Nature and Culture, Old and New:
A Comparative Study of the Representation of Nature
in Australian and Chinese Cultures

ZHANG Chunyan

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the
Australian National University

School of Cultural Inquiry
Australian National University
July 2010
I declare that the following thesis is my own work and that all quotations are acknowledged.

Signature

(Zhang Chunyan)
Acknowledgements

A thesis such as this could not have been completed without the support and generosity of many people, more than I can properly acknowledge. Although there are many whose help in this project may go unwritten, my gratitude go to all those who, in whatever way, helped me to bring this thesis to its submission. My primary thanks go to Professor John Minford, my current supervisor, for his generosity, guidance and patience. His encouragement and advice made the revising process of this thesis an enjoyable and rewarding endeavour, and his instructions and meticulous scholarship kept enlightening me along the way. I would also like to thank my ex-supervisor, Graham Cullum, for the insights, comments and support I acquired from him in the first few years of this project; and to thank Jacqueline Lo, Duncan Campbell, Sasha Grishin and Livio Dobrez, for their kindness in giving their precious time to read my thesis and give me advice. Their perspectives deepened my understanding of the topic. My thanks also go to Li Youwen who inspired me greatly with her perceptions on Australian culture.

I would like to extend my gratitude to the staff of the School of Cultural Inquiry at the Australian National University for their help over the last few years, as well as for their financial assistance that gave me the opportunity to do the fieldwork in mainland China, Taiwan, Melbourne and Sydney.

I am particular grateful to Eugenie Edquist and her family, without whom this thesis might never have come to fruition. Eugenie, her mother Philippa and her sister Isabella made great effort to edit my thesis in the last few months, providing invaluable suggestions on both structure and style. Their great help has enabled me, coming as I do from a non-English speaking background, to complete this thesis.

And finally, I would like to thank my friends and my family members whose support, both intellectual and emotional, gave me hope and confidence to finish this thesis during some very difficult times.
A Note on Translation & Conventions

In this thesis, when I mention the names of Chinese literary works, films, and some philosophical terms in the main text, for the first time, I give their English translations and the pinyin Romanization in brackets in the main text, and then in the accompanying footnotes, I give their original Chinese names. If I only mention a term, a literary work or a film in the footnotes, for the first time, for terms, books and films, I still give their English translations, followed by the pinyin and Chinese characters in brackets; but for essays and poems, I only give their English translations and Chinese characters without the pinyin. For the names of Chinese paintings, I give their English translations in the text, and their original Chinese names in the footnotes. Then in the “Illustrations”, I give their full documentation, including the pinyin Romanization of the paintings’ names, paint medium, size, etc. For all the Chinese names and terms, when I refer to them again later, I only give their English translations.

For the quotations of all Chinese poems and ancient Chinese essays, I give both their English translations and their original Chinese characters. For the quotations of modern Chinese essays, I only give their English translations.

In the “Bibliography”, for the names of Chinese publishing houses, if they have commonly accepted English names, I give their English names, for example, “Peking University Press”; otherwise I give their pinyin names.
Abstract

This thesis compares the representation of the significance of nature to the human spirit in white Australian and Chinese myth-making and national identity construction. In both cultures, the relationship between human beings and nature is of central concern. This is manifested through the representations of this issue in diverse media and forms. Although the environment depicted remains the same, nature has been represented and constructed differently in various periods for different reasons. My intention is to examine the similarities and differences between Australian and Chinese intellectuals' conceptions and representations of nature, old and new, in their respective cultural traditions and modern transformations. In particularly I will focus on the period of the 1920s and early 1930s when the two countries were making the transition from the traditional to the modern periods. Through this I attempt to explore the underpinning cultural dynamic, including the change of aesthetics, ideologies, and values.

In this comparison, examples will be drawn from three fields: literature, painting and film. The ideas surrounding nature's significance to human beings will be discussed in three key areas: (i) the construction of the image of nature as an idealized utopia or as an “alien other” (a harsh and threatening enemy), in other words, “wild” nature as endowed with positive or negative associations; (ii) the construction of the force of nature as friendly, as consoling and refreshing to the human spirit, and as an ideal refuge, or (by contrast) as destructive and frequently battling with human beings; (iii) the construction of the myth of human beings returning to the grandeur of nature as merely small participants within that grandeur, or (by contrast) the myth of great human power and civilization transforming nature for the purpose of “progress”. All three areas centre on the relationship between nature and human civilization.

The comparison demonstrates that the old dominant attitude towards nature (especially towards the “wilderness”) in the Australian cultural traditions, an attitude
which was continued in some ways in the 1920s, contrasted with the dominant ideas of nature in the Chinese cultural traditions. Yet this Australian conception of nature was similar to the new conception of nature which arose in China’s “New Culture”, especially the leftist culture of the 1930s. Both were characterized by an antagonistic relationship between man and nature. Both emphasized man’s transformation, control and battle with nature as symbols of social progress. On the other hand, new Australian ideas of nature (especially of the “wilderness”) in this period contrasted with modern Chinese ideas, yet they resembled the old conceptions of nature present in the Chinese cultural traditions and their continuation into the 1920s. Both focused on the harmonious relationship between man and nature, and emphasized the positive significance of nature to the human spirit.

The reasons for these contrasting developments in the Chinese and Australian intellectuals’ understanding of nature are manifold. In Chinese culture, the aesthetics and ideologies changed from the traditional harmony advocated by both Confucianism and Daoism to modern conflict which was brought about by a series of cultural movements and the devaluation of Confucianism and Daoism in the context of nationalism. In Australian culture, aesthetics and ideologies shifted from the traditionally negative attitudes towards the “wilderness” as framed by both Western conceptions of nature and Australian colonial experience, to a new pursuit of identification with the “wilderness”. This was caused by reflections on the First World War, as well by the processes of industrialization and urbanization, and a growing sense of belonging, all of this considered in the context of nationalism.
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Chapter 1  Introduction

Nature and Culture, Old and New

This is a comparative study of the representation of nature, especially of the complex significance of nature to the human spirit, and its connection with white Australian and Chinese nationalistic myth-making and national identity construction. It will consider the fields of literature, painting and film, in the light of the relevant traditions, and of the new ideas that came forward during the period of the 1920s and early 1930s.¹

In this period, the sentiments and ideologies of nationalism were prevalent in Australia and China. As a result, many similar features appeared in the representation of nature in both cultures. There was both a continuation of tradition and the introduction of new ideas. Significantly, the continuation of a major 19th century Australian tradition, the antagonistic relationship between man and nature, coincided somewhat with the changing representations of nature in China’s “New Culture”, especially “leftist” culture. Similarly, some of the new ideas in Australian representations of nature resembled the old ideals pursued by adherents of the Chinese traditions. These new ideas included the understanding of the consoling force of the outback and the vitality of the bush; white man’s appreciation of and identification with “wild nature”, to which they had a sense of belonging; a disillusionment with human “progress”, brought about by the First World War and a re-evaluation of civilization itself; the perception of the countryside as Arcadia.²

These similarities of ideas had profound causes, and mirrored changed aspects of both cultures during this period in fields such as aesthetics and ideology. Both cultures were characterized by a combination of traditional and innovative representations. In Chinese culture, the transition was much more obvious: the construction of a new sense of human transformation, separation from and struggle with nature (especially

¹ Cultures do not develop so neatly. Several works that I will discuss were produced shortly before or after this period, in 1919 or 1936.
² Some of these “new” ideas had appeared in earlier periods, but in this period they became much more influential.
as portrayed in “leftist” culture), was a sharp rebellion against the age-old idea of the “harmony of humanity with nature”. Apart from the traditional image of nature as an ideal refuge, a peaceful “other” world detached from human struggle, nature took on a new role as a destructive force threatening human life. This construction paved the way for the main trend in later periods of the 20th century. In Australian culture, this period cannot be so clearly defined as a “transitional” period. Yet there were new ideas, and these new ideas were a kind of betrayal of a long established convention which had considered Australian nature, especially the bush and the outback, as “alien”. These new ideas also paved the way for an important trend in Australian representations of nature in later periods.3

Some Ambiguous Terms

1) Nature

Let me first explain some ambiguous terms and concepts. In traditional Chinese aesthetics and philosophy, “nature” is a core concept. Advocating the “way” of nature is the essence of the Chinese indigenous philosophy Daoism. Indeed, for the Daoist “nature” and “Dao” are identical. He Yan (193?-249) was a Chinese scholar who co-founded the philosophical movement known as “pure conversation” (qingtan), in which groups of scholars used Daoist terms and concepts to discuss philosophy and cosmology, and to give new meanings to Confucian texts.4 He interpreted the Daoist classic The Book of Master Zhuang (Zhuangzi) in his essay “On the Nameless” (Wuming Lun).5 “What is nature (ziran)? It is Dao.”6 Ziran, or “nature”, in Daoism

3 According to Bernard Smith, there have been two kinds of conventions in Australian representation of nature. One is the long established convention in which “nature” was monotonous, unpicturesque, idiosyncratic, alien and hostile to white Australians, inducing either loneliness and melancholy or nonchalant resistance; the other tends towards romanticization of some kind or other, with a positive sunny image, an affection for the landscape, and an optimistic interpretation of Australian bushland (See Smith, Australian Painting, 1788-2000, 2001). However, new ideas such as the re-evaluation of human civilization caused by the disillusion of the war did not appear until this period.

4 He Yan: 何宴; qingtan: 清談.

5 Zhuangzi: 莊子; Wuming Lun: 無名論. Wuming means “no name”. Thus this essay can be translated as “On the Nameless”. For a biography of He Yan, see Richard B. Mather, A New Account of Tales of the World, 1976, pp. 523-4.

6 “自然者，道也”, in He Yan’s “On the Nameless”. My translation. The original manuscript of this essay was lost, but the East-Jin Scholar Zhang Zhan 張湛’s Interpretation of The Book of Liezi kept the texts of He Yan’s essay “On the Nameless”. See chapter 4. “Confucius”, in The Book of Liezi. For the Chinese text, see Liezi 列子, in Guoxue Jiben Congshu 國學基本叢書, No.66, 1968, p. 48. For an English translation of Liezi, see A. C.
does not mean the living things or features and products of the earth itself, but a state of naturalness (literally, “self-like”) or spontaneity without the interference of human action or intention. It is closely connected with the fundamental Daoist concept of “non-action” (*wuwei*). As the physical world of nature is the biggest entity embodying this state of naturalness, and had existed long before the appearance of human beings, the concept of “the state of naturalness” is thus closely related to the natural world. Later in the Wei-Jin period (220-420) “nature” (*ziran*) began to be used to mean the natural world itself, including all things in the universe that are not man-made. In ancient Chinese literature, “Heaven” (*tian*) or “Heaven and Earth” (*tiandi*) are sometimes used to mean “nature”, in the sense of the natural world.

Teng Gu, one of the founders of modern Chinese art history, argues that the ancient Chinese were pantheists, thinking that Heaven had consciousness, feelings and a will. It could control human affairs. But “Heaven” was not just a “god”; it actually was nature itself. Wang Bi (226-249), one of the most important interpreters of the classic Chinese texts *The Way and Its Power* (*Daodejing*) and the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing*), treated the relationship between these terms. “Heaven and Earth allow everything to be natural, without purposeful action or artifice; the myriad things can manage by themselves.”

Ruan Ji (210-263), representative of the thought of Daoist “Dark Learning” (*xuanxue*), also discussed the relationship. “Heaven and Earth were born from nature. The myriad things were born from Heaven and Earth with no

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7 *Wuwei* 無為.


9 *tian* 天; *tiandi* 天地.

10 For more information about Teng Gu 腾固 and the ancient Chinese idea of “*tiandi*”, see Zhang QiQun 张啟群, *Chinese Aesthetics of the Past Hundred Years (Bainian Zhongguo Meixue ShiLue 百年中國美學史略)*, 2005, p. 92.

11 Wang Bi: *王弼; Daodejing: 道德經; Yijing: 易經*.


13 Ruan Ji 阮籍; *Xuanxue: 玄學.*
exception. Therefore Heaven and Earth are other names of nature."\textsuperscript{14} More often the ancient Chinese used the term "\textit{shanshui}" (mountain and water) to mean "nature".\textsuperscript{15} (The concept of \textit{shanshui} will be discussed later.) In this thesis when I use "Heaven", "Earth" and "\textit{shanshui}" in the discussion of Chinese culture, they all refer to the natural world.

In the English language, "nature" is a rich, complex and ambiguous term with various meanings. In Raymond Williams’ definition, "nature" has three meanings: (i) the essential quality and character of something; (ii) the inherent force which directs either the world or human beings or both; (iii) the material world itself, taken as including or not including human beings.\textsuperscript{16} In medieval Europe, "God" and "Nature" were both used to mean an "all-powerful force", but "God" was defined as primary and Nature as his minister or deputy.\textsuperscript{17} This contrasts with ancient Chinese concepts of "Heaven" and "nature". But there was a recurrent tendency even in the Middle Ages to see nature as an absolute monarch, and to emphasize the power of natural forces, especially their destructive effects, on human beings. From the 17\textsuperscript{th} century, with the rise of science, there was a critical argument about the observation and understanding of nature. As political ideas evolved, the concept of nature was changed from that of an absolute to that of a constitutional monarch, with a new emphasis on natural laws.\textsuperscript{18} In the 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} centuries, nature was seen not as an inherent and shaping force, but as the classification of cases. This was the beginning of Williams’ third meaning, nature as the material natural world, contrasting with what had been made by man.\textsuperscript{19} The concept of nature is so complex that "any full history of the uses of nature would be a history of a large part of human thought".\textsuperscript{20} In this thesis, when I use this word in the broader sense, I am taking Williams’ third


\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Shanshui}: 山水.

\textsuperscript{16} See Williams, \textit{Keywords: a Vocabulary of Culture and Society}, revised edition, 1983, p. 219.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., p. 221.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., pp. 221-222.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., pp. 222-223.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., p. 221.
meaning of nature – the whole universe of things which are not man-made, especially
the “features and products of the earth itself, as contrasted with those of human
civilization”, features such as rocks, groves, streams. Nature therefore includes all
other living things in the natural world, except for human beings. In a narrower sense,
by the English word “nature” I mean natural scenery or the environment with which
human beings are most directly in contact. When it is used in relation to Australia, its
meanings are often narrowed to “bush” or “outback”. Although nature in Australia
has many and varied forms, it has often been reduced to a rather restricted vision in
representation – the bush, the outback, the red centre, and the desert. Both “bush” and
“outback” have frequently been used to define Australia’s distinctive quality. Many
different kinds of non-urban Australian landscape have been referred to as “the bush”,
including mountain country and tropical wilderness. The “outback” refers to the more
desolate and deserted areas in the huge Australian interior. It is against this
background, and in terms of this kind of nature, that the Australian character and
cultural identity have been constructed.

In its strict meaning, “nature” or the purely natural environment untouched or
unchanged by human activities, has almost disappeared. This is particularly true of
the Chinese situation. Compared with Australia’s relatively “wilder” nature, in China
nature has been more intensively tamed and cultivated by human activities, and has
more historical and cultural associations. This thesis will still consider mountains,
rivers and other natural objects as part of “nature” rather than “culture”. In China,
when talking about “nature”, poets or artists usually do not distinguish between
“wild” nature, “pastoral” nature or “countryside”. The “natural world” as a whole is
distinguished from human civilization. In both cultures, if we only consider the wilder,
uninhabited, uncultivated and unfarmed areas such as mountain wilderness, deep
ocean and moorland to be “nature”, then the more ordinary countryside and pasture
would be excluded. This thesis conceptualizes countryside and pasture as closer to
“nature”, in that they form a contrast to the more civilized city. As Raymond Williams

21 The Oxford English Dictionary, first published in 1933, reprinted in 1961, vol. VII, p. 42, the 13th definition of
“nature”. The “rocks, groves and streams” are quoted from the 18th century poet William Cowper.
points out, nature has meant the “countryside”, the “unspoiled places”, plants and creatures other than man. It is especially used to contrast city and country. Nature is “what man has not made, though if he made it long enough ago - a hedgerow or a desert – it will usually be included as natural.”

2) Landscape & Shanshui

This thesis sometimes uses the terms “landscape” (mostly in Australian culture) and “shanshui” (in Chinese culture) to replace “nature”. These terms, which are frequently used by artists, writers or filmmakers in their discussions of nature, refer to important aspects of nature. Landscape was initially used to mean (i) a picture representing natural inland scenery, or (ii) a view or prospect of natural inland scenery, but in a generalized sense it can also mean (iii) the inland natural scenery itself. The word is potentially problematic. In the first two usages, it often implies a particular viewpoint, deliberately constructed and culturally loaded. But in the third usage, landscape is part of nature. When I use the term “landscape” to refer to nature, I am taking this third usage, as a topographical entity. With the influence of 20th-century geography, the word can now be used in an objective sense to mean the physical entity itself, the material condition of the land, the surface of the earth, flat or mountainous, treed or barren, moist or arid, tilled or untilled, etc. It includes both the living and non-living things upon it, such as plants, animals, rocks, water, fallen trees and leaves, as well as land / water and land / sky interfaces. In this thesis “landscape” is also used in the term “landscape painting” which refers to a Western painting genre depicting natural scenery. (More discussion about landscape painting will be in later sections.)

“Shanshui” is a single term comprised of the two words “mountain” and “water”. The ancient Chinese worship of mountain and water originated with animism. In Chinese

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22 See Williams, 1983, p. 223.
ancient literary works, there are frequent records of “mountain gods / goddesses” and “river gods / goddesses”, such as the “God of the Yellow River” (hebo), the “Lady of the Xiang River” (xiangfuren), and the “Goddess of the Mountain” (shangui).25 The records of gods / goddesses of other natural objects are comparatively much fewer.26 Before the Wei-Jin Period, “nature” (ziran) only referred to a state of naturalness, and shanshui was used to mean the natural world. From the Wei-Jin period onwards (this was also the first period of Chinese shanshui poetry and painting), shanshui was perceived as a greater whole and endowed with philosophical significance.27 Here shanshui means not only mountain and water, but also all the natural objects and phenomena related to mountain and water, such as grass, trees, fish, birds, rain, clouds, mist and so on. In this sense, “shanshui” is a word signifying the whole natural world with the mountain and water as the main bodies, contrasting with human society.28 Shanshui had a special significance and was closely related to the world of the Chinese literati. As the Chinese scholar Shi Zhiming points out, it was Confucius who first proposed that “the benevolent man loves mountains; the wise man loves water”.29 Ever since that time Chinese literati have attempted to find in shanshui a realm (jingjie) of benevolence and wisdom in which the harmony and balance between humanity and nature can be achieved.30 Shanshui culture, including shanshui poetry and shanshui painting, became the chosen literati vehicle for dialogue with nature.

3) Pastoral & Arcadia

Another pair of terms related to nature are “pastoral” and “Arcadia”. In literary or artistic works, in the broad sense Chinese “pastoral” is similar to Australian


26 See Li Wenchu, Chinese Shanshui Culture, 1996, p. 4.

27 Ibid., p. 9.

28 Ibid., p. 3.


“pastoral” in that they all mean the description of the countryside and the life in it. However, Chinese “pastoral” poems and paintings often present a peaceful picture of nature’s abundant gifts in a calm and leisurely setting. The theme of “returning to the pastoral” refers to the return to the peaceful, simple country life, in which human labour on the land is not stressed. In this sense Chinese pastoral is more like European pastoral. But in Australia, there are two distinctive types of pastoral art: one is similar to Chinese (and European) pastoral, emphasizing the leisure provided by nature (e.g. in Arthur Streeton’s (1867-1943) paintings of rural prosperity); the other focusing on the hard labour which was seen as the agent of that prosperity (e.g. in paintings of Tom Roberts (1856-1931)).

The Australian art historian Tim Bonyhady defines the second type as follows: “They did not paint ‘pastoral’ landscapes in the conventional artistic sense of views in the tradition of Claude Lorraine giving visual expression to the poetry of Virgil and Ovid and depicting an imaginary Golden Age in which man lived a peaceful rustic existence of primitive simplicity. Rather, colonial artists painted actual antipodean localities...” Chinese pastoral is more like what Bonyhady calls “Arcadia”. For example, Bonyhady divides the landscape paintings of John Glover (1767-1849) into categories such as “Pastoral Arcadia” and “Aboriginal Arcadia”. Paintings in the category of “Pastoral Arcadia” are all about farm life without emphasis on labour. Here, Bonyhady uses the term “Arcadia” in its most general sense (countryside and rustic life in an idealized way) to refer to paintings that suggest ease and abundance and that conceal hardship, with a similar connotation to Chinese “pastoral”.

4) Australian Culture & Chinese Culture

“Australian culture” and “Chinese culture” also need to be clarified. There is no such thing as a monolithic Australian culture. In this thesis by “Australian culture” I mean the prevalent white Australian culture – that of the early European immigrants and
later native-born white Australians. Australian Aboriginal culture has existed for a much longer time, and Aboriginal painters had interesting perceptions of nature. But in order to limit the scope of my thesis, I will mainly discuss White Australian culture. Aboriginal culture as a whole is simply too big to be manageable within the framework of this thesis. In China there are 56 ethnic groups, and every group has its own culture. In this thesis when I use the term “Chinese culture” I mean the culture of the Han nationality which has been the dominant culture for about 5000 years. It is true that during some dynasties (e.g. Yuan and Qing) the Han people were ruled by other ethnic groups and were regarded as “second-class” citizens. Yet Han culture was never conquered; on the contrary, any ruling nationality had to learn and absorb Han culture to strengthen its governing ability.

5) Myth & Legend

“Myth” and “legend” in this thesis are being used in the limited sense of “narratives” or “accounts”. They serve as an expression and reaffirmation of a system of commonly held values of the group to whose tradition they belong. They help to propagate a certain line of thought in a certain social context, such as that of nationalism. For example, in *The Australian Legend*, the Australian historian Russel Ward analyzes the development of the bush legend in which the national character and bushman image was rather a people’s idea of itself. This stereotype was often romanticized and exaggerated. It became “what the typical, not the average, Australian likes (or in some cases dislikes) to believe he is like”.

It often modifies events by “colouring men’s ideas of how they ought ‘typically’ to behave”; and the “bush” ethos and its values were often regarded as the expression and symbol of nationalism.

In this thesis, “myth” does not have the meaning of “sacred” or “religious”, and it does not contain “magical” ideas or refer to “supernatural” persons or events. Nor does “legend” as used here imply “ancient time” or a “very old story”. For example,

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during the 1920s and early 1930s, the bush legend, which was so consistently a part of Australian silent film production, was by no means, a “dead” myth. The legend was still part of the construction of Australian reality for very broad sections of the public. As Ward argues, the idealized bushman of the 19th century became the national culture-hero of the 20th century. Though some shearers were driving to their work in motor-cars, the influence of the “noble bushman” on Australian life and literature was still strong.\footnote{Russel Ward. 1966. p. 13.} The distinction between “myth” and “legend” is that legend has some historical connection, some elements of a traditional story – “nearly all legends have some basis in historical facts”.\footnote{Ibid., p. 1.} But the truth value of a legend is not important; rather, its importance lies in the fact that the story is being told at all in the cultures that produce or circulate it. This is also the case with “myth”. The authentic qualities of a myth, its truth or otherwise, are not my concern. As John Tulloch argues, the importance of the “bush legend” in constructing Australian identity does not suggest that the legend was a “natural” and direct representation of Australian “reality”. On the contrary, it can be argued that the bush legend was consistently manipulated as part of a hegemonic ideology, and that as an ideological communication the legend has been consistently structured toward a preferred interpretation.\footnote{Tulloch, \textit{Legends on the Screen: the Narrative Film in Australia 1919-1929}, 1981, p. 352.} There are two points here: first, bush “values” were structured in systematic ways and were deliberately inserted into tales of heroes and villains; second, these values and themes were manipulated by certain social group(s).

\textbf{Nature and Culture: The Dynamic Interaction}

This thesis explores the dynamic process of nature’s interaction with culture – nature’s significance to, and relationship with, human beings in both cultures under discussion. An urgent problem confronting humanity globally at present is the alienation of man from nature.\footnote{For a recent restatement of this idea, see Fan Meiyun 楊美筠, \textit{The Contemporary Interpretation of Traditional Chinese Aesthetics (Zhongguo Chuantong Meisuede Dangdai Chanshi) } 2006, p. 1.} This urgency has prompted certain scholars worldwide to rethink their ideas on nature. In an epoch of global communication, east
and west must communicate with and learn from each other. Only then can they hope
to solve this increasingly serious problem of alienation, and achieve a final harmony
between man and nature. There have been some comparative studies of Chinese and
Western ideas and representations of nature, but in these books the authors only focus
on European or American works without mentioning Australian culture.\textsuperscript{40} Australian
ideas and representations of nature have their roots in the European tradition; however, much of Australian culture has been re-structured in a local context and its unique characteristics should not be ignored. European ideas about nature and culture, which shaped the European representation of landscape and natural environment – the wild and cultivated, the urban and rural, and the human ownership of the land – were brought to Australia, but were transformed according to local conditions.\textsuperscript{41} There has been little comparative research on Chinese and Australian cultures, and so far as I know, there has never been a comparative study of Chinese and Australian painting, literature or film during this period, let alone systematic research in this area. I hope my research can fill this gap, and attract other scholars to cast their eyes on this area. In the words of an old Chinese saying, I wish to “cast a humble brick in order to attract jade” (\textit{paozhuan yinyu}).\textsuperscript{42} And I hope the comparison can help Chinese and Australians to arrive at a deeper and clearer understanding of each other’s culture.

Australia and China differ in the orientation of their values and nation-building experience, but they have shown comparable or contrasting views of nature and human civilization in their cultural traditions. During the period of rising nationalism and modernism in both cultures (roughly the 1920s and 1930s), they have also shown comparable shifts in their views of nature and culture. These shifts have influenced both cultures up to this day. Writers, painters and filmmakers, through their choice of different kinds of imagery in their representations, have refracted this complex transformation. Nature, for them, rather than being an actual material entity, is a

\textsuperscript{40} See, for example, the studies by Kong Xinmiao, Li Beilei, Li Yi, Liao Yang, Yang Xiaoshan, Huang Yaomin, and Tong Qingbing, listed in the bibliography.


\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Paozhuan yinyu}: 抛磚引玉.
cultural artifact. They see it, interpret it and endow it with associations, symbolic connections and metaphorical meanings, all of which are determined by and reflect a variety of social and cultural influences. “Nature” is also an arena in which various cultural ideas and concepts blend together or contend with each other. No matter how objectively Australian or Chinese creative artists attempt to portray or render their land, it is difficult for them to achieve that objectivity. In both cultures large forces are at work. Nature has been represented and constructed differently in various periods for different reasons. Although every representation is subjective and is influenced by the artist’s personal experience, although one individual’s frightening or forbidding wilderness might be another individual’s idyllic Eden, nevertheless, shared social and cultural influences underpin these representations.

My deeper aim is to explore the position from which Chinese culture departed, betraying its deep-rooted belief in “the harmony of humanity with nature”. One of the distinct characteristics of Chinese culture has always been its emphasis on the harmony of man with nature (tianren heyi).\(^3\) This is still widely accepted in Chinese intellectual discourse. For example, Du Weiming, a leading representative of “New Confucian” thought, has pointed out, that one of the foundations of Chinese philosophy, is the perception of inanimate objects, plants, animals and humankind as one entity closely bound up in mutual communications. Man is part of the mighty current of the universe.\(^4\) However, few scholars have noticed the new attitudes towards nature that began to germinate in the 1920s. Some Chinese scholars argue that in the 1950s Chinese shanshui painting began to produce representations of architecture and people in a modern style, with new subjects such as the transformation of mountains and rivers.\(^5\) It is my contention that this phenomenon began as early as the 1920s and 1930s.

\(^3\) Tianren heyi: 天人合一.
\(^4\) See Liu Fang 劉方, Chinese Aesthetics: Historical Evolution and Modern Transition (Zhongguo Meixuede Lishi Yanjin Jiqi Xiandai Zhuanxing), 2005, pp. 7-10. This idea is an expression of the Chinese love of nature, the desire to be part of it, as opposed to the desire to conquer it; their aspiration to be equal with it, rather than enslave it.
\(^5\) See, for example, Hong Huizhen 洪惠臻, Chinese Art in Comparison with the West (Zhongxi Huihua Bijiao 中西繪畫比較), 2000, p. 177.
Comparability

China and Australia have experienced widely different processes of cultural and historical development. There are certainly incomparabilities and incommensurabilities between the two cultures, which makes simple comparisons problematic if not impossible. But there are also interesting and comparable areas of similarity and difference between them, especially in the period of the 1920s and 1930s.

Nature, and the attitude towards nature, constitute one such area. In every Chinese dynasty, in every school of Chinese thought (Daoism, Confucianism or Buddhism), and in every aspect of Chinese life (including literature, painting, music and architecture), the appreciation and representation of nature have been so central and important that they provide a key to an overall understanding of Chinese culture. Starting in the Jin Dynasty, shanshui poetry became a permanent and important part of Chinese literature. Chinese painters, instead of focusing their eyes on the beauty of the human body, turned to nature. Ever since the Tang Dynasty (618-907) shanshui painting has dominated Chinese art. This closeness to nature is something not found in the west until relatively recent periods. For a long time European writers preferred to represent human life through drama and epic poetry, and artists created painting with figures and historical subjects, whereas Chinese artists more often than not represented human life in the midst of nature. In the history of Western art, landscape painting did not become important until the 17th century. But Australia in this sense has differed from other Western countries and in its short (white) history, has been in some respects quite similar to China. The representation of nature has always been an important and indispensable part of Australian culture – from the early European colonists’ idea of an “alien”, “ugly”, “unfriendly” nature, a physical world – colours, fauna, flora – very different from their European environment, to later native-born Australians’ searching for home and a sense of belonging. Creative artists have always turned to nature especially the bush, for inspiration and for notions of cultural
identity, building a construct of nature and human interactions with it. Explorers, pioneering squatters, bushmen, gold-rush diggers were the recurring themes of this construct. As Barry Pearce, the Curator of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, argues, from the 1890s “they began to construct a historical mythology for themselves. Much of it was to do with how they had come to terms with their landscape; how they had survived in it, how they used it, and how they felt about it.” In Australia, the representation of landscape is more significant than in many other countries in which white culture dominates, making it a potent obsession within the intellectual culture of Australia. And landscape painting was dominant from the very beginning. Similar to Chinese artists, Australian painters showed more interest in the Australian landscape than in Australian people. The investment of national character in the landscape had a pervasive populist basis, which is evident through a wide range of mass media including painting and film even to recent decades.

In both Australian and Chinese cultures, what the representation of nature revealed is often the idea of Australia or China, not some ultimate “real” nature or “authentic” Australia or China. For example, Australian landscape painting in the early colonial years was very much an “imagined” landscape, with the European (especially British) landscape as its frame and ideal. This is in an important sense similar to the Chinese representation of “shanshui”, which is also an embodiment of ideas and of an ideal of mountains and rivers, especially in traditional shanshui painting which is an ideal projection of the painter’s imagination. (I will compare these “imagined landscapes” in detail in chapters 2 and 3.)

The historical contexts are also comparable in a number of ways. The 1920s and 1930s, in both Australia and China, were a period of resurgent nationalism which saw the building of a new sense of national culture and identity. In Australia, the great age of optimism was over as a result of the First World War; in China, the great age of self-containment was at an end, as the result of a long series of internal conflicts.

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47 Burn, 1990, p. 102.
(beginning with Taiping Rebellion (1851), and culminating in the warlord conflict and the struggle between the KMT and the CCP) and ever increasing Western encroachment, from the First Opium War (1840-1842) onwards. In both countries the sense of comfortable isolation and innocence was gone; in both countries there was widespread industrial and social unrest; in both countries it was a period of industrialization and urban expansion; in both countries it was a period of transition from the culture of a pre-industrial society to that of a modern society. These are the similarities. The contrast lies in the fact that in Australia, the construction of identity and the creation of national myths was undertaken on behalf of a new country, for new inhabitants in a new land, searching for identification with this land; while in China it was undertaken on behalf of an old country and for old inhabitants of an old homeland facing a threat from foreign cultures and a need to re-evaluate their own culture in the light of science and technology. In Chinese intellectual circles of the early 20th century, the conflict and dialogue between traditional Chinese culture and the newly introduced culture of the West, and between old and new Chinese ways of thinking, caused many scholars to adopt Western ideas and to rethink every aspect of Chinese culture, including its ideas of nature.48 In the Australian national ethos of the 1920s which had been baptized by the First World War, there was also a collision of ideas: colonial ideas, Aboriginal views of nature, and the thoughts of those white Australians who regarded Australia as their native homeland. This collision caused the creative artists to redefine white Australians' relationship with nature.

(More detailed discussion of the social context will be found in following chapters.)

Scope of the Research

In Australian and Chinese cultures nature is represented through all kinds of forms, but in this thesis, when discussing the cultural traditions in earlier periods, I have chosen literature and painting as the materials of my analysis. Literature and painting play important roles in representing human interactions with nature. Australian and

48 The introduction of foreign cultures into China started as early as the Eastern Han period (25-220) when Buddhism was introduced into China. But it was not until the beginning of the 20th century that Western cultures were studied intensively and extensively by Chinese intellectuals.
Chinese writers and painters have long been preoccupied with the representation of different environments or landscapes. When discussing the period of the 1920s and 1930s, I have added examples from film. Compared with painting and literature, the shift of aesthetics in film-making was more obvious. Film also carried the responsibility of constructing a national image, cultural spirit and ideology. Apart from its function as entertainment and visual enjoyment, one important function of film narrative lies in the formation of a national identity and in the task of myth-making. Both Australian and Chinese cinemas are the “mobilizer of the nation’s myths and of the myth of the nation”.\(^4\) Both Australian and Chinese silent film in this period were nationalistic. The 1930s is seen by some film historians as the golden age in Chinese cinema.\(^5\) Similarly, the 1920s in Australia saw the popularity of what have been called “Legends on the Screen” – bush films of pioneering. This was the time of the early flowering of silent feature film production, the most productive, indigenous and most acutely “national” period for Australian cinema, until the revival of Australian films in the 1970s and 1980s. Many of the recurring themes and motifs of local cinema were first explored and defined at this time and most of them are about frontier life in which representations of nature are important.\(^5\) Examples from Australian and Chinese feature films are part of the materials of my study. Chinese film covers a broad geographic and historical terrain, but in this thesis I will only discuss examples from Mainland Chinese film.

Chinese \textit{shanshui} painting and Australian landscape painting are the categories from which I will draw my examples of painting.\(^5\) \textit{Shanshui} painting, which was regarded as the highest form of art for more than 1000 years, was not just a category of painting, but a reflection of the attitudes towards “nature”. In many ways it was a


\(^5\) Before the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, when referring to traditional Chinese ink or colour painting of natural scenery, the phrase \textit{“shanshui painting”} was the only choice. At the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, when Western style oil painting was introduced into China, the word “landscape”, translated into Chinese as \textit{“fengjing”}, appeared in artistic terminology. In traditional Chinese ink painting circles, however, people still used \textit{shanshui} and avoided using \textit{fengjing}. \textit{Fengjing} gradually became a special term used for landscape painting in Western media, such as oil or watercolour.
symbol of Chinese culture. Many Chinese consider *shanshui* painting as the quintessence of Chinese painting and the most brilliant expression of Chinese aesthetics. Western scholars such as Michael Sullivan also regard the language of *shanshui* painting as one of extraordinary richness and breadth, embodying the strongest emotional and poetical feelings and the profoundest philosophical and metaphysical ideas.\(^5\) What is more, *shanshui* painting has a double relationship with ideology: it uses nature to “naturalize” a cultural and social construct. It not only reflects power relations; it is itself an instrument of cultural power.\(^4\) For example, traditional literati *shanshui* painting reflects the painter’s anti-government spirit of freedom, whereas the *shanshui* painting of the 1930s is an instrument advocating the new “zeitgeist”.

Australian landscape painting, as discussed earlier, is distinct from that found in most other Western countries. Actually the dominant position of the landscape genre in Australian painting was similar to *shanshui* in Chinese painting. It emerged out of Australian circumstances, the conditions of the land, the pastoral industry and life in the bush, and was the “great” subject of Australian art, a theme that reflected the changing nature of a nation’s identity. As Kosmas Tsokhas claims, landscape painting was a distinctive feature of Australian cultural identity.\(^5\) Ian Burn, an influential Australian artist and writer, also declares that landscape painting in particular became a valued and popular symbol of Australia, and “provide[d] the strongest threads of continuity in any history of Australian art”.\(^6\) Since the late 19\(^{th}\) century, the image of landscape has, in Burn’s words, been “held up as a mirror for a ‘national psyche’ far more than it has as a mirror of the ‘human soul’”.\(^7\) During the period of the 1920s and 1930s, after the grim experiences of the war and with the ongoing depression, landscape painting played an active and vital role in creating a new national

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\(^6\) Burn, 1990, front cover, p. 7.
\(^7\) Burn, 1990, p. 8.
self-image, disseminating the values of the new pastoral order, and providing an optimistically moral edifice which aimed “rather at impressing feelings on us than expressing them”. By the end of the 1930s landscape painting still retained a peculiar vitality within Australian culture and was seen to represent what was constant, eternal and timeless, and was praised by white Australians as part of their national heritage. As a result shifts in the conception of the landscape can to some extent mirror shifts in ideology.

Australian landscape painting and Chinese shanshui painting have different intentions, ideals, requirements and objectives. Shanshui painters stress the importance of expressing inner thoughts and feelings through the painting of shanshui. They call this “xieyi”, literally “writing ideas”. Traditional Chinese writers and artists both use the brush to express themselves, as declared by the great Yuan dynasty painter Ni Zan (1301-1374): “I ‘write’ the free and unconventional spirit that resides in my heart”. They do not pay much attention to the truthful or detailed description of objects in nature. What they pursue is the feeling; what they manifest is the mood, the spirit and frame of mind; their goal is to enter the lofty realm embodied in shanshui.

As distinct from shanshui painting, Australian (or Western) landscape painters tend to stand outside the landscape as spectators in order to “appreciate” nature. From a chosen location, they paint a specific landscape, from a specific view, at a specific time. As a modern Chinese scholar Hong Huizhen argues, the essential difference between Western landscape painting and Chinese shanshui painting is that for the Western painters the landscape in itself (as a physical entity) is not the most important thing. The thing viewed is no more than a scene cut out from nature. Its value lies in, and is connected with, its perception by human eyes. The Chinese painter, by contrast, seeks to lose himself in nature, to enter it, to become part of it.

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59 In the 1930s, Australian art critic Basil Burdett (1897-1942) was complaining that most artists were still absorbed in the landscape: “The life itself is neglected. Our painting is like a novel without any characters. Landscape pervades our exhibitions…” (quoted in Burn, 1990, p. 160).
60 Xieyi: 寫意.
61 倪瓚，“寫胸中逸氣”，from his colophon to a painting of bamboos. See http://www.zhsbw.com/lidai/yuan/nizan/
62 Hong Huizhen, Chinese Art in Comparison with the West, 2000, p. 223.
Nevertheless, despite these differences, Chinese shanshui painting and Australian landscape painting have certain things in common. They are comparable. Both are ways of interpreting nature. Both ways embody the painters’ spiritual worlds, their reflections and thoughts towards life, and the social influence of ideology and aesthetics. As the contemporary art historian Li Beilei claims, the freehand brushwork in shanshui painting is in fact a kind of interpretation of nature; similarly, Western (Australian) landscape painters also embed their personal interpretation of nature in their representations, which are more than mere imitations of nature.63

In literature, I have chosen poetry as the main area providing examples for my analysis of Chinese opinions. In Chinese traditional literature, poetry is the most important carrier of ideas on nature.64 The literati were inclined to combine poetry, painting and calligraphy into one unified expression; and according to the orthodox view, poetry was the dominant form of Chinese literature until the late Qing period. But this does not mean that all the other genres are excluded from this research. For instance, in chapter 6 I use the novella Border Town (Biancheng) by Shen Congwen (1902-1988) as an example to explore the myth of the countryside in Chinese culture.65 From the beginning of the 20th century, the novel (and novella) gradually replaced poetry to be the major literary genre. In Australian literature, the genres I have chosen are more diversified, including poetry, short stories and novels.66 For example, in chapter 3 when I discuss a dominant tradition in colonial Australian literature, I choose some short stories of Henry Lawson (1867-1922) as examples; in chapter 5 when I analyze the new attitudes toward Australian nature and the Aborigines, I discuss the novel Coonardoo by Katharine Susannah Prichard (1883-1969). All these works clearly demonstrate a kind of prevalent sentiment or an

64 See Wolfgang Kubin (translated by Ma Shude 马树德), Chinese Literati’s Ideas on Nature (Zhongguo Wenren De Ziranguan 中国文人的自然观), 1990, p. 5.
65 Shen Congwen 沈从文: Biancheng 边城.
66 This is because in Australian literary history, during the periods discussed in this thesis, there was not such a genre whose position was as dominant as that of Chinese poetry.
important shift in ideology.

Shanshui poetry, the focus of my discussion on traditional Chinese literature, first appeared in the Eastern Jin (317-420) period. For a long time there has not been a strict standard to define shanshui poetry. In this thesis, I use it to refer to those poems in which the description of nature and of human interaction with it is the main theme. If the aim of describing shanshui is only to symbolize human character, as in The Songs of the South, it cannot be categorized as a shanshui poem. Traditional shanshui poetry and pastoral (tianyuan) poetry overlapped. Shanshui and pastoral were both ideal places for the achievement of spiritual liberation inspired by Daoism. They both originated in this cultural context, the only difference being their subject matter — shanshui usually refers to (wild) mountains and rivers, whereas pastoral refers to secluded countryside. However, shanshui and pastoral countryside often had no clear boundary. This is particularly the case with pastoral poetry, because in the countryside there were usually mountains and rivers. Tang Dynasty shanshui and pastoral poetry have even been merged into one category: the school of shanshui pastoral (shanshui-tianyuan) poetry, with Wang Wei (701-761) and Meng Haoran (689-740) as the most outstanding representatives. In this thesis, pastoral poetry is regarded as a part of shanshui poetry.

The three media — literature, painting and cinema — I focus on are all representational, but they have different forms, traditions and perspectives. Each medium has its own limits. Compared with literature and film, painting does not have such an explicit narrative structure and purpose. For example, the figures in Arthur Streeton’s landscape painting, such as the girl chasing her hat in Blossoms, Box Hill (1890), and the boy herding sheep in Golden Summer (1889), are often there as structural parts of the scenery. And when representing the contrast between the city and the countryside, painting cannot show it as clearly or dramatically as film or literature does. However,
in some paintings, the relationship between the figures and their setting is explored for narrative purposes, as shown in Tom Roberts’ *A Break Away!* (1891).

On the other hand, compared with film which is more sensitive to market or government influences, painting is a more inner-directed medium, for the expression of the painter’s moods, feelings and personality. As E.H. Gombrich argues, it is more subjective, and more influenced by the artist’s training, education, mental set and preferences, and current artistic style, conventions and expectations. Every painter has his own conception of nature, framed by the outlook of a certain class, generation, nation, intellectual climate, changes in fashion or taste, and different standards of lifelikeness. However, despite all these differences, painting as a whole carries with it a social, historical, political and philosophical significance, and constructs the relationship between man and nature through the depiction of images, just as film and literature do. This is particularly true in Chinese painting. As Fu Baoshi (1904-1965), one of the best known Chinese modern shanshui painters, claims, Chinese (shanshui) painting is both the clearest vindication of the Chinese national spirit, and the most lively form of Chinese philosophy. During the 1920s and 1930s, the ideas of “fusing Chinese and Western art” on the one hand, and that of “carrying forward the quintessence of Chinese culture” on the other, were contending, and this gave rise to the separation of traditionalists and reformists in Chinese painting. The thinking on Chinese painting reform continued to be dominated by non-professionals, and developments were determined by sociological and political factors rather than by the internal dynamics of the art itself. As a result it is easier to trace the changes of social thinking in this field.

**Methodology, Approaches and Perspectives**

1) **“Representativeness” – Choice of Examples**

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During this period of research, I watched most of the Australian and Chinese black-and-white films made during the 1920s and 1930s, in the Australian National Film Archive in Canberra, and in the China Film Archive and China Film Art Research Centre in Beijing. For the Chinese paintings, I visited the National Palace Museum in Taipei and the Shanghai Museum to see the originals of ancient masterpieces, and visited the China National Museum of Fine Arts in Beijing to study modern Chinese paintings at first hand. For the originals of Australian paintings, I visited the National Gallery in Canberra, the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne and the Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney.

With regard to the length of the thesis, not all the three areas in two cultures are discussed in full detail in each chapter. For example, in chapter 4, when I discuss the representation of the force of nature, the new idea of a positive force of nature was manifested more explicitly in Australian painting than in the other two genres, so in that chapter I have only chosen paintings to illustrate this idea. The criteria for “representativeness” have differed over time. My primary criterion is that “nature” should be the main theme (as in the works of John Glover and Hans Heysen (1877-1968)), or at least that it should play an important role in the work. For example, I have chosen the Heidelberg painters (mainly the works of Roberts and Streeton) because the dominant theme in their works is nature, no matter whether we agree or not with the claim that theirs is “the golden age of Australian landscape painting”. These painters paid more attention to the features and mood of the bush, and to the interaction of Australians with nature and their plight in the bush or outback. They represented the Australians either as “heroes” (e.g. in Roberts’ The Break Away!), or as “noble pioneers” (e.g. in The Pioneer (1904) by Frederick McCubbin (1855-1917)), or as “victims” in the tragic struggle of “Man” with his environment (e.g. in Streeton’s Fire’s On! (1891)). The Heidelberg painters established a local style, and were representatives of one Australian convention of

73 The term “Heidelberg school” has itself been questioned because each artist who painted in the Heidelberg area (Box Hill and Eaglemont) had his own characteristics. In this thesis although I retain the name “Heidelberg” to refer to those artists who painted around the Heidelberg area, I will discuss individual painters and their works rather than the common features of the “school”.

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representing nature.\textsuperscript{74} In chapter 3 I use some of their works to discuss a particular Australian cultural tradition, and in later chapters I compare their works in the 1920s with their earlier works of the colonial period. In film, I have chosen those films in which the narrative function of nature is important, as subject, actor, or as co-worker of the narrative protagonist. Examples of this are, in Australian cinema, \textit{The Breaking of the Drought} (1920), \textit{On Our Selection} (1920), \textit{A Girl of the Bush} (1921) and \textit{The Sentimental Bloke} (1919); and in Chinese cinema, \textit{Wild Torrents} (Kuangliu) (1933), \textit{A Poet at the Edge of the Sea} (Haijiao Shiren) (1927), \textit{Sand Washed by Waves} (Langtaosha) (1936), \textit{Little Toy} (Xiaowanyi) (1933), \textit{Wild Rose} (Yemeigui) (1931), \textit{Return to Nature} (Dao Ziran Qu) (1936) and \textit{Back Home from the City} (Chongfan Guxiang) (1925).\textsuperscript{75}

When choosing examples, I have also paid attention to the nationalist sentiment embodied in the work. For instance, Roberts’ and Streeton’s works are selected, not only for the reasons mentioned above, but also because both actually played an important part in developing an Australian national consciousness. They had the “greatest impact on the formation of a national visual culture in colonial Australia through their interpretation of the pastoral tradition”.\textsuperscript{76} In the years leading up to the 1901 Federation of the six Australian colonies, they made deliberately heroic paintings which have become national icons.\textsuperscript{77} Both Streeton and Roberts searched for characteristic subject-matter that embodied the nationalistic sentiments of the 1890s, which can be compared with the different nationalistic sentiments in their works of the 1920s.

When discussing the Chinese and Australian cultural traditions, I have chosen works which represent dominant or prevalent ideas about nature in that period. For example, the poems of Xie Lingyun (385-433), Tao Yuanming (365-427), Wang Wei, Meng

\textsuperscript{75} Kuangliu: 狂流; Haijiao Shiren: 海角詩人; Langtaosha: 浪淘沙; Xiaowanyi: 小玩意; Yemeigui: 羽玫瑰; Dao Ziran Qu: 到自然去; Chongfan Guxiang: 重返故鄉.
\textsuperscript{76} Hoorn, \textit{Australian Pastoral: the Making of a White Landscape}, 2007, p. 144.
Haoran, Liu Zongyuan (773-819) and Li Bai (701-762) are representative of shanshui poetry, not so much because they were highly regarded as shanshui poets in Chinese history, but more for the fact that their ideas on nature were widely accepted and influential. Australian poet Adam Lindsay Gordon (1833-1870) may be called “representative” because he represented a particular type of character much admired by the white Australians of the colonial period, and an attitude toward frontier life that was prevalent in his day.

When discussing the period of the 1920s and 1930s, I have selected those works which demonstrate new ideas on nature (e.g. paintings of Heysen and Grace Cossington Smith (1892-1984), and Prichard’s novel), or old ideas developed under new circumstances (e.g. the Chinese film Return to Nature). But I will be focusing on the new ideas. The new ideas in those works may not have been dominant at that time, but they were influential, and foreshadowed developments in later periods. In some works, the old and the new, the Eastern and the Western are mixed (e.g. Chinese poet Guo Moruo’s anthology The Goddess (1921)). Works such as these are my first choice. But the mixed ideas should primarily focus on the significance of nature to the human spirit. For example, the artist Lin Fengmian (1900-1991) was an early pioneer of modernism in 20th century Chinese painting. After his return from Paris, he greatly influenced the reform of Chinese painting in terms of painting medium, composition, colour, style and brushwork. His work was an important milestone bridging the tradition and the modern, the Chinese and the west. However, I have not chosen his works as exemplifying new ideas, because in terms of the relationship between man and nature, he was still a traditional at heart. Just as he kept a distance from politics and ideology, his paintings also stand aloof from world affairs, with

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78 Xie Lingyun: 謝靈運; Tao Yuanming: 陶淵明; Liu Zongyuan: 柳宗元; Li Bai: 李白. Although Tao Yuanming’s pastoral poems were not influential during his lifetime, he had the greatest influence on later poets from the Tang Dynasty onwards – all the other five poets were indebted to his reclusive thought.  
80 Guo Moruo: 郭沫若; The Goddess: 女神.  
81 Lin Fengmian: 林風眠.  
their isolated and reclusive feeling. As the art critic Zhang Qiang argues, Lin Fengmian’s shanshui painting clearly demonstrates the inter-connection of the Western concept of “landscape” and the Chinese concept of “shanshui”. He used the eyes of a Western landscape painter and Western perspective to paint Chinese shanshui. Yet his inner cultural sentiments and artistic feeling are typically those of traditional Chinese painting.83 Michael Sullivan also argues that Lin Fengmian was one of the most successful artists who showed how Chinese painting could be “modern” or “Western” in form and style, and yet essentially “Chinese” in feeling.84

In both Chinese shanshui painting and Australian landscape painting, I have mainly chosen those works in which there are activities or traces of human beings. In some works there is no direct description of human beings, but marks of human activities can be perceived, such as the pavilion, temple and bridge in Chinese painting, or stockyard, windmill and cleared ground in Australian painting, showing a relationship between man and nature. And I have also selected those works which are comparable to similar works in the other culture – for example, the most important reason for my choosing the works of Australian artist Eugene von Guerard (1811-1901) is that the sublime beauty and the overwhelming setting in which men appear small and insignificant in his works are comparable to traditional Chinese shanshui painting.

In Chinese film, I have mainly chosen movies made in the early 1930s. Before 1930, most movies were made in Shanghai with city life as their theme, and there was little representation of nature. After 1930, the subjects were expanded from city life to remote country areas. But in Australian film, I have mainly chosen silent films made before 1930, because at this time films of the bush – in which “nature” existed not only as background or setting, but also as foreground, playing an important role – established themselves as a distinctive genre. From 1930 few films were overtly nationalistic, and there was a trend away from representations of the distinctive

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83 Zhang Qiang 張強, Modern Form of Chinese Painting (Guohua Xiandai Xingtai 國畫現代形態), 2005, p. 34.
Australian bush to depictions of city life. I have chosen the film *The Sentimental Bloke* made in 1919, because it is a good example illustrating the city-country polarity. The social context of the year 1919 also falls into the overall category of this period – that of nationalism baptized by the war.

Other reasons for choosing specific examples will be given when discussing the works.

**2) Approaches and Perspectives**

This study is a cross-cultural, cross-national and cross-media study. Generally speaking, there have been three methodological approaches in the comparative study of Chinese and Western cultures: (i) mutual influence study (e.g. the influence of Romanticism on Guo Moruo’s poetry); (ii) comparative study by analogy, without actual contact between the two cultures (e.g. the comparative study of Wordsworth (1770-1850) and Tao Yuanming); (iii) the use of Western theories and methodologies to interpret Chinese culture (e.g. the use of orientalism or postcolonialism to study the culture in the Yunnan area). In the 1920s and early 1930s there was little if any Chinese influence on Australian culture; and there is no evidence to show that Chinese literature, painting and film were in any way affected by Australian culture. The “mutual influence” approach is clearly not applicable to my topic. My own emphasis is closer to the second approach. In the absence of contact, I explore the “common or similar features” in both cultures, and “contrasting characteristics” in these similarities. My study has been conducted from the perspective of a Chinese studying both cultures. It compares a Chinese view of Australian culture and nature with Australian views; it also compares Western opinions on Chinese culture and nature with Chinese opinions. It attempts to avoid using both the Eurocentric values of some Western scholars when they interpret Chinese culture, and the Sinocentric attitudes of some Chinese scholars when they study Western culture. I will also

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analyze and criticize the Eurocentric views of the Australian landscape during the colonial period, and the anthropocentric ideas of the relationship between man and nature, and between nature and culture as a whole – ideas which strongly influenced traditional Australian thinking in the colonial period and modern Chinese thinking in the 1920s and 1930s. My fundamental methodology is grounded in traditional Chinese aesthetics.

In traditional Chinese painting, small human figures were usually assimilated into their natural setting. Some Western scholars argue that this is a kind of "descriptive naturalism" – the painter painted in such a way because he actually could not see them. But Chinese scholars see this style as the result of the Daoist influence on the human relationship with nature – compared with more eternal mountains and water, humanity is just a small part of nature. What is more, instead of concentrating on specific cases, Chinese people more frequently take a "full / whole view", "looking upward and downward" to observe things. As Richard E. Nisbett argues, the collective or interdependent nature of Asian society is consistent with Asians' broad, contextual view of the world and their belief that events are highly complex and determined by many factors. The individualistic or independent nature of Western society causes Westerners to focus on particular objects in isolation from their context. In this thesis I endeavour to bridge and combine the Western mode of detailed analysis of individual examples and the Chinese way of taking the overall situation into consideration. In the comparison, I endeavour to avoid value judgment – praising Chinese works and censuring Australian works, or vice versa.

In any comparative study, the challenge is to find, not simple similarity or difference, but subtler blends of the two. Sometimes common things exist in apparent differences, and different ideas lie buried beneath seemingly common features. For example, it is

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not difficult to find the "pastoral" subject in both Australian and Chinese cultures. In both it represents a close relationship between humanity and nature. But what needs to be more deeply explored, is the profound and contrasting spirit behind this similarity. Australian "pastoral" demonstrates the Western ideology of progress and civilization, while Chinese "pastoral" symbolizes an eastern reclusive ideal, shunning material progress and civilization. To seek such difference in similarity, one needs to find the underlying divergence in aesthetics, spirituality, and social values. Equally significant is similarity in difference. For example, in appearance Heysen’s Flinders Ranges paintings look so different from Ni Zan’s tranquil shanshui landscapes; however, they both manifest a reverence and admiration towards pure, unspoiled nature. They both convey a sense of infinity, eternity and otherworldliness (This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4). I wish to avoid an obsession with apparent similarity, which distorts and blurs individuality. Equally, I do not wish to be blind to real underlying similarities that cross cultural boundaries.

The discussion and comparison of specific representations will be combined with a more general exploration of the ideology, aesthetics and social context that fostered those representations. For instance, in many works of early Australian painting, there were representations of Aborigines in a state of oneness with nature. My focus is on the inner social and philosophical connotations in these works rather than on the analysis of a painting itself. Does it embody the white men’s racist attitude towards the Aborigines who were considered part of nature? Were both of them (Aborigines and nature) considered to be conquered? Or was it an expression of the Romantic aesthetics of sublimity? My goal is to link the apparent phenomenon with its deeper sources of meaning.

Given this conceptual framework, in which the focus is the significance of nature to humanity and to the human spirit, it is the ideology, value systems and aesthetics embodied in the various works of art, cinema and literature that will be emphasized, not so much problems of technique, style and medium. The analysis of technique is
sometimes unavoidable, but it is not my primary concern. Details of this kind (e.g. the
discussion of perspective in Western painting and of the “Three Distances” (sanyuan)
in Chinese painting) are only introduced in order to further the discussion of the
principal theme.89

My focus is on the dynamic process. Australian and Chinese cultures change. They
develop and evolve over time, especially in the period of the 1920s and 1930s when
old and new ideas were intertwining. Although my emphasis is on a parallel
comparison of the two countries in this period, I am obliged to discuss the traditions
of the two cultures in the earlier periods (chapters 2 and 3). In subsequent chapters, in
my discussion of the 1920s and 1930s, new ideas and changes come to the fore.

**Difficulties Encountered**

The first and foremost challenge I have had to face in this project has been the
translation of a concept from one cultural context (Chinese) into another (Australian),
and vice-versa, without distorting the content and meaning of that concept in its
original language, and without losing valuable and characteristic information through
the process of translation. In a comparative study, building a common and
unambiguous lexicon of concepts should be seen as part of the ultimate goal. Yet
there are some insuperable difficulties in communicating the true meaning of Chinese
texts (whether in the original or translated) to a Western framework of understanding
(and vice-versa). This is particularly the case in the translation of ancient Chinese
poetic and artistic language into modern English.

A second challenge lies in the fundamental disparity between the two “national”
cultures. Chinese culture upholds the ideas of “totality”, “wholeness”, “collective
thinking”, and the concept of a greater national unity. Within this culture,
representations of nature can be divided into periods more easily, and it is easier to
generalize and present overall opinions and dominant viewpoints in any one period.

89 *Sanyuan: 三遠.*
But Australian culture has always been diverse, and the representations of nature are more diversified and individually oriented. It is therefore harder to generalize. In Chinese culture there has always been a dominant mainstream ideology, which has resulted in an orthodoxy of thinking, and of morals and values, and a prevalent aesthetic. This contrasts strongly with the diversified nature of Australian culture.

Then there is the problem of “context” versus “text”. This is not a study in art history, nor is it a study in literary or film criticism. It is a study in comparative culture and aesthetics. It has been impossible to analyze individual works / texts in as much detail as would have been appropriate in a traditional critical study. For a thorough discussion of the underpinning culture, sometimes the account of the contextual and cultural background outweighs the detailed account of texts / works. On the other hand, sometimes it is necessary to give a full descriptive account, even though this may weaken the argumentative analysis. Australian and Chinese cultures are so very different. Without such a clear and detailed description and explanation, readers who have no prior knowledge of the two cultures will have difficulty understanding the broader issues. It is hard to strike the right balance.

Finally, the very length of the Chinese tradition makes it necessary for me to give a limited number of examples in chapter 2. This means that “for one thing cited, ten thousand may have been left out” (guayi louwan). In the case of early films, many have been lost altogether. We only know of their existence from contemporary reviews and their references. Others exist only in rare copies which can only be viewed in the archives, and cannot be reproduced in any way.

Structure

In chapters 2 and 3 I go back to the earlier periods to discuss the Chinese and Australian cultural traditions respectively. With Chinese culture, it is commonly agreed that the ideas, philosophies and representations of nature before the 20th
century are part of the “tradition” going back some two thousand years. But in white Australian culture with its history of a little over two hundred years, it is not so easy to talk of the “tradition”. The Australian cultural tradition has never been “monolithic”. I use the word “tradition” in the Australian context to refer to those old and influential ideas and representations that were imported from Europe during the Australian colonial period, on the basis of which the later more varied “Australian tradition” (during the years toward and soon after the federation) evolved. In Chapter 3 I have selected from the various strands of that Australian tradition those elements that can be compared or contrasted with their Chinese counterparts. Chapters 4 to 6 discuss the representation of nature during the period of the 1920s and early 1930s. I will discuss this period in terms of three themes. In Chapter 4 I look at the negative and positive forces of nature, and the diversified appearances of nature. In Chapter 5 I deal with the ideas of progress and civilization intertwining with the ideas of reclusion and the return to nature. In Chapter 6 I discuss the myth of the countryside and the ways in which it is contrasted with the city. All three themes are centred on the relationship between man and nature, and between nature and culture.
Chapter 2  The Myth of Ideal *Shanshui*:

Nature in the Chinese Cultural Traditions

In this chapter, I will discuss the representation of nature, or *shanshui*, in the Chinese cultural traditions. The Chinese *shanshui* myth is comparable to the “bush” myth in the Australian cultural traditions which I will discuss in the next chapter. I will first investigate the philosophical framework for *shanshui*, which is composed of the ideas of nature developed in China’s two most prominent philosophical systems, Confucianism and Daoism. An explanation of both is crucial to understanding the context in which the Chinese concept of nature evolved; however, it was the latter which decisively framed and nurtured the birth and development of *shanshui* painting and poetry, and so this Daoist element will be examined in greater detail. I will then explore the representation of *shanshui* in ancient Chinese literature and art as embodied in three themes: imagined *shanshui* and its “other” world of the mind; “minor” man immersed in the grandeur and sublimity of mountains and boundless rivers; and the theme of reclusion, in which nature is regarded as “refuge”. All three of these themes possess Australian counterparts with striking parallels and contrasts.

I want to first clarify an issue pertaining to the Chinese cultural traditions. All the ancient ideas and representations of nature and humankind discussed in this chapter are in fact those pertaining to and created by the Chinese literati. Some scholars argue that Chinese literature and painting always constructed nature in a detached and non-utilitarian way in which nature appeared as unspoiled, pure and wild. However, in reality nature was exploited, tamed and severely damaged as part of the Chinese agricultural economy. Clearly the labouring peasantry held a highly utilitarian view of nature; but as they did not have the power of discourse (most of them were in fact illiterate), their ideas about nature went unrecorded. Most of the literati, on the other hand, did not need to work in nature, and few of them were willing to listen to the opinions of the labourers. As a result the literati’s imagined and idealized nature is the only representation available for analysis. In reality, this is not a “representation”, but
a “construction” or an “invention” of nature. Although these ideas may only have been believed by a small portion of the population, that portion was enormously powerful and influential, and their ideas determined what sort of art got produced. Even though nature “on the ground” was to some extent physically exploited in ancient China, some argue that this reverence for nature that prevailed among the ruling literati partly prevented the industrial attitudes of the West from taking hold. Whether or not this argument is true, the modern Chinese reformists in the 1920s and 1930s enthusiastically rejected these old philosophies, which were in such stark contrast to Chinese new culture. I will discuss the new culture in chapters 4 to 6.

The Philosophical Framework for *Shanshui*

1) The “Harmony of Man and Nature” in Confucianism

A nation’s cultural tradition arises out of that nation’s earliest religions and mythology. In immemorial times, the ancestors of the Chinese people were close to nature, and at the same time stood in awe of nature. In their earliest religions they worshipped the gods and goddesses of mountains and rivers, as recorded in *Han Ying’s Illustrations of the Didactic Application of the Classic of Songs (Hanshi Waizhuan)* (c.150 B.C.):

“Mountains are what everything on earth looks up to with reverence; grass and trees grow there, the Myriad Things reproduce there, flying birds congregate there, and wild beasts take their rest there. They produce the Myriad Things without any selfish purpose”.¹ The idea of the “harmony of man and nature”, which permeates the whole of Chinese cultural history, originated in this primitive reliance upon nature. In the earliest Chinese religions and mythology, mountains and rivers were regarded as providing protection to human beings. They were not only regarded as the places where Chinese ancestors were born, but also seen as representing the will of Heaven - they were either the transformed body of the God of Heaven, or his residence.² Hence they were sacred. People considered natural disasters to be the

¹ 韓賦, 韓詩外傳： “山者，萬物之所瞻仰也，草木生焉，萬物殖焉，飛鳥集焉，走獸休焉，吐生萬物而不私焉”. My translation. See also J. R. Hightower’s translation, *Han Shih Wai-chuan: Han Ying’s Illustrations of the Didactic Application of the Classic of Songs*, 1952.

² This is recorded in many ancient sources, for example in the Chapter “On Ancient Music” in *The Annals of Lu Buwei (Li Shi Chunqiu)*, 239 B.C.: “The Emperor Zhuanxu – the grandson of the Yellow Emperor –
punishment sent down by natural deities for the wrongdoing of mortals.  

The worship of mountains and rivers in the earliest Chinese religions expressed the initial cultural pattern of a nation for which agriculture was the main way of life. As the German Sinologist Wolfgang Kubin argues, the ancient Chinese people living in an agricultural society that depended on the weather, the seasons and the land, thought of nature as governed by all kinds of gods – the sun, the moon, and all the stars were gods in Heaven; the earth, the mountains and hills, the forests and valleys, and the sea and rivers were all gods in this world. This “shanshui worship” established the foundation for the later development of Chinese shanshui painting and poetry. In other words, many of the themes in Chinese shanshui painting and poetry can be traced back to early “shanshui worship”. Let us take as an example the theme of living a secluded life in the mountains, where shanshui is conceived of as a refuge, a detached spiritual sanctuary from the stresses of worldly life. This understanding of shanshui in some ways has the same function as religion. It provides a safe environment for the Chinese literati as well as becoming a vehicle for their emotions. The literati had a feeling of identification with, of belonging to, shanshui. This reflected the ancient worship of shanshui as the ancestor and God of Creation, as the source of consolation and refuge.

was born in the Ruo river (For an English translation of The Annals of Li Buwei, see John Knoblock & Jeffrey Riegel, The Annals of Li Buwei, 2000.) Also, as recorded in Collection of Bizarre Stories (Sheuyijji 逸異記) by Ren Fang (460-508), vol. 1, mountains were transformed from the body of Pangu, the legendary God of Creation: “When Pangu died, his head became the four great mountains. And as recorded in Chapter 2, “Western Mountains” in The Classic of Mountains and Seas (Shanhaijing 山海經, Warring States Period to the Han Dynasty) interpreted by Bi Yuan: “The Kunlun Mountain was the first abode of the Yellow Emperor (another legendary ruler and ancestor of the Chinese nation) when he came into the human world. The Singapore scholar Wang Kuo-Ying (1986, p. 14) argues that in ancient times shanshui was thought of as the embodiment of the natural vitality of the universe. Chinese reverence towards nature was manifested in literature since the first collection of poems, The Book of Songs (Shijing 詩經) (c. 6th century B.C). The sublimity and magnificence of shanshui reflected the will of Heaven; hence it should be esteemed, respected, praised and worshiped as a god (1986, p. 14). The early Chinese were also pantheists, respecting all kinds of natural phenomena as divine beings, including the sun and moon, the winds and clouds, thunder and storm, the mountains and rivers, etc. There were many descriptions of the loftiness and sublimity of mountains and the power of rivers. In The Songs of the South, this pantheism can be found everywhere.

This theme will be discussed in the following sections.
Later, with the development of society, the early nature-religions were replaced as spiritual systems by various philosophical schools of thought, of which Confucianism and Daoism were most influential from the Warring States Period (475-221BC) onwards. Confucianism and Daoism between them built the cultural and psychological structure of traditional Chinese national identity.\(^6\) Confucians focus on the relationship between human beings and society, while Daoists focus on the relationship between human beings and nature. Both Confucians and Daoists stress the harmony between man and nature. During the long feudal period from the Warring States onwards, with the deeper understanding of nature and the accompanying development of agricultural productivity, people had more and more knowledge of natural phenomena (including natural disasters) and of natural mysteries. They carried forward the deep reverence for nature from their earliest religions, but more and more replaced the terror of nature in those religions with sentiments of intimacy and harmony with nature. The contemporary Confucian scholar Xu Fuguan claims that “of the various ancient cultural systems in the world, there was no other cultural system in which human beings and nature had such an intimate relationship as in China”.\(^7\) His claim may be too absolute, but there are many ancient Chinese documents (both Daoist and Confucian) which do show this harmonious and intimate relationship.

It is true that those writers and critics who were influenced deeply by Confucianism usually had a less profound understanding of nature than the Daoists. Confucianism, which was the dominant political ideology from the Han Dynasty onwards, emphasized ethics and the collective social order, and devalued individualism and the pursuit of personal and aesthetics pleasure. For Confucians, the primary concern is the relationship between human beings themselves and between the individual and

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\(^6\) See Li Zehou 李澤厚, *The History of Chinese Ancient Thought* (Zhongguo Gudai Sixiangshi 中國古代思想史), 1984, p. 308. Some scholars argue that Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism make up the three pillars of Chinese philosophy (See Li Wenchi, 1996). But in terms of their ideas of nature, Buddhism is closer to Daoism.

\(^7\) Xu Fuguan 徐梵書, *The Spirit of Chinese Art* (Zhongguo Yishu Jingshen 中國藝術精神), 1987, p. 193. Xu Fuguan is a Taiwan-based scholar and representative of the “overseas new Confucians”. *The Spirit of Chinese Art*, Xu’s masterpiece of aesthetics, which is also his most influential work, has had a wide-spread influence in mainland Chinese academia since it was published in 1987 by a mainland publishing house.
the society, rather than between man and nature. As the upholders of the official
mainstream ideology, Confucians have regarded nature as a means and a tool to
expound their cultural values and ideals, rather than as something supreme in itself. 8
Nevertheless, in its own way Confucianism does advocate harmony between man and
nature and has contributed to the development of the human attitude of intimacy
towards nature. In *The Analects of Confucius* (*Lunyu*), Confucius (551-479 BC) says:
“Heaven does not need to speak. The seasons revolve within it, all living things grow
within it”. 9 The cycle of seasons and the growth of living things in nature
demonstrate to humans the law of Heaven as embodied in nature. Everything
(including human beings) grows in that natural cycle, rhythmically and harmoniously.
In *The Book of Master Xun* (*Xunzi*), Master Xun (313-238 BC) says: “The stars
revolve; the sun and moon shine in turn; the four seasons foster life; the *yin* and the
*yang* are the Great Transformation; the wind and rain nurture generously. The Myriad
Things are born of this natural harmony, they develop out of its nurture”. 10 In the
Song Dynasty, Cheng Hao (1032-1085), a leading representative of
Neo-Confucianism, wrote in a similar vein: “The benevolent man regards the Myriad
Things in Heaven and on Earth as a single unity”. 11

In aesthetics, Confucians upheld the beauty of nature. In the words of Dong
Zhongshu (c. 179-104 BC): “The way of Heaven and Earth is Beauty”. 12 Confucius
and his followers always interpreted the beauty of nature in a moral sense. For them
the beauty of natural objects lies in the moral significance they symbolize. 13 This in
Chinese aesthetics is called “*hide*”: literally, “*bi*” means “to compare”, and “*de*”

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12 “天地之行美也”, in Chapter 17 of Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒's *The Rich Dew of Spring and Autumn* (*Chunqiu Fanlu 春秋繁露*). Dong was a scholar of the Han Dynasty who promoted Confucianism as the official ideology.

means “morality”. Confucians connect aesthetic thoughts on nature with the noble man’s moral pursuits, and compare the natural beauty of *shanshui* with human nobility of character, suggesting that noble men (sometimes referred to as “gentlemen” or *junzi*) should project social morality into natural objects. In Confucian thought, a certain natural object is loved because it shares certain human characteristics. This was the first time in the history of Chinese aesthetics that a new relationship between mankind and nature – an inner communication and mutual correspondence – was revealed. For example, mountains and water as two images associated with noble human qualities first appeared in Confucian documents from the Qin-Han period (221BC-220AD), and have been discussed again and again ever since. In *The Analects of Confucius*, Confucius says: “The benevolent man loves mountains; the wise man loves water”. The benevolent man loves mountains because the mountain has the characteristics of generosity and tolerance; the wise man loves water because the water has the characteristics of “flowing endlessly” and flexibility. These words demonstrate the close connection between nature and human character in Confucian thought. Another example of this projection can be found in the pine tree. The pine tree came to be read as an image of ideal moral integrity, and as such has long been a symbol of the Chinese national character. A lone pine tree presents an even more intense symbol of that quality. In the works of Confucius, “only when the year grows cold do we see that the pine and cypress are the last to fade”. In the words of Master Xun: “But for the cold, we would not know [the true character of] the pine tree; but for hardships we would not know [the true character of] a noble man”. The Chinese have a supernatural conception of

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14 Bide: 比德
18 See Li Wenchu, 1996, p. 102.
21 “歲不寒無以知松柏，事不難無以知君子” in Chapter 27, “Dalue 大略” of *The Book of Master Xun*. My translation. This chapter is sometimes attributed to one of Master Xun’s disciples.
ancient pine trees which dates well into the pre-Confucian past, regarding them as
partaking of a divine and immortal essence, because they usually grow in remote
mountains and close to pristine streams. The Confucians added a moral sense to the
original appreciation of the tree, making it a symbol with double meanings.

