

Chapter 15

Construction and Development of Ecological Aesthetics



15.1 Reflections on the Discipline Construction of Ecological Aesthetics

If we begin from the mid-20th century, the proposition of Ecological Aesthetics has been 50 years so far. All along, there have been different views on the formulation and development of ecological aesthetics. This is because ecological aesthetics is a new aesthetic concept, and its understanding and acceptance must proceed over time. At the same time, more importantly, the academic colleagues engaged in the study of ecological aesthetics have not done enough in the construction of ecological aesthetics; they have not yet provided more explanatory results for the rationality of ecological aesthetics. Therefore, we need to redouble our efforts. We believe that for the construction of ecological aesthetics, there is need for reflection on two aspects:

(1) Ecological aesthetics is an emerging discipline in the post-modern context

There is a lot of controversy in the academic field as to whether ecological aesthetics can become a discipline. The crucial reason is that it has not been fully understood in the postmodern context regarding the nature of the emerging discipline. Regarding its historical location, ecological aesthetics is the product of post-industrial society in the late 20th century, especially since the 21st century, and is an emerging discipline different from the traditional disciplines in the postmodern context. As a new discipline in the postmodern context, it has several characteristics: one is its transcendence of reflection. In other words, ecological aesthetics is the result of transcending reflection on traditional aesthetics. It is both a reflection and the transcendence of epistemology of “traditional anthropology” and “anthropocentrism,” as well as a transcendence of traditional aesthetics that completely disregards the ecological dimension and is confined to artistic aesthetics. Therefore, ecological aesthetics is an unprecedented aesthetic form that contains ecological dimensions. The second is open pluralism. As a new discipline in the postmodern context, ecological aesthetics, unlike traditional disciplines, has some kind of super-stability, but as an open and pluralistic system. As the author of deep ecology, Alan Naisi said, his ecological

philosophy is only ecological philosophy A. There will be other theorists to join them, as representatives of ecological philosophy B, C, D, E, F, G... and many more. This book expresses our view of ecological aesthetics, which was put forward for your reference, not and it is not possible to be determined at once. The development of ecological aesthetics needs to have more people join them. The third is interdisciplinarity. As a new discipline in the postmodern context, ecological aesthetics has obvious interdisciplinarity, including aesthetics, ecological philosophy, ecological ethics and so on. The fourth is constructive. As a new discipline in the postmodern context, ecological aesthetics has the characteristic of construction. It has developed with the times and has obvious character of advancing with the times. Therefore, the development of ecological aesthetics welcomes more scholars from other related disciplines involved in the construction.

(2) **The importance of the birth of ecological aesthetics**

Ecological aesthetics appeared in the second half of the 20th century. It is undoubtedly a revolution in the field of aesthetics, and is of great significance.

1. **Have a new role in the construction of the world view**

We believe that contemporary ecological aesthetics should become the most basic view of the human world in the new century and become our basic cultural standpoint and attitude towards life. Facts have shown that since the 1960s, the relationship between humankind and nature has undergone significant changes. That is, since the industrial revolution, a "subject and object" mode of thinking is no longer able to adapt to the new situation requirements. The opposition between human beings and nature has been extremely threatening to the survival of humankind. First of all, the opposition between human beings and nature has led to the frequent occurrence of various ecological crises. From the well-known "London fog" to the amazing Japanese "Minamata disease," as well as the recent "SARS virus," "Indonesian tsunami," "H1N1 influenza" and so on—all of these are natural punishments for human destruction. And in recent years the raging "dust storm," "Huaihe pollution," "Taihu cyanobacteria" and so on in China, have all been recognized as serious environmental crises, which are direct threats to human health and safety, and are even related to the success or failure of China's modernization. To continue to oppose nature or to maintain harmony with nature has become a crucial choice for human beings at the crossroads of success or failure. This was Rachel Carson's warning 45 years ago, one of the pioneers of contemporary ecological theory. The antagonism of human beings among themselves, especially the war crisis caused by the capitalist system, and the great development of science and technology, makes any war enough to cause the destruction of humankind. Human-made nuclear weapons have been enough to destroy the whole of human civilization. The expansion of contemporary capitalism and the severe opposition between the north and the south and the rich and the poor caused by exploitation make hundreds of millions of people live in hunger and pain. In this case, ontology will replace epistemology, and "symbiosis" will replace anthropocentrism as the core of the contemporary values and attitudes towards life.

