

# The Ecological Civilization Wisdom in the Thought of "DongtianFudi"

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**Abstract:** *The Chinese nation has always taken it as its mission to address the global proposition of achieving the healthy development of all mankind. To thoroughly implement the ecological civilization thought of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era and accelerate the modernization of harmonious coexistence between humans and nature, it is essential to return to traditional literature to seek its roots. The thought of "DongtianFudi", rooted in traditional Chinese culture and Taoism, contains rich natural and ecological ideas, which have significant implications for the construction of ecological civilization.*

**Keywords:** Fine traditional Chinese culture, DongtianFudi, Ecological civilization.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The achievements of ecological civilization construction in the new era are remarkable. Attention has been paid to ecological issues and construction in areas such as biodiversity, marine ecology, sand prevention belts, and water ecology. There are rich ecological protection ideas in Chinese traditional culture. We must thoroughly implement the ecological civilization thought of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era, accelerate the modernization of harmonious coexistence between humans and nature, and it is essential to seek the roots from traditional literature.

Based on the concept of "DongtianFudi" in Chinese Taoism, which covers philosophical fields such as cosmology, naturalism, geography, and humanism, this article attempts to start from the Taoist classics of the Six Dynasties, mainly focusing on the works of the Celestial Master School and the Upper Reaches School, to explain the ecological thought of "DongtianFudi", explore its modern enlightenment significance, and offer suggestions for building an ecological civilization.

## 2. THE ECOLOGICAL WISDOM IN THE CONCEPT OF "DONGTIANFUDI"

DongtianFudi is a sacred geographical space that the ancient Chinese explored regarding the relationship between gods and humans. It originated from the imagination of people during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods about the overseas abodes of immortals such as Kunlun and Penglai. Through the continuous construction by successive Taoist masters and regimes, it was established in the Tang Dynasty by Sima Chengzhen and Du Guangting. DongtianFudi represents the beautiful imagination of the Chinese people for the "Peach Blossom Spring" in the afterlife. The superior natural conditions and the rare accessibility of the place have prompted both emperors and common people to have a sense of awe and care for DongtianFudi and its resources. Therefore, DongtianFudi is a living model for protecting the ecology, reflecting the attitude of harmonious coexistence between humans and nature that has persisted since ancient times.

### 2.1 DongtianFudi is Rich in Various Natural Resources.

DongtianFudi is mostly located in a beautiful and scenic area with convenient geography. Due to its remoteness from the mundane world, it is home to rare wild animals, abundant precious herbs, valuable metals, as well as wells and rivers. It is a pleasant place that not only suits living but also meets the requirements for alchemy, cultivation and achieving immortality.

DongtianFudi is the habitat of rare wild animals. Animals live and reproduce peacefully here, enjoying a long life while also giving rise to numerous legends, with the main characters being immortals and their mounts: "The birds can live for a thousand years. Ancient people all cherished them, even to the extent of considering them as divine beings. They were named 'Jiahe', 'Tiandai' and 'Baihong'. If there were no such birds, geese could also be used. Geese are also called 'Hong' and both can live for a thousand years." [1] Zhong Shan is the 31st of the 36

Xiaodongtian depicted in Sima Chengzhen's "Map of the Heavenly Palace and Earthly Abodes". The birds of Zhong Shan, such as Jiahe, Tiangai, Bai Hong, can live for over a thousand years. Eating them can turn one into a celestial being.

DongtianFudi is the home of rare medicinal herbs. Due to the favorable climate and soil conditions, the plants here are lush and green, and they also possess magical properties. Consuming them can prolong life, achieve immortality, and even enable one to ascend to heaven and become an immortal: There is a divine mushroom on the mountain. If one consumes it, one can live for a thousand years. This mountain is called Huangling Mountain. To the south lies Chang Mountain, to the north is Qinglong Mountain, and to the east are pine and cypress trees as symbols [2]. "Zhi" refers to the regional division system of Taoism and is also an important part of "DongtianFudi". Generally, there are famous mountains and vast rivers within the "Zhi" area. HouchengshanZhi is the 19th Zhi. It is rich in resources such as rivers, mountains, and pine trees. Consuming top-quality reishi mushrooms can enable one to live for a thousand years.

