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Faculty of Arts and Humanities

English

**Nature and Humanity: A Comparative Study between the Regional Novels of
Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) and Shen Congwen 沈从文 (1902-1988)**

by

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ORCID ID: 0000-0002-5266-8083

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

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Nature and Humanity: A Comparative Study between the Regional Novels of Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) and Shen Congwen 沈从文 (1902-1988)

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This thesis adopts a Taoist approach to a comparison of the representation of Nature in Thomas Hardy's Wessex novels and Shen Congwen's West Hunan novels. In these definitively regional novels, Hardy and Shen demonstrate that they share a belief in the fluidity of the distinctions modern society has imposed between humanity and Nature. A Taoist metaphysical conception of Nature provides models for understanding the holism in their works. The comparisons in this thesis address the uniqueness of Hardy's and Shen's representations of Nature, explore how the links between such representations create interesting dialogic reverberations, and demonstrate how a Taoist frame can illuminate the connections between Nature and humanity in their imaginative literature in new ways.

My three chapters select three pairs of novels from Hardy and Shen to which the relationship between Nature and humanity is central. In Chapter 1, a comparison between *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874) and *Fengzi* (1932-1937) explores the holism in the reciprocity between the human and non-human worlds in Wessex and the fetishist representation of local religion in West Hunan, and here I suggest that the Taoist conception of *ziran* can better capture the metaphysics of Nature in these novels. Chapter 2 explores *The Woodlanders* (1887) and *The Border Town* (1934), arguing that they show Taoist aesthetics of inaction (*wuwei*) in their narratives and their characters' interactions with the environment, and this shows that a comparison between these two novels can delineate a dialectic between Nature and culture which expresses both writers' literary tenet of 'meaning beyond words'. In Chapter 3, a Taoist analysis of *The Return of the Native* (1878) and *Long River* (1938-1945) dissolves the dichotomy between Nature and culture existing in previous criticisms and offers a Taoist observation of the 'return' to holism through atavistic representations of Nature in the face of the dualism of modernity.

Overall, the thesis aims to demonstrate the potential of applying a Taoist literary method to comparative literary studies. Through original translations into English of some of Shen's little-

known work, and the use of primary archive material held in both the UK and China, it offers bold new adjustments to previous scholarship on both Hardy and Shen.

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Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship

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I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and have been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. Parts of this work have been published as:

Yuejie Liu, 'A Dialogic Reverberation between Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* (1878) and Shen Congwen's *Long River* (1938-1945)', *Romance, Revolution and Reform*, 1 (2019), 72-91.

Signature:		Date:	9 May 2020
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Definitions and Abbreviations

FMC - Far from the Madding Crowd

The Return - The Return of the Native

*The Life - The Life and Works of Thomas Hardy*¹

*Complete Works - The Complete Works of Shen Congwen*²

*Collected Letters - The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*³

In this thesis, the newer Pinyin system of Chinese Romanisation terms is used, but the older Wade-Giles system of Chinese Romanisation is used for the Taoist terms ('Daoism' in the Pinyin system) because the *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Taoism* adopts this system and also most of the Taoist references in this study use it.⁴

¹ Michael Millgate ed., *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy* (The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1984).

² Zhang Zhaohe ed. 张兆和主编, *The Complete Works of Shen Congwen* 《沈从文全集》 (Beiyue Literature and Art Publishing House 北岳文艺出版社, 2002). All the translations of Shen's works in this thesis are done by myself except otherwise stated.

³ Richard Little Purdy and Michael Millgate eds., *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy* (Oxford University Press, 1978).

⁴ Fabrizio Pregadio, *The Encyclopedia of Taoism* (Routledge, 2013).

Introduction

The Way that can be told of is not an Unvarying Way;
 The names that can be named are not unvarying names.
 It was from the Nameless that Heaven and Earth sprang;
 The named is but the mother that rears the ten thousand creatures, each after
 its kind.

—Arthur Waley trans., *Tao Te Ching* Chapter 1, in *The Way and its Power: A Study of the Tao Te Ching and its Place in Chinese Thought* (Routledge, 2013), p.141

I considered that our magnificent heritage from the Greeks in dramatic literature found sufficient room for a large proportion of its action in an extent of their country not much larger than the half-dozen counties here reunited under the old name of Wessex, that the domestic emotions have throbbed in Wessex nooks with as much intensity as in the palaces of Europe, and that, anyhow, there was quite enough human nature in Wessex for one man's literary purpose.

—Thomas Hardy, General Preface to The Wessex Edition of 1912

Though these stories happened in Xiangxi, they may also have happened in southwest China; though some phenomena were submerged by the ongoing war, some similar phenomena might be happening elsewhere.

—Shen Congwen, Preface to *Long River*, 1943

I. Literary Reverberations between England and China

Except for the twenty-six years between 1902 and 1928 when they both lived, Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) and Shen Congwen 沈从文 (1902-1988) shared nothing more in common than any two men from distant parts of the globe: except, of course, that they were both writers. This lack of mutual influence in literary history, however, does not necessarily reduce the reverberations in reading their novels. As the quotes above show, as regional writers, they both believed the particular could gesture toward the universal. Sudhir Dixit and Alka Saxena comment on the timelessness and universality of Hardy's novels that 'Hardy in his characters and their presentation and their inner-relationship with the setting, rises much above the narrow bounds of regionalism.'⁵ Similarly, Jeffery Kinkley comments on Shen's West Hunan novels that: 'Shen's

⁵ Sudhir Dixit and Alka Saxena, *Hardy's Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2001), p.52.

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West Hunan fiction by itself presents a full and compelling statement about life.⁶ Specifically, Kinkley explains: '[o]nly a novelist with a sure eye and a good ear could have created characters so indelibly marked by their homeland. Shen's works also interpret rural life in modern China as a whole, and even the existential plight of twentieth-century man. But in that, too, his regional vision takes command, supplying West Hunanese particulars as exemplifications of human universals.'⁷ Shen and Hardy's vision of the connection between the regional and the universal is the starting point of this comparative study. In what follows I will demonstrate that a parallel comparison of their regional novels that is alert to some shared concerns is much more fruitful than an influence study between these two writers.

Hardy never went to China and he knew little about Chinese culture except some anecdotes, however, while Hardy's direct engagement with Chinese culture was likely to have been partial at best, there is no doubt that perceptions of China - however erroneous - circulated freely in the West at least at the level of metaphor, and Hardy's works were read in China during Shen's formative years.⁸ Comparisons were in the air. By contrast to Hardy's limited knowledge about China, Shen read extensively about Western literature and he admired Charles Dickens.⁹ There is no evidence that he read about Hardy, but the 1920s saw translations of Hardy's works become quite popular in China, so it is possible that Shen read about him.¹⁰ Gladys Yang, English translator of Shen's works with her husband Yang Xianyi, once commented that there is a resemblance between Thomas Hardy and the Chinese writers Gu Hua and Shen Congwen.¹¹ Xu Zhimo, who mentored Shen at the beginning of his writing career, was a loyal reader of Hardy and it was he who introduced Hardy to Chinese readers in 1920s.¹² It would be hard to imagine that Xu had

⁶ Jeffrey C Kinkley, *The Odyssey of Shen Congwen* (Stanford University Press, 1987), p.4. West Hunan Province (Xiangxi), China 中国湘西.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.4.

⁸ Chinese scholar He Ning 何宁 summarises Hardy's relationship with China in his article 'Hardy and China 哈代与中国' mainly with biographical evidence such as his letters with Arthur Moule who worked as archdeacon in middle China. See in *Foreign Literary Criticism* 《外国文学评论》, 1999(1), pp.100-06. Besides this, Hardy also mentions China on several occasions in his novels and literary correspondence, for example, in Chapter 7 of *The Woodlanders* (1887), Hardy describes the distortion of woodbine into walking-sticks as 'the Chinese have been said to mould human beings into grotesque toys by continued compression in infancy' (Penguin Classics, 1986, pp.94-95); on another occasion, on 19 February 1904, Hardy wrote a letter to the editor of *The Times* in response to the comments about *The Dynasts* (1903): 'Sir, your critic has humorously conducted his discourse away from his original charge against *The Dynasts* into the quaint and unexpected channel of real performance by means of fantoccini, Chinese shadows, and other startling apparatus' (*Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings* (Macmillan, 1967, p.144).

⁹ Shen Congwen, *Autobiography* (Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 1981).

¹⁰ He, 'Hardy and China'.

¹¹ Yang Ruiren 杨瑞仁, *A Comparative Study of Shen Congwen, Faulkner, and Hardy* (China Federation of Literary and Art Circles Publishing Corporation, 2002), p.3. Gladys Yang 戴乃迭, born Gladys Margaret Tayler (1919-1999), British translator. Yang Xianyi 杨宪益 (1915-2009), Chinese translator. Gu Hua 古华, pen name of Chinese writer Luo Hongyu 罗鸿玉 (1942-).

¹² Xu Zhimo 徐志摩 (1897-1931), Chinese poet.

never talked with Shen about his literary hero, although no evidence has been found, and it is likely that Shen read about Xu's introduction and translations of Hardy, which were published in the major literary periodicals. Such evidence for possible influences between Hardy and Shen can be beneficial for approaching literary history from a more integrated perspective, which is particularly meaningful in today's world literature contexts, but I present such evidence mainly as a background for my parallel study between the conceptions of Nature in these two writers' regional novels.

II. Nature as a Novel Interest

To delineate such conceptions of nature in their novels, I will begin with what both writers have claimed as a 'rustic idiosyncrasy' in their literature. In a letter to Richard Doddridge Blackmore in 1875 Hardy mentioned his distinct rustic sensibilities, which he believed rare in contemporary literature:

Little phrases of nature which I thought nobody had noticed but myself were continually turning up in your book - for instance, the marking of a heap of sand into little pits by the droppings from trees was a fact I should unhesitatingly have declared unknown to any other novelist till now. A kindred sentiment between us in so many things is, I suppose, partly because we both spring from the west of England.¹³

He attributed this subtle observation of the natural environment, that he thought distinct in his style but which found an echo in Blackmore, to their shared origins in the rustic west of England, but there are more important things to note. Hardy claimed in another letter to Kegan Paul in 1878 that his choice of residence in a London suburb was due to a careful consideration of his compatibility with the city: 'We might have ventured on Kensington, but for such utter rustics as ourselves Tooting seemed town enough to begin with.'¹⁴ The note indicates that Hardy was consciously selecting a suburb of London (Tooting) that was at that time more rural and which he believed to be more compatible with his character.

In the preface to *Selected Works* (1936), a collection of his fictions, Shen also insisted on his distinct rustic idiosyncrasy and confronted his middle-class urban readers with his incompatibility with the city:

I am truly a countryman, which I do not mean to boast nor dispraise - a countryman as usual has a rooted rustic idiosyncrasy, with love and hate, grief and joy in their distinct forms, which are totally different from those of city

¹³ Purdy and Millgate eds., *Collected Letters*, Volume I: 1840-1892, p.38.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.57-58.

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dwellers. He is reserved, stubborn, earthy, not without sharp wit but not treacherous. He is as usual earnest about things but may be too earnest so that sometimes becomes clumsy and foolish.¹⁵

Moreover, Shen wrote in response to the critique of his rural novels and exclaimed: 'I felt particularly isolated. There were too few countrymen. [...] Currently though we have writers with a rustic background in China, most of them flatter your interests and attract your attentions for a career "success". There were not many countrymen who would remain so of their own accord.'¹⁶ Similarly, it is noted that due to the popularity of *Far from the Madding Crowd*, a subsequent expectation from Hardy's readers was for him to write another pastoral story about rural manners, which was not his interest. *The Hand of Ethelberta* (1876) was not as successful as his former novel, and Hardy was uneasy about writing what the public deemed a rustic story:

He [Hardy] perceived that he was 'up against' the position of having to carry on his life not as an emotion, but as a scientific game; that he was committed by circumstances to novel-writing as a regular trade, as much as he had formerly been to architecture; and that hence he would, he deemed, have to look for material in manners in ordinary social and fashionable life as other novelists did. Yet he took no interest in manners, but in the substance of life only.¹⁷

'The substance of life' can be understood together with another note by Hardy in 1882, which presents a parallel notion 'a going to Nature':

As, in looking at a carpet, by following one colour a certain pattern is suggested, by following another colour, another; so in life the seer should watch that pattern among general things which his idiosyncrasy moves him to observe, and describe that alone. This is, quite accurately, a going to Nature; yet the result is no mere photograph, but purely the product of the writer's own mind.¹⁸

Both expressions imply a metaphysical concern. The capitalised 'N' in 'a going to Nature' ascribes a significance to Hardy's conception of Nature which enhances it above the natural environment. In both Hardy's and Shen's regional novels, nature is not a backdrop for human thoughts and actions but exists in a reciprocity with humanity. Hardy's manuscript of *The Return of the Native* (1878) was rejected by the publisher of *Blackwood's Magazine* because 'there is hardly anything like what is called Novel interest' in the first chapter, which intensely portrays Egdon Heath.¹⁹ Here, the novel interest is obviously exclusive to the human interest, and *The Return* is critiqued for lacking in such human interest. The same lack of human interest also appears in the beginning

¹⁵ 'Preface to *Selected Works* 习作选集代序' (1936), in *Complete Works* ed. by Zhang, Volume IX, p.3.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.6.

¹⁷ Millgate ed., *The Life*, p.107.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.158.

¹⁹ Frank B Pinion, *Thomas Hardy: art and thought* (Springer, 1977), p.178

chapter of *The Border Town* (1934), which depicts the roads and hills and rivers and a hidden hut where two major characters appear as little dots - an overview of local environment, similar to the first chapter of *The Return*. The narrators in both novels take a bird's-eye view at the beginning to draw a whole picture of the natural environment; also, this bird's-eye view appears in the procession of a plot attempting to convey the whole of a human life, condenses human figures into tiny dots, and puts them in an indifferent universe. Such narratives reveal the limitation of human perceptions and an intuitive connection between human psychology and the environment. In Chapter 3 of *The Woodlanders* (1887), for example, when Giles and Marty walk 'in the lonely hour before the day' through the woods, the narrator states that 'their lonely courses formed no detached design at all but were part of the pattern in the great web of human doings then weaving in both hemispheres, from the White Sea to Cape Horn'.²⁰ The scene develops as if through a camera, gradually rising, and the two human figures are gradually rendered into two little dots in a large web of the universe; the woodland is essential for this association, not as a backdrop but as a being.

Nature is so important to Hardy that, as D. H. Lawrence claims, he introduces it almost as a character, or, as a more important character than human beings in *The Return*.²¹ Such a comparison between nature and character risks falling into anthropomorphism. However, Lawrence once declared in a letter to Gordon Campbell in 1914 that 'I know from the Egyptian and Assyrian sculpture, what we are after. We want to realise the tremendous nonhuman quality of life.'²² This remark echoes Hardy's statement that he was not interested in manners but in 'the substance of life only' and 'a going to Nature': both Hardy and Lawrence are pursuing a kind of literature that expresses beyond the human society. John Paterson comments on this shared concern between Hardy and Lawrence about the nonhuman mystery: 'Reality was not after all exhausted by the human; it was conterminous with a natural cosmos that remained uncomprehended and incomprehensible. Nor was the human exhausted by the social; it was a part of the same nonhuman mystery by which it was surrounded, by the same natural cosmos out of which it came and into which it disappeared.'²³ This comment precisely notes two significant features of Hardy's fiction: first, a mythical Reality persists in the amoral Nature that is ineffable; second, connections exist between humanity and Nature rather than merely in the human

²⁰ Hardy, *The Woodlanders* (Penguin Classics, 1986), p.59.

²¹ Lawrence notes that in Hardy's novels the natural background becomes foreground: '[t]his is a constant revelation in Hardy's novels: that there exists a great background, vital and vivid, which matters more than the people who move upon it.' D. H. Lawrence, *Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers 1936*, ed. by Edward D. McDonald (New York: Viking Press, 1968), p.419.

²² Harry T Moore ed., *The Collected Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, Volume I (New York, 1962), p.291.

²³ John Paterson, 'Lawrence's Vital Source: Nature and Character in Thomas Hardy', *Nature and the Victorian Imagination* (University of California Press, 1977), p.468.

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societies. The scene from *The Woodlanders* in my last paragraph where Giles and Marty walk together as if lonely figures in the forest and at the same time are involved in a larger web can serve as an example of Paterson's note; also, when Gabriel Oak looks up at the constellation in *Far from the Madding Crowd* and Mrs. Yeobright stares at ants when she is dying in *The Return of the Native*, such connections between humanity and a cosmos that is beyond human are foregrounded. Paterson concludes that Hardy portrays characters as states of being rather than traditionally as social or moral, and this observation has a venerable history in twentieth-century Hardy criticism.

One of Virginia Woolf's acute comments about Hardy is that his characterisation is to a great extent shown through interactions between characters and Nature: '[i]f we do not know his men and women in their relations to each other, we know them in their relations to time, death, and fate. If we do not see them in quick agitation against the lights and crowds of cities, we see them against the earth, the storm, and the seasons.'²⁴ Here, metaphysical (time, death, and fate) are aligned with physical (earth, storm, and seasons) elements which together picture the non-human domain that characterises humanity as much as society does, if not more. Ian Gregor similarly notes on Eustacia and Tess: '[h]ere [in *The Return*] Hardy is trying to define the person in terms of the heath, and it is not difficult to feel that ground swell of portentousness which mars so much of the book. In *Tess* Hardy aims at an exactly similar effect, an attempt to define a mood by a landscape.'²⁵ In noticing the importance of Nature, Woolf and Gregor locate a critical focus on Nature in Hardy's fiction for its contribution to his characterisation, which is in line with Lawrence's comment. Nonetheless, such a history of criticism that emphasises characters is still heavily rooted in the human interest of novels and therefore cannot fully explore Nature itself as a novel interest for Hardy: the intimacy shared between characters and Nature as shown in Giles and Oak not only accentuates their characterisations as Nature's sons, but more crucially, it delineates a connection between the human and non-human worlds. This urgently calls for a critical model that can illuminate the complexity and effects of a depiction that works against the anthropocentric as assumed in previous criticisms of the novels.

This line of scholarship on Hardy's conception of Nature confirms not only that Nature is an important interest in Hardy's novels, but also that Hardy treats it very differently from the naturalistic and realistic traditions in other Victorian novels which focus more on the physical and social domain: rather, Hardy's narrators often lay an emphasis on the metaphysical connection between isolated human beings and the universe. These criticisms also form a Eurocentric

²⁴ Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader Second Series* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1935), p.253.

²⁵ Ian Gregor, 'What Kind of Fiction Did Hardy Write?', *Essays in Criticism*, 16 (1966), p.304.

discourse about Hardy's conception of Nature that is dualistic and basically antithetical to the holistic metaphysics which I argue for in the Wessex novels. Comparing the cosmology in Hardy's and Lawrence's views, Paterson comments that Hardy reinstates a holistic conception of 'the natural cosmos as a real existence and man as a part of that existence'.²⁶ He notes that for Hardy 'the merely human or material facts' are not enough and there is always 'the domain of Nature': '[t]o define reality as a function of the merely human and social was to define it as ordinary and commonplace. But to define it as a function of a natural universe independent of and infinitely greater than the human creature and his cities and societies was to define it as the continuing repository of marvel and magic.'²⁷ According to Paterson, Hardy achieves this 'by restoring the ancient heavenly connection between the human creature and the natural world around it'.²⁸ This is useful so far as it goes, but Paterson is more interested in comparing Hardy's and Lawrence's literary styles than exploring Hardy's particularly unusual view of the connection between the human and the non-human worlds. Building on Paterson's work, I will explore this connection more fully in this study through a comparative literature methodology and the particular lens of Taoism, which can foreground the holism in Hardy's and Shen's regional novels. Overall, the aims of this thesis are to:

- (1) Connect the regional with the universal through my comparisons of the mutually illuminating texts from Hardy's Wessex novels and Shen's Xiangxi novels;
- (2) Use Taoist metaphysics to approach the conception of Nature in both writers' novels that demonstrates a holism between Nature and humanity, with Taoist terms serving as literary methods;
- (3) Set the two writers in a dialogue with a demonstration of integrated literary histories of Victorian England and early twentieth-century China by using evidence from their biographical and reflective literature, alongside criticisms from both literary traditions.
- (4) To bring Shen's writings to a Western critical audience through new and in some cases first translations of his lesser-known works

The major focus of this thesis is prose, for its ability to manipulate and develop characters and their sensibilities within and relationships to the environment at leisure and in depth. Among Hardy's 'Novels of Character and Environment', except for the unpublished *The Poor Man and the Lady* and two collections of short stories, three novels - *Far from the Madding Crowd*, *The Return*

²⁶ Paterson, 'Lawrence's Vital Source', p.456.

²⁷ Ibid., p.456.

²⁸ Ibid., p.462.

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of the Native, and *The Woodlanders* - are in special focus because the relationship between humanity and Nature centres their narratives.²⁹ As for the other four Wessex novels, *Under the Greenwood Tree* is more about the social aspects of village life; *The Mayor of Casterbridge* presents a mercantile townscape; *Tess* and *Jude* have shifting settings and are more concerned with individual struggles. On Shen's side, three novels and novellas are selected: *Fengzi*, *The Border Town*, and *Long River*, for their sustained and specific imaginations of Xiangxi and an exercise in Taoist aesthetics.

In this part I have not touched too much upon on Shen's texts and criticism specifically because his literature shares the cultural contexts with Taoism and therefore can be regarded as less incompatible with my Taoist analysis than might first seem for Hardy, but in the rest of this introduction as well as in each chapter, more details will be discussed in relation to Shen. Indeed, I suggest, the comparative methodology of this thesis substantially enables an understanding of Hardy's Wessex from the Taoist perspective by means of comparing it with Shen's Xiangxi, for the two fictional worlds are mutually illuminating in terms of their holism between Nature and humanity. Although critics have already noted a distinctive conception of Nature in Hardy's works, as we have seen, they have never approached his novels from a Taoist view.

III. *Ziran*: a Taoist Conception of Nature

Taoism - inarticulate as it often is - is key to my approach for a number of reasons. It is the first among traditional Chinese philosophies that stresses 'heaven and man merging into one (*tian ren he yi* 天人合一)'. Chapter 25 of *Tao Te Ching* states that 'The ways of men are conditioned by those of earth. The ways of earth, by those of heaven. The ways of heaven, by those of Tao, and the ways of Tao, by the Self-so.'³⁰ Taoist master Chuang Tzu writes in 'On Levelling All Things 齐物论' that '[t]he universe and I came into being together; I and everything therein are One.'³¹ Taoism asserts 'heaven' and 'man' as complementary in 'heaven and men merging into one' because heaven is the origin of everything, and man is the observer of everything - only heaven can provide materials and only man can utilise these materials. Thus, neither man nor heaven or earth is the centre - Tao is, and it connects everything. A Taoist approach to literature thus

²⁹ Also known as 'Wessex novels', including: *The Poor Man and the Lady* (1867, unpublished and lost); *Under the Greenwood Tree: A Rural Painting of the Dutch School* (1872); *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874); *The Return of the Native* (1878); *The Mayor of Casterbridge: The Life and Death of a Man of Character* (1886); *The Woodlanders* (1887); *Wessex Tales* (1888, a collection of short stories); *Tess of the d'Urbervilles: A Pure Woman Faithfully Presented* (1891); *Life's Little Ironies* (1894, a collection of short stories); and *Jude the Obscure* (1895).

³⁰ Arthur Waley trans., *Tao Te Ching* Chapter 25, in *The Way and its Power*, p.174.

³¹ Chuang Tse, *Chuang Tse* 《庄子》, trans. Lin Yutang 林语堂 (Taipei: World Publishing House, 1957).

demonstrates a holistic view of Nature and humanity that accentuates the connections between them rather than put either in the centre. David E. Cooper draws an analogy with language to explain Taoist holism: '[t]he Dao [Tao] is best thought of perhaps as a "matrix" that enables the emergence of things without being disjoined from them, rather as a language might be thought of as a matrix that enables the generation of words that become parts of itself.'³² This shows a delicate understanding of the interaction between part and whole in Taoism as well as the idea that Tao as the overarching self-so demonstrates an abstract completeness which is not merely the mechanical accumulation of parts and can be compared to a 'matrix'. Cooper further elaborates on this: '[j]ust as a language is not a collection of separate words (words have meaning only in relation to one another and to the language as a whole), so it is an error, according to the Zhuangzi, to become rigidly fixated on the distinctions that humans, for pragmatic reasons, draw between separate things.'³³ Here, Cooper confirms the Taoist holistic view that argues for dialectics rather than distinctions between things. The Taoist methodology of this thesis, by providing a holistic paradigm which acknowledges a human incapacity to apprehend the metaphysics of the universe, contributes to dissolving the dualism between Nature and culture exhibited in previous scholarship on the conception of Nature for both writers. Nonetheless, there are problems with Taoism as a whole concept for my method and I will shortly be refining what I have taken it to mean.

Firstly, two notions about Taoism needed to be clarified - *dao(j)ia* and *dao(j)iao*: *dao(j)ia* is the School of Taoism while *dao(j)iao* means the Religion of Taoism. *Dao(j)ia* is a school of thought that appeared in the Spring and Autumn Period (771 BCE-476 BCE), and *dao(j)iao* is the religion derived from this line of thought with diverse branches: '[t]he main difference between *dao(j)ia* and *dao(j)iao* is perhaps that *dao(j)iao* primarily aims at establishing a connection with the sacred, either as a relationship with deities and spirits or as the attainment of personal transcendence. The question of immortality is related to this point.'³⁴ This thesis is not concerned with issues of spirituality or theology; while much work has already been done by Hardy scholars on his relationship with theology, it is *Dao(j)ia*, the school of metaphysics, that I take as my Taoist focus because it enables a broader and fuller exploration of the holism I want to address in Hardy's and Shen's novels.³⁵ The classics of Taoist metaphysics are both primary and secondary texts for this thesis. Isabelle Robinet asks a crucial question: is *dao(j)ia* philosophical? And she defines it as 'a multifaceted

³² J. Baird Callicott and Robert Frodeman eds., *Encyclopedia of Environmental Ethics and Philosophy*, Vol. 1 (Macmillan, 2009), p.202.

³³ Ibid., p.202.

³⁴ *Dao(j)ia* 道家, *dao(j)iao* 道教, the Spring and Autumn Period 春秋战国时期. Pregadio, *The Encyclopedia of Taoism*, p.7.

³⁵ See Chapter 1 for the scholarship on Hardy and theology.

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“perspectivist” way’ from which inexhaustible interpretations can be derived.³⁶ Robinet also confirms the variety of doctrines in different Taoist texts and branches: ‘[t]he *dao* dimension of Taoism is absent in several Taoist trends and texts, and others appropriated the *Daode jing* [*Tao Te Ching*] without much regard for its many possible meanings. Nevertheless, the philosophical spirit and features embraced by the term *dao* are apparent throughout most of the history of Taoism [...].’³⁷ These philosophical features are core to the analyses in this thesis, and I would describe them as the metaphysical conceptions of Nature in Taoism.

This is the point at which my methodological comparison of Hardy with Shen begins to bear fruit. In a brief summary of Shen Congwen’s background, Jeffrey Kinkley notes that Shen is ethnically and socially marginalised for the early twentieth-century middle-class Chinese readers and at the same time this marginalisation becomes an asset for his writing:

Until the 1930s, Shen Congwen was a socially marginal member of China's new intelligentsia. He was an outlander and not of pure Han ancestry. He had not studied abroad, nor even attended high school. On the other hand, he had strong recent personal and historical familial links with the militarised little corner of China to which many Chinese, friend and foe alike, traced his personal peculiarities. Shen also had strong links with the 1890s reform generation. In some ways his ideological concerns - Social Darwinism, local prosperity, and holistic metaphysics, rather than materialism and revolution, suggest the earlier generation. But these same personal factors and predispositions made it easy for Shen to link up with the avant-garde at Peking University, an institution which diffused knowledge even to non-students like Shen. Modern thought sought integrated understanding of the primitive and the sophisticated, the good and evil, the myth-making and scientific capacities in man. Shen Congwen was encouraged to follow his instincts and celebrate his region's peculiar myths, customs, and primitive rites, instead of suppressing them.³⁸

One distinct feature derived from Shen’s marginalised cultural background, Kinkley suggests, is the metaphysical connections shown between Nature and humanity in his works, or in Kinkley’s words, ‘holistic metaphysics’. Richard H. Taylor defines a similar feature of Hardy’s ‘Novels of Characters and Environment’ as ‘psychic interplay’: ‘It is exactly the psychic interplay of “character” and “environment” that sustains the reader’s deeper interest in the major novels, and while this is not absent from the others, the effect is muted by other factors.’³⁹ But Taylor does not specify how this ‘psychic interplay of character and environment’ manifests in the texts and

³⁶ Pregadio, *The Encyclopedia of Taoism*, p.7.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.7.

³⁸ Jeffrey C. Kinkley, ‘Shen Congwen and the uses of regionalism in modern Chinese literature’, *Modern Chinese Literature* (1985), p.175.

³⁹ By ‘major novels’, Taylor refers to ‘Novels of Character and Environment’: ‘The “Novels of Character and Environment” include all the seven novels upon which Hardy's reputation as a novelist rests.’ Richard H. Taylor, *The Neglected Hardy: Thomas Hardy's Lesser Novels* (Springer, 1982), pp.177-78.

why it can sustain the reader's interest beyond a pastoral sensibility. With 'interplay', Taylor's comment indicates the reciprocity between the character and environment within a holistic view of Nature, but 'psychic' nevertheless reveals an anthropocentric emphasis on human psychology. John Alcorn propels another similar notion, 'naturalist', for Hardy: '[t]he naturalists [...] are closer to the unconscious-centred psychology of Freud, Jung, and William James than to the empirical psychology of John Locke; they are suspicious of any conversion of landscape into philosophy, and reject the idea of an empirical event in nature as an occasion for abstract or general thought.'⁴⁰ This echoes D. H. Lawrence's and Virginia Woolf's comments on Hardy: all of them accentuate that Hardy rejects the romantic or transcendentalist ideas of Nature and rather views it as ontological and even inexplicable.⁴¹ Alcorn emphasises the core position of this concern for naturalists: '[t]his "margin of the unexpressed" is of course present in Wordsworth's poems as it is in all good poetry; but in the naturalist novel it is central, not marginal.'⁴² These comments are also in line with Kinkley's observation about the 'holistic metaphysics' shown in Shen's works. Alcorn elaborates on the naturalists' tendency that: 'the naturalist is post-Romantic in his attempt to obliterate the observing, thinking, feeling first-person, the Wordsworthian "I".'⁴³ He exemplifies some writers who developed this 'naturalist impulse' into modernist techniques such as Pound, Eliot, and Joyce, who 'alter the personal lyric voice into the dramatic voice of a persona, placed within a larger objective framework'; meanwhile, Alcorn specifies that '[t]o the later writers, that framework is aesthetic and mythic; for the naturalist, it is natural and ontological'.⁴⁴ Here, the 'larger objective framework' obviously refers to Nature, and Alcorn notes that for naturalist writers it is not an artistic creation for aesthetic or mythic values but an ontological being, therefore Nature becomes an interest for naturalists not in terms of providing backdrops for human activities in their writings but as a kind of existence that shares the same importance with human characters.

Intriguingly, almost uniquely among these critics, Alcorn compares Hardy's novel to Chinese aesthetics: 'His [naturalist's] characters, like the tiny figures in the immense spaces of a Chinese screen painting, or like the grasshopper-sized Clym Yeobright cutting furze, are themselves part of the landscape. Lawrence's exhortation, "just be oneself, like a walking flower", though it can be

⁴⁰ John Alcorn, *The Nature Novel from Hardy to Lawrence*, (Macmillan Press, 1977), p.3.

⁴¹ D. H. Lawrence, 'Study of Thomas Hardy', in Edward D. McDonald ed. *Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D. H. Lawrence* (New York: Viking Press, 1936), p.419: '[...] the vast, incomprehensible pattern of some primal morality greater than ever the human mind can grasp'; Virginia Woolf, *The Second Common Reader* (New York, 1960), p.225: '[...] there is always about them a little blur of unconsciousness, that halo of freshness and margin of the unexpressed.'

⁴² Alcorn, *The Nature Novel from Hardy to Lawrence*, p.4.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.4.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.4.

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quickly understood by a student of Zen or the Tao, would likely have seemed absurd to Wordsworth, Shelley, or Tennyson.⁴⁵ The word 'landscape' is problematic here because Alcorn uses it to describe a view which decentres human beings, but 'landscape' in fact denotes a highly artificial and anthropocentric essence that objectifies Nature, a problem also noted by Zhang Xinying about Shen criticism which will be discussed later. Nonetheless, Alcorn's notion of 'naturalist' differs from the romantic concept of nature since it rejects the dualism that objectifies Nature and acknowledges the limitation of human linguistic forms to apprehend it; rather, naturalists turn to human sub-consciousness for an internal resonance. Although John Alcorn's notion of 'naturalist' and Richard H. Taylor's notion of 'psychic interplay' touch upon the metaphysical conception of Nature in Hardy's works, these approaches do not capture the holistic core that Taoism can provide with. Alcorn also, crucially, suggests room for a Taoist interpretation of Hardy's conception of Nature which can be regarded as a reaffirmation of my Taoist approach. In this thesis, I will focus on how the holism between Nature and humanity in both Hardy's and Shen's novels can be illuminated by *ziran* 自然, the Taoist conception of Nature, which fills the gap that Taylor and Alcorn note but fail to develop into an effective critical language.

The first thing to be noted about *ziran* is its difference from the English word 'nature'. The basic idea in Taoism, Tao, has also been translated as 'the Way', 'the divine Law', or 'Truth'. According to James Miller, 'Dao [Tao] is no more and no less than the flourishing of nature itself'⁴⁶. Miller also points out that the Chinese expression *ziran* and the English word 'nature' (which is used as the translation of *ziran*) are not totally equivalent:

This natural spontaneity translates a Chinese term *ziran* (lit. self-so) that is the basis of the Modern Standard Chinese term for nature (*ziran jie*). In *Daode jing* [*Tao Te Ching*] we read: 'Humans model Earth. Earth models Heaven. Heaven models Dao. Dao models natural spontaneity (*ziran*).' The three basic dimensions of existence (human, earthly, and heavenly) are thus folded into the natural evolution of the Way, which proceeds without reference to any wholly external power or transcendent force. It is important to bear in mind, however, that the ancient Chinese term may not simply be equated with the English word 'nature', for the natural operation of the Dao is not limited to one dimension of life or being. Indeed it lies at the root of all activity, whether human, celestial, political, animal, or vegetal.⁴⁷

In other words, *ziran* is essentially a wider conception than 'nature'; and in Taoism, *ziran* is the natural spontaneity that Tao models - Michael Lafargue makes a good point when he translates

⁴⁵ Ibid., p.4.

⁴⁶ James Miller, 'Daoism and Nature,' in Helaine Selin ed. *Nature across Cultures* (Springer, 2003), p.393.

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp.393-94.

ziran as ‘naturalness’⁴⁸ rather than ‘nature’. The Taoist conception of Nature, *ziran*, includes human beings in the ‘natural evolution of the Way’, which dissolves the division of nature and culture. Tu Wei-Ming also confirms that ‘[t]o say that self-so is all-inclusive is to posit a non-discriminatory and non-judgemental position, to allow all modalities of being to display themselves as they are.’⁴⁹ Graham Parkes approaches the non-equivalence between *ziran* and ‘nature’ from the perspective of the English language and admits that: ‘[t]he problem of the natural in Taoism is compounded by the lack of a single term in Taoist vocabulary that corresponds exactly to our word “nature”.’⁵⁰ He further explains the idea of *ziran* by conducting an anatomy of the Taoist ‘nature’: ‘[t]here is rather a complex of related terms, of which the most important in the present context is t’ien 天, or “heaven/sky”, which often - especially in the compound t’ien-ti 天地, “heaven-and-earth” - comes closest to what we mean by the natural world.’⁵¹ This comment confirms that *ziran* essentially has more connotations than ‘nature’ and arguably that the English word ‘nature’ is only close to the ‘heaven and earth’ element of *ziran*. Miller suggests that ‘the discussion of the Daoist [Taoist] approach to nature is couched in terms of the person-within-the-world, not in terms of “nature” or “environment” as though these terms referred to some external entity or object with which we have to do’, which again points out the non-equivalence between the two words, and the model of ‘person-within-the-world’ captures the Taoist essence of metaphysical connections that I want to emphasise in Hardy’s and Shen’s works through *ziran*.⁵² *Ziran* is distinct from the dualistic literary and critical notions, including ‘landscape’, ‘nature’, and ‘environment’ that ultimately objectify nature.

Previous scholarships on both writers have pinpointed the narrowness of understanding their conception of Nature only within the human domain, and *ziran* offers an approach that emphasises the metaphysical connections between the human and the non-human domains in their novels. Chinese scholar Zhang Xinying argues that previous analyses focusing on ‘landscape’ in Shen’s works have been too limited, which parallels that question of the scholarship on Nature in Hardy’s works as previously outlined, and Zhang suggests that *ziran* is a more appropriate expression for Nature in Shen: ‘Shen Congwen also uses the word “landscape 风景”, but it is a compromise. It is actually “*ziran* 自然”, and *ziran* is connected with Heaven and Earth, and layers

⁴⁸ Michael LaFargue, ‘Nature as part of human culture in Daoism’, *Daoism and ecology: Ways within a cosmic landscape*, eds. by Norman J. Girardot, James Miller, and Liu Xiaogan (Harvard University Press, 2001), p.51.

⁴⁹ Tu Wei-Ming, ‘The Continuity of Being: Chinese Visions of Nature’, in Corinne H. Dale ed. *Chinese Aesthetics and Literature: A Reader* (SUNY Press, 2004), p.31.

⁵⁰ Graham Parkes, ‘Human/Nature in Nietzsche and Taoism’, in J. Baird Callicott and Roger T. Ames eds. *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought* (State University of New York Press, 1989), p.81.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.81.

⁵² Miller, ‘Daoism and Nature’, p.405.

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and layers through to infinite vitality.⁵³ Zhang also points out the artificiality of the word 'landscape' through its objectification of Nature: '[t]he 'landscape' we usually refer to has been picture-processed - they are images captured by our eyes or camera; even if we can associate these pictures with Nature, it is the modern conception of Nature which is objected by us - we have taken human beings as subject and Nature as object.'⁵⁴ He further comments on a dualism between Nature and culture in traditional readings of Shen and a resulting tendency towards anthropocentrism in the understanding of Nature in Shen's works. Zhang suggests that Shen's conception of Nature can be more properly read through 'Heaven-and-Earth', which is clearly a Taoist concept and means 'the natural world' as noted by Parkes; although 'Heaven-and-Earth' does not objectify nature as 'landscape' does because 'Heaven', 'Earth', and 'Man' are equal elements of *ziran*, the expression omits the important element of 'Man' which serves as one of the connections for Tao to achieve self-so. Thus, *ziran*, as a broader concept that accentuates the connections among everything, is more useful for my thesis about the holism in both writers' works.

Similarly for Hardy, as I have demonstrated in the former section, a long line of critics have already noticed that humanity for Hardy is far beyond the physical and social domains - it is just that no one study has fully explored the potential of a Taoist view of Hardy's conception of Nature. Now Zhang shows a similar concern about Shen's works and compares Shen's conception of Nature with Taoism, although not in a systematic way, and this is what I intend to do for Hardy, in the belief that these two critical traditions can illuminate each other. For example, in Chapter 1 I use *ziran* to approach the conception of Nature in *FMC* and present a symbiosis of Wessex through the Taoist idea of 'relational self', which demonstrates that words like 'setting' or 'environment' are problematic for understanding the holism in Hardy's regional novels and that the rich perspectives offered by such authorial emphasis on relativism can reconceptualise the pastoralism in this novel.

Besides the relativism provided by *ziran* as a holistic paradigm, it also delineates a Taoist aesthetic that is helpful for interpreting the passivity in the narratives of both writers' works. Roger T. Ames asserts that Taoism is concerned more with aesthetics than science or philosophy. He uses '*ars contextualis*' rather than 'metaphysics' because metaphysics is 'a universal science of first principles'⁵⁵ while Taoism is an 'aesthetic cosmology' that 'proceeds from art rather than science and produces an *ars contextualis*: generalisations drawn from human experience in the most basic

⁵³ Zhang Xinying 张新颖, *Shen Congwen and the Twentieth-Century China* 《沈从文与二十世纪的中国》 (Shanghai: Fudan University Press, 2014), p.26.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.26.

⁵⁵ Roger T. Ames, 'Taoism and the Nature of Nature', *Environmental Ethics* 8.4 (1986), p.318.

processes of making a person, making a community and making a world'.⁵⁶ The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'metaphysics' as: 'The branch of philosophy that deals with the first principles of things or reality, including questions about being, substance, time and space, causation, change, and identity (which are presupposed in the special sciences but do not belong to any one of them); theoretical philosophy as the ultimate science of being and knowing.'⁵⁷ Following this definition is a sub-entry: 'The study of phenomena beyond the scope of scientific inquiry', which offers a relatively broad definition. In my discussion of Taoism, 'metaphysics' will be used as echoed in Robinet's term, the 'philosophical features', because Taoism does deal with the first principles of things; however, it is 'metaphysics' rather than a 'philosophy' exactly because of what Ames states about '*ars contextualis*', that Taoism proceeds from art rather than science (it is 'beyond the scope of scientific inquiry'), and that '[t]his neologism, *ars contextualis*, is an attempt to express the classical Chinese notion of an "aesthetic" cosmology.'⁵⁸ Ames further explains his definition of Taoism being '*ars contextualis*' in relation to other discourses:

In contrast to the investigation of the general character of the being of things (*ontologia generalis*) or the articulation of the principles of a universal science (*scientia universalis*), the classical Chinese sensibility presupposes the activity of contextualisation in which any particular in its environment is assessed by resource to its construal of the environment and, alternatively, the contribution made by the environment to the constitution of that specific particular.⁵⁹

Although '*ars contextualis*' is not adopted by this thesis, the core of Ames's argument, that Taoism essentially creates a distinct aesthetic cosmology about the reciprocity ('contextualisation' for Ames) between the environment and human beings, also centres my Taoist approach to Hardy's and Shen's texts.

Taoism as a whole, as I have suggested above, is complex and sometimes vague or slippery. We require some specificity and some narrowing down of those aspects which can be applied to aesthetics if it is to continue to be useful as a method, so that in Chapter 2 and 3 I adopt two Taoist terms, *wuwei* 无为 and 'return', for my analysis of the Taoist aesthetics of silence and its rhetoric of returning to spontaneity and autonomy. Overall, I focus on three specific Taoist terms: *ziran*, *wuwei*, and return, because they are regarded by this thesis as fundamental to the Taoist metaphysics of holism which I want to demonstrate in Hardy's and Shen's conceptions of Nature. Taoism establishes a distinct cosmology with frameworks such as the *yin-yang* and the Five

⁵⁶ Ibid., p.317.

⁵⁷ Online *Oxford English Dictionary* <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/117355#eid37064682>>

⁵⁸ Ames, 'Taoism and the Nature of Nature', pp.318.

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp.319.

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Element theories, which may prove to be useful for further studies on Taoism as a literary analytical tool but are not the basis for the analysis of this project because they take us too far down the theoretical philosophy route, which is less helpful in application than *ziran* for establishing a comparison between Hardy and Shen who are anxious about any form of theories or philosophies. I will also discuss the incompatibility of the *yin-yang* theory to my thesis in the next section through a more detailed engagement with the previous comparative studies between these two writers.

The most recent critical interventions into the Nature/humanity relationships that most concern me have been made by ecocritics. It will be helpful to briefly outline what I am doing that is different, as well as the debt I owe to these scholars. Bruno Latour points out that “‘nature’ is what makes it possible to recapitulate the hierarchy of beings in a single ordered series’ and that ‘the Western notion of nature is a historically situated social representation’, affirming the political and social connotations of ‘nature’.⁶⁰ He asserts that ‘[w]hereas ecology is assimilated to questions concerning nature, in practice it focuses on imbroglios involving sciences, moralities, law, and politics. As a result, ecologism bears not on *crises of nature* but on *crises of objectivity*.’⁶¹ For Latour, the question for ecologism is whether the new politics can extricate themselves from logocentrism, and he claims that the politics of nature only exist in Western ideologies: ‘[n]on-Western cultures *have never been interested* in nature; they have never adopted it as a category; they have never found a use for it. On the contrary, Westerners were the ones who turned nature into a big deal, an immense political diorama, a formidable moral gigantomachy, and who constantly brought nature into the definition of their social order.’⁶² Latour notes the ideologically heavily-loaded term ‘nature’ in Western contexts, a notion which is confirmed by Timothy Morton, who proposes his approach as ‘ecology without nature’, which he specifies could mean ‘ecology without a concept of the natural’.⁶³ Thus, the ‘nature’ in Morton’s term mainly refers to the essential quality of things, based on which a ‘natural’ tendency can be assumed. Morton fully elaborates on his expression that: ‘[e]cological thinking that was not fixated, that did not stop at a particular concretisation of its object, would thus be “without nature”. To do ecocritique, we must consider the aesthetic dimension, for the aesthetic has been posited as a nonconceptual realm, a place where our ideas about things drop away.’⁶⁴ For Morton, ecocritique is about aesthetics that dissolve the ideological connotations such as dualism and logocentrism of traditional literary

⁶⁰ Bruno Latour, *Politics of nature* (Harvard University Press, 2004), p.25 and p.232.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.231. The italics are made by Latour.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.43. The italics are made by Latour.

⁶³ Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Harvard University Press, 2007), p.24.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.24.

approaches to 'nature'. In adopting Taoism as a methodology for analysing the conception of Nature in literature, I build on Morton's argument and use the Taoist holistic aesthetic as an alternative to Morton's method to deconstruct the dualism between Nature and man in these two writers' novels. Combining Morton's and Latour's arguments, then, 'nature' is a deeply problematic and heavily ideological concept; but their theories are more of an environmental philosophy or ethics than a literary approach, and their concerns are more relevant to moral or political considerations of the non-human beings rather than a literary representation of them. For this reason, Taoism's holism and holistic aesthetics and its essential negation of logocentrism provide a better approach to literature since it can extricate the ideological attachments to 'nature' from the critical language. Latour here flags - though he does not pursue - the potential of an Eastern alternative to Western 'nature' which confirms the value of the insights of this thesis.

Besides such theoretical ecocritical concerns about the interface between Nature and humanity, there is another line of ecocritical scholarship that focuses on Hardy and Shen. In his essay 'Water Cloud (1943)', Shen himself defines his aesthetic pursuit as a new kind of Taoism.⁶⁵ Chinese scholar Ling Yu summarises this kind of Taoism as 'The belief in good-will intention of human nature from Buddhism, the thought of positively entering society from Confucianism, and the thought of "Heaven and man merging into one 天人合一" from Taoism - all these three streams of ideas are accepted and adopted by Shen and therefore become his new kind of Taoism.'⁶⁶ Ling's explanation combines three major streams of traditional Chinese philosophies and the aspect of Taoism he notes is an expression from the classic text, referring to the holistic metaphysics of Tao. The emphasis on a natural spontaneity in Shen's novels, especially a deep resonance between characters and their natural environment, reflects this Taoist influence. Shen uses more than one-fifth of *The Border Town* (1934) to describe the natural environment, customs, and people of this small town at the beginning. *The Border Town* is intended to be 'pure poetry' as Shen implied in the preface. He reiterates this in 1936:

What I initially wanted to show was a 'form of being', a form of being that is graceful, healthy, natural, and not against humanity. I did not wish to lead the readers to track a utopia, but I wish to make a footnote about the love of humankind with several ordinary people in a small town near Youshui 酉水

⁶⁵ Shen Congwen, 'Water Cloud 水云' (1943; reviewed in 1947), in *Complete Works* ed. by Zhang, Volume XII, pp.97-98.

⁶⁶ Ling Yu 凌宇, 'On the Value of Thought in Shen Congwen's Works 沈从文创作的思想价值论', *Literary Review* 《文学评论》, June, 2002, p.7.

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Valley, who are connected by an incident and will assume their portions of happiness and sorrow.⁶⁷

A peculiar feature of *The Border Town* is that the characters are nameless and abstract. We do not know the name of the old ferryman; 'Emerald' is just an equivalent English translation of the protagonist's nickname Cuicui 翠翠 in Chinese, meaning the colour green. We thus obtain a poetically vague yet visually intense impression of the characters. Similarly, there is a tendency to generalise the characters in *The Woodlanders* (1887). For example, when John South dies because of Fitzpiers's rash decision to cut down his tree, the narrator explains that there are many other woodlanders in the village that share the same feeling for the life of trees as John does. When Marty mourns Giles at the very end of the book, she becomes a representative of 'abstract humanism', which demonstrates a kind of human effacement in the face of the universe.⁶⁸ Ian Gregor observes that in Hardy's novels 'the distinction between people and places is interestingly small' and that '[i]n the contours of Hardy's Wessex we see the nature of the people who live there, the landscape becomes the face and the face the landscape.'⁶⁹ This merging corresponds, as Ned Denny notes, to the method in Taoist paintings in which 'nature is viewed less as an inert sprawl of unconnected objects and more as a living being, less as an enterable panorama and more as a sentient "face"'.⁷⁰ Denny's comment illuminates Gregor's blurring between the face and the landscape in Hardy's novels: it is not that landscape is personalised or characters objectified, but that nature is treated as a being.

As I have shown, there is a strong line of critical works on the significance and distinction of an interest in Nature in their regional novels on both Shen's and Hardy's sides; but no previous work has examined the potential of a comparative reading of these two writers with a Taoist approach. The unique methodology used in this thesis - a combination of Taoist literary analyses and models drawn from comparative literature - will offer a new look at both writers' metaphysical conceptions of Nature. Specifically, three Taoist conceptions - *ziran*, *wuwei*, *return* - are chosen to serve as paradigms for comparisons in each chapter: under the overarching idea of *ziran*, *wuwei* and *return* perform as narrative and rhetorical literary models that help to demonstrate the Taoist holistic aesthetics of *ziran*, which respectively refer to a narrative emphasis on the absolute silence of things and a rhetoric emphasis on the return to Tao and literary autonomy. In a nutshell, this thesis presents a Taoist reading of Hardy's and Shen's novels that evidences far more subtlety in the relationships between characters and the environment than previous work

⁶⁷ Zhang ed., *Complete Works*, Volume IX, p.5.

⁶⁸ Hardy, *The Woodlanders*, p.331.

⁶⁹ Gragor, 'What Kind of Fiction Did Hardy Write?', p.294.

⁷⁰ Ned Denny, 'Taoist Visions', *NewStatesman*, 10 February 2003

<<https://www.newstatesman.com/node/157093>>

has been able to account for. In what follows, I will delineate from a broader perspective of comparative literature and translation to show the contributions of my Taoist methodology.

