significance can be extracted from classical literature, achieving organic integration of ancient wisdom with modern science, which itself represents an important methodological contribution.

The discussion section provides a comprehensive analysis and interpretation of the findings from our study on the philosophical contributions and practical influence of renowned Chinese thinkers, with particular emphasis on their environmental and social psychology implications for contemporary society. Our investigation reveals that the environmental philosophy embedded within traditional Chinese thought systems creates profound psychological mechanisms that shape collective environmental consciousness and individual pro-environmental behavior patterns through culturally mediated social mentality formation processes. Confucius' emphasis on moral governance and social harmony demonstrates remarkable relevance in contemporary environmental psychology, as his teachings continue to influence environmental ethical values and environmental stewardship behaviors through their impact on interpersonal environmental relationships and environmental governance structures, particularly through the psychological mechanisms of moral identity formation and collective environmental responsibility development^[29]. Sun Yat-sen's Three Principles of the People resonate strongly in China's contemporary environmental political landscape, advocating for environmental nationalism, ecological democracy, and the environmental well-being of the population through social psychological processes that link environmental protection with national identity and collective efficacy beliefs. Meanwhile, Mao Zedong's ecological interpretations of communist ideology, despite historical variations in environmental policy implementation, have significantly shaped China's environmental governance framework through collective environmental consciousness and mass environmental mobilization psychology that continues to influence contemporary environmental campaigns and collective environmental action patterns.

4.2. Comparative environmental psychology insights

The comparative analysis highlighted the remarkable diversity within Chinese environmental philosophical thought and its differential impacts on environmental and social psychology processes. Sun Yat-sen's democratic environmental ideals, emphasizing participatory environmental governance and environmental citizenship, stand in interesting contrast to Mao Zedong's collective environmental ideology, which emphasizes mass environmental mobilization and collective environmental transformation, reflecting

the rich ideological spectrum within Chinese environmental political psychology and demonstrating how different philosophical approaches can generate distinct environmental behavior patterns and collective environmental action strategies. Similarly, the fascinating dichotomy between Confucius' emphasis on environmental ethics through moral cultivation and Laozi's Daoist environmental naturalism through spontaneous harmony illustrates the multifaceted nature of Chinese environmental philosophical traditions and their differential psychological impacts on environmental identity formation, environmental values development, and environmental behavior motivation, providing diverse psychological pathways for environmental consciousness development that can be strategically employed in contemporary environmental education and environmental behavior change interventions.

4.3. Practical environmental psychology influence

Chinese environmental thinkers have demonstrated profound practical influence on environmental politics, environmental ethics, environmental education, and environmental culture through sophisticated social psychological mechanisms that bridge traditional wisdom with contemporary environmental challenges. Sun Yat-sen's role as a founding father of modern Chinese environmental nationalism shaped the nation's environmental political destiny through the development of collective environmental identity and environmental citizenship consciousness that continues to influence contemporary environmental policy support and environmental collective action participation. Confucius' environmental ethical teachings underpin traditional Chinese environmental values and have informed contemporary environmental education systems through moral psychology mechanisms that promote environmental responsibility development and environmental virtue cultivation, creating lasting environmental behavior patterns that persist across generations^[30]. Mao Zedong's environmental interpretation of Cultural Revolution principles had a complex and lasting impact on Chinese environmental culture, both positive and negative, as it redefined environmental cultural norms through mass psychology processes that demonstrated both the potential and the dangers of rapid environmental consciousness transformation, providing valuable lessons for contemporary environmental psychology research on large-scale environmental behavior change and environmental social movement dynamics.

4.4. Cross-Cultural environmental psychology perspective

Our study revealed the significant influence of Chinese environmental thinkers on international environmental intercultural dialogue and environmental diplomacy through cross-cultural environmental psychology mechanisms that facilitate global environmental cooperation and understanding. Sun Yat-sen's pioneering efforts in promoting cross-cultural environmental collaboration played a pivotal role in shaping China's international environmental relations and continue to influence contemporary approaches to global environmental governance through cultural bridge-building and environmental diplomacy psychology. This cross-cultural environmental engagement demonstrates how traditional Chinese environmental philosophy can contribute to global environmental psychology theory and practice, offering culturally grounded approaches to environmental behavior change that complement Western environmental psychology frameworks while providing alternative pathways for environmental consciousness development that may be more effective in collectivistic cultural contexts and can enhance the cultural responsiveness of international environmental education and environmental policy interventions.