This use of natural objects (e.g. the pine tree, plum blossom, bamboo and
chrysanthemum) to symbolize corresponding human qualities has had a far-reaching
impact on Chinese painting.22 This partly explains why pine trees are so frequently
represented, as in Li Tang (1066-1150)’s Whispering Pines in the Gorges (1124) (Fig.
1).23 In Chinese painting, the scope of this connection between nature and human
beings is expanded. In addition to making natural objects symbolize moral qualities,
artists also connect natural objects or phenomena to human sentiments or emotions.
In the influential ancient treatise on Chinese painting, The Great Message of Forests
and Streams (Linquan Gaozhi) by Guo Xi (c.1023 – c.1085), the author, a famous
painter as well as art theorist, argues that one of the reasons for painting shanshui and
natural objects is that these various configurations of nature can arouse in the
observer’s mind certain human moods and emotions, as well as certain moral
qualities.24 In the process of artistic creation, Chinese artists have not merely
considered the natural world as an object; they have projected (guanzhao) strong
subjective feelings onto nature.25

As a literary technique, this connection or analogy (which in aesthetics is named
“bide”) is called “bixing”, a device similar to metaphor.26 In painting, natural objects
are compared with human qualities. In a similar fashion, in literature this analogy is
expanded to all sorts of human emotions and moods. “Bixing” was first used in both

22 It has especially contributed to the origins and development of Chinese flower-and-bird painting.
23 李唐, 萬壑松風圖.
24 郭熙, 林泉高致. See his treatise “Mountains and Waters 山水訓” in The Great Message of Forests and
Art of Painting: Translations Comments, 1936, pp. 43-52.
25 Guanzhao: 觀照.
26 Bixing: 比興. For a western analysis of bixing, see Stephen Owen, Readings in Chinese Literary Thought, 1992,
pp. 587, 589-90.
of the earliest compilations of Chinese poetry, *The Book of Songs* and *The Songs of the South*. For example, in *The Songs of the South*, the autumn orchid symbolizes loftiness of character. The second stanza of the poem “The Lesser Master of Fate” begins, “The autumn orchids are so pure / with leaves of green and purple stems”. The poet invests the autumn orchid with the qualities of purity and loftiness of spirit. In the same anthology, the overall season of autumn is associated with sorrow and gloom, as in the verse “Gently the wind of autumn whispers / On the waves of the Dongting lake the leaves are falling”. This association of autumn with sorrow was among many elements of these poems to have a strong influence on later literature.

For many Chinese scholars this intimate relationship with natural objects implies a “unity or harmony of mankind with nature” (*tianren heyi*). Yang Xiaoshan in his published PhD thesis argues that this harmony is based on a projection of the inner mind onto the outer world. The mind is projecting subjective feelings onto the objects it perceives. Based on this psychological set of “intimate” relationships with nature resulting from traditional Confucian philosophical thinking, there has developed a long and deep-rooted convention among Chinese literati whereby their hopes and feelings are “displaced” (*jiqing*) onto natural plants or animals, and the natural scenery becomes identified with their own frame of mind. In Chinese literature, sometimes this experience is also called aesthetic “empathization” or the transplanting of emotion (*yiqing*). For example, in the history of Chinese shanshui poetry, in many poems written in banishment, when the poets traveled to a remote

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32 *Jiqing*: 寄情.
33 *Yiqing*: 移情.
place or when the country was divided, natural objects were often distorted or transformed to be fused with the poet’s alienated state of mind. Mountains and rivers are often shrouded in a melancholy atmosphere. Take, for instance, two lines from a poem by the great Tang poet Du Fu (712-770): “Moved by the times, the flowers sprinkle tears / With the anguish of separation, the birds seem startled”; or the lines in a poem by Luo Yin (833-909): “The mountains with the regret of parting are broken like the heart / The waters with the sorrow of separation flow into the dream”. As Shi Zhiming argues, “empathization” is the personification of shanshui, using mountains, rivers, plants and animals as a mouthpiece to express a wide range of moods. There are “sad” mountains, there is “poignant” sunshine, there are weeping rivers, and “sentimental” flowers and birds. In this projection of subjective feeling onto objects, the human being becomes a living thing with the same emotions as other living things in the natural world.

This empathetic relationship is clearly evident in a well known lyric poem “Autumn Thoughts” (Qiusi) by Ma Zhiyuan (c.1250 – c. 1321-1324), in which the bleak weariness of a lonely traveler is reflected in a series of images, all derived from the natural setting:

Withered vines, old trees, cawing crows;  
Small bridge, flowing river, human dwelling;  
Ancient road, west wind, skinny horse;  
Sun setting in the west,  
Heart-broken man roaming the corners of the earth.37

In this poem, human subject and natural object have reached the same stage of life. They both yearn for rest, for a home. The emotional unity of man and the natural world is expressed in an abrupt sequence of images – vines, trees, crows, bridge, water, house, road, wind, horse, sun, traveler – which all combine to create a poignant

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35 羅隱, “山重水遠當額斷, 水帶離聲入夢流”, in the poem “To the Brothers Cai from Miangu 給谷回寄蔡氏昆仲”. My translation. See the Chinese text in Luo Y in Ji, 1983.
36 Shi Zhiming, 2006, p. 43.
However, although this emotional unity is regarded by many scholars as a philosophical embodiment of the “harmony of mankind with nature”, it is also, to some extent, human-centered. In this humanistic Confucian mode, the purpose of representing natural phenomena is primarily to mirror human emotions. Nature only acts as a foil – as simile or metaphor, or a means to enhance atmosphere. In this way it provides a contrast or comparison to human feelings, but does not exist as itself. The personification of nature makes nature lose its objectivity: it feels what the poet feels, and as a result is not itself anymore – it is artificial nature, not real nature.  

2) The “Unity of Man and Nature” in Daoism

If we say that the symbolism of natural objects in Confucianism is one form of human-centred “personification of nature”, then the Daoist idea of “regarding the human world as corrupted and requiring a transcendence in order to return to nature” is a form of “naturalization of human beings” (ziranhua). Nature is not a foil or symbol for human emotions, but an independent entity which human beings are longing for. Of all ancient ways of thinking, the philosophy and spirit of Daoism, especially of Master Zhuang and his idea of fusing human beings and nature, had the greatest influence on traditional Chinese representations of nature. In Daoism, civilization and art are actually not advocated. Indeed, the Daoists urged a return to nature, and regarded culture as an artificial departure from the “Way”. However, ironically, it was Daoism which framed Chinese artistic aesthetics and spirit. Traditional literati adopted Daoist aesthetics and spirit in their literary and artistic creation. In other words, shanshui painting and poetry were nurtured much more by Daoism than by Confucianism. Since the Eastern Han Dynasty, successive years of domestic wars and ruthless political struggles in officialdom caused many
intelligents to seek spiritual sustenance in nature and to use *shanshui* painting and poetry to express their feelings. Confucian ideology was devalued, while Daoist thought was increasingly revered.\(^4\) The intellectuals were disillusioned with politics and social upheaval, and began to explore the significance and value of individual existence.\(^4\) Daoist ideas, which encourage detachment from the world of reality and avoidance of struggle, attracted more and more attention. Most Chinese art historians attribute the birth of Chinese *shanshui* painting and poetry to the resurgence of Daoist philosophy during the Wei-Jin period; and they regard the development of *shanshui* painting and poetry as the result of the growth and flourishing of Daoism during the entire Six Dynasties period from the downfall of the Eastern Han Dynasty in 220 to the reunification of China in 589, and the subsequent Tang-Song periods.\(^4\) Most of the *shanshui* paintings and poems of the Wei-Jin period were created in Southern China where the natural scenery provided both inspiration and a softer image of beauty, and where Daoist philosophy was more influential.\(^4\)

The “Dao” is the most essential, fundamental and highest concept in Chinese philosophy. It refers to the overall laws and ways of the universe. Nature is its model, as is clearly expressed in *The Way and Its Power*: “Humanity models itself on Earth; Earth models itself on Heaven; Heaven models itself on the Dao; the Dao models itself on nature”.\(^4\) In *The Book of Master Zhuang*, the ideal realm and utmost happiness of human beings is “the harmonious integration with Heaven”, which can make them forget worldly worries and achieve an absolutely free and unfettered state of mind.\(^4\) In Daoism, mankind lives on an equal level with all things: “Mankind

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\(^{41}\) See Wang Kuo-Ying, 1986; Li Wenchu, 1996, p. 126.

\(^{42}\) Zong Baihua 李保华 in *Excursions in Aesthetics* (*Meixuede Sanhu*) 美学的散步, 1984, p. 59) generalized that the Six Dynasties of the Wei-Jin Period was the most chaotic period in Chinese political history, but it was also the most liberated period in thinking. See also Etienne Balazs, (translated by H.M. Wright, edited by Arthur F. Wright), *Chinese Civilization and Bureaucracy: Variations on a Theme*, 1964.

\(^{43}\) *Shanshui* painting and *shanshui* poetry followed almost exactly the same process of development (See Öbi Köichi, 1989, pp. 345-346).

\(^{44}\) According to Chen Chuanxi, *History of Chinese Shanshui Painting* (*Zhenggao Shankuihuaishi*) 中國山水畫史, 1988), real *shanshui* painting only appeared after the capital of the Jin Dynasty was moved from northern to southern China, because the literati were inspired both by Daoist ideas and by the South’s picturesque landscape.


communicates with the spirit of Heaven and Earth, without looking down upon the Myriad Things”. Mankind transcends utilitarianism and enters into the realm of non-action. In this realm of non-action, as a result of their harmony with nature, human beings forget themselves and their material desires. There is no interference with nature. In the remote past, the material pragmatic or utilitarian attitude toward nature dominated. When Confucians endow nature with moral value, they are in fact replacing material pragmatism with spiritual or moral utilitarianism by stressing the social function of nature. Only in Daoism did the human spirit and nature achieve true harmony and oneness. And ever since, shanshui painting and poetry have aspired to the realm of “forgetting self and the material world”.

Working hand in glove with Daoism, Buddhism, which was imported from India and went on to become another school of traditional Chinese philosophy, also contributed to the birth and development of shanshui painting and poetry. Buddhism was spread and accepted in China via Daoism, and many Buddhist doctrines were similar to the Daoist doctrine of reclusion. For instance, Daoism advocates “nothing (wu)”; Buddhism maintains “emptiness (kong)”. Daoism advocates “forgetting (wang)”; Buddhism maintains “exterminating (mie) the desires”. Daoism advocates “forgetting both me and the material world (wuwo liangwang)”; Buddhism maintains “the world of senses is mere vanity (sida jiekong)”. Both Daoism and Buddhism encourage humans to rid themselves of worldly worries and achieve the peaceful realm of the “great void” (taixu). There is one major difference: Daoism pursues happiness in life without caring about the so-called “afterlife”, while Buddhism attempts to exchange suffering in this life for happiness in the afterlife. Although many Chinese literati

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48 As Zhang Qiqun argues, the first large-scale communication between Chinese Han culture and foreign cultures was the introduction of Buddhism (2005, p. 95).
49 As recorded in Sun Chuo 孫绰’s (314 – 371) essay “Analects of a Daoist sage 道語論”, the Buddhist monks of the Wei-Jin period not only exchanged ideas with Daoists and traveled with them in the mountains and rivers, they also imitated their unconventional life style as their common ideal. For example, seven Buddhist monks were compared with “the seven sages of the bamboo grove 竹林七賢” (See the website of “Chinese Confucianism Studies” : http://www.confucianism.com.cn/html/wenxue/1546027.html). For the “seven sages”, see Minford & Lau, eds., 2000, pp. 445-473.
claimed to profess Buddhist values, in fact, they were unconsciously practicing Daoism – they never purposely looked for suffering in life; instead, they were always trying to reduce suffering as much as they possibly could.

The Daoist and Buddhist approach to aesthetics was, in the words of Wang Guowei (1877-1927), not to observe natural objects from “my” (personal or subjective) perspective, but to “observe them from the angle of the objects themselves”, because “[If one] observes objects from ‘my’ perspective, they will possess ‘my’ colour”.51 Master Zhuang especially disapproved of using human criteria to estimate the value of other things. In Daoist doctrine, if we measure nature by a human standard, we run the risk of misinterpreting nature. On the contrary, if we consider nature from the position of nature itself, we may realize that nature has its own system which is not inferior – indeed perhaps superior – to the human system. Nature itself demonstrates the Dao or Way of Creation, and reveals the principle behind the existence of the universe. This is expressed vividly in one of Zhang Jiuling’s (678-740) poems, “Thoughts” (Ganyu):

Orchid leaves are luxurious in spring,  
Cinnamon blossoms are bright in autumn.  
They grow vigorously,  
Of themselves they embellish the seasons.  
The hermit in the forests  
Sits and delights in nature’s scents.  
All plants have their inner hearts,  
What need have they of being picked?52

Chinese shanshui painters and poets seldom felt alienated in the wilderness, and the Chinese cultural tradition seldom thought of perfecting or completing nature, because nature was already perfect and complete. As a whole it was full of life and was the embodiment of the Dao or universal truth.53 Instead of being alienated, they appreciated the life and vitality of the whole universe for itself, independent of human values.

53 “山水以形媚道”, in Zong Bing 宗炳’s (375-443) essay “Introduction to Painting Shanshui 畫山水序”. For an English translation and analysis of some of Zong Bing’s works, see Osvald Siren, The Chinese on the Art of Painting: Translations Comments, 1936, pp. 14-16.
They enjoyed nature’s mystery in the cyclical change of the seasons and in the rhythm of the mountains and rivers. Instead of projecting human emotions outwards as in Confucian “empathization”, they tried to internalize the feelings of natural creatures around them and forget the human self. In this way they observed the characteristics and spirits of mountains and rivers, and regarded them as organic living things. They also came to realize that all things on the earth have the same life cycle from prosperity to withdrawal, drawing no distinction between human beings and other animals or plants. This mental activity of aesthetic experience in nature reduced the Chinese literati’s material desires and enabled them to achieve a harmonious oneness with nature: though every thing has its own peculiarity and is different from every other thing in creation, all the manifestations of nature unite as one, and are dear to the observer. This is the ideal state advocated by Master Lao: “no self in nature” (wuwo), “the great void” (taixu), or “forgetting the self” (wangwo). Using a humble and modest mind, the Daoist observes and learns from nature. This is the state advocated by Master Zhuang: “Heaven and Earth live with me, the Myriad Things are one with me”.

Master Zhuang also says that “Heaven and Earth show their great beauty without saying it; the four seasons observe the clearest laws without discussing them; the Myriad Things have their complete and distinctive constitutions without telling them. The sages trace the origin of beauty in Heaven and Earth and arrive at an understanding of distinctive constitutions of the Myriad Things. Thus the perfect man (is said to) do nothing, and the greatest sage to originate nothing – they just look to Heaven and Earth as their model”. This makes a sharp contrast to the ancient Greek philosopher Protagoras’ (c.490-420BC) “man is the measure of all things”. Why did the Daoists consider nature (Heaven and Earth) as having great beauty? In the eyes of

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54 See Chapter 22 “Knowledge Wandered North 知北遊” of The Book of Master Zhuang.
55 “無我”・“太虛”・“忘我”・
Master Zhuang and later scholars, the great beauty of nature lies in the way it embodies the spontaneity and the wise "do-nothing" spirit of "Dao". In other words, the fundamental reason for nature's great beauty is nature's "letting things take their own course", a wise inaction which makes efficient action possible. This appreciation of nature's beauty starts from respect and reverence to nature and results in the thought that the natural world itself without human interference is most beautiful.

The aesthetic idea that "beauty lies in naturalness" developed as a natural result of the Chinese literati appreciation of nature in its own way and as its own system, without the need to be tamed, perfected or associated with human civilization. This was an application of the philosophical "Dao" to the fields of artistic and literary aesthetics. As a contemporary art historian Mei Mosheng argues, since the existence of nature is the premise of human existence, and since the natural state had become the ideal human state, natural beauty as a matter of course became the ideal beauty. Cai Zhongxiang also argues that nature is the embodiment of "Dao", and therefore is to be esteemed as the supreme aesthetic ideal. This idea that "beauty lies in naturalness" is deep-rooted in traditional Chinese aesthetics. Many ancient scholars, influenced by the idea of nature and natural beauty, made statements such as "making Heaven and Earth one's teacher", "making nature one's teacher", and "making mountains and rivers one's teacher". For example, Zhang Zao (? - 1093) of the Tang Dynasty proposed "making nature one's external teacher and finding the source [of one's inspiration] in one's inner heart-and-mind". This was considered the primary principle for painting shanshui for a long time. For Daoists there was never any debate over the relative merits of natural beauty and artistic beauty – beauty in nature

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61 張璪: "外師造化，中得心源", in Zhang Zao's essay "The Realm of Painting 畫境". The original manuscript of this essay was lost, but the Tang art historian Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠's (c. 815-875) Records of Famous Paintings of the Past (Lidai Minghuaji 歷代名畫記), the first history of Chinese painting, recorded this famous statement by Zhang Zao. See Zhang Yanyuan, Records of Famous Paintings of the Past, 1983, p. 198.

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is “natural”, so it is of course the model of artistic creation. In classical painting theories, “nature” was often called “Heaven”, and natural beauty was often called “heavenly charm” (tianqu) as opposed to “artifice” (rengong).  

“Natural beauty” was advocated by both Confucianism and Daoism, but in different ways. In traditional Chinese aesthetics, Daoist “naturalness” and Confucian “harmony” (which included social harmony) constituted the two theoretical pillars. The Daoist pursued “natural beauty” to its utmost limits. In “The Way of Heaven” in The Book of Master Zhuang, it says that “simple and plain (pusu), [is] the most unrivalled beauty in the whole world”. Here “pu” refers to wood which has not been carved; “su” refers to silk which has not been dyed. In Chinese aesthetic history, there were two forms of beauty: one was the beauty of colorfully and dazzlingly embellished decorations (cuocai loujin), and the other was pure natural beauty without any decoration, like a lotus flower just appearing above the water (furong chushui). The latter was always preferred and praised by literati, as recorded in Zhong Rong’s (469-518) Poems Graded (Shipin): “The poems of Xie Lingyun are like lotus flowers just appearing above the water; the poems of Yan Yanzhi (384-456) are like colorfully and dazzlingly embellished gold”. The most well-known poet of the Tang Dynasty, Li Bai, had a famous saying to describe the highest state of beauty: “The lotus emerging from clear water, natural and without embellishment”. The art historian Zhang Yanyuan of the Tang Dynasty, in his Records of Famous Paintings of the Past, commented that “paintings with natural beauty are the best of the best (shangpin)”. The literary critic Sikong Tu (837-908) in his masterpiece The Twenty-Four Modes of Poetry (Ershisi Shipin) also claimed that a good poem is just

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62 TIANQU: 天趣; RENGONG: 人工.


66 “清水出芙蓉,天然去雕飾”, in Li Bai’s poem “After the Turmoil, On my Way into Exile in Yelang at the Emperor’s command, I Missed My Old Friend, Wei Liangzai, the Prefect of Xiangxia, Expressed My Longing for Him and Gave Him This Poem” in Complete Works of Li Taibai (Li Taibai Quanji 李太白全集), vol. 10.

like the “magic creation of nature”. Zong Baihua, regarded as the only Chinese esthetician to have developed his own system of ideas in the 20th century, summarized it well: since the Wei-Jin period, Chinese aesthetics demonstrated a new ideal, considering “pure natural beauty” as a higher aesthetic state or realm than “colorfully embellished beauty”. As examples, he points to the poetry of Tao Yuanming and Xie Lingyun, to the painting of Gu Kaizhi (348-409), to the calligraphy of Wang Xizhi (303-361) and to the white porcelain of the Song Dynasty. Since the late Tang Dynasty, “natural beauty” has been esteemed as the ultimate attainment of beauty, as argued by Wang Guowei: “[If we look at] the great works of ancient and modern literature, it is the quality of being natural that distinguishes them all.”

In Daoism, “nature” often referred to the growth and cycle of all things in Heaven or on Earth. It was not confined to the natural world as embodied in the physical shanshui. The appreciation of “Dao” could also be achieved everywhere (e.g. through Master Zhuang’s utopian dreaming). It was “neo-Daoism” which practiced the spirit of Daoism in more concrete ways and related the “Dao” with the physical shanshui. During the Wei-Jin period, with the social turmoil and the disintegration of Confucian domination, this dominant school of thought, nowadays referred to as “neo-Daoism”, included among its most illustrious representatives He Yan, Wang Bi, Guo Xiang (252-312), Sun Chuo, Ruan Ji, Ji Kang (224-263) and Xiang Xiu (211-300). It had a great influence on literati philosophy and the literati view of the universe from the Wei-Jin period onwards, and this influence was directly related to the development of literature and art. The neo-Daoists attempted to reconcile the conflicts between the individual and society, between Confucian moral norms and Daoist naturalness. They did not place all their hopes on the political and moral pursuits advocated by the Confucians; instead, they thought of nature as the “essential or

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69 Gu Kaizhi: 翟立之; Wang Xizhi: 王羲之. See Zong Baihua, Aesthetics and Realm (Meixue yu Yijing 美學與意境), 1987, p. 380. Zong Baihua has made a unique and outstanding contribution to Chinese aesthetics, because he established the field of comparative research into Chinese and western philosophy and aesthetics.
71 Guo Xiang: 郭象; Ji Kang: 桓康; Xiang Xiu: 向秀. 
fundamental” and the Confucian norms as “incidental”. They regarded entering into the physical world of shanshui as the best way to free the mind from social or political bonds. This was the ideal life described by Ji Kang: “Contented whether looking up [to Heaven] or down [to Earth]; my heart roams freely in the universe”.72

In this philosophical development, shanshui plays an important role. In order to achieve communication between heart, mind and “Dao”, the literati turned from Master Zhuang’s utopian dreaming to practical and personal experience of shanshui. They did this not only because the beauty of shanshui pleased both the eye and the mind and made them forget worldly worries, but also because shanshui has no man-made elements. This allowed it to be the embodiment of “naturalness”. The spirit and vitality of nature are embodied in shanshui – mountains and rivers. Thus it can fully demonstrate nature’s mysteries and creativity. Shanshui enabled the literati to realize the truth of the universe (the “Dao”) and the best way for the individual to live in that universe, in accordance with the “Dao”. They found in shanshui a realization in “this world” of Master Zhuang’s otherwise fantastic utopia; and the abstract philosophical concept “Dao” became more and more associated with the concrete shanshui and the living things within it. As Ruan Ji wrote in his essay, “the tranquility of mountains and the depth of valleys, are the Dao of nature”.73 Sun Chuo also proposed the practice of “observing shanshui with a Daoist mind”.74 Both Ruan Ji and Shun Chuo explicitly regarded shanshui as the manifestation of Dao, transforming Dao from an abstract idea into a practicable experience.

The idea of shanshui as the embodiment of Dao and of the truth of the universe was also implied in the shanshui painting and poetry of this period, which were

expressions of the literati’s experience of *shanshui*. Zong Bing, the first influential art theorist in China, who both pioneered *shanshui* painting and created *shanshui* painting theory, proposed that the purpose and significance of painting *shanshui* and viewing *shanshui* painting was “to clear one’s mind to observe the Dao”.\(^75\) In his essay “Introduction to Painting *Shanshui*”, he claimed that mountains and rivers represented the Dao (as discussed previously). This essay is the most authoritative ancient treatise on painting in Chinese art history, and laid the foundation of emphasizing the spiritual inspiration and revelation in most Chinese art works. It marks the formation of Chinese *shanshui* painting theory, and determined the unique path taken by Chinese *shanshui* painting among the art traditions of the world.\(^76\) All the later painters and art theorists were influenced more or less by his theory; therefore the saying arose that viewers should use not their naked eyes, but their Daoist eyes, to appreciate a *shanshui* painting. For example, the Ming scholar Tian Rucheng (1503-1557) argues that if a viewer looks at Li Tang’s painting with his naked eyes, he may devalue the painting; but if a viewer looks at Li Tang’s painting with Daoist eyes, he may realize that the painting has profound meaning despite its lack of likeness.\(^77\) Daoist philosophy provided the theoretical and spiritual framework for the spiritual significance of *shanshui* painting and poetry from the very beginning.

Although at the beginning physical *shanshui* was seen more as a means to observe Dao, or as the refuge from worldly worries, neo-Daoism contributed greatly to the aesthetic observation of *shanshui*, and to the idea of loving *shanshui* itself.\(^78\) The observation of physical *shanshui* in neo-Daoism was based on a modest state of mind and the discarding of material desires. This process of observing and learning from

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\(^{75}\) “澄懷觀道”, in “Biographies of Recluses 隱逸” of the Song History (Songshu 宋書) by Shen Yue 沈約 (441-513), vol. 93, Liezhuan 列傳 53. My translation.


\(^{77}\) 田汝成, Chapter 17, “Appreciation of Artistic Works and Articles 藝文賞鑑”, in his *Records of Traveling Around the West Lake* (Xihu Youlan Zhiyu 西湖遊覽志餘).

\(^{78}\) In the Jin History (Jinshu 晉書) by Fang Xuanling 方玄齡 (578-648), there are many records of literati “loving *shanshui*” or “enjoying *shanshui*”. See “Biographies of Recluses 隱逸” of the Jin History, vol. 94, Liezhuan 列傳 64.
shanshui did not rely on logical thinking, but rather on direct appreciation and experience. From then on this new aesthetics dominated the long history of Chinese culture, and with this new understanding and observation of nature, shanshui painting and poetry developed.

Three Themes in the Myth of Shanshui

1) The Imagined Shanshui and Its “Other” World of the Mind

In the meaning of “Dao”, “nature” from the beginning was a contrast to the human world, as described by Jiang Zong (519-594) in the prose poem Cultivating the Heart (Xiuxin Fu): “The pure charm of nature should be preserved / the confusion of human society should be disdained”.79 The Daoists believed that the mountains and rivers where the immortals live had a divine and transcendental quality and were detached from corrupt society. This idea penetrated the thought of the literati, especially in times of turmoil and crisis, in which shanshui was considered as “pure” and officialdom as “dirty” or corrupted. This contrast between nature and culture was reflected in Chinese painting and literature in which nature was the “other” world opposed to the world of humanity. Its aloof, unsullied beauty was just the quality for which Chinese shanshui was praised, appreciated and honored. Far away from worldly affairs, the natural mountains and rivers obtained a unique position in Chinese literati’s life. Three major elements of the Daoist life style – the search for immortality, the tendency towards reclusion and the taking of escapist pleasure in mountains and rivers – came together and reinforced the Chinese literati conception of mountains and rivers as an indispensable part of the ideal life, as the homeland of their bodies and souls. As a result, in Chinese painting and poetry shanshui often took on an “imagined” or “idealized” appearance – beautiful, pure and untamed.

This is a dominant tradition, in which the idealized and pure shanshui was taken as the norm. This was most obviously represented in paradisal shanshui painting.

(shenxian shanshui) and poetry (youxianshi) which depict fairyland scenery with the celestial immortal being in it. For example, in the paintings Temple in the Mountain of Immortals (Fig.2) and Jade Cave in Fairyland (Fig.3) by Qiu Ying (1498-1552), the misty beauty of shanshui was heightened and exaggerated, even to the extent that the landscape resembles a fairyland or paradise, through which the painters conveyed the feeling that they were far away from “this” world. The highest ideal of Daoist religion was to become an immortal living in an imagined paradise such as Kunlun Mountain and Penglai Island, which actually were sublime versions of famous realistic mountains and rivers. Therefore, in paradisal shanshui paintings and poems Kunlun Mountain and Penglai Island are frequently appearing images. In this kind of imagined paradisal shanshui we can see the influence of early primitive religion. The high mountains such as Kunlun Mountain, and islands like Penglai Island are all related to the sacredness and mysteriousness of mountains and rivers which were thought to be the dwelling places of ancestors and gods.

In this kind of paradisal shanshui, the most important image is that of the mist and clouds which enshroud the mountains and rivers, making the shanshui appear floating and indistinct. The clouds and mists were thought of as the vital qi of nature. As claimed by the art theorist Han Zhuo of the Northern Song period, the clouds and mists in mountains are the real qi of the seasons and the vitality of nature. This is the result of the Chinese philosophical understanding of qi. Qi was considered as connecting the world with the whole universe, and as the origin of all vitality. If the qi can flow smoothly and thoroughly without any obstruction, the life spirit of nature will preserve its vitality. Besides the paradisal shanshui painting, in many other paintings, such as Shang Qi’s (?-1324) Painting of Spring Mountain (Fig.4), Gao Kegong’s (1248-1310) Cloud-Girdled Peaks (Fig.5) and Mi Youren’s (1086-1165) Spectacular Views of the Xiao and Xiang Rivers (Fig. 6), we can also see the qi of life

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80 Shenxian shanshui: 神仙山水; youxianshi: 遊仙詩.
81 Qiu Ying: 仇英; Temple in the Mountain of Immortals: 仙山樓閣圖; Jade Cave in Fairyland: 玉洞仙源圖.
(embodied as clouds and mists) floating in mountains and rivers as a major part of the painting. The mountains in these paintings seem as though they could melt away at any moment into the all-enveloping mist. What these painters wanted to demonstrate was not the appearance of shanshui, but the spirit of qi, its winding, cycling and movement, representing the soul of shanshui. Wolfgang Kubin argues that in these descriptions nature was not the kind of nature perceived by the human eyes anymore, but nature in its spiritual essence. His opinion echoes Zong Bing’s idea of shanshui painting from more than 1000 years ago. Both of them discovered the inner spirit of nature represented by shanshui painting.

In one of the best known poems describing the immortals and paradisal shanshui, “My Trip in a Dream to the Lady of Heaven Mountain” (Mengyou Tianmu Yinliubie) by Li Bai, the poet describes the dreamland mountain and river where the immortals live as:

The Lady of Heaven, joining the heavens,  
faces the Heavenly Span.  
Her majesty conquers the Five Summits  
and shadows Vermilion Wall.  
Heavenly Terrace rises up forty-eight thousand staves,  
Yet tips southeast before her as if it wanted to fall.

Wanting to probe the mystery in a dream of Wu and Yue,  
Through a night I flew across the moon on Mirror Lake.

The moon on the lake projected my shadow,  
Escorting me to the River Shan.  
The place where Duke Xie once retired  
stands to the present day;  
The lucdent waters swiftly purl and  
shrill-voiced gibbons cry.  
Feet in Duke Xie’s cleated clogs,  
I climbed the ladder of clouds in the blue.

From the slope I could see the sun in the ocean;  
From space I could hear the Rooster of Heaven.

A thousand cliffs, ten thousand turns,  
a road I cannot define;

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83 Shang Qi: 香绮; Painting of Spring Mountain: 春山圖卷; Gao Kegong: 高克恭; Cloud-Girdled Peaks: 雲繚秀嶺圖; Mi Youren: 米友仁; Spectacular Views of the Xiao and Xiang Rivers: 湘湘奇觀圖.  
84 Wolfgang Kubin, 1990, p. 222.
As he states in the last four lines of the poem (seven lines in English), the poet wishes to transcend frustrating reality through the imagining of a dreamland. The “white deer” is the symbolic animal representing spiritual Daoism. In this kind of paradisal shanshui, the mountain or river where the immortals live possesses “trans-natural” characteristics and becomes the “spiritual mountain” (lingshan). But although the love for shanshui signifies the longing to become immortal, shanshui is not only the means to attain that “immortality”. The beautiful scenery of mountains and rivers itself is praised, as in the line “The lucent waters swiftly purl”. In many paradisal shanshui poems (e.g. Guo Pu (276-324)’s “Fourteen Poems of Wandering Immortals” (Youxianshi Shisishou)), nature is beautified as fairyland.

Poets and artists described this kind of imagined shanshui not because they disliked the real face of nature; on the contrary, they painted and wrote in this way because they were longing for a “real” or “original” shanshui which had not been spoiled by the influence of human society and which preserved the original characteristics of

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85 李白, “夢遊天姥吟留别”. See Complete Works of Li Taibai. For this English translation by Elling Eide and an introduction to Li Bai’s poetry, see Minford & Lau, eds., 2000, pp. 719-763.
nature. The reason why the Lady of Heaven Mountain, the Kunlun Mountain and the Penglai Island were considered paradise was that they are far away from human habitation, standing outside the uproar of society, as in Guo Pu’s first poem of the “Fourteen Poems of Wandering Immortals”:

The capital city is where wandering knights gather,  
The mountain forest is where hermits live.  
[Wealth and fame] in those vermilion gates are not worth glorifying,  
They cannot compare with a dwelling in Penglai Island.  
At the origin of the river the hermits drink clear water,  
In the hills they gather celestial fruits.  
...  

In this poem, society is framed in opposition to nature. Nature (Penglai Island) is a transcendence of the mortal world, while society is the place of hollow wealth and fame. So long as basic life necessities can be guaranteed, all wealth and fame can be discarded. The ideal life cannot be realized in “this” world, so the poet wants to escape from society and longs to live in the “other” world of nature.

If we say that in this paradisal shanshui poetry shanshui is just a dreamland invented totally out of the fantasy of the literati, we must also acknowledge that there is another kind of imagined shanshui in which the description of shanshui is based on actual scenery, but idealized or covered with a beautiful veil. In the poems of Xie Lingyun, the first significant and one of the greatest shanshui poets, shanshui always appears in a very clean, transparent, limpid, pure and serene image. Take, for example, the lines “In the desert wilds the sandy shores lie pure / High in the heavens, the autumn moon is bright”; “The clouds were dazzling bright with sunlight / How fresh and pure the air and water seemed!”; “At the end of spring the green wilderness blossoms / Around the rocky heights the white clouds gather”; “Bathing...”
mountain and lake alike in clean sunlight / This clean sunlight filled me with such joy / That lost in delight I quite forgot to go home".93 The clean, bright sky; the transparent, clear moon; floating white clouds; fresh, pure water; all these images combine to create a limpid, pure and moving picture within a void, empty of anything but the essence of *shanshui*. Xie Lingyun excelled at choosing typical images which reveal the beauty of nature, and juxtaposing them with specific locations in time and space, creating in his poetry an impressive realm. This is the same effect captured in the phrases “Forest and gorge were veiled in dusky colours / The sunset clouds mingled with evening haze”,94 and in two of his finest lines: “Upon the pool, spring grass is growing / The garden willows have changed into singing birds”.95 All these verses arouse the reader’s sense of beauty and stimulated the imagination. Xie Lingyun considered *shanshui* to be a clean and pure domain, and he often used the Chinese character “qing” to describe it in his poems.

In the poems of another *shanshui* poet, Wang Wei of the Tang Dynasty, often regarded as the best *shanshui* poet in Chinese history, we can also observe this kind of description which derives from reality, but is more beautiful and poetic than reality:

Man in repose: the cassia flowers falling.  
Night calm: spring mountains empty.  
Moon surges: startles mountain birds.  
Sometimes their cries, within spring streams.96

In this poem, “Birdsong in Spring Streams” (*Niaomingjian*), not only the rhythms and sound of nature can be felt; the poet also evokes a sense of harmony between man, mountain, streams, and all other living things (osmanthus, or cassia, and birds) in the

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93 “山落，清落，清落觀移人，遊子留，心歸”。in the poem “Written on the Lake on My Way Back to the Retreat at Stone Cliff 石壁精舍還善中作”. See Frodsham, pp. 138, 154-5. I have changed the word “radiant” in Frodsham’s translation to “clean”. The Chinese character “qing” means clean or clear, not radiant.
94 “林表霞落色，雲霞收夕霏”，in the poem “Written on the Lake on My Way Back to the Retreat at Stone Cliff”. See Frodsham, pp. 138, 154-5. I have changed the word “somber” to “dusky”. The Chinese character “ming” just means “dusk”, and the mood of the whole poem is tranquil and joyful, without the implication of the word “somber”.
96 “鳥鳴潤”，translated by Jerome P. Seaton. I have changed the title “Birdsong Torrent” to “Birdsong in Spring Streams”, and “spring’s torrent” to “spring streams” in the last line. See Minford & Lau, 2000, p. 771.
universe, through his choice of images. Wang Wei was a practitioner of both Daoism and Buddhism. The pictures in Wang Wei’s poetry show a quiescent beauty of emptiness, clear and still, which demonstrates the poet’s disillusionment with social life and encapsulates the Daoist and Buddhist ideas of nature. In this stillness, there is vitality and harmony, without any hint of the coldness or lifelessness traditionally associated with the Western concept of the Void (emptiness).

Both Xie Lingyun and Wang Wei were frustrated by the difficulties in their political career, and detested the corrupted officialdom. What they hoped was to live in and enjoy a “clean” shanshui. Their disdain for the moral inadequacy or “darkness” of “this world” reinforced their longing for the pure “other world”. Shanshui in their poetry was beautified and purified through choosing, cutting and composing different images. This sort of mild and limpid shanshui is most picturesquely represented in the poem “Spring, River, Flowers, Moon, Night” (Chunjiang Huayueye) by Zhang Ruoxu (660-720):

Spring river tidal water running level with the sea
On the sea the bright moon rising with the tide
rolling tossing
down its waves a million miles
where spring river
do you lack for moonlight

The river flows twists turns around the scented park lands
moonlight sleeting everywhere on blooming groves
through the void flowing frost flies unseen
white sand of the islets indistinguishable

River sky one colour without a spot of dust
glittering amid the void the bright moon’s wheel
on these banks what people first saw the moon
river moon in what year

春江潮水連海平，
海上明月共潮生。
江流宛轉繞芳甸，
月照花林皆似霰。
江天一色無纖塵，
皎皎空中孤月輪。
江畔何人初見月，
江月何年初照人？
did you first shine on men

... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... 

The author selected the enchanting images of spring, river, flowers and moonlight, to create a tranquil nocturne. In this pure picture, “without a spot of dust”, a tender feeling is aroused in the reader by the flowing river, the fragrance of flowers and the clear light of the moon on a mild spring night.

It is true that many of the shanshui poems written in the southern or central areas of China depict beautiful and mild natural scenery. But even in the remote and cold northern regions of China, where fewer poems were written, nature is still often represented as picturesque and mild, not threatening or destructive to human life.98 Yu Xin (513-581) is representative of those poets who brought southern ideas of shanshui to the north.99 He took southern shanshui as the norm, describing the bleak northern shanshui in as pleasant and mild terms as possible:

Looking for the traces of rabbits in the snow 雪中尋兔跡，
Listening to the singing of pheasants in the woods 林中聽雉聲。
... 無風樹即正，
The trees are so upright without wind 不凍水還平。
The river is so peaceful without being frozen.100

The snow is the traditional symbol of the north, but in this poem the poet does not emphasize bleakness or coldness at all. From this tranquil poem, it seems that the poet regarded nature as a delight to both the eyes and the mind, and as something which can make people joyful and peaceful. This sort of “imagined” shanshui covers the nature of the north with the beautiful veil of the south.

Now let us turn again from shanshui poetry to shanshui painting. Traditional Chinese painting was closely related to poetry – all the ideas, ideals and principles displayed in Chinese painting were also to be found in Chinese poetry. Fundamentally this was
dependent on qualities inherent in the Chinese literati tradition. For centuries, this tradition emphasized the cultural background and personality of the author as being more important than his technical skill. Education and training had led painters and calligraphers to express in their art concepts found in literature and philosophy. From individual feelings of joy and sorrow in everyday life to the expression of attitudes towards nature and the universe, Chinese painters sought to express in art the spirit embodied in poetry. In general the literati held that “there are pictures (i.e. a pictorial imagination) in poetry and poetry (i.e. a poetic imagination) in pictures”.\(^\text{101}\) Since the Yuan Dynasty, the use of lyric prose or verse on shanshui paintings became increasingly prominent as a result of the prevalence of the literati painting theories. This practice persists among traditional Chinese painters even in modern times. As the contemporary esthetician Deng Yizhe argues, from the very beginning Chinese shanshui painting was the art of poets. It portrayed the poetic mind. The lofty realm of poetry was upheld by shanshui painters as their ultimate aspiration.\(^\text{102}\) As a result, what we have seen in the poetry, the “imagined” shanshui, the “other” world of the mind, also frequently appeared in traditional painting. For example, in the Yuan Dynasty painter Sheng Mao’s most famous painting, *Waiting to be Ferried Across the River* (Fig.7), two figures are sitting on the ground, waiting for the boat to ferry them across the river.\(^\text{103}\) The implied meaning of this painting is that the human figures are waiting, not only to be ferried across the river, but also to be saved from this world and carried to the other world, on the opposite side of the river. The painter attempted to create this “other world” of tranquility and remoteness through his poetic depiction of the mountains – misty, peaceful, pure and mysterious, with unlimited possibilities.

With different techniques, but a similar spirit, Qian Xuan’s (1239-1301) *Living in Fuyu Mountain* (Fig.9) depicts the mountain scenery of his home region.\(^\text{104}\) This is in

\(^{101}\) This is from Su Dongpo 蘇東坡’s (1037-1101) comments on Wang Wei’s works, in “Comments on Mojie’s Misty Rain in Lantian 魏摩之畫蓝田煙雨圖” of Dongpo Comments on Calligraphy and Painting (Dongpo Tiba 東坡提跋), vol. 5. My translation.


\(^{103}\) Sheng Mao: 盛懋, *Waiting to be Ferried Across the River*: 秋江待渡圖.

\(^{104}\) Qian Xuan: 錢選, *Living in Fuyu Mountain*: 浮玉山居圖.
no way a mountain in this world: it is clearly idealized as belong to the “other” world of the mind. The mountain rocks have been first drawn in ink lines, then painted in light ink which gives a three-dimensional effect. Examined closely, it looks like an ingeniously and exquisitely carved glaze. In the dense forests, a house is hidden. Seen from a distance, the mountain looks like jade enveloped in a mysterious qi, floating in clouds and mists and surrounded by water. This painting is regarded as an almost abstract shanshui painting.\textsuperscript{105} The painter was a young official when he saw the Southern Song Dynasty collapsing around him, and retired into private life. Perhaps in his mind he wanted to stress the distance between the idealized world and this human world. In the turbulent days of the Yuan Dynasty, Qian Xuan was looking for a solemn and quiet home for his spiritual and emotional self.

This sort of “imagined” shanshui is best represented in the works of Ni Zan, the outstanding shanshui painter of the Yuan Dynasty.\textsuperscript{106} In Ni Zan’s painting, a sense of timeless eternity and profound silence prevails. For example, in \textit{Riverside Pavilion by Mountains} (Fig.8), sparse, straight trees are depicted on the bank of a serene river; distant hills and a pavilion are surrounded by the river.\textsuperscript{107} The atmosphere is one in which both the hills and the river seem to be floating. The painter has used light ink to draw the fine lines, with such lightness and strength that the brush barely touched the silk before it was lifted away, making the picture as clean and clear as possible. Ni Zan, it was said, so used ink as sparingly as if it were gold.\textsuperscript{108} The painting looks like an illusion or a dream, something never to be seen in reality. The imagery seen in Ni Zan’s lonely shanshui is a fine embodiment of the Daoist and Buddhist philosophy of “emptiness” and “illusion”.\textsuperscript{109} On this point both Western and Chinese scholars are agreed on the “otherworldliness” of his art. As Sullivan argues, there is always a cool,

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\textsuperscript{106} Some art scholars (e.g. Dong Qichang 董其昌 of the Ming Dynasty, Yun Nantian 湯南田 of the Qing Dynasty) even esteemed Ni Zan’s works as the best in the whole history of Chinese shanshui painting.

\textsuperscript{107} \textit{Riverside Pavilion by Mountains}: 江亭山色圖.

\textsuperscript{108} See Sullivan, 1979, p. 102.

\textsuperscript{109} See Zhu Liangzhi, 2005, p. 92.
almost unearthly detachment about Ni Zan’s *shanshui*, an austere serenity.\(^{110}\)

In keeping with this “imagined” ideal, these painters developed a freehand aesthetic. Ever since the Wei-Jin period, realistic depiction had gradually given way to a more subtle and indirect way of expressing the spiritual essence of nature. Rather than confining the subject matter to realistic representations of nature, the painters actually focused on symbolic representation. Various techniques of brushwork were gradually developed for depicting the spirit of *shanshui*, which resulted, from the Song to the Qing Dynasties, in a tendency to value freehand brushwork and an almost abstract, but nonetheless vivid expression of spirit and feelings. In this convention, what was upheld was the “illusion” or “image” of the mind rather than any realistic or naturalistic representation: something spiritual rather than material, a *shanshui* of the mind rather than a *shanshui* of the world. *Shanshui* in the mind actually represents the spirit and vitality of nature. Dr Maxwell K. Hearn, the curator of the Asian gallery in the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, points out that the Chinese description of nature was seldom confined to the outside world. On the contrary, they pursued the expression of inner emotions and thoughts, which can be called the “cultivated landscape”.\(^{111}\) Hearn’s understanding is profound, but he focuses exclusively on artists’ expression of emotions and thoughts. In fact, what the artists intended to convey – in addition to their own emotions and thoughts – was the inner spirit of nature and the universe as a whole. In this way they attempted to explore the philosophical relationship between human beings and nature, and ultimately achieve a deeper understanding of human life. In their philosophical and metaphysical attitudes towards nature, the Chinese literati saw in nature the visual expression of the infinite. They tried to realize in pictorial form the scenes that lay behind the image. They wanted to encourage the viewers to visualize a reality beyond familiar images, beyond the painted forms, beyond what they simply saw. It was an image beyond

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110 Sullivan, 1979, p. 102.

111 See Duan Lian 段炼, “The Realm of Shanshui in Gong Xian’s Painting 龚賢山水的境界”, in *Art and Collection (Diancang Gumeishu 典藏·古美術)*, vol. 1, 2004.
images, a reality embodied in philosophical Daoism (xiang wai zhi xiang).\textsuperscript{112}

This convention of freehand brushwork (usually executed in ink monochrome) was brought into full play by literati painters. In Chinese art history, there had been three types of painting: amateur-scholar or literati painting, imperial-court decorative painting (professional painting), and folk craftsman painting.\textsuperscript{113} The literati style of painting dominated most of China's art history. Professional painters had a very low position in social life and their painting was regarded as inferior to the literati painting. Later, during the Six Dynasties, when the literati grasped the technical skill of painting, they wanted to demonstrate their superiority and distinguish themselves from craftsmen, so they defined their paintings as "literati painting" (wenrenhua) or "painting by learned gentleman" (shirenhua), and developed a set of theories to differentiate themselves from craftsmen who, as the literati thought, were merely concerned with technical skills.\textsuperscript{114} The literati painters were more interested in individual expression of the artist's personality, learning and aspiration than in outward representation or demonstration of the artist's skill. To them, the Daoist ideas were more important than technical skills; and the aim of painting or composing poems was to show Daoist ideas, to please themselves and to convey their free, natural mind.\textsuperscript{115} To be a literati artist, one must have had a good education with a sound understanding of history, literature, philosophy, and the arts. On this basis he was free to develop his own personal expression.

From the Northern Song period, literati painting underwent significant developments in the hands of Su Dongpo (1037-1101), the scholar, poet, calligrapher and painter who proposed the formal rationale defining the concept of literati painting. He argued that literati painting paid attention to the feelings, spirit and aura of the target, while craftsman painting paid attention to visual appearance and superficial knowledge of


\textsuperscript{113} See Hong Huizhen, 2000, p. 51.

\textsuperscript{114} Wenrenhua: 文人畫; shirenhua: 士人畫.

\textsuperscript{115} See Christina Chu, "Beyond Northern and Southern Landscape: Chinese Landscape Painting in the Twentieth Century", in Tradition and Innovation: Twentieth Century Chinese Painting, 1995, p. 73.
the object. Whether to convey eternal truth or external appearance is the criterion to
distinguish literati painting and craftsman painting. Su famously wrote that “To
discuss paintings in terms of realistic representation, is to view it like a child”.
Su’s rationale was developed further by his friends, including the poet Huang Tingjian
(1045-1105), the calligrapher and painter Mi Fu (1051-1107), and the painter Li
Gonglin (1049-1106).

In literati painting, the literati used *shanshui* as a way to express their ideas and ideals.
Their vision of the natural environment embodied the whole Chinese philosophical
and aesthetic tendency of closeness and reverence to nature. Lin Fengmian, the
pioneer of modernism in Chinese *shanshui* painting, claimed that Western landscape
painters depicted natural scenery realistically, representing the surface of nature, so
their painting lacked lyrical feeling and was very mechanical. Chinese *shanshui*
painting, however, was an expression of the imagination. Western landscape painting
is the representation of objects; oriental *shanshui* painting is the expression of
impressions. His words are perhaps extreme and lacking in broader analysis; but
they are representative of the typical Chinese scholarly opinion of the western art
tradition, which has been in currency until this day. I do not agree with his opinion
that western painting lacked lyrical feeling, that it was only the representation of
objects rather than the expression of impressions. However, it is undeniable that
compared with traditional western landscape artists, Chinese *shanshui* painters
enjoyed more freedom of expression. Hong Huizhen’s argument is more reasonable.
He puts forward the view that Western landscape painting is presented realistically
from the painter’s perspective, even though sometimes it is idealized and distorted by
emotions; whereas in ancient Chinese *shanshui* painting it is the nature in the
painter’s mind, unconfined by the physical viewpoint of the painter.

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117 Huang Tingjian: 黃庭堅; Mi Fu: 米芾; Li Gonglin: 李公麟.
119 Hong Huizhen, 2000.
Chinese painting aesthetics holds that formal likeness and realistic description demonstrated only the painter’s level of technical skill, but the literati painting intended to demonstrate the essential vitality of living things which surpasses technical accomplishment. Even in the paintings of the Song Dynasty, acclaimed as the most realistic period in the history of Chinese painting, Su Dongpo’s definition of literati painting still remained dominant.

For example, in the northern Song painter Guo Xi’s *Early Spring* (Fig. 10), the painter just demonstrates the basic living elements making up the pine trees (the roots, trunks, branches and leaves), without depicting in detail the change of hues and shades of colour according to different, individual species. All the temporary elements and impressions caused by differences of time, location and light are ignored. Only the essential qualities of the pine trees and rocks are painted. The branches of the tree are drawn in a few lines; pine needles and leaves are only depicted as round or fan-shaped to indicate their essence. As Sullivan suggests, the pine tree was not a particular pine tree but the essential, typical pine tree. The painter goes beyond the form to capture the “spirit”.

As a result of this idealization, the pine trees in this painting look more graceful than real trees. The idealization also allows the pine trees to convey a symbolic meaning: the exposed roots cling firmly to the rocks of the mountain without wavering, an expression of Confucian moral fortitude (as discussed earlier). This is enhanced by the composition of the painting which was also obviously idealized, as the rocks, trees and water match each other harmoniously and picturesquely. The idealization is also represented by the colour of the pine trees – “ink black”, the dominant colour in Chinese literati *shanshui* painting. Black, with its antithesis white, was regarded by

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120 *Early Spring*: 早春圖


122 However, although traditional Chinese *shanshui* painters did not confine themselves to mechanical depiction, neither did they always invent their subject, or “create an environment by heart”. Rather, “making nature one’s external teacher and finding the source [of one’s inspiration] in one’s inner heart-and-mind” (as discussed earlier) was their primary principle.
literati as the visual symbolization of the philosophical concepts of yin and yang, the
essence of all things. The black and white were also considered as embodying the
ideas of “Dao” – the “white” signifies the emptiness, void, and quietness. This is
in contrast to Western painting. In the history of Western painting, colour became
more and more important; while in the history Chinese painting, colour (except black
and white) became more and more insignificant. From the beginning of the Song
Dynasty, black and white (sometimes with light application of other colours as shown
in Qian Xuan’s Living in Fuyu Mountain) had become the only widely accepted
“cultural colours” by the literati.

The Chinese literati earnestly longed for and pursued the liberation of the human
spirit, and achieved this through freedom in painting. This freedom is demonstrated
most clearly in the panoramic view. In order to represent the panoramic view of the
lofty mountains and the flowing rivers, the Chinese literati collocated those natural
phenomenon from various angles (high, low, far, near) and various moments
(morning, noon, dusk) in one single picture, creating a special liberation which was
one of the most important characteristics of the composition in shanshui painting.
Even after the Song Dynasty, when the mode changed from sublime beauty to a more
picturesque or graceful mode, they were still inclined to depict the space
panoramically. This can be seen in Living in Fuchun Mountain (Fig.11) by Huang
Gongwang (1269-1354). This painting depicts the scenery on both sides of the
Fuchun River. The realm of the painting is boundless, composed of layer upon layer
of mountains, surrounded by never-ending rivers. Mountain peaks rise high into the

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123 See Chen Zhidong, Chinese Calligraphy, Painting and Literati Consciousness (Zhongguo Shuhua Yu Wren Yishi 2006. p. 132. Mei Mosheng also argues that the western idea of colour is scientific, while the Chinese idea of colour is philosophical. The literati’s preference for black and white comes from the psychology that they thought the other natural colours were born from black and white (See Mei Mosheng, 2005, p. 89).
124 See Li Beilei, 2006, pp. 299, 240.
125 There was another school of shanshui painting, the blue-and-green shanshui, with Li Sixun 李思訓 (651-716) as the representative. As it represented imperial aesthetics rather than literati aesthetics, this school was regarded as of lesser importance.
126 There is an exception: in the Southern Song period, several painters (with Ma Yuan 馬遠 (1190-1279) as the representative) practiced “one comer” painting. They only painted one comer of the whole scene, to signify that the northern part of China was ruled by the Jin ethnic group.
127 Huang Gongwang: 黃公望; Living in Fuchun Mountain: 富春山居圖.
sky, and the river reaches as far as the horizon. Villages are dotted in a wild profusion of vegetation, and a white sail, a small bridge and waterfalls are all discernible.

Another picture representing this kind of imagined panoramic view is Rivers and Mountains in Autumn Colours (Fig. 12) by Zhao Boju (1119-1185). In order to manifest nature’s magnificence, vitality and vigour, this painting also includes range upon range of undulating mountains and a vast expanse of misty, rolling waters, mixed together with villages, flying birds, streams, waterfalls, verdant pine trees, lush bamboos, long bridges and pavilions. In this painting, the human figures (the travelers and anglers), complete with carriages, horses and boats, give a more all-embracing impression of the scene. These two paintings are good examples of the “ideal composition” of shanshui painting proposed by Guo Xi:

For the mountain, water is its blood; grass and trees are its hair; clouds and mists are its facial expression. Hence the mountain derives vitality from water; prosperity from grass and trees; gracefulness and charm from clouds and mists. For the water, the mountains are its face; pavilions are its eyes and eyebrows; fishing is its spirit. Hence the water derives elegance from the mountains; its vividness from pavilions; its distance and spaciousness from fishing. These are the composition of shanshui.

This sort of composition represented the infinite spirit and organic vitality of nature as well as the observer’s unity with the universe.

Both painters used broad vision, rich content and different perspectives of observation (from both high and low angles, far and near positions) to convey the overall aesthetic experience. What they attempted to unveil was not the partial shanshui seen from a fixed position and single perspective, but the panoramic view of the macrocosmic world from multiple perspectives. This convention was expressed clearly by Zong Bing and Wang Wei (415-453). Zong Bing in his “Introduction to Painting Shanshui” wrote: “Now as I spread out my plain silk [to catch] the faraway brightness, 

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128 Zhao Boju: 趙伯黝, Rivers and Mountains in Autumn Colours: 江山秋色圖.
130 Zong Bing and Wang Wei 王微 are both founders of shanshui painting theory. Zong Bing’s “Introduction to Painting Shanshui” and Wang Wei’s “On Painting 數畫” signified the formation of shanshui painting theory and determined the future path of shanshui painting. (See Li Yi, 2000).
the form of Mount Kunlun may be encompassed by a square inch, a vertical stroke of three inches corresponds to eight thousand feet, and a horizontal passage of ink of a few feet stand for an extent of a hundred li”. Wang Wei expressed a similar view in his “On Painting”: “Human eyes are limited in their scope. Hence they are not able to perceive all that is to be seen; yet, with one small brush, I can draw the vast universe”. The painters often painted the panorama of “ten thousand li” in the space of a scant foot, and seldom confined themselves to particularization.

Unlike the fixed point of view of Western painting, Chinese painting has no fixed perspective – the whole universe is its object. This is not because Chinese painters did not understand perspective, but because Chinese painters always deliberately avoided and opposed it. When they painted shanshui, they were not like common observers who stood in a fixed location to look up at the mountain. Instead, as Shen Kuo (1031-1095) argued, they used moving perspectives to watch both the whole and the individual parts, from the big to the small, and then organized the overall view into a vivid and harmonious picture. Shen Hao, the art historian of the Ming Dynasty, in his “Painting” (Huachen), also suggested that a good painter should “study the whole of nature”, because mountains, rivers, and the Myriad Things have their own characteristics and embody natural truths, and should not be confined to the human being’s fixed and subjective perspective.

On this point, the Australian painter Margaret Preston’s (1875-1963) view was interestingly similar to that of Chinese scholars. She wrote in 1938 that “looking at a picture of a Chinese landscape it can be seen that the scene has been composed from the whole district... The Chinese think that to paint a ‘spot’ or view is very vulgar, to them nature is too important to be treated in a small way... Chinese art... has great structural and imaginative qualities and is now very closely studied by westerners.

132 Shen Kuo 沈括, Chapter 17 “Calligraphy and Painting” (書畫), in Dream Pool Essays (Mengxi Bitan 夢溪筆 談). See also Zong Baihua’s comments in Light of the Sky and Shadow of the Cloud (Tianguang Yunying 天光雲影), 2005.
who have at last realized that Art is not imitation but Creation!"  

Corresponding to this panoramic view, the Chinese way of perspective is called “Three Distances” which means far distance, deep distance and high distance. It observes nature from top to down, from front to back, and from near to far. The aim is to lead the viewer’s sight and mind to places as remote as possible — to the peak of a mountain, or to the end of a river. The aim is also to free the viewer’s heart from worldly worries and temporarily purify the viewer’s soul, which may have been sullied by fame and wealth. If there are only a few rocks and trees in a painting which do not convey the impression of distance or remoteness, it would impose limitations on the viewer’s vision and prevent the viewer’s mind from accessing the desired state of detachment and aloofness. But in front of the endless river and boundless sky, the viewer’s mind is able to fly to the state of “the great void” (taixu), “emptiness” (wu) and “lightness” (dan), which is the ideal state of Daoism. In the composition of both Living in Fuchun Mountain and Rivers and Mountains in Autumn Colours, the “Three Distances” perspective is adopted.

2) Sublime Mountains and Boundless Rivers: Minor Man in Grand Nature

Before the Song Dynasty, Chinese shanshui painting was dominated by the sense of sublimity (zhuangmei). As we have seen in the above discussions of paintings, traditional Chinese culture emphasized nature’s organic and holistic character. In this holistic understanding of nature, human beings were represented as minor figures. Jing Hao (850—?) and Fan Kuan (c.950-1032?) are the best representatives of this understanding. Both of them were good at painting sublime mountains in the central part of China. For example, in Jing Hao’s Mount Lu (Fig.13), the towering mountain

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136 Xu Fuguan also argues that spiritual liberation, which is what the viewer hopes to obtain from the art, can be achieved by the infinitude of unblocked vision (See Xu Fuguan, 1987, p. 302).
137 Zhuangmei: 壽美.
138 “Emptiness”, “qi”, “obscurity” and “wholeness” are the fundamental concepts of Chinese culture. They combined to support the harmony of man and nature (see Ma Qi 马奇, A Comparative Study of Chinese and Western Aesthetics, 1994, p. 45).
with its high ridges and rising peaks soars into the sky, imposing and grand.\textsuperscript{139} The composition of different parts of the mountain set each other off to show the sublime beauty. The striking outline and shape of the mountain are enhanced by the tall pine trees and the solid rocks, with the major and minor peaks rising one upon another. The cottages and bridges are dotted among or concealed by the trees. The whole picture is enveloped in mist, which strengthens the feeling of being personally in the scene, and is covered in a powerful and magnificent atmosphere, with an undertone of desolation and seclusion. This painting demonstrates the principle described in Guo Xi’s treatise “Mountains and Waters”: “Great Mountains [should be] imposing and grand”.\textsuperscript{140}

Similarly, in Fan Kuan’s Traveling amid Mountains and Streams (Fig.14), a huge peak towers up grandly in the middle of the painting, covering two thirds of the whole picture.\textsuperscript{141} On top of the mountain there are dense forests of ancient trees; in the deep gully zigzag streams flow through huge mountain rocks, and a long waterfall hangs down. In order to highlight the grandeur of the mountain, the painter used thick heavy ink strokes showing the texture of rocks and the bark of trees, after sketching the outline. Dong Qichang (1555-1636), the most influential art theorist of the Ming Dynasty, and Xu Beihong (1895-1953), one of the instrumental figures in modern Chinese painting, both praised this painting highly. Dong evaluated it as “the best (shanshui) painting in the Song Dynasty”; Xu commented that it is “a magnificent work, in the ancient and elegant style, without any faulty stroke”.\textsuperscript{142}

In both paintings, human figures or human residences are so small that they are overwhelmed and obliterated into the whole of nature. This concept of “minor man in grand nature” also frequently appears in the depiction of the moist scenery of southern China. Dong Yuan’s (?–962) paintings are some of the best representatives

\textsuperscript{139} Jing Hao: 葉浩; Mount Lu: 匡廬圖.
\textsuperscript{140} “大山堂堂”, in The Great Message of Forests and Streams. My translation.
\textsuperscript{141} Fan Kuan: 範寬. Traveling amid Mountains and Streams: 溪山行旅圖.
\textsuperscript{142} Quoted in Li Wenchu, 1996, pp. 439-440.
of this subject matter. In his *Painting of Xiao and Xiang Rivers* (Fig. 15), the viewer can almost smell the moist atmosphere of the Jiangnan area (south of the Yangtze River).\(^{143}\) The undulating hills are dimly discernible amidst gauzy clouds and mist. Instead of towering crags or precipitous cliffs, what is highlighted is the luxuriant vegetation and wide, peaceful river. The whole picture is painted with light ink to create a bright and enchanting flavour, and everything is shrouded in mist and suffused with moist air. A graceful lady, a small boat in the distance, and an angler sitting idly on the bank—all these images make up the composition of this typically mild and moist Jiangnan picture. All is calm, relaxed, and very close to nature.

In all these paintings, human figures are very small (e.g. the traveling man in *Traveling amid Mountains and Streams*, the fisherman in his boat in *Mount Lu*, the lady and the angler in *Painting of Xiao and Xiang Rivers*). This acts as a foil to demonstrate the sublime grandeur of the mountain or the boundlessness of the river. But the representation of sublimity is not designed to show the dominance of nature over human beings, but to show human unity and intimacy with nature, and nature’s friendliness to human beings. This is well expressed in the inscription on *Mount Lu* by a later collector: “Lend me a boat to float in this green and natural world / With a flagon of spring wine to watch the clouds rising”.\(^{144}\)

Some Westerners see this common feature in traditional Chinese *shanshui* painting as the result of “descriptive naturalism” (This has been discussed in my “Introduction”). Chinese scholars have different interpretations. Zhu Liangzhi argues that this style in Chinese painting was the result of the influence of Daoist ideas on the human relationship with nature.\(^{145}\) Hong Huizhen also argues that according to the traditional attitude, human beings and their activities are just like the rocks, trees or clouds, only a small participant within nature’s phenomena, not master or ruler. They possess a life-death cycle identical to those of other natural things. They climb the

\(^{143}\) Dong Yuan: 董源; *Painting of Xiao and Xiang Rivers*: 薰藻圖.

\(^{144}\) "借我扁舟遙空碧，一壺春酒看雲生": My translation.

\(^{145}\) Zhu Liangzhi, 2005, p. 150.
mountain for the purpose of being closer to the mountain and Heaven, not to conquer the peak.\footnote{Hong Huizhen, 2000, p. 179.} In the paintings mentioned above, human figures are the means through which the painters convey the ideal of intimate relationship between “mother” nature and mankind. It is clear that the painters or poets wanted to transcend to the realm of “forgetting the self”, of total unification with mountains and rivers.

In this closeness between man and nature, where the human figure is depicted as part of the surrounding mountains and rivers, the figure and nature as a whole are represented as different from civilized human society. The figure was considered superior to realistic human beings and a representative of the ideal life which Chinese literati longed for. Remote, mysterious and sublime mountains and rivers were seen, in this context, as the residences of immortal beings, hence nature and immortal beings were together considered admirable. Whether as a celestial being wandering in clouds and mountains of paradisal shanshui, or as a mortal fisherman in a solitary boat, the human figures symbolized the idealized literati’s noble qualities, standing above worldly considerations and detached from the realistic material world. The Chinese literati longing to become immortal did not aim to prolong their natural life, but was rather an attempt to free themselves from worldly worries and to live in an ideal world.

A single fisherman in a solitary boat in a vast expanse of water is one of the most frequently represented images in Chinese shanshui painting. This can be seen in *Painting of a Cold River and Lonely Fishing* (Fig.16) by Zhu Duan in the Ming Dynasty, in *Old Fisherman* (Fig.17) by Wu Zhen (1280-1354), and in *Painting of a Cold River and Lonely Fishing* (Fig.18) by Ma Yuan (1140-1225).\footnote{Zhu Duan: 朱端; *Painting of a Cold River and Lonely Fishing*: 寒江獨釣圖; Wu Zhen: 吳鎮; *Old Fisherman*: 漁父圖; Ma Yuan: 馬遠; *Painting of a Cold River and Lonely Fishing*: 寒江獨釣圖.} As Guo Xi suggested, the ideal composition of shanshui painting takes fishing as its spirit, and derives its distance and spaciousness from fishing.\footnote{See his treatise, “Mountains and Waters”: in *The Great Message of Forests and Streams*.} What, then, is this spirit? It is the spirit of freedom – as free as the fish (symbolized through fishing) in the water.
and the bird in the sky. It is the spirit of reclusion. “Reclusion” will be the theme of the next section.

“Lonely fishing in a cold river” is a recurrent theme in Chinese art. The painters were inclined to depict a man in a solitary boat fishing on an empty river surface under limpid moonlight in the silent night, as in Ma Yuan’s *Painting of a Cold River and Lonely Fishing* and Zhu Duan’s *Painting of a Cold River and Lonely Fishing*. The images created an atmosphere which is empty, clear, and silent. The human figure and the water are fused. The painters attached much importance to the “solitary” boat and “solitary” fisherman, because in Chinese Daoist symbolism, to be “solitary” means to be independent and free without the interruption of human society. In all these paintings, fish are not depicted. As a Chinese saying goes, “the joy of fishing is fishing itself, not the fish”. Actually, the fishermen in painting are not fishing for fish at all; rather, they are escaping fame and wealth and fishing for freedom and self-salvation. This is the expected life-style of Daoism: simple, leisurely and free, without many material or political desires and emotionally content with oneself. In fact, Master Zhuang himself was once an angler. In *The Book of Master Zhuang* he states that he would rather fish idly than serve the court and gain fame and wealth. This life-style was not only represented in painting and literature. It was also practiced by some literati anglers such as the poet Zhang Zhihe (c.730-c.810) in the Tang Dynasty, and the painter Wu Zhen in the Yuan Dynasty.

The image of fishing is also found in *shanshui* poetry, for example in Liu Zongyuan’s (773-819) famous poem “River-Snow” (*Jiangxue*):

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千山鸟飞绝，
万径人踪灭。
孤舟蓑笠翁，
独钓寒江雪。
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The image of fishing is also found in *shanshui* poetry, for example in Liu Zongyuan’s (773-819) famous poem “River-Snow” (*Jiangxue*):

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A thousand mountains with no single bird
Ten thousand paths with no human trace
A solitary boat, an old man in bamboo hat and cape
Fishing in the cold river-snow.153
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149 See Zhu Liangzhi. 2005, p. 68.
150 “釣魚之樂在於釣而非魚”. My translation.
151 See Chapter 17, “Autumn Water 冬水”, in *The Book of Master Zhuang*.
152 Zhang Zhihe: 張志和.
In this poem, nature and the human being are united in silence, as observed by Wolfgang Kubin. However, I do not agree with Wolfgang Kubin when he argues that in this poem there is no single bird, but there is an old man fishing, because human beings are the master of all living things and therefore will not submit to nature.\(^1\) \(^3\) \(^4\)

This view of the relationship between human beings and nature is in actuality a Western one. Kubin transplants it to interpret Chinese culture, distorting the implied meaning of this poem. Writing from the Chinese perspective in which this poem was written, Zhu Liangzhi instead argues that the fisherman in this poem is enjoying his unity with nature, celebrating his solitude, leisure, and detachment from the world.\(^1\) \(^3\) \(^5\)

His argument is more convincing. This enjoyment of solitude, leisure and unity with nature is also shown in Li Bai’s poem “Sitting Alone at Mount Jingting” (Duzuo Jingtingshan):

\begin{verbatim}
All birds vanished in the high sky, 
A solitary cloud floats freely by.
Gazing at each other without feeling tired,
It’s only between Mount Jingting and I.\(^1\)\(^6\)
\end{verbatim}

Sometimes the themes of “human beings fused with nature” and “forgetting the self” are emphasized to the extent that there are no signs of human figure at all, which is best represented in Ni Zan’s works. His paintings, such as Painting of Pines and Pavilion (Fig.19), Painting of Rongxi Studio (Fig.20) and Quiet Streams and Cold Pines (Fig.21), always depict a desolate world, silent and tranquil, somewhat like Daoist realm of the “great void”.\(^1\)\(^5\) In this realm, there is no painter or spectator, only nature itself. Yun Nantian (1633-1690) describes this as a space in which there is no dust of “this world”, only the painter’s spirit existing, fused with nature and wandering in Heaven.\(^1\)\(^5\) These paintings suggest that in Chinese shanshui painting

\(^1\)\(^5\) See Wolfgang Kubin, 1990, p. 215.
\(^1\)\(^5\) Zhu Liangzhi, 2005, pp. 68, 138-139.
\(^1\)\(^5\) \(^6\) My translation. See this poem in Complete Works of Li Taibai.
nature is more valuable and important than human beings. The particular purpose of *shanshui* painting is to capture the value of nature which is not affected by the existence of human beings. In this sort of painting, instead of human figures, there are always buildings (e.g. pavilions) which can be used to observe the limitless universe from above or below. This is the symbol of the communication between man and nature. In most of Ni Zan’s paintings, the focus is the pavilion, standing in the vast river or on the mountain, symbolizing the tiny and transient human space in the boundless and ever-lasting universe. Ni Zan’s pavilion influenced later painters to such an extent that it became a philosophical symbol.\(^{159}\)

It suggested that the spirit of Chinese painting is that of an entirely deep and silent fusion or union of man with infinite nature. The world it reveals is quiet, because the universe is moving quietly according to the natural law or “Way” (Dao), and human life which is at one with nature also moves quietly. Yet in this quiet and lonely world in which the flowers and birds as well as human beings all appear lost and merged in the boundless universe, there is nevertheless life and vitality. Chinese painting aims to highlight the vitality in silence – in a quiet painting, there are always traces of life embodied in birds, clouds, and plants. Even when there is no human figure, nature is not depicted as threatening or dreary at all.

