

“All that Happens on the Earth”: On Wei An’s Deep Ecological View

by

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M.A., Beijing Normal University, 2006

B.A., Beijing Normal University, 2003

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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This thesis examines the writing of Wei An 苇岸 (1960-1999), a contemporary Chinese nature writer, from an eco-critical perspective grounded in deep ecological view. Urged on by China's environmental crisis and social problems, and influenced by Western literature and his own life experience, Wei An developed his own deep ecological life philosophy. He respected every creature's intrinsic value, appreciated the beauty and wonders of nature, advocated the Land Ethic and practiced vegetarianism. He highly treasured the agrarian civilization and objected to modern industrialization, in which he saw very little of any value. Meanwhile, Wei An's ideas contain questionable aspects like the exaggeration of the defects of modernization and idealization of rural living. Although filled with weak aspects, Wei An's ecosophy is a faint but significant voice in contemporary Chinese literature and society, and reflects important changes happening in contemporary China.

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Dedication

To my dear father: Zhize Zhou 周治泽, mother: Xin Ye 叶馨,
sister: Huaying Zhou 周华瑛, and brother: Tianyong Zhou 周天勇, with love

INTRODUCTION

I. Environmental Crisis and Deep Ecology

There exists no shortage of approaches for dealing with the many aspects of the environmental crisis that troubles our planet today. Roughly speaking however these approaches may be grouped in accordance with a distinction between deep and shallow ecology, that the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess drew in his seminal 1973 article “The Shallow and The Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movements: A Summary”, originally published in *Inquiry* Vol. 16, No.1 (1973). According to Naess, the deep ecology approach asks “deep” questions in order to tackle the environmental crisis that we face. It “examines the *roots* of our environmental/social problems” and asks fundamental questions about our values and worldviews, aiming to achieve a fundamental ecological transformation of our sociocultural systems, collective actions, and lifestyles (Drengson and Inoue xvii, xix). In contrast, the shallow ecology approach attempts to reform human activity regarding the environment without demanding a systematic change in human behaviour, attitudes, or institutions. This sort of attitude to environment is also called reform environmentalism and is associated with anthropocentrism (Drengson, “The Life” 28; Devall and Sessions 52). In this thesis, the approach of eco-criticism grounded on the deep ecological perspective will be used to examine certain literary texts.

Naess introduced the distinctions between shallow ecology and deep ecology in the first place and coined the phrase “deep ecology movement”. This movement was soon popularized by its North American supporters such as George Sessions, Bill Devall, and Alan Drengson. In most cases, deep ecology is referred to as an approach or a movement, not as a philosophy (Naess and Haukeland 108). Naess called ecocentric personal

philosophies *ecosophies*, combining the root words from ancient Greek *ecos* (place) and *Sophia* (wisdom), meaning ecological wisdom or wisdom of place. Naess thinks that people could develop different personal philosophies of life, while agreeing with general principles of deep ecology. Naess claimed that his own deep ecological philosophy “Ecosophy T” was one of the many examples of such personal life philosophies (Drengson, “The Life” 34-35, and 41-42; Drengson and Inoue xxiv)¹.

Although the term “deep ecology” is new, the ideas of the deep ecology movement have long existed in human history. As noted above, deep ecology derives its inspiration from a wide variety of deep ecological worldviews, many of which are traditional human spiritual resources, such as the pastoral/naturalist literary tradition, Taoist and Buddhist writing, etc (Devall and Sessions 80). Thus many people hold what are basically deep ecological views but within the context of different spiritual traditions.

However, some people ask if there is an essence or a core to deep ecology and if there is a definite general philosophy of deep ecology. Naess does not think “it is desirable to do more than tentatively suggest what might be the essential ingredients of a deep ecology theoretical point of view” (Naess, “The Basics” 60).” To search for understanding and acceptance of deep ecology by people from different philosophical and religious groups, in 1984, Naess and others summarized eight principles of the platform of the deep ecology movement, and revised them in recent years (Naess, “The Basics” 61).

¹ There is a common misunderstanding in that some people think that Naess is describing a philosophy for everyone called “deep ecology”, and conflate Naess’s personal philosophy with his account of the deep ecology movement (Drengson and Inoue xxi; Katz, Light and Rothenberg xi). To avoid confusion, in this thesis I use “deep ecology” or “deep ecology movement” to refer to the movement of deep ecology, and other terms such as “Ecosophy” and “deep ecological worldview” when referring to a specific ecological philosophy.

Naess uses an Apron Diagram to clarify the relationships between the platform and the other three levels in the discussion of deep ecology. Level 1: verbalized fundamental philosophical and religious views; level 2: the deep ecology platform; level 3: normative or factual hypothesis and policies; level 4: particular decisions and actions. This platform is derived from various ultimate religious and philosophical views at level 1, like Buddhist, Taoist, Christian, or other religions or philosophical premises with affinities to basic views of Spinoza, Heidegger, Whitehead, or others (Naess, "The Basics" 60-62). Here are the deep ecology movement's principles in their latest form:

1. All living beings have intrinsic value.
2. The richness and diversity of life has intrinsic value.
3. Except to satisfy vital need, humankind does not have the right to reduce this diversity and this richness.
4. It would be better for human beings if there were fewer of them, and much better for other living creatures.
5. Today the extent and nature of human interference in the various ecosystems is not sustainable, and the lack of sustainability is rising.
6. Decisive improvement requires considerable change: social, economic, technological, and ideological.
7. An ideological change would essentially entail seeking a better quality of life rather than a raised standard of living.
8. Those who accept the aforementioned points are responsible for trying to contribute directly or indirectly to the realization of necessary changes. (Naess and Haukeland, *Life's Philosophy* 108-109)

The eight points above were first formulated by Naess and George Sessions in 1984, and published in *Deep Ecology* by Bill Devall and George Sessions in 1985, and then revised by Naess in his *Life's Philosophy* in 2002. Naess and others have done much research on people's views about these principles. Many organizations use some version of them, whether or not they use the term "deep ecology movement". This movement has been supported by a variety of persons with a wide range of personal, philosophical, religious and cultural differences (Drengson, "The Life" 32-33).

It is clear from the platform that the deep ecology approach is "in sharp contrast to the dominant worldview of technocratic-industrial societies which regard humans as isolated and fundamentally separate from the rest of Nature, as superior to, and in charge of, the rest of creation (Devall and Session 65)." The dominant worldview refers to the worldview accepted by the majority of people and broadcast by mass media and publications. Devall and Sessions provide a chart to summarize the contrast between dominant worldview and deep ecology (Devall and Sessions 65, 69).