IV. The Comparative Methodology: Potential and Principle

i. The Potential of a Parallel Comparison

The first area of comparative trouble is that the two writers did not influence each other directly: Hardy and Shen lived at different times and in different cultures and there is no explicit evidence of influence, although their link through Chinese poet Xu Zhimo cannot be ignored as I mentioned in the first section of this introduction. For comparative literature as a discipline, however, this need not be a problem. The definition of Comparative Literature adopted by this thesis is that offered by Henry Remak: ‘the comparison of one literature with another or others, and the comparison of literature with other spheres of human expression.’⁷¹ Such a definition highlights the potential of parallel studies in comparative literature which does not regard influence between texts as a premise for comparisons. A parallel comparative study, that is, can be conducted among writers in the same language, or even the same nationality, so that historical influence and national politics stop being the focus. This libertarian conception was a response to the ethos of emancipation in post-war times and indeed has greatly extended the field, beyond the realms of European and American literature.

The parallel comparative literature framework is useful for this thesis, but it is not unproblematic. Susan Bassnett points out that the divergence between influence and parallel studies lies in ‘a distinction between ideas of what history was’.⁷² For influence studies, history is nationalistic and social-economic; for parallel studies, however, it is evolutionary, i.e. a belief in the evolving greatness of human civilisations as a whole. Bassnett then comments: ‘[t]he problem of ahistoricity came later, for as the American version of the formalist method, through the New Critics, acquired such a firm hold on literary criticism, so questions of history per se became less important. Literary history could be considered apart from vexed questions of social, political or economic history’.⁷³ Post-war comparative literature has assumed to unite the world through the humanitarian belief that great literary works are cosmopolitan and that the contexts are not important. However, as René Wellek accentuates in his seminal article on the scope of comparative literature ‘The Name and Nature of Comparative Literature’, history is core to

⁷¹ Henry Remak, ‘Comparative Literature, Its Definition and Function’, in *Comparative Literature: Method and Perspective*, eds. By Newton Stallknecht and Horst Frenz (Carbondale, South Illinois Press, 1961), p.3.

⁷² Susan Bassnett, *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), p.35.

⁷³ *Ibid*, p.35.

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literary studies: '[c]riticism, as I have argued many times, cannot be divorced from history, as there are no neutral facts in literature. The mere act of selecting from millions of printed books is a critical act, and the selection of the traits or aspects under which a book may be treated is equally an act of criticism and judgment.'⁷⁴ Wellek regards criticism as a highly subjective gesture where the study of history is part of the basis through which to make the choice and evaluation. He further announces that: '[t]he attempt to erect precise barriers between the study of literary history and contemporary literature is doomed to failure.'⁷⁵ Wellek argues that the subjective literary creation and the subjective selection and judgement of literary criticism make ahistoricity impossible in comparative literature, and that the elimination of literary history from literary studies would be unreal in practice. On the other hand, he adds that '[n]or can the historical approach be considered the only possible method, even for the study of the dim past.'⁷⁶ For Wellek, a more complete picture of comparative literature would be combinative of history, theory, and criticism, as true to the nature of any literary studies. He envisions a liberation of international and transcultural literary studies on the basis of historicity and his method is a combination of influence study and parallel study if necessary, an approach that is both historical and textual. This is the methodology this thesis adopts.

The parallel comparative literature methodology of this thesis is situated in a historical comparison of the conception of Nature in Hardy's and Shen's novels and will treat Victorian England and early twentieth-century China in which Hardy and Shen wrote these novels as interrelated cultural histories. Despite national and cultural differences, Hardy and Shen share concerns about the transformations of society: from countryside to city, from imperial or colonial to modern, from community to individuality. To put these two writers in a framework of comparative literature and to explore the relationship between them can break cultural narrowness and open up literary vision which may not be achieved by the national-based literary criticism: their novels start from a deep awareness of local cultures and arrive at some understanding of the metaphysical connections between humanity and Nature.

Particularly for Shen, who has claimed to create a new national identity through literature, this comparison can be as meaningful as that stated by the postcolonial approach in comparative literature, such as the objective proposed by the Indian Comparative Literature Association: '[t]o arrive at a conception of Indian literature which will not only modernise our literature departments but also take care of the task of discovering the greatness of our literature and to

⁷⁴ René Wellek, 'The Name and Nature of Comparative Literature', in *Discriminations* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1970), p.20.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.20.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.20.

present a panoramic view of Indian literary activities through the ages.⁷⁷ The emphasis is apparently on establishing a national identity through literary studies, and the process of comparison implied here will start from and end at the home culture. Bassnett comments on this homeward feature of the postcolonial school that: '[i]mplicit to comparative literature outside Europe and the United States is the need to start with the home culture and to look outwards, rather than to start with the European model of literary excellence and look inwards.'⁷⁸ It seems that from a postcolonial perspective, comparative literature becomes a tool to establish national culture and to rebel against Western cultural hegemony, and one important framework that can be inferred is a refusal to take the literary and critical theories imposed by the West for granted. This politicisation of comparative literature can be largely traced to the political concerns of postcolonial criticism which is relevant to the context of the on-going Sino-Japanese war during Shen's writing and the massive influence of the West at that time. Although the core agenda of comparative literature in today's global context is cultural exchange on an equal ground despite inherent differences, however, the fact that Western literary and critical theories have long dominated the world should not be ignored and comparatists always need to be cautious of this. To keep open to different cultures and literatures in their own original cultural background is the starting point of twenty-first century comparative literature. In this respect, it is not important whether the project starts with the home culture or the European model: the focal point is the cultural awareness. Comparative literature as a field of research is more responsive than normative, and more provocative than definite. The warnings provided by the postcolonial school of comparative literature against Western impositions and its stress on the cultural awareness will be cautiously followed by this study.

In terms of how comparative literature works within this thesis, specifically, how my Taoist methodology works for a comparison between two writers of different times and cultural backgrounds, the fundamental question about the priority of similarity or difference for comparison arises. My methodology focuses on a parallel comparative study about the shared literary conceptions and strategies in two writers' fictions and showcases an ecocriticism that foregrounds the similarities without understating the differences and subtleties of the texts as well as contexts in order to form a dialogic and constructive comparison. The premise for such a parallel comparison between texts from different cultures and languages is an awareness that

⁷⁷ Bassnett, *Comparative Literature*, pp.38-39. For Shen's idea of using literature to rebuild a national identity, see 'Venus (Chang Geng 长庚)' in Zhang ed. *Complete Works*, Volume XII, pp.36-41. See also Hu Meixian 胡梅仙, 'On Shen Congwen's Idea of a Reconstruction of National Moarlity', *Social Sciences in Ningxia* 《宁夏社会科学》, No.1, January 2010, General No.158, pp.165-68.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.38.

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very little commonality can be taken for granted, but it does not mean that we should focus on differences or that we can only arrive at differences. Refusing to ignore the differences, my comparison considers the details of historical and political contexts between Victorian England and early twentieth-century China, which is intended to reveal rifts and complexity rather than to arrive at easy agreement or reconciliation. The comparative methodology of this thesis owes a theoretical debt to Welles's contention that a comparative literature study is essentially a literary study and therefore should abandon the rigid division between influence studies and parallel studies, and instead adopt both historical and textual approaches when needed in order to generate a nuanced analysis of the text. Thus, my thesis presents both the textual analyses and historical contexts of both writers, though the structure is thematically based on the three Taoist conceptions.

Two relevant problems threatening the validity of my methodology of comparative literature, as warned by critics, are: first, cultural colonialism; second, reductionism; and the two are interrelated. James St. André notes that there was a growth of East-West comparative studies in the United States and East Asia in the 1990s, which also led to the emergence of a 'Chinese' school of Comparative Literature taking a methodology that is basically an application of Western theory to Chinese texts and a vehicle for the introduction of continental theory to China. This kind of study may turn into a new form of colonialism: 'Western theory as the coloniser, Chinese literature as the colonised.'⁷⁹ He points out that although the discipline has extended the realm of comparison beyond Indo-European Literature, the methodologies of these new comparative studies are still Western-centric. One result of this cultural colonialism was the reductionism of the colonised culture. He thinks East-West comparative literature always relies on monolithic structures; for example, one of the comparatists he discusses sums up Western poetics as 'truth' versus the 'harmony' of Chinese poetics. St. André stresses that differences should be allowed, studied, and contextualised within those two 'systems' of thought, not just between them. In other words, each literature system needs to be treated as a dynamic organism and we should avoid attempting to generalise it into an easy category for comparison. Such warnings are significant to my methodology because by adopting Taoism as literary analysis models for both Shen's and Hardy's texts, this thesis can always remain cautious about claiming any kind of cultural supremacy or universality and be aware of the internal differences as well as external ones. For example, in each chapter I provide contexts for both writers' texts alongside biographical and critical notes that underline the different backgrounds; also, throughout my

⁷⁹ James St. André, 'Whither East-West Comparative Literature? Two Recent Answers from the U.S', *Bulletin of the Institute of Chinese Literature and Philosophy*, 22 (2003), pp.291-302.

arguments I keep emphasising that for both Hardy and Shen it is clear that they resist theory. This thesis is not arguing, then, that they are any kind of Taoists or there is any possibility that they conform to it in their literary experiments; Taoism is illuminating for understanding both writers purely because it accentuates the holistic metaphysics of the connection between the human and non-human worlds in Wessex and Xiangxi novels. Further, although I demonstrate its usefulness in six of the novels, I am not saying Taoism can be applied to all of Hardy's or Shen's works. Some of their early and late works can be very different, especially those that focus on urban society; in demonstrating that comparison has its limits, I am able to avoid the trap of claiming universality, and to treat each group of novels as dynamic and part of a differently evolving oeuvre.

Similarly, another important comparatist, Pauline Yu, centres her critique of parallel comparative studies on the lack of contextualisation and the imposition of Western models on other cultures. This is another way to address what St. André defines as reductionism and cultural colonialism, but one particular aspect pinpointed by Yu is that the literary universals 'almost invariably turn out to be Western ones'.⁸⁰ Her comment warns of the danger of this so-called cosmopolitanism of parallel comparisons easily becoming Western-centric. On the other hand, this can be exactly where the strengths of comparative literary studies lie: to overcome cultural-narrowness and to analyse literatures of different cultural origins in order to gain multiple perspectives.

Cosmopolitanism, as argued by Bruce Robbins, can never be really complete on its own: 'No one actually is or ever can be a cosmopolitan in the sense of belonging nowhere. [...] The interest of the term cosmopolitan is located, then, not in its full theoretical extension, where it becomes a paranoid fantasy of ubiquity and omniscience, but rather (paradoxically) in its local applications.'⁸¹ What may be achieved is what David Damrosch writes of as 'nuanced, localised cosmopolitanism' which starts with cultural awareness of the home culture and ends with a recognition of shared beliefs in different cultures as well as the differences.⁸² Such awareness and recognition depend on a careful examination of contexts and intercultural insights into the texts: this thesis will demonstrate the comparability of Hardy's and Shen's novels with a rigorous study of both the contexts and texts in order to avert reductionism and achieve a kind of nuanced, localised cosmopolitanism between the Wessex and Xiangxi fictional worlds. My arguments throughout rest, then, not only on these earlier critical observations about comparative literature as a field,

⁸⁰ Pauline Yu, 'Alienation Effects: Comparative Literature and the Chinese Tradition', in *The Comparative Perspective on Literature: Approaches to Theory and Practice* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988), pp.162-75.

⁸¹ Bruce Robbins, 'Comparative Cosmopolitanism', *Social Text*, No. 31/32, Third World and Post-Colonial Issues (1992), pp.169-86.

⁸² David Damrosch, 'Introduction: Goethe Coins a Phrase', in *What Is World Literature* (Woodstock: Princeton University Press, 2003), pp.1-36.

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but also on previous comparative literature studies on these two writers, some of which also see the value of a Taoist approach and which can provide us with a useful model.

This thesis is not the first attempt at such a parallel comparative study between Hardy and Shen, and what follows is a brief review of relevant studies that have paved the road for this work but also presented gaps that can be filled by this study. The comparative studies between Hardy and Shen started in China from 1989, when Wang Lingzhen published 'The Keynote in Shen Congwen and Thomas Hardy - Tragic Awareness' on *Literary Criticism*, a Chinese journal.⁸³ The ecocritical comparisons started with Wang Ruihua's 2001 article claiming that Shen and Hardy share the same literary motif: the tragedy of declining countryside and tradition, however, they chose opposite directions in their exploration facing the similar situation: Shen goes into his inner world where traditional Chinese philosophy and literature play a major part while Hardy writes about changes in the outside world.⁸⁴ For Wang, their literary worlds are quite different since they embody opposite aspirations originated from their cultural identities. Wang expresses an appreciation for Shen, in whose literature 'Eastern wisdom' can be found that explores the inner self. The article raises a question about the interrelation between pastoralism and ideology, but it does not conduct any detailed analysis and what Wang claims as 'Eastern wisdom' is rather vague. There have been plenty of journal articles and doctoral theses on this comparison so far and most of the early studies compare these two authors in terms of the biographical and contextual similarities or the themes of their works as Wang does, which is useful for establishing the research field, but a general lack of detailed textual analyses in these studies (partly due to the limit of the lengths) renders the comparisons theoretical and highly over-categorised instead of nuanced.

More recently, Tian Ye in his 2013 article comments that Hardy and Shen share two dichotomies in their works: culture versus Nature, and, material versus spiritual.⁸⁵ For Tian, both writers condemn the corruption of modern civilisation and suggest a return to Nature. Tian defines that Hardy's conception of Nature is 'tragic ecological' and Shen's is 'ideal symbiotic', which he traces back to Greek tragedy and Taoism respectively; but due to the article's short length, Tian has not been able to elaborate on these definitions fully or provide adequate evidence from the texts. Sun Haifang asserts in his 2014 article that although Hardy and Shen share similar pursuits of human's

⁸³ Wang Lingzhen 王玲珍, 'The Keynote in Shen Congwen and Thomas Hardy - Tragic Awareness 沈从文与哈代的基调 - 悲观意识', *Literary Criticism* 《文学评论》, 1(1989), pp.150-51.

⁸⁴ Wang Ruihua 王睿华, 'Two Different Songs about Decaying Lands - Shen Congwen and Thomas Hardy 颓土上的两种歌吟 - 沈从文与哈代', *Jiangsu Social Sciences* 《江苏社会科学》, 6 (2001), pp.172-75.

⁸⁵ Tian Ye 田野, 'Ecological Thought in Chinese and Overseas Writers: Case study of Thomas Hardy and Shen Congwen 中外作家眼中的生态思想 - 以哈代与沈从文为例', *China Adult Education* 《中国成人教育》, 22 (2013), pp.170-72.

harmonious coexistence with nature, they create quite different literary worlds.⁸⁶ For Sun, Hardy creates characters that are lured to urban civilisation and run against Nature, and by the doom of these characters Hardy empowers his critique of modernity and humanity in an industrial age; contrary to Hardy's 'negative' criticism, Shen adopts a 'positive' approach by creating an arcadia and singing praise to characters that remain uncontaminated. Such statements echo the stereotypes about these two writers: Hardy the tragic realist and Shen the pastoral idealist, which tend to overlook the varieties in their corpus of works and can be refuted by many counterexamples from close reading. Ma Yan in his article 'Resonance across Time - The Connotation of Ecological Ideas in Novels of Shen Congwen and Thomas Hardy' analyses these ecological ideas according to three aspects: natural ecology, social ecology, and spiritual ecology. Ma defines them respectively as: the relationship between human beings and Nature, between human beings, and between human beings and their inner selves. This categorisation might be useful for a more comprehensive understanding of ecology in these novels rather than limiting it to the natural environment, but Ma only provides very brief textual analyses for each part, and his understanding of Hardy's texts is based on Chinese translations which obstruct more nuanced analysis of the language and mean that Ma arrives at conclusions that are not so rigorous and sometimes inaccurate. For example, in his analysis of 'natural ecology' in Hardy, Ma quotes a short description of Bathsheba when she first appears in Chapter 1 of *Far from the Madding Crowd*, but his selection of the quote only shows what he intends to show: the intimacy between human beings and Nature, that Nature seems to have acquired a human spirit and the human being is endowed with a natural essence.⁸⁷ The rest of the quote which Ma has omitted actually reveals that Bathsheba is deeply immersed in her thoughts and appears rather indifferent to her environment - the 'intimacy' between human beings and Nature that Ma argues for in this scene is largely observed and expressed by the narrator, and this confirms the novel's focus on perspective and perception and a dialectic between observation and participation which I will elaborate in Chapter 1.

The problem of overgeneralisation and a lack of detailed textual analyses persists in these recent ecocritical comparisons between Hardy and Shen, to a large extent due to the short lengths of such studies. Also, they mainly concentrate on classic novels and short stories and neglect both writers' large collections of works, including letters and criticism. Moreover, none of these

⁸⁶ Sun Haifang 孙海芳, 'An Ecocritical Comparison between Thomas Hardy and Shen Congwen 生态批评视域下的沈从文与哈代比较', *Journal of Shangqiu Normal University* 《商丘师范学院学报》, 10 (2014), pp.69-72.

⁸⁷ Ma Yan 马彦, 'Resonance across Time - The Connotation of Ecological Ideas in Novels of Shen Congwen and Thomas Hardy 穿越时空的碰撞 - 沈从文与哈代小说的生态内涵', *Research of Chinese Literature* 《中国文学研究》, Issue 4 (2016), p.126.

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abovementioned researches treat the two periods in Victorian England and early twentieth-century China as interrelated cultural histories, hence lacking in historical comparisons.

Besides the Chinese scholarship, there are also some overseas doctoral theses working on this comparison although there are no journal articles or books. Among them, He Donghui's thesis 'Reconstructions of the Rural Homeland in Novels by Thomas Hardy, Shen Congwen, and Mo Yan' shares with this study its interest in a comparison of regionalism between these two writers and Chinese writer Mo Yan.⁸⁸ He argues a Darwinian evolutionary discourse for Hardy's narrative which I will compare with the Taoist conception of Nature in the next section (Introduction V) together with other models of ecocriticism about Hardy. For He, Hardy's use of struggle for survival and adaptation is a gesture to reconstruct his homeland that 'challenges the idyllic vision of the rural life, and provides a new criterion for the desirability of rural life'.⁸⁹ He argues for a similar justification of the rural society in face of modernity with Shen's fictionalisation of homeland, centring on the image of water which connects a Taoist tradition with modernist vitalism so that the dichotomy between tradition and modernity disappears. He mainly uses Shen's short stories and autobiographical writings to support his arguments, which is largely based on his contextual methodology; his analysis of the 'water' analogies in Shen's texts is insightful but appears to be random and arbitrary, especially considering that he refuses to provide a coherent theoretical background for his Taoist interpretations and simply states early in his introduction that his thesis 'will not discuss the fictional rural homelands as representatives of English or Chinese concepts of nature or the countryside exclusively', which is somewhat evasive and renders his whole argumentation lacking in depth.⁹⁰ For example, he claims that 'Like water that defines its own course, the rural folk are guided by their own sense of appropriateness and justice', and on the next page he offers a similar observation: 'like water, whose strength lies in its involuntary movement, Xiaoxiao's strength lies in her unconsciousness, in the way that she makes no effort to conform to any role model, moral standard, or political agenda', yet soon he asserts: 'Shen Congwen's characters are people of few words. Like water, they pursue their course of life through quiet moments as well as torrents', with none of these sufficiently supported and coherently linked.⁹¹ Such claims that characters are 'like water' lack definitions of the analogies and specifications about the relationships between these analogies, rendering the arguments less complete and convincing.

⁸⁸ He Donghui, 'Reconstructions of the Rural Homeland in Novels by Thomas Hardy, Shen Congwen, and Mo Yan' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of British Columbia, 2000).

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.28.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.11.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp.149-50 and p.156.

Although his discussion about the Taoist concepts such as *yin-yang* and *wuwei* is illuminating for the water imagery, He fails to provide sufficient evidence either in terms of a Taoist theoretical basis or applying *yin-yang* to the textual analysis about water. For example, He claims that the characters' fear of water in Shen's short story *Eight Steeds* (1935) can be regarded as a *yin* element which will quench the *yang* element represented by their worldly ambitions.⁹²

Reinstating that water is 'one of five basic elements whose presence and variation constitute the phenomenal world', He does not elaborate on the relationship between the *yin-yang* theory and Five Elements in his approach to the water imagery, but only vaguely implies that Shen's construction of the rural homeland is 'supported both by the physical presence of water and a long and rich tradition of the cosmological and philosophical attributes of water', without explaining what these 'philosophical attributes' are.⁹³ Thus, we only know that water is both elemental for *yin-yang* and Five Elements through He's delineation, without seeing the deep philosophical connections between them and how they can be helpful for interpreting Shen's texts.

The terms *yin* 阴 and *yang* 阳 originally mean the shady and the sunny sides of a hill, and as key terms in Taoism they are 'two principles or "pneumas" (*qi*) that are aspects or functions of the Dao [Tao] itself'.⁹⁴ *Qi* 气 is the Taoist concept of pneuma, meaning the creative energy or vital spirit of a person. It is significant to notice that *yin* and *yang* are relative rather than absolute: one thing can be *yin* for one and *yang* for the other, thus they are not dualistic ideas and a Taoist cosmos is in a constant change rather than static. According to *The Encyclopedia of Taoism*, the concept of *yin-yang* has integrated many other forms of classifications, including Five Elements since the Han period (202 BCE-AD 220), and 'other symbols of the endless cycle of phenomenal change - into a complex system of categorisation, giving rise to the system of so-called correlative cosmology'.⁹⁵ He's use of *yin-yang* largely depends on a symbolic analogy he makes between dichotomies, such as water and fire or fear and desire, which neglects the relativism between *yin* and *yang*. Moreover, such mechanic applications of Taoist terms to textual analysis are not sufficient to reveal the deep cosmological or philosophical conception of 'water' in Taoism as claimed by He: the lack of Taoist contexts in He's thesis makes Taoism appear to be at best one part of the general cultural tradition that he uses to connect Shen's rural homeland with modernity. On the other hand, the questions pertaining to He's methodology reflect that it is unrealistic to apply specific Taoist cosmological concepts like *yin-yang* and Five Elements before

⁹² Ibid., pp.154-155. *Eight Steeds* 《八骏图》.

⁹³ Ibid., p.128.

⁹⁴ Pregadio, *The Encyclopedia of Taoism*, p.1164.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p.1166.

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clarifying the basic ideas like Tao and relativism in Taoism, especially since a Taoist method for comparative literary study is still nascent and there is not a systematic basis for reading across cultures through Taoism. Hence, my study has taken this theoretical difficulty into consideration and rejected quick assumptions that all Taoist terms can be applied to the texts of Hardy and Shen. I will start from the basic Taoist conceptions such as Tao and *ziran* and specify how they can subvert and enrich previous scholarships on both writers by highlighting the holism and anti-logocentrism shown in their texts. My use of *wuwei* and 'return' intends to clarify the relativism of Taoism and the idea of 'returning to Tao' as literary devices that contribute to the aesthetics and rhetoric in their novels. Compared with He's approach, I pursue a more detailed contextual introduction of a Taoist literary method with an emphasis on its holistic metaphysics

The most obvious deficiency of the above-mentioned methodologies, including Chinese papers and He's thesis, is the lack of a consistent theoretical basis that can enable not only a thematic comparison but also comparisons that focus on the conceptions and narratives in both writers' works. Particularly, there is a need to develop Taoist literary models for analysing Nature in these texts. Delineating a distinct future for Chinese ecocriticism, Wei Qingqi articulates in the *Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism* that ecocriticism is unique compared with other critical theories when encountering Chinese contexts because it 'recognised the familiar traditional Chinese ideology about nature echoed by the orientalisng elements that surged inside ecocriticism's deep ecological frameworks', hence a 'feeling at home' described by Wei about ecocriticism's potential compatibility with Chinese literary history.⁹⁶ According to Wei, the rich Chinese environmentalist resources provide a ground for an exchange between Western and Chinese ecocriticism, and before the introduction of the Western discourse Chinese scholars had already conducted ecological cultural studies.⁹⁷ Wei argues for a rigorous examination of the kinship between Western and Chinese ecocriticism and restructuring ecocriticism with Chinese elements for which he suggests modernising traditional Chinese aesthetics from an ecological perspective: for Wei, ancient Chinese scholars prefer a poetic and metaphysical form to a theoretical and explicit pattern, and this can be 'reinscribed ecocritically so as to be accessible to contemporary readership, within and without China'.⁹⁸ Wei does not specify what he means by modernising ancient Chinese terms, but what he implies is significant in two ways: first, a distinct Chinese

⁹⁶ Wei Qingqi, 'Chinese Ecocriticism in the Last Ten Years', in *Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism* ed. by Greg Garrard (Oxford University Press, 2014), p.538.

⁹⁷ Wei discusses two major Chinese ecocritics: Lu Shuyuan 鲁枢元 and Zeng Fanren 曾繁仁. Lu's study focuses on spiritual ecology (p.541). Wei observes that Lu's work reveals the deep spiritual wounds cut by dualism and calls for the reshaping of ecological spirit. For Zeng Fanren, as Wei informs, it is the broader field of aesthetics that interests his study, who proposes a Chinese renewal of ecocriticism and a Chinese eco-ontological aesthetics (p.542).

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.540.

context should be emphasised and rigorously researched for an ecocritical comparative study since ecocriticism is essentially cross-cultural but often limited to a Western discourse in academia; second, great potential of ecocritical resources can be discovered from ancient Chinese aesthetics but these need a theoretical adaptation or modernisation.

Wei raises this important question: 'How to mobilise China's relatively disconnected pieces of ecological thought into a critical force is the central task in the modernisation of Chinese environmental discourse,' and it can be regarded as a side-effect of my thesis that it will explore the ecocritical potential of Taoism through comparisons and contribute to a modernisation of Taoist terms.⁹⁹ For instance, I have compared *ziran* with 'nature' in the previous section (Introduction III) with a detailed review of both Western criticism and Chinese contexts in order to demonstrate that *ziran* can revive the holistic metaphysics about the holism between humanity and Nature in our understanding of the conception of Nature in literature, which modernises this ancient Taoist term for the use of ecocriticism. I also select the Taoist terms *wuwei* and 'return' as my analysis tools because they speak to both Hardy's and Shen's literary techniques in dealing with Nature. Furthermore, these three terms - *ziran*, *wuwei*, return - together establish a relatively complete frame for my Taoist literary method because they respectively illuminate the concept, the narrative strategy, and the rhetoric of Taoism.

Being selective about the Taoist terms allows me to provide sufficient textual details for each one and show their capability of working as literary critical paradigms more fully; as for the compatibility of Taoism in reading specific texts, I not only show the possibility of a more holistic understanding through a Taoist approach, but also clarify to what extent it can be applied, hence acknowledging there are aspects of each text that fail to adhere to a Taoist mode of ecocriticism. For example, in Chapter 1 I will demonstrate how the reciprocity between humanity and Nature manifests through both writers' rendering of a relational self which can be illuminated by Taoist *ziran*; however, I specify the contexts through Hardy's notion of 'Novels of Character and Environment' and both writers' preoccupation with religions to examine the compatibility of my Taoist approach and conclude that the secularisation of religions and reconceptualisation of pastoralism in both novels reveal a scepticism towards human institutional powers which can be illuminated by *ziran*. As such, my Taoist methodology conducts a subtle examination of both texts and contexts, differences and similarities, and avoids the reductionism warned of by St. André and Yu that paralyses parallel comparative studies.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p.544.

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The methodology of this thesis can also contribute to comparative ecocriticism, which is the nexus between comparative literature and ecocriticism and offers substantial insights into both fields. For example, the 2013 special issue of *Comparative Literature Studies* 'Sustaining Ecocriticism: Comparative Perspectives' explores the place of ecocriticism within the field of comparative literature.¹⁰⁰ In its introduction, Hsinya Huang and John Beusterien point out that 'Ecocriticism is increasingly finding itself part of the academic mainstream, especially in growing interdisciplinary avenues of study such as comparative literature,' defining the interdisciplinary nature of ecocriticism.¹⁰¹ Explaining the title of this special issue, they assert that 'Comparative literary studies offers one way to sustain ecocriticism in the wake of theoretical claims about the disappearance of nature. In turn, ecocriticism provides the impetus of a call for action often absent in studies in comparative literature.'¹⁰² Thus, for Huang and Beusterien, ecocriticism and comparative literature are not only compatible because of their cross-boundary nature but also complementary because each of them provides a basis for the other.

Among the eight articles included in this issue, two are negotiating a poststructuralist ecocritical discourse and looking for a theoretical ground for ecocriticism between the humanities and sciences, and the other six can be read as practices of comparative ecocriticism with four of them adopting geocriticism, a sub-field of ecocriticism focusing on different narratives of the same locus - whether real or fictional - and although it is essentially comparative, it differentiates from the parallel focus on different loci of this thesis. The other two articles use a similar parallel comparative methodology as this thesis: John Beusterien and J. Baird Callicott's article 'Humor and Politics through the Animal in Cervantes and Leopold' compares the ironic representation of animals in Miguel de Cervantes and Aldo Leopold, revealing a similar 'ecopolitical vision of a biotic community' in these two writers' works; Patrick D. Murphy in 'Community Resilience and the Cosmopolitan Role in the Environmental Challenge-Response Novels of Ghosh, Grace, and Sinha' presents a similar dialectic between the cosmopolitan and the local in three writers' works: Patricia Grace's *Potiki*, Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, and Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*.¹⁰³ Both studies demonstrate what Huang and Beusterien address as 'a vocabulary for a nuanced articulation of the crisis, a cross-cultural sensitivity for dealing with it on a regional and global scale, and a theoretical depth for describing its complex ethical dimensions'¹⁰⁴, or broadly speaking, such comparative ecocritical studies 'testify to how critical sensitivity is sharpened by

¹⁰⁰ Huang Hsinya and John Beusterien eds., 'Special Issue: Sustaining Ecocriticism: Comparative Perspectives', *Comparative Literature Studies*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (2013).

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p.1.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p.1.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.3 and p.5.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.6.

comparison' as He Donghui emphasises in his thesis on Hardy and Shen, and as I put more fully into practice here.¹⁰⁵ These comparative ecocritical studies reflect the need and potential of interdisciplinary and cross-cultural literary studies to address ecological questions in today's global context. My thesis responds to this need through the critical lens of Taoism, demonstrating the metaphysical holism in these works through a parallel comparison of them. This will also reveal the ecocritical values of Taoism.

ii. The Principle of a Foreignising Translation

The second challenge for my comparative methodology is the translation of Shen's works and the Chinese criticism. For this study I have translated a large amount of previously untranslated writing by Shen, which has created new and original material for the comparative study between Hardy and Shen. I translated excerpts from *Fengzi* and *Long River* for the textual analyses of Chapter 1 and Three; for *The Border Town* in Chapter 2, I used Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang's translation and modified some parts to enhance cultural transparency. *Fengzi* has never been translated into English before; *Long River* has once been partly translated for a master's dissertation in Hong Kong but cannot be accessed. I have also translated the rest of Shen's writings used in this thesis, including his essays and letters. This is the first time any of these materials have been translated. Therefore, the translations of Shen's primary texts in this thesis are largely my original work and are intended to contribute to the global circulation of Shen's literature and Shen studies.

Besides the primary texts, I have also used secondary work on both authors in both English and Chinese. While in English there are few comparative studies between these two writers, in Chinese there is a general lack of references to English criticism, and one of the main reasons is that the majority of comparative literature projects are based in Chinese literature departments and their references are largely in Chinese or translation into Chinese. I have read the primary texts of Shen in Chinese and Hardy in English and their criticism in both languages. My translation of Chinese criticism adds significantly to the existing scholarship on both writers and encourages further inter-cultural comparison.

I mention that some of the existent translations have been modified to enhance cultural transparency, and this is the overarching principle of all my translations in this study as well. To suggest such a principle does not presuppose that there is an academic consensus about what

¹⁰⁵ He, 'Reconstructions of the Rural Homeland in Novels by Thomas Hardy, Shen Congwen, and Mo Yan', p.36.

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'translation' is or that there is such a principle in translation studies. My translations work for the aims of this comparative study. First of all, this research is a comparative literary study rather than a cultural or translation study; but it is relevant to both fields due to its cross-cultural and multilingual nature. This thesis takes part in the 'cultural turn' in translation studies, which Jeremy Munday defines as 'a phenomenon which helped the theory of translation expand its boundaries beyond the linguistic, particularly from the 1990s onwards. The link between translation studies and cultural studies became stronger and a translation was no longer perceived merely as a transaction between two languages, but rather as a more complex process of negotiation between two cultures'.¹⁰⁶ Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere explain the main feature of this cultural turn: 'neither the word, nor the text, but the culture becomes the operational "unit" of translation'.¹⁰⁷ In his exploration of the cultural and historical implications of translation, André Lefevere argues for 'the conceptual and textual grids that constrain both writers and translators'.¹⁰⁸ He suggests that '[p]roblems in translating are caused at least as much by discrepancies in conceptual and textual grids as by discrepancies in languages'.¹⁰⁹ Lefevere argues that how translators deal with these cultural grids highlights their creativity in the complex creative process of translation. Kjetil Myskja aptly observes that '[t]his interest in translation studies as closely related to culture studies supplemented, or challenged, an interest in translation as primarily a linguistic process, in which cultural differences were an inevitable obstacle to overcome in order to communicate the source language meaning'.¹¹⁰ Following this cultural emphasis in translation studies, my translations insist on maintaining the original cultural meanings of the source Chinese texts and enhancing cultural transparency for the target English readers. While my translations take linguistic fluency into account as well, it is not the priority.

Myskja notes that in treating the translation process as a negotiation between two cultures, 'questions of power relations would have to be central. This applies both to relations between dominant and subjugated (or numerically threatened) cultures globally and to relations between dominant and marginalised linguistic and cultural forms and their representatives within the same culture'.¹¹¹ Particularly for Shen's novels, which involve a multi-ethnic background, such power relations between the Han and Miao languages and cultures are rendered more complicated by

¹⁰⁶ Jeremy Munday, *The Routledge Companion to Translation Studies* (Routledge, 2009), p.179.

¹⁰⁷ Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere eds., *Translation, History and Culture* (London and New York: Pinter, 1990), p.8.

¹⁰⁸ Susan Bassnett, *Translation Studies* (Routledge, 2002), pp.8-9.

¹⁰⁹ Andre Lefevere, 'Composing the other', in Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi eds. *Postcolonial Translation. Theory and Practice* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), p.76.

¹¹⁰ Kjetil Myskja, 'Foreignisation and Resistance: Lawrence Venuti and His Critics', *Nordic Journal of English Studies*, 12(2), 2013, p.2.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.2.

the translation process from Chinese to English. Lawrence Venuti raises a relevant concept of 'language transparency' and describes two extremes of a translator's position: foreignisation and domestication, dealing with the extent to which a translation assimilates the source texts to the target language and culture. In a foreignising translation, the translation disrupts the linguistic conventions and expectations of the target language to maintain the otherness of the source texts; in a domesticating translation, on the contrary, the translator tries to make the translated texts indistinguishable from those originally written in the target language. Venuti explains the ineffectiveness of domestication through his conception of 'the illusion of transparency' which refers to a problematic insistence on fluency and 'naturalness' that ignores the need for an awareness of cultural differences between the source and target cultures: '[t]he illusion of transparency is an effect of a fluent translation strategy, of the translator's effort to insure easy readability by adhering to current usage, maintaining continuous syntax, fixing a precise meaning.'¹¹² At the same time, Venuti notes that readers also play a vital role in this 'illusion' because of their expectation of reading a cross-cultural text fluently for meaning, who have tendency 'to reduce the stylistic features of the translation to the foreign text or writer, and to question any language use that might interfere with the seemingly untroubled communication of the foreign writer's intention'.¹¹³ Thus, Venuti concludes that 'the effect of transparency conceals the numerous conditions under which the translation is made, starting with the translator's crucial intervention'.¹¹⁴

For the analytical aims of this thesis, the preservation of the source language structures, or more precisely, Shen's distinct style of writing, is one of the major concerns of translation. However, Venuti notes the necessity of 'deviating enough from native norms to stage an alien reading experience'.¹¹⁵ Myskja points out that the terms Venuti uses 'suggest that the ethical question in this case concerns the relationship between the source and the target culture; that the translator has an ethical obligation to indicate the otherness of the source text and the source culture in the translation'.¹¹⁶ The aims of my translations in this study are: first, to make Shen's texts available for a comparison within English scholarship; second, to demonstrate the cultural meanings contained in his writing. Since Venuti notes that translation is 'an interpretation that is always limited by its address to specific audiences and by the cultural or institutional situations where the translated text is intended to circulate and function', it is necessary to point out that the

¹¹² Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*, second edition (Routledge, 2008), p.1.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p.1.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.1.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.16.

¹¹⁶ Myskja, 'Foreignisation and Resistance: Lawrence Venuti and His Critics', p.5.

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function of my translations is to enable a comparative reading and facilitate an understanding of the Chinese culture and language for the readers mainly from English academia.¹¹⁷

Emphasising the creativity of the translator and calling for a visible positioning of the translator, Venuti prioritises subjectivity which is 'very different from the humanist assumptions underlying domestication'.¹¹⁸ Insisting that neither the writer nor the translator is considered as 'the transcendental origin of the text' who is 'communicating it in transparent language to a reader from a different culture', Venuti defines subjectivity as constituted by 'diverse and even conflicting' cultural and social determinations, which varies with the contexts and mediates the language use.¹¹⁹ Thus, this emphasis on the subjectivity in the translation process highlights the radical essence of Venuti's foreignising approach, which he regards as 'a dissident cultural practice, maintaining a refusal of the dominant by developing affiliations with marginal linguistic and cultural values in the receiving situation, including foreign cultures that have been excluded because their differences effectively constitute a resistance to dominant values'.¹²⁰ By 'dissident', Venuti reveals two aspects of the stance: first, it 'enacts an ethnocentric appropriation of the foreign text'; second, it enables a translation to 'signal the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign text and perform a work of cultural restoration, admitting the ethnodeviant and potentially revising literary canons in the translating language'.¹²¹ Myskja aptly summarises that 'Venuti reorients his approach from a literalist concern with preservation of the source language structures, to a concern with the exclusion or inclusion of peripheral and minority forms within the target language in the translation process'.¹²²

This emphasis on the dissident stance of foreignisation which aims at exposing the 'ethnodeviant' elements in the target language is relevant to the translation of Shen's literature in this thesis. Shen cannot speak the Miao language although he has a Miao ancestry; still his Xiangxi novels are permeated with Miao cultural values. It is in this sense that Shen himself is a cultural translator, and it is through his sentiments and expressions that the narration of a Xiangxi world makes sense to the readers. On the other hand, in translating his literature into English and comparing it with Hardy's, I, as a Han translator, add an extra layer of interpretation to the transparency of meanings and values to Shen's already multi-cultural texts. Thus, such a piece of work cannot be viewed as exhaustive of the potential for alternative translations. Eventually, translation, with its

¹¹⁷ Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility*, p.14.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.20.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.20.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.125.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p.125.

¹²² Myskja, 'Foreignisation and Resistance', p.3.

allegiance to both the source and the target cultures 'is a reminder that no act of interpretation can be definitive', and my translations demonstrate my dealings with the cultural grids and the linguistic conventions of Shen's texts that offer one interpretation.¹²³ My translation of Shen's Xiangxi world is based on a particular interest in maintaining the authentic Xiangxi culture that shapes Shen's literature and conveying the complexity of its meanings as represented in his novels, thus I offer additional explanatory notes to enhance cultural transparency, in line with the principle aims of translation for this thesis.

The two research trips to Xiangxi during my second and fourth year of study also helped enhance the cultural transparency in my translations. The first trip was between 31 August and 8 September 2017. I visited Shen's home and tomb at Fenghuang for three days with one day joining a tour to a local Miao village. Shen's home has now become a museum with an exhibition of his books and personal collections. Fenghuang is now divided into an old town and a new town. The old town preserves tradition and is a very popular tourist destination (ancient town tourism is popular now in China). According to my Miao guide, the minority Miao culture has long been assimilated by Han culture. My trips to the Miao village and the southern 'Great Wall' (see Figure 12 in Appendix A) deepened my understanding of local ethnic clashes, which helped me to recognise the deeper sadness behind the forbidden love between Emerald's parents in *The Border Town*. Such an investigation of local history and customs made me reflect on the inefficacy of Yang and Dai's translation of *The Border Town*. For example, there is an explanation about the brothers' names that Yang and Dai leave out of their translation of *The Border Town*, possibly due to the language barrier intrinsic to the different naming systems in Chinese and Western cultures. They translate the two brothers' names simply into 'Number One' and 'Number Two', which are nicknames devised by the villagers to distinguish the elder and the younger brother and indicate a local amiable attitude towards them. The elder brother's name, Tianbao, means 'protected (*bao* 保) by the heaven (*tian* 天)'; the younger brother's name, Nuosong, means 'given (*song* 送) by the god (*Nuo* 傩, a local god)'. Shen writes that '[t]hose protected by the heaven may end up unfortunate while those given by the god shall always be respected according to local customs.'¹²⁴ The narration asserts an indifference of Nature towards human affairs and also shows a local belief in the connection between human beings and gods, but without translating the meanings of

¹²³ Lawrence Venuti, *The Scandals of Translation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), p.46.

¹²⁴ Yang and Dai, trans., *The Border Town*, p.29. This is my translation from Shen's original text, which is omitted in Yang and Dai's translation. American scholar Jeffrey Kinkely's 2009 translation of *The Border Town* translates the brothers names as 'Tianbao (Heaven-protected)' and 'Nuosong (Sent by the Nuo Gods)' and he restores Shen's following sentence: 'He who was protected by Heaven might not be so favoured in the worldly affairs of humans, but he who was sent by the Nuo gods, according to local understanding, must not be underestimated.' Jeffrey C. Kinkley trans., *Border Town: A Novel* (Harper Perennial, 2009), pp.21-22.

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their names, Yang and Dai's translation misses a significant 'cultural unit' of *The Border Town* which is also key to the textual analyses of this thesis.

My second research trip to Xiangxi was conducted from 10 October to 15 October 2018, during which I attended two conferences. The first was held at Jishou University to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of Shen's death. The second was hosted by Pushi Town Council to support research on the relationship between Shen and this wharf town, which has appeared in many of Shen's fictions and personal writings.¹²⁵ The committee organised a boat trip along the route that Shen traveled from home to other towns, and during the trip we were able to see the Coffin Rocks (see Figure 14 in Appendix A) that Shen wrote about in his essay 'The Coffin Rocks,' which were bankside cliffs with wooden coffins left hanging on the rocks as an ancient local funeral custom.¹²⁶ When I translated this essay for the first time before this trip, I used 'box' instead of 'coffin' for its literal meaning, without realising the cultural connotation of the name of the rocks. In this case, I think my two research trips to Xiangxi substantially helped me to understand the history and dynamics of Xiangxi culture in Shen's writings. During this trip I realised the importance of the physical experience for translating Shen's cultural imagination.

The use of both writers' sketches in this thesis also aims to enhance the transparency of the aesthetics their languages attain. Shen was a keen painter and the sketches he drew alongside the letters to his wife during a trip to Xiangxi in 1934 illuminate the Taoist aesthetics of intended blankness in paintings, which I find also suggestive of the emphasis on silence/inaction in his novels.¹²⁷ In Chapter 2 I select two of these sketches to demonstrate Shen's use of blankness in the composition of his impressionistic drawing and its aesthetic emphasis which accords with the Taoist conception of *wuwei*. For Hardy's relationship with visual arts, I conducted some archival research on Hardy's landscape sketches in March 2019. This was initiated by reading the correspondence between Hardy and publishers and illustrators, in which he quite frequently mentions offering sketches to the illustrators for reference. For example, on 1 October 1878, in a letter to Smith, Elder & Co., he wrote: 'I enclose for your inspection a Sketch of the supposed scene in which the 'Return of the Native' is laid - copied from the one I used in writing the story - & my suggestion is that we place an engraving of it as frontispiece to the first volume.'¹²⁸ In another letter to George du Maurier, Hardy invited him for a meeting to discuss the details of the illustrations for *A Laodicean*: 'if you are willing to begin at once, I can call on you any day & hour you name (except Thursday) with the MS. [manuscripts] in my hand, read it over to you, & finish

¹²⁵ Pushi town 浦市镇.

¹²⁶ 'The Coffin Rocks 箱子岩' in *Complete Works* ed. by Zhang Zhaohe, Volume XI, pp.277-84.

¹²⁷ *Letters during a Trip to Hunan* 《湘行书简》, in *Complete Works* ed. by Zhang, Volume XI, pp.107-220.

¹²⁸ Purdy and Millgate eds., *Collected Letters*, Volume I, p.61.

our talk about the first picture'.¹²⁹ The frequency of these correspondences and Hardy's insistence on the faithfulness of images, that the illustrations quintessentially capture the spirit of the scene, makes Hardy's attitude towards images and the relationship between the images and his novel an interesting research question. Besides Hardy's keen effort in supervising the illustrators' work, he was a painter himself. In a letter to Arthur Hopkins, his illustrator for *The Return of the Native*, he wrote: 'Should you, at any time after choosing a subject for illustration, be in doubt about any of the accessories to the scene, &c. I shall have great pleasure in sending a rough sketch, done to the best of my power'¹³⁰. As summarized by Linda M. Shires, Hardy was highly responsive to different art forms: '[a]n architect self-educated in art history by visits to London museums, an avid reader of John Ruskin, keenly alive to music and responsive to the ornamental sculpture and painting of Gothic buildings, Hardy believed in composite muse'¹³¹. Hardy's own drawings and paintings, however, can scarcely be found in existent publications. Chapter 3 of this thesis selects some of Hardy's sketches to illustrate his aesthetic emphasis on temporality in the representation of landscapes, which is in line with Taoist aesthetics.

V. Ecocriticism and Taoism

Critical discussions of nature and literature are increasingly occurring under or in relation to ecocriticism, which has been an active field of literary scholarship for both Hardy and Shen as I have shown so far in this Introduction. Within this field, ideas developed under the rubric of 'deep ecology' come closest to the Taoist approach I am pursuing. In Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle's definition: '[d]eep ecology is an environmental movement that rejects the notion of "sustainable development" and suggests that capitalism, progress, even Western liberalism itself is responsible for the current ecological crisis that afflicts the world.'¹³² Tracing it back to the very foundations of Western philosophy and ideology, they suggest that '[d]eep ecology might be compared to the literary and philosophical work of deconstruction in its call for a radical critique and transformation of conventional ways of conceiving of "human" values, of humanism, even of science itself.'¹³³ It is 'deep', by contrast to the 'shallow ecology', because it stresses the intrinsic value of the nonhuman world rather than environmental conservation for human benefit. According to Arne Naess, guru of deep ecology, there are eight key points of the platform and the

¹²⁹ Ibid., p.76.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p.53.

¹³¹ Linda M. Shires, 'Hardy's Memorial Art: Image and Text in Wessex Poems', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 41.4 (2013), p.743.

¹³² Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, 'Eco', in *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory* (Routledge, 2016), p.146.

¹³³ Ibid., p.146.

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most relevant of them to Taoism is the first principle: '[t]he well-being and flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth have value in themselves (synonyms: intrinsic value, inherent worth). These values are independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes.'¹³⁴ Naess's notion implies that deep ecology deals with a paradigm shift in ecophilosophies from anthropocentrism to ecological holism, which sets to situate human life in ecological terms and non-human life in ethical terms, as summarised by Val Plumwood in her 2003 article.¹³⁵

In respect to an ethical concern for the non-human world, Hardy was a keen defender of animal rights, as manifested in his personal writings. In a statement for an anti-vivisection booklet published by the Vivisection Investigation League of New York in 1909, he writes that '[t]he discovery of the law of evolution, which revealed that all organic creatures are of one family, shifted the centre of altruism from humanity to the whole conscious world collectively.'¹³⁶ Such a statement confirms Hardy's anti-anthropocentric view. Hardy is also aware of the moral limitations of human concern towards the non-human world: he comments on the 'difficulty of carrying out to its logical extreme the principle of equal justice to all the animal kingdom' in a letter to Sidney Trist, editor of the *Animals' Guardian*, that '[w]hatever humanity may try to do, there remains the stumbling block that nature herself is absolutely indifferent to justice, and how to instruct nature is rather a large problem.'¹³⁷

With the emergence of human-animal studies as a field of literary study, scholars such as Anna West and Adrian Tait focus on the representation of animals in Hardy's works. West explains that her book is about Hardy's animals and 'the various ways in which animals manifest themselves in Hardy's work', and the aim of her study is to 'relate Hardy's views both to the debates of his own day, and to ours'.¹³⁸ Tait investigates Hardy's responses to the inhuman treatment of animals and shows Hardy's deep-rooted biophilia within the context of Victorian exploitation of animals and the influence of Darwin on him.¹³⁹ 'Biophilia', as a key critical term for Tait to analyse the interactions between the human and non-human worlds, is borrowed from biologist Edward O.

¹³⁴ Arne Naess, 'The Deep Ecological Movement: Some Philosophical Aspects', in George Sessions ed. *Deep Ecology for the Twenty-First Century: Readings on the Philosophy and Practice of the New Environmentalism* (London: Shambhala, 1995), p.68.

¹³⁵ Val Plumwood, 'Animals and Ecology: Towards a Better Integration', 2003, p.3 <<http://hdl.handle.net/1885/41767>>

¹³⁶ Michael Millgate ed., *Thomas Hardy's Public Voice: The Essays, Speeches, and Miscellaneous Prose* (Oxford University Press, 2001), p.306. See in the same book 'The Moral Rights of Animals' (p.310) and 'Animals' Welfare Week' (p.438), for Hardy's defense of animal rights.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.312.

¹³⁸ Anna West, *Thomas Hardy and Animals* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), p.4.

