

Spring 2015

# Chinese eco-films and their pastoral myth

Runlei Zhai  
*Purdue University*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/open\\_access\\_dissertations](https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/open_access_dissertations)



Part of the [Comparative Literature Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Zhai, Runlei, "Chinese eco-films and their pastoral myth" (2015). *Open Access Dissertations*. 605.  
[https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/open\\_access\\_dissertations/605](https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/open_access_dissertations/605)

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact [epubs@purdue.edu](mailto:epubs@purdue.edu) for additional information.

**PURDUE UNIVERSITY  
GRADUATE SCHOOL  
Thesis/Dissertation Acceptance**

This is to certify that the thesis/dissertation prepared

By Runlei Zhai

Entitled

CHINESE ECO-FILMS AND THEIR PASTORAL MYTH

For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Is approved by the final examining committee:

Charles S. Ross

Chair

Daniel Hsieh

Richard D. Johnson-Sheehan

Daniel C. Morris

To the best of my knowledge and as understood by the student in the Thesis/Dissertation Agreement, Publication Delay, and Certification Disclaimer (Graduate School Form 32), this thesis/dissertation adheres to the provisions of Purdue University's "Policy of Integrity in Research" and the use of copyright material.

Approved by Major Professor(s): Charles S. Ross

Approved by: Charles S. Ross

Head of the Departmental Graduate Program

4/17/2015

Date



CHINESE ECO-FILMS AND THEIR PASTORAL MYTH

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty

of

Purdue University

by

Runlei Zhai

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

of

Doctor of Philosophy

May 2015

Purdue University

West Lafayette, Indiana

For my family

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation could not have been completed without the help of my committee members: Professor Charles S. Ross (chair), Professor Daniel Hsieh, Professor Richard D. Johnson-Sheehan, and Professor Daniel C. Morris. My sincere gratitude goes to Professor Ross, who gave me invaluable suggestions and guidance in the many years of my Ph.D. study. I have learned a great deal from his teaching and mentoring, which was always encouraging, inspiring, and thought-provoking. My gratitude also goes to Professor Hsieh, who was always patient and rigorous in my study of traditional Chinese literature. I should also thank Professor Johnson-Sheehan for his lecturing on environmental rhetoric and Professor Morris for his discussion on American films. They are all excellent role models for my future career.

My special thanks should be given to my parents, who travelled all the way from China to the U.S. to help me take care of my two babies. I also want to thank my husband for sharing the family chores, for helping me with the dissertation format, and for the encouragement and support he gave me in all these years. I am also grateful for having my two beautiful daughters in the process of writing this dissertation. Although life was busy, their happy faces brought me continuous sunshine and satisfaction. This dissertation expresses my deepest love to them all.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	vi
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
I. Important Definitions in Ecocinematic Studies .....	1
II. Literature Review of American and Chinese Ecocinemas .....	5
III. Ecocriticism as the Methodology.....	12
CHAPTER 2. AMERICAN PASTORALISM IN HOLLYWOOD	
ENVIRONMENTALIST FILMS .....	23
I. Three Conflicts in American Pastoralism .....	26
II. Simplification in Hollywood Environmentalist Films.....	33
III. Commercialization as the Ultimate Cause .....	44
CHAPTER 3. HOLLYWOOD’S INFLUENCE ON CHINESE ECOCINEMA .....	47
I. General Trend and Failed Attempts.....	49
II. Three Difficulties in Imitation.....	57
III. Nature and Chinese Pastoral Tradition.....	61
CHAPTER 4. CONSTRUCTION OF THE PASTORAL MYTH IN CHINESE ECO-	
FILMS.....	71
I. Recognition of Chinese Social and Cultural Realities.....	72

II. Establishment of the Human-Nature Connection.....	85
III. Affirmation of the Nature-Culture Unity .....	109
CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION.....	132
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	135
VITA.....	156



## ABSTRACT

Zhai, Runlei. Ph.D., Purdue University, May 2015. Chinese Eco-Films and their Pastoral Myth. Major Professor: Charles S. Ross.

This dissertation is a cross-cultural study of Chinese ecocinema after 1978. It begins by introducing the Hollywood practice in simplifying the conflicts between garden and machine, anthropocentrism and ecocentrism, and Tityrus and Meliboeus in American pastoralism, then explains why such simplification does not work on Chinese screen, and finally studies how Chinese filmmakers reconstruct their pastoral myth in three major steps: first, to recognize Chinese social and cultural realities; second, to establish the human-nature connection, and third, to affirm the nature-culture unity. The conclusion is that Chinese eco-cinema exists in a hybrid form. While Hollywood influences Chinese eco-cinema in terms of production, promotion, and distribution, it manages to develop its own voice by reconstructing a pastoral myth that Chinese audiences could understand and appreciate. It differs from the Hollywood version by creating some tragic, everyday heroes who may seem powerless in protecting or retrieving the pastoral garden, and yet maintain a strong life force not to give up their pastoral faith which has its root in both the human-nature connection and the nature-culture unity.

## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

This dissertation focuses on Chinese ecocinema, a new research field in both film studies and ecocriticism. In the past several decades, critics have been focusing their attention on American ecocinema, neglecting an active growth of eco-films in other countries and areas. Although Sheldon Lu published the first book-length study of Chinese ecocinema in 2009, the book does not touch upon the inter-relationship between American and Chinese ecocinemas. Yet, American culture is an important element in current Chinese cinema. A deep American pastoral tradition can be discerned in American eco-films that directly influence contemporary Chinese screen. The differences are important too for China has its own pastoral tradition. This dissertation seeks to sort out the elements of Chinese and American culture to understand the resulting hybridity and cultural pluralism that characterizes contemporary eco-screen.

### I. Important Definitions in Ecocinematic Studies

The first step in ecocinematic studies is to define related terms such as ecocinema, eco-films, environmentalist films, film vert, green screen, etc. When Roger C. Anderson coined the word “ecocinema” in 1966, he meant to create the motion pictures that could be shown in certain special theaters “in which all the appropriate sights, sounds, and

smells would be brought together, refined, and improved to produce an art form vastly superior to nature itself” (452). Naming those motion pictures “ecocinema,” Anderson believed that his proposal could quiet the public fears of nature being destroyed by creating “something as genuine as, or even more genuine than, nature itself” (452). The proposal was obviously too idealistic to attract serious critical attention. The word ecocinema, as a result, has been largely forgotten until Scott MacDonald published his article “Toward an Eco-Cinema” more than thirty years later.

Using ecocinema as the key word, MacDonald introduces and analyzes five films and videos produced between 1996 and 2001 to exemplify the possibility of making and appreciating an ecocinema. The five films and videos are respectively Diane Kitchen’s *Wot the Ancient Sod* (2001), Andrej Zdravic’s *Riverglass: A River Ballet in Four Seasons* (1997), Peter Hutton’s *Study of a River* (1996) and *Time and Tide* (2000), and James Benning’s *Sogobi* (2001). All of them are noncommercial films with few plots related to human activities. MacDonald believes that although such films lack traditional elements like dramatic plots and captivating conversations, they offer an opportunity to be away from the hustle and bustle of contemporary life and an experience of getting immersed in nature. MacDonald emphasizes that the fundamental job of an ecocinema is to retrain perception “as a way of offering an alternative to conventional media spectatorship” or “as a way of providing something like a *garden*—an ‘Edenic’ respite from conventional consumerism—within the *machine* of modern life, as modern life is embodied by the apparatus of media” (109). Inspired and encouraged by MacDonald, more and more critics and filmmakers turn their eyes toward this garden in the machine and ecocinema has gradually gained currency in nature-related film studies.

In 2009, Sheldon H. Lu and Jiayan Mi published the book, *Chinese Ecocinema: In the Age of Environmental Challenge*, expanding the definition of ecocinema by including Chinese films, especially Chinese feature films, in ecocinematic discussions. “In the simplest terms, ecocinema is cinema with an ecological consciousness. It articulates the relationship of human beings to the physical environment, earth, nature, and animals from a biocentric, non-anthropocentric point of view. In the final analysis, ecocinema pertains to nothing less than life itself” (Lu, “Introduction” 2). Lu’s definition welcomes those films that express ecological concepts, disregarding their film types, genres, production companies, countries, or areas. Focusing on the inter-relationship between American and Chinese ecocinemas, this dissertation adopts Lu’s definition to achieve a global view in studying the ecological consciousness reflected in films of different countries and areas.

Similar to ecocinema, there are other expressions such as eco-films, film vert, green screen and green movies. No matter which term critics use in ecocinematic studies, they generally agree that such a film should have “a conceptual content which more or less explicitly promotes ecological ideas, or, more generally, an ecological sensibility. This conceptual content is usually understood to heighten viewers’ awareness of concepts such as ecocentrism and ecological interconnectedness” (Ingram, “The Aesthetics and Ethics of Eco-Film Criticism” 44). In other words, films in this category should communicate ecological ideas to audiences, raise their ecological consciousness and lead eventually to environmental activism.

Different from the above terms, an environmentalist film refers to the film “in which an environmental issue is raised explicitly and is central to the narrative” (Ingram,

*Green Screen* vii). British scholar, David Ingram, coined the term to describe a Hollywood practice that came under the trend of going “green.” This kind of film can be traced back as far as the silent era, “when two film versions of Peter B. Kyne’s novel *The Valley of Giants* (1918) reconciled a desire to preserve a valley of giant sequoias for its spiritual value with the official conservationist ideologies of their day” (Ingram, *Green Screen* vii). In contrast with ecocinema, environmentalist films are commonly associated with Hollywood’s “commercial aesthetic” that treats environmentalism “as a premise for the exploration of more familiar Hollywood concerns, in particular the testing of the white male hero in gender and ethnic relationships” (Ingram, *Green Screen* viii). With water pollution and global warming as their thematic topics, *A Civil Action* (1998) and *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004) are typical environmentalist films. Paula Willoquet-Maricondi, an important critic in ecocinematic studies, identifies the distinction between environmentalist films and ecocinema by emphasizing the latter’s “consciousness-raising and activist intentions, as well as responsibility to heighten awareness about contemporary issues and practices affecting planetary health” (45). Willoquet-Maricondi argues that while ecocinema “overtly strives to inspire personal and political action on the part of viewers, stimulating our thinking so as to bring about concrete changes in the choices we make, daily and in the long run, as individuals and as societies, locally and globally,” the fundamental message of environmentalist films is “one that affirms rather than challenges the culture’s fundamental anthropocentric ethos” (45, 47).

## II. Literature Review of American and Chinese Ecocinemas

In ecocinematic studies, Hollywood films attract great attention and at least four critics should be mentioned in this specific field. In 2000, David Ingram published *Green Screen: Environmentalism and Hollywood Cinema*, which is the first book-length study of environmental themes in mainstream cinema. Ingram's book focuses on fictional Hollywood narratives and treats three popular environmental subject matters in Hollywood environmentalist films: wilderness and its construction as an Edenic space, the anthropocentric representation of wild animals and non-human nature, and ecological problems brought by modern technologies such as cars and nuclear energy. Dissatisfied with Hollywood's treatment of environmental issues, Ingram argues that "Hollywood environmentalist movies often use their concerns with non-human nature, whether wilderness or wild animals, as a basis for speculation on human relationships, thereby making those concerns conform to Hollywood's commercial interest in anthropocentric, human interest stories" (*Green Screen* 10). Ingram's book paved the way for Hollywood ecocinematic studies and is frequently quoted by later critics such as Noël Sturgeon and Paula Willoquet-Maricondi.

In 2005, another British scholar, Pat Brereton, continued Ingram's discussion by publishing *Hollywood Utopia: Ecology in Contemporary American Cinema*. Brereton's study is not limited to environmentalist films. His book traces the evolution of ecological representations in Hollywood and analyzes the relationship between ecology and popular Hollywood movies such as *Terminator* (1984), *Jurassic Park* (1993), *Dances with Wolves* (1990), *The Fifth Element* (1997), and *Titanic* (1998). Different from Ingram,

Brereton seems more optimistic in arguing that “[relatively] little academic effort is given over to understanding and appreciating rather than dismissing the utopian spatial aesthetic that permeates Hollywood film” (12). Singing high praises of some Hollywood directors like Steven Spielberg, Brereton believes that their films “dramatise and encourage raw nature to speak directly to audiences” and “help to promote an ecological meta-narrative, connecting humans with their environment” (13).

In 2009, two American scholars, Robin L. Murray and Joseph K. Heumann, published *Ecology and Popular Film: Cinema on the Edge*, taking a comparatively neutral stand in examining Hollywood movies. Selecting both feature films like *Soylent Green* (1973) and *Eight Legged Freaks* (2002) and documentaries like *An Inconvenient Truth* (2005), Murray and Heumann explore and discuss a wide variety of environmental themes (environmental politics, eco-terrorism, ecology and home, tragic and comic eco-heroes, the spectacular, and evolutionary narrative) at work in Hollywood. Their book attempts to show that “an eco-critical analysis of films does not necessarily rest solely on outlining blatant environmental messages” but “involves a more studied look at the forms, discourse, and histories that helped define and obscure the possible ecological leanings” (Murray and Heumann 205). With ten chapters on ten films, Murray and Heumann conclude that “[although] many of the films we read here seem to highlight and even promote environmental degradation, they also put that degradation on display, showing us the destruction, the eco-disaster, and the exploitation of resources that now seem in conflict with science, ideology, and media representations of ecology” (205).

In addition to the above four critics, Sean Cubitt and Noël Sturgeon merit our attention by expanding ecocinematic discussions to other artistic forms. Sean Cubitt’s

*EcoMedia* (2005) treats not only Hollywood movies but television programs and maintains that “popular media think aloud and in public about who we are, where we are going, and what debts we owe to the world we live in” (1). Similarly, Noël Sturgeon embraces not only Hollywood movies but television ads, TV series, children’s movies, and even war-related video games in his book, *Environmentalism in Popular Culture: Gender, Race, Sexuality, and the Politics of the Natural* (2009) and offers new perspectives in understanding ecological consciousness by raising questions such as race (how to treat Indians and extraterrestrial space), gender (the silence of women and the feminization of nature), and violence (U.S. militarism) in connection with environmental issues.

The overwhelming attention on Hollywood movies in ecocinematic discussion annoyed some critics such as Paula Willoquet-Maricondi, who invited more than ten scholars to publish *Framing the World: Explorations in Ecocriticism and Film* in 2010. Critics in this book examine not only Hollywood movies like *The Fast and the Furious* (2001) and *Finding Nemo* (2003) but also the native American film *It Starts with a Whisper* (1993), the Canadian environmental justice documentary *Power: One River Two Nations* (1996), the Slovenian independent experimental video *Riverglass: A Ballet in Four Seasons* (1997), the German documentary *Grizzly Man* (2005), and the Japanese eco-horror *Charisma* (1999). With such varieties of films, Willoquet-Maricondi shows the importance of a global view in the ecocritical study of contemporary cinema.

In contrast with the heated discussions in the western world, Chinese ecocinematic study is still in an early stage. There is so far only one book-length study, *Chinese Ecocinema: In the Age of Environmental Challenge* edited by two Chinese



scholars in the US, Sheldon Lu and Jiayan Mi. Published in 2009, the book discusses environmental consciousness in contemporary Chinese cinema in four main areas: hydro-politics, eco-aesthetics, urban space, and bioethics. Dealing with more than twenty films in the past thirty years, the book does a great job in mapping Chinese ecocinematic territories. It, however, does not pay enough attention to the inter-relationship between Chinese and American ecocinemas. Chinese films, especially those produced after Chinese economic reform in the 1980s, have been greatly influenced by American screen. The connection between Chinese and American ecocinemas is even closer due to their mutual concern over environmental issues and attention on ecological consciousness. That connection offers great space for further ecocinematic study.

Inspired by Lu's work, a Finnish scholar, Pietari Kääpä, edited a special issue, *Ecocinemas of Transnational China*, in the *Interactions* journal in 2012. With four articles and a review, that issue explores Chinese ecocinema in a series of interactions between mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. Kääpä emphasizes that both the producers of Chinese ecocinema and its analysts must meet the demands of planetary interconnectedness as Chinese ecological considerations became increasingly global and acquire international cooperation and exchange. Kääpä's study is prompt and insightful. Yet, it focuses on the interconnectedness among the three Chinas (mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan) and needs more illustration on how Chinese ecocinema is transnationally connected with the world.

This dissertation follows the steps of Lu and Kääpä and hopes to have a focused study of Chinese ecocinema in relation to that in Hollywood. It pinpoints the Sino-Hollywood interaction because Hollywood films have always been influencing Chinese

cinema. In the 1990s, for example, “Hollywood blockbusters managed to dominate the Chinese film market with more than 60 percent of the market share” (Sun and Xun 176). The situation continues in the twenty-first century with the release of films such as *King Kong* (2005) and *Avatar* (2009). Chinese filmmakers cannot ignore and sometimes even utilize that influence in cinematic productions, which makes the relationship between Chinese and Hollywood ecocinemas an interesting topic to explore. This dissertation aims to study this topic by discussing whether Hollywood screen is a determining factor in the development of Chinese eco-films, whether Chinese ecocinematic culture replicates that in the US, what native concerns, bioethics, and eco-aesthetics Chinese eco-films display, and how they can survive and even prosper in a hybrid ecocinematic culture. This dissertation hopes to serve as a bridge between Chinese and American ecocinematic studies and by doing so understand the complexity of cultural pluralism and cultural hybridity in contemporary ecocinema.

In order to have an in-depth discussion, this dissertation has three principles in film selection. First, it does not include documentaries but only feature films because Hollywood influences the world mainly by its commercial feature films. Although Hollywood also produces documentaries, their influence in China is comparatively small. In fact, documentaries in China, especially New Documentaries, developed in a unique trajectory. Before the 1980s, Chinese documentaries preformed in “a tightly knit web of political prescriptions, control of studios, ideologically driven film and subject plan, meticulously supervised film crews, narrowly circumscribed scripts and footage, heavily censored film texts, well organized, compulsory mass film viewings, and rigorously curtailed film criticism” (Chu 7). After Deng Xiaoping’s introduction of the reform

policies in 1978, documentaries gradually found more audiences through television stations in forms of “special topic programs” (*zhuantipian* 专题片), which were usually big-budget documentaries made inside the state-owned television system. They emerged and flourished in the 1980s in various television channels, making theatrical release a subordinate way of distribution. Famous examples include *Silk Road* (丝绸之路 1980), *Yangtze River* (长江 1983), and *River Elegy* (河殇 1988), all of which were produced by China Central Television (CCTV), one of the biggest state-owned television stations in China. In the late 1980s, New Documentaries arose to challenge and rebel against the officially sanctioned special topic programs.<sup>1</sup> Generally self-sponsored and independently made, those documentaries reached audiences through international film festivals and internet. Chinese documentaries, as stated above, have a unique development trajectory. They have limited interaction with Hollywood and are therefore not to be covered in this dissertation.

Second, this dissertation deals with films produced after 1978, the time when China began its economic reforms. At the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party in December 1978, Deng Xiaoping presented “four modernizations” as a basis for China’s economic transformation. After a series of reforms in the 1980s and 1990s, China’s economy experienced one of the world’s biggest booms. One study shows that China’s “average gross domestic product

---

<sup>1</sup> According to Chris Berry and Lisa Rofel, the New Documentary Movement started from Wu Wenguang 吴文光’s no-budget independent documentary, *Bumming in Beijing: The Last Dreamers* (流浪北京), in 1990. It is “a video film about artists who, like Wu, were struggling to survive independently outside the state system” (Berry and Rofel 5). Following Wu’s lead, a group of artists began to use their camera to “[create] a vision of ‘reality’ in contrast to what they viewed as the fake, exaggerated, and empty characteristics of not only the old socialist realist documentaries but also the more recent special topic programs” (X. Lu 17).

(GDP) growth increased from approximately 4 percent prior to the reform to the 9.5 percent during 1978-2005” (Brandt and Rawski 1). The fast economic expansion led to many side effects, one of which was the increasingly serious environmental destruction. Problems like global warming, intensive farming, resource depletion, and all kinds of pollution came close to daily life. People began to question the price they paid for economic growth and expressed their ecological worries in all kinds of artistic forms. A typical example is Feng Xiaoning’s *The Ozone Layer Vanishes* in 1989, a science fiction film about how a child saves the world when the ozone layer is in danger. Although ecological ideas can also be detected in earlier films, environmental problems and ecological anxieties arose to a new stage after the 1980s. As a result, “[environmental] destruction and urban demolition have surfaced as important themes in Chinese cinema, literature, and arts in the 1990s and the early twenty-first century” (Lu, “Introduction 7). This dissertation, therefore, concentrates on those themes and their related films.

Third, this dissertation limits the discussion to films in mainland China because films produced in Hong Kong and Taiwan have different development trajectories and require separate discussion. Although the three Chinas share the same social and cultural roots in cinematic development, they diverged later to have different characteristics. The 1980s, for example, witnessed three distinctive movements in three Chinas. In mainland China, directors like Chen Kaige, Tian Zhuangzhuang, and Zhang Yimou formed the Fifth Generation, who impressed the world by images like yellow earth, sorghum fields, waist drums and red cloth in their “ethnographic films.”<sup>2</sup> In Hong Kong, the New Wave

---

<sup>2</sup> For details, see Yingjin Zhang, *Screening China: Critical Interventions, Cinematic Reconfigurations, and the Transnational Imaginary in Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), pp. 208-239.

filmmakers were searching for their identity in the dominating entertainment culture.<sup>3</sup> The Taiwan New Cinema differed from the above two by focusing on the uniqueness of the Taiwan experience narrated in a real-life pace with no obvious climax.<sup>4</sup> As Yeh Yueh-yu comments, the history of three Chinas “has formed quite distinctive national cinemas within each territory” (74). It is true that the film industries in three Chinas have much more cooperation and exchange after the new millennium. The discussion of eco-films in three Chinas and their interaction with Hollywood, however, still seems too big for a dissertation topic.

### III. Ecocriticism as the Methodology

The methodology used in this dissertation is ecocriticism, a critical theory that started developing at the end of the twentieth century. There are several important milestones for its development. In 1978, William Rueckert coined the term “ecocriticism” in “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism” in *Iowa Review*. His intent was to focus on “the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature” (Rueckert 73). Rueckert’s proposal was largely neglected until the establishment of its association ASLE (Association for the Study of Literature and Environment) in 1992 and its journal *ISLE (Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment)* in 1993. From then on, ecocriticism became a recognizable critical school. Another milestone is the publication of two important critical works, which are

---

<sup>3</sup> For details, see Pak Tong Cheuk, *Hong Kong New Wave Cinema (1978–2000)* (Bristol: Intellect, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> For details, see Chris Berry and Feiyi Lu, *Island on the Edge: Taiwan New Cinema and After* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005).

respectively *The Environmental Imagination* by Lawrence Buell in 1995 and *The Ecocriticism Reader* by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm in 1996. Those two books give detailed analysis of ecocriticism: its definition, aims and literary application. After their publication, ecocriticism finally began to receive serious critical attention.

By definition, ecocriticism is “[a] study of the relation between literature and environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis” (Buell, *The Environmental Imagination* 430).<sup>5</sup> It is by nature an interdisciplinary approach, invoking knowledge of environmental studies, natural sciences, and social and cultural studies, all of which play a part in answering questions like the following: How is nature represented in literature? How do our metaphors of nature influence the way we treat it? In addition to race, class, and gender, should *place* become a new critical category? In what ways and to what effect is the environmental crisis seeping into contemporary literature and popular culture?<sup>6</sup> Ecocritics ask questions that embrace nature, literature, and culture and take “an earth-centered approach to literary studies” (Glotfelty, “Introduction” xviii). That approach is often misunderstood as a simple celebration of nature writing or a dogmatic appeal for political change. To show its complexity, Laurence Buell emphasizes that “if one thinks of it [...] as a multiform inquiry extending to a variety of environmentally focused perspectives more expressive of concern to explore environmental issues searchingly than of fixed dogmas about political solutions, then the

---

<sup>5</sup> In *The Ecocriticism Reader*, Cheryll Glotfelty gives a simpler definition: “ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (xviii). The above two definitions are equally important in the introduction of the ecocritical theory.

<sup>6</sup> In the introduction, Cheryll Glotfelty lists more than ten questions ecocritics tend to ask. The above questions are selected from that list. For more details, see Cheryll Glotfelty, “Introduction,” in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Eds. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), xv-xxxv.

neologism becomes a useful omnibus term for subsuming a large and growing scholarly field” (*The Environmental Imagination* 430).

Ecocriticism, at its core, is a theory against anthropocentrism, which means a human-centered vision and a “system of beliefs and practices that favours human over other organisms” (Garrard 206). Buell believes that “[all] living writers and readers, regardless of gender and ethnicity, are more or less constrained by it: by the ethnocentricity of the human estate” (*The Environmental Imagination* 20). Human civilization is in fact characterized by a series of anthropocentric and ethnocentric biases of human ideology. One common example is from the Bible: “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth” (*The New Jerusalem Bible*, Genesis 1.26). Taking for granted the superiority of human beings, people change nature to serve human interests and assess nature in terms of its usefulness to mankind. Nature, in those biases, is “an oppressed and silent class, in need of spokespersons,” and the nonhuman remains “banished from the Critique under the double domination of society and science” (Buell, *The Environmental Imagination* 21).

Ecocritics contend that the root cause of anthropocentrism is hierarchy, which takes place as a result of the dichotomies such as self and other, man and woman, culture and nature, human and nonhuman. In order to establish the identity of the “self,” anything other than the “self” has to be marginalized as the negative “other.” In this way, the subjugation of nature is interconnected with the domination or exploitation of human others. As Buell summarizes, “The natural environment as empirical reality has been

made to subserve human interests, and one of these interests has been to make it serve as a symbolic reinforcement of the subservience of disempowered groups: nonwhites, women, and children” (*The Environmental Imagination* 21). The connection between nature and those disempowered groups is the theoretic foundation for various ecocritical positions such as ecofeminism,<sup>7</sup> social ecology, and eco-Marxism.<sup>8</sup>

One way to fight against anthropocentrism is to advocate an epistemological awakening to ecocentrism, a nature-centered system of values. Philosopher Timothy O’Riordan gives the definition:

Ecocentrism preaches the virtues of reverence, humility, responsibility, and care; it argues for low impact technology but it is not antitechnological; it decries bigness and impersonality in all forms (but especially in the city); and demands a code of behavior that seeks permanence and stability based upon ecological principles of diversity and homeostasis. (1)

With the virtues of reverence, humility, responsibility, and care, people learn to acknowledge the existence of the “other.” Nature, which has been rendered as a thing for human use, “began its existence as an entity-in-itself” (Gaard and Murphy 6). The

---

<sup>7</sup> Ecofeminism is a theory that has evolved from both feminist theory and ecological philosophy. French feminist Françoise d’Eaubonne coined the term “ecological feminism” in 1974 to call attention to women’s potential to bring about an ecological revolution. Ecofeminists argue that when ecologists concern themselves with the domination of nature and feminists with the subjugation of women, both sides have yet to understand that “a central reason for woman’s oppression is her association with the despised nature they are so concerned about. The hatred of women and the hatred of nature are intimately connected and mutually reinforcing” (King 18). For details, see Judith Plant, *Healing the Wounds: The Promise of Ecofeminism* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1989), Patrick D. Murphy, *Literature, Nature, and Other: Ecofeminist Critiques* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), and Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy, *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> Like ecofeminists, social ecologists and eco-Marxists relate the class and economic problems with environmental crisis. They are explicitly political and ask for change in the political structure of society “so that production to meet real needs replaces production for the accumulation of wealth” (Garrard 31). According to Garrard, “this argument is persuasive in relation to mineral resources” but “far less so when applied to non-substitutable and economically invisible resources such as freshwater aquifers or biodiversity” (31). For details, see Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), David Pepper, *Eco-Socialism: From Deep Ecology to Social Justice* (London: Routledge, 1993), and John Clark, *Renewing the Earth: the Promise of Social Ecology* (London: Green Print, 1990).



distinction between entity-in-itself and entity-for-us leads to the de-centralization of human beings. Instead of conquerors and owners, human beings are just common community members, who should recognize and respect their fellow non-human members, which include not only plants and animals but waters and mountains and collectively the whole physical environment. Ecocritics believe that nature exists with its ecological principles that human beings should look up to. This is what O’Riordan asks for near the end of his definition: a kind of coherence between human behavior and ecological principles. While anthropocentric ideologies value speed, bigness, domination, and conquest, ecological principles hold in high esteem stability, permanence, diversity, and homeostasis. According to ecocritics, those ecological principles should replace anthropocentric ideologies and guide human behavior. To learn from those ecological principles does not mean to learn how to succeed as a predator, to conquer more territory, or to dominate more species. In *A Sand County Almanac*, Aldo Leopold explains that it means to think like a mountain, a conviction he came to realize when he had shot a wolf and watched it die:

We reached the old wolf in time to watch a fierce green fire dying in her eyes. I realized then, and have known ever since, that there was something new to me in those eyes—something known only to her and to the mountain. I was young then, and full of trigger-itch; I thought that because fewer wolves meant more deer, that no wolves would mean hunters’ paradise. But after seeing the green fire die, I sensed that neither the wolf nor the mountain agreed with such a view. (Leopold 138-9)

Leopold believes that there is a deeper meaning in the howl of a wolf, and “[only] the mountain has lived long enough to listen objectively to [it]” (137). In *Thinking like a Mountain*, Susan L. Flader emphasizes that to listen objectively to that howl means to

“visualize the wolf in its relation to the total life process of the ecosystem through time, not just as it might affect one’s own immediate interests” (2). That is the essence of thinking like a mountain. It negates self-interests and advocates the ecocentric system of values. With these values, ecocritics hope to re-consider and re-appreciate our literature and culture.

Among so many important ecocritics, Lawrence Buell is the most enlightening for this dissertation. In his groundbreaking book, *The Environmental Imagination*, Buell raises the subject of pastoral and contends that Henry David Thoreau leads a pastoral tradition “from anthropocentric to more specifically ecocentric concerns” in American writing (52). Buell believes that this pastoral tradition is vital for American self-definition. It helps to re-examine the place of nature in American literature and re-evaluate the importance of writers such as Susan Fenimore Cooper, Mary Hunter Austin, Aldo Leopold, Rachel Carson, etc. Buell points out that American pastoralism faced new challenges when words like industrialization, urbanization, and commercialization were no longer strange in our life. He puts forward toxic discourse as a new mode to understand the modern challenges and their impacts on American pastoralism. Toxic discourse, according to Buell, starts with Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* in 1962. Its opening chapter, “A Fable for Tomorrow,” introduces one of the key motifs: “a town in the heart of America that awakes to a birdless, budless spring” (Buell, “Toxic Discourse” 645). This rude awakening to the pastoral disruption is accompanied by a sense of entrapment into a world without refuge from toxic penetration. These motifs frequently appear in contemporary American writing, especially environmental apocalypse literature.

They hold the key to understand the dangers modern pastoralism faces and the future it may or may not have.

Although Buell's study focuses on literature, it works for ecocinema, as well. A central image in Hollywood environmentalist films is a pastoral garden destroyed or at least threatened by modern technologies or ecological disasters. It appears in *Soylent Green* (1973) in the form of video tapes that record what people have already lost in 2022: green trees, red flowers, seas and mountains. It also appears in *Silent Running* (1971) when audiences are first amazed by the beauty and peace of a pastoral garden and then shocked to find the garden enclosed in a vaulted glass-ceiling in a gigantic spaceship. It even appears in children's animation, *The Lorax* (1972, 2012), when the once beautiful, pristine valley disappeared with the Once-Ler's decision to cut the last Truffula tree. The sense of entrapment is also popular in such films. In *Danger Zone* (1996) and *Fire Down Below* (1997), protagonists always find themselves surrounded by toxic wastes no matter how powerful, brave, or heroic they are. In *The China Syndrome* (1979) and *Silkwood* (1983), problems in nuclear power plants intensify the feeling of having nowhere to escape. Other films like *A Civil Action* (1999) and *Erin Brokovich* (2000) work on the implication that we are living in a world where even daily necessities like water are poisonous. In Chinese eco-films, however, images of a destroyed garden are not very common. The pastoral ideal and pastoral disruption is more often transformed into a kind of hunger for something people have already lost in their life: water, trees, family members, or simply the land. The sense of entrapment in most cases gets intertwined with protagonists' rebellion against their fate. Adopting Buell's theory, this dissertation hopes to examine the pastoral ideal and pastoral disruption in eco-films, compare the different

cinematic representations in Hollywood and China, and eventually understand the interactivity between the two cultures.