Regarding “symbiosis,” the first is the symbiosis of human beings and nature, as the relationship between human beings and nature is the basis and premise of the relationship between human and the world. The most basic difference between human beings and animals is the unity of animals and nature; the “relationship” between them does not matter. People are distinguished from nature, resulting in the “relationship” between human beings and nature. The pursuit of harmony between humankind and nature is the eternal goal of humankind. Different historical times have ushered in different relationships between human beings and nature, resulting in a different outlook on life and aesthetics. In ancient times, humankind had just diverged from nature, and the power of nature was far superior to that of humankind. Human beings and nature were antagonistic. Human beings had an inexplicable reverence for and fear of nature, which contains the world view that “all things are spiritual.” To achieve harmony between human beings and nature with simple and bold artistic creation, the pursuit of poetic dwelling constitutes the period of the “symbolic” aesthetic. In the period of agricultural society, despite the great development of human society, the power of nature was still far better than that of human beings. The desire of humankind to live in harmony with nature and in the hope of religion and its resurrection is to develop a religious worldview that hope for the afterlife. In the aesthetic domain, it is manifested in the combination of suffering and salvation. After the industrial revolution, with the development of science and technology, public rationality, social progress, and life improvement, people obtained a dominant position in the relationship with nature. However, the “anthropocentric” outlook on life also appeared, which takes the form of excessive superstition regarding science and technology, as well as the dwelling of science and technology instead of poetic dwelling. This distorted aesthetics shelters people with things. Since the mid-20th century, especially in the new century, through the negative effects of the reflection on the rationality of “anthropocentrism,” human beings put forward the concept of nature as an “ecological whole” and “symbiosis” of the world view. In aesthetics, it is put forward through the “The Fourfold Game of Sky, Earth, Man and Gods” to the ecological aesthetics of people’s “poetic dwelling.” Since then, the ecological concept of a “symbiotic” relationship between human beings and nature has attracted more and more attention from humankind. In 1972, The United Nations tried to make the harmony between human beings and nature become the consensus of all humankind through the Declaration of the Environment. China has also developed a sustainable development strategy in the 1990s, and recently put forward the strategic concept of “scientific development concept” and “environment-friendly society.”

But there is always a difficult contradiction entangled within the relationship between human beings and nature, between development and environmental protection, and between contemporary and future generations. On the one hand, there is the strong advocacy of environmental protection. On the other hand, driven by economic interests, ecological damage and environmental pollution is increasing. The seriousness of the problem has gone far beyond the people’s good wishes and ecological affordability, Environmental and ecological disasters are an increasing trend, and the seriousness of the situation may have gone far beyond people’s estimates. It is time to face it and change it directly. But the key to the problem lies in the cultural attitude

of people and the lifestyles they choose. The famous Roman club sponsor Beyerce has long foreseen and discussed this. It is imperative to change people's outlook on life, their cultural attitudes, and their lifestyles as soon as possible. In contemporary times, we should advocate a kind of "symbiosis" as the main connotation of life, cultural attitudes, and lifestyles. "Poetic dwelling" should be its goal of ecological aesthetic. This is a new aesthetic concept which is a kind of "being in the world" with the existence of existence as its philosophical basis. It treats the relationship between human beings and nature with an aesthetic attitude as its main content, and it promotes combining the current moment of human beings with the future good life as its purpose. It is in line with the reality of the development of society today. The scientific concept of development is the important content of contemporary advanced ecological culture. This kind of ecological aesthetics is a kind of "participatory" aesthetic, which is different from the traditional view of Kant's. It is not only the pleasure of the body as a basis for happiness. Rather, it treats aesthetics as a guide to transform reality, which requires people to follow the laws of ecological aesthetics to transform reality and achieve harmony between human beings and nature. This is exactly what Marx had foreseen, which is the combination of thorough naturalism and thorough humanitarianism in future society. This kind of effort to have ecological aesthetics as the new century's basic view of life is of great significance. However, it is also a very difficult historical task. As an integral part of a grand project, it should be included in the learning and practice of the contemporary, scientific concept of development. Only by treating nature with an aesthetic attitude, as well as the corresponding aesthetic attitude towards others, society, and their own, can contemporary society really move along the road of harmonious development. We believe that it will change people's natural, ecological, aesthetic, and lifestyle views, and achieve the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, as well as the aspirations of our people to have a good habitat through this ambitious study.

2. The Role of Contemporary Aesthetics Discipline Construction

The formulation and development of ecological aesthetics plays an important role in the construction of contemporary aesthetics. First of all, it renews the traditional concept of natural beauty and constructs a new ecology aesthetics. There is always a debate on this issue regarding whether ecological aesthetics can become an independent discipline. We feel that in the new transition period, ecological aesthetics is at least a new discipline growing point. It may not be mature enough, but it generally already possessed a prototype as an independent discipline. In general, a relatively independent subject should have a relatively independent theoretical category, relatively independent research methods, and a relatively independent scholar group. This criterion is, of course, the product of the intellectual system of modern enlightenment, but it still has its reference value under the current educational and disciplinary system. If the basic requirements are set up from the above disciplines, ecological aesthetics can be said to have been initially equipped with the above three elements. From the relatively independent theoretical category, it first renews the traditional concept of natural beauty, and does not admit that nature is opposed to people. Therefore it does not think that there is so-called "natural beauty," which is a separate from

people. Rather, there is only the beauty of natural ecology, which is the harmonious coexistence between human beings and nature. Although natural ecology is closely linked with people and even inseparable, it constitutes a relatively independent area compared with the arts and daily life. The International Society of Aesthetics President Petzward recently said that there is aesthetics of the ecological environment, the aesthetics of artistic philosophy, and the aesthetics of everyday life. The object of ecological aesthetics is the ecological system that includes people, rather than from the outside of the so-called “natural.” Its most basic aesthetic category is the ecological existence of aesthetics, as well as the “poetic dwelling,” “the Fourfold Game,” “home consciousness,” “place consciousness,” “participation in aesthetics,” “ecological aesthetic education,” “ecological literature,” “two forms of ecological aesthetics,” “ecological aesthetic education,” and so on. These aesthetic categories represent a clear breakthrough and innovation compared to the three-point method of traditional aesthetics of “beauty, the feeling of beauty, and art.” Regarding its research method, contemporary ecological aesthetics is different from the traditional epistemological research methods. However, it has adopted contemporary ontology and ecological phenomenology as a method. Because only in the sense of the ontology, as well as from the ecological phenomenology approach, can ecology, humanism, and aesthetics can be truly unified. Ecological aesthetic research scholars, it now appears, are also in the gradual growth stage.

