THE BEAUTY OF NATURE AS A FOUNDATION FOR ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS: CHINA AND THE WEST

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My dissertation aims at constructing an environmental ethics theory based on environmental aesthetics in order to advocate and promote environmentally sustainable practices, policies, and lifestyles. I attempt to construct an integrated environmental aesthetics in order to inspire people’s feelings of love towards nature and motivate them to protect it.

In order to achieve this goal, I first examine the philosophical understanding and aesthetic appreciation of nature from philosophical traditions of China, which have an impact on the general public’s attitude towards nature. In chapter one of my dissertation, I point out that nature is viewed as an organic system which is always in a self-generating process of production and reproduction of life. The metaphysical foundation for this perspective of nature is *ch’i*. Therefore the aesthetic appreciation of nature in China is also the aesthetic appreciation of *ch’i*. With regard to the concept of *ch’i*, I focus on the following three questions: (1) what are the objective and aesthetic features of *ch’i*? (2) How do the Chinese appreciate aesthetic features of *ch’i*? (3) Why the objective features of *ch’i* are regarded as the objects of aesthetic appreciation? I argue that the Chinese appreciate the aesthetic features of *ch’i* by using intellectual intuition and that empathy is the reason why the objective features of *ch’i* are considered to be aesthetic features. In Chapter 2, I explain in detail the two aesthetic categories for aesthetic appreciation of nature in two major philosophical schools in China: emptiness and creativity.

In Chapter 3, I examine the philosophical foundations for aesthetic appreciation of nature in the West. I first investigate the influence of traditional Western philosophy on the perceptions of nature. I argue that traditional Western philosophical thinking doesn’t support aesthetic appreciation of nature. I point out that aesthetic appreciation of nature started from eighteenth century in the West. I examine Kant’s aesthetic categories of beauty and sublime
in his appreciation of nature. In contemporary world, I focus on the Allen Carlson’s positive aesthetics and Arnold Berleant’s engagement model to appreciate the beauty of environment. In Chapter 4, I evaluate the theories of aesthetic appreciation of nature in the West and China and attempt to construct an integrated theory of aesthetic appreciation of nature. The key point of this theory is to establish a caring relationship with nature based on aesthetic appreciation of nature and active participation in the beauty of it. This relationship will motivate people to protect nature and also contribute to human happiness.
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CHAPTER 1

PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR AESTHETIC APPRECIATION OF NATURE IN CHINA

It is well-known that China has a 5000 year history of civilization which is characterized by its agrarian culture. Confucianism and Taoism as the two major schools of Chinese philosophy are theoretical expressions of different aspects of the life of the farmers. Since farmers are in close contact with nature, they have developed strong emotions of admiration and love toward it. Influenced by the emotions, nature is highly valued in Chinese culture. About eighty percent of Chinese art forms such as landscape painting, gardening, architecture, and poetry are related to the praise of nature. At the same time, the pursuit of harmony with nature is an ongoing effort in Chinese philosophy and cultural practice. Nature in Chinese philosophy is viewed as the self-generating process of production and reproduction of life. This view is influenced by the concept of \( ch'i \) in Chinese philosophy. In this chapter, I first examine the metaphysical and aesthetic meaning of \( ch'i \). Second, I explore how Chinese philosophers know and aesthetically appreciate the \( ch'i \). Third, I discuss the concept of empathy and the role it plays in the Chinese aesthetic appreciation of \( ch'i \).

1.1 Metaphysical Foundations of Nature: The Concept of \( ch'i \) and Its Aesthetic Meaning

In Chinese philosophy, nature is viewed as an organic system which is always in a self-generating process of production and reproduction of life. This view of nature is best expressed by the Chinese philosophers as \( sheng-sheng-bu-xi \). The metaphysical foundation for this perspective of nature is \( ch'i \), a core concept in Chinese philosophy as well as in Chinese common sense. Philosophers often use the word \( ch'i \) to form other words such as \( zhi \).
ch’i (ambition), sheng ch’i (animation), and kong ch’i (air). From such usages, we can see that the concept of ch’i contains both material and spiritual meanings. Ch’i has been translated into English as “vital force,” “material force,” “material energy,” and “spirit.” However, like many fundamental Chinese philosophical terms, these translations are still not adequate to capture the rich meanings of ch’i. As Cheng Chung-ying points out, “all existing translations conceal and obscure the rich experiential structure of meaning in the concept of ch’i [qi].”¹ According to Cheng, the concept of ch’i contains a metaphysical, epistemological, and scientific theory. Yet Cheng misses one important aspect of ch’i—the aesthetic dimension.

In this chapter, I examine the category of ch’i from metaphysical, epistemological, and aesthetic dimension. Due to the rich meanings of ch’i, it is very difficult to define it by using one or two sentences but it will be very helpful for us to understand the meanings of ch’i if we explore its features. Ch’i in Chinese philosophy is characterized by continuity, emptiness, and creativity. All these features are interconnected.

First, by “continuity,” I mean that ch’i is the basic stuff out of which everything is made. For this reason, all things and spaces are unified, interconnected, and interpenetrating. Human beings as part of nature are organically connected with mountains, trees, animals, rivers and spaces. The interconnection and interpenetration of the reality can be seen in the Classic of Changes. The distinctive feature of the book is the elaboration of the correspondence of the elements with seasons, direction, colors, body, and virtues. Han Confucian scholar Dong Zhongshu (179-104BC) further developed this idea and it remained an important aspect of Chinese thought up to modern China. The traditional applied

environmental analysis (*feng shui*) and the traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) are both based on the interconnection among things, human beings, and spaces. The interconnection among things can also be found in Chinese literature as Tu Weiming has pointed out. The monkey in the novel titled *Journey to the West* is transformed from an agate and the hero in *Dream of the Red Chamber* Pao-yu is transformed from a piece of precious jade. For the Chinese audience, it is not difficult to accept the reality that a piece of jade or agate can have enough spirituality to transform itself into a human being. Since everything is made out of *ch'i*, a universal sympathetic resonance exists among things in the universe. The interpenetration and resonance among things and space is the result of another feature of *ch'i*: emptiness.

Second, since *ch'i* has no physical form and it is invisible, Chinese philosophers often use *xu* to express the concept of *ch'i*. *Xu* is often translated as “void,” “emptiness,” and “vacuity.” For the sake of simplicity, I use the word emptiness to express the idea of *xu* in this chapter. All these translations are misleading because they are easily misunderstood as non-existence. However, *xu* often contrasts with *shi* (fullness). *Shi* has the meaning of being solid, manifest, visible, tangible, and fully realized while *xu* suggests subtle, hollow, invisible, intangible, and unmanifested. Therefore, *xu* doesn’t refer to non-being or nothingness. Chang Tsai (1020-1077) writes, “If we realize that the Great Vacuity is identical with material force, we know that there is no such thing as non-being.” The empty feature of *ch'i* makes

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the interconnection, interpenetration, and resonance among things and space possible. As T’ang points out, “Whenever a thing is in intercourse with another, it is always that the thing by means of its void contains the other andprehends it.” For T’ang Chun-I, only through emptiness within the things and space can one thing absorb the other so that the interpenetration can become possible. Since ch’i is empty, all concrete things which are made up of ch’i have emptiness within them. Therefore, all concrete things are interconnected with the space that surrounds the object. Chang Tsai addresses this interconnection among things and spaces in the following passage:

If it is argued that all phenomena are but things perceived in the Great Vacuity, then since things and the Vacuity would not be mutually conditioned, since the physical form and the nature of things would be self-contained, and since these, as well as Heaven and man, would not be interdependent, such an argument would fall into the doctrine of the Buddha who taught that mountains, rivers, and the total stretch of land are all subjective illusions.

According to Chang Tsai, the vacuity and things are interdependent rather than mutually exclusive. Things are not self-contained but can be influenced by the vacuity because things have emptiness within them.

Third, by creativity, I mean that ch’i is always in an unceasing process of movement which produces and reproduces life. The creative power in ch’i is due to the yin-yang principle. This feature of ch’i can be seen in the following passages:

As the Great Vacuity, material force is extensive and vague. Yet it ascends and descends and moves in all ways without every ceasing.

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5 Wing-Tsit Chan, A Source Book In Chinese Philosophy, p. 502.

6 Ibid., p. 503.
Material force moves and flows in all directions and in all manners. Its two elements unite and give rise to the concrete. Thus the multiplicity of things and human beings is produced. In their ceaseless successions the two elements of yin and yang constitute the great principle of the universe.  

Because ch’i has inexhaustible power within it, it is always in an unceasing process of movement. The moving power of ch’i is due to the yin-yang principle intrinsic to ch’i rather than caused by external intelligence. Yin and yang are neither material stuff nor the principles of our mind, but are the opposing modes which are intrinsic to ch’i. The combination of yin-yang explains why ch’i is creative. By yin alone or by yang alone, creative power in ch’i ceases to exist so that things will not be produced. The combination of yin and yang takes many forms which are beyond people’s mind. Jacques Gernet once called the combination of yin and yang “spontaneous intelligence,” which I think best captures the yin-yang Principle:

Believing that the universe possesses within itself its own organisational principles and its own creative energy, the Chinese maintained something that was quite scandalous from the point of view of scholastic reason, namely that “matter” itself is intelligent—not, clearly enough, with a conscious and reflective intelligence as we usually conceive it, but with a spontaneous intelligence which makes it possible for the yin and the yang to come together and guides the infinite combinations of these two opposite sources of energy.

All kinds of things are the result of the combination of yin and yang, which is not caused by external and conscious intelligence. Therefore, things are not created but the spontaneous combination of yin and yang which is intrinsic principle of ch’i. Since all things come into being as a result of the transformation of ch’i, all things are full of vitality. For

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7 Ibid., p. 505.
9 Ibid., pp. 146-147.
Chinese philosophers, vitality represents life. This is the reason why nature is often described by Chinese philosophers as *sheng-sheng-bu-xi* (production and reproduction of life). From the above, we can see the deeper reason why nature is viewed as a self-generating process of production and reproduction of life. In this perception, everything is always becoming something so that there are no fixed objects in nature. This is a distinctive feature of the Chinese philosophers’ perception of reality. In contrast with Chinese philosophers, Western philosophers pay more attention to being, which is considered superior to becoming. Being is fixed and eternal while becoming is always changing and unreal. Plato, for example, thinks that forms as the fixed essence of things are superior reality. The forms are beyond time and space. However, *ch'i* in Chinese philosophy is in both time and space.

In Chinese philosophy, the self-generating movement and transformation of *ch'i* manifests Tao which is the combination among truth, good, and beauty. In terms of Tao, Confucianism and Daoism have different interpretations. Chan discussed the difference in one of his comments on *The Doctrine of the Mean*:

> In no other Confucian work is the Way (Tao) given such a central position. This self-directing Way seems to be the same as the Tao in Taoism. But the difference is great. As Ch’ien Mu has pointed out, when the Taoists talk about Tao as being natural, it means that Tao is void and empty, whereas when Confucianists talk about Tao as being natural, they describe it as sincerity.¹⁰

Tao as the manifestation of the movement and transformation of *ch'i* is the same in Confucianism and Daoism. The question is: why does Taoism describe Tao as emptiness while Confucianism uses sincerity to characterize Tao? My answer is that Confucianism focuses on the creative feature in *ch'i* while Taoism stresses the emptiness feature in *ch'i*.

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¹⁰ Ibid., p. 109.
Sincerity is the translation for the Chinese character *chēng*. The word *chēng* frequently appears in *The Doctrine of the Mean*. It is regarded as the Way (Tao) of heaven (nature).

*Chēng* is often described as “ceaseless.”11 The Neo-Confucian scholar Chang Tsai explained *chēng* as “the way according to which heaven can last for ever and is unceasing.” 12 Obviously, *Chēng* is seen as a process. What kind of process it is? The answer can be found in this passage:

The Way of Heaven and Earth may be completely described in one sentence: They are without any doubleness and so they produce things in an unfathomable way. 13

The Chinese characters for “without any doubleness” in this passage are *bù ěr* which means “sincerity.” From here, we can find the answer that *chēng* is a ceaseless process of production and reproduction of things. For this reason, some scholars translate *chēng* as creativity. Tu Wei-Ming explains *chēng* in terms of the creativity:

… can be conceived as a form of creativity…. it is that which brings about the transforming and nourishing processes of heaven and earth. As creativity, Ch’ēng is “ceaseless”(*pù-hsi* [buxi]). Because of its ceaselessness it does not create in a single act beyond the spatiotemporal sequence. Rather, it creates in a continuous and unending process in time and space….it is simultaneously a self-subsistence and self-fulfilling process of creation that produces life unceasingly. 14

From this passage, we can see that *chēng* is the expression of the feature of creativity in *ch’i*. Compared with Confucianism, Daoism emphasizes the feature of emptiness of *ch’i*. Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu often used the word *emptiness* to describe Tao:

11 Ibid., p. 109.
12 Ibid., pp. 507-508.
13 Ibid., p. 109.
Tao is empty (like a bowl), It may be used but its capacity is never exhausted. It is bottomless, perhaps the ancestor of all things.\(^{15}\)

How Heaven and Earth are like a bellows! While vacuous, it is never exhausted. When active, it produces even more.\(^{16}\)

Emptiness, stillness, limpidity, silence, inaction-these are the level of Heaven and earth, the substance of the Way and its virtue.\(^{17}\)

In the above passages, Lao Tzu compares the Tao to a bowl and a bellows to convey the idea that \textit{ch'i} has the inexhaustible and infinite power of producing life. However this power is hidden because of its emptiness.

The Chinese aesthetic appreciation of emptiness and creativity of \textit{ch'i} can be best illustrated in traditional Chinese landscape painting. The important principle of Chinese painting which is recorded in the Ku Hua P’in Lu by Hsieh Ho (479-502) is Spirit Resonance. Spirit is another English translation for Chinese word \textit{ch'i}. According to this principle, the excellent painting should embody the features of \textit{ch'i}. Chinese painters use some methods to capture those features of \textit{ch'i}. First, as I examined earlier, the invisible \textit{ch'i} is always in an unceasing process of movement which nourishes and sustains all kinds of life. The important method adopted by Chinese painters to capture this feature of \textit{ch'i} is called \textit{liu bai} which means to leave the empty space in the painting. Painters often use fog, clouds, and water to indicate empty space which provides a rhythm and a breath to the overall painting. Doing so conveys the moving and creative power of \textit{ch'i}. Second, based on Chinese philosophy, everything is in flux and change since every concrete thing in nature is made up of \textit{ch'i}. Some

\(^{15}\) Ibid., p. 141.

\(^{16}\) Ibid.

Chinese painters draw different heights for mountains and trees to convey the idea of flux and change. The Ming Dynasty painter Chang Tung Chi declared:

The rising and falling of mountains in the distance conveys a sensation of power. The varying height of the trees in a forest is expressive of feeling. 18

Chinese painters used this method to convey the dynamism and change in things.

Other painters such as Ni Zan (1301-1374) painted the trees in a way that makes them sparse and bare so that they have a kind of dynamism to them. When we look at the trees, they appear to stretching out toward the mountains.

1.2 The Way for Chinese Philosophers to Know and Aesthetically Appreciate ch’i: Intellectual Intuition

In the first section of the chapter, I examined the meaning of ch’i from the metaphysical and aesthetic dimensions. In this part, I explore the meaning of ch’i from the epistemological dimension by answering the question: how do the Chinese people know ch’i?

According to the Chinese philosophers, ultimate reality can be known through intellectual intuition. By intellectual intuition, I mean our innate capability to directly grasp the ultimate reality. Compared with the dominant rational way of knowing in Western philosophy, Chinese philosophers depend on intellectual intuition to know things outside of us. Some of them believe that the knowledge we obtain through intellectual intuition is equal to and even superior to what we gain through the senses and reflective mind. Intellectual intuition can be acquired in different ways based on Confucianism and Daoism.

For Confucianism, we can have intellectual intuition if we are persistently cultivating

humanity. The Chinese character for humanity is *jen* which is “not only the innermost sensitivity but also an all-pervading care.”

Tu Weiming considers the “unfolding of humanity” as the self-disclosure of ultimate reality. The Confucian way of knowing the ultimate reality is best illustrated in the following passage by Chang Tsai:

By enlarging one’s mind, one can enter into all the things in the world [to examine and understand their principle]. As long as anything is not yet entered into, there is still something outside of the mind. The mind of ordinary people is limited to the narrowness of what is seen and what is heard. The sage, however, fully develops his nature and does not allow what is seen or heard to fetter his mind. He regards everything in the world to be his own self. This is why Mencius said that if one exerts his mind to the utmost, he can know nature and Heaven. Heaven is so vast that there is nothing outside of it. Therefore the mind that leaves something outside is not capable of uniting itself with the mind of Heaven. Knowledge coming from seeing and hearing is knowledge obtained through one’s moral nature. Knowledge obtained through one’s moral nature does not originate from seeing or hearing.