DongtianFudi is the source of the wells and rivers. Abundant and convenient water resources are advantageous factors for the peaceful and virtuous life and cultivation in DongtianFudi. They also have the functions of treating diseases, prolonging life and promoting cultivation. High-quality water resources nourish the land, animals and plants, forming a good ecological cycle: Jiqushan, within which lies the area of Jinling, covers an area of about 37 to 38 hectares. The soil is fertile and the well water is sweet. Living there, one is sure to experience a prosperous and peaceful life [3]. Jiqu Mountain is also known as Maoshan. The eighth of the ten Dongtian, "Jintan Huayang Dongtian", is located here. This place has fertile soil and sweet well water, making it suitable for farming and living. People can enjoy a peaceful life here, far away from wars and self-sufficient, with a harmonious existence.

DongtianFudi is the deposit site of precious metals. Taoist alchemists to prepare elixirs. Therefore, the precious metals found in "DongtianFudi" are also one of the elements that attract a large number of seekers of Taoism to visit. In the era of cold weapons, precious metals were especially valued by emperors. There are records in books stating that the government organized mining activities in "DongtianFudi": The mountains are rich in gold. During the reign of Emperor Ling of the Han Dynasty, imperial edicts were issued to the prefectures and counties, instructing them to collect the gold from the mountainous areas to replenish the armory. When Sun Quan came to power, he sent the palace guards to mine gold and regularly submitted it to the government. The military commanders led hundreds of families and thus settled in the area of Fulong, and as a result, this place was renamed as the former site of Jinling [4]. Emperor Ling of the Han Dynasty and Sun Quan both extracted gold from Jiqushan to replenish the state treasury and strengthen their military forces.

The above merely lists the abundant resources of "DongtianFudi" from four aspects: animals, plants, water sources and minerals. This is because in a relatively closed environment, "DongtianFudi" generally achieves a system circulation, which can well maintain the ecological balance within the system.

## **2.2 DongtianFudi has an Extremely Well-structured Ecological System.**

The residents and flora and fauna in DongtianFudi follow the principle of need-based distribution, achieving a green circular process from production to consumption. The concept of equality among all things ensures the biodiversity within DongtianFudi; rational and controlled resource exploitation and utilization not only achieve the recycling of resources but also promote ecological protection; the orderly development of nature ensures that everything is utilized to the fullest extent within DongtianFudi, making it a suitable place for human habitation.

People are equal to all things. Taoism holds that both humans and animals and plants follow the principle of mutual growth and decline. "Only humans possess the ability to move freely and actively, thus obtaining the completeness of yin and yang and being inherently more intelligent than other creatures. The "Yin" in "Kan" represents the yang of yang, and it is associated with flying and walking creatures. The "Gan", "Kan", and "Zhen" represent the yin of yang, and they are associated with insects and fish. The "Kun" represents the yin of yin, and it is associated with soil and stones. The "Xun", "Li", and "Xiang" represent the yang of yin, and they are associated with plants. The combination of yin and yang, good and bad, leads to the emergence of fortune and misfortune. Fortune and misfortune are the manifestations of gain and loss." [5] Both birds, beasts, insects, soil, and plants possess the attributes of yin and yang and need to be balanced in order to turn misfortune into fortune. Not only can humans achieve immortality through cultivation, but animals can do so as well.

Attach importance to natural warnings. The Chinese nation has always attached great importance to observing the

laws of natural phenomena and human activities, especially the relationship between natural events and social issues. They have summarized and recorded experiences to warn future generations and prevent repeating past mistakes. For abnormal natural phenomena, they have unique insights and solutions. Among them, the practices that conform to scientific laws are worthy of continued reference. Everything is in order. By integrating natural elements with time and space, we attach importance to extraordinary natural phenomena. We take measures before disasters occur and issue early warnings to prevent the occurrence of natural disasters and human calamities. We rationally and orderly utilize the resources of nature, using them only when necessary and in a controlled manner. Once there is an early warning from nature, we immediately give feedback and never over-exploit.