This dissertation has altogether five chapters. The introduction includes the definition of important ecocinematic terms, the literature review of American and Chinese Ecocinemas, and a brief summary of ecocriticism as the methodology.

The second chapter focuses on the pastoral ideal and pastoral disruption in Hollywood environmentalist films. Guided by critics such as Lawrence Buell and Leo Marx, this chapter finds that there are mainly three major conflicts in American pastoralism. The first is between garden and machine. While garden represents agrarian values, machine is the synonym of industrialization. The pull of these two antithetical forces predetermines the threats and dangers American pastoralism has to face. The second conflict is between anthropocentrism and biocentrism. The choice between these two trends decides the past, present, and future of American pastoralism. The last conflict is between Tityrus, “the happy co-opted shepherd” and Meliboeus, “the dispossessed, alienated shepherd of Virgil’s first eclogue” (Buell, *The Environmental Imagination* 52). Buell believes that Tityrus and Meliboeus bespeak the two faces of modern pastoral, which coexist in American literature and culture. This dissertation tends to show that although the three conflicts are rather complicated in American literature, they are oversimplified in Hollywood environmentalist films. Keeping the motifs of the pastoral disruption and toxic penetration, Hollywood environmentalist films follow an anthropocentric tradition by oversimplifying the three conflicts, providing black-and-white answers to eco-problems, and fabricating pastoral illusions. This chapter tries to pin

down the hidden drive for Hollywood's anthropocentric tradition and discusses commercialization as its ultimate cause.

The third chapter explores Hollywood's influence on Chinese eco-films. From the 1980s, Hollywood blockbusters have exerted strong influence on Chinese screen. Some filmmakers hope to attract world attention by following Hollywood patterns. Disaster films like *Super Typhoon* (超强台风 2008) are typical examples. Those films generally fail to attract audiences, who find nothing new but rigid imitations of Hollywood environmental "fairytales." This chapter lists three difficulties that Chinese filmmakers have in importing the pastoral ideal and pastoral disruption from their Hollywood peers. The first difficulty is in how to present the conflict between garden and machine. In the past thirty years, Chinese economy has been trying to catch up with the world. The rush has led to a series of problems such as the imbalance of economic development in different areas (city and country, east and west) and the increasingly serious environmental deterioration. Those problems make the conflict between garden and machine much more complicated in China. The second difficulty is in imitating the Hollywood practice in dealing with the dichotomy between anthropocentrism and ecocentrism. China has its own cultural and historical tradition in understanding the concept of nature and the human-nature relationship. It is impractical and also impossible for Chinese filmmakers to fully abandon their tradition when they make their own eco-films. The last difficulty is in transforming the images of Tityrus and Meliboeus into convincing characters in Chinese films. This chapter ends by showing that a Hollywood replica is doomed to fail and the only way out is to construct cinematic representations of Chinese pastoralism.

The fourth chapter discusses how a group of filmmakers succeed in reconstructing the pastoral myth on Chinese screen. They produced films like *Mountain Patrol* (可可西里 2004), *Tuya's Marriage* (图雅的婚事 2006), *The Forest Ranger* (天狗 2006), *Still Life* (三峡好人 2006), and *No Man's Land* (无人区 2013). Challenging the Hollywood tradition, those filmmakers turn to Chinese social realities for inspiration and local cultures and religions for salvation. They reconstruct a pastoral myth that Chinese audiences can recognize and appreciate. This chapter analyzes their success in three steps. First, these filmmakers base their stories on Chinese social and cultural realities. They refuse to copy Hollywood patterns and are determined to explore the conflicts and problems that are typically Chinese. Second, they use their cinematic language to establish the connection between human beings and nature. Their camera focuses on the similarities between human and nonhuman others and expresses deep concerns with the social and natural environment. Third, they affirm the unity between nature and culture, nature and society. In their films, nature and culture are not binary oppositions. They face similar challenges from industrialization and share similar fates under the threat of ecological changes and disasters. For these filmmakers, the nature-culture unity can only be achieved when people learn to accept and respect nature-loving cultures and religions. Although their films may differ in settings, characters, plots, and techniques, they all emphasize a kind of mentality to stay with the land. It is not the tendency to go west like most heroes would do in American novels and films. Nor is it a wish to find a secluded paradise like Tao Qian's (陶潜) "Peach Blossom Spring." There is no longer a place to escape from toxic penetration in the twenty-first century. The hope, according to these

directors, lies in the rejuvenation of nature-loving cultures and religions, from which people find faith to love, respect, and live in harmony with the natural world.

The concluding chapter summarizes the interaction between Hollywood and Chinese ecocinemas and emphasizes Chinese eco-films as a hybrid form. They borrow Hollywood cinematic techniques to tell Chinese stories, express their worries, and construct their pastoral myth. They have made their voice heard in world ecocinema. There is even some counter-influence on Hollywood eco-screen. Their success and counter-influence prove the possibility of cultural pluralism in world ecocinema.

## CHAPTER 2. AMERICAN PASTORALISM IN HOLLYWOOD

### ENVIRONMENTALIST FILMS

Although Hollywood environmentalist films could be traced back as far as the silent era, they became truly popular in the 1990s with environmental issues such as rain forest depletion in *Meet the Applegates* (1991) and *FernGully: The Last Rainforest* (1992), water pollution in *A Civil Action* (1998) and *Erin Brockovich* (2000), and toxic waste in *On Deadly Ground* (1994) and *Fire Down Below* (1997).<sup>9</sup> Their popularity continues in the twenty-first century with increasing attentions on environmental disasters in *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004) and *2012* (2009) and animal rights in *King Kong* (2005) and *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* (2011). Hollywood environmentalist films take advantage of contemporary ecological worries, incorporate them into their narratives, and create box office successes one after another. *The Day After Tomorrow*, for example, reached \$544 million in the global box office, and *Avatar* even broke *Titanic*'s worldwide

---

<sup>9</sup> It should be pointed out that American films have a long history and diversity. This chapter focuses on Hollywood environmentalist films because they are in most cases commercial blockbusters that Chinese audiences and filmmakers are able to reach. As it is mentioned in Chapter 3, the Ministry of Radio, Film, and Television (RFT) allowed Hollywood's re-entrance to the Chinese market in 1994 in the hope of boosting the economy. The imported films are mostly star-studded, big-budgeted, and high-tech blockbusters that dominated the Chinese market for the following ten years or so. They exerted a strong influence on the Chinese film market, and the impact on Chinese ecocinema cannot be neglected. It is necessary to analyze the hidden logic in Hollywood environmentalist films (how the pastoral anxiety is expressed and how the related conflicts are simplified or avoided) and then discuss whether such logic works on Chinese eco-screen.



box office record with the figure of \$2.782 billion.<sup>10</sup> The flourish of environmentalist films in Hollywood comes from a shared anxiety among filmmakers and their audiences about the worldwide environmental deterioration threatening human beings' present and future living condition. This anxiety has its deep-rooted cultural connotation, which is simultaneously the hunger for the pastoral ideal and the realization of its disappearance in the modern world. A garden threatened or destroyed is the most vivid representation of such a theme. It could be the world of Pandora intruded and ruined by human soldiers in *Avatar*, or New York City inundated by a storm surge in *The Day After Tomorrow*, or even the secluded attic of Will's house which Caesar can no longer go back to in *Rise of the Planet of the Apes*. To understand this garden image, one needs to know what role the pastoral ideal plays in American culture, literature, and cinema.

The pastoral ideal, in its simplest term, means the wish to lead a peaceful rural life. In his 1982 essay about pastoral, Paul Alpers lists its related allusions that critics have offered throughout the history: "We are told that pastoral 'is a double longing after innocence and happiness'; that its universal idea is the Golden Age; that it is based on the antithesis of Art and Nature; that its fundamental motive is hostility to urban life [...] that it is 'that mode of viewing common experience through the medium of the rural world'" (437). Alpers believes that although critics vary in their definitions, its essence remains the same. It is a particular way or view of life that people hope to find in shepherds. It is a life "marked by a temporary disengagement from the workaday world and an enhanced state of self-sufficiency, leisure, and pleasure, especially the sensuous enjoyment of music, art and lovemaking" (Marx, "Does Pastoralism Have a Future?" 212). It functions

---

<sup>10</sup> The figures related to box office for Hollywood movies are from the website named *The Box Office Mojo*. For details, see <http://boxofficemojo.com>. 7 Feb. 2013.

as a literary form in the classical shepherd poem and migrates to drama, painting, music, novel as well as film. It inspires many great works among which are Virgil's *Eclogues*, Spenser's *The Shepherdes Calendar*, Wordsworth's *Prelude*, and Shakespeare's *As You Like It*.

The traditional pastoral faced serious challenge in the eighteenth century when scientific and industrial revolutions started. Renato Poggioli even announces its destruction in the modern world due to four cultural trends: the humanitarian outlook, the idea of material progress, the scientific spirit, and artistic realism.<sup>11</sup> Some other critics, on the contrary, argue for its rejuvenation in new versions. In "Does Pastoralism Have a Future?" Leo Marx uses American pastoralism to illustrate its capacity for adaptation to new times and places: "in the era when the American republic was founded it reappeared in new guises. Now pastoralism was embodied in fresh, New World images of an ideal liminality, a potential harmony between society and nature" (213).<sup>12</sup> Marx believes that American pastoralism differs from the previous, European version by creating the idea of the new world that is accessible not only to the privileged and powerful but to the common public. This relatively egalitarian notion quickly finds its supporters and forms an important cultural tradition that comes down to Americans

[...] through among others, the transcendental idealists, Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman, the landscapists and planners (A.J. Downing

---

<sup>11</sup> For details, see Renato Poggioli, *The Oaten Flute: Essays on Pastoral Poetry and the Pastoral Ideal* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), pp. 31-34.

<sup>12</sup> It should be emphasized that pastoral and pastoralism are two different terms. In "Does Pastoralism Have a Future?" Marx explains their difference. "We need that term, [pastoralism], or one like it, to sharpen the distinction between the essential, long-lived, energizing mentality and (1) the many aesthetic forms or genres, such as poems or landscape paintings, and (2) the variety of particular works (*pastorals*), in which the mentality (*pastoralism*) has been given expression. 'Pastoral,' in other words, refers to the mode and to the subsidiary forms, works of art or particular embodiments, that lend expression to 'pastoralism,' the mentality or view of life" (211).

and F.L. Olmsted), architects (Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright), and architectural critics (Montgomery Schuyler and Lewis Mumford), and the beat writers and student radicals who associated themselves with the “revolt against the machine” in the 1950s and 1960s. (Marx, “Does Pastoralism Have a Future?” 214)

As most critics agree, American pastoralism has already entered into the core of American cultural self-understanding, and works as a recurrent theme in American literature, painting, music, architecture, and films, especially those that deal with environmental issues.

### I. Three Conflicts in American Pastoralism

Since its first appearance, American pastoralism has exhibited a kind of complexity in most artistic works. In *The Environmental Imagination*, Lawrence Buell claims that American pastoral representation is a complicated issue and “cannot be pinned to a single ideological position” (44). He adopts terms like “ecocentrism” or “biocentrism” in contradiction with “homocentrism” to define and interpret a number of its practitioners such as Thoreau, Susan Fenimore Cooper, Rachel Carson, or Leslie Marmon Silko. In his groundbreaking book, *The Machine in the Garden*, Marx observes that the pastoral ideal “causes the instantaneous clash of opposed states of mind: strong urge to believe in the rural myth along with an awareness of industrialization as counterforce to the myth” (229). In *The Lay of the Land*, Annette Kolodny believes that American wilderness romance from Cooper to Melville to Twain marginalizes women’s fiction and women’s history, and “the inevitable conflict locked into the heart of American pastoral” is “contained within the matrix of the feminine, however attractive as

‘a Beautiful green Tree,’ or as nurturing as a mother robin, must inevitably fall helpless victim to masculine activity” (24). These critics decode the pastoral ideal in terms of social development, cultural ideology, or gender discrimination, revealing the ideal as a complicated and multifaceted issue.

The complexity of American pastoralism comes from its conflicts that were originally hidden in the New World image. When Thomas Jefferson and his contemporaries developed the idea of the new republic, it was assumed to be “a society of the middle landscape, midway between the artificiality of the *ancient regime* and the savagery of the western frontier—a blend of the best features of civilization (or art) and the best features of nature” (Marx, “Does Pastoralism Have a Future?” 213). This middle landscape attracted many followers such as J. Hector St. John Crèvecoeur, Timothy Walker, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Walt Whitman, who sang high praises of an automated utopia. The notion of midway, however, was based on a premise that there was always free land in the New World. That is why a lot of Americans followed the moving frontier line to realize their pastoral dreams. For them, the American West, with its free land beyond the frontier, offered a safety valve to keep down social and economic conflicts. It was the place to know who they were and why they were different from the rest of the world. It was also the reason why Frederick Jackson Turner announced to the whole country that “[the] existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development” (1). Yet, the frontier was announced to be closed in 1890. People became suddenly aware that there was no more free land for their yeoman dreams and agrarian ideals. Nor had they a place to escape the corruption and conflicts that were contaminating the East. With

doubts on the notion of midway, people began to see American pastoralism in its three major conflicts.

The first conflict is between garden and machine that Marx employs in his book title—*The Machine in the Garden*. Marx believes that “the sudden appearance of the machine in the garden is an arresting, endlessly evocative image” that frequently appears in American writing (*The Machine in the Garden* 229). While the garden represents the pastoral way of life and the pursuit of rural happiness, the machine stands for the forces working against the dream of pastoral fulfillment. They appear in the images of the disturbing railroad in Thoreau’s *Walden*, the shrieking little locomotive in William Faulkner’s “The Bear,” and the destructive steamboat in Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Different from the promised harmony in an automated utopia, the confrontation between garden and machine appears in many literary works to be unpleasant, perturbing, devastating, and at the same time inevitable. Their confrontation bespeaks a series of incompatible dichotomies such as agrarianism versus industrialization, rural versus urban life, past versus future, regression versus progression, and nature versus culture. American literature, especially those canonized works in the nineteenth century, followed a tradition of depicting the failure of the pastoral ideal. As Marx comments,

In complex pastorals like *The Scarlet Letter*, *Moby-Dick*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *The Great Gatsby*, “*The Bear*,” or the typical Frost lyric, the pastoral ideal is invoked, it is true, but chiefly in order—as it turns out—to convey its unattainability. These works come closer to being pastorals of failure than of success, and may be taken as elegies for—or jeremiads about the new nation’s unfulfilled aspirations. (“Does Pastoralism Have a Future?” 214)

The sense of failure became intensified with problems like environmental pollution, overpopulation, or nuclear crisis in the twenty and twenty-first centuries. In 1962, Rachel Carson startled the general public by publishing *Silent Spring*, in which the image of an interrupted garden transforms into that of a destroyed paradise. With her accusations on chemical pesticides in general and DDT in particular, Carson describes an idyllic community in the heart of America that awakens to a lifeless, hopeless spring.

Some evil spell had settled on the community: mysterious maladies swept the flocks of chickens; the cattle and sheep sickened and died. Everywhere was a shadow of death. The farmers spoke of much illness among their families. In the town the doctors had become more and more puzzled by new kinds of sickness appearing among their patients.  
(Carson 2)

The pastoral garden is not simply interrupted. It is poisoned and destroyed. Its conflict with the machine leads to not only disappointment but astonishment, anger, anxiety, and even despair. “For the first time in the history of the world, every human being is now subjected to contact with dangerous chemicals, from the moment of conception until death” (Carson 15). Introducing the rhetoric of toxic consciousness into the pastoral topoi, Carson opened up a new phase in the discussion of American pastoralism. After Carson, the fear of a poisoned and destroyed paradise has gained increasing attention in popular as well as serious literature.

The second conflict is between anthropocentrism and ecocentrism, the two contradictory ideologies coexisting in the American pastoral tradition. In *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, Buell summarizes the difference between the two ideologies. While anthropocentrism means “[the] assumption or view that the interests of humans are of higher priority than those of nonhumans,” their antonym, ecocentrism or biocentrism,

refers to “the view that all organisms, including humans, are part of a larger biotic web or network or community whose interests must constrain or direct or govern the human interest” (Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism* 134). American pastoralism, from the very beginning, exhibits a kind of human-centeredness. Its key concept is to have free land, to cultivate it, and to turn it into a bucolic garden. Here, the land, although important, is merely a tool to realize people’s yeoman dreams and agrarian ideals. It is defined to be good and bad in terms of human interests. It is good when it adopts the images of a giving mother or an attractive virgin and is often celebrated for “her” virgin beauties or nurturing abilities. It becomes, however, bad when it fails human expectations by bringing in droughts, storms, or simply failing to yield a decent living. Naming this the land-as-woman metaphor, Kolodny believes that “the American landscape has not been experienced as something similar to, or merely comparable to, but as the female principle of gratification itself, comprising all the qualities that Mother, Mistress, and Virgin traditionally represent for men” (*The Lay of the Land* 150). This feminizing metaphor of the American landscape reveals a subordinate role for both women and nature in the pastoral tradition. While women are expected to perform their archetypal roles as mother, mistress, and virgin, nature faces similar expectations to be fertile, generous, and sacrificing, waiting to be cultivated or discarded when it becomes sterile. The root cause of this feminizing metaphor is anthropocentrism, which is interconnected with and mutually influenced by androcentric ideologies. As Buell summarizes, “nature has been doubly otherized in modern thought. The natural environment as empirical reality has been made to subserve human interests, and one of these interests has been to make it serve as a symbolic reinforcement of the subservience of the disempowered

groups: nonwhites, women, and children” (*The Environmental Imagination* 21). When nature, nonwhites, women, and children are all marginalized, the American pastoral becomes a white male fantasy.

In contrast with this anthropocentric and androcentric version of the American pastoral, Buell traces another version represented by Thoreau, the first major interpreter of nature in American literary history. According to Buell, Thoreau’s thinking about nature “seems pretty clearly to move along a path from homocentrism toward biocentrism” (*The Environmental Imagination* 138). In his works, “[nature] was initially more a pastime for him, a place of recreational resort. Increasingly it became an occupation (or rather occupations, first literary and then botanical) and finally a cause” (Buell, *The Environmental Imagination* 138). Buell believes that Thoreau’s attitude toward nature foreshadows a tendency that later American nature writers like John Muir, Carson, and Annie Dillard follow and advocate. For these writers, nature exists not for human interests. It has its own principle, which human beings should learn to appreciate and respect. Calling it the land ethic, Aldo Leopold introduces another version of the American pastoral, an ecocentric version which “enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land” and “changes the role of *Homo sapiens* from the conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it” (240). The anthropocentric and ecocentric versions of the American pastoral contradict and yet coexist with each other, adding complexity to its related representations.

The third conflict is between Tityrus and Meliboeus, whose modern versions frequent American literary works and represent two dichotomized attitudes toward the



pastoral ideal. Tityrus and Meliboeus are originally two shepherds in Virgil's first eclogue. Tityrus is happy and content. He has his own land and enjoys his leisure by playing the rustic pipe. Meliboeus, on the contrary, is sad and discouraged. He is forced to leave his native land and finds no hope in a homeless future. Interested in their cultural implications, both Marx and Buell borrow these two images to illustrate the double-edged character of modern pastoral. Marx believes that while "Tityrus embodies the pastoral ideal," Meliboeus stands for "an alien world" that encroaches the ideal landscape (*The Machine in the Garden* 21). Calling his state of mind "alienation," Marx points out that "[by] his presence alone Meliboeus reveals the inadequacy of the Arcadian situation as an image of human experience. His lines convey the intervention of reality; they are a check against our susceptibility to idyllic fantasies" (*The Machine in the Garden* 23). Similar to Marx, Buell maintains that Tityrus and Meliboeus bespeak "two faces of modern pastoral," which are simultaneously "a frontal assault on mainstream values like the protestant work ethic" and "a ritual reenactment of the pioneer experience, New England-style, with which the average American do-it-yourselfer can identify" (*The Environmental Imagination* 52). Although their detailed analysis differs, both Marx and Buell agree that the modern Tityrus and Meliboeus exist in American culture and it is "a mistake to resolve either image into the other" (Buell, *The Environmental Imagination* 52). Crèvecoeur, Jefferson, and Whitman are the American Tityrus, believing optimistically in the harmony between garden and machine. Gatsby is their descendant who inherits an uncommon gift for hope. On the other hand, Nick Carraway is the modern Meliboeus, who is disillusioned with the disappearance of a pastoral ideal. Marx is right when he points out that "the outcome of *Walden*, *Moby-Dick*, and *Huckleberry*

*Finn* is repeated in the typical modern version of the fable; in the end the American hero is either dead or totally alienated from society, alone and powerless, like the evicted shepherd of Virgil's eclogue" (*The Machine in the Garden* 364). The modern Tityrus and Meliboeus appear not only in contemporary novels, poems, and plays but other artistic forms like music, painting, and films. They externalize modern people's mixed feelings about the pastoral ideal and are crucial to the understanding of its complexity.

## II. Simplification in Hollywood Environmentalist Films

Although the conflicts and contradictions of American pastoralism attract the attention of many critics and serious writers, they are mysteriously obscured, oversimplified, or even denied in Hollywood environmentalist films. On the one hand, Hollywood filmmakers cannot avoid and sometimes even love the pastoral motif because of its connection with American cultural self-understanding and its involvement with contemporary issues like toxic interpenetration, industrial dehumanization, and environmental catastrophe. The fear of a poisoned and destroyed paradise, which has developed from an academic topic to a public concern, has increasing appeal for moviegoers. For this reason, images of a garden lost or threatened appear persistently in films like *Soylent Green*, *Silent Running*, *The Day After Tomorrow*, *2012*, and *Avatar*. On the other hand, however, Hollywood filmmakers, especially those who care about their box office, are worried that a serious discussion might bore their audiences and offend certain interest groups. They therefore choose to obscure, oversimplify, or even deny the complication and add elements like action, romance, or science fantasy to make their

stories more entertaining.<sup>13</sup> This commercialization of the pastoral motif becomes a general pattern in Hollywood environmentalist films.

Hollywood filmmakers have mainly two ways to deal with the conflict between garden and machine. The first is to simplify the conflict by reducing the machine image into some anti-environmental villains, who according to Ingram take two main forms.

Firstly, hunters are often represented as the main obstacle to wild animal conservation. Once a heroic type in Hollywood cinema, the white hunter is now, with occasional exceptions, one of its arch villains. The second recurrent villain in the environmental movie is the representative of big business: the property developer, oil tycoon or nuclear plant manager. (*Green Screen 3*)

While hunters are basically limited to animal-related films such as *Bambi* (1942) and *Gorillas in the Mist* (1988), anti-environmental tycoons or political powers work as a more dominant villain image in other film genres like action, drama, disaster, or science fiction. *Soylent Green*, which is one of the earliest science fiction films that touch upon environmental issues, serves as a good example. The film begins by showing a pastoral world lost in the near future. From some black and white pictures of people farming and fishing to a quick display of suffocating skyscrapers, cars, smokestacks, garbage hills, and gas masks, the director, Richard Fleischer, succeeds in arousing audiences' fear and curiosity about what happens to New York City in 2022. It is a city with a population of 40 million starving, poverty stricken people, who can only survive with a mysterious food called Soylent. There are no more green leaves, red tulips, rivers, grasslands, seas,

---

<sup>13</sup> In *Movies and the Reagan Presidency: Success and Ethics*, Chris Jordan gives a detailed study of how Hollywood influences world cinema (Hollywoodization) by concentrating on making fewer, but more expensive, blockbuster films in which crucial cultural, social, political, and economical concerns are oversimplified. For details, see Chris Jordan, *Movies and the Reagan Presidency: Success and Ethics*, (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2003). Though insightful, Jordan's book does not cover how pastoral issues are oversimplified. The following discussion attempts to fill that blank.

or mountains. People can only see them on a mechanized screen when they are ready to be euthanized. Instead of showing directly the cause of such a disaster, the director borrows the form of a detective story and uses elements like murder, suspense, and romance to build up the mystery. When Detective Thorn finally uncovers the secret, the culprits turn out to be Soylent Industries, which make Soylent out of people, and some powerful politicians like Governor Santini, who tries every means to disrupt the investigation. The film ends by a tight zoom on Thorn's bloody hand with his words echoing in the darkness, "We've gotta stop them somehow!" Here "we" and "them" refer to two separate groups: victims and victimizers. Victims are the common people, who do not know the truth. Victimizers are those irresponsible industries and politicians. The implication goes like this: the world goes wrong because of some irresponsible industries and politicians. Things will be better if these powers could be stopped.

The same logic appears in *The China Syndrome*, the famous thriller "built upon the rhetoric of pro-nuclear assertions of safety" (Cumbow 62). This time Southern California is in danger. News reporter Kimberly Wells and her cameraman Richard Adams accidentally witness an emergency shutdown of the Ventana nuclear power plant outside Los Angeles. They later realize that the plant comes close to the China Syndrome, which means that the core of the plant will melt into the earth, contaminating groundwater and the surrounding Californian area with radioactive steam. Such a story easily attracts audiences with toxic consciousness. They are eager to find out its causes and solutions. The director controls the pace of his film by creating doubt, curiosity and suspense about the fate of the endangered area. Yet, the answer is not surprising. The plant is built and run by some irresponsible businessmen, who care nothing but profit.

They falsify radiographs of welds on the leaking pump and threaten to kill Supervisor Jack Godell, who attempts to reveal the secret. As Robert Cumbow observes,

[it's] a pity the answer is couched in formulaic terms that summon up remembrance of *The Parallax View*, *All the President's Men*, *Capricorn One* and just about any episode of *Lou Grant* in which all reporters are crusading heroes acting in the public interest, all corporate executives are money-grabbing, conscienceless villains, and all public relations people are sanctimonious toadies. (62)

Such formulaic images are also popular in Hollywood action films. *Fire Down Below*, *On Deadly Ground*, and *Danger Zone* all develop around discovering, fighting, and defeating those money-grabbing, anti-environmental villains. Yet, as Greenpeace video coordinator Karen Hirsch points out, “The issues are extremely complicated—they’re not supposed to be black and white” (qtd. in Stauth 16). Irresponsible companies and politicians are not the only reason for the pastoral destruction. Neither is their punishment the solution to all problems. By reducing the conflict into a war against those villains, Hollywood filmmakers conveniently transform the pastoral debate into the formulaic story of the good versus the bad and satisfy their audiences in many cases by the final defeat of the bad.

The second way to deal with the garden versus machine motif is to create illusions of the garden rediscovered, rebuilt, or regained. In contrast with the sense of failure and disappointment in American pastoral tradition, Hollywood films, especially blockbusters, are addicted to the story of success. Directed by James Cameron, the 2009 epic film, *Avatar*, tells exactly about how a garden is discovered, threatened, destroyed, and finally regained. The film begins by aerial shots of foggy mountains and dense forests but immediately changes to a close-up of Jake’s eyes opening to a reality of tubes and

machines. The contrast between nature and machine clearly introduces the pastoral motif. From Jake's narrative, audiences realize that it is in 2154 when human beings have severely depleted earth's natural resources. There are no more pastoral dreams on earth. People turn their eyes to Pandora, a densely forested moon with a valuable new mineral called unobtainium. The image of Jake's plane showing up in Pandora's sky initiates the first part of the Avatar story—the garden discovered and destroyed. Audiences see how Jake transforms into a 10-foot, blue-skinned Na'vi and meets Neytiri, a female Na'vi, who ushers him to a world of wonders. It is “a lush dreamscape filled with kaleidoscopic and bioluminescent flora and fauna, with pink jellyfishlike creatures that hang in the air and pleated orange flowers that snap shut like parasols” (Dargis). Although these images seem highly imaginative and surreal, they arouse audiences' deepest hunger for the pastoral ideal and the fear of its destruction. The following war of conquest corresponds to that fear when Colonel Miles Quaritch orders to open fire in his well-equipped, high-tech military plane and sees the Na'vis fighting back with their arrows.

Instead of a doomed failure, Hollywood films tend to keep their audiences in theatre by creating illusions of success. Director Cameron proves to be an expert in this. He makes Jake a national hero and a born leader, who can ride Toruk, a dragon-like predator, and fight in a Schwarzenegger style with his machine gun in hand. He also makes Pandora wildlife animals come and combat as Jake's allies when arrows, knives, and fists can no longer stop the attack. He even makes Neytiri behave like a professional paramedic who can accurately find the gas mask and use it when Jake sinks into a coma. Finally, he makes Jake transfer permanently into his Avatar so as to stay and live in his newly found garden. Although audiences know consciously or subconsciously that these

plots are unrealistic, the message of success works like an anesthetic, providing momentary chances to forget the worries and fears in the real world.

The garden rebuilt or regained is also a key element in Hollywood animations. Produced in 1942, *Bambi* tells from a deer's perspective a forest's destruction and restoration. The long shot of the forest at the beginning of the film prepares audiences for the pastoral bliss that has long been forgotten in the human world. From evergreens to a water fall, and then a lake in the moonlight, the camera moves and finally rests on a flying owl landing, yawning, and snoring on a tree trunk. The peace and harmony of the forest is fully expressed when the sleeping chipmunk uses the fluffy tail of his nearby squirrel as his warm blanket. The film invites audiences to identify with Bambi, a white-tailed deer, whose home is soon to be threatened and destroyed. The human world, symbolizing machine and its related problems, works once again as the threat to the pastoral garden. With no visual appearance, the human threat is indicated in two forms: hunters who kill Bambi's mother and the forest fire which according to Bambi's father is caused by human beings.

Yet, just like what happens in *Avatar*, the pastoral destruction is only momentary. It will soon be replaced by the happiness in the garden's restoration. The hell-like red color that dominates the scenes of the forest fire turns suddenly into an energetic green, symbolizing the coming of the next spring. Within 60 seconds, the film shows how nature is restored. The snoring owl is woken up again to join other animals like birds, squirrels, and chipmunks to see the new-born deer. It is not Bambi this time but his two babies. Greatly annoyed by this "happily ever after" ending, Lynne Dickson Bruckner points out that "[the] message in this final scene is problematic: regardless of man's destruction,

nature can eternally renew itself...the forest problematically appears as a resource that not only survives but also flourishes in the face of human carelessness and damage” (193-194). Despite critics’ dissatisfaction, the formula of pastoral celebration, destruction, and restoration continues to work as a hidden outline in many Hollywood films, leaving audiences an impression that no matter how serious the pastoral destruction becomes, nature or the pastoral garden will be rebuilt, regained, or restored in one way or another (by Jake in *Avatar*, by nature in *Bambi*, and by a boy’s wish to get a real tree for his girlfriend in *The Lorax*).

While the conflict between garden and machine is oversimplified and denied, the dichotomy between anthropocentrism and ecocentrism rarely appears in Hollywood environmentalist films. In fact, although environmental issues are raised in those films, anthropocentrism dominates the Hollywood interpretation of the human-nature relationship. *Erin Brockovich*, for example, deals with the problem of water contamination, yet the director’s attention is solely on the impact on human beings. There are scenes how Donna Jensen comes to her awakened toxic consciousness through Erin’s explanation. Her disbelief turns into doubt and then fear when she rushes to get her children out of the polluted water pool. There are also scenes of sadness when Erin visits the contaminated community tortured by rash, chronic headaches and nausea, miscarriages, brain stem tumors, leukemia, and many other kinds of cancer. The film gives a vivid display of the possible reactions to the toxic awakening including “outrage, acquiescence, impotence, denial, desperation” all listed in Buell’s “Toxic Discourse” (646). The anger of knowing the truth comes to its climax when Donna asks Erin if she



can still be called a woman without uterus and breasts. Donna's question shows and proves the contamination as a serious human disaster, a threat to human health.

