

ECOLOGICAL SENSIBILITY AND WISDOM IN TAOISM AND CHRISTIANITY: AN ENCOUNTER OF CHUNG TZU AND FRANCIS OF ASSISI

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Abstract

Chuang Tzu and Francis of Assisi, despite differences in cultural and historical contexts, show us ecological sensibility and wisdom. This is deep ecology which may be one of the solutions to the global warming crisis. According to both of them, the existence of all things in nature, including humans are gratuitously given. All of these entities are interconnected with each other as in the world of quantum physics. From this perspective, we have to realize human's position and our entrusted responsibility to take care of our planet and home, Earth. This is the true way to cope with the ecologic crisis and improve our quality of lives. It requires a fundamental change in human's life in this technologically developed and material-centred world. It is impossible to change only with human effort, but can be made possible through the grace of the transcendent Being.

Keywords: Deep Ecology, 'Equality' (萬物制動), Gratuitousness of Life, Human Ignorance, Inner Discipline, 'Tao', Trinity, Universal Fraternity (大通).

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Introduction:¹ The Ecological Crisis of the Earth

Today, scientists warn that the crisis of the ecosystem due to global warming is worsening at an alarming speed and appeal to us that this is the last chance to help out our Earth, the common abode of humanity. However, some scientists and politicians argue that the crisis we face is not a human-induced disaster, but a phenomenon resulting from the Earth's natural climate cycle. According to them, throughout Earth's history, there have been several major climate changes and mass extinctions that have followed, but the life on Earth has continued to evolve, and therefore most urgent matter is not the crisis itself, but how to adapt to the new rising situations, such as searching for better energy systems that mitigate global warming, or exploring another habitable planet. In other words, there is no need to put a halt on technological development for the sake of human's well-being. How do the rest of the people react to this crisis? Some people feel global warming tangibly through climate changes (typhoons, floods, droughts, too hot or cold weather, heavy snow), some recognize the seriousness of the problem through education and the media, and they do what they can in their own lives to combat climate change. But most people are not really concerned about the seriousness, or even if they show interest, are reluctant to change comfortable, convenient way of their life.

Of course, Chuang Tzu² and Francis of Assisi³ never experienced global warming, but although their time had been very different from

¹This article is a summary of the main findings of my PhD dissertation from an ecological perspective: Hyun-Suk Lee Fmm, *La Liberta' Spirituale nel Taoismo e Cristianesimo: Un'incontro tra Chuang-tzu e Francesco di Assisi*, Estratto della Dissertazione per il Dottorato nella Facolta' di Missiologia della Pontificia Universita' Gregoriana, Roma 2007.

²Chuang Tzu was one of the philosophers in ancient China and was a follower of Lao Tzu, who is the founder of Taoism. Chuang Tzu inspired many Western writers, spiritual leaders, scientists and also Christians. He lived through the most turbulent times in ancient China between 369-286 B.C. In this disastrous time, various schools flourished more than ever. Each one tried to explain the reality with different perspectives from distinctive social and political beliefs, believing to be better than the others. Chuang Tzu was an extensively knowledgeable person, but he remained private in life, refusing power and success, he lived in poverty, seeking absolute freedom. He opened the new horizon between nature and humanity and it provided comfort and strength to the commoners who suffered frequently from wars, violence and exploitation.

³Francis of Assisi was born in 1281 as the son of a wealthy Italian fabric merchant in Europe and lived a prodigal life in his early youth. But after repentance, he left everything and lived the life of the poorest. His spirituality contributed to the renewal of the world and the Church in its pursuit of wealth

ours, they also experienced numerous crisis and challenges in their lives, and looked for ways to overcome such challenges. Surprisingly, they both did something in common, even though the era of Francis of Assisi differs Chuang Tzu by about 1,400 years. They opened new perspectives on the relationship between human and nature and provided answers to the crisis and challenge in their corresponding era. Their teaching can be said to belong to deep ecology. It is not in the form of systematic logical argument, but it is about mystical experiences derived from ecological sensibility and wisdom. In other words, deep ecology is similar to ecology as generally understood. It focuses on the interaction between the structure/function of nature and political/social world of humans, but deep ecology takes one step further and embraces an essential relationship between man and nature in the presence of the Absolute Being.

