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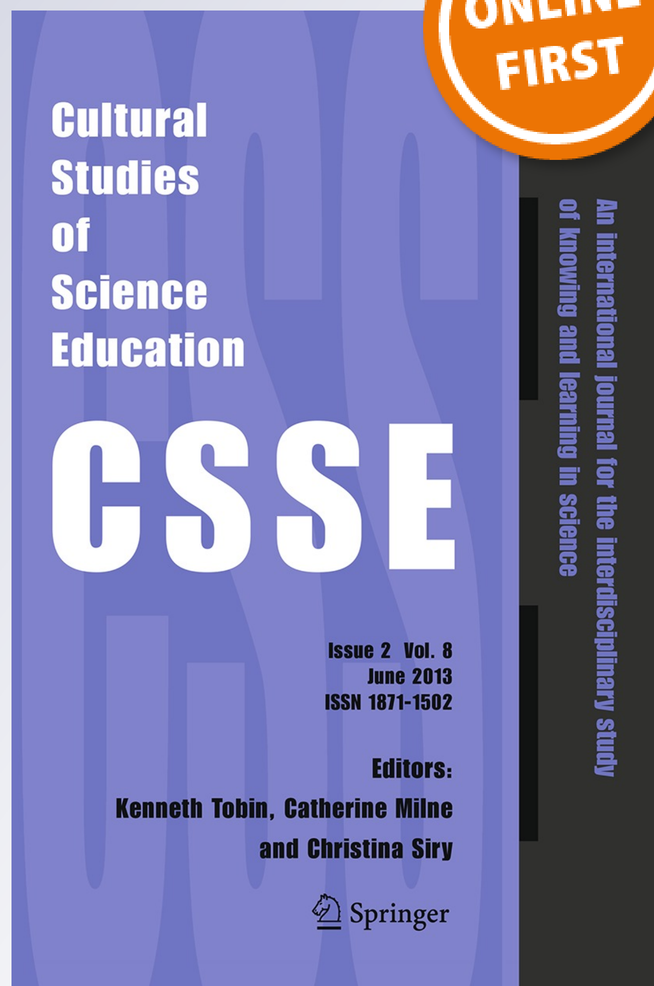

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Peace with the earth: animism and contemplative ways

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Abstract In this paper I problematize the modern everyday ontology that categorically separates the animate from the inanimate, showing that such separation has ethical implications that are environmentally devastating. I propose a turn to an animistic ontology and epistemology. Acknowledging the challenge of such turn, I suggest contemplative practices as a way to aid this turn. I engage a variety of literature and resources from Daoism, Buddhism, Appelbaum's work, neuroscientific findings to support my exploration of the connection between animistic perception and contemplative ways.

Keywords Animistic ontology · Managing percipient energy · Contemplative consciousness · Buddhist worldview of interdependence and interpenetration · Embodied perception through recharging the nervous system

The universe is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects.
Thomas Berry (1914—2009)

概述 (Chinese Executive Summary)

今天西方的,而且逐渐扩展到全世界的本体论是二元论,其特征是二分化,如身体-思维、人-自然、生命-非生命, 以及主体-客体。这样的笛卡尔主义世界观所认定的是从类别和本质上把思维和物质分离开来。而且, 这样的世界观带有价值偏向, 即认为思维高于物质。因此, 思想的统治物质的; 所以, 人类统治非人类。

M. Mueller and D. Greenwood, Editors for Special Issue on Ecological Mindfulness and Cross-Hybrid Learning.

H. Bai (✉)
Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, BC, Canada
e-mail: hbai@sfu.ca

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打着现代化和西化的旗号,这种本体论在全世界广泛地传播开来， 人类不断地剥削、破坏非人类以及其他在思维能力和装备上稍逊的人群。这种世界观在道德应用上有着深远的破坏性, 不仅在人类社会, 而且在非人类的范畴。
过去几个世纪以来, 二元论在全球上演,作为对其破坏性道德后果的回应, 本人以及人数不断增加的理论研究者和活动人士提议本体论和认识论向万物有生的观念转变。万物有生的世界观基于对现实世界的一切都是互相联系和互相渗透的理解。这个世界原本没有被分成两个部分: 生命和非生命。从万物有生世界观的视角看, 笛卡尔主义世界观里所有的二元论都没什么意义。
本人对于本体论转变的兴趣不仅仅在理论上。把理论应用于实践就是教育的工作。受冥想传统的道教、佛教、大卫阿培保 (David Appelbaum) 的哲学思想以及当代神经科学的发现的启发和引导, 我本人亲身实践了万物有生的本体论, 培养了万物有生的感受能力。