### 3) Reclusion: Nature as Refuge

This harmony between human beings and nature resulted in the development of one of the most important themes in traditional Chinese *shanshui* painting and poetry: reclusion. As a special phenomenon in the Chinese cultural tradition, the ideological foundation of “reclusion” is the Daoist idea of retiring from the world. It was a behaviour pertaining to Chinese intellectuals when they turned from serving the government (*rushi*) to living a reclusive life (*chushi*).\(^{160}\) As discussed earlier, Chinese culture takes Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism as its philosophical framework. Chinese literati upheld Confucianism, which advocated engagement in social affairs and making a distinguished career, when they were ambitious and complacent. But

\(^{159}\) See Zhu Liangzhi, 2005, p. 149.

\(^{160}\) *Rushi*: 入世; *chushi*: 出世.
once they had their aspirations thwarted, Daoism, which advocated “doing nothing” (wuwei), was upheld as their spiritual pillar. Therefore the idea that “in times of peace and prosperity, the literati should pursue an official career; in times of turmoil and unrest, the literati should retire to live in nature” was the guiding principle of Chinese literati as early as the beginning of the West Han dynasty, and became a code of conduct from then on. In the history of Chinese art, periods in which shanshui painting flourished, were also periods of social turmoil in which Daoist ideas were predominant. It is true that Master Zhuang himself advocated living a reclusive life in one’s own heart rather than living in the mountains. But he also claimed that “the mountains and forests, the hills and fields fill us with overflowing delight and we are joyful”, and “[when society is in great confusion], worthy men crouched in hiding below the great mountains and yawning cliffs”. The concept of “reclusion” was carried forward and related to shanshui more and more by the neo-Daoists. The best words demonstrating the mountain forest as the residence of recluses are in Guo Pu’s line “the mountain forest is where hermits live” (discussed earlier) and in Zhang Hua’s (232-300) line “Recluses seek protection in the mountains”. From the Eastern Jin period, Buddhism began to enjoy popularity in China. Buddhism stressed nature’s comforting and consoling function, advocated meditation and “nonaction” in nature, concepts compatible with Daoism, heightening the ideal of reclusion in

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162 Shanshui painting originated in the Wei-Jin period, matured in the Five Dynasties, and reached its climax in the Yuan Dynasty – all periods of social turbulence caused by wars or dynastic changes.
163 The book of Master Zhuang, which was thought of as having the decisive influence on the idea of withdrawal from society, does not advocate living the reclusive life just in mountain or river areas. In Master Zhuang’s opinion, living in mountains was too much of a purposeful goal. The genuine recluse should be “free and idle without the river 無江海而閒” – to live even in the most noisy place with a detached heart. (See Chapter 15 “Constrained in Will 刻意”). However, during the Wei-Jin period, as a result of social turmoil, many intellectuals were persecuted. In order to remain out of danger, and under the influence of neo-Daoist ideas on nature, to live a reclusive life in shanshui became more and more popular. According to Xu Fuguan and Li Wenchu, the importance of Master Zhuang’s philosophy on nature lies more in its potential implication rather than its apparent words. What Master Zhuang pursued is an absolute spiritual freedom transcending political achievements, moral ethics and logical reasoning. But this ideal was impracticable in the human world. The only place to achieve his ideal was in the natural world which embodies the Dao of naturalness and non-action. In this sense, Master Zhuang’s thought has a profound “potential shanshui spirit” (See Xu Fuguan, 1986, Chapter 2; Li Wenchu, 1996, p. 133).
The idea that by reclusion in *shanshui*, literati could find refuge and consolation for their body and soul, gradually developed into a posture or attitude embodying a moral and political criticism on the ruling class and an affirmation of the ideal life style. Originating as a natural response and spontaneous action to social conflict and political persecution, “reclusion” became a mode of consciously chosen behaviour. Since Zhang Zao successfully proposed “making nature one’s external teacher and finding the source [of one’s inspiration] in one’s inner heart-and-mind” as an infallible law for Chinese art, there was a tendency to train and purify the literati’s moral character rather than training their technical skills. The reclusive spirit was considered as the most noble and unsullied spirit, and as a result reclusion became a prevalent social phenomenon among literati and the reclusive theme was favored by painters and poets. In fact, almost all *shanshui* paintings have a “reclusive” character. Some painters never attempted to embark on an official career, such as Jing Hao in the Five Dynasties and Ni Zan in the Yuan Dynasty, and their works have therefore been considered as the best representatives of the reclusive spirit. Some literati were frustrated by society and lived in *shanshui* to escape from reality. And there are still more who for a variety of reasons, could not retreat into the mountains, and so even more anxiously needed *shanshui* painting to console their spirits and fulfill their dream of being close to mountains and standing aloof from worldly affairs. Through depicting *shanshui* they attempted to find a compromise between their official careers and the appreciation of nature.

In reclusive *shanshui* painting and poetry, nature was represented as a refuge or homeland providing spiritual consolation to the literati. It is true that in the earliest poems, written for the purpose of summoning the hermits who lived in the mountains

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166 “Reclusion” gradually became a socially approved way of life. The government sometimes even gave rewards or had favorable policies towards the recluse. Sometimes in order to win the court’s favour, some literati would live as a hermit for a period. (See Li Wenchu, 1996, pp. 130, 428).

167 As Xu Fuguan points out, many literati only possessed the reclusive spirit, but seldom practiced it (1987, p. 202).
to return to serve the court, there was the description of mountains as ghastly and bloodcurdling. This is the case in the poem “Summoning the Hermits” (Zhaoyinshi) written by Huainan Xiaoshan, a poet under the patronage of Liu An, the King of Huainan in the Western Han period (202BC-9AD). However, these poems are only a few exceptions to the general poetic trend of the early period. Kubin’s opinion that “living in the mountain forest was considered by Chinese literati in the Han and Jin Dynasties to be dangerous, because nature at that time existed as a wilderness” seems a little too absolute.

In the poem “The Hermits” (Yinshi) by Ruan Yu (165-212) of the Eastern Han period, nature is the only “clean and bright” place. Although there are descriptions of the poverty of a life in reclusion, the poet’s attitude is to praise this kind of life, stating that living in poverty in nature can help to achieve the return of benevolence and truth, as expressed in the final two lines: “Why should one be afraid of living in poverty / so long as one can keep close to the truth”. In many poems of Zhang Hua, Zuo Si (c.250-305) and Lu Ji (261-303) (all of them from the Jin Dynasty), although in the mountain forest they had to “dress in tree-leaves and eat fruits from trees”, they still “played the qin and sang and laughed”. These poets idealized both the shanshui and the reclusive life in it. There are few descriptions of suffering in nature, because in spirit they were idyllically happy, carefree and content.

From the Wei-Jin period onwards, as literati culture was saturated with the thoughts of Daoism and neo-Daoism, the predominant attitude extolled the virtue of the reclusive life and emphasized the beauty of mountains and rivers as contrast to officialdom. The idea of nature as the right place for recluses, more and more clearly became the central idea of Chinese culture. One thing needs to be pointed out here. Since the Wei-Jin period, some wealthy aristocrats’ reclusion in shanshui gradually

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170 阮籍, 隱士.


172 “衣木葉，食樹果，彈琴歌笑”. in “Biographies of Scholars 儒林” of the Jin History, vol. 91, Liezhuan 61. These words are used to describe the literatus Dong Jingdao 董景道 of the Jin Dynasty. My translation. Zuo Si: 左思; Lu Ji: 隱機.
became merged with the concept of entertainment. They undertook the “reclusive” practice in a “libertine” spirit, and wished to live a carefree life in _shanshui_, with trees, flowers, wind and birds as friends, but without suffering the difficulties of living in _shanshui_. As a result, gardening _shanshui_ was prevalent. In gardens, aristocrats could imitate or imagine life in real _shanshui_, one stating that he “…gathered rocks and collected water, making it look like a hill [on which to live a reclusive life]”. Gardening _shanshui_ was a compromise, a halfway world between a worldly life and a reclusive life in the mountains and rivers. Some literati could not retreat into the mountains, and therefore used gardens in the city as a replacement to fulfill their dreams and desires. Gardening _shanshui_ was a manifestation of the reclusive ideal, or in other words, the materialized ideal, as claimed by Guo Xiang: “The sage resides with his body in the court but shelters his heart in mountains”. This type of _shanshui_ was most popular during the Ming and Qing periods, because in tandem with the development of society, people’s desires and demands were expanding, which prevented them from living a poor, lonely and reclusive life. However, their longing for withdrawal into mountains did not change, and they still regarded real (wild) _shanshui_ as the model. The standard of judging the value of a garden was whether it appeared as though created by nature.

Although wealthy aristocrats only experienced the beauty and charm of _shanshui_, there were always real hermits who enjoyed the reclusive life in _shanshui_ despite the poverty and harsh aspect caused by such a life. Jing Hao, the most famous painter of the Five Dynasties, is an example. The composition of his _shanshui_ painting is the direct mirror of his long term residence in the mountains. As displayed in his _Mount Lu_, the mountain and trees make up the main body of the painting, covering most areas of the picture, but without any suggestion of threatening, conveying the idea that the mountain is grand, imposing, and a safe place. This is distinct from the

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shanshui paintings before the Tang Dynasty in which the water covers at least the same area as does the mountain. This kind of representation not only embodies the idea that “the benevolent man enjoys the mountain”, but also demonstrates the transition of painting shanshui from appreciating the Dao to appreciating shanshui itself.

In the poems of the Tang Dynasty, considered the artistic peak of Chinese poetry, the praise of reclusive life in the mountain is extremely common. For example, in Wang Wei’s “Farewell” (Songbie) he straightforwardly contrasts the misled involvement in worldly affairs with enlightened mature recognition of the significance of life in nature as a recluse:

Dismounting I give you wine to drink,  
And inquire where you are going.  
You say you did not achieve your wishes  
And return to rest at the foot of Southern Mountain.  
But go – do not ask again:  
White Clouds have no ending time.  

This poem was written by the poet to his friend Meng Haoran who was disillusioned by the mundane world because in this world he failed in his political ambitions. As a result Meng Haoran decided to depart from worldly affairs and lived as a recluse for a period as Wang Wei did. In another famous poem by Wang Wei, “In Retirement at Zhongnan” (Zhongnan Bieye), he states his reclusive ideal more clearly:

To Middle age I loved the Dao.  
Late now, I lodge upon South Mountain.  
If feelings rise, I go alone:  
Such scenes as I have seen…  
Walk to where the waters narrow,  
Sit, and wait, for the clouds to rise.  
Let me meet by chance with any old woodsman:  
We laugh and chat, no thought of the return.

Wang Wei retreated to the South Mountain where he lived a quiet and peaceful Daoist life, appreciating the simple wisdom of an old woodsman, joyful and leisurely in his

encounters.

The spiritual happiness and contentment of living a reclusive life can also be found in
the poem “Sent to Zhang Wu on Climbing Orchid Hill in Autumn” (Qiudeng Lanshan
Ji Zhangwu) by Meng Haoran:

Here on the north peak among the white clouds
You enjoy the hermit’s life.
And now in my yearning to reach you
I climb these high hills;
My heart follows the wild goose till
She disappears into space.\textsuperscript{178}

But the most impressive declaration of love for the reclusive life in shanshui is in Li
Bai’s “Conversation among the Mountains” (Shanzhong Wenda):

You ask why I live in these green mountains.
I smile, can’t answer; I am completely at peace.
A peach blossom sails past on the current,
There are worlds beyond this one.\textsuperscript{179}

In a similar way to Wang Wei and Meng Haoran, Li Bai was also frustrated by
political reality. In this poem the significance of living in shanshui – “I am
completely at peace” – is made clear. In the “other” world of shanshui beyond “this”
world of humanity, there is an earthly paradise. The image of “peach blossom” is a
symbolic image of paradise without any worldly worries in traditional Chinese
culture. It comes from Tao Yuanming’s well-known prose work, “The Peach Blossom
Spring” (Taohuayuan Ji), which tells about a utopia untouched by the corruption of
society.\textsuperscript{180} It has a similar implication to “Arcadia” in Western culture.

In all these shanshui poems of the Tang Dynasty, the direct connection between a
retreat into nature and individual happiness is highlighted. Wolfgang Kubin’s
argument that in the poems of the Tang Dynasty, regarding nature as something
dangerous played a significant role in people’s concepts of nature, and that there
existed a dominant or prevalent idea that nature is a threatening enemy to human

\textsuperscript{179} “山中問答”, translated by David Young. See Minford & Lau, 2000, p. 752.
\textsuperscript{180} Taohuayuan Ji: 桃花源記. For an English translation, see Minford & Lau, 2000, pp. 515-7.
beings, is not convincing.\(^\text{181}\) Kubin supports his argument by giving the examples of Li Bai’s poem “The Road to Shu is Hard” (\textit{Shudaonan}), Du Fu’s poems “Nigong Mount” (\textit{Nigongshan}) and “Jianmen Mount” (\textit{Jianmen}), Meng Jiao’s (751-814) poem “Cold Stream” (\textit{Hanxi}), and Han Yu’s poem “Southern Mount” (\textit{Nanshan}).\(^\text{182}\)

Admittedly there are some exceptions which depict the threatening forces of nature, but these views never dominated. The poems he quotes are only a few exceptions. And in these poems the negative image of nature often carries an implied metaphorical meaning. They were written for specific purposes. For example, Li Bai wrote “The Road to Shu is Hard” because he encountered difficulties in his political life. The difficulties in traveling on the road to Shu (Sichuan province) signify the frustrations in his political career. The attitude towards nature expressed in these poems should not be taken as the poets’ attitude to nature as a whole. In fact, most of these poets’ poems convey similar ideas on nature to those of Wang Wei and other \textit{shanshui} poets. The dominant image in the Tang era is still one of nature as refuge. The common ground shared by all the poems discussed above is that of nature (embodied in the mountains) represented as an ideal place for human beings to live in, giving pleasure, joy, consolation and a sense of self-contentment. There are no depictions of human beings’ dangerous or adventurous struggle with nature.

In this theme of reclusion, the “mountain” and “society” signify two different kinds of existence and life style. Once the literati were disappointed or disillusioned in political or social life, they desired to throw off the shackles of society and their attention shifted from outer social activities to inner spiritual self (as with Wang Wei, Meng Haoran and Li Bai). As the mountain (or water) was the place in which to obtain spiritual joy and peacefulness, it was regarded as a refuge or escape from society. This idea that “green mountains relieve me of my worries” helped greatly to console the wounded hearts of the adherents of the Ming Dynasty when the country


was ruled by the Manchus.\footnote{\textsuperscript{183} "青山澹吾慮", in Wei Yingwu 韋應物’s (737-c.792) poem “East of the Town 東郊”. My translation. Witter Bynner translates it as “green hills lighten the cares of the world”. See his translation of the whole poem in Minford & Lau, 2000, p. 845.} And with the idea of the mountain forest as the place of relative material plenty and prosperity, there developed the representation of nature as the residence in which people can live comfortably.\footnote{\textsuperscript{184} Kubin expresses a similar opinion. See Kubin, 1990, pp. 107-8, 128.} When describing natural objects or phenomena, positive adjectives such as “fragrant”, “pure”, “precious”, “singing”, “sunny”, and “graceful” were always in use, which can be seen in Zuo Si’s poem \textit{ Summoning the Recluse:}

Leaning on my staff, I summon the recluse,  
Since ancient times this wild road has lain here.  
The cave in the crags is bare of criss-cross beams,  
But among these hills is the sound of a singing lute.  
White snow still lies on the mountain’s shadowy side,  
Red petals flare on the sunny side of the woods.  
A stony spring washes over precious jade,  
Delicate fishes are swimming in its depths.  
No need of strings, or bamboo instruments,  
When mountains and waters give forth their pure notes.  
Why bother now to whistle or to sing,  
When bushy trees are humming mournfully?  
Autumn chrysanthemums are food enough for me,  
The graceful orchid I wear as a buttonhole.  
My feet are tired from all this pacing about,  
I would like to throw my hat-pins clean away.\footnote{\textsuperscript{185} His official hat-pin, sign of his rank. Translated by John Frodsham, but I have changed “lonely” to “graceful” in line 14. See Minford & Lau, 2000, p. 436.}

In this poem the mountain is the synonym of homeland and joy: in material form it provides accommodation (the cave), food (the chrysanthemum) and decoration (the orchid); in spirit it pleases human eyes (with white snow and red flowers), ears (with pure music made by the mountains and water) and hearts (without bothering them with worldly worries).

Although many literati had the “mountain forest complex” which developed as a result of their attitude towards the mountain as refuge, it is not necessarily true, as Kubin argues, that since the Jin Dynasty the reclusive theme in Chinese literature has been related only to the mountain.\footnote{\textsuperscript{186} See Kubin, 1990, p. 120.} The relationship between the mountain and the
water is so close in literati culture that they are often regarded as a whole – *shanshui*. It is unimaginable to exclude the water from the reclusive theme. As Guo Xi in *The Great Message of Forests and Streams* proposed: “For the mountain, water is its blood...Hence the mountain derives vitality from water... For the water, the mountains are its face... Hence the water derives elegance from the mountains” (see earlier discussion). Wang Wei’s poem “A Green Stream” (*Qingxi*) is a good example describing the reclusive life close to the river:

It is said that those who want to sail the Yellow Flower River
Must follow this green stream;
Rounding a myriad turns through the mountains
On a journey of less than a hundred *li*.
The stream bickers among the pebbles
And the deep tranquil green of thick pines.
The surface of an inlet sways with water chestnut
And so clearly mirror the reeds lush along the banks.
Deep in my heart I have always been as free and leisurely
As this limpid stream is;
Let me remain on a hermit’s rock
And cast a fishing-line forever.  

The reclusive theme which focused on the riverside as the ideal place of habitation was also depicted in paintings such as Li Tang’s *Fishing in the Clear Stream* (Fig.22). This painting is Li Tang’s representative work after he came to the south when the northern part of China was ruled by the Jin ethnic group. In contrast to his *Whispering Pines in the Mountains* (Fig. 1), this painting depicts a peaceful and elegant fishing village secluded in the region of rivers and lakes in the Jiangnan area. Actually all the aforementioned paintings of fisherman are also embodiments of the reclusive theme in water. As Master Zhuang said, "angling for fish in solitary places, inaction his only concern – such is the life favored by the scholar of the rivers and seas, the man who withdraws from the world, the unhurried idler". Huang Gongwang’s *Life in Fuchun Mountain* (Fig.11) is a representative of living in the

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187 “青溪”, my translation. See also Li Bole’s translation in *Selected Poems of the Tang Dynasty*, 1966, p.92.
188 *Fishing in the Clear Stream*: 清溪漁隱圖.
mountains but close to the river. Fuchun River is where the famous hermit Yan Ziling (37BC – 43AD) lived and fished, and therefore is a traditional symbol of reclusion. Huang himself also lived peacefully along the Fuchun River as a recluse. In this painting, the cottages are dotted in the woods on the slopes of the mountain or on the riverbank; an angler is rowing a boat to the centre of the river. The whole picture looks like a “Peach Blossom Spring”, peaceful and removed from social turmoil. The literati in the Yuan Dynasty elevated the spirit of reclusion to the highest position and consequently achieved the greatest accomplishment in shanshui painting.

The conception of “shanshui as an ideal place for human beings” is frequently demonstrated in the shanshui paintings of the Northern Song period in which the absence of human figures is rare. The Northern Song masterpieces were lyrical and poetic, utopian worlds in which people lived happily in shanshui. The painters always tried to entice the viewer into their pictorial world by providing a foothold for entry – a path (sometimes hidden, sometimes apparent), a bridge, or a boat (usually with a fisherman in it), conveying the idea of “climbable”, “reachable”, and “visitable”. Sometimes there was also a pagoda, a temple, a balcony or a pavilion situated in the mountains, showing that shanshui was friendly to, intimate with, and “habitable” by human beings.

It is true that by the Northern Song period, the Chinese landscape had already been tamed to some extent. However, Chinese artists and poets seldom deliberately sought tamed nature as their subject matter of reclusion. Nature itself was accounted sacred, was seen as the manifestation of balance, unity, perfection and harmony. They loved nature for its own sake – even in poems as early as the Jin Dynasty, when nature in China was still in a state of wilderness, the mountain forests and rivers were often

190 During the Yuan Dynasty shanshui painting reached its peak and reclusion became a prevalent social phenomenon rather than an individual choice. As China was occupied by the Mongolians, most literati withdrew from official careers and abandoned their responsibility towards society. In the Qing Dynasty, the literati’s spirit was akin to those of the Ming Dynasty, but their artistic expressions were tightly restricted by the government. 191 The peaceful Northern Song period provided good opportunities for literati to embark on an official career rather than to retreat into the mountains. The shanshui painting could satisfy the officials’ dream of living in mountains, hence the authoritative painting theorist Guo Xi proposed that shanshui painting should depict the “climbable”, “reachable”, “visitable” and “habitable” scenery (See Chen Chuanxi, 1988, p. 227).
represented as a good place for recluses to escape to (as discussed earlier).

As a direct result of the attempt to capture the spirit of reclusion, the tradition of literati *shanshui* painting requires a carefree and natural style, conveying an impression of moral integrity and an extremely tranquil atmosphere – a specially Chinese variety of silence and solitude, bland and unassertive, light and clean, misty and moist, simple and elegant, reflecting the painter’s nobility and self-restraint, and his aloofness from politics and material pursuits. Definitive examples of this are the works of Ni Zan (as discussed earlier) who had a far-reaching influence on later literati *shanshui* painters. Ni maintains that paintings or poems depicting reclusive life and pastoral scenery should be encouraged, while those describing public feelings, remonstrating with superior officials, or giving vent to one’s anger or discontent are inappropriate. This is in sharp contrast to the 20th century Chinese “New Culture”, in which the poems or paintings with a strong sense of political responsibility for the country were highly valued. (This will be discussed in Chapters 4 to 6.)

In addition to the mountains and rivers, the pastoral countryside was another sphere in which to express the ideas of the reclusive theme. For economic reasons, some recluses had to live in the countryside rather than in the mountains, as they had to make a living by labouring on the land. Tao Yuanming did so and is considered one of the best poets of the genre. Tao is called a “pastoral poet”, a poet of pastoral reclusion, rather than a “*shanshui*” poet. Although he lived in the country rather than in the mountains, he is nevertheless greatly respected as a hermit due to his

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192 The “detached 散淡” and “desolate 藥條” atmosphere in *shanshui* painting which was established in the Song Dynasty determined the path taken by later Chinese *shanshui* painting. Both Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007-1073) and Su Dongpo commented that the most difficult concept to convey in painting is the “detached” and “desolate” spirit. (See Li Beilei’s essay “Tracing to the Source of the Realm in *Shanshui* Painting 山水畫意境考鏡探源”, in the journal *The World of Calligraphy and Painting* (Shuhua Shijie), March 2008). There is an exception: during the special circumstances of the Southern Song period, the mood of *shanshui* painting was vigorous, bold, strong and fierce, which was inherited by 20th century Chinese painting.


194 Wolfgang Kubin argues that in the Wei-Jin period “reclusion” became a synonym for “luxurious life”. The recluses in fact lived a comfortable aristocratic life in their countryside villas. The idealization of reclusive life was based on material prosperity (1990, pp. 119, 121). However, the most famous and respected “Poet of Reclusion” Tao Yuanming lived a relatively poor life.

195 However, in a broad sense, pastoral poets are included in *shanshui* poets and are often called “pastoral *shanshui* poets”, because they also described *shanshui*, the *shanshui* in the countryside (as discussed in my “Introduction”).
uniquely vivid expression of and adherence to traditional Chinese cultural values. Specifically, these are the maintenance of an unsullied natural heart in returning to the countryside and the upright and lofty refusal to “bend his back for five pecks of rice” – the regulation salary of a magistrate. He represents not only the ideal of a leisurely and carefree pastoral life, but also the unyielding integrity of refusing to take an official career when the country was ruled improperly.¹⁹⁶

Tao resigned his post at the age of 30. He praised and idealized the pastoral reclusive life as peaceful and joyful in his most celebrated poems, “Returning to Dwell in the Country” (*Guiyuantian Ju*), one of a series of five poems on reclusion:

In youth I had nothing that matched the vulgar tone,  
For my nature always loved the hills and mountains.  
Inadvertently I fell into the Dusty Net,  
Once having gone it was more than thirty years.  
The tame bird longs for his old forest –  
The fish in the house-pond thinks of his ancient pool.  
I too will break the soil at the edge of the Southern moor,  
I will guard simplicity and return to my fields and garden.  
My land and house – a little more than ten acres,  
In the thatched cottage – only eight or nine rooms.  
Elms and willows shade the back verandah,  
Peach and plum trees in rows before the hall.  
Haze and dimly seen a village in the distance,  
Close in the foreground the smoke of neighbors’ houses.  
A dog barks amidst the deep lanes,  
A cock is crowing atop a mulberry tree.  
No dust and confusion within my doors and courtyard;  
In the empty rooms, more than sufficient leisure.  
Too long I was held within the barred cage.  
Now I am able to return again to Nature.¹⁹⁷

Tao clearly expressed his ideal in this poem. After being captive as a prisoner in the dust-filled cage of society, he was determined to pursue a life of self-sufficiency as a recluse. Here, in the last line, “Nature” has a double meaning. Tao means to return to both human nature and the physical *shanshui*. In another poem, “Reading the Classic

¹⁹⁶ For centuries, he had been widely praised by the adherents of former dynasties, such as the adherents of the Ming Dynasty in the Qing period.  
In the summer grass and trees have grown.
Over my roof the branches meet.
Birds settle in the leaves.
I enjoy my humble place.
Ploughing's done, the ground is sown.
Time to sit and read my book.
The narrow deeply-rutted lane
Means my friends forget to call.
Content, I pour the new Spring wine.
Go out and gather food I've grown.
A light rain from the East,
Blows in on a pleasant breeze.
I read the story of King Mu,
See pictures of the Hills and Seas.
One glance finds all of heaven and earth.
What pleasures can compare with these? 198

In traditional Chinese culture, pastoral poems and paintings usually describe little labour, but Tao's poems often discuss labour in nature, as in the line “I too will break the soil at the edge of the Southern moor”, underscoring the fact that reclusion was not without its hardships. Due to poverty Tao had to work hard in the fields as a farmer to support his family. His empty house could not shelter him from wind and sun. After long-term exhausting work he grew thin and sickly. His dishes and gourds were often empty; his short coarse robe was torn and mended. He described the hardships and admitted the poverty in his poems:

To be a farmer is surely a harsh lot;
One cannot refuse these hardships. 199

But he enjoyed this kind of life: “I enjoy my humble place”, he wrote, without complaint and with never a thought of abandoning it:

I only wish that I may continue like this;
At ploughing with my own hand I have no complaint. 200


199 Ibid.

200 Ibid.
In Tao’s poetry, ploughing the land is not undertaken only for survival or for transforming the waste land into fertile land; it is in fact a sign of living a secluded life in the countryside. What the poet cared for was the cultivation of the heart rather than the cultivation of the land: “Ploughing’s done, the ground is sown /Time to sit and read my book”.

Tao portrayed nature as peaceful and harmonious. In contrast to Xie Lingyun and Wang Wei’s representations of silent reclusion in the “other world” of the mountain forest, Tao’s tranquility is facilitated by hard work in the real world, creating a space of pastoral *shanshui* which allows him to transcend that mundane reality:

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I built my house near where others dwell,
And yet there is no clamor of carriages and horses.
You ask of me “How can this be so?”
“When the heart is far the place of itself is distant.”
I pluck chrysanthemums under the eastern hedge,
And gaze afar towards the southern mountain.
The mountain air is fine at evening of the day
And flying birds return together homewards.
Within these things there is a hint of Truth,
But when I start to tell it, I cannot fine the words.
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- “One of the Five Poems Written While Drunk”

The first four lines tell that Tao built the “house” in “this” real world. Yet the house provided Tao with a sense of detachment and solitude, helping him transcend the mundane reality as the *shanshui* did. These lines show that Tao’s spirit is closest to Master Zhuang who advocated living a reclusive life without being in the mountains or rivers. The last two lines tell that the great truth cannot be expressed in words, which is the evidence that Tao understands Master Lao’s idea of Dao which is unspeakable: “The Dao that can be described in language is not the constant Dao”.

In Tao’s work, an opposition develops between the pure and clean nature (exemplified by the poet’s own construction of himself as a farmer Daoist and reclusive literatus) and the corrupted and “dusty” world of the court and society. Tao has been too long “held within the barred cage”, and rejoices when he can “return again to Nature”, the implicit opposition of the bureaucratic “cage”. Tao came to represent for later Chinese

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poets the quintessential model of the official who has escaped “the Dusty Net” for a life closer to spiritual liberation, and countless later poets (notably Wang Wei) echoed his lines when they wrote about the country life. For example, in the tranquil picture of Wang Wei’s poem “A Farm House on the Wei River” (Weichuan Tianjia), a buffalo boy and peasants have finished their work and are returning under the setting sun; the wheat grows well; the pheasants are singing, and silkworms are sleeping. The natural elements not only bring happiness to the peasants, but also express the poet’s longing and pursuit of detached pastoral life: “No wonder I long for the simple life”.

As the Chinese literati concept of reclusion (focused on the abandonment of a shamefully materialistic official career or opposition to the corruption of society) could only be achieved in a natural setting of self-contentment and self-perfection, the idyllic life of a Chinese hermit - whether in shanshui or in the pastoral countryside - was always romanticized, and was never depicted as worrying, dull or melancholy, and nature as neither threatening or dreary. In traditional Chinese culture, “reclusion” was both a recurring theme and an important part of the mental and emotional make-up of the literati. In fact, the recluse and those with reclusive ideas have been the greatest contributors to Chinese shanshui painting and literature. Almost all of the important painters and poets were either recluses or expressed reclusive ideas in their work.

**Conclusion**

In the Chinese cultural tradition, although both Confucians and Daoists advocated the harmony of man and nature, each proposed this idea from different perspectives and for different purposes. Confucian ideas of nature derived from a human-centred perspective, and projected human feelings in nature; while the Daoist attitude...
regarded nature as an independent entity full of vitality and spirit, and as superior to human society. *Shanshui* painting and poetry conveyed a strong sense of Daoist nature-centred existence because they were inspired, nurtured and framed much more by Daoism than by Confucianism. As a result, the dominant image of nature in the Chinese cultural tradition is that of an imagined "other" world of the mind, pure, clean, unsullied by human society and detached from human struggles. It protected the human body and consoled the human spirit as an ideal refuge. In this world, human beings are only a small part of the whole universe.
A number of different Australian cultural traditions existed in the colonial period. In this chapter I have chosen elements that are comparable to, and display similar or contrasting characteristics to, the Chinese traditions which I have discussed in my previous chapter. They also provide a contrast to the new Australian ideas of nature in the 1920s and 1930s which I will discuss in the following chapters.

The overall sequence of this chapter follows that of the previous chapter. I will first discuss the framework of dominant traditional European attitudes towards the relationship between human beings and nature, as well as European aesthetic ideas of the wilderness. As descendants of European forebears, in the colonial period Australians had concepts of nature which were inevitably influenced by both European conventions and Australian local conditions. Imported values were mixed with those already rooted in the Australian landscape. Early colonial Australians were eager to preserve their European cultural heritage, especially the colonial elite who regarded it with nostalgia. In this first section, I will elaborate on the dominant attitudes towards nature which had evolved in Europe, leaving the colonial evolution of these ideas for later discussion.

I will then discuss three themes in the early Australian representations of its landscape, themes which are framed by the European ideas of nature (especially that of the "wilderness"). The discussion of these three themes will go hand in hand with the discussion of the colonial evolution of European ideas of nature. Those ideas of nature (e.g. the idea of "otherness") were developed in the age of imperialism and were closely related to colonial contexts like Australia. They are embodied directly in the three themes. First, I will discuss the theme of constructing an "alien other" and an "imagined" landscape, which is a result of regarding European landscape as the norm. Then I will focus on the representation of the "sublime mountain" and the unity of Aboriginal people with nature, which is an embodiment of Eurocentric ideas of nature and race. Finally I will examine the theme of white man's construction of "progress", which itself includes two manifestations: civilizing the wilderness, and battling with nature. These three themes correspond to a certain extent with the
Chinese counterparts which I have discussed in the previous chapter. I will therefore be discussing them with occasional reference to Chinese ideas.

The Conception of “Nature” in the European Cultural Traditions

1) Dualism in the Relationship between Man and Nature

If Daoism shaped the normative tradition of Chinese shanshui painting and poetry, then correspondingly, ancient Greek culture and Christianity laid the foundation for mainstream Western traditional ideas of humankind and nature.

Many historians agree that the assumption of human superiority to nature and negative attitudes towards the wilderness were long established in the West, supposedly originating in the Christian tradition.1 In contrast to the Daoist concepts of “unity with nature”, “forgetting the self” and “non-action”, all of which aim to transcend pragmatic concerns and reduce human will-power and desires, in Christianity from the very beginning there was a clear and dominant tradition that man ruled over the beasts, and that nature was not sacred or divine. In Lynn White’s provocative and influential book *Machina ex deo: Essays in the Dynamism of Western Culture*, he claims that Western views of the natural world had been profoundly influenced by a Judaeo-Christian tradition, which envisages God as entrusting dominion over nature to humankind. White found the origins of this attitude in “Genesis I 26-29”: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth...Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth and subdue it.” This passage clearly gave humanity the right to exploit plants, animals and even “every living thing”. Compared with Daoism, the Christian tradition appears to be much more anthropocentric. Instead of identifying with nature, White claims that Christianity displayed obvious contempt, even arrogance toward nature, and deliberately set out to destroy pagan religious beliefs which had served to protect nature from human exploitation. “By destroying pagan animism”, White writes,

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“Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural subjects.” He concluded that, “despite Darwin, we are not, in our hearts, part of the natural process. We are superior to nature, contemptuous of it, willing to use it for our slightest whim”. This contrasts starkly with the Chinese tradition, in which the ancient nature religion was an important element.

Some scholars have doubted whether Christianity is homogeneously hostile to nature. For instance, John Passmore argues that in Christianity there were two other minority traditions of thought regarding the relationships between man and nature – stewardship and cooperation; and that the Christian arrogance towards nature, the concept of man as master and the separation of man from other living things, was not the original Hebrew teaching; it derived from the Greeks – not from traditional Greek religion, but from developments that occurred after the Greek Enlightenment. Greek science began by rejecting the view that nature was sacred. Many archaeological discoveries relating to pre-Bronze-Age southeastern Europe have revealed countless artifacts that demonstrate the pro-creative powers of both nature and humanity. These powers were honoured in an Earth-based holism. But from Socrates onwards this linkage of humanity and nature was largely displaced by a rigid dualism. Plato intensified the dualistic thought of the Pythagorean school by establishing a dualism of universal and particular, of noumenon and phenomenon, of mind and body, and of spirit and matter, that shaped the majority of subsequent philosophy and religion in the European tradition. This is in very sharp contrast with the Daoist (as well as the Confucian and Buddhist) emphasis on being “at one with nature”, and “at one with mind and body”. The dominant Greek sense of reason regarded the powers of minds set against the “corrupting” influences of the body, with its unruly sensations and emotions. The “untainted reason” was seen as a gift bestowed upon human beings, which led to human separation from the rest of the natural world and evinced man’s

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2 White, 1968, pp. 75-94.
3 Passmore, Man’s Responsibility for Nature: Ecological Problems and Western Traditions, 1980, pp. 32, 13. The “stewardship” tradition regards man as a “steward” of nature, a “farm-manager”; the “cooperation” tradition regards man as co-operating with nature in an attempt to perfect it.
clear superiority to it. The triumph of Greek rationalism, in short, depended upon an intensely oppositional premise.\textsuperscript{6} The human species thus became differentiated from everything else on the earth and acquired certain rights and powers over all other objects and beings. Of course alternative ideas advocating the metaphysical equality of all phenomena did occasionally arise. However, they seldom took root. As Simmons argues, dualism emerged in Classical times, entrenched in Western philosophy by René Descartes (1596-1650), and then became an inescapable element of the work of August Comte (1798-1857) which is at the heart of today’s scientific methodology.\textsuperscript{7}

In addition to Greek science, in ancient Greek mythology, there also existed a separation between man and nature. Chinese scholars Ma Qi and Liu Fang argue that Greek mythology deals almost exclusively with adventure, plunder and conquest. The spirit of the exploration, exploitation and conquest of nature, and of opening up new land, was fully nurtured by this culture. Christian culture, which absorbed many Greek ideas, went on to endow human beings with the right to conquer and enslave nature in the name of the God.\textsuperscript{8} Both Ma and Liu echo Passmore’s view that the concept of the human conquest of nature in Christianity originated not from Hebrew teaching, but from Graeco-Christian doctrine.\textsuperscript{9} These Chinese scholars may have neglected the two minority traditions of stewardship and cooperation in Christianity. But their understanding of the dominant relationship between man and nature in ancient Greek culture and Christianity is broadly similar to that of Western scholars. They note the ideas of separation of mankind from nature, of the enslavement of nature by human beings, and of the human desire to conquer nature.

Ancient Greek philosophy and Christianity laid the foundation for traditional Western ideas of humankind and nature; however, many Western scholars agree that it was in

\textsuperscript{6} Spretnak, 1997, p. 47.
\textsuperscript{7} Simmons, 1993, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{9} In the Old Testament, men and animals have a common principle of life. God is represented as caring for animals just as he does for man. But in the Stoic teaching, the Universe exists only for the sake of its rational members (Passmore, 1980, p. 111).
the process of modernity, in the specific context of European expansion and global imperialism from the 15th century onwards, that the conception of man conquering nature was emphasized to its full extent. Arnold argues convincingly that in Western thought, the ideas of separation, opposition and struggle between humankind and nature are deep-rooted, but there were two opposing views of this relationship – the ascendancy of nature over humankind, which prevailed in ancient times, and the ascendancy of humankind over nature, which prevailed in modern times. In pre-modern times, especially before the catastrophe of the Black Death (1346-1351), despite the influence of Greek and Christian culture, human subordination to, and dependence upon, nature was emphasized, as were the limits which the environment set to the human activities. Influenced by this view, the human being was seen by Europeans as a prisoner of climate with little room for human agency in the continuous fight against hunger and disease. In the pre-industrial age European societies were particularly vulnerable to epidemics and pandemics such as the Black Death, and these were considered to be the effects of the forces of nature. The Black Death had a far-reaching influence on Western attitudes toward nature. It was a major environmental challenge to European civilization, and the capacity to survive it and to turn the experience to constructive use was regarded as one of the most formative episodes in the rise of modern Europe. The Black Death was a profound shock but one which, significantly, Europe was able to absorb and survive. Consequently the survival of any terrible occurrence in the natural environment became the sign of human civilization and victory. The triumph over the Black Death helped cement, in a very real and actual way, the idea of human mastery of nature.

As Arnold argues, the period between the Black Death in the 1340s and Columbus’ crossing of the Atlantic in 1492 signaled the start of a new age which lasted through to the high imperialism of the late 19th and early 20th century. During this period the

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10 See Arnold, 1996.
13 Roberts S. Gottfried argues that the Black Death was a disaster which changed Europe profoundly and ranks it as the greatest environmental event in history, and “one of the major turning points of Western civilization” (See Gottfried, The Black Death: Natural and Human Disaster in Medieval Europe, 1983, p. 163).
Western attitude to nature changed: the sense arose that the forces of nature had finally been captured and tamed by human beings, who now acted as guardians. This shift also represents the transition from what has been seen as Europe’s deep environmental crisis in the 14th and 15th centuries to what appeared to be the technological and ideological mastery of nature in modern times. Spretnak’s argument supports Arnold’s idea. She claims that the mechanistic worldview came into ascendancy in the 16th and 17th centuries with the advances in physics, astronomy and botany, and with the rise of rural capitalism and a new sense of pride and proprietorship over an “improved” and well-managed landscape. Then the rationalism and scientism of the 17th and 18th centuries, together with a series of intellectual movements (e.g. the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution), gave rise to a distinct “anthropocentrism”, the radical and destructive separation between human and nature. Nature was perceived as a captive of modern science and technology, being predictable within inertial frames of reference that could be determined by mathematical calculation. With Descartes’ claim that the new rationalistic methodology would bring human mastery of nature and a “new age of human well-being”, European people believed that they had achieved a greater understanding of the natural world and that they could use and control the forces of nature. It is in this period that other traditions of thought, such as those in Christianity which stress human stewardship and cooperation rather than mastery of nature, became lost, overwhelmed by economic, scientific and technological pursuits and by the rapacious spirit of profit-seeking capitalism. It is also in this period that the Europeans carried with them across the globe well-established environmental ideas and prejudices that helped transform the alien landscapes of their colonies.

Spretnak’s argument may seem too absolute. Western culture is not monolithic. In this

14 Arnold, 1996, pp. 5-8.
15 Spretnak, 1997, pp. 21-54. In this regard, Chinese scholars have reached the same conclusions as their Western counterparts. For example, the Chinese scholar Zhou Wei argues that the rise of the Industrial Revolution and the prevalence of modernist ideas such as scientism and anthropocentrism separated humans from nature. Regarding themselves as the master, human beings have destroyed and exploited nature unscrupulously. (See Zhou Wei, The Realm of Nature and Sketching the Landscape (Zirande Yijing Yu Fengjing Xiesheng 自然的意境與風景寫生), 2005, p. 4.
period not every other tradition of thought became lost. For example, the Western mystical tradition, especially the Romanticism of the 18th and 19th centuries which venerated nature as sacred, competed with the dominant Western tradition, and that attitude of veneration has lasted into the 20th century. However, her view that it is in this period that “anthropocentrism” was strengthened is unquestionably correct. In the dominant Western tradition, the conception of a fundamental dualism and opposition between human beings and nature did not change. This dualism was present in the idea of man as the conqueror of nature in ancient Greek philosophy and Christianity; in the tendency to see the firm hold nature exercised over human lives before the 15th century; in the belief of the human control of nature in modern times. This is most obviously embodied in traditionally negative attitudes towards the wilderness that prevailed in Europe. The Australian landscape was seen by many European colonists as a land of wilderness. What was this conception of “wilderness”?

2) The Aesthetic Framework of the “Wilderness”

The Christian attitude towards the wilderness contrasts strongly with the appreciation of naturalness in Daoism. Frederick W. Turner in his highly regarded study *Beyond Geography: the Western Spirit against the Wilderness* (1983) points out that the cultural and spiritual dynamic behind Western attitudes to the wilderness can be traced back to the early history of the Middle East. An antipathy developed between civilization and the desert, an opposition between cities and the hostile wilderness of nature. It was there, Turner argues, that human beings began to enact the dream of mastering the natural world, a dream that later became incorporated into the Old Testament and hence into Christian tradition. The desert wilderness was regarded as a terrible place, and it was believed to be the task of man to conquer it. With the European expansion, such ideas, codified and embedded in Scripture, extended to many parts of the world, such as Africa, America, Australia and New Zealand. This scriptural justification of conquest helped shape the destructive impulses of the early colonists and informed their deep antipathy to the forest or bush wilderness they encountered.
In addition to the Christian tradition, Roderick Nash points out that negative attitudes towards nature and the wilderness were deeply rooted in the West from the time of the Greeks, mainly as a result of the experience of living in the dark and endless forests of northern Europe. The fear and repulsion caused by these forests, and their associations with evil, lawlessness, strange events and menacing inhabitants, created an enduring reaction against the wilderness. Nash argues that the very term “wilderness” was an invocation of bewilderment: it symbolized “the unknown, the disordered, the uncontrolled” in nature, and “a large portion of the energies of early civilizations was directed at defeating the wilderness in nature and controlling it in human nature”.¹⁷

Nash’s thesis is only partially valid. In European cultures the forest has complex implications, and is not always threatening. However, his argument can be considered useful in that the early European colonists’ attitude to Australian wild bush did favour a pastoral idyll, a cultivated and orderly landscape rather than the wilderness. In Europe, what was known as “nature” had already been largely modified by man and transformed into a tamed landscape. W. G. Hoskins in *The Making of the English Landscape* (1985) studies the historical evolution of the British landscape as a “man-made” rather than purely natural “creation”. He argues that the tendency of European civilization is to give human beings more and more complete control of the natural environment. Similarly, in the 17th century John Locke (1632-1704) argued that uncultivated nature is not only alien to humans, who have both the right and responsibility to cultivate it, but also not valuable and not worthy of protection until it is cultivated. According to him, the wilderness was a wasteland until human labour cleared, tilled, and sowed the land to render it just like the fertile, cultivated land in England: “land that is left wholly to nature, that hath no improvement of pasturage, tillage, or planting, is called, as indeed it is, waste; and we shall find the benefit of it

amount to little more than nothing.”18 Locke believed, as did so many other Europeans, that as man civilizes nature, he at the same time liberates it and frees it from its “negativity”, its hostility to spirit. Undoubtedly, this view reduced the potentialities of nature to nothing more than raw materials and reduced the status of nature to that of a prisoner waiting to be liberated by culture.

For the Europeans, civilization has achieved that liberation and transformation of nature most noticeably in parks, gardens and reservations.19 This appreciation of tamed nature has a long history, which can be traced back to the Graeco-Roman tradition in which the joys of natural scenery referred to those of “the olive grove, the cultivated field, the orchard, [and] the carefully disposed villa or temple”. The wild forests or mountains were seen as crude, inhuman, unperfected, or dangerous, frightening, and threatening, “not worth the attention of a cultivated man”.20 Christianity reinforced this idea by encouraging man to attempt to perfect and transform the wilderness into farm and pasture.21 “Perfecting nature” is understood as imposing form on it, as designing to control and suppress the waywardness of nature. This emphasis on man’s responsibility to make nature more beautiful, useful and fruitful by his efforts took deep root in Western civilization, and was clearly expressed by the English essayist Joseph Addison (1672-1719) in 1712: “Our British gardeners...instead of humouring Nature, love to deviate from it as much as possible. Our trees rise in Cones, Globes and Pyramids. We see the Marks of the scissors upon every Plant and Bush”.22 In this process of “perfecting” and humanizing nature, the idea of man mastering nature was pre-eminent. And through this process of civilizing the wilderness and transforming nature into something more agreeable and more intelligible, Europeans felt they could enter this domesticated world and understand what they had helped to create. They always felt in some measure alienated from or external to untamed wilderness.

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19 See Herbert Marcuse’s argument in Passmore, 1980, p. 35.
This is far indeed from the Chinese cultural tradition. As I have discussed in Chapter 2, the Chinese cultural tradition seldom thought of perfecting or completing nature because nature was already perfect and complete. It was full of life. It was the embodiment of universal truth. In contrast to Chinese literati veneration of natural beauty, in Western aesthetics natural beauty did not enjoy such a high position. This was an inevitable consequence of the general view that nature was of value only when perfected by man. Western intellectuals, from Hegel (1770-1831) to Oscar Wilde (1854-1900), considered natural beauty inferior to the beauty of art and civilization. Wilde claimed (perhaps humorously) that “the more we study art, the less we care for nature. What art really reveals to us is Nature’s lack of design, her curious crudities, her extraordinary monotony, her absolute unfinished conditions. Nature had good intentions, of course, but, as Aristotle once said, she cannot carry them out”.  

In summary, compared with the ideas of the “unity of man and nature” in Chinese Daoism (and Confucianism), the conception of “nature” in the European traditions is much more anthropocentric. The emphasis is on human separation from, and superiority to, nature. In sharp contrast to the Daoist idea of modeling oneself on uncivilized nature and the ancient Chinese appreciation of mountains and forests, Europe, from the time of the Greeks onwards, favoured a pastoral idyll, a pleasant, cultivated and orderly landscape, rather than the “wilderness”. In the following sections I will discuss three major themes found in representation of Australian landscape (which correspond to their Chinese counterparts). These themes are found in Australian literary and artistic works of the colonial period. They are influenced by traditional European ideas, especially the first and third themes.

Three Themes of “Wild” Nature

1) The “Alien Other” and the “Imagined” Landscape

Just as in traditional Chinese culture nature was represented as the “other” of human

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society, so in the Australian culture of the colonial period, Australian nature was constructed as the “other” of human civilization. But the meanings embodied were profoundly different or even opposite. In traditional Chinese culture, *shanshui* was regarded as an idealized “other” world of the mind, superior to the human world; in Western thought, a prevalent attitude regarded nature as the inferior “other” of culture. As John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) declared, “all praise of civilization, or art, or contrivance, is so much dispraise of nature”.\(^2\) Australian nature, besides being considered as the “other” of culture, was also seen as the “other” of the European landscape. This attitude was influenced both by the original European ideas of nature discussed earlier, and by those ideas as they developed in colonial contexts and were transplanted into new countries. Australia is a country born out of European expansion and colonization, and the representation of Australian landscape cannot be understood without due weight being accorded to this influence.

During the process of European expansion, many new theories and ideas supporting European colonial activity appeared. These ideas were interwoven with and reinforced by each other. Although sometimes they were contradictory, the basic assumption never changed. Europe was always regarded as the heart of the world. This “Eurocentric” perspective fostered Western responses to nature when Europeans contacted the rest of the world. The domination of European economic, political and environmental attitudes was matched by the growth of Western ideas about different environments and the people who inhabited them. It is during this period that human beings’ negative attitude towards wilderness experienced its full development.

One of such ideas about different environments and their peoples is the concept of the “other”. The principle of “otherness” was used to explain the relationship between Europe (or the West) and other parts of the world. Just as “European merchants and financiers were struggling to bring all the world’s lucrative trades within their grasp”, so European intellectuals were “struggling to bring their fragmentary knowledge of

the outside world into a coherent system of order and control”. 25 Many early colonists characterized the Australian landscape in terms of certain stereotypical features, defining it in ways which expressed both differences from the West and inferiority to it. Interpretations of otherness tended to focus on representations of non-Western people and their cultures, such as the Aborigines, rather than the otherness of non-European environments. However, alien landscapes were often imbued with as much importance as the peoples or cultures which inhabited them. For example, Rolf Boldrewood (1826-1915) wrote in “A Kangaroo Drive”: 

“Many a time in years past have I spared the poor furry brutes...for surely I trusted that all forest things would disappear before civilization. All history is our warrant for wild beasties, ay, and all aboriginal craters, fading away before the great Anglo-Saxon”.

Here, the importance of the environment is perceived, as a site of difference (or “otherness”) – represented by the “poor furry brutes”, the “forest things”, the “wild beasties”, and the “aboriginal craters”.

In this schema of thought, nature was used to establish a contrast between different societies as well as to explain the cultural idiosyncrasy of any one society such as Australia. The European idea of the wilderness was particular relevant here because to most Europeans, Australia was untamed and almost all “wilderness”. “Wilderness” was used to classify these places and their people as inferior and the “other” of civilization. This was a very clear convention in colonial Australian culture which contrasts with the Chinese notion of “unspoiled” nature. Unlike the Chinese shanshui painters and poets, who appreciated the “naturalness” of all things and seldom felt alienated in the wilderness, to many early Australian painters and writers, no natural shape or wilderness could be perfect. A prevalent attitude among them regarded the Australian “wilderness” negatively and found little beauty in it. Although “alien” nature with similar characteristics of “tropicality” and a luxuriance of flora and fauna excited interest and a taste for the exotic, as a whole the landscape to these artists and

authors was monotonous and melancholy.\textsuperscript{27} It was a flat and wild country which depressed painters and writers used to regarding the European landscape as normative.

This is reflected in the works of early writers such as Barron Field (1786-1846), who in his poem described the Australian landscape as one in which “nature is prosaic, unpicturesque, unmusical”.\textsuperscript{28} Robert Lowe (1811-1892) in “The Songs of the Squatters” described Australian natural features in these terms: “The gum has no shade, the wattle no fruit / ... The plains are all dusty, the creeks are all dried”.\textsuperscript{29} Richard Rowe (1828-79) also viewed the Australian landscape from a perspective of alienation. To him the bush was “a dreary Hades” and the gum-trees were monotonous – though once, in “A trip up the Hunter” he admitted that “there is some good even in gum-trees”.\textsuperscript{30} The colonial experience was often one of a sense of loss. In “Australian Scenery”, Marcus Clarke (1846-1881) defined the quality of the Australian landscape as one of “weird melancholy”: “What is the dominant note of Australian Scenery? That which is the dominant note of Edgar Allan Poe’s poetry – Weird Melancholy”.\textsuperscript{31} He described the gum trees as “odd”, “grotesque” and “distorted”.\textsuperscript{32} Adam Lindsay Gordon (1833-1870) was the first Australian local poet to gain a wide readership. In his most “Australian” poem, “A Dedication”, in \textit{Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes}, he expressed his disappointment with Australian nature in the famous lines:

\begin{quote}
It was true that when some of the first white explorers arrived in Australia, they invoked images of “Eden”, the perception of paradise, and a taste for the exotic and scientific enquiry. This was similar to the attraction of the tropical islands for the Europeans. As Grove argues, for many Europeans from the 15\textsuperscript{\textnormal{th}} century onwards, the tropics continued to be an attractive expression of exotic “otherness”. They were an escape from a bleak, oppressive, excessively humanized environment, and suggested a world where people lived in harmony with nature. (Grove, \textit{Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600-1860}, 1995) Nevertheless, it would be wrong either to imagine that there existed a single, “Edenic” image of the tropics or to imagine that this kind of image prevailed. On the contrary, a sense of danger and alienation was more dominant.

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\textsuperscript{29} Lowe, “Songs of the Squatters”. See the poem in the website of “Australian Bush Ballad’s”: \url{http://www.oecities.com/vorhigeu/poem.htm}.

\textsuperscript{30} Rowe, “A Trip up the Hunter”, in Peter ‘Possum’s Portfolio, first published in 1858, reproduced by the University of Sydney Library, 2000, pp. 85-100 (the digital text: pp.88-103).

\textsuperscript{31} Clarke, “Australian Scenery”, in \textit{Australian Tales}, 1896, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., p. 2.
In lands where bright blossoms are scentless,  
And songless bright birds.\textsuperscript{33}

In echo of Marcus Clarke’s opinion of the gum tree, he describes it as:  

gnarl’d knotted trunks Eucalyptian  
...  
And hieroglyph strange.\textsuperscript{34}

Admittedly in the same poem he also displays a brief positive attitude towards  
Australian nature as:  

In the Spring, when the wattle gold trembles  
'Twixt shadow and shine.\textsuperscript{35}

But as a whole his Australian landscape is impressively alien:  

Where, with fire and fierce drought on her tresses,  
Insatiable Summer oppresses  
Sere woodlands and sad wildernesses,  
And faint flocks and herds\textsuperscript{36}

Some writers, influenced by the fact that sometimes only Britain provided the  
publishers and reading public for Australian writers, added a sense of novelty in their  
descriptions of the landscape that would appeal to English readers who were  
interested in “the colonies” and curious about the differences between this new land  
and the mother country.\textsuperscript{37} However, more often we can see the writers’ negative  
perceptions of the natural features of Australia in their struggle between the old and  
the new worlds, sometimes summed up in a rejection of native plants and animals,  
which seemed to be “as repulsive as they were strange”.\textsuperscript{38} Anything unexpected or  
outside the traditional European “imagined” landscape was considered ugly. As a  
result, Australian gum-tree foliage presented to the eye of the European the  
appearance of being actually “dead” for half the year, growing “in the dry and sterile  
sandstone from which it springs”.\textsuperscript{39} Sir William À Beckett (1806-1869), who had  
lived more than 20 years in Australia, wrote in a poem about Christmas in Australia:  

December, yet not winter – but sunniest of skies,  
A Christmas-day in summer! how strange to English  
eyes.\textsuperscript{40}

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., p. 106.  
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., p. 106.  
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., p. 105.  
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., p. 1.  
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., pp. 1-2.  
\textsuperscript{40} Beckett, “Christmas in Australia”, in \textit{The Earl’s Choice, and Other Poems}, 1863, p. 182.
These descriptions mirror the tendency to regard European, especially British, landscape as the norm, and to see Australian landscape as strange or without a sense of beauty.

In these descriptions, Australian nature, especially the "wild" bush, acquired the quality of an alienating "otherness", against which white man struggled to forge his self-identity. Undoubtedly Australian nature (especially the bush) has its own rhythm, its own aesthetics and laws. The seasons are different from those of settled, temperate northern hemisphere countries: the rainfall is different, even the dominant plant and tree species are different. For the past two centuries Australian writers and painters have always struggled to understand and describe their landscape. In their struggles, many writers have been unable to escape their Eurocentric perspective and frame of reference, in which European aesthetics was the norm. Nicolas Rothwell argues that Western art and writing have a "DNA", with deep-rooted attitudes to colour (for example, the association of the beautiful landscape with green, not Australian grey), to nature and landscape. Their descriptions reflected European ideals of country; and that code, that embedded aesthetic, shaped much in the work of Australian authors.41

This is expressed in Mrs Campbell Praed's (1851-1935) works in which although she and her principle characters possess strong local ties, England still remains the centre of attachment. Mrs Campbell Praed concentrates upon those elements in Australian life and those types of scenery that she regards as most characteristic. But she depicts them as contrasting with an English life and English scenery. For example, in *Fugitive Anne: A Romance of the Unexplored Bush*, when describing a journey through the Queensland bush, she writes:

They went silently through a stretch of gum tree, wild and utterly dreary. The great uncouth trees rose above them, stretching overhead a latticework of stems, vertical rather than horizontal, and giving little shade. The limbs of the ironbarks were rough and knotted, with perhaps a stalactite of gum, red as blood, dropping here and there from some wound or abrasion on their surface, and were hung with long withes of green-grey moss that gave them a strange look of hoary antiquity...all was dull green-grey, arid and shadeless, from the thin leaves of the gum-trees to the tussocks of coarse grass and prickly spinifex...The bush sounds only seemed to intensify the

loneliness. It was getting towards mid-day, and most of the birds were silent. Those that were awake had discordant notes, and were mostly of the parrot kind, they chattered shrilly, their harsh cries rising above the tiny whiz of myriads of new-fledged locusts."

I have put certain words in bold letters for emphasis. The Australian landscape was certainly not "wild", "uncouth", "strange", "shadeless" or a site of "loneliness" to its indigenous inhabitants, the Aborigines. The American Indian Luther Standing Bear articulated it in this way: "Only to the white man was nature a 'wilderness' and only to him was the land 'infested' with 'wild' animals and 'savage' people. To us it was tame. Earth was bountiful and we were surrounded with the blessings of the Great Mystery". But to those observers who accepted English landscape as the norm, and who saw it as too far removed from modern Western consciousness, and especially to those subscribing to European (particularly English) ideas of nature and wilderness, the Australian landscape was clearly not attractive. Arnold's argument is applicable to the Australian situation. Old fears and ancient insecurities especially the Christian attitude toward wilderness were revived in the face of such a vast, forbidding wilderness, which resulted in a fear of losing hold of civilization entirely, of becoming wild, unruly, and ungodly. This symbolic association of the wilderness with "otherness" is endemic to Western capitalist culture, but it takes on an Australian specificity. On entering Australia, the European settlers needed to construct a myth of the land as wilderness in order to convince themselves that the Aborigines were either not there or of no great account. In the Australian tradition, quite apart from nature, this "other" status was also given to those objects and people which were in a despised position in relation to the white man, such as the Aborigines, immigrants and women.

Compared with Mrs Campbell Praed, Mary Theresa Vidal's (1815-1873) works suggest that her "English eye" was gradually becoming accustomed to the Australian

scenery. But she still saw the English countryside as the way things were supposed to be, and thus superior:

Had it been more cleared, and the unvarying outline of gum-trees a little broken, it might have been pronounced a pretty spot. Here and there was a single graceful shrub, many a delicate blossom, and that peculiar depth of blue sky which inspires the eye with a sense of space. It would have been a pleasant scene, but for the brown and sun-dried grass, and that dull bluish hue, a peculiar feature in Australian foliage, which lessens the beauty to English eyes.\(^\text{46}\)

Again, the words in bold letters are my emphasis. Here the Australian landscape is represented as the “other” of England. In the traditional construction, Australian nature was often reduced to a rather singular vision as uniformly bush or desert, which was different from British nature and which strengthened the implication of its “otherness”. In Britain nature had been tamed. Mary Theresa Vidal wants the Australian scenery to be “more cleared”, if she is to pronounce it “pretty”. This is a colonial way of understanding nature. Although she admits to certain attractive features – “a single graceful shrub, many a delicate blossom, and that peculiar depth of blue sky which inspires the eye with a sense of space” – she still finds the peculiar colour of Australian “brown and sun-dried” grass and foliage “dull” and that it “lessens the beauty to English eyes”. To these Europeans, nature in Australia could not match the subtle beauty of England. They missed the changing hues of autumn and the tender green of spring – crab-apples in bloom, horse chestnuts and lilacs. They found the Australian bush and the central desert dull and uniform, without any of the characteristics of the pastoral and the picturesque (in the European sense) which molded European standards of natural beauty. To them it was only possible to “adore” nature in a country where it had been “nearly or quite enslaved by man”.\(^\text{47}\)

The above examples show the negative attitude towards the Australian landscape of

\(^{46}\) Vidal, *Bengala: or Some Time Ago*, published in 1860, digitalized by the University of Sydney Library, 2000 (http://setis.library.usyd.edu.au/ozlit/pdf/p00077.pdf), p.35 (electronic book page). It is interesting and significant that in some works by Australian women writers, such as those of Mrs Charles Meredith and Ada Cambridge, we find emerging a different attitude towards Australian landscape. Mrs Charles Meredith showed strong sympathy for the flora and fauna and found beauty in them. Ada Cambridge, who remains today among the most critically acclaimed Australian women poets, always loved the Australian landscape. In one of her finest poems, “On Australian Hills”, she was the first poet to express the longing, not of the English emigrant for “the old country”, but of the Australian in England for the new country. Nevertheless, to speak metaphorically, these voices are too low and subdued to change the keynote of the whole melody.

many early Australians, and their strongly Eurocentric perspective. Davis J. Tacey makes a strong case in his argument that certainly the Australian landscape could never have given birth to an English Romanticism. It did not foster “green thoughts in a green shade”. Instead, it inspired an otherworldly, desert-mysticism of rocks and bones. Deserts were symbols of destruction to the over-civilized, British consciousness that first arrived here. The creation of a consciousness that connects a people and the spirit of the land takes time and effort; it is a work of culture. During the colonial period, many writers could simply not accept this “alien” landscape. They either viewed it as an ugly “other”, or “imagined” it into more acceptable European forms.

Through imagining the landscape of the “new” world into “old” European terms, certain writers converted the wilderness into a tamed landscape on paper. This is implied in Adam Lindsay Gordon’s poem “Doubtful Dreams”:

Aye, snows are rife in December
And sheaves are in August yet,
And would you have me remember,
And I would rather Forget:
In the bloom of the May-day weather,
In the blight of October chill,
We were dreamers of old together,
As of old are you dreaming still?

All the references to the seasons and nature in this poem are to those of a European landscape.

I have changed the soil and the season,
But whether skies freeze or flame,
The soil they flame on or freeze on
Is changed in little save name;
The loadstone points to the nor’ward,
The river runs to the sea;
And you would have me look forward,
And backward I fain would flee.

In this poem the author combines a description of a realistic Australian landscape (the local landscape of the poet’s home) with an imaginary landscape (the English

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48 In Australian painting Romanticism is to be found, but it was realized through representing Australian landscape in English terms. This will be discussed later.
49 Tacey, Patrick White: Fiction and the Unconscious, 1988, pp. xvi-xvii.
landscape of his heritage), and the focus of his thought and feelings is England. Just as the ancient Chinese poets were preoccupied with the imagined *shanshui*, in this poem there is also a nostalgic longing for and preoccupation with the “old world” of the European, especially the British, landscape. In this sense what the author describes is also an “imagined” land, and he failed to capture the genuine and characteristic features of Australian nature. Jeanette Hoorn argues that Gordon’s use of vocabulary is Anglo-Australian. He speaks of glens, forests and springs as often as he speaks of bush, gullies or creeks. Nicolas Rothwell also points to the rich, dominant, European-derived vocabulary to be found in some colonial writings.

Similar representations can be found in the poems of Henry Kendall (1839-1882). For example, in “Sydney Exhibition Cantata” he wrote: “Shining nations! Let them see / How like England we can be”. Kendall is often considered to be the first poet to whom the beauty of Australian landscape was unveiled. However, from this poem we can see that he still found it necessary to invoke England as a frame of reference. The Australian landscape is no longer “ugly” or “wild”, but its beauty lies in “how like England” it can be. Influenced by the Romantic poets Wordsworth and Shelley, he found in natural scenery moods of the human spirit, using woods and mountains, streams and birds and trees as symbols of the emotions that he wished to express. This is a similar process to the Chinese literati’s projection of personal feelings into natural objects. But from his descriptions it is often difficult to know which country the natural images are from:

> And while sweet Autumn with her gypsy face  
> Stands in the gardens splashed from heels to thigh  
> With spinning vine-bloods...

These lines are steeped in European seasonal imagery. The natural beauty that sparkled through his verse was not that of the wide hot spaces which were generally considered to be the most characteristic of Australian nature; it was rather that of the narrow strip along the eastern coast of New South Wales which he felt most

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resembled England. Kendall’s landscapes are, in fact, “undifferentiated and without life or inhabitants. Moreover, the landscapes themselves are covered in a vague veil of generalization under which nothing is really recognizable, nothing different from anything else”.

This “imagined” landscape sometimes finds its expression in embedding cultural associations in Australian nature, as in the best-known poem of Charles Harpur (1813-1868), “The Creek of the Four Graves”:

I verse a Settler’s tale of olden times
One told me by our sage friend, Egremont;
Who then went forth, meetly equipi, with four
Of his most trusy and adventurous men
Into the wilderness...

... So went they forth at dawn: and now the sun
That rose behind them as they journeyed out,
Was firing with his nether rim a range
Of unknown mountains that, like ramparts, towered
Full in their front, and his last glances fell
Into the gloomy forest’s eastern glades
In golden masses, transiently, or flashed
Down on the windings of a nameless Creek,
That noiseless ran betwixt the pioneers
And those new Apennines...

Here the adventure is based on a premise of strangeness, and everything is alien to the European consciousness. In some poems Harpur exhibits his love for nature, but in this poem he still could not interpret the Australian countryside in its own terms. Instead, he tried to impose European associations – using similes such as “new Apennines” – on the “wild” and “unknown” mountains. As Adrian Mitchell argues, “the term indicates his desire to recognize something familiar in the unfamiliar, to identify the unknown in terms of the known”. In another poem “A Coast View”, in order to evoke the wild, eroded coastline, when describing the cliff formations he used such similes as “Assyrian” arches and “Babylonian” buttresses. Green attributes this to the author’s lack of identification with the local landscape which presented itself in colours and forms that were entirely without literary associations or

60 Harpur, 1973, p. 35.
Elizabeth Perkins argues that "this is an inventive use of the Gothic tradition... The weird and rugged Australian coast is thus tamed and assimilated by an acceptable aesthetic convention". Both arguments are convincing. The wild stretches of "uninhabited" Australia and its youthful settlements were regarded as lacking the brilliant architecture and physical evidence of civilization of older European countries. As inhabitants of a newly established country with a short "white" history, Australians have always possessed a cultural insecurity and a sense of "cultural cringe", a feeling that Australian culture is inferior to others. However, as civilized people "superior" to the Aborigines, colonial Australians expected others to regard them as cultured people, just as other Europeans were. Therefore, it was necessary to elevate culture above nature.

This nature-culture relationship is reminiscent of the tradition of associationist aesthetics which was popular in 19th-century Europe, and may have influenced some of the early Australian painters and writers' attitude towards this land. This theory located the aesthetic value of an object in the series of associated ideas it evoked. As Australia was a new country which from the perspective of the white settlers lacked the romance of an historic past, and which, unlike Europe, was considered to be devoid of literary associations, consequently the Australian landscape was frequently described as "wild", "unknown", "barren", "vacant", "dull", and "destitute of taste", in comparison with the European landscape in which every place and object possesses a real or romantic legend. As Louis Esson declares: "It [Australia] had no culture—there were no castles or abbeys, no folk-songs—there was no Bloomsbury or Montmartre or Latin Quarter of Paris, with exciting bohemian life..." Even when beauty was admitted, it was considered to be purely visual, "without any

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61 See Green, 1984 - 1985, pp. 111-112.
64 To the peoples of other countries, "barrenness" had long seemed to be a metaphor for Australian culture. Australia lacked "style and taste"; it was a "far-off land...rather vague and empty". (See Walker, Dream and Disillusion: A Search for Australian Cultural Identity, 1976, pp. 11-30.) As a white world distanced from its origins, Australia was "in need of salvation from without—from Europe". (Peter Botsman, quoted in Schaffer, 1988, p. 191.)
intellectual associations”. This sense of vacancy in the perception of Australian landscape preoccupied those Australian painters and writers whose underlying assumption was that nature was not appreciable until it had been “humanized” or “consecrated” by human civilization. Even then, tamed nature was often appreciated exclusively as a means to celebrate human historical, cultural, or literary events and accomplishments.

This is very much in contrast to traditional Chinese Daoist ideas of appreciating nature for its own sake. It is true that in Chinese culture there is also a tradition of investing shanshui with cultural associations, such as the temples and pavilions built in mountains; and Chinese literati did commemorate their landscapes for their historical and legendary associations. However, the primary reason for the deep love felt by the Chinese literati for their shanshui was not to be found in historical, literary or artistic associations, but in the landscape’s “unspoiled” naturalness. In many poems and paintings, nature was appreciated just for its separation from human culture (as discussed in Chapter 2).

Now I have discussed the “imagined” landscape in Australian colonial literature. But in fact this tradition of depicting Australia in English terms is most obviously represented in certain paintings of the colonial era. It is true that to some extent, all landscape paintings have an element of imagination. Almost all painters paint the landscape by selecting and combining different elements. However, some Australian colonial painters, just like traditional Chinese artists, did this more obviously and deliberately than did most European artists, wishing to achieve certain effects or create certain atmospheres. As many colonial painters saw no beauty in Australian trees, flowers, birds and beasts, they were often unwilling to accurately reproduce what they saw. Instead, they “improved” on what they saw, just as William Gilpin

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(1724-1804) asserts: “We must ever recollect that nature is more defective in composition; and must be a little assisted”. In this sense painters echoed those writers in representing “imagined” landscapes. They selected those features of the Australian landscape that recalled Europe – especially the pastoral and idyllic landscape that was so reminiscent of England, and incorporated them into their paintings to express a nostalgia for a “dreamed-of Arcadia, a powerful sentiment transferred to Australia”.

This is clearly evident in the works of John Glover (1767-1849). A number of his colonial landscapes followed European “picturesque” and “sublime” formulae. He adapted the techniques and methods of composition he had used in painting the Lake District of England to depict the eucalypt scrub of Australia. For example, in his *Mount Wellington with the Orphan Asylum, Van Diemen’s Land* (1837) (Fig.37) and *Mount Wellington and Hobart Town from Kangaroo Point* (c.1833) (Fig.38), the “sublime” vision is exemplified by the majestic mountain scenery. Instead of the light foliage of the Australian eucalyptus, the foliage looks denser, and the trees appear greener. Many of Glover’s landscapes are idealized in this way. In Glover’s paintings it is easy to see the influence of Romanticism. The romantic aesthetic of nature prized the picturesque mode and sublime beauty. It strengthened the European concept of beauty. In this aesthetic, pictorial elements were assembled with a spacious foreground, rocky cliffs, open grassy glades and the hint of sublime nature in the distant hills. As one of the pioneers of Australian landscape painting, John Glover in his paintings revealed the picturesque mode and pastoral beauty of English Romanticism, as shown in his *Natives at a Corrobory, under the Wild Woods of the Country* (c.1835) (Fig.39). Although like the early romantic poets he felt deeply about nature, and although some of his paintings were regarded as having lucid Australian characteristics, he still painted with English eyes. To some extent, the Australian

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71 This aesthetic influenced Australian painting in the mid 19th century.
72 Sublime beauty stresses high mountains and rocky cliffs, and is typically represented in Eugene von Guerard’s paintings. It will be discussed in the next section “Sublimity: Minor Man in Grand Nature”.

