

# SYMBIOTIC NURTURE BETWEEN LITERATURE, CULTURE AND NATURE IN GARY SNYDER'S META-PICTO-POETRY OF LANDSCAPE<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** This article holds the opinion that some meta-picto-poetry of landscape, composed by American poet Gary Snyder, takes Chinese landscape painting as its subject matter with the characteristics of ancient Chinese poetry, shimmering with incomparable artistic charm and cultural substance. Poetry of this kind is a perfect combination of eastern and western elements, integrating the cultures, thoughts and arts of both sides. The appreciation of this poetry creates a complex experience with a hybrid of artistic forms and aesthetic spaces. Gary Snyder is not only an eco-poet, but also a stylist and a man of practice. His poetic works reveal the fostering relationship between literature, culture and nature. The article intends to make a cross-cultural, interdisciplinary and multi-field attempt in Snyder's criticism, with analytical methods inclusive of eastern and western cultures, ancient and present visions as well as dynamic and static experiences.

**Key words:** Gary Snyder. Meta-Picto-Poetry of Landscape. Symbiotic Nurture. Aesthetic Appeal.

## INTRODUCTION

Acclaimed as “Thoreau in contemporary time”<sup>3</sup>, Gary Snyder (1930-) is a representative writer of Modern eco-literature, with his eco-poetry exerting

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<sup>3</sup> It is generally recognized that in terms of world outlook and way of life, Snyder shares apparent similarities with Henry David Thoreau who advocates that man should return to his true heart and be on intimate terms with nature. Thoreau perceives the healthy and natural connection between

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profound influence to the world eco-literature. Notably, Snyder composed a series of poetry characterized with the lasting appeal of Chinese painting represented by the monolithic “Mountains and Rivers without End”. This poetic form absorbs the characteristics of ancient Chinese poetry, imitating the verisimilitude of Chinese landscape painting, demonstrating unique aesthetic value and culture feel, which showcases the compatibility of thoughts, arts and cultures of humanity.

Quite a number of critics and scholars have been aware of the factors of eastern religion, philosophy and culture in Snyder’s oeuvre. To cite just a few examples: in his monograph “A Cross-cultural Interpretation of Zen-poetics: The Evolution of Gary Snyder’s Zen Thoughts”, Xu Wen holds that Snyder constructed a systematic Zen-poetics with contemporary American features, based on his own poetic production, translation and creative theories. Zhong Ling’s monograph “American Poet Gary Snyder and Asian Culture: A Case Study of Assimilation of Oriental Tradition into Occidental Culture” explores how various eastern culture are integrated into Snyder’s poetic creation. Mao Ming’s monograph “A Dialogue Transcending Time and Space: American Poet Snyder’s Eco-poetics and Chinese Natural Aesthetics” makes a comparative and contrastive study between Snyder’s eco-poetics and ancient Chinese natural aesthetic ideas. Whereas most of them resort to the means of comparative study, emphasizing the heterogeneity and discrepancy of eastern and western cultures. This article proposes that both cultures may fuse with poetry as the vehicle. In the particular form of meta-picto-poetry<sup>4</sup>, “picture image” is juxtaposed with the “text image” harmoniously, thus achieving an immanent unity of truth and beauty. Furthermore, it touches some fields such as history, stylistics, aesthetics, painting, visual art, in the hope of exploring the aesthetic appeal in Snyder’s poetry from the perspective of syncretic culture, meanwhile, initiating some workable methods for the appreciation of poetry of this kind.

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human race and other animals in the world, engaging himself in the practice of living in the wild and meditating on the significance of man’s life. He also preaches that man should minimize their material desire, living a kind of exalted spiritual life.

<sup>4</sup> The term of Meta-Picto-Poetry was initiated by professor Mi Jialu in his article “The Vision that Unfolds: Gary Snyder’s Meta-Picto-Poetics of Landscape”, *Chinese and Foreign Poetics* (v. 3, p.7-15, 2016). Meta-Picto-Poetry refers specifically to the poetry composed by Snyder taking the abstract terrain of Chinese painting of landscape as visual code, combining word and image in the same space.

## 1 HARMONIOUS JUXTAPOSITION OF TEXT AND PICTURE AND DYNAMIC READING EXPERIENCE

Snyder's collection of poetry "Mountains and Rivers without End" is actually an exquisite masterwork inspired by a Chinese handscroll painting of landscape named as "Endless Streams and Mountains".<sup>5</sup> A Chinese handscroll has a vista-vision-plus structure with various forms of techniques, watching positions and physical spaces, unfolding in a series of dynamic pictures. The special folding/unfolding way of touching the scroll dissolves the distance between the viewer and the painting, actualizing the immersive pleasure the viewer feels. The poet feels thrilled when having a visual contact with the landscape in the painting, then he develops a fresh new vision of observing wilderness. Snyder believes that handscrolls are a kind of Chinese mandala<sup>6</sup>, so all people in it are different versions of our own selves, and the cliffs, trees, waterfalls and clouds all signify the variations and positions of ourselves (SNYDER, 1990, p. 107).