我进行这项工作的目的在于寻找爱和医治的知识， 由此使哲学回归西方之哲学为"爱智慧"的根本, 回归东方之使人怜悯、爱、和平的觉悟的本源。基于本人在感知意识下/内所进行的实验,我肯定, 我们有可能以一种不同的方式, 即一种不同于二元论制约下形成的本体论，来"制造"我们的感知。 我主张万物有生作为一种可能的新的意识来抵抗到目前为止人类破坏性的存在, 并与地球重归和平。

Autobiographical preamble

I grew up in Korea, in a family whose worldview was animistic and shamanistic, but that out of a survival necessity from being a colonized country also had a serious commitment to modernization and westernization for their promise of a materially better life through progressive education. My parents, especially my mother, did everything they could to provide me with a highly competitive and elite modern schooling that both subtly and not so subtly discouraged me from my early childhood influences of animistic ways of seeing and being. Gradually, I came to see my earlier ways to be "superstitious," and reject them. I became conditioned to see that superstition and the educated mind did not mix.

> When I was a little child, my grandmother used to instruct me to always first offer morsels of food and sips of drink to Nature/spirit before I ate my food, if I was out in nature. This same instruction was given also on the days of ancestor commemoration and on seasonal festivity days when my family carried out elaborate ceremonies involving invocation of the ancestor spirits and offering specially prepared food and drinks. In following my grandmother's instructions, I had the sense that it was important to share my food with Nature: the myriad of beings, both visible and invisible. There was also the sense that there were more invisible beings than the visible ones. I don't know exactly when I stopped doing this offering ritual, but I know that I was not doing this when I was attending my junior high school.

Among many habits of educated mind within the modernist worldview, I acquired the habit of seeing certain parts of the world as not alive or having no consciousness (Stucky 2010). An essential part of this knowledge acquisition is learning the everyday language that expresses the binary categories, such as what is sentient and what is not sentient, or what is animate and what is inanimate. To confuse these categories in one's thinking and speech would be considered strange, if not *crazy,* as the vernacular expression goes.

> My father was a Traditional Oriental Medicine doctor. Although he was more modernized in his habits of mind than my mother, and respected modern western

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> science and technology, he too harboured, deep down in his psyche, an animistic worldview. I sensed this when he would handle and care for wild gingseng (人蔘) roots that he kept in a specially prepared wooden box lined with lots of fresh moss. He showed me how the roots resembled a human body, told me how they were found by mountain folks who had to have special dreams before the search that instructed them where to locate them. One time, one of these ginseng roots began to show signs of unexpected deterioration. In the way that my father showed distress and repentance, I got the sense that, to him, these roots were not simply or merely expensive merchandise. He was very apologetic to the ginseng (or probably to the spirit of those ginseng roots)! Was my father 'crazy'? Not if we understood his animistic worldview…

Worldviews have everything to do with the way we come to know, see, relate to, and act on the world (Kearney 1984). In other words, ontology (how we understand the world to be) and ethics (how we relate to and act on the world) are intimately related: they go hand-in-hand. T he modern Western worldview is an ontology of what Bruno Latour (1993) calls the "double separation": ''between humans and nonhumans on the one hand and between what happens 'above' and what happens 'below' on the other (p. 13). All forms of dualism have ensued from this double separation: "body-spirit, human-nature, and subject-object dualisms" (Stucky 2010). To be educated into the modern Western worldviews, discourses, and practices means to *embody* these dualisms and to live out their ethical consequences. If the earth is (seen as) mostly made up of insentient matter, and the biosphere is (seen as) made up mostly of mindless plants and 'dumb' animals, then it would follow that human beings with their self-concept of uniqueness and superiority would be inclined to dominate and exploit the earth and its inhabitants (Bai 2001, 2012). My ontological and epistemological quest for animate perception (Bai 2009) is a personal quest for an ethic that will enable us to live in communion, respect, peace and harmony with the earth.

Re/turning to animism

Part of the conventional or 'normal' thinking today is that the world is categorically divided into two types of being: the sentient (animate, living) and the insentient (inanimate, non-living). Animals and plants are recognized by most people, perhaps grudgingly in many contexts, to be living, although not intelligent or even conscious. Rocks, sand, water, air, fire, land, and the like are conventionally known as inanimate: not alive. That should have been astonishing news to our pre-modern animist ancestors!