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landscape in his canvases was a kind of “imagined” landscape which was idealized to better fit with the norm of the British countryside.

Australian artists who painted this kind of “imagined” or “idealized” landscape were criticized in 1883 by a native-born Australian because they “saw Australian scenery with English eyes”, as if through an “atmospheric veil”. The art historian Ron Radford pursues a somewhat different line of argument. In his view, certainly, Glover and von Guerard didn’t paint the midday Australian sun in an impressionist or orientalist idiom like their successors, the Heidelberg school (to be discussed later). These early painters preferred European-style pastoral views, sunsets, or dramatic vistas with mountains and seaside cliffs that suggested divinely ordained ownership of the land. They were, after all, the products of German romanticism (favored by von Guerard) and the English pastoral tradition (an influence on Glover). Yet sunsets, mountains and coastal cliffs do all exist in Australia, and these artists studied them closely. However, Bernard Smith presents an even more convincing argument. In order to avoid the brightness of the Australian light, and the environment’s “anti-picturesque” physicality – the “bold rising hills” or “azure distance” and the “extensive woods spread over a little varied plain” – these painters selected and combined elements such as trees, groves, animals, serpentine curves, and dark foregrounds, to avoid the “sameness”, the “monotonously” light tone of the Australian landscape, and thus rendered it picturesque and sublime in the English mode.

In the Australian tradition, meanings which can be attached to the land are potentially without limit. When discussing this kind of “imagined” landscape, it is undeniable that there are other traditions in the colonial period, such as the Heidelberg painters’ realistic representation of Australian landscape which occurred during the rise of democratic culture and national federation. The years following 1885 distinguished

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the new era of the Heidelberg period from the preceding colonial period, and distinguished the nationalist “sunny optimism” of the Heidelberg painters from the earlier colonial spirit identified with Marcus Clarke’s “weird [and] melancholy” observations of Australian nature. The paintings of the Heidelberg School were celebrated for what was acclaimed as distinctively Australian imagery. Many contemporary art historians agree that they captured the Australian light, the changing colour of the bush, the red ochre of the Australian land, the blue and gold of the grassland and sky, and conveyed a new sense of joy, no longer presenting Australian nature as monotonous and melancholy. However, despite this, many Heidelberg school colonial paintings nevertheless have European literary allusions. The Heidelberg painters’ suburban bush subject matter was influenced by Abram Louis Buvelot (1814-1888). James Smith asserts that “the late Louis Buvelot seemed to be the first to discern the distinctive features of the Australian landscape”. But Bernard Smith argues more convincingly that Louis Buvelot’s tranquil Australian landscape is full of European recollections. The homely, peaceful and rural scenes, the warm light and the settled countryside, and the pastoral landscape he depicts are in these ways like Europe. Although settled countryside and the pastoral landscape exist in Australia, Buvelot created images which often remind viewers of Keats, Shelley and Wordsworth, and the colour in his work is not at all Australian. Similarly, the works of Streeton, one of the most influential Heidelberg painters, are well known for endowing nature with Wordsworthian analogies, although Streeton is regarded as a painter who “definitely captures the quality of Australian light, the heat and dryness of the summer”. In fact, many in the Heidelberg group were fond of quoting the Romantic poets, and many titles of Streeton and Roberts’s works were derived directly from English poetry and reminded the viewer of the Old World and its culture.

78 Quoted in Mary Eagle, The Oil Paintings of Tom Roberts, 1997, p. 42.
80 See Ann Galbally, Arthur Streeton, 1979, p. 15.
81 See Helen Topliss, 1985, p. 16.
For example, the title of Streeton’s famous early painting, *Still Glides the Stream, and Shall Forever Glide* (1890) (Fig.40), comes from Wordsworth’s poem series, *The River Duddon*. Another painting, *The Purple Noon’s Transparent Might* (1896) (Fig.41), takes its title from Shelley’s “Stanzas Written in Dejection near Naples”. In *Still Glides the Stream*, Streeton creates a poetic sensibility and an English Romantic atmosphere through the tall young gums in hazy outline against an evening sky, the gentle mood of reflection embodied in the soft colour and the subdued treatment of distant landscape. When Streeton painted this, he must have had Wordsworth’s sonnet *The River Duddon* in mind – the painting is faithful to the poem’s spirit of the idyllic pastoral, as well as to the essentially English romantic view of nature, preserved especially in the works of Wordsworth and Shelley. These poets were Streeton’s favorites and were constant sources of inspiration. The English allusion in *The Purple Noon’s Transparent Might* is confirmed by Streeton’s statement that the painting “was completed with a kind of artistic intoxication with thoughts of Shelley in my mind”. Sometimes Streeton (and Charles Conder (1868-1909) as well) referred to the poems of the Australian poet Gordon rather than to English Romantics in their titles. Streeton’s *Twilight Pastoral* (1890) was originally exhibited as *Above us the Great Grave Sky*, words taken from Gordon’s poem “Doubtful Dreams”. But as discussed earlier, this itself is a poem in which Gordon evokes the English landscape. Although in the painting *Above us the Great Grave Sky* the landscape is Australian, in using such titles as these Streeton also sought to incorporate the Australian landscape into the British norm. The element that unites the poem and the picture is the idea of “lying beneath the stars and dreaming in the landscape – an essentially [European] pastoral framework”.

2) Sublimity: Minor Man in Grand Nature

As a special kind of “imagined” landscape, the representation of sublime mountains

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in Australia in the mid 19th century also demonstrates the influence of the Romantic aesthetic. But although this theme is derived from the Romantic tradition and possessed certain parallels with sublimity in the Chinese tradition, this theme in Australian art performs a colonial function by embodying white anxieties about race.

As discussed earlier, the Western Romanticism which venerated nature as sacred or divine, brought with it a new evolution of values. This competed with the dominant Western tradition, and has lasted well into the 20th century. God and nature were identified with one another, and the appreciation of nature was thereby elevated to its highest point. In the 18th century, the age of the Enlightenment, various ideas about nature came to the fore. Clarence J. Glacken remarks that “in no other preceding age had thinkers discussed questions of culture and environment with such thoroughness and penetration as did those of the eighteenth century”.85 Nature became one of the principal metaphors of the age, the prism through which all manner of ideas and ideals were brilliantly refracted. Apart from the dominant idea of man mastering nature, early industrialization sometimes also stirred a Romantic reaction for pastoral idylls. Under the influence of writers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), new ideas of nature gained currency, contrasting the simple life of the “noble savage” with the artificiality and constraints of Europe’s great courts and cities.86 Although in the broader structure of science, modernity and European expansion these Romantic thoughts did not fundamentally alter dominant Western attitudes to nature, especially towards the “wilderness”, they have nevertheless influenced some important Australian painters in the mid 19th century and therefore deserve to be discussed here.

Influenced by Romantic aesthetics, colonial artists painted many mountain landscapes, and the works of Eugene von Guerard are typical examples. The rocky alpine landscape of sharpened mountains and the dark light emphasized in his paintings such as Mount Kosciusko, Seen from the Victorian Border (Mount Hope Ranges) (1866)

85 Glacken, Traces on the Rhodian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought from Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century, 1967, p. 501. This phenomenon was evident across a wide cultural and social spectrum – in medicine and science, in philosophy and aesthetics, in painting, poetry and even in landscape gardening.
(Fig.42) created an awe-inspiring atmosphere. This kind of European-style landscape was “imagined” by von Guerard to avoid the “monotonous” Australia landscape with its sunny plains and low hills. Von Guerard painted a series of sublime mountain landscapes such as View from Mount Lofty, South Australia (c.1860) (Fig.43), View in the Grampians from the Top of the Serra Range (c.1870) (Fig.44), and Head of the Mitta Mitta River, Eagle’s View of the Mountains (1879) (Fig.45). In these paintings, the Romantic passion for the sublime wilderness is, within limits, comparable to Chinese shanshui painting and poetry’s passion for unspoiled nature. The pristine and primeval beauty – wild, forbidden and untouched by human civilization – seems to have existed before any human being was born, and will continue to exist after the last human leaves this world. Von Guerard’s landscapes are in this respect reminiscent of the Chinese shanshui painting tradition: even the name “Mount Lofty” which appears in a title of his paintings is a recurring theme in Chinese shanshui painting. Here, European Romanticism seems to converge with Chinese Daoism: both view nature as containing spiritual as well as material truth, as displayed by von Guerard’s rendering of the spiritual in the sublime wilderness. However, unlike Chinese painting in which “minor man in grand nature” conveys the idea of human beings’ harmonious unity with nature, von Guerard’s dramatic vistas with mountains and seaside cliffs, his dark light and great expanses of virgin forest usually create a depressing effect. Despite the awe-inspiring atmosphere, these elements convey a forbidding sense of gloom, which is difficult to find in Chinese shanshui paintings. As in Chinese shanshui painting, in von Guerard’s paintings, we can see the transcendent signification of the Creator’s almighty organizing hand imposing a comprehensible order over nature which excites the viewer’s admiration. Yet unlike the often idealized shanshui painting, von Guerard often enhances the sense of menace by introducing a “hard headed realism which never subverts the shadows and traits that exist in these majestic panoramas – the snake, the fox, the crow, the predator”.

This difference in rendering natural sublimity stems from the different understanding

of the relationship between human beings and nature prevailing in each culture. The ancient Chinese attempted to maintain a harmonious relationship with the whole universe through observing and learning from nature. The sublimity in traditional Chinese aesthetics is rooted in this intimacy and unity between man and nature. In the West, the theory of sublimity proposed by Burke, Kant and Schiller is based on the idea that human beings live in a world full of hostile forces, and is developed with the central concept of opposition between human beings and nature (as discussed previously). At the root of this theory is the battle against the forces of nature. Through science and technology, Westerners studied and subdued parts of nature and in this way achieved a sense of freedom; but towards those parts of nature that remained unsubdued, they felt a terror. Furthermore, although both Australian and Chinese artists' main intention was to employ the conventions of the sublime to convey a sense of grandeur and to emphasize the power of natural forms to the observer, some Australian artists in doing so revealed yet more bias against non-European landscapes. Through emphasizing the gloom and height of the mountain peaks, a framework developed in relationship to European landscapes in which height and not depth finds emphasis, those Australian artists revealed their dissatisfaction with the Australian landscape and with their idea of Australian light and its anti-picturesque physicality.

In this kind of sublime wilderness, human figures sometimes appear, but the scale of human beings in proportion to the landscape is very small. The image of man often appears as a minor player, amidst the overall grandeur of nature, as in the works of von Guerard and John Glover. Very often it is the Aborigines who are most frequently represented as the minor man dwelling in harmony with the Australian wilderness. For example, in Guerard’s *A view of the Snowy Bluff on the Wonnangatta River, Gippsland Alps, Victoria* (1864) (Fig.46), the Aboriginal people gather in a bush by a mountain river. Native plants are in bloom, and the “Arcadian peace and plenty in the foreground is backed by mountain splendour which suggests a real harmony where

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man is seen as an integral part of nature”. Aboriginal figures are often shown not in contrast to the composition, but rather as part of the harmonious whole. As the Aborigines were presumably seen as part of Australia’s exotic “otherness” to be compared with white civilization, in most early landscape paintings, Aboriginal people are not prominently placed due to their “oneness with the land”. Even when the figures are essential to the composition, they do not dominate the picturesque landscape scene.

These overwhelming natural settings, in which humans appear small and assimilated into nature, are comparable to those of traditional Chinese shanshui painting. However, if the implied meaning behind each tradition’s use of the setting is explored, it is clear that the underpinning ideologies are quite in opposition. The oneness of human beings with “wild” nature in Australian landscape painting is often found between the Aborigines and nature. In Glover’s paintings, Aboriginal people appear in three broad types of compositions: sublime compositions in which the land has not yet been invaded by Europeans (for example, The River Nile, Van Diemen’s Land (Fig.47)); paintings in which a mythological theme is being described (for example, The Bath of Diana, Van Diemen’s Land (Fig.48)); and commemorative paintings set in the past (for example, Natives at a Corrobory, previously titled Aborigines Dancing at Brighton (Fig.39)).

By representing only the “natural” simplicity of Aboriginal life and by covering the misery caused by European invasion, these paintings provided comfort for the settler culture. These paintings represent only what the white spectator of the period wanted to see. In imagery full of nostalgia, these pictures allow the white viewer a comfortable space in which to contemplate the nation’s past, without confronting

90 In Glover’s Launceston and the River Tamar (c.1832), there is a small white woman, but instead of being assimilated into the oneness of nature, she symbolizes a white “witness to a new land” (See McPhee, “The Symbolic Landscape”, in David Hanson, John Glover and the Colonial Picturesque, 2003, p. 110). Undoubtedly there are some exceptions. For example, in von Guerard’s Romantic paintings, it is occasionally the white men in oneness with “wild” nature, as shown in View from Mount Lofty, South Australia (c.1860) and The Murr Rock and Lake from Mount Arapiles (1874).
responsibility for its destruction. The indigenous figures so represented do not offer resistance to white settlers and instead greet them peacefully. In a similar fashion to traditional Chinese shanshui painting and poetry, in which the reclusive or pastoral life is misrepresented and idealized, in these paintings the Aborigines are also depicted as living an easy and happy life, in order to disguise the fact that their land was taken from them by force. An 18th century writer in The Guardian claimed that

“It is indeed commonly affirmed, that truth well painted will certainly please the imagination; but it is sometimes convenient not to discover the whole truth, but that past which only is delightful. We must sometimes show only half an image to the fancy; which if we display in a lively manner, the mind is so dexterously deluded, that it doth not readily perceive that the other half is concealed. Thus in writing Pastorals, let the tranquility of that life appear full and plain, but hide the meanness of it: represent its simplicity as clear as you please, but cover its misery”.

In terms of pleasing the imagination, concealing the truth and “covering” misery, these paintings are in a way similar to ancient Chinese shanshui paintings. But the underlying agenda is totally opposite. In shanshui painting the small human figures (usually immortals or idealized literati with noble qualities) and the natural environment are regarded as one whole. That whole is superior to this world; it is a realm to be longed for by the literati. In contrast, the Aboriginal figures, although also regarded as part of nature, were considered to be inferior and in opposition to white civilization, something to be conquered and controlled. This racist attitude featured strongly in the traditional Australian construction of nature, which was closely linked to the white settlers’ dispossession of Aborigines. In the view of white culture, the Aborigines had long been equated directly with their environment. Their near-nakedness in particular was taken as a sign of their uncivilized naïveté and their closeness to nature. The Australian bush had long been seen as the home of supposedly “primitive” people whose way of life was dismissed as unproductive or too backward and subsistence-orientated to serve the wider economic needs of the colonial economy. Willem Janszoon (1570-1630) (his name is sometimes abbreviated to Willem Jansz), a Dutch navigator and colonial governor, perceived Australia as a place where

a malign nature, unadorned by the arts of civilization, had nurtured a race of evil-natured and malignant human beings, and had bred in the animal world a similar race of unnatural monsters which had the appearance of being unfinished by their Creator. Here, indeed, was a country where the Creator had not finished his work. Here nature was vast and indifferent to man’s hopes and dreams. Here nature was so hostile, so brutish that men in time believed God had cursed both man and the country itself, and hence its barrenness, its sterility, its unsuitability for the arts of civilized human beings, and its suitability as a setting for those uncouth barbarians, the Aborigines.94

In this passage the Aborigines are described not only as part of nature, but also as a formative force equivalent to the bush, rivers and mountains. With their non-utilitarian attitudes to nature, the Aborigines were seen as subject to nature to a far greater degree than Europeans were. This was regarded as evidence of their backwardness and inferiority, and hence the need for the British to rule over them. It was deemed necessary to bring about “order” and “progress”, to finally liberate Aborigines from their servitude to their environment.

The “noble savages”, the love of the simple and adventurous life freed from the conventions of civilized life, and the closely associated delight in wild, mountainous scenery are all well-known Romantic tropes. However, although in very early Australian paintings the “noble savage” was seen as a Romantic symbol, from the 1820s and 1830s Romantic admiration of primitive man soon disappeared. Even in the 18th century, that image had appealed only to a small number of educated people. For the majority of colonists, Aboriginal people were considered the lowest level of human beings.95

As has already been suggested, the conception of race and “otherness” are closely linked to each other. During European expansion, especially in the 19th century, environmental ideas were being refashioned to meet the ideological imperatives of a new imperial age. These ideas served to construct not only the relationship between humankind and nature, but also a relationship of power and authority between one set of human beings and another, which was the result of inter-ethnic contact resulting

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94 Quoted in Bliss, Patrick White’s Fiction: the Paradox of Fortunate Failure, 1986, p. 2. See also Manning Clark, A Discovery of Australia, 1976, p. 18.
Europeans used racial distinctions to explain the differences between themselves (the supposedly civilized people) and the peoples they encountered in the process of their colonization (the supposedly savage people). The 19th century witnessed a preoccupation with race as a way of explaining the dynamics of history and culture. This resulted from several factors. Firstly, the issue of slavery and its abolition sparked intense debate as to whether Africans belonged to a distinctive inferior human sub-species. Secondly, Europe’s growing military and economic ascendancy was taken as a sign that Europeans were racially superior, especially when their arrival in many parts of the world was followed by the decline and even extinction of indigenous peoples. Thirdly, the 18th and early 19th centuries saw a rapid growth in the biological sciences, which in turn fostered interest in the differences between the races and between human beings and the rest of the natural world. According to an influential 18th century idea, reflected in Montesquieu’s (1869-1755) *The Spirit of the Laws* (first published in 1748), the more mature and civilized a society becomes, the less it lies in nature’s thrall. Indeed, “the mark of a civilization is precisely its ability to rise above nature’s constraints”. This idea developed and was interwoven later with Charles Darwin’s (1809-1882) “survival of the fittest”, as expounded in his *On the Origins of Species* (1859). As well as being misappropriated to “praise” the inevitability of struggle against nature, Darwin’s evolutionary ideas were also applied to human beings and used to support the view that different races represented different stages in the evolutionary process and that different environmental conditions had been a significant factor in this diversification. At this time the ideas of nature and race were conflated. Alfred Russell Wallace (1823-1913), one of the leading evolutionary thinkers of the 19th century, argued in 1864 that nature’s diversity left its imprint in racial differences, and that different types of nature fostered different races. Harsh soils and inclement seasons were a stimulus for the evolution of a hardier, more provident and social race (the Europeans) than those who lived in warmer climates with nature’s abundance. Wallace made a strong claim for the superiority of races that had evolved in the

96 See Arnold, 1996, pp. 6-29.
97 Ibid., p. 10.
temperate zone over those in the tropical zones: “All the great invasions and displacements of races have been from North to South”; there was “no record of an instance of an indigenous inter-tropical civilization”.98

Agreeing with Darwin’s idea of “natural selection”, Wallace maintained that the “preservation of favoured races in the struggle for life” would inevitably lead to the extinction of all inferior and mentally undeveloped populations through European contact. Alluding to a pattern of rapid demographic decline among indigenous peoples following the arrival of Europeans, Wallace alleged that the North American Indians, the Indians of Brazil, the Australian and Tasmanian Aborigines and the Maori of New Zealand would “die out, not from any one special cause, but from the inevitable effects of an unequal mental and physical struggle. The intellectual and moral, as well as the physical qualities of the European are superior…”99 The early colonists were certainly influenced by these ideas. As a result the Australian Aborigines became absorbed into the concept of Australian nature, as demonstrated in William Harcus’s (1823-1876) 1876 emigration guide:

To successfully plant a young Colony… seems to require special qualities, physical, moral, and intellectual, which are possessed in their highest form by the Anglo-Saxon people. It is a small matter to supplant the Aboriginal inhabitants of a barbarous country and to secure possession of their land…. It is battling with Nature, conquering the soil, holding on against capricious seasons, fighting with the elements and compelling the earth to yield what it never yielded before… a reward for man’s toil…that the real triumphs of an old people in a new land are seen.100

In this discourse the whole of Australia’s nature and people, are imaginatively constructed as inferior.101

3) Progress: “Civilizing Nature” and “Battling with Nature”

99 Ibid., p. 48.
100 Quoted in Schaffer, Women and the Bush, 1988, p. 84.
101 This idea of European superiority among human races which held that a superior physique, intellect and culture enabled the Europeans to conquer the “savage” and extinguish natives by the inherent vigor of their organization, and by their greater capacity for existence and multiplication, had a direct counterpart in ideas about nature – the ecological imperialism, or the conquest and colonization of Australian plants and animals by European plants and animals (See Alfred W. Crosby, Ecological Imperialism, 1986.) Australian animals, such as the kangaroos, wombats, koalas and the like were seen as quaint but inferior. In a remarkable parallel to the experience of the Aborigines, these animals were considered unable to cope with competition from introduced sheep, cattle and foxes. It was accepted as somehow natural that native creatures would pass away in the natural course of things, to make way for a new, vigorous and somehow more fitting European Australia (See Tim Flannery, 1994, p. 13). In this there was a powerful and consciously Darwinian element of “social evolution”.

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The wilderness and the Aboriginal people were natural hurdles to be crossed and overcome, elements to be struggled against by the colonists who were attempting to “appropriate the environment exclusively to a British agenda of ‘civilization’ and ‘progress’.” This led to another manifestation of the Darwinian evolutionary rhetoric, the theme of “progress” – the idea that societies progress from hunter-gatherer to Western industrialism in a linear hierarchy. This theme is prevalent in paintings and literature. Establishing this narrative was of paramount importance to the white invaders. It can be seen principally in two motifs/myths: “civilizing nature”, in which depictions of labour (images of the actual work of taming the wild landscape) or leisure (images of this work completed in the idyllic landscape) are stressed; and “battling with nature”. Both motifs play out the colonial agenda of celebrating masculine control over natural forces.

a) Civilizing Nature

Australian white history is primarily a colonial history of land settlement. The historian Hancock calls it a “history of progressive mastery”. In his *Australia*, the idea of the land, signified as a body to be conquered and civilized by man, is a central preoccupation, one which first emerged in colonial conquest and the Western appropriation of foreign lands. This concept of “man mastering nature” originates in the dualism between humanity and nature, which itself originated in ancient Greek philosophy and Christian dogma. This dualism developed in the process of modernity and European expansion, as was discussed earlier in this chapter. The Darwinian view of nature in terms of “the survival of the fittest” reinforced this concept. It turned history into a series of lessons which espoused a long ascent from chaos to managerial control of a nature. Since nature was indeed in “a fallen state”, then civilization was a necessary moral check upon it. Thomas Henry Huxley (1825-1895) supported Darwin. In 1893, he delivered the pronouncement that: “Social progress…means a checking of the cosmic process at every step”. This is

102 Arnold, 1996, p. 185.
103 Hancock, *Australia*, 1930.
104 Simmons, 1993, p. 29.
105 Quoted in Simmons, 1993, pp. 29-30.
in radical opposition to traditional Chinese ideas about the relationship between nature and culture, in which it is society which is in a “fallen state”, while nature is a necessary moral check upon it. The idea of “progress” is also an inversion of the Chinese theme of “reclusion”, which is in fact a critique of so-called “social progress”.

The civilizing of nature can be found in both subjects of labour and leisure. John Glover’s *My Harvest Home* (1835) (Fig.49) is an example of the celebration of the Europeans’ successful cultivation of the land and of their victory over nature and the Aborigines. The painting depicts the labour of gathering in the wheat harvest: a loaded cart and the six oxen that pull it are complemented by six working farmers in various occupations. In contrast to the previously analyzed paintings by Glover, there is not a single Aboriginal person in *My Harvest Home*. The picture can be read as a celebration on several levels. First, it celebrates the harvest in an agricultural society. Second, it celebrates Glover’s own triumph as an emigrant farmer. Third, it celebrates the displacement of local Aboriginal people. All three celebrations implied white “progress”. In von Guerard’s painting *Glenara* (also known as *Mr Clarke’s Station, Deep Creek near Keilor*) (1867) (Fig.50), the subject is the wealth that the pastures have produced, and the central idea conveyed is that of civilization in the bush. The carefully delineated geometric gardens, the European trees and flowers, the vineyard and the comfortable homestead all convey the idea of prosperity. Von Guerard emphasized European labour by dotting labourers everywhere and depicting men tending vines, caring for the gardens, and transporting products. In this latter painting we see that it is through labour that harmony and control are achieved. This harmony is expressed “not only in the order of the landscape but in the leisure provided by the image of Clarke and his wife playing with their children on the verandah of their home. They represent the rewards of work and the leisure that owners naturally deserved”.

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106 See Hoorn, 2007, p. 75.
107 Ibid., p. 132.
Sometimes hard labour is not directly represented, but hints are given of the result or reward of labour. The land is shown as settled, ordered and owned by the white settlers as a sign of “progress”. For example, in Joseph Lycett’s (c.1774-c.1825) Wooloomooloo (c.1822) (Fig.51), the landscape is represented as settled and owned by Europeans who are represented as masters of this fertile land, which has now been cleared and controlled. In this land they are able to experience leisure, ease, comforts and luxuries. The dominating rocks are replaced by the grassy lawn presenting an easy environment for the strolling white couple. They are complemented by a group of Aborigines who seem to be unconcerned about losing their land to the new European proprietors.

John Lewin’s (1770-1819) watercolor sketch Macquarie River (1815) is also an early example of this motif. In the cleared stretch of dry land, there is no suggestion of Aboriginal ownership. The successful dispossession of the land by the new white settlers is assumed and European intervention is represented through the results of labour. A thatched hut and animals grazing near loaded carts give the suggestion of occupation and arouse comfortable sensations in the mind of the spectator.108 Von Guerard’s homestead landscape paintings of 1856-1869, such as Larra (1857) (Fig.52), also demonstrate the successful clearing and private ownership of the land. By representing a seemingly empty space of vast stretches of pastoral land, completely cleared of forest for the purpose of grazing sheep and cattle, the artist emphasizes the symbolic power of domination. Glover’s Australian Landscape with Cattle: the Artist’s Property, Patterdale (c.1835) (Fig.53) and Views of Mill’s Plains, Van Diemen’s Land (c.1833) (Fig.54) convey a similar message through their images of cattle grazing. They fall within the overall conceptual framework which portrays Australia as the land of sheep and cattle.

This kind of depiction suggests private ownership of the land. With the abandonment of the community of convicts as a long term basis for settlement, the promotion of

108 Ibid., pp. 37-38, 44.
Australia as a place of emigration was enhanced. With their emphasis on the control of the landscape through the depiction of leisure, these pastoral landscape paintings became a means by which Australia was advertised to the British population as a desirable destination.  

Since those who were to come would be free, the idea of private property was heavily promoted.

Whether pastoral activity is depicted as labour or leisure, these images embody the European control over Australian nature through labour, and the leisure that such control provides. Although sometimes the relationship between man and nature is harmonious without any emphasis on labour, it is a “progressive” harmony, distinct from the Chinese idea of “reclusive” harmony. In contrast to Chinese poets’ wish to return to the pastoral countryside, in colonial Australia pastoral land use was a metaphor for civilization and progress. William Charles Wentworth (1790-1872), an Australian poet and politician, describes this as a process by which “an endless variety of hill and dale clothed in the most luxuriant herbage and covered with bleating flocks and lowing herds” is seen to “indicate that you are in regions fit to be inhabited by civilized man”. This is one of the earliest expressions of the relationship between pastoralism and civilization in Australian literature, and stands in striking contrast with ancient Chinese expressions of the relationship between pastoralism and the “naturalization” (ziranhua) of humans. Chinese “pastoralism” symbolizes a reclusive ideal, shunning material progress and civilization. Australian “progressive” harmony is not based on the equality or oneness of humanity and nature, but is founded on the context of work performed in a natural environment in which the indigenous people have been expelled from the land. Although work is not directly represented, the idea of work is implied by representing the results of that work. Pastoral land is thus regarded as the property and “reward” of the industrious

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109 Here, “pastoral” is used in its broad sense, the description of the countryside and the life in it, as defined in the chapter 1 “Introduction”.

110 See Hoorn, 2007, p. 44.

111 Wentworth, A Statistical, Historical and Political Description of the Colony of New South Wales and its Dependent Settlements in Van Diemen's Land with Particular Enumeration of the Advantages Which These Colonies offer for Emigration and Their Superiority in Many Respects over Those Possessed by the United States of America, 1819, p. 47.

112 Ziranhua: 自然化.
European. The scene depicted is, after all, about the conversion of nature.

In these paintings, the value of European labour and the rewarding harvest that hard work brings are stressed. This is done with the intention of demonstrating the European agricultural transformation of the wilderness into “fertile” land, through labour, the successful clearing of the terrain, and the white control of the landscape, which was a result and embodiment of the settler culture. This provided a framework in which the European settlement and early settler capitalism were morally acceptable.\(^{113}\) The description of the introduction of European land management conveys the idea that “the adventurous and hardworking European makes productive what was unproductive land under the old management”.\(^{114}\)

The image of a waste land in need of emigrant cultivation, and the idea of advancement through work, was an enduring theme in colonial Australian art and writing. The early Australian writer James F. Bennett’s (active 1841-43) prose and verse echo the paintings mentioned above. In his *Historical and Descriptive Account of South Australia Found on the Experience of Three Years in that Colony*, Bennett writes: “When he has surmounted the difficulties of a first settlement, he usually finds himself well repaid for what sufferings he may have endured”. He continues this theme: “the forest gives way to his axe – his flocks and herds increase rapidly – and he sees growing up around him, not only an abundance, but a superfluity of the ‘good things of life’”.\(^{115}\) These ideas are also expressed in his verse:

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Then all around was heard the crash of trees –
Trembling a while, then rushing to the ground –
The low of ox, and shouts of men who fired
The brushwood – or who tore the earth with ploughs; -
The grain sprang thick and tall, and hid in green
The blackened hillside – ranks of spiky maize
Rose like a host embattled – the buck of wheat
Whitened broad acres. Scenting with its dowers –
The Autumn winds.\(^{116}\)
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\(^{114}\) Ibid., p. 103.
\(^{115}\) Bennett, 1849, p. 74.
\(^{116}\) Ibid.
In these lines nature is productive as the result of human labour. The suffering of nature caused by human behaviour – the “crash of trees” being felled and ploughing which “tore the earth” – is justified morally through the new productivity and “fertility”. Bennett writes, “I have seen the plains and forests around Adelaide changed from their original desolation into a continued mass of farms – some thousands of acres bearing their first crops of wheat, maize and barley, while the more distant parts in which no track nor trace of human being could be found when first I rode through them, I ultimately saw sprinkled with sheep and cattle stations with occasionally a field of corn”. Bennett justifies the European occupation of the “new land” because this labour brings life to nature and creates prosperity and growth. Australian nature is seen as attractive only when it is “improved” by European settlers, often in order to look like the English countryside, and land is considered valuable only when it is productive.

This pioneering vision was backed by the deep-rooted attitudes toward nature especially the wilderness which existed in the European tradition (these have been discussed earlier). It was also backed by the value systems and environmental perceptions of Europe, where people had been clearing land for agriculture for over a thousand years and where an agrarian-industrial culture had developed. The moral responsibility of Europeans to improve the land (according to European methods) and to bring about its maximum productivity was based on the Christian doctrine that man should carry out God’s intention of “improving” nature and make it fertile. Man should create prosperity through labour, because all of the earth was God’s creation awaiting conversion into productive land through the work and labour of energetic Christians. The hunter-gatherer lifestyle of the Aboriginal people, which left the land in its original state, was regarded as nothing less than sinful. Indeed, it was thought to be the Christian moral duty of colonists to convert what seemed to be barren wastes to green pastures and fertile fields.

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117 Bennett, 1849, p. 75.
In modern times, these assumptions of “civilizing” nature were underpinned by scientific and capitalist attitudes, assisted by the four-stage theory of social evolution and appropriation of the land proposed by John Locke and later, in economic terms, by Adam Smith (1723-1790). The theory held that human societies naturally progressed through four developmental stages: hunting and gathering, pastoral, agricultural and commercial. White man aided the delivery of Australia into and beyond stage two. According to Australian writer James Collier (1846-1925):

The Aborigine’s inability to till the ground or even make use of its natural pasture...was the capital offence, and it was irredeemable...their disappearance was a natural necessity. It came about in obedience to a natural law. It was affected by natural process, and followed the lines of the substitution of vegetal and animal species all over the world".118

In this passage we can see the driving force of capitalism as supported by its myriad scientific and technical agencies. In this sense, the idea of “nature” in Australian culture was but an extension of the economic history of Europe, where capitalism had long since transformed “waste” land into productive agricultural land and turned idle nature to commercial profit. The perception of the new world as a land of profit was a means of distinguishing the invaders and immigrants from the natives they subordinated, expelled or exterminated.119 Nature, here, provides a passive context and a terrain on which the white man battles for his rightful possession.

The Enlightenment, the scientific, agricultural and industrial revolutions, the growth of capitalism and the rise of Western imperialism, all led to Europe’s relentless quest for land, trade and profit. Scientific and technological advances made the wholesale exploitation of nature and natural resources both desired and feasible. At this point, the development of technology “created a new intellectual milieu, and all phenomena of economics, politics and other cultural manifestations are situated within it”.120 The thrust towards political and economic dominance was reinforced by the assumption that Europeans possessed the most progressive and advanced civilization that the world had ever known, and this in turn was supported by the scientific and technological achievements of that civilization. Science and technology as agents of

118 Collier, The Pastoral Age in Australia, 1911, pp.129-130.
120 Simmons, 1993, p. 42.
civilization became a radical new way of perceiving the world and of organizing societies. By the 1890s, certain thinkers asserted that Europeans had right of access to the resources of backward areas, because those people were unable to make use of them.\textsuperscript{121}

The most impressive expression of the “labour and production” narrative, strongly influenced by these ideas, can be found in the paintings of Heidelberg group during the period of Australian nationalism of the late 1880s and 1890s. It is especially present in the works of Tom Roberts. His paintings directly depicted pioneering labour. Roberts’ nationalistic paintings during this period deserve special attention, since these works went on to become icons of the Australian cultural identity. Roberts was regarded as having captured the nation’s imagination and seen as an influential creator of Australia’s self-image. He consciously set out to develop a national school of painting at a time when Australians were beginning to define themselves in terms of their relationship to the landscape. He participated eagerly in this effort toward self-discovery and self-definition and was largely responsible for the development of a vision of the landscape shared by his contemporaries in the second half of the 1880s.\textsuperscript{122} He had a great influence on many later artists such as Elioth Gruner (1882-1939), Lloyd Rees (1895-1988), Fred Williams (1927-1982) and Arthur Boyd (1920-1999). They all acknowledged their artistic debt to him. Arthur Boyd even claimed that “all Australian paintings are in some ways a homage to Tom Roberts”.\textsuperscript{123}

Roberts painted a group of interrelated images on this subject during this period, including \textit{The Woodsplitters} (also known as \textit{Charcoal Burners}) (1886) (Fig.55), \textit{Turning the Soil} (1887) and \textit{Twilight at Healesville} (1886-88) (Fig.56). The landscape in these paintings becomes an arena for the labouring pioneer. \textit{The Woodsplitters}, for example, represents charcoal-burners industriously working in a bush clearing, and an open landscape with stacks of well-cut wood. When looking at this painting, I am

\textsuperscript{121} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{123} See Ron Radford, 1996, p. 18.

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unable to feel the sense of “nostalgia for the disappearance of forest-workers” that Virginia Spate described. Rather, in the emphasis on the cutting of the wood and the clearing of the bush, there is a manifest sense of pioneering progress. Spate argues that the absence of any signs of culture suggests that the man will be absorbed into the land that he had cleared. But this painting, together with two oil sketches of the similar theme of wood getting and charcoal burning, can also be seen as celebrations of the “heroic” and “progressive” qualities of human labour, demonstrating masculine control over nature and the transformation of “unproductive” into “productive” land.

A small group Australians who were conscious of conservation and environmental destruction in the 1870s and 1880s objected strongly to the desecration of the forests in the proximity of the Dandenongs. Leigh Astbury’s argument that these pictures demonstrate nature’s abundance and Roberts’ reverence for nature seem improbable. In its support of such human labour as wood splitting, timber cutting and upturning the “virgin soil”, Roberts’ painting can be interpreted, rather, as an actual endorsement of the destruction of the bush, a sound proof of his pride in human “progress” and “civilization”. The prominent figures in Robert’s landscape paintings are the conqueror, the civilizer and the shaper of nature. Roberts felt himself part of the imperial civilizing mission; he depicted the “strong masculine labour” that shaped nature and contributed to the wealth of Empire. The women in his landscape paintings, such as those in Slumbering Sea, Mentone (1887) (Fig.57) which represents the leisure of middle-class bourgeois ladies, often play a civilizing role in the new society, through their elegance, refinement and their fostering of arts. Roberts seems to “have thought of his art as a means of contributing to social unity and to progress”.

126 See Mary Eagle, The Oil Paintings of Tom Roberts, 1997, p. 50.
127 See Leigh Astbury, City Bushmen: the Heidelberg School and the Rural Mythology, 1985, pp. 103-104.
129 Ibid., pp. 62-64.
transplanting and displacement of European culture into an Australian environment. The red cliff suggests untamed and uncivilized nature, but the women stand for “the implacable forces of the imperial civilizing mission”.130

It is true that in the colonial period Roberts also painted some leisurely pictures (such as *A Sunday afternoon picnic at Box Hill* (c.1886) (Fig.59) in which peaceful activities seem to represent the antithesis of labour. However, these paintings usually suggest not wild nature but rather the familiar bush cultivated by the civilizing hand of man. Some of Streeton’s works also represent this kind of human harmony in the civilized landscape. For example, in *Twilight Pastoral* (also known as *Above us the Great Grave Sky*) (1890) (Fig.58), the soft tone, the beautiful and striking images of natural scenery and the lyrically quiet atmosphere somewhat resembled Chinese traditional *shanshui* paintings in its attempt to convey the lyrical and poetic moods of nature. Instead of focusing on sheep and cattle and the circumstances around their production, in this painting Streeton depicts human intimacy with nature. Specifically this is achieved through the inclusion of a white couple lying together in the balmy open air and the romantic associations of the accompanying sunset. Nature is represented as a place of leisure. However, whether in Roberts’s landscape of leisure or in Streeton’s lyrical nature, the perspective is always a European one, assuming the European possession of the land and emphasizing the bourgeois recreation in Australia.

Moreover, in these paintings nature is represented as managed and civilized, converted into a gentle land. As the business of the Heidelberg School was to paint the imagery of burgeoning white success, the sense of harmony in their painting was derived from ordered images of civilization.131 This is quite distinct from traditional Chinese painting in which nature is never rendered as fit for human consumption, but instead constructed as remote and detached. Chinese painters avoided those artificial elements which would spoil the pure, eternal and noble quality of the natural scenes

130 Virginia Spate, 1996, p. 70.
they created. They conceived the beauty and value of nature to lie in the fact that it was “uncontaminated by corrupted human society”. The temples, bridges, pavilions and huts are added to convey the idea of human communication with nature, not human mastery or transformation of nature.

Whether the artist is emphasizing labour or leisure, once again there is minimal representation of Aboriginal people in this kind of Australian painting. Although black men and women were a part of the pastoral workforce, they are all absent in the canvasses of these pastoral painters. This is the case even though it is clear that in some parts of the outback, black labour dominated the industry.132 The Australian pastoral symbolized civilization and progress, and this narrative excluded Aboriginal people. The Aborigines could only be presented as united and in harmony with wild nature. They never civilized, managed, or controlled nature. Although Glover often depicted the harmony between the Aborigines and nature, there is an absence of Aboriginal people in most of his paintings about European farming of Australian land. In those pictures about the settlement of the land – those in which animals graze, watched over by shepherds, or those which take Patterdale’s farmhouses as their subject – there is no sign of indigenous people at all. This separation of Aboriginal and pastoral landscapes reinforces the idea of a pastoral landscape transformed and owned by white men.

b) The Battle with Nature

Another motif / myth of the theme of progress is white man’s “battling” with nature. Depictions of battle with nature were especially popular when Australians defined their national identity as the actively fighting masters of the bush. In the Australian and Chinese cultural traditions, both the Australian bush and Chinese *shanshui* are associated with otherworldliness in their separation from civilization. In contrast to the Chinese cultural tradition in which the dense mountain forest was considered to

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132 As Hoorn argues, the focus of radical nationalism on the rights of Anglo-Celtic male workers was achieved at the expense of other working-class subjects. The lives and rights of Aboriginals, Asians and other non-Europeans were virtually ignored (2007, pp. 151,173).
be a safe and tranquil refuge, a spiritual and physical home for human beings, in Australia, the bush and mountains were often seen as a threatening frontier, an obstacle to progress. Roberts’ use of the landscape as the location of “pioneering” activity was one of the central themes in Australian art of the 1890s. It was echoed in the bush pioneering pictures of Frederick McCubbin (1855-1917). In McCubbin’s bush paintings, Lost (1886), On the Valley Track (1896), A Bush Burial (1890), The Pioneer (1904) (Fig.60) (to name only a few), the hardships, difficulties and perseverance of the colonial life of Australia’s early settlers are underscored. Since the bush was seen in this sort of narrative as an obstacle to the “progress” and “improvement” of settled government, cutting down trees was thus a way to advance the frontier of effective administrative control and to minimize sites of lawlessness and resistance. The bush was cleared both on the canvas, and in reality. The forests of New South Wales were speedily cleared of their timber and contributed to the comforts and luxuries of man. “Within three years of the felling the first tree on this estate, the whole was enclosed and subdivided; five hundred acres were more or less cleared and a desirable villa house erected; artificial grasses were growing in aid of the natural pasture; and a garden of four acres was in full cultivation”.

The dominant theme in the narratives of the Australian bush and mountains is one that tends towards the ownership, mastery or possession of the frontiers of an alien land. It consolidates and guarantees the identity of the colonists. At least mastery over a threatening landscape allows the illusion of a unified identity to be mutually upheld by its colonizers. It was through a transformation of the environment, by establishing and demonstrating mastery over nature itself, that the colonists sought to legitimize their rule in Australia. To the colonists, overcoming environmental problems was an outstanding monument to the powers of Western science and technology. These victories epitomized colonial faith in the mastery of nature and the material benefits that accrued from it; they were “a visible and enduring statement of the power and

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133 Lycett, quoted in Hoorn, 2007, p. 61.
resources of the colonial state". Therefore, when nature defied the settlers' attempts at mastery, it was described as hostile, obstructive, deceitful, and impoverished. Hancock points out, "to the early settlers, the Bush was an unfriendly wilderness. It would not accept them as it had accepted the Aborigines; they must master it, and mastery... came so painfully and so slow".

Later, when native-born Australians began to assert their own identity against the parental culture of England, they expressed new nationalistic attitudes in literature or painting. Again, nature was constructed as an object to be mastered. The difference between these new narratives and the old was that the master was no longer British, but Australian. This was demonstrated in the works of Roberts and Henry Lawson (1867-1922). As discussed earlier, although there is a harmony between man and nature in Roberts's colonial landscapes, many of these landscapes are European in style, and the relationship between the figures and nature is also derived from European convention. This is particularly apparent in his paintings such as *A Sunday afternoon picnic at Box Hill*, *A Summer Morning Tiff* (1886) and *Reconciliation* (c.1886/7). In the years leading up to the 1901 Federation, as nationalism was becoming a significant issue and Australians began to construct an historical mythology for themselves, Roberts produced deliberately heroic and vigorous paintings. In these nationalistic paintings which are more concerned than ever before with the sentiments of national identity and contain characteristic Australian landscapes, the “harmony” is replaced by man’s struggle against nature. Mary Eagle argues that Roberts’ Box Hill paintings of lovers and picnickers in a quiet bush setting are no less Australian than the shearers and drovers that followed in the 1890s when the nationalism swept over Melbourne. But Roberts is most famous for his nationalistic pre-Federation subject pictures. It is for these nationalistic paintings that he is most remembered rather than for his paintings of lovers and picnickers. It is also

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135 Hancock, 1930, pp. 40-41.
137 See Mary Eagle, 1997, p. 42.
for these nationalistic works that he was regarded as the artist who best expressed the national ethos.\textsuperscript{138}

In his nationalistic works, the human relationship with nature is often heroic and exploitative. An example is the iconic portrait of Australian cultural identity, \textit{A Break Away!} (1891) (Fig.61). Roberts prized it as the work in which his art came closest to realizing his ideal.\textsuperscript{139} The heroic masculine struggle against nature is depicted in sheep-grazing pastoralism, and through the horseman's attempt to stop the rush of the thirsty sheep when smelling the water. In comparison with the native wild animals, the sheep represent the new occupiers of the land, the imported domestic animals in a cleared landscape, "as is shown by the emphatic tree-stumps and the logs used to fence in the stock route".\textsuperscript{140} The horses and dogs in this painting are also heroes who try their best alongside their human masters.\textsuperscript{141} From this painting we can see that when representing nationalism and national identity, nature is depicted as arid and dry. The horseman is challenged by the drought. He does his heroic utmost to stop the rush of the sheep. In other words, at a time when the nation's consciousness was beginning to turn to the task of nation-building, Australians sought in the heroism of bush life inspiration for notions of cultural identity.\textsuperscript{142} This is reinforced by the artist's role as a recorder of a way of life which was passing or had passed – in Roberts's heroic paintings he regarded himself as an historian recording aspects of pastoral experience that would be in danger of being forgotten by subsequent generations. He had a profound historical consciousness and a feeling of his responsibility as an artist living in a young country where history had both to be made and recorded.\textsuperscript{143} Roberts (and other artists) tried to create a self-image of nationalistic significance for a nation determined to be independent. In this sense the task of recording is intertwined with the creation of national myths and stereotypes. This can

\textsuperscript{139} See Helen Topliss, 1985, p. 119.
\textsuperscript{140} Virginia Spate, 1996, p. 80.
\textsuperscript{142} Jane Hylton, 1996, p. 112. Roberts painted five works, each intended to reflect the heroic quality of characteristically Australian bush life. In all these works, there is representation of male domination and masculine symbolism in the rural industry.
\textsuperscript{143} See Helen Topliss, 1985, p. 20.
be seen in all of Roberts’ pictures of pastoral subjects, which fulfilled his nationalistic intentions.144

This theme can also be found in Streeton’s *Fire’s On!* (c.1891), *Lapstone Tunnel* (1891), and McCubbin’s *The North Wind* (1891). They all depict man’s heroic struggle, man’s fight against nature in the dry and infertile country. Sometimes the struggle ends in tragedy, as in *Fire’s On!* (Fig.62), which depicts a dead man being carried out of the shadowy shaft near the great rock boulders of the hillside, as a railway tunnel is blasted through the mountainside. It reveals nature’s threatening force, suggesting a tragic human struggle with nature. The human figures in the foreground and those approaching above the shaft in the middle distance appear ant-like and powerless placed beside the vast dimensions of nature.145

The characteristic themes of the Heidelberg paintings include the pioneers’ heroic struggle against nature, their plight in the bush (as victim and master), and the desire to “record the ‘noble’ role of Man in this timeless scene”.146 Most of the paintings presented the image of a white man: the noble frontiersman. His life was also close to nature, but instead of being at one and in harmony with nature (as Aborigines were thought to be), the frontiersman’s life was represented as dangerous, adventurous and often heroic in its struggle against the Australian landscape – against the bush and against the dry and barren land. This was a typical feature of Roberts and McCubbin’s works.

The image of the noble bushman, created against a backdrop of harsh nature, was underpinned ideologically by the belief that nature had a determining influence on culture. Environmental determinism itself can be traced back to the 5th century B.C. Greek physician Hippocrates. He argued that nature makes human beings (of different races) dissimilar: the milder climates, richer soils, and tamer natural surroundings

created lazy, cowardly people, incapable of hard, physical work. In contrast, where the land was bare, waterless and rough, the inhabitants were keen in intellect, capable and brave. Such ideas, which were extremely influential in Western thought, have been explored in detail by Clarence J. Glacken in his work *Traces on the Rhodian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought from Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century* (1967). Montesquieu repeated the Hippocratic view. But Montesquieu did not see climate as the only possible factor involved in fashioning human laws and institutions. Indeed, he saw it as the task of good law-makers and good governments to rise above the constraints imposed by climate, just as barren soils might, through diligent toil, be made to yield “what the earth refuses to bestow spontaneously”. In his view, nature might be permissive and not merely prohibitive, and morality as well as climate might shape human society and endeavor: “Mankind by their industry, and by the influence of good laws, have rendered the earth more proper for their abode”.

In the century following the publication of *The Spirit of the Laws*, there were many other writers who eagerly pursued Montesquieu’s environmental determinism and who through their own work, sought to provide evidence of its universal validity. Most argued that while other societies had been molded and governed by their environments, Europe by virtue of its intellect and industry had uniquely broken free

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147 Montesquieu repeated the Hippocratic view in explaining Asia’s contrast to Europe as antithesis, as Europe’s “other”. This idea had been enhanced by the long struggle against Islam and the Ottoman Turks. But he differed with Hippocrates in that he thought that Europe’s milder, more equable climate, and the more diverse and fragmented nature of its terrain, resulted in its more moderate laws and more balanced systems of government. According to him, in Europe, “the natural dimensions of geography” favored the creation of states of “a spirit of liberty”; while in Asia, nature could only produce a spirit of servility (Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, 2007, p. 269). Montesquieu illustrated the apparent utility of the environmentalist approach in trying to incorporate and systematize knowledge about such diverse and relatively unfamiliar societies as India, China, and North America. The belief that such societies could only be understood within the context of their physical environment, and that these shaped their moral and material characteristics to a degree unmatched in Europe itself, was a recurrent theme in Enlightenment thought. Such accounts of nature framed discussions of local history, culture and ethnography. The environmental ideas developed by Montesquieu in relation to the distinction between Europe and Asia became a central legacy for political economy and philosophy thereafter.


149 As late as 1934, in another influential work, *A Study of History*, Arnold J. Toynbee (1889-1975) still argued that civilization was wrested from a grudging terrain – the “stimulus towards civilization grows stronger in proportion as the environment grows more difficult”, because “the greater the challenge, the greater the response”. In Toynbee’s analysis, a Darwinian struggle for survival confronts all civilizations, and the forces of nature are among the most resilient adversaries. He rejected the view that civilization had grown up in environments that were particularly favorable for man; on the contrary (as Hippocrates had long before suggested), lands that were by nature blessed with natural abundance produce indolence, not civilization, as was the case in Nyasaland before the European takeover, or in the Amazonian jungles. (Toynbee, 1934, pp. 2-4, 207-44, 249-71).
of the shackles of climatic constraints. One example that has been widely cited was Henry Thomas Buckle's (1821-1862) *History of Civilization in England*. First published in 1857-61, in an age when Europe's mastery over nature was being even more confidently proclaimed, Buckle expounded on the effects of certain "physical laws"—such as climate, soil and natural disasters—on the development of civilization. He argues that Europe's growing sense of superiority to the rest of the world was measured in terms of its unique ability to surmount and subordinate the forces of nature.\(^{150}\)

Australian creative artists were certainly influenced by these ideas as they endeavoured to create national myths. Drawing together the themes of white masculine labour and struggle in the harsh natural environment, Roberts was laying one of the foundation stones in the Australian construction of a white European culture: he produced the myth of the bushman. His paintings summed up a tradition which represented not only aspects of a characteristic form of national life, but one which "embodied those qualities of adventure, freedom, mateship, the life of the open road, the resourceful overcoming of great obstacles which form features of 'mythos' and epic poetry at all ages".\(^{151}\) Additionally, these paintings mythologized the bush and the success of the white settlers.

In these paintings, the new native sons struggle to promote their own interests and authority, their power and presence in the land. National identity is constructed as a battle for mastery over physical and ideological barriers and boundaries. Nature provided the frontier for the native sons' "coming of age". Like the explorers of Empire before them, these native-born white Australians were nourished by the same belief in the progressive history of land-use, a belief derived from Western philosophy.

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\(^{150}\) Here again we find the age-old contrast between Europe and Asia. Civilization in Asia had a number of natural advantages, particularly the abundance of fertile soil; Europe was less favorably endowed. But, unlike in Asia, in Europe the "determining cause" of civilization was "not so much these physical peculiarities, as the skill and energy of man. Formerly the richest countries were those in which nature was most bountiful; now the richest countries are those in which man is most active". Europe had learned, as Asia had not, how to compensate for nature's "deficiencies". Buckle argued that the advance of European civilization is characterized by a diminishing influence of physical laws and an increasing influence of mental laws. (Buckle, 1946, p. 156)

to justify what they did to nature. Hippocrates’s idea that “harsh environments bred tough, resourceful individuals, while warm and fruitful lands fostered indolence” endured through to the beginning of 20th century. To this old formula was now added the fashionable new ingredient of Darwinian struggle. Evolutionary theory combined with environmental determinism to produce statements such as “the dry climate, and the incessant struggles with man and nature in which only the fittest could survive, have combined to produce a brave and hardy race of good physique; while the easy life...though encouraging a rapid increase in the number of its inhabitants, has sapped their energies and stunted their growth”. Within the Australian tradition, the bushman as a national type is seen to be battling the forces of nature, rather than the more amorphous and uncontrolled human forces and obstacles, such as world trade, low prices, depression and the competition of other pioneers.

But whether speaking in terms of the British Empire or in terms of the nationalism of Australia's native sons, nature, so long as it was imagined as an "other" to be incorporated into or appropriated, was endowed with the implication of being “alien” or “threatening”. In the representation of Australian nature these “alien” dangers included droughts and bushfires, floods and poisonous snakes, all of which tested the manly strength of the character and threatened to drive its inhabitants insane. Nature, as the progenitor of these threats, must be explored, conquered and defended against if a national identity was to be assured. Man’s identity could only be secured heroically by his possession and control of it. Sometimes nature threatened to drive him to madness or despair, and the native son was rendered powerless in the face of this force. He became its victim. Man’s identity, which might be secured heroically by his control of the land, was called into doubt by the threat of nature. This is most clearly expressed in literature, especially in Henry Lawson’s works.

Prior to the works of Henry Lawson, in the old bush songs which directly influenced Andrew Barton “Banjo” Paterson (1864-1941), Lawson and other contemporaries, the...

recurring themes included the kangaroo hunt, the bushfire, the branding, the attack by
blacks, the lost child, the death of the explorers, the fight with the bushrangers. In the
works of Paterson, the acclaimed author of what are considered representative
Australian bush ballads, the emphasis is on white Australians’ successful taming of
nature. In *The Man from Snowy River*, the battle between father and son is the battle
for mastery of nature. In the works of Barbara Baynton (1857-1929), the harshest,
ugliest, and cruelest aspects of primitive outback life are presented, and nature itself
is represented among the enemies. Similarly, in “A Bush Fire” and “A Night in the
Bush”, Marcus Clarke described the difficulties of progress in bush life, with “the
mountain bush” as a formidable barrier.

As in Australian painting, the dominant legends from the 19th century are those of the
bushman and its alternative, the pioneer.154 From these classical legends, or perhaps
it is even appropriate to say “national myths”, it is clear that it soon became
obligatory to define Australia in terms of “nature”, or, to put it more cautiously, in
terms of “the bush”. The dominant pattern of the developing Australian character that
Graeme Turner identifies in *National Fictions: Literature, Film and the Construction
of Australian Narrative* (1986) is that of the battler from the bush surviving against
the odds in a hostile and indifferent natural environment, and especially that of the
individual brought down by his environment. The “Australian type” is a good mate
and a battler. The qualities most frequently constructed and most highly appreciated
by the public, such as “mateship”, “endurance” and “bravery”, are forged through
man’s struggle and mastery over nature. In this myth, nature is represented as a
particularly harsh and relentless element which threatens madness and defeat. It must
also be remembered that the Australian bush and desert, as well as the life which was
led there by the Aborigines, “have about them much that is stunningly beautiful, even
if that beauty should tend toward Yeats’ ‘terrible beauty’, or to the dimensions of the
Romantic sublime”.155 Yet the sense which emerges in so much Australian art and
literature, the sense of something sinister and hostile, is undeniably central to the

155 Bliss, 1986, p. 5.
traditional Australian perception of the bush. This dominant theme is convincingly evident in Australian cultural traditions, for example in the works of Henry Lawson.

Lawson has long held undisputed pride of place as an archetypal figure in Australian culture. The prominent Australian literary critics A.A. Phillips claims that the Australian tradition of bushman-as-hero was grounded in the literature of the 1890s with Henry Lawson as the representative.\(^\text{156}\) Lawson's undisputed place as the originator of the Democratic Nationalist tradition has been underlined and reiterated by writers and critics in Hancock's *Australia* (1930), in *A History of Australian Literature* (1984-1985), in *The Oxford History of Australia* (1981), which cited the dominant themes in his work as the dominant themes in Australian society, and in many other publications. Lawson's depiction of the "idealized image of the noble bushman" was so popular that David McKee Wright, a poet and literary critic for the *Bulletin* in the 1920s, claims that "there is not a word in all his work which is not instantly recognized by his readers as honest Australian".\(^\text{157}\)

The dominant themes in Lawson's writings are the bush adventurers' struggling between hope and despair in taming the bush, their loneliness, isolation and mateship. In Lawson's works, the early explorers' visions of landscape can be observed in his earliest verse which imagines Australia as a land full of promise for pastoralists and labourers. But in his works written between 1891 and 1899 when nationalistic sentiment was prevalent, just as in Roberts' paintings, the idealized Arcadian bush of the past begins to give way to the representation of barren wilderness. The bush became the raw material upon which human beings acted and through which they attempted to realize their identity as bushmen. It was an enemy to be fought, as is depicted in his stories "The Drover's Wife", "The Bush Undertaker" and his poem "How the Land Was Won", all works in which Lawson praises pioneering settlement.\(^\text{158}\)

\(^{156}\) See Schaffer, 1988, p. 17.

\(^{157}\) See Wright's "Preface" to the book *Selected Poems of Henry Lawson*, 1918, p. x.

In Lawson’s works, barren, dark, dreary are the words most frequently used to describe the bush. Seen through the eyes of the battling bushman, the bush is a destructive force in any season. For example, in “The Drover’s Wife”, the dominant note is melancholy: nothing is attractive, nothing is lovely. Nature is always sinister and destructive. Lawson links the black snake, the beggar, and the native Aborigines with the forces which threaten white civilization. The drover’s wife overcomes the dangers of the wilderness which include bushfires, floods, cattle disease, raging bullocks and greedy crows – all parts of the alien otherness of the bush. In these activities she acts in a masculine role as the pioneering hero of the Australian tradition. Her conquest of the snake symbolizes the victory of the white man over the bush.

The bush as a frontier which will ultimately drive people mad is emphasized in a number of Lawson’s stories. In general it is female characters such as “The Selector’s Daughter” who go mad in the bush. Many bushmen are depicted as conquering heroes. But there are also exceptions, in which the bushman succumbs to madness or suicide. One example is Ratty Howlett, the crazed selector in the story “No Place for a Woman”. Another is the old shepherd in “The Bush Undertaker”. This story represents the disintegration, alienation, loneliness and eccentricity of the bushman, and concludes with the famous epitaph: “And the sun sank again on the grand Australian bush – the nurse and tutor of eccentric minds, the home of the weird, and of much that is different from things in other lands”.

In this well-known quotation the deep-rooted Western spirit pitted against the wilderness is evident.

As bushmen who undergo the sort of mental degeneration usually experienced by women, Ratty Howlett and the bush undertaker are rare figures in Lawson’s fiction. However, their plight gives definition to the general conditions of madness, isolation and death implicitly considered to be the ultimate threat of the bush. In this battle
against the bush, mateship is constructed as a defining characteristic of the Australian character. In the construction of mateship, the signification of nature cannot be ignored. Mateship is practiced not for its positive qualities but as the bushmen’s refuge when they battle for possession of nature, “a last line of defense against an uninviting, even hostile frontier”.¹⁶¹ Behind this very concept is the assumption that the land is a harsh and hostile enemy.

In Lawson’s works, Mitchell in the story “Mitchell on the ‘Sex’ and Other ‘Problems’” is generally regarded by critics as the character who best personifies the “ideal” bushman, who battles with bravery and does not succumb to the hostile, anti-human threat of the bush.¹⁶² Manning Clark summarizes it in this way: “He was the man with whom Australians could identify, because Mitchell by his very Australianness always came out on top...[He] had endured the hardships of the Australian bush [and he] knew about ‘the power and the glory’ as well as shame and degradation”.¹⁶³ In this statement it is possible to find the concept of the “frontier” proposed by the American historian Frederick Jackson Turner (1861-1932) and reiterated by Walter Prescott Webb (1888-1963). The “frontier thesis” was initially formulated by Turner to deal with old cultures encountering new environments. Although much of the discussion of the thesis has been built around debates about North American history, it can be extended to Europe’s “great frontier”, and serves as a model that can be applied or discussed in relation to the Australian “bush”. In this thesis, the frontier was “the meeting point between savagery and civilization”. It signifies an amalgamation of physical and cultural forces, as Turner himself indicated: “The wilderness masters the colonist. It finds him a European in dress, industries, tools, modes of travel, and thought. It takes him from the railroad car and puts him in the birch canoe. It strips off the garments of civilization... In short, at the frontier the environment is at first too strong for the man. He must accept the conditions which it

furnished, or perish..." The frontier environment played a critical part in creating the spirit of American democracy, the egalitarianism of Western ideas, and a sense of national identity. In this regard, the American “frontier thesis” has the same cultural position as the Australian “bush legend”.

Walter Prescott Webb expressed a similar view in his book *The Great Frontier* (first published in 1951). He claimed that the concept of a moving frontier is applicable where a civilized people are advancing into a wilderness, an unsettled area, or one sparsely populated by primitive people. The frontier movement is an advance against nature rather than against men. Even more emphatically than Turner, Webb saw the encounter with nature that the frontier represented as one of its most important characteristics. In Europe, a man’s life was dominated by contact with other men. The theme of life and the great struggle was man against man, and man against civilization, in which nature had been pushed into the background by civilization. In contrast, at the frontier, man confronted only nature and a vast, seemingly empty wilderness without policeman, priest, or overlord to control his activities. The theme of life was man against nature.

This concept of struggling against nature can be seen from a present-day perspective as the celebration of the destruction of the wilderness and its wildlife, and the conversion of “free” land for agricultural and industrial use. But in Australian cultural tradition, man against man was replaced by man against nature in forging the national identity. Lawson’s bush becomes the terrain on which national pride is built, the foundation of white, male, Anglo-Saxon culture. This way of thinking and writing attempts not only to establish a national identity through the relationship of man to nature but also to maintain the interests of the dominant social, religious and political institutions. Nature, then, is not only a metaphor for otherness through which man attains an identity, but also a site of battles – moral, political, religious and economic – invested in and traversed by the relations of power and knowledge.

In Lawson’s works there is a clear note of colonial expansionism in which the colonial conquest and Western appropriation of a foreign land is celebrated. Environmental determinism is implicit in his fundamental suppositions. These Eurocentric attitudes exist in his writing between the lines. His unspoken colonial assumptions echo those of Hippocrates, Montesquieu and Buckle. Lawson is also convinced that taming nature leads to civilization, and that the superiority of the European lies in his ability to survive, surmount and subordinate any terrible forces of nature. Moreover, an obvious Darwinian racism is apparent in his works. In Lawson’s vision, the Aborigines were associated with the very harshness and desolation of the “bush”. To fight the forces of both nature itself and its representative Aborigines was the evidence of the White settlers’ ability to become the “fittest” race, and proof of the victory and control of civilization over “barbarian” nature.

Conclusion

In the Australian cultural tradition, framed by both Western European ideology and Australia’s own colonial context, the dominant view of the relationship between man and nature was “anthropocentric”, regarding human beings as separated from and superior to nature, as battling against, conquering and controlling nature. This contrasts with the harmony or unity of humanity with nature that permeated the Chinese cultural tradition. In Western aesthetics, there is a deep-rooted negative attitude towards untamed nature especially the wilderness, which is the very opposite of the ancient Chinese literati’s appreciation of the unspoiled shanshui. The Western traditional conception of nature is reinforced by those theories of nature proposed during the European expansion and colonization. All these theories are intertwined to establish the Eurocentric idea that helped transform the “alien” landscape of Australia. As a result, in the Australian cultural tradition, the Australian landscape, especially the “untamed” wilderness, was frequently constructed in terms of an alienating “otherness” and was transformed into an “imagined” landscape with the European, especially the British, landscape as the norm. This contrasted with the idealized
“other” shanshui, the imagined world of the mind with unspoiled nature as its norm, which lay at the heart of Chinese culture. In the Chinese tradition, shanshui and its inhabitants, immortals (or noble literati), were deemed to be superior to human society. In the Australian tradition the “wild” nature and the Aboriginal people were deemed as a whole to be inferior to white civilization. Despite the influence of Romanticism, with its representation of a lyric, picturesque or sublime landscape, Australian nature, whether as an alien force threatening white man with isolation and despair, or as a land with picturesque (or sublime) beauty in the eyes of European Romantics, was always imagined and represented as an “other” (with contrasting or similar characteristics of European landscape), to be incorporated into or appropriated by the framework of the European “self”. And whereas the Chinese literati yearned to live a reclusive life in protective shanshui, white men have long been preoccupied with the idea of bringing “progress” to the “wild” landscape which was regarded as threatening. To the explorers and the squatters, the mountains, the bush and the interior land were considered to be obstacles, frontiers. The authority of white, Western civilization is established, upheld, and maintained as an ideological construct, in the physical actions of battling with nature, conquering the soil, mastering the “barbaric” natives, and through this advancing the cause of progress and civilization.
Chapter 4  Two Myths: Men as Battlers vs. Nature as Refuge

From this chapter to chapter 6 I will discuss the representation of nature in the construction of national myths in Australia and China during the period of the 1920s and early 1930s. Bearing the two countries’ cultural traditions in mind, we can see how the ideas of nature’s significance to human beings developed in the context of nationalism during this period: how the old (traditional) ideas continued; how the new ideas differed from the old; and how the Australian old were similar to the Chinese new, and vice versa. In this chapter 4 I will discuss two contrasting myths: “men as great battlers” and “nature as refuge”. I will first discuss the myth of “men as great battlers”. According to this myth, the force of nature is represented as destructive and human beings are constructed as possessing great power and capable of winning the final victory in the battle against nature. In Australia this myth was the continuation of the old idea of fighting against threatening nature which I discussed in the theme of “progress” in chapter 3. In China this idea was new, betraying the traditional idea of “harmony between man and nature”. In this new myth, the appearance of nature is portrayed as harsh, barren and threatening while human beings are represented as great battlers. This contrasts with the traditional image of nature as an idealized shanshui into which human beings are assimilated as minor participants, as discussed under themes 1) and 2) in chapter 2. I will then discuss an opposite myth, in which nature is represented as indomitable and as providing a consoling and refreshing force to human spirit. This myth in China was the continuation of the traditional idea of “nature as refuge”, discussed under the theme of “reclusion” in chapter 2. In Australia it was a new idea, one that contrasted with the old myth of nature as “threatening enemy”. With this new myth, the appearance of nature began to possess the characteristics of an “authentic” or “typical” Australian natural environment. This kind of nature began to be endowed with positive associations, which broke away from the old aesthetic of “wilderness” as “alien other” and “imagined” landscape in European style.
When I discuss these two myths, my focus and substantial analysis will be on the new ideas (especially on those which make a sharp contrast with the old ideas), because the old ideas have already been discussed in earlier chapters 2 and 3. However I will also discuss at some length changed elements in the old ideas, which may have been influenced by the new social environments of this period. In this chapter, I will not only compare Australian and Chinese representations, but also compare the old and new ideas of nature in both cultures. Compared with Australian creative artists, in the 1920s and early 1930s, Chinese artists were influenced by social ideology to a greater extent; I will therefore discuss the Chinese social context during this period in more detail. Australian creative artists were relatively more independent and individualistic; as a result I will discuss their individual opinions, experiences and aesthetics in more detail.

“Men as Battlers”: Nature’s Force as Destructive, and Human Power as Great

1) Background of the Post-War Australian Fascination with Nature

During the 1920s and early 1930s, Australian society was experiencing a mood of post-war nationalism, a consolidation of identity for a country which had only officially been a nation since 1901. In this time of social and cultural nationalism, the search for a national cultural identity preoccupied diverse groups of Australians.¹ A sense of nation was developed by filmmakers, artists and writers through the discovery of the distinctiveness of their landscape, which can be seen through the popularity of landscape representation in building the national image. Although after the war a high proportion of Australians lived in cities, and it was therefore more difficult for artists and writers to focus on the representation of Australian landscape, there was still a fascination with Australian nature. Some creative artists had a strong belief that the motor cars, the railway, electric power and factories were not suitable subjects for constructing a national identity.² Instead, they thought that the nation’s

¹ See Butel, Margaret Presion: the Art of Constant Rearrangement, 1986, p. 50.
² See Tsokhas, Making a Nation State: Cultural Identity, Economic Nationalism and Sexuality in Australian
true identity was entirely to be found in the bush. The Anzac legend was in fact a new celebration of the bush legend. At the same time, in the construction of a new national myth, the idea of distinctively Australian characteristics came to the fore. The un-European character of their landscape was often seen as a prime symbol of this distinctive Australianness. As a result the quest for the soul or spirit of true Australian nature became the preoccupation of some writers, filmmakers and artists. During this period, a new confidence in both the nation and its nature became intertwined with the old colonial ideas. Let me first discuss the continuation of the old ideas in the myth of man battling with nature.

2) Myth of “Men as Battlers” in Australian Culture

In the construction of the national myths, a number of films, paintings and literary works, presented a conservative continuation of the 19th-century tradition in which nature was constructed as a negative force posing obstacles and trials to the white Australians. In this myth, the pioneer conflict with the land was stressed – in a narrative that emphasized the harsh qualities of bush life in the face of fire, drought and other difficulties. This is most clearly shown in certain films of this period. In this section I will use two films as examples to show how this myth was continued in Australian culture.

*The Breaking of the Drought* (1920), one of the brilliant bush photographer Franklyn Barrett’s (1873-1964) two surviving bush films, is such an example. At the very beginning of the film the caption expresses clearly that Australia is a land of vivid contrasts, “from the frigid snowfields of Arctic Kosciusko to the sun-kissed groves of tropical Queensland, from rich pastures literally flowing with milk and honey to outback plains upon which grim drought has laid its devastating hand”. When the director wishes to demonstrate the Australian people’s heroic spirit, the natural environment is seen as a threatening enemy to test their perseverance – through such phenomena as droughts and sensational bushfires, as the pitiless sun which cracks the

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*History*, 2001, p. 177.

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parched earth, as the death of the animals, as the dust storm. Barrett deliberately sought out the fearful drought conditions at Narrabri in New South Wales to achieve his intentions, combining images of the sun-baked and cracked earth with few sparse trees, starving sheep and a dried up dam.\(^3\) Although the caption declares that Australia is a country of “vivid contrasts”, the opening shots of the film only emphasize the harsh side of nature and capture the horror of the drought poignantly and graphically. The most impressive shots in the film are stretches of dusty earth instead of green paddocks; dry riverbeds instead of flowing streams (Fig. 79). Through the scenes of battling against the bushfire, the catastrophic dust storm and the plagues of mice, the negative image of nature in the film is so impressive that the government even prohibited this film from being exported to other countries, concerned that this film might deter the potential immigrants from coming to Australia.\(^4\) Although the film ends with shots of a rich and promised land, plentiful corn fields, fat cattle and flowing streams, this is achieved through the efforts of the heroic battler successfully fighting with destructive force of natures. The rich land is the reward for fighting, just as the caption describes: “The trials by famine and fire have been terribly severe, but the rewards are correspondingly great, as the dams and creeks are filled again and the waterfalls make glorious play”.