In short, from a complete discipline, ecological aesthetics as a new discipline should be said to be in construction and development, and also needs to be further improved and strengthened. On the other hand, the development of ecological aesthetics is of great significance to the whole aesthetic discipline. It broke through the traditional epistemological model that “aesthetics is the philosophy of art,” by claiming that natural ecology is a very important research content. It also breaks the tendency of “anthropocentrism” in the long-standing aesthetic research, and promotes “ecological holism” and “ecological humanism” in the study of aesthetics. These basic theoretical concepts will greatly affect the art and the aesthetic of daily life, and will bring about important changes for these areas.

3. The role of value reconstruction in contemporary aesthetics

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the German philosopher Nietzsche put forward a major idea of “value reconstruction.” This means that the rapid transformation of society requires the adaptation of philosophy and aesthetics to the necessary value reconstruction. The proposal and development of ecological aesthetics has an important role in the reconstruction of value in the field of aesthetics. Because the relationship between human beings and nature is the most basic relationship in human life, if the grasp of this relationship is to achieve a major shift from anthropocentrism to ecological holism, as well as from epistemology to ontology, then the associated field of aesthetics is bound to follow the change. Earlier, we have already said that the proposal and development of ecological aesthetics occurred during the development from art to nature and life in the aesthetic research project. From the perspective of research, there has been a change from epistemology to the existential theory of being, etc. Some of the relevant theoretical concepts will

also change accordingly, such as the definition of traditional literature and aesthetics based on the established epistemology and the notion of the “mirror.” Now it seems to be a problem because they are based on the aesthetic and literary theory of the “subject and object dichotomy.” Additionally, the “typical theory” that literature and art are higher than life also needs to be re-examined. From the concept of ecological aesthetics, natural ecology and people are symbiotic, with a relationship of common, mutual construction. Each has its richness and irreplaceability. There is no question of who is higher than anyone else. At the forefront of contemporary ecological aesthetics, Plato’s “theory of mind,” Hegel’s “beauty is the sensibility of the concept of appearance,” and Kant’s “quiet” aesthetics, all have obvious historical limitations. For Chernyshevsky’s theory of “beauty is life,” we have generally criticized its “mechanical materialism” tendency for a long time, basically denying it. However, the proposal and development of ecological aesthetics has led us to see that the theory of “beauty is life,” also contains valuable features that emphasize ecology and life. For example, Chernyshevsky’s emphasis on “exuberant health and balanced physique,” and the “beauty of the characteristics,” has a special significance and value. Additionally, the establishment of the split between body and spirit is only by virtue of the audio-visual senses or “quiet” aesthetics. Ecological aesthetics emphasizes that aesthetics is based on spiritual unity, which does not rule out the other body senses in the aesthetic role, thus advocating “participation in aesthetics.” This is also a new breakthrough. The “symbiotic” concept, “home consciousness” and “place awareness” and so on, under the guidance of ecological aesthetics theory, have also had an important impact on contemporary architectural aesthetics, landscape aesthetics, tourism aesthetics, and so on. It is possible to update many traditional ideas. The proposition and development of ecological aesthetics is also a reversal of the tendency of the west to basically deny the value of oriental aesthetics. No doubt, ecological aesthetics has important significance on the re-evaluation of ancient Chinese aesthetics, and breaking the “Euro-centrism” as well as the so-called “Oriental aesthetics of non-logical” conclusion, and rediscovering the Oriental aesthetics, especially the meaning of life aesthetics of the ancient Chinese classical ecological existence, which is that “life is easy.”

4. The special role of contemporary literary criticism

The formulation and development of ecological aesthetics has added a new dimension to contemporary literary criticism, and has provided it with a new theoretical weapon. Ecological aesthetics advocates the “aesthetics of ecological existence theory,” follow the “green principle,” and “home consciousness,” which plays a special role in literary criticism. According to these principles, we not only rediscover the special contributions of Rousseau, Thoreau, Leopold, and so on in the development of ecological aesthetics and ecological literature, but, more importantly, we discover the ecological and aesthetic wisdom of Confucianism and Buddhism of ancient China since the pre-Qin Dynasty. To understand and evaluate a series of ancient and modern important literary works by the use of ecological aesthetics and methods is a significant event. For example, we have re-interpreted and evaluated the famous western *Chatterley Lady’s Lover*, *Moby Dick* and so on, which are familiar to all

of us from the perspective of ecological aesthetics. For the literary works of other Renaissance and Enlightenment periods, we also affirmed the historical status of “humanism” related to “anthropocentrism,” while revealing the limitations of its time. For example, we all know Shakespeare’s famous drama *Hamlet* for the great praise of the people: “noble reason! The essence of the universe! The spirit of all things!” This obvious “anthropocentrism” should now be re-evaluated according to ecological aesthetics. For ecological aesthetic wisdom in our country with *The Book of Songs* as the representative of ancient art works, we should also be based on the principle of ecological aesthetics to be re-excavated and explained.