René Descartes (1596–1650), one of the main architects of modernity, gave a decisive articulation to this separation between what is animate and what is not animate. He posited that there were two kinds of *substance* in the universe: Mind and Matter. He defined 'substance' as that which *exists* independently (Descartes 1644/1985). Hence Mind is one substance and Matter is another, and the two are exclusive of each other, hence totally separate. This articulation is no mere intellectual exercise. I believe that this mind-matter binary worldview has had a profound implication and devastating consequences. The late Thomas Berry (1996) expressed the same understanding in the most stunningly vivid description I know of on this subject:

> In [a] single stroke [Descartes], in a sense, killed the planet and all its living creatures with the exception of the human. The thousandfold voices of the natural world

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> suddenly became inaudible to the human. The mountains and rivers and the wind and the sea all became mute insofar as humans were concerned. The forests were no longer the abode of an infinite number of spirit presences but were simply so many board feet of lumber to be "harvested" as objects to be used for human benefit. Animals were no longer the companions of humans in the single community of existence. They were denied not only their inherent dignity, but even their rights to habitat (p. 410).

Berry's above words, which I first read two decades ago, still haunt me to this day. We have—I have—lost the faculty of hearing and communicating with myriads of fellow beings on this planet. And the ethical consequence is egregious: they do not matter to us as existential beings worthy of our ethical considerations. If they matter to us at all, it is for their utility and commercial values. Such is the nature of conventional or ordinary thinking. So enormously powerful is conventional thinking that to depart from it would immediately put one's sanity into question. However, it is the task of philosophy to question the conventional thinking, and expose its nature: that it is not written in stone. Also, it is the task of philosophy to show that ways of thinking and seeing have ethical implications and consequences. Therefore we must bear the responsibility of how we think and perceive.

Many thinkers, such as Gregory Bateson (1979), Alfred North Whitehead (2006) and R. D. Laing (1982), have pointed out, as part of the history of human thought, how our experience came to be divided into two parts: the knowing subject, and the objectified world "out there" that is to be known. This bifurcation of experience into subject and object, or mind and matter, or human and nature, has played untold havoc in the way humans have related to the world as a "collection of objects" (Berry 2010). Thinking along the lines of Whitehead, Bateson, Laing, Berry, and others, I have been attempting to undo this bifurcation, not just theoretically, but experimentally, in the laboratory of my experience and consciousness. Animism as a *living and lived philosophy* has been what I have been working on in my "lab."

The fundamental understanding of animism is that the whole universe is alive, which includes rocks, air, water, and so on, and this aliveness is not just a belief statement, but a felt and lived reality. In this animistic reality, the tenet of ecology that the earth is one consanguineous unit of interdependent relationships (Metzner 1999) is an experience as palpable as touching a flower. In a more refined observation, an animist would experience all parts of reality to be interconnected and to *interpenetrate* each other, arising together, co-emergently, moment by moment (Bai and Romanycia 2013). Indeed, this latter understanding of interdependence and interpenetration (in Pali, *paṭicca samuppāda,* meaning, *dependent co-arising*) is key to the Buddhist cosmology (Macy 1991). Whether in ecology or in Buddhism, if we embrace an animist frame of mind, the notion that we can segment and isolate each part from the whole, and see it as separate and independently existing, as in Descartes' notion of 'substance', would not make sense. It would make little sense to divide the world into the binary categories of *animate* and *inanimate*. It is, again, important to note that this repudiation is not derived from an intellectual understanding only. More profoundly, this understanding can arrive experientially:

> (From Heesoon's notes, summer 2012) I am taking my early morning walk on the rocky beach near the cabin on Hornby Island where we are staying. My family has been coming to this particular spot just about every summer for the past several years. For miles all around, I am completely surrounded by water, rocks, sand, and trees behind me. I, and one small figure far in the distance, walking slowly over

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> rocks, are the only two human beings in this landscape. I pause my walk and stand still. I slowly breathe in the whole landscape: all the sounds, sights, movements, vibrations, and smells pervading the place enter and merge into me. How long have I been standing still? I don't know. I feel saturated with water, rocks, sand, trees … I am struck by just how alive the whole place is. Amazing. Everything as a whole! I try a thought experiment: Can I pick out what is animate and what is not animate in this totality of aliveness? According to the received wisdom of today, water is not supposed to be alive. Nor are the rocks, sand, clouds, air … What then is left here that is alive? Proportionately, very little! I am now struck by the nonsense that this experiment is producing for me. My senses and my whole being reject the idea that this place, save creeping, crawling, flying creatures and plants, is composed of inanimate beings. This place comes as one living unity, and is part of a larger unity called the earth, and the whole as a whole is alive. Experientially I am unable to separate out what is animate from what is inanimate from this landscape/seascape. This morning, even the human figure walking slowly over the rocks blends in with the rocks, and has become part of the phenomenon of those rocks.

In *Mountains and Waters Sutra*, Dogen Zenji (1200–1253), founder of the Soto sect of Japanese Zen, writes: "Because mountains and waters have been active since before the Empty Eon, they are alive at this moment" (Kaza and Kraft 2000, p. 65). He goes on to say: "People outside the mountain do not realize or understand the mountains walking. Those without eyes to see mountains cannot realize, understand, see, or hear this as it is" (p. 66). Further down in this sutra, Dogen states: "Green mountains are neither sentient nor insentient. You are neither sentient nor insentient. At this moment, you cannot doubt the green mountains walking" (p. 66).