Another film with a similar representation of the relationship between white bushmen and nature is *On Our Selection* (1920) by Raymond Longford (1878-1959). It tells of the Rudd family’s adjustment to bush life. When the film depicts the love between Kate and Sandy, the scenery is mild and beautiful, but when it wishes to demonstrate the human spirit, the relationship between man and nature is constructed as oppositional and antagonistic. The hardship which test the pioneer’s spirit are stressed; the hostility of nature is demonstrated by bushfire, drought, and the sterility of the soil. This sharp contrast gives the audience (especially those without a deep understanding of the diversity of Australian nature) an unintended impression that this


is not the same land at all. The most striking scenes in this film are those demonstrating the impact of implacable force of natures on human fate, such as the bushfire, and those demonstrating the human struggle with nature, such as the shot of putting out the fire which lasts as long as three minutes (Fig.81).

In both *The Breaking of the Drought* and *On Our Selection*, the forces of nature, most frequently the bushfire, are represented as the “other” against which the bushman’s spirit and strength are tested. The owner of the Wallaby station, Jo Galloway, and the bushman Tom, in *The Breaking of the Drought*, are representatives of the heroic fighter. In scenes such as cutting down the trees to feed the starving animals when the grass and scrub have all gone (Fig.82), and rescuing Gilbert (the owner’s son) and a sundowner who are caught in the bushfire (Fig.80), in captions such as “Jo’s spirit never faltered”, and “Gallant horse and gallant rider came bravely through the ordeal”, the image of a fighter pulling through all natural threats and obstacles is established impressively. Gilbert, who is initially tempted by the luxurious city life, also experiences his spiritual regeneration when he is purged by his survival of a natural country hazard – the bush fire (Fig.83).

The purpose of constructing destructive force of natures is not to show the threats posed by nature, but to eulogize the bravery of man (such as Jo and Tom). This is because, as the caption suggests, they were “the backbone of our grand commonwealth”. This purpose is perceived and clearly expressed by Pike and Cooper, who argue that “Barrett has intended to contrast the drought scenes with more prosperous rural conditions and to pay tribute to the indomitable spirit of the Australian farmer”. Barrett himself also stated that his intention was not to run “the risk of spoiling Australia’s reputation by giving drought scenes only...”, but to “illustrate to our city dwellers the brave fight of the man in the land”. In this

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5 A “sundowner” is an Australian and American colloquial expression for a tramp who makes a practice of arriving at a station about sundown, under the pretence of seeking work, so as to obtain food and a night’s lodging (See *Shorter Oxford Dictionary*, vol. II, 3rd edition, 1973, p. 2188).


narrative, the Australian environment is constructed as something used to raise a superior breed of man, a concept underpinned by the ideology of “environmental determinism” proposed by Hippocrates, Buckle, Montesquieu and Toynbee as discussed in chapter 3. The legend has been consistently constructed toward a stereotyped interpretation: most of the heroes are individuals fighting against the force of nature and have direct links with the soil. The American director Wallace Worsley (1878-1944) in the 1920s commented that “the drama of Australia is not as it has so frequently been represented overseas – a drama of an Australian falling victim to the wiles of a native girl ... or of a white woman living amongst Aborigines, but the drama of man’s struggle against nature in the face of great physical and mental hardship, his eventual triumph, and his magnificent reward”. As an American, he recognized the essential qualities of the Australian legend, especially in the films of Franklyn Barrett and Raymond Longford. In the construction of this legend in Australian film of this period, there are few representations of the dominance of man by nature, as in some of Lawson’s 19th-century stories. Rather, the human struggle against nature and man’s eventual triumph through great physical and mental hardship become the essential qualities of this legend.

As a continuation of the late 19th century pioneer legend, this image of nature and the bushman is not only an expression of a national sentiment. It reflects a new ideology of nationhood, baptized by the First World War. Although nationalism had been developing since the 1890s, it was at first often conceived in British terms – the national union of federation also meant union with the larger British nation. In the 1890s, loyalty to Britain was more important than love of native land. As Geoffrey Dutton observes, “loyalty has taken the place of patriotism”. Perhaps no event influenced the development of Australian nationalism more than the First World War and the economic, political and industrial turbulence that came in its wake. This momentous upheaval and the difficult postwar readjustment had unusual significance.
for Australian definitions of nationhood and national identity. The cruelty of the war dispelled many illusions, and shaped a new concept of Australian nationalism. In the historian Geoffrey Serle's words, "for most ex-servicemen, the war stood out in retrospect as far and away the most profound experience of their lives." General Sir Ian Hamilton also comments that "Men live through more in five minutes on that crest [at Anzac Cove] than they do in five years of Bendigo or Ballarat". Neither of these two men exaggerates the effects of the cruelty of the war on human psychology.

The agony of the war through which Australia had passed produced a new flowering of the Australian spirit, and contributed to an outpouring of patriotic and sentimental feelings. As Alomes argues, the colonial nature of Australian history makes it lack a true sense of national interests and responsibilities. The war offered national and personal meaning to a modern society, a "deracinated, transplanted, urban, materialistic society with neither deep beliefs nor spiritual roots in the thin topsoil of a dry continent". This idea is close to Henry Lawson's view that modern evils and apathy could be cured by the purifying flame of war, and that the war could offer regeneration to Australian men. Although Lawson's view of the war was somewhat extreme, his suggestion that soldiers found a sense of meaning in the war experience was a reasonable one. Billy Hughes (1862-1952), the seventh Prime Minister of Australia, claims that "war prevents us from slipping into the abyss of degeneracy, and from becoming flabby... War has purged us, war has saved us from physical and moral degeneracy and decay". This is the same message conveyed by the film The Breaking of the Drought in which Gilbert is purged by the bush fire and experiences his regeneration. Here the Anzac legend and the bush legend come together.

The war intensified the sense of national identity in the 1920s and reinforced the

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13 Quoted in Alomes. 1988, p. 60.
14 Quoted in Alomes. 1988, p. 60.
16 Alomes, 1988, p. 59
18 Quoted in Humphrey McQueen, A New Britannia: An Argument Concerning the Social Origins of Australian Radicalism and Nationalism, 1976, p. 87.
national character of “the Australian type” (the brave battler) by relating the Anzac legend to the bush legend. C. E. W. Bean, the great myth-maker of Anzac, reflected that on Anzac Day “the consciousness of Australian nationhood was born”.19 The propaganda produced during and after the war – the fabric of the Anzac myth – refurbished the bush legend and bridged the gap between the pioneer past and the present. It served to mythologize urban-living experience and staked a new claim to the bush ethos by proving that Australians living in the cities had the same character and qualities as those living in the bush. As the historian Ian Turner points out, the reputation of the Anzacs at Gallipoli and European trenches was instantly incorporated into the traditional values of the Australian bush. Not only did the Australian soldiers pioneer a new “bushman” style of fighting, but the Australian performance was judged to be distinctively within the bush traditions – of physical fitness, an ability to adapt to unusual conditions, and that bush blend of individualism and cooperation.20 In *The Breaking of the Drought* and *On Our Selection*, the pioneering spirit is upheld, symbolizing the active male spirit, the heroic character enhanced by the war. In the myth of the battlers, pitted against the arid and impoverished soil, against the threatening force of nature, and all the hardship experienced by Australian settlers coming to terms with a natural environment so different from their homes in Europe, a certain Australian spirit was advocated and valorized.

In this continuation and extension of the traditional myth of the “Australian type”, the brave battler, the qualities that are frequently presented to and appreciated by the audience, qualities such as “endurance”, “bravery” and “mateship”, are often depicted by reducing the status of nature as the “other”. If droughts and bushfires are among the most common natural phenomena, and a sense of fear is most frequently caused by such threats posed by nature, then the natural human response is inevitably one of “endurance”, “bravery” and “mateship”. This is humanity’s only escape in the face of natural adversity. Sometimes the character who endures hardship in nature is a

19 Quoted in Alomes, 1988, p. 60.
woman, for example Mrs Galloway and Marjorie Galloway in *Breaking of the Drought*, and the "never despairing" mother Mrs Rudd in *On Our Selection*. They are represented either as passively enduring and resisting the natural disaster without yielding, or as actively struggling against adversity like a typical bushman, as the caption states: "a true-hearted woman of the Outback, whose kindly nature has not been soured by adversities". The young bush heroines are often accomplished horsewomen who labour in the countryside as the emblem of bush values. They assert Australianess through demonstrating both country strength and independence. Such a character is Molly Henderson in *The Breaking of the Drought*. After successfully taming a wild horse, she is the champion horsewoman of the state (Fig.89 (i) ). Here the horse symbolizes a wild force of nature, and the motif of "taming the horse", which frequently appears in Australian film in this period, symbolically mirrors human strength and wisdom. These sorts of girls are "emblematic of 'bush' values". They come to represent not women's interests or strengths, not the passive qualities of the female spirit, leisurely and pleasure-seeking, as portrayed in the Hollywood films of this period, but those of a masculine national character, the pioneering, active, heroic male spirit. In this way characters such as Molly Henderson came to represent that masculine economy.

3) Myth of “Men as Battlers” in Chinese Culture

As with the Australian representation of bush battlers in the context of nationalism, the Chinese culture of this period (especially the leftist culture of the 1930s) also frequently constructed nature as destructive and human beings as great battlers. This was a break with traditional ideas. This is shown clearly in film, painting and literature, each genre demonstrating different aspect of the myth. I will use examples from all three genres. All the films discussed in this section are from the 1930s, because the films made in the 1920s were still saturated with traditional ideologies (for reasons I will discuss in chapter 6). In the discussion, I will occasionally refer to this myth in Australian culture when there are significant similarities or differences.

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between the two cultures.

a) Representation of the Myth (with Films and Paintings as Examples)

As in Australia, during the 1920s and 1930s, in China, the age of self-containment and isolation was also over, with the overthrow of the Qing Dynastic regime in 1911. And just as Australian society was experiencing a mood of post-war nationalism and a consolidation of identity, Chinese society was also experiencing a strong national sentiment. External forces such as foreign aggression denied peace to China and forced the Chinese government to open its doors and import western cultures. Internally revolutions and rapid changes of regime, civil war amongst the warlords, and the war between the newly established Communist Party and the nationalist Party (KMT), pulled the whole nation into a state of crisis and agony. This compelled the Chinese intellectuals to consider the condition of the national spirit, in their urgent need to save the country from collapse.

In terms of culture, this was one of the most turbulent periods in Chinese history. Because of a series of revolutions and movements, among which the most influential one was the New Culture Movement, the traditional culture was tottering. The New Culture Movement, which radically liberated people’s thoughts, was an intellectual revolution starting from 1915 and lasting to the 1920s, whose leaders included Chen Duxiu (1879-1942), Li Dazhao (1889-1927), Cai Yuanpei (1868-1940), Hu Shi (1891-1962) and Lu Xun (1881-1936).\(^\text{23}\) It sprang from the upsurge of nationalism and disillusionment with traditional Chinese culture, and aimed to resist both Chinese feudalism and Western imperialism by the way of creating a new culture based on Western science and democracy. The movement reached its peak on May 4, 1919 (the “May Fourth Movement”), with the student demonstrations in Beijing, protesting the Chinese government’s weak response to the Treaty of Versailles after the First World War. These revolutions and movements fiercely criticized age-old Chinese traditions, especially those of Confucianism and Daoism, accusing them of being responsible for

\(^{23}\) Chen Duxiu: 陳獨秀; Li Dazhao: 李大釗; Cai Yuanpei: 蔡元培; Hu Shi: 胡適; Lu Xun: 魯迅.
the backwardness and poverty of China. The revolutionaries introduced new ideas such as enlightenment and modernity, shifted the artistic and literary emphasis from an idealized or imagined peaceful world to the realistic world of conflict (including the reform of society and the struggle with nature), and from heaven to earth.

This is demonstrated in the first leftist film, *Wild Torrents* (*Kuangliu*) (1933), directed by Cheng Bugao (1898-1966) and scripted by Xia Yan (1900-1995), an active leftist. Interestingly, in the new Chinese myth it is usually “water” (not “fire”) that stands for the force of nature. In *Wild Torrents*, nature is purposefully constructed as a destructive force that man fights against. The film is regarded as “the beginning of a new path for Chinese cinema”. It narrates the struggle between the peasants and the flood on the one hand, and on the other, the peasants and the landlord. In this film, the central problem is the class struggle between landlord and the peasantry, but nature plays an important role – as an enemy being fought against, just like the landlord class. The main scenery is the darting rain and clouds. The film is filled with intrigue, tension and struggle – between human beings themselves, and between human beings and nature. The threat posed by water and flood to the lower-class people’s life is emphasized. In a similar way to the Australian bush legend, here, in order to demonstrate the strength of the peasants, who are regarded as symbolizing...

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24. *Kuangliu*: 狂流; Cheng Bugao: 程步高; Xia Yan: 夏衍. From 1928, influenced by the Communists, the mainstream literature began to lean toward the “left” with utilitarianism and fighting spirit as the guiding principle. Following the steps of leftist writers, in 1931, the China Leftist Dramatists Association launched a “leftist film movement” to criticize the feudal ideas in Chinese film, and became a leader in film production. The leftist film movement was a significant force which fundamentally changed the landscape of national cinema in the 1930s. According to an official definition, leftist films refer to those anti-imperialist, anti-feudal films produced between 1933 and 1935 in the leftist film movement under the leadership of the Cultural Alliance of Chinese Leftists. But many other films, although not made between 1933 and 1935, or under the leadership of leftists, can also be considered ideologically akin to leftist films if they were influenced greatly by leftist ideas. The term can be extended to include films released in 1937, and can be pushed back to account for film criticism that anticipated the emergence of leftist films (See Zhang Wei 張薇, *Offbeat Scanning of Early Chinese Film* (Qianchen Yingshi: Zhongguo Zaoqi Dianyingde Linglei Saomiao — )), 2004, p. 63).


26. The main plot: in a village called Fuzhuang, beset by rain day after day, landlord Fu Boren collects money donated by villagers for building dykes and dams; however, he squanders it, causing the dykes of Fuzhuang to fall into a perilous condition. Led by Liu Tiesheng, all the peasants in the village fight against the flooding. Fu Boren and his family move to the city to escape the catastrophe. He collects lots of money donated by the peasants to build the dam, but he cheats them. Later, Hankou city is inundated by the flood, but the flood in Fuzhuang village is under the control of the peasants. With the arrival of another thunderstorm, the dam is in danger again. No longer able to tolerate this, the poor peasants defeat Fu Boren to get back the donated money to build the dam. Finally, the old dam breaks, and Fu Boren is drowned in the river.
the Chinese spirit, the force of nature is represented negatively as the “other”: the rainstorm, the thunderstorm and flooding, posing a threat to human “success”.

Wild Torrents is an unprecedented film, making a shift in the direction of Chinese cinema. It is representative of a series of films influenced by leftist ideas in which nature’s destructive force is stressed. These films include Sea-burial (Haizang) (1933) in which fishermen are swallowed by a typhoon (Fig.92), Triumphant Song (Kaige) (1935) in which peasants, with their collective power, win the battle against both landlord and drought in the countryside south of Yangtze River, and Song of the Fishermen (Yuguangqu) (1934) which articulates the leftist idea of “rural bankruptcy” and conveys an impressive sense of gloom. In all these films, the force of nature as a threatening enemy is emphasized. For example, at the beginning of Song of the Fishermen the director makes it clear in the caption that although the sea was traditionally praised by poets, it is actually a disaster for the fishermen. The film exaggerates the conflict between man and nature through the use of depressing music, the lyrics of the song and the shots of storms which deprive the fishermen of their lives. All of this is in sharp contrast to the image of water in traditional representations. In a similar way to “men as battlers” in Australian film, in these Chinese films the force of nature is stressed in order to heighten the power of the human beings. The peasants are repressed not only by the landlord class, but also by hostile nature – both cause their bankruptcy and homelessness. Nature is an evil force, or works together with an evil force, to test the peasants’ spirit and willpower.

27 Zhou Xing 周星, Art History of Chinese Film (Zhongguo Dianying Yishushi 中國電影藝術史), 2005, p. 64.
28 Haizang: Kaige: Yuguangqu: 他 >=
29 It needs to be clarified that in some of these films, in terms of technology (not ideology), there was a link between man and nature in the Confucian sense. Human emotions are projected onto natural objects or phenomena. For instance, in the movie Song of the Fisherman, when highlighting the grief felt at the grandma’s death, the director cuts from the crying children to the shot of crying crows among the dead trees. This technique of using lyrical Montage to express the inner feelings of the characters is a main tradition of Chinese film. Catherine Yi-Yu Chowoo argues that montage mingling human image with natural image, which is prevalent in Chinese classical poetry, can be regarded as Chinese Montage (See “The Montage of Chinese Film”, in Chris Berry, ed., Perspectives on Chinese Cinema, 1991). Through this type of montage, the director connects shots of character and shots of natural phenomena such as the wind, flower, snow or the moon. Nature is made use of to symbolize or suggest character. Through this the director achieves the integration of human psyche and natural atmosphere. In some scholars’ opinion, this is a sort of “harmony of man and nature” (See Huang Huilin, 2001, p. 160). In fact this is also “Bixing” in Chinese film (See Chapter 2 for the discussion of “Bixing”). The directors and cameramen consciously or unconsciously bring this aesthetic from classical poetry into cinematic narrative, to achieve a poetic lyricism. However, in terms of ideology, all the above films focused on the conflict of humans and nature.
Wild Torrents and the films mentioned above undermine the traditional utopian vision of an idyllic countryside as a safe haven from society's evils. They depict class conflict in the countryside. In this conflict, nature's force plays the role of the enemy. In other words, natural disaster and man-made calamities — social conflict or class exploitation — are interwoven as an enemy to be defeated by the peasantry, who represent a new force in the Chinese national revolution. Here lies the difference between these Chinese and Australian films. In the Australian myth, "the conflation of natural threats devalues the social divisiveness of class conflict." This can be seen in The Breaking of the Drought in which natural hazards repress the hostility between social classes. In this myth, what is absent is the question of the theft of one man's labour by another. Although nature is represented as a similarly destructive enemy, the battlers are often constructed as escaping from politically or economically unpleasant realities. The idea of "national identity" or "national interest" is used to distract attention from the unpleasant realities of class exploitation, whereas in the new Chinese myth, the image of nature is often constructed as a tool to criticize those unpleasant realities.

Wild Torrents advocates the collective power of the mass, and calls on people to be the master of both country and nature through collective struggle. This political imperative was not seen in Australian cinema in the same way. In The Breaking of the Drought and On Our Selection, we witness the opposition between small, independent human qualities (such as those of the individual or family) and huge natural forces. The Australian myth seems to displace collective action from class consciousness to locate it in the more "natural" community: the family. There is a general reduction of a radical political dimension in the Australian bush legend during this period. However, from another perspective, individual experiences and pioneering individualism in Australian culture are constructed in so stereotyped a way that they virtually form a collective ethos. The battle with the natural environment is

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31 Ibid., p. 358.
waged by “idealized” men or by women with manly characteristics. In this environment, one discovers the collective identity of the bushman battler.

“Destructive nature and human battler” is not only represented in film. It can also be found in Chinese painting of this period. Painting as a medium lacks the narrative quality of film, but it can dramatically demonstrate the change in subject matter (the appearance of nature and of human figures in nature). The landscape became more and more harsh, and the human figure was represented as more and more significant. This kind of painting departed from the traditional idea of “minor man in grand and friendly nature” to “great man pitted against hostile nature”. The greatness and supremacy of humanity is usually achieved at the cost of the harmony between humanity and nature. Human beings’ struggle against nature and their distressful life in nature is brought to the fore. As the film and art critic Zhou Xing claims, the New Culture Revolution and the spirit of the May Fourth movement had such a great impact on Chinese culture that they changed its direction altogether. Many artists replaced the hymn of remote shanshui with the cry of battle. They became involved in the depiction of human suffering and the struggle in nature. Zhao Wangyun is an example.

Zhao Wangyun (1906-1977), one of the pioneer Chinese painters advocating the representation of real life, made heroic journeys to the northwestern rural areas. In his painting, the threatening force of nature fuses with a clear anxiety about the destiny of the nation. For example, in Peasants in the Boundless Dusk (c.1933) (Fig.25), the dense texture of the rocky surface, the deep folds of the mountain, the rising precipices and the eerie atmosphere created by the murky ink tone articulate a great tension and convey a sense of threatening landscape in the northwestern Loess Plateau. Snowstorm in the Orchard of the Cangshi Road (c.1933) (Fig.26) depicts

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32 Zhou Xing. 2005, pp. 36-37.
33 Zhao Wangyun: 趙望雲.
the travellers’ difficulties and struggles caused by the snowstorm; even the trees are nearly blown down. Waiting to be Saved (c.1930s) (Fig.27) represents the terrifying waves of a river and passengers in a boat fighting with the waves and waiting to be saved. A Boat in Exile (c.1930s) (Fig.28) depicts the flood in Jiangsu and Shandong provinces and human figures battling with it. Whereas traditionally in Chinese painting human figures are assimilated into the oneness of nature, in Waiting to be Saved and A Boat in Exile the appearance of the human figures and their struggle with the force of river are impressive and striking elements in the whole picture. There is a manifest lack of harmony between humanity and nature; there is no “forgetting the self in nature”. Instead, what impresses the viewer is the confrontation between man and nature, and the longing for human emancipation and freedom through the breaking of the oppression of nature.

In these films and paintings, there are several related points of significance. What relates them together is the idea that nature is something to be battled against. The first point concerns the representation of nature’s appearance – the subject matter. For hundreds of years, mainstream Chinese shanshui painting was characterized by the beauty of softness, elegance and peacefulness. From the 1920s, the subject of the shanshui painting was expanded. This is exemplified in Zhao Wangyun’s painting. Instead of representing the mild and pleasant southern scenery, Zhao was the first influential painter to take the northwest landscape as his major subject. Through depicting a basically hostile terrain (the precipitous mountains, the storm, the deluged river), and the strength of the human beings or animals in their battle against the harsh natural environment, Zhao intended to convey a strong sense of realism and thereby to awaken the spirit of the people. This is similar to the representation of the harshness of nature in Australian nationalistic paintings and literature of the late 19th century (e.g. in the works of Roberts and Lawson) and in the continuation of this

36 Waiting to be Saved: 待援者, in Zhao’s painting collection Zhao Wangyun Travelling Impression (Zhao Wangyun Luxing Yinxiang Huaxuan 趙望雲旅行印象畫選), See Cheng Zheng, 2002, p. 21.
tradition in Australian films of the 1920s. In this period, the subjects in Chinese painting were expanded to include the Loess Plateau, the Gobi Desert, the banks of the Yellow River and the far southwestern and northwestern regions where the climate is harsh and the terrain bleak and inhospitable. To Zhao and those painters who focused on depicting the harsh environment, the more harshly the landscape was represented, the more the heroic qualities of the human spirit could be demonstrated. Such subjects, compositions and motifs became their vehicles to evoke the national spirit. Even the natural environment in the Jiangnan area, which was traditionally represented as mild, pleasant and gentle, was now constructed as harsh, inhospitable and destructive in leftist films or paintings. This can be seen in the flood, rainstorm, sea storm, typhoon, and drought represented in *Wild Torrents* and *A Boat in Exile*.

The second point concerns the way human beings are represented. From these films and paintings, it is clear that depicting the contemporary common people, especially lower class people (e.g. peasants and workers), as opposed to immortals or noble figures, became the focus of attention. Compared with the traditional idealistic and idyllic style, this new style was highly realistic and sardonic, with a power of evocation. This is shown in the films *Wild Torrents*, *Song of the Fishermen* and paintings *Peasants in the Boundless Dusk*, *Waiting to be Saved* and *A Boat in Exile*. These people, especially the peasants exhibiting qualities of bravery, endurance and fighting spirit, were also comparable to the “bushmen” in the Australian cultural tradition of the late 19th century and in the continuation of the tradition in the Australian film of the 1920s. The image of these poor people, either in the role of “fighter” (e.g. the peasants in *Wild Torrents*) or as “victim” (e.g. the fishermen in *Song of the Fishermen*), with their shabby, worn-out clothes and bare feet, broke with the tradition of the decent, elegant stereotype. They were endowed with a heroic quality to fight against natural forces such as flood and drought, in contrast with the noble figure and their “unity” with nature. Both these realistic figures and realistic nature are from “this” world, as opposed to the traditional imagined shanshui image.

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39 In the past, occasionally there were also descriptions of the cold and harsh nature unfriendly to human beings in the north of China. But this kind of representation was never the dominant or mainstream tradition.
of "other" world.  

The third point concerns the image of water. In leftist film and some realistic shanshui painting of the 1920s and 1930s, water is a destructive power, as seen in roaring rivers or the stormy sea. This image of water has the same function as the image of (bush)fire in the Australian films mentioned above. Both work to test the human spirit. This image is distinct from its counterpart in traditional Chinese culture, in which water was considered to be the mother or the nurturing force which fostered humanity. In shanshui culture, the dominant character of water was tender, mild and peaceful. The unselfish nourishing character of water suggested the Confucian idea of mercy and benevolence. Daoists also sang the praise of water: "Water benefits all things without contending with them".  

There was little representation of floods in traditional shanshui painting and poetry. 

Related to the idea of water, in traditional Chinese culture, fishing was also a symbol signifying the realm or state of standing aloof from worldly affairs. The fisherman’s life was represented as carefree, detached and in harmony with nature: an ideal lifestyle of the recluse with noble qualities (as discussed in Chapter 2). The fisherman in traditional culture is never a member of the poor ordinary class. However, in the 1920s and 1930s, the fisherman’s life was constructed more often as dangerous and impoverished, threatened by both the upper class and natural forces, as represented in the film Song of the Fishermen. The fisherman was no longer a symbol of the ideal carefree life, but of a life which was poor and hard. Qi Baishi, one of the most influential painters of this period, depicted the realistic life of the fisherman in the inscription on his painting The Fisherman: 

Looking at the fishing basket I am thinking,  
Where shall I go since the lake and river are all dried up?  
I don’t worry if there is no wine left tomorrow,  

40 In the paintings of the traditionalists of this period, there were few representations of man’s struggle against nature. But the human figure changed from that of the nobles and immortals to the common people, particularly the peasants, as in the works of Qi Baishi (齊白石) (1864-1957). 

But I do worry if they come to collect taxes, as my basket is empty.\textsuperscript{42} In this poem there is no spirit of detachment at all. Rather it gives a realistic description of the life of the fisherman living in poverty and subject to heavy taxes and levies.

Another image relevant to the image of water is snow. In traditional \textit{shanshui} culture, “snow” was depicted as bringing peace and consolation to the human spirit, covering the “ugly” reality and misery, and detaching human beings from “this” world. For example, Ju Ran’s (active in the Five Dynasties) \textit{Snow} (Fig.23) depicts a sublime mountain covered with snow.\textsuperscript{43} Several travellers, light on their feet, are walking toward a temple which is partly hidden in the depth of the mountain, symbolizing the clean “other” world of Buddhist detachment. Similar representations of snow can also be found in Dai Jin’s (1389—1462) \textit{Walk in the Snow to Look for Plum Blossom} (Fig.24) which demonstrates the tender character of snow and the travellers’ joyful journey through it.\textsuperscript{44} There is no expression of haste or misery in these paintings. To paint the snow is to paint the ideal of transcending the filth of “this” world. In addition, the white snow symbolizes the realm of “emptiness” and “void”, which is in accordance with the idea of Daoism. However, the 1920s and 1930s, as we have seen in Zhao Wangyun’s paintings \textit{Snowstorm in Cangshi Road}, a new image of snow appeared, as an unfriendly and threatening force bringing trouble and increasing the potential for misery in human lives.

\textbf{b) Reasons for the Ideological and Aesthetic Change}

The reasons for these great changes were profound. Chinese \textit{shanshui} culture had maintained a steady, uninterrupted and continuous development for more than one thousand years with relatively few influences from abroad.\textsuperscript{45} However, from the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, especially since the New Culture Movement, many

\textsuperscript{42} 齊白石, "漁翁圖" 题詩 My translation.
\textsuperscript{43} Ju Ran: 巨然; Snow: 雪圖.
\textsuperscript{44} Dai Jin: 戴進; \textit{Walk in the Snow to Look for Plum Blossom}: 踏雪尋梅圖.
\textsuperscript{45} During the Qing period Chinese court painting was influenced greatly by the Italian Jesuit painter Giuseppe Castiglione (郎世寧) (1688-1766). But this influence was confined to the court and did not affect mainstream literati painting.
momentous changes within the tradition as well as great challenges from abroad upset the centuries-old complacency. Political upheavals in history almost always bring radical changes in art in their wake. When society is in chaos caused by trouble and unrest, writers, filmmakers and artists are prone to give vent to their feelings. The violence of the social changes and the impact of alien cultures on China in the 1920s and 1930s was of an order unprecedented in history since the Spring and Autumn Period. Not surprisingly this resulted in Chinese shanshui culture undergoing radical and profound change in its subject, content and social function.

Film, painting and literature at this time were consequently saturated with the serious concerns of the nation and the misery experienced by its people. One of the fundamental concepts propounded by the New Culture Movement was that artistic works should have a positive effect on society and should both reflect the real life of ordinary people (especially their misery) and help to reform society. The peasants in the countryside and the workers in the city were considered the lowest class in China. They experienced great misery. To represent their life and struggle thus became the primary concern of many Chinese intellectuals especially the leftists of the 1930s, as can be seen in the films Wild Torrents, Song of the Fishermen and Zhao Wangyun’s painting. At the same time, the status of the literati was declining. Before the 20th century, the literati who represented the mainstream of cultural life, were inspired by a passionate love of nature. They were educated within the ideological structures of Confucianism and Daoism, both of which upheld the ideal of human unity with nature. In addition to this, the traditional literati, especially the aristocratic class, were less worried about the necessities of life, even if they lived a reclusive life in the mountains or by riversides. Wolfgang Kubin expressed a similar idea, that the development of the concept of nature in Chinese classical literature had a close connection with the rise of the aristocracy. Without the feudal nobility there would not have been the passion for shanshui from the Six Dynasties.\textsuperscript{46} Although there were always exceptions such as Tao Yuanming, who lived a reclusive life in relative

\textsuperscript{46} Kubia, 1990, p. 2.
poverty, Kubin’s thesis is broadly speaking a reasonable one. But in the 1920s and 1930s, the majority of the peasantry and workers, who were now thought of as representing the mainstream of Chinese social and cultural life, were by no means lovers of nature. Rather, they were, and were often represented as, the embodiment of those who opposed the forces of nature. On the one hand they were seldom if at all influenced by Daoism and Confucianism, because most of them could quite simply not afford an education. On the other hand the radicals or leftist intellectuals were fiercely opposed to Confucianism and Daoism, which they regarded as feudal doctrines responsible for China’s backwardness.

This state of affairs is particularly evident in Chinese painting, which was in a state of acute tension, pulled in opposite directions. While some artists sought to preserve existing artistic traditions and conventions, others supported a move towards Westernization and a complete abandonment of tradition. This tendency was the product of the psychology of a militarily and economically inferior nation. During this period of crisis and the wholesale questioning of traditional values, the fundamental tenets of Confucianism and Daoism were being severely criticized. How could the values of traditional shanshui painting remain stable and unchallenged? During this time western painting and the ideas it was based on became widespread in China and achieved almost the same standing as traditional Chinese painting. In 1917, in the preface to his treatise Collected Paintings of Wanmu Hut (Wanmu Caotang Canghuamu), Kang Youwei (1858-1927) severely denounced literati painting and advocated the adoption of a western realistic style of art.47 This call for change was echoed by Chen Duxiu, Liu Haisu (1896-1994) and Xu Beihong (1895-1953), leading artists and progressive thinkers of this period.48 These people, together with other students who had studied in Paris during the early 1920, had the strongest impact on modern Chinese painting. After their return to China, they were given important

48 Liu Haisu: 劉海粟; Xu Beihong: 徐悲鴻.
positions in the new system of art education based on French models. This group of reformists advocated the rejection of all the formulae of traditional painting, its technique and its aesthetic, from colour and form to idea and spirit. The aesthetics and value of traditional painting, which had lasted for more than 1000 years, were re-examined, and some artists began to explore a new way of embodying the Chinese national spirit in painting. The movement of Chinese and Western Art Fusion (Zhongxi Hebi Yundong) in the 1930s introduced a new element into Chinese art: to paint directly from models and nature. Although some painters still followed the conventional methodology, they were more or less influenced by this new idea. As Zhang Qiang comments, the introduction of western realistic painting and the reform of Chinese painting based on realism had a destructive impact on traditional aesthetics. In the period from the 1920s to the 1940s, the focus of Chinese painting was to criticize its tradition. Hui Lan is not exaggerating when he claims that the art movement during the 1920s and 1930s produced the ideological seeds of the whole of 20th-century Chinese modern art.

The aesthetic and ideological shift from the “imagined” or “idealized” shanshui to the realistic landscape, symbolized the transition from traditional to modern culture. In Chinese culture, the “modern” signifies the separation from the “classical” or “traditional”. “Modern” culture starts with the break from the traditional aesthetics of “harmony” and “idealization”. The new images of nature and human beings are in fact the embodiments of modern aesthetics and ideology. At the beginning of the 20th century, China began to attempt to modernize its culture, a change which was accelerated by the impact of western cultural concepts. The concept of “modern” Chinese painting and literature has a dual connotation. On the one hand, it refers to

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50 Zhongxi Hebi Yundong: 中西合壁運動.
53 According to some Chinese historians, the “modern” period in China refers to the period from the establishment of the Republic of China in 1911 to the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949. But other historians claim that in a broad sense, the whole 20th century can be categorized as the “modern” period (See Zhang Qiang, 2005, pp. 3 - 4).
those works which are in a historical sense produced in "modern" times, namely, in
the 20th century. On the other hand, it refers to those works which are in a cultural
sense produced with "modern" ideas. All the films and paintings discussed earlier
in this chapter are in a double sense "modern". During this period, in the eyes of
Chinese traditionalists, "modern culture" was condemned, while traditional culture
was thought to be pure, clean and morally uplifting. But in the eyes of the reformists,
especially the leftists of the 1930s, "modern culture" was seen as a construction of
images mirroring the national sentiment, and an advanced and morally lifting trend.

In this process of modernization, with the overthrow of the old empire and the end of
the feudal system, classical aesthetics began to collapse. The new aesthetics were
constantly absorbing western aesthetic ideas. In this way Chinese aesthetics in the
20th century went through a difficult process, involving both collision and fusion
between traditional Chinese and western aesthetics. The principle shifted from being
one of "detachment from society" and admiration of "unity between man and nature",
to one advocating "participating in and transforming both society and nature". The
ultimate aesthetic ideal became "sublimity" in the Western sense. As Feng Xiaolun
argues in Chinese Aesthetics of the 20th Century (Ershi Shiji Zhongguo Meixue),
"harmony" represented the pre-modern classical aesthetic ideal, stressing that the
elements composing "beauty" (such as human beings and other parts of nature)
should be harmoniously combined into one. "Sublimity" (chonggao) represented the
modern aesthetic ideal, and a state of disharmony, imbalance or contradiction
between those elements. His idea was echoed by many scholars such as Xu
Jianrong, who claims that the fundamental principle of the "new culture" in the
20th-century China is disharmony, or to put it in another way, that the 20th-century
cultural tradition is anti-tradition. In this "anti-tradition", struggle was the core
issue, and the representation of heroism and tragedy in this human struggle became

56 Chonggao: 崇高. See Feng Xiaolun 封孝倫, Chinese Aesthetics of the 20th Century (二十世紀中國美學),
57 Xu Jianrong, in Lu Fusheng 路銘盛, Xu Jianrong 徐建融 & Gu Wenda 谷文達 The Gate of the 20th Century
widely accepted as the target of modern literature, film and art.

This aesthetic change is the result of both Western influence and the domestic crisis of the nation, which from a pastoral and lyric past projected modern art into a new era of “blood and fire”. The “feminine gentility”, regarded as the measure of classical beauty since the Song Dynasty, was subjected to severe criticism, on the premise that fragile beauties and bookish gentlemen would lend no assistance to the strengthening of a weak nation. The traditional idea of harmony was regarded as fostering a faint-hearted and conservative national character, causing the stagnation of Chinese civilization, especially in the Qing Dynasty. To prove this, the reformists and leftists pointed to the fact that in traditional Chinese art and literature, while there were many good works which dealt with reclusive or lofty ideas, there was a lack of real tragedy and any expression of a true fighting spirit. This had helped to cultivate the “middle-of-the-road” national character. Consequently, during this reformist period the harmony, detachment, peacefulness and unassertiveness of classical aesthetics were repressed, while conflict and struggle among human beings, between humanity and nature and between human beings and their fate came to the fore. In fact, as Huang Huilin claims, these struggles and conflicts lasted through the whole 20th century, in all those areas, including social conflict, national conflict and class conflict, in which the ideal of harmony could never be regained.

Even in the shanshui painting of some “traditionalists” such as Pan Tianshou (1897-1971), it is easy to find evidence of this change of aesthetics. For example, in Shanshui in the Style of Shi Tao (1932) (Fig.29), a free rendering of a Shi Tao (1630-1724) original, although Pan Tianshou claimed that he wanted to defend the non-utilitarian character of traditional literati painting, and stated his allegiance to the old master Shi Tao, the traditional representation of ease and detachment were no

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58 See Ma Qi, 1994, pp. 74-75.
59 Ibid.
60 Huang Huilin, 2001, pp. 18-20.
longer present.\textsuperscript{61} Through his use of forceful and vigorous brushwork (as opposed to fine and smooth), through his creation of precipitous compositions and imposing forms (in some cases painted with his fingers), a heroic feeling is conveyed. This is a bold manner and a powerful style, rough, cold, and fierce. Clearly the modern aesthetic, which emphasized “conflict”, “sublimity” and “heroic vigour”, had freed him from the bonds of tradition.\textsuperscript{62} The violent emotion, imposing manner and iron-like modern composition in Pan Tianshou’s painting convey a great sense of strength to the viewer. It is full of masculine beauty and irrepressible vitality, without any hint of femininity or the traditional detachment of the literati. His painting demonstrates his desire to use extreme strength to counter the delicacy and fragility in both Chinese painting and the Chinese national character.\textsuperscript{63}

This is a great change, one that permeated every aspect of Chinese culture, especially after 1930 when the leftist influence on culture began to dominate. It resulted in the discarding of age-old ethical and moral traditions, mild social reforms or unpractical humanist ideals. As a result, we see sharp conflicts in the national myth-making in Chinese film, painting and literature (literature will be discussed later): conflicts with feudalists, with imperialists, with landlords, and with nature. In these conflicts, there was glorification of the hero, just as there was in the Australian bush and pioneer legends. People were encouraged to confront reality and nature, rather than compromise with them. Of course “conflict” was not the only voice in Chinese culture during this period. But the dominant voices were always preoccupied with conflict, especially in Chinese film of the 1930s, which consciously dealt with the


\textsuperscript{62} The change of style in Pan Tianshou’s painting is most obviously demonstrated in his flower-and-bird painting. He chose the vulture which is more ferocious than the eagle as his major subject matter. His son Pan Gongkai explains, “In Chinese ancient literary works, the raptors such as the eagle, falcon, and roc were sometimes used to symbolize the human spirit. But the vulture was never represented because it was rare in the Central Plain area. The vulture is the bird which flies the highest in the world, and it always lives independently on the top of the snow-capped mountain. It has a strong vitality, a kind of majestic and rough beauty totally different from the tender beauty of oriole or parrot. This kind of beauty is not a “sleeping pill”, but the “stimulant”, which rouses people, gives people strength, inspiration and courage” (See Lu Xin 鄧昕, Appreciation of Painting and Calligraphy by Famous Modern Artists, vol. 7, Pan Tianshou (Xiandai Mingjia Hanno Jiancang Congshu 現代名家翰墨畫錄叢書卷七, 潘天壽), 2005, p. 52.

realities experienced by ordinary people and with public grief. This generic trend of social realism yielded an aesthetic and cinematic legacy of passionate concern about social tragedy, and with time inevitably to a more passionate involvement in the class struggle. The emphasis on class struggle was also partly influenced by the “class struggle” theory of Marxism, which flourished in China from the 1920s, after the Russian “October Revolution”. In the Chinese myth of battlers, (as distinct from Australian film which replaces class conflict with the struggle between man and nature), class struggle never disappears. The suffering of the common people, and opposition of the classes, were the intertwining themes.

c) Guo Moruo (1892-1978): Literary Representation of the Myth

The most obvious change in the representation of the relationship between man and nature during this period was the emphasis on the “greatness” of man. The earliest and most impressive manifestation of this was in Chinese literature. The literary revolution foreshadowed the overall intellectual movement of the “New Culture”. Guo Moruo’s poetry anthology The Goddess (Nūshen) (1921) was a representative example.64 Literary works did not represent the threats of nature as dramatically as the visual arts did. But they constructed the myth effectively by elevating the status of man in nature. This section will focus on the work and philosophy of Guo, and will discuss how his ideas related to the social ideologies of the time (e.g. nationalism, Westernization, Romanticism, Expressionism, Marxism and leftist politics). Guo is a case study, demonstrating how social and political change influenced Chinese artistic expression in the 1920s and the 1930s.

Guo was a prominent figure in 20th-century Chinese aesthetics. He was one of the founders of modern Chinese poetry, and was one of the most important littérateurs, estheticians and critics of his generation. His poetry marked the beginning of the new aesthetics. His anthology The Goddess is considered by Chinese scholars to be a milestone in the history of China’s “new poetry”, laying the foundation for its

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64 Guo Moruo: 郭沫若; Nūshen:女神.
subsequent development. With its fresh ideas, unique style and fierce and vigorous approach, *The Goddess* was representative of the “zeitgeist” of the May Fourth movement of spiritual liberation, influencing the literature, art and aesthetics of the entire period. As Guo’s contemporary Yu Dafu (1896-1945) commented, “the complete break from the fetters of the old poetry dates from *The Goddess*”. Wen Yiduo (1899-1946), another leading poet of the “new poetry” movement, also emphasized that *The Goddess* was completely in tune with the spirit of the time, that is, “the spirit of action” (in contrast with the traditional Daoist spirit of non-action), “the spirit of rebellion” (in contrast with the traditional spirit of harmony), and “the spirit of science”.

These comments reflect the manner in which *The Goddess* rejected the traditional spirit of *shanshui* poetry. In terms of style, *The Goddess* was written in free style. The change from classical rhyming verse to the colloquial free style symbolizes the change from the old system of imagery and the old aesthetic principles, to the new. In terms of ideas, Guo’s aesthetic ideas in fact combined traditional Chinese and Western aesthetics. As was the case with many Chinese scholars during this period, he had absorbed both Eastern and Western ideas about society, nature and human beings. But the reason why *The Goddess* is regarded as embodying the new aesthetics is that it is permeated with a fighting spirit. In the relationship between man and nature, Guo’s image of man is seldom that of a small man harmoniously assimilated into the grandeur of nature, but rather that of a “great” man with supreme power equal to, or even superior to, the power of nature itself.

For example, in one of the poems in *The Goddess*, “Drunken Song Under the Plum Blossom Tree” (*Meihua Shuxia Zuige*), Guo wrote:

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Plum Blossom, Plum Blossom!
I admire you!
I admire myself!
I admire the noumenon of the universe expressed by myself. 69

This poem shows how prominent the advocacy of the selfhood of human beings was in Guo’s early thought, consistent with the idea of pantheism. Pantheism was taken up by Guo Moruo during his search for the meaning of human life. It was a combination of both Eastern and Western philosophy. 70 Guo said, “As I like Zhuangzi and Tagore, so equally I was attracted by pantheism, and felt an affinity with Spinoza’s works and Goethe’s poems”. 71 Guo’s pantheism, however, was different from Spinoza’s pantheism. In Spinoza’s opinion, god was nature; in Guo’s opinion, humanity is as great as nature – both are the embodiment of god. This is demonstrated in “Drunken Song Under the Plum Blossom Tree”: the plum blossom is “nature”, and therefore “god”; “I” am “nature”, therefore “I” am also “god”. I am the noumenon which can represent the universe through the self. Guo expressed this idea in this way: “Pantheism is actually atheism. Everything in nature is the embodiment of god; I myself am also the embodiment of nature. I am god; everything in nature is also the embodiment of myself.” 72 Guo thought that human beings should not be bound up by feudal doctrines. The poem conveys the idea that by obtaining individual liberation a “great” human also attains a position of equality with god. 73 This self-image, this “I”, which denies all the gods in heaven and the human world, which breaks through all spiritual toils, is praised as the new god. This understanding of pantheism was beyond both Spinoza’s pantheism and traditional Chinese pantheism which only regards natural objects and phenomena as embodiments of god. On the one hand, Guo exalted humanity to a position of equality with “god”; on the other hand he considered all

70 Cai Zhen 蔡震’s argument that “to Guo Moruo, pantheism was not a philosophy, but a poetics” is not convincing (see Cai Zhen, “Poetic Feeling Towards Nature in The Goddess and Japanese Culture《女神》對大自然的詩性感悟與日本文化”, in Guo Moruo Studies (Guo Moruo Xuekan 郭沫若學刊), 2005, the 2nd issue).
things in nature to be embodiments of human “selfhood”. In Guo’s pantheism the
focus is on the human “self”, an expanding self, and the emphasis is on the limitless
power of the human self. Pantheism in this way becomes the “pan-self”. This is Guo’s
contribution. The power of humanity was elevated by Guo to a level never achieved
in ancient Chinese literature.

The Goddess not only elevates the status of humanity, but also, and more importantly,
shows the fighting spirit of human beings as great battlers. It was seen as a clarion
call to liberate thinking, first and foremost because it created a rebellious image of the
human being (“I”) who had the supreme power: “I worship the destroyer of the God -
I worship myself! / I am a destroyer of the God!”74 This dominant spirit of rebellion
and confrontation in Guo’s poems is absent in traditional Chinese culture – not
merely in Chinese poetry. Guo’s most famous poem “The Heavenly Dog” (Tiangou)
in The Goddess exaggerated the extent of human power:

I am the Heavenly Dog!
I’ve devoured the moon,
I’ve devoured the sun,
I’ve devoured all of the stars and planets,
I’ve devoured the whole universe.
Thus I’ve come into being as ‘I’!

I am the moonlight,
I am the sunlight,
I am the light from every star,
I am X-rays,
I am the whole sum of ENERGY of the universe!

I gallop rapidly,
I bellow harshly,
I burn fiercely.
I burn like a raging fire!
I bellow as if I were the sea!
I gallop like electricity!75

...
universe”. Human action is endowed with the power of natural force: “burn like a raging fire”, “bellow as if I were the sea”, and “gallop like electricity”. But human power surpasses natural force because it can “devour” the moon and the sun, and all of the stars and planets, and even the universe. None of this human dominance appears in traditional poetry. In another poem “The Pyramid” (Jinzita) Guo once again shows human force as greater than nature:

Create! Create! Create with all your might! 創造喲！創造喲！努力創造喲！
The creative forces of man can rival those of the God! 人們創造力的權威可與神祇比伍！
If you do not believe, just look at me – the grand Pyramid! 不信請看我，看我這雄偉的巨制罷！
Even the Sun in the sky is bowing his head to me!76 便是天上的太陽也在向我低頭呀！

In these two poems, all the natural phenomena which have destructive or creative forces are praised, but the greatest praise of all is reserved for the force of humanity, which has a destructive or creative power greater than the force of nature itself. Humanity has the power to devour the energy of the whole universe; humanity has the force to destroy and create everything. It is not merely a lonely “self”; it is a “self” which embodies both the nation and the people. During the period of national adversity, it is a big “self” which condenses the essence of the whole of society and the whole of humanity, and which therefore can resist everything, including nature. Through this new “self”, the intellectuals’ ideal of realizing both “individual liberation” and “national liberation” is achieved. This echoes the “May Fourth” spirit, which pursued both individual and national liberation. The new elevation of the value, importance and dignity of the human being, usually integrally connected with a concern for the destiny of the whole country, is thus achieved at the expense of the old harmonious relationship between humanity and nature.

This construction of great human power, and its victorious domination of nature, is influenced by both the “zeitgeist” of this period and by imported Western ideas. The importation of Western culture led to a constant re-evaluation of traditional Chinese

culture. Some Chinese intellectuals for the first time reflected on their own history and culture with a critical and negative eye. Of the Western philosophies, Marxism was the most influential on leftist thinking. Although Guo Moruo was not a leftist when he wrote *The Goddess*, he had for some time (when studying in Japan) been influenced by the leftist socialism flourishing in Japan, which advocated political democracy and freedom of the individual. The social context of China in the 1920s pushed Guo closer to Marxism. In the 1920s, the ideas of Science and Democracy were popular in China, and Marxism, especially its materialist world view, was exerting an increasing influence on Chinese intellectuals. Marxism holds that nature is subordinate to human beings. The “subjection of nature’s forces to man”, noted in the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848, was one of several expressions of the triumphant power of the bourgeoisie, a measure of its mastery over the means of production as a whole. Capitalist or communist, humanity in the Marxist view was “the sovereign of nature”. Chinese leftists adopted the Marxist idea of the human “mastering of nature” when they constructed the new relationship between humanity and nature, as represented in the films discussed earlier. *The Goddess* also exaggerates human power (especially the power of the masses). For this it was praised by leftist writers as the first great anthology of the new poetry, and as the representative of the May Fourth spirit.  

Guo recollected later that at that time he was preoccupied by the ideas of “human freedom”, and had begun to be interested in the ideas of Marx and Lenin. The October Revolution in Russia provided an ideal of human society. In the poem “Lesson of the Big Cannon” (*Jupaozhi Jiaoxun*), he declares that “the supreme ideal is in the world of peasants and workers”.

In addition to Marxism, *The Goddess* is also influenced by Western romanticism and expressionism. Many Chinese scholars see Guo as principally influenced by romanticism, because his poetry is full of such passion and such transcendental...

77 See Wei Hongshan, 2005, p. 37.
imagination. European Romanticism, with its criticism of feudal ideology and industrial civilization, especially its advocacy of subjectivity, selfhood, revolution and revolt, had a great influence on Chinese intellectuals at the beginning of the 20th century. Guo was certainly influenced by Romantic works and by the aesthetics of Romanticism when he studied in Japan. In the Introduction to his translation of *The Sorrows of Young Werther* he wrote that the romanticism in Goethe’s works resonated for him, especially Goethe’s admiration of nature: “he [Goethe] loves and worships nature. Nature bestows on him infinite love, comfort, consolation, enlightenment and nourishment, leading him to revolt against technology, established morality, the class system, established religion and all knowledge”.

As Guo publicly declared, he learned a great deal from Goethe, Shelley, Byron, Wordsworth and Whitman. Wordsworth’s definition of poetry in *The Prelude* as the “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings”, finds an echo in Guo’s statement that “good poems are the natural overflow of feelings”. Yet Guo differed from Wordsworth. For Guo, poetry was not “emotion recollected in tranquility”. Guo was more deeply influenced by Walt Whitman. Like Whitman, he was unwilling to be tied by any restrictions: “Whitman’s poetic style which discarded all the old formulae is in step with the trend of the May Fourth spirit. I was totally captivated by his vigorous, bold and unconstrained style”.

Despite this, I find Wei Hongshan’s argument that Guo was more influenced by expressionism than by romanticism, a convincing one. It is especially true of Guo’s concept of nature. Expressionism, which had its origins in Germany at the start of the 20th century, was introduced into China after the First World War. During the 1920s, the literary Creation Society (Chuangzaoshe) contributed greatly to the translation, introduction and publicization of expressionism. As a member of the Creation
Society, Guo Moruo showed great interest in it. Expressionism was characterized by the expression of intense emotion in the works, with a strong sense of anti-tradition, dissatisfaction with reality, and a rebellious spirit, elements which often occurred during a time of social upheaval. The influence of expressionism on Guo’s poetry can be seen in his poems “The Heavenly Dog” and “The Pyramid”. During this period in China, the events that were shaping people’s ideas were similar to those in the West at the birth of expressionism. To put it another way, the rebellious ideology of expressionism and its dissatisfaction with social reality were in step with the Chinese “zeitgeist” of the period. The end of the 19th century was the zenith of capitalist civilization in the West. Among the negative effects brought about by industrialization were the conflict between human beings, and human rebellion against the norms of society. Expressionism was an artistic attempt to reconstruct human selfhood consistent with the prevailing Nietzschean spirit of rebellion. Similarly in China, at the beginning of the 20th century, a spirit of rebellion, and a consciousness of destroying the old world and creating the new, were beginning to evolve. At this time the new and old social powers and ideologies were contending vigorously. Confronted with a dark present and a stubborn feudal power, social reformists called for a spirit bold enough to rebel against the existing social system and established tradition, and to reform the national character. Expressionism, with its vehement sentiments of rebelling against authority and rejecting tradition, with its heightened passion and fury of expression, not only conformed to the requirements for artistic reform in China, it also satisfied the demand for ideological and political revolution. This can be seen in the reformists’ praise of Nietzsche and the Creation Society writers’ strong “identification” with expressionism and their praise for “vehement resistance”. In this similar context of events and thought, the free and bold representation of subjective selfhood in Western expressionism won the favour of Chinese intellectuals.

Guo’s acceptance of and identification with expressionism also arose from the

86 See Wei Hongshan, 2005, p. 135.
demands of Chinese literature. In order to counter the influence of feudal literature and create a new literature, Chinese intellectuals introduced Western modern literature with the aim of accelerating modernization in form, style, language and ideas of their own literature. This newly emerging modern expressionism, with its spirit of anti-tradition coinciding with the May Fourth spirit, was embraced by Chinese intellectuals because it was in sympathy with the ideas then current in Chinese literary and artistic circles. From the May Fourth movement to the end of the 1920s, as an innovation introduced from Western modern art and literature, expressionism attracted many Chinese intellectuals' attention.

For Guo Moruo, it was possible to empathize with expressionism and romanticism because they both possessed the same spirit of rebellion. In the idea of nature, romanticism had a close and intimate link to nature, the result of its opposition to the effects of industrial civilization. Artists and poets turned to nature to find their spiritual homeland. They eulogized pastoral life, looked to the power of nature to counter convention and corruption in society, and hoped nature's beauty could overcome the social corruption caused by industrialization. But expressionism could at times be critical of nature. From the beginning of the 20th century, continuing industrial development had resulted in major changes to Western society and the natural environment. The tranquility of the countryside, formerly the refuge of the romantics, was shattered, and the harmonious relationship between humanity and nature was disrupted. These circumstances led some expressionists to reject “nature” as an unfriendly and sometimes even hostile force. Although both romanticism and expressionism are represented in The Goddess, the poems mentioned above mainly demonstrate the pride in human power, the revolutionary atmosphere generated by expressionism and the tone of indignation, exemplified in “The Heavenly Dog” by the line “I’ve devoured the whole universe”. Guo proclaimed that “we should break all the bonds of nature and tradition, and free ourselves from their heavy shackles”.  

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87 Ibid., p. 115.
88 Guo Moruo, “Impression and Expression 印象與表現”, in Newspaper on Current Affairs, the 33th issue, Dec. 30th 1923.
He broke free from romanticism and accepted expressionism (especially in his later works) by denying the harmonious relationship between humanity and nature. The Czech scholar Marian Galik has also noted this, and commented that Guo’s opinions during this period undoubtedly embodied an expressionist spirit. Proof of this lies in two of Guo’s essays published in 1923. In “Our New Literature Movement” (Womende Wenxue Xinyundong), Guo argued that in China at that time, there were only two ways forward: one was to “live a reclusive life in the mountains and forests, to be a friend of nature and to shun society”; another was “to bravely struggle to the end against the ugliness of society”. He advocated that people take the second path. In “Nature and Art: My Empathy with the Expressionists” (Ziran yu Yishu: Duiyu Biaoxianpaide Gonggan) he claimed that the artist should be the “father of nature”. This is in sharp contrast to the position of the traditional literati who saw nature as the teacher.

The ideas of nature in both articles contradict the romantic ideas of nature which he expressed in the introduction to The Sorrows of Young Werther, discussed earlier. From Guo Moruo’s contradictory and complex ideas of nature – the pantheism of East and West, the romantic and expressionistic concepts of nature, the idea of elevating human power over nature, and the Marxist idea of achieving mastery over nature – we can see the trademark of the period: the mixed ideas of the old and the new, the East and the West. Yet Guo’s primary contribution lies in his construction of the new myth of “men as great battlers”.

“Nature as Refuge”: Nature’s Consoling, Refreshing Force

1) “Nature as Refuge” in Chinese Film

In this period, traditional Chinese ideas and aesthetics, although embattled and in the process of being superseded by modern and western aesthetics, did not totally...
disappear or die out. The conflicts and collisions between the old and the new continued for a long period, resulting in pluralism and diversified styles in the interpretation of nature. For example, in films of the 1920s and non-leftist films of the 1930s, nature continues to be praised for its ability to relieve the misery of humanity. By contrast with the leftist films, the “force of water” in these films is still constructed positively. In this section I will take two films as examples to briefly discuss the continuation of this tradition.

The films A Poet at the Edge of the Sea (Haijiao Shiren) (1927), directed by Hou Yao (1903-1942), and Sand Washed by Waves (Langtaosha) (1936), directed by Wu Yonggang (1907-1982), are typical representatives of nature’s power to heal and console.92 A Poet at the Edge of the Sea centres on a poet’s suffering in the world of reality and his final escape to a seaside village.93 In this “nature as refuge” type narrative, only the sea has the power to console the poet’s wounded heart and soul. Sand Washed by Waves is concerned with a struggle between a criminal and a policeman, and is similar in conception and in its view of nature. In this film, conflict and hatred among human beings exist only in civilized society, while in nature (represented by a desolate island) all conflicts disappear (Fig.93). Nature is shown as having the power to harmonize and even eliminate conflict between human beings. In both films, in a continuation of the tradition, “water” (the sea) is seen as the embodiment of nature, as the symbol of freedom, regeneration and of the ability to release oneself from the cares of the world. The shots of waves breaking on the shore give prominence to one aspect of the sea – the characteristics of serenity, placidity and tolerance. In this way the sea is represented not only as the background against which human activities are acted out, but also as a kind of “presence”, an important agent in human life, with its own independent identity. For example, at the beginning of Sand Washed by Waves, there is a long shot moving from right to left. The object of

92 Haijiao Shiren: 海角詩人; Hou Yao: 侯曜; Langtaosha: 浪淘沙; Wu Yonggang: 吳永剛.
93 The main plot is as follows: a poet, tired of the corrupted city life, wants to escape to a desolate island. He rejects the approaches of a wealthy city girl and falls in love with a fishergirl – the continuation of the “fisherman” tradition. Both of them experience hardship and suffering in society. Finally, the poet and the fishergirl are rescued and live happily in a seaside village.
this is to show a desolate coastline in which, with the exception of two human skeletons, nothing else remains. It stands as a metaphor for the power of nature, illustrating the ability of the waves of the sea to wash away all traces of human life, no matter how heroic or debased. The film shows that all worldly conflict will in the end be diminished by nature – demonstrated by the fact that ultimately only sand and bones remain. The film is an allegory suggesting that when seen in relation to the force of nature, human life and death are as insignificant as grains of sand, and that ultimately everything will be reduced to nothingness. This opening shot creates the same feeling of space and time as the traditional shanshui painting. At first glance the art of film seems far removed from traditional Chinese painting. Film is a western art, created in tune with the values of western culture, reproducing a certain “view” of reality in both space and time. The traditional Chinese arts have no such characteristics, and there is no tradition of perspective in ancient Chinese painting. However, despite these contradictions, the director of Sand Washed by Waves has succeeded in blending the aesthetic values of Chinese shanshui painting with the imported western technology of movie-making.

Both of these films make human power seem insignificant by indicating that on the desolate island, human existence and survival is in the hands of nature. Both films convey the message that by seeking refuge in nature it is easier for human beings to rid themselves of their worldly fetters. As distinct from the culture of the left in which water was constructed as a destructive force, here it is represented as a means of defusing conflict. In this myth the human beings rely on the power of nature to withstand political and social turmoil. Both films were criticized by the revolutionaries and leftists as being divorced from reality, and detached from the problems of human society.94 The message that life and soul could only be wakened by the nourishment of omnipotent nature was a continuation of the traditional myth of shanshui, with the sea replacing the mountain as the most frequently appearing image.

Chinese culture has its origins in the inland, the Central Plains (comprising the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River), and Chinese civilization was in its earliest stages a Loess (Yellow Land) civilization. Images of the sea seldom appear in traditional art. As the French scholar Augustin Berque argues, traditionally, agriculture, live-stock-breeding and forestry relate to the land and to mountains rather than to the sea, with the natural result that mountain and country predominate in representations of the force of nature.\(^5\) But during this modern period, as the centre of economic and cultural life moved from the inland to the southeastern part of China, especially the area around the Yangtze River and the East China Sea, representation of the sea became the new focus.

2) “Nature as Refuge” in Australian Painting

I have shown that during the 1920s and 1930s, in Chinese culture, traditional values continued to exist beside the new ideas about the relationship between man and nature. Now I will examine a comparable, though somewhat different pattern in Australian culture. Interestingly, similarities can be found between Australian “new” ideas and Chinese “old” ideas.

During this period, besides the continuation of the traditional construction of nature as a destructive force of nature and enemy of human beings, there were also representations of Australian nature as a positive force with “unique” Australian characteristics such as “the bush” and “the outback”, bringing a sense of vitality, regeneration and consolation to white Australians. In the colonial period, although there were also some representations of nature as a consoling or regenerating force, nature in these representations often appeared in “European” mode or with European references. In the nationalism of the 1880s and 1890s, a certain view of Australianness appeared in some works of the Heidelberg painters such as Roberts and Streeton, who captured the Australian landscape and light in its blues and yellows. But their works, which often included European references, mainly depicted the

scenery of rural Victoria and not the true outback. What is more, in the second half of the 1890s there was an emerging tendency to represent the Australian landscape in dark and somber tones, or with domesticated images, even in some works of the Heidelberg painters (e.g. the later works of McCubbin) in which the emphasis shifted from bright light and colour towards subdued and low-keyed tones. As Ian Burn argues, this tendency appeared as a Europeanizing process.\textsuperscript{96} The Australian landscape reappeared as an extension of the European landscape, rather than something uniquely Australian. In this “tamed” nature and “civilized” land, there were no hints of conflict between human beings and nature, but this harmony was achieved at the price of losing the sense of locality and the characteristics of Australianness. (See detailed discussion in Chapter 3.)

But during this period of the 1920s and 1930s, representations of “authentic”, “wild” and “unknown” nature with a positive force and a sense of genuine beauty appeared. This is most apparent in certain developments and forms of Australian painting, as in the outback paintings of Hans Heysen and in Grace Cossington Smith’s depictions of the bush.\textsuperscript{97} In their works, an admiration of the outback and the bush replaced the radical representations of the human battle against nature. In this section I will be focusing on the discussion of Heysen and Cossington Smith, using them as examples to demonstrate the construction of two facets of the myth (nature’s force as consolation and nature’s force as refreshing) in Australian culture.

\textbf{a) Heysen: Nature’s Force as Consolation}

As an exponent of true national expression, Hans Heysen had an affinity with the primeval Australian landscape. From 1926 to 1933 he made nine visits to the Flinders Ranges, where he was challenged and revitalized by the nature of the terrain. It was this scenery which formed the main focus for his oil and watercolor paintings. Although painting is less narrative than film and literature, the impressive quality of

\textsuperscript{96} Burn, 1990, p. 38.

\textsuperscript{97} Although in Heysen’s works, there are several representations of threatening nature (such as \textit{Approaching Storm with Bushfire Haze} which depicts a bushfire in the Adelaide Hills in the summer of 1912), this is not the main subject matter in Heysen’s works.
an image can evoke emotion and induce contemplation. In his painting *The Hill of the Creeping Shadow* (1929) (Fig.63), a sense of untamed beauty – vast, silent, ancient, austere and indomitable – is conveyed through the red and yellow tones (the colour of red earth), the dark top and the shadow of the hill, the lack of green grass or foliage, the dry creek and the cracked land, which has been reduced by drought to skeletal outcrops but still survives. There are no human figures in the painting, but if there had been, it is safe to say that the human figures would definitely have been dwarfed by the presence of the force of nature. The representation of vast spaces and silences to demonstrate nature’s force since time immemorial is achieved by emphasizing the “bare bone” land forms, the erosion of the semi-arid land, and the weathering of ridges and cliffs. Heysen expressed his feeling for this land in 1932 in these words:

> It was in the Flinders Ranges that I was made curiously conscious of a very old land where the primitive forces of Nature were constantly evident. The barren hillsides, incised and torn by Nature’s forces, hold a peculiar attraction. Their geological structure is seldom obscured by foliage, and in many parts where great masses of stone are piled layer on layer in regular formation, as if built up by some very ancient people, their appearance is given an architectural order... The far Northern interior of Australia with its stern reality of desert country holds a peculiar fascination for many who have come under its spell, and I must confess to having fallen a victim. I have seen it on calm days of crystalline purity when the eye could travel, as it were, to the end of the world, bringing with it that wonderful sense of infinity that a land of moist atmosphere could never give. There is an undeniable call about this interior which covers by far the greater portion of Australia, and offers, for the artist, a wide field as yet practically untouched.98

From this paragraph it is clear that this artist’s view of wild nature is diametrically opposed to that of the colonial painters and writers, but in its way close to the traditional Chinese attitudes toward pure and unspoiled nature. Heysen was fascinated by its “crystalline purity”. To him it had an “undeniable call”, and the “practically untouched” landscape gave him a “wonderful sense of infinity”. All these feelings, especially a sense of timelessness, eternity, profound silence without signs of human beings, and otherworldliness, can be found in traditional Chinese paintings, such as in Ni Zan’s painting (as discussed in Chapter 2). Both of these artists, Chinese and Australian, painted a landscape in which nature is primitive and unalterable, and can be read as “frozen” in deep time (e.g. Heysen’s *The Three Sisters of Aroona* (1927)

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(Fig.64) and Ni’s *Quiet Streams and Cold Pines* (Fig.21)). Heysen wrote to his friend Sydney Ure Smith: “everything looks so old that it belongs to quite a different world... Fine big simple forms against clear transparent skies – and a sense of spaciousness everywhere”. 99  But although he was struck by the simplicity of the forms with their fierce colours, clear edges and the flat light against clear transparent skies, what impressed him first and foremost was the unknown antiquity of the landscape which brought a wonderful sense of infinity to him. As Heysen’s friend, the artist Lionel Arthur Lindsay (1874-1961) observed, there was little in the science of composition that Heysen did not know, but in the face of the nakedness of the Earth, instead of deliberate composition, Heysen used a more direct approach, preferring spontaneous recreation after the way of nature herself. 100

As with the *shanshui* in traditional Chinese culture, and the construction of water in non-leftist Chinese culture of this modern period, Heysen constructed a vision of the pristine and primeval in order to show that nature has the power to renew the human mind and to console the miserable human heart. This myth of “nature as refuge” has its origin in the misfortunes which befell his family during and after the First World War. Before he saw the Flinders ranges, during the War, Heysen’s father was assaulted in an Adelaide street as a “damned German” and his wife’s brother-in-law was interned in the “German Concentration Camp” at Liverpool, New South Wales. Heysen himself suffered the insult of having his national loyalty and personal integrity questioned because of his German ancestry, an experience he found deeply hurtful. 101  Subsequently his wife suffered a nervous breakdown in 1922 and their third daughter died from meningitis in 1925. All these misfortunes affected him to such a degree that in a letter to Lionel Lindsay he wrote: “Even Dame Nature could

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101 See Thiele, *Heysen of Hahndorf*, 1974, pp. 162-5. The Trustees of the National Art Gallery of N.S.W. refused to include Heysen’s works in a Loan Exhibition of Australian Art until he “definitely and satisfactorily” declared whether his “allegiance and sympathies are with the British Nation”. He wrote to Grüner in April, 1918: “I disliked the approach of the Gallery Board on the question of nationality”. In 1915 the Australian Art Association, of which Hans was a member, officially drew his attention to the “many rumours of your lack of sympathy with the British cause” and asked him to make his position clear. During the ensuing 5 years rumours about the potential treachery of Hahndorf, his native town, including spy rings, and the transmission of messages to the enemy, were prevailing.
arouse no response, it seemed as if we were living in another world with no sun to
give warmth or life..."102 But in 1926 when he first visited the Flinders Ranges he
was immediately excited by the landscape. This different “Dame Nature”, so
characteristically Australian, this state of “wilderness”, aroused his passionate
response and gave him condolence. In his letter to Lionel he said that even time could
not heal his pains. But what time could not do, Nature could: “Let us hope it will be
Nature’s compensation”.103 The dry mountains helped ease his negative feelings, and
made him once again feel exhilarated by the natural world.104 This resembled the
feeling conveyed in traditional Chinese shanshui culture and its continuation in such
films as A Poet at the Edge of the Sea.

This attitude towards the power of Australia’s “wild” nature is similar to the
traditional Chinese attitude towards the power of shanshui. To put it another way,
“wild” nature and “unspoiled” shanshui held the same significance for the human
soul. In times of profound sadness and distress, both provide a refuge for those who
want to turn away from the cruelties and stupidities of the world. When the human
world seems to be on the brink of destruction, or in times of profound change, it is
only the tranquility of nature which can ease the human mind. The same feeling of
consolation aroused by the grandeur of nature (manifested in the outback, mountains,
rivers and sea) is present in both Australian and Chinese representations. Compared
with the infinity of nature, and the solace of the unchangeable and the all-pervasive,
human misery pales into insignificance. Heysen openly admitted his need for nature’s
immense silences to comfort his soul. He yearned for the distant and unpeopled
solitude – not only of the Flinders but, beyond it, of Central Australia itself.105 This is
in a sharp contrast to the colonial attitude toward the “wilderness”. Heysen felt such a
deep affinity with these wild solitary ranges, such an understanding of their
primordial, rearing outlines and subtleties of colour. To Heysen they had a purity that

103 Quoted in Thiele, 1974, p. 248.
105 See Thiele, 1974, p. 249.
breathed the spirit of the earth and enthralled his senses.\textsuperscript{106}

One outcome of his affinity with wilderness, was that Heysen expanded the subject matter of Australian painting to include the remote inland and the sunburnt outback (regarded as uniquely Australian) and used this as a way of representing the power of the natural world. Heysen thought that the arid reds, blues and ochres of land wracked by drought and desolation were preferable to the greens of a fertile and plentiful countryside, and refused to accept a verdant Flinders: “To me it becomes more and more interesting on each successive visit under summer conditions. Although there was nothing but wind, dust, and sand on every day, the landscape was never devoid of some paintable matter”.\textsuperscript{107} Even when painting plants he chose to depict nature in its harshest form. In his \textit{Three Gums in the Flinders Ranges} (1930s) (Fig.65), the gums are depicted as huddling for survival in creek beds, twisted and gnarled by their attempts to survive drought and flood. But their massive roots still claw deep into the bedrock, evidence of the survival of living things in even the most adverse conditions. The visual impact is given force by the sparseness of trees in the background plains and ranges.