¹³⁹ Adrian Tait, 'A Merciful Man": Thomas Hardy and the Thinking of (in) Humanity', *FATHOM* [Online], 4 (2016) <<http://journals.openedition.org/fathom/619>>

Wilson's well-known hypothesis that humans are instinctively interested in nature.¹⁴⁰ West observes that the power of Hardy's representation 'lies in his ability to invest himself imaginatively in his subjects, whether it "be Fanny Robin or a homeless dog or Bathsheba Everdene or a newborn lamb"', indicating a biophilic understanding similar to Tait.¹⁴¹ Both studies emphasise the historical contexts of environmental ethics and how Hardy engages with the debate about animal rights. The scientific basis for Wilson's assumption has long been a debate, but it is also crucial to note the anthropomorphic inclination of the biophilic ecocriticism. Esmeralda G. Urquiza-Haas and Kurt Kotrschal comment that '[a]nimals are by far the most frequent nonhuman targets of people's attribution of mental states', pointing out that biophilia is an unavoidably anthropocentric paradigm.¹⁴² The biophilia hypothesis contends that 'the multiple strands of emotional response are woven into symbols composing a large part of culture', however, I am arguing in this study that such biophilic interpretations of culture consolidate the dualism and anthropocentrism of the representation of Nature, and what is urgently needed is an anti-anthropocentric mode of ecocriticism.¹⁴³

As mentioned by Bennett and Royle in their definition of deep ecology, deconstruction, which has often been associated with it, also connects the Taoist methodology of this thesis for their shared stance that is highly sceptical of linguistic construction of meaning. I have discussed such deconstruction critical views in my engagement with Latour and Morton (Introduction III), which are very helpful for exposing the questions of dualistic and logocentric discourses. Compared with deconstruction which demonstrates the problems of logocentrism and presents a scepticism, Taoism is more constructive in a sense that its holistic view can provide an intrinsically decentring model for ecocriticism which repels logocentrism or anthropocentrism. Committed to exceeding the anthropocentric and logocentric critical paradigms, my study delves into the new ecocritical potentials of ancient Chinese metaphysics and approaches the conception of nature in the novels with a Taoist analysis of their imageries, aesthetics, and rhetoric. There is also a line of Western scholarship on Taoism in the field of ecocriticism, but most of this concentrate on historical and contextual implications and rather leave out the analytical power of Taoist metaphysics for a holistic view of Nature, which this thesis intends to supply through detailed textual analysis and comparisons.

¹⁴⁰ Edward O. Wilson, *Biophilia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984).

¹⁴¹ West, *Thomas Hardy and Animals*, p.84.

¹⁴² Esmeralda G. Urquiza-Haas and Kurt Kotrschal, 'The mind behind anthropomorphic thinking: attribution of mental states to other species', *Animal Behaviour* 109 (2015), p.167.

¹⁴³ Edward O. Wilson, Chapter 17 'Biophilia and the conservation ethic', *Evolutionary perspectives on environmental problems* (Routledge, 2007), pp.249-57.

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David E. Cooper notes: '[s]ome ancient Daoist [Taoist] texts exhibit a concern for the treatment of nonhuman life and nature. Passages in the *Zhuangzi* criticise inappropriate treatment of wild animals, and several of the *One Hundred and Eighty Precepts* (c. third century CE) prescribe environmental protection'; he also warns that '[w]hen extracted from the tradition, harmonious communication between cosmos and humanity becomes a slogan for ecologically responsible behaviour rather than a basis for it', reminding us that the original stance of Taoism is more relevant with 'biospiritual disciplines of self-cultivation' than environmentalism.¹⁴⁴ In light of Cooper's warning, the Taoist methodology of this thesis accentuates that holistic metaphysics can be viewed as a critical method to understanding the abstract interrelations between the human and the non-human domains in literature, rather than an alternative ecophilosophy with political or ethical implications. Thus, a metaphysical holism is more precise than the ecological holism of deep ecology to describe the metaphysics of Taoism that will be used as a form of literary ecocriticism in this study. Also, in terms of the non-logocentric nature of Taoism which can contribute substantially to the existent ecocritical methods such as ecologism or deconstruction, this thesis acknowledges that being a literary approach with its focus on texts, it can never achieve the ideal state of non-anthropocentrism, because after all we are humans talking about human linguistic attributes; however, Taoism demonstrates an ancient insight into a conscious critical view of language which can be used as a non-logocentric and anti-anthropocentric stance in my analyses of the texts. Thus, it is not non-anthropocentric or ecocentric criticism that this thesis is aiming at, which is impossible, rather, it demonstrates a Taoist criticism which is anti-anthropocentric and non-logocentric.

As for using Taoism to approach Shen's novels, an anxiety persists in attempts to classify Shen under any Chinese philosophical school since he maintains an iconoclasm throughout his career, although his works show influences from different aspects of these philosophies.¹⁴⁵ His education at the local private school provided him with access to Confucianism; in 1933, Shen published a collection of nine short stories entitled 'Under the Moonlight' and eight of the stories are adapted from Buddhist texts; according to his student, Chinese writer Wang Zengqi, Shen often read *Lao Tzu* and *Chuang Tzu* (Taoist classics) when he was teaching at the Southwest Associated University

¹⁴⁴ Callicott and Frodeman eds., *Encyclopedia of Environmental Ethics and Philosophy*, pp.202-03. *One Hundred and Eighty Precepts* is a classic text for the Taoist religion (*Daojiao*).

¹⁴⁵ In 'Water Cloud', Shen claimed that he 'believes in nothing but being', and the whole essay elaborates on his uncertainty about modern literary and philosophical theories. For religious and philosophical influences on Shen, see *Congwen's Autobiography* (1934).

from 1939 to 1947.¹⁴⁶ Although Shen was brought up in a multi-cultural and ethnically-marginal area, he was familiar with these three sources of traditional Chinese classics which are the foundation of Han society (the major ethnic group in China). In a correspondence published in 1937, however, Shen writes:

Don't weaken yourself with memory, all memories are hurtful. And stay away from old books. We're no longer obligated to take up the intellectual burden of the past. If, while we're still young ourselves, we read too many of those books written in a Taoist or Buddhist spirit leading out of the world and into the grave, by old men tortured with our overlong national history, it's a surer path than memory itself to premature senility.¹⁴⁷

Despite the influence of traditions in his formative years, it can be implied from this note that Shen resists the power of it. In another essay, Shen critiqued the restrictions that Confucian morality has put on humanity.¹⁴⁸ Shen's statements on the philosophies of Taoism and Buddhism are not staunch, thus his relationships with theories and philosophies are slippery. It is not the aim of this thesis, however, to argue that Shen or Hardy is a Taoist, but to argue that the Taoist model of *ziran* illuminates their conception of Nature more clearly than other notions.

Besides ecocriticism, the naturalist and Darwinian discourses of nature also prove insufficient for the metaphysical concerns of this thesis. William Newton compares Hardy and naturalists and asserts that Hardy's novels do not depend on physiology as naturalists insist. Naturalists draw analogies between natural process and men in order to show a physiological basis for human perceptions and emotions.¹⁴⁹ For Hardy, however, the emphasis is not on physiology although he does use similar analogies - his emphasis is rather on human psychology akin to what we find within *ziran*. Newton distinguishes Hardy's approach from that of the naturalist's and argues that when Hardy 'stresses the physiological analogy between man and nature' like the naturalists, 'he is interested in it not simply as a means of studying the *causes prochaines* of man's behaviour but as one way of commenting upon the cruelty and purposelessness of the universe as he sees it.'¹⁵⁰ Newton further delineates that naturalists use physiology to record or explain its mechanism whereas Hardy uses it to interpret and question life. Therefore, the naturalists observe and apply

¹⁴⁶ Ju Wenjiao 巨文教, 'Zhang Zhaohe and Wang Zengqi Talk about Shen Congwen - an Interview 张兆和、汪曾祺谈沈从文 - 访张兆和、汪曾祺两位先生谈话笔录', *Modern Chinese Literature Researches Series* 《中国现代文学研究丛刊》, 1994 (02), pp.275-83.

¹⁴⁷ Zhang ed., *Complete Works*, Volume XVII, p.181.

¹⁴⁸ See 'The Disease of Chinese People 中国人的病', in *Complete Works* ed. by Zhang, Volume XIV, pp.86-90.

¹⁴⁹ See Émile Zola, 'The Experimental Novel', *The Experimental Novel: And Other Essays* (Cassell Publishing Company, 1893).

¹⁵⁰ William Newton, 'Hardy and the Naturalists: Their Use of Physiology', *Modern Philology*, 49.1 (1951), p.41.

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while Hardy observes and analyses and questions. Newton also addresses the question of 'chance' since it seems to be a shared motif between Hardy and the naturalists. For Newton, Hardy's emphasis on artistic imagination, not necessarily romantic imagination, obviously differs from the naturalists' rejection of such an imagination based on their belief in determinism. He defines Hardy's writing as 'queer juxtaposition of heredity and half-supernatural accidents' which 'serves admirably to express his peculiar reading of life, a reading in which there was no place for such a thing as absolute determinism'.¹⁵¹ Newton finally concludes that: '[h]ence the juxtaposing of the determinism of the naturalists and the accidents and coincidences of romance was with Hardy no mere capricious and meaningless attempt at literary miscegenation, but his way of expressing his belief that all of human destiny is not to be explained by science, by determinism, or by anything else.¹⁵² It is the naturalist scientific commitment and determinism that differentiates it from Hardy's conception of Nature, and Hardy's focus is on the metaphysical conception of man's place within what I designate as *ziran*, not a physiological or a religious grounding.

Another important line of criticism on Hardy's conception of Nature is that of the Darwinists. It is noted that Hardy was a keen reader of Darwin: '[d]uring his stay in London he attended, on 26 April, the funeral of Darwin in Westminster Abbey. As a young man he had been among the earliest acclaimers of *The Origin of Species*.'¹⁵³ For Gillian Beer, a core message from Darwin is that 'it was possible to have plot without man - both plot previous to man and plot even now regardless of him'.¹⁵⁴ So, a Darwinian conception of Nature is revolutionarily anti-anthropocentric: 'man is unfitted by the shortness of his span either to recognise the great extensions of change in the natural world or to effect change himself'.¹⁵⁵ Hardy, however, makes a seemingly contradictory move against the deep history of evolution: 'Hardy's texts pay homage to human scale by ceasing as the hero or heroine dies. The single life span is no longer an absolute but polemical. That is one formal expression of his humanism. It opposes evolutionary meliorism or pessimism by making the single generation carry the freight of signification.'¹⁵⁶ Beer attributes this contradiction between Hardy's belief in the evolutionary theory and his narrative emphasis on the single life span of humans to a concern for the plot which 'is almost always tragic or malign' in Hardy's works: 'it involves the overthrow of the individual either by the inevitability of

¹⁵¹ William Newton, 'Chance as Employed by Hardy and the Naturalists', *Philological Quarterly*, 30 (1951), p.175.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p.175.

¹⁵³ Millgate ed., *The Life*, p.158. In parallel, Shen also admired Darwin, which is mentioned in *Congwen's Autobiography* (1934).

¹⁵⁴ Gillian Beer, *Darwin's plots: evolutionary narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and nineteenth-century fiction* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.17.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.16.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.222-23.

death or by the machinations (or disregard) of “crass casualty”. Deterministic systems are placed under great stress: a succession of ghost plots is present. [...] Hardy reads such plans as plot; plot becomes malign and entrapping, because it is designed without the needs of individual life in mind’.¹⁵⁷ Beer argues that, as such, ‘[h]uman variety is oppressed by the needs which generate plot’ in Hardy’s novels, but my Taoist analyses of the texts will show that the plot is more of a means than an aim to illustrate Hardy’s idea of tragedy which is deeply embedded in a holistic conception of Nature and humanity.¹⁵⁸ Still, in terms of Darwin’s influence on Hardy, Beer accurately notes that ‘[t]he two major emotional and creative problems which evolutionary theory forced on Hardy were to find a scale for the human, and a place for the human within the natural order’, which can be framed by Taoist metaphysics more clearly with their holistic paradigm.¹⁵⁹ A Darwinian reading of Hardy concentrates on his relationship with the evolutionary idea of nature, either oppressed or directed by it, but Taoism helps us to understand the metaphysics through which Hardy’s holistic sensibility and language actually operate and which cannot be revealed by the evolutionary view.

Such critical paradigms of Nature as naturalism and Darwinism are necessarily concerned with modernity. In her introduction to *The Routledge Companion to the Environmental Humanities*, Ursula K. Heise notes a correlation between ecocriticism and modernity in the narratives of decline and extinction: ‘[n]arratives of decline and extinction or, conversely, of resilience and improvement in nature always intertwine ecological facts with cultural histories and value judgments [...]. Such stories often seek to define a particular community’s vision of its own place in history and geography, its anxieties over the changes that modernisation and colonisation impose, and its aspirations for the future.’¹⁶⁰ Building on this, Wessex and Xiangxi can be regarded as such representations of decline in the sense that they both show inevitable changes to the agricultural societies in the face of an encroaching modernity and a melancholia about the decline of an ecologically vivid past. Heise further delineates the role of environmental humanities in this context:

decline narratives are often a powerful means of expressing political resistance to modernisation and colonisation, even as they also frequently constrain visions of the socio-ecological future as anything other than a recreation of the past. The expertise of environmental humanists in the critical analysis of fictional as well as nonfictional narrative puts them right at the heart of a vigorous debate between different strains of the environmental

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p.223.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p.223.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p.235.

¹⁶⁰ Ursula K. Heise, ‘Introduction: planet, species, justice - and the stories we tell about them’, in *The Routledge Companion to the Environmental Humanities* (Routledge, 2017), pp.6-7.

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movement over what story templates will prove to be most effective in the future.¹⁶¹

Thus, the correlation between ecocriticism and modernity not only lies in their shared concern with a historical immediacy, but also in that ecocriticism, or as broad as Heise defines as environmental humanities, provides 'story templates', that is paradigms, for modernity. I am not saying that Wessex and Xiangxi can be viewed as completely decline narratives because there obviously are various historicities in both fictional worlds that both writers use to try to break through the linearity of temporal sequence in traditional realistic novels. Moreover, Hardy and Shen are suggesting Wessex and Xiangxi as models for the future since the reflections and critiques of such rural societies are as salient as the nostalgia in their narratives, and nonnegligibly there is always a contrasting presence of the city in their regional novels whose connection with the rural communities cannot always be said to be negative.

By 'modernity', I refer to a specific definition of it by Bruno Latour, who argues that underneath the ambiguity of 'modernity' there lies a dichotomy of the ancient and the modern: '[m]odernity comes in as many versions as there are thinkers or journalists, yet all its definitions point, in one way or another, to the passage of time. The adjective 'modern' designates a new regime, an acceleration, a rupture, a revolution in time. When the word 'modern', 'modernisation', or 'modernity' appears, we are defining, by contrast, an archaic and stable past.'¹⁶² Latour acutely observes that the essential nature of modernity lies in its description of the newness of time. In an ecological view of the scholarship about Nature in literature, pastoralism can be regarded as an example of 'an archaic and stable past' with which Latour contrasts modernity. I will demonstrate a reconceptualisation of pastoralism in both writers' novels that subverts the traditional modernist claim that their use of pastoralism shows a retreat and nostalgia. In understanding modernity as newness, we still need to be wary of its slippery definitions. Miles Ogborn reminds us of the ambiguity of modernity when he notes that 'an enormous variety of processes, institutions and experiences are claimed as modern even though they seem to have little in common', and this is especially true when a cross-cultural context is in question.¹⁶³ In Chapter 3 of this thesis, I will specify the different contexts relevant to modernities that are concerned with both writers' literary 'return' to the holistic metaphysics in Wessex and Xiangxi.

On the totalisation and reductionism of trying to define modernity, Ogborn's comment resonates Latour's definition: '[i]n part this reduction is due to thinking of modernity as a particular

¹⁶¹ Ibid., pp.6-7.

¹⁶² Bruno Latour, *We have never been modern* (Harvard university press, 2012), p.10.

¹⁶³ Miles Ogborn, *Spaces of modernity: London's geographies, 1680-1780* (Guilford Press, 1998), pp.2-3.

relationship to time and history whereby the “modern” is simply the “new”, the contemporary, marking a separation from the past and offering reimaginings of the future.’¹⁶⁴ Philibert Secretan suggests three sets of duality that define the ideologies of ‘the modern’: ‘[n]ewness, artificiality, emancipation: these three aspects of modernity begin to present a unity of meaning which is totally antithetical to the trilogy of tradition, nature, establishment.’¹⁶⁵ Secretan confirms that ‘nature’ is an important element opposite to the modern notion of ‘artificiality’, but his dualistic classification may shape a misconstruction of the ecological past, conducting the totalisation Ogborn warns against. Contrary to Secretan’s dualistic paradigm, the Taoist approach of this study demonstrates that, for an integrated understanding of the ecological past and modernity, it is helpful to render the conception of ‘nature’ in holistic metaphysics rather than in a duality. Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger, the eco-modernists named by Heise, claim that ‘the solution to the unintended consequences of modernity is, and has always been, more modernity - just as the solution to the unintended consequences of our technologies has always been more technology’.¹⁶⁶ This comment also addresses the ever-renewing essence of modernity, that it is always multifaceted and calls for new paradigms, which on the other hand indicates the value of comparative studies for a more comprehensive understanding of modernity, especially the ecological modernity of our times.

To be more specific about this ecological modernity we are facing, especially in terms of ecocriticism, ‘Anthropocene’ becomes an overarching critical concern for the literature-environment nexus. In Heise’s introduction to *The Routledge Companion to the Environmental Humanities*, she raises that one of most important questions that informs the book is how we can or should envision human agency in the Anthropocene.¹⁶⁷ According to the definition by Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer, the span of the Anthropocene covers both Victorian England and early twentieth-century China, which are the subject historical periods of this research.¹⁶⁸ Rose et al. elaborate on the imperative need for a paradigm shift in response to the Anthropocene that: ‘the Anthropocene unmakes the idea of the unlimited, autonomous human and calls for a radical reworking of a great deal of what we thought we knew about ourselves and the humanities as fields of enquiry’.¹⁶⁹ Neimanis et al., however, in acknowledging a transformational force of the Anthropocene, remind us that we need to exercise caution in relation to this term which literally

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., pp.2-3.

¹⁶⁵ Philibert Secretan, ‘Elements for a theory of modernity’, *Diogenes*, Volume 32, Issue 126, p.74.

¹⁶⁶ Ted Nordhaus, and Michael Shellenberger, ‘Evolve: A Case for Modernization as the Road to Salvation,’ *Orion Magazine*, September/October, 2011 <<https://orionmagazine.org/issue/september-october-2011/>>

¹⁶⁷ Heise, ‘Introduction’, p.4.

¹⁶⁸ Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer, ‘The ‘Anthropocene’, *Global Change Newsletter*, 41(2000), p.17.

¹⁶⁹ Deborah Bird Rose et al., ‘Thinking Through the Environment, Unsettling the Humanities’, *Environmental Humanities*, 1(2012), p.3.

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claims an 'Age of Man' because in the context of today's ecological crisis, 'calling an epoch after ourselves does not necessarily demonstrate the humility we may need to espouse. Moreover, discourses of Anthropocene risk overwriting important differences among human populations and covering over uneven power distributions both in terms of responsibility for and vulnerability in the face of environmental problems.'¹⁷⁰

From another perspective, these cautions provide a useful platform for an exploration of anti-anthropocentric methodologies for ecocriticism that exposes the overwrought potential of the 'Anthropocene'. Emphasising the pluralism of the idea of 'environment' in environmental humanities, Neimanis et al. see more of an opportunity than a challenge: 'Environmental humanities suggest rather (employing many different conceptual frames and espousing a large variety of theoretical commitments) that human ideas, meanings and values are connected in some important way to the shape that the "environment out there" assumes.'¹⁷¹ The comment locates the pluralism and cosmopolitanism of ecological ideas which at the same time promotes comparative ecocriticism. Neimanis et al. also observe that 'this kind of scholarly endeavor is several decades old, with its institutionalisation (through some infrastructural support) a much more recent thing', reverberating Wei's note about the rich Chinese ecocritical resources and the need to modernise the aesthetic terms (Introduction III.i).¹⁷² On the one hand, it is the pluralism of ecological conceptions that propels a comparative view in order to address environmental issues on a global scale; on the other hand, comparative ecocriticism is urgently in need because there remains a question of Eurocentricity in the discourse: 'the tradition of environmental humanities, narrated in this particular way, certainly leaves many things out, particularly as it privileges the most entrenched traditions within the Western academe'.¹⁷³

For environmental humanities, to decentre 'human' from our ontological and cultural stories is first of all to decentre Eurocentric discourses, as affirmed by Emily Potter and Gay Hawkins that 'humans and non-humans are intimately bound in ways that put into question some of the fundamental precepts of western thought'.¹⁷⁴ They also suggest that non-Western cultures can offer a different conception of Nature that benefits ecocriticism: 'humans and non-humans have always been caught up with each other in ways that make a nature/culture binary impossible to sustain - something that many non-western cultures have long acknowledged', which notes a

¹⁷⁰ Astrida Neimanis et al., 'Four problems, four directions for environmental humanities: Toward critical posthumanities for the Anthropocene', *Ethics & the Environment* 20.1 (2015), p.68.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.71.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p.72.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.72.

¹⁷⁴ Emily Potter and Gay Hawkins, 'Naturecultures: introduction', *Australian Humanities Review* 46 (2009), p.39.

possibility of sustaining a non-dualistic ecocriticism by non-western models.¹⁷⁵ Similarly, in response to the Eurocentricity of ecocriticism, Neimanis et al. suggest: '[t]he story of the emergence of environmental humanities could be told in many alternative ways. It could anachronistically collect many of the different (and predominantly peripheral or non-Western) cosmologies, philosophies, and histories that extend across millennia to tell the stories of human implication with non-human worlds.'¹⁷⁶ Thus, instead of any linear narratives of the emergence of Environmental humanities, it is a transition of the field to a non-western discourse that is more in need. My study suggests that Taoism can be one of such transitions.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p.39.

¹⁷⁶ Neimanis et al., 'Four problems, four directions for environmental humanities', p.72.

Chapter 1 The Relational Self in Symbiosis: A Comparison between *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874) and *Fengzi* (1932-1937)

For truly, Being and Not-being grow out of one another.

—Arthur Waley trans., *Tao Te Ching* Chapter 2, in *The Way and its Power*, p.143.

In Art particularly, the primitive belief that all objects are alive, and concern themselves with Man is eminently adapted to stimulate ideality.

— Lennart A. Björk ed., *The Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy*, Volume I (London: Springer, 1985), p.76.

Beauty is by nature ubiquitous, since all objects, if approached with Pantheistic sensations, will infallibly display their exquisiteness and integrity.¹⁷⁷

—Shen Congwen, 'Beauty and Love' (1943), in *Complete Works* ed. by Zhang, Volume XVII, p.360.

The first quote from *Tao Te Ching* in the epigraph emphasises the connection between being and not-being in Taoism, hence a metaphysical holism in the universe, and this chapter will demonstrate how Hardy and Shen establish such fictional worlds of holism in Wessex and Xiangxi respectively, starting from *Far from the Madding Crowd* and *Fengzi*. In both writers' personal writings, they show an interest in primitive pantheism as displayed in the second and third quotes in the epigraph above. This chapter deals with the holistic metaphysics on which the Wessex and Xiangxi fictional worlds are based and argues for a secularised 'religion' of Nature in *FMC* and *Fengzi* that can be compared with the Taoist concept of a relational self. To view the self as relational to Nature is in accordance with Hardy's classification of 'Novels of Character and Environment', in which the term 'environment' can be illuminated by a comparison with the Taoist idea of *ziran* as discussed in the Introduction. Moreover, the pastoral features of these two novels demonstrate a conscious use of the genre as a criticism of the urban misconception of the countryside and the rigidity of modern institutions (theological and social) which alienates

¹⁷⁷ Translated by Wu Xianlin in 'Pastoral Elegists at Work: A Comparative Study of the Artistic Features of Thomas Hardy and Shen Congwen', *The Thomas Hardy Journal*, Volume 23, 2007, p.61.

humanity from Nature. Hardy shows in *FMC* a conception of Nature that can be compared with Shen's representation of the local religion of Nature in *Fengzi*.

1.1 Novels of Character and *Ziran*

Fengzi is a novella by Shen of which the first nine chapters were written in 1932 and the last one in 1937. Thus, chronologically it was written before *The Border Town* (1934) and reviewed at the time *Long River* (1938-1945) was about to be published in 1938. It is an unfinished story about a young Xiangxi scholar teaching at a northern city in China. There he meets an old recluse who has worked in Xiangxi as an engineer in his early years, and together they talk about the old man's memory of this much-cherished place. Before *Fengzi* Shen had written some short stories with Xiangxi settings, but *Fengzi* is the first work dedicated to a relatively comprehensive introduction to local customs and landscapes. Similarly, Hardy explains in the preface that he firstly uses 'Wessex' in *FMC* and thus it marks the beginning of this fictional construction.¹⁷⁸ It is from this novel that a pattern of symbiosis between humanity and Nature becomes clear in Hardy's Wessex, and this chapter traces this pattern and compares it with Shen's similar construction of Xiangxi in *Fengzi*. The reason why *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872) is not treated as the commencement of the Wessex novels is that Hardy in this novel does not show any intention to construct a whole literary world. According to Rosemarie Morgan, 'at the outset of his novel-writing career, in the 1870s, Hardy hadn't even conceived of a "Wessex", coherently designed or otherwise'.¹⁷⁹ Also, a variety of styles in *Under the Greenwood Tree* demonstrates Hardy's tentative experiments with literary representations of the region, and at most it can be viewed as a rough sketch of the Wessex world, as confirmed by Stephen Regan: '[t]he novel's radical undecidability about the image of rural life that it might convey is matched by an equally radical uncertainty about the question of genre - about the appropriate literary form and means of representation.'¹⁸⁰ This is not to say that Hardy's style is stable in *FMC*, as Regan notes that this latter novel presents many 'other literary conventions which further complicate and occasionally undermine its realist credentials, so much so that Hardy's writing sometimes seems willfully anti-realist'.¹⁸¹ To claim Hardy as a realist can be problematic since the writer himself is so suspicious and cautious of 'realism' in art, which will be more fully discussed in Chapter 3; but here through this brief introduction of *Fengzi* and *Far from the Madding Crowd* as commencement of Xiangxi

¹⁷⁸ Robert C. Schweik ed., *Far from the Madding Crowd: A Norton Critical Edition* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1986), p.5.

¹⁷⁹ Rosemarie Morgan, *Student Companion to Thomas Hardy* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2007), p.197.

¹⁸⁰ Stephen Regan, 'The Darkening Pastoral: *Under the Greenwood Tree* and *Far from the Madding Crowd*', in Keith Wilson ed. *A companion to Thomas Hardy* (John Wiley & Sons, 2009), p.246.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.247.

and Wessex novels, I emphasise that both Shen's and Hardy's recreation of their homeland show a complex rendering of the 'real' and the dream.

Both the Wessex and Xiangxi novels show a strong reliance on the sense of place and the 'settings' constitute a big part of the novels' interests. Weatherbury is based on the real village of Puddletown which is not far from Higher Bockhampton where Hardy was writing the novel; the Zhengan county in *Fengzi* was the real historical name of the region and was renamed Fenghuang in 1913. This was Shen's hometown. Thus, the local communities in both novels are, to a great extent, intimately built upon Hardy's and Shen's own physical experience and memory of places. As for their literary pursuit, Hardy confesses in the preface the process of creating Wessex:

I first ventured to adopt the word 'Wessex' from the pages of early English history, and give it a fictitious significance as the existing name of the district once included in that extinct kingdom. The series of novels I projected being mainly of the kind called local, they seemed to require a territorial definition of some sort to lend unity to their scene. Finding that the area of a single county did not afford a canvas large enough for this purpose, and that there were objections to an invented name, I disinterred the old one.¹⁸²

The imaginative world of Wessex, which falls under the name of an ancient Anglo-Saxon Kingdom, becomes an immediate literary phenomenon that attracts attention to the extent of its realistic representation. It is noted by Hardy that '[s]ince then the appellation which I had thought to reserve to the horizons and landscapes of a partly real, partly dream-country, has become more and more popular as a practical provincial definition.'¹⁸³ This partly real, partly dream nature of Wessex is shared by Shen's Xiangxi world. Although Xiangxi did and does exist, Shen's imaginative creation of the literary world of Xiangxi definitely makes it more intriguing for readers. Especially after the publication of *The Border Town*, a pastoral or even utopian image of Xiangxi is solidified and it is believed by many readers that Fenghuang is the border town in the novel, although it is clearly stated in the novel that the town is Chadong 茶峒, which is also a real place name.¹⁸⁴ This speaks to Hardy's comment that Wessex has entered common usage since his novels.

It is significant to note that the fictional worlds of Wessex and Xiangxi are not only based on Hardy's and Shen's senses of real places but also their ideas of what literature, or literary representations of places, should and can do. 'Setting', as it is so important for both Wessex and Xiangxi novels, might not be the best word to describe the dynamics of the environments, nor might other literary terms such as 'landscape' or 'scene'. The Taoist conception of *ziran* can better illuminate the idea of Nature in these novels because it reveals the interdependence between

¹⁸² Schweik ed., *FMC*, p.5.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp.5-6.

¹⁸⁴ Chadong was renamed Border Town 边城 in 2005.

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humanity and the environments (natural, cultural, and social). In addition to the conception of *ziran* discussed in the Introduction, which mainly focuses on its difference from the Western conception of nature, here I will distinguish it from 'setting' in order to clarify my use of it in this chapter to analyse the sense of place in literature. The Oxford English Dictionary defines a literary setting as '[t]he environment or surroundings in which a person or thing is "set"; the literary framework of a narrative or other composition.'¹⁸⁵ This definition accentuates the authorial design of a setting and hence the passivity of it. Michael Bennett, on the other hand, subtly points out that 'if ecocriticism has taught us anything, it has taught us to view "settings" not just as metaphors but as physical spaces that inform, shape, and are shaped by cultural productions.'¹⁸⁶ Here, 'metaphors' refers to a literary imposition of human emotions on the environment, and so for Bennett, the ecocritical approach to literary settings reminds us of the reciprocity between humanity and the environment in literature and the anthropocentrism of other forms of literary criticism. My readings of the two novels in this chapter will indicate the limitations of previous ecocritical approaches by turning to *ziran* as a method of reading which illuminates the metaphysical holism of the conception of Nature in Hardy's and Shen's literary imaginations.

Before I move on to the texts, how *ziran* is used in this chapter as a literary method needs a fuller explanation. *The Encyclopedia of Taoism* elaborates on *ziran* that 'On the cosmological level, *ziran* defines the way the world goes on by itself without anyone "doing" it, and expresses the faith in a world well-ordered and self-regulated in a natural way. Epistemologically, it means that we do not know what is producing life or how life is achieved.'¹⁸⁷ So, it is concluded here that *ziran* is 'an expression of human ignorance and respect of the secret of life'.¹⁸⁸ As I have quoted in the Introduction of Chapter 25 of *Tao Te Ching* that 'the ways of Tao' are conditioned 'by the Self-so (*ziran*)' which means that Tao models itself on what is so of its own, which is tautology as argued in *The Encyclopedia of Taoism*: '*ziran* can therefore also be an expression of agnosticism'.¹⁸⁹ This comment reverberates with both writers' scepticism towards artificial institutional powers that I will delineate later, but first of all it pinpoints the metaphysical holism of Taoism, as implied in the tautology of *ziran*, that Shen shows through a secularised religion of Nature in *Fengzi* and Hardy through a symbiosis in *FMC* - both reveal the connections between the human and non-human worlds without actually naming the source of such connections, hence a holistic metaphysics

¹⁸⁵ Online Oxford English Dictionary, <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/176859?rskey=sXCil9&result=3&isAdvanced=false#eid>>

¹⁸⁶ Michael Bennett, 'Anti-Pastoralism, Frederick Douglass, and the Nature of Slavery', in Karla Armbruster and Kathleen R. Wallace eds. *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism* (University of Virginia Press, 2001), p.197.

¹⁸⁷ Pregadio, *The Encyclopedia of Taoism*, p.1302.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., p.1302.

¹⁸⁹ Arthur Waley trans., *Tao Te Ching* Chapter 25, in *The Way and its Power*, p.174.

rather than religion or philosophy, and this is why a Taoist metaphysical analysis can illuminate what has been ignored in previous ecocriticism about both writers.

Roughly parallel with the construction of Wessex in his novels is Hardy's categorisation of 'Novels of Character and Environment', and the 'environment' here can be more clearly understood through *ziran* rather than as settings against which human activities are observed. Himan Heidari claims an ecocritical approach to *FMC* and equals the 'environment' in 'Novels of Character and Environment' with natural settings, which ignores the ambivalence of Hardy's conception of Nature.¹⁹⁰ Heidari's emphasis is on a modern distortion of nature and that Hardy presents in his Wessex a pastoral nostalgia and retreat: 'Hardy's "pre-industrial world of Wessex" is a return to [the] past and that shows Hardy's disapproval and criticism of society and industry which awfully changed the face of nature. By creating Wessex, Hardy takes shelter in the bosom of nature and rural countries.'¹⁹¹ Heidari's reading of the novel, however, is very selective, and he ignores much in the novels to come to his conclusion that Hardy presents a pastoral utopia in *FMC* without considering Hardy's multifaceted representations of Weatherbury as a complicated society. There are two questions concerning his arguments that is useful for clarifying my Taoist methods. First, Heidari applies to Norcombe Hill in *FMC* a definition of wilderness from Hans Bertens that argues wilderness 'is often represented as a place with a special significance, a place of healing and redemption, or evil and danger where the individual's moral resolve is severely tested'.¹⁹² With Norcombe Hill being wilderness, Heidari argues that Hardy 'puts Gabriel Oak to the test with himself'.¹⁹³ Such a definition is deeply problematic because it presupposes 'significance' as a criterion in the evaluation of 'wilderness', especially for its role in testing the characters' moral or psychological states, which ignores the intrinsic value of Nature and objectifies it for characterisation. Despite his statement of adopting an ecocritical approach and insisting on the intrinsic 'value' of Nature, Heidari's study still presents an anthropocentric view of Nature that it should serve the aim of characterisation and plot. Meanwhile, by approaching the 'environment' in Hardy's Novels of Characters and Environments through Taoist metaphysical *ziran*, it is the connections between humanity and Nature that is emphasised, hence putting characterisation and narratives about Nature in *FMC* at the same footing.

Another question about Haidari's ecocriticism is his analysis of Oak, whom he argues as the symbol of harmony with Nature: 'Oak is the only character in the novel whose actions,

¹⁹⁰ Himan Heidari, 'An Ecocritical Reading of Thomas Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd*', *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences*, 73 (2016), pp.63-64.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.64.

¹⁹² Hans Bertens, *Literary Theory: The Basics*, second ed. (London: Routledge, 2008), p.201.

¹⁹³ Heidari, 'An Ecocritical Reading of Thomas Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd*', p.66.

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experiences, and his lifestyle are so much interwoven in his environment that he is considered as a traditional man and this traditionalistic behaviour, as Hardy shows in the 19th century, is a call for returning to the peace once man had with nature.¹⁹⁴ Rendering Oak as a rather flat character as Nature's son, Heidari's analysis of him neglects the dynamics in Oak's relationship with Nature: it is not an idealised existence that is being emphasised, but a relationship that is always in a flux; Oak is not favoured for his conformity to Nature since Nature is amoral, rather, he is conscious of this and strikes balance in this relationship. For example, regarding Oak's predicting the storm with his knowledge about animals and weather in Chapter 36, Heidari claims that 'these things are all a part of Oak's instinct, in other words, nature is perceived in his personality'.¹⁹⁵ Without considering Oak's occupation and experience, such a claim appears simplistic or even mystifying. Rather than accentuating Oak's natural talents or power, a symbiosis between Oak and other creatures is underlined and the narrator's mocking tone subverts the positions of the shepherd and the sheep and puts them on an equal footing: 'if there was one class of manifestation on this matter that he thoroughly understood, it was the instincts of sheep' and that 'The creeping things seemed to know all about the later rain, but little of the interpolated thunder-storm; whilst the sheep knew all about the thunder-storm and nothing of the later rain.'¹⁹⁶ Compared with these creeping creatures and the sheep, human beings can be as ignorant as Troy who cannot sense the coming storm at all, hence the mocking tone of the narrative demonstrates human limitation and an ecological need for interdependence between the human and non-human worlds. Now a comradeship forms between Oak and the sheep when they face Nature together, and such interdependence and empathy create a symbiosis in *Weatherbury*.

Heidari claims that Oak is a symbol of peace and harmony with nature throughout the novel; he also contrasts Oak, a representative of nature, with Troy, a voice of civilisation, which creates a dichotomy between nature and culture in this novel.¹⁹⁷ This dualistic view affirms the dichotomies of nature/culture and countryside/city in the conventional anthropocentric pastoral genre; also, Heidari's analysis regards characters as static against the changeful environment, which again conforms to 'the pastoral stasis versus the urban changefulness' pattern that understates the complicatedness of rural society and the subtlety of a reciprocity between characters and Nature in Wessex. Kerridge insightfully points out that 'Oak's character has no hard boundaries but is always in flux, always a product of relations with whatever surrounds him.'¹⁹⁸ Oak is depicted not

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., p.66.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p.66.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., p.188.

¹⁹⁷ Heidari, 'An Ecocritical Reading of Thomas Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd*', p.67.

¹⁹⁸ Richard Kerridge, 'Ecological Hardy', in Karla Armbruster and Kathleen R. Wallace eds. *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism* (University of Virginia Press, 2001), p.130.

as a static pastoral semi-god, but a vibrant being in a constant reciprocity with Nature. *Ziran*, with its emphasis on spontaneity and connection, provides a more dynamic and holistic analysis of the characters and their relationships with Nature. Through reviewing Heidari's approach, it becomes clear that *ziran* can be more illuminating for the holism in *FMC*. In the next part, I will demonstrate how *ziran* is helpful for understanding the relational self in these two novels through the symbiosis of Wessex and a secularised religion of Nature in Xiangxi.

1.2 A Relational Self and the Secularised Religion of Nature

Regan concludes that in *FMC* 'the narrative proceeds according to the ways in which people perceive the world around them', and that 'Hardy's preoccupation with ways of seeing is clearly more than a novelty. The visual relationships established early in the novel have a profound structural importance and also carry a weight of social and cultural meaning.'¹⁹⁹ He suggests that this shows Hardy's understanding of what constitutes realism: '[i]nstead of an authoritative, single-minded account of what is true or real, we are much more likely to encounter a conflicting and competing series of impressions.'²⁰⁰ Regan calls it the 'the fallible, tentative nature of human perception'.²⁰¹ Underlying these series of impressions, is a need to connect, or reconnect, with *ziran* in the face of a modernity that alienates humanity from *ziran*. I argue that what Hardy and Shen actually suggest in these novels is a Taoist idea of relational self that resists the alienation of modern society.

Anna L. Peterson explains that the holistic metaphysics of Taoism 'assumes that the underlying reality of all life is continuity of being, in which all things are part of the same larger whole and thus interrelated and interdependent'.²⁰² She further delineates: '[w]hat this suggests for personhood is that the human being is irreducibly contextual, never autonomous in the Western sense. In this light, personal cultivation is coextensive with cultivation of one's environment. To reduce nature to a means not only compromises the creative possibilities of nature but also impoverishes one's own.'²⁰³ This implies a polar instead of a dualistic relationship between Nature and culture 'where each member requires the other as a necessary condition for being what it is'.²⁰⁴ Hardy's 'Novels of Character and Environment' show such a polar relationship between characters and the environment, or in Taoist terms, between humanity and *ziran*, since I define

¹⁹⁹ Regan, 'The Darkening Pastoral', pp.248-49.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p.249.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p.249.

²⁰² Anna L. Peterson, *Being Human: Ethics, Environment, and Our Place in the World* (University of California Press, 2001), p.92.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.93.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.92.

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'environment' here as *ziran*, which includes both the natural and social environments. As Peterson emphasises, Taoism proposes no outsider creator for that continuity of being exists in a metaphysical holism where everything is interrelated.²⁰⁵ Therefore, the conception of *ziran* is a kind of Taoist metaphysics which differs from theology (Christianity in Victorian England) and philosophy (Confucianism in early twentieth-century China). In the introduction I differentiated the Taoist conception of *ziran* from an anthropocentric definition of nature, and in this part, I will further elaborate on *ziran* in terms of its metaphysical implications. Through my demonstration with examples from these two novels, I want to compare a religion of Nature in both Hardy's Wessex and Shen's Xiangxi.

1.2.1 A Religion of Nature in *Fengzi*

In her article 'Romanticism and Ecocriticism', Kate Rigby offers two opposing ideas under the subtitle 'Sacred and Secular': the first comes from M. H. Abrams, who argues that German and English Romanticism entails 'the secularisation of inherited theological ideas and ways of thinking'; while the second, by Stephen Prickett, claims the movement is the reconstruction of religion 'in the aftermath of the divinely guaranteed world order'.²⁰⁶ Rigby agrees with Abrams and she states that the Romantic reclamation of a place for the sacred is interlinked with and a response to the period's secularising tendency. She further explains this tendency through Friedrich Schleiermacher's *On Religion* (1799), in which he suggests: '[t]he universe exists in uninterrupted activity and reveals itself to us in every moment. [...] Thus to accept everything individual as a part of the whole and everything limited as a representation of the infinite is religion.'²⁰⁷ Rigby points out that Schleiermacher looks to artists and writers for a resacralisation against the 'new barbarism' of rationality, in which he values their capacity to bear witness to the phenomenology of religious experience. Cultural desecralisation and the aesthetic responses to it began in the late eighteenth century and gathered speed through the nineteenth and first part of the twentieth century.²⁰⁸ For Shen, religion plays an important part in understanding the ethnic minority's culture and their relationship with Nature in Xiangxi. Schleiermacher's generalised idea about religion is suggestive of a metaphysical pattern rooted in responses to modernity which can be more specifically illuminated by the Taoist idea of *ziran*. Although there are detailed descriptions of the rituals performed by local folk on various occasions, Shen offers a much more secularised definition of local religion in *Fengzi* and his emphasis is on a holism of Nature — a

²⁰⁵ Peterson, *Being Human*, p.92.

²⁰⁶ Kate Rigby, 'Romanticism and Ecocriticism', in Greg Garrard ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism* (Oxford University Press, 2014), p.71.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p.72.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.60-79.

religious conception of Nature's vitality. Nature in Shen's Xiangxi world is energetic and powerful, providing human life with a source of vitality. In *Fengzi*, a yearning and admiration for this vitality is contrasted with the degraded and barren urban society where the young scholar and the old recluse are both repelled.

Ziran, a Taoist conception of Nature as discussed in the Introduction, stresses an interdependence between the human and non-human worlds. Wen Yiduo, a Chinese writer contemporary with Shen, notes in his article 'The Spirit of Taoism' that: 'I believe there must be a predecessor for this philosophy or metaphysics and it is very likely to be a primitive religion with mysterious thoughts, or to be specific, a witchery religion.'²⁰⁹ Zhou Renzheng offers a similar observation of the Chu culture in Xiangxi: '[i]n terms of religion, there is no systematic religious belief in the Chu culture - all of its religious system can be regarded as remnant of primitive fetishism.'²¹⁰ Wen's and Zhou's comments provide a religious connection between Taoism and the Xiangxi local religion. Zhou avers that Shen's religious concern with Nature and beauty shows an emphasis on human internal relations with the non-human world: '[f]or Shen, the so-called "world of god" is Nature's Kingdom of sentience and order. This world does not objectify the self-power but naturalise it. Its basis is a modern pantheism, and it is associated with a primitive animism.'²¹¹ He explains the 'awe for Nature' in Shen's Xiangxi as 'not an external fear in our unconsciousness, but a conscious internal concern. The god of Nature is a source for emotions and self-power, rather than a mysterious object simply external to the self-power.'²¹² Obscuring distinctions among religious terms such as fetishism, pantheism, and animism, Zhou defines Shen's representation of local religion that 'God, for Shen, is neither the almighty god in religions, nor the formidable object in fetishism; it is Nature and natural beings in the human sentient world. In the world of emotions and arts, beings are forms of existence for Nature, as well as the source and destination for emotions.'²¹³ It is not the task of this study to define the theological nature of the local belief system, and Zhou's elaboration confirms this ambiguity in Shen's writing; instead, I argue that the Taoist holistic metaphysics of *ziran* best describes the gist of holism in the Xiangxi novels. Nevertheless, Zhou provides an insight into a 'religion' of Nature in *Fengzi*: the 'conscious internal concern' shown in the 'awe for Nature' brings a metaphysical holism to the foreground of the novel.

²⁰⁹ Wen Yiduo 闻一多, 'The Spirit of Taoism' '道教的精神', *Complete Works of Wen Yiduo* 《闻一多全集》 (Hubei People's Publishing House 湖北人民出版社, 1993), p.143.

²¹⁰ Zhou Renzheng 周仁政, *Shen Congwen and the Chu Culture* 《巫覡人文 - 沈从文与巫楚文化》 (Yuelu Press 岳麓出版社, 2005), p.21. Chu 楚 (704 BCE-223 BCE) was a kingdom in South China and Hunan was a centre in it since the middle Spring and Autumn period.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.68.

²¹² *Ibid.*, p.68.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, p.68.

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Zhou's idea of the interaction between self-power and Nature is in line with Peterson's criticism about the relational self in Hardy's novels: for both, the border between humanity and Nature obscures, thus a holistic view that humanity is relational to Nature is presented. In *Fengzi*, the local squire states that the Xiangxi religion of Nature is not superstitious because of its different conception of god from that of monotheistic religions.²¹⁴ Zhou notes that this religion of Nature is not superstition, since its emphasis is not on an external supernatural power but an internal intuitive belief in the interdependence between the human and non-human worlds. He further compares this religion of Nature to a primitive fetishism of the Chu culture, arguing that god or god's will is not treated as an external and absolute will, thus this belief is not as superstitious as monotheism.²¹⁵ I propose that rather than fetishism, the religion of Nature in Xiangxi novels can be better understood through a comparison with the Taoist conception of *ziran*.

Fengzi was written at a time when Shen was hindered by the Sino-Japanese war from returning to his hometown, and he was living with his youngest sister in Qingdao, a city in Northern China, where she was educated. It is evident that a contrast between his rural education and his young sister's urban education also contributes to *Fengzi*. The title of this novella, 'Fengzi', is the name of a young woman whom the scholar meets during his walk, and it is also a nickname for 'phoenix', which reminds us of Shen's hometown, Fenghuang (the Phoenix Town). These details indicate a biographical tendency, and Shen's conscious re-examination of his sense of place in Xiangxi and of a belonging to that culture, as Kinkley comments about Shen: '[a]uthenticity of self in his works was joined, then overshadowed, by authenticity of place.'²¹⁶ Ling Yu argues that Shen builds his work upon his life experience rather than some learned theories because he is suspicious of theories, which stems from the large gap between what he experiences and what he learns.²¹⁷ Shen witnessed a failure of urban education that he believed to have led to an inner suppression of humanity which in his imagination of a native Xiangxi is full of vitality from Nature.²¹⁸ Instead of an anthropological record of the religious system in Xiangxi, Shen secularises the local religion in *Fengzi* based on his own experience and his idealism about literature. His emphasis on this vitality of the Xiangxi culture originates from his rural upbringing and the influence of Western theories that reevaluate primitive cultures at the turn of the twentieth century. According to Kinkley, Shen was influenced by Chinese scholars who introduced Western anthropology and psychology to China in the early 1920s, and that

²¹⁴ Zhang ed., *Complete Works*, Volume VII, p.164.

²¹⁵ Zhou, *Shen Congwen and the Chu Culture*, p.92.

²¹⁶ Kinkley, *The Odyssey of Shen Congwen*, p.111.

²¹⁷ Ling Yu, *From the Border Town to the World*, p.95.

²¹⁸ See Shen's reflective essays 'My Education 我的教育' (Zhang ed., *Complete Works*, Volume V, pp.200-28) and 'An Untamed Zebra 无从驯服的斑马' (Zhang ed., *Complete Works*, Volume XXVII, pp.351-402).

Influence from Western ethnography is also evident in Shen's acceptance of the idea that all art had its origins in the needs of ancient primitive man (the original outlet being primitive religion), and that art from contemporary tribal societies was therefore in the mainstream of world art. Shen went on in the 1930's to equate religion and art functionally, and even to name art as the successor to religion after the Death of God.²¹⁹

Shen asserts that he would write a praise of god in the age of the death of god.²²⁰ Obviously what he achieves in his Xiangxi novels is a world with god, but this 'god' is not simply the gods and goddesses in the local religion but more of a metaphysical and vital Nature. Shen homogenises the idea of religion in his novels into a celebration of local pantheistic beliefs and an interdependence between humanity and Nature, which I define as a religion of Nature. In *Fengzi*, Shen demonstrates his commitment to this idea through the dialogues between carefully juxtaposed characters from different backgrounds, who nevertheless share a yearning for the rural sacred.

The first three chapters of *Fengzi* are about the young scholar's experience in the city, during which he encounters Fengzi and her companion on the beach and becomes friends with the old man whose house he regularly passes by; the other seven chapters are the old man's memories about Xiangxi based on conversations between the young scholar and the old man, and by the end of Chapter 10, readers are still held in the old man's reminiscence which endows the story with a dream-like feature. In Chapter 7, the old man recalls his discussion with the local squire on their way to the mine. They observe the dew on a spider's web in the early morning and cannot find the right word to describe this 'divine' scene. The squire says that god creates beauty but makes humankind invent their own means to praise it, and from a failure of language the inability of humankind is exposed. The engineer asks for an explanation about the apparent contradiction between the squire's belief in Nature as god and a belief in science, since he invites him to improve the mining industry through modern technologies. The squire answers that there is no contradiction at all:

The meaning of god for us is not as rigid as that in Christianity. God means Nature here: everything that is naturally created instead of artificially. God is usually reasonable, tolerant, and beautiful. Those things that cannot be achieved by human beings are regarded as god's achievements; those within human capabilities should be done by humankind. However clever human intelligence can be, there is no interference with god's power. Science can only be confronted by superstition - either science be impeded by superstition or science destroys superstition. Our god is not superstitious: it does not resist knowledge or science. Science may create a rainbow over the sky, but it is only because that human intelligence improves as a historical progress [to be able

²¹⁹ Kinkley, *The Odyssey of Shen Congwen*, p.112.

²²⁰ 'Water Cloud', in *Complete Works* ed. by Zhang Zhaohe, Volume XII, p.128.

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to understand the scientific mechanism of rainbow-forming]. Understanding how the rainbow comes into being does not decrease the wonder of its existence without human power. God should be very agreeable and happy that humankind can imitate its creation.²²¹

This points out two significant aspects of the Xiangxi religion in Shen's novels: first, Nature is regarded as sacred; second, the local religion is more of a loose set of pantheistic beliefs in Nature than a dogmatic system. The engineer goes on asserting that science will ultimately destroy natural religion, but the squire believes that god will remain since human beings always need an unknown force to submit to. The squire also states that the disruption caused by science to religion will only happen to urban people, because they negate the rule of god before they can fully apply science. Their discussion ends with another observation of the wildflowers by the road, both awed by the sacred beauty.