The line, "You are neither sentient nor insentient," cuts through the conventional binary category of mind-and-matter, and destroys at one fell swoop our entrenched dualistic ways of thinking. That is, if we were to overcome the dualistic habit of mind and stop thinking and seeing in terms of what is animate and what is inanimate, we would be able to see mountains and all other phenomenal beings as alive and "flowing" (p. 67). This is a great promise. What does it take to overcome the dualistic consciousness?

Dogen Zenji was very much aware that overcoming the habit of dualistic thinking is very challenging. This modality of thinking has assailed humanity throughout the ages and across many cultures. Modernity has been sweeping across the entire globe with the rise of modern rationalism and empirical science, and concomitant industrialization has further deepened and entrenched this dualistic worldview. Today, we call such habits of mind the "ordinary consciousness." Dogen Zenji is clear that these habits of mind are limiting as in "looking through a bamboo tube at a corner of the sky" (p. 67). How loudly and heatedly we debate and fight over which bamboo tube's end of view is right or wrong, true or false! We expend so much of our energy fighting over views from the ends of our bamboo tubes. *Could it be that we have no energy to spare to invest in animistic perceptions of the world?*

In the organism's economy of energy and attention in which we are engaged everyday, it seems to be the case that whatever energy is lost in doing one thing is not available to another. Could it be that energy lost in fighting over the views 'out of the bamboo tubes' is energy robbed out of our animal self? Could it be that the more we thus lose our vital energy through intellection, the less likely we are to see the world as fully alive? If so, the way to overcome dualistic thinking would not be through logic, reasoning and argumentation. It will be through stopping the continual draining and dissipation of vital energy, and recharging it.

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> (from Heesoon's Journal, summer 2012) Many a time I noticed the change in my colour perception of the world after a meditation or even just a short but deep rest. Very intriguing. The first time I really noticed this was a couple decades ago already. I was doing a noon hour sitting with the UBC Zen society members in the Tea Gallery of the Asian Centre building. This Gallery looks over the little pond that surrounds the Asian Centre building, and faces the Nitobe Garden. We sat for 25 minutes (zazen), did a 10-minute kinhen (walking meditation), and sat again for another 25-minute zazen. As I came out of the second sitting, my eyes rested upon the cedar branches above my eye-level and in front of the all-glass walls of gallery that I was facing on my cushion. What struck me and amazed me was that my visual perception of the tree branches and needles was unusually vivid. The colour green was astonishingly fresh and glowing. I shifted my gaze to my fellow meditators, and I felt an exquisite sense of existential appreciation for their being. This kind of visual 'vivification' has been a regular experience associated with not only sitting practices but also with more informal quick 'recharging' rests whereby I go into, what we might today call, alpha-wave states (Fehmi 2007). For another example, I had a very vivid experience of this phenomenon recently. After a neigong (a form of internal martial art) practice session, my neigong teacher who is also trained in Chinese meridian message, worked on my sore eyes, neck and shoulder. (Like many of my academic colleagues, I spend far too much time at the computer!) Only after five minutes or so of massage during which I was doing deep breathing, I opened my eyes. My eyes happened to rest on the ochre coloured dinning room wall. I was a little shocked to see that the colour was extremely vivid—a nearly florescent, and richer, deeper shade of ochre. After a while, when I went back to looking at the wall, I noticed that the vividness began to fade, and the colour came back to its usual paler and flatter hue. What is going on?

My experience above seems to confirm the works that I have been studying: the Daoist scholarship and David Appelbaum's work. In the next section, I make my foray into these works. As a preamble, I will say that there is a vital connection between recharging of my nervous system, or to speak it in the Daoist language of *qi* (biogenic energy) philosophy, to nourish the self and replenish the life energy (Kohn 2005), and seeing the world in greater animation. The world comes alive when my whole being is more fully nourished and replenished.