Today these two figures bring fresh inspiration to us who are tired of living each day in endless competition in material-oriented world and warn of human ignorance and greed that cause global warming and ecosystem crisis. Their ideas and spirituality have been favoured beyond time and religion because they talk about true happiness across the ages and cultural differences. They testify that happiness cannot be guaranteed by the convenient and comfortable life provided by the advances in science and technologies that humanity seeks today. Those seeking true happiness will have to realize their position and role in this universe and be free from the artificial bondage created by human beings.

Let us take a look at the contents of the writings by Chang Tzu and Francis of Assisi. Their teachings emphasize not at the abstract-logical level, but arise from vivid experience within the human's profound mind. Within their experience, there is a comprehensive understanding of the world, its problems and solutions – the ecological sensibility and wisdom we need today.

1. Chuang Tzu's Ecological Sensibility and Wisdom

1.1. The Vision of the Universe

'Equality' (萬物制動) and 'all things flow through each other' (大通).⁴ 'Tao'(道) is a mysterious absolute being beyond human comprehension. There is no name for Tao, because of its state,

and power, and opened up new horizons for the relationship between nature and humanity.

⁴Cfr. *Chuang-tzu: The Interior Chapters*, cap. II, Interpreted by Haun Yuong Dk, Seoul: Hong Sin Mun Hwa 2003.

'Nothing Absolute' (虛靜: Empty Silence), is not a thing, nor does it have a form or shape. It is reluctantly called 'Tao' to distinguish it from other named things.⁵ Chuang Tzu acknowledges the existence of absolute being, but he does not care for it beyond human limits. On the other hand, he takes attention to the relationship between Tao and all things in the world. He said 'Tao' might be called the 'mother or parents of all things,' 'producer of all things. All things in the world obtain 'Te' (德: individual virtue) from 'Tao' (universal virtue) and therefore exist. 'Te' is a microcosm that manifests macrocosm 'Tao'. It is an interior principle and principle of life of all things. Everything in the world is self-generated and self-nurtured through 'Te'(自生自花),⁶ but 'Te' is not confined to anything but transcends everything.

'Tao' does not ostracize anything that originated from itself, embraces all things without partiality and accomplishes everything. It means that 'Tao' manifests itself dynamically by flowing through all things, just like how the ocean embraces all kinds of water. This manifestation of 'Tao' is called 'non-action and spontaneity'(無爲自然)⁷ in Taoism. It does not mean to do nothing, but not exerting its purpose or intention on anything. Thus, 'Tao' neither govern the world nor compel it. From a human perspective, there are differences and distinctions between all things, but from the point of view of 'Tao,' all things are equal and one. The distinctions made by humans, noble-lowly, superior-inferior, right-wrong, good-bad, moral-immoral... does not exist in 'Tao's perspective. Even if we cannot feel and express the effects of 'Tao' with human senses and reason, we can experience it and transfer to others.⁸ This means that humans can incorporate with 'Tao,' and flow through all things. For Chuang Tzu, 'all things' include not only living entities, but material and immaterial things, natural phenomena, psychological and mental elements, history and events and so on. One thing to note here is that when Chuang Tzu says all things are one, he does not mean to deny the unique identity of things, or resolution of the boundary of things. He means to not emphasize too much on differences. For example, by transcending 'you-and-I' boundary,

⁵*Chuang-tzu: The Interior Chapters*, cap. II, 13.

⁶*Chuang-tzu: The Exterior Chapters*, cap. XII, 8 (translation from Chinese into Korean, Interpreted by Kwon O. Sok, Seoul: Hong Sin Mun Hwa, 2002⁶; *Tao-Te-Ching* 10; *Tao-Te-Ching* 10).

⁷*Chuang-tzu: The Exterior Chapters*, cap. XIII, 2.