5. The role of practical guidance

As an organic part of contemporary ecological theory, ecological aesthetics, like other contemporary ecological theories, not only has a very important theoretical character, but also has a very important practical character. Ecological aesthetics is not only a theoretical construction, but also is a guide to our practice. First of all, it should guide our life practice so that each of us can have an ecologically aesthetic attitude in our treatment of natural ecology and real life so that we may lead lives of loving, natural ecology, saving, and simplicity. In this way, a “loving and nursing ecology” may become our standard of living. This kind of ecological aesthetic principle should be further combined with environmental aesthetics, urban aesthetics, and architectural aesthetics, and can be carried out in real life. Furthermore, it is becoming more and more important for people to realize “poetic dwelling” and “good living.”

15.2 We Must Lay the Philosophical Foundation of Ecological Aesthetics Firmly on the View of Ecological Ontology

At present, the academic field’s doubts about ecological aesthetics mainly focus on how to unify people and nature, or how to unify the ecological view, the humanist view, and the aesthetic view. This is actually related to the principle of whether ecological aesthetics can be established. To solve this problem, we must achieve a major transformation of philosophy and adjustment. Facts have shown that the reason why ecological aesthetics can be established, and that people, nature, ecology, humanities, and aesthetics can be unified, is that the philosophical basis of modern ecological aesthetics is the concept of ecological ontology. This is, first of all, an era and academic progress. It is a breakthrough in traditional epistemology and “anthropocentrism.” The history of philosophy tells us that the relationship between human beings and the world has two models. One is the traditional, epistemological model, in which the subject and object are diagonally opposed. It led to the emergence of “anthropocentrism” during the era of the industrial revolution, which believes that human beings can dominate everything, and that the source of later “ecocentrism,” which believes that non-human creatures can have greater value than human beings. But this subject and object dichotomy and epistemological model, as well as the

resulting “anthropocentrism” and “ecocentrism” have been historically proven to be impracticable. In this way, at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, there was a philosophical view of existentialism different from epistemological philosophy. This view of existential philosophy is a “being in the world” mode of life, which advocates that people and all things are symbiotic, and together constitute the world. People as “this” have the ability to understand and explain the meaning and value of all things. Heidegger pointed out: “Dasein is an entity which, in its very Being, comports itself understanding towards that Being. In saying this, we are calling attention to the formal concept of existence. Dasein exists. Furthermore, Dasein is an entity which in each case I myself am.”¹ also said, “The concept of ‘facticity’. Implies that an entity ‘within-the-world’ has Being-in-the-world in such a way that it can understand itself as bound up its ‘destiny’ with the Being of those entities which it encounters within its own world.”² Here, Heidegger summed up the “Dasein and the world” mode of life with “within-the-world.” Moreover, this “within-the-world” also means that the “Dasein” of that person also has the “being” of all who are in existence, and have the “destiny” that has been within the world, which is bound up by all the people who encounter it. In other words, people and all things on earth are closely linked. They form a symbiosis and common prosperity. They cannot be away even for a few moments, and together they constitute the “world.” In fact, this is the concept of ecological ontology: it is a kind of existential philosophy with an ecological dimension. It is the philosophical foundation of human beings and nature and the unity of ecology and humanism. The theory of ecological existence is a new concept of aesthetics. It abandons the substantive concept of beauty, and places beauty in certain world relations, seeing beauty as the process of the gradual emergence of the truth, which is put forward in the famous proposition that “beauty is the self-placed truth.” Here, the existence of the existence of “*Dasein*” in the understanding and in interpretation, gradually moves from shelter to clarity. Its truth is to self-display, and the beauty is to be presented. This is the unity of existence, the unity of truth, the appearance of beauty, and the unity of ecology, humanism, and aesthetics. It should be noted that the philosophical basis of ecological aesthetics and of the ecological existence is our basic view of ecological aesthetics. This does not exclude other understandings of ecological aesthetics. The openness of ecological aesthetics makes it completely willing to accept the argument and analysis of various views. For example, there is a “weak anthropocentrism” view in ecological philosophy, ecological literature, and ecological aesthetics, which advocates we should not give up the guidance of epistemology on ecological theory. We believe that this is also a valuable consideration. As long as both theory and practice can work together, we may wish to co-exist with it. The famous American contemporary ecological writer Silovik clearly expressed his theory of epistemology, which does not prevent him from becoming an important ecological writer. Of course, the inherent theory of self-consistency is worthy of scrutiny. However, these are all matters within the scope of academic discussion.

¹Heidegger [1], pp. 61–62.

²Ibid., pp. 65–66.

15.3 The Relationship between Ecological Aesthetics and Environmental Aesthetics

The relationship between ecological aesthetics and environmental aesthetics has always been a common concern of academia both at home and abroad. Contemporary Western aesthetic fields, mainly in Anglo-American academia, have been vigorously advocating environmental aesthetics, and Chinese contemporary aesthetics scholars strongly advocate ecological aesthetics. In 2006, an international aesthetics seminar was held in Chengdu. After an author made a speech on ecological aesthetics, the question that foreign scholars focus on is the relationship between ecological aesthetics and environmental aesthetics. Originally, from the perspective of the natural ecological dimension of aesthetics, ecological aesthetics and environmental aesthetics all belong to the range of natural ecological aesthetics, which is a breakthrough in the traditional concept of “aesthetics is the philosophy of art.” They should belong to the coalition of forces that need to be united. There is no need to divide its frontiers too clearly. However, from the perspective of academic research, it is necessary to find out the relationship between the two. This is also the response of Chinese academia to the relevant international academic circles’ questions.