This kind of representation is in sharp contrast to that of the colonial painters (e.g. Glover) who transplanted European green to the Australian landscape. In appearance this image of a parched inland, a drought-stricken and bare-boned land (which was more and more popularly accepted as a symbol of Australia during the 1930s), is comparable to the images of drought and harsh terrain in Roberts’s nationalistic paintings of the 1890s (e.g. \textit{The Break Away!}). It is similar also to the work of Chinese painters with “new” ideas such as Zhao Wangyun and his nationalistic painting of the 1930s. However, the purpose and significance of Heysen’s awakening of the national consciousness to the harshness of the Australian landscape was totally different. During that period in Australia, drought and the Depression had resulted in general poverty and desolation, but despite this Heysen thought that the spirit of the

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., pp. 212, 222.

\textsuperscript{107} From a letter to Heysen’s friend Sydney Ure Smith on 27 November 1928, quoted in Thiele, 1974, p. 205.
people remained unbroken. Unlike Roberts, Lawson and Zhao, Heysen in his paintings does not show the spirit of the people through depictions of their struggle with the harshness of their environment. Rather, his work shows similarities with traditional Chinese culture. The absence or sparseness of trees and the drought-stricken appearance of the landscape convey the impression of nature as an unassailable power with a strength beyond challenge by human beings. Nature must be seen as a source of essential truth and a force that demands “contemplation and thought”.  

Although most living things were dead and plant life withered, and the country had been literally reduced to sand, the people who lived amongst it all were actually optimistic: “It is hardly believable that after 5 years of this drought their hearts would still beat sound. Perhaps the land they live on is all they possess, and to leave it means ‘chaos.’.”

This “contemplation” also brought about a spiritual identification with the dry and parched land, which in this period was represented more beautifully than ever. Heysen could feel his heart beating with the pure excitement induced by the changing colours of the landscape ranging from the deepest purple to the palest yellow through every shade of red and orange. He wrote to Lionel: “The Far North holds me fast... my mind dwells there – undoubtedly there is a peculiar fascination about the place... I must confess only a very hardened sinner could not have been touched by the desolation – it seemed impossible that anything could ever spring up again in that parched land”.

His paintings and letters convey the message that “authentic” Australian nature – the gum trees and the primordial land – were now appreciated as a kind of unique beauty infused with a spirit of its own. Some critics think that Heysen’s works were also influenced by European conventions. For example, Colin Thiele argues that his

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110 Ibid., p. 206.
111 Ibid., p. 207.
attitude towards rural landscapes was influenced by Jean Millet and other Barbizon painters, and his interest in light, shade and colour was influenced by the techniques of J.M.W.Turner.\textsuperscript{112} John Neylon also argues that his rural subjects reflect his close study of the “atmospheric” artists, particularly Claude Lorrain, J.M.W.Turner, John Constable and Jean-Baptiste Corot.\textsuperscript{113} But although his paintings do show an allegiance to European conventions in aspects of technique and choice of rural subjects, he was depicting unique Australian subjects, such as the gum trees, the Adelaide surrounds, and the Flinders Ranges. Although Neylon argues that in the 1920s Heysen’s works were influenced by the reductionist style of modernism and had a kind of hardness and “sharp-edge” aesthetic, those works were not “imagined” landscapes.\textsuperscript{114} His impressions of the Old World were fading under the summer light of the Australian bush. Thiele argues more reasonably that Europe seems to be foreign to Heysen’s blood, an overlay to the real soul of his experience. His European tour (1899-1903), while assisting his painting in many ways, did not influence his choice of subject matter, and as he stood again on Australian soil, his true allegiance reclaimed him.\textsuperscript{115} The great European artists and the European artistic movement of the time helped to open Heysen’s eyes to the appreciation of Australian light and colour. They enabled him to achieve a greater sense of regional identity, which can be seen in the major subject matter of his works: the Flinders Ranges-related landscapes from 1926-1933. Heysen confessed that the quality of Australian sunlight and the lure of the great gums enthralled him.\textsuperscript{116} Sunshine and light above all were for him the essence of Australian landscape, life and atmosphere: “It always appears to me Australia has something individual in its light that colours local substances with just something that another country has not got, and it is this something out of which an Australian school has got to come ... Streeton often got this something, but he didn’t explore beyond its very surface... I wish he had stayed here and probed deeper into the mysteries of our forms – and light”.\textsuperscript{117} Lionel Lindsay’s comments are fair and

\textsuperscript{112} Thiele, 1974, p. 74.
\textsuperscript{114} Neylon, 2004, p. 27.
\textsuperscript{115} Thiele, 1974, p. 77.
\textsuperscript{116} See Thiele, 1974, p. 103.
\textsuperscript{117} From a letter to Lionel Lindsay, 20 March 1912, see Thiele, 1974, p. 288.
convincing: “Heysen had felt the majesty and mystery of the earth in this wonderful series of mountain landscapes [the Flinders Ranges]... They are his discovery and, I believe, the most important contribution to Australian landscape made in the 1920s”.\textsuperscript{118}

This appreciation of “typical”, “authentic” Australian nature, which stands in such contrast with the dominant attitude of the colonial period, is comparable to the traditional Chinese literati appreciation of \textit{shanshui}. Both regard “wild” or “unspoiled” nature itself as perfect, embodying eternal truth and vitality. It has the power to make people forget the “self”, to bring them a sense of home. Heysen was also overwhelmed by nature’s infinite perfection, and felt an almost pantheistic reverence for Nature, as can be seen in such comments as: “It is no wonder that often the object of art is forgotten when one is so constantly brought in close contact with the absolute perfection of Nature’s details – it is all perfect in its finish, and therefore hopeless for an artist to imitate”.\textsuperscript{119} “The more one lives with Nature and the ‘inner truths’ come gradually home to one”.\textsuperscript{120} “Nature after all is so pure and lively, so perfectly finished”.\textsuperscript{121} “My aim is simple and my present attitude is to practically accept Nature as she is”.\textsuperscript{122} This “perfectly finished”, pure nature with its “inner truth” does not need to be transformed by human hands. Its finest nuances of form and colour have the power to give human beings spiritual sustenance in times of tragedy and sorrow: “I must confess, the Sun – its light and its warmth – is my religion”.\textsuperscript{123} This echoes exactly the traditional ideas of nature in Chinese culture.

\textbf{b) Ideological and Aesthetic Change: towards a “Unique” Australian Nature}

Heysen’s ideas and his representation of the myth of “nature as refuge” represent the changing attitudes to nature of some Australians. During this period, in the context of nationalism and national identification with the land, more and more Australians

\textsuperscript{118} See Thiele, 1974, p. 234.
\textsuperscript{119} See Thiele, 1974, p. 129.
\textsuperscript{120} From a letter to Lionel Lindsay, 8 Dec, 1918, quoted in Thiele, 1974, p. 289.
\textsuperscript{121} From a letter to Lionel Lindsay, August, 1920, quoted in Thiele, 1974, p. 290.
\textsuperscript{122} From a letter to Lionel Lindsay, 7 Oct, 1920, quoted in Thiele, 1974, p. 291.
\textsuperscript{123} See Thiele, 1977, p. 12.
began to have a sense of belonging to this land. Commentators on Australian painting were excessively sensitive to derogatory comments about the Australian landscape. They believed that it was too often judged according to the standards of European (especially British) landscape, and was therefore considered ugly and bereft of literary associations. Among artists, there was wide agreement as to what was distinctive about the Australian landscape. There was a widely shared vision of its beauty, its significance and its unique spirit. The view of Australian scenery as monotonous, sombre and relatively colourless, typical of former periods and one which was also held by some visitors and newcomers to Australia during this period, was severely criticized by many nationalists and Australian-born artists. They argued that “the subtlety of colour led to an appreciation of the beauty of the Australian landscape which lasted longer than the more dramatic but quickly exhausted beauty of other landscapes”.

Critics encouraged the view that the achievement of artists lay “in revealing to Australians the landscape of their country and providing them with formulas and conventions by which they might perceive it in terms of beauty, where once they had seen it with the eyes of indifference, of apathy, even of distaste”. The “primeval” simplicity of forms thought of as unattractive to European eyes began to be appreciated for their own sake. The Australian light and colour were regarded as unique and the landscape itself was considered by some to be the most harmonious in tone and colour in the world because “the clarity and intensity of the light led to a precision of tone – indeed, a tonal perfection – which made for refined harmonies of colour.”

Even Max Meldrum (1875-1955), a painter and art theorist who ran the Meldrum School of painting between 1916 and 1926, hardly a strong nationalist, pronounced that, in contrast to the “richer and more obvious colours” of the European landscape, the colour scheme of the Australian landscape was “more evasive, delicate and evanescent”, and time was required for the eye to become “accustomed to the prevailing harmony of colours, form and tone.”

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124 See Burn, 1990, p. 100.
125 Quoted in Burn, 1990, p. 100.
127 Burn, 1996, p. 100.
128 Quoted in Burn, 1990, p. 100.
The changed attitude toward the gum tree is also evident. Although the Heidelberg artists had painted the gums in various ways, nobody in Australia had studied the gum as Heysen had, or analyzed its character to such a degree. He referred to the play of light and shadow along its great bole, the tatters of loose bark hanging in the wind, the mottled sunlight on leaves and limbs, and the twisted trunks and limbs surviving in the drought. Heysen showed his love for the gum tree when he said “there is something immensely exhilarating when tall white gums tower into the blue heavens – the subtle quality of the edges where they meet the sky – how mysterious”.

The beauty of gum trees provided spiritual revelation for him: “Never have I seen them so magnificent nor clothed in such beauty of subtle colour and tones – with ever shifting lights and shadows weaving alternating patterns. They are a never ending source of pleasure and stimulus.” And he emphasized the gum trees’ “sheltering” or “mothering” force: “He is on the crest of a rise – placed against a clear space of sky, and seems capable of mothering all the cows and birds in the district”. It was Heysen who made the Australian gum tree a special and central subject first for his own art and eventually for Australian art at large. His contribution to Australian art is profound and enduring. A whole nation came to see the gum tree as he saw it. From Heysen’s depiction of the Flinders landscape and gum trees, we can perceive a new understanding of what constituted the “typical” Australian environment – its colour, light and flora.

The gum tree was also regarded as a symbol of majesty, strength, and vitality. A photo caption in *Sydney Mail Annual*, October 1930, stated that, “The hoary old gum tree, tattered and twisted by wind and heat, is one of the most picturesque veterans of the bush, and symbolical of the Australian spirit of indomitable endurance that has been our history”. This idea is similar and comparable to the traditional Chinese

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129 From a letters to Lionel Lindsay, 14 March, c.1926, quoted in North, 1977, p. 12.
130 From a letter to Lionel Lindsay, 4 May 1948, quoted in Thiele, 1974, pp. 304-5.
131 From a letter to Lionel Lindsay, c.1924. quoted in Thiele, 1974, p. 300.
133 Quoted in Burn, 1990, p. 102.
(especially Confucian) conception of the spirit of the pine tree. For example, in Heysen’s *Three Gums in the Flinders Ranges* (Fig. 65), the artist deliberately exaggerated the scale of the tree to create a heroic and mysterious atmosphere. Similarly, in Chinese representations of the pine tree, the giant trunk formation of the gum tree was emphasized in order to symbolize the life force, endurance, resilience and grandeur. Just as the Confucians projected noble human qualities onto pine trees, the gum trees were also endowed with such “human” qualities as majesty, dignity, nobility and heroism. Heysen personified the gum tree: “He is full of vigour and holds his head erect, surveying the whole countryside”.134 Although imbuing trees with human qualities can be interpreted as “humanizing” the trees or as a way of “denaturing” nature, Burn is not convincing when he argues that it was by these means that the artists showed the gum tree as tamed and controlled.135 Rather, as was the case with the Chinese literati, the Australian artists used the gum tree to express their own national sentiments. In this period, assertions about the uniqueness of the landscape were often closely linked with the idea of national potential and cultural individuality.136

Besides Heysen, many other painters and writers saw the gum tree in a positive light. Roberts said that one of the first things that struck him about Australian art after the First World War was the rapid growth which had taken place in the popularity of gums.137 The gum tree in the past was seen by many Australians as dull and ugly because its form was thought of as inelegant and without rhythm, its trunk too white, and its foliage too thin and hard, and not as green as European trees. We have seen this view expressed by Marcus Clarke in Chapter 3. But the tree was now regarded as representing the uniqueness and beauty of the Australian landscape. J. S. MacDonald (1878-1952), a well-known Australian art critic of this period, commented that the gum tree was all and solely Australian. Latitude and altitude could not keep it out of

134 From a letter to Lionel Lindsay, 13 July 1924, quoted in Thiele, 1974, p. 300.
135 See Burn, 1990, p. 48. Burn argues that Heysen developed the gum tree’s “anthropomorphic possibilities, interrupting his landscapes with giant gum-trees frozen in self-conscious, melodramatic poses” (p.48).
136 See Burn, 1990, p. 102.
any Australian landscape, and it had more shapes than any tree growing on the earth. 
Indifferently it grew out of sand, rocks, loam, clay, gravel, swamps or the snow, and 
each case it took to itself a different form: bark, trunk, limbs, leaves and their texture 
and density all varying. Margaret Preston, one of the best known artists of this 
period, began her campaign to develop and promote a national art and considered “the 
gum leaf shape of a sharp triangle” to be one of the basic Australian forms, influenced 
by Aboriginal art. As Rothwell argues, Australian writers (and artists) began to 
understand the flora around them as an alternative creation, and a rival in grandeur 
and variety to the trees and plant life of other continents. Their enthusiasm was 
strengthened by influences from the Aboriginal world in which the roles of plants and 
trees were clearly delineated as sources of food and medicine, and as emblems from a 
pre-existing world known as the “dreamtime”.

Relevant to the idea of the gum tree is that of the bush. The new ideas of the bush as a 
living entity with a refreshing force and a sense of beauty, symbolizing rebirth and 
vitality of growth, are now more explicitly expressed. This new image of the bush is 
clearly represented in some modernist paintings. During this period, Australia, like 
China, was also coming to terms with modernity and modernism. Although some 
conservative theorists had anti-modernist attitudes, some modernists like Grace 
Cossington Smith, Margaret Preston, Roland Wakelin, Roy de Maistre, and G. W. 
Lambert who had reputations as important painters, did make an effort to introduce 
modernism into their works. Starting from the experimentation with the methods of 
Cezanne, van Gogh and Gauguin, modernism gradually influenced the work of 
younger painters and grew in numbers and influence. Burn argues that in terms of 
cultural identity and national myths, modernist trends such as Cezannism, English 
post-impressionism and French decorative cubism had little influence on the

139 The other forms are the boomerang shape and the circles often used by Aboriginal artists in concentric 
arrangements, and the basic Australian colours, red, yellow ochre and blue. See Butler, *The Prints of Margaret 
expression of a national spirit.¹⁴² But in fact the modernists made a considerable contribution to diversity in the painting of Australia landscape and flora, and they brought a fresh perspective to the representation of Australian national and cultural identity. Examples of this were Cossington Smith’s paintings of the bush.

c) Cossington Smith: Nature’s Refreshing Force

Grace Cossington Smith’s works reveal the implied vitality and the cycle of nature, as in *The Gully* (1928) and *Landscape with Flowering Peach* (c.1932).

*The Gully* (Fig.67) is modern in style and innovative in its approach to the bush. A large tree trunk stretches up beyond the frame of the painting, symbolizing the spiritual vitality of nature. The vivid pink and bottle greens of the new leaves emerging from the sprouting and sprawling trees are set against a fallen tree, signifying the cycle of life and death. The soft pink represents the colour of youth and life force. Looking at this painting, it is possible to feel the strength of spirit and vitality of the untamed bush, as described by Deborah Hart: “It is about the muted tones of the Australian bush enlivened by a vital structural dynamic”.¹⁴³ I agree with Bruce James that this painting demonstrates the artist’s appreciation and “unfrightened receptivity” of a primitive world. But I do not sense the “threat” of the bush, as James does.¹⁴⁴ One of the differences between painting and literature or film is that the meaning of the image in painting is felt rather than plainly stated. It is possible to experience a variety of interpretations and feelings when viewing the same painting. Mary Eagle argues that a metaphysical reading is suggested by *The Gully* and that the meaning is unresolved, but she also extracts from it an impression of fertility and fecundity.¹⁴⁵ Whichever way one interprets it, through the sprouting and sprawling trees, the lush green vegetation, the rhythms of trunks, branches, leaves and rocks, and the colours of greys, greens and pinks, it is clear that the artist is seeking to reveal the mystery and sacredness of nature in a state of virginity, and to convey the

¹⁴² Burn, 1990, p. 204.
¹⁴⁴ Bruce James, *Grace Cossington Smith*, 1990, p. 75.
message of a fertile and untamed bush — the natural grandeur of the Australian forest. The vitality of the bush is like the traditional Chinese concept of the “mountain forests”, suggesting the most profound principle underlying the force of nature: the cycle of all living things and of regeneration.

*Landscape with Flowering Peach* (Fig.68) also suggests this organic, natural growth. As distinct from Heysen’s Flinders Range paintings and *The Gully*, in this painting a sense of nature as a reviving force is represented in a gentle and lyrical way, through the soft, billowing peach tree covered in pink and purple blossom and the emerald green grass and flowers, signifying the burgeoning and flamboyance of spring. If the traditional bush ethos represented in Australian landscape painting can be considered masculine in gender, then this painting is more feminine. Although Cossington Smith was not directly influenced by Chinese art, the painting evokes the feeling of traditional poetic Chinese painting. Beatrice Irwin, an art theorist of this period, described the feeling of a poetic Chinese landscape: “One has only to stand on a Chinese hillside in April, and absorb the rainbow effect of pale-green rice fields against miles of cherry and peach bloom, delicately fringed with golden millet, to feel even in one’s own superficially attuned organism a reflex of the calm and penetration that characterizes Chinese life and literature”. Irwin’s understanding of “Chinese life and literature” is correct. This sense of poetic harmony is just what *Landscape with Flowering Peach* conveys. But it is necessary to make it clear that this “calm and penetration” only characterizes traditional Chinese life and literature, not modern Chinese leftist culture.

The spirit of nature conveyed in both *The Gully* and *Landscape with Flowering Peach* (and in some of Margaret Preston’s later works), has more than a little in common with traditional Chinese culture. The idea of the (unknown) bush as a thing of beauty with a quiet and refreshing vitality is exactly the idea of *shanshui* discussed in Chapter 2. Cossington Smith conveys this in her painting through her use of colours:

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146 See Butel, 1986, p. 31.

greens, pinks, purples, etc. As a member of the founding trio of Australian modernism, Cossington Smith's chief preoccupation was with colour. For her colour was the key to finding new ways of expressing her feelings. As she said, "My chief interest I think has always been colour, but not flat crude colour, it must be colour within colour, it has to shine; light must be in it". In 1924 she transcribed Beatrice Irwin's *New Science of Colour* in which Irwin proposed a tripartite colour system, physical, mental, and spiritual. Irwin expressed the view that the study of colour would lead to more subtle emotions, profound ideas and spiritual perception. From the two paintings it is obvious that Cossington Smith's ideas about nature are derived from colours, as James argues: "The distinct sense that her colours pulsate and cast auras is unmistakable and deliberate". The different colours she uses also embody her perception of colour in terms of national peculiarities and her identification with the colour of the bush. She expressed this explicitly in her later years: "I’m particularly fond of the Australian bush with its marvelous soft colour and the colour of the gum trunk themselves, the pinks and the whites, the reds and greys and blacks. The Australian bush, I feel, has never really been painted and I think it is still waiting for somebody to paint the Australian bush as it is".

Cossington Smith's image of the bush shows its power to refresh, inspire and revitalize. Her works also demonstrate the fact that during this period some Australians came to realize that the bush had its own rhythm, its own aesthetic and laws. George W. Lambert (1873-1930), an influential artist, expressed his love of the bush when he wrote: "The beauty of the Australian bush is staggering ... I have been much struck with the subdued and harmonious colour of the landscape – the distinctiveness of the quiet greys of the bush ... wherever you look, there are romantic

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148 The other two being Roland Wakelin and Roy de Maistre.
152 See Hart, 2005, p. 28.
153 Bruce James, 1990, p. 67.
landscapes like tapestries, and human invention cannot improve their design”.155

Cossington Smith’s depiction of the energizing power of nature is also expressed in her works *Black Mountain* (c.1931) (Fig.66) and *Landscape at Pentecost* (1929) (Fig.69). The former emphasizes the energy and force of the mountain with its yellow colours and delicate red lines which radiate outwards across the space of the paper. In *Landscape at Pentecost*, although the farming country is indicated by the sweep of lush green pastoral landscape, what strikes the viewer most is the heaving hillock of raw earth, the expanse of golden-ochre landscape in the foreground. The bare heart of the earth is emphasized by the “scarified, strangely opulent excavation”.156 The artist uses the ochre colour to emphasize the energy of the earth, which contrasts sharply with the green-blues and greys in the background. It was as late as the 1970s that Cossington Smith said: “It’s one of the oldest continents. There’s a sort of wisdom about it, as though it knew much more than other countries. ... I don’t think we are doing as much as we should to preserve our country. I don’t think we appreciate it nearly enough”.157 But these two earlier works enable us to understand and empathize with the feelings she expressed for this ancient land in the 1920s. The painting *Black Mountain* expresses the rotational movement and the implied energy of the earth, and the image conveys a feeling of transcending a particular place and a mystical approach to the environment. *Landscape at Pentecost* shows the similarities of her ideas about Australian nature with those of Margaret Preston and George Lambert who strongly advocated painting the theme of “a bare and nurturing land”.158 Although in this period Cossington Smith did not share the radicalism displayed by Margaret Preston in the 1940s when she incorporated Aboriginal colour and form into her work, Cossington Smith certainly shared Preston’s identification with, and love for, this ancient land. This identification was explicitly expressed in the vigour, energy and vitality of the refreshing bush and nurturing earth, seen in the works

156 See Bruce James, 1990, p. 85.
Undoubtedly there is variety in her works. For example, during the Second World War the landscapes she painted lacked brightness and vitality and conveyed a feeling of depression. However, during the most important years in her artistic life, from 1926 to the 1930s, when her potential as a painter of colour and light, structure and rhythmic pattern, was realized, all of her remarkable works manifested so clearly the inspiration, solace and refreshment she obtained from nature.

Deborah Hart argues that Cossington Smith’s landscape painting express her personal feelings for the atmosphere of the bush and open country. Drusilla Modjeska also comments that she saw her subjects through the intensely feminine sensibility of a woman working in isolation, ignored by a patriarchal culture. Yet her works do more than reflect the opinion of a woman who lived undisturbed and close to the bush in Turramurra, devoting herself entirely to painting. They also embrace the important social, political and moral considerations which were affecting Australian history and which necessarily altered the artist’s vision of the world. Her works show the growth over time of emotional and spiritual links to a new land, which during this period gave Australians a sense of peace and tranquility, and enabled the human soul to find a home. This appreciation of the unknown bush, and of the distinctively Australian harsh, barren outback as a nurturing land and as a kind of positive force for human beings (as shown in the works of Cossington Smith and Heysen I have discussed), had seldom been represented in the paintings of former periods. It emphasizes a sense of “spiritual essence” of nature and the Australian white people’s pursuit of spiritual connection to, and knowledge of, the country.

Heysen’s yearning for the outback and Cossington Smith’s appreciation of the bush were quite distinct from the clearly identified tradition in Australian culture in former

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159 James also argues that in Landscape at Pencost, the red-brown clay of the cut-away road might almost be peeling back “the suburban crust” to discover “the original, even aboriginal continent” (James, 1990, p. 85).
161 Drusilla Modjeska, Stravinsky’s Lunch, 1999, p. 332.
162 James holds a similar opinion. See Bruce James, 1990, front cover.
periods, in which white man attempted to humanize, civilize and transform nature into something more agreeable or intelligible than a wilderness (as I have discussed in chapter 3). As Heysen wrote: "... There it is – despite flies, ants, and hot winds which torture the body. There is something primitive lurking in that landscape that appeals to the primitive in one’s own nature, I suppose, and one can get away from the noises of our so-called civilization". He evokes a new sense of the relationship between nature and culture, one which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Conclusion
During the period of the 1920s and early 1930s, both Australian and Chinese cultures were coming to terms with modernity. In this transition from the traditional to the modern, in the context of the national sentiments, both cultures were characterized by aesthetic and ideological diversity. The old and new ideas and representations of nature and man’s relationship with it intertwined. Both cultures constructed the myth of men as battlers and the myth of nature as refuge. The myth of “great” man battling with “destructive” nature was an old Australian idea and a new Chinese idea. The myth of “consoling” nature providing “refuge” for man was an old Chinese idea and a new Australian idea. In the cultural diversity of this period, man’s relationship with nature in Chinese culture developed from one of traditional harmony to one of a more and more pronounced antagonism. The attitude of certain Australian artists towards “wild” Australian nature (especially the outback and the bush) changed from perception of it as “alien” and “threatening”, to a growing sense of identification with it.

Chapter 5  Nature vs. Culture – “Reclusion” or “Progress”?  

In this chapter, I will discuss the representation of nature’s significance to the human spirit from the perspective of the relationship between nature and human civilization. I use the words “reclusion” and “progress” as a pair of antonyms, because in the relationship between nature and humanity, “progress” often implies the human transformation or civilization of nature through labour, machinery and technology, while “reclusion” often implies the human return or retreat to nature in order to live a comparatively more “primitive” life. This kind of life conforms to, and is in harmony with, the rules of nature. It lacks the intention to transform or tame nature with human civilization, industry and technology, all of which are often considered symbols of “progress”. “Reclusion” diminishes human power and ambition to transform or civilize the natural world in the name of “progress”.

I will discuss the representation of the relationship between nature and human civilization in the 1920s and early 1930s, centering on two contrasting ideas: the transformation of nature with human power for the purpose of “civilization” and “progress”; and the return to the grandeur of nature as merely a small participant in the natural world. I will first analyze the myth of “progress”. During the 1920s and 1930s, both Australian and Chinese creative artists constructed this myth. In Australia, the ideology was a continuation of the old ideas of transforming nature and material progress; in China, it was a new myth which betrayed the old “reclusive” spirit. Then I will discuss some new ideas appearing in the old themes in both Australian and Chinese cultures during this period. The new ideas in the old Australian themes relating to “labour” and the “pastoral” landscape, are comparable to the traditional Chinese idea of retreating to nature; while the new ideas in Chinese old themes of “shanshui” and “reclusion” resemble the traditional Australian idea of possessing nature and bringing “progress” to the country. Finally I will discuss the myth of “returning to nature”. In Australian culture this represents a challenge to the concept
of white civilization; in Chinese culture it is a continuation of the traditional "reclusive" idea.

"Progress" – Nature to be Transformed

1) The Myth of "Progress" in Australian Culture (Old)

During the 1920s and early 1930s, both Australian and Chinese nationalistic sentiments stimulated the construction of a myth of progress. In Australia this was a continuation of the long established western view of human appropriation and control of nature, and the desire of white Australians to "belong" to the new land by appropriating it. This myth was explicit in some Australian films which showed the settler working the land, transforming nature and bringing civilization as the theme. In this section I will give a number of films as examples to discuss this myth. Let us once more take On Our Selection (1920) as an example. This time it will be discussed from the perspective of "progress" through human toil. The Rudd Family was the archetypal bush family, struggling to make a living by hard labour. The director Langford portrayed the hardships of bush life and emphasized this in scenes of the family at work: felling trees, building their hut, clearing the ground, ploughing, harvesting, pulling the ripened corn and shelling the corn with their hands (Fig.85). The captions to the film, such as "the whole family working like bullocks", and "they delved and toiled in loneliness through the years", enhance the impression of hardship. But even more emphasis is given to the fact that human beings were transforming the land and bringing "progress" to it: in eighteen months, the selection is shown to have developed from a shabby hut with only a single room to a four-room slab hut, a log store-room, a stockyard and eight acres of land under corn. The drought was over, replaced by abundant rain which made the grass lush and the pastures fertile. All this was seen as the reward for the family's toil, achieved through the strength of their efforts to turn the wilderness into a humanized and civilized land.

This film, like most other films of this period (e.g. The Breaking of the Drought), constructed a myth of final fulfillment achieved through productive human work.
transforming the wild bush, the cracked earth and the starving cattle and sheep into a
scene of overflowing water casks, rich pastures and fat animals in a “sun-kissed” land
(Fig. 86). Tulloch argues that in this particular discourse both man’s moral and his
physical labour soften the extremes of Australian nature, replacing an opposition
between man and nature with a bountiful communion.¹ Yet although there is this
bountiful communion, the relationship between man and nature is not like that of the
traditional Chinese sense of harmony. It is based on the transformation of the
wildness of nature through the civilizing agency of humanity.

This sort of representation shows that during this period, the core value of the 19th
century in Australia – “improvement-progress-settlement” – was still influential.² In
the 1920s Australian nationalism was influenced by a conservative national tradition
which justified the idea of progress. Labour on the land was considered as both the
mark of progress and the essence of being Australian, represented by man’s
transformation of the wilderness into farms and prosperous homes. It was also a
justification for those who advocated the construction of a “new nationhood and
identity, forged out of the imputed distinction between the ‘eager eyes and greedy
cosmopolitanism’ of the Old World, and the pioneer life on the frontier”.³ In this
“new nationhood and identity”, nature was constructed as a “wasteland” waiting to be
improved and exploited by human civilization.

This view of labour on the land also underpinned the traditional ideological view that
the land belongs to those who work it (as discussed in Chapter 3). This was the ideal
of John Locke’s belief that property rights should depend on the labour a man put into
the land. In On Our Selection, the idea of possession was expressed by such captions
as “Pioneers of Australia strove through the silences of Bush-lands and made them
ours”. It also justified the deep-rooted ideology of dispossession of the Aborigines.
This was manifested by such definitive and emblematic lines from the film The

² Ibid., p. 356.
³ Ibid., p. 348.
Romance of Runnibede (1928) as: “I have cleared every foot of this land and I’m not letting a few blacks drive me away”. In this narrative, European pastoralism and agriculture is shown as the means of transforming the landscape from native grasslands to pasture and agricultural plots. Russel Ward expresses a similar opinion, although he discusses it in the wider context of the expansion of industrial civilization. He argues that this was an obvious self-justification for the exploitative evils of an expanding imperialism, which claimed that its wealth came not from persecuting the natives and taking their land, but from the labour of pioneers. Although in reality black men and women were a part of the pastoral workforce, in this cultural construction, they were all absent. By avoiding acknowledgement of Aboriginal representation, the culture makers constructed the idea of an Australia whose progress was solely the result of white intervention.

This view of labour or progress, using a narrative centred on squatters and selectors, differed from the traditional “progress” myth, which was seen through the legend of the egalitarian bushman. Alomes and Jones have also noted this, and argue that in the inter-war years, this myth stressed values which focused on the settler as squatter and selector rather than on the tradition of the egalitarian bushman as the shearer or drover. The squatters’ legend was one in which the expansion of technology, finance, and patriarchal civilization encouraged the transformation of wilderness; while the selectors’ legend was one of privatized farm civilization in which a piece of land, a home and working family became the key icons (as shown in On Our Selection). Different social groups and classes placed emphasis on different aspects of the myth. But they had one thing in common: transforming a “wasteland” into a pastoral paradise through labour. Whether in the ideas of labour and the survival of the fittest, or in the belief of civilizing the land by science, technology, settlement and individual self-improvement, nature was represented as something which was to be transformed for the purpose of “progress”.

This idea during the 1920s was supported by the ideal of “Australia Unlimited” which had the intention of providing “A Million Farms for a Million Farmers”. Some Australians thought that their land could support 100 to 200 million people, and would be increasingly prosperous. The Hughes government placed great importance on increased population through its immigration and settlement programs. The land and the new settlers were considered to be the basis of this expansion. The government resumed the task of ambitious development, and encouraged closer settlement, and succeeded in making the land more productive.

It also advocated films showing Australia engulfed by a rising tide of prosperity and promoting the idea of “what a great country Australia really is, what can be done with its lands, and how it can be transformed from a wilderness into smiling farms, and prosperous homes”. As a result, the ideology and self-image of the 1920s was one of material growth, explicitly represented in certain films.

In these films, characteristic and impressive shots show a station in a wilderness, a few (or a lone) tree(s), a solitary horse(wo)man and a multitude of sheep, rough tracks, and burning white roofs, which symbolize wealth, human cultivation and control (Fig.87). This can be seen in A Girl of the Bush (1921), in The Hayseeds (1933) and in The Squatter's Daughter (1933). As Tulloch argues, the cultural icons support this comforting notion of purpose and control. The theme of human dominance and control is clearly demonstrated by the competent pioneer on the edge of civilization. This is the mark of progress. This “progress” and “control” are achieved by the victory of human culture over untamed nature. For example, in The Squatter's Daughter, the opening shots show the “achievements” of one and a half centuries of white European settlement in the Monaro in New South Wales. The large flock of sheep, “surely the largest ever assembled anywhere in the world in front of a camera”, is proudly paraded before the eyes of the viewer. Produced for international

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8 Ibid., p. 358.
9 Quoted in Tulloch, 1981, pp. 139-140.
audiences, the film shows the basis for the creation of the wealth which supported the European development of Australia. The image was embedded within the self-consciousness of a national “culture”.12

A frequently appearing image in Australian film during this period is a solitary rider sitting comfortably on a stationary horse, watching a crowd of sheep. The sheep cluster together around a single tree. This image shows human civilization and progress. Tulloch argues that the image implies that the Australian “vastness” and pioneering “unknown” are caught up and controlled by the vertical of the tree and the horizontal of sheep and rider, one dynamic connoting “nature”, the other “culture”. “Yet the tree signifies ‘culture’ too, since it visually extends the vertical dominance of the man. It is also, in a sense, his alibi of power. It is because he is in control of nature that he is, in the Australian cultural domain, a man. Further, the tree has been extracted from the nature behind it on behalf of culture… On the vertical plane the sheep are dominated by the tree, but on the horizontal plane by the rider. They are in nature, but of culture”.13 His interpretation of the tree as the symbol of “culture” and as the “alibi” of the rider’s power is much too forced. The fact that the tree has been extracted from its landscape and is visually impressive is not a plausible reason for seeing it as representing “culture”. But his opinion is convincing in that this image symbolizes the fact that “culture” controls and dominates “nature”, and suggests that the horse(wo)man becomes a real Australian (wo)man in the cultural domain only after he / she is shown to have been successful in controlling nature. In this image, the abundant sheep are a sign of civilized domestication for the use of humans (as discussed in chapter 3 when analyzing Tom Roberts’s painting A Break Away!), and more specifically, a sign of the labour undertaken by the horse(wo)man. The rider, sitting comfortably on the horse and watching a crowd of sheep, signifies a pause in the drive to master the land and make it produce wealth. This image is a visual

12 The director Ken Hall said of these images in The Squatter’s Daughter: “I wanted the wide horizons and beauty of the country to show through on the screen and to suggest in the opening shots the vast size of the wool industry… a projection of Australia with which I am glad to have been associated” (See Ken Hall. Directed by Ken. G Hall: Autobiography of an Australian Film Maker, 1977, p. 78).

expression of this description of the popularity of paintings on the theme of pioneers, displayed in the Melbourne’s Centennial International Exhibition in 1888: “...The unknown wilderness has been made to produce coal and gold, wool and wine...Out of the barren earth there has come wealth, out of the handful of settlers a great people”.\textsuperscript{14} This image links the legacy of the nation’s pioneering image (as the provider of progress, prosperity and civilization out of a “wilderness”) in the past to the abundance of the present, to the creation of this material achievement (Fig.88).

2) The Myth of “Progress” in Chinese Culture (New)

Just as the myth of “progress” had developed in Australia during this period, a similar myth was also under construction in China’s new culture. This myth was also catalyzed and strengthened by the intense nationalistic feelings which came out of a sense of national crisis, the result of domestic wars and foreign (Japanese) aggression. But the notion of “progress” in the Chinese new culture has broader meanings than it has in Australian culture. Besides the transformation of “wilderness” into fertile farming land, and scientific and technological development, it also has the meaning of “actively participating in social life”, as suggested by the radical leftist Chen Duxiu’s slogans: “Go forward, do not retire”.\textsuperscript{15} Actually during this period the Chinese sense of “progress” was a concept closely connected with the idea of scientific, social engagement, transformation and modernization. The modern art theorist Mei Mosheng argues that the 1920s and 1930s were a period of Westernization, with emphasis on upholding science, and pursuing material wealth.\textsuperscript{16} Although he does not explicitly link these three characteristics (westernization, upholding science, and the pursuit of material wealth) with the idea of “progress”, they are always categorized together as broadly connoting the idea of “progress”. Since the Western term “scientific” was introduced to China by the early communist Li Dazhao in 1917 to denote a road leading to a more advanced society, it has had a close association with the idea of “progress”. What was seen as “scientific” was more concerned with

\textsuperscript{14} Quoted in Leigh Astbury, \textit{City Bushmen}, 1985, p. 130.
\textsuperscript{15} See Lu Fusheng, 1995, p. 57. These slogans became the guidelines for many Chinese intellectuals and artists.
\textsuperscript{16} Mei Mosheng, 2005, p. 99.
pragmatism or practical knowledge than with any spiritual pursuit. Many Chinese intellectuals (especially the leftists) thought that social progress was accelerated by the “scientific” spirit, and was to be achieved by “going into society”, “experiencing the real world” and introducing western technology; while “retrogression” was seen as being caused by the feudal literati’s ideas of reclusion. Some of these intellectuals were influenced by Marxist ideas. It has been commonplace since Marx to speak, in some contexts, of the “progressive” character of capitalism, and within it of urbanism and of social modernization. As Raymond Williams argues, the productive efficiency and the newly liberated forces of the capitalist breakthrough, the simultaneous damnation and idealization of capitalism in its specific forms of urban and industrial development, the unreflecting celebration of man’s mastery of nature and his exploitation of natural resources, were all embodied in the word “progress”. Although for the leftists, capitalism later lost its “progressive” character and was replaced and superseded by socialism, for most of the Chinese intellectuals of the 1920s and 1930s, both capitalism and socialism represented the idea of “progress” when compared with traditional feudalism. In all these embodied meanings of “progress”, the active intervention in and transformation of nature and society by human beings is stressed rather than the idea of human beings returning to the natural world as insignificant participants. And it is on the basis of this dualistic opposition that I construct “reclusion” and “progress” as concepts of polarity. In the myth of progress, in terms of the relationship between nature and culture, it is culture which is dominant, symbolized by human activity and a sense of control.

The idea of “actively participating in social life and transforming society” gradually became the prevalent attitude in the 1930s. I argued in the second chapter that traditional Chinese shanshui painting and literature was “the art of the scholarly recluse”. As this art of the recluse was generally escapist, self-cultivating and only for the literati’s own amusement, it was unrelated to the desire for a strong nation (in the sense of material prosperity) and “progress”—the popular theme of this new period.

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17 See Kong Xinmiao, 2000, p. 90.
The art and literature of this splendid ancient civilization was criticized by some Chinese intellectuals (e.g. Lu Xun) as impeding the advance and progress of the country. As a result it became the object of attack and vituperation.

Criticism of the "reclusive" spirit was explicit in certain films which promoted the myth of progress. In these films, nature was still represented as a place for reclusion. However, this image was used to criticize those people who had escaped to nature instead of devoting themselves to the national revolution. For example, in A Story on Hua Mountain (Huashan Yanshi) (1934), the Hua Mountain, the ideal site for a recluse, is understood to embody a certain recognizable beauty as a misty paradisal mountain in the traditional shanshui painting. However, the escape to it of the hero Chen Beifeng as a recluse following the failure of the domestic revolution, is viewed in a negative light, as "pessimistic" and "decadent", and as "cutting himself off from the social struggle" (Fig.94). His image is that of a pessimistic and depressed "coward" rather than that of a traditional "noble" or "honoured" man. The film ends by echoing the call of the revolutionaries through the mouth of the hero, who is shocked and awakened when the city of Shenyang falls into the hands of Japanese in 1931: "I shouldn't live a carefree and leisurely life as a recluse in the mountain. I will safeguard my motherland!" It is significant that in the cultural tradition self-awakening was achieved through leaving society and returning to nature (as exemplified by Tao Yuanming); but during this period it was achieved though leaving nature and returning to society. By condemning the retreat into the mountains, the film in effect condemns the ideology of regarding nature as the sacred shelter and protector for human beings. It deconstructs the traditional praise of human unity with nature.

19 Huashan Yanshi: 華山艸史. The main idea of the film: Chen Beifeng, a student in Peking University, and his girlfriend go to Hua Mountain to spend their holidays. They write poems and play music in the Mountain. Chen's classmate Huang Zhensheng goes to Guangdong, joins the Revolutionary Army and participates in the revolution. Encouraged by Huang, Chen also takes part in the revolution. During the massacre in 1927, Chen becomes pessimistic again and returns to Hua Mountain for three years as a hermit, lonely and depressed. In 1931, when Shenyang falls to the Japanese, his spirit is devastated. After smashing his musical instrument, he joins the army again and is killed in the fighting.
In this new myth, there was no room for the noble recluse. With the disappearance of the literati class, some intellectuals transmuted their reclusive experience of the joys and sorrows of life from something disengaged to expressions and articulations that were truly of this world. In the reformists’ painting, countryside and field were the subject matter, together with images of villages, cultivated fields, roads and houses. Although in traditional *shanshui* painting there were also representations of pavilions, cottages or temples, those images symbolized the communication between man and nature. During this period, however, the cultivated fields and houses were endowed with a more man-made significance, manifesting the human transformation of nature.

Just as Australian artists treated the theme of farmers’ labour in their culture, peasants’ labour in harsh natural conditions was also a recurring subject in Chinese modern painting, signifying the same kind of transformation.\(^{20}\) One example is Yu Ben (1905-1995)’s *Late Returning* (1935) (Fig.30).\(^{21}\) It depicts the toil of man and buffalo and their relationship with the land. In the background is the lingering light of the setting sun, the evening mist, the villages in the distance and the vague hills, all of which was the traditional representation of the pastoral. But in the foreground, there is a stocky clodhopper carrying his plough, pulling a buffalo and walking back home in the open country. The clodhopper, a massive figure forming a sharp contrast to the light natural environment, stands in obvious contrast to the traditional reclusive theme, in which figures are small, at ease and detached. In the painter’s eye, the labouring people had the most appeal, for they contributed to the progressive development of society. He claims: “I can only and must paint these stubborn, indocile figures. They live a hard life, but they have a strong and tough character”.\(^{22}\)

Echoing Yu Ben’s subject of labouring peasants, but with a more radical and impressive strength, Zhao Wangyun gave full play to this subject. Apart from the

\(^{20}\) Although in an Australian sense “farmer” has a different meaning from “peasant”, in this thesis I compare Australian farmers with Chinese peasants from the perspective that both words connote “labouring in nature”.

\(^{21}\) Yu Ben: 余本; *Late Returning*: 晚歸.

representation of nature’s threatening force (as discussed in chapter 4), in his painting peasants’ labour is another major theme which has important and interesting affinities with the theme of labour in Australian film. In his painting the figures are labouring figures, and the animals are ploughing animals, as shown in *The Ploughmen in the Fields of Longping* (c.1933) (Fig.31) and *The Cattle Harrowing the Soil in Early Spring* (c.1933) (Fig.32). There are never dawdling or idling figures, never high-class noble people or leisurely old men in misty clouds. Nor is there a pavilion, garden or temple; instead, the peasants pulling livestock dominate. He said, “In my painting there will never be those people who don’t work or labour”. As with certain Australian films, such as *On Our Selection*, Zhao’s focus was also on the plight of human beings in their encounters with the harshness of nature. This can be seen in *Fatigue* (1928) (Fig.33), which depicts a peasant in a dry and barren field, leaning on his hoe and gasping painfully. The topics that Zhao addressed are how people perform difficult tasks in threatening natural environments; how people endure danger in their work; how people labour in the forest, field, and moor... Although it is not easy for a painting to construct the myth of progress by narrating the story of an ascent from nothing to a final fulfillment of prosperity (as Australian films did), in Zhao’s painting we can still read the message of “progress” because his words which explain the theme of labour reveal his intention: “The feelings outpoured in the process of labour were endless, because labour was a human activity contributing to the creation and development of the country”. These words embody an ideology similar to that of the Australian film *On Our Selection*. Both suggest that nature needs to be controlled and transformed by human labour for the purpose of progress and the development of society.

**New Ideas in Old Themes**

In appearance, Yu Ben and Zhao Wangyun’s labour themes are also similar to those

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23 *The Ploughmen in the Fields of Longping*. 隆平村野代替牛馬的耕種人生 *The Cattle Harrowing the Soil in Early Spring*: 芳草耙地之牛。
25 *Fatigue*: 疲勞。
found in Roberts’ and Heysen’s paintings of farm labourers during this period. For example, in Tom Roberts’ *Ploughing in the Dandenongs* (1924) (Fig.70), the figures of a horse and man ploughing also occupy the foreground. However, if we compare this painting with Roberts’ depiction of human labour in nature in the colonial period, we will find that there is something different and new. It is this “new” connotation which differentiates this painting from Yu Ben or Zhao Wangyun’s painting in its deeper meaning, and which differentiates this painting from Roberts’ representation of a “progressive” spirit in the colonial period. In this section I will discuss these new ideas of nature as they appeared in old themes in both cultures.

1) “Labour” as a Symbol of Reclusion (in Australian Painting)

This new idea is most obviously demonstrated in Australian painting with Roberts and Heysen as representatives. During this period the themes of ploughmen and farm labourers were favoured by some Australian landscape painters. In Roberts’ treatment of labour of the colonial period, in paintings such as *Woodsplitters* (Fig.55), *Twilight at Healesville* (Fig.56) and *The Break Away!* (Fig.61), a sense of human self-confidence and optimism is obvious. These works were painted in a period of great expansion during the booming years of Melbourne. In fact many Heidelberg painters’ works in the colonial period demonstrate a self-confidence in the ability of pioneers to bring progress to the land by their own efforts, and even their depictions of the poetic feeling of human beings in the landscape, reflect the booming years of expansion and optimism. However, during the 1920s, in Roberts’s treatment of rural labour, there was often a sense of peace and contemplation. For example, in *Ploughing in the Dandenongs* (Fig.70), besides the description of horse and man ploughing, the whole picture, with the stretch of the mountain, delicate colours and soft tones, conveys an impression of peace and tranquility of the sort that frequently appears in traditional Chinese painting, a tranquility which dissolves the idea of “human labour controlling or transforming nature”.

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27 For a more detailed discussion of the labour theme in the colonial period, see Chapter 3 of this thesis.
28 Although Leigh Astbury’s argument that these pictures demonstrate nature’s abundance and Roberts’ reverence for nature is not convincing (as I explained in chapter 3), his opinion that there is a generally optimistic spirit in these paintings of rural labour is quite reasonable (See Leigh Astbury, 1985, pp. 103-104).
The sense of peace and tranquility is also demonstrated and proved by Roberts’ other paintings of this period, such as *Sherbrooke Forest* (1924) (Fig. 71) and a series of Dandenongs landscapes. Helen Topliss’s opinion that the contribution made by Roberts and his contemporaries in the 1880s and 1890s did not lead to any developments in the next decades till the end of 1920s and that “the work itself largely repeated earlier motifs in a formulaic way”, is not convincing.29 As discussed in chapter 3, in Roberts’ painting of the colonial period, the harmony between human beings and nature is often present in landscapes with European associations, while in his nationalistic pictures depicting landscapes with obvious Australian characteristics, the struggle between human beings and nature often replaces the sense of harmony. However, in the 1920s, although he painted such works as *Country Road Makers* (1923) and *The Quarry, Maria Island* (1926) which show the strong masculine characteristics of conquering nature by labour, there are more representations of a harmonious relationship between human beings and nature in characteristically Australian landscapes. Virginia Spate argues that even the *Country Road Makers* suggests a continuity with the past rather than the raw newness of human intervention in the landscape seen in *The Break Away*! 30 This argument may not be convincing, but her idea that unlike Roberts’ earlier Australian landscapes, most of his late works of the 1920s suggest a kind of continuity of time, and a completeness of the landscape which does not need to be civilized by human hand, is very convincing. For example, in *Sherbrooke Forest*, a sense is conveyed of a vast, centuries-old, peaceful and tranquil forest unscarred by human industry. And compared with the slender young gum trees in Roberts’ colonial paintings, the eucalypts in this painting are much more impressive. There are horses and a dray, but they are all dwarfed by the majestic gum trees.

Compared with his earlier work, in the works of the 1920s, there is not much suggestion of a vigorous manhood which conquers, controls, shapes or civilizes

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29 Helen Topliss, 1985, p. 25.
nature. Instead, sometimes there is a sense of human “humility”, as shown in Sherbrooke Forest.\textsuperscript{31} The peaceful, quiet and overwhelming landscape dominates, “offering therapy to a shell-shocked society”.\textsuperscript{32} One reason for these changes may be his reflections on the First World War. After the cruelty of the War, which was caused by human greed and man-made machines, the product of “civilization”, the enthusiasm for “progress” prevalent in the colonial period was rethought. Those quiet and subdued paintings demonstrate a sense of returning home, of making this land (Australian nature) a spiritual home, something close to the myth of reclusion in traditional Chinese culture.

Another reason may be related to the painter’s personal disillusionment with Europe. The situation for an Australian expatriate artist in England was never an easy one. Roberts experienced difficulties and disappointments in England, which was also the experience of many other Australian artists in Europe. He found that England “does not need anybody... She has everybody and everything. The supply is in excess of the demand... The only thing is to make her want you, and that is difficult, for she really only wants the exceptional in any line”.\textsuperscript{33} He returned to Australia in the 1920s, and at this time he had a spiritual and emotional identification with this land, and rediscovered its beauty: “It all came back when I sat there with the blue sweep of the [Dandenong] Ranges before me, and the sunshine warm and golden and the dear remembered beauty”.\textsuperscript{34} As a result, there is a more lyrical and poetic atmosphere in his works, and more harmony between man and nature. This can be seen in Washing Day, Kallista (c.1923-25) (Fig.72) which depicts a woman at a washing line framed into the left-hand side of the composition by a copse of gum trees. “an idyllic landscape glimpsed beyond”.\textsuperscript{35} It reflects a human delight in nature, showing Roberts’ pleasure at returning to the landscape of Australia. His choice of living in the

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\textsuperscript{32} Humphrey McQueen, “The Fortunes of Tom Roberts”, in Tom Roberts, 1996, p. 30.

\textsuperscript{33} Roberts stated this in an interview in 1906, three years after his arrival in London. Quoted in Helen Topliss, 1985, p. 25.

\textsuperscript{34} See Mary Eagle, 1997, p. 105. Streeton, too, on his return in the 1920s, was drawn to the “blue Dandenongs” in Melbourne.

Dandenong countryside was just like that of Tao Yuanming who returned to the countryside as a recluse. He expressed his love in a letter to Walter Barnett in 1926: "Here we have something new yet old, no tidy self-contained elms and chestnuts that reflect every mood of these days. Think of the red gums of a Murray flat, how they stretch their arms one to another, they are a great tree, showing all their great construction". Just as Jessie Traill, a close friend of Roberts in his late years, comments, after years of seeking, Roberts interpreted the bush with more love: "... There was something in the artist that, seeing beauty, could communicate it to those with him – never looked hills so blue and dreaming distant; never trees on the nearer slope so finely traced; never clouds massed so bold and luminous as when his appreciation beside one seemed to see it into one’s own eyes".

Roberts's painting demonstrates that during this period, apart from the representation of human beings labouring in the world of nature as a symbol of material progress, some Australian creative artists began to redefine Australian landscape and civilization. Disillusioned by the war, human beings needed a more direct association with the land. The new dawn at the end of the ploughed furrow represented peace and serenity. Instead of being constructed as a way to "progress", human labour in nature was represented as a reaction to the mechanism of civilization and progress. As the most famous painter of pastoral landscapes in the years between the two world wars, some of Heysen's works are the best representatives.

In the early 1920s Heysen particularly favoured ploughmen and farm workers as subjects. His paintings The Quarry (1924), Ploughing the Field (1920) (Fig.73) and The Toilers (1920) (Fig.74) all depict the motif of hard physical labour performed by human beings and animals. For example, in both Ploughing the Field and The Toilers, a ploughman with two horses is in the centre of the foreground, a ploughed field; all of them toil on their own farmland, with the ploughman bending his back forward and grasping the harrow. There is a clear sense of human nobility achieved through

36 Ibid.
37 Quoted in Mary Eagle, 1997, p. 105.
If we simply judge these pictures by their appearance we may come to the conclusion that Heysen’s rural labourers are the equivalents of Chinese new peasants – both suggest an intense nobility. And as with the works of Zhao Wangyun and Yu Ben, these paintings of Heysen extol the dignity of human labour: the bodies are strong, and there is a rural solidity about their situation, the simple sincerity of the land-working peasant close to the earth. Heysen makes a similar claim to that of Zhao Wangyun and Yu Ben, saying that “rural life under these conditions has always held a great fascination for me”. 38

Nevertheless, Heysen’s stress on labour had a totally different, even contrary, ideology to Zhao and Yu. Contrary to the idea of “progress”, Heysen sought to assert the unity of man, animal and earth against the mechanism of civilization of a world falling into a “deep dirty morass”, by eulogizing the merits and values of a passing way of life. 39 Although both Heysen and Zhao praised the dignity and nobility of labour, Heysen’s representation conveyed the message of resisting the coming of mechanization, and was marked by a nostalgia for the passing of a pastoral tradition. 40 The Chinese leftist legend emerged from the idea of modernism which sought to break the pastoral shanshui tradition and welcomed mechanization. In other words, Australia’s heroic, monumental peasants assumed iconic status as symbols of resistance to the modern world, while China’s heroic peasants were represented as the symbols of modernity and prophets of significant social change. In both societies, this period was a transition from the traditional to the modern. Zhao and Yu’s painting embrace modern ideas and suggest that the modern spirit of Chinese culture was breaking away from the classical harmonious ideals of the unity of man and nature, that the traditional metaphysical thought was giving way to a contemporary pragmatism and utilitarianism. Contrary to Zhao and Yu’s enthusiastic evocation of

38 North, 1977, p. 10.
39 North, 1977, p. 11.
social engagement, Roberts and Heysen in this period sought to retreat from both modern life and modernist ideas. They expressed an exuberant zest for the return to the countryside in their works.

The contented-looking labourers in Heysen’s paintings and the cheerful feeling he expressed are closer to the theme of pastoral reclusion found in the Chinese cultural tradition, with Tao Yuanming as the prime example. To both Heysen and Tao, “labour” is a symbol of returning to the more “primitive” life style which focuses on human harmony with nature. They all demonstrate a deep communication with nature and a desire to return to the simple life and to move away from what was seen to be the dirt and stress of industry or city life. Heysen’s words and deeds all demonstrate his inclination toward reclusion. He claimed that The Toilers came nearer to “Mother Earth” than any previous work he had painted dealing with toilers of the fields.41 He wrote: “I always look forward to my yearly migration and undisturbed communion with Nature. You would love it too Lionel – to get right away from everything and lead the primitive life, without the cursed ‘noise’ of civilization and so called ‘progress’”.42 In a similar way to Chinese shanshui pastoral poets and painters such as Tao Yuanming, Wang Wei and Ni Zan, Heysen also lived a secluded life in the mountains. His house, the Cedars, was encircled by Hahndorf and the Hills beyond. It was a world in which human life and nature were entwined in a timeless cycle of seasons and agricultural toil. Also like Tao Yuanming, Heysen responded deeply to the solitude and natural beauty of the Hahdnorf countryside and never departed from his creed of returning to nature. He expressed the joy and excitement he felt for the great old gums he had known as friends, the beauty of valley, slope, and hill. To him, the great gums, the river, the smoky blue of the ranges were so attractive that among his trees and pastures he could be detached and protected from the “destruction which man call progress”.43 The ploughmen in Heysen’s painting were like those in Tao Yuanming and Wang Wei’s poems, simple and naïve, but with the virtues of dignity,

41 Quoted in North, 1977, p. 48.
43 See Thiele, 1974, pp. 182, 250.
respect, scrupulous honesty and satisfaction with their lot. They stood for the simple and reclusive life in nature as against the “progress”, the life he lived himself and which was admired by his artist friend Lionel: “I often think of you and your fine simple life. No cities, no necessity to read newspapers, or catch trains or cater in any way for the vulgarian who possesses the world today, the stupid, pompous Public – essence of mediocrity that would write itself down as civilization”.44 There was no emphasis on material progress in these paintings, and the labourers are not symbols of the transformation of nature, but symbols of a return to nature. In this representation, nature was no longer regarded as a wasteland waiting for human liberation.

One reason for the emergence of this new idea, labouring on the land as a symbol of retreating from modern civilization and progress, can be attributed to the stylistic preference of the painter. Many scholars point out that Heysen’s use of labourers as subjects was influenced by Millet and the Barbizon painters. Ian North argues that Heysen’s rural labourers are the Australian equivalents of Fontainebleau peasants. Both Millet and Heysen sought to assert the unity of man, beast and earth against the express train of civilization.45 Colin Thiele argues that it was the dignity of the rural worker, and the labourer in the fields, that Millet and the Barbizon painters had captured in France, and that Heysen himself was soon also to capture in the hills of Hahndorf.46 John Neylon argues that inspired by Millet and other Barbizon artists, a later generation of artists, among them the impressionist Pissarro, Vincent Van Gogh and Gauguin, adopted the idea that sanctuary from modern life and even spiritual renewal could be found in what were perceived as the less sophisticated cultures of the countryside.47 Lou Klepac observes that Heysen’s works have a particular affinity with Van Gogh’s because they were both deeply influenced by Millet and shared a reverence for the dignity of human toil.48 These interpretations are all reasonable. Yet Heysen’s representation was not only a matter of stylistic preference, but also the

44 See Thiele, 1974, p. 129.  
45 North, 1977, p. 11.  
46 Thiele, 1974, p. 58.  
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result of social changes and the War.

As discussed earlier, Heysen’s disillusionment and negative feelings about the War, his experience of wartime anti-German prejudice and his family loss, all contributed to his determination to be ever-true to nature. On the other hand, during this period, in his hometown Hahndorf, there were many changes taking place in the village. Increasing industrialization, mechanization and the expansion of the cities into the countryside hastened the end of centuries-old traditions and ways of life. Heysen hated and rejected technological civilization, and knew that modern technology could be environmentally and psychologically disastrous.49 His ideas were embodied in his distinctive rendering of the Australian landscape and the farmers inhabiting it – the heroic, monumental farmers who assumed iconic status as symbols of resistance to the modern world.

Some critics consider Heysen “a faintly vulgar if honest successor to the Heidelberg School”.50 This is not convincing. Although Heysen’s extolling of rural labour has similar connotations to Roberts’ paintings in the 1920s, it differs from and contrasts with the theme of rural labour in the paintings of the “Heidelberg School” in its golden years of the 1880s to 1890s. The latter eulogizes “progress” and “civilization”, while Heysen endeavours to construct a myth used more for escape than for accelerating progress – to escape from the evils caused by urbanization and war machines which were the products of so-called “progress”. Some criticize Heysen for “irrelevantly extolling heroic rural labour and the eucalyptus to a people more pre-occupied with fighting world wars and creating the most urbanized society on earth”.51 But this criticism just demonstrates that the ideas embodied in his works are close to the traditional Chinese myth of reclusion. In Heysen’s representations, the traditional spirit of individual labouring farmers is opposed to the modern war machine with its mass-produced, totally impersonal and insidious poison gas.

49 North, 1977, p. 15.
50 See North, 1977, p. 10.
51 Ibid.
2) “Pastoral” as the Land for Retreat (in Australia)

In chapter 3 I discussed the proposition that the “pastoral” landscape in earlier periods had long been considered a symbol of the human endeavour to civilize, transform and control nature. During the period of the 1920s and 1930s, apart from the influence of the First World War, both Australia and China were in a state of early urbanization, industrialization and modernization. This resulted in new attitudes toward nature and the human relationship with nature in Australian culture. Besides the new idea of reclusion in the old theme of the labourer working the land, some Australians created a new trend which represented the pastoral landscape as a place of retreat for mankind, in which harmony, peace and quietude were enhanced without placing undue stress on human labour. This is similar to the old Chinese myth of the recluse “returning to the idyllic life”. In Australian painting, this kind of pastoral landscape dominated the period following the First World War.

In this representation, labour is not obvious. In many paintings there are no representations of human beings – no landowners or workers, no Aboriginal people or white settlers to spoil the extravagant pictorial design, only a few flocks of sheep or cows, a bit of fencing, distant mountains, far horizons and grand vistas of plains. It seems that the land belongs to nobody. The representation of this tranquil pastoral landscape without human beings was favoured by many painters including Roberts and Elioth Gruner (1882-1939). But the artist who typically represented this pastoral landscape during this period was Arthur Streeton, the most influential and highly acclaimed artist of the 1920s and 1930s. His style and subjects were identified with a desirable national image. Many critics and collectors thought that the images in his paintings contributed to the creation of a national iconography, a national symbol. Features of those images were linked with the ideals of nationhood.

52 Elioth Gruner’s paintings, such as Spring Frost, Milking Time (Araluen Valley) (1922), Dissolving Mists (1932), Blue Morning (1925), Spring in Devon (1924), Pastoral (1931) all represented this pastoral utopia with fertile land, cows or sheep, modest farmhouses, old barns and tranquil pastures, suggesting an Arcadian dream.

53 Burn, 1990, p. 96.

W.K Hancock remarked that Streeton’s paintings of pastures, sheep and graziers “had become a national habit”. Lionel Lindsay also declared that Streeton’s painting *Barron Gorge* was the “quintessential Australia”. As Streeton was a cultural hero of such national importance, and because his landscapes of the 1920s and 1930s were seen as part of the contemporary acclamation of specifically Australian virtues, his construction of the national myth can be regarded as representing an important trend in the thought of this period.

Streeton’s *The Sheep Country* (c.1920) and *Land of the Golden Fleece* (1926) (Fig.75) are representatives of the “ideal” national image and nationalistic attitude. In both paintings, there are images of sunburnt grassy plains, eucalypt trees, a flock of grazing sheep, a river or a small pool of blue water against a low backdrop of blue ranges (*The Sheep Country*) or reflecting hills and sky (*Land of the Golden Fleece*). In both paintings, there are no references to the European landscape as shown in Streeton’s paintings of the colonial period (as discussed in Chapter 3). There are no references to human habitation, and there are no fences or houses to suggest human ownership or control. The land is often unenclosed.

Some scholars argue that although the images are devoid of human beings and their labour, the flocks of sheep or cows and fertile lands are signs of the rural countryside. This idealistic representation of rural harmony was not only an expression of anti-modern or anti-industrial sentiment. It also conformed to the school of thought that saw Australia’s future dependant on the land, which was regarded as the beneficent foster mother nourishing its people.

This opinion is to some extent reasonable. During this period, primary and secondary industries in Australia were developing very quickly. Manufacturing, following its wartime boost, was aimed mainly at domestic markets as a substitute for imports, and was subordinate to the export trade which depended largely on rural production. By

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55 See Hoorn, p. 240.
the mid 1920s, pastoral and agricultural production was providing half of the national income. Hence the images of plenty affirmed Australia's international trading status and, in that sense, symbolized national progress. In this pastoral myth of a pre-industrial utopia, there were still discreet hints of pastoral wealth and national potential, with references to the productivity of the land. On the other hand, the imagery still signified a white use of land. The cleared land, grazing sheep and placid cows, were alien to traditional Aboriginal practices. This utopia, for those who wanted to escape from the harsh realities of the War and industrialization, was advanced by white man's civilization, which brought a sort of prosperity based on the pastoral industry and achieved by the transformation of wilderness into pasture by the white man. The panoramic view was often represented as an intimate and known landscape, rather than an unknown wilderness. Accompanying these signs was the idea that pastoral wealth did not come from oppressing the traditional owners and taking their land, but from the more advanced and therefore justified use of the land by the white settlers in a European way. The idea of possession based on "progress" in land use legitimized the appropriation of the land from the Aboriginal peoples and reinforced the social Darwinist outlook (see Chapter 3). In this sense landscapes were still being constructed in terms of the old pastoral myth.

However, the new ideas and concepts conveyed by these paintings outweighed the old ideas, and they are too significant to be ignored. In both The Sheep Country and Land of the Golden Fleece, the large and spectacular vistas and the expanded vision evoke an emotional response in the spectator. They bring a sense of a peaceful home and "pure" landscape for human beings to return or retreat to, characterized by strength, beauty and tranquility. Streeton constructed such images which both define a sense of belonging to a place and suggest that in that place, beauty and truth may be found. The war and industrialization endowed the landscape with new values and meanings. As Burn observes, Streeton and other artists who created this pastoral utopia imposed a "static quality" on the images to promote the feeling of peace and quietude which

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57 See Burn, 1990, p. 102.
was badly needed after the war. Yet this feeling of peace and quietude is not simply what was needed after the war. It was also the result of reflecting on the war itself. On the one hand, the ideal national landscape suggested the grief and national emotion associated with the war. On the other hand, the tranquil utopia of the iconic landscape is inspired by the reclusive spirit resulting from disappointment and disillusionment, which led the war generation to contemplate the actual nature of war.

The pastoral landscape here was different from that of former conventions. In the pastoral theme of earlier periods, what was conveyed was the idea that the industrious hand of human beings improved the works of nature, shown through the results of labour (e.g. the enclosed and ordered landscape) or the rewards of labour (e.g. the harvest). All of these suggested human possession and control of the land (as discussed in chapter 3). Now in the tranquil pastoral landscape the narrative was directed towards reducing human intervention in the landscape to the very minimum, and nationalist discourse was expressed by the idea of the landscape possessing a spiritual quality. There is less evidence of man and “heroic” human activities. The pastoral landscape is no longer a symbol of human civilization, but a symbol of detachment from the human world, from war and industrial machines, and from harsh realities. Many scholars have expressed similar opinions on this point. Ann Galbally considers Streeton’s works to show “a strange disregard for the human participants”, and argues that “industrialized urban Australia was ignored by this romantic conception”. Burn claims that the pastoral landscape tended to suppress all such specific references to modernity along with all references to working the land, mechanically or manually. It was “no longer a landscape where people lived and worked or relaxed and played”. It conveyed an emotion that was more detached and universal, “the spirit of a new order” in a postwar world. In this “new order”, what needed to be promoted was not machinery or industry, but, as the director of the National Gallery of Victoria, J.S. MacDonald states, “a land with a maximum of

58 Burn, 1990, p. 89.
59 Ann Galbally, 1969, pp. 64, 72.
60 Burn, 1990, p. 162.
61 Burn, 1990, p. 81.
flocks and a minimum of factories”, leaving it to others to “mass produce themselves into robbers” and exist “like mechanical monkeys chained to organs whose tunes are furnished by riveting machines”. Although “a maximum of flocks” suggests rural prosperity which, compared with the “wilderness”, is a kind of “progress”, it can nevertheless be considered as closer to the idea of reclusion because compared with the machine and industrial progress, it symbolizes and advocates a return to a pastoral utopia of pre-industrial peace. This implies that nationalism in the 1920s is different from nationalism in the 1890s, when Australians still believed in industrial progress and new technology. Eagle also argues that the qualities of Streeton’s art as national image and Australian legend lie in its vast spaces, its quality of permanence and its sense of great antiquity. The permanence and antiquity imply a longing for the “purity” of a landscape safe from the destruction of human beings and war. According to Hoorn, in 1920s’ nationalism, the conservatives in Australia invoked the landscape and sought out purity in a “virgin” land uncontaminated by either European or indigenous inhabitants. In the vast expanses of seemingly unsettled lands in Land of the Golden Fleece, the great, vast spirit of Australia prevailed.

All the interpretations imply that this construction of purity, permanence and antiquity with an indication of retreating into an idealized pastoral utopia, demonstrated that national sentiment in Australia had turned from war to peace. The war was a traumatic experience for Australians. After the brutal conflict of “man” against “man”, the ideal tended to be a harmony between “man” and “nature”, which seemed untouched by the violent hand of industry and war machines. As Eagle points out, in The Land of the Golden Fleece “the unhurried yet forceful brushstrokes, which translated cloud, hill, plain, trees and sheep into their own characteristic squared form, are largely responsible for creating that vision of Australia as a land of permanent values beyond human death and decay”. After the war, many of Streeton’s...

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63 The Great Exhibitions of the 1870s and 1880s in Australian capitals demonstrated to Australians that they were part of the technological progress of the century (See Alomes, 1988, p. 19).
64 Eagle, 1994, p. 160.
paintings have this sense of quietness and desolation, this disregard for human beings, which is the result of reflection and rethinking of civilization and the machinery it created. The war was caused by human beings and the machines they invented, and to retreat to the peace of nature (without human beings) seemed a natural choice.

On the other hand, social conflict, aggravated during the war by the conscription issue, after the war became even more serious. In 1919 some returned soldiers fought ferociously in the streets with militant trade unionists. The depression of the 1930s magnified working-class radicalism and intensified the problem of urban unemployment, driving artists like Streeton and Heysen to return to painting the nature in which they placed their hopes for the future. This idea of a pastoral utopia performed a function similar to the function of the pastoral shanshui for the recluse in traditional Chinese culture. The sense of remoteness and contemplative solitude in these paintings enhanced the feeling of detachment from the struggles of human beings and worldly affairs.

3) Shanshui to be Possessed (in China)

Just as new ideas were incorporated into old themes in Australian culture, so in Chinese culture of this period the old themes were also reconstructed with new ideas. Because of political upheaval, social turbulence and various wars, sometimes shanshui was constructed as a territory, a strategic terrain, or a battlefield. This is most clear in painting, even in some shanshui paintings of the traditionalist Pan Tianshou. This deconstructs shanshui as a place and symbol of reclusion. It focuses instead on the defence or loss of territory, and the strategic function of shanshui, placing shanshui within a political ideology and school of tactical thought, as shown in Pan Tianshou’s Cannon Emplacements at Yongjiangkou (1932) (Fig.34), which deals with the theme of anti-Japanese aggression, and Gao Jianfu (1879-1951)’s Five Storied Tower (1926) (Fig.35), which is concerned with the civil war of the 1920s.  

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68 See Tsokhas, 2001, p. 177. 
69 Cannon Emplacements at Yongjiangkou: 五層炮臺; Gao Jianfu: 高劍父; Five Storied Tower: 五層樓.
This sort of *shanshui* painting is a type of distorted or deformed *shanshui* art which has lost the essential qualities of traditional *shanshui* painting. The painters made use of it as a foil to manifest their strong national sentiments, distorting *shanshui* to mirror social attitudes and psychology.70

Distorting *shanshui* painting by investing it with nationalistic overtones is not a recent phenomenon in China. In the Southern Song period, the Jin Tartar occupation of northern China constituted a violation of China’s nationhood. It resulted in the style of “One-Corner” composition represented by Ma Yuan and Xia Gui.71 They simply painted one corner of mountain or water, signifying “broken water and debilitated mountain”. When the Mongols overran China in 1279, Zheng Sixiao (1239-1316) painted orchids without earth to grow in, signifying the loss of land.72 However, none of them endowed their work with political associations or depicted the signs of war (e.g. watchtowers and cannons), or rendered *shanshui* in terms of strategic terrain or the battlefield as did the painters of the 1920s and 1930s.

Pan Tianshou’s *Cannon Emplacements at Yongjiangkou* differs markedly from the traditional *shanshui* in that it is a strategic landscape that has strong historical associations with the defense of the coast against Japanese pirates. It depicts the cannon emplacements around the Zhenhai estuary, near the mouth of the Yongjiang River in Zhejiang province. This place had been the site of battles against Japanese “pirates” and invaders as long ago as the Ming dynasty. It was therefore stamped with an aura of anti-foreign resistance.73 In this picture, Pan emphasizes the block-like bread loaf shape of the hill, the watchtower atop the hill and cannon emplacements set in a protective notch at the viewer’s lower right, and a vista to the ocean beyond.