⁸*Chuang-tzu: The Interior Chapters*, cap. VI, 7.

your experience can flow through and become my experience and my experience can become yours in 'Tao.'⁹ By abandoning distinction between 'right-wrong' or 'good-bad,' one can connect with other people and share their knowledge. A person's knowledge is relative, limited and only partial to the whole truth, but from the point of view of 'Tao' collective knowledge of various people will make parts into a whole, like how numerous spokes gather at the centre to form a complete cartwheel.¹⁰ Chuang Tzu opened the limited horizons of humans to the whole universe and showed a way to transcend him/herself. This is only possible under one condition: people need to attain 'empty silence' state of mind⁷ like 'Tao' 'Nothing Absolute.'

1.2. Tendency of Ordinary People: Ignorance and Blind Obsession

According to Chuang Tzu, human beings accidentally came into existence during the nature's endless cycles of generation and extinction. Living as a gratuitous being, humans are only a minute part of vast nature. Every part of nature is a unique, precious entity with nothing to add or to remove. Therefore, no matter how infinitesimal an entity may be, it should not be damaged or exploited. But in general, people consider themselves superior to plants and animals because they are conscious moral beings. The result of such belief is constant fabrication of artificiality under the rationale of providing better, easier life. Chuang Tzu explains that the human mind is the main culprit and all evil things in the world originate from there. Thus the pure virtue ('Te') of human is deteriorated, and there are five characteristics of damaged 'Te': obsessed with one's own knowledge and causing disputes to determine what is right and wrong; always unstable, unintegrated, and lacking orders of the world in order to nurture oneself; excitedly active without rest, finally consumed and exhausted; unnatural and artificial/pretending. A mind with these qualities causes endless confusion not only for oneself but for the world, in which he/she is left in pain of unknown reason. Chuang Tzu insists that internal discipline is needed to stop the overly abusive human mind.

1.3. Inner Journey for Life according to Nature

There are three ways to restore 'Te' (pure virtue) received from 'Tao': 'mental fasting,' 'concentration' and 'sit quietly forgetting.' During these processes, the human's cognitive ability (analyze, reason and synthesize) can be a useful tool in realizing the true figure

⁹*Chuang-tzu: The Interior Chapters*, cap. II, 27.

¹⁰*Chuang-tzu: The Interior Chapters*, cap II, 9-10.

of what they desire. It helps them to understand how foolish it is to cling to this desire. This ability cannot make humans be aware of the truth itself, but it can be a useful tool in leading them to the truth. “The net is a tool for catching fish, and after catching it, we forget about it. The lasso is a catcher, but once the rabbit is caught, the lasso is forgotten.” Like this, words/letters are a way to convey the meaning of the mind to the other person.¹¹ In order to reach the truth, the illumination of Tao is absolutely necessary. Let’s look at the three ways to restore the abused mind, one by one.

First: ‘Mental Fasting’ (心制).¹² This is stopping excessive activity of the mind, freeing from ignorance and accepting one’s destiny comfortably. For this to happen, humans must be free from three types of attachments. First one is understanding and accepting the fact that all humans get old, get sick and will die someday. Life and death are natural phenomena as occurrences of day and night and it is an inevitable reality for humans. So do not judge death as good and bad. Do not be obsessed with fear of death or try to avoid it. Second one is understanding individual’s ‘destiny’ and ‘time’. These are provided by the cycle of nature, (generation-extinction) regardless of human will or efforts. Do not judge what is lucky and unlucky. Rather than trying to avoid one’s destiny or desiring a different destiny, one should accept ‘destiny’ and ‘time’ as being inevitable.¹³ This is only possible for a truly courageous person without a fatalist attitude. Third one is understanding traditions, conventions, norms, cultures and words that support mental structure. The value system of an era was created by the needs of the people living in that time period, and it is not the truth itself. This also applies to words. Strict literal translation of words despite changes in culture and situation will strain society and put unnecessary burdens on people.