Tu Weiming considers the “unfolding of humanity” as the self-disclosure of ultimate reality.

To enlarge one’s mind is to fully develop our moral nature which is characterized by the innate capability to be sensitive to other forms of life. If we fully develop our ability, we will be able to embrace all things in the world in a caring way. In other words, we can identify ourselves with everything in the world. In terms of our fully developed moral nature, we can have intellectual intuition which enables us to understand the ultimate reality of the world.

In contrast to Confucianism, Daoism stresses emptiness, which is the ideal structure of the mind which is characterized by no-structure. In other words, emptiness is both a state of mind which is devoid of all the knowledge we get through sense experience and rational argument. With emptiness in the mind and the body, we can directly understand the ultimate reality.

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reality. Chuang Tzu calls this ability of direct understanding shen which is often translated into English as “spirit.” In terms of spirit, T’ang Chun-I (1909-1978) gives an excellent definition that it is a function of mind which “meets the things in their changing process with intuitive and sympathetic understanding but without attachments.”21 The belief that emptiness of the mind can enable us to have the intuitive knowledge of the ultimate reality is best demonstrated by Chuang Tzu in the following passage:

Make your will one! Don’t listen with your ears, listen with your mind. No, don’t listen with your mind, but listen with your spirit. Listening stops with the ears, the mind stops with recognition, but spirit is empty and waits on all things. The Way gathers in emptiness along. Emptiness is the fasting of the mind. 22

“Make your will one” refers to intense concentration. Ears represent the knowledge we obtain through sense organs while mind refers to the knowledge we get through reason. Spirit is the translation for the Chinese word ch‘i. The Way (Tao) means the ultimate reality.

Emptiness in this passage not only refers to the psychological state of mind but also the state of body. Body and mind in Chinese philosophy are interconnected. The tranquil state of mind can generate the excellent flow of ch‘i in our body. (I discuss this point in detail in chapter two). Therefore, when our mind does not have self-conscious thought from sense perceptions and reason, our body will be full of ch‘i. When our mind is empty and full of ch‘i, we remove our “cognitive flaws” such as “our tendencies to be ‘full’ of ourselves or ‘stuck

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22 Ibid., pp. 57-58.
on’ our values and ideals.”

As the result of emptiness, shen is followed which enables our mind to see the ultimate reality of the world. For the Daoist philosopher, the knowledge we get through shen is equal to or even superior to knowledge we get through sense perception and rational argumentation. Chuang Tzu (369-286 BCE) states:

What you can look at and see are forms and colors; what you can listen to and hear are names and sounds. What a pity!-that the men of the world should suppose that form and color, name and sound are sufficient to convey the truth of a thing. It is because in the end they are not sufficient to convey truth that “those who know do not speak, those who speak do not know.” But how can the world understand this?

For Chuang Tzu, Tao as the ultimate truth cannot be known by words. Words are the result of our sensual perception and understanding. The ultimate truth can only be intuited instead of being known by words. However, Tao can still be known by intellectual intuition. Many Western scholars tend to label this way of knowing as the mystical knowledge which has no truth value. To me, that is a bias and prejudice. We cannot say that everybody can arrive at this state. It requires years of mental training. The founder of Buddhism after six years of meditation suddenly got enlightenment one day and he realized that everything is one and in a constant process of change and movement.

The Chinese mode of thinking influenced by Confucianism and Daoism can also be found in Heidegger’s works. In his the Introduction to Metaphysics, he discusses why human beings have become alienated from the reality of the world. He writes:

They thrash about amid the essence, always supposing that what is most tangible is

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what they must grasp and thus each man grasps what is closest to him. The one holds to this, the other to that, each man's opinion [Sinn] hinges on his own [eigen]; it is opinionatedness [Eigen-sinn]. This opinionatedness, this obstinacy, prevents them from reaching out to what is gathered together in itself, makes it impossible for them to be followers [Horige] and to hear [horen] accordingly. 25

For Heidegger, the opinionatedness of human beings prevents them from reaching out to find the ultimate reality. Confucianism and Daoism stress different ways to get rid of this opinionatedness. According to Confucianism, by consistently cultivating the virtue of jen, we can embrace all things in our heart so that we can “enter” all things in the world. According to Daoism, by emptying the mind of all conscious content, we can have a spirit which enables us to have intuitive knowledge of the ultimate reality. The belief that we can have a direct understanding and experience of the ultimate reality through intellectual intuition is not allowed in the two dominant Western epistemological theories. For Kant, knowledge is constructed through the imposition of the rational structure of the mind onto the world. The ultimate reality of the world, called the numenal world by Kant, is never known by us. Hume, an empiricist, denies that we can achieve certainty in the knowledge of the outside world because we are not able to have sense experience of the ultimate reality. In contrast with Western philosophers, Chinese philosophers believe that we can achieve certainty about the world by intellectual intuition that is equal with and even superior to the senses and reason. Modern physics has already proved that the “mystical knowledge” we get through intuition is compatible with the knowledge we get through reason by using technologies.

This compatibility is best explored by Fritjof Capra. According to Capra, there are parallels between modern physics and the concept of ch’i in Chinese philosophy. These

parallels can be found in the following aspects. (1) Based on Chinese philosophy, all things are interdependent and interpenetrating because of ch‘i. According to Capra, modern physics expresses the same insight that no entity can be understood in isolation. (2) All things in nature are essentially in a constant process of change and movement because of ch‘i. For Capra, modern physics offers the same insight. He states:

The discovery that mass is nothing but a form of energy has forced us to modify our concept of a particle in an essential way. In modern physics, mass is no longer associated with material substance, and hence particles are not seen as consisting of any basic ‘stuff’, but as bundles of energy. Since energy, however, is associated with activity, with processes, the implication is that the nature of subatomic particles is intrinsically dynamic.26

For modern physics, because particles are seen as bundles of energy, all things in nature are in a constant flux since energy itself is associated with activity. The concept of energy is very close to that of ch‘i in Chinese philosophy.

1.3 The Reason Chinese Philosophers Have the Aesthetic Appreciation of ch‘i: Empathy

As I mentioned earlier, Tao is the value term which represents the unity among truth, goodness, and beauty. Beauty is based on truth and goodness. Confucianism uses sincerity to describe Tao while Taoism uses emptiness to do it. Sincerity and emptiness represent the highest beauty. A question may arise here: why are sincerity and emptiness regarded as the objects of aesthetic appreciation? I argue that it is through empathy. Empathy was once widely discussed by modern German aesthetists. The Chinese aesthetist Chu Guang-qian who

once studied in Germany did detailed research on the empathy.27 According to Chu Guang-qian, German aesthetist Robert Vischer and American psychologist E.B. Titchener first translated the German word *Einfühlung* into empathy. Some people compare the theory of empathy with the evolution theory of evolution in biology and they regard Theodor Lipps as the Darwin of aesthetics. Many German aesthetists think that the empathy is the basic principle of aesthetics and almost all the questions concerning aesthetics can be answered by this principle. Lipps’ theory of empathy is well expressed in the following passage:

Empathy means, not a sensation in one’s body, but feeling something namely, oneself, into the esthetic object. 28

Aesthetic pleasure has no object at all. The esthetic enjoyment is not enjoyment of an object, but enjoyment of a self. It is an immediate feeling of a value that is lodged in oneself. But this is not a feeling that is related to an object. Rather, its characteristic consists in this—that there is no separation in it between my pleased ego and with which I am pleased; in it both are one and the same self, the immediately experienced ego. 29

To Lipps, empathy means that we project our feelings onto the object. Aesthetic experience is not related to the object as such, but only to “my pleased ego.” Lipps illustrates his theory of empathy by an example of Doric architecture in ancient Greece. The ancient Greeks did not use walls but rather columns to support the roof when they constructed temples. The columns were very strong with vertical stripes. According to the theory of physics, we are supposed to feel the columns do downward because of gravity. However, when we see Doric columns, we feel them soaring to the sky. Lipps asks the question: who makes the movement of soaring? He answers that it is our emotion that makes us feel that it

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29 Ibid., p. 375.
soars. A question may arise here: why does emotion bring in aesthetic experience? For Lipps, the projection of emotions enlarges the self so that the self can “fly” in an infinite world which is accompanied by great spiritual pleasure. I agree with Lipps that the projection of emotions does create aesthetic experience, but it is not a necessary condition for aesthetic experience. The projection of rational categories onto a certain object can also create aesthetic experience. Allen Carlson’s positive aesthetics is a case in point. I discuss it in detail in chapter three.

An important difference between the projection of feelings and that of reason is that in the former, the subject merges itself with the object while in the latter, there is a separation between the subject and object. Nevertheless, there is also a similarity in that aesthetic experience is in essence a projection of the human mind. If all human consciousness is destroyed in this world, there would be no beauty or ugliness in it. However, human beings do not randomly project their emotions or rational categories onto an object. The object on which we project our emotions has certain objective features which can “communicate something” to us. For this reason, I argue that empathy functions in two directions. As I have already mentioned, empathy is the English translation for the German word *Einfühlung*. Lipps was the first person to regard empathy as the first aesthetic principle and give a systematic discussion of it. There is no theory of empathy in ancient Chinese philosophy. The Chinese aesthetic experience of *ch’i* stems from the two directions of empathy. Empathy in the Chinese aesthetic appreciation of nature is characterized by the following three features.

First, empathy functions in two directions in establishing the harmonious relationship between nature and human beings. The first is that the nature has certain features or structures
which trigger certain emotions in the subject. Second, the subject whose mind has the similar
structures or features with nature imposes their cherished values onto the object. The Chinese
perception of empathy shares some similarities to Arnheim’s gestalt psychology. Arnheim
articulates his theory in the following passage:

Motifs like rising and falling, dominance and submission, weakness and strength,
harmony and discord, struggle and conformance, underlie all existence. We find them
within our own mind and in our relations to other people, in the human community
and in the events of nature. 30

According to Arnheim, the forces in the physical world are similar to those in human world.
The reason why human beings can have emotions toward a certain art form or nature is that
the forces in an art form and nature are similar to the forces in the appreciator’s mind. Human
beings do not just randomly “impose” their feelings onto a certain object. Rather, the inherent
perceptual patterns contain a desired expression. Human beings impose their structurally
similar states of mind onto the object. Arnheim uses the example of a weeping willow to
illustrate his point. For him, our imposition of the feeling of sadness onto a willow is based
on the inherent patterns of a willow such as the shape, direction, and flexibility which easily
convey the desired expression. As I showed earlier, because Confucianism and Daoism focus
on different features of ch’i, they use different aesthetic categories to describe ch’i. The
reason is that they value different states of mind. Confucianism values sincerity which is
characterized by the unceasing effort of the cultivation of humanity as a sublime state of mind.
In contrast, Daoism values the emptiness of the mind. An example of the Japanese
neo-Confucianist Kaibara Ekken illustrates the two direction of empathy. Kaibara Ekken is a

30 Rudolf Arnheim, Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye (London: Faber and
famous Japanese scholar who spreads the neo-Confucian moral teachings throughout Japan. According to Mary Evelyn Tucker, he was known as the “Aristotle of Japan” for his studies of the natural world. Ekken shows great interest in the theory of ch’i. He calls the ch’i joyful energy. He states, “Grass and trees are produced ceaselessly and, similarly, within our hearts the originative process of nature flourishes and is an endless source of joyful energy—this is happiness.” In this passage, we can see that the unceasing process of the production of life in nature is compatible with his pursuit of happiness—never ending efforts to serve other people and their country. However, there is some difference between Arnheim’s gestalt theory and the foundation of empathy in Chinese philosophy. For Arnheim, human beings and the material world are still qualitatively different. The unity between human beings and nature for Arnheim is mechanical unity rather than organic unity. In Chinese philosophy, the unity or harmony between nature and humans is an organic one because of ch’i. ch’i as a force is not a physical movement but a biological one. In other words, ch’i itself is full of life and vitality. As a result of the two dimensions of empathy, there is no separation between subject and object so that the aesthetic appreciation of nature is neither an appropriation of the nature by the subject nor an imposition of the subject on nature but the merging of the self into nature. In other words, the object of aesthetic appreciation is the harmony between human beings and nature. Aesthetic experience of harmony is the result of a continuous effort through self-cultivation. Confucianism and Daoism have different methods for self-cultivation. For Confucianism, self-cultivation is through sincerity which refers to the unceasing effort of cultivating the unselfish emotions of love. In this way, we can participate in the nourishing

process of ch’i. By “nourishing,” I mean that the movement of ch’i that produces and sustains everything in nature. In Daoism, self-cultivation is through emptying the mind of all false goals such as the pursuit of fame, long life, reputation and wealth. In this way, the movement of ch’i in our body joins us to the movement of ch’i in nature.
2.1 The Aesthetic Category for Appreciation of the Beauty of Nature in Daoism: Emptiness

2.1.1 Daoists’ Practice of Yang Xin and the importance of Emptiness

In chapter one, I showed that emptiness (xu) is an alternative way to express the concept of ch’i because of its invisibility. I also have pointed out that emptiness has an aesthetic value. The question is: why is ch’i as the physical reality of the world aesthetically appreciated? In other words, what makes the transition of fact to value possible? My answer is through empathy. As I discussed in chapter one, empathy operates in two directions in Chinese philosophy. One direction is that a certain object has an objective feature which appeals to a subject. The other direction is that a subject imposes his or her emotions onto a certain object. The two directions of empathy can be understood as the compatibility between a feature of an object and that of a mind. Aesthetic experience is accompanied by great emotional pleasure which stems from this compatibility. The above is the philosophical foundation for the aesthetic value of emptiness. In philosophical Daoism, emptiness is the sublime state of mind which can help us achieve self-realization. This idea is derived from Daoists’ practice of yang sheng. Before I address the importance of emptiness in achieving self-realization, I need to introduce this practice.

Yang sheng has been translated into English as “nourishing life” or “fostering life.”
The practice of *yang sheng* is motivated by the desire of prolonging life and attaining immortality. It has been going on for almost five thousand years in Chinese culture. Many ancient texts have addressed this practice. A majority of them are Daoist text: for example, *Bao Pu Tzu*, *Chuang Tzu*, *Dao De Ching*, and *NeiYe*. The practice of *yang sheng* is based on the ancient Chinese understanding of the body which is greatly influenced by traditional Chinese medicine. In order to gain a deep understanding of the body based on Daoism, I first examine the Western understanding of body which is characterized by dualism. Mind and body in such a dualistic way of thinking are separated. Mind, which is defined by its rationality, plays an important role in philosophy in the West since the main task of philosophy is to pursue the truth. In comparison, body which represents the pursuit of desire tends to prevent us from pursuing the truth. This mode of thinking can be found in Plato’s dialogue *Phaedo*. He states:

\[\ldots \text{as long as we possess the body, and our soul is contaminated by such an evil, we’ll surely never adequately gain what we desire—and that, we say, is truth. Because the body affords us countless distractions, owing to the nature it must have, and again, if any illness befalls it, they hamper our pursuit of that which is. Besides, it fills us with lusts and desires, with fears and fantasies of every kind, and with any amount of trash so that really and truly we are, as the saying goes, never able to think of anything at all because of it.}\]


For Socrates, the body is dominated by desires, lusts, fantasies, and diseases which contaminate the soul which aims at the pursuit of truth. Within our body, our soul is not able to think about truth very well. Descartes continues this mode of thinking. His famous slogan, “I think, therefore I am,” demonstrates the idea that rationality, as the defining nature of human beings, can guide us to find the truth. By contrast, body is not capable of thinking.
By “body” I understand all that which is fit to be determined by some figure, to be circumscribed by place, to fill up space in such a way as that all other body be excluded from it, to be perceived by touch, sight, hearing, taste or smell, and to be moved in many ways, surely not by itself, but by whatever else by which it be touched. For I also judged that to have the power of moving itself, as well as the power of sensing or of cogitating, in no way pertains to the nature of a body.  