In Chapter 2, the young scholar overhears a conversation between Fengzi and her companion on the topic of 'beauty'. The two are sitting on the beach at eventide, and Fengzi's companion expresses his awe at such a beautiful scene: 'even a pagan cannot help but think of god on this occasion'.²²² Fengzi, estimated by the young scholar to be no more than twenty years old, only laughs at his solemn statement, and the man complains about her taking Nature for granted. She asks: '[b]ut why should beauty be astonishing? I am not astonished by anything about it. Everything is natural and in an eternal order, why should one be astonished?'²²³ Her companion exclaims: '[e]verything is natural and that should be more astonishing! Why should it be natural? In whose power do these symmetry, harmony, and unification lie? It is in the power of Nature. But what is a proper expression to describe its virtue except for "god"?'²²⁴ The man also asserts that the integrity and justice of Nature are beyond human intelligence and forbid human interference.²²⁵ He explains that it is the task of philosophy to distinguish god's rule from human power and that science takes the human part into control - this reminds us of the local squire's explanation about religion and science. Although the identity of Fengzi's companion is unclear, it is obvious that his view of Nature is more in line with a native Xiangxi perspective because it emulates a direct representation of the native perspective in the local squire; and later we learn that Fengzi is related to her companion and that the old engineer knows Fengzi, thus both Fengzi and her companion may also have a Xiangxi origin. Ling Yu states in the preface to Zhou's book that Shen inherits the natural mythology in Xiangxi culture rather than the historical mythology in

²²¹ Zhang ed., *Complete Works*, Volume VII, p.123.

²²² *Ibid.*, p.88.

²²³ *Ibid.*, p.89.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.89.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.90-91.

Han culture.²²⁶ Natural mythology, in other words, is a religion of Nature. Ling's comment confirms that the Xiangxi novels subvert the submissive position of Nature in the modern urban civilisation and elevate it to an equal importance with human society.

1.2.2 A Symbiosis in *Far from the Madding Crowd*

A comparison made by F. B. Pinion between Hardy and D. H. Lawrence claims that both of them believe in 'pagan forms of religion [that] are superior to Christianity in creating vital links between the material cosmos and the human psyche'.²²⁷ This comment echoes the quote from Hardy's literary notebook in the epigraph in pinpointing Hardy's concern with religious feelings towards Nature which is complicated by his relationship with Christianity. For Hardy's relationship with theology, Norman Vance summarises that Hardy 'had grown up with the Evangelical habit of Bible reading and serious reflection which never left him and which led to complex but by no means wholly negative engagements with traditional theology and institutional Christianity'.²²⁸ But such an early influence is manifested in a subtle and sometimes contradictory attitude in his literature. James Russell Perkin attributes Hardy's 'contradictory set of attitudes' towards Christianity to three components: firstly, Hardy's intellectual rejection of the supernatural claims of the Christian religion; secondly, his censure of the institutional church for its lack of charity despite the ethical dimensions of Christianity; thirdly, 'Hardy had a strong affection for the Church of England as a cultural and social institution, even though in his novels he often portrayed its failure to live up to that role.'²²⁹ Perkin categorises Hardy into a group of late Victorian writers distinguished by a duality in their attitudes towards Christianity, including Walter Pater and Mary Augusta Ward:

each of these novelists writes as an insider, as someone intimately acquainted with the theological disputes that were rending the Church of England, and as someone affected personally by them. They all take for granted the existence of liberal biblical hermeneutics in a way that was not possible for writers born earlier in the century. Furthermore, each writes with a strong dose of scepticism, especially when it comes to the other-worldly and the miraculous elements of Christianity.²³⁰

²²⁶ Ling Yu in Zhou, *Shen Congwen and the Chu Culture*, p.3.

²²⁷ F. B. Pinion, *A D. H. Lawrence Companion: Life, Thought and Work* (London: Macmillan, 1978), p.81.

²²⁸ Norman Vance, 'George Eliot and Hardy', in David Jasper, Elisabeth Jay, and Andrew Hass eds. *The Oxford Handbook of English Literature and Theology* (Oxford Handbooks, 2007), p.484. On Hardy's relationship with theology, Timothy Hands's book *Thomas Hardy: Distracted Preacher?* (Springer, 1989) offers a thorough study of Hardy's religious life and argues for Hardy's paradoxical and conflicted relationship with theology; Jan Jedrzejewski's *Thomas Hardy and the Church* (Springer, 1996) traces the evolution of Hardy's attitudes towards Christianity and elaborates on the tension between Hardy's emotional attachment to the Church and his rejection of its ontological essence.

²²⁹ James Russell Perkin, *Theology and the Victorian Novel* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), p.162.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.160.

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According to Perkin, these writers are 'preoccupied with theological questions and have a world view that is in some sense fundamentally religious', in contrast to the early modernists who are 'fundamentally skeptical secular writers', including Henry James and Joseph Conrad.²³¹ The metaphysical basis of Christianity is widely challenged in Hardy's times by the newly developed disciplines of natural science and a social debate led by Victorian sages such as Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin, and Matthew Arnold. Vance comments on Hardy's typical ambivalence that '[i]f he was not a conventional believer he was not a conventional unbeliever either, and he could be at least as sceptical of scientific rationalism and the positivist "Religion of Humanity" as he was of institutional Christianity.'²³² In later novels like *Tess* and *Jude*, Hardy creates a literature of overt doubt, and many studies have been done about Hardy's relationship with theology based particularly upon his later novels and poems (including his long epic poem *The Dynasts*).²³³ Perkin accurately points out that '[t]here is a persistent trend in the interpretation of Hardy that sees the instinctive life, or the life close to nature, or a pagan life - these terms all describe something similar - as Hardy's ideal, to be opposed to the atomistic life of urban and industrial society and to the life-denying laws of Christianity.'²³⁴ This ideal instinctive life can be compared with the metaphysical *ziran* in Taoism for which Nature is a natural institutional force against the artificial institutions of dogmatic religions and the modern society. It is not an aim of this thesis to delve into Hardy's critique of Christianity, and my focus is on his early novels because in these novels Wessex as a symbiotic wholeness is a more salient theme than in his later novels.²³⁵

Chapter 2 of *FMC* introduces Oak's daily practices. It opens with a kind of music created by Nature: the sounds of different plants and birds 'grumbling', 'moan', 'simmered and boiled', 'rattled against the trunks with smart taps' - a rather grotesque scene, but after all it is December Wessex on a hill.²³⁶ What impresses us is the detailed depiction of the different movements of plants in a windy winter and the various sounds they make:

²³¹ Ibid., p.161.

²³² Vance, 'George Eliot and Hardy', p.484.

²³³ For example, G. Glen Wickens's book *Thomas Hardy, Monism and the Carnival Tradition: The One and the Many in The Dynasts* (University of Toronto Press, 2002) locates *The Dynasts* in the context of the monistic debate in relation to Hardy's readings of monistic philosophers. Norman Vance's article 'George Eliot and Hardy' (2007) and Chapter 6 'Thomas Hardy's Apocryphal Gospels' of James Russell Perkin's book (2009) offer analyses of *Tess* and *Jude* to demonstrate Hardy's dealings with the religious crisis in the Victorian age.

²³⁴ Perkin, *Theology and the Victorian Novel*, p.165.

²³⁵ For a detailed discussion of Hardy's relationship with philosophy, see Robert Schweik, 'The influence of religion, science, and philosophy on Hardy's writings', in Daniel Kramer ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Hardy* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp.54-72, and, Phillip Mallett, 'Hardy and philosophy', in Keith Wilson ed. *A companion to Thomas Hardy* (John Wiley & Sons, 2009), pp.21-35.

²³⁶ Schweik ed., *FMC*, p.11.

The thin grasses, more or less coating the hill, were touched by the wind in breezes of differing powers, and almost of differing natures - one rubbing the blades heavily, another raking them piercingly, another brushing them like a soft broom. The instinctive act of humankind was to stand and listen, and learn how the trees on the right and the trees on the left wailed or chanted to each other in the regular antiphonies of a cathedral choir; how hedges and other shapes to leeward then caught the note, lowering it to the tenderest sob; and how the hurrying gust then plunged into the south, to be heard no more.²³⁷

The narrator delineates a subtle botanical symphony. It is likely, however, that the different pieces of the 'musical instruments' may only be identifiable to him. For the urban readers who lack this kind of rural experience, it can be much easier for them to imagine the music as a 'solo' by the wind. Obviously, the narrator is experienced enough to be alert to these subtle sounds. Moreover, the comparison of this botanical symphony to 'a cathedral choir' implies the harmony and divinity associated with Nature from the narrator's native perspective. By suggesting an 'instinctive' act of standing and listening to the music, the narrator appeals to the readers that the heightened senses illustrated here should be expanded to a larger population, or, the narrator is implying that this kind of instinctive act of humankind is becoming elusive.

In another episode, Hardy describes the constellation in a night sky, which is within Oak's knowledge but beyond most of his rustic fellows as well as the readers, and the narration turns into an abstract thinking about the universe: 'The sky was clear - remarkably clear - and the twinkling of all the stars seemed to be but throbs of one body, timed by a common pulse.'²³⁸ 'Body' and 'pulse' endow a touch of life to the stars, which indicates holistic metaphysics that integrate the universe with all beings on earth. Deep inside this feeling of holism lies a human feeling of awe towards Nature. After such an intimate moment of shared destiny between the human and non-human worlds, the narrator distances these rural sensibilities from the 'civilised' ones:

The poetry of motion is a phrase much in use, and to enjoy the epic form of that gratification it is necessary to stand on a hill at a small hour of the night, and, having first expanded with a sense of difference from the mass of civilised mankind, who are dreamwapt and disregardful of all such proceedings at this time, long and quietly watch your stately progress through the stars. After such a nocturnal reconnoitre it is hard to get back to earth, and to believe that the consciousness of such majestic speeding is derived from a tiny human frame.²³⁹

²³⁷ Ibid., p.12.

²³⁸ Ibid., p.12.

²³⁹ Ibid., p.12.

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This narration quite appropriately paraphrases the title of this novel - far from the madding crowd ('the mass of civilised mankind'): the novel depicts a reciprocal relationship between humanity and environments in Weatherbury. This episode reminds us of a similar tone in the conversation between Fengzi's companion and the local squire, which shows a disagreement over and considerable worry about the disregarding attitude towards Nature in modern urban society. Hardy shows through Oak what he means by 'a regard to Nature':

Being a man not without a frequent consciousness that there was some charm in this life he led, he stood still after looking at the sky as a useful instrument, and regarded it in an appreciative spirit, as a work of art superlatively beautiful. For a moment he seemed impressed with the speaking loneliness of the scene, or rather with the complete abstraction from all its compass of the sights and sounds of man. Human shapes, interferences, troubles, and joys were all as if they were not, and there seemed to be on the shaded hemisphere of the globe no sentient being save himself; he could fancy them all gone round to the sunny side.²⁴⁰

Oak appears here to be more connected with the universe than with human society. There is a sharp contrast between the triviality of a human dimension and the immensity of the universe. Hardy uses an oxymoron to stress this impression - a loneliness that is 'speaking' its presence and an abstraction of human senses which is 'complete': human existence is so limited, yet it achieves a kind of integration with the universe. Furthermore, the macroscopic view of the last sentence transcends an anthropocentric view and arrives at a metaphysical connection between human fate and the universe. The whole scene is sacred for a revelation of Oak's relational self to his environment, the universe, rather than a dependence on an outside creator. This shows a similar worldview with that of *Fengzi*: it is through Nature that human sentience approaches divinity and only by integration with Nature can humanity be elevated from triviality to wholeness.

Symbiosis between the human and non-human worlds is another feature of Nature in *FMC*. In Chapter 22 'The Great Barn and the Sheep-Shearers', many metaphors that are based on a comparison between the human and non-human worlds can be found:

It was the first day of June, and the sheep-shearing season culminated, the landscape, even to the leanest pasture, being all health and colour. Every green was young, every pore was open, and every stalk was swollen with racing currents of juice. God was palpably present in the country, and the devil had gone with the world to town. Flossy catkins of the later kinds, fern-sprouts like bishops' croziers, the square-headed moschatel, the odd cuckoo-pint, - like an apoplectic saint in a niche of malachite, - snow-white ladies'-smocks, the toothwort, approximating to human flesh, the enchanter's night-shade, and the black-petaled doleful-bells, were among the quainter objects of the vegetable world in and about Weatherbury at this teeming time; and of the

²⁴⁰ Ibid., p.15.

animal, the metamorphosed figures of Mr. Jan Coggan, the master-shearer [...].²⁴¹

In order to present a religion of Nature, the narrator relates the non-human world to human religious domains: fern-sprouts with bishops' croziers, moschatel and cuckoo-pint with a saint in a niche, and the shearers' metamorphosed figures. These descriptions transcend the boundaries between the human, animal, and vegetable worlds, and achieve a symbiosis among all beings, and make an impression that human sentience and empathy are shared by all of them.

For example, Bathsheba is closely related to animals in two episodes. The first one is when she checks the farm one night and the features of the cow herd are depicted in great detail, and then the narrator reveals:

Above each of these a still keener vision suggested a brown forehead and two staring though not unfriendly eyes, and above all a pair of whitish crescent-shaped horns like two particularly new moons, an occasional stolid "moo!" proclaiming beyond the shade of a doubt that these phenomena were the features and persons of Daisy, Whitefoot, Bonny-lass, Jolly-O, Spot, Twinkle-eye, etc., etc. - the respectable dairy of Devon cows belonging to Bathsheba aforesaid.²⁴²

The moment when readers meet the 'staring though not unfriendly eyes' of the cows through their imagination, a connection between sentient beings is established; and the names of these animals imply diverse individualities and an intimate relationship between Bathsheba and them. These subtle details decrease human superiority and heighten animal sentience, as Ivan Kreilkamp asserts: the care and love shown for an animal in *FMC* becomes 'an embodiment of a fragile nonhuman subjectivity within an anthropocentric society and its narrative forms'.²⁴³ The second episode is when Bathsheba, having learnt of Troy's betrayal and Fanny's tragic death, sleeps near a swamp for the night and wakes up in a non-human world:

It was with a freshened existence and a cooler brain that, a long time afterwards, she became conscious of some interesting proceedings which were going on in the trees above her head and around.

A coarse-throated chatter was the first sound.

It was a sparrow just waking.

Next: 'Chee-weeze-weeze-weeze!' from another retreat.

It was a finch.

²⁴¹ Ibid., pp.112-13.

²⁴² Ibid., p.126.

²⁴³ Ivan Kreilkamp, 'Pitying the Sheep in *Far from the Madding Crowd*', *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 42, no. 3, 2009, pp.474-81.

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Third: 'Tink-tink-tink-tink-a-chink!' from the hedge.

It was a robin.

'Chuck-chuck-chuck!' overhead.

A squirrel.

Then, from the road, 'With my ra-ta-ta, and my rum-tum-tum!'

It was a ploughboy.

[. . .]

She looked further around. Day was just dawning, and beside its cool air and colours her heated actions and resolves of the night stood out in lurid contrast. She perceived that in her lap, and clinging to her hair, were red and yellow leaves which had come down from the tree and settled silently upon her during her partial sleep. Bathsheba shook her dress to get rid of them, when multitudes of the same family lying round about her rose and fluttered away in the breeze thus created, 'like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing.'²⁴⁴

In the previous chapter Bathsheba wishes to 'speak to someone stronger than herself, and so get strength to sustain her surmised position with dignity and her lurking doubts with stoicism', and the next morning she finds her company in Nature.²⁴⁵ The bird's waking sounds and the fallen leaves surround the heartbroken heroine naturally, as if nothing has happened, and at that moment it is this indifference of Nature that heals Bathsheba: a realisation that life has to go on even with a broken heart. The scene shows a symbiosis among beings in the sense that they are all in their own order integrated within Nature.

Indeed, there are episodes in this novel in which human emotions are projected onto Nature, but on the one hand they can be viewed as narrative strategies to illuminate a reciprocity between characters and environments; on the other hand, as Hardy emphasises about the half-dream essence of Wessex, these human emotional projections constitute such dreamy elements of the novel. For instance, Boldwood experiences a different night after he receives Bathsheba's Valentine letter: 'The moon shone to-night, and its light was not of a customary kind. His window admitted only a reflection of its rays, and the pale sheen had that reversed direction which snow gives, coming upward and lighting up his ceiling in an unnatural way, casting shadows in strange places, and putting lights where shadows had used to be.'²⁴⁶ Rosemarie Morgan comments on this that Hardy mirrors 'the inner world of his characters in external forms in nature'.²⁴⁷ Obviously this narrative implies Boldwood's mood in the sense that the lights appear in a strange way for

²⁴⁴ Schweik ed., *FMC*, p.232.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.226.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.81.

²⁴⁷ Morgan, *Student Companion to Thomas Hardy*, p.38.

Boldwood which accentuates his abnormal emotions, and an analogy can be made between this and Boldwood's relationship with Bathsheba which is stirred by Bathsheba's letter and directed by Boldwood's fantasy at a Romantic turn. 'Then the dawn drew on. The full power of the clear heaven was not equal to that of a cloudy sky at noon', and such dim light continues next morning:

It was one of the usual slow sunrises of this time of the year, and the sky, pure violet in the zenith, was leaden to the northward, and murky to the east, where, over the snowy down or ewe-lease on Weatherbury Upper Farm, and apparently resting upon the ridge, the only half of the sun yet visible burnt rayless, like a red and flameless fire shining over a white hearthstone. The whole effect resembled a sunset as childhood resembles age.²⁴⁸

Here the description is contrasted with the previous ones in the tone: the light 'was not of a customary kind' and cast 'in an unnatural way' during the night, which is more attuned to Boldwood's excited emotional state; but now the narrator announces that the rayless sun is 'one of the usual sunrises of this time of the year', diminishing the peculiarity of the scene by connecting it with Nature and creating a world that is larger than Boldwood's psyche. Such connection between the human and non-human worlds is exactly why *ziran*, the self-so of the universe which penetrates and therefore connects everything, can contribute to the understanding of Hardy's 'Novels of Character and Environment' by emphasising a holism between characters and *ziran*. Immediately after this scene of the sunrise, the narrative turns to Boldwood's view again:

Boldwood was listlessly noting how the frost had hardened and glazed the surface of the snow, till it shone in the red eastern light with the polish of marble; how, in some portions of the slope, withered grass-bents, encased in icicles, bristled through the smooth wan coverlet in the twisted and curved shapes of old Venetian glass; and how the footprints of a few birds, which had hopped over the snow whilst it lay in the state of a soft fleece, were now frozen to a short permanency.²⁴⁹

The whole scene is dismal. The link between sunrise and sunset indicates a beginning as an end, which is parallel with Bathsheba's fake proposal. Boldwood's observation is contradictory: on the one hand, he is said to be 'listlessly noting'; on the other, great details are presented in his vision which are unnoticeable to careless eyes, thus the vision betrays Boldwood's anxiety as well as excitement on receiving Bathsheba's proposal: he is too disturbed to remain listless inside although he appears so, and he fixes his heightened attention on the non-human world in order to keep calm outside. Readers are allowed to detect his secret feelings first through this seemingly inconsistent narration and later through his eager action to check whether there is a

²⁴⁸ Schweik ed., *FMC*, p.81.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.82.

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further letter from Bathsheba. This also reminds us of the episode when Bathsheba wakes amid the swamp with animals and plants after her emotional turmoil because of its similar narrative strategy that shifts readers' attention between her psychology and Nature. Kerridge notes this kind of 'turn of attention' in Wessex novels: '[t]he Romantic subjectivity of the lover of natural history is here taken to an uncomfortable extreme. More usually, the turn of attention to nature in the form of small-scale life at the margins of human affairs brings relief from the pressure of events. This is the naturalist's pastoral: a diversion from the unhappiness that burdens "higher existence"'.²⁵⁰ This comment puts Nature in a submissive position to human feelings and a naturalist plot and regards the observations of a non-human world as a Romantic projection of human feelings, which brings relief or diversion from human affairs; but Kerridge ignores the triviality of human dimensions presented in this novel and the symbiosis of Wessex that connects the human and non-human worlds. The 'higher existence' that Kerridge refers to here can be found in Hardy's own words as follows:

A woeful fact - that the human race is too extremely developed for its corporeal conditions, the nerves being evolved to an activity abnormal in such an environment. Even the higher animals are in excess in this respect. It may be questioned if Nature, or what we call Nature, so far back as when she crossed the line from invertebrates to vertebrates, did not exceed her mission. This planet does not supply the materials for happiness to higher existences.²⁵¹

What Hardy means by 'higher existences' which are burdened with unhappiness is not a superiority of human beings but a complication of happiness for humanity under the impact of human societies and cultures, which, like the worries of Fengzi's companion and the young scholar in *Fengzi*, reflects an alienation of humanity from Nature in the modern world, as represented by characters such as Fengzi and Troy.

Fengzi, as the only character that is named in the novel, can be viewed as an epitome of dislocated humanity: she inclines to the urban society but clearly obtains certain connections with a rural homeland, and the authorial gesture of only naming her among all the characters symbolically attributes an individuating effect to her, and her incompatible speeches with other characters also contribute to this alienation. From a Taoist perspective, naming is against the Tao which is nameless and cannot be named. Thus, being the only one with a name in the novel, Fengzi stands out as a lonely figure against the nostalgic mode of the novel.

Similarly, Troy is portrayed as a lonely figure in *FMC*, especially with his red army uniform and reckless behaviours distinguishing him from the rural communities. Besides his occupation and an

²⁵⁰ Kerridge, 'Ecological Hardy', p.135.

²⁵¹ Millgate ed., *The Life*, p.227.

evident lack of interest in farming even after he marries Bathsheba, another trait that alienates him from the countryfolk is his eloquence: 'He spoke fluently and unceasingly. He could in this way be one thing and seem another: for instance, he could speak of love and think of dinner; call on the husband to look at the wife; be eager to pay and intend to owe.'²⁵² It is with the help of this talent of language that Troy woos and cheats both Fanny and Bathsheba, which is linked to his rashness that causes many tragic turning points of the story: Fanny and Bathsheba are wooed by him and abandoned; it is the realisation that she might have indirectly killed Fanny and her unborn child because of her marriage with Troy makes Bathsheba give up Troy totally; it is Troy's impulse to win back Bathsheba's love and farm after his departure and his sudden appearance at Boldwood's Christmas party that leads to his death and Boldwood's madness. The final resolution in Bathsheba and Oak's marriage seems more like a meek resignation due to Bathsheba's depression after such tragedies. Therefore, Troy is always associated with blandishments, betrayals, and conflicts throughout the novel, just as the narrator comments: 'Idiosyncrasy and vicissitude had combined to stamp Sergeant Troy as an exceptional being.'²⁵³

For Penelope Vigar, Troy has the sky-like character in contrast to the earth-like Oak, and she describes the disparity between Oak and Troy as 'the warring of the sky and the earth'.²⁵⁴ Vigar's arguments, however, are largely based on a symbolic character analysis, 'a pattern of imagery' for the differences between Oak and Troy, which propels her to declare that *FMC* is the first of Hardy's novels 'to show consistently the extended relationship between the mental and the physical states, between the worlds of absolute reality and imagined truth'.²⁵⁵ It is questionable that Hardy ever believes in such notions as 'reality' or 'truth' in the first place, but here I want to highlight that the dualism in Vigar's criticism may not help with acknowledging the ambiguity in Hardy's narrative, especially in understanding the holism in *FMC*. If we approach it through a Taoist perspective, however, the contrast between Troy and Oak is more properly viewed as Troy's alienation from the rural community, being against *ziran*: not only Oak, but all the countryfolks are attached to the Tao of a natural spontaneity in Wessex, and Troy's alienation from the symbiosis makes him stray away from the Tao which leads to catastrophes. The symbiosis in the Wessex and Xiangxi novels can be better understood through a holistic conception of Taoist *ziran* that sets a relational self to Nature. The distinctive pastoral imagination of such a symbiosis serves as a criticism of the alienation of man from Nature in modern society, which I will specify in the next part.

²⁵² Schweik ed., *FMC*, p.132.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.130.

²⁵⁴ Penelope Vigar, 'A Distinct Development in Artistic Vision', in Schweik ed. *FMC*, p.429.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.429-30.

1.3 A Reconceptualisation of Pastoralism

The title of *FMC* seems to encourage a certain pastoral imagination and retreat. It is inspired by Thomas Gray's poem 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard' (1750). Gray mourns the death of his friend Richard West in the poem and celebrates the integrity and value of the rural society:

Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife,
Their sober wishes never learn'd to stray;
Along the cool sequester'd vale of life
They kept the noiseless tenour of their way.²⁵⁶

Like Gray's poem, *FMC* is a counter response to a contemporary patronising ignorance about the reality of rural society, and one major kind of such arrogance is to assume a pastoral stasis in contrast to all the changes in the industrialised and modernised cities. In 'The Dorsetshire Labourer', Hardy shows his consistent concern about the misrepresentations of rural society which depict it as immune to changes:

That seclusion and immutability, which was so bad for their pockets, was an unrivalled fosterer of their personal charm in the eyes of those whose experiences had been less limited. But the artistic merit of their old condition is scarcely a reason why they should have continued in it when other communities were marching on so vigorously towards uniformity and mental equality. It is only the old story that progress and picturesqueness do not harmonise. They are losing their individuality, but they are widening the range of their ideas, and gaining in freedom. It is too much to expect them to remain stagnant and old-fashioned for the pleasure of romantic spectators.²⁵⁷

In this passage, Hardy firstly confirms the seclusion of rural communities in Dorsetshire and the 'artistic merit of their old condition', but he quickly points out that such artistic concerns would and should not hinder the changes that these communities were experiencing. Michael Millgate comments on Hardy's attitude shown in this article that 'although he profoundly regrets the isolated, static, integrated rural life that he once knew, he is by no means the impassioned advocate of a return to a Golden Age'.²⁵⁸ Hardy emphasises that it is already outdated to think that 'progress and picturesqueness do not harmonise', implying a possibility of being progressive and 'picturesque' at the same time. Although the word 'picturesqueness' here is heavily loaded with an outsider's point of view which alienates Hardy's voice from his fellow countryfolk and

²⁵⁶ *Poems by Thomas Gray* (Dublin: printed by Thomas Ewing, 1771), p.54. Reproduction of original from the Harvard University Houghton Library.

²⁵⁷ Thomas Hardy, 'The Dorsetshire Labourer' (1883) in Roger Lowman, *Thomas Hardy's 'The Dorsetshire Labourer' and Wessex* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2005), pp.64-65.

²⁵⁸ Michael Millgate, *Thomas Hardy: his career as a novelist* (Springer, 1994), p.220.

joins him with the 'romantic spectators', the overall tone is affirmative of a less-secluded rural society which maintains its virtues. Millgate claims that Hardy is wiser than merely accepting the modernised changes happening to the rural communities: '[h]e realises not only that the pressures making for change are inexorable - wiser in this, perhaps, than more recent writers who have felt that the nineteenth-century process of urbanisation and of rural depopulation could somehow have been prevented or arrested - but that the changes themselves are not without their beneficial aspects.'²⁵⁹ Hardy deplores the loss of their individuality, but at the same time he sees their gaining of vision and freedom, which contrasts with the romantic spectators' pastoralisation of the rural communities for artistic pleasures.

Indeed, Hardy's *Wessex* and Shen's *Xiangxi* demonstrate some pastoral patterns, but they are adopted for a combinative purpose of a realistic representation of the rural life and an idealistic representation of a sense of place, echoing Hardy's half real and half dream style. The pastoralism in these novels needs a reconceptualisation to avoid a romantic conception of Nature in the criticism, since it is obviously against both writers' concern with representing the complexity of rural society. Robin Magowan observes that 'one might claim that there are as many definitions as there are critics of pastoral,' pointing out the slippery meanings of pastoralism.²⁶⁰ At the same time, he aptly summarises that 'pastoral is a narrative form seeking to project within certain arbitrary limits a vision of the good life'.²⁶¹ By 'arbitrary limits', Magowan further explains: 'pastoral as a form involves a recognition of limits - of space and time - within which that ideal of limited contentment which pastoral knows as the happy mean can be practically realised'.²⁶² Thus, Magowan's elaboration on pastoralism involves a key recognition of the limits that the pastoral ideal establishes itself within. More specifically, Magowan delineates the temporal limits of pastoralism that 'while it is one of the cardinal aims of pastoral to give value to the past (antiquity, old age), it does this through the medium of the constantly changing present seen as a last lingering of an infinitely distant Golden Age'.²⁶³ For Magowan, not only the value system of the pastoral ideal but also the distance at which such an ideal is observed are vital elements of pastoralism, as he further explains: '[t]he pastoral triumph over the twin facts of distance and time is, to be sure, a triumph of the art of illusion in the power of memory to ignore those

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.220.

²⁶⁰ Robin Magowan, 'Fromentin and Jewett: Pastoral Narrative in the Nineteenth Century', *Comparative Literature* 16.4 (1964), p.331.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.333.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, p.333.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.333.

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elements of regret and instead take pleasure in its ability to resurrect life, see the old confirmed in the abiding present.²⁶⁴

Magowan argues that pastoralism functions as a mode of visioning a good life which is ultimately the narrator's illusion and that the narrator should be aligned with the readers as outsiders. Addressing their distinct position, Magowan points out that they possess a compounded sense of a living antiquity: 'since as a nineteenth-century man he possessed a sense of the past, he was able, unlike his predecessors, to compound his physical isolation with a sense of being isolated in a backwater of history, a region in which the comparative isolation of its setting had preserved intact the habits and manners of a much earlier age'; however, he emphasises that 'this vision, this sense of a living antiquity, belonged strictly to the narrator. It was his creation, his illusion'.²⁶⁵ As for the rural characters, Magowan notices that: '[t]he people living there, the pastoral folk themselves, had naturally no such feelings and were apt to regard their lot matter-of-factly as the only one possible. This lack of perspective could in itself become a theme of pastoral comedy when it took the form of rustic literal-mindedness and so-called realism.'²⁶⁶ We can read such lack of perspective in the representation of the rural folk in *Wessex* and *Xiangxi*. Shen mentions his use of such 'pastoral humour' for 'a reconciliation of human affairs' in the preface to *Long River*, in order to alleviate the bitter impression his works may leave on readers when 'analysing the reality and dealing with the problems faithfully'.²⁶⁷ Magowan puts the narrator and reader of the pastoral in the more advantageous position of having more perspectives, both of the past and the present, than the characters in the story, and declares that '[i]t is this ability to achieve perspective that makes pastoral of all the forms of nonpersonal literature closest to criticism.'²⁶⁸ Building on Magowan's analysis of perspectives in the pastoral genre, I suggest that the pastoralism in the *Wessex* and *Xiangxi* novels makes use of a myriad of perspectives to present a relational self to the environments, and such relativity between the human and non-human worlds is a significant aspect of the Taoist conception of *ziran*, thus the pastoralism in both novels can be interpreted through *ziran*.

Another important kind of perspective that is salient in these two novels is from the hidden observers, which offers another medium through which readers can compare how a relational self is formed. On this, Millgate notes that *FMC* is 'full of conversations overheard and meetings accidentally or deliberately observed' and states that 'the position of the looker-on is

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.334.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.335.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.335.

²⁶⁷ Zhang ed., *Complete Works*, Volume X, pp.6-7.

²⁶⁸ Magowan, 'Fromentin and Jewett: Pastoral Narrative in the Nineteenth Century', p.334.

characteristically one of deprivation.²⁶⁹ He compares the scenes where Bathsheba is secretly watched by Oak, Boldwood, and Troy, and claims that these scenes inevitably show the inferior status of the observer. I suggest, however, that the on-looking and overhearing in this novel emphasise an authorial intention to include more perspectives to demonstrate the relational self of Bathsheba that establishes her connections with the environment. Similarly, in *Fengzi*, the young scholar's and the old man's observations of Fengzi form very important portraits of the character which keeps her never far away from readers' view although she rather isolates herself from other characters' shared background of Xiangxi.

I have analysed Troy's alienation from *ziran* in the previous section, but at least we can gather quite diverse perspectives of him through the narrative; compared with Troy, Boldwood is the truly isolated character in the sense that he obtains sparse points of views from other characters. His impulsiveness and self-isolation distance him from *ziran*. As a gentleman-farmer at little Weatherbury, he is 'lonely and reserved'.²⁷⁰ More importantly, the Taoist 'relational self' is not found in Boldwood because he is not described in relation to the environment: Boldwood is mostly reserved to his own world, and compared to other reticent characters like Oak in *FMC* or Giles in *The Woodlanders*, Boldwood lacks interactions with any kind of environment, human and non-human. We learn about Boldwood, before the Valentine card, mainly from Bathsheba's workfolk's indirect and unfamiliar descriptions of him, and the several encounters between Bathsheba and him all somehow failed, with Boldwood half-hidden from her view. This is best summarised in Chapter XII when Boldwood passes her 'abstractedly'.²⁷¹ I have already analysed the interaction (or more accurately, the lack of it) between Boldwood and his environment in the previous section, but there I want to highlight Hardy's narrative strategy in shifting readers' attention between his inner world and the world around him. He appears even more aloof and reticent through the abstract language of the narrative, as in 'Boldwood had felt the symmetry of his existence to be slowly getting distorted in the direction of an ideal passion. The disturbance was as the first floating weed to Columbus - the contemptibly little suggesting possibilities of the infinitely great.'²⁷² Rather than directly revealing Boldwood's thoughts, the narrator comments on Boldwood's psychological reaction as an omniscient observer: 'It is foreign to a mystified condition of mind to realise of the mystifier that the processes of approving a course suggested by circumstance, and of striking out a course from inner impulse, would look the same in the result.'²⁷³ This observation acutely captures the contrast between actions that approve a natural

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.407-08.

²⁷⁰ Schweik ed., *FMC*, p.90.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.76.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, p.80.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.80.

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course and those strike out a course impulsively, which can be regarded as actions following or against *ziran*. In *FMC*, Boldwood stands out as a fantasist whose actions are mainly based on his imagination about Bathsheba's intention, thus impulsive and unnatural. Boldwood is curious about Bathsheba but gazes at her 'blankly', 'in the way a reaper looks up at a passing train'; he wants to know more about her but is clumsy at approaching her: 'Boldwood, it must be remembered, though forty years of age, had never before inspected a woman with the very centre and force of his glance; they had struck upon all his senses at wide angles'; he lacks confidence and 'could not assure himself that his opinion was true'.²⁷⁴ About his impulsive nature, the narrator comments:

The phases of Boldwood's life were ordinary enough, but his was not an ordinary nature. That stillness, which struck casual observers more than anything else in his character and habit, and seemed so precisely like the rest of inanity, may have been the perfect balance of enormous antagonistic forces - positives and negatives in fine adjustment. His equilibrium disturbed, he was in extremity at once. If an emotion possessed him at all, it ruled him; a feeling not mastering him was entirely latent. Stagnant or rapid, it was never slow. He was always hit mortally, or he was missed.²⁷⁵

Thus, Boldwood's aloofness and impulsiveness distance him from the rural community in the novel, as demonstrated in Chapter 22 at the sheepshearers' gathering: 'Boldwood always carried with him a social atmosphere of his own, which everybody felt who came near him.'²⁷⁶ In this sense, he sharply contrasts the *ziran* of the local society. Boldwood may be at odds because he was a late addition to the story: when Hardy first sketched for Leslie Stephen the idea of the novel, he described the major characters as 'a woman-farmer, a shepherd, and a sergeant in the Dragoon Guards'.²⁷⁷ While Boldwood might not 'fit' the novel because Hardy introduced him late into the narrative, a Taoist reading allows us to see his character and Hardy's particular choices on how to describe him as sharply at odds with *ziran*: he cannot be understood in relation to *ziran*, which reveals the richness of the sensibility of *ziran* in other parts of the novel. Similarly, Diggory Venn in *The Return* is withdrawn, self-contained, and alienated from the local community. According to J. C. S. Temblett-Wood, Venn is 'a curious character who comes in and out of the story as Hardy needs him', who can even be viewed as 'only a rather awkward part of the machinery of the story'.²⁷⁸ Like Boldwood, who is defined in relation to Bathsheba, Venn's relation to Thomasin does not bring him closer to the community but rather reveals his oddity. The

²⁷⁴ Ibid., p.93.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., p.95.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., p.318.

²⁷⁷ Frederick William Maitland, *The Life and Letters of Leslie Stephen* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), p.271.

²⁷⁸ Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native* (1878; Macmillan, 1985), p.17.

contrast provided by these characters becomes important: they are created in terms that are so entirely out of line with *ziran* that they bring the holistic dynamics of *ziran* in other parts of the narrative into relief.

Besides the secret observations which add to the perspectives in these novels, a dialogic structure and a valuing of reminiscence of *Fengzi* also reflect a commitment to presenting different perspectives; meanwhile for *FMC*, it is the intellectual allusions and the 'historical imagination' that add perspectives to the layers of reality of the rural society.²⁷⁹ Richard Kerridge classifies two ways of loving nature: '[t]he unalienated lover of nature inhabits; the alienated lover of nature gazes. The first is a native, deeply embedded in a stable ecosystem; the second is a Romantic, a tourist, a newcomer, and a reader', and he notes that Hardy's novels are 'appreciative of both ways of loving nature and intent on exploring the relationship between them'.²⁸⁰ Combining Kerridge's comment with Magowan's argument that the narrator and the reader of the pastoral are outsiders because of their multiple perspectives, is it to say that the richness of perspectives ultimately reveals an outside judgement of Wessex and Xiangxi and in turn makes them serve as a criticism of the urban society where most of their readers come from? Kerridge's binary classification ignores the connections between the two kinds of nature-loving that I think is exactly why different perspectives are emphasised in the representation of Wessex and Xiangxi, which are never totally indigenous or stable. The sense of place is a combinative idea that is relative to different perspectives and to both the past and the present, and the pastoral elements in *FMC* and *Fengzi* function as a lens to reflect such dynamics. The relationships between old traditions and new changes, between insiders and outsiders, between the naïve and alienated views, and between the narrators and readers - all of these are depicted as in flux by these two writers through their frequent shifts of perspectives, omniscient and personal narrators, and secret observers or eavesdroppers, which reveals an awareness of relative positions in each relationship and an anxiety that a single perspective could distort Wessex and Xiangxi. This anxious commitment to relationalism is not comprehensible through the relativity (of present and past) that is emphasised by readings of the novels as pastoral but can be more fully understood by turning to a Taoist-inspired redefinition of the pastoral. Both novels are pastoral in a way that goes beyond conventional ideas of the term and its relation to utopianism.

Back to Magowan's comment that pastoralism serves as a form of criticism, Kinkley comments on Shen's contribution that 'he was using West-Hunanese [Xiangxi] landscapes and characters to

²⁷⁹ See the definition of 'historical imagination' by J. Hillis Miller, 'Point of View', in Schweick ed. *FMC*: 'The conventional past tense of the narration is a way of expressing the separation of the narrator from the culture he describes. He sees it in the perspective of history, as relative to its time and place (p.398).'

²⁸⁰ Kerridge, 'Ecological Hardy', p.134.

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frame universal questions of life and death, love and sexuality, permanence and change, ultimately he conveyed a sense of his country folk as a moral community sitting in judgement on modern China'.²⁸¹ This can be compared to Hardy's use of pastoralism and regionalism as a criticism of the rigid adherence to social and religious institutions that ignores the connections between humanity and Nature in Victorian society. R. A. Forsyth accurately points out that 'we find Hardy being praised, not for re-creating in durable form an idealised existence in the countryside, but rather for interpreting nature, the countryman, country dialects and country ways to the townsman who knew so little of these things.'²⁸² As I discussed about both writers' insistence on their distinct rustic idiosyncrasy and their incompatibility with the city in the Introduction (II), Hardy and Shen are highly aware of their urban readers; they are also aware of the inevitable changes to the rural communities, which their novels pay a tribute to but never appeal for an idealistic return to the past. A reconceptualisation of pastoralism in their novels enables Hardy and Shen to interest the urban readers and at the same time provide multiple perspectives of the rural communities, with an emphasis on the relationships between Nature and humanity, hence a relational self that forms the local symbiosis and a distinct sense of place - a holism they truly return to in their works of fiction and set as a criticism to the urban alienation from Nature.

1.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, the Taoist conception of the relational self to the environments is used to illuminate the holistic view of *ziran* in the commencing novels of the fictional Wessex and Xiangxi. The symbiosis I have identified in *FMC* and *Fengzi* is also evident in further Wessex and Xiangxi novels: in *The Woodlanders* and *The Border Town* the relational selves of Giles and the old ferryman to the environments and other characters are at the core of a representation of the local sensibilities; for *The Return of the Native* and *Long River*, characters are defined by their relationships with the environment, namely, Egdon Heath and the River Yuan 沅水. The pastoral genre that is taken by both novels as an art of perspective resonates with a Taoist emphasis on the relativity between humanity and environments and sets Wessex and Xiangxi as a criticism of modern man's alienation from Nature. Wessex and Xiangxi novels create a distinct sense of place and belonging that shapes the characters in terms of their relations to it. Both Hardy and Shen are at the same time influenced by and wary of dogmatic theology and philosophy, their novels

²⁸¹ Kinkley, *The Odyssey of Shen Congwen*, p.111.

²⁸² Raymond Aubrey Forsyth, *The Lost Pattern: Essays on the Emergent City Sensibility in Victorian* (Australia: University of Western Australia Press, 1976), p.24.

illustrate a religion of Nature based on holistic metaphysics in place of the orthodox theologies and instrumental philosophies of the modern world that alienate humanity from Nature, and Taoism can provide a metaphysical basis for understanding such a 'religion' of Nature in Wessex and Xiangxi.

Chapter 2 The Aesthetics of Silence: A Comparison between *The Woodlanders* (1887) and *The Border Town* (1934)

Because the eye gazes but can catch no glimpse of it,
It is called elusive.
Because the ear listens but cannot hear it,
It is called the rarefied.
Because the hand feels for it but cannot find it,
It is called the infinitesimal.
These three, because they cannot be further scrutinized,
Blend into one,
Its rising brings no light;
Its sinking, no darkness.
Endless the series of things without name
On the way back to where there is nothing.
They are called shapeless shapes;
Forms without form;
Are called vague semblance.
Go towards them, and you can see no front;
Go after them, and you see no rear.
Yet by seizing on the Way that was
You can ride the things that are now.
For to know what once there was, in the Beginning,
This is called the essence of the Way.

—Arthur Waley trans., *Tao Te Ching* Chapter 14, in *The Way and its Power*, p.159.

Silent? ah, he is silent! He can keep silence well. That man's silence is wonderful to listen to.²⁸³

—*Under the Greenwood Tree* [1872] (Oxford University Press, 1999), p.91.

Silence has sometimes a remarkable power of showing itself as the disembodied soul of feeling wandering without its carcase, and it is then more impressive than speech.

²⁸³ Hardy changed this line in the 1912 Wessex edition - see Colum Kenny, *The Power of Silence: Silent Communication in Daily Life* (Routledge, 2018), p.9: 'In 1912, Hardy removed the words "silent" and "silence" in this passage and substituted in some cases "close" and "dumbness" among other changes [...] but the original is striking.'

—*Far from the Madding Crowd* [1874], (New York & London: Norton Critical Edition, 1986), p.100.

In his article about Hardy's uses of silence, Jean-Jacques Lecercle classifies them into two categories: first, a total or absolute silence which is 'the silence of things that are mute because they are not endowed with speech or any form of expression (this is not the silence of the ineffable, this is the silence of a world indifferent to human affairs as symbolised by the ability to speak)'; and second, 'a negative or relative silence, which marks the absence of speech, a form of speech that is mutely conveyed because it has been repressed, a silence that is a sign or a signal, an integral part of the linguistic exchange'.²⁸⁴ With this classification, the above two quotations from Hardy's novels fall into the second category where silence is a sign; but in *The Woodlanders*, there is a constant presence of the 'absolute silence' which on the one hand, as Lecercle notes, shows a Nature indifferent to human affairs, but on the other hand, demonstrably enacts an aesthetic of silence that constitutes its very tragic power. This is an aesthetic shared by Shen's *The Border Town* and it can be illuminated by Taoism. The quote from Chapter 14 of *Tao Te Ching* suggests domains that are beyond human sensibilities, yet the only way to approach them is not by naming but by returning to Tao. Such aesthetics can be understood through *wuwei*, which means to follow the natural course of Tao and not interfere. By 'aesthetics' of these novels, I mean a pervasive evaluation of the qualities of silence as intrinsic to the narrative about Nature. Compared with total passivity, *wuwei* can be viewed as a positive passivity: it demonstrates an understanding of the limitations of human capability and appeals not to impose artificiality on the working of *ziran*. Instead of doing nothing at all, *wuwei* is more about doing the right thing at the right time. In this chapter, *wuwei* is discussed in two aspects: first, on the level of plot - tragedy happens where human interference and *ziran* clash; second, as a narrative strategy of the novels, it shows an aesthetic of inaction that confirms the Taoist view of the constancy of Nature in contrast to the changeability of human affairs.

2.1 Relative Silence of Speech

If Hardy shows the vitality of Egdon Heath through imposing images of it (see Chapter 3), he achieves this for Little Hintock through sounds in *The Woodlanders*. Compared with those sound-rich scenes, there are scenes where silence is emphasised. In *The Border Town*, Shen also shows a world of rich and subtle sounds, which ultimately accentuates an aesthetic of silence. Silence is a

²⁸⁴ Jean-Jacques Lecercle, 'Thomas Hardy's Silences', *FATHOM* [Online], (2)2013, pp.1-2, <<http://journals.openedition.org/fathom/328>>

key word that distinguishes *The Woodlanders* and *The Border Town* from the two writers' other regional novels being discussed in this thesis.

According to David Lodge, in his 1974 introduction to *The Woodlanders*, each character's accordance with the natural environment implies their morals.²⁸⁵ Following this logic, Giles's proficiency as a woodlander and his retreat into the woods can be easily interpreted as characteristic inaction, which is described by Lodge as 'some fatal streak of weakness in Giles, a vulnerable innocence, and some of that "listlessness"'.²⁸⁶ However, Lodge neglects the opportunity to thoroughly investigate the aesthetics behind this link between the environment and character, which actually delineates more than the anthropomorphic analogy between Nature and humanity. Taoist *wuwei* can capture the aesthetics in these novels and enable a fuller analysis of the relationship between the human and the non-human worlds that moves us away from an anthropocentric obsession with morality.

Giles's silence links more with Lecerle's classification of the second kind of silence: the relative silence of speech. For example, in Chapter 38, Giles listens to Grace's proposition and observes her 'with a curious consciousness of discovery' and the next page presents a narrative from Giles's point of view about his contemplation.²⁸⁷ Giles's contemplative silence, however, causes insecurity in Grace: '[s]he was so sweet and sensitive that she feared his silence betokened something in his brain of the nature of an enemy to her. "What are you thinking of that makes those lines come in your forehead?" she asked. "I did not mean to offend you by speaking of the time being premature."' ²⁸⁸ When Grace attempts to announce the termination of their loose engagement, Giles hides himself in the tree and his lack of response irritates her; until this point when Grace finally advances a possibility of developing their relationship, she still finds his silence unbearably vague. But Giles's silence is not as vague as it appears to Grace when he is among his fellow woodlanders. In Chapter 15, Giles learns that Mrs. Charmond has decided to deprive him of his house and turns into 'taciturnity' after a blaze of rage:

Winterborne subdued his feelings, and from that hour, whatever they were, kept them entirely to himself. Yet assuming the value of taciturnity to a man among strangers, it is apt to express more than talkativeness when he dwells among friends. The countryman who is obliged to judge the time of day from changes in external nature sees a thousand successive tints and traits in the landscape which are never discerned by him who hears the regular chime of a clock, because they are never in request. In like manner do we use our eyes on our taciturn comrade. The infinitesimal movement of muscle, curve, hair, and

²⁸⁵ David Lodge, 'Introduction', in *The Woodlanders* (Macmillan, 1974), p.17.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.24.

²⁸⁷ Hardy, *The Woodlanders*, p.343.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p.344.

wrinkle, which when accompanied by a voice goes unregarded, is watched and translated in the lack of it, till virtually the whole surrounding circle of familiars is charged with the reserved one's moods and meanings. So with Winterborne and his neighbours after his stroke of ill-luck. He held his tongue; and they observed him, and knew that he was discomposed.²⁸⁹

Giles's silence, which usually leads to misunderstandings between Grace and him, is treated with sympathy and respect here by his fellow countrymen. It can be a demonstration of the relativity of the silence of speech which necessitates two parts: the speaker and the listener. So, even the silence in a speech requires a receptive listener, and the extent of the reciprocity between the two sides determines the meanings behind the silence. Grace, after her education, obviously belongs to those 'who hear the regular chime of a clock' and therefore she cannot become a 'taciturn comrade'. This excerpt also finely observes the emotional details entailed in changes of appearance when gestures become noticeable without the distraction of voice, and hence demonstrates 'the value of taciturnity'. Such episodes about the relative silence in speech elaborate on the difficulty of effective conversation where silence is an essential part - it can be regarded as a way of showing 'action (speech) through inaction (silence)'. This is clearly significant, but the silence that I am going to focus on is of a less tangible nature: it is what Lecerclé calls the 'absolute silence of things', which, I argue, forms a special aesthetic in these two novels.

2.2 Novelistic Lyricism?

Lecerclé confirms the relationship between silence and aesthetics, suggesting that 'silence has a direct relationship with aesthetic experience [...] as an attempt to represent the un-representable, and thus to phrase the ineffable'.²⁹⁰ I will first turn to such an aesthetic of silence in Shen's works. Zhao Shuanghua compares two similar dialectics in Shen's writings - the constant/the variable and the stillness/motion - and states that the latter is more rooted in the novel while the former shows more about Shen's view of history and society; the dialectic of stillness/motion 'is saturated with Shen's own life experience and fits more with the narrative in the novels which lays an emphasis on space rather than time. Furthermore, "stillness" can be regarded as a particular Chinese aesthetic and life philosophy'.²⁹¹ She also points out that the stillness in *The Border Town* suppresses motion, which can be an alternative description of 'action through

²⁸⁹ Ibid., p.155.

²⁹⁰ Lecerclé, 'Thomas Hardy's Silences', p.1.

²⁹¹ Zhao Shuanghua 赵双花, 'On the multiple connotations of "stillness/motion" narrative in Shen Congwen's West Hunan novels in wartime (1937-1947) 论战争语境下沈从文湘西小说“静/动”叙事关系的多重内涵 (1937-1947)', from *The Corpus of the International Forum for Shen Congwen Studies* 《2018年吉首大学沈从文研究国际学术论坛论文集》, Jishou University (2018), pp.124-25.

inaction'.²⁹² Zhao attributes Shen's use of stillness/motion dialectic to his deep concerns about a traditional past and a political present, a representation of the regional and a modern pursuit of cosmopolitanism, and the future of the New Literature Movement and the future of the Chinese nation.²⁹³ Her analysis provides insightful engagements with the historical contexts that help to explain the formation of such a dialectic in Shen's view; my analysis, however, shows how Zhao's observation of Shen's use of stillness/motion is particularly exemplified in *The Border Town* as an aesthetic of silence, and different from Zhao, my emphasis is on how this aesthetic works within the texts and its Taoist implications about the relationship between the human and non-human worlds.