70 See Lu Xin, 2005, p. 27.
71 Xia Gui: 夏圭.
72 Zheng Sixiao: 鄭思肖.
73 Pan Tianshou’s engagement with the site may have begun in 1932, and he depicted this place many times from 1932 to 1959. He started to paint this kind of strategic *shanshui* in 1932 because at the end of the preceding year, Japan had invaded Manchuria and in January 1932, Japanese naval forces bombed Shanghai (see Vinograd , “Strategic Landscapes”, in *Studies on 20th Century Shanshuihua*, 2006, p. 292).
The inscription of another painting by Pan Tianshou, *Qianjiang Shanshui* (1945) (Fig.36), depicts a related topography with similar strategic and military associations, and reveals that his traditional literati’s idea of escape and reclusion was mixed with a new idea of “engagement with the realistic life”, which symbolized a kind of “progress”: “Feeling concerned about world affairs and depressed by the times, my mind is not at ease; facing the wind helplessly, I dawdle around. The lone cry of a goose tumbles down from the midst of the heavens, the autumn and the river billows can be seen beyond the sky”.74 The allusions to world affairs, difficult times, and feelings of helplessness are all typical of the feelings of this turbulent period. This sort of strategic *shanshui*, whether expressing the feeling of national triumph or national humiliation, as Vinograd argues, is engaged with the themes of national pride, resistance to aggression, and feelings of exile at a time of wars and crisis. It embodies the dialectic of the 20th century China’s historical and political turmoil. The artists used *shanshui* as a sort of assumption of cultural power, through which certain distinct regional, national, and cultural identities were represented.75 In this construction of national and cultural identity, nature loses its traditional role as a place of refuge for the recluse, detached and aloof from worldly struggles. It becomes instead a place of battle, associated with struggle and warfare. This is in sharp contrast to Heysen’s idea of avoiding war and retreating to nature. What is more significant is that, through the act of endowing the *shanshui* with a strategic ideology, a sense of the control exercised by man over nature becomes explicit, emanating not from human labour, but from warfare. This idea of regarding *shanshui* as something to be controlled by human intervention is similar to the Australian myth of progress, although the latter is achieved through human labour bringing material prosperity and civilization to the “untamed” natural world, while the former is achieved by humans in conflict with other humans. In fact, the Australian myth of progress to some extent can also be viewed as a contest with the Aborigines for the land – not a battle using the conventional machines of war, but one in which the weapons are the Europeans’ way of using the land and their civilizing process.

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74 *Qianjiang Shanshui*. The inscription is translated by Vinograd, 2006, p. 298.
75 Vinograd, 2006, pp. 298-301.
4) “Civilization” and “Progress” in a Detached Utopia (in China)

During this period, like Australia, China was also in a state of early urbanization, industrialization and modernity. Some intellectuals were obsessed with a nostalgia for the traditional way of life, and constructed nature as a detached utopia in their works. However, the harmony and tranquility in their description of this reclusive life is often destroyed by the presence of a hint of concern about the direction of social progress and civilization. The director Sun Yu’s two films *Little Toy* (*Xiaowanyi*) (1933) and *Return to Nature* (*Dao Ziran Qu*) (1936) are examples of this. Sun Yu enjoyed the title of “poet director” and was familiar with the tradition of Chinese poetry. His films were full of poetic sensitivity, romantic sentiments, and idealized dreams. For example, in *Little Toy*, the heroine Mrs Ye and her family lived a peaceful and reclusive life in Taoye Village near Tai Lake before the domestic wars and Japanese invasion (Fig.95). Here she made a living by making a variety of toys. In this film, the lakeside village is represented as a utopian land. Sun Yu and the cameraman use a romantic, lyrical style to poeticize the village, making it full of beautiful scenery and laughter and joy, with honest and warm-hearted people living a simple and happy life. This recapitulates a reclusive theme, and was satirized by the leftists as “turning the impoverished village into a Land of Peach Blossoms”.

This form of romantic idealism can also be found in *Return to Nature*. Sun used a large part of the film to represent the splendid scenery on the desolate island and the idealized life in nature (Fig.96). The film’s narrative centres on the message that equality between upper and lower classes, and spiritual freedom, can only be achieved in the great world of nature. The social hierarchy which seems right and proper and unalterable in civilized society collapses on the desolate island. The most capable man, who used to be a servant in a warlord family, becomes the leader, while the masters of the family lose their superior status. In leftist films, social hierarchy

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76 *Xiaowanyi*: 小玩意; *Dao Ziran Qu*: 到自然去.
77 See Zhou Xing, 2005, p. 67.
was also criticized, but the hope of equality was still located in civilized human society. In *Return to Nature*, however, equality and freedom can only be achieved in nature (the desolate island) whose image is constructed to contrast with that of civilized human society. Only in nature can people get rid of their fetters and pretence, demonstrate their true feelings and personalities, and become pure, simple, innocent and honest. When they finally come back to civilized society, they put on their masks, living again a hypocritical, unequal, restrained, and selfish life.

Both *Little Toy* and *Return to Nature* offer a vision of the unity of the human and natural worlds, revealing the Daoist outlook which attributes the utmost human happiness to a return to nature. However, there are significant new ideas in this traditional theme. In *Return to Nature*, although on the desolate island class equality is achieved, there is still domination and there were still rules, as shown by the leader Ma Long’s purposeful controlling of the animals (calves and goats) and women. This is distinct from the ideal world in Tao Yuanming and Wang Wei’s poetry in which men, women and animals live peacefully in harmony. The filmmakers explicitly suggest that although human beings are able to return to nature to live a simple and innocent life, they are no longer primitive or natural men. Instead, brought up in civilized society and branded with its traces, they are unable to regain the true equality, unity and harmony which is based on the reclusive spirit and diminution of human power.

In *Little Toy*, the new ideas are more explicit. Although Mrs Ye lives a happy and peaceful life in the village, she is not detached from the worries and concerns of the outside world. “Our toys are hand made,” she reflects. “They are looked down upon by foreigners. If our toys are no better than those of foreigners, we can’t survive, and can’t match foreign toys like the airplanes and trains made by machines in the factory”. In contrast to the Australian construction of an idealized pastoral utopia safe from the destructive power of war, in which the ideology of rural prosperity rather than industrial development is promoted, in *Little Toy* Mrs Ye encourages people to
study the new technology and save the country with industry and new machines. Both Australia and China were shocked by the violence brought by the machines of war – the products of industrialized society. This led them to reflect on the new ideas of "science", "technology", "progress" and "civilization". Both countries were obsessed with the grief and national emotions associated with the war. However, in Australia, what was badly needed was a feeling of peace and quietude, and this need resulted in a reclusiveness of spirit which turned away from present realities and the destructive products of industrialization. In China, on the contrary, emphasis was placed on patriotic struggle and industrial progress, and the developments of new machines were given pre-eminence, as the means of building a strong nation. Mrs Ye’s daughter Zhuer is a young woman whose consciousness is steeped in these ideas. “Shanghai children,” she reflects, “only play with foreign toys. Will they fight foreign aggressors when they grow up? I hope to open a factory and make toys with advanced machines to compete with foreigners.” The aggression of the Japanese army, with its powerful weapons, made the Chinese realize the power of industrialization and the machines it could produce. In contrast to Australia, where the post war period heralded a change in national mood to one of peace, in China it was war and revolution which dominated the national consciousness, and the focus of national thinking was on the need for societal struggle with the consequent turmoil this created. Whether the theme was reclusive or progressive, the peaceful inner spirit as conveyed in the traditional shanshui painting and literature seemed unattainable. In Little Toy Mrs Ye finally left the peaceful village and called on people to fight against the invaders (instead of retreating or escaping to nature): “If we keep on retreating, one day we will have no place to retreat to. Escape is not a good way.”

The new ideas embodied in Little Toy and Return to Nature suggest that in some constructions of “nature as utopia”, which were traditionally associated with the “reclusive” theme, there are suggestions of “progress”, “civilization”, and “social struggle”. The Daoist ideas of “quietness” and “inaction” upheld by the ancient literati were now seen as increasingly irrelevant to the needs of the present. Many
intellectuals had no real desire to seek reclusion, although they were tired of the turmoil which was pervading society. The adherents of the shanshui tradition living in this period suffered more inner pain and doubt than those living in any former period. Firstly, the most significant transmitter of traditional scholar-bureaucrat culture, the “court”, did not exist any more. In the past, when “being in the court” was considered as synonymous with corruption, the praise of reclusive life as “being in nature” was often regarded as a means of demonstrating the spiritual cleanliness of the literati and their resistance to social philistinism. But now, in the absence of this contrast, being a recluse lost part of its significance and many intellectuals lost much of the psychological driving force of living a reclusive life. Secondly, with the turmoil of the war, the expansion of the railway, and the continuing process of urbanization and industrialization, shanshui painters, writers and filmmakers became increasingly distanced from the real shanshui. They lived in the city, where they were faced with the impact of industrialization on society, and its collision with traditional Chinese cultural values based on agricultural civilization. As Hang Jian argues, the adherents of the shanshui tradition in this period were living in an alien land in which both their spirit and their bodies were in exile. This alienation gradually reduced their confidence in both the practice and the representation of the reclusive life. In ancient times when there was turmoil, many literati retreated to the mountains, something which was encouraged and praised by all. Now this kind of behaviour was devalued. As discussed earlier, since the establishment of the Republic of China in 1911, traditional culture had been rejected or subjected to increasing criticism. The disillusion and collapse of traditional cultural values made it difficult for the literati to find their inner homeland. Unlike Australian creative artists during the same period who lived in a cultural environment sympathetic to the concept of pre-industrial rural prosperity, most Chinese intellectuals lived in a cultural environment preoccupied with the idea of social progress based on science and technology. In the outside world, the literati could not easily get access to the pure shanshui; in their inmost hearts their

loyalty to traditional values was faltering. As a result, in Chinese painting and film of this period, even in representations of the reclusive theme, the influence of these realities often made inclusion of the idea of "progress" unavoidable. Sometimes it was subliminal, as in Return to Nature, or at other times it was expressed explicitly, as in Little Toy.

"Reclusion" – Return to Nature

1) The Myth of "Reclusion" in Chinese Culture (Old)

Of course in spite of the increasingly popular new ideas, in the Chinese culture of this transitional period, we have to admit that the myth of "returning to nature", the true "reclusive" spirit, was still kept alive by a small number of traditionalists. For example, in chapter 4 I discussed A Poet at the Edge of the Sea as a film manifesting the positive force of the sea. This film also incorporates the traditional theme of a return to nature to live a reclusive life. It demonstrates people's spiritual suffering in an era of material prosperity, and the corruption of human civilization, and attempts to regain the spiritual freedom which can only be achieved in nature. The director Hou Yao is obsessed with the idea of reclusion, and he himself acted as the lonely poet who saw the city as a machine devaluing human nature. When the poet loses his eyesight and becomes frustrated by the city, he declares: "I will leave this degenerate civilization, return to the bosom of nature, regain inner freedom, and discard all worldly affairs! I'd rather live on the desolate island, than stay in the golden tomb of the city prison which devastates human nature!" In ancient shanshui poetry and painting, it was the apparatus of officialdom that the literati escaped from; now it was the city life that the intellectuals could not bear. Both were embodiments of all that was corrupt, dirty, and hypocritical. The film successfully constructed a utopian world in which poet, seagull and wave were at one, and the sound of singing, water and wind resonated harmoniously. A Poet at the Edge of the Sea clearly demonstrates continuity with the traditional literati spirit and frame of mind of Tao Yuanming, Wang Wei and Li Bai who were saturated with the sentiments of escaping from the society. In a moment of revolution this film re-asserted the traditional Chinese literati
ideal of escaping from reality, and encouraged people to cut themselves off from the class struggle, and retreat to a distant sea coast. For this reason it was criticized by the leftists as “a step backward”, “retrogressive” and “decadent”.

This traditional “reclusive” spirit was also continued by some writers who still had close spiritual connections with traditional culture. During the May Fourth movement, most intellectuals were preoccupied by “rebellious” and “progressive” ideas. Later, disappointed and disillusioned by civil wars and revolutions which did not produce their ideal of a completely changed society, the longing of a small number of intellectuals to retire from social life intensified. For example, in 1925, Zhou Zuoren (1885-1967), a well-known essayist and translator, wrote in his introduction to Feng Wenbing (1901-1967)’s short story collection *The Story of the Bamboo Forest* (*Zhulinde Gushi*), “I always have the inclination to withdraw from society and live in seclusion.” His idea is similar to that of Tao Yuanming. Zhou’s brother Lu Xun commented that Tao became a reclusive *shanshui* poet after seeing the turmoil of society and the usurpation of the power of the state. However, it was the relatively peaceful environment after the turmoil of the later Jin period that nurtured the “pure mind” with which Tao was able to resist contamination by evil influences, and provided the tranquil *shanshui* for his retirement. The writers of the 1920s could not live a detached and self-contained life in a “Peace Blossom Spring” utopia as Tao did. It was difficult for them to find the unsullied *shanshui* or peaceful pastoral environment which had been ideal places of refuge for an ancient recluse. The reclusive mentality of these intellectuals after the May Fourth movement had its origins in the spiritual bewilderment brought about by the radical change in society and ideology. It was this bewilderment which prompted them to seek out a tranquil home and to look for an inner balance in nature. As the unsullied *shanshui* was almost

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82 Zhou again and again claimed that he liked Tao’s attitude toward life and the tone of his writing.
impossible to reach, they had instead to put their hopes in the “shanshui” of this world. For example, Yu Pingbo (1900-1990), a well-known essayist, poet, historian and critic, retreated to West Lake in summer, living in Lin Hejing’s residence on the Solitary Mountain. 84 Lin Hejing (967-1028) was a Song poet and hermit, well-known for considering “the plum tree to be his wife and the crane his son”. Yu Pingbo watched the beauty of the sun rising over Geling Mountain and listened to the rain and the thunderstorm. In this way his “inner coolness came out with the rain”; and his depression “was broken with the thunder”. 85 Wang Shiyong (1902-1949) returned to East Lake. “Through appreciating the remote mountains and placid water, my mind was widened... I want to find a pure land in this dirty world”. 86 Wang Senran (1895-1984) “wandered at leisure in the grassland and slept on the petals of flowers, cut off from all worldly worries”. 87 Xu Zuzheng (1894-1978) indulged himself in the “clear quietness of the deep mountain and old temple”. 88 Xu Weinan (1900-1952) felt intoxicated in the clear coldness of the blue mountain and green water far from human society. 89 They lingered on the mountains and water, amid trees and flowers, realizing the significance of individual human life though their communication with nature. By returning to shanshui, their sorrows and worries were allayed, their hearts were cheered and their minds were composed. As Wang Tongzhao (1897-1957) commented, “lush green grasses”, “a cup of fragrant tea”, “birds singing”, “shadows of flowers”, all these can make him “escape from the destructive bondage of social life, and obtain temporary tranquility and the chance to seek the old dreams”. 90

84 Yu Pingbo 俞平伯; Lin Hejing 林和靖.
These writers considered the mountain and water to be a temporary refuge for their sorrowing spirit, just as the “seven sages” (including Ruan Ji and Ji Kang) roamed in the bamboo forest in the Wei-Jin period, or the forty literati (with Wang Xizhi as the representative) gathered together in “Orchid Pavilion” (Lanting). However, losing oneself in nature and remaining aloof from worldly affairs was not easy to achieve during this period. To the city dwellers, sometimes there were many impediments to living a reclusive life in shanshui, or a pastoral existence. In order to get rid of society’s ties and spiritual constraints, some writers resorted to “fantasizing” about a return to nature, and their fantasies made it seem as if they were actually living in the world of nature. For example, although Zhou Zuoren lived in Beijing city, in many of his essays he wrote that he could still listen to the orioles singing in the spring countryside of the Jiangnan area; he could still taste the wild vegetables of his remote hometown; he could sit in a small boat drifting in the river. Through this fantasy he could “enjoy a little bit of natural beauty and harmony in this ugly world”.

The essence of this “reclusive” spirit was based on the ancient literati dedication to the cultivation of self as a means of “maintaining one’s own integrity” (dushan qishen). This pursuit differentiated from the “zeitgeist” of this period. These writers to some extent diverged from the “human-centred” orientation of this period, and were permeated with the ancient “aristocratic” notion of human harmony with nature, although the authors were all at the same time advocates of “popular plebeian literature”. Frustrated by revolutions and civil wars, they chose to concentrate on their own happiness. These writers were able to free themselves from any sense of social responsibility or social “progress”, by resolving to “maintain their own integrity”, to be worldly-wise and “play safe.” Such passive elements muted the “modern” tenor of these works and weakened their ability to inspire rebellion. The idea of “refusing to be contaminated by evil influences” and “preserving one’s purity of mind” was based on keeping reality at a distance and detaching oneself from “progressive trends”. This demonstrated the spiritual intimacy of these writers with the “reclusive” ideas of the

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92 Dushan qishen: 獨善其身.
Sometimes the spirit of the “return to nature” was embedded with another mark of this period: the influence of Western culture, as shown by several of Guo Moruo’s poems. As I discussed in chapter 4, Guo Moruo’s ideas were a combination of the East and the West, the old and the new. Apart from those bold and new assertions, in several of his poems he expressed the old idea of “coming back to nature”, without the distinction between human beings and other things, without struggles or selfish desires, in order to achieve spiritual liberation. This is the ideal state depicted in his poem “Earth, My Mother!” (*Diqiu, Wode Muqin*) in which the workers, peasants, trees, the grass and angleworms all become equal and free:

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Earth, My Mother!
I admire all the grass and trees, my sibling, your offspring,
They freely, independently, amiably, healthily
Enjoy their endowed life.

... Earth, My Mother!
I do not want to fly in an aeroplane,
Neither ride in carts, on horseback, wear socks or put on shoes,
I only wish to go barefoot, ever closer to you.93

... Earth, My Mother!
I do not want to fly in an aeroplane,
Neither ride in carts, on horseback, wear socks or put on shoes,
I only wish to go barefoot, ever closer to you.93
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Here, Guo Moruo’s ideals were beyond the scope of pantheism. As Sun Shaozhen argues, with this imagery he was actually representing Jean Jacques Rousseau’s concept of “natural rights”.94 Rousseau (1712-1778) proposed that before civilized society there existed a natural state in which there was no government, no law, no authority. Natural man living in this natural estate was born with the rights of liberty, equality and the pursuit of happiness. Private ownership was the source of inequality, and the development of science and art caused the corruption of morality. In short, Rousseau advocated a return to nature. Guo’s poem “Earth, My Mother!” presented Rousseau’s idea of casting off the restrictions of feudal authority and doctrine. It

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represented the “natural man”, who achieved the ideal of a return to nature. Guo described the process of writing “Earth, My Mother!” in his essay “My Experience of Writing Poetry”. In this essay he emphasized that when once he was captured by his inspiration, he took off his clogs and lay down on the land, showing his intimacy with the earth by kissing and hugging it. In this way he felt that he experienced a rebirth, seeing another world and becoming another man. Here, Guo Moruo was not only intoxicated by Rousseau’s thought, he also imitated Rousseau’s behaviour.\footnote{See Guo, “My Experience of Writing Poetry”, in Collected Works of Moruo, vol. 11. In 1749 when Rousseau was conceiving the article Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts on the question “Has the Progress of the arts and sciences contributed more to the corruption or to the purification of morals”, he also lay down on the earth and experienced a feeling of rebirth.}

This Rousseau-influenced idea of a “return to nature” and intimacy with the earth is also conveyed in the poem “Notes on a Tour to West Lake” (Xihu Jiyou). Guo wrote this poem when he felt depressed in social life and went back to the countryside:

By the foot of the Leifeng Pagoda  
There is an old man hoeing the fields,  
He has taken off his cotton-padded coat  
And hung it on a branch of a young mulberry.  
He has stopped hoeing,  
And raised his eyes to look at me.  
Ah, his kind and amiable eyes,  
His healthy yellow face,  
His graying beard,  
His veined and gold-coloured hands.  
I want to kneel down in front of him,  
And call him: “my father!”  

In this poem we can see a representation of human labour in nature, similar to the one in Heysen’s paintings Ploughing the Field and The Toilers. The poetic idealization of the “healthy” life of the peasants in Guo’s poems was indeed close to Heysen’s ideas. Through the depiction of the ploughman, both expressed their longing to leave the civilized world and return to live a more “primitive” life in close communication with nature. Both of them detested the corruption and degeneration of social life, and both
considered the natural world to be a pure land. They saw peasant life as a form of redemption, which provided consolation and revelation to their painful spirit.

2) The Myth of “Reclusion” in Australian Culture (New)

a) Return to the Primeval Landscape and Devaluing Human Transformation

In Australia, during this period, the myth of “return to nature” in a true “reclusive” spirit, and without any hint of rural prosperity resulting from (white) man's transformation or civilization, was achieved by breaking through the pastoral order, and attaching importance instead to the appreciation of primeval, untouched and indomitable nature, as shown in the outback landscapes of Heysen, and in Cossington Smith’s bush images.

In Heysen’s earlier pastoral landscapes, such as *Ploughing the Field*, we can find reclusive ideas buried beneath images of human labour, as discussed in earlier sections. But the new images in his later paintings of the Flinders Ranges manifest these ideas in the most explicit way. As discussed in chapter 4, his paintings of this period suggest that the true spirit of the country resides in the outback. Contrary to the notion of human transformation of the wilderness, his mountainous landscapes evoke in the viewer a sense of a land which is unalterable and indomitable. The pristine and primeval landscape imparts an impression of the sacred which defies civilization. The purposeful avoidance of people or signs of human habitation, civilization and modernization, enhances the feeling of purity in the landscape, and conveys the idea of an ancient, unchanging continent unsullied by progress and untouched by civilization. (See chapter 4 for the detailed discussion of this landscape.)

As Heysen grew old, he was increasingly inclined to return to “wild” nature, to the outback of Central Australia (as well as the Flinders), just as the Chinese ancient recluses had done. For him, to get away from everything and simply commune with nature – the vastness and silence of the northern country – was a call very hard to
resist. The significance of nature to Heysen, and his reclusive ideas, is embodied in these words: “How sorry one feels for all those poor devils – so-called humanity – whose eyes have never been opened to the vast store of beauties of our wonderful world… A love of Nature is the one thing that life has for us all if only we could be made conscious of it. I think it the only thing really worthwhile. I doubt whether ambition holds great happiness for man…”97 From these words we can see that he valued nature above social life, and questioned the meaning of human “ambition” which, here, is a symbol of “progress” and “civilization”. The human world outside might be threatened and shaken by the evil and destruction of machines, but in nature, the artist could still see heaven and find the truth, constancy, and certitude of life. As he expressed it, he always looked forward to being able to “get away from Everything and lead the primitive life, without the cursed ‘noises’ of civilization and so called ‘progress’”.98 These words echoed the Chinese ancient literati and the traditionalists of this period, suggesting that the utmost happiness in human life was achieved through an intimate dialogue between man and nature and the dissolution of human ambitions to “civilize” or strive for “progress”, which might result only in alienation and destruction.

The idea of elevating the status of nature in its pristine form and devaluing the transforming role of man can also be found in Grace Cossington Smith’s Trees (1926) (Fig.76). In this painting, there is an absence of human figures.99 In the foreground is the edge of a tennis court, low down in the painting. Also low down, slipping away, are the gardens and paddocks of Turramurra where the suburbs of Sydney meet the bush. Although the domestic details of the diagonal line of the tennis court, the irrigated flowerbeds, the tap, hose and bucket are indications of human civilization or humanized / tamed nature, they are “set within the awe-inspiring presence of nature – the domesticated garden leading to the untamed bush”.100 The domesticated and

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98 Quoted in Burnett, 1977, p. 104.
99 Admittedly Cossington Smith sometimes also chose subjects related to the modern machine age. Yet her interpretations of the “wild” bush and “untamed” earth are much more impressive.
cultivated garden is dominated by the mysterious Australian bush that lay beyond. Compared with the dizzying upward thrust of the branches of the trees, the “tamed” tennis court seems insignificant. The glory of the painting is in the trees, the great soaring gums that “rise above the tamed garden, above the deciduous green and flowering pinks of the peach, filling the frame with a whirl of movement and colour: smoky greens and blues, dusky grey, ochre and olive”.  

From both Heysen and Cossington Smith’s representations, it is clear that during this period, there was a growing understanding of the spiritual ties that native Australians felt with the country. The landscape was not just seen as something to be claimed or worked, or as a rich land to be taken, or a metaphor of dispossession. Cossington Smith successfully conveys the idea of “uncivilized nature” through the colour of the gum tree and her usually dramatic composition. The domesticated tennis court and garden are dwarfed by the grand and impressive tree. Modjeska argues that her planes are flattened and her colour is heightened. The eucalypt is unlike any that had yet been painted, an utterly Australian, utterly modern tree. Hart also argues that in its ravishing colour and dynamic, faceted composition, it is a bold and thoroughly modern painting. Here the quality of being “modern” lies not only in the brilliant and heightened colour, but also in the new ideas of the bush it presents. Cossington Smith also conveys the idea of “uncivilized nature” through painting all sides of a tree and emphasizing its essential shape and “things unseen”. What interested her was not the surface, or even the hidden structure of the tree, but the “silent quality which is unconscious, and belongs to all things created”. This is indicative of a similar perspective to that of the traditional Chinese painters’ depiction of pine trees, and is especially similar to the traditional Chinese literati’s emphasis on the inner spirit or qi of natural things. Modjeska argues that this is the product of a fully engaged imagination which can indeed see a tree from all sides at once.  

104 Quoted in Modjeska, 1999, p. 195.  
Smith painted *Trees* she painted not only what she saw when she looked out into the bush beyond the tennis court, but also the spirit of the tree. Here the Australian "modern" understanding of nature merges with the Chinese "traditional" understanding of nature.

Cossington Smith’s idea of painting “things unseen” was similar to both traditional Chinese and Aboriginal art, which aimed to represent not the object alone but essential truths which may or may not be visible to the human eye. The traditional cultural construction of the pastoral image had defined the landscape in terms of white use of the land as the symbol of progress. It had made the Aboriginal presence seem like an intrusion into the European-style rural landscape, and excluded Aboriginal values and the Aboriginal way of using and understanding the land. Consequently, freeing the landscape from this definition made possible expressions of other relationships with the land, especially those which had been previously excluded. Although *Trees* does not embody an Aboriginal concept of nature, it foreshadows the forthcoming representations of Aboriginal understanding of nature. From the late 1930s, the Aboriginal relationship with the land, which was alien to the European conventions, was taken into consideration by Albert Namatjira (himself Aboriginal), Margaret Preston and other artists and writers who directed their imagery towards this end. The form, content and purpose of Australian art were subjected to questioning and redefinition. From the 1920s, the specific “national” character seen through the lens of a pastoral vision of Australia had become looser, with competing ideas and styles. Some of that diversity is suggested in the different attitudes to the landscape, and each in its way constructs its own cultural

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106 See Butler, 1987, pp. 44-45; Burn, 1990, p. 196; Hoorn, 2007, p. 229. During the 1920s Margaret Preston believed that the fundamental forms and colours of Aboriginal art would provide the basic for a national art. Although during this period she was not particularly concerned with the spiritual significance of Aboriginal art, in the early 1930s she began to develop a greater respect and deeper understanding of Aboriginal art and culture. It is Preston’s landscape paintings which most obviously sought the spiritual essence found in Aboriginal art and were at the same time influenced by traditional Chinese art and philosophy. As her first images of the Australian bush were painted in 1939 and most of the others were done in the 1940s, I will not discuss her works in detail. During the interwar years the pictures of the Arrernte artist Albert Namatjira also came into prominence. His Central Australian landscapes of the late 1930s, unsullied by human contact, fitted the new demands for a virgin landscape and may also have contributed to developing the new style of pastoral imagery.

references. Each invokes legitimacy for its own notions of picture making but eventually resolves itself into a shared epistemology of the Australian landscape.

b) Searching a Spiritual Homeland in Nature and Questioning White “Progress”

During this period, in addition to visual artists, certain writers such as Katharine Susannah Prichard, Eleanor Dark (1901-1985) and Henry Handel Richardson (1870-1946) also explored other dimensions of the landscape. This was distinct from former periods when nature was usually seen as a source of danger and threat in the form of floods and bushfires, or as something “weird” and “melancholy”. Certain Australian writers now started to look at the Australian landscape in a new way, and in so doing began in a small way to change the national literary tradition. The relationship between Australians and the natural environment was treated more subtly. Nature was seen less as an arena of conflict, but more as a place of harmony with human beings. A dominant theme for these writers became the representation of a new regional identity, a sense of belonging and attachment to the land. This sense of belonging rendered the features of the desert and central Australia more beautiful than they appeared to the outside eye. As Nicolas Rothwell points out, it is impossible for a writer on the Australian bush to sense this aspect of the land unless he feels it as a matter of identity. This sense of belonging was comparable to the sense of “return to nature” in Chinese culture. In earlier periods, the expression of white man’s connection with Australian nature included a possessing of the land under the guise of “progress”, which conversely entailed a dispossessing or displacement of the Aboriginal attachment to the land. During this period, however, the construction of this racially confrontational interpretation was weakened in various ways. With the new sense of belonging there came a growing awareness that the bush was not simply the preserve of the white man, but held ancestral presences drawn from the Aboriginal domain. In the writing of Katharine Susannah Prichard on the bush and Aboriginal Australia, the Australian experience was critically assessed as it had never been

109 See Burn, 1990, p. 16.
before in literature.

Prichard's *Coonardoo* (1929) is a representative of the idea of feeling at home with nature in Australia and accepting nature as it is. Through exploring the Aborigines' perception of nature which is close to the traditional Chinese concept of "return to Mother Nature", it questioned white man's idea of civilization and progress. It caused a ripple of outrage in 1929 with its story of the tragic – and destructive – love of a white man for a black woman and its evocation of a land raped and taken. From the perspective of the 1920s when such things were barely spoken of, it was not only subversive but brave.

In this novel, Prichard demonstrated her realization that it was possible to learn from the Aborigines how to accept Australia as home. The threat of the Australian wilderness is reduced when white Australians learn to replicate the closeness to nature of the Aborigine. The novel narrates the love relationship between the Aboriginal girl Coonardoo and the white farmer Hugh. In this story, which is told from the perspective of Coonado, for the first time in Australian literary history the thoughts and feelings of an Aboriginal protagonist form part of a narrative. In this way the author forces the reader to take Coonardoo's view of the world.

Coonardoo identifies positively with nature. Her idea of "mother earth" implies the Aborigines' understanding of the "spirit of place". Coonardoo's appearance is compared to a natural phenomenon – she is "handsome and spirited as a young filly", and her eyes are "dark and velvety as a moth's wing with glittering irises". The Aborigines know that Coonardoo is responsible for the productivity of the farm. The myths of the Aboriginal dreamtime and her closeness to nature enable her to ensure that the farm thrives. So the relationship between a white settler and an Aboriginal girl becomes an ideal basis for a life led in close harmony with nature. Prichard makes it clear that the native born farmer Hugh's tragedy is caused by his failure to overcome his prejudice towards Aborigines. As Hugh rejects Coonardoo's love and
denies his feelings for her, his failure is paralleled by his loss of the farm and Coonardoo’s death. When Hugh tells Coonardoo to leave the farm, his rejection is shown as an affront against nature. It is implied that the state of harmony between Aborigines, white settlers and nature has been destroyed because of inappropriate values and the mistreatment of the first inhabitants.

In death Coonardoo’s body again becomes united with her home country. She dies close to her fire and becomes an image of the burnt, deserted place: “Her arms and legs, falling apart, looked like those blackened and broken sticks beside the fire”. While the Aborigines in this novel are in close contact with nature until death, the situation of white Australians is exemplified in the image of the dead and deserted landscape which is symbolic of the hopelessness and destruction produced by their attitudes. The novel reflects an Australian identity and blames white settlers for their treatment of the Aborigines, and in this way reconstructs white men’s relationship with nature. Although it is not until Patrick White (1912-1990)’s novels (e.g. Voss) that it is possible to experience a true feeling of unity with nature, in Prichard’s works we can see the seeds of that idea. The hope of finding an intuitive harmony with nature lies with the generation that follows Coonardoo and Hugh – with their son.

In Prichard’s novels, there was also another kind of implied questioning of “progress”: the environmental concern. Breaking through the former periods’ exaltation of pioneering progress, of cutting down trees and clearing the land, from the late 1920s some writers and artists began to express doubts about “progress” and show their concern for the natural environment in their representations of a national image. The environmental message in Prichard’s works is conveyed through her concern for the violation of virgin bush and the intrusion of large-scale agricultural production into the fragile natural environment. On this point, Heysen also showed his concern,

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Yet, as Susanne Braun-Bau argues, Prichard from her “white” position cannot show what a hopeful future for Aborigines might look like. This leads to the literature of Aboriginal authors and their concept of “Aboriginality” in which a traditional perception of nature and a former harmonious relationship between men and nature is achieved. See Braun-Bau’s essay “Nature and Psyche: Nature Imagery and the Depiction of Consciousness in Australian Novels of the 20th Century” in: http://ubt.opus.hbz-nrw.de/volltexte/2007/418/pdf/E_Nat_Austr_07_BB-1%5B1%5D.pdf.
warning that modern technology could be environmentally and psychologically disastrous. He was devastated by the desecration of the natural environment, and his originality lay in the way he embodied this perception in distinctive statements about Australian life and landscape, imprinting them deeply in the national consciousness: "What would the world be without horses and trees, skies, and all the other visual things around us?" 112 Streeton, like Heysen, also formed strong views about preserving the bush. He said in an address on "Australian Trees and Art" at a meeting of the Forest League in 1925: "It seems an amazing thing to me that a community which spends thousands of pounds on hospitals and homes, which specializes in the treatment of the insane, and which is progressive and businesslike in so many ways, should suffer hundreds and hundreds of acres of valuable timber to be destroyed to facilitate some work of the moment when so little is gained for it".113 Streeton was concerned with the deforestation of the countryside, and he also fought vigorously in later years for the conservation of forests. The message of destruction, typified by the burnt forest, was conveyed in a number of paintings from the late 1920s, such as Our Vanishing Forests (1929), Mount Dandenong (1926), Bushfire Blue (1926) and Burning Log (1926). Although he rendered these works in a beautiful way rather than evoking the cruelty, violence and pessimism, which were the trend in Australian art during this period, the message conveyed by this pessimistic interpretation and its anxiety for the care of the Australian environment, cannot be overlooked.

Conclusion:

From the above discussion, a conclusion can be drawn that among creative artists during the 1920s and early 1930s, in both Australia and China, understanding and representation of the relationship between nature and human civilization became diversified. Both Australia and China were influenced by the war, industrialization and modernism. In Australia, the old concept of "transforming nature with human civilization", a form of "progress", gave way to a new trend which saw "returning to nature" as a form of "reclusion", in which the sense of human control and power was

112 See North, 1977, p. 15.
113 Quoted in Eagle, 1994, p. 164.
diminished. In China, the ideas and concepts of the relationship between man and nature developed in a converse way.
Chapter 6 The Myth of the Country(side)

In chapter 5 I discussed the ideas of social “progress” on the one hand, and “retreating to nature” on the other, in both Australian and Chinese cultures. As the proper venue of the retreat from the city to the world of nature, and as the place where humanity and nature can have direct interaction, the country(side) has long been a focus for the imagination, one rich in associations. The contrast between the country and the city is a specific representation and extension of the contrast between nature (the under-cultured countryside) and human civilization (the over-cultured city). In this chapter I will discuss the myth of the countryside, especially in the construction of the contrast between city and country that was present in both cultures during this period. From this myth, human beings’ ideas of the relationship between man and nature, and their understanding of nature’s significance to the human spirit, are further revealed.

In the city-country contrast, usually the city embodies a distinctive form of civilization, a place of noise, worldliness and ambition, while the country is associated with the idea of a natural way of life, unspoiled by progress, a place of peace, innocence, and simple virtue.¹ The country, in the sense of cultivated land, mediates between the wilderness and the over-cultured city. It is a humanized version of nature. This is particularly true in Australia. Tulloch points out that the country in Australian films was “the edge of civilization” – a narrative space with an emphasis on “either the toughening, purifying edge of culture, or on the civilizing quality of human society in the wilderness”.² Compared with the wilderness, the country had been civilized by the labour of individuals and families. However, compared with the industrial civilization of the city, the country was much less sullied by human society. It is in this sense that I define the country (side) as a sub-category of “nature”.

I will first discuss the myth of the countryside as a place where human beings live a harsh life, in conflict with the forces of nature. This is an old way of looking at man’s

interaction with nature in Australian culture, but a new construction in Chinese culture. Then I will discuss the myth of the countryside as a “Peach Blossom Spring” or Arcadia, which becomes the newly dominant representation in Australian culture but which in Chinese culture is a continuation of old ideas. As some of these ideas (e.g. the human battle with nature, and nature as refuge) have already been discussed in the previous chapters, I will only mention them, but not repeat the former discussions.

The Myth of the Countryside as a Place Where Life is Harsh

In Australian and Chinese cultures during the period of the 1920s and early 1930s, there were similar constructions of the countryside as a place where human beings live a harsh life. In this construction, the image of nature is often negative, a world barren, dry and threatening to humans. In Australia, this construction manifests itself in the old idea of human beings in conflict with nature (see discussions in chapter 4), labouring in nature, working in an inhospitable frontier to make the barest living (see discussions in chapter 5). In China this new myth betrays the old myth of an “Arcadian” countryside blessed by nature with plentiful fruits. This is shown in the film *Wild Torrents* and in Zhao Wangyun’s paintings. The difference lies in the fact that in Australia, despite its challenges, the countryside was still regarded as a peaceful homeland for human beings to return to, in contrast to the corrupted city. But in Chinese leftist culture, the construction of a negative image of the countryside was so extreme that it was depicted as a totally wretched world.

1) In Australian Culture

The contrast between city and countryside is most clearly demonstrated in the Australian film *The Breaking of the Drought*. Gilbert Galloway, the son of a country family, lives a corrupt life in the city (Sydney) with his friend Olive, a city girl who loves luxurious things and who symbolizes the exploitation and seduction of the city. Gilbert and Olives’s lives are the antithesis of Majorie Galloway (Gilbert’s sister) and her parents’ ideal agrarian way of life on Wallaby station. Majorie’s parents represent
the typical Australian man battling with the Australian bush and the typical Australian woman stoically enduring all hardships. The film featured natural disasters to intensify the moral message. Majorie and her parents pull through droughts, bush fires, dust storms, floods and rabbit plagues in the countryside, while Gilbert indulges in the pleasures of dancing, gambling and other temptations in the city. Country life is likened to a prolonged battle with “bitterness, dreariness and hunger, drought and sweat”, whereas city life is seen as filled with wasted days and pleasure-making. Yet despite the problems of country life, something which is clearly manifest in this film (and in Australian cinema as a whole during this period) is its idealization of country values and its satirical vision of city dwellers. The country was constructed as a place of honest labour and moral purity, providing a reasonable living for all, while the city was represented as a place of sophisticated society rife with loose living and corruption. When Majorie’s father, Mr Jo Galloway, asks her if she wants to live in the city, she answers, “No, Dad, I have no desire for city life. My place is here with you”. Her answer is the central idea of this film, and is strengthened by her words to her “city” brother Gilbert: “Give up this evil life and go into the bush. There’s plenty of honest work to be done”. The country was also represented as a place of redemption and forgiveness where the family could be reunited and finds spiritual regeneration. Gilbert at last gives up his evil life in the city and seeks to expiate his follies and sins in the clear bracing air of the Outback. He returns to the countryside in time to witness his family’s ruin and then their salvation from bushfire. He himself is also rescued both physically and spiritually, resulting in a baptism and regeneration of his soul.

In this film, the ugliness of the bush is sometimes presented as hard and uncompromising, forcing settlers to constantly re-work their strategies for survival.\(^3\) This is a continuation of the 19\(^\text{th}\)-century theme of bush-pioneering values and progress. However, in this construction human beings are still encouraged to return to the countryside. This is both a metaphorical and an actual retreat. The country is still

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\(^3\) Shirley & Adams, 1983, p. 57
represented as providing a better life for Australians. Through the construction of
country life as one which provides a healthy contrast to life in the city, the film
evokes a nostalgic feeling for a world of closer relationships and communication
between man and nature. The film emphasizes the opposition between country and
city through contrasting shots, with images of wild flowers and the freshness of the
countryside shown beside potted ferns and flowers in a vase. Contrasted too is the
pipe in the countryside, a symbol of bush fortitude, and the cigarette in the city, which
signifies city seduction.4 The independent country women who find pleasure in
taming horses and the city women who dance for men are also constructed in contrast
(Fig.89). The return to the country of the prodigal son Gilbert is a triumph of the
virtues of a life in the natural world of the country over life in the city, although this is
achieved by battle against, rather than unity with, nature.

This film demonstrates a country contempt for the “soft life” of the city. One reason
for this city-country contrast which extolled the hardships of life in the country was
that this harsh existence was thought to be the source of the Australian spirit. As
Russell Ward suggests, the Australian spirit is derived from the isolated, ordinary
people of the bush, in contrast to the fragmenting high-life of the people of the cities.5
The director Charles Chauvel (1897-1959) also believed that the true spirit of the
nation was constantly regenerated in its rural heartlands.6 As discussed in chapter 4,
the creation of the Anzac legend contributed to the renewal of claims about mateship
and the bush ethos, which were said to spring from experiences of hardship and
isolation. The country provided the challenge which produced the stoic strength of the
ideal Australian, someone capable of dealing with any adversity. In this city-country
opposition, the contrast between city villainy and country purity was enhanced by the
harshness of country life in which people worked hard and constantly struggled with
nature.

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Another reason was that the vicissitudes of country life were seen as purifying and character building. The idea that labouring on the land helped people to escape the evils of city life was a long established tradition in Australia. As early as 1817 when John Macarthur (1766-1834), the Australian wool industry pioneer, returned to New South Wales from London, he argued that farming was the most suitable activity the colony could offer for the reform of convicts:

> From every observation I have been enabled to make upon the characters and conduct of convicts, both during the time of their servitude and after they are restored to freedom, I am confirmed in the opinion, that the labours which are connected with the tillage of the earth and the rearing and care of sheep and cattle, are but calculated to lead to the correction of their vicious habits – when men are engaged in rural occupations their days are chiefly spent in solitude – they have much time for reflection and self-examination, and they are less tempted to the preparation of crimes than [they] would [be] herded together in towns, a mass of disorders and vices”.

The attitude of John Thomas Bigge (1780-1843), the Commissioner appointed to examine the government of New South Wales, was similar. The country was viewed by him as pure and removed from the crime of urban life, and thus conducive to law and order and to the reform of criminals. From this time on, cities were regarded as places where the impoverished gathered, presenting temptations that encouraged criminal behaviour; while the country represented a recuperative space for people from the city where they could rest and restore themselves. The simple act of cultivating the earth purifies them.

In this city-country contrast, the emphasis is placed, on the one hand, on the idea that in the countryside, it is man’s toil and struggles that have triumphed over the extremes of the Australian climate. This is demonstrated in The Breaking of the Drought, which utilizes both the parallels and oppositions in nature and culture. In the city, there is spiritual drought; in the country, there is natural drought. But in the country, through the labour of humans and their ongoing battle with the land, both of these droughts can be broken, and both natural and social fulfillment can be attained.

On the other hand, the emphasis is placed on the idea that the lives of human beings should not be distanced from this kind of humanized nature. Australian nature was

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8 Quoted in Hoorn, 2007, p. 53.
9 See Hoorn, 2007, pp. 53-54.
constructed as a kind of extreme, where human beings and nature if separated, become both harsh and solipsistic, like drought and bushfire in the country and corruption in the city; but if they are united, they can produce both spiritual and physical fulfillment and prosperity. This unity of man and nature differs from the traditional Chinese sense of unity because it is achieved through struggle and labour, and has been fortified by the inhospitability of the land.

2) In Chinese Culture

In a similar way to the construction of the harshness of rural life in Australian culture, representation of a rural life challenged by hardship was also popular in the new trend of Chinese culture, especially in the leftist culture of the 1930s which focused on rural bankruptcy in the countryside. But it went even further and destroyed the very concept of the fundamental harmony or unity of man and nature. As discussed in earlier chapters, during this period the most influential painter representing the suffering of the rural lower-class people was Zhao Wangyun. He forged a completely new path, breaking with the elegance and decency prevalent in Chinese painting by depicting the miserable lives of the peasants in an unfriendly and alien natural world. His paintings *Fatigue* (Fig.33), *The Ploughmen in the Fields of Longping* (Fig.31), and *Snowstorm in the Orchard of the Cangshi Road* (Fig.26), all reveal the economic bankruptcy of the countryside. This bankruptcy was worsened by the threat of natural phenomena like drought and snow storms. The painter discarded imaginary or illusory scenery, directly penetrating into the real life of country people, in an attempt to arouse the conscience and consciousness of national misery.

Compared with painting, the representation of the miseries of life in the country in leftist films of the 1930s was much more striking. A series of films describe the plight and suffering of impoverished peasants in the countryside of southern China, such as *The Spring Worm* (*Chuncan*) (1933), *Harvesting Year* (*Fengnian*) (1933), both of which depict hardships experienced in the Jiangnan area (Fig.97); *Red Tears of Tie*
*Ban* (Tieban Hongleilu) (1933) which shows suffering in the Sichuan countryside (Fig.98); and *The Wave of the Salt* (Yanchao) (1933) (Fig.99), *Song of the Fishermen* (1934) (Fig.91), and *The Angry Waves in the Chinese Sea* (Zhongguohai De Nuchao) (1933), all of which represent the harsh realities of life in the south-eastern seaside villages.¹¹

In these films, in order to emphasize the sufferings of the peasantry, as with the emphasis on the farmers’ pioneering spirit in Australian films, nature in the countryside was represented as gloomy, desolate, and threatening. However, in the process of dealing with city-country relationships, Chinese film-makers differed from their Australian peers. There was no simple denial of the city through a visual and emotionally rhetorical identification with the country. There was no encouragement to return to the countryside either. In Australian films class conflict in the countryside was disguised by the urban divide. In *The Breaking of the Drought* the class differences between Damper and Gilbert are absent. They are both from the country, and for both of them city temptations are the cause of their downfall. In Chinese leftist films, however, class struggle was reinforced by the struggle of man with nature. The malign natural forces were constructed as accomplices of the landlord. (See the discussion of *Wild Torrents* in Chapter 4).

The myth of a miserable countryside lacking any sense of a peaceful homeland, which is particularly evident in Chinese film in the 1930s, was the result of many factors. First, in reality, class conflicts between the peasantry and the landlords escalated dramatically during the 1930s. Faced with the deteriorating situation engulfing rural China, many filmmakers and audiences ceased to “daydream” or “imagine” a pastoral utopia aloof from strife. Second, although many intellectuals especially filmmakers had been influenced by the new May Fourth spirit and by Western culture as early as the 1920s, it was not until the 1930s that they realized the importance of film as a medium which could propagate their views. It was from this

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¹¹ Chuncan: 春關; Fengnian: 豐年; Tieban Hongleilu: 鐵板紅嶺錄; Yanchao: 鹽潮; Zhongguohai De Nuchao: 中國海的怒潮.
period that they began to incorporate new ideas into films, ten years after the May Fourth spirit had started to spread throughout China. These new ideas included criticism of the native agricultural system based on the Confucian hierarchy and the exploitation of peasants’ labour by landlords. In this process of cultural reflection, the countryside – which once bore the weight of the idealized imagination of the filmmaker and audiences – ceased to be regarded as a spiritual home, a peaceful place, or a “Peach Blossom Spring”, detached from social struggle. On the contrary, it now became a world of misery. Even the natural world of the countryside of the Jiangnan area was not represented as pleasant, mild or friendly. Rather, it was seen as in league with the enemy, contributing to the misery of the peasantry. This idea dominated Chinese cinema in the 1930s. As Li Daoxin claims, Chinese film from the 1930s entered a new period of cultural reconstruction. This change in portrayal of the country was testimony to the shift towards self reflection in Chinese culture.12

During this time film came to be seen as a new art form which could lend itself to social education and reform. Cinema’s didactic function of enlightening the masses to save the nation in crisis, was considered to be as important as, and at times as more vital than, its profit-making function.13 Endless civil war, coupled with foreign military and economic aggression during this period, caused film workers, who were seeking to save China in crisis, to see the portrayal of Chinese nationalism as critical.14 Even the director Zheng Zhengqiu (1888-1935), a representative of the traditionalists, proposed the slogan of “anti-imperialism, anti-capitalism and anti-feudalism” to Chinese film circles.15 It was by the use of this propaganda, that the tradition of a Chinese cinema with “social responsibility” was first established and developed a close connection with social reality.16 From then on, Chinese film has always been associated with political ideologies.

14 Ying Zhu (2003) also argues that the development of a leftist, progressive national cinema is to a great extent Chinese nationalistic reaction to both social and political disasters and Hollywood dominance.
The third factor that influenced the myth of a miserable country in Chinese thought, was a political one. At this time more and more intellectuals were coming under the influence of left-wing thought which advocated exposing the social evils and the harsh reality of life in both the city and the countryside in order to achieve social reform and revolution. In Chinese cinema of the 1930s, while there were also films promoting the traditional ideas of the National government, films with leftist ideas became dominant. These films were innovative in both style and content with their radical nationalistic spirit and revolutionary ideas. It can be argued that the leftism which activated most writers and filmmakers in the 1930s was basically an expression of social discontent. As a result in film one finds an overriding obsession with the ills of contemporary society, in both country and city. The basic artistic mode in which this obsession was expressed may be termed “social realism” (or “critical realism”, not to be confused with the later, more ideological mode of “socialist realism”).

The basic ethos of social realism was to criticize and expose the dark side of society, criticism which was motivated by a humanistic concern for the plight of the Chinese people, both in the city and in the country. This resulted in a series of radical transformations in many aspects of Chinese film in the 1930s: in artistic aesthetics (from representing peaceful harmony to constructing tragic struggle); in concept (from film as entertainment to film as a vehicle for reform); and in ideology (from film as means of praising the good to one responsible for revealing social evils). In this social criticism, the harmonious relationship of human beings with nature in the countryside was lost. The countryside was no longer a spiritual homeland, a peaceful refuge or the “Land of Peach Blossom Spring”.

The Myth of the Countryside as “Peach Blossom Spring” or Arcadia

In the construction of the rural myth during this period, however, the representations of “city-as-a-villain” and “country-as-a-utopia” in which human beings find refuge, in which the hard realities of country life were given little or no prominence, also remained an important theme in both Australian and Chinese non-leftist cultures.

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Both show more significant similarities. In this myth, the countryside was represented not as an uninviting and dangerous environment, but more as a place of harmony between people and nature. In Australia this was the new idea of an “Arcadian” countryside, and in Chinese culture, it was the old idea of a “Peach Blossom Spring”.

1) In Australian Culture

The Australian films *The Sentimental Bloke* (1919) and *A Girl of the Bush* (1921) were examples of this. In *The Sentimental Bloke*, the narrative structure hinged upon a sense of “countryside as Arcadia”. Although it still described people’s labour (such as Bill ploughing and cultivating the land), it did not stress the hardships or adversities in the countryside (the orchard), nor did it represent the unpredictability of nature. Instead, it emphasized the harmony between man and nature in the countryside. The city was constructed as corrupted and sophisticated, and the country as a place of hope and joy. Bill and Doreen’s marriage was threatened when the Bloke reverted to boozing with old mates in the city, but the couple’s fate was changed and assured of a bright future by Uncle Jim’s gift which transported them to a magical new land in the countryside to manage an orchard. In this film, the director Longford conveys the idea that good fortune and happiness in life come when human beings leave the seduction of city for the Arcadia of the countryside. The landscape was pleasant, and the life in the farm was happy. This agrarian utopianism in which the ultimate return from the wickedness of the city to the innocence of the country is stressed, was similar in narrative structure to the myth of “harsh life in the countryside”, but differed in that it showed no human suffering in the world of nature. This was a romantic fantasy made by city dwellers about a vanishing life style.

In *A Girl of the Bush*, the outback station “Kangaroo Flat” apparently suggested and represented both the “outer edge of civilization” and the “inner edge of the wilderness”. The “vampire-like” relation of city to country is represented by Oswald’s inability to shoot or fight in the countryside, which was seen as “defining
precisely the parasitic city in terms of the absence of central bush qualities”. As one of the most nationalistic of Australia’s silent era directors, Franklyn Barrett (1873-1964) captured the stark beauty of the Australian countryside. There were no representations of people battling with nature. The mountain, river, water, sheep, and bush were not shown as in any way threatening. The director convincingly established the country-city opposition, identifying the city with “dissipation and hard times” and the country with “purity and regeneration”. He achieved this through his photography of the country and city life, for instance by cutting from the heroine Lorna at work in country occupations (shearing and dipping sheep) to the scene of Oswald gambling in the city; and through Lorna’s evocative words: “I love a sunburnt country, a land of sweeping plains, of ragged mountain ranges, of droughts and flooding rains”(Fig.90).

The return to a country home after experiencing the sophistication and seduction of the city and the loss of romantic illusions about city life was a recurring theme during this period, as in A Girl of the Bush, A Sentimental Bloke, The Moth of Moonbi (1926), and The Man from Snowy River (1920). According to Tulloch, sexual promiscuity, gambling and larceny were in fact common phenomena in the country. The forces of pride, greed and calculation were evident in the activities of landowners as well as in city merchants and townsfolk. But in these films they are shown to be typical of life in an Australian city. What is being celebrated is the idea of rural society, as opposed to a society affected by the pressures of a new industrial age. With growing urbanization and a nostalgic longing for the bush, in the construction of the city-country myth, the country, by means of “healthy” interaction between man and nature, came to represent the family and homeland – both the material and the spiritual.

One significant point is that although some Australian films during the 1920s and 1930s were adapted from novels or poems written around the 1890s (e.g.

19 This is a quotation from the poem “My Country” by Dorothy Mackellar (1885-1968). It is an iconic poem about Australia.
The Sentimental Bloke), in which the country or bush was represented as a hostile “enemy”, in these later film versions the countryside was constructed much more positively. Undoubtedly the representation of Australian countryside in film, a form of mass media, had close links with the control and direction of the government and the market. The Australian government in the 1920s encouraged the positive representation of its landscape for the purpose of promoting Australian immigration and trade – to attract more immigrants from Britain and other European countries and to appeal to an international audience. Those films considered harmful to Australia’s image of “a place of sanctuary” were banned.21 During this period there was a profound Australian fear of invasion from Asia. As a result there were schemes to attract large numbers of British migrants. As the former New South Wales Premier and Nationalist leader in the Legislative Assembly, Sir Joseph Carruthers claimed, by the early 1920s he had elicited the help of the cinema trade in his propaganda work:

I adopted the slogan of ‘A Million Farms For A Million Farmers’. That slogan stands for the filling up of our empty spaces with men of the British breed, so as to have a really white Australia – safe for all time against all danger of foreign invasion or conquest... To my mind the picture theatre presented exactly the form of appeal that would teach the people.22

His words were intended to illuminate and convey to the audiences exactly what the slogan and the policy meant. His intention was to construct an impression of a pleasant land capable of attracting more immigrants of British origin.

Furthermore, during this period, Australia had entered the mainstream of international politics, reaching beyond the boundaries of the Empire, and saw itself as having attained a new international status. The experience of the First World War and the new feeling of national status which followed it, accelerated a more strident call for Australia’s cultural individuality to be recognized internationally.23 Much attention was given to the specific image of Australian life being projected both at home and overseas. Films about drought and convicts were prohibited from export lest they discourage immigration. For example, The Breaking of the Drought, which included actual footage of the drought, was not only prohibited from export, but also under

21 See Alomes, 1988, p. 96.
22 Quoted in Tulloch, 1981, p 139.
23 Burn, 1990, p. 203.
federal pressure was not passed for local viewing. This was because it showed the country in a negative light, thought likely to deter potential immigrants from European countries who would be able to counter the “foreign invasion” of Asian immigrants. By contrast, the film *The Blue Mountain Mystery* (1921) was praised because it showed the mountain scenery in all its beauty with vast open spaces, imposing mountain height and fertile countryside, which was thought would make effective propaganda for Australia.

Positive representation of nature in the countryside was also partly linked to the desire to make the film commercially successful. The problem of what sort of films would appeal to the international market was a major question in the trade of the 1920s. Chauvel claimed that the way to film success was to “present dramas of the great outback set amid the natural beauties of the country…which hold a world of romance and glamour to the dwellers of the cities”. For example, in his film *Greenhide* (1926), the bush was a “land of silent, slumberous strength”, and the city was the refuge of flappers, bathing belles and spoiled young women. In order to appeal to the international market, many directors presented a wonderful and beautiful land. In a word, the positive countryside scenes would appeal to both the city dwellers and to overseas audiences.

In the immediate post-war years, not only filmmakers, but also artists represented the city-country contrast in their works. Because of the limitations of canvas and technique, it was not easy for them to represent the contrast as obviously as the filmmakers. What they emphasized was the countryside as a place in which peace and sanity prevailed. They portrayed the pleasant experiences of city dwellers in the countryside. Hans Heysen and George Lambert frequently represented the countryside as a healthy Arcadia and the countrymen as noble farmers. In chapter 5 I discussed the idea that Heysen’s rural subjects were symbolic remnants of a past which had retreated from urbanized modern life. Through extolling the virtues of a

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25 Ibid., p. 167.
26 Ibid., p. 81.

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healthy outdoor life in the country, he expressed his idea that “the country is grand...I am glad that I am out of the city...” In chapter 5 I also discussed the manner in which Arthur Streeton’s landscape painting represented a more typical nationalistic contribution to depiction of the contrast between city and country, because of his reverence for rural life and the idea of “maximum of flocks and minimum of factories”. Farming was constructed as an ideal way of life, and the country as a healthy place. His well-known work *Land of the Golden Fleece* (1926) symbolizes the importance of the grandeur and beauty of the countryside to feelings of national pride. It is blue and gold, fertile and rich with all the bounties of nature. Many paintings of this period conveyed a central idea that the country way of life was widely accepted as representing everlasting virtues and values; whereas “modern” life, represented by the city, was identified as impermanent and unstable, and its dubious values were the product of other industrialized nations. As Burns points out, in such a climate the city was identified as a corrupting force, breeding low morals and industrial chaos. The spirit of the countryside had a dual role. One the one hand, it upheld rural prosperity and the wealth of the nation; on the other hand it opposed the evils of the new national corporatism of Australian capitalism during the 1920s and 1930s.

In Australian painting, the myth of the “countryside as Arcadia” was also constructed in terms of a retreat from the city to the country in search of pleasure. In this kind of construction, the significance of nature to human beings was embodied in its ability to provide a healthy way of life to the city folk by harmonious interaction with the countryside. The country stood as a metaphor for health and sanity in opposition to perceived disease and decadence of the city. This is apparent in George Lambert’s paintings. Lambert saw the country as his escape to sanity. On several occasions he wrote to his wife Amy of his belief in its restorative powers. For example, he presented the city dwellers’ pleasure in horse riding and racing in the countryside in

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28 Thiele, 1974, p. 126.
31 Ibid.
The Oakleigh Riders (1921) (Fig.77). In this painting, he emphasized the delights of the countryside by showing the sun warming the golden ground and the light creating a halo around the landmass. Lambert expressed his opinion that the countryside was a refuge for city people whose “sense of beauty is very strong”, and who did not want to “go through a stern curriculum” in the city, but would rather go to the countryside to see “the sun and the sky and the trees all dancing at the same time”.32

The representation of this relationship between city dwellers and nature – one of retreating to the country for recreation – reflected the fact that in the 1920s a number of city dwellers had the time and money to visit rural areas for health and recreation.33 It also reflected the fact that rural life in Australia was changing in the 1920s.34 During this time many Australian landowners did not need to work their land themselves. These pastoral paintings reflected the wealth of the landowners and the pastimes of the leisured class. In The Oakleigh Riders, the men, women and horses are not engaged in toil but are instead leisured visitors. This resembles the aristocrats’ passion for leisure and pleasure in shanshui during the Wei-Jin period in Chinese traditional culture. Both emphasize the abundance of nature’s gifts in a calm and leisurely setting, a tranquil scene and frictionless space devoid of signs of human labour.

However, as distinct from traditional Chinese depictions of man “at one” with, or being assimilated into, nature, in Lambert’s paintings of this period the figures were usually detached from the natural environment. As Gray argues, Lambert created a new vision in which he emphasized the dislocation between the wealthy and the land.35 For example, in The Squatter’s Daughter (1923-4) (Fig.78), the figure was not immersed into the landscape, but separated from it, as if she was located artificially in her environment. This kind of detachment between humans and nature suggests the fact that human beings were separated from the land during this period. The appreciation of the landscape was conveyed not from the point of view of those

34 Gray, 2007, p. 46.
united with the land but from the perspective of those who were separated from it. The city dwellers’ return to the countryside was caused by their concern that they had become “out of tune with nature”. This was embodied in images showing men and women who do not fit easily into their environment, as in The Squatter’s Daughter. Yet this representation also reflected the idea of extolling the virtues of the countryside. When city people became ill, a spell in the bush was regarded as the best way to help them recover and become healthy in both the physical and the moral sense.

One reason for constructing the countryside as an Arcadia in paintings was related to concerns about immigration, markets and the national image (similar to that in Australian films). This was proved by the 1923 exhibition of Australian art held in London, which included numerous pictures of fertile pasture, showing no hint of drought. It was also proved by the 1925 exhibition of Australian art in London, Paris and British provincial galleries, which focused on idyllic landscapes, and which proved to be immensely popular.36

Another reason for this kind of construction in both film and painting is related to urbanization and industrialization. At the end of the First World War, white Australia was already a highly urbanized society. The manufacturing regions and suburbs of cities expanded spectacularly. During the 1920s, there was a massive shift in population: as many as a quarter of a million people left the country and country towns for the metropolitan centres and the few truly industrial cities.37 With the economic growth and expansion of the cities, suburban life was becoming characteristic of the Australian way of life, together with the increasing dominance of the city and its institutions over the bush.38 Considering the economic interests of rural production and population, the government needed to counter the attraction of the cities. At the same time the government was actively promoting closer settlement

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36 Burn, 1990, p. 102.
38 Alomes, 1988, pp. 24-25.
through the policy of providing farms for returned soldiers. All these concerns encouraged the construction of the countryside as an Arcadia.

Writers, painters and filmmakers during this period, in order to appeal to a world increasingly urbanized and modern, frequently romanticized rural values. This romanticization of the countryside at a time of urbanization occurred in several countries. Painters such as Pissarro, Vincent Van Gogh and Gauguin adopted the idea that sanctuary from modern life and spiritual renewal could be found in what were perceived as the less sophisticated culture of the countryside. In Australia, creative artists had a similar nostalgic feeling for the countryside at a time when increasing industrialization saw the expansion of cities and mechanization was hastening the demise of the old traditions. It is true that industrial production, motorized transport, electricity and suburbanization attracted people’s attention; and that some artists and writers turned to the modern world, symbolized by science and engineering, motor cars and electric power. However, the urban, political and industrial conflicts and unemployment created by the process of industrialization led to the dream of retreat from the city. The idealization of rural life represented a reaction to the unprecedented expansion of capitalism in the early 20th century. The rural idylls, the romance of the outback and the pastoral myths were contrasted with the end results of industrial development. Just as the historian Richard Hofstadter observes, the more commercial the society grows, the more reasons it finds to “cling in imagination to the noncommercial agrarian values”.

In this period, the average Australian had to live a large part of his life in an urban environment. Urban culture was fostered by an urban middle class, whose lives were directed by ideas of reason, progress and a belief in material improvement. Those people who lived in the city were confronted constantly by its greed, corruption and crime. They felt separated from nature, and wanted to find harmony between mankind

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39 Radi, 1974, p. 359.
43 Alomes, 1988, p. 70.
and nature. For this reason country life, in spite of its crudities and disadvantages, to
them represented an ideal. The artists and filmmakers extolled the virtues of rural life
and rural beauty to a people “more preoccupied with fighting world wars and creating
the most urbanized society on earth”. It represented a romantic escape from the
constrictions of urban industrial society, from the dirty city and the limitations of time
and space to “the vision splendid of the sun-lit plains extended, and at night the
wondrous glory of the everlasting stars”. It is this human attachment to the land and
nature which is the crux of the contrast between rural life and industrial civilization,
although in rural life nature has already been cultivated or humanized. It is true that
not all filmmakers or artists went back to live permanently in the countryside. They
found an even more lasting way of returning to their country home, by sending their
characters back there instead. As a result the creative artists exalted rural experience,
with all its pain, failures, and frustrations, into an ideal way of life.

On the other hand, industrialization and modernization eroded the traditional agrarian
balance of roles and intricate network of relations, and uprooted large numbers of
people culturally and physically. This erosion had the effect of increasing the
importance of cultural identity and the sense of “belonging” to the land. As Alomes
argues, the celebration of love of country and its uniqueness came at a time when the
industrial revolution was homogenizing much of modern life. In this view
nationalism satisfies the need for security and for a sense of belonging in a world
undergoing rapid change. If it often romanticizes the rural, and the traditional, it
appeals to a world increasingly urban, modern and secular. Thus, the romantic dream
of going back to the country appealed to a society where urban routine was the
norm.

What is more, the virtues found in rural Australia which transcended urban corruption
offered solace and a provincial cultural nationalism to urban Australians. During the
1920s cities were undergoing radical expansion and political and industrial conflict

45 North, 1977, p. 10.
47 Anthony D. Smith, Theories of Nationalism, 1971, p. 113.
was rife as was unemployment (usually over 8%). It was against this background that
the spiritual resurrection in the countryside was enhanced, and the idea that the
Australian environment would give rise to a breed of men superior to the products of
the civilization of the old world was emphasized. This idea helped to avert the eyes of
the public from these conflicts. In other words, the current city malaise could be cured,
and Australia’s future would lie in the purity of country life. In this rural dream, the
depressed urban workers were led to believe that the country was a place of healing
far away from the diseased life of the city. The virtues of the men and women of the
countryside were contrasted with the evils of the inhabitants of the city. As the film
director Beaumont Smith (1885-1950) declared, Australian filmmakers had a great
national duty to produce Australian films with true types of Australian manhood and
womanhood – types that the younger generation would be anxious to imitate.⁴⁹

Another reason is related to the dominance of Hollywood film production in Australia.
During the 1920s Hollywood supplied between 82% and 98% of the films screened in
Australia.⁵⁰ The rural myth of “good country” in the city-country contrast in those
paintings and films was also the embodiment of the ideology which opposed US
domination by “drawing on the British-Imperial connection which the wool industry
served”.⁵¹ The perceptions of an idealized rural Australia supported the myth of a
pre-industrial Australia, a myth which regarded the connection with Britain as
“native” and American as “foreign”, and which was achieved through encouraging
“acceptance of the idea of a simple, provincial society looking to Britain for guidance
and expertise while providing it with the fruits of the land such as the wool and the
wheat.”⁵² This myth served those who saw Australia’s main role as that of a farm for
the empire. In this rural myth, manufacturing and urban life were seen as “unnatural”
for Australia. Criticism of rural development was viewed as treasonable, and
investing in urban manufacturing was thought to be as morally dubious as the city

⁴⁹ Quoted in Alomes, 1988, pp. 70-71.
⁵⁰ Tulloch, 1982, p. 34.
⁵² Alomes, 1988, p. 71.
itself. In reality, manufacturers had difficulty obtaining investment loans throughout the inter-war years because of the prevailing belief that rural development and British immigrants should be the national priority.

During this period, Australian nationalism in the middle and upper class was pro-British. The class and empire link had become central during the First World War. This sentiment in Australian middle-class society was reinforced by the closer links made possible by advances in communications technology. In culture as well as economics, the young Australia of the late 19th century had disappeared and middle-aged conservatism was dominant. The close economic relationship between Australia and Britain in the 1920s was reinforced by Prime Minister Bruce’s policy of “Men, Money, Markets”. Under this policy Britain would supply immigrant settlers and capital for Australian rural development and markets for primary produce, while Australia would provide a market for British manufacturing. Imperial and national fantasies merged in the picture of “Australia Unlimited”. Although there were struggles between these two countries, the hardest battles were in the city, not in the bush.

Under these circumstances, when Hollywood films brought US values into Australia, in the 1920s they were regarded by media analysts as “trash”, “vulgar”, “cheap and nasty”, “of no educational value”, “grossly indecent, immoral and detrimental to the prestige of the British Empire”. The point of these critics, seen for example in the Royal Commission of 1927, was that the quantitative impact of U.S. cultural mores via the medium of Hollywood films, had been to drive out “authentic” cultural values, whether local or British. In the 1920s Australian filmmakers, politicians and pressure groups were highly aware of the power of Hollywood which they saw as threatening the “conservation of British sentiment”.

53 Ibid., p. 71.
54 Ibid., p. 84.
55 Ibid., p. 76.
56 Ibid., p. 72.
58 Ibid., p. 15.
As a result of the above, between the wars many Australians escaped from the realities of life by immersing themselves in the celebratory myths of the Australian countryside in the aforementioned paintings and films. These contained no reference to the threatening force of the natural world. The hardships and struggle and sense of isolation which were so often part of country life, were also absent. Rural labour was not emphasized. Instead, the artists and filmmakers selected an “ideal” view of nature to create a more abstract and permanent landscape, “not to imitate the real but to replace it with a symbolic expression”.\(^{59}\) This is exactly what traditional Chinese literati and non-leftist filmmakers, writers and painters of this period pursued in their representations of the countryside.

2) In Chinese Culture (by Comparison with Australian Culture)

As in Australia, in China from the 20th century, with the spectacular growth of the major capital cities and rapidly expanding industry, agricultural economy in the big cities was also largely replaced by an industrial economy.\(^{60}\) And also as in Australia, in order to regain traditional values and preserve traditional culture which was severely affected by the process of industrialization and by Western culture, in the 1920s some filmmakers and writers created a series of rural dreams. In these dreams, the vulgar ostentation of city life was also unfavorably contrasted with the simple rural values of the country.\(^{61}\) The myth of the opposition of the country to the city, regarded as an especially local Australian feature in film, was also a characteristic of Chinese film of this period: the country as a location for the pure of spirit produces a reasonable living for all, in contrast to the corruption, materialism and inequalities of the city.

In the period before 1932, there were a series of films in which the countryside was idealized and the reality of the economic hardships was hidden.\(^{62}\) This can be seen in

\(^{59}\) Bum, 1990, p. 90.

\(^{60}\) Urbanization and commercialism have become an irreversible trend since the invasion of Western capitalism, particularly since the turn of the century.

\(^{61}\) In China, industrialization and urbanization in the modern sense did not begin until the end of the 19th century, after China’s door was forced open by the Western powers.