For Descartes, body doesn’t have the ability of moving, sensing, and thinking. In addition, body cannot communicate with other bodies since the body as a solid matter establishes a boundary with other bodies. In contrast with the Western devaluation of the body, Daoism puts a great emphasis on it. For Daoism, the body itself has a moving power which is responsible for physical vitality and mental clarity. Instead of establishing a boundary with other bodies, body from the perspective of Daoism is connected with all other bodies. These above perspectives of body in Daoism are greatly influenced by traditional Chinese medicine in which the body is seen as the dwelling place for three treasures: essence, ch’i, and spirit. Essence is the translation for the Chinese character jing. It refers to the texture within our body which has the potentiality to shapes birth, development, maturation, decline, and death. Essence has two sources. One is prenatal essence (xian-tian-zhi-jing) which is inherited from the parents. The quality and quantity of prenatal essence is fixed at birth. The other source is postnatal essence derived from the ingested food and continuous physical, emotional and mental stimulation from a person’s environment. Postnatal essence can modify prenatal essence. Ch’i, as I noted in chapter one, is the basic stuff out of which everything is made which includes elements of yin and yang. Human beings as part of nature are also made up of ch’i, which has more complicated structure and meanings in traditional

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Chinese medicine. Compared with essence, \textit{ch’i} is invisible stuff, the function of which is to
govern all types of activities in daily life such as physical activity, mental activity, and the
process of life. In our body, \textit{ch’i} is in a constant motion and has four primary directions:
ascending, descending, entering and leaving. The normal flowing of \textit{ch’i} is responsible for
the warmth and vitality in our body. When our body is in healthy condition, \textit{ch’i} moves
harmoniously in these various directions. However, if our mind is agitated, the movement of
\textit{ch’i} will be in disorder, resulting in diseases. A detailed account of the impact of the agitated
mind on bodily health can be found in \textit{The Yellow Emperor’s Classic of Medicine} which is
often referred to as Neijing. In chapter thirty-nine, “Differentiation of Pain,” it is said:

I understand that many diseases come from disharmony of the qi \([ch’i]\). They often
involve emotional disharmony. For example, when one is angry, the qi rises upward;
when one is joyous, the qi disperses; when one is sad, the qi becomes exhausted;
when one is fearful and frightened, the qi descends; when one is chilled, the qi
contracts;\textsuperscript{34}

Our emotions such as joy, anger and sadness cause the disharmony of \textit{ch’i} which is
called rebellious \textit{ch’i} by traditional Chinese medicine. The term implies that \textit{ch’i} is going in
the wrong direction. For example, according to traditional Chinese medicine, stomach \textit{ch’i}
should go downward. If it rebels and goes upward, there may be nausea and vomiting.

\textit{Spirit} is the translation of the Chinese word \textit{shen}. Spirit is a fundamental element of
what is unique to human life. Shen as the most refined form of \textit{ch’i}, enables us to perform our
daily activities with excellence. The practice of \textit{yang sheng} sometimes is called “cultivation
of \textit{shen}.”

\textsuperscript{34} Maoshing Ni, \textit{The Yellow Emperor’s Classic of Medicine: A New Translation of the Neijing Suwen with
Daoists adopt many methods to achieve the purpose of *Yang Sheng*. Those methods include cultivation of the mind, breath meditation, ritual, martial arts, life nourishing through diet, *qigong* (practice of cultivation of *ch’i* in our body), and living in harmony with seasons and calendar. Among these methods, cultivation of mind which is often called *yang xin* in Chinese is the most important one. The immediate aim of *yang xin* is to attain tranquil state of mind. The important technique for *yang xin* is to empty out the mind of all thoughts, emotions and desires. The question is: how can cultivation of tranquility in the mind contribute to longevity? The answer is poetically stated in the following two passages in Nei-yeh (inner cultivation and inner training), verse XV and verse III.

For those who preserve and naturally generate vital essence
On the outside a calmness will flourish.
Stored inside, we take it to be the well spring.
Floodlike, it harmonizes and equalizes
And we take it to be the fount of the vital energy.
When the fount is not dried up,
The four limbs are firm.
When the well spring is not drained,
Vital energy freely circulates through the nine apertures.\(^{35}\)

All the forms of the mind
Are naturally infused and filled with it {the vital essence},
Are naturally generated and developed [because of] it.
It is lost
Inevitably because of sorrow, happiness, joy, anger, desire, and profit-seeking.
If you are able to cast off sorrow, happiness, joy, anger, desire, and profit seeking,
Your mind will revert to equanimity.\(^{36}\)

From the two passages, we can see the influence of traditional Chinese medicine on Daoist understanding of body. (1) Emotions and desires have a tendency to exhaust the vital


\(^{36}\) Ibid., pp. 105-106.
essence which naturally dwells in our mind. (2) The vital essence as the source of vital energy, if exhausted, will affect the free and excellent flow of vital energy. If it does, bodily health will be affected. (3) Only if we empty our minds of emotions and desires that accompany the tranquility of mind, can we have a good circulation of vital energy which will finally contribute to bodily health.

Yang xin as the important method of practice of yang sheng is also greatly valued by Chuang Tzu. Chapters three, fifteen and nineteen of Chuang Tzu titled “The Secret of Caring Life,” “Constrained in Will,” and “Mastering Life,” mainly focus on this method. The following passage in Chuang Tzu can illustrate Chuang Tzu’s method of yang sheng.

Let there be so seeing, no hearing; enfold the spirit in quietude and the body will right itself. Be still, be pure, do not labor your body, do not churn up your essence, and then you can live a long life. When the eye does not see, the ear does not hear, and the mind does not know, then your spirit will protect the body, and the body will enjoy long life.37

Here “spirit” is the translation for the Chinese word shen. As discussed above, shen as one of the treasures in our body is the refined form of ch’i which is responsible for health, vitality and mental clarity. Therefore, by “enfold the spirit in quietude.” Chuang Tzu stresses that we should try to cultivate the tranquil state of mind so that the circulation of ch’i will occur excellently. In this way, we can attain shen, which demonstrates the good bodily health.

In order to have shen, we need to empty the mind of all sensual and intellectual activities.

From the above, we can see that emptiness plays an important role in cultivating a tranquil state of mind which will finally contribute to long life. Besides the physical benefits,

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various spiritual benefits can also be achieved through this practice. Norman once made such comment on Daoism that “the very idea of life and health, including as it does both physical and spiritual dimensions, evokes an archaic aura of religious meaning—that the fullness of life is supranormal by conventional standards.” Among the spiritual benefits, the most important one is the ability to have intuitive knowledge of the ultimate reality. This ability is often called “Shen,” by Daoist philosophers. Shen refers to “the core level of consciousness that is without will or desire and that is the source of unbiased thinking, clear intuition, and the mystical experience of merging with the Tao.” The spiritual benefit of cultivating a tranquil state of mind can be found in Early Daoism. The passage on jingshen in huainanzi specifically illustrates this point.

When the numinous essence is abundant
And the vital breath is not dissipated,
Then one is breathing according to natural guidelines,
One attains equanimity.
When one attains equanimity
One becomes fully absorbed.
When one becomes fully absorbed
One becomes numinous.
When one is numinous then:
With vision there is nothing unseen,
With hearing there is nothing unheard,
And with actions there is nothing incomplete.

Numinous in this passage is another translation for the Chinese word shen. From this passage, we can see the relationship among breath meditation, tranquil state of mind, and

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40 Ibid., p. 309.
numinous. When one has a focused mind, one’s breathing will be well in order. This is followed by a balanced flow of breath. Next one becomes fully absorbed. The Chinese word for absorbed is *tong*, which means that there is no obstruction. When we fully focus on the breath, the vital energy in our body flows naturally without being blocked, which is followed by experience of *shen*. This experience allows us to comprehend the ultimate reality. With regard to the physical and spiritual benefit of cultivation of a tranquil state of mind, Chuang Tzu gives an excellent metaphor which can help us have a better understanding of the relationship among emptiness, vital energy, health and mental clarity.

So it is said, If the body is made to labor and take no rest, it will wear out; if the spiritual essence is taxed without cessation, it will grow weary, and weariness will bring exhaustion. It is the nature of water that if it is not mixed with other things, it will be clear, and if nothing stirs it, it will be level. But if it is dammed and hemmed in and not allowed to flow, then, too, it will cease to be clear. As such, it is a symbol of Heavenly Virtue. So it is said, To be pure, clean, and mixed with nothing; still, unified, and unchanging; limpid and inactive; moving with the workings of Heaven—this is the way to care for the spirit.  

The last sentence, “this is the way to care for the spirit” tells us that Chuang Tzu in this passage is discussing the way to nourishing life. As I showed earlier, caring for the spirit is the key to nourishing life. Chuang Tzu uses the analogy of the water to express the relationship among *ch’i*, emotions, and mental clarity. When our mind is pure without the distractions of emotions, the *ch’i* in our body flows normally without being blocked, which is responsible for mental clarity and health.

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2.1.2 Chuang Tzu’s Philosophical Understanding of Emptiness: Emptiness and Self-Realization

Due to the physical and spiritual benefits we can obtain through the cultivation of a tranquil state of mind, Daoists have developed a strong affection toward tranquility. Since tranquility is the result of emptiness, Daoists are also fascinated with emptiness. Chuang Tzu develops the concept of emptiness which he thinks is both a sublime state of mind and a state of body. As a sublime state of mind, emptiness is characterized by the following two features. (1) The subject is unconcerned with fame, reputation, profit, wealth, recognition, and cultural values. (2) The subject has no structure in his or her mind. That is, the subject is empty of all the knowledge we obtain through senses and rationality. As a result of emptiness, the subject has attained a tranquil state of mind which has no self-conscious thought, deliberation, and application of rigid standards. Influenced by the Daoists’ understanding of body, Chuang Tzu thinks that a good circulation of ch’i will be accompanied by this tranquil state of mind. As I discussed in chapter one, emptiness (xu) is an alternative way to describe ch’i due to its invisible nature; emptiness is also a physical state of body. Emptiness as both a psychological state of mind and physical state of body can help us achieve self-realization. A question may arise here: Chuang Tzu’s concept of emptiness seems to endorse a no-self doctrine. How can we achieve self-realization if the self is emptied? One distinction can help us answer this question: authentic self and false self. The authentic self involves many aspects: cognitive abilities, natural endowments, biological powers, and authentic feelings which guide us to do the right thing. False self for Chuang Tzu is related to fame, reputation, cultural values, bodily life, and rationality. The pursuit of those things will harm our authentic self. Emptiness refers to emptying the false self. In the following, I will examine in detail how
emptiness as both a psychological state and bodily state can help us achieve self-realization.

With regard to the cognitive abilities, I mean that emptiness can lead us to comprehend the 
Tao, the ultimate reality, which I have already discussed in chapter one. I now examine the 
relationship between emptiness and the realization of natural endowments, biological powers 
and authentic feelings.

First, emptiness can help us realize natural endowments so that we can perform daily 
activities with excellence. This idea is best illustrated by Chuang Tzu’s story of wood carver 
Ching in chapter nineteen of the book named for him. Based on this story, woodworker 
Ch’ing carved a piece of wood and made a bell stand. Everyone was amazed by his work.

When asked whether he had any secret for the creation of such an excellent work, he replied,

I am only a craftsman—how would I have any art? There is one thing, however. When 
I am going to make a bell stand, I never let it wear out my energy. I always fast in 
order to still my mind. When I have fasted for three days, I no longer have any 
thought of congratulations or rewards, of titles or stipends. When I have fasted for 
five days, I no longer have any thought of praise or blame, of skill or clumsiness. And 
when I have fasted for seven days, I am so still that I forget I have four limbs and a 
form and body. By that time, the ruler and his court no longer exist for me. My skill is 
concentrated and all outside distractions fade away. After that, I go into the mountain 
forest and examine the Heavenly nature of the trees. If I find one of superlative form, 
and I can see a bell stand there, I put my hand to the job of carving; if not, I let it go. 
This way I am simply matching up ‘Heaven’ with ‘Heaven.’ That’s probably the 
reason that people wonder if the results were not made by spirits. 42

For Ching, the “secret” to making an excellent bell stand lies in the preservation of 
*ch’i* in his body. The way to do so is to cultivate a tranquil state of mind through emptying the 
mind of all elements of distractions including praise, blame, congratulations, rewards, and 
even the body. When his mind is completely empty of all those elements of distraction, the

ch’i can be well preserved which brings out the excellent work. From here, we can see that ch’i is both a state of mind and also a state of body.

Chuang Tzu in other stories calls this a state of body shen. It can be found in the story of Cook Ting. Ting has a marvelous skill to cut up an ox. When asked why his skill has reached that level, he replied:

…When I first began cutting up oxen, all I could see was the ox itself. After three years I no longer saw the whole ox. And now-now I go at it by spirit and don’t look with my eyes. Perception and understanding have come to a stop and spirit moves where it wants. I go along with the natural makeup, strike in the big hollows, guide the knife through the big openings, and follow things as they are. So I never touch the smallest ligament or tendon, much less a main point. 43

Cook Ting at first uses the knowledge about the ox derived from senses and understanding to perform the cutting. However, after three years of practice, he stopped using sensation and understanding rather he used his shen (spirit) to guide his cutting. Emptiness in this story mainly refers to emptying the mind of the knowledge we get through senses and rationality. As a result, shen (spirit) can be produced to perform an excellent work.

Second, emptiness can help us realize the biological powers which can relate us to the vitality of nature. By the biological power, I refer to the excellent flow of ch’i within our body which can renew and vitalize our body. Chuang Tzu states:

If the gentleman can in truth keep from rending apart his five vital organs, from tearing out his eyesight and hearing, then he will command corps-like stillness and dragon vision, the silence of deep pools and the voice of thunder. His spirit will move in the train of Heaven, gentle and easy in inaction, and the ten thousand things will be dust on the wind. 44

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44 Ibid., p. 116.
The five vital organs are a concept of traditional Chinese Medicine. They are believed to be the main dwelling house of *ch'i*. If our mind is not distracted by external things, we become very tranquil from the outside. However, *ch'i* has an excellent circulation in our body which is accompanied by *shen* (spirit). Chuang Tzu by using the opposite words *silence* and *thunder* best illustrate the relationship between emptiness of the mind and its realization of biological power. A question may arise here: how can the realization of biological power connect us to the larger whole: nature? The answer can be found in the following passage of Chuang Tzu:

If you abandon the affairs of the world, your body will be without toil. If you forget life, your vitality will be unimpaired. With your body complete and your vitality made whole again, you may become one with Heaven. Heaven and earth are the father and mother of the ten thousand things. They join to become a body; they part to become a beginning. When the body and vitality are without flaw, this is called being able to shift. Vitality added to vitality, your return to become the Helper of Heaven. 45

A number of points are in order. First, *abandon* and *forget* are often used by Chuang Tzu to express the idea of emptiness: we should not be distracted by the desires for fame, reputation, wealth and long life. Second, if our mind is empty, *ch'i* will have a good circulation in our body so that *shen* will be well preserved. Third, the circulation of *ch'i* in our body encounters that of *ch'i* in nature so we can experience the flow of *ch'i* in nature within our body. This experience is often called *yu* by Chuang Tzu. *Yu* is often rendered as wandering. The literal meaning of *Yu* in Chinese is “walking without touching the ground,” “flying,” and “swimming.” The Chinese character *yu* appears frequently in Chuang Tzu’s work. In chapter one, “Free and Easy Wandering,” Chuang Tzu writes:

Lieh Tzu could ride the wind and go soaring around with cool and breezy skill, but after fifteen days he came back to Earth. As far as the search for good fortune went, he didn’t fret and worry. He escaped the trouble of walking, but he still had to depend on something to get around. If he had only mounted on the truth of Heaven and Earth, ridden the changes of the six breaths, and thus wandered through the boundless, then what would he have had to depend on? 46

As we know, the Chinese philosophers like to use stories or metaphors to suggest truth. By using the story of Lei Tzu, I think Chuang Tzu tries to convey the following ideas. First, when Lei Tzu rides the wind and freely flies in the sky, he is unconcerned with good fortune. In this story, Chuang Tzu illustrates the idea that emptiness of mind can give us freedom. However, Lei Tzu still doesn’t get perfect freedom. The reason is that Lie Tzu still depends on the wind which implies that his mind is still dominated by some desires or goal. For this reason, he cannot achieve perfect freedom. The last sentence in the quote above best demonstrates Chuang Tzu’s life ideal that we can enjoy perfect freedom by wandering through boundless nature. The way to achieve it is to empty the mind of all thoughts, emotions, and desires, generating a good circulation of *ch’i* in our body.

Finally, emptiness can help us realize our authentic feelings. In order to have a better understanding of this point, I think it is necessary for me to introduce the life ideal in Confucianism. As we know, Confucianism revolves around *jen*, the perfect virtue. Only if we achieve *jen*, can we become a full human being. One distinctive feature of *jen* is to love all people. This love is based on the emotional love we have towards the family members. For

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46 Waston, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, p. 32
Confucianism, we cannot achieve *jen* without following *li*, the social rules. The purpose of *li* is to enhance the interaction between people so that they can relate to each other in a caring and loving way. However, in practice, many people try to pretend that they have caring and loving feelings towards other people to “show off” their virtue of Jen. Daoist philosophers notice this tendency and make a sharp criticism. Lao Tzu expresses his objection in chapter nineteen of *Dao De Ching*:

> Abandon sageliness and discard wisdom; Then the people will benefit a hundredfold. Abandon humanity and discard righteousness; Then the people will return to filial piety and deep love." 47

This practice is often called *wu wei* which means no action. According to Lao Tzu, people have innate loving feelings towards their parents. There is no need to promote the idea of *jen* and *yi* to educate people. Chuang Tzu uses stories to express the idea that human nature which has not been refined by civilization is beautiful. The reason can be found in the following passage:

Confucius looked shamefaced and said, “Please, may I ask what you mean by ‘the Truth?’” The stranger said, “By ‘the Truth’ I mean purity and sincerity in their highest degree. He who lacks purity and sincerity cannot move others. Therefore he who forces himself to lament, though he may sound sad, will awaken no grief. He who forces himself to be angry, though he may sound fierce, will arouse no awe. And he who forces himself to be affectionate, though he may smile, will create no air of harmony. True sadness need make so sound to awaken grief; true anger need not show itself to arouse awe; true affection need not smile to create harmony. When a man has the Truth within himself, his spirit may move among external things. That is why the Truth is to be prized. 48

The translation of truth in this passage is very misleading. Truth in the Western

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47 Ibid., p. 149.