'The constant and the variable 常与变' that Zhao engages with is a dialectic raised by Shen, most clearly in his preface to *Long River*: he summarises that his literary creation is to 'write about the constant and the variable about the lives of ordinary people and all their sorrow or happiness in between'.²⁹⁴ The 'constant' stands for *ziran* - the constant circle of a natural life - which is illustrated through the salient seasonal frameworks of both *The Border Town* and *The Woodlanders*; the 'variable', on the other hand, is represented by changeable human affairs within an anthropocentric view of society and culture, as demonstrated by the twists in the love relationships among characters in these novels and the tragic results of human meddling. *The Border Town*, intended as 'pure poetry' and the 'Greek temple', represents 'the constant', in which the fall and the final restoration of the white pagoda symbolises a hope to maintain the constant. The novel's temporal frame corresponds to local festivals and Emerald's love story is intertwined with local customs which celebrate Nature, a manifestation of the local culture, and this is why readers can always feel a presence of Nature in the narrative. The variable, on the other hand, can be found in the changes in the circumstances - political, societal, and cultural - of the characters, which are unfathomable. For example, the change in local marriage customs which favours the 'mill' over the 'ferry' and the doom of the ferry in the face of modernisation bespeak societal transformations; Tianbao's and the old ferryman's deaths indicate a change of relationships among other characters, especially that the love between Emerald and Nuosong now becomes forbidden because the brothers' family blames her grandfather for Tianbao's death. Although these 'variables' are noted, the emphasis is on 'the constant' - the integrity of a natural being - as represented by the novel's cyclic narratives of the Dragon Boat Festival and the final restoration of the white pagoda.

²⁹² Ibid., p.128.

²⁹³ Ibid., p.130.

²⁹⁴ Zhang ed., *Complete Works*, Volume X, p.6.

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Building on Lecerle and Zhao, then, an aesthetic of silence can be located in both Hardy's and Shen's novels; however, following Lecerle's classification of two kinds of silence is his claim that it is only in poetry that the absolute silence can be represented: 'if the writer is also a poet, perhaps he will be even more concerned with the first form of silence, as lyrical monologism, in contrast with narrative or dramatic polyphony, is often about affect and atmosphere, and about all that by definition cannot be said because it lies beyond the scope of speech. Only in poetry can the mute inglorious life of things come into being by being named'.²⁹⁵ This comment should remind us of Chapter 1 of *Tao Te Ching* which describes the relationship between the nameless (Tao) and the named (outcome/manifestation) and suggests that the outcome will be naturally achieved by following Tao, hence 'action through inaction', the basic idea of *wuwei*:

The Way that can be told of is not an Unvarying Way;

The names that can be named are not unvarying names.

It was from the Nameless that Heaven and Earth sprang;

The named is but the mother that rears the ten thousand creatures, each after its kind.

Truly, 'Only he that rids himself forever of desire can see the Secret Essence';

He that has never rid himself of desire can see only the Outcomes.

These two things issued from the same mould, but nevertheless are different in name.

This 'same mould' we can but call the Mystery,

Or rather the 'Darker than any Mystery',

The doorway whence issued all Secret Essence.²⁹⁶

The 'Mystery' and the 'Darker than any Mystery' refer to Tao's essential ineffability. Laozi does not direct us to mysticism here but explains the relationship between the nameless and the named: one is the essence and the other is the outcome (or in another translation, the manifestation). Here, he equals 'action' with 'desire' and argues that in order to see through the manifestation and reach the essence of the universe we should get rid of desires (intentions to interfere) and attain a state of 'inaction'. Therefore, 'inaction' in fact means not to act recklessly, and 'action' means that in doing nothing reckless everything is done. Furthermore, the named and the nameless raise a question of representation: the futility of human signs in the face of the unfathomable Tao, and in this case *wuwei* means to abandon the system of signs and become

²⁹⁵ Lecerle, 'Thomas Hardy's Silences', p.2.

²⁹⁶ Arthur Waley trans., *Tao Te Ching* Chapter 1, in *The Way and its Power*, p.141.

silent, in order to perceive Tao and dissolve the confrontation between Nature and culture, thus following *ziran*. Chapter 37 of *Tao Te Ching* also states: 'Tao never does; Yet through it all things are done,' which suggests the concept of 'action through inaction' since Tao connects everything, and it is achieved by not interfering with it.²⁹⁷ Such a Taoist conception of *wuwei* can illuminate how the aesthetic of silence works in these novels.

Focusing on a similar aesthetic effect in Hardy's novels, Lecerclé proposes the lyrical monologism of poetry as essential for creating the 'affect and atmosphere' about the ineffable, which assumes that the poetic form can associate the named with the nameless. Lecerclé delineates an analogy between silence in music and the aesthetics of silence in literature, arguing that like a note being an integral part of the melody, there is in Hardy's works 'a gradient of silences in which the silence of the ineffable is expressed, silently, in the signs of silence, the climax of which is the silence of intuition and poetic vision'.²⁹⁸ Lecerclé draws our attention to a similar characteristic of silence in music and poetry: silence is an essential part of their narrative rather than what he claims for novels and drama which merely 'stage it'. In Lecerclé's view, however, silence is only internal to poetry among literary forms and he does not develop any argument about Hardy's contribution to this aesthetic aspect of silence in literature.

As for Shen, Wang Dewei also proposes a notion of lyrical ambiguity in Shen's mystical representation of Xiangxi: '[l]yricism is seen as a mode that attempts to capture, to possess and be possessed by, what otherwise is severed by a realist presentation of the world.'²⁹⁹ He exemplifies what he means by the mystical features of Xiangxi with examples from the death scenes in *The Border Town*: the 'highly stylised manner' of the love-suicide episode in *The Border Town* where Emerald's parents commit suicide for the sake of honour and love, Wang argues, presents deaths 'as if confronting a predestinated fate, one suspects that, beyond any rationalisation, there lurks in the death scenes something else that resists any ethical explanation'.³⁰⁰ Building on this observation, Wang asserts that '[c]oherent narrative cannot account for the mystical agenda in this experience' and that Shen's impressionist style can be an alternative to 'the contrived detour of poetry' that 'may approximate it'.³⁰¹ He then concludes: 'Shen Congwen's deceptively clear and noncommittal style can thus be understood as a lyrical strategy with which to utter the unspeakable.'³⁰² The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'lyricism'

²⁹⁷ Ibid., Chapter 37, p.188.

²⁹⁸ Lecerclé, 'Thomas Hardy's Silences', p.3.

²⁹⁹ Wang Dewei, *Fictional Realism in Twentieth-Century China: Mao Dun, Lao She, Shen Congwen* (Columbia University Press, 1992), p.237.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., p.237.

³⁰¹ Ibid., pp.237-38.

³⁰² Ibid., p.238.

as ‘affectation of high-flown sentiment or poetic enthusiasm’.³⁰³ Here, Wang defines a lyricism in Shen’s Xiangxi novels that expresses a kind of poetic enthusiasm in its representation of the unspeakable. The cause of the suicide of Emerald’s parents, rather than what Wang argues as predestined, is more evidently historical and societal, since their love is forbidden both for a discrepancy in their ethnic and social identities and for the societal judgements of Emerald’s mother’s premarital pregnancy.³⁰⁴ A feeling of predestination, however, does exist in the old ferryman’s fear that Emerald may follow her mother’s unfortunate destiny, which also leads to his indecision and meddling in Emerald’s marriage and adds to a contingency of human destiny.

Nonetheless, different from Lecercle, Wang observes Shen’s use of lyricism in his novels and argues that the affect and atmosphere about the ineffable can be achieved by novels. I argue that this is achieved not by the narrative ambiguity implied by Wang, but by the aesthetics of the absolute silence of things that captures the unspeakable tragic potential of human fate in front of the constant evolution of the universe.

2.3 The Seasonal Tempo

This absolute silence of things permeates *The Woodlanders* and *The Border Town*, firstly, because the narratives follow a seasonal tempo and this constancy transcends the contingency of human fates. The local festivals celebrating Nature and tied to the cycle of seasons in *The Border Town* that I have discussed previously under Shen’s notion of ‘the constant’, parallel with an emphasis on a seasonal tempo in *The Woodlanders*. Human participation in this process is represented by the woodlanders’ occupation, which depends on their reciprocal relationship with Nature. Ken Ireland defines the seasonal tempo of the novel as ‘sylvan time’ and suggests that it ‘reflects a native’s sensitivity to natural setting, shared by both Giles and Marty’ which ‘separates them from the “mechanical” time of the outside world’.³⁰⁵ Ireland explains about the tension between this

³⁰³ Online Oxford English Dictionary, <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/111680?redirectedFrom=lyricism#eid>>

³⁰⁴ See Qi Pei 祁培, ‘An Narratological Study of the Story about Cuicui’s Parents in *The Border Town* 《边城》里翠翠父母故事叙事功能研究’, *Journal of Higher Correspondence Education (Philosophy and Social Sciences)* 《高等函授学报 (哲学社会科学版)》, Volume 20, No.12, December 2007, in which the author argues that the narrative structure of the novel sets the tragedy of Emerald’s parents as a comparison to that of Emerald’s, which accentuates the inevitability and contingency of their fates. In Hu Xiaofang 胡晓芳, ‘The Discrepancy between the Army and the People and between the Han and Miao Ethnic Groups: Notes on a Love Tragedy in *The Border Town* “军民之分”与“汉苗之防”对《边城》中一段爱情悲剧的注解’, *Reviews and Research on Chinese Literature* 《中文自学指导》, No.3, 2007 (Sum No.193), the author demonstrates the historical and ethnic discrepancies in the identities of Emerald’s parents which contribute to their tragic ending.

³⁰⁵ Ken Ireland, *Thomas Hardy, Time and Narrative: A Narratological Approach to His Novels* (Springer, 2014), p.155.

sylvan time and the mechanical time through Marty, whose presence and survival throughout the book 'encompasses an arc of narrative from the winter of the first year to the spring of the third year', and he argues that 'the novel's leisurely tempo and indirect presentation, its painterly play of light effects, its alternation of plot-lines and prismatic viewing of events, particularly its tension between the seasonal calendar of nature and causal sequences involving circularity and clock-time, contribute to its overall temporal and narrative profile.'³⁰⁶ It is exactly this seemingly 'leisurely' and 'indirect' narrative, however, that endows *The Woodlanders* with a poetic temperament: the painterly features, the alternative perspectives, and the tension between the sylvan time and the causal sequences as argued by Ireland particularly contribute to its distinct style. As with *The Border Town*, it is noticeable that an aesthetic of silence permeates the natural cycle of the seasonal tempo, which accentuates the fact that a tragic power lies in the contrast between this constant silence and order and the changeability of human affairs. The Taoist conception of *wuwei* illuminates this aesthetic, firstly, by revealing an essentially Taoist acceptance of the changeability of the named in front of the nameless Tao reflected in the novels; secondly, by demonstrating what can be regarded as a narrative inaction in such an aesthetic of silence of the named, these novels actually achieve the affect and atmosphere of the nameless, which is modelled on the Taoist 'action through inaction'.

Lodge also offers a reading of the natural tempo and aligns it with the traditional pastoralism that is static and nostalgic, epitomising in Giles: 'Giles, and the whole action of which he is a part, clearly symbolise the passing of a certain kind of society and way of life'.³⁰⁷ On the other hand, Lodge notes a counteractive evolutionary portrayal in the novel which threatens the old natural cycle of the woodlanders' life: '[c]orrespondingly he expressed, with rare eloquence, the old view of nature as cyclical, harmonious, life-giving, self-renewing, susceptible of magical or intuitive control by suitably endowed persons, while at the same time articulating in many of his most powerful descriptive passages the new evolutionary account of the biological world that was superseding it.'³⁰⁸ These seemingly contradictory narrations of the pastoral and the evolutionary conceptions of Nature can be compared with Shen's conception of 'the constant and the variable', and contrary to Lodge's argument for pastoralism, my analysis of the aesthetics of silence in *The Woodlanders* implies an emphasis on 'the constant' in its narrative and this emphasis is very different from what Lodge defines as a pastoral stasis. The natural tempo of these novels embodies a Taoist view of the universe and evolution (*ziran*), thus 'the pathos of this process' claimed by Lodge can be interpreted as a melancholia in the face of the clash between an

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p.148.

³⁰⁷ Lodge, 'Introduction', pp.31-32.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p.32.

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everlasting *ziran* and the changeable and contingent human world, rather than a nostalgic glance at the pastoral past. Both Shen and Hardy present an aesthetic of silence through a narrative of 'the constant' that ultimately links with the nameless and contrasts with 'the variables' of the named.

Like Lodge's comment on a persistence of pastoralism in Hardy, Wang Dewei similarly points out some classical pastoral features of *The Border Town*: '*The Border Town* impresses with its author's determined resource to idyll and its melancholy contemplation of the mythic human cycle. In *The Border Town*, serene mountains and festive rituals are so introduced as to constitute a seemingly enclosed, self-sufficient world whose historical background remains comfortably vague.'³⁰⁹

Indeed, certain idyllic elements exist in both novels. Compared with the frame of pastoral criticism in *Fengzi* and the looming New Life which ascribes a historical contingency to *Long River*, *The Border Town* stands quite alone and distinctively, as if in pure tribute to the past.

The relatively static imaginaries of Xiangxi, however, are not a pastoral retreat or part of a utopian imagination; they are closely related to the writers' conception of Nature in terms of the contingency of human destiny facing the constant evolution of things. By 'evolution', I refer to the passing and changes of things in Taoist terms, not in a Darwinian sense; by 'things', I mean the myriad of non-human elements that constitute the universe. Wang arguably subverts his previous criticism of the pastoralism in *The Border Town* by adding that the titles of *The Border Town* and *Long River* seem to show Shen's different historical concerns: 'the "border town" points to a mythical utopia which stands outside time and change, whereas the 'long river' might indicate national or human struggles in the stream of history'.³¹⁰ Wang's comparison here indicates that contrasting with *Long River's* explicit historical view, *The Border Town* stands quite distinctively as an ahistorical novella which again conforms to classic pastoralism. However, Wang immediately adds that '[b]ut this contrastive reading evades the nuances of Shen Congwen's imaginary nostalgia, making him appear a simple-minded native soil writer juggling two discrete themes of paradise found and paradise lost.'³¹¹ Instead, Wang argues that such a contrast between the pastoral and historical modes of Xiangxi not only exists between Shen's different novels but also within each of them and therefore 'confronts the reader with the endless interplay between myth and history, dream and reality'.³¹² With a similar emphasis on a reconciliation among different genres, Lodge suggests: '[i]t is the delicate, precarious balance which Hardy manages to hold between these conflicting and logically incompatible value-systems and knowledge-systems that

³⁰⁹ Wang, *Fictional Realism in Twentieth-Century China*, p.265.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.265-66.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.266.

³¹² *Ibid.*, p.266.

makes *The Woodlanders* the powerful, absorbing and haunting work of fiction it is.³¹³ Building on Lodge's and Wang's arguments about a balance of genres in both novels, I suggest that the seemingly contradictory genres of pastoralism/evolutionism for Hardy or myth/history for Shen can be interpreted through the dialectic between the constant and the variable raised by Shen with illuminations from Taoism.

The dialectic of the constant and the variable is concerned with what Hardy and Shen regard as tragedy, which eventually demonstrates a holistic view of Nature and humanity. Hardy writes in his notebook in November 1885: 'Tragedy. It may be put thus in brief: a tragedy exhibits a state of things in the life of an individual which unavoidably causes some natural aim or desire of his to end in a catastrophe when carried out.'³¹⁴ In *The Woodlanders*, Little Hintock is introduced as 'where, from time to time, dramas of a grandeur and unity truly Sophoclean are enacted in the real, by virtue of the concentrated passions and closely knit interdependence of the lives therein', affirming that the tragic power of the story originates from the contingency of human affairs in a metaphysically holistic universe.³¹⁵ Meanwhile, Shen comments on *The Border Town* that '[e]verything was full of goodness and good will, however, everything was also untimely and inopportune, and thus plain goodness and innocent hope inevitably lead to tragedy', showing a similar view of tragedy that it is rooted in variable circumstances and untimely action.³¹⁶ The 'suitably endowed persons' noted by Lodge, such as Giles, Marty, and Emerald, are at the same time embodiments of inaction, immersed in the aesthetics of silence surrounding them in the narratives, which ultimately confirms the two writers' view of tragedy.

With regard to the tragic power of Hardy's novels, Ian Gregor compares the works of Hardy and Lawrence to show that the dualism between Nature and culture in Lawrence's works is absent in Hardy's: '[f]or the latter [Hardy] the final picture must always be the acceptance of things as they are, for him there can be no rainbow, ending in Italy or Australia or Mexico. He foresaw no such intimations of immorality.'³¹⁷ Gregor reminds us that for Lawrence, as he proclaims in his famous critical essay of Hardy, this acceptance of Hardy 'constituted a desperate evasion', or, 'a meek resignation before prevailing social and moral codes', and the tragedy of Eustacia, Tess, Sue lies in the fact that 'they were not at war with God, only with society'.³¹⁸ Gregor comments on Lawrence's critical view of Hardy: '[t]his is the language of the permanent exile, placing social and

³¹³ Lodge, 'Introduction', p.32.

³¹⁴ Millgate ed., *The Life*, p.182.

³¹⁵ Hardy, *The Woodlanders*, p.44.

³¹⁶ Zhang ed., *Complete Works*, Volume XII, p.111.

³¹⁷ Gregor, 'What Kind of Fiction Did Hardy Write?', pp.294.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.294.

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personal judgements in irrevocable opposition. But for Hardy no such dichotomy presented itself, if Nature consisted in the life of things it consisted no less in the laws man made to govern the life of things. [...] Lawrence's position was too atomistic for him ever to feel the reality of this kind of acceptance.³¹⁹ This comment notes that the tragic power of Hardy's characters lies beyond what Lawrence argues are their conflicts with society, and more in their helplessness with the changeability of human affairs in the face of the evolution of things - the sense that human beings are only a tiny part of the eternal cycle of the universe. This view is ultimately holistic and anti-anthropocentric since human fates are transcended by a natural cycle of Nature. In *The Woodlanders* and *The Border Town*, it is not just society that causes Giles's and Emerald's tragedies, but also their initial characteristics and the contingency of events; for Marty and the old ferryman, their tragedies arise from good-will stuck in inopportune occasions. For both groups of characters, the silence of Nature in the narration creates a kind of aesthetic about the constant evolution of the universe and a human melancholic acceptance of their changeable fates.

A brief contextual investigation of the two novels can help form a deeper understanding of both writers' views of tragedy. The story in *The Woodlanders*, according to Hardy, happened around 1876 to 1879.³²⁰ England was amid the second industrial revolution and agriculture was experiencing a massive mechanisation. Like the reddleman in *The Return of the Native* and the ferryman in *The Border Town*, the occupation of the woodlanders was destined to decline - hands to be replaced by machine. Hardy writes in the 1912 preface to *The Woodlanders*: 'In respect of the occupations of the characters, the adoption of iron utensils and implements in agriculture, and the discontinuance of thatched roofs for cottages, have almost extinguished the handicrafts classed formerly as "copsework", and the type of men who engaged in them.'³²¹ Both stories pay a tribute to the old way of life familiar to the writers, as Hardy writes in the Wessex Preface (1912): 'I have instituted inquiries to correct tricks of memory, and striven against temptations to exaggerate, in order to preserve for my own satisfaction a fairly true record of a vanishing life.'³²²

The time of the story in *The Border Town* is not shown in the texts, but according to Shen's introduction in the preface it should be around the 1910s, twenty years before it was written.³²³ Shen writes in an essay about the creation of *The Border Town* that: 'I was planning to create some pure poetry, poetry that is unattached to life. [...] I need some legend, some bitter

³¹⁹ Ibid., p.295.

³²⁰ Mary M. Saunders, 'The Significance of the Man-Trap in *The Woodlanders*', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 20.4 (1974), p.529.

³²¹ Hardy, *The Woodlanders*, p.40.

³²² Ibid., p.443.

³²³ Zhang ed., *Complete Works*, Volume VIII, pp.57-60.

experience originated from bad luck, a tragedy that was doomed if I were to be responsible for the past. [...] to write about the pastoral life that was totally opposite to my life then but very accordant to my past emotions, in order to make a balance of my life.’³²⁴ By the time Shen wrote this story, he was teaching at Qingdao University in a Northern city far from his hometown in West Hunan. He was newly wedded with Zhang Zhaohe (in Peking, September 1933) and soon started writing the story.³²⁵ He recalls in the preface that the inspiration for this novella is from the violence he experienced when he was a young soldier back in 1921; another source of inspiration is a young girl in a funeral procession during his journey to Qingdao in 1933.³²⁶ Both sources demonstrate that the poetic and pastoral tone in the novella actually originates from tragic experiences and emotions. *The Border Town* was published in *National News Weekly* from January to April 1934.³²⁷ According to Shen’s recollection, it can be inferred that West Hunan at that time was far from being a pastoral and peaceful countryside: in fact it was the changes happening in this piece of land that initiated *The Border Town*, which encapsulated Shen’s idea about ‘the constant and the variable’.³²⁸ These backgrounds provide a violent contrast for the silence in these two novels and can enrich the meanings behind the silences.

In 1949 Shen wrote in a reflective essay that ‘Unfortunately, it was not until 1935 that Mr. Liu Xiwei, the critic, who could finally see behind the words and forms in *The Border Town* and other short stories like “Sansan 三三” the lyricism and the sorrow of a broken young heart and see an effect of picture and music at work.’³²⁹ A substantial part of the ‘effect’ noted by Shen lies in his use of the aesthetics of silence, a practice whose power and meaning can best be illuminated by Taoism. The silence as contrasted by sound/voice can be compared to the intended blankness in Taoist paintings:

In honour of the changefulness and mobility of Nature, Taoist artists always leave their works unfinished. This practice also invites the viewer to become a co-creator of the piece, as if a participant within Nature. Even the most elaborate pieces of Taoist art consist merely of brush strokes in varying shades of watered black on white paper. Empty space is critically important, because emptiness has its own kind of fullness.³³⁰

³²⁴ ‘Water Cloud’, in *Complete Works* ed. by Zhang Zhaohe, Volume XII, p.110.

³²⁵ Zhang Zhaohe 张兆和 (1910-2003), Chinese writer.

³²⁶ Zhang ed., *Complete Works*, Volume VIII, p.60.

³²⁷ *National News (Guo Wen) Weekly* 《国闻周报》 (1924-1937), established by Hu Shi 胡适 in Shanghai, was a weekly newspaper that contained both national and international news and comments, introductions of foreign theories, literature and arts, and book reviews.

³²⁸ Zhang ed., *Complete Works*, Volume X, p.6.

³²⁹ Zhang ed., *Complete Works*, Volume XXVII, p.25. Liu Xiwei 刘西渭, is the pen name of Chinese writer and translator Li Jianwu 李健吾 (1906-1982), whose article ‘*The Border Town and Eight Steeds* 《边城》与《八骏图》’ was published on *Literature Quarterly* 《文学季刊》, Volume 2, No.3, June (1935).

³³⁰ Landscapes of Tang Yin (1470-1523): Example of Taoist Painting,

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The capitalised Nature in this comment can be understood as *ziran* in Taoism, and rather than 'unfinished', the blankness is intended in order to contrast the fullness of reciprocity between the human and non-human worlds in *ziran*. Similarly, the silences (linguistic 'blankness') in these two novels are intended to be potential awakening moments for the holistic metaphysics of *ziran*. Both *The Border Town* and *The Woodlanders* adopt a poetic narrative that achieves an aesthetic of the silence of things, as Lecerle argues for lyrical monologism. The aesthetics of emptiness indicating fullness aptly explain the Taoist concept of 'action through inaction', which can be regarded as an artistic exhibition of *wuwei*.

Such an aesthetic of silence can be understood more clearly if we take a look at the 'intended blankness' in Shen's sketches. The following two paintings are Shen's illustrations for the letters to his wife during a journey back to Xiangxi to visit his diseased mother in 1934, in which slight brushes and much blankness are portrayed intentionally, and they remind us of the aesthetics of traditional Chinese ink-and-wash paintings. The captions to these sketches record accurate times and places, emphasising the temporality of Shen's impressionist aesthetics, which I will elaborate more in Chapter 3:

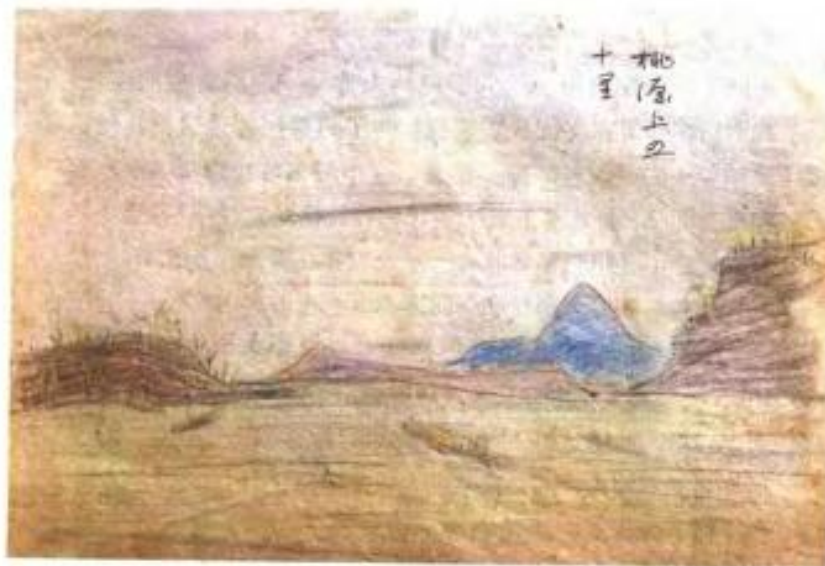


这是桃源上面筒家溪的楼子，全是吊脚楼！这里可借写不出声音，多好听的声音！这时有摆槽唱歌声音，有水声，有吊脚楼人语声……还有我喊叫你的声音，你听不到，你听不到，我的人！

二号 十三早十一画

Figure 1 Shen's sketch of the Diaojiao buildings³³¹

³³¹ Zhang ed., *Complete Works*, Volume XI, p.116. See Figure 12 in Appendix A for a photo of the Diaojiao buildings I took during my research trip in 2017.



在这种光景下听槽歌，你说使人怎么办，听了槽歌可无法告诉你，你说怎么办。三三，我的……

槽歌太好了，我的人，为什么你不同我在一个船上呢？

十三下午四点

Figure 2 Shen's sketch with an inscription '50 li upstream Tao Yuan [a place along the river]'³³²

³³² Zhang ed., *Complete Works*, Volume XI, p.121. This illustration and caption are in the middle of a letter from Shen to his wife Zhang entitled 'A Letter Written on the Little Boat', in which Shen keeps an accurate account of times: he notes in the caption to the illustration 'four o'clock on 13th afternoon' and by the end of the letter he notes 'five o'clock on 13th afternoon'. For my analyses of an emphasis on temporality in Shen's representation of Nature, see Section 3.3.

Both paintings show an unbalanced composition where attention is easily diverted to a large proportion of blankness that accentuates an aura of tranquility and holistic metaphysics. It is exactly such concentration on the blankness in these paintings that creates an aesthetic of absolute silence, which elaborates on the nameless essence of Tao. Shen comments on the art of the novella and compares it to that of ancient Chinese paintings: ‘realism or verisimilitude can never be the highest achievements of artworks: it is the “design” that matters. The inking, the coloring, and the blankness are all beyond question. For some works, the blankness is particularly vital, which stages a beauty of silence in proportion and induces a lesson of the nameless.’³³³ Both Shen’s sketches here and *The Border Town* reflect this comment. In the next part, I will delineate more specifically on how such an aesthetic of silence works in the narratives of *The Woodlanders* and *The Border Town* through rendering the absolute silence of Nature as an important witness to the human fates.

2.4 Nature-Witnessing

At the very beginning of *The Border Town*, Shen introduces the old ferryman:

This ferryman is the old fellow who lives just below the pagoda. Seventy now, he has stayed since the age of twenty beside this stream, ferrying countless passengers in fifty years. It is high time the sturdy old man retired, but evidently fate will otherwise: no throwing in his hand for him. Without reflecting what this job means, he carries on quietly and faithfully. Fate, in his case, is the girl at his side who makes him feel the lure of life at sunrise and stops him from brooding about death at sunset. His sole companions are the ferry-boat and Brownie, the dog; his sole relation this girl.³³⁴

There is a silence of convention in this excerpt, as it appears at another point in Chapter 1: ‘The old man in midstream breaks into cheerful song, his hoarse voice mingling with the strains of the flute to float out into the stillness and bring new life to the stream. Indeed, the echoing music accentuates the stillness.’³³⁵ The shift in the use of the word from ‘quiet 静’ to ‘stillness 寂’, both describing silence, captures a shift of the narrator’s attitude and implies a change which is later narrated in Chapter 12 when Emerald does not respond to the matchmaker sent by Tianbao, the elder brother. Again, this shift is expressed through sound:

What the snag is how to get round it he [the old ferryman] does not know. He lies awake at nights thinking things over, till it dawns on him that perhaps she loves the younger brother, not the elder. Soon convinced that this is the case, he smiles an unnatural smile to hide his dismay, worried by the sudden

³³³ Zhang ed., ‘On Novella 短篇小说’ (1942), in *Complete Works*, Volume XVI, p.505.

³³⁴ Yang and Dai trans., *The Border Town*, p.8.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.12.

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realisation that Emerald is exactly like her mother and may come to the same end. Assailed by old memories, he cannot sleep. He slips out of the house to the cliff above the stream and gazes up at the stars, while around him crickets and other insects shrill. It is long before he can sleep. [...] But things cannot go on like this indefinitely. The peace of their uneventful life is soon to be irrevocably shattered.³³⁶

This event refers to Tianbao's death and the subsequent coldness between the two families. The old ferryman's meditation on the cliff reminds us of Giles's contemplation on the tree, both are scenes containing overwhelming silence and at the same time conflicts within the characters' minds. Immersed in his own thinking, the shrill of the insects makes the old ferryman focus on his thoughts more intensely, leaving readers to feel the silence as even more unbearable because of the distance between his psychology and ours: the silence/blankness creates grounds for space, anxiety, and imagination. The idea of 'action through inaction' is shown through this kind of 'silence speaks louder' scene, which allows characters to retreat into their meditation and obstruct readers' omnipresence.

An echo of this effect can be found in Chapter 1 where the narrator distances himself and occupies a speculative position: 'Peace reigns supreme and the townsfolk spend all their days in an unspoiled solitude hard to imagine. Tranquillity makes them reflect more deeply on life, makes them dream more. Naturally every soul in this little town in his allotted span of days has his private hopes and is torn by love and hate. Exactly what fills their minds it is hard to say.'³³⁷ In the original Chinese text, Shen uses the word 'silence' rather than 'peace' as chosen by Yang and Dai's translation, and I think 'silence' can better convey the aesthetics of the narration: an unspeakable connection between human fate and the universe and mutations lurking in the beauty of silence which acquires human courage to face and to lead a dignified life. Wang aptly summarises the melancholia in the aesthetics of *The Border Town* that 'given the spontaneous rhythm and lyrical tempo that prevail, the novel is subsumed by an all too acute awareness of the ominous forces of misunderstanding, deferral, desperate passion, and destruction'.³³⁸

Similarly, in Chapter 13: 'Dusk is as tender, lovely and tranquil as ever. But anyone brooding over the evening scene is bound to have a faint sense of desolation. Then the day appears in a melancholy light. The girl growing to womanhood is conscious of something missing in her life. Soon another day will be gone beyond recall. Life is unbearably dull. She starts to dream.'³³⁹ Here the silence stirs a girlish desire in Emerald for something she cannot fully understand yet - a

³³⁶ Ibid., p.126.

³³⁷ Ibid., p.18.

³³⁸ Wang, *Fictional Realism in Twentieth-Century China*, p.267.

³³⁹ Yang and Dai trans., *The Border Town*, p.134.

representation of Emerald's blooming puberty, which is hidden beneath the tranquility of life, an unbearable silence after the enthusiastic wooing of the two brothers. Also, in Chapter 13, the old ferryman is drunk after meeting with a friend and tells Emerald stories about her mother, but she receives everything in silence. Then the insects take the foreground and their sounds contrast forcefully with Emerald's silence: 'Silver moonlight lies everywhere, turning the bamboo forests on the hills black. The chirring of insects in the undergrowth is steady as a downpour of rain. An oriole gives a few trills before realising it is too late for such a commotion. Closing its little eyes, it settles back to sleep.'³⁴⁰ The little sounds and motions of the microcosmic world demonstrate Nature's indifference to human affairs on the one hand, on the other hand the depiction of the natural rhythm accentuates a distinct aesthetic whose silence and inaction allies everything in the scene, including Emerald, into a web, and suggests there is something ineffable connecting everything, whether it be Tao or Fate. This scene is reminiscent of a scene in *The Woodlanders* where Giles and Marty walk together in the woodland and the narrator observes them from a bird's-eye view:

They went out and walked together, the pattern of the airholes in the top of the lantern rising now to the mist overhead, where they appeared of giant size, as if reaching the tent-shaped sky. They had no remarks to make to each other, and they uttered none. Hardly anything could be more isolated, or more self-contained, than the lives of these two walking here in the lonely hour before day, when grey shades, material and mental, are so very grey. And yet their lonely courses formed no detached design at all, but were part of the pattern in the great web of human doings then weaving in both hemispheres, from the White Sea to Cape Horn.³⁴¹

Another example is that when Fitzpiers returns from his elopement with Mrs. Charmond and his sudden appearance alerts Grace, she reacts with super-sensitivity towards sounds of her surroundings: 'The window was open. On this quiet late-summer evening whatever sound arose in so secluded a district - the chirp of a bird, a call from a voice, the turning of a wheel - extended over bush and tree to unwonted distances. Very few sounds did arise.'³⁴² The world of rich sounds in Little Hintock suddenly turns mute in Grace's imagination and all her auditory sense is open to the hints of her husband's approach, which is symbolic of an intruding artificial sound into the natural sound system. In a hurry to escape, Grace does not notice the subtlety of the natural environment; as if sympathetic with Grace's plight, the natural environment silently acts as accomplice in her escape. The relationship is reversed: it is not Grace listening to her surroundings, but the surroundings listening to her. What she has not heeded is narrated:

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.138-40.

³⁴¹ Hardy, *The Woodlanders*, p.59.

³⁴² *Ibid.*, pp.267-68.

The leaves overhead were now in their latter green - so opaque that it was darker at some of the densest spots than in winter-time, scarce a crevice existing by which a ray could get down to the ground. But in open places she could see well enough. Summer was ending; in the daytime singing insects hung in every sunbeam; vegetation was heavy nightly with globes of dew; and after showers creeping damp and twilight chills came up from the hollows. The plantations were always weird at this hour of eve - more spectral far than in the leafless season, when there were fewer masses and more minute lineality. The smooth surfaces of glossy plants came out like weak lidless eyes; there were strange faces and figures from expiring lights that had somehow wandered into the canopied obscurity; while now and then low peeps of the sky between the trunks were like sheeted shapes, and on the tips of boughs sat faint cloven tongues. But Grace's fear just now was not imaginative or spiritual; and she heeded these impressions but little.³⁴³

Nature is a living being in this episode. The late-summer night woodland is depicted as a human-like creature with its distinctive lethargy. The outline of a human figure is made up from a combination of comparisons between human organs and natural phenomena, and Grace is totally unaware of this, which makes the relationship between the woodland and her again reversed: she is being observed by the woodland rather than the woodland being observed by her. Here, Hardy reveals reciprocity between characters and the natural environment. Grace's shifting positions in this reciprocity (she is sensitive to nature only when she is melancholic) demonstrates her awkward double identity between the country and the city.

Characters being listened to or watched by the natural world is a familiar occurrence in both *The Woodlanders* and *The Border Town*. Nature is an observer and participant at the same time for the human world, and a focus on the silence of the things in the narration illustrates the fullness of connection between characters and their environment, hence a kind of symbiosis in Hardy's 'Novels of Character and Environment' as I argued in Chapter 1. The reversed relationships between characters and Nature also show an anti-anthropocentric view: a connection between Nature and human sensibility is shown in the way the narrators observe and participate in Nature at the same time, and this is the holistic essence of *ziran*. Ultimately this connection can be felt when the human body and the universe become one, which is the meaning of 'man and heaven merging into one' in Taoism. A Taoist body would be one that embraces the passivity in *ziran* and becomes one with the Tao — the emphasis of *ziran* is always on a reciprocity, thus there is always a dialectic of action and inaction. This interaction provides an insight for interpreting the holistic metaphysics of the conception of Nature in these novels. The absolute silence of the things in the natural environment embodies a witness to human affairs, which is a kind of positive inaction

³⁴³ Ibid., pp.268-69.

(*wuwei*); and since witnessing permeates the narrative and builds up the suggestiveness of silence, it creates a Taoist aesthetic in these novels.

2.5 Qualities of Silence

Besides witnessing, another significant narrative function of silence can be noted at the key moments of the novels. Lecerle observes in *The Return of the Native* three specific characteristics about its use of silence: firstly, absolute silence appears more frequently than the relative silence of speech in this novel; secondly, 'the strategic distribution of the occurrences of the word "silence": they tend to occur at turning points of the narrative'; thirdly, 'the presence of silence is felt, and focused upon, even if the word is not uttered'.³⁴⁴ The first and third ones have already been analysed in the preceding discussions; the second characteristic is also true in *The Woodlanders* and *The Border Town*, and it constitutes a major contribution to the aesthetics of silence in these two novels.

The protagonists' death scenes - important turning points of the stories - provide examples of the quality of silence. Both the deaths of the old ferryman and Giles are amid violent storms, which seems to contradict the aesthetic of silence aforementioned, but the silent aftermaths following their dramatic deaths reinforces this aesthetic. In Chapter 20, Emerald is bewildered after her grandfather's death, and there is one scene with the silence of the natural environment that more emphatically depicts her confusion than the explicit description about her tears: 'Brownie [a pet dog] barks outside and Emerald opens the door. She stands in front of the hut for a while, listening to the insects all around. The moon is bright, the clear blue sky is inlaid with brilliant stars. It is all unbelievably quiet and lovely. She wonders: "Can it be true? Is grandad really dead?"'³⁴⁵ The quiet beauty of the things remains indifferent to her mourning, but it also bespeaks a more powerful natural force of which the old ferryman's death is but a part. In *The Woodlanders*, too, Grace seems to have finally become accustomed to the silence of Giles but only ironically after his death:

Fitzpiers left the cot, and the stroke of his feet was soon immersed in the silence that pervaded the spot. Grace remained kneeling and weeping she hardly knew how long, and then she sat up, covered Giles's fixed statuesque features, and went towards the door where her husband had stood. No sign of any other comer greeted her ear, the only perceptible sounds being the tiny cracklings of the dead leaves which, like a feather bed, had not yet done rising

³⁴⁴ Lecerle, 'Thomas Hardy's Silences', p.9.

³⁴⁵ Yang and Dai trans., *The Border Town*, p.202.

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to their normal level where indented by the pressure of her husband's receding footsteps.³⁴⁶

This subtle auditory experience again creates an aesthetic of silence that lies in the indifference of Nature to Giles's death and attributes to Grace a sensitivity towards the woods which normally belongs to Giles or Marty, thus intensifying a sense of mourning.

Besides these death scenes, the openings and endings of the novels also exemplify the quality of silence at the turning points. *The Border Town* opens with a native view of local geography and customs, which demonstrates a serene life. The beginning of *The Woodlanders* is narrated from a stranger's view, with the barber intruding into the woodland, and shows Little Hintock as excluded and extremely silent:

At length could be discerned in the dusk about half a mile to one side, gardens and orchards sunk in a concave, and as it were snipped out of the woodland. From this self-contained place rose in stealthy silence tall stems of smoke, which the eye of imagination could trace downward to their root on quiet hearthstones festooned overhead with hams and fitches. It was one of those sequestered spots outside the gates of the world where may usually be found more meditation than action, and more listlessness than meditation [...].³⁴⁷

'Self-contained', 'stealthy silence', 'quiet', 'sequestered', 'meditation', 'listlessness' - all these descriptions establish a distinct aura of solitude which excludes the barber and other intruders. The ending of the novel, with Marty alone standing in front of Giles's tomb, is as sad and silent as the ending of *The Border Town* where Emerald is waiting at the ferry for her lover's return. These structural silences are repeated internally too: besides the beginning and the ending of the whole novel, many chapters in *The Border Town* and *The Woodlanders* begin and end with this silence as well. Silence is shown throughout the novels and in important scenes such as key moments in the development of the relationship between the lovers, which constructs a whole aesthetic of silence and the narrative (action) is achieved by this silence (inaction).

The white pagoda that has crumbled during the storm at the old ferryman's death, which 'is generally believed to have much to do with the favourable influences at work round Chatong [Chadong]', is restored by the end of the novel.³⁴⁸ As in *The Woodlanders*, the novel does not end with a death, but with the impact of these deaths: mourning and insecure futures. Emerald continues her grandfather's occupation in a hope that Nuosong will return someday, although traditionally she should be married by her age and it is not likely that she can sustain the ferry by

³⁴⁶ Hardy, *The Woodlanders*, p.390.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.44.

³⁴⁸ Yang and Dai trans., *The Border Town*, p.210. Yang and Dai mistakenly translate the name of town 茶峒 in the novel into Chatong, which should be Chadong.

herself. The ending scene is open but melancholic, with a tacit acceptance of the ill fate between Emerald and Nuosong by the villagers and Emerald's suppressed yearn for Nuosong, which is in line with her character: 'When winter comes a new white pagoda is completed. But the young man whose serenading in the moonlight made Emerald's heart soar up lightly in her dreams has not come back to Chatong [Chadong]. He may never come back. Or he may come back tomorrow.'³⁴⁹ Whatever happens next, it depends on Nuosong; Emerald's inaction about her fate is compared to the silence of Nature and is associated with a quiet melancholia in the face of the changeability of human fate, which exactly explains Shen's conception of tragedy. Similarly, the ending scene of *The Woodlanders* is where Marty finds that Grace is leaving with Fitzpiers and it will be her alone that mourns for Giles:

As this solitary and silent girl stood there in the moonlight, a straight slim figure, clothed in a plaitless gown, the contours of womanhood so undeveloped as to be scarcely perceptible in her, the marks of poverty and toil effaced by the misty hour, she touched sublimity at points, and looked almost like a being who had rejected with indifference the attribute of sex for the loftier quality of abstract humanism. She stooped down and cleared away the withered flowers that Grace and herself had laid there the previous week, and put her fresh ones in their place.³⁵⁰

In this deathly quiet scene, the comradeship between Marty and Giles is reinforced. As previously stated in the novel, 'They had planted together, and together they had felled.'³⁵¹ This excerpt also attributes to Marty an almost asexual feature, which is in accordance with Giles's suppressed sexual identity in his relationship with Grace. My point is that sexuality is never the real focus of the characterisations of Giles and Marty in this novel: they are depicted as spiritual counterparts which together represent a mode of human sensibility towards the natural environment, which contains a tragic power in the advent of a modern alienation between humanity and Nature. In another excerpt from Chapter 44, their compatibility is contrasted to the incompatibility of others with the woodland's intrinsic values:

The casual glimpses which the ordinary population bestowed upon that wondrous world of sap and leaves called the Hintock woods had been with these two, Giles and Marty, a clear gaze. They had been possessed of its finer mysteries as of commonplace knowledge; had been able to read its hieroglyphs as ordinary writing; to them the sights and sounds of night, winter, wind, storm, amid those dense boughs, which had to Grace a touch of the uncanny, and even of the supernatural, were simple occurrences whose origin, continuance, and laws they foreknew. [...]. The artifices of the seasons were

³⁴⁹ Ibid., p.210.

³⁵⁰ Hardy, *The Woodlanders*, pp.438-39.

³⁵¹ Ibid., p.399.

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seen by them from the conjuror's own point of view, and not from that of the spectator.³⁵²

Now with Giles's death, it seems the spirit of this reciprocity between the woodlanders and the woods is gone, although Marty promises to continue the work: 'Whenever I plant the young larches I'll think that none can plant as you planted; and whenever I split a gad, and whenever I turn the cider-wring I'll say none could do it like you.'³⁵³ This loss just reminds us of the death of the old ferryman who takes away the spirit of the border town, as symbolised by the white pagoda: although it is restored, the deaths and changes cannot be undone, and it is even more tragic when everything resumes its tranquillity as if nothing has happened.

The aesthetics of silence involve sexual inaction, and both novels show an emphasis on the metaphysical aspect of Nature rather than on physical desires (not including Fitzpiers's active sexuality which is satirised by the narrator). To be clear, however, it is not specified in Taoist doctrines that sexual desire should be suppressed; considering the wartime context of these metaphysics, 'inaction' in the doctrine is more about regulating the desire for power rather than the sexual desire, and in this chapter we use a metaphorical rather than a literary interpretation of the Taoist 'action through inaction'. Both Emerald and Marty are depicted as attuned with *ziran* but not sexually attractive: for Emerald, it is mainly that she is too young and naïve; for Marty, it is narrated explicitly about her that she lacks feminine attractiveness: '[i]n years she was no more than nineteen or twenty; but the necessity of taking thought at a too early period of life had forced the provisional curves of her childhood's face to a premature finality. Thus she had but little pretension to beauty; save in one prominent particular, her hair'³⁵⁴; '[h]e saw Marty standing in her doorway, a slim figure in meagre black almost without womanly contours as yet.'³⁵⁵ In Chapter 20, a narrative about Marty's reluctant help for the courtship of Giles and Grace during the Midsummer eve revels reveals her awkward position both in this courtship and in relation to her own sexuality:

Neither Grammer nor Marty South had seen the surgeon's manoeuvre, and still to help Winterborne, as she supposed, the old woman suggested to the wood-girl that she should walk forward at the heels of Grace, and 'tole' her down the required way if she showed a tendency to run in another direction. Poor Marty, always doomed to sacrifice desire to obligation, walked forward accordingly, and waited as a beacon, still and silent, for the retreat of Grace and her giddy companions, now quite out of hearing.³⁵⁶

³⁵² Ibid., p.399.

³⁵³ Ibid., p.439.

³⁵⁴ Ibid., p.48.

³⁵⁵ Ibid., p.158.

³⁵⁶ Ibid., p.197.

The silence and stillness of Marty reflects the state of her sexuality along with her embarrassment, highlighted by the narrator's entitling her as 'the wood-girl'. It is a curious relationship between Marty and Giles. When Giles first appears at Marty's cottage, there is a lack of mutual sexual attraction: '[t]here was reserve in his glance, and restraint upon his mouth', and then they walk together in the wood without any intimacy, even that of co-workers: '[h]ardly anything could be more isolated, or more self-contained'.³⁵⁷ Still, Marty is rendered as a spiritual match for Giles as Grace gradually realises: 'she had never understood Giles as Marty had done. Marty South alone, of all the women in Hintock and the world, had approximated to Winterborne's level of intelligent intercourse with Nature. In that respect she had formed his true complement in the other sex, had lived as his counterpart, had subjoined her thoughts to his as a corollary'.³⁵⁸ The asexuality of these characters echoes their reciprocal sensibility towards Nature, which eventually indicates that the vitality of such sensibility and reciprocity is fading, and this adds to the melancholic aesthetics of silence in both novels.

2.6 Conclusion

Beyond the textual domain, understanding the historical context of Shen's text is helpful for explaining his literary *wuwei* in terms of the function of language and literature. Shen started his literary career in the light of the May Fourth Movement and the New Culture Movement, and his works became a significant part of the 'New Literature'. However, his attitude towards language and literature was indebted to traditional Chinese aesthetics, including Taoism, with which he familiarised himself in his formal and informal educations. On the call of the literature revolution, Shen, like many contemporary writers, faced the rise of a new language for writing in the Vernacular Language Movement, together with a new view of language and literature.³⁵⁹ According to Chinese scholar Liu Tairan, Shen was sceptical about this new instrumental view of the Chinese language: 'for the forerunners of the New Culture Movement, vernacular Chinese is a transparent language which carries the mission to represent the world truthfully and completely in order to critique the society, revolutionise the society, and rebuild the nation'.³⁶⁰ Underlying

³⁵⁷ Ibid., p.59.

³⁵⁸ Ibid., pp.398-99.

³⁵⁹ 'The Vernacular Language Movement 白话文运动, which fostered a radical change in the writing style of Chinese composition, developed from century-long usage of a northern dialect in literature and gained momentum during the student and intellectual-led New Culture Movement (1917–1923). It won nationwide acceptance in the 1920s and has made a lasting impact on education, communication, and literary research.' From Yuan Haiwang and Cheng Linsun, *Berkshire encyclopedia of China: Modern and historic views of the world's newest and oldest global power* (Berkshire Publishing, 2009), p.2387.

³⁶⁰ Liu Tairan 刘泰然, 'Intuitional Experience and Visual Regulation: On the Relationship between Language and Picture in Xiangxing Shujian and Xiangxing Sanji "文字不如绘画": 直感经验与视觉成规 - 论《湘行书

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this political instrumentalism of language is the modern threat of objectifying the world through mimetic realism, positing a duality between Nature and culture, which is against the holistic metaphysics of traditional Chinese philosophy and aesthetics. Liu Tairan continues: '[t]his [the Vernacular Chinese Movement] was not only a change of vocabulary and grammar, but a change of the whole way of thinking and living - the way of perception and acquiring meanings. This meant the collapse of the holistic classical world: the world that man and heaven merge into one.'³⁶¹ He concludes about Shen that, however, '[t]here is always an intentional use and recreation of the classical pattern in his narratives.'³⁶² Understanding the context of *The Border Town* allows a closer observation of the classical elements in the novel. Liu Tairan observes that in Shen's works there are distinct Chinese poetics, which I argue in this chapter can be understood through the Taoist *wuwei*:

In traditional Chinese culture, the relationship between signs and reality is seldom considered to be adequately captured within one single representation system. There is a definite awareness of limitation between signs and reality, signs and meanings - the so-called 'meaning beyond words 言不尽意' implies that signs cannot represent the world as mirrored images. Based on this linguistic scepticism, Chinese poetics generates a unique representation system - 'establishing lively and concrete images to express abstract and infinite meanings 立象尽意.'³⁶³

Liu concludes that 'in classical Chinese culture, it is not a binary relationship between signs and the world. Signs are not regarded as antitheses to the world, nor abstract or fictional appendants; they are "together born with heaven and earth", hence "it is through language that the changes of the world can be observed"'.³⁶⁴ Liu's explanation obviously borrows from the Taoist conception of heaven and man merging into one, and he notes the literary use of silence as action: by claiming the eventual failure of language to represent the nameless, a restriction of logocentrism is revealed, hence a potential of infinite meanings as well as the suggestiveness of silence. Thus, an anxiety of representation is alleviated because the gap between signs and the world is filled with metaphysical connections (Tao) and the reader's imagination.

