



“Terrestrial identity” as grounded relationality

A comparative study of contemporary Chinese and Hawaiian sources

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ABSTRACT

In this essay, I discuss a potential nexus for comparison between Hawaiian and Chinese philosophies grounded in what I call “terrestrial identity”. I bring Fei Xiaotong’s (1910–2005) description of the formation of social identity in China, which is historically agrarian and inalienably place-based, to meet contemporary Hawaiian philosophical perspectives of personal responsibility (*kuleana*), genealogical (*mo’okū’aubau*) consciousness, and “seascape epistemology” (Ingersoll, 2016) to flesh out a new theory of relationality, one that includes the ontological, historical, and ethical relationship of humans to the land on which they orient themselves and that defines the circumstances of their lives. The concept of terrestrial identity is inclusive in terms of types of relational entities, accommodating place, space, and memory into a comprehensive social ontology. It also opens onto discussions of contemporary social problems in a way that centres place and contextuality. I will conclude this essay with such a discussion, regarding homelessness among Kānaka Maoli (Native Hawaiians).

KEYWORDS

Chinese philosophy; Hawaiian philosophy; social patterns; comparative philosophy; cross-cultural philosophy; Fei Xiaotong

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In this essay, I compare contemporary Chinese and Hawaiian thought to develop a theory of “terrestrial identity”. This relational theory of human identity emphasizes the constitutive relationship with the ground beneath one’s feet. I bring Fei Xiaotong’s (1910–2005) description of the formation of social identity in China, which is historically agrarian and inalienably place-based, to meet contemporary Hawaiian philosophical perspectives of *mo’okū’auhau* consciousness, *kuleana*, and “seascape epistemology” (Ingersoll, 2016) to flesh out a new theory of relationality, one that includes the ontological, historical, and ethical relationship of humans to the land on which they orient themselves and that defines the circumstances of their lives. I compare Fei Xiaotong’s theory of social organization with contemporary expressions of Hawaiian social and cultural understanding in order to provide unique insights for broader environmental and ecological concerns. These concerns cluster around distinctions that determine who belongs to or in a place and who does not, which are important for current debates about migration and climate change.

I begin by discussing Fei’s theory of Chinese social association, which emphasizes the agrarian roots of contemporary Chinese culture. The social structure that Fei claims is peculiar to China is structured by the relationships each individual forms with those around them. Of course, these webs of relationships intersect, but the relative balance of power among individuals is never smoothed out. In other words, there is no average or objective view of Chinese society that accurately captures both the spatial and hierarchical aspects of its organization, because these aspects are different based on whose eyes they are viewed through. This indicates a place-based conception of identity. The way that relationships radiate out from each individual is inalienably spatial. Fei likens this aspect of social organization with the composition of village life in rural China, where the history of a people and their place rarely diverge¹.

I form the latter half of my theory of terrestrial identity by identifying a similar thread in contemporary Hawaiian epistemology and cultural studies. This thread extends to connect to the idea that all of the elements that make a place unique, including landscape and cultural memory, are also formative elements of a person’s relational identity. Hawaiian (Kanaka) identity is grounded by a genealogical relationship between the Hawaiian body and the land and ocean comprising the Hawaiian Islands. As recorded in Hawaiian oral history, *mo’olelo*, each place cradles a specific genealogical history, from the formation of the landscape to the generation of its people. In the contemporary resurgence of Hawaiian studies and cultural practices, this kind of identity presages the constitution of a modern Hawaiian identity after a century of colonial rule.

¹ In his work on Fei Xiaotong, Stephan Feuchtwang mentions that Fei does not draw sufficient attention to the historical fact of uprooted and replaced lineages in China.

I show that it can also inspire a theory of terrestrial identity by contributing ideas of place-based memory and terrestrial literacy.

When the pre-colonization social system was suddenly upended and replaced, the inevitable result in Hawai‘i was dissolution and alienation among the native population. I will conclude with a discussion of homelessness among Kānaka Maoli (Native Hawaiians) as a case study of the contribution that terrestrial identity makes to considerations of contemporary social issues. It is my hope that by elaborating a concept of terrestrial identity, I can open up space for discussions about contemporary social problems as they crop up in specific places.