48 Ibid., p. 349.
philosophy mainly refers to the ultimate reality of the universe, which is unrelated to human life. For Chuang Tzu, it is the authentic expression of one’s feelings. In this passage, Chuang Tzu criticizes Confucianism for its responsibility for the fake feelings it created through the promotion of the ideal of jen. As we know, the main concern of Confucianism is to promote social harmony, which can be achieved by achieving jen. The essence of jen is to extend the feelings of love produced and cultivated within the family to other beings. This love is the result of the cultivation of natural unselfish love towards our family members. In order to achieve this ideal, we need to follow a set of rules. The purpose of the rules is to overcome selfishness and show a genuine love towards the welfare of other people. Confucius admits that it will be difficult for people to achieve this ideal but it is not impossible. In practical life, many people pretend to have those affectionate feelings towards their family members and other people, but they are forced and not authentic.

One example is in the funeral ceremony where we mourn our parents. There are many rules in the ceremony which are meant to foster the loving and respecting feelings of children toward their parents when they are dead. One of the rules is to cry, to wear simple clothes, and to eat simple food. However, many people who are not really affectionate toward their parents pretend to be affectionate by crying loudly. Chuang Tzu strongly criticizes this kind of moral teaching, which he thinks distorts human nature. This is the deeper reason why Chuang Tzu values an authentic human nature which has not been “corrupted” by so-called civilization. It is also the reason why he thinks that nature in this original state has a greater beauty. This view can be found in the following passage. Jo of the North Sea has said:

Horses and oxen have four feet-this is what I mean by the Heavenly. Putting a halter on the horse’s head, piercing the ox’s nose-this is what I mean by the human. So I say: do not let
what is human wipe out what is Heavenly; do not let what is purposeful wipe out what is fated; do not let [the desire for] gain lead you after fame. Be cautious, guard it, and do not lose it—this is what I mean by returning to the True. \(^{49}\)

For Chuang Tzu, the humane intervention of the natural state is wrong. It distorts the original authentic feelings.

2.2 The Aesthetic Categories for Appreciation of the Beauty of Nature in Confucianism: Creativity

As I noted in chapter one, the creativity in \(ch'i\) lies in its unceasing process of production and reproduction of life. This dynamic process of \(ch'i\) also has an aesthetic value. Chinese philosophers use \(cheng\) to express their aesthetic appreciation of creativity of \(ch'i\). Why is the creative process of \(ch'i\) aesthetically appreciated? My answer is through empathy. The feature of creativity in \(ch'i\) is compatible with the valued state of mind in Confucianism which is sincerity. This compatibility is best illustrated by *The Doctrine of the Mean*:

Sincerity is the way according to which heaven can last for long and is unceasing. The reason why the man of humanity and the filial son can serve Heaven and be sincere with himself is simply that they are unceasing in their humanity and filial piety. Therefore for the superior man sincerity is valuable. \(^{50}\)

Sincerity is not only the completion of one’s own self, it is that by which all things are completed. The completion of the self means humanity. \(^{51}\)

Two points need to be made about the above passages. First, sincerity helps to complete all things. By this, the author means that sincerity is an unceasing process of transformation which produces and reproduces life. Second, sincerity is also an unceasing effort of the mind to practice humanity and filial piety so that the superior person can


\(^{50}\) Ibid., p. 108.

\(^{51}\) Ibid.
complete him or herself. For the Chinese philosophers, sincerity is a process of
transformation and nourishment. In this vision, creativity in nature and sincerity in the mind
can obviously be seen from the two points. I now investigate in detail the Confucian concept
of cheng.

First, I think it is necessary for me to examine the Confucian conception of
self-realization since cheng as a valued state of mind is regarded as the way to achieve
self-realization. The defining feature of self in Confucianism is emotion. I investigate the
notion of emotion in Confucianism by answering the following questions. (1) What is
emotion? Why is emotion considered as a valued element of mind? (2) What is the highest
development of emotion? (3) How can we cultivate emotion? The Chinese character for
emotion is Qing which plays an important role in Chinese philosophy.

The Chinese philosopher Meng Peiyuan once made a comment that Chinese
philosophy can be said to be an emotional philosophy. What is emotion? Emotion in
Confucianism mainly refers to our innate feelings to show sympathetic bonding with other
human beings and other creatures. The innate emotions can be easily identified in a child who
shows natural affection toward his or her parents, brothers, and sisters. Mencius writes,
“Children carried in the arms all know to love their parents, and when they are grown a little,
they all know to love their elder brothers.”52 The natural affections toward our parents,
brothers and sisters are the defining nature of a human being. It gives human beings dignity.
Confucianism has a high respect for this affection. It can be seen from the conversation
between Confucius and the Duke of She.

52 James Legge, trans. The Chinese Classics: The Works of Mencius (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University
The Duke of She told Confucius, “In my country there is an upright man named Kung. When his father stole a sheep, he bore witness against him. Confucius said, “The upright men in my community are different from this. The father conceals the misconduct of the son and the son conceals the misconduct of the father. Uprightness is to be found in this.”

From this passage, we can see what Confucius values is the natural affection between father and son when the conflict between emotion and law arises. The innate emotions can also be self-evident when we interact with other people. For Mencius, we can also have innate capability to sympathize with others. Mencius also used the example of a drowning child to illustrate the point that every person has the innate capability of sympathy for others. He says that every person will experience a sense of alarm and distress when he or she sees a child who is about to fall into a well. In other words, every person has a mind which can’t bear to see the suffering of other people.

In contrast with the stress on the element of emotion in Confucianism, the dominant Western philosophy focuses on reason. From the entire Western history of philosophy we can find that a majority of philosophical ideas revolve around the idea of rationality. For Kant, rationality refers to our unique capability to set up moral laws for ourselves and obey the law. Only if we stick to the moral law, can we have dignity. On the contrary, if we are subject to the laws set up by other people, we will have no dignity. Aristotle’s theory of happiness also revolves around the concept of rationality. Happiness for him is the actualization of human function which is rational. However, the word *rationality* seldom can be found in Chinese philosophical literatures. The Chinese word *qing* (affection) and *xin* (feelings) can frequently be found in Chinese philosophical works. The difference in understanding the self in

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53 Ibid., p. 41.
Confucianism and Western philosophy is the result of different social and historical backgrounds. Roger Ames argues that in the West, the stress of reason is the result of the development of ancient city-states. It was socially necessary to articulate cultural interests and values under the pressure to incorporate a diversity of beliefs and customs. Formal rationality is the result of “a process of abstract generalization which allows for the coexistence of differences by suppressing specific content.”

China is a totally different story. It is well known that Chinese civilization is characterized by its agrarian culture. Although there is a tendency in the modern China for the land to be transformed for industrial purposes, the majority of Chinese people are still farmers. The most important feature of agrarian culture is immobility. For economic reasons, people often live in a same place where their grandparents have once lived. This immobility creates a very complex family system. According to Feng Yu-lan, there are over 100 family kinship terms which have no counterpart in English. Due to underdeveloped transportation and agriculture technology, different families tend to live close. It is often the case that an entire village in a certain area is made up of the people who have the same surname. Since people live in a community, it is very easy for people to develop strong emotional ties towards each other especially one’s parents, brothers, and sisters.

It may be objected that such affection does not distinguish animals from human beings since animals also have affection towards their parents and others in their group. My response to this objection is as follows. Animals do have natural affection toward parents and others in their group. They even have some rationality which enables them to do simple

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calculation or some reflective activities. However, human beings can pursue emotion for its own sake. In contrast, the affections towards the parents in the animal world are only driven by instinct, and they cannot elevate this instinct to the life ideals. Moreover, human beings can extend the natural affection toward one’s parents to strangers, animals, and all living beings in nature. Obviously animals cannot make such an extension. Human beings also can pursue emotion for its own sake.

Second, for Mencius, our sympathetic bonding toward parents and others needs to be developed. Mencius stresses in his work that our sympathetic feelings are just “a spark” in our mind and need to be strengthened, developed, and extended to all living beings in nature. He states:

Treat with respect the elders in my family, and then extend that respect to include the elders in other families. Treat with tenderness the young in my own family, and then extend that tenderness to include the young in other families.55

For Mencius, the affection we have towards our parents and children can be extended to the parents and children in other people’s families. However, this extension of affection to other human beings is still not adequate for Confucian ideal. For Mencius, we also should extend these affections to animals, trees, and everything in nature. He articulates his ideal in the following passage:

In regard to inferior creatures, the superior man is kind to them, but not loving. In regard to people generally, he is loving to them, but not affectionate. He is affectionate to his parents. And loving disposed to people generally. He is loving disposed to people generally, and kind to creatures.56

55 Ibid., p. 61.
56 Chan, A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy, pp. 80-81.
This passage shows Mencius’ perceptive of love is graded instead of being egalitarian. For him, we can be affectionate toward our parents but it would be wrong if we show much more affection to the strangers and other creatures. However, love and kindness are still based on the natural affections we have toward our parents instead of reason. It is the extension of familial love. The neo-Confucians Chuang Tsai expresses a similar view in the famous Confucian ideal, “Forming one body with nature.”

Heaven is my father and Earth is my mother, and even such a small creature as I finds an intimate place in their midst. Therefore that which fills the universe I regard as my body and that which directs the universe I consider as my nature. All people are my brothers and sisters, and all things are my companions.57

In this passage, Chang Tsai identifies himself with the entire universe. His identification is based on affectionate belongings which can be seen from his analogy of parents, bothers, and companions. The emotions of love toward all people and creatures in the entire universe are based on the metaphysical foundation of nature which I have discussed in the first chapter. Based on the concept of ch’i, we know that everything in nature is full of vitality and life. Therefore, the emotions of love for all things in nature are also the emotions of love of life. Our capability to emotionally identify ourselves with all things in nature represents the highest development of emotion, which is also the state of self-realization, which is called Jen in Confucianism.

Third, is it possible that we can extend the feelings of love toward the family members to all life in nature? For Confucianism, it is difficult since the selfish desires in our mind tend to inhibit these innate tendencies. However, it is still possible to do so if we

57 Ibid., p. 497.
constantly cultivate ourselves. Confucianism talks about two ways that can help us extend our sympathetic bond with our parents to neighbors, strangers, country, the world and all things in nature.

The first way is an external one which is called *li*. *li* has been translated as “rituals,” “ceremonies,” “etiquette,” and “manners.” The purpose of *li* is to encourage people to relate to each other in a caring and affectionate way. The most important part of *li* is the funeral ceremony. A comment by Hsun Tzu (313-238 BCE) can best illustrate the point that *li* can enhance the affection of people. Hsun Tzu says: “The sacrificial rites are the expression of man’s affectionate longing. They represent the height of piety and faithfulness, of love and respect. They represent also the completion of propriety and refinement.”58 For Hsun Tzu, the sacrificial rites are not just social regulations but the authentic expression of human affectionate longing. The practice can enhance the feelings among the living and the dead. These feelings represent our love and respect for the dead and are also an indicator of human refinement and civilization. The second way to cultivate emotions is an internal one which is called as sincerity. It is the persistent effort of an individual mind to overcome self-centeredness so that he or she can communicate with an ever expanding network of human relationships in a loving and caring way. For this reason, Confucianism considers sincerity as an internal process of self-transformation and nourishment.

The question is: what is the relationship between sincerity and *li*? Sincerity is the most important way for us to form a sympathetic bond to other people. Without sincerity, *li* is just a format for our behavior which has no meaning. From the above, we can see that sincerity as

the spiritual process of self-realization has a similar structure to the creativity of *ch’i*. The compatibility between sincerity in the mind and creativity in the *ch’i* lays the foundation for empathy which explains the aesthetic appreciation for the creativity of *ch’i*. 
3.1 Metaphysical and Religious Understanding of Nature in the West

In the West, nature was not the object of aesthetic appreciation until the eighteenth century. The non aesthetic attitude towards nature in the West is strongly influenced by Western philosophical understandings of nature. In the following, I investigate the influence of Western philosophy on the perceptions of nature.

3.1.1 Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Hume, Berkley, and the Existence of the Natural World

In traditional Western philosophical thinking, nature was not even a certain reality. This view of nature is reflected in the philosophy of Plato, Descartes, Hume, and Berkley. Plato in his theory of forms established a two-world reality. One is the natural world we experienced through the senses. For Plato, everything in this world of the senses comes and goes; therefore, nothing is permanent. Their temporary existence was caused by a participation in the permanent and ultimate reality: the form of Good. Plato in his allegory of cave illustrates the idea that the objects we experience of the senses are just shadows. The second world is the world of forms which is the perfect archetype of everything in the world we live in. The forms are independent of our mind, invisible, permanent, and transcendent. They can only be grasped by rationality. The forms represent the unity among truth, good and beauty. There is nothing of beauty in the natural world. This view can be found in Plato’s Phaedo,

If someone could reach to the summit, or put on wings and fly aloft, when he put up his head he could see the world above, just as fishes see our world when they put their heads out of the sea. And if his nature were able to bear the sight, he would recognize
that this is the true heaven and the true light and the true earth. For this earth and its stones and all regions in which we live are marred and corroded, just as in the sea everything is corroded by the brine, and there is no vegetation worth mentioning, and scarcely a degree of perfect formation, but only caverns and sand and measureless mud, and tracts of slim wherever there is earth as well, and nothing is in the least worthy to be judged beautiful by our standards.  

For Plato, real beauty can only be found in the world of forms. Since everything in the natural world is just the copy of various forms, there is no beauty in them. In the world of forms, the colors are brighter, the surface of rocks is smooth and everything is perfectly proportioned.

Descartes, in his most important book, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, tries to find something about which he can be absolutely certain. The statement “I think, therefore I am” is the result of this effort. By “I,” he means that he is a thinking thing that can affirm, doubt, understand, and deny. In order to prove the existence of other people and the natural world, Descartes tries to prove the existence of God. He relies on God’s goodness as the guarantee of the knowledge we get through our senses and reason. However, his argument is still not very persuasive since the “thinking” I can become the object of doubt. Although there are many problems with Descartes’ enterprise, it “marked the beginning of a period of profound skepticism, with regard not only to the existence of God but also the existence of the external world.” According to Eugene Hargrove, Descartes’ enterprise makes the existence of the external world very questionable. The empiricists tend to drop it out of their philosophical system. For Hume, all the knowledge we have of nature comes from our perceptions which

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can be divided into impressions and ideas. By impressions, Hume means the forcible, lively and vivid perceptions we have when we are directly exposed to external objects and feelings. For Hume, when we try to recall these impressions, we form certain ideas. Compared with perceptions, ideas are less forcible and lively. Hume argues that all our ideas can be traced back to the impressions. Based on this argument, he infers that our knowledge of causality upon which all matters of fact depend is not an objective knowledge of nature but a subjective knowledge. For him, there is no necessary connection between a given cause and its effect. Our knowledge of causality is the result of habitual psychological expectation based on the repeated experience of pair of events. Therefore, for Hume, we can never know whether the future will always resemble the past. All we know is our perceptions and we have no way to know the external natural world. Berkeley articulates a view similar to Hume’s. One famous statement of Berkeley “To be is to be perceived” better summarizes his view. For Berkeley, the existence of objects is in essence the collections of the ideas. Since the ideas are in the mind, all the objects in nature are mind-dependent. Some objects may not be perceived by finite mind but it will be always perceived by God’s mind.

Kant makes a distinction between the phenominal world and the numenal world. This distinction affirms the existence of the natural world. However, according to Kant, all the knowledge we obtain is constructed by the imposition of mental structures creating the phenominal world as we experience it every day. Since our mind is programmed by categories such as causality, we can never know the numenal world which is the world as it really is.
3.1.2 Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Descartes and the Separation between Humanity and Nature

In the Western philosophical thought, the natural world is usually regarded as the external reality to human beings and it is not interdependent and interpenetrative. It is generally believed that human beings are superior to all other creatures because of their rationality. Most of the Western philosophical theories such as metaphysics, ethics, and epistemology are closely related to reason. Reason in Western philosophy has the following features. (1) Reason as a unique capacity of the mind is independent of our body. (2) Reason can come up with the right moral principles. (3) Reason directs us to the pursuit of true knowledge which can finally be used to better our own lives. These three features of reason can be found in the philosophical theories provided by Plato, Aristotle, Kant, and Descartes.