Table 1

<i>Dominant Worldview</i>	<i>Deep Ecology</i>
Dominance over nature	Harmony with Nature
Natural environment as resource for humans	All nature has intrinsic worth/biospecies equality
Material/economic growth for growing human population	Elegantly simple material needs (material goals serving the larger goal of self-realization)
Belief in ample resource reserves	Earth "supplies" limited
High technological progress and solutions	Appropriate technology; non-dominating science
Consumerism	Doing with enough /recycling
National/ centralized community	Minority tradition/bioregion

From the chart, it is evident that deep ecology supporters consider humankind an integral part of its environment and place greater value on non-human species,

ecosystems and processes in nature than current environmental movements, and call for a change in basic economic, technological and ideological structures. However, it seems that these ideas have not been accepted by the majority of people in the world.

II. Deep Ecology in Chinese Philosophy and Literature

1. Ancient China: Before the 20th century

There are rich deep ecological elements in ancient Chinese philosophy, especially in Taoism and Buddhism (Q. Wei, “Zouxiang” 32-33). Taoism has a deep and profound ecological awareness. The central concept in Taoism is “Tao (way 道)”, and “the way of heaven (天道)” is primary, while “the way of human (人道)” is secondary. Man should follow the way of heaven, and man and heaven can become one. As Laozi 老子, the most famous Taoist master, said, “Humans follow (*fa*) earth, Earth follows heaven, Heaven follows Tao, Tao follows self-becoming (*tzu-jan*)人法地，地法天，天法道，道法自然 (*Tao Te Ching* Chapter 25)”(E. Chen 117). Another Taoist philosopher Zhuangzi 庄子 said that, Heaven, Earth and “I” live together, and all that is on the earth and “I” form a big inseparable Self (“天地与我并生，而万物与我为一”, *Chuang-tzu* “Qi wu lun 齐物论 The sorting which Evens Things out (Chapter 2)”) (Cao 30). Taoists think that every being on the earth has its own place and that mankind is not the center of the world. In terms of material and spiritual aspects, Taoists advocate a voluntary, simple way of life and restraining oneself from excesses of desire. For example, Laozi said, “the five colors blind a person’s eyes; the five musical notes deafen a person’s ears; the five flavours ruin a person’s taste buds.//Horse-racing, hunting and chasing, drive a person’s mind to

madness.// Hard-to-get goods, Hinder a person's actions.五色令人目盲；五音令人耳聋；五味令人口爽；驰骋畋猎，令人心发狂；难得之货，令人行妨 [*Tao Te Ching* Chapter 12] (E. Chen 84).” Taoists do not encourage physical entertainments, but consider spiritual pursuit more important, all of which is similar to deep ecology (He 43-54).

Likewise, Buddhism contains a deep ecological awareness. Buddhists think that all living beings are equal, and animals are not "introduced" to the world in order to serve humans, and sacrifice their lives when humans need. Buddhists advocate vegetarianism and an end to killing other beings. They also suggest a simple and restrained lifestyle (He 63, 79; Q. Wei, “Zouxiang” 32-33). In addition, animism and pantheism have been cherished by many throughout Chinese history. Hundreds of gods and goddesses as well as saints, immortals and demigods are worshiped in Chinese folk religion. Many Chinese believe that everything in the world has a spirit and that some non-human beings can even become gods. So many people have awe and respect for nature, which gives them a humble attitude towards nature and an avoidance of anthropocentrism (He 8, 99-111).

Ecological awareness in Taoism, Buddhism and Chinese folk religions has also influenced traditional Chinese art and literature (Q. Wei, “Zouxiang” 25). Harmony between human and nature was a favourite artistic theme for many. In poetry for example, *Shi Jing* 诗经 (Classic of Poetry), the first Chinese poetry collection compiled about 3000 years ago, incorporates a large number of poems in which the beauty of nature and a harmonious relationship with nature are depicted and appreciated. In the Jin Dynasty, Xie Lingyun 谢灵运 initiated the “Poetry School of Mountains and Rivers (*Shanshui shipai*), and then Tao Yuanming 陶渊明 founded the “Poetry School of the

Countryside” (*Tianyuan shipai*). In these poems, authors call for the embracing of nature and a return to nature or rural life from the city and civilization in order to attain a balance and harmony of mind and body. Other styles of Chinese literature, drawing, music and sculpture exhibit the same attitudes (He 54-58).

2. Modern China: Before the 1980s

However, in the 20th century a dominant technological worldview which advocated that man should conquer nature and treat nature simply as tool gradually replaced traditional Chinese views about nature. During the Republican period (1912-1949), influenced by modern Western evolutionary theories, the Chinese tended to abandon their earlier worship of nature. During the first three decades of the People’s Republic of China, which began in 1949, the relationship between human beings and nature worsened. While traditional Chinese philosophy advocated “Harmony between Heaven and Humankind天人合一” (Q. Wei, “Zouxiang” 23; He 33), Mao Zedong took another view: “Man Must Conquer Nature人定胜天”. Nature was considered as the tool and slave of human beings (Shapiro 6-7, 9). Most nature writing composed in this period is consciously or unconsciously full of an anthropocentric and anti-environmental view.

3. Contemporary China: Since the 1980s

Fortunately, in the past three decades, urged on by the severity of the ecological crisis and the influence of both Eastern and Western spiritual resources on ecological awareness, deep ecological ideas have begun to emerge both at the practical level and at the spiritual level (He 54-63; Q. Wei “Zouxiang” 31-33).

In the 1980s, the idea of reform environmentalism that people should protect the natural environment in their own interest and that of their offspring became common sense in China, though people did not pursue this idea to its practical conclusion. The people seldom asked deep questions about current lifestyles, values, basic policies and institutions; their environmental awareness mainly stayed on the level of shallow ecology (Q. Wei, “Zouxiang” 16-20).

Since the late 1990s, ecological philosophy and ethics including deep ecology have been introduced into China. Some philosophical scholars such as Yang Tongjin 杨通进, Lei Yi 雷毅, Yu Mouchang 余谋昌 and Liu Xiangrong 刘湘溶 introduced and recommended deep ecology and non-anthropocentrism. Environmental activists such as Liang Congjie 梁从诫, Shen Xiaohui 沈孝辉 and Xi Zhinong 奚志农 have promoted deep ecological ideas though some of them do not use the term “deep ecology” specifically (He 5-7). Meanwhile, people have begun to re-evaluate Chinese literary and philosophical classics from the perspective of deep ecology and have discovered rich resources in Taoism, Buddhism, animism, pantheism, and other spiritual traditions. In China, however, deep ecological ideas are not as popular as shallow ecological ideas. Thus the shallow ecology approach is the mainstream view of nature in China (He 19).