PART 1: TERRESTRIAL IDENTITY IN FEI XIAOTONG’S THEORY OF SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

Fei Xiaotong was one of a handful of social scientists to bring anthropological research he had conducted in rural China to the classroom to illustrate the roots of Chinese culture. In a time of rapid global modernization, he cautioned against importing theories and methods of development from places with different social histories and contexts, especially the US and the UK. He constructed a theory of human organizational tendencies in China that he saw as a counter to the prevailing structures in this so-called “West”. He draws out the differences between China and the West in *Xiangtu Zhongguo*, translated into English as *From the soil: The foundations of Chinese society*. This work was published in 1947, just as Marxist Orthodoxy was taking hold of Chinese academia. Yet, he shows the arrangement of contemporary Chinese social relationships that are not reducible to the structures of class interests. According to Fei, Chinese society is fundamentally agrarian, which defines Chinese social structures even in urban environments, and because the “West” does not have the same social structure, China cannot hope to mirror its achievements by the same means.

The fundamental difference between Chinese and Western societies, according to Fei, is the way that social groups are formed. In the West, groups are formed voluntarily, and every member has qualifications that allow them to be a part of that group and enjoys benefits that everyone in the group enjoys. Individuals in Western-style social groups enjoy equality and are fungible within the defined lines of the organization, like straw in a tied bundle. Fei calls this the “organizational mode of association” (*tuantigeju* 團體格局). In this mode, individuals choose whether or not to be a part of an organization and they can be involved in different organizations. This structure lends to the promotion of individual rights, as membership is non-coercive and each member who meets their responsibilities receives certain entitlements. Grouping is not

defined geographically or lineally, although anyone is free to organize according to these criteria. This mode of organization necessitates a differentiation between public and private, as the family does not fit the model of voluntary inclusion. Rather, families are private concerns, each not necessarily connected to any other. Individual rights come from each individual's relationship to the organization, which in its most inclusive manifestation is the immaterial state. Public life is the most formative element of social cooperation and compatibility, rather than the family. This model is problematic if imposed on populations that do not share in this type of social identity, especially one where the family takes precedence. This focus on family, Fei argues, is the primary organizing element in China.

The Chinese pattern of association is based on the relationships shared between individuals and those around them, expanding outward in concentric circles. Fei calls this a "differential mode of association" (*cha xugeju* 差序格局). In this mode, the line between private and the public is blurred. The constituting feature of this system is the multitude of interpersonal relationships. The realm of ethical concern is populated by familiar faces and moral actions are contextualized by the actual relationships they benefit. One's family is the nexus of moral behaviour, and as one expands their social network one's realm of moral concern grows. This is very different from what Fei considered the Western mode of interpersonal ethics, which he saw as favouring groups based on preferences and identity more than family or clan. Fei highlighted the difference between Western, or more accurately, American, and Chinese society by comparing their historical counterparts. In early American society, individuals needed to band together to survive. Fei saw early American settler colonists as untethered from geography-based identities. Whole segments of society could up and move across the sea and set their sights West, and their strength was precisely drawn from a sense of adventure and danger in the face of the unknown.

According to Fei, Chinese society was primarily agrarian, and families tended to be more or less permanently settled on the land and mostly self-sufficient (Fei, 1992: 71). One of the defining features of Chinese society is the spatial metaphor given rise by its agrarian history. In ancient, agrarian China, each family was firmly rooted in the land they cultivated in a way that was foundational to their identity. Those outside of the home with whom they shared a relationship were those closest to them, their neighbours, and those relationships defined their moral obligations to one another. On this scale, relationships begin to translate into social currency, which can be used to accumulate power. The more powerful the family, the wider the realm of moral concern. Fei writes:

In the traditional structure, every family regards its own household as the center and draws a circle around it. This circle is the neighborhood, which is established

to facilitate reciprocation in daily life. A family invites the neighbors to its weddings, sends the red-dyed eggs when a new baby is born, and asks for their help in lifting its dead into coffins and carrying the coffins to the cemetery. But a neighborhood is not a fixed group. Instead, it is an area whose size is determined by the power and authority of each center. The neighborhood of a powerful family may expand to the entire village, while a poor family's neighborhood is composed of only two or three nearby families (Fei, 1992: 64).