Environmental aesthetics is an important reference and resource for the development and construction of contemporary Chinese ecological aesthetics. From a cultural standpoint, ecological aesthetics and environmental aesthetics have two common positions, which is the standpoint of jointly advocating the protection of the ecological environment in the face of serious ecological damage in contemporary China. China’s contemporary ecological aesthetics is actually a product of the gradual deepening of China’s modernization and its entry into the era of ecological civilization. It regards the construction of ecological civilization as its own goal, and environmental aesthetics is also produced after western environmental problems have been highlighted, taking environmental protection as its own firm stance. As the Finnish environmental esthetician Joseph Seppama said, “We can see more and more clearly that modern environmental aesthetics started only in the 1960s and was a product of the environmental movement and its way of thinking. The emphasis on ecology distinguishes today’s environmental aesthetics from the German version of the earlier 100-year-old.” He also explicitly regards “ecological principles” as one of the important principles of environmental aesthetics, pointing out that “in nature, when a natural cycle process is continuous and self-contained, the system is a healthy system.”³ Another common position is that they represent a breakthrough for traditional aesthetics that ignore natural aesthetics. China’s ecological aesthetics researchers have made it clear that the most basic feature of ecological aesthetics is that it is a kind of aesthetic that contains an ecological dimension.⁴ an important

³Seppanmaa [2], pp. 221,180.

⁴Fanren [3], p. 303.

position of western contemporary environmental aesthetics is a breakthrough in traditional aesthetic neglect of the natural ecological environmental aesthetics. Allen Carlson, a prominent Canadian environmental aesthetist, points out in his book *Aesthetics and the Environmental*: “Many of the issues in contemporary work on the aesthetics of nature are foreshadowed in one article: Ronald W. Hepburn’s seminal “Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of Natural Beauty.” (see Footnote 5) After noting that by essentially reducing aesthetics to the philosophy of art, analytic aesthetics virtually ignores the natural world, Hepburn sets the agenda for the discussion of the late twentieth century. He furthermore suggests that with nature such serious appreciation may require different approaches that can accommodate not only nature’s indeterminate and varying character, but also both our multi-sensory experience and our diverse understanding of it.⁵ The development of western environmental aesthetics is earlier. The ecological aesthetics produced in the mid-1990s in our country has obviously accepted the resources of environmental aesthetics. In the process of the construction of ecological aesthetics, environmental aesthetics has given great nourishment. Their discourse on “livable” ideas gives us great inspiration. In particular, Berleant’s *Art and Engagement, Ecology Phenomenology* as well as the theoretical point of view that “there is nothing outside of nature” affect us even more. It is from this sense that we believe that environmental aesthetics is an important resource and reference for the construction of contemporary Chinese ecological aesthetics.

Of course, China’s ecological aesthetics and western environmental aesthetics still have some obvious differences. First, ecological aesthetics and environmental aesthetics originate in different times and regions. Environmental aesthetics originated in the Western developed countries of the 1960s. At that time, these countries basically completed industrialization, and most of them have relatively rich natural resources. It was in the mid-1990s, especially into the early 21st century that China began to gradually form a certain scale of ecological aesthetics research. Its historical background is a gradual deepening of industrialization, and scholars found that the simple dimension of economic development can’t achieve modernization on its own, but must be accompanied by a cultural and aesthetic dimension. This is the reason for the scientific outlook on development and the construction of a harmonious society. The study of ecological aesthetics in our country has been gradually developed. Therefore, the construction of eco-aesthetics in our country is confronted with the current situation of a society in urgent need of economic development. Additionally, the unprecedented shortage of environmental resources, economic development, and environmental protection have all become needs. This is in contrast with the historical and cultural background proposed by western environmental aesthetics. Moreover, in the 21st century, humankind’s understanding of ecological theory has also made great developments and changes. It is hard to sustain “anthropocentrism,” and simple “ecocentrism” can hardly become a reality. Rather, only the “symbiosis” between

⁵Carlson [4], p. 17.

human beings and nature is the way to go. It is under such circumstances that eco-humanism and eco-holism have emerged that are more in line with the law of social development, and have become the theoretical fulcrum of contemporary ecological aesthetics.

Secondly, from the point of view of word meaning, “ecology” and “environment” also have different meanings. The word “environment,” with the meaning of “encirclement, revolving around, and surrounding things,” clearly refers to the external being of people and the opposite of human beings. The environmental aesthetician Seppamaa himself thinks that “even the term ‘environment’ implies the human view that human beings are at the center and everything else surrounds him.”⁶ In contrast, “Ecological” has the meaning of “ecology and ecologically protected,” while the prefix “eco” means ecologically, family, and economical. Heidegger said in the interpretation of “being,” that “‘Being’ does not mean that ready-made thing is ‘one in the middle of another’ in space; as far as origin is concerned, the ‘in’ does not mean the spatial relationship of the above methods at all. ‘In’ is originated from *innan-*, living, habitare, stay. ‘An’ means that: I have lived, I am familiar, I am used to, I care; it has the meaning of *colo: habito* [I live] and *diligo* [I care].”⁷ Here, “colo” already has the “living” and “stay” connotation. The term “ecology” was first combined by the German biologist Haikel in 1866 with the two Greek words *okios* [‘homeland’ or ‘home’] and *logos* [research]. It can be seen that the meaning of “ecology” does include the meaning of “home, residence, and stay” and so on. It is more in line with the integration of man and nature than “environment.” From the perspective of ecological aesthetics as an ecological ontological aesthetics, the meaning of “living and staying” included in “ecology” more conforms to the connotation of the aesthetics of ecological existence.