Along with the revival of ecological awareness, environmental understanding is represented in contemporary Chinese literature. In the early 1980s, short stories, such as Wureertu 乌热尔图’s “Laoren yu lu 老人与鹿 (Old Man and Deer) (1981), convey the writers’ concern with modernization’s negative influence on forests and the traditional hunting life. In the middle and the late 1980s, environmental documentary literature such as Sha Qing 沙青’s “Beijing shiqu pingheng 北京失去平衡 (Beijing Has Lost Its

Balance)” (1986) and Xu Gang 徐刚’s *Famuzhe, xinglai!* 伐木者, 醒来! (Wake up, Loggers!) (1988) focused on the environmental crisis and caught a wide range of people’s attention. The middle and the late 1980s are often considered as the opening stage of contemporary Chinese ecological literature (Wen and Rao 12). Since the views on nature in these environmental literary texts of this period exhibit mainly shallow ecology views, some scholars called this type of environmental literature “light green writing” (Q. Wei, “Zouxiang” 16).

Since the 1990s contemporary Chinese environmental literature has become more influential (Wen and Rao 12). More writers have taken up environmental writing, and while most of the environmental writing in this period is still “light green writing”, deep ecological ideas can be found in some texts. This kind of environmental literature with a perspective of deep ecology is called “dark green writing” (Q. Wei, “Zouxiang” 21).

Fiction such as Jiang Rong 姜戎’s *Lang tuteng* 狼图腾 (Wolf Totem), Jia Pingwa 贾平凹’s *Huainian lang* 怀念狼 (Yearning for the Wolf), Hu Fayun 胡发云’s “Laohai shizong 老海失踪 (Old Hai’s Disappearance)”, Zhang Kangkang 张抗抗’s “Shabao 沙暴 (Sand Storm)” and Guo Xuebo 郭雪波’s “Shahu 沙狐 (Sand Fox)”, and prose such as Wei An’s *Dadi shang de shiqing* and Liu Liangcheng 刘亮程’s *Yigeren de cunzhuang* 一个人的村庄 (One Person’s Village) are typical of deep ecological writing in this period.

III. Wei An’s Nature Writing in Chinese Literature

In this thesis, the writing of Wei An 苇岸, one of the above Chinese ecological writers, will be examined from the approach of eco-criticism grounded in principles of

deep ecology, as an example of this deep ecological trend in contemporary Chinese literature.

“Wei An 苇岸” was a pseudonym; the author’s real name was Ma Jianguo 马建国.

Wei An was born in an ordinary peasant family in Beixiaoying Village 北小营村, Changping County 昌平区, a suburban county of the city of Beijing, on January 7th 1960. Wei An had a poor childhood but also gained a rich rural experience in the village, which later became an important writing resource. In 1977, China reinstated a National Entrance Exam to Universities after the Cultural Revolution. Wei An took the exam in 1978 and was admitted into the Department of Philosophy at Branch One of Renmin University of China 中国人民大学一分校. Wei An entered Branch One in the spring of 1979 and graduated in 1984, when he temporarily withdrew from school for one year because of a health problem. At Branch One, Wei An was very interested in poetry and kept in close touch with literature club members on the campus. He published a poem titled “Qiufen 秋分 (Autumn Equinox)” in 1982, which was his first publication. After graduation, Wei An worked as a teacher at Cadre College of Changping County 昌平区干部学校. Wei An traveled much in northern China by himself, including Inner Mongolia, Hebei, Heilongjiang, Shanxi, and Shaanxi, beginning in 1986. He was a convert to Western vegetarianism. He was married and divorced, but he had no children. On May 19th of 1999, at the age of 39, Wei An died of liver cancer (163-167).

Wei An composed essays in his spare time and gradually gained attention as one of the main “Essayists of New-born Generation 新生代散文作家”, a group of the essayists born after 1960. Wei An was not a very prolific writer. All of his writing spans no more

than 170,000 Chinese words (Yuan, “Wei” 309). Most of Wei An’s work has been collected in three books, one published during his lifetime and the other two posthumously: *Dadi shang de shiqing* 大地上的事情 (All that Happens on the Earth) (1995), *Taiyang shengqi yihou* 太阳升起以后 (After the Sun Rises) (2000), *Shangdi zhi zi* 上帝之子 (Son of God) (2001). *After the Sun Rises* also contains 27 articles on Wei An by his critics and his friends. These three collections include 53 articles by him, which can be roughly grouped into several categories: a series of 75 short vignettes about his observations on the natural environment and rural life, titled “Dadi shang de shiqing 大地上的事情 (All that Happens on the Earth)”, a series of 6 short vignettes about his observations on 24 traditional *Jieqi* 节气 (24 solar terms of traditional lunar calendar throughout a year), essays on human relationships to nature, prose about travel in the western border region of China, essays on non-violence, vegetarianism, the land ethic and other relevant ideas, essays about Western literature and writers, contemporary Chinese writers and Chinese essay writing, and a few articles on other themes. In general, Wei An’s writing deals with nature or literature.

Born in 1960, Wei An experienced the dramatic shifts in the Chinese natural environment and society after 1978, when the nation started on the road to economic reform. Disappointment with modernization and love of nature made people like Wei An re-evaluate the essence of agricultural civilization, criticize modernization and look to traditional Chinese or Western deep ecological views. Wei An’s writing demonstrates the current change of views toward nature among Chinese people.

Even compared with other contemporary environmental literature, which may show the changes happening in the 1980s and 1990s, Wei An’s writing has greater significance

in several ways. Firstly, Wei An was among few writers to connect the environmental problems with humans' own spiritual problems and therefore criticize modernization and the dominant worldview. He respected the inherent value of nonhuman beings and opposed anthropocentrism. He appreciated the traditional agricultural civilization and criticized the modern industrial way of life. He advocated simple living and vegetarianism and rejected consumerism. Such deep ecological views are rare in contemporary Chinese literature.