As I clarified at the beginning of this chapter, rather than passivity, *wuwei* is more about doing the right thing at the right time. It provides a means for focusing on 'passivity' in the narrative that breaks down the assumption of an opposition between an inaction associated with traditional agricultural society and action associated with modern urban society. Meanwhile, alongside

简》《湘行散记》中的语-图关系', *Theoretical Studies in Literature and Art* 《文艺理论研究》, (3) 2018, p.189.

³⁶¹ Ibid., p.190.

³⁶² Ibid., p.190.

³⁶³ Ibid., p.190.

³⁶⁴ Ibid., p.190.

wuwei as a narrative aesthetics of silence in these two novels, it is a concept that enables a focus not just on actions (*wei* 为) but on timing. For example, the old ferryman's and Mr. Melbury's meddling with Emerald's and Grace's marriages can be regarded as *wei*. The final tragedy of the three lovers in *The Border Town* is in some degree due to the misunderstandings between the ferryman and the two brothers' family: they think the ferryman's elusiveness about the marriage is the cause for Tianbao's futile hope to gain Emerald's love and ultimately his tragic death. In the case of Grace's tragic marriage to Fitzpiers, it is partly caused by Mr. Melbury's meddling with her relationship with Giles: Mr. Melbury intervenes in the natural course of their relationship and partly causes both the break-up and the reunion between them which result from his misperceptions of the circumstances and untimely remedies, thus can be regarded as a violation of *wuwei*. Another kind of *wei* can be found in characters such as Marty and Nuosong, which is not totally against what is suggested by the circumstances. They follow their instincts and their actions follow their judgements of the circumstances: Marty's writing on the wall speaks what Giles refuses to admit but what is most likely to happen - deprived of his property, it is even harder for him to marry Grace. In Nuosong's case, he well understands that the key to winning Emerald's heart is that she makes certain her feelings rather than deciding on a better singer, and obviously he would be the one to win if both the brothers sing, so he sings for two of them which is not only an expression of his love for Emerald but also what he deems a timely action in order to make the competition fair for his brother. Compared with the interventions of the father figures, Marty and Nuosong actually do not meddle with but follow the natural course. Such analyses of the characters, however, can easily simplify *wuwei* as a critique of unfit actions and ignore the sociopolitical factors that lead to the tragedy as I have explained in my textual analysis, thus missing the most important implications of *wuwei* in terms of its aesthetical contributions to the narratives, and to an understanding of timeliness as an aesthetic.

In this chapter, I focussed on textual analyses of *The Woodlanders* and *The Border Town* and approached the aesthetics of silence in both novels with a Taoist conception of *wuwei* to illuminate their emphasis on the absolute silence of things by the seasonal tempo, the Nature-witnessing, and the qualities of silence. Such an emphasis on silence shows a dialectic between the nameless and the named and reflects a holistic view of Nature and humanity. In their representations of the constancy of *ziran* as illustrated by an absolute silence of things, which contrasts the variability of human affairs, both *The Woodlanders* and *The Border Town* state a melancholic acceptance of human insignificance. Silence is used as a literary announcement of the inability of human language and power in the face of *ziran*. The anxiety of both writers about a failure of representation, raised in Chapter 1, as reflected in their use of perspectives, is developed in this chapter as an aesthetic of silence that can be illuminated by the Taoist

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conception of *wuwei*, accentuating the unspeakable metaphysics of *ziran*. In the next chapter, the question will find its resolution in the Taoist conception of 'return'.

Chapter 3 The Taoist Return: A Comparison between *The Return of the Native* (1878) and *Long River* (1938-1945)

Tao is eternal, but has no fame (name);
The Uncarved Block, though seemingly of small account,
Is greater than anything that is under heaven.
[...]
Once the block is carved, there will be names,
And so soon as there are names,
Know that it is time to stop.
Only by knowing when it is time to stop can danger be avoided.
To Tao all under heaven will come
As streams and torrents flow into a great river or sea.

—Arthur Waley trans., *Tao Te Ching* Chapter 32, in *The Way and its Power*,
p.183.

The quote from Chapter 32 of *Tao Te Ching* describes a ‘return (*fan* 返)’ movement to Tao in Taoism. A Taoist return is a return to the Origin, to the Tao. The goal is to return to one's original nature and to the pristine simplicity of the authentic state of things where there is no ego (*wu wo* 无我), as indicated by the phrase ‘uncarved block 朴’ in the quote. In Chinese poetics and Taoist aesthetics, ‘a world without a self (*wu wo zhi jing* 无我之境)’ is related to an intuitive vision of the world as a unified whole: the holistic metaphysics of the Taoist worldview, and by following Tao and conducting *wuwei* one can achieve oneness with *ziran*.³⁶⁵ Chinese scholar Yan Chunyou explains ‘a world without a self’ that ‘[f]or humanity, Tao means no ego, because Tao is without self and unconscious. When everything artificial is denied, it is Tao’.³⁶⁶ Yan subsequently points out two biggest artificial obstacles for a return to Tao: language and institutional power - ‘Tao is not what can be named and is beyond argument because it is being, not words’³⁶⁷ and ‘Tao flows through the initial beings of everything which cannot be categorised by any “-ism”’.³⁶⁸ The movement of a return in Taoism is compared to that of streams ‘flowing back to the sea,’ like

³⁶⁵ The translation of ‘a world without a self 无我之境’ is borrowed from Wang Kuo-wei and Ching-I. Tu trans., *Poetic Remarks in the Human World* 《人间词话》 (Taipei: Chung Hwa Book Company 中华书局印行, 1970), p.2.

³⁶⁶ Yan Chunyou 严春友, ‘On Different Layers of Zhuangzi’s Thoughts and their Functions 论庄子思想的不同层次及其作用’, *Journal of Hebei Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)* 《河北师范大学学报(哲学社会科学版)》, 28.2, 2005, p.33.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.33.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.34.

homecoming, since the sea is also the origin. Taoist 'return' also reflects the excessiveness and ultimate limitation of human institutions and language, and that intuitive awareness goes beyond language, conceptual thought, and societal doctrines.³⁶⁹ Starting from this quote, this chapter deals with two novels by Hardy and Shen that delineate human alienation from *ziran* and explore a return to native being which can be compared to a Taoist return to holism. Through their melancholic undertones these two novels pay tribute to a mythological past of the local cultures, revealing the ache of modernism that alienates humanity from *ziran*: not only in a sense that the relativity of the human subject to his/her traditional, rooted environment is threatened by the alienating power of the modern world; but also that through the comparison, we see that in the two interrelated cultural histories of England and China, the institutional powers of a modern society hinder the vitality of Wessex and Xiangxi. Thus, Hardy and Shen offer an imaginative return to their native cultures in these novels. A dialectic between Nature and culture surfaces through their uses of the naïve and the poetic languages which ultimately makes connections between native sensibilities and enchanted atavistic representations of Nature. Still, an adherence to *ziran* which can be viewed as a kind of natural institution in Taoism and a scepticism towards modern institutions in their novels put Hardy and Shen in a complex relationship with institutional powers which is reflected in their novels and essays.

3.1 Resistance to an Alienation from *Ziran*

Both *The Return* and *Long River* begin with a bird's eye view of Nature. Such a panorama situates human destiny within a macroscope of temporal and spacial infinity, which on the one hand decentres and trivialises human beings; on the other hand, it should be noted that both beginnings demonstrate a view in motion: either with the motion of the red-dleman's carriage in *The Return* or a boat that carries a traveller down the river through Xiangxi. Like a camera's gradually zooming in on the human species in the vast universe, such a focus on relationship between humanity and Nature establish a keynote of *ziran* at the very beginning of the novels.

Both novels accentuate a resistance to the alienation from *ziran*, and such an authorial stance and artistic inclination can be more clearly understood if associated with both writers' experiences of being returned natives themselves. Shen left West Hunan and started his life and writing career in cities at the age of twenty-one; and due to the intensifying wartime situation, he remained an urban resident and writer for urban readers for the rest of his life, except for two short return trips to his family in 1934 and 1936. His writings of Xiangxi are therefore, to some extent, all like

³⁶⁹ Pregadio, *The Encyclopedia of Taoism*, pp.6-7.

the old man's recollections in *Fengzi*. He claims to maintain a rural idiosyncrasy: '[t]he so-called "rustics" have their idiosyncrasy and weakness in the same thing. They see less of the world but react strongly, and they adjust the silent teachings of *ziran* into their lives and face it with certain childishness, then become part of it.'³⁷⁰ For his liberal belief in literature, he states:

[The rustics] do not believe in the monumental classics and doubt all kinds of notions and opinions in society, as if they were carelessly looking into the windows of a department store or standing at the crossroads - 15 years passed since I settled in the city, my objectives and aspirations still lie in the impractical features of the imagination stirred by the versatile clouds in sky and splattering waters on earth, and they are my weakness.³⁷¹

By 'weakness', Shen means his staunch belief in the vitality and creativity of natural instincts based on his rural idiosyncrasy, rather than conforming to an urban and social influence on human nature. He repeats the word 'childishness' several times when he is describing the state of his mind and writing, which can be viewed as a 'return' to originality, to Tao. Shen's essays offer something between subtle descriptions and abstract thinking: they show a holism that breaks the dichotomy of object and subject, concrete and abstract, which reminds us of Zhuangzi's butterfly metaphor, as if in a lost or unconscious state of mind, like dreams.³⁷² In this way, he manages to maintain his literary tenets and beliefs and critique the alienation of human nature from *ziran* in the modern society.

Both Hardy's and Shen's literary 'return' not only concerns with their reimagining a homeland in literature, but also relates to their views of the aim and function of literature which is also expressed through their iconoclasm and impressionism as I have delineated in the previous two chapters. I have demonstrated how Nature acts as a being instead of a mere backdrop to human beings in their novels and how the silence in their narratives accentuates this agency of Nature. In this chapter, I move from the thematic and narrative concerns about Nature to a rhetoric one: what kind of language is most effective of representing Nature? Both writers' scepticism towards artificial institutions, their insistence on their literature being impressions rather than theories, and their mediation between two modes of languages - the naïve and the poetic - all show their exploration of this question, and such an exploration makes them distinct from their

³⁷⁰ Shen, 'Diving into Abyss 潜渊' (1939-41), in *Complete Works* ed. by Zhang, Volume XII, p.87.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.87.

³⁷² The butterfly metaphor quoted from Sam Hamill, *The Essential Chuang Tzu* (Shambhala Publications, 1999): 'Long ago, Chuang Chou [Zhuangzi] dreamed he was a butterfly fluttering among trees, doing as he pleased, completely unaware of a Chuang Chou. A sudden awakening, and there, looking a little out of sorts, was Chuang Chou. Now, I don't know whether it is Chou who dreamed he was a butterfly, or whether a butterfly dreams he's Chuang Chou. But between Chuang Chou and the butterfly, we ought to be able to find some sort of distinction. This is what's known as Things Changing' (p.18).

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contemporaries which brings Hardy and Shen into a dialogue through their literature across time and space.

The return of the native, however, can become problematic when the native has become educated, which is also shared by both writers themselves. An understanding of Hardy's dilemma can be attained through this following sketch by him for his poem collection:

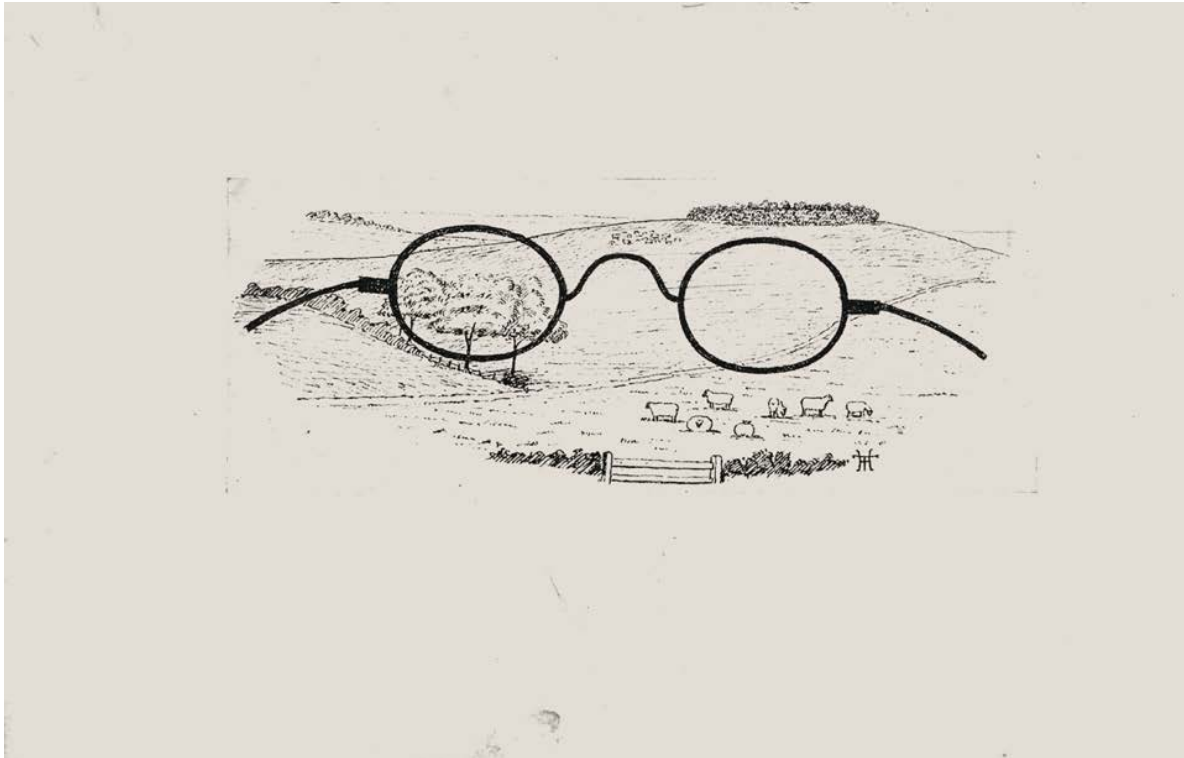


Figure 3 Illustration for *Wessex Poems* (1898)³⁷³

As portrayed in this illustration, Nature exists both through the writers' vision and outside it, and such a double-sidedness constitutes the unique conception of Nature in Hardy's novels which on the one hand 'examines' Nature, as represented by the glasses which are associated with intellectual investigations and can be regarded as an alienating power of the modern institutions; on the other hand, Hardy claims his observations to be mere impressions, something unmediated as it existed outside the lens. Morton Dauwen Zabel comments on this aspect of Hardy that concerns his literary orientation: '[h]e felt that poetry and fiction, if they bowed to the critical faculty, would ultimately meet an enervation of their strength, their native daemon and vitality. [...] Caught between the intimacy of his physical sensations and the enveloping grandeur of his imaginative and scientific visions, he based his faith as a poet on a magical conception of man and

³⁷³ Collected from Dorchester History Centre archive, box TH72. The picture accompanies Hardy's poem 'In a Eweleaze near Weatherbury' (1898).

nature.³⁷⁴ Wessex is half real and half dream, echoing the double-sidedness shown in Hardy's sketch, and Zabel notes it as a dilemma between Hardy's physical sensations and intellectual visions. Facing the critical faculty of modernity, however, the 'dream' elements are about to be deconstructed by an alienation effect of the age, and a 'return' to impressions and sensibilities seems to be against the social evolutionary trend. As suggested by Zabel, Hardy's response is creating 'a magical conception of man and nature'.

For Shen, the call of modernity propels him to leave the army and pursue a faith in New Literature, but it is not strong enough for him to abandon the traditional Chinese aesthetics that imagine the Chinese language and the world through a holistic view, contrary to the modern instrumental view of language that objectifies Nature. Shen, like Hardy, is ultimately sceptical of the encroaching modernity and resists a modern alienation from Nature. As I have done with Hardy, we can have a glimpse of Shen's 'return' through some of his sketches. In several letters to his wife in 1957, Shen drew four sketches of the view he saw through the window of his residence in Shanghai (Figures 4, 5, 6, and 7):

³⁷⁴ Morton Dauwen Zabel, *Craft and Character: Texts, Method, and Vocation in Modern Fiction* (Viking Press, 1957), p.78.

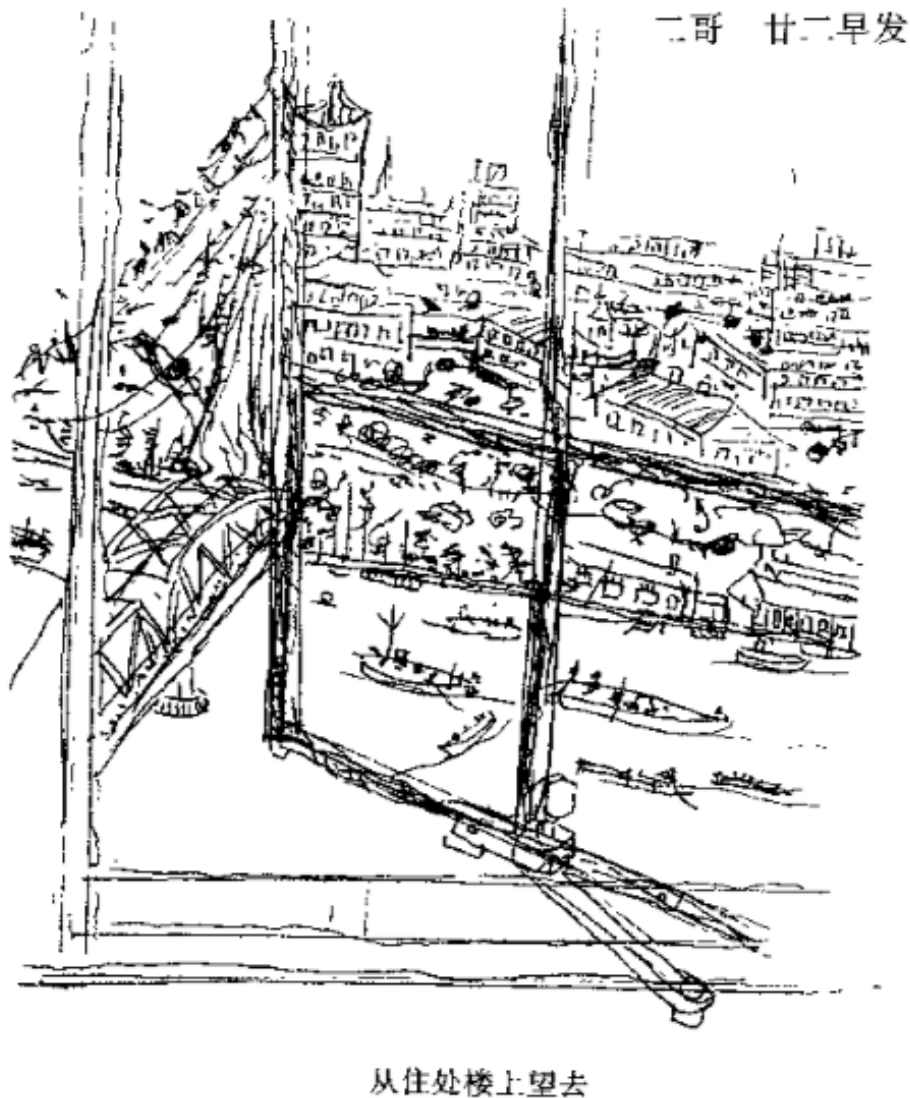


Figure 4 Shen's sketch in a letter to his wife, 22 April 1957 ['Looking from my residence']

'The hazy sunlight shines on everything. Looking from the window on the morning of 22 April, I hear thousands of kinds of shouts and yells and calls. With the boat moving and the water flowing, people on the trams are engaged in their own thoughts; everything is moving, however the water that flows the boat appears quite still.'³⁷⁵

This first sketch is drawn several days earlier than the three others and it shows a rather complete image of Shen's view: the buildings, the bridge, and the boats compose a rather busy view of a modern city. Several days later, on 1 May, the Labor's Day, Shen's sketches depict people's celebration parade on the bridge and several boats below the bridge, which zoom in on the boats comparing with his first sketch. The contrast between the crowded bridge and the lonely boats is sharpened by the blankness in the place of the river.

³⁷⁵ Zhang ed., *Complete Works*, Volume XX, p.157.

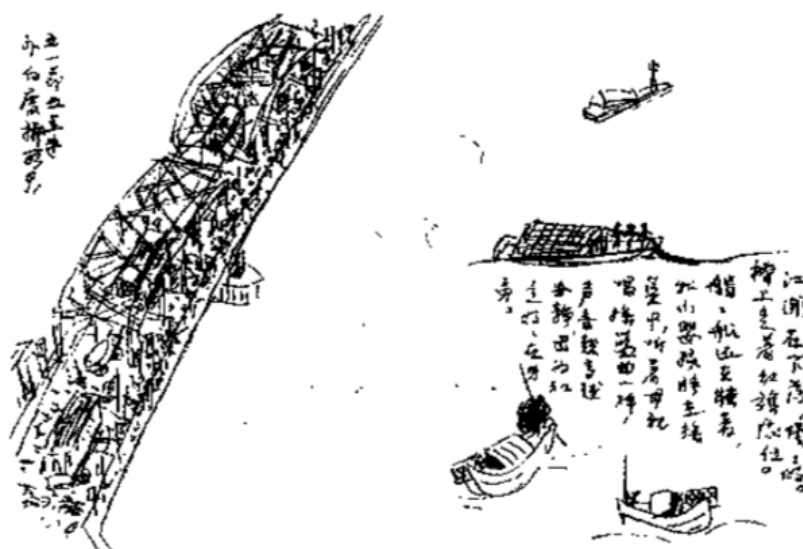


Figure 5 Shen's sketch in a letter to his wife, 2 May 1957 (5:30pm).

'The tide is falling slowly, with red-flag parade on the bridge and a little boat sleeping on the water, like a baby in cradle listening to mother's lullaby - the louder her voice the quieter the baby is, because he knows that mother is around.'³⁷⁶

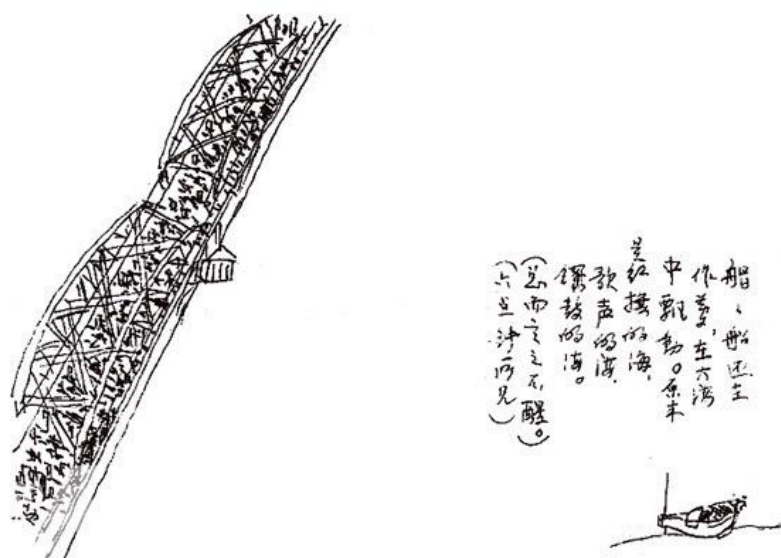


Figure 6 Shen's sketch in a letter to his wife, 2 May 1957 (6pm).

'The little boat is still in dream and floating in sea - a sea of red flags, of songs (all in all cannot wake up).'³⁷⁷

³⁷⁶ Ibid., p.177.

³⁷⁷ Ibid., p.178.

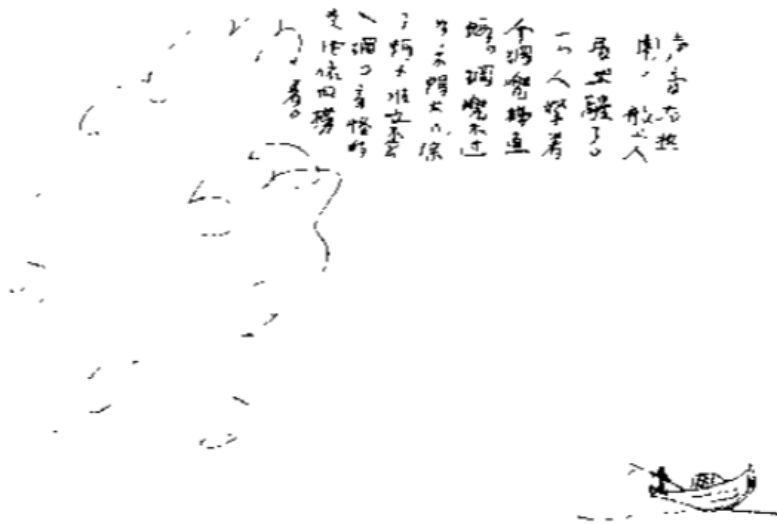


Figure 7 Shen's sketch in a letter to his wife, 2 May 1957 (follows the previous one without specifying the exact time).

'It is becoming too loud and the person on the boat is awake. He tries to catch fish and shrimps by a fishing net which is about the size of a straw hat and could not catch anything but tiny shrimps. Strangely, he continues fishing.'³⁷⁸

In figures 5, 6, and 7, the views gradually zoom in on the boats more and more and finally focus on one of them, with the bridge totally disappearing from the view. Shen's captions on the sketches also demonstrate his gradual shift of attention and finally concentrates on the fishing boat. If we only see the last sketch, it is difficult to imagine that the boat is set in such a busy environment, and the contrast is essential for understanding the alienation shown in this sketch which illuminates the alienating power of modernity in *Long River*. The gradual zoom reminds us of the opening chapters of *Long River* and *The Return*, but here the connection between humanity and Nature that Shen emphasises is shown through the lonely yet stubborn fisher, which to some extent is reflected in Shen himself as resisting the alienation of the age. The intended blankness in these sketches illustrates an inaction in representation which I have analysed in Chapter 2 through the Taoist conception of *wuwei*, and together with the captions, it reflects Shen's insistence on the value of 'the constant': the integrity of natural being in Xiangxi, the traditional Taoist holistic view of Nature and culture, and a persistence in hard work. The small fishing boat and the seemingly incapable fishing net serve as a metaphor for his liberal literary tenets that insist on the artistic autonomy of literature. These sketches ultimately demonstrate Shen's idea of

³⁷⁸ Ibid., p.178.

a return to what he deems to be the original and essential assets for his literary creation, in spite of the chaos of modernisation: his experiences and impressions within *ziran*.

3.2 Scepticism towards the Institutional Power

Long River is an unfinished novel written between 1938 and 1942.³⁷⁹ When he began it, Shen had just returned from his second trip to his hometown Fenghuang after he first left Xiangxi in 1921. He wrote a number of short stories and essays about the changes that had happened to Xiangxi after his long leave; and he already had an idea of writing another novel about these changes when he wrote *The Border Town* (1934), a major literary success. Shen writes: 'I plan to provide the readers with a comparison. I will write another work about the civil war in the last two decades and its impact on farmers [...] I will write about the worries and fears of common people during the changes through which this nation has been brought to an unknown destiny by history.'³⁸⁰ Shen repeats his intentions in the preface to *Long River*: 'I will continue *The Border Town* in another work to write about the distortion of the characteristics and soul of local farmers and their loss of simplicity in the last two decades.'³⁸¹ Changes to traditional agricultural life and the impact of modernisation on local communities, material as well as mental, are therefore themes for both *The Return* and *Long River*. Shen explains in the preface that *Long River* 'helps us learn more about the society: the social progress of a place during the war must contain conflicts of human feelings and the remaking of human relationships'.³⁸² For *The Return*, it is 'contemporaneous with Hardy's earliest memories of a rural way of life still dominated by the timeless rhythms of the solar year and its associated customs and rituals' - south western England during the 1840s.³⁸³ Nevertheless, changes had already taken place to Wessex which can be found not only in the representation of Clym's foreign trade and cosmopolitan education, but also in Hardy's complicated narrative that shows a tension between his native and his intellectual identities. This kind of tension, which can also be noticed in *Long River*, allows Hardy and Shen to be positioned in an interesting dialogue with one another about the alienated native self in the face of modernity.

³⁷⁹ This is according to the editorial note in Zhang ed., *Complete Works*, Volume X, p.2. American Chinese scholar David Der-wei Wang claimed that it was in fact written at the end of 1939 or beginning of 1940 and first serialised in 1943. The first separate edition was published in 1945 by the Wenju Press in Kunming, and another edition in 1948 by Kaiming Bookstore Press in Shanghai. In Shen's own autobiographical notes (*Jishou University Journal*, 1988, Volume 2) he only recorded the 1948 edition.

³⁸⁰ Zhang ed., *Complete Works*, Volume VIII, p. 59.

³⁸¹ Zhang ed., *Complete Works*, Volume X, p. 5.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 7.

³⁸³ Michael A. Zeitler, *Representations of Culture: Thomas Hardy's Wessex & Victorian Anthropology* (Peter Lang, 2007), p.93.

The story of *Long River* is set in 1936 in Xiangxi.³⁸⁴ As a brief background, Shen writes in the preface:

At that time [when he travelled back to Xiangxi in 1936] the Xiangxi government was assigning thousands of young students to go to the countryside and carry out the civil training of villagers, which was very difficult technically. The wartime conditions in Wuhan [capital city of a neighbouring province, where the government of the Nationalist Party was located] was getting tense so the evacuation of institutions and refugees from other provinces was increasing. The public lacked real understanding of Xiangxi and often summarised it as 'bandit country'.³⁸⁵

In 1934, Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-Shek, 1887-1975), leader of the Nationalist Party (Kuo Min Tang, KMT) launched the New Life Movement whose aim was 'the promotion of a regular life guided by the four virtues, namely, *li* 礼 [ritual/decorum], *yi* 义 [rightness or duty], *lian* 廉 [integrity or honesty], and *chi* 耻 [sense of shame]'.³⁸⁶ These virtues are fundamental Confucian doctrines and the New Life Movement stresses the role of the state in everyday life. Despite its emphasis on traditional values, Adif Dirlik argues that the movement is 'far from being a reaffirmation of traditional Chinese political conceptions, it was fashioned by and in response to the twentieth-century Chinese revolution. Its underlying spirit had greater affinity with modern counterrevolutionary movements than with political attitudes inherited from China's past'.³⁸⁷ Liu Wennan notes that the New Life Movement is 'located in a new domain of state control between morality and law' and that 'it was actually an integral part of China's own modernising process, in which the state redefined its moral and legal role in people's everyday lives in order to build a modern nation-state'.³⁸⁸ In *Long River*, villagers are anxious about the New Life Movement, as represented by Manman who is always alert to all sources of news about it. Like Clym's audience by the end of *The Return*, they feel disinterested rather than uninterested in the looming new changes caused by modern institutional forces because they do not understand the force nor their own situation. They feel isolated: '[t]his must be what the city is like, we are excluded'.³⁸⁹ And they hardly understand the nature of the movement: on hearing that machines will replace their manual workshops, they think 'it must be machine cattle doing the work'³⁹⁰ and 'the oil mill owners don't understand how this will affect them - they only make fun of the idea that machine

³⁸⁴ Zhang ed., *Complete Works*, Volume X, p.63.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p.6.

³⁸⁶ Chiang Kai-Shek, 'Essentials of the New Life Movement', *Speech, Nanchang* (1934).

³⁸⁷ Arif Dirlik, 'The ideological foundations of the New Life Movement: a study in counterrevolution', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 34.4 (1975), p.945.

³⁸⁸ Liu Wennan, 'Redefining the moral and legal roles of the state in everyday life: The New Life movement in China in the mid-1930s', *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review*, 2.2 (2013), p.335.

³⁸⁹ Zhang ed., *Complete Works*, Volume X, p.56.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.88.

can do everything'.³⁹¹ Shen's critique of the New Life Movement is concerned with a historical discrimination against the Xiangxi Miao group, whose regional habitat was traditionally regarded as a 'bandit country' by the Han society.³⁹² For Shen, the New Life Movement represents a blind modern institutional power that neglects local vitalities and identities. In the narration of *Long River*, the value of a local dialectic between Nature and culture is foregrounded, and Shen seems to argue for a cultural as well as an artistic autonomy against nationalist modernisation. The implementation of the New Life Movement mainly relied on the police force, and in this novel it is represented by the security guard team, which becomes a major source of corruption and discrimination in local communities. Maggie Clinton focuses on the fascist core of the movement and argues that the Confucian precepts in the New Life Movement are used to foster subordination and social hierarchies which are believed necessary for industrial productivity and military service:

What appear on the surface to be bafflingly trivial concerns were understood by NLM promoters as ways of disciplining people for mechanized agricultural work and industrial production, of encouraging rationalized saving and spending habits, and of preparing the average citizen for war. Its relentless incantations of national unity and cohesion harbored distinct social hierarchies. Everyone would have a role and a purpose, but only a few would have a voice. The Confucianism celebrated by the NLM instructed people to mind their own places and defer to social superiors.³⁹³

Clinton further explains that the elements of the Confucian heritage which did not accord with the gist of the movement were suppressed - '[t]he NLM's invocation of traditional values masked a profound reordering of the social world'.³⁹⁴ Thus, according to Clinton, the New Life Movement was a conservatively disguised modernising movement with a fascist nature:

Collapsing morality into efficiency and obedience left no room for morality to act as a check on abuses of power. And while the stated purpose of militarisation was to unify society in a regimented fashion, it actually encouraged people to seek out power where they could find it and wield it against co-nationals. Although this kind of low-grade social destabilisation might well have proven useful in terms of state management of society, it still ran up against fascists' professed desire for social concord on Confucian terms.³⁹⁵

Faced with a misunderstanding and violation of regional culture on the one hand, and the poor implementation of the modernising movement in Xiangxi on the other, Shen's *Long River* portrays

³⁹¹ Ibid., p.89.

³⁹² See Shen's 'Preface to *Long River*', ibid., p.6.

³⁹³ Maggie Clinton, *Revolutionary Nativism: Fascism and Culture in China, 1925-1937* (Duke University Press, 2017), p.158.

³⁹⁴ Ibid., p.159.

³⁹⁵ Ibid., p.159.

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a Xiangxi in change but at the same time struggling to cling to its intrinsic cultural values. Shen states in the preface to this novel that '[t]he integrity and passion of the characters in *The Border Town* might have become a past, but there should remain some essence in the blood and dreams of the young generation - in favourable conditions, it can rekindle their pride and confidence'.³⁹⁶ Hence a return to these values is implied, and Nature is core to Shen's representation of such a world.

The first notable shared feature of both Hardy and Shen's regional novels, then, is that Nature, instead of being a backdrop, seems to have an agency of its own and can also form part of a reciprocal relationship with the characters. Both authors write long passages about Nature even before the characters are introduced. This was by no means a common aesthetic device. Hardy once sent the manuscript of *The Return of the Native* (1878) to John Blackwood, publisher of *Blackwood's Magazine*. Blackwood politely declared himself unable to place it in the near future and complained that Hardy had spent too long on the opening scenes 'without a thread of light to throw an interest round the rugged figures' and that 'there is hardly anything like what is called Novel interest'.³⁹⁷ The publisher's complaint implies that 'nature' is not a legitimate subject for what is called 'Novel interest', and it serves to remind us that what these two novelists were doing was formally and aesthetically daring in its way.

Long River and *The Return* overlap in the plot of 'the return of the native.' In *Long River*, Yaoyao's fiancée is about to return from his urban education, and their arranged marriage is at stake not only because of the probable interference of the security captain, but also as a result of the clash between the native upbringing of Yaoyao and the modern culture to which her fiancée has adapted. In *The Return*, this clash is represented by the marriage between Eustacia and Clym. Yaoyao is described as passionate and shrewd, like a potential Eustacia, and her eagerness to see the outside world is mentioned several times in the novel. Although Shen did not offer an end to the story since the novel was heavily censored and he only finished the first volume, all these threats can be traced in the existing part. To trace these plot similarities is not simply to show how much the stories are alike, but to demonstrate how this similar pattern of impossible marriage helps to build on the tension of the conflict between the native and the modernised. Clym's blueprint of enlightening the Egdon natives is no less a representation of the modernising institution which he acquires from his cosmopolitan readings and experience, but it is an alienating power that neglects the uniqueness of Egdon Heath and its relations with the villagers.

³⁹⁶ Zhang ed., *Complete Works*, Volume X, p.5.

³⁹⁷ Frank B Pinion, *Thomas Hardy: art and thought* (London: Springer, 1977), p.178.

The blind forces of modern alienation are also represented by the security guard in *Long River*. The security team is appointed by the local government to keep local peace, especially the order of the wharf since people from all walks gather here and it is the most crowded place in Lùjia Ping. However, it becomes a villain force and asks protection fees for all kinds of reasons, even for public gatherings like the village opera. The captain of the team, who has been to larger towns and cities, is a stranger to Lùjia Ping. There are many episodes in the novel showing his ignorance of the local customs and dialect. Shen mentions in the preface that some episodes are supposed to be rural humour in a wish to ease the desperate feelings about the war, and the captain can be viewed as such a representation. The captain appears arbitrary and awkward, but he also threatens a crisis through his vengeful intentions towards Changshun who refuses to please him and his sexual fantasy about Yaoyao. Like Fitzpiers in *The Woodlanders*, the captain represents a new-world stranger who is about to cause catastrophes because he refuses to understand the *ziran* of the locus, which is against the returning movement to Tao. The captain and Fitzpiers, however, have different reasons to reject such a return. The captain is a vicious character without any sympathy towards the rustics. He is undereducated but has experienced the New Life in big towns which he often brags about - he is artificial though not cultivated, a dangerous combination of savagery and culture. Hardly any natural link can be found between him and the rural culture. Being nameless, he is a representative of many other army forces in Xiangxi at that time, ignorant of the local culture and indifferent to their way of life, as evidenced in Shen's autobiography where he writes about his early years in a local army. Fitzpiers, on the other hand, represents a highly educated force from the new urban culture. He thinks the villagers are too ignorant to accept his scientific medical treatment. His professional skill is believed by Grace to be his only trustworthy part and is shown throughout the story to be quite serious; his other researches, however, show a pretentious understanding, in particular his definition of love, and he is totally a slave to his base impulses for sex and affection.³⁹⁸ Despite their differences, the captain and Fitzpiers are similar in the sense that they both represent the modern blind forces, ignorant of rural life and too self-interested to learn about it, which demonstrate an alienating power of modernity against the return to Tao.

Both Hardy and Shen show their scepticism towards the institutional powers of modernity and a resistance against alienation through a literary impressionism and a dialectic between Nature and culture that are intrinsic to the cultures of Egdon and Xiangxi, which I will address respectively in the following sections.

³⁹⁸ Hardy, *The Woodlanders*, p.165.

3.3 Literary Impressionism

In *The Return*, the community on Egdon Heath conforms to a diverse standard of time:

The next evening the mummers were assembled in the same spot, awaiting the entrance of the Turkish Knight.

'Twenty minutes after eight by the Quiet Woman, and Charley not come.'

'Ten minutes past by Blooms-End.'

'It wants ten minutes to, by Grandfer Cantle's watch.'

'And 'tis five minutes past by the captain's clock.'

On Egdon there was no absolute hour of the day. The time at any moment was a number of varying doctrines professed by the different hamlets, some of them having originally grown up from a common root, and then become divided by secession, some having been alien from the beginning. West Egdon believed in Blooms-End time, East Egdon in the time of the Quiet Woman Inn. Grandfer Cantle's watch had numbered many followers in years gone by, but since he had grown older faiths were shaken. Thus, the mummers having gathered hither from scattered points, each came with his own tenets on early and late; and they waited a little longer as a compromise.³⁹⁹

The different time conception gives Egdon a distinct feature of diversity from the urban unitary clock, which stems from a dependence on agricultural activities that emphasise seasons and weathers rather than specific standardised time. This dependence on environment creates richer senses of specific time and place, hence a neglect of the modern standard but a stress on the senses; and these time and space bound senses constitute a shared experience of the community, which expands to the non-human world and forms a symbiosis. Simon Gatrell comments on *The Return* that '[i]t is a symbiosis, not a domination. The heath cannot be dominated, it can only be co-operated with; Eustacia understands this, and finds it humiliating.'⁴⁰⁰ By Gatrell's definition, the 'symbiosis' between Egdon Heath and the characters means that 'the heath, for better or worse, assists in shaping those lives'.⁴⁰¹ In the light of Gatrell's analysis, Eustacia's plight can be understood as her resistance to Egdon's share of influence on her character. Symbiosis means reciprocity rather than domination, temporality that is in constant change and mediation rather than a single and rigid standard. Both Hardy and Shen lay a great emphasis on this symbiosis in these novels. For example, the following paragraph in *The Return* is typical of Hardy's narrative:

On the fine days at this time of the year, and earlier, certain ephemeral operations were apt to disturb, in their trifling way, the majestic calm of Egdon

³⁹⁹ Hardy, *The Return*, p.134.

⁴⁰⁰ Simon Gatrell, *Thomas Hardy and the Proper Study of Mankind* (Springer, 1993), p.45. The Italic is made by Gatrell.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p.46.

Heath. They were activities which, beside those of a town, a village, or even a farm, would have appeared as the ferment of stagnation merely, a creeping of the flesh of somnolence. But here, away from comparisons, shut in by the stable hills, among which mere walking had the novelty of pageantry, and where any man could imagine himself to be Adam without the least difficulty, they attracted the attention of every bird within eyeshot, every reptile not yet asleep, and set the surrounding rabbits curiously watching from hillocks at a safe distance. [. . .] It was a fine and quiet afternoon, about three o'clock; but the winter solstice having stealthily come on, the lowness of the sun caused the hour to seem later than it actually was, there being little here to remind an inhabitant that he must unlearn his summer experience of the sky as a dial. In the course of many days and weeks sunrise had advanced its quarters from northeast to southeast, sunset had receded from northwest to southwest; but Egdon had hardly heeded the change.⁴⁰²

Hardy creates a sense of a lively animal community in this passage. Both the place and time are set: it has to be on Egdon Heath and it has to be at this time of a 'fine' day close to the winter solstice. The temporal and spatial accuracy provides a local view and adds more possibilities for diversity since the setting is so specific: it can be quite different at another moment and on another spot of the Heath. Furthermore, overcoming an anthropocentric perspective, the narrative shows the senses of a versatile community of birds, reptiles, rabbits, and even Egdon Heath, which offers a relativity of perspectives with subjects. In *Long River*, the resilience of local farmers and sailors is similarly depicted through their symbiosis with the orchard and the river: 'half of the local population make their roots in earth, the other half flow with the river. Those who attach to the piece of land have their physical being relied on agricultural production, their mental being on deities and taboos, and their fantasies on the river'.⁴⁰³ This emphasis on symbiosis in their novels, which reflects their scepticism towards singular human value systems, is elaborated through their literary impressionism.

Hardy was a frequent visitor to art exhibitions, and judging from his notes and diaries, he was a keen appreciator of Impressionist paintings. Impressionists tend to attach a very specific title including the moment and place they paint to their paintings. A landscape has an infinite number of appearances, depending on the time of day and season: for impressionists, truth is a combination of geographical and meteorological reality and it is only valid for that moment and place. Both Hardy and Shen have repeatedly stated that their literature captures impressions of life rather than the 'truths' that some readers are looking for. In the preface to *Tess* (1892), Hardy claims that 'a novel is an impression, not an argument,' then he quotes a letter of Schiller to Goethe that '[a]s soon as I observe that any one, when judging of poetical representations,

⁴⁰² Hardy, *The Return*, p.115.

⁴⁰³ Zhang ed., *Complete Works*, Volume X, p.12-13.

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considers anything more important than the inner Necessity and Truth, I have done with them.'⁴⁰⁴

In the preface to *Jude* (1895), Hardy declares that this novel is 'simply an endeavour to give shape and coherence to a series of seemings, or personal impressions, the question of their consistency or their discordance, of their permanence or their transitoriness, being regarded as not of the first moment'.⁴⁰⁵ Likewise, in the preface to *Poems of the Past and Present* (1901) he asserts:

'[u]nadjusted impressions have their value, and the road to a true philosophy of life seems to lie in humbly recording diverse readings of its phenomena as they are forced upon us by chance and change.'⁴⁰⁶ Hardy defines the principles of impressionist art:

At the Society of British Artists there is good technique in abundance; but ideas for subjects are lacking. The impressionist school is strong. It is even more suggestive in the direction of literature than in that of art. As usual it is pushed to absurdity by some. But their principle is, as I understand it, that what you carry away with you from a scene is the true feature to grasp; or in other words, what appeals to your own individual eye and heart in particular amid much that does not so appeal, and which you therefore omit to record.⁴⁰⁷

This argument investigates the question of realism in art and literature. Hardy thinks that the impressionists have stronger ideas about subjects and that literature shows this subjectivity more than art. Jane Thomas notes that Hardy's narrative techniques are informed by ideas from art. Arguing that Hardy proposes a new form of creative address to the world to encourage a deeper and more focussed engagement than mere observation would allow, she explains that Hardy 'deploys a set of highly stylised devices which refer to works of art, artists, techniques and the subtle organisation of space, light effects and perspectives combined with emblematic or symbolic elements in a manner comparable to a painting or sculpture.'⁴⁰⁸ Thomas further elaborates that Hardy 'regularly employs terms such as "line", "perspective", "profile", "foreground", "background", and "middle distance"' and such narrative devices help him to select his subjects and intensify the impression and expression of what is true of them.⁴⁰⁹ For Hardy, art is selective and subjective: '[a]rt is a disproportioning - (i.e., distorting, throwing out of proportion) - of realities, to show more clearly the features that matter in those realities, which, if merely copied or reported inventorially, might possibly be observed, but would more probably be overlooked. Hence "realism" is not Art.'⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰⁴ Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* [1892] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.5.

⁴⁰⁵ Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure* [1895] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p.44.

⁴⁰⁶ Thomas Hardy, *Poems of the Past and Present* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1919), p.3.

⁴⁰⁷ Millgate ed., *The Life*, p.191.

⁴⁰⁸ Jane Thomas, 'Thomas Hardy and the Visual Arts', in Phillip Mallett ed. *Thomas Hardy in Context* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), p.437.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p.437.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.239.

This discussion between ‘the real’ and realism in art can be vividly captured by the impressionist school of art. Nathalia Brodskaja summarises in her book about this relation between observation and representation in impressionism:

It was a genre that appealed to observation and observation alone, rather than to the imagination, and from observation came the artist’s new view of nature, the logical consequence of all his prior pictorial experience: it was more important to paint what one saw, rather than how one was taught - that was a fact! It was impossible to see the workings of nature within the confines of the studio, so the Impressionists took to the outdoors and set up their easels in fields and forests.⁴¹¹

The ‘imagination’ here refers distinctively to an anthropocentric imagination which Brodskaja further explains as those associations with Nature in education, the ‘facts’. It is not a free imagination but a circumscribed one restrained by human values and institutions: ‘[t]he Impressionists cast doubt on painting’s literary nature, the necessity of always having to base a painting on a story, and consequently, its link to historical and religious subjects.’⁴¹² This subversive paradigm of Impressionist art is also illuminating for understanding the literary impressionism in Hardy and Shen, which achieves an imagination that is beyond the anthropocentric representation of Nature and reflects their concerns about ‘the real’ and realism in literature.

We can first start with Hardy’s painting practice to understand his impressionism. In the following watercolour, Hardy records that this is his first attempt at sketching from nature, which resonates with the impressionist tenet of going outdoors and painting on the site:

⁴¹¹ Nathalia Brodskaja, *Impressionism* (Parkstone International, 2018), p.26.

⁴¹² *Ibid.*, p.26.



Figure 8 Hardy's watercolour 'From Black Heath corner', with his inscription 'first attempt at sketching from nature' (time unknown).⁴¹³

This picture too is 'an endeavour to give shape and coherence to a series of seemings' as Hardy claims for his novel-writing: its view from the top of a hill brings near and far into dialogue. Hardy's decision to make the rim uneven and to surround it with white space is significant in light of my earlier discussion of Shen's similar Taoist technique in his paintings, and of Chinese ink drawing, that emphasises the function of blankness for the aesthetics of silence of Nature. Hardy's inscription indicates that it may be quite different and significant for him to paint on the spot rather than in a studio, which is full of a sense of temporality. To a similar effect, Hardy's narratives about Nature in his Wessex novels resemble the impressionist technique of observing and painting on the site, full of sensory experiences that add to the immediacy of temporality. Two other paintings by Hardy in 1871 have also clearly noted the time and place:

⁴¹³ Dorchester History Centre archive, box TH.DISPLAY.BOX2. J. B. Bullen suggests 1850 as a possible date for this sketch, see J. Barrie Bullen, *The Expressive Eye: Fiction and Perception in the Work of Thomas Hardy* (Oxford University Press, 1986), p.47.



Figure 9 Hardy's watercolour 'Plantation behind our house, Aug. 1871' [Bockhampton].⁴¹⁴

⁴¹⁴ Dorchester History Centre archive, box TH.DISPLAY.BOX2.



Figure 10 Hardy's watercolour 'Reign Barrows (3/4 mile from our house), Aug. 1871'.⁴¹⁵

The emphasis on temporality of these sketches shows the importance of the immediacy and contingency of impressions to Hardy, and it is core to his understanding of realism in literature. Beyond Hardy's careful noting of the time and place, these images are striking in that - like Impressionist paintings - they could be viewed as studies in tone and line as well as time and atmosphere. Each of them in its different way uses blocks of relational colour and texture, which is not exactly realist: the trees in Figure 4 are represented with a wide variety of different shades of greenness and white dots are spread among the whole scene to create such an effect of sunlight or even a touch of breeze, adding to the effects of impressions; the sea and the hill in Figure 5 are in essence mere daubs of cross-hatched blue and grey and brown, conveying a subjective idea rather than an objective certainty.