Pointing in the direction of the contemplative ways

Over the past decade, I have been tracking down clues as to what the connection is between certain contemplative practices, such as meditation, and animated perceptions of the world, and just what happens, physiologically and otherwise, in this connection. I shall share my findings so far. Three sources of clues here: Appelbaum's work, Daoism and Buddhism, and contemporary neuroscientific findings. I have to say, David Appelbaum's *The Stop* (1995) is one of the most intriguing philosophical works I have encountered. Forgoing the introduction to or synopsis of this work, I focus on some of the key concepts that are relevant to my research here. *The stop* is an event, a movement in one's experience, wherein the automaticity of thought comes to a halt and gives away to an embodied awareness. Appelbaum states: "The stop stops a continuous, automatic leave-taking of percipient energy. Such energy is automatically and without effort drawn into a conceptual

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frame that moment-by-moment constructs the world" (1995, p. 77). This constant mental construction of the world is, according to Appelbaum, what drains and robs the organic energy from the body—the source of organic energy. What is meant by the mental construction of the world? Simply put, it is the constant discursive activity that goes on 'in the head' that we all are very familiar with: the chatters, the noise, and the images that attempt to *represent* reality. In this media age of information and virtual manipulation of reality, the level of discursive activity is very high indeed and still rising.

Where else have I been hearing about the mind's constant chatter and busywork? In the Buddhist cultural context, this kind of mental activity is known as the "monkey mind" (Suzuki 1970, p. 101). The monkey mind phenomenon, then, is not a 21st century problem, although it certainly seems to have intensified in recent centuries. It must be as old as the human civilization itself. The historical Buddha was teaching 2,500 years ago how to tame the monkey mind. We could even say, perhaps justifiably, that the forward March of human civilization is the byproduct of the brilliant and hyperactive monkey mind. But there seems to be a very hefty price we are paying for this genius behind civilization: disembodiment or de-animation.

Iain McGilchrist (2009), in *The master and his emissary: The divided brain and the making of the western world*, a landmark publication based on his 20 years of research, makes the case that the human civilization is increasingly dominated by the left-brain activities, and the result is the predominance of the discursive, abstract, explicit, precise, fragmenting, narrow, static, mechanical, and lacking empathic ways of being. The left-brain dominated ways of being, McGilchrist argues, give rise to disembodiment, or what I have been calling here *de-animation*. To wit, the world experienced through the left-brain is 'lifeless': cold, heartless, isolated, discrete, abstract, discursive, unchanging, and de-contextualized. The world experienced through the right brain, however, is a very different reality: a living, breathing, constantly changing, implicit, interconnected, interpenetrating, unknown, intuitive, sensuous, embodied, and empathic world. Doesn't the right brain based world *sound, look*, and *feel* like the kind of world that many environmental educators, ecophilosophers, social activists, artists, and animists—in short, all lovers of the earth—are saying that we need to create?

Of course, McGilchrist is not proposing that we somehow disable the left hemisphere, if such were possible. Jill Bolte Taylor's accident, a massive stroke in her left hemisphere of her brain, gave her an incredible and nearly fatal opportunity to experience the world through the right hemisphere only (Taylor 2006). This incident is not something to be simulated and duplicated. (The irony of the situation is that Jill Bolte Taylor is a brain scientist—a neuroanatomist.) However, the experience led her to share her acquired wisdom with others, namely, that we correct the imbalance created by the domination of the left-brain based over the right brain based activities and ways of being. Such re-balancing is not a matter of surgical or biochemical intervention. Rather, taking into account neuroplasticity (Doidge 2007), this rebalancing is a matter of determinedly engaging in more of right brain ways of being and doing things. However, I must be careful in not giving a misleading impression here. I am not suggesting categorically that certain activities are intrinsically right brained and certain others are intrinsically left-brained. My sense is that it is not the question of *what* we do, but *how* we do it, that is critical to our understanding and practice of embodiment and animation. For example, I could turn a most tranquil and nourishing experience of tea drinking—a potentially right brained activity—into a very tense and emotionally stressful left-brain activity, if I don't have my heart in the right place, and my very presence is disturbing.

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Perhaps not coincidentally, the qualities of experience that the right brain is mainly responsible for, as McGilchrist attested, are well known to people who practice meditation and other contemplative arts. There have been very rich and diverse traditions of contemplative practices in many cultures throughout human history, east and west, south and north, many or most of which seem to support what are now considered to be ''right brain'' activities. It makes sense to me that in a civilization seemingly founded upon the brilliant hyperactivity of the left-brain, there should have emerged a counterculture of contemplative ways of being, however marginalized they have been throughout history, to provide a precious antidote and counterbalance. And it makes sense that in today's out-of-balance, "runaway world" (Giddens 2003), meditation, yoga, tai chi, along with all manners of relaxation-inducing therapies, should proliferate. Again, the fact that one is engaged in any of these activities does not mean, let alone guarantee, that one is achieving balance. I have seen many people, myself included at times, who add on one more activity of meditation or yoga, or whatever is supposed to be relaxing, to one's air-tight schedule and breathless pace, thereby mostly negating the purpose and effect of these contemplative arts. What McGilchrist and other brain scientists are revealing to us are strong clues as to how we would need to change our priorities and commitment, if we are to live a more animated, bonded and belonging, loving, happier, and fulfilled lives: changes in what we value and find meaningful, and how we should spend our time and energy differently.