Secondly, Wei An's adherence to deep ecology was also exemplified by his personal life. Wei An was among a few writers who combined their writing and their personal lives (X. Lin, "Wushi nian" 68; Yuan, "Introduction" 9; Ning 209). Wei An was a vegetarian because of his principles of simple living and sympathy for animals, though, as a non-Buddhist, being a vegetarian was difficult in China. Wei An said that he "voluntarily reduced [his] consumption as much as possible, for the sake of the planet's present and its future (109)."² He was called "the last saint in the 20th century" and a "son of earth" for his unusual lifestyle and ideas (X. Lin, "Wei" 175). He was viewed as belonging to the 19th century, and a rare person in today's society which advocates the accumulation of material goods, like certain species of animals in danger of extinction. He was considered as rare, but representing the last hope of mankind (Ning 213). His life was regarded as an incredible legend in contemporary China (Zhu 204).

Thirdly, Wei An was more affected by Western literature, while most of contemporary Chinese writers are heavily influenced by traditional Chinese ecological

² This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 但我敢说我是一个为了这个星球的现在与未来自觉地尽可能减少消费的人。

In the rest of this thesis, only the page numbers will be given if the source of the citations and quotations is *Shangdi zhi zi*.

thought. Contemporary Chinese writers can draw on both traditional Chinese and Western ecological ethical sources to gain moral insight into the conditions of the world (X. Lin 58; Q. Wei, “Zouxiang” 94). Wei An’s writing is an interesting example of how Western literature influenced Chinese literature during the last two decades of the 20th century.

IV. Previous Research on Wei An

Some scholars have recognized the value of Wei An’s writing and have arrived at some provocative conclusions regarding his work. Wei Qingqi 韦清琦, a Chinese ecocritic, wrote about Wei An in her 2004 Ph.D. dissertation “Zouxiang yizhong lüse jingdian: Xin shiqi wenxue de shengtaixue yanjiu 走向一种绿色经典：新时期文学的生态学研究 (Towards a Green Canon: An Ecological Study of ‘New Period’ Literature)”. A part of this dissertation about Wei An was also published in another paper of hers in 2005 (Q. Wei, “Shengtai” 107-112). In her dissertation, Wei Qingqi discusses Wei An’s writing in the whole of the third section of her Chapter 7 “Research on Writers” and in the “Debate on Vegetarianism” section of her Chapter 3, Preface, Conclusion, and other parts, around 10 pages of her dissertation altogether. Wei Qingqi considers Wei An as one of the most important nature writers in contemporary China, and Wei An’s writing as an excellent piece of classic green writing, a typical piece of deep ecological writing, and “a green canon”. She claims that Wei An’s writing shows a non-anthropocentric perspective, which is not easy to find in other Chinese literary works. Wei Qingqi also considers Wei An’s vegetarianism as a good example for understanding the vegetarian debate in China; Wei Qingqi talks about the following

characteristics of Wei An's writing: Wei An's writing follows the tune of nature rather than that of industrial society, which is a feature of ecological writing; Wei An considered the objective nature itself as a sensitive, emotional living being not an unfeeling object; Wei An made nature narrate itself in his writing, by adopting an egalitarian perspective to look at nonhuman beings like sparrows, instead of having the arrogant human attitude, to speak on behalf of nature; Wei An viewed every being in nature, even every tiny creature, as an intimate family member, and depicted them with great care and love; Wei An was merciful to everything on the earth; Wei An appreciated the original appearance of everything on the earth, and called for a return to nature and a close contact with nature through activities like labouring in the field; Wei An disliked scientific progress changing the original features of the earth and everything on it; Wei An objected to and criticized modern industrial civilization and progress. Wei Qingqi also talks about the paradox of Wei An's vegetarianism and considers that it was unnecessary for Wei An to stick to vegetarianism (Q. Wei "Zouxiang" iv, 46-49, 84-90, 94). Wei Qingqi's work enumerated many of characteristics of Wei An's nature writing, though briefly, and provided a rather integral picture of Wei An's writing. However, perhaps because the reviews on Wei An only account for a small part of her dissertation, Wei Qingqi did not deeply explore Wei An's ideas. Moreover, she did not devote much space to the way Wei An formed his ecological views, nor spell out how deep ecology was related to Wei An's life philosophy. Nor did she criticize the weak points in Wei An's writing.

Lin Xianzhi 林贤治, another Chinese critic, wrote another important 11 page article on Wei An after Wei An passed away in 1999 and briefly introduced Wei An's writing

again in a long essay “Wushi nian: Sanwen yu ziyou de yizhong guancha 五十年: 散文与自由的一种观察 (Fifty Years: Observation on Essays and Freedom)” in 2000. In these two articles, Lin recalls memories of Wei An as a friend and comments on Wei An’s work. He thinks that Wei An was the last saint in the 20th century, a kind-hearted person who understood labour and love, a writer of prose who was original and creative. He thinks that Wei An’s writing style was like a lake, that is silent and poetic. He also points out that Wei An’s spiritual sources were Western, such as the influence of Thoreau and Jean-Henri Casimir Fabre. He emphasizes that Wei An’s worship and love for the life of even the tiniest creatures on the earth was great and rare in the history of Chinese writers. Lin claims that *All that Happens on the Earth* was the first book to incorporate “land ethic”, a theory built on love for everything on the earth, as a literary theme into the long history of Chinese literature. For Chinese literature, he said, lacks the soul of being involved with everything on the earth. Lin also praises the fact that Wei An focused on the spiritual aspect rather than the material aspect of life, and adhered to nonviolence and vegetarianism (X. Lin “Wushi nian” 57-59; “Wei” 168-178). Lin’s writing on Wei An is insightful, graceful, and poetic. It attracted a lot of attention to Wei An’s work. Perhaps because the two articles are general reviews, Lin expressed his ideas about Wei An concisely, based on his reading and personal relationship with Wei An, but he did not elaborate on these points.

Yuan Yi 袁毅, the editor of *Son of God*, wrote a 25 page long article as his “Introduction” for this book. In this article, Yuan recalls his personal impression of Wei An as his friend and his editor. He supplies some details of Wei An’s kindness to his friends and even strangers, and passionately acclaims Wei An as an honest, integral, and

caring person. Yuan also gives us some details of other aspects of Wei An's life, which are valuable for assembling Wei An's biography. In terms of his writing and worldview, Yuan thought that Wei An had a natural link to nature and folk, that he was loyal to the earth, and he tried to observe and experience everything happening on the earth. Yuan also appreciated Wei An's restraint in vegetarianism, advocacy of nonviolence, and his concern for the improvement of human spiritual life. In the end, he viewed Wei An as a humble and pure son of nature (Yuan, "Introduction" 3-27). Yuan's article provided us with a different perspective from one of Wei An's friends and editors, and furnishes us with a rather comprehensive picture of Wei An's personal life and his writing.