Such a literary impressionism can also be observed in Shen's style and will be more clearly understood with the help of its context within the literary movements in Shen's times. The kind of

⁴¹⁵ Dorchester History Centre archive, box TH.DISPLAY.BOX2.

impressionism claimed by Shen in the preface to *Selected Works* (1936) implies that Shen's novels work as a counterforce to the political influence on Chinese literature at his time. He writes:

Reading my works may help you gain something, no matter what it is: it might be some melancholia, some happiness, or some trouble, more or less. If you have no preoccupation, you can also try to feel the emotions of the characters and the writer. This won't corrupt you! However, it is a pity that most of you have been blinded by the critics or that your tastes have been fixed by the theorists. Most of you believe that literature should contain 'thoughts', should have 'blood' and 'tears'; and you request that these elements should be visible in the plot, the dialogue, even the book cover and catalogue. How easy it is to fulfil all these requests! However, I cannot give you what you want. I give up you intentionally and claim this intention here in the preface. My works don't have these elements - the 'thought' you look for - I don't understand what it means.⁴¹⁶

In this assertive statement, Shen demonstrates his understanding of the public's expectation of literature in 1930s China to be political and moral; still he insists that what he provides are impressions and argues that these impressions rather than political or ideological 'truth' are what should be offered by a novel. This echoes the anti-theory attitude of the Impressionist art noted by Brodskaja. She traces the historical premise of the close observation of nature pursued by the impressionists: '[i]f the natural landscape was incompatible with the traditional concept of composition and perspective, then artists had to reject academic rules and obey nature. If traditional pictorial technique stood in the way of conveying the truths artists discovered in nature, then this technique had to be changed.'⁴¹⁷ Consequently, '[a] new genre of painting appeared in the works of the Impressionists that lacked traditional finish and often resembled a rapid oil sketch. But the Impressionists still lacked a new aesthetic theory that could replace tradition. Their one, firm conviction was that they could employ any means to arrive at truth in art.'⁴¹⁸ This reluctance to theorise any doctrines about representation is for Brodskaja what defines impressionism.

Jesse Matz connects Hardy's defensive attitude that insists on his literature being impressions rather than philosophy with this similar anti-theory tendency in impressionist art: '[w]hat his [Hardy's] defensiveness indicates is that the best way to describe Impressionism, for him as for others, was not to describe it at all - that somehow to 'rationalise' it would be to spoil its power to combine reason with sense and remake the fictional imagination.'⁴¹⁹ With this suggestion, Hardy's ambiguity in his texts, especially his ambivalence in perspectives, genres, and styles can be partly

⁴¹⁶ Zhang ed., *Complete Works*, Volume IX, p.5.

⁴¹⁷ Brodskaja, *Impressionism*, p.26.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.26.

⁴¹⁹ Jesse Matz, *Literary Impressionism and Modernist Aesthetics* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.123.

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understood as an anxiety about representation in literature and also a conscious choice of evading that, which reminds us of the nameless Tao that reveals the anti-logocentrism of Taoism. In regard to this, Matz concludes that 'Hardy's peculiar and cryptic references to impressions suggest that Impressionism had to remain a kind of anti-philosophy and that as such it could only remain unsatisfying to critical reason.'⁴²⁰

This inclination to foreground impressions as their literary tenets is related to Hardy's and Shen's iconoclasm, which has been discussed in the Introduction (V), and it is in line with the spirit of Taoist 'return' that denies artificial institutions. Matz points out that Hardy's scepticism about theories is never anti-intellectual since Hardy himself read extensively and 'probably devoted more time than did his peers to thoughts of a "philosophical" nature'.⁴²¹ On the other hand, Hardy's wariness about theories is almost instinctive, as illustrated by his constant mediation between two modes of writing in his novels: the naïve and the poetic, which I will delineate in the next section. Matz further notes that Hardy 'resisted theory in a very specific context: the moment in which the artist adjusts his temperament to the task of creation', defining the moment as in which 'Hardy felt, theory would give fiction an unreal systematicity.'⁴²² This scepticism towards theory also speaks to Hardy's uneasy relationship with Christianity as I have discussed in Chapter 1 and the beginning of this chapter. Matz aptly summarises that '[w]anting by contrast to find a temperamental location between the detachment of intellectual abstractions and the immediacy of concrete life, Hardy sought an Impressionist compromise. For as much as he wanted to refuse theory, Hardy wanted to refuse fact.'⁴²³ This comment finds a reverberation in Brodskaja's note about the insistence of impressionism on being wary of 'fact', whether it being rendered by education, religion, ideology, tradition etc. In this chapter I regard 'fact' and theory as equally representative of artificial institutions that Hardy and Shen consciously prevent their literature from joining the force, and this is what Matz confirms in his comment on Hardy's resistance to theory: for Hardy, a writer's temperament should always come first than the 'task of creation', which is in line with Shen's statement about his impressionism.

The impressionist compromise named by Matz is very close to a Taoist 'return,' and actually I suggest that a Taoist approach is more illuminating for the authorial gesture, mediating between observation and participation in these novels. Hardy's and Shen's use of impressionism reflects a scepticism towards artificial institutions with an 'unreal systematicity,' nonetheless they show worlds of symbiosis in Wessex and Xiangxi that seem to conform to a natural institutional power,

⁴²⁰ Ibid., p.123.

⁴²¹ Ibid., p.121.

⁴²² Ibid., p.121.

⁴²³ Ibid., p.121.

which I argue can be compared to Tao in Taoism. Matz claims that impressionism provides an approach to understanding Hardy's inconsistency in imaginative literature because they share an iconoclastic tendency; however, there is another strand in Hardy's novels that is rather ignored by both Matz and Thomas: the metaphysical holism between humanity and Nature, which can be regarded as a natural institutional power. In terms of this metaphysics that is shown in Hardy's and Shen's representation of Nature, impressionism is more of a device than a paradigm or aesthetic, as Brodskaja points out that the Impressionists lack a new aesthetic theory; but Hardy and Shen do demonstrate a new aesthetic against the artificial institutional forces that they find in their times, which I suggest can be approached through Taoist aesthetics. This new aesthetic, rooted in impressionism, finds its expression in both novelists' works in the convergence of two discrete forms of language working in tension with each other. My next section explores the operations of this dialectic.

3.4 A Dialectic between Nature and Culture

John Barrell notes in *The Return* 'the grand impossibility' of the narrator's task to achieve two languages at the same time - the naïve and the alienated.⁴²⁴ He asserts that readers are given no position from which they can argue that what Hardy announces as a fact of life on Egdon is, in fact, a fiction, 'by representing the geography of the heathfolk in terms of what we may suspect to be a myth, of primal unity'.⁴²⁵ According to Barrell, readers are alienated from the sense of place 'who are thus obliged to understand the process of our alienation in terms of the correlative myth, of history as the progressive differentiation of a lost, an original unity - and who cannot therefore describe that unity as "mythical", because, from the alienated viewpoint we have been assigned, we cannot know the minds of the heathfolk, and can assert nothing about how they work'.⁴²⁶ However, I argue that in these novels, the dichotomy of the self and the other dissolves, becoming instead a dialectic between culture and Nature which makes use of poetic and naïve languages respectively. The 'naïve' refers to a sensory language that is largely based on rustic sensibilities and is rich in physical experience and impressions; the 'poetic' language, on the other hand, is abstract and attempts to comprehend the metaphysics and aesthetics of life. The dialectic between Nature and culture can be viewed as a dialectic between an unconscious, impressionist state and a conscious, reflective manner of writing in these novels. The way Hardy and Shen mediate between these two kinds of languages shows an attempt to connect the

⁴²⁴ John Barrell, 'Geographies of Hardy's Wessex', in K. D. M. Snell ed. *The Regional Novel in Britain and Ireland, 1800-1990* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), p.114.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.103.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.103.

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concrete with the abstract, and to retrieve connections between humanity and Nature facing the alienation of modernity.

Earlier in line with Barrell's dualistic criticism about Hardy, Raymond Williams centres on a dichotomy between the customary and the educated, which can be compared with the dialectic between Nature and culture that I raise here. Williams insightfully points out that the problem of Hardy's style can relate to the unconsciously 'customary' and the consciously 'educated' languages of Tess, suggesting that 'the truth is that to communicate Hardy's experience neither language would serve, since neither in the end was sufficiently articulate: the educated dumb in intensity and limited in humanity; the customary thwarted by ignorance and complacent in habit'.⁴²⁷ The combination of and the transitions between these two languages, however, can achieve compelling outcomes, which will be demonstrated in my textual analyses. For Williams, Hardy stresses traditions and 'unchanged landscapes' because they are part of the structure of his feeling; nevertheless, Nature is overridden by social relations which are shown by changes within rural communities. Although Williams contributes significantly to a contextual understanding of the economic and social aspect of Nature in Hardy's novels, he rather ignores the poetic and philosophical aspect of Hardy's writings about Nature.

Following Williams's Marxist criticism of Nature in Hardy, Terry Eagleton asserts that it is through the body that Hardy achieves a transition between objective experiences and subjective consciousness: '[i]t would hardly exaggerate the novel's purpose to say that the body itself becomes a mode of symbolic interpretation - a transitional point between the objective reality of Nature and purely subjective consciousness.'⁴²⁸ For Eagleton, the body is not only the focal point for the rapport between mind, body and environment but also 'the socially visible aspect of men and women', where there is an alienation between identity and society, or between 'inward and objective modes of knowledge'.⁴²⁹ This is in line with Williams's dualism of the customary and the educated. Through their Marxist analyses of Hardy therefore, Williams and Eagleton suggest that Nature is only important when it reveals alienated human conditions and is always overridden by social relations.

For Hardy, however, Nature means more. Williams rightly observes that Hardy 'sees as a participant who is also an observer [and that] this is the source of the strain',⁴³⁰ whereas for Eagleton, '[t]he tension, rather, is in his own position, his own lived history, within a general

⁴²⁷ Raymond Williams, *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970), p.107.

⁴²⁸ Terry Eagleton, 'Thomas Hardy: Nature as Language', *Critical Quarterly*, 13, 2 (1971), p.157.

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.160-61.

⁴³⁰ Williams, *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence*, p.110.

process of change which could come clear and alive in him because it was not only general but in every detail of his feeling observation and writing immediate and particular.⁴³¹ Building upon these critical frameworks, I argue that Hardy and Shen both deal with this strain and tension between the unconscious participant state of the 'native' and the reflective observer state of the narrator (and writer) with a mediation between the naïve and the poetic languages, through which they search for connections between the two positions and try to dissolve the dichotomy between Nature and culture. Among the terms offered by Barrell and Williams to describe the dichotomies they assert - the naïve and the alienated, the customary and the educated - Barrell's terms are adopted instead of Williams' because the focus of this thesis is on aesthetics and rhetorics rather than the overarching socio-political implications that Williams' terms concentrate on; as for Barrell's explicit dualism between 'the naïve' and 'the alienated', I change 'the alienated' into 'the poetic', in order to demonstrate that by naming them less dualistically, my Taoist approach reveals a holistic view of Hardy's rhetorics in writing with two kinds of languages.

The critical concern about the binary between city and countryside in their works also echoes Shen's and Hardy's own experience. After nearly two decades in major Chinese cities, Shen still exclaimed: 'I discover that my life survives in the city as an empty shell.'⁴³² Like in a wasteland, all the intellectual seeds that have commercial values or the conceptual seeds that have moral values in the urban society cannot take roots and grow in me.'⁴³³ Shen states in 'One Man's Confession' that he 'inlays the past misery and loneliness into unique landscapes and relives them again and again, especially the fresh happiness of unconstrained childhood whose impressions can steady the present dismay with an effort'.⁴³⁴ On 21 August 1888, Hardy writes about a similar confusion in his diary: '[t]he literary productions of men of rigidly good family and rigidly correct education mostly treat social conventions and contrivances - the artificial forms of living - as if they were cardinal facts of life.'⁴³⁵ The focus on the manners of urban and cultivated life confuses Shen and Hardy, which generates a melancholia in them about the incompatibility of modern culture and rural identity. This melancholia is echoed in Hardy's 'native', Clym Yeobright. Both Hardy's *The Return* and Shen's *Long River* are stories about 'the return of the native', and both texts also demand an engagement with the same question: how possible is a spiritual return in the face of modernity? Although, for Clym, the answer is a grim one, as authors, Hardy and Shen achieve a kind of return by reimagining their homelands. A comparison between these two novels can

⁴³¹ Ibid., pp.111-12.

⁴³² Shen had lived and taught in Beijing, Shanghai, Wuhan, Qingdao, and Kunming when he published *Candle Flickering* (Shanghai: Cultural Life Press, 1941) from which this note is taken.

⁴³³ Zhang ed., *Complete Works*, Volume XII, p.23.

⁴³⁴ Zhang ed., *Complete Works*, Volume XXVII, p.17.

⁴³⁵ Millgate ed., *The Life*, p.222.

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locate a productive tension between the naïve and the poetic languages as crucial to Shen and Hardy's idea of what the novel can achieve; and a close reading of characterisations and rituals in particular in these two novels can reveal their searching for connections with a re-enchanted Nature.

Long River begins with a description of local tangerine orchards as they appear through the seasons, sometimes from a local perspective, sometimes from a traveller's:

The trees are not high and are a colour of thick greenness all year round. In summer, the blossoms are white and small, and are so fragrant that they can make you 'drunk.' After the frost's Descent in September, the fruits amongst the branches are contrasted by the heavy frost so that they appear even more yellow and bright, like beams of sunlight if looking from afar. When the picking season comes, piles and piles of them can be seen everywhere along the little wharfs, like heaps of fire.⁴³⁶

Here, Shen executes shifts between an observation of the local agricultural circle, from the vantage point of local knowledge, and a poetic description that associates tangerines with sunshine and fire, arguably issuing from a traveller's perspective. The poetic language, however, does not seem to interfere with a local temperament nor alienate a stranger from local Nature. The narrator continues after several scenes about the exchanges between the local orchard owner and a traveller:

Two thousand years ago, Qu Yuan 屈原, the outcast from the state of Chu, rode in a little white boat and sailed upstream along the River Yuan, and he must have seen such tangerine trees and so wrote 'Ju Song 橘颂' ('Ode to the Tangerine'). Although the local living conditions changed more or less over the course of two thousand years, people and trees still lived by the earth, attached to the soil on both sides of the river; throughout the changes of seasons and weathers, the old died and went back to earth, and the new was born and grew as if all out of the soil.⁴³⁷

During the Warring States Period (475 BCE-221 BCE), the Hunan Province was part of the state of Chu, which nurtured the well-known ancient Chinese poet Qu Yuan (c. 340 BCE-278 BCE). 'Ju Song' is from his poem collection *Jiu Zhang* 《九章》 (*Nine Chapters*) and is a typical example of a classical Chinese lyrical poem that sings the praises of things. The use of this nostalgic reference to an earlier moment in literary history triggers a poetic imagining of Xiangxi and connects the past with the present. The transition from the previous scene with its dialogues between the native and the traveller to this poetic depiction of those living on this piece of land achieves a connection between the naïve and the poetic.

⁴³⁶ Zhang ed., *Complete Works*, Volume X, p.10.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.12.

In *The Return*, such shifts between the naïve and the poetic languages are also salient. In a passage depicting the calm winter on Egdon Heath, human loneliness and human connections with non-human beings are captured in a comic tone: ‘any man could imagine himself to be Adam without the least difficulty, they attracted the attention of every bird within eyeshot, every reptile not yet asleep, and set the surrounding rabbits curiously watching from hillocks at a safe distance’.⁴³⁸ Here, Hardy illustrates a reversed relationship between the traditional human observer and the non-human participant, and the narrator describes how characters are observed by bird, reptile, and rabbits - naïve sensibilities that are attached to the locale, in a poetic language that is only discernible to the narrator. Instead of alienation, the rich reciprocity between the human and non-human worlds highlights connections between humanity and Nature. Similarly, when Mrs. Yeobright returns from her rejected visit to Clym and Eustacia, in contrast to her physical and emotional exhaustion, ‘the intermittent husky notes of the male grasshoppers from every tuft of furze were enough to show that amid the prostration of the larger animal species an unseen insect world was busy in all the fullness of life’.⁴³⁹ This animated microcosm of insects contrasts with the emotional turmoil caused by the rejection and the dying physical life of Mrs. Yeobright, yet what is shown is an order of Nature that renders all organisms equal rather than alienating human life from Nature. In both examples, a poetic language that distances the observer is at work, and a reconciliation is achieved by this shift between sensory experiences and a poetic view.

In the opening scene of the novel when Thomasin is carried back in Venn’s van to her aunt’s home from her failed wedding, Venn takes a rest during the trip and surveys the scene. Given the later development of the plot, it may be deduced that Venn is concerned with the destiny of Thomasin’s marriage to Wildeve; what comes next, however, is not Venn’s further plan but the narrator’s observation of Nature:

To do things musingly, and by small degrees, seemed, indeed, to be a duty in the Egdon valleys at this transitional hour, for there was that in the condition of the heath itself which resembled protracted and halting dubiousness. It was the quality of the repose appertaining to the scene. This was not the repose of actual stagnation, but the apparent repose of incredible slowness. A condition of healthy life so nearly resembling the torpor of death is a noticeable thing of its sort; to exhibit the inertness of the desert, and at the same time to be exercising powers akin to those of the meadow, and even of the forest, awakened in those who thought of it the attentiveness usually engendered by understatement and reserve.⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁸ Hardy, *The Return*, p.115.

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.267.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.37.

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This passage is set on an evening in November near Rainbarrow, where Eustacia lives, and, in this respect, what Hardy is depicting here resembles the hibernation of animals: the repose, the slowness, the torpor of death, and the inertness. Although human activities, particularly in such a rural area, are slowed by the season, it seems here that human thinking is also slowed down as in a reciprocity with Nature. The narrator uses poetic language to describe a holistic world where everything is under the same force of the winter torpor, including human feelings. Following this paragraph is a description of Egdon in Venn's naïve language - an impressionistic view that illustrates distinct temporality: '[t]he scene before the reddleman's eyes was a gradual series of ascents from the level of the road backward into the heart of the heath. It embraced hillocks, pits, ridges, acclivities, one behind the other, till all was finished by a high hill cutting against the still light sky.'⁴⁴¹ In these transitions of perspectives and languages, Hardy shifts from the burden of human thoughts to Nature's rhythm, and thus establishes connections between humanity and Nature.

One distinct feature of both *The Return* and *Long River* is the seasonal structure of the plot, which in turn introduces agricultural communities' association with rituals. Chapter 1 of *Long River*, 'Human Beings and the Land 人与地', echoes *The Return*'s Chapter 1 'A Face on which Time makes but Little Impression', as both are dedicated to elaborating the local environment and customs. By placing both in a central position from the beginning of the novel, Hardy and Shen declare them to be their 'Novel interest': a re-enchantment of the relationship between humanity and Nature. John Paterson suggests that '[t]o Hardy, Nature was its own excuse for being. It was what his Angel Clare would call "actualised poetry", a poetry whose beauty and splendour were expressions not of an eccentric art or a socialised imagination but of natural objects in themselves.'⁴⁴² Arguing for Nature's own agency in Hardy, Paterson's note provokes the dialectic between Nature as being and Nature as 'actualised poetry' in Hardy's works, which raises a question of representing Nature in literature: whether language casts an anthropocentric shadow over the agency of Nature? I suggest that the dialectic between the two languages in Hardy's and Shen's novels is an authorial mediation to demonstrate their impressionism, or an 'impressionist compromise' as suggested by Matz, which refuses to alienate Nature through language.

Hardy seems to find a resolution for this tension between Nature and language in the ancient primitive culture, which he asserts as a 'new aesthetic' for his time. In 1878, the year that *The Return* was published, Hardy notes his understanding of the new aesthetics of his times with examples from art: 'as I wrote at the beginning of *The Return of the Native* - that the beauty of

⁴⁴¹ Ibid., p.37.

⁴⁴² Paterson, 'Lawrence's Vital Source', p.456.

association is entirely superior to the beauty of aspect, and a beloved relative's old battered tankard to the finest Greek vase. Paradoxically put, it is to see the beauty in ugliness'.⁴⁴³ Another note by Hardy in January 1887 elaborates on this new aesthetic:

The exact truth as to material fact ceases to be of importance in art - it is a student's style - the style of a period when the mind is serene and unawakened to the tragical mysteries of life; when it does not bring anything to the object that coalesces with and translates the qualities that are already there - half hidden, it may be - and the two united are depicted as the All.⁴⁴⁴

And on fifth August 1888 he notes again: '[t]o find beauty in ugliness is the province of the poet.'³⁹ For Hardy, this aesthetic is 'new' because it departs from the Victorian tradition of realism in imaginative literature and rejects an objectification of Nature: the new aesthetic is about the dissolution of the dichotomy between Nature and culture. Xiao Jiwei argues for a similar aesthetic in Shen's works suggesting that whilst he was '[a]ttuned to the traditional aesthetic sentiment that emphasises the cosmic-universal meaning of nature, his writing is however too unruly to be labelled classicist; its spirit unmistakably modern, it nonetheless deviates from social realist aesthetics that became the hallmark of Chinese literary modernity.'⁴⁴⁵

As a novelist, Hardy deploys this new aesthetic through an atavistic representation of Egdon Heath: 'Civilisation was its enemy; and ever since the beginning of vegetation its soil had worn the same antique brown dress, the natural and invariable garment of the particular formation. [...] We seem to want the oldest and simplest human clothing where the clothing of the earth is so primitive.'⁴⁴⁶ The personification of Egdon in *The Return* demonstrates a synchronisation between the heath and the age: '[i]t was at present a place perfectly accordant with man's nature - neither ghastly, hateful, nor ugly; neither commonplace, unmeaning, nor tame; but, like man, slighted and enduring; and withal singularly colossal and mysterious in its swarthy monotony.'⁴⁴⁷ The development of anthropology in the late-Victorian age cast a spotlight on ancient cultures. Hardy quotes from Schlegel in his notebook: '[t]he deepest want & deficiency of all modern Art lies in the fact that the Artists have no mythology',⁴⁴⁸ which expresses a yearning for a mythological past before the dualism of nature and culture had been established. Michael Zeitler traces Hardy's readings of Edward Burnet Tylor, Andrew Lang, and Walter Pater while he was writing *The Return*

⁴⁴³ Millgate ed., *The Life*, p.124. *The Return* was serialised on *Belgravia* from January to December in 1878, and this note was recorded on 22 April 1878.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

⁴⁴⁵ Xiao Jiwei, 'Nature, Woman and Lyrical Ambiguity in Shen Congwen's Writing', *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature*, 67, 1 (2013), p.47.

⁴⁴⁶ Hardy, *The Return*, p.33.

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.33.

⁴⁴⁸ Björk ed., *The Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy*, Volume I, p.15.

and affirms an 'anthropologically informed representation of Wessex' in the novel.⁴⁴⁹ Hardy writes on 18 December 1890:

Mr E. Clodd this morning gives an excellently neat answer to my question why the superstitions of a remote Asiatic and a Dorset labourer are the same; 'The attitude of man', he says, 'at corresponding levels of culture, before like phenomena, is pretty much the same, your Dorset peasants representing the persistence of the barbaric idea which confuses persons and things, and finds wide generalisations on the slenderest analogies.' (This 'barbaric idea which confuses persons and things' is, by the way, also common to the highest imaginative genius - that of the poet.)⁴⁵⁰

For Hardy, there are obvious synergies between Wessex and Eastern cultures, and through his propensity to personify Nature in *The Return*, as seen in the personification of Egdon Heath, Hardy does confuse 'persons and things', which he suggests is the highest imaginative tool of the poet. Hardy adds the observation to his note that the 'barbaric idea which confuses persons and things' connects atavistic beliefs with poetic imaginations. Therefore, by illustrating Egdon Heath and its links with an undeveloped state of civilisation, Hardy demonstrates not how outdated but how vital it is: '[t]he instincts of merry England lingered on here with exceptional vitality, and the symbolic customs which tradition has attached to each season of the year were yet a reality on Egdon',⁴⁵¹ and this reading is amplified by Zeitler's suggestion that Hardy reimagines Wessex as a living connection to the roots of a mythopoeic culture.⁴⁵² Drawing on Zeitler's study of Hardy's relationship with Victorian anthropology, I argue that Hardy as a novelist makes the readers 're-feel' myth rather than the scientific discourse of anthropology, re-enchanting readers with connections to a primitive past through his characterisation of Eustacia Vye and Diggory Venn and his representation of the seasonal rituals of bonfires.

Eustacia's energy, paralleled with that of Egdon Heath, challenges it; however, sometimes Eustacia seems to be reconciled to Egdon's power and becomes integrated with its inner passion. For example, in the scene where Eustacia dances with Damon Wildeve at a village festival, fantastical senses override their sense of social norms:

There is a certain degree and tone of light which tends to disturb the equilibrium of the senses, and to promote dangerously the tenderer moods; added to movement, it drives the emotions to rankness, the reason becoming sleepy and unperceiving in inverse proportion; and this light fell now upon

⁴⁴⁹ Michael A. Zeitler, *Representations of Culture: Thomas Hardy's Wessex & Victorian Anthropology* (Peter Lang, 2007), p.72.

⁴⁵⁰ Millgate ed., *The Life*, p.241.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.347.

⁴⁵² Zeitler, *Representations of Culture*, p.70.

these two from the disc of the moon. All the dancing girls felt the symptoms, but Eustacia most of all.⁴⁵³

This scene can be interpreted as an illustration of Eustacia's unconscious compatibility with Egdon - both of them contain a sensual vitality that can liberate spirits from social order - and the regained passion between Eustacia and Wildeve during the dance that facilitates their elopement. Unlike that of others, Eustacia's dancing is viewed by the narrator as rebellious - 'back into old paths which were now doubly irregular,' as the personified rebellious Egdon Heath challenges the aesthetics of the age: to see beauty in ugliness is to see through the alienation of modern society and restore a connection with the mythological past.⁴⁵⁴

Diggory Venn is another mythological character: his redness serves as a vivid mark. Expressions relating to his redness are associated with sin and crime: the 'bloodcoloured figure' or 'the mark of Cain', but clearly Hardy has another idea: he finds a beauty and nostalgia in this redness.⁴⁵⁵ Hardy allies the reddleman's way of living with aesthetics: 'the poetry of existence', 'a sublimation of all the horrid dreams', and 'imagination', although it might be about the ugly and dark, as suggested by the words 'horrid' and 'bogeys'.⁴⁵⁶ In contrast, the new era of Egdon - where modern culture and mythology are at odds with one another - is filled with modern inventions, and can be much less imaginative and distinct. Its idiosyncrasy is lost, and the new epoch is faceless in its uniformity and a threat to regional identity.

Venn is the most mobile character in the novel. It is through Venn's view and movement that the narrator and the reader explore Egdon. In the following episode, sensibilities that arise from local knowledge are revealed through Venn's point of view: '[t]hough these shaggy hills were apparently so solitary, several keen round eyes were always ready on such a wintry morning as this to converge upon a passer-by. Feathered species sojourned here in hiding which would have created wonder if found elsewhere.'⁴⁵⁷ Then a traveller's point of view is added by the narrator:

A traveller who should walk and observe any of these visitants as Venn observed them now could feel himself to be in direct communication with regions unknown to man. Here in front of him was a wild mallard - just arrived from the home of the north wind. The creature brought within him an amplitude of Northern knowledge. Glacial catastrophes, snowstorm episodes, glittering auroral effects, Polaris in the zenith, Franklin underfoot - the category of his commonplaces was wonderful. But the bird, like many other

⁴⁵³ Hardy, *The Return*, p.245.

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.245.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.91.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.91.

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.98-99.

philosophers, seemed as he looked at the reddleman to think that a present moment of comfortable reality was worth a decade of memories.⁴⁵⁸

Here, the narrator is less of an observer as he is the object of observation. As the first sentence suggests, the birds are observing the passers-by. This demonstrates that there is another layer of observation or witness between characters, the narrator, and the non-human world; a world in which the narrator tries many times to mingle his view. In this passage, then, two threads emerge: Venn is a traveller being observed by the non-human world as well as the narrator, however, a communication is also described between Venn and his native environment, which renders the narrator and readers as alienated strangers. The return of the mallard, from Venn's perspective, is a sensory and seasonal experience; from the narrator's perspective, however, it carries more meanings and universal connections. In this way, the seeming alienation is reconciled by uncovering these connections, and the narrative structure, with its complex points of view, yields more than a novelised anthropology. Thus, the myth of a reciprocity between humans and Nature is revealed.

Long River also shows the vitality and connections within Nature that can be found in traditional Xiangxi culture. Shen writes in the preface to *Long River* that:

Having been away from my hometown for eighteen years, everything seems different when my boat enters Chen River basin. Superficially, everything has made a progress; deeply, if observed carefully, a tendency towards decay is contained within the change. Most obviously, the traditionally preserved rural virtue of integrity and simplicity is nearly extinct. What replaces it is a vulgar view of life that flaunts venality and has been cultivated successfully by practical society in the last two decades. Though superstitions have been knocked down, morality and the sense of right and wrong are lost as well.⁴⁵⁹

Compared with modern degradation, the seasonal rituals of the old way of life hold more beauty for Shen. In *Long River*, local religion is shown as a fetishistic belief in Nature facilitated through seasonal rituals and a pervasive supernatural belief: '[n]o matter how plain and innocent their life is, they still manage to keep an exotic emotion: either the local legends and tales lead them to a beautiful and gentle wonderland, or, by believing in gods, they find a way to deal with all kinds of misfortunes.'⁴⁶⁰ Shen notes the emotional release and a kind of imaginative enablement through performing local rituals: 'Although non-religious', Yaoyao's family follow local festivals and taboos, and 'from these circumstances they obtain a merry and solemn emotion of liberation'.⁴⁶¹

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid., p.99.

⁴⁵⁹ Zhang ed., *Complete Works*, Volume X, p.17.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid., p.21.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid., pp.44-45.

This valuing of rituals as constitutive of landscape and place is conveyed as rooted in the native sensibilities of Wessex and Xiangxi, confronting a loss of the sense of belonging in modern society that both Hardy and Shen personally expressed. The image of fire is used as a specific illustration of this valuing of rituals in both novels: in *Long River*, it is the burning of straw; in *The Return*, it is the bonfires. In both novels, fire is linked with mythological or religious rituals. For *The Return*, bonfires are more than dramatic settings or signal lights between Eustacia and Damon: they are marks of Egdon's old mythological past which foreground seasonal rituals. For *Long River*, the ethnic minority Miao culture in Xiangxi is reputed to embrace a worship of the god of fire, Zhu Rong 祝融, whom they believe to be an ancestor of their tribe.⁴⁶² Therefore, the repetitive images of burning fires can be viewed as reminders of an ancient belief in Xiangxi. On seeing the fire, Manman, the old sailor and now gatekeeper of the local ancestral temple, perceives something but fails to articulate it:

He seems to have perceived something that belongs to the destiny of the local future, but he could not tell what exactly it is, nor does he really understand. When he arrives at the Maple Col and looks at the Turnip Brook, which is veiled by the night mist, as if asleep, there are only several dots of flickering lights amongst the thin wood. Downstream there are also few lights. The brook sounds aloud in the silence of the night. Over the distant mountain is a patch of wild burning, extending and dancing, on and off. The old sailor stands on the steps of the temple and says to himself: 'The good fortune is leaving! What is coming comes, I fear nothing!'.⁴⁶³

At the end of the last chapter when the village opera is finished, the narrator follows Yaoyao's perspective and describes the lively scene of people's departure at the harbour. Then the narrator turns to a fire over the mountain, where '[t]he reddish violet wild burning over a distant mountain is blown by the wind and glowing more and more fervently,' and Manman, watching the same direction, comments that 'the burning has been there for over ten days - it seems to be endless'.⁴⁶⁴ This view initiates a debate between Yaoyao and Manman about the endurance of beauty. Yaoyao compares the burning of the fire to the sun and argues that 'beautiful things should be there forever'; Manman, seeing through Yaoyao's innocence and idealism, says: 'Beautiful things will never last long.'⁴⁶⁵ This melancholic aesthetic can also be found in Shen's other fiction, as well as in his personal writings, where he states repeatedly that '[b]eauty always makes people melancholic, yet still it is appreciated.'⁴⁶⁶ Xiangxi's past and an encroaching

⁴⁶² Chen Zhaozhao, 'Research on Zhu-Rong: The Mythical Legend and the Connection with the Worship in Fire', *Chia Nan Annual Bulletin*, No. 30 (2004), p.438.

⁴⁶³ Zhang ed., *Complete Works*, Volume X, pp.106-07.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.168.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.169.

⁴⁶⁶ Zhang ed., *Complete Works*, Volume XII, p.107. Shen's original Chinese is '美丽总使人忧愁，可是还受用。'

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modernity converge on these descriptions and imaginations of fire: the flickering flame can be either the passion of a remnant culture or a prophecy for the weakening of the vitality of such culture under the threat of modernisation.

In *The Return*, the recurring bonfire represents Wessex's pagan past: 'it is pretty well known that such blazes as this the heathmen were now enjoying are rather the lineal descendants from jumbled Druidical rites and Saxon ceremonies than the invention of popular feeling about Gunpowder Plot'.⁴⁶⁷ The bonfire can also be viewed as a ritual that reveals a permanent ethos of rebelliousness against the seasonal frame of the novel, connecting the past with the present:

Moreover to light a fire is the instinctive and resistant act of man when, at the winter ingress, the curfew is sounded throughout Nature. It indicates a spontaneous, Promethean rebelliousness against the fiat that this recurrent season shall bring foul times, cold darkness, misery and death. Black chaos comes, and the fettered gods of the earth say, Let there be light.⁴⁶⁸

The bonfire portrays Egdon Heath as poised between the atavistic and the civilised. The eye contact with birds, fires and bonfires in these novels captures fluid moments of vision that associate the present with a mythological past. In revealing the connections between them, Hardy and Shen call for a new aesthetics of re-enchantment and imagination. The beauty of Hardy's and Shen's regional novels lies in an obliteration of the modern tendency to objectify 'landscapes' (the word indicates an anthropocentric view) and to alienate Nature; instead, their narrative demonstrates the interdependence between human culture and Nature.

The tension between the native and the cultivated identities that is core to the representation of Clym can also be noticed in *Long River*. In *The Return*, sympathy is shown towards Clym's dilemma in the narrative: '[i]n consequence of this relatively advanced position, Yeobright might have been called unfortunate. The rural world was not ripe for him.'⁴⁶⁹ Patricia O'Hara compares *The Return* to Victorian anthropology and states that it 'contemplates the cultural journey from primitive infancy to civilised maturity'.⁴⁷⁰ However, by contrast to this progressive view of anthropology, she notes that '[i]ts [*The Return's*] meditations on the cultural past and present lead only to dislocations - to a condition analogous to that of the returned native, Clym Yeobright, last seen as a man of "less than thirty-three", suffering from a "wrinkled mind"'.⁴⁷¹ This contradiction between a physical return of the native and the impossibility of a spiritual return is elaborated by the two

⁴⁶⁷ Hardy, *The Return*, pp.40-41.

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.41.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.171.

⁴⁷⁰ Patricia O'hara, 'Narrating the native: Victorian anthropology and Hardy's *The Return of the Native*', *Nineteenth Century Contexts*, 20, 2 (1997), p.158.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.158.

writers' mediations between the two kinds of languages. For Hardy and Shen, the difficulty of writing about the 'native' not only lies in the reluctant adaptation to an increasingly cosmopolitan modern culture but also in the tense but productive movement between abstract language and their intense sensibilities towards Nature. Nature in their works is autonomous, and language is simultaneously too concrete (naïve) and too abstract (poetic), thus a combination of the naïve and the poetic languages reflects both language's assertion of its own distinct mode of representing Nature and a simultaneous recognition that Nature's autonomy is too irreducible to be accurately articulated by either language. Xiao Jiwei comments about Shen: '[a]t the core of [...] his regionalist universalism is a lyrical ambiguity derived from his distinctive approach to nature.'⁴⁷² Xiao defines this 'lyrical ambiguity' as 'a certain loss of self in the other as well as an effort to sustain an aesthetic distance between the two'.⁴⁷³ This comment echoes that of Williams's criticism about the narrator in Hardy's novels being participant and observer at the same time: the immersion and distance offered by these two positions create a unique mediation where Hardy and Shen combine a naïve and a poetic language to link the 'native' with the poetic and to deal with the alienation posed by modernity on Nature.

3.5 A Return to Literary Autonomy

Shen comments on realism in literature and art: 'What is real? I do not understand the difference between real and unreal in literature, neither can I tell their difference in terms of emotions. There is only beauty and non-beauty in literature and art and cannot be described as real or unreal, and moral prejudice shall not interfere with the aesthetics either.'⁴⁷⁴ In another essay 'Abstract Lyricism 抽象的抒情' (1961), Shen melancholically writes that the ideological control of literature causes a waste of its recreational functions:

Although there is a pervasive degradation owing to a failure of political power in society, and certain art departments are plagued by a feudal mentality; however, in literature there is an overemphasis on its social impact and educational responsibility and a neglect of its recreational influence (especially for such a request for a novelist). There is an exaggeration of the moral obligation of literature and an ignorance of the vital emotional motivation behind a literary work. Thus, the things that occur to a writer first are literature's political, educational, and moral effects, even the flattering effect of writing for the privileged few people who are in power.⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷² Xiao, 'Nature, Woman and Lyrical Ambiguity in Shen Congwen's Writing', p.43.

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.45.

⁴⁷⁴ Zhang ed., *Complete Works*, Volume XII, pp.106-07.

⁴⁷⁵ Zhang ed., *Complete Works*, Volume XVI, p.533.

Shen argues for an autonomy of literature that is free from political and ideological powers, and his scepticism towards artificial institutions and a literary impressionism in his novels are reflective of this argument. What Hardy and Shen illustrate with their uses of two kinds of narrative languages is again a form of resistance against the alienation between Nature and culture, which embodies their unique gesture to connect their native and cultured identities.

The return is also a return to literary autonomy. Virginia Woolf acutely warns us to keep at the right distance when reading Hardy: '[b]ut let us, as we approach the danger-zone of Hardy's philosophy, be on our guard. [...] Nothing is easier, especially with a writer of marked idiosyncrasy, than to fasten on opinions, convict him of a creed, tether him to a consistent point of view.'⁴⁷⁶

This readers' tendency to claim the writer's philosophy or creed is also explicitly protested against by Shen in his reflections upon the reception of his novels as I have shown earlier in this chapter, which in his concern are largely misunderstood by the urban readers. Woolf further explains what she means by the 'marked idiosyncrasy' in Hardy which I have compared to impressionism in this chapter: '[n]or was Hardy any exception to the rule that the mind which is most capable of receiving impressions is very often the least capable of drawing conclusions.'⁴⁷⁷ Woolf is insightful in suggesting that the reader should sometimes overlook Hardy's plots and probe into the underlayer of which he is largely unconscious - his idiosyncrasy that inclines to impressionism and sensibilities based on physical experiences - and Woolf insists that Hardy encourages his readers to do so: '[i]t is for the reader, steeped in the impression, to supply the comment. It is his part to know when to put aside the writer's conscious intention in favour of some deeper intention of which perhaps he may be unconscious. Hardy himself was aware of this.'⁴⁷⁸ So, it can be argued that the literary impressionism of Hardy is a deep awareness of the limitation of human perceptions and representations, and by claiming their literature as mere impressions, Hardy and Shen acknowledge the doom of logocentrism. The return to literary autonomy is a return to the openness of interpretations of texts.

3.6 Conclusion

A brief introduction of the New Life Movement as a background for *Long River* opens a comparison between the representations of the alienating effects of modernisation in *Long River* and *The Return* which overlap in their plots of 'the return of the native.' Such a problematic return, with its inevitable clash between the traditional sensibilities and the modern institutions,

⁴⁷⁶ Woolf, *The Common Reader*, p.254.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.254.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.254.

finds a resolution in both writers' narrative emphasis on a temporality that works against the blind institutional power of modernity which expunges regional identities. The narrators in both novels mediate between the naïve and poetic languages to demonstrate a dialectic between Nature and culture, and this can be viewed as a resistance to the human alienation from *ziran* which is in line with the Taoist conception of returning to Tao. Existing in between the traditional and the modern, Hardy's and Shen's return journeys are difficult but persistent, as shown through their insistence on such autonomy of literature. In this sense, Kester Rattenbury's argument that Hardy was an architect throughout his life can also be used here as a metaphor for his literary construction of Wessex. Rattenbury regards Wessex as an 'architectural project' which is 'both an elegy for a vanishing world and a condemnation of its cruelties'.⁴⁷⁹ By interpreting Wessex as 'the greatest, most influential and forward-looking conservation campaign of them all', Rattenbury suggests a delicate metaphor for Hardy's literary creation and its autonomy.⁴⁸⁰ Although Shen was never an architect like Hardy, it is quite appropriate to say that his literary construction of Xiangxi achieves a similar conservation campaign.

⁴⁷⁹ Kester Rattenbury, *Thomas Hardy, Architect: The Wessex Project* (London, Lund Humphries, 2018), p.11.

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.103.

Conclusion: Toward a Taoist Literary Method

In Tao the only motion is returning;
 The only useful quality, weakness.
 For though all creatures under heaven are the products of Being,
 Being itself is the product of Not-being.

—Arthur Waley trans., *Tao Te Ching* Chapter 40, in *The Way and its Power*, p.192.

Landscape, like 'Nature', is defined by its Other.

—Eithne Henson, *Landscape and Gender in the Novels of Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, and Thomas Hardy: The Body of Nature* (Routledge, 2016), p.2.

Nature is always already contaminated by the human and by language.

—Bennett and Royle, 'Eco', p.140.

The first quote above from *Tao Te Ching* quite comprehensively combines the three aspects of *ziran* each of my chapters has dealt with: the relational self, *wuwei*, and return, which are adopted by this study as literary approaches to understanding the conception of Nature in Hardy's Wessex and Shen's Xiangxi novels. The only and eternal motion of Taoism, a return to Tao, is used to analyse not only the theme 'the return of the native' but also the impressionism and the dialectic between Nature and culture that ultimately confirms a return to holistic metaphysics in their fictional worlds. 'Weakness,' appreciated by Taoism as 'the only useful quality,' accentuates the gist of *wuwei* - action through inaction - which can be found in the aesthetics of silence and demonstrates a distinctly Taoist rhetorical commitment in the work of both writers. The last part of this quote concisely expresses a holistic view of humanity and Nature: a relational self in the universe. By comparing the two novelists' works, this study shows that their literary creations of Wessex and Xiangxi reach far beyond their own regional scope and that their representations of Nature converge in Taoist conceptions and aesthetics. Beneath the similarities between their literary representations, a shared authorial anxiety about logocentrism sustains their commitment to imagining a holistic way of being. The Wessex and Xiangxi novels are unique within two distinct literary histories, but between them a strikingly similar response to modernity can be located through a Taoist comparison.

Robert N. Watson, in his comment about the effort of pastoralism, foregrounds a literary need to go back to nature that is 'partly fuelled by a craving for unmediated knowledge in any form': '[a]s

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the persistent references to the Garden of Eden suggest, the movement back to nature was partly a code for a drive back toward some posited original certainty - a drive baffled by paradox and by history [...].'⁴⁸¹ This note speaks to my concern of the metaphysical holism of Nature in both writers' works, the so-called 'posited original certainty' by Watson, and he points out two vital points which can frame my Conclusion here: first, such a 'literary need to go back to nature' is closely related to a pursuit of 'unmediated knowledge', which is compared to *ziran* in this thesis, the Tao, and the originality and autonomy of literature; second, there is an intrinsic paradox to this literary return to Nature since definitions of Nature are always complicated by our mediated thoughts such as history and ideology. In this thesis, I have tried to demonstrate a Taoist literary method that can illuminate on these questions by comparing texts from Hardy, Shen, and the Taoist classics.

To clarify the paradox between Nature and language, I quote two other comments in the epigraph which help dissect the question. The second quote in the epigraph, taken from Eithne Henson's study of three canonical English writers on the intersection between the representation of landscape and gender in their novels, illustrates the dualistic criticism of 'Nature and Other' in the Western literary tradition. I have argued in Chapter 1 that the dynamics between characters and Nature in *Fengzi* and *Far from the Madding Crowd* imply a polar instead of a dualistic relationship between Nature and culture, where each one requires the other as a necessary condition for being what it is, hence relational rather than dualistic. Nature, as a novel interest for Hardy's Wessex and Shen's Xiangxi, provokes an overarching question for this study: what is 'nature' in these novels? In my Introduction, I have shown that previous scholarship on the representation of Nature in Hardy's and Shen's novels is insufficient for understanding the holism in their conception of Nature. Compared with other critical frameworks, Taoism provides a model of metaphysical holism (*ziran*), which is regarded in this thesis as a more coherent conception for what is fundamentally significant to methodological transitions of comparative ecocriticism towards a decentering model (as against anthropocentric or ecocentric models) that emphasises the connections between the human and non-human domains.

Contrary to Henson's claim in the epigraph, Timothy Clark notes a subversion of the dualistic conception of Nature in ecocriticism: '*Nature* and the *natural* cannot now convincingly function as self-validating norms underwriting a romantic, anti-modern politics or as the self-evidently desirable other of the artificial or the cultural.'⁴⁸² He pinpoints that Nature is more explicitly

⁴⁸¹ Robert N. Watson, *Back to Nature: The Green and the Real in the Late Renaissance* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), p.3.

⁴⁸² Timothy Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), p.202. The italics are made by Clark.

affirmed as amoral in ecocriticism which is 'acknowledged as an agent in its own right, capricious, awesome and easily capable of wiping humanity off the face of the earth'.⁴⁸³ Nature as an agent in its own right is exactly what *ziran* suggests, however, it seems that Clark can only define this ecocritical concern as a retort against the romantic discourse that objectifies nature or against environmentalism which regards nature as 'wilderness' or human constructions. Taoism, by contrast, can approach the conception of Nature from a holistic view and provide a discourse that overcomes the dualism and logocentrism of aforementioned critical models of 'Nature and Other' in literature.

Clark acknowledges that one of the current problems for ecocriticism is that there is no distinct ecocritical approach: '[l]ooking over the body of environmental literary criticism as a whole, it is still hard to see any specific "ecocritical" method emerging. Instead, the issues are taking the more challenging form of a general uncertainty and revision of intellectual boundaries.'⁴⁸⁴

Bennett and Royle also notice this problem of ecocriticism and thus claim that it is not proper to call it 'ism' yet: 'it [ecocriticism] does not offer a distinctive methodology of reading, but draws on feminist or Marxist or historical or postcolonial or psychoanalytic or deconstructive approaches, in order to attend to a world of environmental questions.'⁴⁸⁵ One of the major challenges for this methodological need to be specific is the inclusiveness of environmentalism. Clark notes a faltering voice of ecocriticism resulting from this inclusiveness, arguing that 'The "environment", after all, is, ultimately, "everything": 'issues at the same time of morality, ethics, biology, "animal rights", statistics, geography and politics'.⁴⁸⁶ This observation consolidates that 'environment' is not a very effective critical language for nuanced ecocritical concerns in literary studies, as I have argued in Chapter 1 (1.1). Taoism as a literary ecocritical tool offers a more specific focus on the holism in ecocriticism and a critical language that avoids the dualistic discourse.

As Deborah Bird Rose et al. point out in their monumental introductory statement of environmental humanities, 'conceptual sensitivity' is a key point for the field to generate 'a more integrated and conceptually sensitive approach' and what can be done is 'to enrich environmental research with a more extensive conceptual vocabulary'.⁴⁸⁷ *Ziran*, *wuwei*, and the Taoist 'return' can be regarded as examples of such 'more extensive conceptual vocabulary' since they provide a holistic discourse about Nature: *ziran* focuses on the holism between the human and non-human domains which stresses the spontaneity and the metaphysical connections that can be

⁴⁸³ Ibid., p.202.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid., p.202.

⁴⁸⁵ Bennett and Royle, 'Eco', p.141.

⁴⁸⁶ Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*, p.203.

⁴⁸⁷ Rose et al., 'Thinking Through the Environment, Unsettling the Humanities', p.2.

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approached through the Taoist relational self; *wuwei*, as a Taoist term that suggests the linguistic limitation and a narrative strategy that achieves effects through inaction which I have compared to the intended blankness in the Chinese ink paintings (as demonstrated through Shen's sketches in 2.3), acknowledges the distinct aesthetics of silence in both writers' novels and endows my criticism with an anti-logocentric discourse; finally, in Chapter 3, I suggest that the Taoist 'return' can be viewed as a rhetoric used by both Hardy and Shen in face of an alienation of humanity from Nature that shows their sceptical attitudes toward artificial institutional powers, and through Wessex and Xiangxi they delineate a return to the holistic metaphysics, the Tao, as well as a return to literary autonomy in face of the modern instrumentalism of language. The Taoist terms in my thesis enrich an ecocritical vocabulary by extending the critical views of Nature to the ancient Chinese metaphysics. My thesis proposes Taoism as a form of literary ecocriticism, which not only answers the call of comparative ecocriticism to tackle the question of Eurocentricity remaining in environmental humanities, but also teases out a useful vocabulary for analysing the details of cross-cultural texts and offering a potent voice for the ecocritical concerns in literature.

The third quote in the epigraph from Bennett and Royle's newly added chapter 'Eco' (followed by 'Animals') in their popular introductory book to literary criticism and theories avers the new question that ecocriticism brings to humanities and in Clark's words it is 'how language may be open to the natural world?'⁴⁸⁸ To what extent can literature return to Nature? If Nature is always contaminated by language, then how possible is an eco-representation or ecocriticism? Clark proclaims that '[t]he main future challenge for ecocriticism may lie in the way environmental questions will continue to resist inherited structures of thought and are uncontainable within the competence of any one intellectual discipline.'⁴⁸⁹ These inherited structures of thought are registered in our languages, and Clark sensibly locates this ecocritical caution of previous discourses. One of the reasons for such reminder is the salient anthropomorphism of existent literature, which is defined by Bennett and Royle as 'often a sentimental appropriation of the non-human for human ends'.⁴⁹⁰ They also draw on John Ruskin's 'affective fallacy', which is loosely equalled with anthropomorphism.⁴⁹¹ Among Bennett and Royle's examples of 'the ruses and delusions of anthropomorphism [...] in the celebration of natural sublimity,' Hardy's representation of Egdon Heath is included. I have demonstrated in Chapter 3 that this prominent anthropomorphic reading, which finds its epitome in D. H. Lawrence's study of Hardy, needs a re-

⁴⁸⁸ Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*, p.47.

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.203.

⁴⁹⁰ Bennett and Royle, 'Eco,' p.147.

⁴⁹¹ John Ruskin, *Modern Painters* (Wiley & Halsted, 1860), Part 4, Chapter 12.

consideration within a Taoist view where the element of 'return' in the novel actually signals a motion towards holism that decentres the human domain.⁴⁹²

The linguistic contamination of Nature suggested by Bennett and Royle is ultimately a question of the human alienation from Nature through cultures, especially the modern culture as reminded by Latour, and my Taoist method in this thesis is trying to find a voice in the fictions of Hardy and Shen that locates such a paradox between Nature and culture in their imagination of a return to Nature, to the holism between humanity and Nature. Both of them realise the paradox between language and Nature, and in order to approach such a return, they show the dialects between observer and participant, the action and inaction, the naïve and poetic languages, as well as through their literary impressionism, Ultimately demonstrating the ambiguity and fluidity of their language, they understand language as a connection to Nature, not an alienation from Nature.