Snyder's collection "Mountains and Rivers without End" is undoubtedly a kind of picto-poetry that has the framework of Chinese handscroll of painting, corresponding with the handscroll "Endless Streams and Mountains" in form. When we read Snyder's poetry the way we appreciate the handscroll, fabulous insight may be generated. The first poem of the collection happens to be entitled as "Endless Streams and Mountains" which is also the source of the poet's inspiration. The forty poems included in the collection can be regarded as the counterpart of scenery in the handscroll, but in a reverted order. The acknowledgement termed as "by way of thanks" and the postscript named "the making of mountains and rivers without end" that are supposed to be at the beginning of a book are located at the end, serving as equivalent of inscriptions on the painting.

The binding and layout of the collection also demonstrate ingenious artifice. The first few pages and the last few ones of the collection are covered and surrounded with the handscroll "Endless Streams and Mountains". When opening the book, readers may feel instantly enveloped by the vision of endless mountains and rivers. The order of viewing handscroll and reading collection

<sup>5</sup> The handscroll of ink painting is now preserved in Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio, USA. The center part of the painting is 213 centimeters long and 35 centimeters high. The handscroll painting of landscape includes the three unique Chinese art forms—poetry, calligraphy and painting with 49 seals, 9 inscriptions and 4 styles of ink painting on it and passed through 17 collectors.

<sup>6</sup> Mandala (曼荼罗): any of various geometric designs (usually circular) symbolizing the universe; used chiefly in Hinduism and Buddhism as an aid to meditation.

of poetry is also reversible: the former is from right to left, and the latter left to right, which means the beginning of the collection is the end of the handscroll, and vice versa. Consequently, reading poetry and viewing painting combine into a circling process, which may be associated with the Buddhist view of *samsara*<sup>7</sup>, and also conform to Snyder's religious belief.

Every poem in the collection is composed with various styles and features. Snyder stresses that each of the poems can be read separately and casually, as travellers stroll idly in a courtyard. Although the structure seems loose, it is not discontinuous at all. Because there is almost one “Ku structure”<sup>8</sup> in each poem, which appears constantly, representing a series of focused images, for purpose of constituting the sematic skeleton of the whole book. The most typical example of Ku structure in the whole collection is “walking on walking” which runs through the whole book, echoes each other and clinches the gist. In this way, the poems, the scenery, the theme of the collection are assembled into one unity. Meanwhile, the significance of the Ku structure “walking on walking” merits our consideration. Seemingly, there is a repetition of the same image of “walking” in the phrase, yet the two images contain quite different connotations. The first “walking” may refer to travelling on foot, leading readers to experience the spectacular landscape of the country. Nevertheless, the second “walking” has a deep structure and implication, which might signify treading on a spiritual journey or religious pilgrimage. It is not an exaggeration that the adroit usage of the unique “Ku structure” makes the collection transcend the limitation of time and space, becoming the twin artwork of the handscroll. In the collection, the poet prefers to imitate the stroke techniques of ink-brush used in Chinese painting and calligraphy by means of words. Such as, at the end of the collection, “The space goes on. / But the wet black brush tip drawn to a point/lifts away.” (SNYDER, 1996, p. 154.). The poetic lines are finished with such a dynamic image, and the short four lines form a visual dot at the center of the page, displaying a perfect marriage of poetry and painting.

In Chinese tradition, once the experience of scenery is transformed into a piece of artwork, it may produce a kind of complementary effect, offering a particular insight different from the real world to the viewer. Phenomenologist Strauss (1943) claims that the field of man's vision is the key to the formation

<sup>7</sup> Samsara (轮回): (Hinduism and Buddhism) the endless cycle of birth and suffering and death and rebirth.

<sup>8</sup> Snyder calls a terse phrase in his poetry “Ku structure” that is similar to the image of Chinese Zen poetry and contains a double-layered structure of natural image and Zen image.

of scenery. We are surrounded by the field of vision in the scenery that follows our movement when we move (378). Similarly, if we read picto-poetry of landscape from a mobile perspective, we are sure to experience the landscape as if we were personally on the scene. The moving body carries not only physical organs, but also a variety of experiences shuttling back and forth through the scenery. Those physical experiences are impressed with common memories so that they would transcend all discrepancies between ancient and modern times, oriental and occidental cultures, and arouse common feelings from viewers' heart. This echoes Merleau-Ponty's standpoint that man's sensory experience shares the "connaturality" with the world, which is the prerequisite for the formation of landscape.

Viewers can travel through the landscape at will by folding/unfolding the scroll, which means everything in the scroll is no longer static. Actually, all elements of the scenery – streams, rivers, mountains, waterfalls, woods, rocks, people etc. – are in constant dynamic interactions so that every detail of the scenery will present its peculiar property. Even if some parts of the scenery appear repeatedly, they are no longer identical. Comparatively, in the first stanza of poem "Endless Streams and Mountains", viewers are "[...] seeing this land from a boat on a lake/ or a broad slow river, / coasting by." (SNYDER, 1996, p. 5.). When the boat trip comes to an end, "The watching boat has floated off the page." (SNYDER, 1996, p. 6.). The word "page" in the sentence is rather intriguing which may refer to both the scroll of painting and the page of poetry. The watching boat is not running on water, but on the page, which implies that the viewers are watching painting and meanwhile reading poetry. In other words, poetry and painting mingle on pages, supplying readers with the joyful experience of artistic integration of painting and poetry.