Second: Maintain and cultivate the pure mind (集中).¹⁴ In order to preserve ‘Te’ (德: original mind/virtue), we must rest our tired mind and prevent it from being consumed by excessive activity. In order to cultivate human mind, we need discipline to gather the will into one place. Here, ‘will’ means the direction of pure virtue. When will is

¹¹*Chuang-tzu: The Miscellaneous chapters*, Translation from Chinese into Korean, Interpreted by Choi Dea Lim, Seoul: Hong Sin Mun Hwa 1998⁶, cap, XXVI, 15.

¹²*Chuang-tzu: The Interior Chapters*, cap. II, 12; *Chuang-tzu: The Exterior Chapters*, XX, 1.

¹³*Chuang-tzu: The Interior Chapters*, cap. V, 7.

¹⁴*Chuang-tzu: The Interior Chapters*, cap. III, 2; *Chuang-tzu: The Exterior Chapters*, XI, 2; XV, 3; XIX, 4; XXII, 2. 9.

focused on one object, it prevents distraction of the mind. Like an arrow charging toward a target, the focused human mind could surpass the boundaries of me and the object.

Third: 'Sit quietly forgetting'(坐忘).¹⁵ This is a state of self-emptying. A purified, cultivated mind is in a state of sitting quietly, forgetting everything. It includes three kinds of state. The human mind is completely emptied of knowledge. In this state, there is no distraction and no defensive mind; Even though natural emotions, such as joy, anger, sorrow and happiness still occur, the mind resembles a quiet surface of the water or a mirror. When emotions arise, they reflect. When emotions disappear, it remains empty; Forgetting life and death, one entrusts oneself to the cycle of change in nature. And by forgetting self, one suddenly unites with Tao into mysterious state. In this state, humans can 'live according to nature.'¹⁶ This is not a blind obedience to nature, but in harmony with changes in nature, enjoying the waves and fluctuations of nature. This is the state of 'incorporation of 'Tao' and 'flowing through all things.' This is the 'True Human' who transcends the boundaries between subject and object, between this and that, the saint who adapts to the nature of others and does not interfere with their nature. He/she treats everyone without preference and does not boast of their accomplishments. It is a person who meets with others and simply approaches others; the 'divine human' whom nothing in this world can hurt or scare, fills the entire universe with joy and life. In this ideal human being, we can find the ecological sense and wisdom that people need today.

2. St Francis of Assisi's Ecological Sensibility and Wisdom

2.1. Vision of Universe: 'Universal Fraternity'

This intuition that Francis gained from his deep faith in the Trinitarian God demonstrates a balance between an individual's inner experience and Christian faith. All creatures are created by the Creator Father, and therefore, are all united in universal fraternity. The reason for this is as follows. There is, of course, a great abyss lying between man and God the Creator Father, but through Son Christ and by the Holy Spirit, human is able to see, feel, finally love, desire, and experience the Father. To Francis, the creation is the act of Trinity God unfolding his goodness and love to all of his creatures. In such an act of the divine beneficence, the Father God is the source of

¹⁵Chuang-tzu: *The Interior Chapters*, cap. VI, 7.

¹⁶Cfr. *Chuang-tzu: The Interior Chapters*, cap. I.

all goodness. The Son Christ participates in Father's will. He is the paragon, the first born of all creations. Even though he was born noble (God), but chose to become a lowly (human being). For this, Christ is the only mediator between God and human. The Holy Spirit can be described as God's love itself and to Francis, the Holy Spirit of the Lord was also the spirit of life. The Spirit God is the mediator of communion between God and Son and between humans and God and it gives life to all things.¹⁷

In conclusion, from the vision of the communion of Trinity the whole universe becomes a one big family. Within this family, humans have special dignified position because he/she is born in the image of God and resembles the Son, Jesus. They have an important duty of guiding all creations to the path leading to God. He called all things, whether if it had life or not, brothers and sisters and saw in them the goodness of God. He expressed gratitude to other creatures that provided for human needs. To the people, proclaimed how great God's love is. He practiced poverty and humility just like Jesus Christ and encourage others to do the same.