In Plato’s *Apology*, Socrates articulates a famous statement in Western philosophical thought that a life which is unexamined is not worth living. This statement highlights the basic spirit of Western philosophy: the pursuit of truth by using our rationality. Aristotle continues this line of thinking in his *Nicomachean Ethics*. Aristotle views reason as the function of human beings. By function, he means a distinctive feature of human beings which distinguishes them from other creatures. According to Aristotle, the best life for us is to achieve happiness. Happiness is achieved by carrying out the unique rational abilities of human beings:

…we set down the work of a human being is a certain sort of life, while this life consists of a being-at-work of the soul and actions that go along with reason, and it belongs to a man of serious stature to do these things well and beautifully, while each thing is accomplished well as a result of the virtue appropriate to it—if this is so, the human good comes to be disclosed as a being-at-work of the soul in accordance with virtue, and if the virtues are more than one, in accordance with the best and most
complete virtue.\textsuperscript{61}

For Aristotle, the work of human beings lies in the rational activity of the soul. If the rational activity is performed well, we will attain a certain virtue. Therefore, the life of happiness is also the virtuous life. Virtue includes intellectual virtue and moral virtue which are both concerned with the excellent performance of reason. Intellectual virtue can be acquired through the training of intellectual reason while moral virtue is through performing actions. Moral virtue can be acquired through habit. From the above analysis, we can see that Aristotle’s key concepts such as function, happiness, intellectual virtue, and moral virtue are all related to the concept of rationality. Kant’s view on the features of human nature is implied in his influential statement:

Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and reverence, ‘the more often and more steadily one reflects on them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me. I don’t need to search for them and merely conjecture them as though they were veiled in obscurity or in the transcendent region’ beyond my horizon.\textsuperscript{62}

The moral law, as Kant explains in his \textit{Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals}, has two formulations. The first one is that we should always act in the way that our maximum of action can be willed as the universal law. The second one states that we should always treat humanity not merely as a means but only at the same time as an end. The two formulations of the moral law are the product of our practical reason which gives humanity dignity. The dignity of human beings is based on the fact that human beings have a rational capability that


can help them set up their own moral laws and obey those laws. From the second categorical imperative, we can see Kant’s preference for humanity. Kant’s valuing human beings over other creatures can be found in the following passage:

Thus we see that all duties towards animals, towards immaterial beings and towards inanimate objects are aimed indirectly at our duties towards mankind.63

For him, only humans have the privilege of enjoying moral respect from others. As for other creatures such as animals and plants, they are not the object of moral consideration. Humans have only indirect duties to animals. The duties are really to other humans, since animals don’t count as ends. The lack of moral consideration for other creatures causes the emotional alienation from all other creatures and life forms in nature.

John Stuart Mill’s theory of morality which revolves around the greatest happiness principle is also the result of rational thinking. For Mill, the moral principle is to promote the greatest happiness to the greatest number of people. From this principle, we can see that only human beings are the objects of moral consideration. Other creatures and living beings are not included. Happiness, as Mill defines it, is an extended pleasure, including spiritual pleasure. When discussing the motivation for us to follow this moral principle, Mill says that it involves feelings of unity with other people. He doesn’t mention our feelings of unity with other creatures and living beings in nature.

The modern philosopher Descartes, at the very beginning of his Discourse on the Method, points out that reason is “the only thing that renders us men and distinguishes us

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from the beasts."\textsuperscript{64} By reason, Descartes means the thinking capability of human beings such as understanding, doubting, affirming, and denying. For him, only reason can direct us to the truth. The best life for Descartes is the life of pursuing the truth and applying true knowledge to this life. However, for Descartes, reason as an activity of spiritual entity is independent of our bodies and every object of nature. The reason is that mind as a mental substance has no physical properties such as length, width, and depth. By contrast, every object in nature has physical extension and they form their own separate closed systems. Therefore, there is no interaction between mind and material substance. From the above discussion of the role of rationality plays in Western philosophical theory, we can see that reason sets us apart from the natural world. There are no common elements between them. The natural world is the external reality unrelated to human beings.

3.1.3 Descartes and the attitude of mastery towards nature

Nature in Descartes’ eyes is characterized by the following features. First, nature is made up of concrete and independent material objects. Those objects have objective features which are intrinsic to them. These objective features are called primary properties by Descartes. Primary properties include length, width, and depth, which can be quantified and measured. But secondary qualities such as color, tastes, and smells are subjective and dependent on the perceiver. For Descartes, primary qualities accurately represent the reality of the external objects in space while the secondary qualities are the result of interactions between the object and the perceiver, and their disagreements among perceivers over these

qualities. Since primary qualities can represent the nature as it really is, everything in nature is material and independent from each other. Second, nature is inert in the sense that no object in nature can move by itself. Everything in nature forms its own identity and can be separately dealt with. The question is: how do different objects interact with each other? According to Descartes, every object in nature interacts with others through mechanical laws.

This perception of nature is reflected in the four rules of method which is articulated by Descartes in his *Discourse on the Method*. The first rule states that he will never accept anything as true he doesn’t know for certain. The second rule says he tends to divide each difficulty he examines into many parts in order better to resolve them. The third rule is that he will conduct his thoughts in an orderly manner by beginning with simple objects so that he can ascend gradually to the complex ones. The last rule is that he will review everything to make sure he omits nothing. I think if Descartes had a firm belief in the Chinese perception of nature, he would not have come up with the four rules of his method. One of the important reasons is that the all objects in nature are in an organic relationship with each other and it is impossible to know an object without understanding its relationship with others. Therefore, the difficulties we examine cannot be divided into parts; they have to be understood systematically. Influenced by the rationalist perceptions of nature of his time, Descartes expresses an attitude of mastery over nature in the last part of *Discourse on Method*. He writes,

… knowing the force and the actions of fire, of water, of air, of the stars, of the heavens and of all the other bodies in our environment just as distinctly as we know the various crafts of our artisans, we might be able, in the same fashion, to employ them for all the purposes to which they are appropriate, and thus to render ourselves,
as it were, masters and possessors of nature.  

Descartes’ attitude of mastery over nature stands in contrast with the attitude of living in harmony with nature in Chinese philosophy. For Descartes, the reason for acquiring knowledge of nature is to use it for bettering our own lives. In Chinese philosophy, in contrast, we are supposed to come to know the Tao in order to bring our action into harmony with the Tao. Descartes’ attitude promotes the development of science but at the same time alienates us from nature.

3.1.4 Judeo-Christian Thought and Nature

Some interpretations of Judeo-Christian thought have had some negative influence on the aesthetic appreciation of nature. Many scholars, such as Lynn White, Jr., believe that the Christian tradition views nature as something to be confronted and dominated by humans and used for their purposes. Influenced by this tradition, human beings are not understood as part of nature but as dominating beings who are superior to nature on the grounds that the human body, although made out of clay, is made in God’s image.

This view makes it difficult to develop an aesthetic attitude toward nature since the purpose of nature is to serve human purposes. Moreover, the Christian tradition encourages a certain negative attitude toward nature. H. Paul Santmire provides a detailed analysis of impact of Christian theologians’ interpretation of Christianity on appreciation of nature. According to Santmire, Luther, Calvin and Origen all give a negative account of nature.

According to Luther, nature is cursed by God because of human sin. God’s curse is

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reflected in all the creatures on earth such as thorns, thistles, water, fire, and all the insects. Nature is created and cursed for the purpose of motivating humanity to seek redemption through God.  

For Calvin, God rules over our lives and the Christians who are chosen by God should not fulfill a given social role having an identity formed by society but work to transform the society and environment. This divine election has the effect of calling the believer to rise above nature and history to express the glory of God.

Origen views nature as material-vital world which is created by the goodness of God in order to stop the fall of the rational spirits toward ultimate non-being. For Origen, nature is created “only for the purpose of educating humanity, through trials and tribulations, to return to a higher incorporeal, spiritual destiny.” Nature will fall into nothingness at the very end.

3.2 Early Theories of the Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature

3.2.1 Kant: Beautiful and Sublime

During eighteenth century, Kant was the first philosopher to develop a systematic theory of aesthetic appreciation of nature. He examines the categories of the beautiful and the sublime in his Critique of Judgment, the third of his three Critiques. According to Kant, aesthetic reflective judgments or judgments that an object in nature is beautiful are based on the form of an object. Kant illustrates this part by using the following example:

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68 Ibid., p. 127.

69 Ibid., p. 49-50.
All form of objects of the senses (the outer senses or, indirectly, the inner sense as well) is either shape or play; if the latter, it is either play of shapes (in space, namely, mimetic art and dance), or mere play of sensations (in time). The charm of colors or of the agreeable tone of an instrument may be added, but it is the design in the first case and the composition in the second that constitute the proper object of a pure judgment of taste.\(^{70}\)

For Kant, the form of an object in nature is beautiful because the form has the capacity to trigger the quick communication of two cognitive mental powers. They are imagination and understanding which produce disinterested pleasure. For this reason, Kant says that the aesthetic judgment is based on the purposiveness of an object.

Kant stresses that the judgment that an object in nature is beautiful must be devoid of all interest. Therefore, a judgment that an object in nature is beautiful cannot be based on sensation and the concept of the good in the object since both of them are connected to interest. Kant calls the judgment based on sensation and the concept of good preference for the agreeable and a preference for the good. In terms of the preference for the agreeable, Kant uses the following example:

The green color of meadows belongs to the objective sensation, i.e., to the perception of an object of sense; but the color’s agreeableness belong to subjective sensation, to feeling, through which no object is presented, but through which the object is regarded as an object of our liking (which is not a cognition of it).\(^{71}\)

For Kant, the judgment that an object is agreeable arouses a desire for that object. For this reason, we express an interest in that object. The preference for the agreeable is not universally valid for everyone because the preference is not based on any judgment about the character of the object but on what gratifies our senses.

\(^{70}\) Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, p. 72.

A preference for the good is also connected with interest. Kant defines *good* as what we like through its mere concept. *Good* is usually used in two senses. If something is useful for other things, we call this instrumentally good. But if the object is good for its own sake, it is called intrinsically good. However, Kant points out that both senses of good always contain the concept of purpose. In contrast with the agreeable, which is related to our senses, the good is related to the will which is determined by the principles of reason.

In contrast with the aesthetic judgment of the beautiful, the aesthetic judgment of the sublime in nature is concerned with the formlessness of the object rather than the form of the object. Kant discusses two kinds of sublime in nature: mathematically sublime and dynamically sublime.\(^7^2\) Mathematically sublime is related to nature which is large beyond all comparison. His account of the mathematically sublime is based on a distinction between two ways of estimating an object’s size: mathematical estimation of magnitude and aesthetic estimation of magnitude.

According to Kant, estimation of magnitude by means of numerical concepts is mathematical while estimation of magnitudes in mere intuition is aesthetic. He claims that all estimation of the magnitude of natural objects is aesthetic. According to Kant, there is a maximum for the aesthetic estimation of magnitude. By maximum, Kant means a greatest unit of measure for the aesthetic estimation of magnitude. The existence of the greatest aesthetic unit of measure is based on Kant’s understanding of imagination. To take in a very large entity by intuition, so that we can use it as a measure or unity in estimating magnitude, the *imagination* must engage in two actions: (1) apprehension and (2) comprehension.

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\(^7^2\) Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, p. 101.
Apprehension progresses to infinity, but comprehension soon reaches its maximum, the most that can be grasped in one intuition. Kant’s idea of the maximum for the unit of measure for aesthetic estimation of magnitude is the idea that our comprehension of the unit of measure in one intuition has some limit beyond which the aesthetic estimate of the magnitude of the natural object in one intuition is not possible because it will take too long to apprehend. This point is best illustrated by Kant’s explanation of a comment made by Savary in his *Letters on Egypt* that to gain the full emotional effect of the pyramids, it is necessary to get neither too close to them nor too far away from them. The reason, Kant explains, is that if we get too far away, the parts to be apprehended, the tier of stone is too obscurely represented, and their presentation has no effect on the subject’s aesthetic judgment. But if we get too close, it takes too long for the eye to complete the apprehension from the base to the peak so that the comprehension is never complete. The following passage further explains Kant’s idea of the maximum of the unit of measure for the aesthetic estimation of magnitude.

A tree that we estimate by a man’s height will do as a standard for [estimating the height of] a mountain. If the mountain were to be about a mile high, it can serve as the unity for the number that expresses the earth’s diameter, and so make that diameter intuitable. The earth’s diameter can serve similarly for estimating the planetary system familiar to us, and that [in turn] for estimating the Milky Way system. And the immense multitude of such Milky Way systems, called nebulous stars, which presumably form another such system among themselves, do not lead us to expect any boundaries here. Now when we judge such an immense whole aesthetically, the sublime lies not so much in the magnitude of the number as in the fact that, the farther we progress, the larger are the unities we reach.  

According to Kant, as the magnitude of the natural object increases, the unit measure

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74 Ibid., p. 257.
for the aesthetic estimation of the natural object must also increase. The unit measure cannot be too small or too big; rather they must be appropriate to the magnitude of the natural objects. However, when the magnitude of the object increases to infinity, the unit measure for the estimation of magnitude has to increase to the infinite, which our imagination cannot comprehend in one intuition. This inability produces frustration in our mind, which is overcome by reason’s ideas, which in turn helps us grasp the whole. In the end, the frustration transforms into a positive pleasure. This is the source of the sublime in nature.

The dynamic sublime is related to the might of nature such as the power of a hurricane, a tidal wave, and an erupting volcano or a tumultuous sea. The sublime in nature is ultimately based on feelings of pleasure which are followed by displeasure. The feelings of displeasure are caused by physically weakness when we face the might of a certain phenomenon. With respect to the physical force of nature, we are physically inferior to nature. To judge nature as being dynamically sublime, it must be thought of as something that we are physically unable to resist, producing a feeling of fear. But this fear is not the actual fear we would have if we were physically facing the might of nature, for example, a powerful hurricane. This fear arises out of imagination while we simultaneously imagine ourselves to be in a safe place. The feeling of displeasure occurs because of physical weakness in fact of powerful nature is soon replaced by a pleasure from moral feeling that our reason can overcome the sensibilities.

In other words, although nature can physically dominate us, it doesn’t have dominance over our reason, for we are able to regard all worldly goods such as health, wealth, and even life as being less valuable than being a good person with a good will. The
supremacy of moral feeling over the physical world produces a feeling of pleasure which ultimately determines the judgment of the sublime in nature. In sum, Kant stresses that the sublime is not based on any concepts of the natural object but based on subjective feelings which can be universally valid. The ultimate source of these feelings comes from the victory of mental power which enables us to think the infinite as a whole over intuition.

3.2.2 The Aesthetic Category before the Eighteenth Century: The Picturesque

In the late eighteenth century, another aesthetic category of landscape was developed. The picturesque as a quality in nature was discussed theoretically by William Gilpin, Sir Uvedale Price, and Richard Payne Knight. In an essay on the picturesque, Price discusses in detail what the concept of picturesque means. He first cites Gilpin’s definition before giving his own. Gilpin defines picturesque objects as those “which please from some quality capable of being illustrated in painting,” or “such objects as are proper subjects for painting.”75 Price points out that these definitions are too vague and too confined because they didn’t specify which quality illustrated in painting is picturesque. Price then examines the objective theory of beauty of Edmund Burke. According to Burke, smoothness and gradual variation are the two essential qualities of beauty. Price, in contrast holds that picturesque is based on the two opposite qualities of roughness, and of sudden variation joined to that of irregularity. These qualities are exemplified in the many objects and landscapes. Picturesque scenery is characterized as broken, abrupt, irregular, and undulating with variety. Price uses many examples such as water, animals, trees, and buildings to show his understanding of picturesque. According to him, all water with broken surfaces and abrupt motion rather than

clear surface and smooth motion is considered as picturesque. Among trees, the rugged old oak or knotty wych elm rather than the smooth young beech is described as picturesque. In the animal world, wild and savage animals are regarded as having a marked and picturesque character. The picturesque is also associated with buildings. A temple or palace of Grecian architecture in ruin is considered picturesque.

The category of the picturesque reveals that Price has a very deep appreciation of the beauty of nature in which the visible qualities of roughness and sudden variation and irregularity express an invisible process of growth and decay in nature. This is very similar to Daoist aesthetic appreciation of emptiness in Chinese landscape painting. However, there is still a salient difference which I discuss in detail in chapter four.