From a Confucian perspective, the power of an individual is a result of their self-cultivation and resulting ethical influence on others. Notice that the examples in this selection of what neighbours do for one another is practical and not defined by obligation or need. Acting ethically in this context means performing the appropriate rites and rituals and meeting the expectations of others with whom one shares a relationship. The larger the network extending out from the individual, the more power and influence this individual has. The attendant reciprocation to each relationship concentrates social, economic, and political power in those that have an extensive network. But this network is not “solid”. Those within a network do not necessarily share relationships with one another, and not everyone in the network is entitled to the same benefits. Instead, the individual at the centre of the social web dictates the commitment to other individuals based on their influence. In other words, although those with comparatively little influence are included in the network of a powerful individual, the further they are away, the fewer relationships they will share between them.

Fei's theory of differential social association, which relies heavily on his interpretation of the concepts of benevolence (*ren* 仁), filiality (*xiao* 孝), fraternal respect (*di* 悌), sincerity (*xin* 信), and loyalty (*zhong* 忠) from the Classics, relies on each person's felt obligation toward those with whom they share a relationship. This prevents the system from accommodating universal and comprehensive moral principles that are extended to everyone equally. Just as in agrarian societies, where families were tied to the land and so their relationships may be defined spatially, the mode of social association which is bolstered by this history preserves the idea that everyone has their proper place. This distribution may also be viewed vertically as a socio-economic hierarchy. Those at the bottom are still entitled to benefits that come as a result of their being a part of a vast interlocking whole, even if their web of connections does not reach far up the hierarchy.

The contribution of Fei's concept of *chaxugeju* to a theory of terrestrial identity that has broad significance beyond China is the connection of each individual across a defined spatial distance from a rooted place. It presumes that society and ecology are inseparable. This is not peculiar to China or Chinese philosophy or sociology, but it is given a most insightful breakdown by Fei

Xiaotong. In what follows, I will build from this take on localized relationships, including those to the land that shapes the scope of our influence on others. Fei Xiaotong does not describe specifically one's moral obligation to the land itself, though he does assume that care is taken not to destroy something so vital to an agrarian existence. Of course, when this model is applied to an urban landscape, the intrinsic idea of appropriate place is abstracted above the surface of the ground. The scope of one's relationships, however, retains a spatial orientation. The next step is to extend the idea of mutuality and respect to the land itself. Sustainable cultivation is an integral part of Hawaiian history, and its importance to Kanaka cultural identity cannot be underestimated. To further form my theory of terrestrial identity, I draw from the Hawaiian tradition the visceral connection of people to the land.

PART 2: TERRESTRIAL IDENTITY IN HAWAIIAN THOUGHT

I am likening Fei Xiaotong's description of the agrarian mode of social organization and the Hawaiian conception of land- and place-based knowing based on their shared differences from contemporary social policies and attitudes that are distanced from considerations of relationships that include ethical obligations to the land. By solidifying a cross-cultural concept of terrestrial identity, I aim to create a frame for understanding beneficial relationships between humans and their environments more generally, and how humans can snugly "fit in" in all of the different environments they inhabit. Tracing a theory of terrestrial identity springs from a need to philosophize about the connection between humans and the land that makes their existence possible, and that should not be destroyed or exploited. Constitutive relationships with the land provide ethical reasons to protect and maintain it beyond the transitive harm that may be done to humans.

In this part, I bring in Hawaiian thought to reorient the understanding of the relationship between humans and the land. This relationship is genealogical, so the respect owed to the land is that expected for one's ancestors. This reverence is translated into ritual and sustained awareness, as well as an empathetic deepening of one's sense of self into one's surroundings. Karen Amimoto Ingersoll's theory of seascape epistemology provides a sustained discussion of the types of knowing required for this relationship. I shall start by saying that I do not prescribe that we all turn to Hawaiian identity and beliefs, as that would be an affront to Kānaka Maoli. Rather, historical cognizance, awareness of the natural tendencies of the land, and caring for the land as if it is an elder form the firm foundation for terrestrial identity. These elements are all given voice by the Hawaiian cultural tradition, and so are an appropriate contributor to this type of conversation. The combination of Fei Xiaotong's theory and

what I draw from Hawaiian thought forms a theory of terrestrial identity that is useful for addressing contemporary issues. In part 3, I show this by addressing the problem of homelessness in Hawai‘i.