Again, from the perspective of aesthetic connotation, “ecology” has a more positive meaning than “environment.” Ecological aesthetics originated in the late 20th century and the early 21st century. It has integrated the achievements of long-term exploration on the protection of the ecological environment for more than 100 years. It is well-known that over 100 years ago, humankind has been trying hard to explore the scientific relationship between humankind and the natural ecology, and experienced painful lessons of “anthropocentrism” and “ecocentrism.” “Anthropocentrism” has been shown to be an unreasonable path by more than 200 years of industrial revolution. Serious environmental pollution is a painful lesson left to humankind, and “ecocentrism” is also an impossible way. Facts have shown that as a member of the ecological chain, all species, including humans, have only relative equality, and there can be no absolute equality. The absolute equality view of “ecocentrism” is impossible, and can only be a thoroughly “utopian” idea. The only viable way is the path of “ecological holism” and “ecological humanism.” As Marxism advocates “the unity of naturalism and humanitarianism,” Marx pointed out: “This communism, as completed naturalism, is equal to humanitarianism, and as completed humanitarianism,

⁶Seppamaa [2], p. 136.

⁷Heidegger [1], p. 63.

equal to naturalism.”⁸ So called “Ecological holism” and “ecological humanism” are the synthesis and reconciliation of “anthropocentrism” and “ecocentrism,” which are the absorption of favorable factors and the abandonment of unfavorable factors. The ecological aesthetics is guided by the theory of “ecological holism” and “ecological humanism” as their own theories.

The history of “environmental aesthetics” is earlier, and is obviously limited by “anthropocentrism” and “ecocentrism.” *The Beauty of Environment* by Seppama has a more obvious “anthropocentric” tendency. He not only defines the “environment” as something external to human beings, but also shows the tendency of “anthropocentrism” in the connotation of “environmental aesthetics.” In his opinion, “the core area of environmental aesthetics is the issue of aesthetic objects,” and “making the environment an aesthetic object is usually based on the audience’s choice.” He chose to examine the way and object of investigation, and define its scope of time and space. He believes that, “aesthetic objects seem to mean the fact that this thing is at least to a certain extent suitable for aesthetic appreciation.”⁹ It is clear that Seppama did not completely jump out of traditional aesthetics. He not only examines the aesthetic completely from the main body, but also considers the formation of aesthetic object of environmental aesthetics from the formal aesthetic of the traditional art, such as the proportion of form, symmetry and harmony, etc.. He treats this as the so-called “picturesque landscape,” without considering ecological aesthetics’ “poetic dwelling” and “homeland consciousness” and so on, which it should have. In contrast, Carlson is a relatively complete environmentalist, and is more inclined to the “ecocentric” point of view. His “Natural All-Beauty Theory” proposed in his book *Aesthetics and the Environment* is a reflection of this “ecocentrism.” He said: “all the natural world is beautiful. According to this view, the natural environment, insofar as it is untouched by man, has mainly positive aesthetic qualities; it is, for example, graceful, delicate, intense, unified, and orderly, rather than bland, dull, insipid, incoherent, and chaotic. All virgin nature, in short, is essentially aesthetically good.”¹⁰ He calls natural aesthetics “affirmative aesthetics,” with the help of many western ecological theorists’ points of view. For example, the famous ecological theorist, Marsh, believes that nature is harmonious, and that humankind is an important disturbing body of harmony and nature. Geographer Rodin Tarter believes that humankind is terrible, nature is sublime and so on. Obviously, Carlson’s “Natural All-Beauty Theory” is based on the theoretical stand of “ecocentrism,” which thus leads to the total negation of human activities, including human artistic activities, which should be said to be very incomplete. Of course, environmental aesthetics also contains many profound and valuable aesthetic connotations. For example, Berleant’s theory of “environmental aesthetics” is more scientific and reasonable. He actually advocated a brand new aesthetic concept of natural ecology. He said: “Environment, in the large sense, is not a domain separate and distinct from ourselves as human inhabitants. We are rather continuous with environment, an integral part of its processes. The usual

⁸Marx and Engels [5], (Vol. 42), p. 120.

⁹Seppanmaa [2], pp. 36, 41, 44.

¹⁰Carlson [4], p. 109.

tradition in aesthetics has difficulty with this, for it claims that appreciation requires a receptive, contemplative attitude. Such an attitude befits an observer, but nature admits of no such observer, for nothing can remain apart and uninvolved.”¹¹ Here, he put forward the famous “Environment, in the large sense,” wherein “nothing can remain apart.” The “nature” here is not external to people or against people, but rather includes people. In fact, it is what we usually call a “natural system.” What he calls “Aesthetics and the Environment” opposes traditional aesthetics. It is an aesthetic of engagement applied to natural aesthetics, which is different from the “static non-utilitarian aesthetics” which emphasizes artistic appreciation represented by Kant. We are more willing to translate it into the “Aesthetics of Engagement,” which refers to the active participation of the eyes, ears, and nose in the natural aesthetic. The theory of “nothing can remain apart” and the “Aesthetics of Engagement” have become important resources and references for building ecological aesthetics.