There is an ongoing idea in Chinese art that holds "the natural landscape is literature"<sup>9</sup> which explains why Chinese literati read not only poetry of landscape, but also paintings of this kind. The master Chinese calligrapher and painter Rao Tsongyi proposed that paintings ought to be read with calm and care. He deems that observing paintings equals to reading paintings, which means besides observing the composition of the picture, more importantly, readers should read the vigorous and forceful discourse conveyed by the pictures of landscape. It follows that readers may share identical experiences in reading paintings and reading poetry. As Liu Qianmei asserts, Literature

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<sup>9</sup> The original Chinese is "自然山水便是文".

produced by previous generations could demonstrate the real looks of the landscape of the time only in the readings of later generations.

We have reasons to believe that the best way to read the collection of poetry “Mountains and Rivers without End” is to make an intertextual study of the handscroll “Endless Streams and Mountains.” If so, here comes another question, i.e., how does Snyder use his brief and forceful lines to create the endless landscape of mountains and rivers?

In view of postmodern reading theory, reading is not just an action affiliated to the creation of writing, or a passive reception of the work. Instead, the significance of reading lies in the process of rediscovering the meaning of the text. Barthes (1915-1980) borrows the Buddhist metaphor of “[...] mustard seeds are able to contain Mount Sumeru”<sup>10</sup>, comparing the traditional reading to Buddhist practice, which implies that we can perceive the gigantic Mount Sumeru in the text as tiny as a mustard seed. Barthes believes that the evaluation of reading owes to the original impetus of writing practice (LIU, 2012, p. 133). Purporting to achieve grand significance in commonplace, Snyder makes use of a technique of “riprapping” in his picto-poetry (TAN, 2012, p. 6.). “Riprapping” refers to the parallel of plenty of brisk, succinct and impressive images that may produce the effect of clarity and abundance, which also accords to the Chinese tradition of composing classic poetry. The following lines are from poem “Endless Streams and Mountains”,

[...] a trail of climbing stairsteps forks upstream.  
 Big ranges lurk behind these rugged little outcrops-  
 these spits of low ground rocky uplifts  
 layered pinnacles aslant,  
 flurries of brushy cliffs receding,  
 far back and high above, vague peaks. (SNYDER, 1996, p. 5).

Apparently, the six lines of less than thirty notional words succeed in portraying a series of images exclusive to Chinese ink paintings of landscape: nestling mountains and rivers, looming trails, misty valleys, stony forests, overlapping peaks.... All the consecutive images make several dichotomies of “entity and emptiness, dynamic and static, form and spirit, big and small” exist in one space, so as to present before readers the particular “watchable yet

<sup>10</sup> The original Chinese is “芥子纳须弥”.

distant”<sup>11</sup> painting of landscape, and produce boundless room for them to imagine and experience.

## 2 META-PICTO-POETRY OF LANDSCAPE MANIFESTING DAO

Throughout human history, all schools of philosophy and religions intend to explore the ultimate truth, attempting to explain the relationship between the truth and man's life experience. In China, the mainstream school of thoughts that is composed of Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism agrees on Dao as the ultimate truth. Lands, mountains and rivers are always there, but they only exist as “landscape” when being consciously observed by people so as to appear with instant aesthetic perception. “When observing mountains and rivers, people need to activate both their sensuous movement and spiritual involvement. Therefore, the perception of mountains and rivers becomes a common experience so that we can associate Dao with paintings of landscape.” (SHEN, 2012, p. 89). This view proves a fact that paintings of landscape display not only a tiny spot sensed by one's eyes but also a cosmic vista. It is safe to say that Snyder captures the esoteric significance of Dao when appreciating handscroll paintings, which so deepens his comprehension about space and nature that he decides to illustrate his understanding of Dao acquired from those paintings with words. In this way, the interaction between nature and one's soul may break through the barrier between words and pictures.

Snyder's poetic language would be easily sensed as “insipid and tasteless”<sup>12</sup> for its seemingly terse and concise style, whereas, readers may perceive a sense of tranquility and subtlety that is right the depiction of Dao in Daoist philosophy and one of the aesthetic categories in Chinese poetry and painting (LIU, 2012, p. 143). This shows that the refined and succinct manner of Snyder's poetry is not the result of the inefficiency of his poetic skills and the deficiency of artistic grandeur. On the contrary, this proves that the poetic flavor of natural scenery represented in art works is always beyond sensory feelings and could only be perceived in the form of Dao. This also explains why picto-poetry of landscape could manifest Dao, which supports the proposal initiated by Zhang Zao who says that artistic creation is

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<sup>11</sup> The phrase is used to describe the viewers' unique viewing experience of Chinese painting of landscape. The original Chinese is “可望而不可置于眉睫之前”.

<sup>12</sup> The original Chinese is “恬淡稀微”.

indebted to nature, but natural beauty may not automatically become artistic beauty. It is the artist's sentiment and perception of nature that promotes the transformation.<sup>13</sup>

Snyder has been fascinated and influenced by the Daoist philosophy, so that his poetic oeuvre is imbued with multiple implications of Dao. Firstly, it means “road”, referring to both the way to follow and the practice of self-cultivation; secondly, it resembles “the wild”. In Snyder's view, wilderness is an attribute of natural existence and the commonality shared by man and nature. Since “the wild” is as eternal as “Dao”, man and nature are supposed to exist in harmony. Thirdly, it contains the dualism of Yin and Yang<sup>14</sup>, which is signified by natural rivers and mountains. Finally, it embraces the idea that man is an integral part of nature; all existence is an organic whole. The essence of non-self may help one obtain absolute freedom and enjoy the Happy Excursion<sup>15</sup>, because he truly understands that happiness and freedom can be self-contained without any aid of external conditions.