Suitable for human habitation, it became the earliest natural environmental protection area in Chinese history. Rich resources, orderly natural conditions; the widespread concept of "entering the mountains at certain times"; the promotion of cultural factors such as legends about immortals; the support and protection provided by the government - all these factors have made Dongtian Fudi the earliest nature reserve in Chinese history: The "Hetuneyuanjing" states: "The earth is rich in soil and water is clear. The Juqu Mountain and the Jin Tan Hill can be used to guide people to ascend to the higher realms and reach the Cur City." Additionally, in the "Heshuzhongpian": "The QuJin Mountain has a hill in the middle. Warriors and patients should not go there, nor should floods be allowed to reach it." [6] Maoshan has no natural disasters, wars, diseases, venomous insects or fierce beasts. It is always green throughout the year. The soil is suitable for growing crops and there is miraculous water from wells that can be used for daily life and irrigation.

### **2.3 There are Dedicated Positions Specifically Responsible for Managing Nature**

In DongtianFudi. DongtianFudi is not only a paradise for human beings but also a residence for immortals, possessing dual attributes of both human and divine. In the Taoist immortals' system, there are specific immortals in charge of nature, and the immortals in DongtianFudi also have the responsibility to manage their respective areas. In Tao Hongjing's "DongxuanLingbaoZhenlingWeiyeTu", three levels of natural deities are listed: the higher-level natural deities - the Five Celestial Emperors; the middle-level natural deities, consisting of fifteen figures including generals, messengers and warriors, as well as the exclusive natural deity - the Great Beast Master. The "Twenty-Four Regiments", which are part of "DongtianFudi" , have their managers and terms of office recorded in detail in the "ErshibaZhi".

The concept of DongtianFudi addresses the issue of what kind of ecological civilization should be constructed from the perspective of the harmonious coexistence of all things, and solves it at the level of forming a self-sustaining positive development system. It has become a living model for ecological construction, rich in abundant resources and biodiversity; it completes the construction of a positive ecological cycle; it establishes an orderly management institution and system, which are the three major wisdoms of "DongtianFudi" in maintaining ecological balance, and are also the three major measures that inspire ecological construction in the new era.

## **3. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF "DONGTIANFUDI" IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF ECOLOGICAL CIVILIZATION**

"Green mountains and clear waters are as valuable as gold and silver" not only refers to a good water ecosystem and forest ecosystem, but also involves the concept of protecting the environment. Taoism have long recognized the significance of a good ecological environment for social development, advocating the protection of all things and the conservation of resources. By starting from the three aspects of concepts, systems, and measures, a comprehensive strategy for ecological protection has been well established.

### **3.1 This has Led to the Concept of Treating Nature Kindly and Achieving Harmonious Development Between Humans and Nature.**

When the Taoist thought system was established, there was the concept of equality among all things: "Man follows the Earth, the Earth follows the Heaven, the Heaven follows the Dao, and the Dao follows nature." Humans and all other things share the same origin and are born from the same root. In terms of behavioral norms, this is manifested as not killing or despising any life, and respecting all forms of life: Since both humans and beasts share the divine essence bestowed by heaven and earth, we call humans "those who possess the divine spirit" [7]. The ecological cognition of the ancient Chinese people, which respects all natural elements and natural laws and advocates using resources only when necessary and in a controlled manner, has significant enlightenment value for promoting the idea of harmonious coexistence between humans and nature.

### **3.2 Established Management Institutions and Systems for Protecting Nature.**

DongtianFudi has its own dedicated clerical system, similar to the current civil service system. From the top-level officials responsible for overall planning, to the second-level officials specifically in charge of a certain area, and then to the staff at all levels responsible for specific tasks, the hierarchy is clearly defined and the responsibilities are distinct. This has formed a management institution and system with orderly rewards and punishments and a distinct structure."FeitianZhangren, TaiyiZhonghuang, XuanshangYutong, MengshouXiansheng. These four are the guardians of the mountains, rivers, all beasts and spirits in the world. They should be natural deities, not something that can be acquired through human learning." [8] These deities are the dedicated personnel in charge of mountains, rivers, and all beasts. They are responsible for monitoring all the dynamics of organic and inorganic substances within their jurisdiction. Following the principle of "whoever is in charge is responsible", they ensure the orderly operation of all mountains, rivers and creatures within their area.