My own contemplative practice base has been in the Buddhist traditions, especially in Zen. However, in more recent years, I have also taken a keen interest in Daoist philosophy and practice with its focus on 'nourishing' the person in embodied ways, seeing its close resonance with Appelbaum's understanding of the *stop* phenomenon. Given my quest for 'animated perception', the Daoist practice that aims at the perceiver experiencing the whole world/earth as vibrating and pulsing with *qi (*氣: vital energy, organic energy, or life force) promises to be very helpful to my research.

"Turning the light around"

The Daoist texts, and classical Chinese philosophy texts in general, are not easy to comprehend to us who have been educated into the mode of thinking that are abstract, categorical, analytic, and essentialistic or decontextualized (Hall and Ames 1998). Consider, for example, the following passages from *The secret of the golden flower* (Cleary 1991), a classic lay manual for Daoist and Buddhist practitioners for achieving mental freedom and clarity, that I have been trying to work with in my personal practice: "When the light is turned around, the energies of heaven and earth, yin and yang, all congeal" (p. 17). Also: "Nothing is worse than to have a running leakage of spirit and consciousness; this is conformity, so the way of the golden flower is accomplished completely through the method of reversal" (p. 18). Again: "The turning around is stopping, the light is seeing. Stopping without seeing is called turning around without light; seeing without stopping is called having light without turning it around" (p. 21). These would have remained more or less unintelligible passages for me if I hadn't previously encountered Appelbaum's *The stop,* and made sense of the movement and management of percipient energy. Believing, as I do, that these kinds of neurophysiological experiences are usually transcultural, even if ways to get to the experience are culturally variant in terms of language expressions and practices, I applied my understanding of percipient energy to the Daoist concept of 'turning the light around', and made sense of the latter. What both *The stop* and *The secret of the golden flower* are pointing to is the possibility of *doing* our perception differently than the

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usual way we go about perceiving the world. (More on *the usual way*, later.) And this different way holds key, I believe, to an embodied and animated perception of the world. This different way is the contemplative way.

Appelbaum (1995) states: "The stop neutralizes a tendency of percipient energy to animate intellectual categories through which events are viewed" (p. 80). In the next paragraph, he further states: "Once percipient energy does not *go out*, it is more available to events within the organism" (p. 80). So the first step to doing perception differently is to create the condition of the *stop*, and this is where the meditation practice comes in. Meditation is foremost an activity of quieting the constant "mind chatter" or "monkey mind" that, according to Appelbaum, continuously drains the body of organic energy. My own experience validates this. While some thoughts and emotions are more stressful and energy-draining than others, such as worries about one's children, financial security, or relational turmoil, all thoughts, by their constancy and sheer volume, are energy depleting. When consumed by mental activities, we feel depleted, listless, and 'spent'. This phenomenon is what I mean by *de-animation* and *disembodiment*. Our typical response to this situation of depletion is reaching for the nearest stimulants of one form or another. More coffee, please! But the body drained of organic energy cannot be restored by stimulants, however powerful and effective their short-term benefits may be. Stopping the constant and subtle source of energy depletion and recharging the nervous system is what we need to do. This practice, when seriously undertaken, would radically change the manner of our *presence* on this planet. This, I would suggest, is the promise of animism for environmental education.

The cardinal practice in 'turning the light around' or Appelbaum's *Stop* or any of the contemplative practices is, then, to calm and quiet the mind so that one's attention is not continually grabbed and occupied by mental objects, be they thoughts, feelings, sensations, and images. *The Secret of the Golden Flower* instructs: "… see to it somehow that you don't have much on your mind, so that you can be *alive and free*. Make your mood gentle and your mind comfortable, then enter into quietude" (p. 31; italics, mine). Further: "Even as you let go of all objects, you are alert and self-possessed" (p. 32). And here is an important warning for us who are in quest of animated perception: "Even in the midst of alert awareness, you are relaxed and natural. … If you tend to fall into a *deadness* whenever you go into meditation and are relatively lacking in growth and creative energy, this means you have fallen into a shadow world. Your mood is cold, your breath sinking, and you have a number of other chilling and withering experiences" (p. 32, emphasis added). I have encountered many meditators who seem to achieve quietude of some kind but show signs of cold and depressed mood, lacking vital and creative energy.