Let alone that the Daoist philosophy evolves around the concept “Dao”. The first sentence of Laozi is “The Dao that can be trodden is not the enduring and unchanging Dao”<sup>16</sup>. Dao is invisible, intangible and inexpressible, yet it exists ubiquitously. In Chinese language, Dao (道) equals to Lu (路) which refers to the usual road leading people to somewhere. Chinese poet Hanshan<sup>17</sup> (寒山) once wrote: “Pilgrims climb along the road of Cold Mountain, while the road to the saint realm is endless.”<sup>18</sup> The “road” in the two lines implies the two connotations of “Dao”: the first one means the spiritual journey guiding people to the state of enlightenment and transcendence; the second one refers to the practice of self-cultivation he daily takes. The poem reveals a truth that one has to fulfill strenuous practice routine in earthly life in order to attain the stage of supreme completeness.

<sup>13</sup> The original Chinese is “外师造化，中得心源”。This is an artistic principle initiated by Zhang Zao [张璪 (约735-785)], a famous painter in Tang Dynasty.

<sup>14</sup> The original Chinese of “一阴一阳之谓道” that can be explained as “Dao is composed by the two fundamental elements: Yin and Yang”.

<sup>15</sup> The original Chinese is “逍遥游”。It is Chuang Tzu's ideal of life [庄周(369 BC.-286 BC.), a Chinese Taoist philosopher], which refers to a supreme spiritual state of absolute freedom in which one can wander around the world at his will, detached from any worldly affairs and casting off the constraint of any mundane values.

<sup>16</sup> The original Chinese is “道可道，非常道”.

<sup>17</sup> Hanshan (寒山) is a renowned poet and Zen Buddhist in Tang Dynasty, also called “Cold Mountain”.

<sup>18</sup> The original Chinese of Hanshan's Zen poem is “登陡寒山道，寒山路不穷”.



In Chinese cosmology, mountains signify one of the two component elements of Dao. Mountains represent “yang” (阳). “It is the true essence of Chinese Fengshui.<sup>19</sup> “Temples of Buddhism and Daoism are always located on mountains that are believed to be the homeland of spirit and gods.” (MI, 2016, p. 11). That is why poet Hanshan feels at home living on mountains. Snyder declared that he was indebted to Hanshan for his philosophical thoughts and poems, meanwhile he modeled on Hanshan for self-cultivation. Snyder is always being infatuated by mountains, so that he loves dwelling and meditating on mountains. He views mountains as mandala, the sacred palace where gods live. He compares mountains to Buddha, “Peaks like Buddhas at the heights/ send waters streaming down/ to the deep center of the turning world.../Mountains will be Buddhas then.” (SNYDER, 1996, p. 147) and dances with the Mountain Spirit, “The Mountain Spirit and me/ like ripples of the Cambrian Sea/ dance the pine tree.” (SNYDER, 1996, p. 149). He regards mountains as “mountains of soul”. We can firmly believe that Snyder’s recognition of mountains as holy existence results in his fascination for Chinese paintings of landscape and his completing of the voluminous picto-poetry “Mountains and Rivers without End”.

In Chinese culture, mountains possess the attributes of “yang” (阳) that suggests “spirit, altitude, transcendence and masculinity.” In Chinese paintings of landscape, mountains are depicted with various shapes, proportions and rules. Therefore, the mountains in those paintings are composed of ample shapes and shades, with each part having a peculiar trait. This requires observers to view mountains from an all-around and rotating perspective instead of a linear and regular one. The rich and delicate shapes of mountains in the paintings excite the poet’s inspiration and encourage him to pursue and perceive Dao in sceneries of the wild.

Snyder considers the wild as a holy temple. In his mind, the primitive natural scenery is not only sublime and sacred, but also all human beings’ spirit homeland. Climbing mountains step by step is a pilgrimage in which the climbers can be in close touch with the true world and their true selves. This is the practice of both man’s body and soul which supplies him with immense physical and mental pleasure. The practical process is deemed holy because it may help the climbers disengage their imprisoned selves out of worldly affairs so as to get infused with the real world and experience the blissful inspiration

<sup>19</sup> Fengshui (风水) is a kind of geomantic omen. It is a metaphysical science passed down from ancient Chinese history, originally referring to the location of a house and a tomb, the core of which is the harmony of man and nature.

and reflection. Therefore, Snyder boils down his contemplation into a conclusion that “wilderness” exists in all things on earth, including human heart. “To practice in the wild” serves as his motto of spiritual cultivation that he operates in both his literary creation and everyday life. That is why Snyder claims that “practice in the wild”<sup>20</sup> can purify and sublimate one’s soul.

In Chinese cosmology, water represents “yin”(阴) that is the other component element of Dao. Mountain and water are interdependent of each other. The symbiosis of Yin and Yang is an organic whole that generates a “divine consciousness” motivating the birth of mountains, rivers and nature as well, which may transcend the dichotomy of purity and contamination, nature and artificiality, more and less etc. In Snyder’s picto-poetry of landscape, the poet begins his journey in nature with a stream that is also a kind of path leading people to the ethereal Holy Land. On the paintings of landscape, mountains and rivers embrace and encircle each other. When the poet is appreciating the symbiotic interactions between mountains (Yang) and rivers (Yin) in the handscroll, he must be enlightened and awakened. He subsequently invites the landscape into his own life and preserves it in his poetry, displaying before the reader a fantastic scenery with verisimilitude: “[...] mountains walking on the water, water ripples every hill.” (SNYDER, 1996, p. 8).