The impact on nature, however, is neglected. It is true that every movie may have a subject to focus on. Yet, it becomes ironic when a movie picks up the subject of ecological disasters and refuses to see the damage on nature. In *Erin Brockovich*, the director seldom focuses his camera on the affected animals or plants. In contrast with the heartfelt sadness in visiting the human victims, Erin sees the dead roosters shown in the pictures and the lifeless frog in the cooling pond simply as evidences of what the PG&E corporate has done to people's health in Hinkley. Nature, in this film, is a silenced "other" that exists solely for the benefits of human beings. The ending reaffirms the anthropocentric notion when the victims in Hinkley get their compensation; Erin's boss moves to a downtown high-rise office; and Erin receives a two-million-dollar check as a reward. It seems that nothing needs to be done in terms of the environment. To express her dissatisfaction, Willoquet-Maricondi claims that "not only are the working-class affected families, bodies, and environments forgotten by the film but so is any serious discussion of a way of life that demands ever-increasing dependence on nonrenewal and polluting sources of energy, not to mention obscene profit margins" (48).

This anthropocentric and utilitarian notion is even more obvious in the Hollywood version of *The Lorax* (2012), a film that proclaims to be an environmental fable. The beginning of the film appears highly environmental by criticizing the utilitarian notion of a consumer society. People live in Thneedville, a place announced to be a Got-all-that-we-need-ville. It is a so-called paradise where everything including trees and air could be manufactured and bought. Yet, the film's undertone tells a different story. It is a place

“that was plastic and fake,” “a town without nature, not one living tree.” Audiences feel ready to see a world full of pollution and chemical waste outside Thneedville after hearing that “the air’s not so clean” and “we don’t want to know where the smog and trash and chemicals go.” The plot is basically the same with the book and the 1972 television versions until it comes to the interpretation of the word “unless.” Appearing enlightened, Once-ler tells Ted that he may be the reason the Lorax left the word “unless” there “because unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better.” Ironically, Ted looks for a real tree because of his infatuation with Audrey, a girl promising to kiss the one who can get a real tree. Although moved by Once-ler’s story, Ted has traces of the utilitarian notion when Once-ler asks him to plant the last Truffula seed. “Yeah, but nobody cares about trees anymore.” Obviously Ted doubts about the significance of planting the seed when nobody cares about it. It is in fact a reaffirmation of the need-based philosophy that comes to its climax when Audrey, Ted and O’Hare debate about the need of having trees. While O’Hare defames trees, which according to him are filthy, Audrey and Ted emphasize the need of having trees because they produce fresh air for free. “Come on! We know why you’re really against trees. Because they produce fresh air.” “For free!” Introducing the word photosynthesis, Audrey explains that trees can produce fresh air and reduce health problems, two main reasons for the town people to “give it a try.” Here, human need is still the center. Things are valued in terms of their contributions to human beings. Despite its proclamation to be an environmental fable, the 2012 version of *The Lorax* contradicts itself by criticizing the anthropocentric ideology and yet internalizing and disclosing it in the end. As Ingram points out, “Hollywood cinema has treated environmentalism in the same way as all other topical

issues” (*Green Screen* viii). The introduction of environmentalism is not for rational debate but for entertainment. It is therefore not necessary for such movies to be politically clear or coherent. They adopt the most popular stands to appeal to the widest audience. The anthropocentric bias, deeply rooted in Western culture, permeates Hollywood films, and its conflict with ecocentrism, as a result, is conveniently set aside.

In terms of the last conflict, which is between Tityrus and Meliboeus, Hollywood chooses once again to evade the complication, and this time the conflict is evaded by the creation of the new eco-hero. In *Ecology and Popular Film*, Murray and Heumann introduce the new eco-hero that “fails to fit in categories of tragic or comic heroes as defined by either Aristotle or Joseph W. Meeker” (6). Citing examples from *The Day After Tomorrow* and *Children of Men* (2006), they believe the new eco-hero has roles that “are filled not by tragic pioneers or even bumbling comic heroes, but by fathers seeking to save their own children or children they adopt as their own from an environment that humanity has made toxic in multiple ways” (6). In *Green Screen*, Ingram defines the new eco-hero as “a rebellious outsider, usually white and male, such as Forrest Taft (Steven Seagal) in *On Deadly Ground*, Jesse (Jason James Richter) in *Free Willy* (1993), or the maverick inventor Thomas Alden (Jeff Daniels) in *Fly Away Home* (1996), usually in alliance with family members or friends” (2). Both definitions are, however, limited in the characterization. In fact, the new eco-hero is more like an environmental superman or superwoman, who has super courage, determination, or optimism to make impossible things possible. Jack Hall in *The Day After Tomorrow*, Jake in *Avatar*, Forrest Taft in *On Deadly Ground*, and Erin in *Erin Brockovich* all belong to this type of hero. With two colleagues dying or wounded, Jack can tramp through seventy miles of subzero blizzards

in less than two days. Albeit an intruder, Jake can “make the bond” with Toruk, a legendary action that only Neytiri’s grandfather’s grandfather can accomplish. Appearing to be forever calm and confident, Forrest can always pin down his enemies and prevent them from posing environmental hazards. Without a law degree or any experience in law firms, Erin can get all useful evidences and win big in the PG&E case. These new eco-heroes create miracles one after another, saving innocent people in their own ways. In Hollywood, no matter how bad or serious the situation is, there is always a way out and a hope to be saved. The new eco-heroes provide audiences with an excuse to believe in miracles and the forever happy ending and transform pastoral worries, with which the film starts, into relief and hope of a better future in the end.

By outlining these general patterns, this dissertation does not mean that they are necessarily the guidelines to understand all Hollywood environmentalist films. Kevin Costner’s *Dances with Wolves* (1990) is celebrated as America’s first “environmental Western” that questions “our ideas about our relationship to nature and the meaning of our past” (Dumanoski). According to Richard White, a historian writing about Indians, the West and environmental history, “[nature] always serves as a setting in the Western, but this one makes nature a character” (qtd. in Dumanoski). Cultural historian Richard Slotnik agrees by pointing out that *Dances with Wolves* “makes our interconnectedness with nature a major theme” (qtd. in Dumanoski). David Ingram, however, warns his readers that to understand the environmental politics of Hollywood movies by their manifest content may leave hidden meanings unexplored. It is true that *Dances with Wolves* re-examines the frontier myth, transforming it from a story of progress through conquest to a story of destruction and loss. Yet, its basic pattern is still a white, male hero

protecting vulnerable natives in need of a savior. Ingram believes that the film fails to recognize Native Americans as members of complex, heterogeneous and historical cultures and wild animals as more than friendly and subordinate companions to human beings. Instead of its proclaimed environmental concerns, the film externalizes “a need to renew the hegemony of the white American male, restored to innocence through mythic contact with the redemptive purity of nature” (Ingram, *Green Screen* 180). Such a need can also explain *Avatar*, which has been referred to as “*Dances with Wolves* in space” (Boucher). The promotion of environmental sensibilities and the need to satisfy hegemonic masculinity are equally popular in Hollywood films, especially those star-studded, high-tech blockbusters. To understand their coexistence, one needs to see the Hollywood film industry’s “vested interest in promoting commodity consumption as a social good” (Ingram, *Green Screen* 181).

### III. Commercialization as the Ultimate Cause

In *Ecology and Popular Film*, Murray and Heumann underline the fact that “the American movie industry responds to contemporary cultural trends, presumably for economic gain” (92). They use filmic responses to the environmental movement of the 1970s to exemplify the fact. “[When] the *Soylent Green* DVD was released in 2003, reviews from distributors like ‘Home Theater’ asserted that ‘Hollywood, never slow to jump on a trend, began to invest in ecological themed films [after the first Earth Day]. Perhaps one of the most famous is *Soylent Green*, released in 1973” (qtd. in Murray and Heumann 93). Starting from the mid-twentieth century, environmental discussions have

been drawing Hollywood attentions that range from the population bomb (discussed in *Soylent Green*) to nuclear threat (in *The China Syndrome*), deforestation (in *The Lorax*), clean energy (in *On Deadly Ground*), toxic contamination (in *Erin Brockovich*), and global warming (in *The Day After Tomorrow*). Sensitive to the burgeoning appeal of eco-friendly films, the Hollywood marketing machine takes advantage of not only new ecotopics but old films which could be environmentally interpreted. *Bambi*, which was initially marketed as a love story, got the label of “one of the first environmentally conscious films ever made” in its 55<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition in 1997 (“The Magic”). The 2012 remake of *The Lorax* has environmentalism as one of its selling points and attracted more than 70 different product integration deals, some of which are, however, inappropriate for the film’s environmental message. They include “deals to promote the gasoline-powered 2013 Mazda CX-5 crossover SUV and a line of disposable diapers, drawing criticism from those both protective of mother nature and Seuss’s legacy” (Zakarin).

Hollywood environmentalist films are mirrors reflecting the latest environmental issues, and yet they are very often distorting mirrors. Instead of social and political reform or improvement, they bring in environmental issues mainly for the box office and for the attraction of maximum audience. When problems become too sensitive to please audiences, they will be obscured, oversimplified, or denied. The environmental discussion will also be diverted or even minimized with the introduction of entertaining elements like romance, suspense, action, and new techniques like 3D effects. Such films in Hollywood increase proportionally with surprising box office successes. In addition to the previously mentioned box office record of \$2.782 billion by *Avatar* and \$544 million

by *The Day After Tomorrow*, *Erin Brockovich* reached \$256 million in the global box office, and the remake of *The Lorax* garnered \$70 million in the opening weekend, ranking first in 3,729 theatres. No matter how critics praise or criticize those films, they continue to attract worldwide attention and their influence cannot be overlooked. The film industry in other countries has to face such influence, be it imitation or denial. The Sino-Hollywood relationship is without exception, and their interaction is what the following chapters are about.

### CHAPTER 3. HOLLYWOOD'S INFLUENCE ON CHINESE ECOCINEMA

In the Introduction to *Chinese Ecocinema*, Sheldon Lu observes that “China’s ecological woes make up a long list: massive earthquakes; epidemics of SARS and bird flu; periodic sandstorms; air, water, and soil pollution; desertification; flooding and drought; deforestation; the loss of land to urban sprawl; and numerous coalmine accidents” (1). In the post-Mao era, which is after 1976, almost all these ecological woes have been translated into the cinematic language. *Aftershock* (唐山大地震 2010) is about the Great Tangshan Earthquake of 1976. *38 °C* (三十八度 2003) has epidemics of SARS as its social background. *Old Well* (老井 1986) treats the ecological theme of water shortage and scarcity. *Clouds and Rain over Wushan* (巫山云雨 1996) and *Still Life* (2006) are stories before and after the Three Gorges Dam construction. *Suzhou River* (苏州河 2000) discusses water pollution in Shanghai. *Back to 1942* (一九四二 2012) concentrates on the 1942 Henan famine caused by flooding and drought. *The Forest Ranger* (2006) pinpoints an individual effort against deforestation. *The World* (世界 2004) deals with urbanization, and *Blind Shaft* (盲井 2003) develops around coalmine accidents. These eco-themed films increased dramatically in the twenty-first century. Many critics attribute the increase to the environmental deterioration that came to an unprecedented scale after the modernization campaign and the corresponding ecological consciousness that filmmakers,



critics, and audiences share in Chinese cinematic practice. Such an explanation, however, fails to cover the whole picture. A trend to imitate Hollywood is always at work in the process of making Chinese eco-themed films. Released several months after the 2003 SARS outbreak, *38°C* imitates the Hollywood commercializing pattern by borrowing a hot ecological issue to tell a romantic love story. Costing over 50 million yuan (\$8 million), *Super Typhoon* claims to be the first natural disaster film in China but turns out to be a clumsy copy of Hollywood genre films. Officially budgeted at more than 100 million yuan (\$16 million) for the former and 200 million yuan (\$32 million) for the latter, *Aftershock* and *Back to 1942* are both famous for their near-Hollywood-style marketing campaign. A careful study of the above films may tell us that the filmmakers discussed here are mainly those after the “Fifth Generation” (*diwudai* 第五代). These directors include not only the popular names such as Jia Zhangke 贾樟柯 (director of *The World* and *Still Life*), Lou Ye 娄烨 (director of *Clouds and Rain over Wushan*), and Zhang Ming 章明 (director of *Suzhou River*), who are commonly defined as the “Sixth Generation” (*diliudai* 第六代) but also directors of Chinese commercial and entertainment films such as Feng Xiaogang 冯小刚.<sup>14</sup> These directors were mostly born

---

<sup>14</sup> According to Sheila Corneilius and Ian Haydn Smith, the “Six Generation” is a term “mainly used of film-makers who emerged in the early 1990s. They were mostly born in the 1960s, so the Cultural Revolution was part of their early childhood. Uninterested in the broad sweep of history, the directors concentrate on personal accounts of young people’s experience. Financed by foreign money and with very few of the films distributed in China, they are seen as a part of the more general underground movement which includes print media and performance arts” (108). Other similar terms include the “Post-Fifth Generation” (*hou wudai* 后五代), the “Post-Cultural Revolution Generation” (*hou wenge yidai* 后文革一代), the “Urban Generation” (*dushi yidai* 都市一代), and the “New-Born Generation” (*xinshengdai* 新生代), or simply the “New Generation.” Many critics found these terms problematic in the discussion of the filmmakers after the “Fifth Generation.” As Michael Berry explains, “unlike the Fifth Generation, which was composed primarily of the collective of filmmakers from the BFA [Beijing Film Academy]’s 1982 graduating class, not all of the Sixth Generation were graduates of the 1989 class; in fact, many never even

in the 1960s and 1970s and had therefore easier access to Western (European and Hollywood) films. As Shaoyi Sun and Li Xun comment, “for the directors born in the late 1960s and 1970s, particularly for those not trained at BFA, Hollywood seems to have played a larger role in their cinematic endeavor” (159). In fact, ever since the Ministry of Radio, Film, and Television (RFT) approved the annual importation of ten international blockbusters, primarily big-budget Hollywood films, in early 1994, Chinese cinema has been profoundly influenced in terms of production, promotion, and distribution. As one of its subgenres, Chinese ecocinema cannot be an exception.

### I. General Trend and Failed Attempts

Before the importation of Hollywood blockbusters, the Chinese film industry was experiencing a series of reforms towards marketization. The originally state-run enterprises proved impotent in both productivity and efficiency, leading to a gradual and continuous loss of audience in the 1980s. In 1984, for example, “only 26 billion tickets

---

attended BFA. Instead, ‘Six Generation’ has been used as a blanket term covering most new independent PRC cinema, but even that definition is insufficient as more and more ‘Six Generation’ filmmakers turn to commercial filmmaking. Furthermore, directors like Huo Jianqi and Li Yang are both closer in age to the Fifth Generation, but have been grouped with Six Generation filmmakers because of the time frame in which they began to direct feature films. The label ‘Urban Generation’ is equally lacking for the simple reason that many of this group’s films do not center on representations of urban China” (*Speaking in Images* 543). For more details on the “Six Generation,” see Dai Jinhua, “A Scene in the Fog: Reading the Sixth Generation Films,” in her *Cinema and Desire: Feminist Marxism and Cultural Politics in the Work of Dai Jinhua*, eds. Jing Wang and Tani E. Barlow, (London and New York: Verso, 2002), pp. 71-98, and Sheila Corneilius and Ian Haydn Smith, “The Six Generation” in their *New Chinese Cinema: Challenging Representations*, (London: Wallflower Press, 2002), etc. For more discussions and debates on the naming of the “Six Generation,” see Lü Xiaoming 吕晓明, “90 niandai zhongguo dianying jingguan zhiyi ‘diliu dai’ jiqi zhiyi” 90年代中国电影景观之一 “第六代”及其质疑 (An inquiry into ‘the Six Generation’ as a Chinese film spectacle in the 1990s), *Dianying yishu* 1999, No. 3, pp. 23-28, and Shaoyi Sun and Li Xun, “The Politics of Naming: The ‘Six Generation’ and Beyond” in *Lights! Camera! Kai Shi!: In Depth Interviews with China’s New Generation of Movie Directors*, (Norfolk, Conn.: Eastbridge, 2008), pp. ix-xiii.

were sold, down 10 percent from 1980. In the first quarter of 1985, the moviegoing audience was 30 percent smaller than in the previous year” (Zhu and Nakajima 26). The situation did not improve in the early 1990s when film industry restructuring went to all levels including state-run enterprise reform, ownership reform, distribution reform, and production reform. With a wish to boost the economy, the Ministry of RFT allowed Hollywood’s re-entrance to the Chinese market, which “generated huge box-office revenues, totaling 70-80 percent of the total box office in 1995” (Zhu and Nakajima 29). For the following ten years or so, Hollywood blockbuster dominated the Chinese market, exerting a strong influence on the Chinese film industry. In terms of eco-themed films, the influence turned out to be multilayered and multifaceted.

First, Chinese eco-themed blockbusters appeared. Since 1995, Hollywood “star-studded, big-budgeted, and high-tech blockbusters such as *Natural Born Killers* (dir. Oliver Stone, 1995), *Broken Arrow* (dir. John Woo, 1995), *Twister* (dir. Jan De Bont, 1996) [...] *Waterworld* (dir. Kevin Reynold, 1995) [...] and *Jumanji* (dir. Joe Johnston, 1995) have played to Chinese audiences” (Zhu and Nakajima 29). Accustomed to those high-cost productions, Chinese audiences formed a special kind of “big-picture consciousness” (*dapian yishi* 大片意识), which Ying Zhu and Seio Nakajima explain as “a revelation about budgets and quality” (29).<sup>15</sup> It was a tendency to judge the quality of a film by its budget, star power, and technology. This “big-picture consciousness” worked on both audiences and Chinese film practitioners. “Domestic big-pictures” appeared consequently,

---

<sup>15</sup> For discussions on this “big-picture consciousness,” see Ying Zhu and Seio Nakajima, “The Evolution of Chinese Film as an Industry” in *Art, Politics, and Commerce in Chinese Cinema*, eds. Ying Zhu and Stanley Rosen, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010), pp. 17-33, and Michael Berry, “Chinese Cinema with Hollywood Characteristics, or How *The Karate Kid* Became a Chinese Film,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Chinese Cinemas*, eds. Carlos Rojas and Eileen Chow, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 170-189.

and some of them were eco-themed “big-pictures.” Released in 2004, *Mountain Patrol* cost more than 10 million yuan (\$1.6 million). The amount increased consecutively to 50 million yuan in *Super Typhoon* (2008), 100 million yuan in *Aftershock* (2010) and 200 million yuan in *Back to 1942* (2012). There were also more film stars involved. On the poster of *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* (巴尔扎克与小裁缝 2002), the names of the leading actors (Chen Kun, Liu Ye) and actress (Zhou Xun), who were nationally famous at that time, appeared right below their film still to attract more audiences. In *Aftershock*, the cast included more than ten film stars and the number doubled in *Back to 1942*, in which two Academy Award winners, Adrien Brody and Tim Robbins, played supporting roles. Although high-tech blockbusters in China were still rare, some filmmakers began to spend huge amount of money on special effects. Costing over 30 million yuan, the technical reproduction of the Tangshan earthquake in *Aftershock* created an epic in the Chinese film history.

Second, there were more attempts to commercialize ecological topics and concerns. When *Mountain Patrol* was released in 2004, the director, Lu Chuan 陆川, emphasized on many occasions that this was not an environmental film. “I did not film solely for environmental protection. Nor do I want to promote my film by the environmental message” (“Peng Hui yu Lu Chuan”). The reluctance to commercialize ecological issues gradually disappeared when Hollywood environmentalist films such as *The Day After Tomorrow*, *Avatar*, and *The Lorax* flooded Chinese theatres. In 2008, “the first disaster movie of China” became the key phrase of *Super Typhoon*’s marketing campaign. In 2010, *Green Water* (绿水) was introduced as the first environmentalist

thriller that has elements of suspense, fashion, and humor. With increasing ecological anxieties in the general public, Chinese film practitioners found that filming those anxieties has both artistic and market values. Released thirty-two years after the Tangshan earthquake and two years after the Wenchuan earthquake, *Aftershock* targeted people's fear of earthquakes and won both critical and box office successes.<sup>16</sup>

The third influence was the emergence of genre films in Chinese ecocinematic practice. In addition to *Super Typhoon* as the first disaster film and *Green Water* as the first environmentalist thriller, *Mountain Patrol* was the director's attempt to make a Chinese Western.<sup>17</sup> The film is set in Kekexili (Hoh Xi), a remote region in the western province of Qinghai. Situated on the highland between Kunlun Mountain range and Ulan UI Mountain, Kekexili is commonly called "no man's land" because of its high altitude (4,500 to 5,000 meters) and severe weather (four degrees Centigrade below zero in general). Just like the Wild West in Hollywood Westerns, Kekexili is "the meeting point of savagery and civilization" (Turner 3). The film begins by picturing a tired mountain ranger dozing off in his car. The camera moves slowly and quietly toward him, indicating a possible sneak attack. Some rude knocks of the window suddenly break the silence.

---

<sup>16</sup> Gaining more than 600 million yuan in box office, *Aftershock* has become the highest grossing domestic movie ever made by the year 2010. It is also the first Chinese movie to play on IMAX. In terms of its critical review, *Aftershock* has won the Best Feature Film Award at the 4<sup>th</sup> annual Asia Pacific Screen Awards (APSA) and its main actor Chen Daoming received the Best Performance by an Actor award for the same film.

<sup>17</sup> It is generally agreed that He Ping 何平 has created the Chinese "Western" genre in Chinese cinema. He directed two major Chinese Westerns: *Swordsmen in Double Flag Town* (双栖镇刀客 1992) and *Sun Valley* (太阳谷 1995), which are both set in the western area of China. This film genre has obvious similarities with Hollywood westerns, and attracted the attention of quite a number of Chinese movie directors such as Lu Chuan and Ning Hao, both of whom created their own versions of Chinese eco-themed western: *Mountain Patrol* and *No Man's Land*. It has to be pointed out that Hollywood Westerns are not necessarily eco-themes films. This dissertation, therefore, does not discuss in individual chapters their influence on Chinese eco-screen. It is, however, a good topic for further research which I may work on after writing this dissertation.

From the ranger's surprised face to a close-up of a wrinkle-faced poacher, the director introduces the main conflict of his story: the life and death struggle between rangers and poachers. Instead of cowboys and hooligans, the ranger-versus-poacher battle is equally breath-taking. The captured ranger is forced to see poachers shooting and skinning hundreds of Tibetan antelopes and then is shot dead. After the killing, the director moves his camera to the rugged and majestic landscape. It is a five-second static shot of Kekexili with its boundless landscape, mountains, clouds, and penetrating sunshine. The unique beauty of the arid and desolate landscape runs through the whole film, reminding audiences of the similar practice in Hollywood Westerns. As the story develops, there are scenes of gun fights, car chase, and hand-to-hand combats. There are also elements of local color and subplots of romance. Most importantly, there are heroes. Mountain rangers like Ritai and Liu Dong are fighting with no external help from the government. They are short of hands, money, and weapons. Yet, they never hesitate to fight no matter how hard and dangerous their life becomes. *Mountain Patrol* is not the first Chinese Western, yet it is undoubtedly the first Chinese Western to face and express ecological anxieties.

The last influence was on content. Although *Mountain Patrol* resembles Hollywood Westerns in some basic elements like the battle of good versus bad, the setting, action, local color, and romance, it is in essence a Chinese story that audiences can recognize and understand. There is another trend, however, to copy and paste stories from Hollywood. Being called "a Hollywood rip-off," *Super Typhoon* is accused of replicating plots from *The Perfect Storm* (2000) and *The Day After Tomorrow* (Zhou). At the beginning of the film, the camera shows an external view of the Planet Earth and

gradually zooms into some spiral cloud bands and a city underneath. The director obviously hopes to express a sense of incoming danger that characterizes the beginning of *The Day After Tomorrow*. Yet, while the message is clear when Jack jumps over the breaking shelf in Antarctica, audiences can easily miss the message in *Super Typhoon* if they cannot immediately connect spiral cloud bands with typhoons. Set in Zhejiang province on the southeastern coast of mainland China, the film is basically about how typhoons threaten a gardenlike city and how the disaster is avoided later. Audiences, especially fans of Hollywood disaster films, should be quite familiar with such a pastoral motif. The director uses about two minutes to create the garden image. Without much plot, he moves his camera from a young boy's smiling face to a group of children's smiling faces, from a newlywed couple taking pictures on the beach to fishing boats heading toward the sea. Most of these images reappear at the end of the film, indicating that the garden is disrupted and yet restored. As discussed in the previous chapter, the theme of the pastoral disruption and restoration is fairly common in Hollywood environmentalist films. Although the garden faces the danger of destruction, it will be restored, regained, or rediscovered in the end. Such illusions play a vital role in the simplification of the pastoral motif. Like a Hollywood apprentice, the director in *Super Typhoon* adopts not only the motif but the ways how it is simplified into a story of success.

Audiences can guess from the very beginning that the city will be rescued and in most cases the rescuer will be a Hollywood type of superman. Claiming that his film harmonizes Hollywood disaster films and Chinese leitmotif films, which are also called "main-melody films" (*zhuxuanlü dianying* 主旋律电影) meaning state-supported

propaganda films, the director makes the city mayor a Hollywood type of superman, hoping to celebrate patriotism and nationalism through that image. The city mayor makes his first appearance in a food market, bargaining pork prices like an ordinary citizen. Seeing a pickpocket pinching an old lady's purse, he fights and catches the thief but is mistakenly brought to the police station. He seems not angry at all and waits patiently for his secretary to prove his innocence. The director highlights the mayor's physical and moral superiority and reinforces it by revealing the mayor's second identity as a veteran of Special Forces. For Chinese audiences, such a heroic figure is more like a superman travelling to China. His superiority stands out at all critical moments. When the local fishermen refuse to give up their boats against the incoming typhoon, the mayor comes just in time to persuade them from the disaster. When the thief the mayor catches at the beginning of the film gets stuck under a tank truck that leaks natural gas, the mayor shows extraordinary courage to run into the typhoon to help him and extraordinary wisdom to drag him out by flattening the tire right before the explosion. When a shark comes to attack people, the mayor is so much like Chief Brody in Spielberg's *Jaws* (1975), fighting fearlessly with the monster and driving it away in the end. The mayor seems able to make all correct decisions and save all possible lives including a pregnant woman, a dog, and even a goldfish in its fishbowl. With this super heroic image, the director fabricates a happy ending that contradicts what really happened in 2006 when Super Typhoon Saomai hit the east coast of China and caused 456 deaths and \$2,469 million in damage ("Review" 6).

*Super Typhoon* turned out to be a failure in both box office and critical review. Although it attracted some audiences due to its promotion as the first disaster film in



China, its 10 million yuan box office gross fell far behind its production cost (50 million yuan). Its critical review was overwhelmingly negative. Calling the mayor a superhuman figure, James Hadfield expressed his disbelief by saying that “it’s certainly the first disaster movie I’ve seen in which nobody actually dies: a hymn to the virtues of good planning and upright city officials.” The movie’s special effects brought no applause, either. Dissatisfaction focused on the movie’s “repeated depictions of the impact of the contempo typhoon (with the same five or six model cars washed around)” and “the late appearance of a rubbery-looking aquatic beast” (Edwards). Among all criticism, the film’s imitation of Hollywood was most frequently attacked. In *Xinmin wanbao*, Zhou Ming asked directly in the title of his film review, “What is the reason for a high-cost Hollywood rip-off,” initiating a heated discussion of Hollywood knockoffs on Chinese screen.

*Green Water* faced similar problems when it was released as the first environmentalist thriller in 2010. Getting its inspiration from *Erin Brockovich*, the film begins by showing some local people’s mysterious deaths and develops quickly into a dramatic war between good environmentalists and a bad polluting factory. It ends unsurprisingly with the factory being defeated and punished. Although it is not about a legal case in court, the film still centers on how heroes achieve environmental justice by fighting against anti-environmental devils. As a low-cost Hollywood knockoff, the film failed to attract either audiences or reviewers and quickly disappeared in the Chinese cinematic market.

It is hard to use a simple yes or no to judge the Hollywood influence on Chinese eco-films. While *Super Typhoon* faced harsh criticism from both audiences and reviewers,

*Aftershock* garnered success in both box office and film festivals. In contrast with *Green Water*'s failure in critical review, *Mountain Patrol* was listed as one of the most important works in Chinese ecocinematic studies. For Chinese film practitioners, it is a necessary step to imitate Hollywood in terms of production, promotion, and distribution. It is, however, a dead end to copy and paste Hollywood movies to express and illustrate Chinese ecological anxieties. Director Jiang Wen 姜文 mentions in an interview the impossibility of imitating Hollywood:

[Hollywood's] filmmaking is not something that is easy for China to mimic. First of all, we don't have that stage. It is only after [Arnold] Schwarzenegger left Europe and migrated to the United States that he was able to turn himself into today's Schwarzenegger. If he were still in Austria, he never would have become today's Schwarzenegger. Second, we don't have that kind of economic, political, and cultural network that can quickly turn a local or regional issue into a global event. (Sun and Xun 180)

In terms of eco-themed films, the difficulties are even more complicated. The root of Hollywood environmentalist films is their pastoral ideal, which is an essential part of American self-understanding. No matter how they commercialize their ecological concerns and anxieties, Hollywood filmmakers are telling stories of their own pastoral ideal, the hidden conflicts their ideal has, and the possible or impossible futures their ideal faces. These stories cannot be rigidly copied onto Chinese screen. There are three major difficulties in the process of imitation.

## II. Three Difficulties in Imitation

The first difficulty lies in how Chinese filmmakers present and interpret the conflict between garden and machine. While industrialization started in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century and is now a synonym to urbanization, commercialization, and environmental deterioration in the United States, its situation in China is more complicated. Due to a series of wars and political movements, it did not develop in a fast speed until the late twentieth century when the Chinese leader, Deng Xiaoping, announced the policy of reform and opening-up. Within decades, China has undergone tremendous changes. Cities like Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou become completely modernized. Like many other metropolitans, they face the problems like overpopulation, traffic jams, water and air pollution and alienation. Yet, in some remote areas of inland China, people still live below the poverty line, fighting for the basic necessities like water, land, and natural resources. This imbalance of economic development is reflected on Chinese eco-screen and leads to complicated and ambiguous attitudes toward industrialization. In Wang Quan'an 王全安's *Tuya's Marriage* (2006), Tuya lives in Inner Mongolia, a region where desertification is making life extremely hard for nomadic herders. Without a well near home, Tuya needs to walk several miles every day to fetch water. She knows the importance of machine, which means an easier life. Yet, she is afraid of the well-digging machine, which paralyzes her husband in an accident. In Qi Jian 戚健's *The Forest Ranger* (2006), the villagers know that it violates the law to cut trees. Yet, it seems a quick and easy way to improve their lives. The dilemma between economic development and environmental protection also appears in Lu Chuan's *Mountain Patrol* (2004). Facing a captured poacher, the reporter, Gayu, asks, "What is your job?"<sup>18</sup> The old man answers

---

<sup>18</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from Chinese are mine.

with no sense of guilt at all, “I skin the animals. Five yuan for each pelt. I’m the fastest skinner in Ge’ermu. All my three sons are skinner.” Before audiences and critics censure him and identify him with an anti-environmental ruffian, the old man continues, “In the past, I was a shepherd. I herded sheep, cattle and camels. Now the grasslands have turned into desert. The sheep and cattle are all gone dead or sold off. Nothing to eat. It’s tough to survive here.” The old man is a victim of environmental deterioration and a victimizer of his environment at the same time. Knowing how common such a paradoxical situation is in China, filmmakers find it difficult to give black and white answers to the conflict between garden and machine, and this ambiguity becomes especially obvious in the discussion of underdeveloped areas of China.

The second difficulty is in emulating the Hollywood practice in simplifying and evading the dichotomy between anthropocentrism and ecocentrism. China has its own cultural and historical tradition in the understanding of the human-nature relationship. There are beliefs that human beings and nature are intimately connected. The ancient philosopher, Zhuangzi 庄子 (369-286BC), for example, emphasizes that “[heaven] and earth were born together with me and the myriad things are one with me” (18).<sup>19</sup> To be one with heaven, earth, and the myriad things means to be integrated with nature. Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (179–104 BC), an eminent Confucian scholar of the Han Dynasty, also observes the affinity between the human body and nature.