Besides the above three articles, there are a few more academic journal articles on Wei An's writing, such as Wu, Zhen'ge 伍振戈's paper and Feng Jiping 冯济平's paper. Wu's paper was published in 2001. In this paper, Wu talks about Wei An's love to nature and concern of human mentality, and Wei An's objection to materialism and modernization; Wu considers Wei An's writing as a unique and valuable existence in Chinese literature. Feng's paper was published in 2003. In this article, Feng analyzes the Feng claims that "the content of Wei An's [writing] (original natural world) and the form (simple words and phrases) produce [a] superficial limpid beauty. The sentimental appeal in Wei An's [work] produces [an] intimate [mystical] beauty. The superficial limpid beauty and the intimate [mystical] beauty [make] an organic whole (Feng 45)". This paper offers a reading of Wei An's nature writing from the aesthetic perspective.

There are not many academic articles on Wei An specifically in the journals so far, but there are another 24 articles and one poem about Wei An in *Son of God*, and other short articles or messages on Wei An on the internet. These articles are mainly about the

memories and comments of Wei An from his friends, or the comments and thoughts on Wei An from his readers. These articles offer more details of Wei An's biography and show a part of the reader response to his writing.

In general, established reading of Wei An mentions most of the main characteristics of his writing and his views, such as his love for nature, love for every living being on the earth, resistance to the industrial society, the hope of a return to nature and old fashioned lifestyles, advocacy of nonviolence and vegetarianism, the influence of Western literature, etc. There is no doubt that through this research on Wei An we have gained some insight into his achievements. However, as Wei Qingqi wrote, the value of Wei An's writing contrasts sharply with the lack of respect and recognition Wei An received during his lifetime and following his death (Q. Wei "Zouxiang" 94). There are only a few journal papers specifically on Wei An, and most of the other articles are general reviews, simple comments, or commemorations of Wei An. Moreover, most ocurrent research on Wei An has remained at a sentimental or empirical stage, praising him or gathering information about him rather than moving into an academic exploration and analysis of all of his writing, and relating it to his life philosophy, the deep ecological trend and the whole context of Chinese environmental writing. Wei An's views on nature and society were strongly associated with each other, and they depend heavily on his deep ecological worldview, but so far reviewers have only talked about Wei An's attitudes towards land ethic and anti-modernism separately but did not view the whole of his life philosophy from the perspective of deep ecology. And they failed to situate his writing within the broader perspective of deep ecology in general within China or elsewhere. Furthermore, though some people have noticed the great influence of Western literature on Wei An, of

writers like Henry David Thoreau and Leo Tolstoy, they seldom examined the depth of such influence or other influences which contributed to the formation of Wei An's deep ecological view. Last but not least, the weak points and certain paradoxes in Wei An's writing were seldom mentioned. However, without such a critique or elucidation we cannot hope to do justice to the complexity of Wei An's ecological worldview nor understand its place in the history of China's deep ecological thought.

In a nutshell, the comprehensive and careful research on Wei An's writing that would help us to understand and evaluate his thought has yet to be carried out. This thesis will try to remedy this situation. Accordingly, in the following chapters, Wei An's works primarily from a deep ecological perspective and focus on the formative factors of his deep ecological view, his views of nature and society and their relationship, as well as some critiques of his ecosophy and writing will be discussed.

Chapter 1: Crisis of Modernism in China, Western Literature, and

Life Experiences: How Wei An Developed His Ecosophy

Because of [*Walden*], I felt as though I had a rebirth. The spiritual enjoyment and psychological influence it brought me is not comparable with that of any other book I have read. It teaches people to simplify life and to resist the lure of the money-oriented value system. It filled me with faith and helped me find the direction towards the simple life I adopted from then on. (119)³

--“Ren bixu zhongyu ziji 人必须忠于自己 (One Must be Loyal to Oneself)

As mentioned in the Introduction, Wei An had a well developed outlook that was considerably different from the common worldview of the 1990s’ China. How did Wei An develop his deep ecological view? This chapter will discuss several factors of that development: firstly, his reaction to China’s environmental crisis and social problems in the late 20th century; secondly, the influence of Western literature; and thirdly, his own life experience and personality.

I. Reaction to the Crisis of Modernization in Contemporary China

The 1980s and the 1990s brought greater social change to China than any other period in its history. After Mao’s death in 1976, Deng Xiaoping came to the forefront among China’s leaders and started a series of reforms that touched almost every segment of society (Grasso, Corrin and Kort 235). China’s aim is to quickly develop into modern society, and to catch up with the Western developed countries. While the nation has

³ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 由于这本书，我觉得我获得了一次新生。它给我带来的精神喜悦和灵魂颤动，是我读过的其他书所不能比拟的。它教人简化生活，抵制金钱至上主义的诱惑。它使我建立了一种信仰，确立了我今后朴素的生活方式。

achieved great success in economics, the side effects of modernization have also become apparent. Wei An lived through these changes from his teenage years onwards.

On the environment level, China's rapid economic growth has depleted the natural resource base and caused serious pollution problems. China's natural resources are limited and the ratio between resources and population is much lower than the world's average, but rapid economic growth along with the huge demographic pressure has transformed China into the second largest energy consumer in the world during the last two decades. Besides the scarcity of natural resources, industrial development has created widespread pollution that has damaged the environment, including air pollution, water pollution, and soil pollution, which are harmful to nature and human health (Jacques 61; Lee 35). According to a report released by the World Bank, 750,000 people died of pollution in China in 2007 (Spencer A1-A2).

Another change in China after the 1980s occurred on the spiritual level. Beginning in 1978 the society's central task switched from "class struggle" to "economic development". To be rich was glorious and a mainstream value (J. Wang i). That was why Wei An said, "it seems that overnight there is only money left in the world (156)."⁴ In addition, the road to democracy was cut off, when following a series of demonstrations led by Chinese labour activists, students, and intellectuals between April 15 and June 4, 1989, the pro-democracy movement was ended by the Tian'anmen Square Massacre. The Tian'anmen Square incident caused many Chinese people's worldview to collapse. Most Chinese people suffered a loss or crisis of belief; they could not believe in Marxism-Leninism and socialism as before; they lost their passion for political issues

⁴ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 仿佛一夜之间，天下只剩下了金钱。

and democracy; and they became sceptical towards authority, the official ideology, and human nature. Instead, they focused on their own interest rather than the collective or national interest, disregarding the rightness of the means by which it was achieved, because they found that only wealth and power were reliable and acceptable goals of the current Chinese society (J. Liu). Hence, not surprisingly people like Wei An concluded that people, since 1978, especially in modern cities, had become corrupt, and he worried about people's alienation from nature, their loneliness, their lack of community and the disparity between rich and poor.