Sam Low, in his book chronicling the legendary outrigger canoe journey of the Hōkūle‘a and its effect on contemporary Hawaiian identity, *Hawaiki rising*, indicates that the cultural differences between the Kānaka Maoli and the white settler/colonists, *haole*, have to do with the shared identity between place and person.

[The] *kabūna* remembered stories that went back to the beginning of time, a hundred generations or more, all of them associated with particular events and people and places. And so the land had become layered with meaning that shaded into myth, no less powerful than if the events had happened yesterday. It was a Homeric topography which an Athenian might understand but which eluded most of the *haole*, although they prided themselves in their philosophical descent from the ancient Greeks. It was also a vision that was doomed (Low, 2018: 7).

The *kabūna* are the people who act as repositories of ancient, oracular knowledge in the oral transmission of traditional Hawaiian culture, as well as caretakers the physical places described therein. Human accomplishments and cultural memory are embedded in actual places, and these places are the root of human identity. According to Hawaiian cultural history, the placement of people on the land has deep significance in the forms of sustaining and familial relationships between people and the land, *‘āina*. Kāhuna form a lineage of memory extending back through generations of Kānaka Maoli and converging, uninterrupted, on the creation of *‘āina* and the cosmos. Each geological feature of the landscape, the craters, bays, forests, and mountains, has an origin story tied into Hawaiian lineages, which are rooted to particular places. Those who would eventually facilitate the destruction of this relationship, those for whom the land did not have existential connotations, could not have estimated the destruction they would cause the Native Hawaiians. The wounds inflicted on the land by biochemical and military testing after the annexation of the Hawaiian Islands constitute harms done to Kanaka people. The devastation of indigenous plants and the destruction of the water table on Kaho‘olawe were direct affronts to Hawaiian cultural identity.

The relationship between Kanaka Maoli and *‘āina* is sustained by the recognition of the personal responsibility, one’s *kuleana*, to care for the land through the effort of one’s love and attention, *aloha ‘āina* or *mālama ‘āina*. According to Noenoe K. Silva, “Kuleana encompasses right, authority, and responsibility, and it suggests a familial relationship” (Silva, 2017: 4). Beyond the need to care for the land so that it may yield food and materials necessary for life, there is a felt and sustained relationality between people and the land that is most

accurately described in genealogical terms. This understanding of oneself and one's environment shapes an environmentally conscious way of living, but it also necessitates a uniquely non-Western, non-consumptive, non-capitalist way of thinking about one's ancestral past because it includes both human and non-human entities. Noenoe K. Silva describes this genealogical (*mo'okū'auhau*) consciousness as an indigenous, decolonized way of thinking about one's place, both as the situatedness in a cultural narrative and on the land that embodies its historical significance. This consciousness is used to understand the context and content of the Hawaiian oral tradition. *Mo'okū'auhau* consciousness is a literary understanding of the cosmogonic origins of the Hawaiian islands, Hawaiian people, and the non-human entities that also inhabit the Islands. The preservation of the Hawaiian oral tradition is invaluable for understanding Hawaiian cultural identity. It also builds on this tradition, weaving contemporary orientations of Hawaiian literary, artistic, and political production into an ancient and familiar pattern. The landscape in Hawai'i today has been rendered unrecognizable over the last 120 years, and this has changed the way that Hawaiians orient themselves on their ancestral homeland. *Mo'okū'auhau* consciousness is the reconciliation of the past and present, and it provides a way to understand a distant and different past that is at the same time familiar by virtue of the narrative history of place.