It is a Chinese artistic doctrine that mountains and rivers are liable to manifest Dao<sup>21</sup>, likewise, painters and viewers of landscape may perceive Dao in paintings of the kind. Mountains and rivers interact with man’s heart, the result of which is the appearance of landscape:

[...] mountains and rivers can be considered as the manifestation (显象) of Dao, while those ones painted by artists are the representation (表像) of Dao. The formation of both physical manifestation and metaphysical representation are both associated with the operation of one’s heart and soul. (SHEN, 2012, p. 79).

Ancient Chinese artist and critic Tsong Bing<sup>22</sup> indicates that man’s eye enjoying the sight of landscape, man’s heart resonating with all things on earth, and man’s spirit perceiving the ultimate truth of the universe, all the

<sup>20</sup> Snyder even named a collection of prose he wrote, “The Practice of the Wild” to attach importance to this practice.

<sup>21</sup> The original Chinese is “山水显道”.

<sup>22</sup> Tsong Bing [宗炳 (375-443), a famous painter and critic in Nan Dynasty] came up with the idea that the forms and shapes of mountains and rivers agree with Dao properly[山水以形媚道].

three processes are intimately related. On the painter's part, Dao is manifested as mountains and rivers, then, he transforms them into the representation of paintings, which is the order of artistic creation: Dao – manifestation – representation. Conversely, on the viewer's part, he appreciates the representation of paintings, then realizes the manifestation of Dao, finally tends to perceive Dao latent in the painting, which is the order of artistic appreciation: representation – manifestation – Dao.

Hence, the magnificent view of mountains and rivers attract people to return to the embrace of Dao. As Tsong Bing preaches, saints and philosophers are capable of learning from Dao, so that they could sympathize with and care for all things on earth, which goes by the name of Ren (仁: benevolence). Confucius stated similar opinion: “The benevolent are fond of mountains, while the wise delight in the water.”<sup>23</sup> Then, how can we perceive Dao, the supreme truth in the universe, like saints and philosophers? Snyder supplies an answer: “clearing the mind” as stated at the beginning of “Mountains and Rivers without End”. In Chinese philosophy, nature means “self-thus” which refers to a kind of free and relaxed state, and could only be approached through emptiness and effortlessness by means of the Daoist practice “forgetting while sitting”<sup>24</sup> or the Buddhist practice “Zen meditation”. “Clearing the mind” is the essential requirement of Zen meditation that instructs people to discard all distracting thoughts in the mind in order to maintain a stainless heart, which is the only road drawing near the “Thusness”.<sup>25</sup>

When creating handscroll of landscape, painters usually clear the mind to create a mental state of emptiness in order to meet the “pure” landscape in their mind. As to viewers, they also need to clear the mind when unfolding the scroll, infusing tranquility and serenity into their heart for the sake of stepping on a visual journey to seek the Creator lurking behind landscape. As Snyder once put, clearing the mind is to cultivate self-restraint and intuition, for great insights could only appear when people reach the state of emptiness (SNYDER, 1990, p. 22). He also discovered that when heart filters all images, it will create itself (SNYDER, 1969, p. 10). This view echoes Tsong Bing's opinion, “clearing the mind to perceive Dao”<sup>26</sup> and “Cherishing Dao to

<sup>23</sup> The original Chinese is “仁者爱山，智者爱水”.

<sup>24</sup> The original Chinese is “坐忘”.

<sup>25</sup> Thusness (真如): or “suchness”. It is a central concept in Buddhism, and is of particular significance in Zen Buddhism. True thusness is without defiling thought; it cannot be known through logic and conception.

<sup>26</sup> The original Chinese is “澄怀观道”.

resonate with things”<sup>27</sup>, which means “in order to retain the original and innocent soul, one has to weed out the unwise “ego”, i.e. “the part of heart contaminated by man’s evils”. After constant purging, the heart becomes as clean and clear as a mirror. With a mirror-like heart, one views things like viewing himself, so that he could attain the state of Oneness that integrates the true self with nature.

It is apparent that the image of path (road) runs throughout Snyder’s works with the Ku structure of “off the path” taking the lead. “Off the path” may suggest that one should leave behind the turmoil of mundane life and set foot on the road of pursuing the true meaning of life. In this sense, religious practice is just on the path leading to Dao. Purporting to reach the transcending state of Dao, one is supposed to trek along the trail of unremitting self-cultivation. In the handscroll named as “Endless Streams and Mountains”, trails are faintly discernible. And in Snyder’s namesake picto-poem, the counterpart of the handscroll, a trail serves as a controlling image guiding readers poetic eye to observe the details of scenery. Carrying the poet’s dream and imagination, the trail meanders through his spiritual journey. Though having no trace of beginning or ending, it is always present, conducting people to their innermost being. As Snyder once declared, the human world is a net of trails, and the metaphor of trail originates from the time when we travelled on foot or horse (SNYDER, 1990, p. 144).