Wei An observed the changes happening around him. He saw that the Yangtze River had become so polluted that it turned into the second "Yellow River", a river famous for its yellow color (90-92). He saw that a part of Xiaoxing'anling Forest had been cut down and that only second-growth trees were left, standing lonely like little orphans in a plundered village (*Dadi* 75). He experienced at first hand the serious air pollution in the city of Beijing (159). He saw that the meadows in the Hebei plain, where he grew up, had been replaced by farms. He observed that more and more wild animals had lost their habitats. For example, Wei An said that the number of birds' nests had greatly fallen, and that he could see more than 30 species of birds in his childhood but in the 1990s he barely saw any other kinds of birds except magpies and sparrows (35, 39-40, 51). Wei An wrote, "Nowadays all that is made by the gods is decreasing, while all that is made by man is increasing. Bird nests, earth, plants, air and water have met a common unpredictable fate, because the overwhelming influence of economic development despises everything else. Everyone who is familiar with and cares about

villages has experienced or seen an unprecedented and total change of transformation of their character (79).”⁵

Another example that shows Wei An’s disappointment with modern society is his comment on the disappearance of rabbits from the fields. Wei An agreed with Thoreau that it must be a poor country indeed if it does not support a hare (13). He considered rabbits as the soul of the land. However, human expansion had made the rabbit disappear. Wei An was saddened by this. He walked through the fields in his neighbourhood looking for rabbits for a whole day but found no rabbits (51). On April Fools’ Day, he played a joke on one of his friends pretending that he had finally caught a wild rabbit by hand, as if to say that the goal of catching a rabbit could only be realized on April Fools’ Day. Wei An wrote: “yes, rabbits have disappeared from our land, as the rabbits sigh in a Western folk song: this is a human era (51).”⁶

Meanwhile, Wei An also sensed the nation’s social problems. He felt that since the economic reform the villagers had lost their kindness and purity, and the people in the city had become more indifferent and colder to each other. Quite probably he also experienced the trauma and loss of hope brought on by the Tian’anmen massacre of 1989, though he did not talk about it directly in the writing. The unpleasant incident might lead him to see clearly the downside of current society and the corruption of people’s morals that followed in its wake.

⁵ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 在神造的东西日渐减少、人造的东西日渐增添的今天，在蔑视一切的经济的巨大步伐下，鸟巢与土地、植被、大气、水，有着同一莫测的命运。在过去短暂的一二十年间，每个关注自然和熟知乡村的人，都已亲身感受或目睹了它们前所未有的沧海桑田性的变迁。

⁶ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 是的，野兔已从我们的土地上销声匿迹，正如它们在一支西方民歌中所慨叹的：“这是人的时代。”

In a word, China experienced great economic, environmental and social changes in the 1980s and the 1990s. And the environmental crisis and social problems he saw around him led Wei An to a reconsideration of the value of modernization and to the formation of his deep ecological view in response to the crisis and the problems.

II. Influence of Western Literature

Problems with the reality of China might have provided Wei An with the motivation to ponder deep ecological questions. Regarding the spiritual resource of his deep ecological views, Western literature played a vital role. Wei An once made a list of the writers and poets who influenced him the most, supplied him with faith and helped shape his writing. It includes Henry David Thoreau, Leo Tolstoy, Rabindranath Tagore, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Francis Jammes, Kahlil Gibran, Hans Christian Andersen, William Blake, Hermann Hesse, Victor Hugo, Juan Ramón Jiménez, Hesiod, Sheikh Saadi, Friedrich Schiller, Albert Schweitzer, Marcus Aurelius, and Shams al-Mo'ali Abol-hasan Ghaboos ibn Wushmgir. He also admired the ecologist Aldo Leopold very much. None of the writers on the list are Chinese, and most of them are Western writers (140-141; *Dadi* 161-162).

As mentioned in the Introduction, ancient Chinese thought contains a richness of ecological wisdom derived from philosophy, literature and folk religious traditions. Although weakened by official ideology, it has influenced modern and contemporary Chinese literature. For instance, a modern Chinese writer, Shen Congwen 沈从文's "Biancheng 边城 (Border Town)" was influenced by Taoism. In contemporary China, the majority of environmental writing has been influenced by traditional Chinese ecological

awareness. For example, Xu Gang 徐刚, a famous Chinese environmental writer, conveys many Taoist ideas through his nature writing). However, traditional Chinese thought contributes little to Wei An's writing. Wei An said, though Chinese literature had a long history, it had not entered into his vision and he did not read much about it. He was not very interested in traditional Chinese literature, though he said that he rather liked some Chinese writers, including Tao Yuanming 陶渊明, Fan Zhongyan 范仲淹, Su Shi 苏轼, Lu Xun 鲁迅, Feng Zikai 丰子恺, Ba Jin 巴金, Zhang Chengzhi 张承志, Yi Ping 一平 (104, 141; *Dadi* 94, 161-162). He was even unfamiliar with *Honglou meng* 红楼梦 (Dream of the Red Chamber), one of the masterpieces of Chinese fiction. He mentioned that he did not read much of it not because he lacked time, but because he lacked the motivation and interest in it, and because of his own literary view and belief (140-141; *Dadi* 161-162). Likewise, although Laozi and Zhuangzi's words are frequently quoted by other contemporary Chinese nature writers, Wei An never cited words by Laozi or Zhuangzi, except that he once mentioned *Tao Te Ching* without any further explanation (*Dadi* 102). In contrast to his frequent quotations from Western literature, he only quoted one verse by Han Yu 韩愈, a Chinese poet of the Tang Dynasty and another verse by Bai Juyi 白居易, another Chinese poet of the Tang Dynasty (36; *Dadi* 81).

Wei An explained his attitude towards Chinese literature like this: "in Chinese literature, people could see almost everything, such as cleverness, wisdom, beauty, artistry, skill, individual kindness and hatred, self-protection and so on, but one could not find a soul sharing the feeling of oneness with every other being on the earth, something

every writer should have (*Dadi* 162).”⁷ Hence, Wei An chose to embrace the Western instead of the Chinese literary tradition.