Neimanis et al. state that 'the efficacy of environmental humanities will depend on their ability to address contemporary problems and gaps created or left by other modes and configurations of knowledge production' and they identify four key problems that the environmental humanities can address.⁴⁹³ Among them, the problem of alienation and intangibility is explained as the difficulty of human beings to relate to environmental issues which are 'predominantly sensible at other scales', with 'intangibility' referring to 'the difficulty of literally grasping these phenomena and effects'.⁴⁹⁴ This is caused by the fact that 'humans, particularly those embedded in Western cosmologies, organise their dominant imaginaries, practices, and politics around a human-scaled existence'.⁴⁹⁵ In other words, this problem can be addressed if human beings can rid ourselves of the anthropocentric scale and think of ourselves as a species. Neimanis et al. summarise the solution offered by environmental humanities: '[a]ddressing this intangibility will require an understanding of humans as intimately part of the environment, as through-and-through embedded in it, as well as a more capacious ability to imagine our implication in pasts, futures and worlds at scales different to our own.'⁴⁹⁶ They envision that the direction for environmental humanities to solve this problem is 'attention to diverse environmental imaginaries'.⁴⁹⁷ This

⁴⁹² For a clarification of 'anthropomorphism', see Bennett and Royle, 'Eco', p.147: '[e]cocritical thinking analyses the ways in which such figurations of the apparently non-human lead inexorably to anthropocentrism, to the configuration of the world in human terms - which in turn leads to the exploitation of the non-human (however that category is defined) for human benefit.'

⁴⁹³ Neimanis et al., 'Four problems, four directions for environmental humanities', p.73. The four key problems are: (1) The Problem of Alienation and Intangibility; (2) The Problem of a Technocratic Approach in a Post-Political Situation; (3) The Problem of Negative Framing; (4) The Problem of Compartmentalisation.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.74.

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.74.

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.74.

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.81.

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solution is proposed on the premise that 'a deep understanding of environment cannot be divorced from human imagination, culture, and institutional and social practices'.⁴⁹⁸ In its display of Wessex and Xiangxi as such ecological imaginaries, my thesis seeks out 'nodes of specific, situated connection between humans and non-human natures'.⁴⁹⁹ Specifically, in my Introduction to *ziran* (III), I have discussed the conception of Nature in Hardy's and Shen's novels in relation to the Taoist idea of 'Heaven and man merging into one', illustrating the holistic view that human beings are part of *ziran* that speaks to the 'embeddedness' raised by Neimanis et al.

Similarly, addressing the curious relationship between language and Nature, Timothy Clark pertinently points out the impossibility of orienting ourselves in a world without language and confirms that language is 'a kind of decisive environment out of which we define ourselves'.⁵⁰⁰ At the same time, he emphasises that '[t]his is an environment that, especially in the West, expresses the overwhelming and often oppressive weight of centuries of anthropocentric modes of thought and perception but that still contains hidden resources and inventive possibilities for those writers and thinkers able to discern and exploit them'.⁵⁰¹ Clark's deliberate omission of an Eastern discourse indicates his unfamiliarity with such traditions in the East, or, as implied by Latour, this can be an opportunity for the Eastern perspectives to provide modes of thought and perception that can tackle the anthropocentric and logocentric discourses in the Western traditions.

As I have demonstrated in the Introduction (III), John Alcorn, among other critics, firstly raises the potential of a Taoist view to approach the conception of Nature in Hardy's works. Bruno Latour articulates the non-dualistic essence of an Eastern view of Nature: '[i]t is the peculiar trait of Westerners that they have imposed, by their official Constitution, the total separation of humans and nonhumans - the Internal Great Divide - and have thereby artificially created the scandal of the others'.⁵⁰² Latour intends to reconnect the social and natural worlds by introducing a new word 'natureculture' to the debate: 'the very notion of culture is an artifact created by bracketing Nature off. Cultures - different or universal - do not exist, any more than Nature does. There are only nature-cultures, and these offer the only possible basis for comparison'.⁵⁰³ This notion of 'natureculture' can find a resonance in my analysis of Taoism in relation to Hardy's and Shen's dialectic between Nature and culture in Chapter 3. Distinct from Latour's recent invention of this

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid., p.82.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., p.84.

⁵⁰⁰ Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*, p.54.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid., p.54.

⁵⁰² Latour, *We have never been modern*, p.104.

⁵⁰³ Ibid., p.104.

new word 'natureculture', my thesis shows the usefulness of the ancient Taoist metaphysics that has long existed in the Chinese literary tradition.

Besides Latour's note on possible contributions from the Eastern traditions for a non-dualistic ecocritical paradigm, Zhang Longxi, in his 2012 book about comparative hermeneutics between Eastern and Western literature *The Tao and the Logos*, elaborates on an inherent anti-logocentrism of Chinese hermeneutics and poetics.⁵⁰⁴ Zhang summarises that 'In the Chinese tradition, the inadequacy of language and the limitation of finite interpretations are readily recognised.'⁵⁰⁵ Zhang also suggests that the writer's statement about a lack of proper expressions or 'forgetting of words' can be regarded as a gesture to refute logocentrism: '[b]oth sides of the signifying word, its limitation and its suggestiveness, are memorably expressed in the poet's forgetting of words. It is a moment that at once indicates the difficulty of articulation and the poet's skilful use of silence to overcome that difficulty.'⁵⁰⁶ Although Zhang is more concerned with poetry, his observation of a distinct Chinese poetic aesthetic is in line with the Taoist concept of *wuwei* and confirms the contribution of such Eastern aesthetics to comparative literature.

Continuing their comment about the paradox between language and Nature in the epigraph of this Conclusion, Bennett and Royle assert: '[w]riters and critics are, however, well placed to analyse the ways in which this wasting of our world is not simply material or physical, but also rhetorical - the ways in which it is defined, conditioned and even, in certain respects, controlled by language itself.'⁵⁰⁷ They draw an analogy between environmental problems and anthropocentric literature: '[v]iolence has to do with the human, starting with the violence of language itself, in its representations and appropriations of "nature".'⁵⁰⁸ These comments pinpoint the significance of being aware of the 'contamination' of language or the linguistic appropriation of 'nature' in ecocriticism. With a Taoist reading, I am not suggesting that Hardy and Shen demonstrate carefully judged rhetorical strategies for a literary return to Nature in their novels: what I have shown through the Taoist conceptions of *ziran*, *wuwei*, and return is a literary imagination and presentation of metaphysical holism between humanity and Nature that constitutes a kind of conceptual sensitivity for comparative ecocriticism. Taoist *wuwei* and return postulate a literary motion against logocentrism, which is another vital contribution of Taoism to the question of linguistic alienation of Nature in literature. Besides a Taoist return motion that

⁵⁰⁴ Zhang Longxi 张隆溪, *The Tao and the Logos: Literary Hermeneutics, East and West* (Duke University Press, 2012).

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p.126.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p.128.

⁵⁰⁷ Bennett and Royle, 'Eco', p.140.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p.141.

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shows a possibility of literature returning to Nature, I have also demonstrated in Chapter 2 how the Taoist conception of *wuwei* can reconcile between language and Nature by illuminating the aesthetics of the silence as an anti-logocentric gesture in literature. Furthermore, a typical tendency of current ecocriticism to resist logocentrism is the constant invention of new vocabularies, which might become an obstacle for more in-depth conversations across disciplines and cultures. Latour's 'natureculture' can be regarded as such an example. Instead of defining a new ecocritical term, my study investigates the conceptions of ancient Taoist metaphysics and compares them with the new terms that engage with similar critical concerns. I have suggested that Taoist terms might prove more useful than previous or newly invented ecocritical terms, such as *ziran* for nature/landscape/setting, *wuwei* for lyrical ambiguity, and Taoist 'return' for 'natureculture'.

With an intrinsic scepticism towards logocentrism, its long existent vocabulary such as *ziran* emphasising on holism and *wuwei* on the aesthetics of silence, and a rhetoric that aims at a return to self-so, Taoism proves to be a distinct ecocritical approach that is timely for the 'faltering voices' of ecocriticism as noted by Clark. Bennett and Royle insightfully suggest that inevitably, we are all ecocritics to a certain extent: '[e]cocritical thinking in this respect involves a change of scale and vision: rather than an obsession with human-sized objects, it attends both to the miniature realm of a blade of grass, an ant, amoeba, or pathogen, and to the mega-scale of the ocean, the mountain, or even the earth itself (as well as everything in between).'⁵⁰⁹ I have discovered and compared such scale and vision in the fictional worlds of Wessex and Xiangxi. This study has established links among three bodies of literature: Hardy's Wessex novels, Shen's Xiangxi novels, and the Taoist classics, which converge on the metaphysical holism of Taoism. It demonstrates new angles for Hardy and Shen studies and the huge potential of comparative studies between them. From imaginary to aesthetics to rhetoric, the Taoist methodology of this study provides original critical approaches to the conception of Nature in novels and facilitates a fundamental Taoist contribution to comparative ecocriticism. Overall, this study breaks new ground for the environmental humanities and proves that ideas from such different cultures can not only be reconciled but also offer constructive implications. The connections I demonstrate between Wessex and Xiangxi provoke a cross-cultural literary discussion and find resolution in Taoism: such an academic encounter and the sparks it stirs for further inquiries are the beauty of comparative literature.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid., p.141.

Appendix A Maps and Pictures

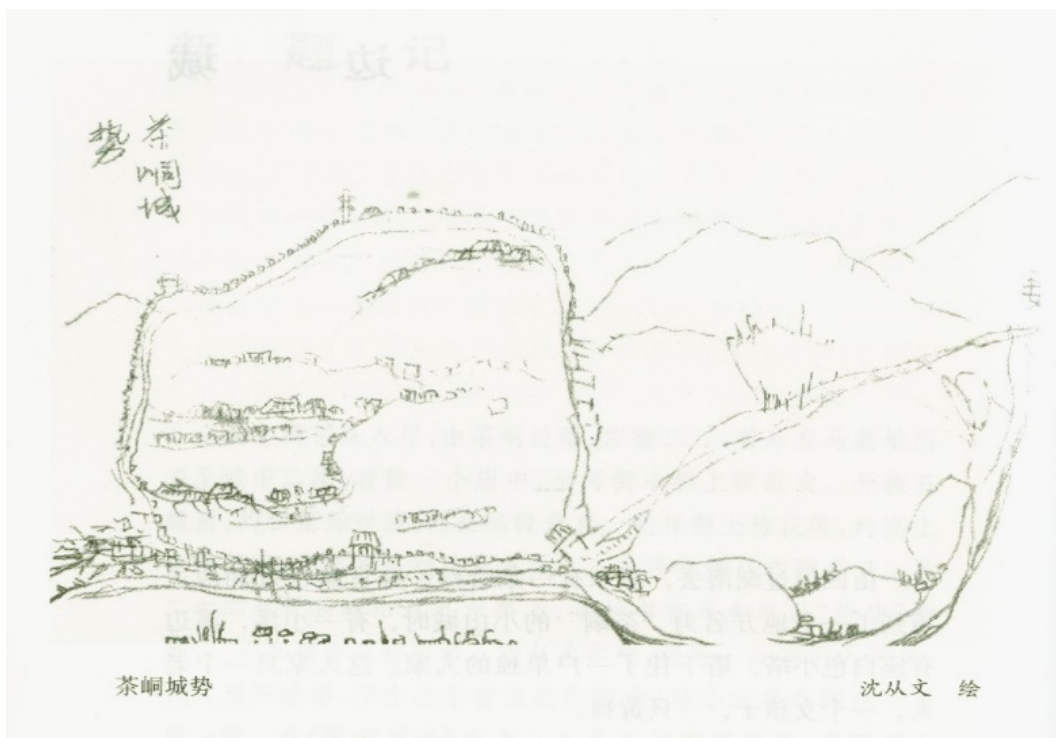


Figure 11 Shen's drawing of the terrain of Chatong, the border town⁵¹⁰



Figure 12 The stilted buildings (Diaojiu buildings 吊脚楼) by the River Tuo 沱江, Fenghuang 凤凰⁵¹¹

⁵¹⁰ Time of creation is unknown, included in Zhang ed., *Complete Works*, Volume VIII, p.62.

⁵¹¹ The picture was taken by me during my first research trip to Xiangxi in 2017.



Figure 13 The South China Great Wall 南方长城⁵¹²



Figure 14 The Coffin Rocks 箱子岩⁵¹³

⁵¹² Also known as the Miao Border Area Wall 苗疆边墙. Built in 1554, it was about 190 kilometres long and served as a border between the Miao and Han ethnic groups until 1936. The picture was taken by me during my first research trip to Xiangxi in 2017.

⁵¹³ The picture was taken by me during my second research trip to Xiangxi in 2018.



Figure 15 Hardy's own map of Wessex, 1895⁵¹⁴

⁵¹⁴ The Thomas Hardy Association <<http://thethomashardyassociation.org/images/maps/map4.htm>>

Appendix B Synopses of the Novels

B.1 *Fengzi* 《凤子》

Fengzi is an unfinished story whose first nine chapters were published in *Literature and Art Monthly* in 1932.⁵¹⁵ In 1933, it was published in a collection of Shen's short stories under the title *Fengzi* by Hangzhou Cangshan Bookstore.⁵¹⁶ The preface was included when it was republished by Lida Bookstore in 1934.⁵¹⁷ In July 1937, Shen published Chapter 10 in *Literature Magazine*.⁵¹⁸

The story starts with a lovelorn young Xiangxi scholar who has left Peking for a coastal city to teach in a local university. He lives with his colleagues in a house close to the sea and their seclusion disturbs him at the beginning, but he gradually becomes accustomed to it. During his regular walk to the sea, he discovers a house with an exquisite garden, which belongs to an old recluse. Although they often greet each other, the young scholar feels it can hardly be counted as friendship; meanwhile he recalls that on a previous day he had eavesdropped on a conversation on the beach between a middle-aged man and a young woman named Fengzi, on the abstract topic of Beauty and Nature. The scholar was fascinated by Fengzi's companion, whose speech about the divinity of Nature moved him. The young scholar and the old recluse finally introduce themselves to each other and surprisingly find out that they have shared interests in Xiangxi — the old man had visited there as an engineer 20 years ago while the scholar confesses that as a native, he left there 15 years ago. The old recluse welcomes the scholar to meet more regularly and the scholar starts wondering whether the old man is the one he overheard on the beach, because he has noticed a similar wisdom in their talks. They form a genuine friendship based on their similar tastes, and the young man's idealism provokes the old recluse, who soliloquises that the young scholar is another Fengzi. The scholar is amazed at his comment and confirms that the old man was the man he heard on the beach. He tells the old man about the anecdote and the old man promises to tell him his story.

The next six chapters tell the story from the old man's perspective about his experiences at Zhengan as an engineer in his thirties on an invitation of a friend who was the local squire, and his mission to investigate local mine resources.⁵¹⁹ The narrative is largely constructed by their

⁵¹⁵ *Literature and Art Monthly* 《文艺月刊》(1930-1941).

⁵¹⁶ Hangzhou Cangshan Bookstore 杭州苍山书店.

⁵¹⁷ Lida Bookstore 北平立达书局.

⁵¹⁸ *Literature Magazine* 《文学杂志》(1937-1948).

⁵¹⁹ Zhengan 镇竿 was renamed Fenghuang 凤凰 in 1913, which is Shen's hometown.

conversations on topics such as Nature, local religious beliefs and rituals, courting and marriage customs, bias about the local culture, and modern science and technologies. The engineer is impressed by a young woman he meets in a chestnut wood and Chapter 10 ends with his dreaming about her, after he watches a local ritual about redeeming the vow to god with the squire who asked him to stay longer and watch another local ritual about the fight between man and animals.

B.2 *The Border Town* 《边城》

The Border Town tells a love story involving three young people. On the border between Sichuan and Hunan provinces lies a small town, Chadong, where an old ferryman and his orphan granddaughter Emerald (Cuicui) live by the river. The local wharf master Shunshun has two sons, Tianbao and Nuosong, who help their father with his business. Nuosong meets Emerald at a dragon-boat festival and feels attracted to her, while Tianbao also falls in love with her later and sends a matchmaker to propose marriage. Meanwhile, a local landlord proposes a match between Nuosong and his daughter with a new mill as the dowry. Nuosong is still in love with Emerald and the two brothers decide to follow a local custom and sing love songs to Emerald so that she can choose between them; however, Emerald's attitude remains ambiguous. Tianbao goes on a business trip in depression and dies in an accident on the water. Shunshun decides he does not want Emerald to be his daughter-in-law anymore after his elder son's death; Nuosong blames the old ferryman for his elusive and tentative attitude, which gives both brothers hope, and becomes estranged from him. Annoyed by Shunshun and Nuosong's misunderstanding and aloofness, as well as a hopeless future for Emerald in terms of marriage, the old ferryman dies. Nuosong exiles himself from Chadong in confusion, leaving Emerald fruitlessly waiting for him at the ferry.

B.3 *Long River* 《长河》

In a small wharf town called Lǜjia Ping ('Ping' means level ground), which is halfway along the Chen River in Hunan Province, lives the chairman of the local commerce chamber. A security guard team assigned by the local government comes to settle in the town and often impresses protection fees upon the locals. Downstream is Maple Col, where the local ancestral temple is located, and the gatekeeper is an old sailor. Opposite Maple Col, across the river, is Turnip Brook, where Teng Changshun owns a large orange orchard. Changshun has two sons and three daughters, among whom Yaoyao (meaning the youngest) is beautiful and shrewd. The orchard has a good harvest again that year. The old sailor, Manman (a local nickname for 'uncle'), becomes worried about the New Life Movement, which he hears about from passengers. In the

meantime, the local business chairman and Changshun, who are relatives by marriage, also hear about the 'New Life' from the sailors on their cargo boats. In order to maintain good business relationships, the chairman buys a boat of oranges from Changshun as presents for his network. Meanwhile the security captain schemes to obtain a boat of oranges from Changshun by blackmail to sell in other towns and fill his own pocket, but Changshun is experienced enough to see through his trick and cunningly refuses. The conflict is mediated by the chairman, but a seed of resentment is planted in the heart of the captain, who yearns for Yaoyao at the same time. This unfinished novel ends with a village opera performance sponsored by Changshun to celebrate the harvest - everything seems to be the same as the old way. The unfinished novel leaves Changshun's business under threat of intrusion from the capitalistic economy, the wars, and the revenge of the captain; Yaoyao's future is shadowed by the menace of the captain, and her fiancée is about to return from an urban education, a potentially problematic return of the native coupled with the confrontation of an arranged marriage. Because unfinished, the narrative leaves us in suspense about the impact of the New Life Movement.

B.4 *Far from the Madding Crowd*

It was first anonymously serialised in *Cornhill Magazine* during 1874. The story begins with 28-year-old shepherd Gabriel Oak, who has leased and stocked a farm, spies Bathsheba Everdene, a 20-year-old well-educated newcomer who lives nearby to help with her aunt's farm. A series of encounters happen between the two, including one incident where Bathsheba saves Gabriel's life. Gabriel proposes to Bathsheba, but she refuses because she does not love him and will not give up her independence for him. His affections for her remain strong even after she moves away to the town of Weatherbury upon inheriting her uncle's farm. Gabriel is financially ruined after his sheepdog accidentally drives his sheep off a cliff, and he rescues Bathsheba's new farm from fire when he travels to look for a job, after which he is hired by her. Bathsheba learns to manage her farm and becomes acquainted with William Boldwood, her neighbour and a successful middle-aged farmer, to whom she sends a Valentine card as a prank on a whim. Boldwood becomes obsessed with Bathsheba and proposes to her, which she refuses but agrees to reconsider later. Bathsheba then meets Sergeant Frank Troy who quickly stirs her emotions. Troy has a bad reputation as a womaniser and both Gabriel and Boldwood try to warn Bathsheba, with Boldwood even threatening violence against Troy; Bathsheba disguises herself and escapes to Bath where Troy is staying to warn him of Boldwood's anger and comes back as wife of Troy. Troy quickly proves to be unmotivated to help with running the farm, and develops a habit of spending money recklessly: the marriage is not working out so well and their relationship becomes worse and worse. One day, they meet a young woman close to giving birth on the road who seems to be

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impoverished and ill, and the encounter triggers Troy's strange behaviour but he refused to explain. The woman is Fanny Robbins who was formerly a servant at the Everdene farm and had an affair with Troy while he was stationed in a nearby town. Fanny believed she was going to elope with Troy but was abandoned by him and found herself pregnant. Fanny and her baby both die during the childbirth, and Bathsheba learns about the fact that Troy is the father; grief-stricken and ashamed, Troy runs away and is thought to have drowned. Boldwood becomes more and more emphatic about his proposal since Bathsheba is declared a widow, but she wants to wait a full seven years after his presumed death. Troy secretly returns to Weatherbury almost a year after his vanishing and sees Bathsheba at a fair and decides to return to her; he makes a surprise appearance at Boldwood's Christmas party at which Bathsheba promises to respond to Boldwood's proposal; Troy tries to reclaim Bathsheba as his wife but Boldwood, in a rage, shoots him dead. Although traumatised by these events, Bathsheba slowly recovers and finally marries Gabriel.

B.5 *The Woodlanders*

It was originally published serially in *Macmillan's Magazine* from May 1886 to February 1887, followed by a book version later that year. The story begins as Grace Melbury, daughter of a timber merchant in Little Hintock, an isolated woodland village in Wessex, returns after a year away, studying. Her fiancé Giles Winterbourne, a stolid timber merchant, is faithfully devoted to her. Giles is adored by Marty South, a young girl who helps her father John Smith with logs. After Marty realises that Giles loves Grace and not her, she sells her hair to the local barber who makes a wig for Mrs. Felice Charmond, a local upper-class woman. Mr. Melbury wronged Giles's father many years before and to atone for this he promises that Grace will marry Giles. Understanding this, Grace intends to honour her father's promise although she shrinks from Giles's plainness, especially that it is evident she is too refined for him. On the contrary, Mr. Melbury, although being an honourable man, regrets about his promise and cannot bear to see his only child throw herself away when she can marry better. A series of unfortunate circumstances causes Giles's loss of his property that ensures his livelihood, and he becomes a travelling farmer, which finally breaks his engagement with Grace. Grace has also caught the eye of the socially superior Edred Fitzpiers, the village doctor who is the descendant of a formerly fine family and of great charm but questionable moral character. The local folk thinks he consorts with the devil, for he performs many unusual experiments. He is so taken with Grace that he is willing to overlook her humble origin and marry her; Grace agrees to his proposal at the urging of her father even though she is not in love with him and has grown quite fond of Giles. Fitzpiers has formerly developed an affair with a village wife, and after he marries Grace, he begins an affair with Mrs. Charmond. Grace

reacts with indifference, but Mr. Melbury goes to Mrs. Charmond and asks her to end the affair and assaults Fitzpiers, who flees to the continent together. Mr. Melbury tries to arrange for Grace to divorce Fitzpiers but is unsuccessful. Grace renews a relationship with Giles, but they are resigned to be friends only. Fitzpiers returns after quarrelling with Mrs. Charmond when he learns about the origin of most of Mrs Charmond's hair from Marty's letter, trying to convince Grace to take him back. Grace flees to Giles's cottage. In order to avoid scandal, Giles, who is seriously ill, relinquishes his cottage to Grace and moves into a rude hut, where he soon dies of exposure. Although Grace mourns his loss, she eventually reconciles with Edred and leaves for the city. No one is left to mourn Giles except Marty.

B.6 *The Return of the Native*

It first appeared in the magazine *Belgravia* in monthly instalments from January to December 1878. Hardy originally intended for the novel to have five 'books' (emulating the five-act structure of the classics), but, giving in to the pressures from the readers, he added a six book to end the story 'happily'.

The novel is set on Egdon Heath, a fictional barren moor in Wessex, and (with the exception of the epilogue and aftercourses) covers exactly a year and a day. It begins on the evening of Guy Fawkes Night as the reddleman (red dye salesman) Diggory Venn is driving across the heath with Thomasin Yeobright in his van, who was supposed to have been married to Damon Wildeve, a local innkeeper, earlier that day but there had been a mixup with the license. Venn is in love with Thomasin, and unsuccessfully wooed her two years before; now, although he believes Wildeve is unworthy of her love, Venn is so devoted to Thomasin that he is willing to help her secure the man of her choice. Thomasin arrives at the home of her aunt, Mrs. Yeobright, who was formerly opposed to her niece's choice of husband, and publicly forbade the banns; now, since Thomasin has compromised herself by leaving town with Wildeve and returning unmarried, Mrs. Yeobright decides that the best outcome is that the marriage takes place as soon as possible. She and Venn both begin working on Wildeve to make sure he keeps his promise to Thomasin. Wildeve, however, is still preoccupied with Eustacia Vye, an exotic young woman living with her grandfather in a lonely house on Egdon Heath, whose Italian father came from Corfu, and who grew up in Budmouth, a fashionable seaside resort. She loathes the heath and holds herself aloof from most of the heathfolk; yet she roams the heath constantly, carrying a spyglass and an hourglass. Wildeve and Eustacia meet on Guy Fawkes night, and Wildeve asks her to run off to America with him, which she demurs. Eustacia drops Wildeve when Mrs. Yeobright's son Clym, a diamond merchant in Paris, returns to his native Egdon Heath, whom she thinks can help her escape the heath. Clym, on the contrary, thinks life in Paris is shallow and decides to stay and

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becomes a schoolmaster against his mother's wish. Clym is soon enchanted by Eustacia and they fall in love, and Eustacia accepts his proposal; Mrs. Yeobright is infuriated and tells Clym that she will refuse to see him if he marries Eustacia. Wildeve finally marries Thomasin with wounded pride by Eustacia, and Thomasin gives birth to a daughter the next summer. Clym and Eustacia move to a small cottage five miles away and enjoy a brief period of happiness. Things soon deteriorate when Clym nearly blinds himself because he studies day and night for his new career as a schoolmaster and then decides to eke out a living, at least temporarily, as a furze-cutter. Disappointed that Clym is content to remain on the heath, Eustacia rekindles her affair with Wildeve, who has unexpectedly inherited a large sum of money, and is now in a better position to fulfill Eustacia's hopes. A series of coincidences happen and Eustacia comes to believe that she is responsible for the death of Clym's mother, at the same time Clym misunderstands and blames her too, so she moves back to her grandfather's house. Clym calms down, but his letter for reconciliation arrives later than Eustacia's making the decision to flee with Wildeve to Paris and has set off through rainstorm to meet him. Deeply upset about her breaking the marriage vow for a man unworthy of her, she falls (or throws herself) into the nearby Shadwater Weir. Wildeve also drowns trying to save her.

In the epilogue, Venn gives up being a reddleman to become a dairy farmer. Two years later, Thomasin marries him, and Clym becomes an itinerant preacher.

Appendix C Timelines of Hardy and Shen

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928)

Childhood 1840-1856

Hardy was born the eldest son of Thomas and Jemima Hardy at Higher Bockhampton, (then Upper Bockhampton), a hamlet in the parish of [Stinsford](#) to the east of [Dorchester](#) in Dorset, England on the 2 June 1840. His father and grandfather were master stonemasons, who also performed in the quire of the local parish church. His mother was a cook and servant maid. He attended a village school established by the lady of the manor, Mrs. Julia Martin of Kingston Maurward. His early readings included Dryden's *Virgil* and Johnson's *Rasselas* given to him by his mother. In 1849, Hardy was transferred to school in Dorchester and started playing the fiddle at local weddings and dances. He also began learning Latin, French, and German, and reading the novels of Harrison Ainsworth and Alexandre Dumas père.

Architect 1856-1870

Hardy was articled to one of his father's employers, architect John Hicks, whose office in Dorchester was next to the school kept by the Rev. William Barnes. He studied Latin and Greek from five to eight in the morning and started writing verse. He was also introduced to modern thoughts by Horace Moule, son of the Vicar of Fordington and eight years

Shen Congwen (1902-1988)

Childhood 1902-1916

Born on the 28 December 1902, to an eminent soldierly family in Fenghuang, Hunan Province (an autonomous prefecture of the Miao and Tujia ethnic minority groups), Shen's grandfather on his father's side was a Han (the major ethnic group in China) general and his father was trained in martial skills and dreamed about being a general for his whole life. Shen's grandfather on his mother's side was a famous Tujia scholar in the town and was among the first group of local people to acknowledge Western influences and modern culture, as did Shen's mother. His grandmother on his father's side belonged to the Miao ethnic minority group, a group highly discriminated against in this area. Therefore, Shen has three ethnic identities. Shen's parents had nine children, four of whom died young, and Shen was the second of the three remaining boys. He suffered two severe diseases in childhood. He went to a local school between the ages of six and fourteen.

Army 1917-1922

From 1916 to 1917, Shen was sent to a military school where he also dreamed about becoming a general, following the family tradition. He joined a local army in 1917. The revolution the army advocated became a slaughter arising from ethnic conflicts and revenge among different interest groups. He witnessed thousands of meaningless deaths. Because of

<p>Hardy's senior. He studied Greek dramatists and read Darwin's <i>On the Origin of Species</i> (1859). From 1862 to 1867, he worked as assistant-architect to Arthur Blomfield. Hardy read widely during this period, including works by Spencer, Huxley, J. S. Mills, Shelley, Browning, Scott, and Swinburne. He also studied paintings in The National Gallery and attended operas and theatres. In 1865, Hardy published his first article, 'How I Built Myself a House' in <i>Chamber's Journal</i>. He also started sending poems to periodicals, which were rejected. He returned to Dorset for health reasons and was employed by Hicks, and his successor Crickmay in Weymouth. He completed his first novel, <i>The Poor Man and the Lady</i>, in 1868, which was accepted by Chapman and Hall, but George Meredith advised Hardy not to publish it due to its socialistic content, which might become a handicap to his future. He then started writing <i>Desperate Remedies</i>. Hardy was sent by Crickmay to St. Juliot in Cornwall and met his future wife, Emma Lavinia Gifford, the rector's sister-in-law.</p>	<p>his relatively decent level of literacy and good handwriting, he was appointed as secretary to an officer and was able to access some traditional Chinese literature and contemporary newspapers in the officer's collection. He also learned to write traditional Chinese poems by transcribing poems for the officer.</p> <p>In 1921, he read translations of Dickens in an eminent relative's study. Shen sympathised with the experience of Dickens' characters and was inspired by their fight for their own destiny. He also admired Dickens' style, stating that it is not preaching morals but observing life and entailing morals into phenomena. Shen described himself as someone who does not want to learn moral lessons but is obsessed with phenomena of life.</p>
<p><u>Novelist 1870-1897</u></p>	<p><u>Novelist 1923-1950</u></p>
<p>Hardy's first published novel was <i>Desperate Remedies</i> (1871), followed by <i>Under the Greenwood Tree</i> (1872) and <i>A Pair of Blue Eyes</i> (1873). His first success, <i>Far from the Madding Crowd</i> (1874), was first serialised in <i>The Cornhill Magazine</i> edited by Leslie Stephen. He married Emma in 1874 and was</p>	<p>Shen had a chance to approach some magazines and newspapers of the 'New Culture Movement' initiated by the massive student movement (the May Fourth Movement) in Peking in 1919 when he worked in a newspaper office established by the army officer, and Shen was sponsored by him to go to Peking for study. However, due to his grassroots background, he</p>

<p>encouraged by her to abandon architecture for writing.</p> <p>After the publication of <i>The Hand of Ethelberta</i> (1876) and <i>The Return of the Native</i> (1878), Hardy moved to Upper Tooting. He joined the Savile Club and became well-known in London literary circles. In 1880, Hardy became seriously ill after the publication of <i>The Trumpet Major</i> and he moved back to Dorchester in 1883, where he supervised the building of Max Gate. He started living there in 1885, but the couple continued making long annual visits to London. In between these years, <i>A Laodicean</i> (1881) and <i>Two on a Tower</i> (1882) were published.</p> <p>The early years at Max Gate witnessed the publications of Hardy's major novels, including <i>The Mayor of Casterbridge</i> (1886) and <i>The Woodlanders</i> (1887), and two collections of short stories: <i>Wessex Tales</i> (1888) and <i>A Group of Noble Dames</i> (1891). <i>Tess of the D'Urbervilles</i> was published in 1891 and quickly translated into several languages; however, many libraries refused to stock it and Hardy was deeply offended by the review in <i>The Quarterly</i>, claiming that 'if this sort of thing [criticism] continues no more novel writing for me' (<i>The Life</i>, p.259).</p> <p>Hardy's father died in 1892. <i>Life's Little Ironies</i>, another collection of short stories was published in 1894. <i>Jude the Obscure</i> was published in 1896, causing even more scandal, and Hardy complained that the novel had been misinterpreted and resolved to give up</p>	<p>was refused by the universities. Thus, he self-educated himself in the library and later was able to audit some university classes. He learned writing at university and started submitting to newspapers and magazines for publication.</p> <p>On 12 December 1924, Shen's essay 'A Letter not Sent' was first published in the <i>Morning Paper</i> supplement. He then frequently published works in this magazine. Shen also published in the <i>Modern Review</i> and was introduced to the Crescent Society 新月社. Xu Zhimo later became the editor-in-chief for the <i>Morning Paper</i> and wrote appreciative reviews for Shen. In 1925, Shen published more than 60 of his works which were diverse in form, including poems, essays, plays, and short stories. Shen serialised a novella, <i>In another Country</i>, in the <i>Modern Review</i> from 24 April 1926, and this was off-printed the next year under the title <i>Mistress of the Fort</i>. His first collection of works, <i>The Duck</i> 《鸭子》, was published in November 1926.</p> <p>Due to the change in the political climate, the Chinese publishing industry was transferred from Peking to Shanghai in 1927. Shen thus left for Shanghai to seek more career opportunities. In March 1928, Xu Zhimo issued the monthly magazine, <i>New Crescent</i>, and Shen's novel, <i>Alice in China</i>, was serialised in the first eight volumes of this magazine. In the same year, Shen was invited by Hu Shi to teach Chinese Literature at Wusong Chinese College, where he fell in love with his student Zhang Zhaohe. Between 1925 and 1929, Shen published over two hundred pieces of writing and more than twenty</p>
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<p>novel-writing. Nonetheless, <i>The Well-Beloved</i> (1897) was published, which had been written ten years earlier.</p>	<p>collections of works, which gained him such titles as ‘productive writer,’ ‘King of Short Stories,’ and ‘Alexandre Dumas in China’. In 1930, he began teaching New Literature studies and Creative Writing at Wuhan University, middle China.</p> <p>As the political tension intensified between the two main Chinese political parties, the Kuomintang and the Communist Party, writers also fell into two groups. Shen’s closest friend, Hu Yeping joined the Communist Party and plunged into revolution, finally being arrested by the Kuomintang and persecuted despite Shen’s endeavours to rescue him; another close friend, Ding Ling (Hu’s wife) joined the Association of Chinese Left-Wing Writers and was also in danger of persecution. Xu Zhimo died in an air crash in 1931, which caused Shen great grief.</p> <p>Shen began teaching at the University of Qingdao, northeast China, in 1931, and wrote an autobiography of the first twenty years of his life (《从文自传》). He married Zhang Zhaohe in 1933 and went back to Peking to compile textbooks for middle schools and primary schools. During his honeymoon, he started writing <i>The Border Town</i> and serialised it in a paper from December 1933 to April 1934. On the 23 December the same year, the literature supplement of <i>Ta Kung Pao</i> started publication, and Shen was invited to become the editor-in-chief. He made it a platform for all those liberal writers who condemned the autocracy of the Kuomintang but also suspected the left-wing literary movement, which gained them the title</p>
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'Peking School of Writers 京派作家'. The supplement also published criticisms on both Chinese and foreign literature and translations. Shen returned to his hometown to visit his very sick mother in January 1934. His mother died a month later. Shen's first son, Longzhu 龙朱, was born this year. His second son, Huchu 虎雏, was born in 1937. On the 29 July 1937, Peking was invaded by the Japanese army and Shen, together with other writers, fled to Wuhan and was separated from his family. The whole cultural circle was shaken and the educational centre was evacuated to Kunming 昆明, southern China, where Shen's family reunited in November 1938. At the beginning of 1938, he went back to Xiangxi again and lived with his elder brother for three months, during which time he advocated local officials and officers to support the war against aggression and to help settle the refugees. He started writing a collection of essays introducing Xiangxi and a novel, *Long River*. Due to the content about the conflicts between Xiangxi ethnic minority groups and the Kuomintang, the first volume of *Long River* was abridged several times. The censorship lasted for ten years and only parts of the work were published, which made it impossible for Shen to finish the other three planned volumes.

In 1946, Shen became professor at Peking University and went back to Peking. In 1947, a student at Southwest Associated University, Ching Ti, and an English lecturer, Robert Payne, published a collection of the English translations of fourteen of Shen's short stories, *The Chinese*

<p><u>Poet 1897-1928</u></p> <p>Hardy's first collection of verse, <i>Wessex Poems</i>, was published in 1898, then <i>Poems of the Past and the Present</i> in 1902. The first part of <i>The Dynasts</i> was published in 1904, the year his mother died, and the subsequent parts in 1906 and 1908. Another collection of verse, <i>Time's Laughingstocks</i> was published in 1909. In 1910 Hardy was awarded the Order of Merit and the freedom of Dorchester. He made final revisions to his novels, the <i>Wessex Edition</i>, in 1912.</p> <p>In November 1912, Emma suddenly died. Hardy made a pilgrimage to St. Juliot and Emma's birthplace at Plymouth in March 1913. He published a collection of short stories, <i>A Changed Man and Other Tales</i> (1913), and a collection of verse, <i>Satires of Circumstances</i> (1914), including 'Poems of 1912-1913' which were responses to Emma's death.</p> <p>He married Florence Emily Dugdale in February 1914, whom he had first met in 1904 and who had worked as his secretary since 1912. In the following years, he published <i>Moments of Vision</i> (1917), <i>Late Lyrics and Earlier</i> (1922), <i>The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall</i> (1923), and <i>Human Shows</i> (1925). He also worked on his autobiography and burned his old correspondence, notes, and other private papers during these years.</p>	<p><i>Earth: Stories by Shen Congwen</i>, by George Allen & Unwin in London. This is the first English translation of Shen's works.</p> <p><u>Antiquarian 1950-1988</u></p> <p>The formal political persecution of Shen started from 1948: he was given the title 'pink-colour writer (decadent and obscene)', 'reactionist', 'literary beggar', and 'jester of the landlord class'. Students of Peking University campaigned to 'fight against Shen Congwen who belonged to the Middle Way'. Shen believed that his literary and political views would not be tolerated by the new government and was worried about political persecution. This kind of illusion finally led to his attempted suicide at home, but he was discovered by a relative and sent to hospital immediately. After recovery, he was sent to the Central Revolutionary University to study Communist theories and policies for ten months, during which period he was only allowed to return home at weekends and was made to write confessions.</p> <p>He was then assigned to the History Museum to transcribe. Because of his interest and expertise in traditional Chinese paintings and calligraphy, Shen was allocated tasks such as clearing up Beijing's antique shops, purchasing new antiques for the museum, lecturing the ancient art classes, and revising the annotations to ancient literature. The job also offered him access to huge collections of Chinese antiques and research materials. Previously he had written diversely about ancient Chinese</p>
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<p><u>End of life 1928</u></p> <p>Hardy died on 11 January 1928 at Max Gate. His ashes were laid in the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey while his heart was buried in Emma's grave in Stinsford churchyard. A collection of verse, <i>Winter Words</i> was published posthumously in 1928. <i>The Early Life of Thomas Hardy</i> (1928) and <i>The Later Years of Thomas Hardy</i> (1930) was published under Florence's name.</p>	<p>paintings and developed a hobby of collecting antiques.</p> <p>Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Shen was censored by the government, especially during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1967-1977), when his property was confiscated eight times, his books were burned, his family members were allocated to different provinces to labour, and he was criticised and denounced at public meetings. He had also been assigned to keep vegetable gardens and clean up woman's toilets, but Shen managed to carry on his research in antiques. He completely gave up creative writing. By the spring of 1964, he had finished the book <i>Research on Chinese Ancient Costume</i>, a first detailed study on this topic. The book was also censored and finally came out in 1981.</p> <p><u>End of Life 1988</u></p> <p>In Shen's later years, his reputation was restored. On 27 October 1980, Shen, together with his wife, were invited to visit the U.S. for three months, where he gave twenty-three talks in fifteen universities about New Literature in China, his antique studies, and his transformation from a writer to an antiquarian. In 1981, a translation of <i>The Border Town</i> and three short stories by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang (Gladys B. Tayler) was published by the Chinese Literature Press. In 1982 and 1983, Shen was nominated for the Nobel Prize.</p> <p>On 10 May 1988, Shen died of heart disease in Beijing. His ashes were taken back to Fenghuang in 1992, half buried in his tomb at the foot of</p>
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<p><u>References</u></p> <p>Andrew Norman, <i>Thomas Hardy: Behind the Mask</i> (The History Press, 2011).</p> <p>Thomas Hardy, <i>The Return of the Native</i> [1878] (London: Macmillan, 1974).</p> <p>Thomas Hardy, <i>The Woodlanders</i> [1887], ed. by James Gibson (Penguin Classics, 1986).</p>	<p>Tingtao Mountain 听涛山 and half spread over the River Tuo 沱江.</p> <p><u>References</u></p> <p>Jeffrey C. Kinkley, <i>The Odyssey of Shen Congwen</i> (Stanford University Press, 1987).</p> <p>Ling Yu 凌宇, <i>Shen Congwen</i> 《沈从文传》 (Beijing 北京: East Press 东方出版社, 2009).</p> <p>Shen Congwen 沈从文, <i>Autobiography</i> 《从文自传》 (Beijing 北京: People's Literature Publishing House 人民文学出版社, 1981).</p> <p>Wu Shiyong 吴世勇, ed., <i>Shen Congwen's Chronicle: 1902-1988</i> 《沈从文年谱:1902-1988》 (Tianjing: Tianjing People Press 天津人民出版社, 2006).</p> <p>Shen Congwen and Zhang Zhaohe 张兆和, 'Timeline of Shen Congwen 沈从文先生自订年表', <i>Journal of Jishou University (Social Sciences Edition)</i> 《吉首大学学报》 (社会科学版), (2) 1988.</p>
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Glossary of Terms

■ Animism

The belief that all creatures, objects, and places possess a spiritual essence.

■ Anthropocentrism

Human-centredness. In philosophy, it can refer to the point of view that humans are the only, or primary, holders of moral standing. The belief that human needs and interests are of overriding moral and philosophical importance. Anthropocentrism is the opposite of ecocentrism.

■ Chuang-tzu (Zhuangzi 庄子) (c. 369 BCE-286 BCE)

Thinker living in the Warring States period. He is generally regarded as the second most prominent figure in Taoism, philosophical or religious. The book *Chuang-tzu*, otherwise called *Nan-hua Ching*, is ascribed to him, although some scholars consider it a collaborative work.⁵²⁰

■ Culture

The distinctive ideas, customs, social behaviour, products, or way of life of a particular nation, society, people, or period.⁵²¹ The definition of ‘culture’ in this thesis also conforms to what Raymond Williams defines as the ‘social’ definition of culture, ‘in which culture is a description of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour’.⁵²²

■ Nature (with a capitalised N)

Nature is the English translation of *ziran* in Chinese which means ‘self-so’ and it rules both the material and non-material worlds In Taoism (for a differentiation between ‘nature’ and ‘*ziran*’ in Introduction II). The Oxford English Dictionary offers a relevant definition for ‘Nature’: ‘[t]he creative and regulative power which is conceived of as operating in the material world and as the immediate cause of its phenomena. Sometimes referred to as if having a non-specific but

⁵²⁰ Hu Hsiao-Lan and William Cully Allen, *Taoism* (Infobase Publishing, 2009), p.93.

⁵²¹ Online Oxford English Dictionary

<<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/45746?rskey=DS9cvw&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>>

⁵²² Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (London: Pelican Books, 1965), p.57. Williams also notes that ‘a “social” definition, which treats either the general process or the body of art and learning as a mere by-product, a passive reflection of the real interests of the society, seems to me equally wrong’ (p.60). Thus, imaginative literature is regarded as part of the analysis under such a definition of ‘culture’.

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independent existence or character (usually with capital initial).⁵²³ Throughout the thesis I use 'nature' to refer to the word within an English context with its cultural connotations; '*ziran*' is used to refer to the word within a Taoist context with its cultural connotations; and 'Nature' is used when I emphasise the metaphysical connotations of 'nature' that is illuminated by the Taoist conception of *ziran*.

■ Deep ecology

A green ideological perspective that rejects anthropocentrism and gives priority to the maintenance of nature, and is associated with values such as biocentric equality, diversity and decentralisation.

■ Ecocentrism

An approach to understanding that prioritises the maintenance of ecological balance over the achievement of human ends. Only deep ecologists fully embrace ecocentrism.

■ Ecocritique

A critique that examines the terms of ecocriticism, how the conception of the environment is manipulated, and how ecocriticism can move beyond its familiar confines to engage larger cultural questions.

■ Ecologism

A political ideology that considers the non-human world worthy of moral consideration, and that this should be taken into account in social, economic, and political systems. Ecologism, for its part, differs from both the politics of material distribution and the politics of identity. Indeed, in important ways, ecologism has both a post-material and a post-identity orientation. It is post-material in that, to a greater or lesser degree, it views economics as the enemy of ecology, materialism being a form of intellectual and spiritual corruption that results in an alienation from nature. As a form of post-identity politics, ecologism transcends conventional conceptions of identity because, by questioning, and trying to weaken, the divide between the human and natural worlds, it dispenses with human-centred notions of selfhood, whether individual or collective. It practises the politics of sensibilities, sensibilities referring to levels of awareness or discernment. By attempting to re-orientate people's relationship with, and appreciation of, the non-human, ecologism sets out to do nothing less than transform human consciousness and

⁵²³ Online Oxford English Dictionary
<<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/125353?rkey=e1DTHv&result=1#eid>>

expand the range of our moral responsibilities. As such, ecologism, especially in the form of deep ecology, deals with issues of ontology, that is, issues concerning the nature of being, existence or reality in general.⁵²⁴

■ Ecology

As a distinct branch of biology, ecology focuses on the ways in which plants and animals are sustained by self-regulating natural systems - ecosystems - composed of both living and non-living elements. Ecology implies both interconnectedness and equilibrium, as all ecosystems tend towards a state of harmony through a system of self-regulation.

■ Environmentalism

A concern about the natural environment and particularly the desire to reduce environmental degradation; a policy orientation rather than an ideological stance (unlike ecologism).

■ Fetishism

The belief that objects, particularly human-made, have supernatural powers.

■ Holism

A belief that the whole is more important than its parts; holism implies that understanding is gained by studying relationships between the parts.

■ Logocentrism

A term coined by the German philosopher Ludwig Klages in the 1920s. It regards language as a fundamental expression of an external reality. It holds the logos as epistemologically superior and that there is an original, irreducible object which the logos represents. Not Derrida's definition that regards logos (the Greek term for speech, thought, law, or reason) as the central principle of language and philosophy: speech higher than writing.

■ Lao-tzu (Laozi 老子) (601 BCE-531 BCE)

Thinker who lived in the Spring and Autumn period. Believed to be the author of *Tao Te Ching*, he is commonly honoured as the founder of Taoism and is deified by Taoists.⁵²⁵

⁵²⁴ Andrew H. Heywood, 'ECOLOGISM AND THE POLITICS OF SENSIBILITIES', 2016, <<https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/ECOLOGISM-AND-THE-POLITICS-OF-SENSIBILITIES-Heywood/c1f1d435d21803a1754c84dd9a332c6b891fe802>>

⁵²⁵ Hu and Allen, *Taoism*, p.92.

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■ Macro/microcosm

In Taoism, the macro/microcosm theory means that cosmos, human being, society, and ritual area are analogically related to each other, so that an event or an action that occurs within any of these domains can be relevant for the others.⁵²⁶ In this thesis, they are used in general terms — macrocosm means a large structure that contains small structures, and, microcosm means a small structure that has all the features and qualities of the something larger.

■ Monotheism

The belief that there is only one God/Goddess.

■ Pantheism

The belief that God is immanent in or identical with the universe; the doctrine that God is everything and everything is God. Frequently with implications of nature worship or (in a weakened sense) love of nature.

■ Pastoralism

A belief in the virtues of rural existence: simplicity, community and a closeness to nature, in contrast to the corrupting influence of urban and industrialised life.

■ Polytheism

The belief that there is more than one God/Goddess.

■ Return (*fan*) 返

As a basic term in Taoism, 'fan' means 'returning to the Origin (Tao)'. The goal is to return to one's original nature or to pristine simplicity of the authentic state of things. *Tao Te Ching* states that 'In Tao the only motion is returning.'⁵²⁷ It is related to an intuitive vision of the world as a unified whole, and a perception of the value and the natural strength (*qi* 气) of life. This is not merely a reflection of the limitations of language, as some have claimed, but an intuitive, personal and sometimes mystical awareness that goes beyond language, conceptual thought, and social or moral practices and doctrines.⁵²⁸

■ Shallow ecology

⁵²⁶ Pregadio, *The Encyclopedia of Taoism*, p.56.

⁵²⁷ Arthur Waley trans., *Tao Te Ching* Chapter 40, in *The Way and its Power*, p.192.

⁵²⁸ Pregadio, *The Encyclopedia of Taoism*, pp.6-7.

A green ideological perspective that harnesses the lessons of ecology to human needs and ends and is associated with values such as sustainability and conservation; humanist ecology.

■ Tao (Dao) 道

The Way. Tao is a primordial unity from which all phenomena evolve, and to which they ultimately return. The Tao is omnipotent, ineffable, unchanging, and eternal, the source of all.

■ *Tao Te Ching (Daode Jing)* 《道德经》

It is the single most revered scripture in both philosophical and religious Taoism, and is traditionally attributed to Lao-tzu, though some scholars think that it was written by a group of thinkers.⁵²⁹

■ *Wuwei* 无为

Inaction; non-action; non-interference. *Wuwei* means to do things the natural way, by not interfering with the patterns, rhythms, and structures of Nature, without imposing one's own intentions upon the organisation of the world. Non-action means less the not doing of something than the doing of the right thing at the right time.⁵³⁰

■ *Ziran* 自然

'Self-So'. Spontaneity. As an adjective, the term *ziran* means 'spontaneous', 'natural', 'so of itself'. As a noun, it denotes spontaneity, naturalness, and the things as they are. *Ziran* is the Dao as producing life, its de (virtue). *Ziran*, as a quality ascribed to something, means 'true' and 'primal', and denotes transcendence.⁵³¹

⁵²⁹ Hu and Allen, *Taoism*, p.94.

⁵³⁰ Pregadio, *The Encyclopedia of Taoism*, p.1067.

⁵³¹ *Ibid.*, p.1302.

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