The Secret of the Golden Flower is explicit, as with many other meditation instructions, about the connection between concentration or attention and energy. The way to gather energy is through concentration of mind: "When the mind enters, the energy enters; with warm energy, the birth [of altered perception] takes place" (p. 25). And, again in accord with many meditation instructions, the way to control the mind is through breath: "If the mind tends to run off, then unify it by means of the breath; if the breath tends to become rough, then use the mind to make it fine" (p. 26). In other words, by "tuning the breath" (p. 24), we can regulate the flow of percipient energy. The flow we aim for is the reversal of the ordinary, and is achieved by preventing the leakage and dissipation of organic energy out of the body, thereby recharging and re-animating the latter.

How do we know when we have "turned the light around" and achieved animated perception? No external instrument of detection and calibration exists, and for a good

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reason. We will know it subjectively when we see, feel, taste, and hear the world differently: more alive, vivid, curious, awe-inspired, present, sacred, meaningful, and so on.

> (From Heesoon's Journal, Spring 2012) I have been introducing Frederick Frank's Zen Drawing to my graduate classes in here and there for the past many years. Some students quickly warm up to this form of contemplative activity. One of the students, who was both an artist and an environmental educator, decided to do a Zen Drawing with plants as part of her presentation. She brought small potted plants, one for each person, for our seminar group. Mine was an ivy plant. As minutes ticked away in my concentrated and absorbed state, my eyes only following the every detail of the plant, never looking at my drawing hand or what I have drawn, something quite extraordinary was taking place in my perception. The ivy plant "came alive," literally before my very eyes. Of course, I knew, intellectually, that the plant was alive, was a living being. But this is not the same thing as what I experienced at that moment. I'm searching for words to adequately describe the extraordinary experience I had. The ivy was glowing with an extraordinary degree of vividness in appearance … and for a moment, I thought I saw some movement, too, as if wriggling or vibrating. What was happening? For my part, I was not under any chemical influences, and I was not prone to mental instability. Whatever the biochemical and neurological explanations there might be for how I ended up with this experience, I shall not use them to 'explain away' my experience. What is important here is that I had this experience through accessing the state of concentration and absorption—a pause in my 'ordinary consciousness', and that this experience allowed me to see the plant in a more animated light. This meeting with the plant—was there not the sacred sense of the Buberian I-Thou encounter here?–was an extraordinarily touching experience for me.

I understand that we have two different autonomic nervous systems: sympathetic and parasympathetic. I also understand that the contemporary ethos, lifestyle and activities tend to overtax the sympathetic nervous system that engages us in the fight-or-flight stress response (Fehmi 2007). For sure, we are designed to have our sympathetic nervous system taxed, but only now and then, once in a while, as when we find ourselves being chased by a tiger and the like. Now, we are, or we think we are, chased constantly and relentlessly by all manners of virtual tigers. The growing appeal of meditation in our culture bespeaks the level of stress and anxiety in the general population. Unmitigated and accumulating stress, perhaps literally, burns out the nervous system, and the person is left consumed and depleted, physically, emotionally, and otherwise.

Meditation is a very challenging activity for most of us. We are so deeply conditioned, as it were, to run on the *monkey mind* program, that it is very difficult for us to switch off the program. Anyone who, as a beginner, has attempted to do sitting meditation would readily attest to it. It is indeed bewildering and discouraging to come out of a 20-minute sitting, feeling exhausted and stressed out from being chased around and buffeted by unending streams of thoughts and feelings. One did *nothing* but sitting still, right?

Essentially, the goal of meditation is achieving a state of consciousness that is tranquil (in contrast to: noisy, anxious, fractious, frenetic, carving and grasping), spacious (in contrast to: constricted, narrow, tight, stuck, panicky), and full of warm and radiant aliveness (in contrast to: unfeeling, cold and grey, flat, deadened). But to compound the difficulty of this already challenging practice, if one tries hard to 'achieve' these states, that very trying hard will compromise the effort and would not bring about the desired results. Tranquility, calm and balanced presence are precious achievements, indeed.

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Animistic perceptions of the world

Raimundo Panikkar (Raimon Panikkar), intercultural philosopher, Catholic priest, Hindu scholar, and Buddhist practitioner, whose re-vision of philosophy's mission influenced me greatly in my own re-direction as a philosopher of education, states: "… Philosophy has to take a stance and offer avenues of action for a more just and brighter "Human Future" (1992, p. 237). One of these action points Panikkar proposes is recovering animism. He states: "… I understand by animism the experience of life as coextensive with nature. Every natural being is a living cell part of a whole, and mirroring the whole at the same time. Not only animals and plants are alive, also mountains and rocks, matter as well as spirit" (p. 243). And he adds: "Animism stands, further, for the relatedness of all reality according to one principle which is itself all relatedness and not univocal. To say all is alive … affirms the moving, free, precisely living relationship of every brim of Reality" (p. 243). This, to me, expresses the deepest spirit and clearest understanding of animism.