### **3.3 Established a System for Protecting Animals and Plants, and Maintained Biodiversity.**

Establish exclusive rules for protecting nature and ensure systematic protection of the ecological environment. Taoism has specific rules for protecting animals and plants: the sin of hunting wild animals and birds, the sin of scholars and common people burning fields, forests and mountains [9]. Farmland is a necessary material condition for the survival of an agricultural society. The harvest of crops largely depends on water sources. The protection of water sources lies in the mountains, and the mountains rely on vegetation to maintain their vitality. The natural ecosystem is interrelated and forms a life community. Whether it is the six domestic animals or the wild birds and beasts, no one should be killed or imprisoned unjustly. Protecting mountains, forests, rivers and lakes. All the natural things in the sky, earth and water should be included in the protection scope. This is in line with the new era's concept that "mountains, waters, forests, grasslands, lakes, rivers and sands are a unified natural ecological chain".

Formed a self-sufficient ecosystem. In the first part, the construction of the perfect ecological structure of "DongtianFudi" has been discussed. What is worth emphasizing is that "DongtianFudi" has an independent lighting system. DongtianFudi, which possesses both Reality and transcendence attributes, features "Sun Essence and Moon Light" that simulate the real sun and moon: "From here, it descends for three or four miles before reaching the eastern YinGongdongxuan gate. Entering this cave entrance, two hundred steps in, it becomes as bright as during the day. Without discerning the differences between this cave and this realm, in order to draw in the light of the sun and illuminate the interior of the cave?" [10] I wonder if the light in the cave is the sunlight that was introduced, somewhat similar to the function of today's solar-powered street lamps. Ershibazhi clearly states that there is an internal lighting system within the cave, and its operation is the same as that in the human world: "Shou Gui said: Are the size of the inner chambers similar to the city walls and gates of the human world? The reply was: Each of the twenty-four Zhi has a large chamber, which may be a square of a thousand li, five hundred li, or three hundred li. All of them contain the essence of the sun and the moon, which is called the root of the hidden deities. It penetrates deep into the inner chambers and is exactly the same as that in the world" [11].

The concept of "DongtianFudi" addresses the crucial issue of why we should build an ecological civilization by emphasizing the harmonious unity of human and nature. It elaborates on the significance and necessity of ecological construction from three aspects: constructing the superstructure, popularizing the concept of ecological protection, ensuring the separate responsibilities of management mechanisms, and using both rewards and punishments. This concept is worthy of being adopted by current ecological construction efforts.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

The concept of "DongtianFudi" has significant implications for the construction of ecological civilization. By leveraging legends to attract believers to come and live and practice in the mountains, it indirectly enhances the local ecological protection efforts. By integrating local characteristics and adapting measures to local conditions, it preserves the biodiversity of regional species. The dedicated personnel management system improves management efficiency. The harmonious coexistence between humans and nature further promotes the construction of a new form of human civilization.

Formed a specific group dedicated to protecting and building the ecosystem. Due to its unique natural and cultural characteristics, DongtianFudi often holds large-scale gatherings: Only on the 18th of March did people from all walks of life gather together, with hundreds of carriages and thousands of people present. Both commoners and

monks, men and women, were like a crowd in a city. They all came to climb the mountain to listen to the chanting and praise of Lingbao [12]. During the major festivals when the weather is good, gatherings of several thousand people are quite common. Making use of this occasion for special publicity not only helps to strengthen religious beliefs but also plays an indirect role in ecological protection. Therefore, it is necessary to do a good job in publicity, tell the ecological stories well, and start ecological protection from children and from the grassroots level.