3.2.3. The Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature in the Contemporary World

Influenced by the Western philosophical and religious attitudes toward nature, not many Western philosophers pursued the topic of aesthetic appreciation of nature until the late 1960s and early 1970s. Due to the increasing deterioration of the environment, people started to rethink their relationship with nature. Environmental aesthetics as the subdiscipline of environmental philosophy is the result of this thinking. Many different theories have been developed to understand the aesthetic appreciation of nature. There are two major approaches to nature appreciation. One is the cognitive approach. Allen Carlson’s positive aesthetics represents this approach. The other is the noncognitive approach which is best reflected in Arnold Berleant’s engagement model of the aesthetic appreciation of nature. I focus on the aesthetic theories of Carlson and Berleant.
3.2.3.1 Cognitive Theory: Allen Carlson’s Positive Aesthetics

Carlson’s discussion of positive aesthetics can be found in the chapter six “Nature and Positive Aesthetics,” of his *Aesthetics and the Environment: Appreciation of Nature, Art and Architecture*. Carlson holds that the idea of positive aesthetics is associated with the comment made by the landscape painter John Constable that “I never saw an ugly thing in my life.” Carlson articulates the basic idea of positive aesthetics at the beginning of the chapter that the natural environment as it is untouched by human beings has mainly positive aesthetic qualities. He investigates three possible justifications for this view before he defends his own justification. The first justification for Carlson can be attributed to Robert Eliot. According to him, the natural world is not an artifact, the environmental evaluation doesn’t include a judgmental element. Since the natural world cannot be judged not to be beautiful, it is beautiful. But for Eliot, our responses to nature are not aesthetic. Carlson responds that an aesthetic response is possible even if aesthetic judgments comparable to those made with regard to works of art cannot be made.

Next Carlson examines the second possible justification of positive aesthetics. This justification is historically related to the tradition of appreciating wild nature in terms of the sublime. For Carlson, this justification considers negative aesthetic judgments as pointless and presumptive since the natural world is both outside our physical and mental control. Carlson responds that this view only partially supports the positive aesthetics position, but it


77 Ibid., p. 76.
is still not an adequate justification. He uses the analogy with the aesthetic appreciation of art to illustrate the idea that negative criticism can be applied to nature.  

The third justification is that nature is not made by human beings but “designed, created, and maintained by an all-knowing and all powerful God.” Therefore, it is pointless and presumptuous to criticize nature. Carlson rejects this justification based on the following considerations. (1) It is doubtful that only theists can appreciate the natural world appropriately. For Carlson, the non-theists can also appreciate the beauty of the natural world for different reasons from the theists. (2) This justification cannot solve the historical problem of evil. (3) Historically, Western theism has given little or no support to the positive aesthetics.

After investigating the three possible justifications of positive aesthetics, Carlson articulates his own justification for positive aesthetics. For him, scientific knowledge plays an important role in the development of aesthetic appreciation of nature. The justification is suggested in the following passage:

The key to the justification lies in the kind of thing nature is as opposed to art and the kinds of categories which are correct for it as opposed to those for art. Art is created, while nature is discovered. The determinations of categories of art and of their correctness are in general prior to and independent of aesthetic considerations, while the determinations of categories of nature and of their correctness are in an important sense dependent upon aesthetic considerations. These two differences are closely related. Since nature is discovered, rather than created, in science, unlike in art, creativity plays its major role in the determinations of categories and of their correctness; and considerations of aesthetic goodness come into play at the creative level. Thus, our science creates categories of nature in part in light of aesthetic goodness and in so doing makes the natural world appear aesthetically good to us. 

78 Ibid., p. 80.

Carlson holds that in the aesthetic appreciation of nature it is the creative activity of the mind that determines the categories and their correctness. The question is: why can scientific correctness determine the aesthetic goodness? Carlson explains that a correct scientific categorization can make the natural world more intelligible to us. Second, those qualities of nature which are comprehensible to us are also aesthetically good. However, he doesn’t explain very well why there should be a connection between aesthetic goodness and scientific correctness. He only offers some possible explanations:

It may be a function of our biology or of our culture; it may be a result of human evolution or an article of humanistic faith; it may simply be a reflection of our superstition. 80

Carlson’s positive aesthetics can be summarized as follows: (1) The correct scientific categories of nature are the object of aesthetic appreciation; (2) these correct categories of nature are produced by the creative activities of mind; and (3) the correct categories of nature make nature intelligible to us and they are also aesthetically good. I think that Carlson’s aesthetic appreciation of nature is in essence the projection of “correct” categories which are invented by a rational mind.

The question is: why can projecting our correct categories of nature created by a rational mind produce aesthetic experience? I think the connection between scientific correctness and aesthetic goodness is the legacy of the Western philosophical tradition. As we know, one of the distinctive features of this tradition is that beauty is based upon truth. Plato, for example, thinks that real beauty lies in the form of beauty instead of the actual people and

80 Ibid., p. 93.
things in nature. The form of beauty never changes; therefore, it is eternal and also the true. Therefore, in Western philosophical tradition, truth is not in nature but in something which is transcendent and permanent that are the forms. The development of modern science especially biological sciences changes this traditional philosophical view on nature. What is true is regarded as dwelling in nature instead of in transcendental reality. Influenced by Western traditional philosophical tradition, the truth in nature is regarded as the philosophical foundation for the beauty in nature. This above analysis partly explains the logical relationship between correct scientific categories and aesthetic goodness. The other part of reason for this logical relationship can be found in the relationship among reason, truth and pleasure.

In the Western philosophical tradition, rationality is usually regarded as the reliable way for knowing the truth. Since the correct scientific categories of nature are regarded as the production of rational activities of the mind, the logical relationship between scientific categories and aesthetic goodness can be explained. The final reason for this logical relationship can be found in the relationship between rationality and pleasure. I argue that pleasure is the ultimate source for the logical relationship between correct scientific categories and aesthetic goodness. Without the feeling of pleasure, the scientific categories will become a cognitive judgment on nature instead of an aesthetic judgment. When reason discovers the correct scientific categories of nature, it will be accompanied by pure pleasure. In terms of the relationship between rational activities and pleasure, Aristotle is the first Western philosopher to address this issue in his works.

Aristotle in chapter ten of his *Nicomachean Ethics* addresses the relationship between
pleasure and rational activities of our soul. According to him, there will be pure pleasure which accompanies rational activities of our mind. Pleasure completes these rational activities. This kind of pleasure is the best among all other pleasures. He explains the reason in the following passage:

… for there is a pleasure that goes with each of the senses, and similarly with thinking and contemplation, and its most complete activity is most pleasant, and it is most complete when it belongs to a power that is in good condition directed toward that which is of most serious worth among the things apprehended by it, and the pleasure brings the activity to completion.  

Aristotle thinks that pleasure accompanies all activities but rational activities are the best. In terms of rational activities, Aristotle makes a distinction between intellectual virtue and moral virtue. By intellectual virtue, Aristotle means the excellent performance of intellectual reason which includes both metaphysical and scientific knowledge. Both kinds of knowledge are related to nature. Moral virtue refers to the excellent performance of practical reason which is related to human affairs. For Aristotle, the best rational activities are those of intellectual reason. He offers the following reasons: (1) reason is the best part of our soul and the object of reason is the best knowledge; (2) this activity is the most continuous and; (3) it is an activity which is similar to the activity of God. Since rational activity is the best kind, Aristotle thinks the pleasure accompanied by this activity is highest pleasure, one that is pure and is not mixed with any pain.

To sum up, from Aristotle’s discussion of the relationship between rational activities and pure pleasure, we know that rational activities of our mind can be accompanied by pure pleasure. I think this is the key to solve Carlson’s theoretical problem: why a correct scientific

\[ \text{Aristotle, } \text{Nicomachean Ethics, } \text{trans. Joe Sachs (Focus Publishing R. Pullins Company, 2002), p.186.} \]
categories logically relates to aesthetic goodness.

3.2.3.2 Non-cognitive Theory: Arnold Berleant’s Bodily Engagement

In contrast to Carlson’s approach to aesthetic appreciation of nature, which is featured by subject-object and mind-body dualism, Arnold Berleant stresses no separation between subject and object and an integration of them. For Berleant, the aesthetic appreciation of nature is not through reason but through bodily engagement of the environment. Therefore, the object of appreciation is neither nature nor the experience of the subject but the combination between the object and the subject. One meaning of body, based on Berleant’s view, is the five physical senses such as sight, hearing, touch, taste and smelling. The corresponding objects of appreciation through the five physical senses include color, size, sound, temperature, and taste. He states:

Environmental appreciation is not just looking approvingly at lovely scenery. It occurs in activities like driving down a winding country road, tramping along a hiking trail, padding the course of a stream, all these with acute attention to the sounds, the smells, the feel of wind and sun, and the nuances of color, shape and pattern. 82

According to Berleant, the environmental appreciation is not just a single activity of mind but the participation of five sensual organs. However, Berleant stresses that aesthetic appreciation of nature is not just a physical sensation but also a cultural one. For Berleant, although we perceive things through five sense organs, our perception is infused with cultural elements. In other words, the beauty of the environment is the result of culturalized perceptions. He gives a detailed explanation in the following passage:

We come to realize, then, that aesthetic perception is never purely physical sensation and never discrete and timeless. It is always contextual, mediated by the variety of conditions and influences that shape all experience. And because we live as part of a

cultural environment, our aesthetic perception and judgment are inevitably cultural. This is not just an abstract statement; it denotes the unending variety of cultural perception. Each society at every historical period has its distinctive manner of perceiving aesthetically. This, indeed, is what may be meant when we speak of knowing a different culture, acquiring its mind-set, its feel of the world.\(^8\)

For Berleant, because our perceptions have been infused with cultural meanings, we perceive the environment with the glasses of culture. To fully employ our culturalized perceptions is to enrich our social and organic life.\(^8\) Berleant points out that his view on aesthetic perceptions of environment should not be misunderstood as an anthropocentric one, that the human world is superior. What he wants to stress, however, is the idea that all statements and all inquiry cannot be separated from the human perspective. “Claims to objectivity or epistemological realism are thus necessarily spurious.”\(^8\)

From the above, we can observe a big difference between Carlson and Berleant. Carlson’s positive aesthetics focuses on the objective reality of nature which can be known through the scientific knowledge gained through rationality. In contrast, Berleant stresses the role of culture in shaping our aesthetic perceptions of the environment. For this reason, Carlson criticizes Berleant’s bodily engagement model on the grounds that the sensory immersion in nature is tantamount to emptiness. For Berleant, Carlson’s objective knowledge of nature cannot be attained by human beings. Therefore, objective appreciation of the beauty of nature is impossible. In other words, disinterested appreciation cannot be achieved. He offers a critique of disinterestedness by making a comment on Kant’s judgment of taste based on disinterested taste.

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\(^8\) Ibid., p. 21.

\(^8\) Ibid., p. 24.

\(^8\) Ibid., p. 194.
Although Kant did not consider the judgement of taste a cognitive judgement, since it is not based on or directed towards concepts, contemplation, none the less, originates in classical thought in cognitive and moral contexts. Pythagoras, for one, found in contemplation the completion of rational human nature, while Plato considered pure contemplation the ideal of human understanding. Aristotle designated active reason as contemplation (theoria) and found in pure contemplation philosophical knowledge, intellectual enjoyment, and the completion of moral development. And in the contemplation of the beautiful, Plotinus, like Plato, finds help in moving from the sensuously to the spiritually beautiful. So began a long tradition of finding the fulfillment of human development in the disengaged, contemplative intellect. 86

By using the example of Kant, Berleant tries to convey the idea that we think within the context of history. Although Kant pursues disinterested taste which is not related to any interest from sensual pleasure and utilitarian purpose, such a pursuit itself reflects the influence of Western philosophical ideas which are characterized by the pursuit of rationality and self-realization. For Berleant, all our perceptions and rationality have been infused with cultural influence and nobody can think beyond that.

Despite the above difference in the aesthetic appreciation of nature between Carlson and Berleant, I argue that there is still a common ground on which Carlson’s positive aesthetics and Berleant’s bodily engagement model can be integrated. Such integration is also the approach to aesthetic appreciation of nature adopted by Chinese philosophers. I discuss this integration in detail in chapter four.

4.1 Differences in Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature between China and the West

In this chapter, I examine the differences in aesthetic appreciation of nature between China and the West from the following three aspects: (1) the object of aesthetic appreciation; (2) the subject of aesthetic appreciation; and (3) the mission of aesthetic appreciation of nature. Then I examine the similarities in the aesthetic appreciation of nature between China and the West in terms of following two aspects: (1) the psychological foundation for aesthetic appreciation of nature; and (2) the social aspect of aesthetic appreciation of nature.

The first difference I am going to examine in the aesthetic appreciation of nature between China and the West concerns the object of aesthetic appreciation. According to Carlson’s positive aesthetics, everything in nature is beautiful only if it is seen under the correct scientific categories. He stresses that creativity plays an important role in the determination of those correct scientific categories. Therefore, for Carlson, the object of the aesthetic appreciation of nature is the creative activity of the human mind. Hargrove has criticized this aspect of Carlson’s aesthetic appreciation of nature. He states:

While I believe that the process by which we develop categories to appreciate natural objects is largely correct, I think there are some problems with Carlson’s account. I am troubled by Carlson’s claim that the creativity involved in aesthetic appreciation of natural objects is in the human activity producing aesthetic categories, not in the

According to Hargrove, the source of beauty lies not in the creative activities of human mind but in the creative process of nature which produces natural history. Hargrove’s position is very similar to the Chinese aesthetic appreciation of nature. As I have shown in the chapters one and two above, nature in traditional Chinese philosophy is viewed as a continuous self-generating life process. The aesthetic appreciation of nature in China in fact is an aesthetic appreciation of \textit{ch’i}, the metaphysical foundation for nature. \textit{Ch’i} is characterized by continuity, creativity, and emptiness.

According to Confucianism, the object of aesthetic appreciation is the creativity in \textit{ch’i}. By creativity, I mean the creative process of production and reproduction of life. For Confucianism, this creative process embodies the highest moral value. The Confucian scholar Chu Hsi (1130-1200) describes this process in the following passage:

\begin{quote}
The mind of Heaven and Earth is to produce things.” In the production of man and things, they receive the mind of Heaven and Earth as their mind. Therefore, with reference to the character of the mind, although it embraces and penetrates all and leaves nothing to be desired, nevertheless, one word will cover all of it, namely, Jen (humanity).\footnote{Chan, \textit{A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy}, pp. 593-594.}
\end{quote}

According to Chu Hsi, the process of the production of life in nature is morally good. Since in Chinese philosophical traditions, beauty is based on moral goodness, this process which embodies the highest good also has the highest beauty.

By comparison, the object of aesthetic appreciation of nature for Daoism is the formless form of \textit{ch’i}: emptiness. Emptiness is regarded as the virtue of nature and also the
object of aesthetic appreciation. The virtue in emptiness can be found in Chuang Tzu
(between 399—295 B.C.E.),

Emptiness, stillness, limpidity, silence, inaction—these are the level of Heaven and
earth, the substance of the Way and its virtue.89

For Chuang Tzu, emptiness is the material foundation for Tao and it also morally
good therefore it is beautiful.

The second difference concerns the subject of aesthetic appreciation of nature. In the
West, environmental philosophers such as Carlson stress the role of reason in aesthetic
appreciation of nature. As we know, for Carlson, the qualities such as order, regularity,
harmony, balance, tension, and so forth that science discovers in nature makes nature more
intelligible to us and nature is therefore beautiful. In other words, if nature is not seen through
scientific categories, we will not experience the beauty of nature. Therefore, for Carlson,
aesthetic appreciation of the beauty of nature is in fact the process of rational activities of the
mind which tries to discover the correct scientific categories. By contrast, in China, emotion
and body plays an important role in aesthetic appreciation of nature. Confucianism focuses on
the role of intuition in aesthetic appreciation of nature while in Daoism, body plays an
important role.

By emotion, I refer to the feelings of universal love, which are developed from the
feelings of love toward parents and family members. In Confucianism, we have inborn
feelings of love toward parents and family members. The inborn feeling of love is our true
nature. If we can develop the feelings so that it can be deepened, strengthened and extended
to the people who are outside the circle of close family members, we will have the potential

to achieve the highest developed feelings of love—loving all things in nature. The feelings of love enable us to experience the beauty of creativity in nature as Chang Tsai (1020-1077) states in the following:

The negative and positive spiritual forces (kuei-shen) are the spontaneous activity of the two material forces (yin and yang). Sagehood means absolute sincerity forming a unity with Heaven, and spirit means the Great vacuity in its wondrous operation and response. All modes and forms in the universe are but dregs of this spiritual transformation. 90

“Absolute sincerity” in the above passage has two meanings. The first it refers to one’s innate and unselfish feelings of love toward parents, brothers, and sisters. The second is the unceasing process of cultivating, developing and extending the innate feelings of love. “Sagehood” refers to a sage who has the highest development of the feelings of love: loving all things in nature. The highest development feeling of love is also the highest attainment of moral virtue (humanity). The feelings of universal love enable the sage to experience the beauty of creative activities of two material forces. A question may arise here: how can cultivating feelings of universal love lead us to experience the creative activities of two material forces? There is a basic assumption in both Confucianism and Daoism: the body is interrelated with the mind. In Confucianism, the cultivation of virtue can cause an active flow of energy in the body, which will help us establish a relationship with the creative activity of ch’i in nature. Mencius (371-289 B.C.) once addressed the relationship between virtue and the flow of ch’i in our body in the following passage:

If the will is concentrated, the vital force [will follow it] and become active. If the vital force is concentrated, the will [will follow it] and become active. … As power, it is exceedingly great and exceedingly strong. If nourished by uprightness and not

injured, it will fill up all between heaven and earth.91

The “will” in this passage refers to the will to practice moral virtues and power refers to ch‘i. For Mencius, if we cultivate virtue of uprightness, then vital force will fill the entire nature.