2.2. Tendency of Ordinary People: Ignorance and Blind Obsession

The true happiness of humans comes from living in harmony within the universal brotherhood of the Trinity God. This is a gratuitous gift from God. But humans fall into sin because of greed and mistakenly thinking that they are permanent owners of God's things. Instead of theologically and logically approaching the problem of human sin and evil, Francis sees the spiritual and ethical aspects of human beings through Jesus Christ.¹⁸ Original sin was the beginning of all evil, but its solidarity is apparent in everyday human life. Adam's sinful conduct is based on the spiritual attitude of a human being before God. The first man sinned because he lacked goodness. This lack of goodness is not just a thing of the past but it still remains an integral problem of modern society. When placed in tempting situation, Adam showed three characteristics. First, failure to accept his identity as meagre and naked before God; second, shamefulness of his meagreness and nudity; third, trying to hide his poverty and nakedness from God. He takes God's granted goodness and poses it as his own. In this way, man is gradually separated from God. The possessiveness of selfish, self-centred

¹⁷Cfr. *The Earlier Rule 23*, in *St. Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies: English Omnibus of the Sources of the Life of St. Francis* (2 Volume), Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983 (4th Revised).

¹⁸*The Earlier Rule 23,2; The Admonitions 5,2ss*, in *St. Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies*.

human mind threatens the order of life and becomes a tool for evil-doing in the world. As a result, human life becomes miserable and painful. Life of penance is necessary to restore it to as God first intended.

2.3. Restoration of Universal Brotherhood through the Life of Penance

The purpose of life in penitence is to remain awake in the presence of God. That is, to keep the Spirit of the Lord always in one's heart and not to turn off His activity. This is the major role of the Holy Spirit. It leads us to follow and resemble Christ's poverty and humbleness. There are roughly three directions in this journey.

First one is practicing virtue. To Francis, virtue has two aspects. One related to God (the divine power of the Trinity God, the charity of Christ, the power of his Word, the divine activity of Trinity God dwelling in the human heart, and the gift of the Holy Spirit), and one related to humans.

Humans can gain God's divine and spiritual power through Christ's virtue (charity, obedience, wisdom, simplicity, poverty), following Christ's footsteps. Francis made it possible by enduring all but sin with patience and gentleness. On the human aspect, he restrained his body and senses through fasting and learned to be satisfied with the most basic and primary needs in life. Through this discipline, his senses and the flesh were filled more and more with God's things.¹⁹ The other training was inner penitence. This is done by staying away from the desires and greed of humans who tend to pose God's good as their own. The virtue of obedience is important in this process. The reason is because when God gave free will to man, it marked the beginning of all sin. The obedience, then, is not merely enduring but more following and resembling Christ's humility and obedience. That is the mystery of *kenosi*²⁰

Second is contemplation. The practice of virtue opened up Francis' heart to God's presence, and through contemplation, he intuitively felt God anytime, anywhere. His contemplation included three stages: meditation, prayer and illumination. He recognized and learned God's will through meditation on the Bible and the liturgical words. He was a simple man and did not explore God theologically and philosophically or express him in technical terms. He heard the

¹⁹The Major Legend by Bonaventure 14,1, in *St. Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies*.

²⁰Cfr. *A Salutation of Virtues*, in *St. Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies*.

word of God through the poverty and humbleness in Christ and found divine wisdom. Francis practiced two kinds of prayers, intensive prayer during a certain period of time and daily prayers. During intensive prayer, he heard God's will and was empowered to follow it. This was done throughout his life and was often exhausting and painfully long time for Francis. Daily prayer was contemplation in action, which is characterized by affectionate intuition and immediate execution of God at every moment. Illumination is the experience of God's Spirit dwelling in a pure mind's praying soul. Illuminated by the Holy Spirit, Francis tasted the beatitude of infinite Trinitarian God.