How do *kuleana* and *mo'okū'auhau* consciousness contribute to a way of understanding one's terrestrial identity if one is not Native Hawaiian? These terms are intricately connected to Hawaiian culture, specifically, and so cannot be generalized in a way that is not harmful to contemporary Hawaiian identity as well as sovereignty. Yet, I think that there is instructive value in understanding what types of emotional connection are embedded in their relationship to the *āina*. This widening of the scope of familial, or perhaps filial, relationships to include non-human entities makes, in my mind, a unique contribution to ecological and environmental philosophies. It does so because it necessitates a different way of understanding the world and one's place in it. In short, it suggests a unique epistemology. Karin Amimoto Ingersoll theorizes a "seascape epistemology" as a Kanaka way of understanding the world in light of one's genealogical responsibilities to the land. This epistemology closes the distance between oneself and nature and recognizes that the dualistic act of Othering can cause unintended harm to the *āina*. She writes, "Seascape epistemology approaches difference as an interactive relationship rather than a rigid dichotomy. Preserved is a concern for Otherness, a relationship of respected alterity that forges rich, complex, and, paradoxically, intertwined identities" (Ingersoll, 2016: 98). An ethical relationship defined by flexibility, tolerance, and respect for the land has much to offer contemporary ethical theory. Ingersoll underlines the importance of alterity in seascape epistemology by grounding it in a formative relationship to the sea, which she characterizes as "ocean

literacy”. While the land is solid, in relative stasis, which she likens to ethical preferences for stable, human-centric abstract ethical theory, the ocean is the opposite. The ocean is seen as untamed, unpredictable, dangerous, or, on the other hand, passive and devoid of ethical ties. She writes, “Human and environmental bodies affect each other, creating a complex whole from distinct and incoherent parts. Oceanic literacy helps to remember the historical consciousness within place and our human moral connection to the planet” (Ingersoll, 2016: 96). This model of cooperation, understanding and respect applied beyond not just human but also conscious entities is necessary for a future colored by the threat of ecological collapse and the myriad problems it will bring.

Again, it would be irresponsible of me to carve out a piece of Hawaiian philosophy for all of us who are not Hawaiian to share. The relationships that define terrestrial identity are not formed merely from historical knowledge and good intention directed downward from where one happens to be standing. I think it is safe to say that that the Kanaka conception of terrestrial identity is more fully developed than Western, consumption-focused, capitalist countries. Because terrestrial identity is necessarily place-based, it is not a general statement about the level of personal responsibility entailed in a relational ethic that includes non-human entities. These entities, just like the people that surround us, are not interchangeable. In fact, it might be that mindset that has deferred a robust conception of ethical obligation to the environment. But I do think that forms of terrestrial identity are solidifying as a result of ecological awareness and acceptance of the environmental issues we face. That is why we need to think deeply about what terrestrial identity is so that we can flesh out the morally appropriate relationship we each have to the land. Importantly, and this is a theme that connects the comparative philosophical perspectives outlined here, this identity must cohere with how we conceive of ourselves historically, culturally, and genealogically. We will not be able to convincingly make a case for a new type of identity, which defines a new set of ethical obligations, and hope that it will catch on in different places among different cultures. Perhaps we can look for something that has left traces in the stories we have heard from our elders and whom we believe we are. Perhaps terrestrial identity is not a creation but a return.

PART 3: HOMELESSNESS IN HAWAII

Hawaiian intellectual history imparts the view that all things are genealogically related, and one has a personal and filial responsibility to respect and preserve the entirety of the natural and human ecosystem². Therefore, disruption of the

² The filial connection between humans and the natural ecosystem is an idea developed by Julia Morgan in her dissertation *Mālama, ‘Āina, Kalo, and Ho‘opili: Growing a third way environmental relationship* (Ann Arbor: ProQuest LLC, 2016).

relationship between people and the land on which they orient their identities results in a disintegration of cultural and personal identity. Karin Amimoto Ingersoll writes, “Loss of land is a particularly critical element of Hawaiian colonization (and decolonization) because Kanaka language, economy, politics, and culture are all connected to the ‘*āina*...” (Ingersoll, 2016: 11). Misguided and racist land reform initiatives paired incriminatingly with a lack of cohesive restorative policy have done the work to existentially and literally unhouse the Kānaka Maoli.