Daoism stresses the role the body plays in the aesthetic appreciation of nature. Body in Daoism is considered as the entity which is made up of ch‘i. Ch‘i is always in a process of movement. According to Daoism, the ordered circulation of ch‘i is responsible for bodily growth and vitality. However, human beings’ activity of mind such as pursuit of fame, reputation, wealth and long life has a great potential to upset the good circulation of ch‘i in our body. Therefore, Daoism strongly advocates cultivation of an empty and tranquil state of mind so that the circulation of ch‘i in our body is excellent. In this way, the body will become sensitive to the flow and vitality of ch‘i in nature. In other words, the body will be able to appreciate the beauty of vitality in ch‘i. Bodily participation in the beauty of nature is poetically expressed by Chuang Tzu in the following passage.

If you abandon the affairs of the world, your body will be without toil. If you forget life, your vitality will be unimpaired. With your body complete and your vitality made whole again, you may become one with Heaven. Heaven and earth are the father and mother of the ten thousand things. They join to become a body; they part to become a beginning. When the body and vitality are without flaw, this is called being able to shift. Vitality added to vitality, you return to become the Helper of Heaven.92

According to Chuang Tzu, when we can detach ourselves from the pursuit of fame, reputation, wealth and long life in this world, our body will be full of vitality. As I mentioned

91 Ibid., p. 63.
above, vitality is one function of the good flow of \textit{ch'i}. When our body is full of vitality, we will participate in the flow of \textit{ch'i} in nature. When we participate in the flow of \textit{ch'i} in nature, we will also be participating in the beauty of emptiness. As I mentioned before, emptiness is the form of \textit{ch'i}.

The third difference concerns the mission of environmental aesthetics. In the West, environmental aesthetics is interwoven with the mission of environmental protection. Carlson holds that aesthetic appreciation of nature can help us make sound ethical judgments about environmental problems.\textsuperscript{93} Hargrove argues that aesthetic value has been influential in some important decisions concerning the preservation of some of North Americans most magnificent environments.\textsuperscript{94} J. Baird Callicott makes a similar point. He says that “Many more of our conservation and management decisions have been motivated by aesthetic rather than ethical values, by beauty instead of duty.”\textsuperscript{95} As part of efforts in motivating people to perform moral responsibility toward nature, environmental aesthetists in the West try to justify the duty to protect the environment by using environmental aesthetics.

By comparison, Chinese aesthetic appreciation of nature is closely related to the meaning of everyday life. As I said above, emotion and body plays an important role in aesthetic appreciation of the beauty of nature. When emotion and body achieve aesthetic appreciation, they establish a harmonious relationship with nature. Living in harmony with

\textsuperscript{93} Carlson, \textit{Aesthetics and the Environment}, p. 67.


nature is an ongoing pursuit for Chinese philosophy, which has great impact on the life ideal of Chinese people. Chan once pointed out that

If ONE WORD could characterize the entire history of Chinese philosophy, that word would be humanism—not the humanism that denies or slights a Supreme Power, but one that professes the unity of man and Heaven. In this sense, humanism has dominated Chinese thought from the dawn of its history. 96

The unity of man and Heaven is in fact the harmonious relationship between man and nature. It is based on aesthetic appreciation of the beauty of nature and people’s participation in the beauty of nature through feelings of love and body. Living in harmony with nature is still the ideal for Chinese people in modern society. One of the current national policies in China is to establish a harmonious relationship with nature. This policy was framed in the Fourth Meeting of Sixteenth National Congress in determinations on strengthening the governing ability of Communists’ party.97 This policy is in fact a reflection of the Chinese life ideal: harmony between human beings and nature. The question is: how can we participate in the beauty of nature? In Confucianism, we know that creativity in ch’i is the object of aesthetic appreciation. The way to participate in the creativity in ch’i is to cultivate, develop and extend the innate feelings of love we have toward parents, brothers, and sisters to nature. For Daoism, the way to participate in the beauty of the emptiness of ch’i is to cultivate an empty mind. By empty mind, I do not mean that the mind is full of nothing. Rather it refers to a state of mind which is tranquil and not concerned with any desire for fame, reputation, blame, wealth, and so forth. According to Daoism, when our mind is empty, our mind is full of creativity and vitality. In this way, we can participate in the beauty of

96 Chan, A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy, p. 3.
nature. This idea is best illustrated by Chuang Tzu’s story of the wood carver Ch’ing. The wood carver Ch’ing carved a piece of wood and made a bell stand. Everyone was amazed by his excellent work. When asked whether he had any secret for the creation of such an excellent work, he replied that the most important thing is that he tries to maintain his vital energy by disciplining his mind when he tries to make a bell stand. By disciplining his mind, he means that he makes an effort in emptying his mind of thoughts of praise, blame, skill or clumsiness— even his own body— so that he can be completely concentrated in his work. Chuang Tzu thinks that the woodcarver Ch’ing participates in the beauty of nature by action through no action. In other words, he makes his great achievement by adopting an attitude of mind, which is empty of all desires for fame, reputation, and wealth.

4.2 Similarities in the Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature between China and the West

The similarities in the aesthetic appreciation of nature between China and the West are reflected in the following two aspects: the psychological foundation for transition from the truth to beauty of nature and the social aspect of aesthetic appreciation of nature.

As I have shown above according to Carlson, the object of aesthetic appreciation of nature is the creative activities of the mind. Hargrove holds that the object of aesthetic appreciation is the creative activity in nature. For Confucianism and Daoism, the creative process in nature is the object of aesthetic appreciation. A question may arise here: the above mentioned objects of aesthetic appreciations all belong to the facts of the mind and nature. Why are the facts regarded as the foundation for beauty in nature? In other words, what

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98 Ibid., p. 205.
makes the transition between fact and aesthetic value possible? I think that Kant’s theory of
aesthetic judgment can provide us with the best answer. As we know, one of the distinctive
features of Kant’s aesthetics is that the source of beauty and sublime of nature lies in the
pleasure of human mind. I agree with Kant on this point that the source of beauty lies in the
subjective feeling of pleasure. However, I think that the feeling of pleasure can be produced
by other positive feelings such as the feeling of awe, excitement and so on. In the following, I
will explain how the different feelings make the transition from facts to aesthetic value
possible.

In terms of Carlson’s environmental aesthetics, the creative activities of the mind
mainly refer to the scientists’ rational activities of the mind, which discovers correct scientific
categories for nature. I have pointed out in chapter three that cultivated rational activities of
the mind will be accompanied by feeling of pleasure as Aristotle has addressed in the Chapter
of X of Nicomachean Ethics. The cultivated rational activities in our mind will be
accompanied by pure pleasure. By cultivated rational activity, I mean that the reason, after a
certain process of training can understand things very well without experiencing any
confusion. Because of the pure pleasure, we judge the truth of nature to be valuable either
ethically and aesthetically. Otherwise, the truth of nature is only an objective fact. We can
find the support for this point from Holmes Rolston, III’s argument on intrinsic value of
nature. He says,

In the case of bare knowing, the knower has an internal representation of what is there,
perhaps calmly so. Valuing requires more, an internal excitation. That brings emoting, and
perhaps this marriage of a subject to its object gives birth to value. ….All valuing nature is
built on experience too, but that does not entail that its descriptions, its “values,” are just those
experiences. Valuing could be a further, nonneutral way of knowing about the world.\textsuperscript{99}

For Rolston, nature has intrinsic value which is based on the experience of the objective properties in nature. The experience doesn’t refer to artists’ or general public’s experiences but the scientists’ experiences guided by scientific knowledge. Since scientists most of the time use rationality to interpret the observations they make on nature, the scientists’ experiences of nature also involve the process of rational activities in the scientists’ mind. Rolston stresses that values require not only bare knowing but also an internal excitation. I think Rolston’s concept of internal excitation is a different way of expressing of the feelings of pure pleasure which are accompanied by rational activities of the mind. Without the participation of the feelings of pure pleasure, the concept of intrinsic value will not be produced. By using Rolston’s words, “this marriage of a subject to its object gives birth to value.” From the above analysis, we can conclude that the feeling of pleasure makes it possible for the transition between truth and value which contains both ethical and aesthetic value.

According to Hargrove, the object of aesthetic appreciation is the creative activity of nature. His justification for the beauty in nature is metaphysically founded on God’s creativity. He argues that when God creates the world, he brings the good and beauty together to the world even though he doesn’t follow any standard of good and beauty. We can transfer God’s creativity to nature. For Hargrove, the reason why nature’s creativity is regarded as the object of aesthetic appreciation is feelings of awe or wonder. Nature is self-created and it has an order or design in terms of its complicated ecological relationships. However, it doesn’t

follow any standard. I think the feelings of wonder or awe toward nature is the production of these above facts.

In terms of the aesthetic appreciation of nature in China, the objects of aesthetic appreciation are the two important features of ch’i: creativity and emptiness. Chinese philosophers regard the two features of ch’i as the objective realities of nature; therefore they are also the objects of aesthetic appreciation. The ultimate source of beauty of ch’i is the feeling of pleasure which is accompanied by feeling the emotions of love toward sincerity and emptiness. As I explained before, sincerity in Confucianism refers to the consistent effort in cultivating unselfish feelings of love so that they can be extended to all kinds of life. Emptiness refers to the state of mind which is emptied of all intellectual activities, emotions, and desires. Sincerity and emptiness are important ways for the Chinese to achieve self-realization. Therefore, the Chinese have strong emotions of love toward sincerity and emptiness. The two features of ch’i are similar to the two ways which lead people to self-realization. Therefore, on the one hand, the two features of ch’i inspire people to cultivate the feelings of unselfish love and tranquil state of mind. On the other hand, the Chinese feel their emotions of love toward the two features of ch’i.

The second similarity in aesthetic appreciation of nature between China and the West lies in the social aspect of aesthetic appreciation. By “social aspect”, I mean that the beauty of nature is constructed by the society rather than purely based on the facts in nature. In this aspect, Arnold Berleant’s theory of environmental aesthetics is very similar to the Chinese aesthetic appreciation of nature. According to Berleant, aesthetic appreciation of nature is not just a personal experience but a social one. He writes,
In engaging aesthetically with environment as with art, the knowledge, beliefs, opinions, and attitudes we have are largely social, cultural and historical in origin. These direct our attention, open or close us to what is happening, and prepare or impede our participation. Here as elsewhere, the personal is infused with the social.\textsuperscript{100}

According to Berleant, the aesthetic appreciation of nature is not purely subjective but objective in the sense that societal values direct our aesthetic attention with regard to nature. Arnold’s point is very similar to the Chinese aesthetic appreciation of nature. As I pointed out before, Confucianism and Daoism focus on the different features of \textit{ch’i} and aesthetically appreciate them. According to Confucianism, the continuous process of production and reproduction of life in \textit{ch’i} is morally good and therefore beautiful. By comparison, Daoism regards the emptiness of \textit{ch’i} as something which has great beauty. The different aesthetic focus between Confucianism and Daoism is due to the different values or life ideals pursued by the two philosophical schools. Confucianism pursues sincerity in social life while Daoism pursues a tranquil state of mind which is followed by emptying the mind of all conscious thoughts.

\subsection*{4.3 Criticism of the Western Environmental Aesthetics}

The criticism I would like to make of Western environmental aesthetics is that Western environmental aestheticians such as Allen Carlson overemphasizes the role that rationality plays in our aesthetic appreciation of nature. For Carlson, our aesthetic appreciation of nature is based on the correct categories which are the product of the creative and rational activities of scientists’ mind. In other words, only rationality can help us know nature on its own terms. I agree with Carlson on the point that aesthetic appreciation of nature

\textsuperscript{100}Arnold Berleant, \textit{Living in the Landscape: Toward an Aesthetics of Environment} (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997), p.13
should be based on the correct understanding of nature. However, I disagree with Carson that only rationality enables us to have a correct understanding of nature. I argue that there are many other ways for us to appreciate nature on its own terms. One of those ways is examined by Yuriko Saito. In her article, “appreciating nature on its own terms,” Saito comes up with an alternative way for us to know nature on its own terms. She articulates her way of knowing nature on its own terms by commenting on Carlson:

Carlson cites the cognitive reason for appropriately appreciating nature-that is, “if we are to make aesthetic judgments which are likely to be true,” However, I am emphasizing the moral dimension of forming such “true” aesthetic judgments. …..I believe that the ultimate rationale for appreciating any object appropriately, that is on its own terms, is the moral importance of recognizing and sympathetically lending our ears to the story, however unfamiliar to us, told by the other. 101

Saito thinks that to know the truth of nature is a moral capacity rather than an intellectual capacity. But she doesn’t give a clear definition or interpretation of the moral capacity. From the above quote, “moral capacity” as she understands it seems to refer to the feelings of sympathy and love. With those feelings, we will have patience to listen to a story which is unfamiliar to us so that we can have a deeper understanding of this story. If Saito means this, then it is very similar to Confucian way of knowing the truth. As I showed in the first two chapters, for Confucianism, our persistent expanding and cultivation of inborn feelings of unselfish love enables us to see the truth clearly. This point can be seen in the following two passages:

Mencius said, “All things are already complete in oneself. There is no greater joy than to examine oneself and be sincere. When in one’s conduct one vigorously exercises altruism, humanity is not too far to seek but right by him.”102

102 Chan, A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy, p. 79.
He who exerts his mind to the utmost will know his nature. He who knows his nature
knows Heaven.103

As I have shown before, self in Confucianism mainly refers to the moral emotion:
unselfish love. Self-realization in Confucianism is the highest development of moral emotion.
Based on this understanding, the meaning of first passage can be easily seen. If we make a
persistent effort, we will be able to achieve humanity, the highest development moral emotion:
loving everything in nature. If we can achieve this state, then we will be able to embrace all
things in nature in our feeling of love. It is in this sense that Mencius says that “All things are
already complete in oneself.”

In the second passage, Mencius tells us that if we can fully develop our feelings of
love, we will know our mind. Therefore, we can know nature. I think without the feeling of
love toward others and nature, it will be difficult for people to have patience to know them on
their own terms.

In Daoism, only if we try to cultivate a tranquil state of mind, are we able to know
nature on its own terms. According to Daoism, a tranquil state of mind is followed by empty
mind, which is completely emptied of all rational activities, emotions and desires. The mind
can achieve freedom to help us to know nature on its own terms. This point is well expressed
by Chuang Tzu, “The Way gathers in emptiness alone. Emptiness is the fasting of the
mind.”104 Rationality is not the only way to know the truth. Cultivation of a feeling of
unselfish love and a tranquil state of mind can both direct us to the truth.

In the justification of moral duty toward the environment, Western environmental

103 Ibid., p. 78.
aesthetists also uses a rational approach. This rational justification can be best seen in Hargrove’s argument. His argument is constructed as follows: (1) The beauty of nature is aesthetically good; therefore, it has intrinsic value. (2) If something has intrinsic value, we have a moral duty to protect it. (3) Since the beauty of nature has intrinsic value, we have moral duty to protect nature. From Hargrove’s argument, we can see that our moral duty toward nature is based on the rational recognition that the beauty of nature has intrinsic value. Although Hargrove also addresses the role that the emotion of love plays in our moral duty toward nature, in his response toward Passmore’s justification of moral duty for nature, the love he mentions is the derivative love from God rather the immediate love towards nature.105

Hargrove’s justification is very weak in terms of motivating people to perform moral duty toward nature. I think that without the participation of feelings of admiration, love and respect toward nature, the rational understanding that the beauty in nature has intrinsic value will not be strong enough to motivate us to protect it. Aldo Leopold expresses a similar view in the following passage.

Obligations have no meaning without conscience, and the problem we face is the extension of the social conscience from people to the land. No important change in ethics was ever accomplished without an internal change in our mental emphasis, loyalties, affections, and convictions. 106

I think by “mental emphasis and convictions”, Leopold stresses the rational understanding of nature. Loyalties and affections refer to the feelings of love towards nature. Therefore, for Leopold, a rational understanding of nature and the feelings of love towards it

both must work together in order to motivate people to fulfill their moral responsibility
towards nature.