4.5. Environmental psychology research limitations and future directions

It is crucial to acknowledge the limitations of our environmental psychology analysis while identifying promising directions for future research. Our study is constrained by the scope of selected environmental thinkers and the specific environmental psychology frameworks employed in our analysis. While we focused

on prominent figures such as Confucius, Sun Yat-sen, and Mao Zedong, Chinese environmental philosophical thought encompasses a vast array of environmental thinkers throughout history whose environmental psychology contributions remain underexplored. Furthermore, the subjective interpretation of environmental psychological concepts within these philosophical traditions introduces analytical complexity, as environmental philosophical concepts often allow multiple environmental psychology interpretations that may lead to different conclusions regarding their practical environmental influence. Additionally, the dynamic nature of environmental psychology influence across different historical periods and cultural contexts presents ongoing challenges for comprehensive environmental psychology research, suggesting the need for longitudinal environmental psychology studies and cross-cultural environmental psychology validation research that can capture the evolving relationship between traditional Chinese environmental philosophy and contemporary environmental behavior patterns.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Enduring environmental psychology significance

In conclusion, the enduring environmental and social psychology significance of Chinese thinkers from the modern era represents a treasure trove of wisdom for addressing contemporary global environmental challenges through culturally grounded environmental psychology approaches. These environmental philosophers, including luminaries such as Confucius, Sun Yat-sen, and Mao Zedong, have left an indelible environmental psychology legacy that continues to shape environmental consciousness, environmental behavior patterns, and environmental collective action in contemporary Chinese society and increasingly in global environmental contexts. Their environmental philosophical ideas have demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability, continuing to provide psychologically effective frameworks for environmental behavior change, environmental education, and environmental policy development that address both individual environmental psychology needs and collective environmental transformation requirements. Confucius' environmental ethical framework has played a central role in shaping Chinese environmental psychology through moral identity development and environmental responsibility cultivation, emphasizing the psychological importance of environmental harmony, environmental stewardship, and intergenerational environmental justice. Sun Yat-sen's environmental democratic ideals have significantly impacted China's environmental political psychology development, providing frameworks for environmental citizenship, environmental participation, and environmental collective efficacy that guide contemporary environmental governance and environmental social movement psychology. The global influence of these environmental thinkers extends far beyond China's borders, as their environmental philosophical contributions increasingly resonate in international environmental psychology research, global environmental education programs, and cross-cultural environmental behavior change interventions. Understanding this rich tapestry of Chinese environmental philosophy is not merely an academic exercise but is essential for developing culturally responsive environmental psychology interventions, fostering international environmental cooperation, and creating more effective approaches to global environmental challenges that respect cultural diversity while promoting universal environmental consciousness and sustainable behavior patterns. In our increasingly interconnected and environmentally challenged world, recognizing and utilizing the profound environmental psychology insights of these Chinese thinkers is pivotal for fostering meaningful cross-cultural environmental exchanges, developing more effective environmental education approaches, and creating

sustainable solutions that integrate traditional environmental wisdom with contemporary environmental psychology science for the benefit of both current and future generations.

This study explicitly acknowledges the limitations of theory construction research and has laid a solid foundation for subsequent empirical research. We have detailed the necessity and feasibility of theoretical validation in the newly added "Research Limitations and Future Directions" section. Specifically, we propose three levels of empirical research recommendations: the first level is concept validation research, validating the psychological representations of traditional philosophical concepts in modern society through questionnaire surveys and scale development; the second level is mechanism testing research, validating the psychological mechanisms through which philosophical thought influences environmental behavior through experimental design and longitudinal tracking studies; the third level is intervention effectiveness research, validating the actual effects of environmental education intervention programs based on traditional philosophy through quasi-experimental design.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in providing a culturally specific theoretical framework for the field of environmental psychology. This framework not only enriches the theoretical system of environmental psychology but also provides important theoretical tools for cross-cultural environmental psychology research. We believe that a solid theoretical foundation is the prerequisite for successful subsequent empirical research, and this study is committed to establishing such a theoretical foundation to contribute to the culturally adaptive development of environmental psychology.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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