Third is life of love. Francis' body and soul, sparked by the flame of the Holy Spirit, went through a total change in God's infinite love. He was transformed into celestial seraphic love itself, like angels of seraphim praising the Triune God.²¹ He became a second Christ and in the family communion with the Triune God, humans along with all other creations joined the universal brotherhood. Francis perceived the Father's love in all that existed in the world, so that all things in the world served as a testimony to the Father's love, like a shining mirror that reflects and reveals the Father's glory. With his clear and transparent soul, he approached all creatures with a child-like heart. This experience was expressed well in his hymns of the Sun. He thought of the position and role of humans in the universe as follows: humans use and consume creatures and cannot survive without them. Every day humans must give praise and thanks to God for the sustenance of their existence through exhausting God made creations.²² And therefore, all creation including trees, flowers, weeds, even trivial stones, should be treated with respect.²³ There is no image of human acting as the master of creation. Rather, the godly creations compassionately provide the means to sustain the "the little man."²⁴ Francis also treated his brothers with respect, trust and kindness. He recognized and embraced each of the brothers' uniqueness and freedom, encouraging each one's inner freedom and creative thinking as the brothers made decisions.²⁵ This is evident in the

²¹*The Major Legend by Bonaventure 9, 1, in St. Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies.*

²²*Legend by Perugia 43, in St. Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies.*

²³*Legend by Perugia 51, in St. Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies.*

²⁴*The life of St. Francis by Thomas Celano 58, 80-81, in St. Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies.*

²⁵*A Letter to Brother Leo, in St. Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies.*

diversity of the early brothers' lives.²⁶ This is because he had believed in the presence of the Holy Spirit in each of his brothers. The only thing he wanted from them was to be good brothers, just as Heavenly Father was good, and to be the missionaries that share God's gift with other people, for his glory.

3. Dialogue between Chuang Tzu and Francis of Assisi on the Deep Ecology

The Second Vatican Council recognized that interreligious dialogue is the way to enrich each religion on the journey to the truth. Because the seeds of the Word exist in other religions, it is to be recognized, preserved, and developed²⁷ for the sake of humanity. There are four ways to do this: dialogue sharing daily life, cooperation for the common good, dialogue between experts and spiritual dialogue.²⁸ This does not mean that the proclamation of the Gospel is not necessary. Rather than unilaterally forcing our beliefs, we should be able to announce Christ in an attitude of sharing good things with others. Then different religions will enrich each other and help each follower's life of faith. For this reason, interreligious dialogue for missionary work has taken an important role in proclaiming the Gospel.

The encounter between Francis and Chuang Tzu belong to part of the spiritual dialogue. They will share the spiritual abundance experienced during the process of seeking the Absolute, such as prayer, meditation or practice of virtue. The encounter will focus on the transformed life with beliefs/faith of the Absolute, and special attention will be spotlighted on the ecological sensibility and wisdom of two figures. This will faithfully follow the methodology set forth in the Vatican II Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions: affirmation of what everyone shares universally.²⁹ We will recognize the others as they are without judging them according to our standard. We will notice some things in common, differences and elements that can enrich Christian ecological perspective, purifying in the light of Christ.³⁰

²⁶*The Little Flowers of St. Francis* 85, in *St. Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies*.

²⁷Vatican II, *Nostra Aetate*, 2.

²⁸Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, n. 42.

²⁹Vatican II, *Nostra Aetate*, 1.

³⁰John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* n. 56.

Let us compare the experiences of the spiritual journey of the two figures in the following chart.

	Chuang Tzu	Francis of Assisi
View of the World	'equality' and 'all things flow through each other'	'universal fraternity'
Obstacles	ignorance and blind obsession	ignorance and desire to possess
	- abused mind: source of evil	- disobedient and arrogant mind: source of evil
	- ingratitude as being a part of nature - belief in the superiority of humans -pursuit/depend on superficiality, and adorn with superficial things - obsession of partial and biased human knowledge	- ingratitude towards God - shame of being meagre and naked - desire to possess God's things as his/hers, especially one's will - exploiting God's goodness to decorate and glorify him/herself
	- inner disorder and instability; exhausted due to excessive mental activity, unnatural - hurting self and others (dispute between right/wrong, good/bad... ect)	- inner disorder: divided and unstable mind - inclined to sin and evil - evil, selfish, dichotomy between word and action - act against charity
	- miserable and sad in pain without knowing why	- miserable, sick
Way	- trust in 'not action' and 'spontaneity' - restoration and cultivation of damaged 'Te' (virtues) - inner discipline: 'mental fasting,' 'concentration,' 'sit quietly forgetting'	- faith in Jesus Christ - restoration of imagery of God - way of penance: practice of virtue, contemplation, life of love
Results	- incorporation of Tao, live according to nature	- communion of the familial Trinity of God and live in universal fraternity