An objection may be made that the rational understanding of nature will promote
certain kind of emotions toward it. I do agree that rationality will tend to produce a certain
emotion, which makes us judge something as valuable either ethically or aesthetically.
However, as I showed above, this rationality will be a cultivated one. Cultivated reason tends
to be accompanied by a feeling, which motivates people to perform duty toward others and
nature. Kant provides us with an example. Kant once said, two things fill his mind with awe:
one is the starry Heavens above and the other is the moral law within. Moral law is the law
given by one’s own rationality. When affirming the role that rationality plays in setting up the
moral law, Kant denies the role that emotions play in setting up the moral law. For Kant, if a
person does something only out of inclination or feelings, his action doesn’t have moral
worth. Instead, only if a person does something based on moral law governed by rationality,
does his action have moral worth. Kant seems to deny emotion in moral action, but I think he
is in fact affirming another kind of emotion which is accompanied by rationality. That
emotion is the feeling of awe which can finally motivate people to perform moral duty
towards human beings. As Hume points out:

Reason in a strict and philosophical sense can have an influence on our
conduct only after two ways: either when it excites passion by informing us of
the existence of something which is a proper object of it; or when it discovers
the connexion of causes and effects, so as to afford us means of exerting any
passion.107

I agree with Hume that the final motivation to moral action is through emotion. The

rational cognition of certain moral rules motivates us to do something only if it excites an emotion. I think well cultivated rationality can generate such passion.

However, in the general public, rationality in terms of moral problems is not as cultivated as in some people who have a strong conviction on a certain moral issues after many years of training and thinking. For the general public, we need to cultivate emotions of love towards nature by encouraging them to interact with nature physically. Therefore, I argue that in order to motivate the general public to protect the nature, we should try to take various measures to excite their emotions of love, respect, and admiration toward nature, which can be done in various ways. I argue that to promote the physical interaction with nature is an important way to cultivate affection toward nature.

I would like to use the concept of *jen* in Confucianism to illustrate this point. According to Confucianism, *jen* is the highest attainment of morality. It refers to the loving feelings towards all humanity and everything in nature that can be achieved only in relationships. I think Confucianism makes a very good point here. Without constant physical interaction among human beings, human emotions of love toward each other will be greatly reduced. The same holds true in the relationship between nature and human beings. If we learn about nature only through books and media without physically being in nature, our emotions of love toward nature are difficult to develop. There are many ways to promote the physical interaction between nature and human beings. For example, we can develop ecotourism and field trips in nature. Daoists’ bodily practice such as Tai Chi Quan and meditation can also cultivate sensitivity toward the nature.
4.4 Criticisms on the Chinese Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature

As I showed in chapter one, the Chinese aesthetic appreciation of nature is the result of empathy: the two features of *ch’i* which are creativity and emptiness are similar to the structure of the Chinese people’s mind in which the values of sincerity and emptiness are greatly valued. The Chinese imposed their feelings of love toward sincerity and emptiness onto *ch’i*. For this reason, nature is beautiful. In Chinese philosophy, aesthetic appreciation of nature is integrated with people’s participation in the beauty of nature. The life ideal for Chinese people is to live in harmony with nature, which is based on aesthetic appreciation of nature and people’s participation in the beauty of nature. In today’s China, national policy regarding the environment is to live in harmony with nature.

However, the values of sincerity and emptiness which have greatly valued over the long Chinese history are in the process of being challenged with changes in economic structure. As we know, the five-thousand-year history of Chinese civilization has been nurtured under agrarian culture. Sincerity as the main value of Confucianism and emptiness as the main value of Daoism are features of agrarian culture. In this aspect, I agree with Karl Marx’s philosophical view that the economic structure shapes the superstructure including ethical values.

As I explained above, sincerity has two meanings. The first is to be true to one’s nature: innate and unselfish feelings of love. The second is to continually cultivate unselfish feelings of love so that they can be developed, deepened, and extended to other people. Only in this way, can we become human beings. Human being is defined in terms of their innate and unselfish feelings of love in Confucianism, and the pursuit of the cultivation of these
feelings is the life ideal for Confucianism. The philosophical definition of human being and the life ideal are a product of agrarian culture. The most important feature of agrarian culture is immobility as a result of economic conditions. In the past, it was very normal for four generations to live in the same place. This immobility encouraged the deep interaction among the family members, friends, and neighbors, which laid a foundation for a philosophical definition of human being and the pursuit of the feelings of love among the people in life.

Roger Ames writes.

Anglo-European rationalism was born from the need to connect diverse ideas, beliefs, and practices. Our reason was the gift of the ancient city-states, spread from Italy to the Peloponnesus, spun through the shuttles of Hebraic Monotheism and Latin conceptions of humanitas, and variously refined in the competing furnaces of German, French, and English provincialisms. … The development of cities allowed for the institutionalization of plurality and diversity which both promoted and sustained a process of raising to consciousness the norms and principles of social and cultural life. The conflict among diverse norms was partially adjudicated through the process of abstract generalization which allows for the coexistence of differences by suppressing specific content. Formal rationality is the result. … The tacit assumption that civilization is dependent upon rationalized urban centers is seriously called into question by the history of Chinese society.108

I think this passage gives us a deep insight into the difference between China and the West in their philosophical definition of human being. The development of cities in the West encouraged the use of rationality in the social life. However, in China, the development of cities started only after 1949. The long history of China is characterized by agrarian culture, which nurtures one of the most complex and well-organized systems of family. The Chinese philosopher Feng Yu-Lan has pointed out that “A great deal of Confucianism is the rational

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justification or theoretical expression of this social system." The Confucian philosophical understanding of human beings and the pursuit of the meaning of life are the reflections of the Chinese family system.

However, since 1978, an open and reformed policy has been implemented and the market-oriented economy is booming in China. As a result, farmers are leaving their land for the city to make a living by working in industry. People have become mobile for these economic reasons. In public, people frequently encounter strangers instead of people who are close to them. In this situation, the philosophical definition of the feelings of love is seriously challenged. The value of sincerity based on this definition is therefore no longer a cherished value in China. Since the aesthetic appreciation of nature in China is the result of empathy and people no longer have strong feelings of love through sincerity, the concept of living in harmony with nature needs to be reformed.

In Daoism, emptiness refers to a state of mind which is unconcerned with fame, reputation, wealth and so on. In an agrarian culture, most people are farmers. This value was easily followed and accepted by Chinese people in the past. However, in a market-oriented economy, fame, reputation, and wealth play an important role in make his living. It is difficult for people to follow this value.

Based on the above analysis, we can conclude that the Chinese aesthetic appreciation of nature based on empathy is being challenged due to the influence of market-oriented economic structure. Living in harmony based on an aesthetic appreciation of nature and people’s participation in the beauty of nature needs to be reformed so that it can become

suitable for the modern society.

4.5. Integrating Environmental Aesthetics between China and West

In this dissertation, I have tried to examine the possibility of constructing an integrated environmental aesthetics which can be applied to both China and the West based on my comparative analysis of both aesthetic appreciation of nature. My final purpose is not just to provide a theoretical justification for environmental protection but also to discover a meaning of life through establishing a harmonious relationship with nature based on aesthetic appreciation of and participation in the beauty of nature. I think an integrated environmental aesthetics should have the following characteristics:

First, the aesthetic appreciation of nature should be based on truth in nature. In other words, we should appreciate nature on its own terms. Although I argue that the ultimate source of the beauty of nature is the subjective feelings of pleasure, pleasure is universally valid in the sense that it is generated by a faculty of mind which can direct us to the truth. However, there are different ways for us to discover the truth in nature. Scientific knowledge which is produced by scientists such as biologists, ecologists and physicists under the guidance of scientific reason is an important way for us to find the truth in nature. However, it is not the only way. The truth of nature can also be found in non-rational ways. Intellectual intuition is another way for us to find the truth as I showed in the first two chapters. Daoism called this ability of intellectual intuition shen. To some degree, we can call this intellectual intuition a moral capacity in the sense that we get the intellectual intuition after exerting a moral effort. For Confucianism, if we can cultivate an unselfish feeling of love which originates from the innate feelings of love we have toward our parents, brothers, and sisters
and extend that love to all things in nature, we will be able to discover the truth in nature.

I think the Confucian view on knowing the truth is at least partly correct. The strong feelings of love toward nature will motivate reason to know nature on its own terms. If we don’t have feelings of love toward nature, we may sometimes be limited to a narrow sense of rationality in which we use the concepts of logic that are most comprehensible to the human mind. Intellectual intuition is achieved differently in Daoism. For Daoism, only if we empty our mind of all desires, emotions and intellectual activities, we can have intellectual intuition. The Daoists’ way of knowing tends to be criticized by some Western environmental philosophers as mysticism, which cannot be trusted. However, with the help of Daoism, I argue that it can avoid the flaw of knowing through rationality alone.

Second, environmental philosophers such as Carlson and Hargrove tend to stress the role that reason plays when they use environmental aesthetics to justify our moral duty toward the environment. I argue that in China feelings of love toward nature can provide the foundation for moral duty toward nature. Based on my analysis of the environmental aesthetics of China and the West, I think that in order to motivate people to care about nature and take actions to protect it, we should pay attention to both rationality and emotion in terms of their role in environmental protection. The rational knowing will not effectively motivate the general public to protect nature without the participation of feelings of love toward nature. Therefore, in practice, we should try to cultivate people’s feelings of love and respect towards nature.

In terms of the cultivation of feelings of love toward nature, there are two ways to do it. The first is to provide the general public with more scientific knowledge of nature
especially ecological science. The important knowledge that ecological science can give us is that human beings are the members of the biotic community and everything in this community is interconnected and interdependent. I think that without this basic scientific understanding of nature, it is difficult to cultivate feelings of love and respect. An objection may be made here: ancient Chinese people tended to have a strong feelings of love toward nature even if they didn’t have scientific knowledge. Therefore, this feeling of love will continue in China even if they don’t have scientific knowledge of nature.

I argue that ancient Chinese people’s strong feeling of love toward nature is to a large degree due to the recognition that for Chinese people, nature is an important member of community. This recognition was the result of agrarian culture where the land provided the basic necessities of life. However, with the establishment of the market economy, much agricultural land is being transformed into factories. The sense of feelings of love is being reduced due to the fact that land is being separated from the human community at a fast rate. Therefore, we need to use scientific knowledge to educate people that land, soil, rivers, mountains, and human beings are all part of one big community.

In Western society, scientific knowledge of nature is also crucial in cultivating a sense of biotic community of which human beings are part. The reason is that nature in the West is usually regarded as separate from human beings. The modern philosopher Descartes defined human beings as thinking things which refers to their rationality. Rationality is identical to the main aspects of the mind. Mind for him was unextended thing which was independent from the body and from nature. In the West, mind is also considered as superior to other things in the world. If we are misled by this kind of philosophy, we will be difficult to
cultivate a sense of respect and loving feelings toward nature. The second way is to encourage people to have physical interaction with nature. In this way, people’s feeling of love towards nature can be strengthened. This love can also encourage people to know more about nature. People’s feelings of love towards nature can greatly motivate people to perform moral duty toward nature.

Third, the mission of environmental aesthetics should not be limited to moral duty toward nature. I argue that environmental aesthetics have a potentiality to play an important role in constructing a meaning of life for the people in modern society of both China and the West. As we know, nature for Chinese people represents the combination of truth, goodness, and the beauty. The meaning of life for Chinese people is to participate in this truth, goodness, and beauty. By comparison, in the West, nature is not viewed as reality. The ultimate reality, for example, has been viewed as the Good which produces the forms. The meaning of life is pursued not in nature but in contemplation of the Good.

Ecological science has changed the way people in the West look at nature. Nature is often regarded as the source of life and also the ultimate reality. Two questions may arise here: (1) In the modern world, how can we draw ethical and aesthetic value from the basic facts in nature? (2) What is the relationship between value in nature and the meaning of life? To answer the first question, I argue that ecological science could provide us with the theoretical foundation for ethical and aesthetic value in nature. As we know, ecology has brought us a new paradigm on nature: nature is considered as a living community in which myriad things in nature such as animals, plants, rivers and mountains are interdependent and interconnected. Human beings are members of this biotic community. Some criticisms may be made here: for
example, the argument that we can draw ethical and aesthetic value from the facts of nature violates Hume’s is/ought dichotomy. In response, I think that emotion is the connection between facts and value. From Leopold’s land ethics, we can find such a connection. As we know, Leopold once came up with an influential moral precept: “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community.” Integrity and stability are concepts of ecology. Clearly Leopold regards integrity and stability as characteristics of nature that have moral value and therefore deserve our respect and protection. In terms of beauty, it is also based on the ecological knowledge. Callicott once pointed out that “Leopold’s land aesthetic, like his land ethic, is derived from evolutionary and ecological biology.” He explains clearly what the land aesthetic is in the following: “Leopold’s land aesthetic, on the other hand, recognizes the beauty of neglected natural environments. It emphasizes less the directly visible, scenic aspects of nature and more the conceptual-diversity, complexity, species rarity, species interactions, nativity, phylogenetic antiquity—the aspects of nature revealed by evolutionary and ecological natural history.”

Leopold was capable of appreciating the beauty of nature based on scientific knowledge in nature. I think there are two reasons. First is that he is a well trained ecologist so his rational thinking ability in this area is well cultivated.

As I showed above with regard to the relationship between rationality and pleasure, the activity of the cultivated rationality will be accompanied by the feelings of pure pleasure which is one reason why Leopold thinks that properties such as diversity, complexity and species rarity in nature are beautiful. The second reason why I think Leopold regards these

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properties in nature as beautiful is that the feelings of love toward nature Leopold has by constant interacting with the living community-nature. Based on the above analysis on Leopold, I argue that it is possible to value nature both ethically and aesthetically based on the scientific knowledge of nature. In other words, nature in the modern world has the potential to be recognized as the entity which is the combination of truth, goodness and beauty. Although people can find the meaning of life in a different way finding in nature, finding in nature is a good way to do.

These considerations bring us back to the second question that I asked earlier: what is the relationship between the meaning of life and value in nature? By value in nature, I refer to both ethical and aesthetic values which are intrinsic. Ethical value is based on the aesthetic value which is based on the truth of nature. I think that if we theoretically established that nature as the biotic community represents the truth, goodness, and beauty, the meaning of life for human beings can be pursued by establish a caring relationship with nature. This caring relationship has the following features: (1) we need to know nature on its own terms. Our effort in knowing nature should not be directed solely toward material benefits for human beings. In other words, nature should be known for its own sake. If knowing nature is motivated by desires for profit, fame, and wealth, the secrets in nature will never be discovered. As Saito points out, knowing nature on its own terms is a moral capacity. (2) We need to have constant physical interaction with nature. Hiking, climbing the mountains, and camping in nature are good ways for us to physically interact with nature. (3) We should respect nature for its own sake. We shouldn’t impose human values on nature.

The crucial question here is why establishing a caring relationship with nature could
become the meaning of life for human beings in modern society. I think the answer to this question is dependent on the first premise that the meaning of life for human beings is to pursue happiness. I will not try to prove that the first premise is true because I consider it to be a self-evident truth for the majority of people around the world. By happiness, I refer to the full development of the two major functions in human beings: rationality and emotion.

Rationality has two dimensions: The first is related to intellectual life. We use this type of rationality to think about the big picture: nature. Scientists, especially biologists and ecologists, often use this part of rationality to do research on nature. The other type of rationality is related to morality. It means that we should respect and perform the moral duty toward it when we rationally justify that something has a value for its own sake. By emotion, I refer to the feelings of love.

The question I am going to examine is: how establishing a caring relationship with nature help us fully develop the two functions of rationality and emotion? I argue that the process of understanding nature is the process of rational activity. It is also a process of the cultivation of rationality. Pleasure should be accompanied by this rational activity when rationality becomes a cultivated one. This pleasure will keep the rational activity moving forward so that we can have more knowledge of nature. Pleasure also has another function which will encourage us to think that nature has intrinsic value and is also beautiful. Our physical interaction with nature will be encouraged with more understanding of nature and the attribution of value in nature. The physical interaction easily nurtures emotions of love toward nature. Our rational understanding of nature and feelings of love toward it will encourage us to respect nature for its own sake instead of only for human interests. I
summarize my line of thinking about the relationship between nature and meaning of life in the following:

(1) Ecology provides the theoretical foundation for the statement that nature represents truth, goodness, and beauty.

(2) Rational activity of the mind which produces the correct ecological knowledge will be accompanied by the subjective feelings of pleasure.

(3) Due to (1) and (2), nature for human beings carries ethical and aesthetic value.

(4) The meaning of life for human beings is to pursue happiness, by which I mean the full development of human functions: rationality and emotion.

(5) By establishing a caring relationship of nature, human functions (rationality and emotion) can be fully developed.

(6) Due to the above, understanding what it means to be a human being can be achieved by establishing a caring relationship with nature.
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