For example, the human head is round, correlating to Heaven that is believed to be round; the human foot is rectangular, correlating to the

---

<sup>19</sup> The original text: 天地与我并生，而万物与我为一。For the original text, see Chen Guying 陈鼓应, ed., *Zhuangzi jinzhujinshi* 庄子今注今释, (Taiwan: Taiwan Shangwu yinshuguan 台湾商务印书馆, 1999), 79. For the translation, see Victor Mair, *Wandering on the Way: Early Taoist Tales and Parables of Chuang Tzu*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1994), 18.

square Earth; the human body is believed to be composed of 366 pieces of bones, correlating to the number of days in a year; the four limbs correlate to the four seasons; the five inner organs corresponds to the Five Elements; and the eyes correspond to the sun and moon. (Yao 174)<sup>20</sup>

While the above quotes illustrate the human-nature connection, there are beliefs that human beings are the highest of all creatures. In *Chun qiu fan lu*, the same book that illustrates the human-nature resemblance, Dong announces that “[man] is above and beyond all ten thousand things, and is thus the noblest of all under heaven” (L. Zhang 68).<sup>21</sup> The above quotes illustrate that nature is a complicated concept in traditional Chinese literature and culture. It may mean different things in different contexts. In terms of the human-nature relationship, it is even more complicated. These traditional ideologies cannot be easily set aside when Chinese film practitioners are making their own eco-films.

The last difficulty is in replicating the Hollywood type of superman or superwoman. As discussed above, Chinese ecological problems are multilayered and multifaceted. People’s attitude toward nature is also complicated. It is hard to convince audiences that a borrowed image can work as a spokesperson of Chinese ecological anxieties or as a savior of the related threats and problems. Chinese film practitioners

---

<sup>20</sup> The original text: 唯人独能偶天地。人有三百六十节，偶天之数也；形体骨肉，偶地之厚也[...]观人之体，一何物高物之甚，而类于天也！[...]是故人之身首盆员，象天容也[...]足布四方，地形之象也[...]天以终岁之数成人之身，故小节三百六十六，副日数；大节十二，副月数也。For the original text, see Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒, *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng* 春秋繁露义证. Xibian zhuzi jicheng 新编诸子集成. Eds. Su Yu 苏舆 and Zhong Zhe 钟哲, (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中华书局, 1992), 354-356. For the summarized translation, see Yao Xinzong, *An Introduction to Confucianism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 174.

<sup>21</sup> The original text: 地之精所以生物者，莫贵于人。人受命乎天也，故超然有以倚；物疾疾莫能为仁义，唯人独能为仁义；物疾疾莫能偶天地，唯人独能偶天地。For the original text, see Dong Zhongshu, 354. For the summarized translation, see Zhang Longxi 张隆溪, *From Comparison to World Literature* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2015), 68.

need to create their own images to represent their pastoral ideal or their own eco-heroes to face their ecological challenges and threats. As Director Wang Quan'an says in an interview, "My view of human beings is not to expect the arrival of some sort of idealized superheroes, but to treat them as they are in real life" (Sun and Xun 171-172). These real-life images may not have super power, wisdom, or courage to make impossible things possible. Yet, they are common people audiences can be identified with. Tuya, for example, refuses to leave her grassland no matter how difficult her life becomes. Her connection with the land comes from a simple wish to keep her family together. Ritai is fighting against poachers not because he has awakened ecological consciousness but because he believes in his culture and religion. The success of these images lies in Chinese filmmakers' understanding of nature and the pastoral ideal ingrained in Chinese culture. It is therefore necessary to examine those related concepts in the context of Chinese pastoral tradition before any discussion of Chinese eco-themed films.

### III. Nature and Chinese Pastoral Tradition

Nature plays a vital role in traditional Chinese literature. People began to recognize and comprehend nature in forms of songs, poems, and essays more than two thousand years ago.<sup>22</sup> As J.D. Frodsham observes, "Whereas Western society did not

---

<sup>22</sup> There are quite a number of important works studying the concept of nature in traditional Chinese literature. The first one is Wolfgang Kubin's *Zhongguo wenren de ziran guan* 中国文人的自然观 published in 1990. From *The Classic of Poetry* (*Shijing* 诗经) and *The Songs of Chu* (*Chuci* 楚辞) to *tianyuan* poetry (田园诗) in the Jin Dynasty (265-420), and finally to Tang poetry, Kubin gives a chronological study of how the concept of nature has been formed in traditional Chinese literature. He argues that nature plays a complicated role in traditional Chinese literature, ranging from a simple sign of the external world to a cultural and religious symbol of peace and happiness. Different from Kubin, the Japanese scholar Koichi

really begin to appreciate landscape until the middle of the seventeenth century or so, the Chinese had attained a similar level of understanding some fifteen hundred years earlier” (193). The role nature plays in Chinese pastoralism could be understood in three different aspects: philosophical, social, and religious. These three aspects are internally connected, establishing an important tradition that celebrates a simple, peaceful, and natural life by retreating into nature.<sup>23</sup>

The first role nature plays is philosophical. In *Dao De Jing* written by Laozi 老子 in the Warring States Period (300-222BC), nature does not simply mean flowers, birds, or the natural landscape. It represents a way to understand the universe. “Nature speaks (*yen*) little. / Hence a squall lasts not a whole morning, / A rainstorm continues not a whole day. / What causes (*wei*) these? Heaven and earth. / Even [the actions of] heaven and earth do not last long, / How much less [the works] of humans” (Laozi 113).<sup>24</sup>

---

Obi has a more focused study of the connection between nature and poetry in the Six Dynasties (220-589) in *Zhongguo wenxue zhong suo biao xian de ziran yu ziranguan* 中国文学中所表现的自然与自然观 published in 1989. Obi believes that the relationship between Chinese literature and nature is particularly intimate in the Six Dynasties. His book, therefore, analyses the works in that period and hopes to answer the following questions: How is nature described in the Six Dynasties? What does it signify and why? The third book is *A Deconstructive Reading of Chinese Natural Philosophy in Literature and the Arts: Taoism and Zen Buddhism* published in 2004. The author Hong Zeng discusses the concept of nature in not only classical Chinese poetry but Chinese natural philosophy, classical Chinese painting, classical Chinese novels and contemporary Chinese films. Different from the above three, *Concepts of Nature: A Chinese-European Cross-Cultural Perspective* published in 2010 adopts a cross-cultural perspective and intends to clarify some common misunderstandings in doing transnational and transcultural studies of nature. It analyses how the concepts of nature differ in China and some European countries, especially Greece and emphasizes the uniqueness in understanding nature in Chinese literature, philosophy, cosmology, natural studies (*gezhi xue* 格致学) and evidential studies (*kaozheng xue* 考证学). There are, of course, many other works on the concept of nature in Chinese literature and culture. It is impossible to list all of them in one footnote. The following is an ambitious summary of the nature’s role in Chinese pastoral tradition.

<sup>23</sup> As it is mentioned in the previous footnote, the role nature plays in traditional Chinese literature and culture is multi-layered and multi-faceted. It could be pastoral in some works and yet wild, powerful, and intimidating in some other works. This section focuses only on the role nature plays in Chinese pastoral tradition, a necessary step in discussing the reconstruction of the pastoral myth on Chinese eco-screen.

<sup>24</sup> The original text: 希言自然。故飘风不终朝，骤雨不终日。孰为此者？天地。天地尚不能久，而况于人乎？ For the original text, see Nan Huaijin 南怀瑾, ed., *Nan huaijin xuanji* 南怀瑾选集, Volume 2,

Although critics differ in their understanding of the first sentence, they generally agree that nature (*zi ran* 自然) here is more than heaven and earth. It manifests the Dao 道, which is “something nebulous existing (*yu wu hun ch’eng*), / Born before heaven and earth. Silent, empty, / Standing alone (*tu*), altering not (*pu kai*), / Moving cyclically without becoming exhausted (*pu tai*), / Which may be called the mother of all under heaven” (Laozi 116).<sup>25</sup> Laozi names it the Dao, which all humans should follow.

“Humans follow (*fa*) earth, / Earth follows heaven, / Heaven follows Dao, / Dao follows self-becoming (*tzu-jan*)” (Laozi 117).<sup>26</sup> Here, nature (*zi ran* / *tzu-jan*) is translated into self-becoming, indicating that its connotation goes beyond the external world to manifest a rule that all creatures should go after.

Another Taoist, Zhuangzi 庄子, holds a similar view. In Chapter “Knowledge Wanders North,” Zhuangzi explains the ubiquitous power of the Dao. “Without it, Heaven would not be high, / Earth would not be broad, / The sun and moon would not progress, / The myriad things would not prosper. Is this not the way?” (Zhuangzi 216)<sup>27</sup> Although critics have different translations of the Dao such as the way, the rule, or simply the Dao, they generally agree that it refers to something the natural world follows. Zhuangzi believes that birds, fish, mountains, and rivers are all manifestations of the eternal way. For Taoists, nature externalizes the Dao and is an important way to understand the universal truth. This philosophical understanding of nature has greatly

---

(Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe 复旦大学出版社, 2003), 221. For the translation, see Ellen M. Chen, *The Tao Te Ching: A New Translation with Commentary*, (New York: Paragon House, 1989), 113.

<sup>25</sup> The original text: 有物混成，先天地生，寂兮寥兮，独立而不改，周行而不殆，可以为天下母。For the original text, see Nan Huaijin, 236.

<sup>26</sup> The original text: 人法地，地法天，天法道，道法自然。For the original text, see Nan Huaijin, 242.

<sup>27</sup> The original text: 天不得不高，地不得不广，日月不得而行，万物不得不昌，此其道与？For the original text, see Chen Guying, 575.



influenced the literati in later times and prepares for its cultural implication as a way of simple and natural life.

The second role nature plays is the antithesis of society and corrupted politics. This social function is particularly obvious in the works of Tao Qian 陶潜 (365–427).<sup>28</sup> Dissatisfied with the corruption and infighting of the Jin Court, Tao chose to resign and became a hermit in the countryside. In his famous poem “On Returning to Dwell in the Country,” Tao expresses his deep love of nature. “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 thirteen years. / The tamed bird longs for his old forest—/ The fish in the house pond thinks of his ancient pool” (Acker 52).<sup>29</sup> Tao describes his past life as an imprisonment in the dusty net. He is unhappy and feels difficult to accept the urban vulgarity. The contrasting images are hills and mountains, the old forest, and the ancient pool, indicating a simple and free life that is only possible in nature. It is important to notice that the nature Tao celebrates is not the wilderness humans need to fight for survival. It is cultured nature where there is land and house with peach and plum trees and dogs and cocks. “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 [...] A dog barks

---

<sup>28</sup> As an important poet in Chinese pastoral tradition, Tao Qian has attracted ample attention. Studies on him include *Tao Yuanming ji jiaojian* 陶渊明集校笺 (The Works of Tao Yuanming [Tao Qian] with Collations and Notes), Bin Gong ed., (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe 1996); A. R. Davis, *T'ao Yüan-ming: His Works and Their Meaning*. 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); and Charles Yim-tze Kwong, *Tao Qian and the Chinese Poetic Tradition: The Quest for Cultural Identity*, (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1994), etc.

<sup>29</sup>The original text: 少无适俗韵，性本爱丘山。误落尘网中，一去三十年。 羈鸟恋旧林，池鱼思故渊。 For the original text, see Bin Gong 龚斌, ed., *Tao Yuanming ji jiaojian* 陶渊明集校笺, (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe 1996), 55. For the translation, see William Acker, *Tao the Hermit: Sixty Poems*, (New York: Book Collectors Society, 1952), 52-53.

amidst the deep lanes, / A cock is crowing atop a mulberry tree” (Acker 52-53).<sup>30</sup> This is a perfect pastoral image that emphasizes self-sufficiency, the retreat from corrupted society, especially politics, and the harmony between humans and nature, nature and culture.

This pastoral image also appears in Tao’s essay, “Peach Blossom Spring” (*tao hua yuan ji* 桃花源记), in which he describes how a fisherman accidentally finds a world to realize the pastoral ideal. Tao explains how mysterious and beautiful such a place could be. “One day he went up a stream, and soon didn’t know how far he’d gone. Suddenly, he came upon a peach orchard in full bloom. For hundreds of feet, there was nothing but peach trees crowding in over the banks. And in the confusion of fallen petals, there were lovely, scented flowers. The fisherman was amazed” (Hinton 122).<sup>31</sup> After stepping into a small cave and squeezes through it, the fisherman finds a secluded world characterized by simplicity, sufficiency, and contentment. “There, on a plain stretching away, austere houses were graced with fine fields and lovely ponds. Dikes and paths crossed here and there among mulberries and bamboo. Roosters and dogs called back and forth. Coming and going in the midst of all this, there were men and women tending the fields. Their clothes were just like those worn by people outside” (Hinton 122).<sup>32</sup> The images of austere houses, fields and ponds, roosters and dogs correspond to what Tao describes in the aforementioned poem, “On Returning to Dwell in the Country.” There is only one

<sup>30</sup> The original text: 方宅十余亩，草屋八九间。榆柳荫后檐，桃李罗堂前[ . . . ] 狗吠深巷中，鸡鸣桑树颠。 For the original text, see Bin Gong, 55.

<sup>31</sup> The original text: 缘溪行，忘路之远近。忽逢桃花林，夹岸数百步，中无杂树，芳草鲜美，落英缤纷，渔人甚异之。 For the original text, see Chen Qiaosheng 陈桥生, ed. *Tao yuanming* 陶渊明, (Beijing: Zhongxin chubanshe 中信出版社, 2005), 91. For the translation, see David Hinton, ed. and trans, *Classical Chinese Poetry: An Anthology*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux; 2010), 122.

<sup>32</sup> The original text: 土地平旷，屋舍俨然，有良田美池桑竹之属。阡陌交通，鸡犬相闻。其中往来种作，男女衣著，悉如外人。 For the original text, see Chen Qiaosheng, 91.

more thing needed in the construction of a pastoral world: the pastoral peace and bliss by staying away from the society.

They told him how, long ago, to escape those years of turmoil during the Ch'in Dynasty [221 to 206 B.C.E.], the village ancestors gathered their wives and children, and with their neighbors came to this distant place. They'd kept themselves cut off from the people outside ever since. So now they wondered what dynasty it was. They'd never heard of the Han, let alone Wei or Chin. As the fisherman carefully told them everything he knew, they all sighed in sad amazement. (Hinton 122)<sup>33</sup>

Phrases like “years of turmoil” and “sighed in sad amazement” indicate a negative image of the outside world, contradicting the simple, free, and happy life within the village. To show how precious such a world could be, Tao ends his story by depicting people's fruitless efforts in rediscovering it.

When he got back home, he went to tell the perfect what had happened. The perfect sent some men to retrace the route, but they were soon lost and finally gave up the search. Liu Tzu-chi, who lived in Nan-yang, was a recluse of great honor and esteem. When he heard about this place, he joyfully prepared to go there. But before he could, he got sick and passed away. Since then, no one's asked the way. (Hinton 123)<sup>34</sup>

“Peach Blossom Spring” sets up a basic pattern for the pastoral ideal later poets and writers love to pursue.

The third role nature plays is religious. In Chinese literature, nature has often been associated with religion, namely Buddhism and Taoism, which developed into a religion during the Eastern Han Dynasty (25 - 220). Being a devout Buddhist, Wang Wei 王维

---

<sup>33</sup> The original text: 自云先世避秦时乱，率妻子邑人来此绝境，不复出焉，遂与外人间隔。问今是何世，乃不知有汉，无论魏晋。此人一一为具言所闻，皆叹惋。For the original text, see Chen Qiaosheng, 91.

<sup>34</sup> The original text: 及郡下，诣太守说如此。太守即遣人随其往，寻向所志，遂迷不复得路。南阳刘子骥，高尚士也，闻之，欣然规往，未果。寻病终。后遂无问津者。For the original text, see Chen Qiaosheng, 91.

(699-759) exemplifies that connection.<sup>35</sup> In his poem, “Deer Retreat,” the image of empty mountains has obvious Buddhist connotations. “Empty mountains, no men seen / Only hearing echoes of men’s talk. / A backcast glow enters the deep forest / and shines again upon the green moss” (Yu 187-188).<sup>36</sup> The quietude of mountains is set against human voice. The dense and dark forest is in contrast with the light of low sun. Through those natural images, Wang Wei delineates a peaceful, quiet, and harmonious world away from the society. The key to understand that world is the image of empty mountains. In Mahayana Buddhism, to be empty means to forget oneself (*wang wo* 忘我) and anything related to the self, such as fame, wealth, sadness and happiness, desires and worries. By emphasizing the word “empty,” Wang Wei advocates a “self-less” attitude through which one can enter the world of eternal peace. As Marsha Lynn Wagner comments, the image of empty mountains “expresses fundamental philosophical issues of being and nonbeing” and the religious concept of “emptiness” in Mahayana Buddhism (“The Art of Wang Wei’s Poetry” 100). “Deer Retreat” exemplifies the complexity of the Chinese pastoral tradition, in which nature has to be understood in relation to religion, philosophy, social and cultural connotations.

In contemporary Chinese literature, the pastoral tradition continues to function under the threat of industrialization, urbanization, and ecological deterioration. Shen

---

<sup>35</sup> In *The Anchor Book of Chinese Poetry*, Tony Barnstone and Chou Ping introduce Wang Wei as “the great Tang dynasty poet of pastoral Buddhism” (58). Important works on him include Marsha L. Wagner, *Wang Wei*, (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981), Pauline Yu, *The Poetry of Wang Wei: New Translations and Commentary*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), and *Laughing Lost in the Mountains: Poems of Wang Wei*, translated by Tony Barnstone, Willis Barnstone, and Xu Haixin, (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1991), etc.

<sup>36</sup> The original text: 空山不见人，但闻人语响。返景入深林，复照青苔上。 For the original text, see Chen Shuyuan 陈舒原, ed., *Wang Wei 王维*, (Beijing: Wuzhou chuanbo chubanshe 五洲传播出版社, 2005), 79. The translation is from Pauline Yu, *The Reading of Imagery in the Chinese Poetic Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 187-188.

Congwen 沈从文's *Border Town* (边城 1934) visualizes that threat.<sup>37</sup> Set in Cha Tong, a small town in western Hunan province, *Border Town* opens with the description of a simple and happy family: Grandpa, his grand-daughter Cuicui, and their yellow dog. As a boatman, Grandpa works not for wealth. He keeps saying that his life is good enough with a small piece of farmland which he and his grand-daughter live on. In accordance with this family, Shen describes the surrounding natural environment, which indicates an obvious pastoral tradition. "Households near the water appeared among peach and apricot blossoms. Come spring, one had only to look: wherever there were peach blossoms there was sure to be a home, and wherever there were people, you could stop for a drink" (Shen, *Border Town*, 11).<sup>38</sup> The implication is clear when Shen emphasizes that one can find villagers and their homes by following those peach blossoms. It seems that Tao Qian's peach blossom spring is finally found in the modern world.

Nevertheless, this simple and peaceful life is transitory. The coming of prostitutes foreshadows the threat. Shen explains that prostitutes come to the small town because there are more and more businessmen and sailors, symbolizing a disturbing, mobilizing, and commercializing culture from the outside world. The threat becomes increasingly obvious when Cuicui's life is disrupted by the loss of her young love. The book details

---

<sup>37</sup> Shen Congwen is often called a pastoral novelist in modern Chinese literature. In *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*, Chih-tsing Hsia identifies in Shen's writing a "limpid pastoral prose with its concrete evocation of landscape" (207). In *The City in Modern Chinese Literature and Film*, Zhang Yingjin points out that Shen's description of an idyllic scene near Pu Shi "includes these essential ingredients of Chinese landscape poetry: a white pagoda on top of a steep cliff, hundreds of small fishing boats moored in the river, a flock of green-headed birds flying over the water, cooking smoke from the boats slowly rising and merging with the thin clouds in the sky, which are colored purplish red by the setting sun" (282). Shen's works are critical in the understanding of the pastoral tradition in modern Chinese literature.

<sup>38</sup> The original text: 近水人家多在桃杏花里，春天时只需注意，凡有桃花处必有人家，凡有人家处必可沽酒。For the original text, see Shen Congwen, *Shen Congwen xiaoshuo xuanji* 沈从文小说选集, (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe 人民文学出版社, 1957), 230. For the translation, see Jeffrey C. Kinkley, *Border Town: A Novel*, Harper perennial Modern Chinese classics (New York: Harper Perennial, 2009).

how two brothers, Tianbao and Tansong fall in love with Cuicui. Realizing that Cuicui loves only his younger brother, Tianbao decides to leave Cha Tong and unfortunately dies on his way out. Feeling guilty of his brother's death, Tansong decides to leave, as well. Losing both her love and her grandpa, who dies at a stormy night near the end of the story, Cuicui is no longer that happy and carefree little girl. Although she waits every day for Tansong, the narrator states clearly that the young man may never come back again. Here, Shen expresses great sadness in losing touch with the past and pastoral way of life. In another book, *Chang He* (长河 1938), Shen explains, "In the winter of 1934, I came back to western Hunan from Peking [...] It has been 18 years [...] The most obvious change is the disappearing honesty and simplicity in the countryside. What substitutes is a profit-seeking world view that has been formed in the past twenty years [...]" 'Modernity' has come to western Hunan" (3).<sup>39</sup> Shen admits that this is the reason why he wants to write *Border Town*. It is a respectful memory of a disappearing past, an attempt to immortalize the once cherished pastoral values.

A similar attitude appears in Fei Ming 废名's *The Bridge* 桥, another pastoral novel published in 1932.<sup>40</sup> Fei Ming spent ten years writing this book, in which he created a beautiful, quiet and romantic world between human beings and the land. There is no indication of where this place is or when this story happens. There is not much plot involved. The book is more like a Chinese painting, where there are rivers, trees, villages,

---

<sup>39</sup> The original text: 一九三四年的冬天, 我因事从北平回湘西 [...] 去乡已经十八年[...] 最明显的事, 即农村社会所保有那点正直素朴人情美, 几几乎快要消失无余, 代替而来的却是近二十年实际社会培养成功的一种唯实唯利庸俗人生观 [...] “现代”二字已到了湘西。

<sup>40</sup> Feng Wenbing 冯文炳 (1901-1967), who wrote under the name of Feng Ming 废名, a pioneer of lyrically descriptive fiction rooted in ordinary daily life. Fei Ming is best known for adapting poetic language into his stories. One of the most important works on him is Chen Zhenguo's *Feng Wenbing yanjiu ziliao* 冯文炳研究资料 (Studies on Feng Wenbing), (Beijing: Zhishi chanquan chubanshe, 2010).

sunrise and sundown. It is beautiful and peaceful, reminding the reader once again of Tao Qian's peach blossom spring. Yet, different from Tao Qian, Fei Ming knows the futility of realizing this pastoral ideal in the modern world. He expresses his sadness by delineating the tears that often appear in the novel. Fei does not explain clearly why the villagers cry. Yet, the hidden sadness is always there, asking the reader to think of the outside world tortured by wars, famine, political and social upheavals in the 1930s.

In contemporary Chinese literature and culture, the pastoral tradition inherited from the agricultural society has constant conflicts with the commercial values in the industrial and post-industrial ages. Those conflicts challenge people's philosophical, cultural, and religious understanding, leading to a crisis of belief in Chinese pastoral tradition. Filmmakers in China need to keep those conflicts and the belief crisis in mind so as to tell their pastoral stories. In fact, their challenge is how to picture those conflicts in cinematic languages and, if possible, create or recreate a pastoral myth that filmmakers and audiences can share on the Chinese eco-screen.

## CHAPTER 4. CONSTRUCTION OF THE PASTORAL MYTH IN CHINESE ECO-FILMS

A careful study of Chinese eco-films in recent decades may tell us that Chinese filmmakers have never stopped making efforts to recreate the pastoral myth on Chinese screen. From water shortage (*Old Well* and *Tuya's Marriage*) to water pollution (*Suzhou River*), from Tibetan antelope poaching and killing (*Mountain Patrol*) to deforestation (*The Forest Ranger*), from urban demolition (*The World*) to the Three Gorges Dam construction (*Clouds and Rain over Wushan* and *Still Life*), Chinese filmmakers can and dare to face China's grave ecological realities and use their camera to record and reflect the pastoral disruption. In fact, the peach blossom spring has become increasingly difficult to find when terms like PM 2.5, Sudan I, and melamine characterized the daily worries of the common Chinese.<sup>41</sup> The key to understand the pastoral disruption in China is the loss of connection between realities and dreams and the destruction of balance between human beings and nature, nature and culture. To recreate the pastoral myth, Chinese filmmakers need to re-establish the connection in three major steps: first, to

---

<sup>41</sup> PM 2.5, or Particulate Matter 2.5, refers to tiny particles suspended in the air with a diameter of less than 2.5 microns. It is reported that short-term and long-term exposures to PM 2.5 lead to health risks such as lung cancer, asthma, and adverse pregnancy and birth outcomes. The increasingly serious problem of air pollution in China makes the term extremely popular to the common Chinese, especially those in big cities like Beijing and Shanghai, who would check the PM 2.5 levels before going out. Sudan I became a popular term in China after the State Food and Drug Administration discovered in 2005 that Sudan I, a kind of red dye that causes cancer and other negative health effects, was used in food. Melamine was known to the common public after the 2008 Chinese milk scandal. The milk and infant formula produced by Sanlu Group was adulterated with melamine, leading to the death of six infants and the hospitalization of more than 50,000 babies.



recognize Chinese social and cultural realities; second, to establish the human-nature connection; third, to affirm the nature-culture unity. This chapter is a detailed discussion of those three steps.

### I. Recognition of Chinese Social and Cultural Realities

The very first step of reconstruction is to recognize Chinese social and cultural realities. As discussed in the previous chapter, the industrialization in China has experienced a speed-up since the 1980s, leading to an upsurge of social and cultural problems such as the imbalance of economic development in urban and rural places, the uncontrollable environmental deterioration, and the loss of the pastoral tradition. Filmmakers need to take those realities into consideration in reconstructing the pastoral myth on Chinese screen. In fact, there are quite a number of filmmakers, such as Wang Quan'an, Lu Chuan, and Jia Zhangke, who are making efforts to root their stories in what can really happen in China, and their films play an important role in deciphering the pastoral anxieties and dreams in recent decades.

*Tuya's Marriage* serves as an example. Coming from a real story in Inner Mongolia, *Tuya's Marriage* is about Tuya, a woman forced to divorce her paralyzed husband when she can no longer support the family by shepherding. She chooses to marry the one who can accept not only her children but her former husband. She has refused several suitors and been refused by many others. No matter how hard life

becomes, she stays with her homeland, a place almost swallowed by desertification. The director, Wang Quan'an, explains why he became interested in such a story.

My mom was born near the place where I shot this film. I have always admired Mongolians there. I love their life style and their music. When I heard that the local government forced Mongolians to leave their pasture, which is facing severe desertification due to rude and irrational industrial development, I decided to record what has been taking place there before it vanishes. Tuya's marriage is also what really happened in that place. ("Tuya de hunshi")<sup>42</sup>

What attracts Wang is not simply a marriage story but the grassland culture hidden behind. The story may sound strange and hard to believe at the beginning. Yet, it is true to life, reflecting the problems and dangers almost all Mongolian herdsmen face at the present time. To achieve the veracity and historical accuracy, Wang chose the house the last Mongolian family lived in as the filming location and native Mongolian herdsmen as the main actors and actresses. Although the leading actress, Yu Nan, is not a native Mongolian, she spent five months there learning how to ride a camel, herd sheep, and take care of a herdsmen family. All those efforts are for a truthful account of the grassland culture, which is under the threat of drought, desertification, pollution, and human exploitation. As Wang observes, "When the film was finished, the houses and people there disappeared, as well. They are no longer the proud Mongolians who are always on horseback. They became farmers scattered on the outskirts of towns and cities or fruit vendors around city corners. They became people not different from us" ("Tuya

---

<sup>42</sup> The original text: 我的母亲就出生在离这次拍摄地很近的地方。我一直喜欢那个地方的蒙古人，喜欢他们的生活方式和音乐。当我听说这个地方因粗暴的工业开发导致草场严重沙漠化，当地政府强令当地的蒙古牧民搬离牧区时，就决定在那一切消失之前，拍摄一部电影来记录这一切。而这个独特的婚姻故事，也是出自当地一个真实的事件。

de hunshi”).<sup>43</sup> Rooted in the everyday Mongolian life, *Tuya's Marriage* provides audiences with a chance to apprehend Chinese filmmakers' ecological anxieties and dreams, which are not only about the deteriorating environment but about the disappearing culture and tradition.

Directed by Jia Zhangke, *Still Life* is another film inspired by what one sees, hears, and feels in this day and age. In the speech, “This is Cowardice for the Whole Generation,” Jia describes how a trip to the Three Gorges led to the production of *Still Life*. “When I got there [the Three Gorges], I became suddenly heavy-hearted. Standing on the street and looking at the wharf, I found Fengjie a place bustling with all kinds of people and activities. I can still see how hard Chinese work and live. The urge to shoot a film came at that time” (Z. Jia 181).<sup>44</sup> The key word in Jia's description is “hard.” People in the Three Gorges are living a hard life. They are struggling with the drastic change caused by the Three Gorges Dam construction. The change does not simply mean the physical immigration of a million local residents or the sudden demolition of those two-thousand-year-old cities. It is more of a psychological issue. As Jia points out, “In this abrupt change, it is the people there facing all the pressures, duties, and the many years after immigration” (Z. Jia 181).<sup>45</sup> In this regard, Jia is similar to Wang Quan'an, filming both the environmental changes and the related mental and cultural response. Jia believes that the immigrant experience is by no means unique.

---

<sup>43</sup> The original text: 电影拍完的时候，电影中的那些房屋和那些人也就消失了，他们再也不是骑在马上背上骄傲的蒙古人了，而变成了一些散落在城郊农田里的农民或城市角落卖水果的小贩，一些和我们差不多的人。

<sup>44</sup> The original text: 进入到那个地区【三峡】的时候，我觉得一下子有心里潮湿的感觉。站在街道上看那个码头，奉节是一个风云际会、船来船往的地方，各种各样的人在那儿交汇，忙忙碌碌，依然可以看出中国人那么辛苦，那时候就有拍电影的欲望。

<sup>45</sup> The original text: 在这样一个快速转变里面，所有的压力、责任、所有那些要用冗长的岁月支持下去的生活都是他们在承受。

As tourists, we go sightseeing with cameras in our hands. It seems as if those mountains, rivers, and houses have nothing to do with us. Yet, when we sit down to think about it, this drastic change is deep in our hearts, as well. When we are busy taking subways every day or go home from work at three in the morning, we may have the same feeling of being helpless and lonely. (Z. Jia 181)<sup>46</sup>

In other words, no matter where one works or lives, be it the grassland in the west, remote towns and villages in the south, or mega cities like Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou, the changes have the same impact on every Chinese. It is a collective national response that no one can get away from. As Jia summarizes,

I always believe that people in China have not much difference since we are facing all the changes. The changes bring us ample material wealth. Going to a supermarket, we will find ourselves living in an age of plenty. But we are also under the pressures of this age. The changed time and space, the sleepless and busy life is not a peculiarity for those in the Three Gorges. It is a shared experience for everyone. (Z. Jia 181)<sup>47</sup>

From ecological problems to the related mental and cultural response, Chinese filmmakers are making efforts to record and contemplate the shared experience that characterizes and defines the after-reform generations.<sup>48</sup>

In addition to individual experience, Chinese filmmakers are also inspired by local news and reports. As a story about Tibetan antelope poachers and patrollers, *Mountain Patrol* is based on the reports about two real persons in Kekexili. Gisang Sonan

---

<sup>46</sup> The original text: 我们这些游客拿着摄影机、照相机看山看水看那些房子，好像与我们无关。但是当我们坐下来想的时候，这么巨大的变化可能在我们内心深处也有。或许我们每天忙碌地挤地铁，或许凌晨三点从办公室里出来坐着车一个人回家的时候，那种无助感和孤独感是一样的。

<sup>47</sup> The original text: 我始终认为在中国社会里面每一个人没有太大的区别，因为我们都承受着所有的变化。这变化带给我们充裕的物质，我们今天去到任何一个超市里面，你会觉得这个时代物质那样充裕，但是我们同时也承受着这个时代带给我们的压力，那些改变了的时空，那些我们睡不醒觉，每天日夜不分的生活，是每一个人都有，不仅是三峡的人民。

<sup>48</sup> It has to be admitted that due to the above reason Chinese eco-films in the after-reform decades are mostly told in a realist manner, which echoes “the gritty textures of realist, documentary and independent film traditions” that “Six Generation cinematic storytelling adopts” (Ng 13). Although these films are powerful and profound in social and cultural criticism, they lack variety in subject matter, style, and genre.