\(^{62}\) This was the beginning year of the leftist cultural movement.
A Woman in Shanghai (Shanghai Yifuren) (1925) directed by Zhang Shichuan (1899-1954) and The Sea of Fragrant Snow (Xiangxuehai) (1934) directed by Fei Mu (1906-1951). Both directors imbued their films with traditional cultural values (e.g., Confucianism) and the classical aesthetic ideas embodied in traditional Chinese poetry and painting. But the most obvious contrast between city and country was found in the film Back Home from the City (Chongfan Guxiang) (1925) directed by Dan Duyu (1897-1972). This film, which was designed to educate, was in part an allegory, featuring the relation between rural and urban life in the middle of the 1920s and the perils of unbridled urban adventures. In this film, every figure has a symbolic name signifying his or her appearance or personality, such as Time (Guangyin), Indulgence (Ni'ai), Money (Jinqian), Flattery (Chanmei) etc. Back Home from the City displayed images of a cosmopolitan lifestyle and of mass consumption. Through the narration and the mise-en-scène (the scenery of the country and its simple life style, and the kaleidoscopic city life) it demonstrated the fundamental opposition between countryside and the city, and explicitly praised the countryside through the return of Simplicity and Chastity (two paragon female virtues) to the safe haven of nature. In this film, the countryside was represented as the peaceful “Peach Blossom Spring”, far away from the turmoil of the world (Fig.100). The captions conveyed the message clearly: “In the Serene Village which is really like a land of Peach Blossom Spring, the villagers are free from all anxieties. Even the fowls and dogs live safely and peacefully”. In contrast, the city, Shanghai, as the representative of urban civilization, the place of so-called “high quality life” and

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63 Zhang Shichuan: 张石川; Fei Mu: 费穆; Shanghai Yifuren: 上海—婦人; Xiangxuehai: 香雪海.
64 Dan Duyu: 但杜宇; Chongfan Guxiang: 重返故鄉.
65 Guangyin: 光陰; Ni'ai: 溺愛; Jinqian: 金錢; Chanmei: 詐媚. The basic plot of Back Home from the City: Time sends her five daughters to the city for a month, staying with their aunt Indulgence and uncle Coward (nuoruo 侮弱). Indulgence’s prodigal son Money frequently takes Simplicity (sun 女) to nightclubs and restaurants, while his playboy friends Flattery and Seduction (yinyou 引誘) date Youth (qingnian 青年) and Vanity (xurong 虚榮). Only Chastity (zhenjie 賢節) resists the extravagances in the city and is interested in the studio of a painter Sincerity (chengken 誠懇). Later, Beauty (meili 美麗), one of the sisters, dies from excessive drinking, and Money abandons Simplicity for Coquetry (yaoye 妖冶), as was characteristic of most urban tales of this kind. After Coward’s business goes bankrupt, Simplicity and Vanity stay with Scheme (yinxian 陰險), who eventually steals all their belongings. In the meantime, Vanity has eloped with Seduction, and Youth has returned home. Coquetry flirts with Flattery who gets into a fight with Money and they are both killed. Alone, Simplicity retreats to the mountains and realizes her mistakes. At last, Chastity escapes and joins with Simplicity on a trip “back home from the city”.

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wisdom, was full of social evils and human vices like brothels and opium dens, and inhabited by playboys and prostitutes. The idea of city superiority which arose with the economic development in the big cities during the process of urbanization, was bitterly satirized. It was not regarded as superior, wise or elite, but as luxury-loving, loose-living, foul and rotten. This view of the city—a place of temptation leading to degeneration, and a flourishing underworld—was comparable to such Australian films as *The Breaking of the Drought*, *The Sentimental Bloke* and *A Girl of the Bush*. The final act of retreating to the countryside (just as Simplicity does) was a continuation of the traditional Chinese pastoral and reclusion themes.

The “city conceived in vice/evil/villainy” was the fundamental value orientation in Chinese film before 1932. Compared with literature and painting, Chinese film in the 1920s had a less intimate relationship with the new radical thoughts of the time; it was still in pursuit of classical harmonious aesthetics. As Leo Ou-Fan Lee argues, the revolutionary ideas of the 1920s had apparently little effect on the burgeoning film industry which remained a commercial enterprise for urban popular entertainment. In the struggle between the old and new cultures in the 1920s, film, as a foreign technology newly entering into the Chinese cultural market, was distanced from this cultural contention. The New Culture and May Fourth movements did not immediately have an impact on the film industry which reveled in traditional narratives and conservative ideologies. From *Back Home from the City* it is clear that what characterized Chinese film during the 1920s was the desire to impart moral education with traditional Confucianism as the code promoted by the National government. There were three reasons for this. First, film as a newly imported art and technology, was comparatively marginalized, with less influence on intellectuals’ vision during the 1920s. The intellectuals who advocated the New Culture mainly focused on old fields with deep-rooted traditional ideas such as literature and painting. Film, as an immature art developing from the entertainment “shadowplays” (yingxi),

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66 Li Daoxin, 2005, p. 59.
was looked down upon by the intellectuals who did not foresee its important effect on society. It was not until the early 1930s that they began to realize the serious impact of film on society.

Secondly, during the 1920s social turbulence and conflict was not as violent as in the 1930s. People with traditional ideas could still escape into the utopian world created by films to avoid the contentions of the real world, and to get satisfaction from seeing evil doers punished. As a result there was a proliferation of “soft” entertainment films – romance, martial arts films, ghost films and costume drama. However, in the 1930s, faced with the aggravation of the national crisis, there was no room for daydreaming.

Thirdly, holding fast to the virtues of the countryside and criticism of the city also constituted the response of Chinese filmmakers to the impact of foreign culture and industrialization threatening traditional agriculturally-based Chinese culture. As discussed earlier, during the 1920s, just like Australia, China was also in the early stage of rapid urbanization and industrialization. Also similar to Australia, in the 1920s foreign films dominated the Chinese film market as much as over 80%, and most of them were Hollywood movies. Upset by the domination of Western films and the corruption of the cities, and threatened by the influence of both Western and Japanese industrial civilization, in a nationalistic spirit, some filmmakers attempted to restore the glory of traditional Chinese civilization and to reform society by moral education. On the one hand, they produced morally educational films with traditional Confucian thought as their guiding principle. This use of the cinema as a tool for social reform was a continuation of the traditional Confucian idea that the function of literature is to convey Confucian philosophical and moral principles. As

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70 As a new technology and form of art originating in the West, film was first brought to Shanghai on August 11, 1896 when “Western shadow plays” (xiyang yingxi 西洋影戲) were exhibited in the Xu Garden. In the next 100 years and beyond, this imported Western technology has become an indispensable part of the social, political and cultural life of Chinese people. However, in the 1920s, not many Chinese intellectuals realized its importance. The first Chinese film Dingjun Mountain (Dingjunshan 定軍山) was made in 1905, and the first narrative feature film The Difficult Couple (Nanfu Nanqi 難夫難妻) was made in 1913.

71 Li Daoxin, 2005.

72 At the same time, the government established a film censorship board in 1927 to ban foreign films which portrayed China in a negative light.
Li Daoxin observes, to demonstrate the right and wrong, the good and evil from the perspective of moral judgment, was the means taken by Chinese cinema from 1896 to 1932, when faced with the problems of Hollywood domination and moral degeneration.\(^7^3\) In fact, adhering to traditional Chinese morality was one of the regulations prescribed for Chinese film policy during this period.\(^7^4\) Moral concerns such as eradicating greed, the reform of the society through promoting education, and universal love, are all derived from Confucian morality.

On the other hand, the filmmakers tended to idealize the countryside and rural values. Chinese ancient civilization had originated in the inland and was dependent on agriculture; therefore the “harmonious relationship” between human beings and the natural environment of the countryside had long been enshrined as an ideal. Holding fast to the values of the countryside and its cultural ideology, were the resort of traditional Chinese agricultural civilization when threatened by modern cosmopolitan civilization. Traditional filmmakers such as Sun Yu, Fei Mu and Dan Duyu were insistent on the representation of traditional native culture in the colonial context of the early 20th century. Suffering from the effects of the impact of Western culture, especially Western film culture, they attempted to maintain national dignity through restoring ancient culture, by which they tried to find a consistent cultural tradition. From the dialogue and conflict between imported culture and the native spirit of China, between urban civilization and rural imagination, they set out to construct a narrative of city-country contrast, in which the country, the embodiment of native culture, was idealized as the “Peach Blossom Spring”, as a symbol of anti-colonial nationalism.

The conflict between the country and the city in Australian and Chinese cinema during the 1920s was similar in the sense that it mirrored the conflict between an imported culture (US culture in Australia and Western culture as a whole in China) and “native” culture (“native” signifying British-rooted culture in Australia and native

\(^7^3\) Li Daoxin, *Historical Construction of Chinese Film (Zhongguo Dianyingde Shixue Jiangou)*, 2004, p. 212.
\(^7^4\) Ying Zhu, 2003, p. 197.
rural culture in China). The idealized description of the countryside which was embodied in the myth of city and country in both Australia and China acted as an advocate for a return to rural values. This city-country contrast informed obvious spiritual and cultural conflicts. In these conflicts, nature (the countryside) was constructed as the embodiment of what was local and native, and as the symbol of national spirit and national culture struggling to survive in the face of the influence of imported American Hollywood culture (in Australia) and “foreign city culture” (with Shanghai as its focus) in the anti-colonial environment then existing in China.

In both Australia and China at this time, the traditional family structure declined with the development of industry and the decline of the patriarchy. Hollywood films in both countries were strongly condemned for devaluing the traditional family. In both nations the city-country contrast operated in support of family values which were considered to have close ties with the countryside. In China the traditional agricultural economy was based on patriarchal clan kinship. In Australia, the process of land settlement created a wholly supportive link between the notions of “family” and “countryside”. But during this period, it was thought that the family, the father and the British Empire had lost its authority to the new cultural influences form America. In both nations, with the development of urbanization, women played an increasingly important role in city life, challenging male dominance. This was particularly so in Australia. Between 1924 and 1929 more Australian women than men entered the workforce, taking advantage of their wartime liberation from the dictates of gender assigned job classifications. It finally became respectable for single women to earn a living, and the expansion of the newly mechanized business world created the need for many married women to remain in the workforce. As a result, as a reaction to this, family values, the country patriarchy, and a commitment to traditional sex roles were advocated in both Australian and Chinese cinema. The country was regarded as a place to escape from the ladylike refinements of the city and the challenges posed by women to male supremacy, arising from the freedoms

75 Tulloch, 1982, p. 122.
76 Ibid.
77 Butel, 1986, p. 27.
allowed them during the war. Meanwhile, agricultural scenes were often glorified and the way of life of farmers and peasants was upheld. In short, the country and family values in both nations in the 1920s had the same connotations.

Another element common to Australian silent films and Chinese films of the 1920s is that the filmmakers of both countries made use of the concept of a retreat from the city to the country as a central device to displace the realities of class and industrial conflicts. In both The Sentimental Bloke and Back Home from the City, class exploitation was replaced by a city-country dichotomy: city villainy vis-à-vis country purity. The strong class consciousness in the first half of The Sentimental Bloke was weakened by the sentimental optimism which accompanied the acquisition of Uncle Jim’s farm. The class struggle was hidden and negated by the simple representation of the “true country” order. The film ended with the “untruth that in country nature bestows its gifts without favour of class”. Nature here provides Bill with a land of Arcadia purified by the elimination of class. In this myth, the vampire quality of the city steals the country’s wealth, as expressed in the words of Sylvia Lawson:

The city... functioned generally as a hive of evil, full of delusive siren songs; it was evidently not conceivable that a young man or woman from the bush, with basically sound instincts, could come to the city and find health and happiness within it; the city could only function as the site of false hopes, set up in order to be dismantled.

Such a representation in Australian and Chinese cultures in the 1920s allows for speculation on the way different classes may have experienced a sense of common national identification. In so far as it was possible for most of the population to identify with the image of the idealized country, this representation conformed to the widely accepted view of Australia and China as consensual societies based on populist sentiments. The social construction embodied is one in which class stratification is accepted as harmonious and organically cohesive. The ideas of national identification with the countryside and national interest in the countryside can distract people’s attention from the realities of class exploitation, especially from

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78 Buell, 1985, p. 3.
81 Burn, 1990, pp. 103-104.
continuing industrial and political conflict. In both nations the pre-industrial myth was a kind of escapism.

The idea of the transition from pristine rural to degenerate urban-industrial society, is a myth which, as Raymond Williams claims, is difficult to underestimate in modern social thought. It is the main source for the perpetual nostalgia for an “organic” or “natural” society. In this myth, it is not simply human exploitation (or class inequality) but the whole of industrial civilization which is seen as injurious to human beings. In other words, in this myth what injures human beings most is not human beings themselves, but the separation of human beings from nature, and it follows from this that all human wounds can be healed so long as human beings have close contact and a harmonious relationship with nature.

This agrarian utopianism – the “back-to-the-land-narrative” – in Australia, was a rural dream which bypassed the land monopoly by the squatters, a dream that all men could make their homes in the country, and that dissipation would cease to exist along with inequality: “Then would every man sit on his veranda or under his big tree smoking his pipe in contentment while the vine brought forth her fruit and the wilderness blossomed as the rose”. This seems to inform the ending of The Sentimental Bloke. It also reflects a wish or hope that in the Australian countryside it would be possible to create a new ethical code – the dream that a new and purer humanity without the evils brought by the modern city life in the “old world” could be achieved in this “new” land. In Chinese culture, it took the form of a rural dream reacting to the perceived aggression of Western culture, industrial economy and urban commercialism, and notionally reaffirming the national spirit. As the moral antithesis of the city, with parallels to Chinese non-leftist culture, the “new ethics” of the countryside (in contrast with the city-born civilization of the Old World) in Australian culture represented the traditional values of the family, and a male-dominated society, which was the opposite of the evils of exploitation, seduction, parasitism and

82 Williams, 1973, p. 96.
83 Buxton, in Crowley, 1974, p. 172.
hedonism of city life. This value system was based on the idea of harmony, including the harmony between human life and nature: a world in which man finds himself through his idyllic communication with nature, after leaving the greed of the town. In this myth, rather than man investing nature with value through his own labour, nature itself is the true repository of value, of all that is worth while, creating the gentle community of the ideal pastoral world.

The idea of an idealized and romanticized countryside also featured in the work of some Chinese non-leftists during the 1930s, but much less than it had in the 1920s, for reasons discussed earlier. The director Sun Yu and the writer Shen Congwen were amongst this small number of intellectuals. In chapter 5 I discussed Sun’s film Little Toy in which the countryside was constructed as peaceful and tranquil. In another of his films Wild Rose (Yemeigui) (1931), the city-country contrast is even more obvious. The hero, Jiang Bo, a painter and an admirer of nature, tires of city life and escapes to a fishing village where he falls in love with a country girl – the “wild rose” Xiao Feng. In this film, the countryside, as the embodiment of nature and a transformed shanshui, is idealized as an imagined utopia contrasting with the sophistication of city living. The director identifies less with the city than with the country, his nostalgia for which symbolizes the traditional literati’s intimacy with shanshui. He uses the film to construct a world in which simple, clever and humorous villagers contentedly enjoy a harmonious, happy existence in the country (Fig.95), although he does show that there could at times be friction between these people. Then the camera turns to the city with the caption “Our so-called busy city”. From the English language in the street poster and the motor cars it is clear that the city has been Westernized. In contrast to the peaceful life in the countryside, the city life is shown as full of hardships. The “wild rose” – Xiao Feng – was free and healthy in the countryside, but in the city she is ridiculed and despised by the “civilized”, fashionable city girls. The dwellings of the poor are shabby and crowded. Jiang Bo and Xiao Feng are poverty-stricken and suffer from hunger and cold in the winter. In

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84 Yemeigui: 野玫瑰.
order to pay rent for their room to the merciless landlord, they are forced to pawn their clothes. Xiao Feng, the innocent girl, steals a drunkard’s wallet, and Jiang Bo is arrested and sent to prison.

In the contrast between city and country, the countryside was constructed as ethically superior. It was an unspoiled land of “Peach Blossom Spring” rather than a backward society with narrow-minded people. In this interpretation, the city is criticized as a prison and a hell, the centre of all social ills. At the end of the film Little Toy, the declaration of saving the nation from destruction was uttered by an illiterate but clear thinking peasant (Mrs. Ye) to the muddle-headed urbanite, which explicitly demonstrates the filmmaker’s evaluation of urban and rural civilization.

Yet the social context of the 1930s was different from that of the 1920s. Just like other filmmakers who were criticized for their romantic representation of the poverty-stricken countryside, Sun Yu’s “poetic country complex” was also often mocked by his contemporaries. Shen Xiling (1904-1940), a famous film director of the 1930s, commented that the Taoye village in Little Toy – both its scenery and its people – was a utopian homeland of filmmakers: “A village as beautiful as Taoye and its people cannot be found in semi-colonial China!” Wild Rose was also criticized by the leftists as “having lost contact with reality”, and “divorcing itself from the social struggle”. But Sun Yu justified his pastoral illusion in this way: “They said that I depicted the impoverished countryside as the ‘Peach Blossom Spring’. Yet although it’s true that the countryside became impoverished because of exploitation by the local tyrant and the aggression of the imperial economy; nevertheless, the beauty of nature can never be destroyed by economic bankruptcy.” Therefore the country scenery in his film always resembles the spring scenery of southern China, with lotus-covered ponds, beautiful open fields and healthy men and women. Shen


17 Cheng Jihua, 1980, pp. 266-269.

18 Yang Yuanying, 2000, p. 122.
Xiling's criticism is not totally convincing. Compared with films of the 1920s, Sun Yu’s film is not detached from reality. As I discussed in chapter 5, the people living in the country could not escape from the problems of the outside world. For example, at the end of *Wild Rose*, although both Xiao Feng and Jiang Bo return to the countryside, the Japanese invasion awakens them from their dream. Inspired by patriotic feeling, they both join the army to defend their native land. In *Little Toy*, Mrs. Ye finally leaves the peaceful village and calls on people to fight against the invaders.

The director’s construction of the city-country contrast sometimes could not be accepted in the 1930s, but it is now widely appreciated by film scholars. For instance, Li Daoxin argues that the film united the national sentiments of anti-imperial aggression by encouraging people to reflect on the cultures of city and country. The romanticization of rural scenery and rural life in itself constituted a profound criticism of the city, the era and the society.\(^8^9\) Li’s comment is a reasonable one. Criticism of the city is in fact criticism of the dehumanizing factor which deprived human beings of their contact and communication with nature. The director’s romantic attitude toward country life was an expression of his resentment of the alienation of city life and his inability to overcome this. Although he never experienced life in the country, he conceived the significance of country life in film. This fantasy of the countryside was the result of the director’s discovery that he was exiled from his homeland and living in an alien world.

The longing to retreat to the countryside can also be found in Chinese literature of this period, as in the novels of the “mandarin duck and butterfly” (*yuanyang hudie pai*) school which claimed for itself the role of upholder of traditional values.\(^9^0\) The writers of this school were unwilling to be influenced by “modern” thought, and practiced a more traditional form of morality than did other intellectuals. The countryside was regarded by them as a moral utopia. This school’s criticism of the

\(^8^9\) Li Daoxin, 2004, p. 274.

\(^9^0\) *Yuanyang hudie pai*: 鴻鵠蝴蝶派.

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modern city came predominantly from a perspective of moral concern. They constructed the idea of a city-country contrast in order to uphold traditional moral values like filial piety which had been lost or were under threat from “modern” and Western culture. Yet in reality they were not practicing or promoting the interaction of human beings with the natural world in the country. As distinct from Tao Yuanming who actually returned to live in the country, the writers of “mandarin duck and butterfly” school were not willing to leave the luxuries of modern city living. What they could not tolerate, as Pan Jian argues, was simply the moral corruption of city life. They attempted to adjust to the changes in the environment, but they found themselves unable to adapt to the commercial life of the modern city; nor were they able to keep up with constant change. They represented a certain type of intellectual who while living in the urban area, and enjoying the luxuries of the city, felt lost in the transition from the old to the new culture, and thus idealized the countryside.

The literary work which can best demonstrate the myth of the countryside in the sense of continuation of traditional Chinese literati’s attachment to the pastoral countryside is Shen Congwen’s novella The Border Town (1934). The novella conveys the author’s tender feelings toward rural life in his homeland in west Hunan Province. In this novella, he emphasizes the lyrical side of the rural landscape and the tranquil, carefree and leisurely nature of rural life. As David Der-wei Wang argues, the novella is one of the most important examples of lyrical fiction, because of its idyllic story, dream-like imagery and figurative language. The story centres on the birth and growth of an old ferryman’s granddaughter, Cuicui, in a country border town. The countryside is idealized as a rich place with an abundance of plants and animals: “the species of bamboo, the ring-necked pheasants that come to the house to feed, the freshwater mussels whose shells are good for collecting”. Human beings live

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93 Jeffrey C. Kinkley, The Odyssey of Shen Congwen, 1987, p. 117.
harmoniously with, and close to, nature. Cuicui (which means “emerald”), who gets her name from the “bamboos and hills of a glorious emerald green” (also the source of the bamboo flute), was a young woman born in this rich countryside and nurtured by nature:

Wind and sun have tanned the growing girl’s skin, her eyes resting on green hills are as clear as crystal. Nature is her mother and teacher, making her innocent, lively and untamed as some small wild creature. She has the gentleness of a fawn and seems not to know the meaning of cruelty, anxiety or anger.94

This description is similar to that of Coonardoo. Both young women are the embodiment and personification of nature’s beauty, purity, fertility, and its untamed wilderness. Cuicui is always dressed in green. Her name is suggested by her natural surroundings. She is also the incarnation and symbol of nature’s nurturing power. She is a seed that her deceased parents have left in the world, and she is nurtured and brought up by bountiful nature.95 With all her nymph-like associations with mountain and river, her existence in this world seems to be only temporary. She is always ready to flee back to where she belongs, the mountains: “should a stranger on the ferry stare at her, she fixes her brilliant eyes on him as if ready to fly any instant to the mountains”.96

A sense of serenity, which permeates the whole novella, is represented by the image of water and the music of the bamboo flute in a tranquil and undisturbed environment. “The quiet water is too deep for a pole to reach the bottom; but it is so clear that you can see the fish swimming there”.97 Nurtured by the quiet water, the people traveling on it also conduct themselves in an unhurried manner. As the boat gets close to the bank, Cuicui “pulls lazily on the hawser while the barge inches slowly across”.98 On a sunny day when no one comes by to disturb them, Cuicui and her grandfather would sit on a boulder in front of the door to enjoy the sunshine and play the bamboo flute. Even the echoing music accentuates the quietness. The echo of the music can be

95 Sun Hong, 1987, p. 44.
96 In The Border Town, p. 3, translated by Sun Hong, 1997, p. 33.
97 In The Border Town, p. 1, translated by Sun Hong, 1997, p. 17.
98 In The Border Town, p. 4, translated by Sun Hong, 1997, p. 17.
understood as a metaphor for reciprocity between man and nature and evokes a sense of the communication which exists between the two.

The tranquility and purity of the landscape and rural life are a continuation of the traditional ideal of the human relationship with nature in the *Peach Blossom Spring*. In fact, this rural town was itself in the same region as the place described in *Peach Blossom Spring*, the original essay by Tao Yuanming. Cuicui and her grandfather – the ferryman – are endowed with the same significance as the legendary fisherman portrayed in *Peach Blossom Spring*. As David Der-wei Wang argues, as the latest practitioner of the “Peach Blossom Spring” tradition, Shen Congwen was undeniably influenced by Tao Yuanming in the depiction of rural Hunan. Tao Yuanming’s “Peach Blossom Spring” was a haven of peace unmolested by the tyranny of the Qin Dynasty. Likewise, the rural border town was also a peaceful land far from the social turmoil of the outside world, a place of peace where Cuicui’s legendary ancestors were said to have found refuge.

In terms of the contrast between the country and the city, Shen creates a counterpart to the Australian rural myth which promised immigrant farmers regeneration on the “edge of civilization” between the savage wilderness and the wickedness of the city. An indispensable part of this fantasy is seen in the frontier people’s indifference to monetary gains. Concern about financial matters is rarely seen here. In contrast to the leftist description of the poverty-stricken countryside, there were no financial problems in Shen’s border town. As discussed in Chapter 2, in traditional Chinese literati culture, monetary gains were disregarded. Shen idealized rural life where there was no need to care about food and clothes, and idealized also the purity and simplicity of the country people by depicting their lack of any desire to make profit. For example, the ferryman insists that no toll should be paid, “because the ferry is public property”. Whenever a passenger wants to give some coins to him, the ferryman thrusts them back into the passenger’s hand, protesting almost truculently: “I’m paid for this job – three pecks of rice and seven hundred coins! That’s enough! I

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don’t want your money!” 100 Like her grandfather, Cuicui also refuses to accept tips from passengers. Even the paper dealer is portrayed as generous, in contradiction to the Chinese proverb “no commerce is without deceit” (wujian bushang). 101 It seemed that they were not contaminated by the industrial and commercial society at all. Yet the depictions are only an idealized version of the countryside. In fact, Shen Congwen himself was a victim of the treachery of small town economies. But little of such greed and treachery is found in his idyllic border town. As Kinkley points out, “Shen values the ‘childlike mind’ of the country person over urban sophistication, and thus naïveté and guileless sincerity, even unto foolishness and ‘stupidity’”. 102 For him, “being stupid” is a virtue, and at root it signifies intensity in living, not blandness.

This purity of mind, in Kinkley’s words, is “a directness undulled by inhibitions resulting from the literacy, acquisitiveness, and class distinctions of Han [urban] civilization”. 103 Sun Hong also argues that Shen Congwen’s rural perspective demonstrates his belief that it is the development of Confucianism and urbanization that leads to decadence and corruption. By contrast, the frontier people in West Hunan have retained their vitality and honesty through their literary and economic primitiveness. 104 Shen Congwen himself also claims that the difference between the ethos of the Han Culture and that of the marginal folks on the frontier is that “the tribes-people do not read, seek to marry into a particular station, tell lies, or have the slightest idea of how to make a profit from a commercial transaction”. 105 Yet there is one important point which Kinkley, Sun and even Shen himself fail to express explicitly: purity and honesty are characteristic of “frontier” or “tribal” people rather than of more civilized people, because the “frontier” or “tribal” people have more interaction with nature than with their fellow man.

However, like Sun Yu’s film, The Border Town was also written in the 1930s, the period when China was suffering from civil wars and national crisis. Although Shen

101 Wujian bushang: 無奸不商.
104 Sun Hong, 1997, p. 59.
105 See Kinkley, 1987, p. 10.
created such a myth in an attempt to idealize his rural homeland by describing it as an uneventful world and hiding its cruel realities, this novella still constitutes “a dialectical part of, rather than an exception to, post-May Fourth realism”. The tranquil scenery in the border town cannot hide the turmoil outside. Therefore, the novella is enshrouded in an atmosphere of melancholy. There is suicide, accidental death, misunderstanding, and inevitable loss, which makes the serenity in *The Border Town* equivocal. Beneath the tranquility surrounding the ferryman and Cui cui we can hear the undertone of the turbulent times: “Sometimes Emerald and the dog listen intently to her grandfather’s tales of fighting in the town in years long past”.

Despite Shen’s attempt to disassociate the peaceful life in the border town of the countryside from the unrest in the outside world by claiming his war stories come from “years long past”, it is easy to connect these stories with the misery that Shen has experienced since his childhood. As Sun Hong argues, in spite of Shen’s dedication to show beauty in the world of nature and man, his experience of the violence and cruelty of real life makes it hardly feasible for him to create a fictional country as bright as that of Tao Yuanming.

**Conclusion**

From the discussion, it is clear the Australian construction of the traditional “threatening” landscape and human beings’ harsh life in the countryside was similar to the construction of the rural myth in China’s new (especially leftist) culture of the 1930s; while the Australian construction of the countryside as an Arcadia was similar to that of the Chinese traditional culture in the 1920s and the non-leftist culture of the 1930s. However, in Australia, whether it was the happiness or the hardship of rural life which was being represented, the contrast between city and country always favoured country life as the healthier alternative. This contrast stands as a

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109 Shen Congwen’s grandfather, father, and brothers all had military careers and were either killed in action or served until they died. See Shen Congwen’s Works (Seng Congwen Wenji 沈從文文集), vol. 6, 1983, p. 70.
110 Sun Hong, 1997, pp. 64-66.
condemnation of the inhuman forces which accompanied modernization, urbanization and industrialization, forces which deprived human beings of their contact and communication with nature. Yet in Chinese culture, the theme of “rural virtue and urban vice” only made its appearance in traditional culture. The new culture devalued the countryside, equating it with the misery of the city, and undermined the traditional image of “Peach Blossom Spring” in which human beings could achieve spiritual fulfillment through close communication with nature.
Conclusion

After examining and comparing the traditional and modern representations and constructions of nature and its relationship with human beings, a conclusion can be drawn that Chinese and Australian intellectuals' understanding of the significance of nature to the human spirit developed in contrasting ways as both progressed from a traditional to a modern culture. In China, the conception of the human relationship with nature changed from one of traditional harmony, and reverence for nature as superior to the human society, and from the idea of a safe haven where human body and spirit were protected, to the modern concept of a world in conflict, where nature was a threat to be battled with or something to be controlled, transformed, and possessed by man. In Australia, the concept of the human relationship with nature evolved from traditional antagonism, in which the "wilderness" was seen as an alien and threatening "otherworld" to be battled with and civilized, into the modern concept of nature as a place of affinity and harmony, where both the wilderness and the countryside were regarded as engendering a sense of home and belonging. This is clearly demonstrated in the 1920s and early 1930s when both countries were in transition from a rural, pre-industrial society to an urban modern society. However, it should be pointed out that traditional ideas did not die out or disappear during this period but were kept alive by some intellectuals in various ways. The intertwining of the old and new ideas resulted in diversified representations and constructions. During this time a resurgence of nationalism in Australia and China transcended the individual social conditions in each country, and played a key role in shaping these intertwined conceptions. In Australia the old way of thinking about nature was in some ways similar to the new ideas which had been emerging in China, while the new ideas in Australia were comparable with Chinese traditional ideas. This is manifested in the construction of three pairs of antithetic myths: the myth of men as "great" battlers (struggling with "destructive" nature) versus the myth of nature as a "refuge" consoling and refreshing human beings; the myth of "progress" versus the myth of "reclusion"; the myth of the countryside as a place where living is harsh versus the
myth of the countryside as an Arcadia.

### Ideas of Nature in Chinese and Australian Cultural Traditions

In their traditional cultures, Chinese and Australian conceptions and representations of nature are contrasting. In traditional Chinese culture, originating in the primitive worship of mountains and rivers, and framed by the concepts of nature in Confucianism and Daoism, the idea of reverence for nature, and of “conforming to”, rather than opposing nature, was tremendously powerful in the thinking of the literati. While undoubtedly there were always exceptions and different schools of thought; nevertheless, the dominant ideology was one of an ideal harmony and unity between man and nature. It is true that compared with Daoism, in Confucianism the harmony between man and nature is to some extent human-centred because the Confucians have always projected strong subjective feelings onto nature, connecting aesthetic thoughts about nature with the moral pursuits of noble men. However, traditional Chinese *shanshui* painting and poetry were framed and nurtured mainly in the philosophy and aesthetics of Daoism which is nature-centred. Daoism believes that the inner communication and mutual correspondence between man and nature are a way of “naturalizing human beings” (*ziranhua*). Daoists transcended utilitarianism or the measuring of nature by human standards; instead, they saw nature’s values as independent of man’s world, and sought to achieve a realm of “non-action”, “forgetting the self” and “modelling on nature”. The aesthetic idea that “beauty lies in naturalness”, which was advocated by both Confucianism and Daoism, but pursued to its utmost limits by Daoists, developed as a natural result of the way in which Chinese literati appreciated nature for what it was and for the way it worked, without the need to be tamed, perfected or subjected to the civilizing forces of human society. Following Daoism, neo-Daoism contributed greatly to the aesthetic observation of *shanshui*, and to the idea of loving *shanshui* itself by practising the spirit of Daoism in more concrete ways, and also related the “Dao” with the physical *shanshui*.

In the Australian cultural tradition, representations of nature are framed by the
combination of Western European ideas of nature, science, progress and race, with home grown factors such as the context of colonialism and the dispossession of the country’s Aboriginal inhabitants. The dominant Western ideas of nature have a long tradition, from their beginnings in the dualism of the ancient Greek Enlightenment and Judaeo-Christian tradition, to the modern mechanistic world view of nature. In contrast to the Daoist aim of transcending pragmatic purposes and reducing human will-power and desires, in the Western tradition, the dominant view was anthropocentric. It saw human beings as separate from and superior to nature, and as engaged in combating, conquering and controlling it. In Western aesthetics, in contrast to the traditional Chinese appreciation of an unspoiled natural world, there is a deep-rooted negative attitude towards nature in its untamed state, especially “wilderness”. The traditional Western conception of nature is reinforced by those theories of nature which accompanied European expansion and colonization, such as the idea of “otherness”, the evolutionary ideas of Darwin, and environmental determinism. All of these ideas together intertwined to establish the Eurocentric view that helped transform the “alien” landscape of Australia. As a result, the Australian landscape, when represented in literary and artistic works, was transformed, civilized, and battled against.

The contrasting concepts of nature in the Chinese and Australian cultural traditions found their expressions in three corresponding themes: (i) an “imagined” nature of otherworldliness, (ii) small human figures immersed in the grandeur of nature, and (iii) the polarity between returning to and seeking refuge in friendly nature, and battling against or civilizing a “threatening” wilderness. In the first theme (i), in both cultures, “untamed” nature was represented as an “other” of culture. In Chinese culture, because unspoiled nature was eulogized, and natural beauty was elevated to the highest position, the world of nature was often constructed as an idealized “other” world, a pure and clean utopia, superior to and detached from corrupted society. This is demonstrated in paradisal shanshui painting and poetry, in the poems of Xie Lingyun, Li Bai and Wang Wei, in the tranquil and remote shanshui paintings of
Sheng Mao, Qian Xuan, Ni Zan, in Huang Gongwang and Zhao Boju’s imagined panoramic view, achieved through the moving perspective of “Three Distances”. What these poets and artists wanted was to transcend a frustrating reality by imagining a utopia unsullied by corrupted human society. In Australian culture, on the contrary, there was a very clear tradition from the early colonial period which found little beauty in the natural features of the Australian landscape and regarded the Australian “wilderness” as strange and ugly. This can be found in the literary works of Adam Lindsay Gordon, Marcus Clarke, Mrs Campbell and Mary Theresa Vidal. Australian traditional culture also depicted an “imagined” landscape. Unlike the Chinese tradition in which the unsullied shanshui was regarded as the norm, the result of a reverence for nature in its pristine state, in the Australian imagined landscape, it was the European, especially the British landscape which was regarded as the norm, a view derived from contempt for the untouched natural world in favour of an appreciation of a man-made landscape. Many creative artists selected those features of the Australian landscape that recalled Europe, and avoided Australian light, colour, plants and animals, as shown in the poems of Adam Lindsay Gordon, Henry Kendall and Charles Harpur, and in the paintings of John Glover and Eugene von Guerard. In the colonial period, even in the Heidelberg painters’ realistic representation of Australian landscape, European literary allusions could still be perceived. Whether as an alien force, threatening white man with isolation and despair, or as a land with a picturesque (or sublime) beauty, Australian nature was always imagined and represented as an “other” (with contrasting or similar characteristics to European landscape) incorporated into or appropriated by the framework of a European “self”.

In their traditional cultures, the Australian bush myth is comparable to the Chinese shanshui myth. Both bush and shanshui are associated with otherworldliness because of their separation from and their contrast with human civilization. Yet the shanshui was regarded as superior to the human world, while the “wild” bush was considered to represent an inferior and alienating “otherness”, against which human beings have struggled to forge their identity. The dense mountain forest in Chinese tradition was
considered to be a safe haven and a spiritual and physical home for human beings; but the bush and mountains in the Australian tradition were usually seen as a threatening barrier imposing hardships on human beings.

In the second theme (ii), Chinese culture constructed human beings as being assimilated into the sublime mountains or boundless rivers, a result of the thinking which saw human beings as simply small participants within the vast universe in which they were neither master nor ruler. This is shown in the paintings of Jing Hao, Fan Kuan, Dong Yuan, Ni Zan and in the poetry of Liu Zongyuan. The spirit of deep and tranquil union between man and an infinite and friendly nature is embodied, particularly in the representation of a single angler fishing alone in a cold river. This subject symbolizes the realm of “forgetting the self” and a total unification with the universe, as well as the expected life style of the Daoists: simple, leisurely, detached and free. In the Australian colonial period there were also representations of sublime and pristine mountains, and of small human figures assimilated into overwhelming natural settings (as in the works of von Guerard), which were influenced by the Western Romantic aesthetics. However, because of each culture’s different understanding of the relationship between man and nature, the sublimity in von Guerard’s painting usually creates a depressing, gloomy and forbidding impression. In Chinese representations the figures which are at one with nature are usually the immortals or idealized literati, who are endowed with noble qualities. The figures and the natural environment were generally regarded as admirable and superior to this world. By contrast, in Australian landscape painting the human figures which are depicted as part of the “wild” mountainous surroundings are usually Aboriginal people. The Aboriginal figures and the untamed nature they inhabited were also considered to be apart from civilized society, but they were regarded as inferior to white civilization, and as something to be conquered and controlled. This racist attitude features strongly in the traditional Australian construction of nature. The “Aborigines”, like the “immortals”, were also constructed to please the imaginative interpretation of the period, at the same time obscuring the reality of their misery;
however, the underlying agenda was totally opposite.

In the third theme (iii), both cultures constructed a relationship between nature and culture. In traditional Chinese culture, the dominant view was that society was in a state of decline from grace and that nature was a necessary moral check upon it. "Reclusion" thus became a recurring theme. When frustrated by social or political life, the literati always longed to escape from society and return to nature. In this theme, nature was regarded as a detached spiritual sanctuary which was superior to the cultured world created by humans. The reclusive spirit was extolled to such an extent that most literati, including Zuo Si, Wang Wei, Meng Haoran, Li Bai, Huang Gongwang and Ni Zan, in their poems or paintings, all expressed their longing to return to *shanshui*. The best example representing the ideal of unyielding integrity and the return to the countryside is Tao Yuanming, who idealized the reclusive life in the countryside as living in "Peach Blossom Spring", peaceful and joyful. This sort of reclusive and "primitive" way of living in the world of nature reduced human will-power and desires because it required humans to conform to nature. It is in fact a critique of so-called "social progress".

On the contrary, in the Australian cultural tradition, it is nature which is in a "fallen state" and civilization the moral check upon it. The colonists always attempted to bring civilization, which they saw as progress, to the wildness of the Australian bush. This concept of "progress" which emphasized human will-power and desires is an inversion of the Chinese "reclusion" theme. This theme can be found in the representation of both white men's attempts to "civilize" the wildness of nature and in their battle with it. As distinct from the Chinese literati who appreciated nature for itself and seldom thought of perfecting it, colonial Australian creative artists always stressed the transformation of nature in their works by representing the land cleared for pastoral use and owned by white settlers, as a sign of "progress" and a metaphor for civilization. This is most impressively expressed in the paintings of the Heidelberg group during the 1880s and 1890s, especially the works of Tom Roberts who directly
celebrated the “progressive” human activity of bringing civilization to the bush. These ideas were underpinned by the theories of social evolution and appropriation of the land which supported the transformation of “waste” land into productive agricultural ground capable of generating commercial profit, and by the assumption that Europeans possessed the most progressive and advanced technology and civilization.

In the Chinese cultural tradition, the literati always had a sense of identification with and belonging to nature, considering and constructing nature especially *shanshui* as a safe, friendly and hospitable refuge which provided comfort and consolation to their bodies and souls. In contrast, in the Australian cultural tradition, especially in the creation of national myths, nature, especially the bush and mountains, was constructed as a place of danger, full of destructive and threatening forces, which stood in the way of the “progress” of the white settler. The dominant theme in the national myth is the heroic, sometimes tragic, struggle of the bushmen and pioneers with an alien nature which they sought to master, a struggle which consolidated the Australian national identity. This is most clearly represented in the paintings of Tom Roberts and in the literature of Henry Lawson.

**Ideas of Nature in Chinese and Australian Cultures of the 1920s and the 1930s**

In the 1920s and the early 1930s, when sentiments of nationalism were becoming widespread in Australia and China, both cultures were characterized by a pluralism of traditional and innovative ideas and representations. In Chinese culture, this was a turning point. On the one hand, the cultural traditions were maintained by some intellectuals who were preoccupied with traditional ideas. They continued to construct the myth of “nature as a refuge” in which the natural force (e.g. “water force”) was praised for its ability to relieve human misery, as shown in some films of the 1920s (e.g. *A Poet at the Edge of the Sea*) and non-leftist films of the 1930s (e.g. *Sand Washed by Waves*). Disillusioned by civil wars and revolutions, disappointed by urbanization, industrialization and modern life, and obsessed with a nostalgia for the
traditional way of life, they also continued to construct the myth of “returning to nature”, especially the myth of returning to the “idealized countryside” to regain traditional values. This is shown, for example, in Zhou Zuoren’s prose, in the films *Back Home from the City* and *Wild Rose*, and in Shen Congwen’s novella *The Border Town*. The traditional “return to the pastoral (country) life” used to be a way of indicating resistance to the fetters and humiliation of official life. During this period, however, it came to be seen as a response to the turbulence and corruption of the city.

However, at the same time, there was a significant aesthetic and ideological shift. This was caused by the violence of the social changes and the impact of alien cultures. The New Culture movement brought about the nation-wide devaluation of traditional Chinese culture, especially Daoism, and led to the importation of Western modes of thought such as Marxism, expressionism, and Western realistic painting. The shift was also influenced by the endless civil wars coupled with foreign military and economic aggression, the serious issues facing the nation and the misery being experienced by the Chinese people, the decline of the literati, and the construction of a new national character. All these factors pushed the new culture to develop towards constructing an antagonistic relationship between man and nature.

This is represented in the myth of battlers, the myth of progress, and the myth of harsh life in the countryside. In these myths, nature’s appearance is portrayed as harsh, barren and threatening and nature’s force as destructive (e.g. in the film *Wild Torrents*). Human beings are made to appear increasingly powerful, engaging frequently in battles with nature (e.g. in Guo Moruo’s poem anthology *The Goddess*), thus replacing the traditional idea of “the minor man in grand and friendly nature” with the notion of “the great man in hostile nature”. The position, power and fighting spirit of human beings (in their struggle with nature) were elevated to a level never achieved in traditional *shanshui* poetry and painting. In these myths, rather than a return to nature, emphasis is placed on human beings’ active intervention in and transformation or control of nature for the purpose of “progress” (usually through
representing peasants' labouring in harsh natural conditions, as in the paintings of Zhao Wangyun). The "reclusive" spirit is criticized. In these myths, the countryside, regarded by the literati in a long established cultural tradition as an idyllic and safe haven, lacking duplicity and intrigue, and as a place of spiritual repose and a refuge from the misery of the world, is undermined, replaced by the image of rural bankruptcy which is intensified by the depiction of nature as a threatening force (e.g. in a series of leftist films). During this period, even in the works of some "traditionalists", such as the paintings of Pan Tianshou, the films of Sun Yu and the novella of Shen Congwen, it is easy to find evidence of this change in ideology and aesthetics. Not only did the traditionally "detached" shanshui sometimes become the strategic terrain, but the harmony and tranquility of the countryside was often destroyed by a sense of concern about social progress and social struggle.

To summarize, this is the path of development of Chinese culture: from nature-centredness to human-centredness; from the spirit of "reclusion" to the spirit of "progress"; from an imagined utopia to realistic shanshui, from the literati's "detached" attitude to the "intervention" of the lower classes in nature and society; and from a past of pastoral and lyric harmony to modern struggle and conflict. The change in Chinese intellectuals' representation of the relationship of man with nature from the traditional idea of harmony to a modern one of conflict, is a reflection of social, aesthetic and ideological change in China.

During the 1920s and early 30s, in Australian culture, people's conceptions and representations of nature were also characterized by the interweaving of the old and the new. On the one hand, the First World War strengthened the sense of national identity and reinforced "the Australian type" in the national character by relating the Anzac legend to the bush legend. As a result Australians continued to construct the old myths of human beings as heroic battlers in conflict with the threatening forces of nature, of the transformation of nature by humans, which was seen as material progress, and of human beings living a harsh life in the countryside. All these old
myths are ideologically similar to the new myths in Chinese culture. In these myths, it is the conflict of man with nature which is stressed. The image of nature is often a negative one, depicted as the “other” and it is by opposing this “other” that the spirit and strength of the Australian national “type” have been forged. (e.g. in the film The Breaking of the Drought). Praise is also given to the settler who works the land, transforming the wilderness and bringing civilization to it (e.g. in the film On Our Selection).

On the other hand, as in China, more significant in this period, was the aesthetic and ideological shift taking place in cultural life in Australia. This was sometimes the result of the personal experiences or stylistic preference of the creative artists, but more often it was brought about by social change. During this period, with the gradual growth of white Australians’ emotional and spiritual links to the land, an increasing number of people began to feel a sense of belonging and an identification with Australian nature. In terms of the relationship between nature and culture, after the cruelty of the war, the result of the conflict of “man” against “man” and man-made machines, the product of “civilization”, the enthusiasm for “progress” and “civilization” was rethought, and replaced by the ideal of harmony between “man” and “nature”. In contrast to China, where patriotic struggle was equated with industrial progress and the development of new machines, in Australia, the pursuit of peace and tranquility demanded detachment from industrial machines. What is more, just like China, Australia was also in a state of early urbanization, industrialization and modernization, which was eroding traditional agrarian values, hastening the end of traditional ways of life, and inducing some Australians, who felt a nostalgia for the countryside, to construct a rural dream of Arcadia. The political and industrial conflicts and unemployment during this time made the development of an escapist rural dream such as this even more necessary. Meanwhile, because of the concern about the market, national image, and an ideological opposition to US film domination, the Australian government in the 1920s began to encourage the positive representation of the landscape. All these factors combined to create new attitudes
towards the relationship of human beings with nature in Australian culture.

This was reflected in the myth of “nature as refuge”, the myth of “reclusion”, the myth of the countryside as an Arcadia, and the emergence of new ideas within the old themes (such as “labour in nature” and the “pastoral landscape” as symbols of an escape from civilization and progress). In these new myths, the portrayal of nature began to exhibit the characteristics of an “authentic” or “typical” Australian natural environment (such as “the bush” and “the outback”). And this kind of primeval nature was increasingly seen as having positive associations, and constructed both as indomitable and as providing a consoling and refreshing force to the human (white Australian) spirit in times of tragedy and sorrow, bringing them a sense of home (e.g. in the paintings of Heysen and Cossington Smith). This broke away from the old aesthetics of “imagined” nature and the old idea of “wilderness”. In these myths, the gum tree became a symbol of strength and vitality with a sense of beauty, and “wild” nature itself was regarded as perfect, embodying eternal truth and vitality, refreshing and nurturing human beings, with no need for transformation by human hands. In these myths, “human labour” did not signify human controlling, transforming or developing nature anymore, but signified the unity of man, animal and earth against the mechanisms of civilization and progress. It was a symbol of retreat from “progress” and a return to a “simpler” life style which focused on the deep communication between man and nature (e.g. in the paintings of Roberts and Heysen). In these myths, the pastoral landscape did not symbolize material progress, but stood for the “reclusive” spirit and pre-industrial peace, and was a way of escaping from the mechanized world of industrialization (e.g. in the paintings of Streeton). This representation sought to dissolve the human desire for progress by deliberately avoiding any human intervention in the landscape, suggesting that rather than man investing nature with value through his labour, nature itself was the true repository of value. In these myths, there was a new challenge to white civilization. Nature was not just constructed as something to be claimed as territory, worked for sustenance and profit or to be used as a metaphor for dispossession. Aboriginal values and the
Aboriginal perception of nature (which saw the land as a spiritual homeland), were explored by the white man (e.g. in Prichard's novel *Coonardoo*). In these myths, the countryside, as a place where humanity and nature interact directly, was romanticized as a peaceful home land and a healthy Arcadia where human beings could seek refuge, in contrast to the images of corrupt city life. The significance of nature was embodied in the healthy life which resulted from living in harmony with nature. It implied that the injuries to human beings brought by living in an industrialized society, could only be healed by restoration of close and harmonious contact of man with the natural world (e.g. in the films *The Sentimental Bloke* and *A Girl of the Bush*, and in the paintings of Heysen, Lambert and Streeton).

These new ideas starting to develop in Australia were the opposite of the attitudes to nature which were dominant in former periods, but they were extremely close to the ideas of the traditional Chinese literati. In other words, Australian "modern" understanding of nature incorporated Chinese "traditional" understanding of nature. As discussed, the new myths which emerged in China from the idea of modernism were breaking with the classical ideals of the unity of man and nature. In contrast with Chinese culture, in Australia, the cultural values, during the transition from traditional thinking to modernity, developed from a focus on the conflicts (between white men and "wild" nature, and between white man and Aboriginal people), towards the idea of harmony, including harmony between man and nature and between human beings themselves.

**Ideas of Nature in Australian and Chinese Cultures of Later Periods**

As discussed in the “Introduction”, the new ideas in this period foreshadowed developments in later periods. Now let us briefly look at their influence on later intellectuals. In Australian intellectual life of the late 1930s to 1940s, the influence of the Flinders paintings of Heysen can be seen in the primeval landscapes, especially the dead trees, bare hills and the traditionally less ingratiating aspects of the landscape, which became a common feature of Australian painting especially in the work of
Albert Namatjira (1902-1959). Heysen also influenced Russell Drysdale (1912-1981), Sidney Nolan (1917-1992) and even Brett Whiteley (1939-1992) in their metaphoric representation of the desert and outback. In literature, the strongly nationalistic Jindyworobak group advocated the appreciation of Australian landscape in the late 1930s and 1940s. More recently, especially from the late 1960s and 1970s onwards, with the development of postmodernism, post-colonialism, deep ecology, ecofeminism and eco-ethical thought, there has been a world-wide challenge to established Western values such as progress, civilization and masculinity. In recent and contemporary research on the aesthetics of nature, the traditional idea of anthropocentric aesthetic appreciation has been rejected; instead, a new perspective on the place of human beings in the cosmos and concern about human beings’ devastating impact on the environment are gaining currency. In Australia, great efforts have been made to reconstruct the Australian national identity as a “multicultural” one in which the disparate values brought by immigrants have introduced alternative perspectives and brought about the decline of the European “master narratives” such as the myth of progress, humanism, rationality and masculinity in the relationship between humanity and nature. At the same time, the raised profile of Aboriginal people in Australian society has introduced their conceptions of harmony, unity, peace and balance with nature. The rise of feminism defied and reinterpreted previous male norms and challenged man’s assumption of mastery over nature. All these elements, together with the increasing concern about the natural environment, gave increased impetus to the idea of harmony in nature.

This is reflected in the poetry of Les Murray who often writes about the unique qualities of the Australian landscape and the way in which human beings are destroying the planet; in the works of Glen Phillips who develops a strong identification with the Australian landscape; and by Tim Winton, who uses metaphors of nature in a profound way to illustrate human beings’ dependence on the land and the way they are destroying it. This is also expressed in films like Picnic at Hanging Rock (1975) in which the bush is valued as a place of vigour and spiritual dynamism.
But the most obvious examples are in Australian painting. John Olsen’s works show the influence of contemporary ecological ideas about nature (e.g. the mingling of animal, botanical and human) and of changes in human beings’ perception of the universe. In John Wolseley’s environmentally aware paintings the theme is far deeper than a mere encounter with the landscape. Rather it is concerned with the biological and spiritual connectedness and ecological discovery. Similarly William Robinson’s works depict the splendour of nature and combine multifaceted perspectives.

In Chinese culture, while new ideas appeared in the 1920s and 1930s, the most radical shift of ideologies came after 1949, especially around the 1960s and 1970s when traditional culture was totally overthrown by the government during the so-called “Cultural Revolution”. This was accompanied by the Hegelian-Marxist doctrine that “nature, before man operates on it, is mere potentiality” and Chairman Mao’s famous slogan that “nature must be conquered”. It is highly significant that at this time, when the idea of struggle against nature was becoming “questioned” and “old-fashioned” in the west, the very same idea was becoming widely accepted in China. Once again, this reflected the contrasting social and political movements in East and West, this time during the 1960s and 1970s. The shanshui painters were directed to depict the transformation of nature by humanity to the extreme. It was a common phenomenon for artists to depict shanshui with red flags, factories, water reservoirs, electric poles, automobiles and other icons of the time. Art became the tool of the politics. The theme of “China Reconstructs” was an ideological tenet permeating film, literature and painting. For example, In Spring on Lake Dongting (1973) by Song Wenzhi, the tall electric cable towers in the countryside are a testimony to the bustling activities of a flourishing economy.

In the 1980s, as China entered a new age of reform under the open-door-policy, particularly in recent years, she was able to shake off the chains that had previously

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1 See Smith, 2000, p. 571.
2 Song Wenzhi: 宋文治; Spring on Lake Dongting: 洞庭春晓.
fettered the nation. The ever-increasing interaction with the outside world and the unprecedented growth in global communications opened the door for Chinese intellectuals to contemporary Western thought. This, together with the deterioration of the natural environment in China and rethinking of 20th-century “modern” culture, contributed to the resurgence of traditional ideas about the relationship between man and nature. The achievement of harmony and unity of man and nature was once again portrayed in contemporary Chinese cultural works, such as in Wang Xufeng’s novels and Hu Fayun’s fictions, and in the constructions of the wilderness, of “yellow land” and “yellow river” in Chinese films.3

The contemporary period has been characterized by the convergence of different cultures. While in Australia, international influences have been significant, especially those from Asia, at the same time Chinese works have been influenced by Western conventions. More and more scholars have come to realize that Western postmodern ideas of nature and the human relationship with it, echo those of ancient China. But in fact, as early as 1918 Heysen wrote prophetically of this convergence:

Yes, Chinese and Japanese [traditional] art is indeed fascinating and it seems surprising to us how very modern their philosophy was over a thousand years back. After all there is nothing new – Dame Nature doesn’t change. She is what makes our world so very beautiful, and all true modern art must spring from her just as the art of a thousand years ago.4

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1 Wang Xufeng, Hu Fayun.
2 From a letter to Lionel Lindsay, 8 Dec, 1918, see Thiele, 1974, p. 289.
Illustrations

Part I: Paintings

Fig.1. Li Tang 李唐 (1066-1150). *Whispering Pines in the Gorges* (*Wanhe Songfengtu* 萬壑松風圖) (1124). Ink and slight colour on silk. 188.7 x 139.8 cm. National Palace Museum, Taipei.

Fig.2. Qiu Ying 仇英 (1498-1552). *Temple in the Mountain of Immortals* (*Xianshan Lougetu* 仙山樓閣圖) (Ming Dynasty). Ink and slight colour on paper. 118 x 41.5 cm. National Palace Museum, Taipei.

Fig.3. Qiu Ying 仇英 (1498-1552). *Jade Cave in Fairyland* (*Yudong Xianyuantu* 玉洞仙源図) (Ming Dynasty). Ink and colour on silk. 182.3 x 106.7 cm. National Palace Museum, Taipei.

Fig.4. Shang Qi 商琦 (?-1324). *Painting of Spring Mountain* (*Chunshan Tujuan* 春山圖卷) (Yuan Dynasty). Ink and slight colour on silk. 39.6 x 214.5 cm. The Palace Museum, Beijing.

Fig.5. Gao Kegong 高克恭 (1248-1310). *Cloud-Girdled Peaks* (*Yunheng Xiulingtu* 雲橫秀嶺圖) (Yuan Dynasty). Ink and slight colour on silk. 182.3 x 106.7 cm. National Palace Museum, Taipei.

Fig.6. Mi Youren 米友仁 (1086-1165). *Spectacular Views of the Xiao and Xiang Rivers* (*Xiaoxiang Qiguantu* 灑湘奇觀図) (Song Dynasty). Ink on paper. 19.8 x 289.5 cm. The Palace Museum, Beijing.

Fig.7. Sheng Mao 盛懋 (Yuan Dynasty). *Waiting to be Ferried Across the River* (*Qiujiang Daidutu* 秋江待渡圖) (1351). Ink on paper. 112.5 x 46.3 cm. National Palace Museum, Taipei.

Fig.8. Ni Zan 倪瓚 (1301-1374). *Riverside Pavilion by Mountains* (*Jiangting Shansetu* 江亭山色圖) (1372). Ink on paper. 94.7 x 43.7 cm. National Palace Museum, Taipei.

Fig.9. Qian Xuan 錢選 (1239-1301). *Living in Fuyu Mountain* (*Fuyu Shanjiitu* 浮玉山居圖) (Yuan Dynasty). Ink and slight colour on paper. 29.6 x 98.7 cm. The Shanghai Museum, Shanghai.

Fig.10 Guo Xi 郭熙 (c.1023 – c.1085). *Early Spring* (*Zaochuntu* 早春圖) (Song Dynasty). Ink and slight colour on paper. 158.3 x 108.1 cm. National Palace Museum, Taipei.

Fig.11 Huang Gongwang 黃公望 (1269-1354). *Living in Fuchun Mountain* (*Fuchen Shanjiitu* 富春山居圖) (Yuan Dynasty). 33 x 636.9 cm. Ink on paper. National Palace Museum, Taipei.

Fig.12 Zhao Boju 趙伯駒 (1119-1185). *Rivers and Mountains in Autumn Colours* (*Jiangshan Qiusetu* 江山秋色圖) (Song Dynasty). Ink and colour on silk. 56.6 x 323.2 cm. The Palace Museum, Beijing.

Fig.13 Jing Hao 荊浩 (850-?). *Mount Lu (Kuanglutu* 嵃廬圖) (Five Dynasties). Ink on silk. 185.8 x 106.8 cm. National Palace Museum, Taipei.

Fig.14 Fan Kuan 範寬 (c.950-1032?). *Traveling amid Mountains and Streams* (*Xishan Xinglutu* 溪山行旅圖) (Northern Song Dynasty). Ink on silk. 206.3 x 103.3 cm. National Palace Museum.
Museum, Taipei.

Fig.15 Dong Yuan 董源 (?-962). *Painting of Xiao and Xiang Rivers* (*Xiaoxiangtu 潇湘圖*) (*Five Dynasties*). Ink and slight colour on silk. 50 x 141.4 cm. The Palace Museum, Beijing.

Fig.16 Zhu Duan 朱端 (Ming Dynasty). *Painting of a Cold River and Lonely Fishing* (*Hanjiang Dudiaotu 寒江獨釣圖*) (*Ming Dynasty*). Ink and slight colour on silk. 171.9 x 109.0 cm. The Tokyo National Museum, Tokyo.

Fig.17 Wu Zhen 吳鎮 (1280-1354). *Old Fisherman* (*Yufutu 漁父圖*) (*Yuan Dynasty*). Ink on silk. 84.7 x 29.7 cm. The Palace Museum, Beijing.

Fig.18 Ma Yuan 马遠 (1140-1225). *Painting of a Cold River and Lonely Fishing* (*Hanjiang Dudiaotu 寒江獨釣圖*) (*Southern Song Dynasty*). Ink and slight colour on paper. 26.8 x 50.3 cm. The Tokyo National Museum, Tokyo.

Fig.19 Ni Zan 尼瓊 (1301-1374). *Painting of Pine and Pavillion* (*Songlin Tingzitu 松林亭子圖*) (*Yuan Dynasty*). Ink on silk. 83.4 x 52.9 cm. National Palace Museum, Taipei.

Fig.20 Ni Zan 尼瓊 (1301-1374). *Painting of Rongxi Studi* (*Rongxizhaitu 容膝齋圖*) (1372). Ink on paper. 74.7 x 35.5 cm. National Palace Museum, Taipei.

Fig.21 Ni Zan 尼瓊 (1301-1374). *Quiet Streams and Cold Pines* (*Youjian Hanlintu 幽閑寒林圖*) (*Yuan Dynasty*). Ink on paper. 59.7 x 50.4 cm. National Palace Museum, Taipei.

Fig.22 Li Tang 李唐 (1066-1150). *Fishing in the Clear Stream* (*Qingxi Yuyintu 清溪漁隱圖*) (*Southern Song Dynasty*). Ink on silk. 25.2 x 144.7 cm. National Palace Museum, Taipei.

Fig.23 Ju Ran 巨然 (active in the Five Dynasties). *Snow* (*Xuetu 雪圖*). Ink on silk. 103.6 x 52.5 cm. National Palace Museum, Taipei.

Fig.24 Dai Jin 戴進 (1389—1462). *Walk in the Snow to Look for Plum Blossom* (*Taxue Xunmeitu 涤雪尋梅圖*) (*Ming Dynasty*). Ink on silk. Private collection, United States of America.

Fig.25 Zhao Wangyun 趙望雲 (1906-1977). *Peasants in the Boundless Dusk* (*Muse Cangmangzhongde Nongmin 暮色蒼茫中的農民*) (c.1933). Ink on paper.

Fig.26 Zhao Wangyun 趙望雲 (1906-1977). *Snowstorm in the Orchard of the Cangshi Road* (*Cangshi Lushang Guomalin Zhixue 滄石路上果木林之雪*) (c.1933). Ink on paper.

Fig.27 Zhao Wangyun 趙望雲 (1906-1977). *Waiting to be Saved* (*Daiyuanzhe Duiyangzhe 侍援者*) (c.1930s). Ink on paper.

Fig.28 Zhao Wangyun 趙望雲 (1906-1977). *A Boat in Exile* (*Liawang Zhichuan 流亡之船*) (c.1930s). Ink on paper.

Fig.29 Pan Tianshou 潘天壽 (1871-1971). *Shanshui in the Style of Shi Tao* (*Ni Shi Tao Shanshui 擬石濤山水*) (1932). Ink and colour on paper. 49.5 x 45.5 cm. Private collection.

Fig.30 Yu Ben 余本 (1905-1995). *Late Returning* (*Wangui 晚歸*) (1935). Oil on canvas. 82 x 94 cm.

Fig.31 Zhao Wangyun 趙望雲 (1906-1977). *The Ploughmen in the Fields of Longping* (*Longping
Fig. 32 Zhao Wangyun (1906-1977). *The Cattle Harrowing the Soil in Early Spring* (*Chunmeng Padi Zhiniu* 春耕耙地之牛) (c.1933). Ink on paper.

Fig. 33 Zhao Wangyun (1906-1977). *Fatigue* (*Pilao 疲勞*) (1928). Ink on paper.

Fig. 34 Pan Tianshou 潘天壽 (1871-1971). *Cannon Emplacements at Yongjiangkou* (*Yongjiangkou Paotai* 鹿江口炮臺) (1932). Ink on paper.

Fig. 35 Gao Jianfu 高劍父 (1879-1951). *Five Storied Tower* (*Wucenglou 五層樓*) (1926). Ink and colour on paper. 80 x 42 cm.

Fig. 36 Pan Tianshou 潘天壽 (1871-1971). *Qianjiang Shanshui* 淮江山水 (1945). Ink on paper.

Fig. 37 John Glover (1767-1849). *Mount Wellington with the Orphan Asylum, Van Diemen's Land* (1837). Oil on canvas. 76.5 x 114.2 cm. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.

Fig. 38 John Glover (1767-1849). *Mount Wellington and Hobart Town from Kangaroo Point* (c.1833). Oil on canvas. 76.2 x 152.4 cm. Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery and National Gallery of Australia.

Fig. 39 John Glover (1767-1849). *Natives at a Corrobory, under the Wild Woods of the Country* (previously titled *Aborigines Dancing at Brighton*) (c.1835). Oil on canvas, 77 x 114 cm. Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.

Fig. 40 Arthur Streeton (1867-1943). *Still Glides the Stream, and Shall Forever Glide* (1890). Oil on canvas. 82.0 x 153.0 cm. The Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney.

Fig. 41 Arthur Streeton (1867-1943). *The Purple Noon’s Transparent Might* (1896). Oil on canvas. 123 x 123 cm. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.

Fig. 42 Eugene von Guerard (1811-1901). *Mount Kosciusko, Seen from the Victorian Border* (*Mount Hope Ranges*) (1866). Oil on canvas. 108.2 x 153.3 cm. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.

Fig. 43 Eugene von Guerard (1811-1901). *View from Mount Lofty, South Australia* (c.1860). Oil on composition board. 29.2 x 45.1 cm. Private collection.

Fig. 44 Eugene von Guerard (1811-1901). *View in the Grampians from the Top of the Serra Range* (c.1870). Oil on canvas. 68.6 x 91.5 cm. Private collection.

Fig. 45 Eugene von Guerard (1811-1901). *Head of the Mitta Mitta River, Eagle's View of the Mountains* (1879). Oil on millboard. 38.8 x 48.8 cm. State Library of Victoria, Melbourne.

Fig. 46 Eugene von Guerard (1811-1901). *A view of the Snowy Bluff on the Wonnangatta River, Glippsland Alps, Victoria* (1864). Oil on canvas. 93.8 x 151.0 cm. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.

Fig. 47 John Glover (1767-1849). *The River Nile, Van Diemen's Land* (1837). Oil on canvas. 76.4 x 114.6 cm. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.

Fig. 48 John Glover (1767-1849). *The Bath of Diana, Van Diemen's Land* (1837). Oil on canvas. 96.5 x 134.5 cm. National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.

Fig. 49 John Glover (1767-1849). *My Harvest Home* (1835). Oil on canvas. 76 x 114 cm. Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart.
Fig.50 Eugene von Guerard (1811-1901). Glenara (also known as Mr Clark's Station, Deep Creek near Keilor) (1867). Oil on canvas. 68.2 x 121.8 cm. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.

Fig.51 Joseph Lycett (c.1774-c.1825). Wooloomooloo (c.1822). Watercolour. 17.6 x 27.7cm. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.

Fig.52 Eugene von Guerard (1811-1901). Larra (1857). Oil on canvas. 35 x 55.9 cm. Private collection.

Fig.53 John Glover (1767-1849). Australian Landscape with Cattle: the Artist's Property, Patterdale (c.1835). Oil on canvas. 76.7 x 114.6 cm. National Library of Australia and the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.

Fig.54 John Glover (1767-1849). Views of Mill's Plains, Van Diemen's Land (c.1833). Oil on canvas. 76.2 x 114.6 cm. Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide.

Fig.55 Tom Roberts (1856-1931). Woodspitters (also known as Charcoal Burners) (1886). Oil on canvas. 61.4 x 92.3 cm. Ballarat Fine Art Gallery, Melbourne.

Fig.56 Tom Roberts (1856-1931). Slumbering Sea, Mentone (1887). Oil on canvas. 51.0 x 76.5 cm. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.

Fig.57 Tom Roberts (1856-1931). Twilight at Healesville (1886-88). Oil on cedar panel. 35.3 x 24.7 cm. Private collection, Hobart.

Fig.58 Arthur Streeton (1867-1943). Twilight Pastoral (also known as Above us the Great Grave Sky) (1890). Oil on canvas. 68.3 x 35.4 cm. National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.

Fig.59 Tom Roberts (1856-1931). A Sunday Afternoon Picnic at Box Hill (c.1886). Oil on canvas. 38.6 x 28.7 cm. National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.

Fig.60 Frederick McCubbin (1855-1917). The Pioneer (1904). Oil on canvas. 223.5 x 86 cm; 224.7 x 122.5 cm; 223.5 x 85.7 cm. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.

Fig.61 Tom Roberts (1856-1931). A Break Away! (1891). Oil on vancas. 137.3 x 167.8 cm. Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide.

Fig.62 Arthur Streeton (1867-1943). Fire's On! (1891). Oil on canvas. 183.8 x 122.5 cm. The Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney.

Fig.63 Hans Heysen (1877-1968). The Hill of the Creeping Shadow (1929). Oil on canvas. 88.8 x 114.3 cm. The Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney.

Fig.64 Hans Heysen (1877-1968). The Three Sisters of Aroona (1927). Oil on canvas. 76.0 x 90.0 cm. Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide.

Fig.65 Hans Heysen (1877-1968). Three Gums in the Flinders Ranges (1930s). Watercolour. 30.5 x 40.5 cm. Private collection.

Fig.66 Grace Cossington Smith (1892-1984). Black Mountain (c.1931). Watercolour with gouache over pencil. 35.6 x 42.3 cm. Private collection.

Fig.67 Grace Cossington Smith (1892-1984). The Gully (1928). Oil on pulpboard. 110.5 x 82.5 cm.
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Fig. 69 Grace Cossington Smith (1892-1984). *Landscape at Pentecost* (1929). Oil on paperboard. 83.7 x 111.8 cm. Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide.

Fig. 70 Tom Roberts (1856-1931). *Ploughing in the Dandenongs* (also known as *The Potato Field*) (1924). Oil on canvas. 61.2 x 91.8 cm. The Oscar Paul collection.

Fig. 71 Tom Roberts (1856-1931). *Sherbrooke Forest* (1924). Oil on canvas. 48.0 x 68.4 cm. The Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney.

Fig. 72 Tom Roberts (1856-1931). *Washing Day, Kallista* (c. 1923-25). Oil on canvas on hardboard. 35.5 x 52.3 cm. The Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney.

Fig. 73 Hans Heysen (1877-1968). *Ploughing the Field* (1920). Watercolour on paper. 42.0 x 52.5 cm. Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide.

Fig. 74 Hans Heysen (1877-1968). *The Toilers* (1920). Watercolour on paper. 73.0 x 86.0 cm. Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide.

Fig. 75 Arthur Streeton (1867-1943). *Land of the Golden Fleece* (1926). Oil on canvas. 50.7 x 75.5 cm. National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.

Fig. 76 Grace Cossington Smith (1892-1984). *Trees* (1926). Oil on plywood. 91.5 x 74.3 cm. Newcastle Region Art Gallery.

Fig. 77 George W. Lambert (1873-1930). *The Oakleigh Riders* (1921). Oil on canvas. 71.3 x 91.5 cm. Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth.

Fig. 78 George W. Lambert (1873-1930). *The Squatter's Daughter* (1923-4). Oil on canvas. 61.4 x 90.2 cm. National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.

**Part II: Film Stills**

Fig. 79 *The Breaking of the Drought* (1920). Sun-baked and cracked earth with few sparse trees in the drought.

Fig. 80 *The Breaking of the Drought* (1920). The bushman Tom rescuing Gilbert in a bushfire.

Fig. 81 *On Our Selection* (1920). Fighting a bushfire.

Fig. 82 *On Our Selection* (1920). Man’s struggle against nature.
Fig. 83 *The Breaking of the Drought* (1920). Gilbert purged by his survival of a bushfire.

Fig. 84 *The Squatter’s Daughter* (1933). Quick way to cut down the trees.

Fig. 85 *On Our Selection* (1920). Rudd’s family pulling the ripened corn and shelling the corn with their hands.

Fig. 86 *The Breaking of the Drought* (1920). From lack to plentitude.

Fig. 87 *A Girl of the Bush* (1921). A few trees, a solitary horseman and a multitude of sheep, rough tracks, and burning white roofs, symbolizing wealth, human cultivation and control.

Fig. 88 *A Girl of the Bush* (1921). Abundant sheep: a sign of civilized domestication and “progress”.

Fig. 89 *The Breaking of the Drought* (1920). City-country contrast: (i) the independent country woman Molly who finds pleasure in taming horses; (ii) the city women who dance for men—surface sensation and spiritual loss.

Fig. 90 *A Girl of the Bush* (1921). Bush woman: Loma.

Fig. 91 *Song of the Fishermen* (*Yuguangqu* 漁光曲) (1934). Harsh life of the fishermen.

Fig. 92 *Sea-burial* (*Haizang* 海葬) (1933). The survival fishermen after the typhoon.

Fig. 93 *Sand Washed by Waves* (*Langtaosha* 浪淘沙) (1936). In a desolate island all conflicts between the criminal and the policeman disappear.

Fig. 94 *A Story on Hua Mountain* (*Huashan Yanshi* 華山豔史) (1934). Chen Beifeng and his girlfriend find refuge in the Hua Mountain.

Fig. 95 *Little Toy* (*Xiaowanyi* 小玩意) (1933). Taoye village people lived a peaceful and reclusive life before the domestic wars and Japanese invasion.

Fig. 96 *Return to nature* (*Dao Ziran Qu* 到自然去) (1936). The aristocratic family spend their holiday in a desolate island.

Fig. 97 *The Spring Worm* (*Chuncan* 春蠶) (1933). Peasants’ harsh life in the Jiangnan area.

Fig. 98 *Red Tears of Tie Ban* (*Tieban Hongleilu* 鐵板紅淚錄) (1933). Peasants in the Sichuan countryside.

Fig. 99 *The Waves of the Salt* (*Yanchao* 鹽潮). Peasants’ harsh life in the south-eastern seaside villages.

Fig. 100 *Back Home from the City* (*Chongfan Guxiang* 重返故鄉) (1925). Simplicity goes back to the countryside.
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