Theodore Rozak, who is credited with coining the term "ecopsychology" (2001), proposes, from a viewpoint of psychologist, that "[e]copsychology seeks to recover the child's innately *animistic quality of experience* in functionally 'sane' adults" (p. 320, emphasis added). In Rozak's words, I recognize my own journey of disenchantment and gradual loss of touch with the animistic sensibility that was core to my primary humanity as experienced in my early childhood.

It also makes total sense now why reading Maurice Berman's *Re-enchantment of the world* (1981) in the 80s, when I was first trying to figure out my cultural dislocation as an immigrant in Canada, was absolutely eye-opening. Reading it, I began to understand, more articulately, the historicity of my own life: how my own experience of losing touch with animistic sensibility is part and parcel of the modernism through westernization that was strived to be accomplished in Korea over a single generation. My own family history illustrates this, and I embody the cultural dislocation in accomplishing the transition from animism to modernism over a single generation.

However, lest my readers think that my advocacy for animistic quality of experience (Rozak 2001) is driven simply by personal nostalgia, I would like to address this possible misimpression with a quote from Stephen Jay Gould (as cited in Orr 2004):

> We cannot win this battle to save species and environments without forging an emotional bond between ourselves and nature as well—for we will not fight to save what we do not love (p. 43).

This emotional bond is what animistic sensibility is most strongly about, and hence it is my contention that cultivating this sensibility is an urgent task in environmental education. I am aware that my view here may not be mainstream in the environmental education discourse. David Orr (2004) reminds us:

> Mainstream scholars who trouble themselves to think about disappearing species and shattered environments appear to believe that cold rationality, fearless objectivity, and a bit of technology will get the job done. If that were the whole of it, however, the job would have been done decades ago. Except as pejoratives, words such as *emotional bonds*, *fight*, and *love* are not typical of polite discourse in the sciences or social sciences. (p. 43).

Indeed, "fight" is not as foreign as "love" in the academic or intellectual discourse. Love is altogether a difficult task. Panikkar (1992) states,

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> [I]t is the task of philosophy to know, to love, and to heal—all in one. It knows in as much as it loves and heals. It loves, only if it truly knows and heals. It heals if it loves and knows (p. 237).

We have been culturally inducted and educated into hurtful and hurting knowledge, not love's knowledge (Bai and Romanycia 2013). Any knowledge that one acquires "without learning to form respectful relationships with the object of knowledge" (Bai and Romanycia 2013) is potentially hurtful and hurting knowledge. And how can we form respectful, and I would add, *loving*, relationships with our objects of knowledge when we see them as inanimate, inert, disposable 'things'? We cannot. David Abram (1996) is incisive in his analysis:

> To define another being as an inert or passive object is to deny its ability to actively engage us and provoke our senses; *we thus block our perceptual reciprocity with that being*. By linguistically defining the surrounding world as a determinate set of objects, we cut our conscious, speaking selves off from the spontaneous life of our sensing bodies (p. 56).

To (re)turn to animism is to see the world and all its inhabitants—including mountains, rocks, rivers, wind, water … —as 'alive', preciously alive, and deserving of our respect, love, and compassion. But, as I labored to show in this paper, becoming an animist and learning to see the whole and every part of the world as alive goes against the grain of all our conditioning that has produced the everyday consciousness of modern sensibility. I endeavoured to show in this article that contemplative ways and practices would be a way to turn us towards animism.

The final words in this paper go to Raimundo Panikkar (1992):

> No ecological renewal of the world will ever succeed until and unless we consider the Earth as our own Body and the body as our own Self (p. 244).

Again:

> We kill, and extract from the very womb of matter, the extra energy units which our greed needs because we have disrupted the rhythms of Nature. We do not only torture animals—and Men, if we include politics. We torture Matter as well (p. 244).

Finally:

> Peace with the Earth excludes victory over the Earth, submission or exploitation of the Earth to *our* exclusive needs. It requires collaboration, synergy, a new awareness (p. 244).

Animism is this new awareness.

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Author Biography

Heesoon Bai is a Professor in Philosophy of Education at Simon Fraser University, Canada. A past recipient of the Simon Fraser University Excellence in Teaching Award, the Roger Hamill's Environmental Educator's Award, and the Canadian Society for the Studies in Education Mentorship Award, Professor Bai researches and writes in the intersections of ethics, ecological worldviews, contemplative ways, Asian philosophies, and existential psychotherapy. Her co-edited and co-authored books include: *Fields of Green: Restorying Culture, Environment, Education (2009)*; *Speaking of Teaching: Inclinations, Inspirations, and Innerworkings (2012)*; and *Contemplative Learning and Inquiry Across Disciplines* (forthcoming). Her most recent publications are in *Journal of Moral Education* and *International Handbook on Research in Environmental Education*.