Dorje was head of the Wild Yak Brigade, an unofficial group that patrolled Kekexili in search of Tibetan antelope poachers. Kekexili, which runs through Qinghai, Xinjiang, and Tibet, is famous for the Tibetan antelope, a rare species increasingly endangered as a result of the international trade in shahtoosh, the wool from its neck. Attracted by huge profits, poachers killed thousands of Tibetan antelopes and caused their numbers to “decline from almost 1,000,000 at the turn of the nineteenth century to under 75,000 by the turn of twentieth century” (qtd. in Economy 161). With no government support, Sonan Dorje kept fighting for more than two years till poachers killed him in 1994. His brother-in-law, Zhawa Dorje, assumed his position and successfully stopped some poachers before he was murdered at home in 1998. Attracted by their stories, the director, Lu Chuan, creates the main character, Ritai, who leads his patrolmen to fight against poachers and eventually loses his life for those antelopes. In dramatizing their stories, Lu does not stay on the surface of animal protection. He goes a step further to investigate the hidden forces that drive Ritai (Sonan Dorje and Zhawa Dorje in reality) to fight with no human and material support from the outside and with no fear of difficulties, hardships, and deaths. According to Lu, the answer lies in their cultural and religious beliefs. As one of the patrolmen says in the film, “Do you know what Kekexili means in Tibetan? It means ‘beautiful mountain, beautiful maiden.’” For Ritai and other patrolmen, Kekexili does not simply mean a place. It has rich cultural and religious connotations. *Mountain Patrol*, in this sense, is a pilgrimage in search of those connotations. It proves once again the trend of correlating ecological issues with local cultures and traditions in Chinese eco-films.

In fact, the correlation between ecological and cultural anxieties appears first in Chinese literary works. Jia Pingwa 贾平凹's *Memory of Wolf* (怀念狼 2007), for example, talks about the extinction of wolves in the rural areas of Shangzhou prefecture in Shaanxi province. From a wolf problem, Jia expresses his worries about the disappearance of the related Shangzhou culture. Xue Mo 雪漠's *The Hunting Plain* (猎原 2009) is situated in Liangzhou, Gansu province. It is an elegy of not only the endangered wolves and foxes but a long-neglected local culture in east Hexi Corridor. Guo Xuebo 郭雪波's *The Desert Wolf* (大漠狼孩 2001) and Jiang Rong 姜戎's *Wolf Totem* (狼图腾 2004) are both about Inner Mongolians and their disappearing grassland culture. These literary works disclose the cultural problems hidden behind the ecological crisis, providing a rich source for the making of Chinese eco-films.

Directed by Qi Jian, *The Forest Ranger* (2006) is exactly a literature-inspired eco-film. It is adapted from Zhang Ping 张平's novel *Criminal* 凶犯, which is about Li Tiangou, a forest ranger who becomes a "criminal" for killing three brothers in the village of Qinghe in Shanxi province. As a veteran, Tiangou goes to Qinghe to be a forest ranger. He is warmly welcomed by local villagers with their various gifts like eggs, sheep, and even money. Yet, Tiangou soon finds that the villagers live by felling and selling trees in a nearby reserve forest and the Kong brothers are the head of their illegal activities. Tiangou tries to stop them and is thus alienated by all villagers. Under the order of the Kong brothers, they cut off the water and electricity supply of his family, insult his wife, and threaten the safety of his son. Near the end of the story, Tiangou is almost beaten to death. With wounds all over his body, he kills the three Kong brothers

and becomes satirically the “criminal” waiting to be convicted. As the story indicates, Tiangou is not simply fighting with some anti-environmental forces. He is facing the whole village and a money-oriented social value that gradually dominates the after-reform decades. The author, Zhang Ping, mentions on many occasions that *The Forest Ranger* is one of the most faithful book-to-film adaptations among all his works since “it does not affect the book’s power in social criticism and realistic description” (S. Li).<sup>49</sup> The book is indeed realistic. It is based on a real story in which a forest ranger was prosecuted for killing two local tyrants in the 1980s. The reality-inspired works also include “Gada Meiren,” a Mongolian folk song about an uprising against the Khorchin grassland selling, Zhang Ling 张翎’s *Aftershocks* 余震, a novel describing what happens after the Tangshan Earthquake, and Liu Zhenyun 刘震云’s *Remembering 1942* 温故一九四二, a book recording a major famine in Henan that caused the death of three million people. These works were all adapted into films: *Gada Meilin* 嘎达梅林 in 2005, *Aftershock* in 2010, and *Back to 1942* in 2012. These reality-inspired works question the human-nature relationship from different angles and become important resources for the making of Chinese eco-films.

With attention on social and cultural realities, Chinese filmmakers begin to have their own interpretation of the garden versus machine motif. They refuse the Hollywood practice that reduces the machine image into hunters or anti-environmental villains, and emphasize instead how complicated and insoluble the conflict between garden and machine could be. For them, hunters and anti-environmental villains cannot sufficiently

---

<sup>49</sup> The original text: 没有削弱原著的尖锐性和真实性。

explain the loss of the pastoral tradition in current China. Ecological degradation, commercialization, economic disparity, and social inequality are all problems leading to the pastoral disruption. While villains could be punished by law or annihilated by Hollywood heroes, it is hard to eliminate the aforementioned problems that have entered the daily, routine life of every Chinese. By visualizing these problems, Chinese filmmakers find their own way to express their pastoral concerns, anxieties, and disappointments.

In *Mountain Patrol*, for example, Ritai's pastoral dream is simply to keep the peace and balance in Kekexili, and it seems easy to blame the poachers for the destruction of his dream. The director, however, tells the other side of the story by revealing that the causes include not only human factors like greed and selfishness but social problems like environmental deterioration, commercialization, and lack of laws and regulations. Interviewed by the journalist, Gayu, the old skinner, Ma Zhanlin, is the key to understanding the environmental problem. As a former herdsman, he joins the poaching team because there is no more grassland to herd his sheep and cattle. He has no other social skills and chooses to work for poachers, getting only five yuan for skinning each pelt. When he says that it's tough to survive here, he means not only animals but human beings like himself. He is just one of the many herdsmen forced to break physically and spiritually away from their past life. For them, desertification is not merely an environmental problem. It is a social and cultural problem, as well.

Besides desertification, commercialization is another threat to the pastoral tradition. For Ritai, Tibetan antelopes are holy beings. They are a necessary part of Kekexili and should be protected against any human intrusion. Yet, for poachers, they are



commodities evaluated by how much each pelt is worth. They are for this reason butchered, skinned, and then deserted. Their commodification bespeaks a money-oriented social value that influences all human and nonhuman beings. In order to get money, people like herdsmen, country doctors, and even students become poachers. There are also a lot of local residents willing to be smugglers of antelope wool. In a commercialized society, the human-nature harmony is seriously violated. When Ritai fights against poachers, he is also fighting with this money-oriented social value detrimental to the pastoral belief.

The last threat to Kekexili is lack of laws and regulations. When Gayu tries to interview Ritai at the beginning of the film, Ritai is wary of this outsider and refuses him directly. Yet, when Gayu explains that publicizing their stories might convince the government to declare the region a nature reserve, Ritai agrees to let him tag along. The changed attitude externalizes a deep worry over the chaos in Kekexili and a hankering for the establishment of related laws and regulations. As the leader of the civilian mountain patrol, Ritai knows the difficulties in fighting without legal or administrative support. They catch a lot of poachers and smugglers, and yet have no power to arrest anybody. With no financial or material help from the outside world, they are fighting a lonely battle. The feeling of powerlessness is most obvious when Ritai has to sell the confiscated pelts to get money for treating a seriously wounded patrolman. By revealing the above problems, the director emphasizes a kind of introspection that all Chinese need in the after-reform decades. It asks one to examine what has been neglected or lost in the pursuit of economic gain.

In *Tuya's Marriage*, the cause of the pastoral disruption is similarly complicated. Environmental problems like water shortage and desertification and social problems like urbanization and commercialization are all threats to the pastoral tradition. For Tuya, the pastoral bliss means to stay with her family on the grassland. It seems simple and reachable. Yet, the film begins by picturing Tuya weeping on her wedding day after a boy laughs at her young son for having two fathers. In a narrative flashback, the film investigates the hidden problems in her marriage. She has two young children and a husband who is permanently paralyzed in a well-digging accident. She needs to take care of the family, which means not only household chores but tending the flock on a piece of semiarid land and fetching water by hand from a distant, drying well. When Tuya dislocates her back in a truck accident, the family is on the brink of collapse. Tuya's misfortune seems accidental at first glance. The root problem, however, is water shortage. The director uses the image of a drying well to summarize her hard life. It is toilsome to travel twenty miles every day for water and despairing when the only well is drying up.

Sheldon Lu once observes that "China's belated modernity has often been expressed as water pathology" ("Introduction" 5). Water shortage in the image of a drying well frequents Chinese films such as *Yellow Earth* (黄土地 1984) and *Old Well* (老井 1987). The problem in *Tuya's Marriage* is more specifically intertwined with desertification. Besides the drying well, the director pictures the cold, barren land and the only tree with dry and yellow leaves. It is not surprising when Tuya's neighbor Sen'ge says, "I do not want to be a herdsman anymore. Almost ready to move." For herders, desertification destroys not only the land but their way of life. They are forced to leave the grassland, making the pastoral way of life no longer possible. Tuya's persistence, in

this situation, is bound to be challenged. Her husband's sister advises her to divorce. Sen'ge asks why she insists on a meaningless marriage. Tuya's tragedy, in this sense, is the tragedy of Chinese pastoral tradition, which is threatened and later substituted by the commercialized social value that makes Sen'ge's wife run away for someone richer and Baolier's wife divorce him when he goes bankrupt. In picturing a woman's fight for the lost tradition, the director Wang Quan'an succeeds in eternalizing the good, old days that are doomed to disappear in the new age. As Wang says, "I feel much relieved when I think of those people, whose happiness, tears, and angers are all recorded in *Tuya's Marriage*" ("Tuya de hunshi").<sup>50</sup>

Although *Mountain Patrol* and *Tuya's Marriage* are both stories set in the remote areas of China, it does not mean the pastoral disruption will stay away from the more populated towns and cities. *Still Life* depicts the pastoral disruption in Fengjie, a bustling town near the Three Gorges Dam. With a history of more than 2,000 years, Fengjie is famous for both its scenic beauty and cultural relics. It attracts many of China's greatest poets who went there to live, travel, and work. It seems a perfect place to realize one's pastoral dream. The director, however, shows a different Fengjie, which teems with immigrants, empty houses, and hills of debris. Located in the heart of the Three Gorges reservoir, it faces the problem of relocation with its old site being completely submerged into water. Through the eyes of two outsiders, the director tries to catch that transitory moment right before its disappearance.

---

<sup>50</sup> The original text: 一想到那些曾经美丽的人，他们的欢喜悲伤还有愤怒都被记录在这部叫《图雅的婚事》的电影，内心就平静安宁了许多。

Han Sanming, a coal miner in Shanxi, comes to Fengjie to look for his wife and daughter, whom he has not seen for sixteen years. With their address in hand, he finds their home inundated by water. For him, Fengjie is money-dominated place. He is forced to pay for a show he has no intention to watch at all. He has to bargain for a ride while everyone else knows that the place he goes to does not exist anymore. Influenced by commercialization and immigration, people in Fengjie have lost their tie with the land. They leave home to become migrant laborers, who are always ready to move to the next place to work. As Sanming later knows, both his wife and daughter work far away from home. They are displaced people, whose pastoral ideal yields to a chance of survival. Through the eyes of Han Sanming, the director shows how the local residents in Fengjie have been uprooted and forced to become desensitized to their environment.

As a parallel story, Shen Hong, a nurse in Shanxi, also comes to Fengjie to look for her husband. For her, Fengjie is a place of indifference. Working in Fengjie as a successful contractor, her husband has neither returned home nor contacted her for the past two years. Leaving not even a valid telephone number, he seems indifferent to what Shen Hong has been going through. In order to see and talk with her husband, Shen comes to Fengjie, only to find rumors about his intimacy with another woman. The camera follows her steps to observe the people in factories, construction sites, and the base of the Three Gorges Dam. Busy with demolition or construction, people there have little interest in helping her. The director pictures how a government official walks past her and shows to his guests a newly-built cross-river bridge that costs 240 million RMB. Instead of the indifference Shen Hong faces, the government official gets immediate compliments: "Turning a deep chasm into a thoroughfare. You have realized Chairman

Mao's ideal!" In 1956, Mao published his poem "Swimming" (*Youyong* 游泳). In the second stanza, he described an idealistic future.

Sails move with wind,  
Tortoise and Snake are still,  
Great Plans are afoot:  
A bridge will fly to span the north and south,  
Turning a deep chasm into a thoroughfare;  
Walls of stone will stand upstream to the west  
To hold back Wushan's clouds and rain  
Till a smooth lake rises in the narrow gorges.  
The mountain goddess if she is still there  
Will marvel at a world so changed.<sup>51</sup>

Mao's plan was obviously to change the world, to build a bridge and a dam so as to have no more chasms or flood. In his ideal, human beings were the master and conqueror of nature. It was therefore popular to see such notions as "humanity's determined triumph over nature" (*ren ding sheng tian* 人定胜天) and "fight Heaven, struggle with the earth, and win a high yield" (*zhantian doudi duogaochan* 战天斗地夺高产) in the Mao era (1949-1976).<sup>52</sup> These notions continue to influence people's perception of nature in the post-Mao era. *Still Life* shows candidly its influence by picturing how people concentrate themselves on transforming the landscape, turning tragically numb to the mental and cultural losses individuals are confronted with. It is in essence the same with *Mountain Patrol* and *Tuya's Marriage*, questioning what has been neglected or lost in the process of fast economic development. More importantly, the

---

<sup>51</sup> The translation is from Sheldon Lu, "Gorgeous Three Gorges at Last Sight." *Chinese Ecocinema: In the Age of Environmental Challenge* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009), p 46. The original text: 风樯动, 龟蛇静, 起宏图。一桥飞架南北, 天堑变通途。更立西江石壁, 截断巫山云雨, 高峡出平湖。神女应无恙, 当今世界殊。For the original text, see Mao Zedong, *Mao Zedong shici jiangjie* 毛泽东诗词讲解, (Changchun: Jilin renmin chubanshe 吉林人民出版社, 1977), 156.

<sup>52</sup> For more details on the concept of conquering nature in the Mao period, see Judith Shapiro, *Mao's War against Nature: Politics and the Environment in Revolutionary China*, (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

neglect and loss is not an individual case. It is a problem that the whole nation needs to tackle with.

In addition to the above films, there is a long list of cinematic attempts to explore the theme of the pastoral disruption on Chinese eco-screen. Focusing on common individuals, these films investigate their joys and sorrows, excitements and fears, hopes and angers related to the loss of their pastoral dream. It is hard to find Hollywood types of heroes or illusions of the garden rediscovered, rebuilt, or regained. In most cases, these individuals are fighting a losing battle. They know the difficulties in repelling the force of machine. Yet, they never give up. Their insistence represents a hope to reconstruct the pastoral myth by reestablishing the human-nature, nature-culture connections.

## II. Establishment of the Human-Nature Connection

As the second step of the reconstruction, stories on Chinese eco-screen exhibit an obvious tendency to relate the fate of human individuals with that of nature. Examples could be found in *Mountain Patrol*, in which Ritai and his fellow patrolmen are fighting for the life of Tibetan antelopes but suffer the same fate when they are killed one by one by the ruthless poachers. Han Sanming and Shen Hong appear helpless in the face of family destruction in *Still Life*, echoing the helplessness of nature in the background story of the Three Gorges Dam construction. In *Back to 1942*, women are treated like animals and the land, easily bought and sold for the sake of hunger and survival. Here, the close relationship between human beings and nature should be understood on two different levels. On the first level, people are passively connected with nature by sharing the same

destiny such as being marginalized, commodified, or victimized. Yet, on the second level, some people are also actively connecting themselves with nature by choosing to stay with, speak for, and defend the otherized nature.

This co-existence of the passive and active connection with nature is particularly important in the understanding of female images in Chinese eco-films. Being treated as the others in the patriarchal culture, women and nature experience similar oppression and face similar danger. They are marginalized, silenced, commodified, subdued, and even humiliated. According to ecofeminists, they share such experience because of the patriarchal construction of modern civilization, which is characterized by a series of dualisms such as self and other, culture and nature, man and woman, and human and animal. These androcentric and anthropocentric biases of human ideology construct male identity as separate from and superior to the identities of women, animals, and the natural environment. Ecofeminists, therefore, encourage a kind of “epistemological awakening” whose purpose is “to sensitize dominators to the realities of the dominated” (Donovan 92), and in other words to recognize the existence of the other. Under this notion, women and nature are no longer the others to be debased, but the ontological entities to be recognized and respected. In Chinese eco-films, quite a number of filmmakers exhibit an epistemological awakening by picturing women and nature not as foils to male heroes but as self-existent entities having their own stories to tell. In their stories, the passive connection between women and nature becomes in most cases active, from which women find belief and strength to fight for their chance of finding the peach blossom spring. This passive-to-active conversion holds the key to understand the female identities in Chinese eco-films and the pastoral myth reconstruction on Chinese eco-screen.

As a proof of androcentric and anthropocentric biases of human ideology, the commodification of women and nature appears often simultaneously in Chinese eco-films. At the beginning of *Mountain Patrol*, for example, there is a long shot of Tibetan antelopes strolling and eating leisurely on the grassland. Their peace is ruthlessly interrupted when two guns jut out from the side of a truck and start firing. In quick and shaky motion, the camera shifts back and forth between the running antelopes and the chasing truck. Although death could be anticipated, it is still appalling when the director shows in the next scene how a wounded antelope is shot dead, skinned, and discarded. As the narrator says, “In 1985, poachers began hunting antelopes for their fine wool, which was prized in foreign markets. Within a few years, the number of antelopes plunged from one million to under ten thousand.” The director uses less than four minutes to successfully introduce how the Tibetan antelope, a rare species of animal, is reduced to the silenced other waiting to be commodified, slaughtered, and hunted to the point of extinction. The theme of commodification and maltreatment is reinforced later when audiences see how reckless the poachers could be. They kill antelopes regardless of their gender and age. Although Ritai and his fellow patrolmen are trying their best to stop the poachers, they still have to bury more than 10,000 antelopes each year. It becomes one of the most appalling scenes when Ritai walks on a piece of barren land covered by the newly captured antelope fleeces. He tells Gayu that it is the breeding season and most of the killed antelopes are female. As the camera follows their slow and heavy steps, the background is filled up with the bloody fleeces laid out silently on the ground.

The suffering of Tibetan antelopes epitomizes what many human and nonhuman others have to suffer in the patriarchal culture. Although Leng Xue is not a major



character in the movie, she exemplifies how women are commodified in the modern society. She is the girlfriend of Liu Dong, a penniless patrolman who often needs her financial help. When Liu comes once again to borrow money, Leng Xue asks angrily, “Do you think I make easy money?” Obviously Leng Xue leads a hard life. She cannot get any help from her boyfriend, who often goes patrolling without a word. She seems constantly alone, fighting for her own survival. The director does not state directly what her profession is. Yet, there are enough implications in her speech and appearance. She is drinking with some men in a bar when she first appears. She is wearing fishnet tights and high boots when she reappears later. Being asked if she is cold in those clothes, she answers peacefully, “It’s my working outfit.” For a girl like Leng Xue, “commodifying” her body is a choiceless choice. As Heather Widdows emphasizes, “the language of commodification is meant to capture elements of objectification—the transformation of persons into things onto which desires can be projected—as well as the contractual nature of the process brought about by the technological and financial elements” (81). To treat the female body as commodity is exactly a process of objectifying women into things onto which androcentric desires such as male centeredness and male dominance could be fulfilled. Such a process is in essence the same with the commodification of animals and natural resources, which fulfills anthropocentric desires. *Mountain Patrol*, in this sense, is not simply about animal abuse. It is more a censure of dualistic ideologies including human versus animal, man versus woman, and culture versus nature. That is part of the reason why the director, Lu Chuan, refuses to label and promote his work as an environmental film.

The commodification of women and nature also appears in Ning Hao's *No Man's Land* released in 2013. Resembling *Mountain Patrol*, *No Man's Land* begins by picturing the human intrusion into nature. On a piece of barren land, there are no traces of human beings but some wild birds resting and flying around. The peace of nature is suddenly interrupted when a falcon is trapped, caught, and caged by a poacher coming from nowhere. The falcon turns out to be a precious bird worth a million RMB. The following story is about the related cheats, fights, and deaths in the process of smuggling those birds. Appearing frequently in the movie, the caged falcons become a critical image indicating how reckless human beings could be in the realization of anthropocentric desires. Corresponding to the falcons, the nameless prostitute the lawyer, Pan Xiao, encounters plays a similar role. She is cheated and sold to the boss of a gas station, who forces her to marry his retarded son. When she refuses, she is compelled to work as a prostitute. She is so much like the caged falcons when Pan Xiao meets her in a confined room that has no other furniture but a shabby loveseat and a bed for her "work." Through the twin subjugation of women and nature, the movie criticizes not only the dualistic ideologies decentering human and nonhuman others but the greed and selfishness of modern people as the root cause. As the director, Ning Hao, explains, "Except *Mongolian Ping Pong*, all my films are about one thing, which is desire" (Ning 183).<sup>53</sup> Here, desire means specifically the hunger for material gains. It could be a million RMB the falcon is worth, or 20,000 RMB the prostitute is sold for, or even the unreasonable 1,500 RMB the boss of the gas station asks for fueling Pan Xiao's car. According to Ning Hao, the biggest change to Chinese people after the reform and opening-up is "the loss of ideal,

---

<sup>53</sup> The original text: 除了《绿草地》以外，所有的都在谈一个东西，就是欲望。

faith, and political aspiration,” which leads to a money-oriented and self-centered society (184).<sup>54</sup> *No Man’s Land* visualizes such a society and denounces those who are commodifying all human and nonhuman others for self-benefits.

Different from *Mountain Patrol* and *No Man’s Land*, Jia Zhangke’s *Still Life* focuses on marginalization as the key word to understand the woman-nature connection. When the film starts, audiences hear all kinds of noise—human noise from a moving ship and mechanic noise from the surrounding machines. The Yangtze River, in contrast, remains silent. The camera moves slowly from the back of the ship to the front, recording human activities such as chatting, playing poker games, palm reading, and arm wrestling. Nature, in the meantime, serves only as the background showing blurred and indistinct images of the nearby trees, mountains, and rivers. Here, human beings are undoubtedly the center while nature is marginalized visually and silenced aurally. This human-nature dualism is best understood when the film’s historical background—the Three Gorges Dam construction—is taken into consideration. As a \$24-billion project, the Three Gorges Dam was promoted as a major source of renewable power and an effective way to prevent floods downstream. Yet, after its construction, hidden dangers and problems emerged. “[The] construction of the dam has caused the destruction of numerous homes along the river, inundated historical and archeological sites, and disturbed the original equilibrium of the ecosystem” (Lu, “Introduction” 6). Neglecting eco-ethics, the Three Gorges Dam testifies how nature is marginalized, silenced, and disempowered in the modern world. Thus, when Han Sanming holds a ten-yuan note, on which the beautiful

---

<sup>54</sup> The original text: 不谈理想，不谈信仰，不谈政治诉求。

scenery of the Kui Gate is printed, he becomes speechless to see its “new” look after the construction.<sup>55</sup> It is surrounded by demolition debris and violated by construction noise.

Similar to nature, the modern woman, Shen Hong, is the marginalized other in her marriage. For her husband, Guo Bin, she is the invisible woman whom he does not need to see or contact for years. “For the past two years, I can only sit at home, waiting for his phone call.” This is a marriage in which the wife has not even a way to express her dissatisfaction and anger. Having no idea where her husband is or what he is doing, Shen Hong comes to Fengjie for a chance to talk. Yet, her search turns out to be fruitless. She tries to find him in the factory where he works but is told that he is no longer there. She goes to Wang Dongming, her husband’s old friend, for help but is told that her husband’s cell phone is turned off. When the husband cannot be reached, communication becomes impossible. From Shen Hong’s first appearance in the movie, she is always holding a bottle, drinking water wherever she goes and making sure to fill it up when it becomes empty. As Dai Jinhua comments, “This action and this little prop are meant perhaps to intentionally signify ‘thirst’: emotional, physical, sexual” (“Temporality, Nature Morte, and the Filmmaker” 10). In a marginalized marriage, thirst means more specifically a hunger for voice, a need to be seen, and a wish to be loved and respected. In the middle of the film, there is a one-minute shot recording how Shen Hong tries to cool off by using an electric fan. Audiences can hear nothing but the boring sound of the fan and see the woman moving restlessly in front of the machine. It proves and externalizes her discomfort and anxiety in a marriage unworthy of its name.

---

<sup>55</sup> The Kui Gate 夔门, also named Qutang Pass 瞿塘峡, is the gateway from the Sichuan basin to the Three Gorges at the Yangtze River. It is famous for its high mountains towering on both banks and the fast moving waters underneath. Known as the shortest and most majestic of the Three Gorges, the Kui Gate has been printed on the back of the ten-yuan note since 1999.

Compared with commodification, the problem of marginalization is less noticeable, and yet more pervasive and widespread. In *No Man's Land*, the falcons appear to be free only at the beginning of the film. Once they are caught, they will be confined to limited spaces such as cages and car trunks. In a similar way, the Tibetan antelopes in *Mountain Patrol* lose their freedom once the poachers come. They are chased, killed, and skinned, and their pelts are hidden in people's clothes, trucks, or under the ground. Although the prostitute in *No Man's Land* has no danger of being skinned, she faces all other problems including being sold, chased, or killed. In addition to the cramped room she is forced to stay as a prostitute, she also appears in the trunk of Pan Xiao's car or the passenger seat of several other cars and trucks. She is never able to control a car, not to mention her own life. There are scenes in which her both hands are tied by ropes and her mouth is taped shut. Her loss of voice and freedom becomes the best footnote in the understanding of the man versus woman, human versus nature dichotomies.

Besides the above two forms of subjugation, women and nature are expected to play similar roles in the society. In her 1980 book, *The Death of Nature*, Carolyn Merchant uses the images of nature as nurturer or disorder to explain the woman-nature connection.

Central to the organic theory was the identification of nature, especially the earth, with a nurturing mother: a kindly beneficent female who provided for the needs of mankind in an ordered, planned universe. But another opposing image of nature as female was also prevalent: wild and uncontrollable nature that could render violence, storms, droughts, and general chaos. Both were identified with the female sex and were projections of human perceptions onto the external world. (2)

In Chinese eco-films, both images could be found. The grassland in *Tuya's Marriage* is expected to be rich and fertile. When it fails human expectation, it is conveniently deserted. The Yangtze River in *Still Life* is thought to bring resources like water and fish. When it renders storms and droughts, the Three Gorges Dam comes to conquer and dominate it and convert it again to a nurturing mother image that brings renewable power. According to Merchant, "The second image, nature as disorder, called forth an important modern idea, that of power over nature," and "the new images of mastery and domination functioned as cultural sanctions for the denudation of nature" (*The Death of Nature 2*). Thus, the hundred-year-old trees in *Forest Ranger* become just a means to bring firewood and money to the Kong brothers. The Tibetan antelopes in *Mountain Patrol* and the falcons in *No Man's Land* are synonyms to profits and wealth in the eyes of poachers.

Corresponding to nature's role as nurturer or resources-provider, women are required to perform similar roles in the society. Having her husband and two children to take care of, Tuya is expected to be a nurturing mother who stays at home to do all the family chores. When her husband is disabled, she steps out of the family to do her husband's work. Instead of encouragement and support, Tuya is confronted with doubts and questions. "Why do you stay with Bater?" For her neighbor, Sen'ge, Tuya's decision is questionable. Her double role as housewife and breadwinner challenges his belief system, which is based on the masculine versus feminine division of labor. "I know what you want. A MAN!" By assuming her need of a man, Sen'ge negates her role as breadwinner and limits her back to the image of a giving mother.

The prostitute in *No Man's Land* faces the same problem when she is bought to marry a retarded man. She is valued in terms of her ability to reproduce. According to

Carolyn Merchant, “[a woman’s] value begins at puberty when she becomes capable of bearing children, continues through motherhood as the reproducer of social norms in young children, and ends after menopause, unless as a widow she temporarily perpetuates the line of descent and property inheritance” (*Ecological Revolutions* 16). In refusing to marry the retarded man, the prostitute denies her role as a child-bearing machine. She is therefore beaten and imprisoned and later tamed to be a sex-provider. The following story is about her escape, her efforts to run away from the roles she is imposed to play in the patriarchal society.

In *Still Life*, Shen Hong is expected to be a silent wife and mother who needs and asks for nothing. When she appears in Fengjie to look for her husband, she becomes a troublemaker. “What happened? Why did you come without telling me before hand? Any problems at home?” Instead of happiness, her husband appears impatient and even angry at seeing her. For him, Shen Hong should be silent and invisible. If she attempts to make herself heard or seen, she becomes a trouble.

In fact, the female images in Chinese eco-films are mostly “trouble-makers.” They are dissatisfied with their traditional roles in the society and active in discovering their own voice and self. In the process of their self-discovery, they become actively connected with nature, which gives them power and confidence to live as a self-existent entity. According to Patrick D. Murphy, “[only] by recognizing the existence of the ‘other’ as a self-existent entity can we begin to comprehend a gender heterarchical continuum in which difference exists without binary opposition and hierarchical valorization” (*Literature, Nature, and Other* 4-5).

*Tuya's Marriage* is one of the best examples of this active connection with nature. From the very beginning of the film, Tuya is emotionally and culturally connected with the land. She grows up on it and chooses to stay as a herdsman while most of her neighbors are leaving the grassland to become drivers, vendors, or oil-diggers. For her, the land is not something to be given up simply because it fails human expectation. Although there are desertification and droughts, it is still her home. She is trying her best to stay on the grassland with dignity in the same way she fights for her family survival. Hence, she gets irritated when Sen'ge persuades her to divorce Bater and go to find someone richer and healthier. For her, to stay on the grassland means she can still keep her family together. Her reluctance and sorrow could be anticipated when she is forced to divorce Bater after the car accident and leave with Baolier, an oil-developer who promises to give her children the best educational chances and her husband the most comfortable nursing home. The saddest moment comes when she is about to leave with Baolier to a city six hundred kilometers away. The camera freezes on Bater's impassive face for about six seconds and moves then to Tuya, who stands outside the murky window of the nursing home, hesitant to leave.

If the story ends here, Tuya would not be in any way different from other herdsmen. She proves herself, however, unfitted for and unwilling to lead an urban life. She has a severe headache soon after she gets into Baolier's car heading away from the grassland. She seems uneasy to see Baolier not wearing his glasses and disinterested in hearing him describing their future life in the big and luxury villa. When Baolier tries to rape her in the hotel and Bater attempts to commit suicide in the nursing home, Tuya knows that she does not belong to the city. Her return is inevitable. The traditional



Mongolian music arises when Tuya and her family go back home in a truck. With the red moving truck, the yellow mountains, and the distant white sun, the director makes the return one of the most moving and impressive scenes in the film. The color red here is worthy of attention. Tuya loves wearing red scarves throughout the film. Her scarf is once again red in the returning scene, corresponding to the color of the truck. It symbolizes vitality and hope, which would always be there so long as Tuya stays on the grassland. In *Women and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her*, Susan Griffin celebrates her identification with nature: “This earth is my sister: I love her daily grace, her silent daring, and how loved I am *how we admire this strength in each other, all that we have lost, all that we have suffered, all that we know: we are stunned by this beauty*, and I do not forget: what she is to me, what I am to her” (219). Griffin’s words best explain the connection between Tuya and nature. She belongs to the grassland. Only on the grassland can she find her strength and vitality, and only when she is on the grassland can there be hope. Although Tuya is still walking with her camel and water buckets in the next scene, her persistence changes Sen’ge, who decides to sell his truck, his only property, to help her find and drill a well. With hopes of water, the film ends by the Mongolian wedding ceremony between Sen’ge and Tuya. It is true that the future is still problematic for a woman with two husbands. Tuya’s stay on the grassland, however, gives audiences a reason to believe in the reconnection between human and nature.