3.1. Elements in Common

From the chart we can see that Chunag-tzu and Francis of Assisi have many beliefs in common: the existence and position of human beings in the universe, their problems and the ways to restore them.

This is the basis of the ecological sensibility and wisdom of two figures. Let's look at the five similarities:

1. Existence of Humans: Humans exist regardless of their will (through 'not action and spontaneity' of Tao / love of God), they do not get to choose their existence. Thus, all things in the world, including human beings, are gratuitous beings. Each being's character is unique, nothing to add or take away (Te/image of God).

2. Position and Role in the Universe: Humans as a part of nature, are linked with everything that exists in nature, and can be in communion (flow through) with Absolute Being. Humans and all things in the world are equal and one family, because they all originate from one source although their physical appearances may be different. Therefore, humans are not rulers of this world, they are a part of nature or ministers of service, but also have the power to bring confusion and destruction to the world. This connects with third factor.

3. Ignorance and Blind Greed of Human Beings: Humans do not understand their true self and role in this universe, and this ignorance places them into blind greed (obsession / desire to own). Humans adorn and embellish themselves superficially, with God's goodness, rather than realizing and accepting their true position as gratuitous beings. The result is pain (artificial life/sinful life). Not only do humans suffer themselves, but also bring confusion and destruction to the whole world. This confusion and destruction is the ecological crisis humanity is facing at this moment. Two historical figures, despite their time and cultural differences, urge that although finding a technological alternative to ecological crisis is necessary, human repentance is the essential solution at the fundamental level.

4. Internal and External Repentance: If people learn to live with minimalistic life (living with only a few of the most necessary things), their body and soul will be purified and restored to their original nature. It means entrusting oneself within Absolute Beings (through 'not action and spontaneity' of Tao / love of God) and living in communion with nature. In other words, to obtain ecological sensibility and wisdom, humans need the help of transcendental beings.

5. Human Knowledge and its Limitations. The human cognitive ability is neither good nor bad. If used positively, it will help humans live as leaders of truth; but on the other hand, in today's society it has contributed to the so-called myth of progress. Birth of science and technology and developments within civilizations offer a lot of

convenience and comfort to humankind, but when humans become dependent on it, their inner self will get sick and damaged. This causes exploiting and destroying nature for their own satisfaction, an individual or nation fighting for his/her own profits, as well as violence, murders and wars. Finally, humans become slaves to their own inventions, a mere tool for making more money and capital. Thus, the Earth, the common abode of humankind, falls into the whirlpool of chaos. The powerless and poor are left alone in pain without any solution or way out.

This is the reality of humanity today. Although there are the positive aspects of human progress and development, its negative effects cannot be overlooked. At the frontline of this reality, Francis and Chuang Tzu urge us to realize that true human happiness is to live in nature and with people. This is not achieved in a mechanical, hierarchical world, but in a world where each and every one reacts to each other's waves as if in the quantum world. It may look like chaos, but love and mercy are also in it. The wisdom of the Cross and the ways of Tao may look weak, but it is stronger than anything. It will embrace everything, help and nurture everything. Its wisdom embraces all human knowledge whether biased, relative or partial and transcend them.