We may draw a conclusion that both the picto-poetry and the handscroll point to an essential road directing to the “Mount of Spirit”.<sup>28</sup> Thereafter, following the poet’s example, readers prepare for the ritual of “clearing the mind”, then “sliding into the created space”. After a long period of wandering visual course, they tend to catch the flashing epiphany. Therefore, as for readers, the reading process is to some extent a voyage of the heart. They would realize gradually the state of mind at which the poet arrives when observing the handscroll, and contact the “self-thus” manifested by mountains and rivers. This also conforms to the oriental idea of “[...] man is an integrate part of nature.”<sup>29</sup> “Nature” here has two levels of connotation: one denotes the nature that contains and breeds all things on earth. Man and nature are in

<sup>27</sup> The original Chinese is “怀道应物”.

<sup>28</sup> See the poem “Wumen Guan” [《无门关》], composed by Wumen Huikai Zen master (无门慧开禅师). The original Chinese is “佛在灵山莫远求，灵山自在汝心头，人人有个灵山塔，好在灵山下修。” “Mount of Spirit” usually refers to the sacred place Buddhists admire and the holy home they aspire to return.

<sup>29</sup> The original Chinese is “天人合一”.

essence one unity, which suggests being close to nature is to be close to man himself. The other connotation refers to man's natural nature that is precisely the "thusness" or "self-thus" in Buddhism. Snyder holds that introspection and enlightenment should be the only way to identify man's true "self". He regards poetry as a mediate instrument to build up a connection between nature, consciousness and language, which manifests the inheritance he owes to Romanticism and Modernism.

### **3 HIERARCHY OF APPRECIATING META-PICTO-POETRY OF LANDSCAPE**

There are generally three levels in appreciating Chinese ink paintings of landscape, i.e., to see the scenery in the painting, to see the preface and postscript on the painting, and to sense the voice-over beyond the painting.<sup>30</sup> This inspires us to use the three levels of artistic perception to appreciate Snyder's picto-poetry of landscape. In the sphere of Chinese ink landscape painting, there exists a popular artistic conception of "mountains and rivers are like paintings". The reason why mountains and rivers would become "landscape" and be portrayed in paintings is because there is a viewer. "Once a natural object is taken for scenery, it would become a landscape including man, which is co-existence of natural objects and viewers. The landscape can be considered as a result of man's experience." (YOLAINE, 2012, p. 97). As thus, viewers could not only see scenery, but also experience a certain spiritual realm. It's self-evident that the gist of appreciating paintings of landscape is to combine the viewer and the viewed for the purpose of experiencing the sense of uniting man and nature conveyed by the paintings.

Tsong Bing proposed three principles in appreciating paintings: seeing with eye, resonating with heart, and easing with spirit,<sup>31</sup> which invite viewers to relive the sensation they experience during their visit of the real scenery with their imagination. The painter's purpose is not to mimic the external look of nature, but to impress the viewer with the psychological effect as he views the real scenery. In this way, the painting of landscape may replace the physical one in the sense that the viewer may be personally on the scene when viewing the painting and similarly feel the elation of his spirit. Thus, the viewer may see himself watching and fusing with the view. This is the principle of seeing the scenery in the painting.

<sup>30</sup> The original Chinese is "画中之观、画之上观、画外之观".

<sup>31</sup> The original Chinese is "应目，会心，畅神".

The process and experience of reading picto-poetry of landscape may be identical with observing a handscroll. When viewing a handscroll of landscape, the viewer should initially imagine the picture of natural mountains and rivers. His visual focus must shift constantly with the motion of the unfolding scroll, so that the viewer may observe a series of dynamic scenery. Similarly, when reading the picto-poetry, readers flip the pages one by one, each page being like a painting-frame displaying various shapes and traits of landscape portrayed by words. In the whole process of reading the poetry, the viewer becomes indefinite and his feelings turn fickle, thereby the viewer's sense of self disappears. As in the poem "Endless Streams and Mountains", the pronoun "I" only appears once. After finishing viewing the handscroll, "— I walk out of the museum—low gray clouds over the lake— chill March breeze." (SNYDER, 1996, p. 8.). It seems that the poet just awakens from his contemplations after viewing the handscroll. Where the subject of viewing withdraws, the real "I" emerges, and proceeds with life's journey, carrying the spirit refreshed by mountains and rivers. Obviously, there is a dynamic relationship between the viewer and the view, which allows the viewer to feel the spatial extension during the temporal process of viewing the poem. This temporal-spatial experience of infinity dispels the viewer's self when he strolls idly on the pages/painting-frames, which finally leads him to the desirable realm of merging with nature.

Chinese paintings of landscape purport to invite viewers to experience the intimate fusion with landscape. With the help of this kind of perspective, readers may learn the organic functions of picto-poetry of landscape so as to obtain the immersive experience of being on the scene. In his poem "Endless Streams and Mountains", Snyder depicts valleys, villages, harbors for travellers "[...] to live, to travel, and to tour." (ZHANG, 2006, p. 66).<sup>32</sup> We also see multiple ranges of hills, deep and remote rocks and woods, plain and extending valleys. Snyder makes use of the "adjective plus noun" structure, such as, "misty air, vague peaks, hazy canyon" ... to display vivid visual pictures. In addition, plenty of gerunds are used to motivate the scenery, i.e., sliding, coasting, receding, cascading, reaching, watching etc. Besides the subtle and exquisite language, ingenious innovations on format (irregular lines, italics, boldface, punctuation, i.e.) enormously vivify the typical dichotomies of Chinese ink paintings of landscape: virtual and actual, dynamic and static, shape and charm. All the above-mentioned techniques joint together to produce the

<sup>32</sup> The original Chinese is "可居, 可行, 可游".

unique visual beauty of Chinese painting of landscape which might be the reconstruction of natural landscape and tend to integrate the viewers' soul with natural scene. Picto-poetry follows the similar rules – it utilizes word pictures to express the viewers' feeling and experience when they appreciate the paintings. Consequently, readers can equally be satisfied with pleased eyes, resonated heart and eased spirit. This could be the supreme target that works of art are determined to achieve. Snyder's picto-poetry is almost there.