In *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, Val Plumwood argues that “[one] essential feature of all ecological feminist positions is that they give positive value to a connection of women with nature which was previously, in the west, given negative cultural value and which was the main ground of women’s devaluation and oppression”

(8). *Tuya's Marriage* is obviously an attempt to celebrate the positive value of the woman-nature connection. In an age characterized by the loss of pastoral tradition and belief, it is of great importance to criticize the negative value of women's connection with nature and at the same time recognize the positive value, which according to ecofeminists are critical steps towards a healthy and harmonious relationship with nature. In fact, quite a number of eco-films in China are endeavors to awaken Chinese to their once cherished ideals and beliefs and to a positive, healthy, and active connection with nature.

The prostitute in *No Man's Land* experiences that awakening when she can identify herself with the falcons. In the first half of the film, the prostitute has no idea that she is sharing the same fate with the falcons when both are bought and sold, imprisoned, and ill-treated. Unable to see what the root problem is, she naively believes that her life will be better when she can run away from the gas station. "I know what I'm going to do. Across my hometown, Jiuquan, there is a small place called Anxi. Nobody knows me there. I'm going to rent a room there, install some mirrors, and start a dancing school or something." It seems that her life goal is to avoid some bad guys she unfortunately gets to know and nothing bad will ever happen again if they cannot find her. Yet, when she falls once again into the hands of the gas station owner, the director shows how her fate resembles that of the falcons by giving a close-up of the caged falcons first and then following the owner's gaze to the prostitute who sits close to the cage, frightened and astonished. In the eyes of the gas station owner, the prostitute and the falcons are the same. They are both the other to be commodified, the tools to make money, and the objects to satisfy androcentric and anthropocentric desires. The best woman-nature

analogy comes near the end of the film. Remembering her past days in the no-man's-land, the prostitute says, "I was looking at those birds. Why did they fly that high? Risking their life for a mouthful of food. I'm like those birds. Those years in the no-man's-land were wasted ones. Nobody treated me like a human being, not even myself." The prostitute's words indicate her awakening from a passive connection with nature to an active one. In *Reweaving the World*, Irene Diamond and Gloria Feman Orenstein maintain that "[ecofeminist] politics does not stop short at the phase of dismantling the androcentric and anthropocentric biases [...] ecofeminism seeks to reweave new stories that...honor, rather than fear, women's biological particularity while simultaneously affirming women as subjects and makers of history" (xi). The prostitute does become the subject and maker of her history. She walks out of the no-man's-land, tells her story to a dancing school teacher, makes friends with her, and eventually settles down in the dancing school, which is her version of the peach blossom spring. It has everything she wants: the warm sunshine, the quiet life as a dancing school teacher, and the recognition of her self-existent identity realized through the use of her real name, Li Yuxin.

While ecofeminists focus their attention on the woman-nature connection as "a vantage point for creating a different kind of culture and politics" (King 23), stories on Chinese eco-screen testify that this vantage point does not simply exist in women. In addition to gender, any kind of oppression in terms of race, class, physical abilities, or species could become a vantage point that enables one to transform the human-nature, nature-culture distinctions and to envision and embrace a free, healthy, and harmonious social and natural environment. That is in fact the critical step in reconstructing the pastoral myth on Chinese screen.

Concentrating not on the woman-nature connection, *Mountain Patrol* is about the relationship between nature and some male patrollers. In the eyes of poachers, there are no essential difference between patrollers and Tibetan antelopes, both of which could be bullied and killed for money. This negative connection is vividly shown at the beginning of the film. After being caught and knocked out by some poachers, the patroller, Qiangba, wakes up to witness the death of a wounded antelope. The director emphasizes their similarity by giving a two-second close-up of Qiangba's face down on the ground and his eyes staring at the antelope, then filming from Qiangba's angle how the antelope is shot dead and skinned, and finally adopting the angle of the dead antelope to record how Qiangba is mercilessly killed in the same way. This negative human-nature connection signifies violence and chaos in Kekexili, which the director shows by making the Chinese title of the film, 可可西里 (*kekexili*), blood-red on the screen with the last stroke in each word drooping down to symbolize bloodshed. With the coming of poachers, the peach blossom spring cannot be found in Kekexili.

This negative human-nature connection gradually changes, however, when the journalist, Gayu, comes to Kekexili to cover the story. As an outsider, Gayu views antelopes and patrolmen both as victims to be covered in his news story. He comes to a different understanding after living and fighting with Ritai and his patrolmen, who impress him by their willingness to fight and die for those animals. It is first of all indicated in the departure scene, in which the director uses handheld shooting to record how the patrolmen hurriedly load their trucks, leave their family members, and drive into the mountains for poachers. While the camera pans quickly from one patrolman to another, it stays steady when they say goodbye to their family members. In addition to

hugs, kisses, and words like “Come back alive,” the departure scene has a close-up of Ritai’s daughter standing behind the trucks with tears on her face. These details signify the possible dangers and deaths waiting for those patrolmen. Yet, they are still willing to fight. Their willingness is further illustrated when the director shows how seriously they are short of hands, money, and guns. In order to keep poachers away from antelopes, A Wang stays alone in the mountain for more than three years with minimum supply; in order to chase poachers, Dawa gets pulmonary edema after running too fast on highlands, and yet Ritai cannot even collect enough money to treat his disease. The negative human-nature connection is completely transformed when Gayu sees how the patrolmen collect and cremate the abandoned antelope skeletons with a Tibetan religious ceremony. The camera fixes on Gayu’s thoughtful face when he watches those patrolmen walk around the fire with prayers for those animals. For patrolmen, Tibetan antelopes are holy beings whose life and soul should be respected. When the head poacher asks Ritai why he keeps chasing him, Ritai answers shortly, “You killed my antelopes.” The word “my” indicates a close, active connection between Ritai and those animals, who are not the other to be commodified, marginalized, bullied, or killed but ontological entities to be recognized and respected. For the same reason, people like college students, soldiers, or ranchers come to Kekexili to join in the Wild Yak Brigade. With their belief in an active human-nature relationship, these people give Chinese filmmakers a chance to reconstruct the pastoral myth on Chinese screen.

Different from *Mountain Patrol*, *No Man’s Land* is more like a modern parable about a man’s awakening to the existence of the other (human and nonhuman) after his loss of social and economic power. When the lawyer, Pan Xiao, appears at the beginning

of the film, he is ambitious, arrogant, and mercenary. Feeling proud of stepping onto the top of the social hierarchy, he looks down upon all others. He is not friendly to the little boy on the wagon, the truck drivers on the road, and the policemen who work hard to catch the poachers. In order to get money, he is willing to defend the accused poacher with a clear knowledge of his crime. He cares about nothing but fame and money and hopes to get both by hitting the headlines. His power disappears, however, when he drives into the no-man's-land, a 500 kilometers long desert highway where laws and regulations are not in force. His arrogance is ruthlessly ridiculed when two truck drivers stain his car and refuse to apologize. Instead of his former loud and pompous voice, he becomes timid and nervous in finding himself threatened by the rude drivers. His following experience teaches him that fame and money cannot protect him in a place ruled by physical abilities and weapons. He is heavily overcharged for gas, auto repair, and even a lighter and physically as well as mentally tortured by the poachers. When the poacher whom he accidentally runs over revenges by forcing him to pour gas onto himself, the power relation is completely changed. He is no longer the dominator empowered by his social and economic status. He is the dominated other sharing the same fate with the prostitute and the caged falcons. His belief in social stratification gradually gives way to an interconnected sense of self that values responsibilities and care.

Pan Xiao becomes a different man afterwards. He helps the truck driver bind up his wound and persuades him to look for the police. Although his own life is in danger, he protests against the poacher who is grabbing away the prostitute's life savings. When he stands barehanded in front of the poacher, trying to stop him from killing the prostitute,

the driving force is not money or fame but his respect for the life and dignity of all human and nonhuman others. The director emphasizes his difference by showing how he sets free the caged falcons, throws money into the fire, and saves the prostitute by killing both the poacher and himself.

While Hollywood filmmakers are busy making superheroes to rebuild or rediscover the pastoral garden, Chinese filmmakers create images like Tuya, Ritai and Pan Xiao to reconstruct the pastoral myth. John Shelton Lawrence believes that there is a template for the American superhero's character and environment, which has altogether six characteristics: the bipolar moral world, the license of innocence/call of destiny, the supremacy of the Caucasian male, the disguised identity and outsider role, super powers, physical and moral, and the calibration of retaliatory vengeance.<sup>56</sup> These characteristics, however, fail to explain Chinese heroes.

First, different from the American superhero, people like Tuya, Ritai and Pan Xiao are not living in a world where “[good] and evil are starkly defined” (Lawrence 89). No people are absolutely bad in *Tuya's Marriage*, *Still Life*, or *Mountain Patrol*. There might be selfish persons like Baolier, Shen Hong's husband, or the old skinner, yet they are not devils to be blamed for the pastoral disruption. Even when there are evil forces like the poachers in *No Man's Land*, the story cannot be summarized into a good versus bad battle since no persons there are absolutely good.

---

<sup>56</sup> For details, see John Shelton Lawrence, “The Lone Ranger: Adult Legacies of a Juvenile Western” in *Hollywood's West: The American Frontier in Film, Television, and History*, eds. John E. O'Connor and Peter C. Rollins, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2005), pp. 81-96. Although the template Lawrence describes is not specifically set for Hollywood eco-heroes, they share the same characteristics in character and environment.

Second, while the American superhero “acquires his special role through a profound experience of being a victim that motivates him to become armed but selfless crusader who works solely for others” (Lawrence 90), this victim to crusader transformation seldom appears on Chinese screen. It is true that Tuya, Sanming, and Shen Hong are all leading a hard life. Yet, they can never be called victims or crusaders. They are just common people trying not to be crushed by their negative experiences. Even Ritai does not fall into this category since he fights not for himself but for the maltreated antelopes.

Third, the American superhero is usually “a white-skinned man” with “perfect English” (Lawrence 90). The images in Chinese eco-films, however, are diversified. There are men as well as women. There are Han people in the central areas of China as well as ethnic minorities like Mongolians or Tibetans. There are people from both upper and lower classes and from different educational backgrounds. Chinese eco-heroes are not limited by their gender, ethnicity, class, or other social criterions.

Fourth, Lawrence believes that the American superhero “emerges in a social world of failed institutions, where laws and elected leaders cannot be relied on to provide for the community’s safety; because those incompetent officials can be indifferent to the community’s true needs as well as its savior, he cannot be a functioning member of that community or wear its uniform” (90). In Chinese eco-films, however, the cause of the pastoral disruption cannot be summarized into some failed institutions or incompetent officials. It is thus off the point to discuss whether Chinese heroes belong to those institutions or not.



Fifth, the American superhero “has remarkable power of anticipation, physical strength, and moral intuition that allow him to act effectively and nearly invincibly in confronting evil. He never starts a fight but never loses one either, just as in any shootout he can fire his weapon second and his target first” (Lawrence 91). Chinese eco-heroes do not have such invincibility. They do not have super power to make impossible things possible. They cannot save people from the pastoral disruption. Nor can they protect themselves against misfortune. They are more like common people struggling hard to maintain their own dignity and hope. This powerlessness is the key to understand Ritai. As the leader of the Wild Yak Brigade, he knows who and where the poachers are, yet he cannot stop them from killing more than 10,000 antelopes each year; he knows the danger of leaving his patrolmen in the mountain with a dead truck, yet he can do nothing but wish that it did not snow.

Last but not least, “[the] power of the American superhero is basically benign. If it hurts anyone at all, it is only the bad man, who deserve it, and only to the extent necessary to subdue them” (Lawrence 91). In other words, the American superhero will never do anything wrong or kill any innocent persons. Ritai, however, has to make many difficult decisions that cannot be easily defined as good or bad, right or wrong. With no more food or gas supply, he has to decide whether to continue his chase of the head poacher hiding in the snowy mountains. His decision to go on leads to the death of many poachers and patrolmen, and later the death of himself. He also has to decide whether to sell antelope pelts or not to treat Dawa’s disease. When Gayu questions him about the pelts-selling, Ritai retorts, “I know you’re a reporter. You think Kekexili is protected by you reporters? I’ll go to prison if I have to. I know selling pelts is illegal. But I can’t

worry about that now. I'm only worried about Kekexili, about my patrolmen." To explain his decision, Ritai continues, "Ever seen prostrators on a pilgrimage? Their faces and hands are filthy. But their hearts are pure. I sold pelts before. I had no choice." Ritai is exactly such a prostrator. In order to keep the peace in Kekexili, he is willing to do and sacrifice anything. He stubbornly chooses to stand with those antelopes no matter how hard and dangerous it is. Even his death resembles that of the antelope audiences see at the beginning of the film. Both of them are wounded by a bullet, convulsed with pain on the ground, and eventually killed by another bullet. Through Ritai's image, the director creates a new type of hero—the tragic, everyday hero who is more like a common man with uncommon persistence to fight for his dreams that have little chance of being realized in the modern world.

This tragic, everyday hero has two distinctive features. First, he has a strong life force that makes him unwilling to give up his pastoral faith no matter how hard life becomes. Han Sanming in *Still life* is a good example. His physical appearance is not heroic at all. Short and dark, Sanming looks like a typical lower-class countryman who comes to Fengjie in his white undershirt, black trousers, and a small, shabby travel bag in hand. It seems easy to cheat and bully him in a place foreign to him. The camera records his passiveness when some scam artists drag him to a show, force him to buy the ticket, and go through his bag for money. His powerlessness is emphasized when he pays for a ride to his wife's home and then finds the home inundated by water. It is hard to expect a man like Sanming to save or retrieve the pastoral garden. Nevertheless, his image changes when audiences see how tenaciously he looks for his wife and daughter in Fengjie. Knowing clearly that his brother-in-law does not like him, he visits him on a

boat and insists asking the whereabouts of his wife and daughter. The camera fixes on the brother-in-law who sits on the one side of the cabin, eating his noodles with other relatives and warning him impatiently not to be a trouble-maker. Sanming's voice comes from the other side of the cabin while his image stays outside the camera until one of the relatives gets angry and lurches across the cabin to kick him. The camera then pans to Sanming, who stubbornly stands in front of the relatives, remains silent for about twenty seconds, and continues to say that he wants to see his daughter. As Ian Johnston says, "Here Sanming's steadfastness is imbued by Jia with a certain modest nobility."

According to the director, Jia Zhangke, one needs compassion and courage to understand the charm of such characters. In the reunion scene, facing his wife's question why he comes to look for her after sixteen years of separation, Sanming lights a cigarette, starts smoking, and says nothing. In his book, *Jia xiang* 贾想, Jia Zhangke points out that according to the original script Sanming should say, "I had an accident when I worked in a coal mine this spring. Being buried there, I began to think that I would go and look for you, look for the child if I can get out" (183-84).<sup>57</sup> With experiences of working in coal mines, the actor, who bears the same name with Han Sanming, suggested crossing these words out. Jia agreed and explained later why he made that decision:

He [Sanming] is right. There are so many things in life. It's not necessary to articulate everything. Just like this film. I do not feel necessary to list out all the causes and effects. Because we belong to the same age. Confronted with stories of this age, we can understand them if we have the compassion, if we can see the lives of others from our small world. Maybe we had a similar life in the past, but we

---

<sup>57</sup> The original text: 春天的时候，煤矿出了事情我被压在底下了，在底下的时候我想，如果能够活着出来的时候我一定要看看你们，看看孩子。

pretend to forget. When we are alone, when we have the courage, the ability to face, we can understand. (184)<sup>58</sup>

Sanming chooses silence because there are too many things to tell. His silence is a special way to summarize the hardships he needs to face, the changes he needs to adjust to, and the losses he needs to accept in this age.

Jia believes that there is a strong life force hidden in such people. He says in an interview:

When I was making *Still Life*, what I first saw was a site of destruction, a two-thousand year old city that was destroyed in two years, leaving a sense of void and emptiness. But at the same time, the people are still going about their daily lives—which is evidence of a strong life force. So there's a sense of contradiction between destruction and an ongoing urge to live. (Rapfogel 47)

This strong life force best explains Sanming, who experiences enough pain and suffering, makes few complaints and presses on as if nothing stops him. When he is told that he needs to take over a family debt of 30,000 RMB to get his wife back, his answer is short and firm: “Give me a year. I’ll pay it.” The film ends by Sanming going back home to work in illegal coal mines, which is dangerous but the only way to fulfill his promise. The last image of the film is Sanming watching a distant figure walking a tightrope between two buildings under demolition. It allegorizes the stories of Sanming, Ritai, Tuya, and many other tragic, everyday heroes, who are trying hard to keep a balance between past and present, changes and traditions, losses and rewards, disappointments

---

<sup>58</sup> The original text: 他说得非常好，生活里面那么多的事情何必说那么清楚呢。就好像这部电影其实有很多前因后果，没必要讲那么清楚。因为都是我们这个时代的人，面对这个时代的故事，如果我们有一个情怀，我们就能够去理解。如果我们能从自己的一个狭小的世界里面去观望别人的生活，我们就能够理解。或许我们曾经有过这样的生活，但我们假装忘记。当我们一个人的时候，如果我们有一种勇气，有一种能力去面对的时候，我们能够理解。

and dreams. This difficult balancing act forms a special kind of grace and beauty that characterizes the eco-cinematic practices in China.

The second feature of the tragic, everyday hero is his close connection with other human and nonhuman beings in the world. While Hollywood loves lonely heroes, Chinese filmmakers create images that value “the interconnectedness of all life” (Gaard 308). Although Ritai has to fight alone sometimes, he is never lonely. He has his family and patrolmen. There are at least two scenes in which Ritai and his patrolmen are singing and dancing together. Setting a sharp contrast with the difficulties and dangers they are confronted with, the happiness on their faces indicates their willingness to fight and die for the same dream. Tuyu is the only breadwinner of the family. She often needs to work alone on the grassland. Yet, her beauty lies exactly in her efforts to keep the family together. Although Sanming fails to go back home with his wife and daughter at the end of the story, his dream of family reunion does not end. Even Pan Xiao learns to care about others after his nightmarish experience in the no-man’s-land. He changes from an egotist to a man willing to sacrifice himself for others. His relationship with the prostitute also develops from indifference and distrust to mutual acceptance, respect and aid. According to ecologists, life on earth exists in a relationship of mutual acceptance and dependence. This interconnectedness is the prerequisite for the construction of a healthy and well-balanced society. The stories of these eco-heroes testify that this interconnectedness is not only among human beings who may be different in race, class, or gender but between human beings and nature. Ritai devotes his whole life to the protection of Tibetan antelopes. Tuyu cannot be her true self when she leaves the grassland. Pan Xiao sets free the falcons before his death. These people connect

themselves with nature because of the culture they choose to accept and celebrate. It is not the androcentric and anthropocentric culture that dominates the modern world but the culture that recognizes and respects the integrity of nature. This nature-culture unity is the third step in reconstructing the pastoral myth on Chinese screen.

### III. Affirmation of the Nature-Culture Unity

Chinese eco-films are not simply about nature but about culture, about the loss of the pastoral culture. The reconstruction of the pastoral myth, in this sense, is a process of reconstructing culture, not the money-oriented and self-centered culture but the culture that recognizes the beauty and power of nature and the one that can be harmonized with nature. This attention to culture could be traced in almost all Chinese eco-films. *Tuya's Marriage* is about the Mongolian grassland culture threatened by rural modernity. *Still Life* visualizes the disappearance of the traditional, local culture in the Three Gorges Dam area. *No Man's Land* criticizes the modern consumer culture, and *Mountain Patrol* celebrates the mysterious Tibetan culture related to its religion. No matter what kind of culture these films zoom in on, they are all efforts to affirm the nature-culture unity, the essence of a promising, well-balanced society and the key to retrieve the modern peach blossom spring. This nature-culture unity is realized in two steps: first, to correlate ecological and cultural anxieties; second, to celebrate nature-loving cultures and religions.

As it is mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, there is an obvious trend of correlating ecological issues with local cultures and traditions on Chinese eco-screen. While “[much] of the Western tradition can be understood in terms of increasing self-

consciousness about the difference between culture and nature” (Loy 9), most of the Chinese eco-films are trying to show how the problems of nature and culture are interrelated. Culture is not higher than nature as Claude Lévi-Strauss argues in his often-quoted binary oppositions such as nature versus culture, raw versus cooked, inedible versus edible.<sup>59</sup> Nor is it safe from being destroyed because of its “advantageous” position in the closer versus further hierarchy. For Chinese in the after-reform decades, ecological crisis and cultural crisis coexist in their life. It is hard to differentiate their respective causes and consequences, which are in most cases intertwined with each other. Intrigued by such a phenomenon, Chinese filmmakers such as Jia Zhangke, Wang Quan’an, and Ning Hao use their camera to investigate this correlation and the possible solutions to both crises.

In Jia Zhangke’s *Still Life*, nature and culture are simultaneously threatened and destroyed. According to Jiayan Mi, “[three] words in Chinese—*yan* 淹 (inundation), *chai* 拆 (demolition), and *qian* 迁 (relocation)—can be configured as heightened signifiers to articulate the ecocidal condition revealed by [*Still Life*]” (24). With attentions to both nature and culture, this dissertation finds that these three words are signifiers to articulate not only the ecocidal but cultural-cidal conditions in the film. The director, Jia Zhangke, visualizes the theme *yan* by showing how a young man brings Sanming to the bank of a river and tells him that his wife’s home is now under water. Feeling puzzled at what he sees, Sanming asks, “Why is there water everywhere?” The young man answers, “The old Fengjie was inundated long ago. Didn’t you see the news? Do you know the Three

---

<sup>59</sup> For details, see Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, vol. 1 (New York: Basic Books, 1963) and *The Raw and the Cooked* (New York: Harper, 1969).

Gorges Dam project?” The physical and cultural loss of Fengjie is immediately connected with The Three Gorges Dam construction, which means the destruction of many houses, farmlands, natural scenery, and historical sites. When Sanming leaves with the young man, the camera pans slowly and silently from right to left, giving a horizontal view of the river. The old Fengjie is no longer there. One can only stand there, imagine its past prosperity, and mourn its loss. The director emphasizes the sign “water level 156.5 meters” by making it appear at least twice in the movie, indicating what Sanming sees in Fengjie will soon be inundated, as well.<sup>60</sup>

Related to the topic of inundation, the word *chai* has the same destructive power. The encircled Chinese character 拆 appears frequently in the movie. Whenever and wherever it appears, the buildings nearby will be demolished. As an outsider, Sanming works temporarily as a demolition worker, the easiest job to be found in Fengjie. Through his eyes, the director pictures the town’s present. It has the rubble and ruins everywhere. The destruction here is both physical and mental. It refers not only to buildings but the sense of home that is of great importance to human society. That is why Mr. He gets so angry when he sees workers painting the word *chai* on the walls of his family hotel. As Sheldon Lu observes in his article, “Tear down the City,” the word *Chai* “points not only to the physical demolition of the old cityscape but also, more profoundly, to the symbolic and psychological destruction of the social fabric of families and neighborhoods” (137-138).

---

<sup>60</sup> There are three different stages in the construction of the Three Gorges Dam: in June 2003, the water level rose from 70m to 135m; in October 2006, it reached 156.5m; and on 4 November 2008 it increased to 172.3m and finally to 175m on 25 October 2010. The number 156.5 indicates that what audiences see on screen will soon disappear with the flood.



When homes are destroyed, people are forced to relocate. This relocation involves more than 1.3 million local residents, who face the problem of physical and mental adjustment to the new environment. Jiayan Mi once observes that the Three Gorges Dam “has created the largest settlement operation in modern China: social and political discontent could have explosive consequences” (25). What makes it even worse is the loss of cultural roots in the form of archaeological sites and relics. Although the Chinese government announced a full 1 billion RMB to fund the Three Gorges Relics Rescue Program to discover and rescue the archaeological sites and relics. It is hard to imagine the inundation of more than 2,000 known historical sites—some dating to the Paleolithic era—and the relocation of many other sites and relics, whose significance cannot be separated from its geographic locations.<sup>61</sup> It is even harder to imagine how many undiscovered sites and relics would be lost in the floods. When Shen Hong goes to look for Wang Dongming, her husband’s old friend, he is working exactly in such an archaeological team. The director does not show the relics Wang is working on. They stay outside the camera, unseen and unvoiced, just like many other sites and relics that would disappear with the Three Gorges Dam construction. As Lisa See comments, “These losses in China... may go quietly unmourned today, but their absence will ripple across the centuries.”

---

<sup>61</sup> For example, the 1,700-year-old Zhang Fei Temple, which was originally constructed in honor of General Zhang Fei during the Three Kingdoms Period (220-280) on the southern bank of the Yangtze River, was relocated westward 32 kilometers to the upstream. This relocation was time and money consuming. It took about 10 years and the overall cost of the temple resettlement exceeded 70 million RMB. There are quite a number of works studying the resettlement of local residents such as Gorild Heggelund’s *Environment and Resettlement Politics in China: The Three Gorges Project* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2004), Yan Tan’s *Resettlement in the Three Gorges Project* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008), Deirdre Chetham’s *Before the Deluge: the Vanishing World of the Upper Yangtze River* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), etc. There are, however, few studies about the relocation of cultural sites and relics in the Three Gorges Dam area.

The most ironic part in *Still Life* is the consumption of both nature and culture when both are being destroyed. Jiayan Mi once points out:

Since [the Three Gorges Dam] construction began in 1993, both the national media and the travel agencies along the Yangtze River have cashed in on the “water level 175 meters” as a hot selling spot to promote tourism, claiming that the majestic Three Gorges scenery will be gone forever after its completion and urging the whole nation to rush in to the Yangtze River to get a last glimpse of the Three Gorges. (26)

This overhyped tourist fever is clearly shown when Shen Hong leaves Fengjie by a cruise ship, on which a tour guide introduces the Three Gorges area by quoting Li Bai’s poem, “Leaving Baidi City Early in the Morning” 早发白帝城:

At daybreak I took my leave of Baidi among the dappled clouds  
And travelled back the hundreds of miles to Jiangling in a day.  
The apes on both the river banks cried out unceasingly;  
My light boat passed by mountains, countless mountains, on the way.<sup>62</sup>

Instead of the dappled clouds, audiences see a cruise ship crowded with tourists busy taking pictures of themselves. Instead of the unceasing cries of the apes on both banks, audiences hear the tour guide broadcasting in a loud and mechanical voice the beauty of the Three Gorges and its imminent loss on 1 May 2006. Neither tourists nor the tour guide are truly interested in what the dam construction would do to the local residents. As the tour guide’s introduction ends by the word “inundated,” the camera shifts to Shen Hong, who is taking a last glimpse of the place, and the background music arises in a heavy and droning tone as if to mourn the loss of the local residents and people’s indifference to them.

---

<sup>62</sup> The original text: 朝辞白帝彩云间，千里江陵一日还。两岸猿声啼不住，轻舟已过万重山。 For the original text, see Wang Yanju 汪艳菊 ed., *Li Bai* 李白 (Beijing: Wuzhou chuanbo chubanshe 五洲传播出版社, 2005), 113. For the translation, see Peter Harris, *Three Hundred Tang Poems* (New York: Random House, 2009), p 137.

People's indifference is in fact the biggest problem in Fengjie. It seems that only those who do not care about the past could prevail and prosper. Shen Hong's husband, Guo Bin, does not care about the past. He cuts his connection with his wife and family in Shanxi and becomes a successful foreman in the local demolition office. His lover and partner, Ding Yaling, also succeeds in chairing a large industrial group responsible for a number of demolition projects in the Three Gorges area. The government official, who shows to his visitors the cross-river bridge and lights it up by making a simple phone call, feels even proud of destroying the past. As Ping Zhu summarizes, "They are people who are actively destroying the past to make way for a 'grand' future" (321). This "grand" future is constructed ironically by a destructive force and has therefore no cultural and historical roots.

Shen Hong and Sanming, however, do not belong to this group. They want to get hold of the past by looking respectively for their lost family members. In a conversation with Brother Mark (*xiao ma ge* 小马哥), a young man infatuated with Chow Yun-fat's movies and TV series in the 1980s, Sanming talks about his past, his family, and his purpose for coming to Fengjie.<sup>63</sup> Hearing Sanming's story, Brother Mark comments, "You are pretty nostalgic." Sanming's answer is short and simple, "How can one forget about the past?" Brother Mark's following words are often quoted by critics: "The world is not suitable for us any more. We are too nostalgic." *Still Life* is about those nostalgic people. It is insinuated by the movie's Chinese title, *Sanxia haoren* (三峡好人), which

---

<sup>63</sup> Chow Yun-fat 周润发 is a Hong Kong actor best known for his role as Brother Mark in the 1980 TV series *The Bund* (shanghai tan 上海滩), a story about the rise and fall of a gangster in Shanghai in the 1930s. The series was a hit throughout Asia and made Chow a superstar. His image as Brother Mark became a symbol of the popular culture in the 1980s.

can be literally translated into “good people in the Three Gorges area.” “Good people” here means the people who care about the past, who want to comprehend the present by associating themselves with the past, and who respect and value the connection between past and present, memory and reality, self and other.

Wang Dongming is another example. While his friend, Guo Bin, is busy with material pursuit, Dongming works in an archaeological team, trying to protect and save the newly-discovered cultural relics. In his apartment, Shen Hong finds an array of old clocks and watches stopping at different times. According to Ping Zhu, these watches and clocks “represent his anxiety over the passage of time” (321). Yet, by chaining them together and putting them on the wall, Dongming is more interested in how to connect different periods of time and make sense of their connection. As the director Jia explains, *Still Life* is about how to face the consequences of what happened before:

The two protagonists are searching for their respective spouses, they’re trying to solve problems from the past—it’s because of the past that they find themselves in their present situation. In the same way, I feel that the problems that China faces right now are a result of its history, its pasts, and those who are middle-aged have gone through that whole process. I realized during the making of *Still Life* that for China to move forward, it has to reckon with the problems of the past. (Rapfogel 47)

In other words, the biggest problem in China at the time being is the inability to face, understand, and respect the past. The past here means not simply the history of the past. It refers more specifically to the destruction, abandonment, and distortion of the past, the culture, tradition, history, and most importantly the once cherished dreams and beliefs in China. In order to proceed, one needs to reconnect with the past, to reestablish the social,

cultural, and mental connection with other human and nonhuman beings, and finally to accept and respect a society that values the human-nature, nature-culture connections.

In *Tuya's Marriage*, the ecological, social, and cultural anxieties coexist, as well. This coexistence is predestined because of the movie's social and political backdrop: "excessive exploitation of the Inner Mongolian steppe grasslands and heavy industrialization in the surrounding areas have caused desertification and water shortages that force many local herdsmen to abandon their traditional way of life and leave their homeland" (H. Li 125). For the Inner Mongolian herdsmen, the threats to culture and nature are intimately related. If the grasslands disappear, their traditional way of life disappears, as well. That is part of the reason why the director got so surprised and angry when he saw some of the grasslands turned hellish due to industrialization, exploitation, and pollution.<sup>64</sup> *Tuya's Marriage*, therefore, is an attempt to record what is going to disappear in terms of both nature and culture. In "Gender Roles and Their Displacement in *Tuya's Marriage*," Hua Li believes that "[through] Tuya's search for a suitable husband, the film allegorically presents three different ways of life represented by three Mongolian men" (125). This dissertation maintains that the three different ways of life represented by Bater, Sen'ge, and Baolier are also indicative of the three different stages of how the nomadic lifestyle disappears in Inner Mongolia under the threat of industrialization, urbanization, and commercialization.

---

<sup>64</sup> The director's words are "When I went there for the preparation of my film, I thought I was standing on the Mars. The rude industrial development and pollution made some of the places hellish. I was shocked and angry." The original text: 当我第一次采景到那里时, 我觉得我是站在火星上, 粗暴的工业开发污染使有些地方看上去简直就像地狱, 我非常惊讶也非常生气。For details, see "Tuya de hunshi: daoyan de hua." (*Tuya's Marriage: The Director's Words*). *www.163.com*. 11 Apr. 2007. Web. 28 April 2014.