According to a study conducted by faculty and students at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa in 2015, almost one-third of the people experiencing homelessness in Hawai‘i identify as Hawaiian/Part Hawaiian (28%) (Dunson-Strane & Soakaim, 2015: 14). Kānaka Maoli experience the highest percentage of poverty among ethnic groups living in Hawai‘i and are overrepresented in jails and prisons as well (Kana‘iaupuni, Malone, & Ishibashi, 2005: 1–11). Why are so many Hawaiians struggling at the bottom of the social heap? Pre-colonised Hawai‘i was self-sufficient even though its population numbered nearly a million, compared to fewer than 100,000 who identified as Hawaiian in the 2010 U.S. census (about 6% of the Hawai‘i population). Of course, the wealth of the Hawaiian ruling elite was not distributed among the commoners (*maka‘āinana*), but the social structure was based on the inclusive model of community interdependence. Bonds were ritualised among members of large families as well as between the people and the land (*‘āina*), and the ruling class (*ali‘i* and *ali‘inui*). The composition of the ancient Hawaiian social structure shares many of the themes related to harmonious hierarchies in the context of ancient Chinese philosophy, including, as I have shown, the cultural importance of relationships to the land. When these types of familial organizational structures are undermined, the effects can have disastrous results on economic as well as psychological self-sufficiency.

Fei’s distinction between the organizational and differential modes of association frames a discussion about a society’s need for laws to govern the people. The organizational mode requires laws that apply equally to everyone while the differential mode does not. In practice, however, laws do not have equitable effects among citizens. The potential for abuse of power is rife in a law-making society, as those with power may write laws to protect themselves that disadvantage those with comparatively less power. Today, progress in maintaining the rights of the poor that conflicts with moneyed interests is in most cases perpetually stalled. In Hawai‘i, for example, activists who advocate for those experiencing extreme poverty and homelessness are concerned about the number of exemptions and allowances that permit new condominium projects to subvert the state’s commitment to providing affordable housing units (Civil Beat Editorial Board, 2016). Although an organization mode of association is successful at accumulating wealth, it may be at the expense of equitable distribution among

citizens. Those who are not organized among powerful groups do not enjoy the same rights as those who are. In Hawai'i, a large number of people find themselves without shelter, food, and clean water. They are radically disconnected from the groups that have more than enough to buy the luxury versions of each. From the perspective of Fei's critique of Western organizations, we see modern, Western societies in an unflattering mirror. There are individuals and groups that are politically invisible, and all are not beholden, from within their own groups, to care about them or for them. Fei does not explore the implications of a society structured by boundaries and the lack of inclusivity that comes as a result of powerful groups undermining the relationship of citizen to state. His likening of the organizational mode to conflict and totalitarianism is not an avenue I would like to travel very far down, though any critique of dominant modes of capitalism would probably share many similarities.

Do the poor fare any better in a differential mode of association? In Fei's account of the history of Chinese society, this question is redundant. Poverty is a defining feature of agrarianism, one that had a profound effect on the evolution of Chinese societies through the ages. Poverty was the reason that people formed inclusive relational networks. Families and communities were mostly self-sufficient, but there was little excess that could be used for establishing a system of capital commerce. This deters the potential for a powerful state but puts it at a disadvantage against adversaries that do have such potential. Agrarian societies lack a centralized power structure capable of defending them from the common result of war: the loss of land. Fei writes:

In wars of agrarian societies, the most common pattern is to drive out the natives, take over their land, and cultivate it personally. [...] In studying Chinese history, we often come across references to conquerors who “buried tens of thousands of enemies alive.” [...] Such a situation is not one that an aggressive industrial power would understand [...] The conquest would be meaningless if the conquerors allowed the defeated to continue farming. In this sense, conquest actually means to conquer the land, not the people (Fei, 1992: 112–113).