3.2. Differences: Relationship to Absolute Being on the Journey of Repentance

There are several differences between the beliefs of Chuang Tzu and Francis of Assisi: the absence of the concept of personified God, the personal relationship with God and the mediator, the theological faith. This faith is bestowed by God as the gratuitous gift to whoever strives to follow and resemble Jesus Christ. In short, Chuang Tzu's credence of the 'non-action' and 'spontaneity' of Tao cannot be replaced with the Trinity God of Christianity. Regarding the mysterious experience of the holiness (all things flowing through each other), a misunderstanding can arise from the Christian point of view in the experience of oneness, in which the boundary between the subject and the object disappears. However, Chuang Tzu recognizes the differences between all things including humans, but states if we focus on commonalities rather than differences, it will be possible to exchange the experiences of all things, including humans' experience. This is a very sensitive idea for monotheistic religion. The differences must be acknowledged, but there is no need to conform. The main reason for interreligious dialogue is not because the religions are the same, but because they are different.

3.3. Practical Elements for Enrichment of the Spiritual Life

Regarding this, I would like to suggest Chuang Tzu's ideas of the Tao and its effects in the journey of the inner cultivation. There are two elements: the 'absolute nothingness' from the view of the experience of God's love and mercy, and the 'non-action and spontaneity' from the view of the wisdom of the *kenotic* love of Christ. I think it is possible to interpret these elements as negative theology in the Christian tradition, as a spiritual and vital principle of human life. Chuang Tzu regards 'Tao' as a supreme state of 'absolute nothingness that is empty and calm. It is similar to a state of human mind and its effects. Without any purpose or intention, it embraces everything, it nourishes and loves without partiality and it can accomplish anything. This is similar to Francis' experience of God's love and mercy, and similar to the fruit of the love of self-emptying love of Jesus Christ. In order to respond to this love, human beings at the same time need to empty themselves and entrust themselves to absolute beings. Chuang Tzu did not know the Christian grace, but emphasized the absolute trust in the efficacy of Tao, 'non-action and spontaneity.' In short, our two figures testify that human beings cannot attain ecological sensibility and wisdom on their own, but need help from Absolute Being.

Conclusion: Chuang Tzu and Francis of Assisi's Suggestions on the Ecological Crisis

They advise us not to be arrogant and dependent on our strength, but encourage us to compensate for the mistakes we have made. First of all, humankind has to remember their position and role in the vast universe. Astronomer Carl Sagan said that when we learn about the universe around us, we can only be humble. In space, the Earth is merely a pale blue dot. We must ask this question. Who are these humans inhabiting this small dot? We are beings smaller than dust from the view of the universe. According to Chuang Tzu and Francis, nature is not a mere substance surrounding us, but was created by an absolute being; it should be treated with respect and gratitude. This is the crucial key and wisdom to counteract the effects of ecological crisis threatening our Earth. With such wisdom humans gain strength to stand against the idols of neoliberal economic system and its negative effects: consumerism, materialistic thinking and infinite competition for profit making of capitalists, pushing the poor and powerless into pain with no escape.

To respond to this culture of death, most importantly, we have to realize and accept that our knowledge is limited, partial, and if we

rely solely on such knowledge, we will fall into self-contradiction, for example ecology or technology, ecology or development, etc. This does not mean to disregard science and technology, but solely they cannot improve the quality of life or lead us to the truth and happiness. Our two figures say to us faced with ecological crisis: be humble and repent, and then you will learn how to cope with two extreme situations. This is called 'walking on two roads'(兩行).³¹ There is a Chinese wisdom that goes as follows: when things reach an extreme, they can only move in the opposite direction (物極必反).³² When faced with extreme situations, you have to change. Once you get through the problem, the change will last long (窮變通久).³³ Therefore, at the face of the ecological crisis, change how we live, if we change and it works, its effect will last long.

³¹*Chuagn-tzu: The Interior Chapters*, II, 9.

³²*Tao-Te-Ching*, 25, Interpreted by Sang Dae Kim, Seoul: National Sources Center, 1996, 85-87.

³³*I-ching I, Gyesajeon*, 12, Interpreted by Ghi Dong Lee, Seoul: Sungkyun Kwan University Press, 2016, 921-931.