Bater stands for the first stage the disappearance—the disappearance of the grasslands. From Baolier's recollection, audiences know that Bater was a champion wrestler and skillful equestrian in the past. He won Tuya's love over other admirers and was never hesitant to protect his love against other suitors. Such a strong and masculine image can be easily found in films, novels, and folklores about the traditional nomadic herders in Inner Mongolia: "full of heroic spirit, strength, power, energy and passion, riding on horseback, herding sheep and cattle, singing eclogues or love songs to [his woman], or wrestling in public competitions" (H. Li 126). The reality, however, is his change to a disabled husband who can only stay at home, look after the children, and help with some light household chores. The contrast is clearly indicated in the image of Bater playing the flute while some suitors come to discuss with Tuya about her remarriage. The camera shifts back and forth between Tuya and the suitors in the living room when a sad and soft tune intrudes. The following scene is an external view of another room where Bater plays his flute beside the window. The music he plays is "Gada Meiren," a famous Mongolian folk song about Gada Meiren, an Inner Mongolian folk hero who in 1929 led a rebellion against forced land cultivation in the region and died in 1931 when the rebellion failed. For Inner Mongolians, Gada Meiren "is remembered as a martyr and is a symbol of identity and unity" (Burjgin and Bilik 62). Yet, Bater is not a hero like Gada Meiren. After the well-digging accident, he cannot ride a horse, herd his sheep and cattle, or wrestle in public competitions any more. Instead of protecting Tuya, he needs to be taken care of even after his divorce. He cannot even play the music of "Gada Meiren" fluently. His playing is broken and awkward with some notes frequently out of tune. Without the grasslands and his two legs, he has lost control of everything: his flute, his

marriage, and his life. His masculinity, as Hua Li points out, “is ruthlessly taken away in the process of industrialization” (126). The loss of masculinity is further emphasized when Bater plays the flute in the nursing home and in hearing Tuya saying yes to one of the suitors in the latter half of the story. These are all moments of powerlessness that characterizes Bater’s life as well as the life of many other herders in Inner Mongolia. Losing the grasslands, they are all “crippled” like Bater, not being able to be herders any more. The music of “Gada Meiren” is in this way a lament for all Inner Mongolian herders who have lost their freedom and power under the threat of industrialization, desertification, and pollution.

Having the strong urge to leave for the outside world, Sen’ge represents the second stage of the disappearance—the disappeared wish to stay on the grassland. As Tuya’s neighbor, Sen’ge knows clearly the difficulties of living on the grassland. As he says to Tuya, “Without water, no one can survive here.” Yet, different from Tuya and Bater, he does not insist on being a herder. He tells Tuya early in the movie that he does not want to be a herder any more. The external world changes him physically and mentally. He rides motorcycles, motor tricycles, and trucks instead of horses and camels. He emphasizes the power of money on many different occasions. His opening remarks in the movie are “Sarina, I don’t want to divorce. I have money.” For him, money and marriage are interrelated. He needs to buy a big truck to keep his wife from leaving him. He keeps saying that he wants to get rich. When Tuya points out that his wife does not love him and what she loves is the truck and money, he answers, “What’s wrong with the love of money and trucks? She loves me so long as I have the truck and money. Men earn money and women spend it. Simple as that. When I buy a big truck and get wealthy, I

may not want her, either. I'll find a beautiful young college girl to marry at that time." Commercialization has an obvious impact on Sen'ge, who has relinquished his traditional value system. The relinquishment makes him unable to understand Tuya's insistence on marriage. "You marry Bater. He is your man. You marry another man. He becomes another woman's man. Marriage is just a piece of paper." The market economy has magnified people's material desires and diminished at the same time the wish to keep in touch with tradition. They do not believe in the traditional values like marriage and family ties any more. Giving up their nomadic lifestyle, they become farmers, fruit vendors, truck drivers, and many other small business owners, roaming around the outskirts and corners of unfamiliar towns and cities and struggling to be accepted by urban dwellers.

Baolier embodies the last stage of how the nomadic lifestyle disappears in Inner Mongolia—the alienated soul away from the grassland. As Tuya's former classmate, Baolier knows what the nomadic lifestyle was on the grassland. He shares with Tuya and Bater the past memories such as the horse racing and wrestling competition. Yet, just like Sen'ge, he is attracted by the outside world and chooses to leave the grassland to make money. The physical and mental change on him is even more profound. He appears in the movie like a typical urban dweller wearing a pair of glasses and standing beside his luxury car. When Tuya asks him why he comes to the grasslands, he replies, "I'm here to see if there is oil in this area. I'm an oil-developer now." For him, money means power. Since he has money, he believes in his power. He wants to marry Tuya and insists on using money to solve her problem. He sends Bater to the nursing home. When Tuya says that it's like killing Bater, he makes another suggestion to build Bater a house and buy



him another wife. When he cold-bloodedly hangs up the phone to prevent Tuya from knowing Bater's suicide, audiences know that he does not belong to the grassland any more. He can never win the heart of Tuya and the respect of Bater and Sen'ge. He becomes an outsider on the grassland. Yet, he does not belong to the city, either. As he tells Tuya and Bater, "The outside world is too cold." Although he has money and followers beside him, he is a lonely soul. He lives alone in his huge and luxury villa and gets easily emotional in hearing the traditional music played by the morin khuur.<sup>65</sup> He becomes a man who does not belong anywhere.

From a "crippled" life on the grasslands to the urge to leave for cities, and finally to become an alienated soul denied by both places, the director has drawn a very gloomy picture of what the life is and will be for Inner Mongolian herders. Between grasslands and cities, they have to make a difficult decision. Whichever they choose, their future is overshadowed by the loss of root, identity, and faith. The nomadic lifestyle, at the same time, is doomed to be a legend that can only be found in songs, folklores, poems, novels, and films. That is why when Tuya stays with Baolier in an urban hotel and Bater drinks with Sen'ge in a provincial nursing home, the director adopts the image of television to indicate their identical loss of the past. All of them seem busy talking about their sadness, disappointment, and anger, paying no attention to what is shown on television. While Baolier is telling Tuya about his miserable life in the former marriage, the director positions them on the right half of the screen, showing on the left half a huge television

---

<sup>65</sup> The morin khuur, which is also known as matou qin 马头琴, is one of the most important musical instruments of the Mongolians. It consists of a trapezoid wooden-framed sound box to which two strings are attached. The strings are traditionally made from horses' tails, making sounds poetically described as a horse neighing or galloping on the grassland. Considered a symbol of the Mongolian nationality, the morin khuur becomes one of the masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity identified by UNESCO.

on which equestrians are riding horses on the grassland. In a similar way, when Bater drinks with Sen'ge and talks about their loss of wives, a small television stays on the right side of the screen, showing groups of galloping horses in an Inner Mongolian horse-racing game. None of them are facing the televisions. Tuya is sitting on a huge bed far away from the television. Baolier walks past the television, giving not even a glance. Sen'ge is sitting on the ground with his back towards the TV stand. Bater is the only one facing the television, yet his eyes turn sideways towards the window. It indicates that the nomadic lifestyle is getting away from their life. As Hua Li comments, "in a gradually industrializing and urbanizing society, they all become alienated from their tradition and culture, winding up mere spectators of the heroic nomadic way of life" (127). Although this nomadic lifestyle is disappearing, it keeps haunting the lives of all Inner Mongolian herders, reminding them of what they have lost and given up. It is just like the traditional music from the television. No one listens to it, yet it continues on and on, lamenting the loss of a whole generation.

If *Still Life* and *Tuya's Marriage* could be summarized into the destruction of both nature and culture, *No Man's Land* allegorizes their paralleled desertification in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The story begins by emphasizing that it takes place on a piece of barren land. It is barren in terms of nature and culture. In this 500 kilometers long desert highway, there are few trees, lakes, or animals. It is not visited by law and has no traces of love or care. It is a piece of empty land dominated by monetary desires. This money fetish is the key to understand the whole film. It is money that drives Pan Xiao to travel ten hours by train and three hours by horse wagon to defend the poacher. It is also money that causes the imprisonment of the falcons and the prostitute. It is finally money that leads to the death

of the avaricious persons such as the gas station owner, his wife and son, and the two poachers. This thirst for money is most vividly manifested in the episode of the “Night Paris” motel. Everything is evaluated by money. In order to fill up his gas tank, Pan Xiao needs to pay 300 RMB for gas and 1,200 RMB for a sex show he has no intention to watch at all. When he protests by calling it extortion, the gas station owner answers shamelessly, “Extortion? We don’t like that word here. What we do is a tying sale!” To get money whenever and wherever possible, people in the “Night Paris” motel ask Pan Xiao to pay 100 RMB for a cheap cigarette lighter, 1,500 RMB for taping the front window of his car, and even 50 RMB for keeping his secret. Everyone is greedy, violent, and vicious, attracted to and dominated by money. According to the director, such a world lacks beliefs, faiths, and ideals, and has therefore no hopes. It leads undoubtedly to disasters such as cheats, fights, and killings. Except the prostitute, almost everyone dies in the end.

By correlating ecological and cultural anxieties, Chinese filmmakers tend to show that problems like animal poaching, desertification, and pollution are not merely ecological. They are social and cultural, as well. The solution, if there is any, lies in a changed attitude toward both nature and culture. Although they may differ in their solutions, these filmmakers generally agree that the changed attitude does not dichotomize man and woman, self and other, nature and culture. It emphasizes instead mutual acceptance and dependence, connection, unity and harmony.

For the director, Ning Hao, the solution is in the negation of self-centeredness, which he uses the story of monkeys to illustrate. In the opening scene, the voiceover of the protagonist and narrator Pan Xiao announces,

I hate to use animals to make my point, but one of my high school teachers loved telling stories about ancient monkeys. He said there were two monkeys who decided to cooperate in order not to be eaten by tigers while picking up peaches. The first monkey would climb up the trees to eat peaches while the second one kept an eye for tigers. In return, the first monkey would give half of the peaches to the second one and the second one could not ignore his duty. It required the two monkeys not to think only about themselves. As a result, two monkeys developed into a group and the monkey group developed into human society.

The key phrase in this story is “not to think only about themselves,” which means not to be self-centered. According to the high school teacher, that is the essence of human society. It requires human beings to forsake the self and other dichotomies and to accept and depend on each other. Pan Xiao learns the lesson after his hellish experience in the no-man’s-land. He changes to a man willing to risk his own life for others. When the poacher asks if he comes back for the woman, Pan Xiao says, “You’ll never understand. You are different from us. You are not a human after all.” Here, human beings are defined by their willingness to accept, care about, and sacrifice themselves for others. The director believes that this willingness to sacrifice is the key for salvation. “This film has two themes: good versus evil and salvation. The ending is about salvation. When you come here, a place of the ultimate evil, you can only sacrifice your whole self to solve the problem, and then get your resurrection” (Ning 184).<sup>66</sup> Pan Xiao sacrifices his life to stop the evil in the desert. His death brings back the freedom of the falcons and the prostitute. Many critics believe that the ending feels “mawkish” and “tagged on” (Lee). It is, however, necessary for the message of hope. Walking out of the “natural” and “cultural”

---

<sup>66</sup> The original text: 我这个片子里其实混杂了两个命题，善恶和救赎，最后就拿救赎的命题来谈这个东西，就是你走到这儿，你走到如此邪恶的境地，你只有全部奉献才可以解决你的问题，死而后生。

desert, the prostitute welcomes her new life in the dancing school, where she can find acceptance, understanding, and love.

For the director, Wang Quan'an, the solution is in the recognition and celebration of the grassland culture in Inner Mongolia. As a culture that cannot be separated with nature, it has two important cultural symbols—the horse and the grassland, both of which play a vital role in Tuya's life. While Baolier goes everywhere in his sedan and Sen'ge is anxious to upgrade his vehicle from motor cycles to trucks, Tuya is always attractive and confident on her horses. Her red scarf and robust body shape is in perfect tune with the galloping horses on the grassland, giving her a special kind of beauty and vitality that difficulties in life cannot destroy. Besides the horse, the grassland is also important for Tuya. Only when she is on the grassland can she be her true self. She becomes uncomfortable in Baolier's sedan and faces the threat of rape and violence in the urban hotel. Her return to the grassland affirms and even strengthens her connection with nature and this nature-loving culture. In her film review, Maria Garcia says that Tuya is “Mother China, Hope, the Asian expression of the eternal Feminine.” Tuya represents hope because of the culture she chooses to stand with. It gives her strength to fight against misfortunes and tells her who she is and where she belongs to when many are getting lost in the modern age.

The non-diegetic musical motif “Black Steed” (“*Hei junma*” 黑骏马) helps to understand this nature-loving culture. Widely known and sung by the Mongolians, “Black Steed” is a Mongolian long song about a man's search for his lost girlfriend on

the grassland.<sup>67</sup> Appearing frequently in the movie, it symbolizes the grassland culture whose beauty and power has often been neglected by Mongolians. In “Gender Roles and Their Displacement in *Tuya’s Marriage*,” Hua Li maintains that “Black Steed” appears in altogether four episodes, which are “all emotion-laden moments without dialogue” (130). It is true that the song is often used in emotion-laden moments. Li’s list, however, misses one important episode, which is the key to understand this musical motif. It is when Tuya decides to go back home with Bater, who attempts to commit suicide in the nursing home. The director begins by a long shot of a red truck moving slowly on the grassland and then the music arises when the camera zooms into the faces of Tuya, her husband and children, and her neighbor, Sen’ge, who are all going back home in the truck. In the previous episodes such as when Tuya’s son asks Sen’ge if his parents are divorcing or when Sen’ge tells Tuya that he is going to leave the grasslands, the song is always heard without its lyrics. It symbolizes the “silenced” culture that people tend to ignore or give up in times of difficulties. The lyrics, however, can be clearly heard in this episode, signifying that the grassland culture may seem invisible and ineffectual on the surface, yet its power could be clearly felt when one leaves the grassland. As Baolier says, “Once I went to Macau...and heard by chance the music of our Mongolian morin khuur. It sounded so familiar that my tears just gushed out.” As a culture rooted in nature, it connects one to the land whether he or she realizes it or not. By ending his film in Tuya’s stay on the grassland, the director tends to say that the harmony between human beings

---

<sup>67</sup> Long song can also be called the long drawn song (*chang diao* 长调). It is one of the central elements in Mongolian traditional music. It is called Long song because each syllable of the lyrics is extended for a long duration. Its themes cover philosophy, religion, romance, and celebration, and often use horses as a cultural symbol. Its common accompaniments are the morin khuur and the Mongolian flute.

and nature, nature and culture is always possible when there are persons like Tuya who keep their faith in nature and the nature-loving culture.

Different from Ning Hao and Wang Quan'an, the director, Lu Chuan, hopes to find the solution in the local culture and religion practiced in Qinghai and Tibet. For the journalist, Gayu, the culture and religion in the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau is as difficult to understand as those patrolmen. He comes to Qinghai as a news reporter and an outsider. His difference could be seen in the clothes he wears, the language he speaks and the demeanor he has. He wears a baseball hat, a multi-functional jacket, and a pair of jeans. His language is standard Mandarin and he keeps looking around after his arrival. For him, it is a strange place with mysterious culture and religion. When he runs into a sky burial and sees how a corpse is cut into pieces and fed to the vultures, he feels difficult to accept and turns his head away. His attitude sets a sharp contrast with that of Ritai, who also attends the ceremony, which turns out to be for the death of Qiangba, a patrolman murdered by the poachers. Looking at the dead body, the vultures, and then the sky, Ritai shows no fear or hesitation in his eyes. To understand these patrolmen, Gayu needs to understand their culture and religion.

It is first of all a culture that loves nature. These patrolmen are not fighting for money or fame. They are willing to give up their stable jobs such as teachers, doctors, and ranchers because of their love of Kekexili. Gayu comes to understand their love after living and fighting with them on the snowy mountains. As one patrolman says, "I get homesick every time I go out on patrol. Even the lights on the highway remind me of home. But when I'm home I start thinking of Kekexili." Although it has the life-threatening quicksand and threats like altitude sickness and pulmonary edema, Kekexili is

their spiritual home. They feel proud of its beauty and uniqueness. The director emphasizes their pride in the middle of the film when Gayu and some patrolmen stand on top of a snowy mountain, admiring the majestic beauty of the starry sky. For those patrolmen, everything in Kekexili is holy and inviolable. They are willing to sacrifice anything for its safety and peace. They may not use the big terms like animal extinction or biological imbalance. They protect Tibetan antelopes just like what one would do for his family members.

In the Qinghai-Tibet plateau, one not only loves but respects the natural world. In Tibetan, Kekexili means “beautiful mountain, beautiful maiden.” Although the land-as-woman metaphor also appears in American pastoral, the implied human-nature relationship is different. The American landscape is compared to a giving mother or an attractive virgin because the land is expected to be free, generous, and fertile and to satisfy human expectations like freedom, comfort, and wealth. When it fails these expectations, it becomes bad and needs to be conquered, controlled, or dominated. In Kekexili, there are no such expectations. People love Kekexili and respect the land as “a thing-in-itself and for-itself, rather than a thing-for us” (Murphy, “Voicing Another Nature” 38). They have no intention to conquer or change it in any way. While telling Gayu how beautiful and unique Kekexili is, the patrolmen also mention its danger like the quicksand. When Liu Dong finds himself stepping into the quicksand, the camera records how hard he struggles to get out. From a frontal view to the back and then a close-up of Liu Dong’s body getting deeper and deeper into the sand, the director shows how insignificant human beings are in comparison to nature. On Liu Dong’s face, there is no fear, grief, or anger. Realizing his impending death, he just moves his head up toward



the sky until the quicksand swallows him completely. In Kekexili, people show respect to the natural world. They follow the natural rules, against which one can easily get hurt or killed. They never blame or curse nature. They respect its power and are willing to protect it against any kind of violation. Such willingness can only be deciphered when their religion is taken into consideration.

The religion practiced in the Qinghai-Tibet plateau is Tibetan Buddhism, a form of Mahayana Buddhism that evolved from the 7<sup>th</sup> century in Tibet. Its religious doctrines are in the modern terms very “eco-friendly.” “Tibetan Buddhists strongly believe in the intricate web of life, which encompasses human, animal and plant life, and saw the danger of disturbing the sensitive fabric of relations” (Rosa and Munasinghe 60). They believe that human beings are part of nature and put great emphasis on compassion and lovingkindness extended to all forms of life. As Cao Ziqiang, former vice president of the High-Level Tibetan Buddhism College of China, says, “Tibet has done a good job in environmental protection. This has much to do with Tibetan Buddhist dogmas requiring quietness during self-cultivation in order to better merge oneself with nature” (qtd. M. Zhang). This human-nature connection is essential in the understanding of sky burial that appears twice in the film. In the Qinghai-Tibet plateau, four ritual methods of disposal of corpses are practiced: cremation, sky burial, ground burial, and water burial. Among them, sky burial may seem the most grotesque as it involves body-cutting and vulture-feeding.

In sky burial, the body cutters (*ro-rgyab-pa*) place the body on a flat rock representing a mandala and begin to slice across the chest cavity of the body according to the instructions of the lama or tantric adept (*ngag-pa*). The ritual of meditational dismemberment is actualized in the ritual of sky burial. Giving the body as food to the vultures becomes

a final act of compassion. The vultures are kept at bay until the proper time when slices of the body are cast upon the rock mandala for consumption. This is to prevent the vultures from fighting over the corpse and injuring each other. The skeleton bones and skull are hammered into dust, mixing with barley flour (*tsam-pa*) and fed to the vultures. (Goss and Klass 83)

As Robert Goss and Dennis Klass point out, sky burial has obvious religious connotations. It provides a strong teaching on impermanence by the decomposition and disposition of the human corpse and accords with Buddhist ideas of compassion and egolessness by the feeding of vultures. In simpler terms, human beings belong to nature. People come to the world naturally and leave it naturally, as well. Death is not to be afraid as life and death follow the wheel of reincarnation. When the physical body is disintegrated and offered to the sacred vultures, the spirit goes up to heaven. The patrolmen in the film are practitioners of such a belief. They can face death calmly and focus instead on how to find the ultimate truth through their existence. For them, they are protecting not only Tibetan antelopes but their ideals, faiths, and more importantly their religion. Gayu may have doubts on these patrolmen at the beginning of the film. Yet, he is totally changed after the death of Ritai. He understands and respects them and tries his best to help them. As the director shows in the end, one year after Gayu's report, Kekexili is declared a national nature preserve and the population of Tibetan antelopes goes back to 30,000 and still growing. To end his film in hope, the director indicates that the nature-loving, nature-admiring, and nature-unifying cultures and religions are always important in the re-establishment of the human-nature connection.

On Chinese eco-screen, there are continuous efforts to reconstruct people's faith in culture. These cinematic efforts may differ in character, setting, plot, or theme. Yet,

they have three features in common. First, they say no to the self and other dichotomies in terms of gender, class, race, or species and advocate equality among all human and nonhuman beings. Life in this way is not to be understood in androcentric or anthropocentric biases. It exists in an interconnected web where mutual acceptance and dependence are appreciated. Second, they oppose money-oriented, benefit-centered social values that dominate the current Chinese society and call for love, compassion, egolessness, and sacrifice that are essential in the construction of the human-nature, nature-culture harmony. Third, they question the changes brought by industrialization, urbanization, and commercialization and emphasize the necessity and importance of re-embracing the cultural and religious traditions where people learn to love, respect, and harmonize themselves with nature. These values and ideals are the key elements in the reconstruction of the pastoral myth on Chinese screen. They remind audiences not to give up their traditions in face of ecological and cultural crises, not to be discouraged and frightened by the tremendous changes of the modern times, and not to lose themselves in the overwhelming forces of the modern machine.

There is, however, a paradox in the reconstruction. In order to fight against the influence of industrialization, urbanization, and commercialization, quite a number of filmmakers turn their eyes toward the cultures and religions practiced in the remote areas of China such as Inner Mongolia, Qinghai, and Tibet. These cultures and religions, on the one hand, indicate the remaining hopes of finding the peach blossom spring in the modern times. On the other hand, they are not safe from being threatened, deformed, and even destroyed by industrial, commercial, and urban forces. Such a paradoxical situation makes the Chinese filmmakers the modern Sisyphus, trying to hold on to the pastoral

tradition that is gradually disappearing under the modern forces. Thus, there are few images of the garden rediscovered, rebuilt, or regained on Chinese screen. Without the Hollywood type of illusions, these filmmakers are fully aware that the reconstruction is an impossible mission. They can only create some heroes who are willing to do such missions with an awareness of their destined failure. In doing so, they become heroes themselves, encouraging their audiences not to lose faith in an age that is without the pastoral faith.<sup>68</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup> In fact, the films made after 2010 may tell us that the aforementioned filmmakers are getting increasingly pessimistic. Jia Zhangke's *A Touch of Sin* (天注定) released in 2013 in France and the United States tells about common people's desperation in four separate episodes. The original ending of *No Man's Land* is bleak, as well. As Ning Hao explains in his book *Hun da cheng ren* 混大成人, the film ends originally in destruction, death, and violence. The prostitute remains submissive and powerless throughout the film. She changes, however, after the death of Pan Xiao. She resorts to violence and kills the poacher in the end. With elements of violence and sex, both films encounter the problem of censorship. Originally shot in 2009, *No Man's Land* was finally released in 2013 after four major revisions. *A Touch of Sin* has so far not been released in China. It remains a problem how Chinese filmmakers keep a balance between voicing their thoughts and reaching their audience.

## CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

Every country has its pastoral dream. When the dream was interrupted, threatened, or destroyed by the roaring force of the machine, its destruction and the possible reconstruction would become recurrent themes in literary and cinematic works. Filmmakers in Hollywood reconstruct the dream by creating supermen or superwomen who have super power, courage, and wisdom to rediscover, rebuild, or regain the pastoral garden. They realize these illusions by simplifying the conflicts between garden and machine, anthropocentrism and ecocentrism, and Tityrus and Meliboeus. Such simplification does not work, however, on Chinese screen due to three reasons. First, it is hard to simplify the conflict between garden and machine, which became increasingly complicated in China after the unchecked and unregulated economic boom in recent decades. Second, although many Chinese are losing touch with their pastoral tradition, their understanding of the human-nature relationship still differs from the Hollywood version. Third, the images of Tityrus and Meliboeus may not agree with Chinese social and cultural backgrounds. The sound and fury of China's recent industrial, urbanizing, and market-driven economic development has led to a series of ecological, social, and cultural crises. People get addicted to the pursuit of personal fame and monetary gains. They gave up their pastoral ideal, ignored their historical and cultural tradition, and even denied their cultural identity. Seeing the above problems, a group of Chinese filmmakers

began to reconstruct the pastoral myth that Chinese can understand, appreciate, and accept. In this myth, human and nonhuman beings exist not in the self and other dichotomies but in an interconnected web where mutual acceptance and dependence are emphasized. When the machine comes to break the connection and balance, there is no Hollywood type of supermen or women. Nor are there any illusions of the balance restored. What people see are some tragic, everyday heroes, who may make mistakes and appear powerless in some occasions and yet maintain a strong life force not to give up their pursuit of happiness in times of difficulties. They know they may fail in the end. Nevertheless, they are still willing to fight for what they love: their families, friends, nature, and more importantly, culture.

For Chinese filmmakers, these heroes represent the pastoral ideal that has its root in both the human-nature connection and the nature-culture unity. The unity here has two levels of meaning: first, the correlation of ecological and cultural crises; second, the celebration of nature-loving cultures and religions. On Chinese eco-screen, ecological and cultural crises are in most cases interconnected and interacting upon each other. When the garden is destroyed, “the ‘world of nature’ and ‘world of culture’ each suffer: nature from the ecological crisis and culture from a spiritual crisis” (Levinskaya 128). People need therefore “a spiritual revolution to get out of the ecological predicament” (Shuyuan Lu 64).<sup>69</sup> The revolution, in Chinese eco-films, refers specifically to the renewed attention to and the celebration of the once ignored cultures and religions that teach people how to love, respect, and harmonize themselves with nature. These cultures and religions, as it is mentioned in the previous chapter, stand for the remaining hopes of

---

<sup>69</sup> The original text: 生态解困：期待一场精神革命。

finding the peach blossom spring. Yet, they are also threatened by industrialization, urbanization, and commercialization, leading to a paradox that Chinese filmmakers may never be able to solve or overcome in their reconstruction.

It has to be admitted that Chinese filmmakers are learning a lot from Hollywood. The reference to hot ecological issues, the participation of big and even super stars, and the increase of big budget blockbusters are all traces of such an influence. In cinematic techniques, filmmakers in the new generation are also showing their interest in Hollywood. Ning Hao, for example, admits in his book *Hun da cheng ren* that he fell in love with Hollywood Westerns when he was still a little kid. He praises highly Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven* (1992), which he believes to be "a discussion of social problems in the form of an old Western" (183).<sup>70</sup> *No Man's Land* imitates *Unforgiven*, discussing the problems in China in the form of a Chinese Western. These influences testify that Chinese eco-cinema is not built on an isolated island. Many filmmakers have been learning and will continue to learn from their foreign peers. They can make their voice heard so long as they are telling their own stories. The film awards they got at home and abroad are proofs of their success. There is even some counter-influence as people can see more and more Chinese elements on Hollywood screen. *Kongfu Panda* (2008), for example, has obvious elements of Daoism. This influence and counter-influence demonstrate the possibility of cultural pluralism in world eco-cinema. The peach blossom spring will be finally found when people learn to respect different voices, different cultures, and different species.

---

<sup>70</sup> The original text: 我倒是更看重新一代的西部片，它是借西部片的形态讲当下的问题。

## BIBLIOGRAPHY



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 2012*. Dir. Roland Emmerich. Sony Pictures Releasing, 2009. Film.
- 38°C 三十八度*. Dir. Xin Liu 刘新. Jinma Film Corp. 金马影视公司, 2003. Film.
- A Civil Action*. Dir. Steven Zaillian. Touchstone Pictures, 1998. Film.
- Acker, William. *Tao the Hermit: Sixty Poems*. New York: Book Collectors Society, 1952. Print.
- Aftershock 唐山大地震*. Dir. Xiaogang Feng 冯小刚. Huayi Brothers 华谊兄弟, 2010. Film.
- Alpers, Paul. "What Is Pastoral?" *Critical Inquiry*. 8 (Spring, 1982). 437-460. Print.
- Anderson, Roger C. "Ecocinema: A Plan for Preserving Nature." *Arboretum News of the University of Wisconsin Arboretum and Wildlife Refuge* (1966). Rpt. In *BioScience* 25.7 (Jul., 1975): 452. Print.
- Avatar*. Dir. James Cameron. Twentieth Century Fox, 2009. Film.
- Back to 1942 一九四二*. Dir. Xiaogang Feng 冯小刚. Huayi Brothers 华谊兄弟, 2012. Film.
- Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress 巴尔扎克与小裁缝*. Dir. Sijie Dai 戴思杰. Empire Pictures (United States), 2002. Film.
- Bambi*. Dir. David Hand. Walt Disney, 1942. DVD.

- Barnstone, Tony, and Chou Ping, eds. *The Anchor Book of Chinese Poetry*. New York: Anchor Books, 2005. Print.
- Berry, Chris, and Lisa Rofel. "Introduction." *The New Chinese Documentary Film Movement for the Public Record*. Eds. Chris Berry, Lu Xinyu, and Lisa Rofel. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010. 3-14. Print.
- Berry, Chris, Xinyu Lu, and Lisa Rofel, eds. *The New Chinese Documentary Film Movement for the Public Record*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010. Print.
- Berry, Chris, and Feiyi Lu, eds. *Island on the Edge: Taiwan New Cinema and After*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005. Print.
- Berry, Michael. *Speaking in Images: Interviews with Contemporary Chinese Filmmakers*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004. Print.
- . "Chinese Cinema with Hollywood Characteristics, or How *The Karate Kid* Became a Chinese Film." *The Oxford Handbook of Chinese Cinemas*. Eds. Carlos Rojas and Eileen Chow. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. 170-189. Print.
- Blind Shaft* 盲井. Dir. Yang Li 李杨. Kino International, 2003. DVD.
- Boucher, Geoff. "James Cameron: Yes, 'Avatar' is 'Dances with Wolves' in space...sorta." *Los Angeles Times*. 14 Aug. 2009. Web. 18 Oct. 2014.
- Brandt, Loren, and Thomas G. Rawski. "China's Great Economic Transformation." *China's Great Economic Transformation*. Eds. Loren Brandt and Thomas G. Rawski. Cambridge: Cambridge university press, 2008. 1-26. Print.
- , eds. *China's Great Economic Transformation*. Cambridge: Cambridge university press, 2008. Print.

- Brereton, Pat. *Hollywood Utopia: Ecology in Contemporary American Cinema*. Bristol: Intellect Books, 2005. Print.
- Bruckner, Lynne Dickson. "Bambi and *Finding Nemo*: A Sense of Wonder in the Wonderful World of Disney?" *Framing the World: Explorations in Ecocriticism and Film*. Ed. Paula Willoquet-Maricondi. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010. 187-205. Print.
- Buell, Lawrence. *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995. Print.
- . "Toxic Discourse." *Critical Inquiry*. 24.3 (Spring, 1998). 639-665. Print.
- . *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*. Blackwell Manifestos. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005. Print.
- Burjgin, Jirgal and Naran Bilik. "Contemporary Mongolian Population Distribution, Migration, Cultural Change, and Identity." Eds. Robyn Iredale, Naran Bilik, and Fei Guo. *China's Minorities on the Move: Selected Case Studies*. New York: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 53-68. Print.
- Carson, Rachel. *Silent Spring*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002. Print.
- Chen, Guying 陈鼓应, ed. *Zhuangzi jinzhu jinshi* 庄子今注今释. Taiwan: Taiwan Shangwu yinshuguan 台湾商务印书馆, 1999. Print.
- Chen, Qiaosheng 陈桥生, ed. *Tao Yuanming* 陶渊明. Beijing: Zhongxin chubanshe 中信出版社, 2005. Print.