Wei An’s preference for Western literature reflects a larger trend, namely the growing Western cultural influence, on the life of China of the 1990s. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), because of strict governmental ideology and control, little Western literature was permitted to circulate in China except for works that could be held up as targets for political criticism. After the Cultural Revolution, China opened itself up to the world. Chinese people, especially intellectuals, were eager to learn about Western culture, literature and ideas. To meet people’s needs, in the 1980s and the 1990s China began to introduce Western literature and theory in large volume to its people. Many Western works, particularly those dealing with philosophy, literature, and society, were translated and published. For example, in the early 1980s Sichuan People’s Press published over 100 books in a series of “Zouxiang weilai 走向未来 (Heading towards the Future)”, most of which were about foreign society, humanities, social science and law. As well in the 1980s, Yuan Kejia 袁可嘉 edited a series of eight books titled “Waiguo xiandai pai wenxue zuopin xuan 外国现代派文学作品选 (Selected Foreign Modernist Literary Works)”, all of which became best sellers then. The introduction of Western thought and literature to China changed the nature and appearance of Chinese thought and literature. Many famous writers have been influenced by and imitated Western works. For example, Mo Yan 莫言’s stories have been influenced by Gabriel García

⁷ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 在中国文学里，人们可以看到一切：聪明、智慧、美景、意境、技艺、个人恩怨、明哲保身等等，唯独不见一个作家应有的与万物荣辱与共的灵魂。

Márquez; Yu Hua 余华's writing has been influenced by Franz Kafka, Yasunari Kawabata 川端康成 and Alain Robbe-Grillet (X. Chen 17-18).

Wei An began college in 1981 and studied in the Department of Philosophy at Branch One School of Renmin University for about five years. It was the period when much Western thought and literature was introduced to China. Wei An read many Western philosophical and literary works and their influence is detectable in his writing by the large number of citations and references to Western works. Wei An also wrote quite a few reviews on a large number of Western authors such as Henry David Thoreau and Francis Jammes, including a long review titled “Zuojia shengya (40 ze) 作家生涯 (40 则) (40 Vignettes about Writers' Careers)”, all of which express his preferences for certain writers. By comparison, he seldom commented on Chinese writers except Lu Xun, Zhang Chengzhi, Zhang Wei 张炜, and the writers who were his personal friends: Haizi 海子, Hei Dachun 黑大春, Yiping 一平 (148, 154, *Dadi* 118-158, 201). In general, the influence of Western writers on Wei An's worldview was great and it meant much more than that of Chinese Literature to him. Among Western writers, Henry David Thoreau, Francis Jammes, and Leo Tolstoy were the most influential for Wei An.

1. Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862)

Henry Thoreau was the one of the writers who influenced Wei An the most. In his study, portraits of Thoreau and Leo Tolstoy hung on the wall as long as Wei An stayed and worked there. Wei An told his friends that he lived in the “shadow” of the two great writers (Yuan, “Introduction” 23-24). Wei An wrote three essays especially on Thoreau: “Ren bixu zhongyu ziji 人必须忠于自己 (One Must be Loyal to Oneself)”, “Thoreau

yiwei zhe shenme: zhi Shu Cai 梭罗意味着什么: 致树才 (What is Thoreau's Significance: To Shu Cai)", and "Wo yu Thoreau 我与梭罗 (Thoreau and I)" (97-100, 119-132). He also talked about Thoreau's writing and worldview in several other articles (13, 34, 102-103, 116-117; *Dadi* 200).

Wei An said that Thoreau was the writer closest to his spirit, predilection and personality. He highly praised Thoreau's *Walden* and was greatly influenced by it. He was attracted by *Walden* when he first read it in 1986, and made more than ten thousand words of reading notes on it. He considered this book unique and claimed that no other book in the world could compare with it. Wei An cherished *Walden* as no other book and collected many editions of it. Wei An also said that he liked *Walden* more than any poem in the world, and under *Walden*'s influence he stopped writing poetry. After that his main interest turned into reading and writing of prose (123).

Thoreau's ideas influenced Wei An in several ways: firstly, Thoreau's idea of returning to nature and living in harmony with nature edified Wei An's view of nature. Thoreau was considered as one of the precursors of nature writing. Thoreau did not like the modern cities of his time and enjoyed a life of solitude in the woods. Thoreau considered the wild animals and plants as his friends, and cherished wild animals' trust in him. For example, he thought that a sparrow perching for a while on his shoulder was a great honour, for he thought that he was more distinguished by that than by any epaulet he could have worn. Similarly, Wei An thought that wasps' choosing his home to nest in was an honour for him. Thoreau paid much attention to small beings such as ants, rabbits, sparrows, squirrels and partridges, and so did Wei An. Wei An's fondness for rabbits was also influenced by comments of Thoreau's on rabbits. Thoreau liked rabbits and

considered rabbits “among the most simple and indigenous animal products; ancient and venerable families known to antiquity as to modern times; of the very hue and substance of Nature (Thoreau 302).” Wei An quoted Thoreau’s words about rabbits and said that he also thought that rabbits were the soul of the land (13, 51).

Secondly, Thoreau’s ideas of simple living and pursuing a deeper spiritual life provided Wei An with the insights necessary for advocating the simple living lifestyle and allowed him to criticize the modern civilization. Thoreau was mainly an advocate of simple living. Thoreau asserted that many people were slaves of their own wealth, and could not find any time for rest in their lives. In the first chapter of *Walden*, Thoreau discussed how to live simply, and demonstrated that people did not need much to support a simple life by his experiments and practice at Walden Pond. Thoreau proved that, if people chose to live a simple life, they did not need to work that hard, and that they could have more time to enjoy life and pursue higher spiritual goals. Wei An agreed with Thoreau and asserted that *Walden* gave him a rebirth, made him have faith in life and helped him find the direction towards the simple life he later adopted (119). In addition, Thoreau’s emphasis on the richness of the spiritual world also influenced Wei An. Wei An thought that Thoreau tried many kinds of professions in order to find a life of quality and spiritual richness. Wei An wrote, “Thoreau makes us understand that people can gain freedom and dignity only after getting away from the desire for material. Extra money can only help people get extra things, but what the soul needs cannot be bought with

money. Thoreau's idea of purifying the inner world will edify future generations forever, although it is neglected by modern society (121)."⁸

Thirdly, Thoreau's idea on vegetarianism contributed to Wei An's adoption of vegetarianism. Thoreau did not use tea, coffee, butter, milk, or fresh meat for both economic and spiritual considerations. In terms of economics, Thoreau thought that if he did not eat meat he did not need to work hard to pay for expensive meat. In terms of spirit, Thoreau believed "that every man who has ever been earnest to preserve his higher or poetic faculties in the best condition has been particularly inclined to abstain from animal food, and from much food of any kind (Thoreau 231)." Thoreau had "no doubt that it is a part of the destiny of the human race, in its gradual improvement, to leave off eating animals, as surely as the savage tribes have left off eating each other when they came in contact with the more civilized (Thoreau 232)". In an article Wei An introduced Thoreau's vegetarian ideas with approval and regarded Thoreau as a good example of a vegetarian (116).