In peace and war, agrarian societies never get off the ground, so to speak. They are connected to the land and lack the strong central state necessary to organize a cohesive defence, much less an offensive. They do not relate abstractly to one another in terms of identity, which precludes organization into a powerful but immaterial state. The power of an agrarian society relies on the optimization of relationships among a large number of people. But each of these relationships is among concrete, unique individuals and has unique valences, which creates a dynamic harmony that never fully materialises as a singular social phenomenon³. This type of society is, in Fei's words, egocentric,

³ For more on Confucian social harmony, see Ames, 2010: 84.

as opposed to generic or reductionistic. The uniqueness of each individual, their identity and desires, is maintained in dynamic relationships that preserve difference. The result is a harmony that is active as opposed to equanimous, temporal as opposed to universal. At the heart of this type of Chinese society beats a concert of individual efforts. The rhythm is determined by social and natural forces that shape the human experience, which each person strives to approximate in order to achieve optimal compatibility. This is consistent throughout the Ruist socio-historical palimpsest that we have today. It is also present in the Hawaiian understanding of each person's responsibility to the land, on the basis of shared needs as well as shared ancestors.

Contemporary Hawaiian sovereignty movements and invaluable Hawaiian scholarship help us to understand the impact of colonization and Westernization on Native Hawaiians, the land, and, most importantly, the relationship between the two. It is not as simple as saying the land reform policies disadvantaged Native Hawaiians who did not understand or were unwilling to conform to Western expressions of land value and trade, though this is an all too familiar theme among indigenous communities. What I have outlined here is a way of thinking about home and belonging that has an existential component. It is the idea that without the land, we cannot be who we are. This is not simply about agriculture and infrastructure or proper land use. When the land is tied into one's cultural narrative, the relationship one shares with it is diminished by such characterizations. The importance of non-indigenous understanding and support of this notion is an important element of terrestrial identity. For those of us whose pasts and presents do not privilege our place and its history, we must look toward cultures that do and learn from them. This is the first step to embodying the space we inhabit with ecologically-inclusive, place-based cultural understanding. For example, successful programs for addressing homelessness in Hawai'i among Kanaka Maoli draw upon indigenous understanding of the relationship to the *'āina*.

By bringing up this example of a dire social problem, I hope to show that the philosophical consideration of terrestrial identity is helpful for addressing our social problems and how these problems converge with environmental concerns. The voices I have brought into conversation here both underline our awareness of our ethical responsibilities as *spatial*. It matters where we live, who else lives there, what sort of lifestyles are possible and preferred there, and what has happened there. These factors all contribute to who we are as well as how we ought to be. Our terrestrial understanding of ourselves is at the same time historical and situated, the relationships that sustain and support us reach us from different places in time and space. These connections exist, and so our culpability for our actions extend outward, whether we are aware of it or not. Forming a theory of terrestrial identity is a step toward understanding our impact on and our place in our world.

CONCLUSION

As we witness and learn about the environmental consequences of our actions, we as philosophers must continue to hash out the nature of our ethical relationship to our shared world. These modes of ethical thinking, thankfully, are proliferating, and I hope to have made a contribution to the conversation by introducing the concept of terrestrial identity. This term is not limited to the exposition and context that I have provided here, but rather it is meant to start the conversation about how we ought to see ourselves today, in an era defined by our impact on the planet.

I laid the groundwork for terrestrial identity using Fei Xiaotong’s theory of social organization in order to differentiate it from Western modes of social thinking, which I argue tend to exclude connection to the land as a formative element of identity. His theory emphasizes the spatiality of ethical concern, which he draws from his understanding of Chinese, agrarian cultural history. Not only is the realm of ethical concern primarily distributed in one’s immediate vicinity, but the land is also implicated in this realm by virtue of the context of these relationships. In other words, in an agrarian society, life is never distanced from the land.

I then engaged Hawaiian thought to showcase a developed cultural definition of the relationship between humans and the land. The concepts of *kuleana*, (*mo’okū’auhau*) consciousness, and seascape epistemology are all Hawaiian ways of understanding the existential connection between Kanaka Maoli and the places central to their cultural history. The importance of including this as an example of terrestrial identity gives a benchmark for the cultivation of other, varied expressions of place-based identity that include the land in the realm of ethical relationality.

Moving forward, the goal of this project is to form a novel viewpoint from which to assess our ethical relationship to our planet. This relationship must be flexible, cooperative, tolerant, and responsive. It must cross the span of Otherness so thoroughly a part of the modern, Western, capitalist understanding of the land and its resources. The importance of reconfiguring our relationships with the land to accommodate the place-based context of our ethical lives cannot be underestimated.

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