Adapt measures to local conditions to promote biodiversity. In the system of "DongtianFudi", there are not only famous mountains such as the Five Great Mountains, but also twenty-eight administrative regions concentrated in the Sichuan and Shaanxi regions, as well as water deities like the South Sea. Each of them has its own unique ecological environment and species, and the priorities of natural ecological protection and construction also differ. The West Mountain of Huashan, which is full of blooming flowers, is rich in large trees and forests. The key to ecological protection lies in the vegetation. Therefore, no large trees are allowed to be cut down within the mountain range. Those who violate this rule will be severely punished: On the mountain top, at the foot of the mountain, within the valley, or along the temple path, there are trees that signify life and death. They are called the Divine Forest and are forbidden to be cut down. Anyone who violates this rule will bring disaster upon themselves. In the southwestern corner of the mountain, there is a forest of towering cypresses and pine trees. This is the place where the mountain god holds his banquets. It is called the Black Mountain Forest. There are cases where woodcutters secretly collect it, and the possibility of them being burned by fire or eaten by tigers is very high [13]. This approach of protecting the environment based on local conditions is also feasible at present. Take the Yuncheng Salt Lake Salt Mine for example, which has a mining history of 4,600 years. Long-term mining has led to the degradation of the local ecological environment. Since the new era, the local government has vigorously restored the original appearance of the salt lake and turned it into an ecological protection area and a tourist destination. This is a vivid case of supporting local ecological construction and promoting characteristic development in the new era. Taking into account the actual conditions of each region, leveraging the initiative of local authorities, developing distinctive ecologies, achieving a virtuous cycle between ecology and economy, and narrowing the imbalance in development - all these have significant implications for current ecological construction.

Improve the management institutions and systems. Establish ecological nature reserves and management institutions and systems, and form long-term effective management to ensure the sustainable development of the ecosystem. DongtianFudi was the earliest nature reserve in Chinese history. With the support of the government, it has maintained a good ecological tradition. Most of them are now natural and cultural scenic areas, which are living models of good ecological regions. In the current process of ecological protection and construction, attention should also be paid to typical areas, the establishment of nature reserves, and the cultural construction and inheritance of nature reserves. Mount Tai has been officially recognized since ancient times: In the 28th year of Emperor QinShiHuang, he traveled eastward through various prefectures and counties. He climbed up to the ZouFeng Mountain and erected a stone. He held a discussion with the scholars from Lu and others, inscribing the stone to praise the achievements of the Qin Dynasty. They also discussed matters related to the sacrificial ceremonies and worship of mountains and rivers. Eventually, he ascended Mount Tai, erected a stone to build a shrine, and in the area below, a violent storm suddenly struck. He took shelter under a tree and, out of gratitude, bestowed the title of "Major Official" upon the tree [14]. Under the official protection and with the systematic protection of nature stipulated by Taoism, the Five Great Mountains of China, including Mount Tai, have been preserved intact to this day through the worship and protection by generations of Chinese people. The cliff carvings during this period have become an indelible mark of the national culture, witnessing the harmonious and friendly relationship between the Chinese nation and the natural landscape, and shaping the unique attitude and temperament of the Chinese people towards nature. The management of the natural process by the dedicated personnel is not autocratic or centralized. The Divine system holds regular gatherings: All the celestial beings and the sacred beings witnessed this great light, and all gathered together in unity [15]. Different levels of immortals gather regularly in certain sacred spaces to discuss major matters concerning heaven and earth. This provides a model for contemporary management systems. In the process of ecological construction, the advantages of democratic centralism should be fully exploited. Various opinions from all parties should be widely solicited. At the same time, legal documents for protecting the ecology should be promulgated and implemented in accordance with the law, benefiting the people.

"Chinese excellent traditional culture contains many important elements, which jointly shape the distinctive features of Chinese civilization." As a part of Chinese civilization, the concept of "DongtianFudi" perfectly explains the five characteristics of Chinese civilization: continuity, innovation, unity, inclusiveness, and peace.

During the course of historical development, it adhered to the principle of taking what is needed, maintaining a balance between meeting people's needs and respecting natural laws. It practiced using resources while protecting them, and protecting while utilizing them. This has formed a distinctive cultural tradition. At the same time, it has stood firm as a scenic spot on the Chinese land, remaining intact despite wars and turmoil, and becoming a representative of the temperament of the Chinese nation.

The concept of "DongtianFudi" is a unique wisdom of the Chinese people. It addresses the major theoretical and practical issues of why to build an ecological civilization, what kind of ecological civilization to build, and how to build it from three aspects: the harmonious unity between humans and nature, the self-sustaining development system of all things, and the joint protection of nature by the government and the public. This concept provides a guide for China's ecological civilization construction in the new era and is worthy of specialized research and further development. Of course, while drawing on traditional culture, one must always maintain rationality. Many unreasonable ideas, such as feng shui and unreasonable theories of the interaction between heaven and man, must be guarded against and avoided.

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