Finally, the reason why ecological aesthetics has its origin in the Chinese cultural atmosphere has a very profound relationship with the traditional Chinese cultural resources. In ancient Chinese philosophy of culture, there was no “environment” external to human beings, only one “heaven” with people. Heaven and humankind are always closely linked. Exploring ancient Chinese cultural history is to explore the history of the relationship between heaven and human beings and ancient and modern, or the so-called “Study [of] the occasion of heaven and earth, [and] know the ancient and modern change.” The so-called “occasion of Heaven and Man” and “harmony between man and nature” and “harmony between Heaven and Earth” all refer to the more complex relationship between human beings and nature in the “ecosystem,” whether it is Confucianism’s “neutralization,” of “People and things, Daoism’s “Daoist nature.” and “Everything in One,” or Buddhism’s “beings equality,” “无尽缘起” and so on. All are talking about the “ecosystem.” These oriental ecology theories influenced many Western ecophilosophers and estheticians in modern times, such as Thoreau, Heidegger, and so on. Especially Heidegger’s “ecological existence” in philosophy and aesthetics, “the Fourfold Game,” and “homeland consciousness” and so on can be said to be “a foreign land interpretation of Lao Zi Daoism.” In the soil of such a rich and abundant oriental ecology theory, we believe we must be able to develop ecological aesthetics with Chinese characteristics that combines both modern consciousness and conventions and rich ancient cultural connotations.

We have discussed the relationship between ecological aesthetics and environmental aesthetics above. We have also emphasized that “aesthetics and the environment” has a strong practicality, and has “landscape aesthetics” and “livable environment” as its core connotation. To explore the urban and rural living environment and the construction of a large number of issues, there are many both professional and operational thinking. Due to the current lack of ecological aesthetics, the development of ecological aesthetics urgently needs to be absorbed, drawing on the resources of this aspect of environmental aesthetics, because the fundamental nature of ecological theory is its strong practicality. Of course, how to play the guiding role of ecolog-

¹¹Berleant [6], p. 12.

ical aesthetics in urban and rural environment construction in the end can still be discussed.

In short, the two aesthetic forms of ecological aesthetics and environmental aesthetics actually have very close relations, if we learn more from each other in theoretical explanation, we can totally explain the aesthetic relationship between human beings and the natural ecology from different perspectives. As Professor Chen Wangheng, the author of the first “environmental aesthetics” in our country said, “both of these aesthetics have existent value, and they cooperate with each other to jointly promote the development of aesthetics”.¹²

15.4 The Future Development of Ecological Aesthetics

The future development of ecological aesthetics is mainly focused on construction and gradually improving in its construction. To this end, we should achieve the following five aspects of convergence:

(1) Connect with the Construction of Contemporary Ecological Civilization

Ecological aesthetics is the product of contemporary ecological civilization, which is an organic part of contemporary ecological civilization. Therefore, its development depends on the construction of contemporary ecological civilization to provide realistic and theoretical support. As we all know, ecological aesthetics is the product of ecological civilization since the mid-20th century. Ecological civilization is the arrival of a new era after industrial civilization. Generally speaking, it began in the 1960s. However, its real birth was in the 1970s, marked by the United Nations Conference on Environment and the Environment Statement in 1972. In theory, it is the end of anthropocentrism, and the beginning of new eco-humanism. In practice, it is the end of treating nature as an enemy and the beginning of symbiosis between human beings and nature. Economic development is the end of a simple model of economic growth, though now we have reached the beginning of a win-win situation between economic development and natural ecological protection. This is actually the beginning of a new era. As a post-development country in China, the construction of ecological civilization really started in October 2007, after the national ideology formally proposed the goal of ecological civilization construction. Since then, the construction of ecological civilization has become an advanced culture in line with the direction of social and economic development. Ecological aesthetics is an integral part of this advanced culture. Only by linking up with the construction of ecological civilization in contemporary society can we gain the impetus from the construction of realistic ecological civilization, obtain the resources, obtain abundant information, and find the correct direction so as to make the construction of ecological aesthetics not only obtain some legitimacy and rationality—thus making it firmly based on the reality—but also can at the same time avoid many inconsistencies between the times

¹²Wangheng [7], p. 45.

and the reality in China. In this way, it will not become a kind of utopianism without a realistic interpretation and vitality. Of course, the development of ecological aesthetics is in great need of international dialogue. In a sense, our country currently does not have advanced status in the construction of ecological theory, including ecological aesthetics. The task of learning from foreign advanced theories is still heavy. However, the practicality of ecological theory determines that it must base itself on the land of its own country and conform to its own reality, and to obtain nutrition mainly from the country's ecological civilization.

(2) Connect with the Development of Contemporary Ecological Theory

Ecological aesthetics is ecological theory, especially the organic part of ecological philosophy. In this way, the development of ecological aesthetics must be linked with the development of contemporary ecological theory. It has been shown that the development of contemporary ecological aesthetics is synchronized with the development of ecological theory, and the breakthrough of ecological philosophy and ecological ethics leads to the breakthrough of ecological aesthetics. Ecological theory is a very cutting-edge and sensitive theoretical form, involving many very complex theoretical and practical problems, such as natural intrinsic value, natural rights, natural aesthetic attributes, the relationship between ecology and humanism, the relationship between ecology and science and technology, and so on. All of the progress of these theoretical issues will be important for the development of ecological aesthetics. To this end, we must strive to absorb the achievements of ecological theory both home and abroad in this regard. Of course, it must also be closely integrated with the our own situation of ecological aesthetics, especially the special experience of the aesthetic, sensual characteristics, digestion, absorption, and innovation in the construction of ecological aesthetics.