After the Song and Ming Dynasties, it became a fashion that men of letters preferred to impress inscription on paintings. Chinese ink paintings of landscape usually implied with profound connotations, the true meaning of which might exist beyond the paintings. Thus, viewers are supposed to read the inscriptions first. Otherwise, they would fail to get the true meaning of the paintings. The inscriptions on paintings may transcend worldly restrictions, conveying rich literary, historical and social implications to erudite literati. The first viewer is the painter himself who is simultaneously the earliest one to inscribe on the painting. Thanks to the inscriptions on the paintings, later viewers have the access to the proper understanding of the paintings, and follow the painter's steps to climb the mountains, walk along the trails, paint, and inscribe, then step into the artistic experience of Woyou (visual travel).<sup>33</sup>

The second section of the poem "Endless Streams and Mountains" is an objective account of the inscriptions on the namesake handscroll, introducing the significance and reason why the poet chose to compose the poem based on the handscroll to the reader. The inscriptions chronicle the history and cultural events related to the scroll, expressing the poet's attachment to natural scenery and the nutrition the scroll absorbs from ancient culture. Readers can share the ecological thoughts of harmony between man and nature with the poet, and admire the vital force originated from precursory civilization. This is the second level of appreciation: seeing the inscriptions on the painting, which is actually the interpretation of the historical and cultural background of the landscape described by the poem. Similarly, at the end of the collection "Mountains and Rivers without End", there is an essay entitled as "The Making of Mountains and Rivers without End", which is equivalent to the inscription on paintings. The essay keeps track of the whole process of the poet's creation of the collection, demonstrating the poet's forty-year sedulous spiritual journey of pursuing art and truth during the process of his literary

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<sup>33</sup> Woyou (卧游) means sightseeing by means of appreciating paintings of landscape.

creation, which undoubtedly arouses readers' admiration and esteem for the poet's persistent endeavor and lofty realm.

After describing the vicissitudes of the handscroll, the poet continues to express the associations and enlightenment he obtains from viewing it. His inner being is filled with abundant joy and excitement being baptized by the sacred feel, so he behaves like a child, "[...] stamp the foot, walk with it, clap! Turn, /the creeks come in, ah!" (SNYDER, 1996, p. 8). Therewith, he summons the gods of mountains and rivers in ancient legend, letting them tell their own story, "Old ghost ranges, sunken rivers, come again/ stand by the wall and tell their tale." (SNYDER, 1996, p. 9). Then the poet himself makes the process of his poetic writing stand out markedly on paper, "[...] grind the ink, wet the brush, unroll the/ broad white space: /lead out and tip/ the moist black line." (SNYDER, 1996, p. 9). Therefore, to see the inscriptions on the painting may coalesce all the essential elements: the historical background, cultural significance and their relations with the poet, so that the reader's mind could shuttle back and forth through history, reality and mythology. As a result, the soul and spirit of natural landscape may spontaneously fuse into readers' life.

It should be noted that there is still an invisible world beyond the structure and texture of the paintings of landscape, which requires viewers' imagination to fill the blank. As Huang Guanmin put, "If the viewer gets to know the painter's thoughts and experiences beforehand, and feels the profound meaning of the painting with scrupulous attention, then he will definitely discern a more truthful world than the visible one beyond the scenery." (49). Snyder is deeply influenced by oriental culture, especially Zen thoughts, and spends his whole life in pursuing the ultimate truth. He keeps travelling, pilgrimaging, seeking mandala, holy temple and the path in the wild. He parallels his poetical creation with spiritual practice, which endows his words with philosophical and Zen thoughts.

The collection of poetry "Mountains and Rivers without End" is a typical example of this kind. It begins with Milarepa's<sup>34</sup> (1040-1123) aphorism

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<sup>34</sup> Milarepa [米勒日巴尊者 (1052-1135)]: a respectable Yoga practitioner, philosopher and poet.



“The notion of Emptiness engenders Compassion”<sup>35</sup> and Dogen’s<sup>36</sup> (1200-1253). Zen poem “Painting of the Rice Cake” suggesting that the collection is an account of the poet’s spiritual search for truth and enlightenment. It abounds in poetic phrases tinged with Zen thoughts, such as: “Ceaseless wheel of lives” (SNYDER, 1996, p. 9); “The awareness of emptiness brings forth a heart of compassion.” (SNYDER, 1996, p. 151). The collection displays the three phases of poet’s sensation aroused by the landscape at the sight of the handscroll painting. Snyder claims that, at the first sight of the mountains on the painting, they look as real mountains; at the second sight, they become different mountains at different places; at the third sight, they become mountains of soul that penetrate reality, turning into the primordial mountains<sup>37</sup> (MCLEOD, 1980, p. 378). The poet repeats the Ku structure “walking on walking./ under foot earth turns/ streams and mountains never stay the same” three times at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the book, which carries the Zen thought all through the whole collection. Furthermore, the work is ended with a philosophical poem “Finding the Space in the Heart” that is full of Zen and mandala thoughts, predicting that the poet’s spiritual journey will come to completion, and he is sure to find the “Self-thus” so as to enter into the Buddhist Anatman.<sup>38</sup>