- Chen, Shuyuan 陈舒原, ed. *Wang Wei* 王维. Beijing: Wuzhou chuanbo chubanshe 五洲传播出版社, 2005. Print.
- Chen, Zhenguo 陈振国, ed. *Feng Wenbing yanjiu ziliao* 冯文炳研究资料 (Studies on Feng Wenbing). Beijing: Zhishi chanquan chubanshe 知识产权出版社, 2010. Print.
- Chetham, Deirdre. *Before the Deluge: the Vanishing World of the Upper Yangtze River*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002. Print.
- Cheuk, Pak Tong. *Hong Kong New Wave Cinema (1978–2000)*. Bristol: Intellect, 2008. Print.
- The China Syndrome*. Dir. James Bridges. Columbia Pictures, 1979. Film.
- Chu, Yingchi. *Chinese Documentaries: From Dogma to Polyphony*. New York: Routledge, 2007. Print.
- Clark, John. *Renewing the Earth: the Promise of Social Ecology*. London: Green Print, 1990. Print.
- Clouds and Rain over Wushan* 巫山云雨. Dir. Ming Zhang 章明. Beijing Film Studio 北京电影制片厂, 1996. DVD.
- Corneilius, Sheila, and Ian Haydn Smith. *New Chinese Cinema: Challenging Representations*. London: Wallflower Press, 2002. Print.
- Cubitt, Sean. *EcoMedia*. Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2005. Print.
- Cumbow, Robert C. "Review: *The China Syndrome*." Rev. of *The China Syndrome*, dir. James Bridges. *Movietone News*. December 1979: 62-63. Print.

- Dai, Jinhua 戴锦华. *Cinema and Desire: Feminist Marxism and Cultural Politics in the Work of Dai Jinhua*. Eds. Jing Wang and Tani E. Barlow. London and New York: Verso, 2002. Print.
- . "Temporality, Nature Morte, and the Filmmaker: A Reconsideration of *Still Life*." Seminar Reading at University of California, Santa Cruz. 21 Apr. 2014. Web. 24 Jun. 2014.
- Danger Zone*. Dir. Allan Eastman. Nu Image Films, 1996. Film.
- Dargis, Manohla. "A New Eden, Both Cosmic and Cinematic." *The New York Times*. 17 Dec. 2009. Web. 27 Mar. 2013.
- Davis, A. R. *T'ao Yüan-ming: His Works and Their Meaning*. 2 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983. Print.
- The Day After Tomorrow*. Dir. Roland Emmerich. 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 2004. Film.
- Diamond, Irene, and Gloria Feman Orenstein. *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990. Print.
- Donovan, Josephine. "Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Reading the Orange." *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy*. Eds. Greta Gaard, and Patrick D. Murphy. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998. 74-96. Print.
- Dong, Zhongshu 董仲舒. *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng* 春秋繁露义证. *Xinbian zhuzi jicheng* 新编诸子集成. Eds. Su Yu 苏舆 and Zhong Zhe 钟哲. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中华书局, 1992. Print.
- Dumanoski, Dianne. "'Dances with Wolves' Confronts Myths about Settlement of the West." *Boston Globe*. 22 Jan. 1991. Web. 12 May 2014.

*Erin Brockovich*. Dir. Steven Soderbergh. Jersey Films, 2000. Film.

Economy, Elizabeth C. *The River Runs Black: The Environmental Challenge to China's Future*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010. Print.

Edwards, Russell. "Review: *Super Typhoon*." *Variety*. 18 Nov. 2008. Web. 22 May 2013.

Fei, Ming 废名. *Qiao* 桥 (The Bridge). Shanghai: Shanghai kaiming shudian 上海开明书店, 1932. Print.

*FernGully: The Last Rainforest*. Dir. Bill Kroyer. 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 1992. Film.

*Fire Down Below*. Dir. Félix Enríquez Alcalá. Warner Bros. Pictures, 1997. Film.

*The Forest Ranger* 天狗. Dir. Jian Qi 戚健. Shanghai Film Studio 上海电影制片厂, 2006. Film.

Flader, Susan L. *Thinking like a Mountain: Aldo Leopold and the Evolution of an Ecological Attitude toward Deer, Wolves, and Forests*. Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1994. Print.

Frodsham, J.D. "Landscape Poetry in China and Europe." *Comparative Literature* 19.3 (Summer, 1967): 193-215. Print.

Gaard, Greta. "Ecofeminism and Native American Cultures: Pushing the Limits of Cultural Imperialism?" *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*. Ed. Greta Gaard. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993. 295-314. Print.

Gaard, Greta, and Patrick D. Murphy. "Introduction." *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy*. Eds. Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998. 1-13. Print.

- , eds. *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998. Print.
- Gada Meilin 嘎达梅林*. Dir. Xiaoning Feng 冯小宁. China Film Group Corporation 中国电影集团公司, 2002. Film.
- Garrard, Greg. *Ecocriticism*. London and New York: Routledge, 2012. Print.
- Garcia, Maria. "Tuya's Marriage." *filmjournal.com*. *Film Journal International*. Web. 12 Oct. 2014.
- Glotfelty, Cheryll. "Introduction." *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Eds. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996. xv-xxxv. Print.
- Glotfelty, Cheryll and Harold Fromm, eds. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996. Print.
- Gong, Bin 龚斌, ed. *Tao Yuanming ji jiaojian 陶渊明集校笺* (The Works of Tao Yuanming [Tao Qian] with Collations and Notes). Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海古籍出版社, 1996. Print.
- Gorrillas in the Mist*. Dir. Michael Apted. Universal Pictures, 1988. DVD.
- Goss, Robert E., and Dennis Klass. *Dead but Not Lost: Grief Narratives in Religious Traditions*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005. Print.
- Green Water 绿水*. Dir. Liangzi 亮子. Shaanxi qinle chuanmei Corp. 陕西秦乐传媒文化有限公司, 2010. Film.
- Griffin, Susan. *Women and Nature: The Roaring inside Her*. New York: Harper and Row, 1978. Print.

- Guo, Xuebo 郭雪波. *Da mo lang hai* 大漠狼孩(The Desert Wolf). Guilin: Lijiang chubanshe 丽江出版社, 2001. Print.
- Hadfield, James. "Tokyo Film Fest: *Super Typhoon* Review." *Twitchfilm*. 2 Nov. 2008. Web. 22 May, 2013.
- Harris, Peter. *Three Hundred Tang Poems*. New York: Random House, 2009. Print.
- Heggelund, Gorild. *Environment and Resettlement Politics in China: The Three Gorges Project*. Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2004. Print.
- Hinton, David. *Classical Chinese Poetry: An Anthology*. 1st ed. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008. Print.
- Hsia, Chih-tsing. *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1999. Print.
- Ingram, David. *Green Screen: Environmentalism and Hollywood Cinema*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000. Print.
- . "The Aesthetics and Ethics of Eco-Film Criticism." *Ecocinema Theory and Practice*. Eds. Stephen Rust, Salma Monani, and Sean Cubitt. New York: Routledge, 2013. 43-61. Print.
- Iredale, Robyn, Naran Bilik, and Fei Guo, eds. *China's Minorities on the Move: Selected Case Studies*. New York: M. E. Sharpe, Inc. Print.
- Jia, Pingwa 贾平凹. *Huai nian lang* 怀念狼(Memory of Wolf). Guangzhou: Guangzhou chubanshe 广州出版社, 2007. Print.



- Jia, Zhangke 贾樟柯. *Jia xiang (1996-2008): Jia Zhangke dianying shouji* 贾樟柯(1996-2008): 贾樟柯的电影手记 (Jia's Thoughts (1996-2008): Notes on Jia Zhangke's Films). Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe 北京大学出版社, 2009. Print.
- Jiang, Rong 姜戎. *Lang tu teng* 狼图腾 (Wolf Totem). Wuhan: Changjiang wenyi chubanshe 长江文艺出版社, 2004. Print.
- Johnston, Ian. "Still, Life: Looking at Jia Zhang-ke's Recent Masterpiece." *Bright Lights Film Journal*. Issue 58 (Nov. 2007). Web. 23 July 2014.
- Jordan, Chris. *Movies and the Reagan Presidency: Success and Ethics*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2003. Print.
- Kääpä, Pietari and Tommy Gustafsson, eds. *Ecocinemas of Transnational China*. Spec. issue of *Interactions: Studies in Communications and Cultures* 2.2 (2012). Print.
- Khatib, Lina, ed. *Storytelling in World Cinemas: Contexts*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013. Print.
- King, Ynestra. "The Ecology of Feminism and the Feminism of Ecology." *Healing the Wounds: The Promise of Ecofeminism*. Ed. Judith Plant. Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1989. 18-28. Print.
- King Kong*. Dir. Peter Jackson. Universal Pictures, 2005. Film.
- Kolodny, Annette. *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975. Print.
- Kongfu Panda*. Dir. John Stevenson and Mark Osborne. *DreamWorks Animation*, 2008. Film.

- Kubin, Wolfgang. *Zhongguo wenren de ziran guan*, 中国文人的自然观. Shude Ma 马树德, translated. Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe 上海人民出版社, 1990. Print.
- Kwong, Charles Yim-tze. *Tao Qian and the Chinese Poetic Tradition: The Quest for Cultural Identity*. Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1994. Print.
- Laozi. *The Tao Te Ching: A New Translation with Commentary*. Trans. Ellen M. Chen. New York: Paragon House, 1989. Print.
- Lawrence, John Shelton. "The Lone Ranger: Adult Legacies of a Juvenile Western." Eds. John E. O'Connor and Peter C. Rollins. *Hollywood's West: The American Frontier in Film, Television, and History*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2005. 81-96. Print.
- Lee, Maggie. "Film Review, 'No Man's Land.'" *Variety.com*. 16 Dec. 2013. Web. 28 Sep. 2014.
- Leopold, Aldo. *A Sand County Almanac, With Other Essays on Conservation from Round River*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1966. Print.
- Levinskaya, Victoriya. "The Place of Ecological Culture in Civil Society." Eds. Said Shermukhamedov and Victoriya Levinskaya. *Spiritual Values and Social Progress*. Cultural heritage and contemporary change. Series IIIC, Central Asia; vol. 1. Uzbekistan philosophical studies; 1. Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2000. 123-132. Print.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *Structural Anthropology*, vol. 1. New York: Basic Books, 1963. Print.

- . *The Raw and the Cooked*. New York: Harper, 1969. Print.
- Li, Hua. "Gender Roles and Their Displacement in *Tuya's Marriage*." *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*. Vol. 7 No. 2 (2013), 123-137. Print.
- Li, Shanghong 李尚鸿. "Cong xiaoshuo xiongfán dào diányǐng tiàngǒu—shānxī shěng zuójia zhāng píng fāngtánlù" 从小说《凶犯》到电影《天狗》—陕西省作家张平访谈录 (From the Novel *Criminal* to the Film *The Forest Ranger*—An Interview with the Writer Zhang Ping in Shanxi Province). *chinawriter.com.cn*. 1 Dec. 2008. Web. 13 May 2014.
- Liu, Zhenyun 刘震云. *Wengu 1942 温故一九四二 (Remembering 1942)*. Beijing: Reminwenxue chubanshe 人民文学出版社, 2009. Print.
- The Lorax*. Dir. Hawley Pratt. CBS Productions, 1972. TV Special.
- The Lorax*. Dir. Chris Renaud and Kyle Balda. Universal Pictures, 2012. Film.
- Loy, David R. "On the Duality of Culture and Nature." *Philosophica*. Vol. 55 (January 1995), 9-35. Print.
- Lu, Sheldon and Jiayan Mi, eds. *Chinese Ecocinema: In the Age of Environmental Challenge*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009. Print.
- Lu, Sheldon. "Introduction: Cinema, Ecology, Modernity." *Chinese Ecocinema: In the Age of Environmental Challenge*. Eds. Sheldon Lu and Jiayan Mi. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009. 1-14. Print.
- . "Gorgeous Three Gorges at Last Sight: Cinematic Resemblance and the Dialectic of Moderniation." *Chinese Ecocinema: In the Age of Environmental Challenge*. Eds.

Sheldon Lu and Jiayan Mi. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009. 39-55. Print.

---. "Tear Down the City: Reconstructing Urban Space in Contemporary Chinese Popular Cinema and Avant-Garde Art." *The Urban Generation: Chinese Cinema and Society at the Turn of the Twentieth First Century*. Ed. Zhang Zhen. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007. 137-160. Print.

Lu, Shuyuan 鲁枢元. *Wenxue de kuajie yanjiu: wenxue he shengtaixue* 文学的跨界研究: 文学和生态学 (A study of literature in an interdisciplinary approach: literature and ecology). Shanghai: Xuelin chubanshe 学林出版社, 2011. Print.

Lu, Xinyu. "Rethinking China's New Documentary Movement: Engagement with the Social." Trans. Tan Jia and Lisa Rofel. *The New Chinese Documentary Film Movement for the Public Record*. Eds. Chris Berry, Lu Xinyu, and Lisa Rofel. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010. 15-48. Print.

Lü, Xiaoming 吕晓明. "90 niandai zhongguo dianying jingguan zhiyi 'diliu dai' jiqi zhiyi" 90年代中国电影景观之一“第六代”及其质疑 (An inquiry into 'the Six Generation' as a Chinese film spectacle in the 1990s). *Dianying yishu* 电影艺术 1999. No. 3. 23-28. Print.

MacDonald, Scott. "Toward an Eco-Cinema." *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 11.2 (Summer 2004). 107-132. Print.

"The Magic behind the Masterpiece." *Bambi: 55<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition*. Walt Disney Home Video. Produced and written by Harry Arends and Savenick, 1994. DVD.

- Mao, Zedong, *Mao Zedong shici jiangjie* 毛泽东诗词讲解. Changchun: Jilin renmin chubanshe 吉林人民出版社, 1977.
- Marx, Leo. *The Machine in the Garden; Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1964. Print.
- . "Does Pastoralism Have a Future?" *The Pastoral Landscape*. Ed. J. Dixon Hunt. Hanover: University Press of New England, 1992. 209-25. Print.
- Meet the Applegates*. Dir. Michael Lehmann. New World Pictures, 1991. Film.
- Merchant, Carolyn. *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1980. Print.
- . *Ecological Revolutions: Nature, Gender, and Science in New England*. H. Eugene and Lillian Youngs Lehman series. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010. Print.
- Mi, Jiayan. "Framing Ambient *Unheimlich*: Ecogedon, Ecological Unconscious, and Water Pathology in New Chinese Cinema." *Chinese Ecocinema: In the Age of Environmental Challenge*. Eds. Sheldon Lu and Mi Jiayan. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009. 15-38. Print.
- The Mountain Patrol 可可西里*. Dir. Chuan Lu 陆川. Huayi Bros. Media Group 华谊兄弟, 2004. Film.
- Murphy, Patrick D. *Literature, Nature, and Other: Ecofeminist Critiques*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995.
- . "Voicing Another Nature." *Literature, Nature, and Other: Ecofeminist Critiques*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995. 31-46.

Murray, Robin L. and Joseph K. Heumann. *Ecology and Popular Film: Cinema on the Edge*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009. Print.

Nan, Huaijin 南怀瑾, ed. *Nan huaijin xuanji* 南怀瑾选集. Volume 2. Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe 复旦大学出版社, 2003. Print.

*The New Jerusalem Bible*. Henry Wansbrough, gen. ed. New York: Doubleday, 1985. Print.

Ng, Konrad. "The Vision of China in the Films of Jia Zhangke." *Storytelling in World Cinemas: Contexts*. Ed. Lina Khatib. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013. 11-20. Print.

Ning, Hao 宁浩. *Hun da cheng ren* 混大成人. Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe 广西师范大学出版社, 2012. Print.

*No Man's Land* 无人区. Dir. Hao Ning 宁浩. China Film Co., Ltd. 中国电影制片厂 And Beijing Galloping Horse Media Co., Ltd 北京小马奔腾文化传媒股份有限公司, 2013. Film.

Obi, Koichi. *Zhongguo wenxue zhong suo biao xian de ziran yu ziran guan*, 中国文学中所表现的自然与自然观. Yiping Shao 邵毅平, translated. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海古籍出版社, 1989. Print.

O'Connor, John E., and Peter C. Rollins, eds. *Hollywood's West: The American Frontier in Film, Television, and History*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2005. Print.

*Old Well 老井*. Dir. Tianming Wu 吴天明. Xi'an Film Studio 西安电影制片厂, 1986.

DVD.

*On Deadly Ground*. Dir. Steven Seagal. Warner Bros. Pictures, 1994. Film.

O'Riordan, Timothy. *Environmentalism*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London: Pion, 1981. Print.

*The Ozone Layer Vanishes 大气层消失*. Dir. Feng Xiaoning 冯小宁. Children's Film

Studio 中国儿童电影制片厂, 1989. DVD.

“Peng Hui yu Lu Chuan: yanyi kekexili ‘shengsi xi’” 彭辉与陆川：演绎可可西里生死

戏 (Peng Hui and Lu Chuan: Filming ‘the Life and Death Battle’ in Kekexili).

*Xinwen huike ting 新闻会客厅 (People in the News)*. *Sohu.com*. 11 Nov. 2004.

Web. 10 May 2013.

Pepper, David. *Eco-Socialism: From Deep Ecology to Social Justice*. London: Routledge,

1993. Print.

Plant, Judith, ed. *Healing the Wounds: The Promise of Ecofeminism*. Philadelphia: New

Society Publishers, 1989. Print.

Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. New York: Routledge, 1993.

Print.

Poggioli, Renato. *The Oaten Flute: Essays on Pastoral Poetry and the Pastoral Ideal*.

Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975. Print.

Rapfogel, Jared. “Still Lives in Times of Change: An Interview with Jia Zhangke.”

*Cineaste*. 33.2 (2008): 44-47. Print.

“Review of the 2006 Typhoon Season.” China Report for 39th Session of ESCAP/WMO Typhoon Committee. *severe.worldweather.org*. 4-9 Dec. 2006. Web. 25 Jun.

2013.

*Rise of the Planet of the Apes*. Dir. Rupert Wyatt. 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 2011. Film.

Rojas, Carlos, and Eileen Chow, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Chinese Cinemas*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. Print.

Rosa, Luiz Pinguelli, and Mohan Munasinghe, eds. *Ethics, Equity, and International Negotiations on Climate Change*. Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2002.

Rueckert, William. “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism.” *Iowa Review* 9.1 (Winter 1978). 71-86. Print.

See, Lisa. “Waters of Three Gorges Dam Will Wash Over World Culture.” *Los Angeles Times*. Jun. 8 2003. Web. Aug. 22 2014.

Shapiro, Judith. *Mao’s War against Nature: Politics and the Environment in Revolutionary China*. New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. Print.

Shen, Congwen 沈从文. *Border Town: A Novel 边城*. Trans. Jeffrey C. Kinkley. Harper Perennial Modern Chinese classics. 1st ed. New York: Harper Perennial, 2009. Print.

---. *Chang He 长河*. Taiyuan, Shanxi: Beiyue wenyi chubanshe 北岳文艺出版社, 2002. Print.



- . *Shen Congwen xiaoshuo xuanji* 沈从文小说选集. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe 人民文学出版社, 1957. Print.
- Shermukhamedov, Said, and Victoriya Levinskaya, eds. *Spiritual Values and Social Progress*. Cultural heritage and contemporary change. Series IIIC, Central Asia; vol. 1. Uzbekistan philosophical studies; 1. Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2000. Print.
- Silent Running*. Dir. Douglas Trumbull. Universal Pictures, 1972. Film.
- Silkwood*. Dir. Mike Nichols. ABC Motion Pictures, 1983. Film.
- Smith, Stephen W. and Ronan Deazley, eds. *The Legal, Medical and Cultural Regulation of the Body: Transformation and Transgression*. Farnham, Surrey, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009. Print.
- Soylent Green*. Dir. Richard Fleischer. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1973. Film.
- Stauth, Cameron. "Eco Trip." *American Film*. Nov 1990. 16-17. Print.
- Still Life* 三峡好人. Dir. Zhangke Jia 贾樟柯. Shanghai Film Studio 上海电影制片厂 and Xstream Pictures 西河星汇影业有限公司, 2006. DVD.
- Sturgeon, Noël. *Environmentalism in Popular Culture: Gender, Race, Sexuality, and the Politics of the Natural*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009. Print.
- Sun, Shaoyi, and Li Xun. *Lights! Camera! Kai Shi!: In Depth Interviews with China's New Generation of Movie Directors*. Norfolk, Conn.: Eastbridge, 2008. Print.
- Super Typhoon* 超强台风. Dir. Xiaoning Feng 冯小宁. Beijing Xinyinglian Film Corp. 北京新影联影业有限公司, 2008. DVD.

- Suzhou River* 苏州河. Dir. Lou Ye 娄烨. German Essential Films and China's Dream Factory, 2000.
- Tan, Yan. *Resettlement in the Three Gorges Project*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008. Print.
- A Touch of Sin* 天注定. Dir. Zhangke Jia 贾樟柯. Shanghai Film Studio 上海电影制片厂 and Xstream Pictures 西河星汇影业有限公司, 2014. DVD.
- Turner, Frederick Jackson. *The Frontier in American History*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1986. Print.
- “Tuya de hunshi: daoyan de hua” 图雅的婚事：导演的话 (“*Tuya's Marriage: The Director's Words*”). *www.163.com*. 11 Apr. 2007. Web. 28 April 2014.
- Tuya's Marriage* 图雅的婚事. Dir. Quan'an Wang 王全安. Xi'an: Xi'an Film/Maxyee Cultural Industry 西安电影制片厂, 2006. Film.
- Vogel, Hans Ulrich, and Günter Dux, eds. *Concepts of Nature: A Chinese-European Cross-Cultural Perspective*. Boston: Brill, 2010. Print.
- Wagner, Marsha Lynn. “The Art of Wang Wei's Poetry.” Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1975. Print.
- . *Wang Wei*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982. Print.
- Wang, Wei. *Laughing Lost in the Mountains: Poems of Wang Wei*. Tony Barnstone, Willis Barnstone, Xu Haixin, trans. Hanover: University Press of New England, 1991. Print.
- Wang, Yanju 汪艳菊, ed. *Li Bai* 李白. Beijing: Wuzhou chuanbo chubanshe 五洲传播出版社, 2005. Print.

- Wang, Yiman. *Remaking Chinese Cinema: Through the Prism of Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Hollywood*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013. Print.
- Widdows, Heather. "Persons and Their Parts: New Reproductive Technologies and Risks of Commodification." *The Legal, Medical and Cultural Regulation of the Body: Transformation and Transgression*. Eds. Stephen W. Smith and Ronan Deazley. Farnham, Surrey, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009. 77-88. Print.
- Willoquet-Maricondi, Paula, ed. *Framing the World: Explorations in Ecocriticism and Film*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010. Print.
- . "Shifting Paradigms: From Environmentalist Films to Ecocinema." *Framing the World: Explorations in Ecocriticism and Film*. Ed. Paula Willoquet-Maricondi. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010. 43-61. Print.
- The World* 世界. Dir. Zhangke Jia 贾樟柯. Xstream Pictures 西河星汇影业有限公司, 2004. DVD.
- Xue, Mo 雪漠. *Lie yuan* 猎原 (*The Hunting Plain*). Lanzhou: Dunhuang wenyi chubanshe 敦煌文艺出版社, 2009. Print.
- Yao, Xinzhong. *An Introduction to Confucianism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. Print.
- Yeh, Yueh-yu. "Defining 'Chinese.'" *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*. 42 (December 1998). 73-6. Print.
- Yellow Earth* 黄土地. Dir. Kaige Chen 陈凯歌. Guangxi Film Studio 广西电影制片厂, 1984. DVD.

- Yu, Pauline. *The Reading of Imagery in the Chinese Poetic Tradition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987. Print.
- . *The Poetry of Wang Wei: New Translations and Commentary*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980. Print.
- Zakarin, Jordan. "Fake Lorax Twitter Mocks the Film's Many Marketing Tie-ins." *The Hollywood Reporter*. 2 Mar. 2012. Web. 15 Apr. 2013.
- Zeng, Hong. *A Deconstructive Reading of Chinese Natural Philosophy in Literature and the Arts: Taoism and Zen Buddhism*. Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2004. Print.
- Zhang, Ling 张翎. *Yu zhen 余震 (Aftershocks)*. Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe 华东师范大学出版社, 2009. Print.
- Zhang, Longxi 张隆溪. *From Comparison to World Literature*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2015. Print.
- Zhang, Mingyu. "Tibetan Buddhism: Tibetan Plateau Environment Protector." *xinhuanet.com*. 4 Jan. 2010. Web. 29 Oct. 2014.
- Zhang, Ping 张平. *Xiong fan 凶犯(Criminal)*. Beijing: Zuoja chubanshe 作家出版社, 2006. Print.
- Zhang, Yingjin. *The City in Modern Chinese Literature and Film: Configurations of Space, Time, and Gender*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1996.
- . *Screening China: Critical Interventions, Cinematic Reconfigurations, and the Transnational Imaginary in Contemporary Chinese Cinema*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002. Print.

Zhou, Ming 周铭. “Weihe hao juzi pai ‘shanzhai ban’ haolaiwu dapian?” 为何耗巨资拍

山寨版好莱坞大片? (“What is the reason for a high-cost Hollywood rip-off?”)

*Xinmin wanbao. (Xinmin Evening News).* 28 Oct. 2008. Web. 14 May 2013.

Zhu, Ping. “Destruction, Moral Nihilism and the Poetics of Debris in Jia Zhangke’s *Still*

*Life.*” *Visual Anthropology*, 24 (2011). 318-328. Print.

Zhu, Ying. *Chinese Cinema during the Era of Reform: The Ingenuity of the System.*

Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2003. Print.

Zhu, Ying and Seio Nakajima. “The Evolution of Chinese Film as an Industry.” Eds. Ying

Zhu and Stanley Rosen. *Art, Politics, and Commerce in Chinese Cinema.* Hong

Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010. 17-33. Print.

Zhu, Ying, and Stanley Rosen, eds. *Art, Politics, and Commerce in Chinese Cinema.*

Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010. Print.

Zhuangzi 庄子. *Wandering on the Way: Early Taoist Tales and Parables of Chuang Tzu.*

Translated by Victor Mair. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1994. Print.

VITA

## VITA

**RUNLEI ZHAI****EDUCATION:**

- 2009-2015**      **Ph.D.** in Comparative Literature, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN, USA  
**Concentrations:** Modern Chinese Literature, Modern American Literature, Chinese Film Studies, Eco-Cinema, Eco-Studies, Nature Writing, the Pastoral Tradition in Literature and Film  
**Dissertation:** Chinese Eco-Films and their Pastoral Myth
- 2003-2006**      **Ph.D.** in American Literature, Beijing Foreign Studies University, Beijing, P.R.China  
**Concentrations:** American Literature, Women's Studies, Western American Literature, Eco-Studies  
**Dissertation:** In Search of Mother's Garden: An Ecofeminist Study of Four Major Works by Western Women Writers in the United States
- 1999-2002**      **M.A.** in British and American Literatures, Beijing Foreign Studies University, Beijing, P.R.China
- 1995-1999**      **B.A.** in English Language and Literature, Henan University, Kaifeng, Henan Province, P.R.China

**PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:**

- 2009-2011:**      **Teaching Assistant**, Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN 47907, USA  
**Courses taught:** Chinese 101, 102

- 2009 summer:** **Instructor**, Yale University Intensive English Language Program at Beijing Foreign Studies University, Beijing, 100089, P.R. China  
**Course taught:** Public Speaking
- 2002-2009:** **Lecturer**, School of English and International Studies, Beijing Foreign Studies University, Beijing, 100089, P.R. China  
**Courses taught:** Analytical Reading in English, Conversational English, Debating in English, Writing in English, and American Literature
- 2007-2009:** **Instructor**, (Part-time) Lancaster University Foundation Program at Beijing Foreign Studies University, Beijing, 100089, P.R. China  
**Course taught:** Reading and Writing in English
- 2006-2007:** **Visiting Scholar**, Department of English, Yale University, CT 06520, U.S.A.
- 2002-2003:** **Administrative Assistant** (Part-time) for graduate student affairs in School of English and International Studies, Beijing Foreign Studies University, Beijing, 100089, P.R. China

#### **GRANTS, AWARDS, AND HONORS:**

- 2011-2012:** Recipient of Purdue Research Foundation (PRF) Research Grant for Ph.D. dissertation: "Chinese Eco-Films and their Pastoral Myth," Purdue University
- 2009:** Teacher of Excellence Award, Beijing Foreign Studies University
- 2007-2008:** Teacher of Excellence Award, School of English and International Studies, Beijing Foreign Studies University
- 2006:** Best Doctoral Dissertation Award for Ph.D. dissertation: "In Search of Mother's Garden: An Ecofeminist Study of Four Major Works by Western Women Writers in the United States," Beijing Foreign Studies University
- 2005:** CSC Scholarship, China Scholarship Council
- 2004:** Teacher of Excellence Award, Beijing Foreign Studies University
- 1995-1999:** Henan University Education Scholarships



- 1997:** Honored at the “21<sup>st</sup> Century Cup” National English Speech Contest held by *China Daily*, Beijing, P.R. China
- 1996:** First prize of English Speaking Contest, Zhengzhou, Henan Province, P.R. China
- 1995-1999:** Outstanding Student Leader, Henan University, Kaifeng, Henan Province, P.R. China

## **PUBLICATIONS:**

### ***BOOKS:***

Jin, Li, **Runlei Zhai**, Jiping Yang, Ming Zhou. *Twentieth-Century American Women’s Fiction*. Beijing: Peking University Press, 2010.  
(It was funded by the Beijing Publishing Foundation for Theoretical Works in Social Science, and won the award for the Most Distinguished Achievement in Philosophy and Social Science in Beijing in 2010.)

**Zhai, Runlei.** *In Search of Mother’s Garden: An Ecofeminist Study of Four Major Works by Western Women Writers in the United States*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2009.

Gong, Yan, Limin Jin, **Runlei Zhai**, Jing Wang, and Dujuan Zhou, eds. *Contemporary College English: Textbook for Oral English*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Vol. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2005.

### ***ARTICLES:***

**Zhai, Runlei.** “The Anti-Gaze in a Hybrid Shakespeare: A Discussion of Women Characters in *Prince of the Himalayas*.” *Forum for World Literature Studies*, Vol. 2, No2, 2010: 194-205.

**Zhai, Runlei.** “Leslie Marmon Silko: Preacher of the American Indian Culture.” *Foreign Literature*, No. 204, 2007: 3-9.

**Zhai, Runlei.** “Yellow Women.” translation into Chinese. *Foreign Literature*, No. 204, 2007: 10-14.

**Zhai, Runlei.** “Going Out of the Cave—A New Reading of *Winesburg, Ohio* through

Plato's 'Allegory of the Cave.'" *Journal of Henan University*, Vol. 46, 2006: 117-119.

**Zhai, Runlei.** "A New Reading of the Double in *The Bell Jar*." *Critical Essays in School of English in Beijing Foreign Studies University*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2006: 259-272.

***TO BE PUBLISHED:***

Jin, Li, **Runlei Zhai**, Changyin Shen, etc. eds. *Contemporary American Literature Annual Scholarship: 1980-2000*.  
(This project was sponsored by the National Academic Committee in China.)

**PAPER PRESENTATIONS:**

- 2014.01** "Gender and Identity in Chinese Ecocinema," The 53rd Annual Meeting of the Southeast Regional Conference of the Association for Asian Studies (SEC/AAS), Duke University, Durham, NC 27708.
- 2010.10** "Love under the Threat of Rural Modernity," The 2010 Film & History Conference, Milwaukee, WI 53203.
- 2008.10** "A Different West, A New Eden--An Ecofeminist Study of Mary Hunter Austin's *The Land of Little Rain*," International Conference—"Beyond Thoreau: American and International Responses to Nature," Tsinghua University, Beijing, P.R. China.
- 2004.10:** "Going Out of the Cave—A New Reading of *Winesburg, Ohio* through Plato's 'Allegory of the Cave,'" National Annual Meeting on American Literature, Jinan, Shandong Province, P.R. China.

**ACADEMIC ASSOCIATIONS:**

American Comparative Literature Association, USA  
Association of Asian Studies, USA  
Modern Language Association, USA  
Center of Gender and Global Issues, P.R.China