(3) Link with the Ecological Wisdom of Chinese Traditional Culture

China is an ancient cultural country with a history of 5,000 years of civilization. With the establishment of agriculture in our country and the development of agricultural civilization, we have a wealth of ecological wisdom. However, at present, we have not done enough to organize and interpret this. There is sufficient evidence to prove that the development of ecological theory in contemporary Western countries, including ecological aesthetics, is obviously related to the influence of ancient Chinese ecological wisdom. Our theoretical circles do not know enough about this. At present, the sorting out and interpretation of China's traditional ecological wisdom has just begun. There has been some progress in document collation and theoretical explanation, but the gap is still large. Facts have shown that the ancient Chinese aesthetics has a morphology different from that of western aesthetics, which is an aesthetics of the epistemology of static object's rather than one of ecological life. Therefore, the development of China's contemporary ecological aesthetics inevitably accompanies the recognition and collation of the life aesthetics of ancient Chinese ecology. On this basis, the theory of ecological aesthetics with Chinese characteristics and Chinese style will be gradually formed to make its own contribution to the development of world aesthetics.

(4) Link with the Development of Contemporary Ecological Literature and Art

The practicality of ecological aesthetics is also manifested in that it is closely related to the practice of literature and art. Its development must be based on summing up the development of ecological literature and art, and play a guiding role in the further development of ecological literature and art creation. At present, the development of ecological literature in the world is gradually showing a flourishing trend. Eco-criticism has gradually become significant school. However, in our country, both the development of ecological literature and art as well as the criticism of ecological literature and art have not developed in a satisfactory way. The gap with the international versions is obvious. We need to better play a guiding role of ecological aesthetics, to promote the development of eco-literary and ecological criticism, and to promote a benign interaction between the two. Only on this basis can the development of ecological aesthetics can have a more solid foundation.

(5) Linking up with the Road of Building a Culture with Chinese Characteristics in the Dialogue between China and the West

In today's era, cultural construction has broken through "Eurocentrism" and has moved toward the era of exchanges, dialogues, and pluralistic coexistence. Under such circumstances, the cultural construction of all countries should absorb and supplement each other on the basis of exchange and dialogue, and at the same time closely combine with national conditions. We should build a cultural pattern that combines both international and national characteristics. The same is true of the construction of ecological aesthetics. We may say that in the initial stage of ecological aesthetics construction, due to the lack of resources, we are more absorbed Western resources. In this way, in our country, the construction of a variety of ecological theories including ecological aesthetics has made remarkable achievements. At the national level, there have been proposed guidelines for the construction of ecological civilization. We should strive to take the road of Chinese characteristics in the construction of ecological aesthetics.

These Chinese characteristics are mainly shown in two aspects: one aspect is that it closely follows the reality of China and is in line with China's reality. China is a post-development country. Modernization and industrialization are still in the mid-term development stage. Economic and social development is the need of the prosperity of nations and of national rejuvenation. In addition, our country is a resource-scarce country. The population is huge, and the resources are relatively poor. Under such circumstances, we can only insist on the win-win development and environmental protection as well as the unification of ecology and humanity as we develop the guiding ideology of ecological aesthetics. Neither can we go on the road of anthropocentrism, nor can we go on the road of ecocentrism. On the other hand, as China is an ancient civilization with relatively rich ecological and cultural resources. Therefore, in the construction of modern ecological aesthetics, we must strive to excavate and absorb the ancient ecological aesthetic wisdom and construct ecological aesthetic discourse with its own characteristics. Facts have shown that although the modern

theory of ecology in the developed western countries has come to the forefront of the world, we really should pay attention to absorbing and drawing lessons from western modern ecological theory. However, China's cultural tradition has accumulated a lot more resources of ecological wisdom than the west. Confucianism and Daoism release each of the ecological wisdom showing a unique glory, they will become a valuable asset for the construction of modern ecological civilization of humankind, and have also become valuable assets for the construction of contemporary ecological aesthetics. We should properly summarize and transform and integrate it into the discourse system of modern ecological aesthetics construction, thereby making our ecological aesthetics have an obvious Chinese style that can contribute to the world.

References

1. [Germany] Heidegger, M. (2006). *Being and time* (revised translation), translated by Chen Jiaying, Wang Qingjie. Sanlian Bookstore.
2. [Finland] Sepanmaa, Y. (2006). *The beauty of environment*, translated by Wu Xiaoxi, Zhang Yi. Hunan Science and Technology Press.
3. Fanren, Z. (2007). *Chinese aesthetics in transition*. The Commercial Press (曾繁仁:《转型期的中国美学》,商务印书馆2007年版).
4. [Canada] Carlson, A. (2005). *Aesthetics and the environment—The appreciation of nature, art and architecture*, translated by Yang Ping. Sichuan People's Publishing House.
5. Marx and Engels. (1979). *Collected works*. People's Publishing House.
6. [U.S.] Berleant, A. (2006). *The aesthetics of environment*, translated by Zhang Min, Zhou Yu. Hunan Science and Technology Press.
7. Wangheng, C. (2007). *Ecological aesthetics*. Wuhan University Press (陈望衡:《生态美学》,武汉大学出版社2007年版).