From the perspective of seeing the voice-over beyond the painting, readers eventually vibrate with the poet’s spiritual endeavor, and arrive at the culminating truth: the grand beauty of mountains and rivers can conduct people to the track of Dao, which meanwhile sublimates the reader’s spirit and soul to a loftier level. We may realize the truth that what man ought to pursue is not the beauty of the physical world, but the exploration of the inner consciousness. Appreciating the beauty of the nation, presented in the form of mountains and rivers, is the first step toward the Great Road (Dao), while the

<sup>35</sup> In Buddhism, “emptiness” means that there is no inherent entity in anything in the earthly world, including man. Therefore, man should not be obsessed with his individual benefit; instead, he ought to break the fences between others and himself, meanwhile devoting himself to the welfare of his fellow creatures with a heart vibrating with compassionate zeal. The original Chinese is “了悟空性才能产生慈悲。”

<sup>36</sup> Dogen [道元禅师(1200-1253)]: a Japanese Zen master, founder of Japanese Zen Buddhism – the Caodong school.

<sup>37</sup> The three sights are similar to the “threefold states of life” illustrated in Zen thoughts. The original Chinese is “见山是山；见山不是山；见山还是山”。

<sup>38</sup> Anatman (无我): in Sanskrit means not spiritual, corporeal, unreal, something different from spirit or soul, not self, another.

significance of appreciating paintings /poetry of landscape lies in the fact that man could return to his self-thus as well as the embrace of wonderful nature.

In conclusion, the aforementioned three principles of perception can serve for the three stages of artistic appreciation of paintings / poetry of landscape: seeing with eye, resonating with heart and easing with spirit. Snyder employs words as ink to paint his own thoughts and feelings, which are brimming with Chinese culture of landscape and cosmology on pages. With their imaginary eyes, readers may transform the literal picture into an organic whole with psychological and aesthetical significance, in the meantime they may resonate with the poet's sense of becoming an integral part of nature. The meta-picto-poetry of landscape, composed by Gary Snyder, demonstrates his inclination to oriental culture and spiritual pursuit for truth and enlightenment. Poetry of this kind reveals a kind of homogeneous relationship between man's existence and nature, which happens to vibrate with the attributes of identity and integrity in Zen thoughts. It is noticeable that Snyder achieves a kind of spiritual identity from Zen thoughts, which help him reach the desirable realm of self-acceptance and self-transcendence.

## CONCLUSION

Snyder comes to realize that one's spirit-soul-being could be sublimated through persistent practice and cultivation, and that the cultural ideal of pursuing the self-consciousness of life and lofty spiritual realm could help people break out of the predicament of spiritual passivation and lack of belief brought about by over-industrialization and political voracity at present time. The methods and experiences of spiritual cultivation he practices and the idea of Oneness with all beings are assuredly a breath of fresh air in the modern tumultuous world. His life wisdom, learnt from eastern philosophical thought, and literary creation, nourished by oriental literature and art, are amiable and inspirational.

It is safe to say that Gary Snyder is not only an eco-poet, but also a stylist and a practitioner of oriental Zen. His literary creation succeeds American tradition of Romanticism and is suffused with thoughts and notions of eastern philosophy and religion. His poetic works reveal the fostering relationship between literature, culture and nature. He and his works are both paragons of the fusion of eastern and western thoughts and arts, which manifests the compatibility of human civilization. His unremitting endeavor

in poetic morphology has enriched the genre of English poetry. His artistic ideal, lifestyle and literary production altogether arouse a sense of duty from people, i.e., to heal human society which has been degraded into an ugly and paralyzed world by human greed. With the aid of keeping intimate touch with healthy and harmonious nature, together with the overall enhancement of humanity's spiritual realm, all of his gestures are for the purpose of remodeling human society into a limpid and blissful paradise.

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**Resumen:** Este artículo sostiene que algunas Meta-Picto-Poesías del Paisaje compuestas por el poeta estadounidense Gary Snyder toman como tema la pintura china del paisaje con las características de la antigua poesía china, resplandeciente de incomparable encanto artístico y sustancia cultural. La poesía de este tipo es una combinación perfecta de elementos orientales y occidentales, que integra las culturas, los pensamientos y las artes de ambas partes, cuya apreciación crea una experiencia compleja con un híbrido de formas artísticas y espacios estéticos. Gary Snyder no es sólo un eco-poeta, sino también un estilista y un hombre de práctica. Sus obras poéticas revelan la relación de fomento entre literatura, cultura y naturaleza. El artículo pretende hacer un intento transcultural, interdisciplinar y multidisciplinar en la crítica de Snyder, con métodos analíticos que incluyen culturas orientales y occidentales, visiones antiguas y actuales, así como experiencias dinámicas y estáticas.

**Palabras clave:** Gary Snyder. Meta-Picto-Poesía del Paisaje. Crianza simbiótica. Atractivo estético.

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