Fourthly, Thoreau's philosophy of nonviolent resistance, which is expressed in *Civil Disobedience* also played a role in Wei An's thinking on nonviolence. Wei An praised highly Thoreau's nonviolent fight for civil rights and the abolition of slavery. Although Wei An formed his nonviolent views mainly under the influence of Tolstoy and Gandhi, Thoreau was probably an early influence for Wei An on this subject.

Wei An's writing style was also affected by Thoreau. For example, they both preferred to use natural beings as metaphors; both liked to use scientific words to describe nature; both tended to use long sentences and quotations; and both wrote from

⁸ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 梭罗使我们懂得人只有从物欲的泥淖中挣脱出来才能保持尊严, 获得自由。多余的钱财只能够买多余的东西, 人的灵魂必需的东西是不需要花钱买的。虽然梭罗陶冶内心的主张已被现代社会所忽视, 但他的理想却永远启迪着后人。

an intellectual perspective. Wei An compared a paragraph in *Walden* with one of his own poems, showing that his writing was very similar to Thoreau's. Wei An said that he had finally found a writer about whose writing style he was extraordinarily excited and in total agreement with. Wei An thought that Thoreau's words were "organic", for Thoreau used the living beings of nature as metaphors in his writing, and he considered Thoreau's writing style free, casual and as simple and open as the land (124-127). After reading Thoreau Wei An gave up writing poetry and turned to prose.

From worldview to writing style, Thoreau had a significant influence on Wei An. *Walden* changed Wei An's writing and worldview and even his lifestyle. As Wei An said, because of *Walden*, he was reborn and adopted the principles of a simple life (119). It is then quite possible that Wei An would not have developed his deep ecological views fully without the influence of Thoreau.

2. Francis Jammes (1868-1938)

Wei An's favourite poet was Francis Jammes, a French poet who lived most of his life in his native region of Béarn and the Basque Country. Jammes's poems are known for lyricism and for singing the pleasures of a humble and harmonious country life filled with donkeys and peasant maidens. Jammes believed that everything has a spirit. Jammes had a strong love for the land, for every living creature and for the beauty of all these creatures. He was a friend to birds, flowers and donkeys. As Shu Cai 树才, a Chinese poet who translated Jammes's poems into Chinese, says, Jammes regarded the land as the root of his life (Shu Cai 44).

Although Jammes was not well known in China, Wei An was greatly influenced by his poetry. Wei An wrote an article titled "Wo re'ai de shiren 我热爱的诗人：弗朗西斯

· 雅姆 (The Poet I Love: Francis Jammes) to introduce Jammes to Chinese readers. He also talked about Jammes in several other parts of his writing (103, 109, 132-135; *Dadi* 194-195). Wei An said several times that he loved Jammes's poems the most (109, 133; *Dadi* 195; Shu Cai 48). He also recommended Jammes's prose to be included in "A Series of Famous Prose in the world 世界散文名著丛书" (109). He even planned to translate one of Jammes's prose collections from French into Chinese with a friend (Shu Cai 48). At the end of his life, Wei An requested that his friend Shu Cai 树才 translate more of Jammes's poems for him. Shu Cai thus translated another 14 poems by Jammes especially for him. Although he was already very sick at that time, Wei An read the 14 poems in one evening in May of 1999. Wei An also requested that Shu Cai read two of Jammes's poems at his funeral (Shu Cai 48).

There are several ways in which Jammes's influence shows up. Firstly, Jammes's poetry provided Wei An with the picture of the ideal rural life Wei An had long sought. Jammes described all of creation as kind and the rural life as desirable, wonderful, and full of love, sacrifice, tolerance and harmony. These depictions of the country filled with beauty showed Wei An how wonderful the pre-modern society was, and confirmed Wei An's preference for the rural area over the city.

Secondly, it is likely that Jammes influenced Wei An with his love to everything. Jammes's love was similar to a religious love, and extended to all the beings on the earth. Jammes might not reflect on many philosophical issues as deeply as Thoreau did, but his love for nature was honest, pure, simple, and selfless. As Wei An commented, "[Jammes's poetry] emanates a spirit that makes people go beyond normal human nature, or, to put it another way, it makes possible another side of human nature which is pure,

broad, kind and simple (133).”⁹ Jammes’s strong love for nature and all life reinforced Wei An’s love for “all that happens on the earth”, which was the basis of his deep ecology, and probably the motive for nonviolence and vegetarianism.

Thirdly, Jammes had a preference for showing the bright side of things rather than the dark side of things. Wei An appreciated this point. Wei An said that Jammes’s poetry did not portray the present reality of mankind, but the potential of mankind. Wei An thought that Jammes’s writing lit a candle in the darkness of humanity (134-135). Much like Jammes, Wei An too was dedicated to singing about the beauty and kindness of nature and society, rarely depicting the downside.

Fourthly, Jammes’s lifestyle, particularly his rejection of city life, had an impact on Wei An. Jammes lived a peaceful life in the country far away from the lively, busy, bustling and crowded city of Paris. Wei An admired Jammes’s peaceful life and its isolation from the city. He quoted Rainer Maria Rilke with approval, as claiming that Jammes’s voice was like the sound of a bell in the clear sky. The metaphor of the bell in the clear sky suggests that Jammes’s voice was pure, limpid, and precious and was different from those of the complicated and busy world. It also symbolized Jammes’s life which was lived outside of the mainstream value in the world. Jammes’s isolation also encouraged Wei An to keep a distance from modern life and speak with a voice that was very different from the voices of mainstream.

⁹ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: [雅姆的诗]散发着一种令人欣悦的高于人性之上或者说展现了人性另一种可能的清澈、宽阔、仁爱、朴拙的气息。

3. Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910)

In addition to Thoreau and Jammes, Wei An was also greatly influenced by Leo Tolstoy, the Russian writer and philosopher. As he said, he lived in the “shadow” of Thoreau and Tolstoy (Yuan, “Introduction” 24). Wei An considered Tolstoy as the noblest person in human history and the greatest of people’s artists (*Dadi* 116-117). Wei An wrote a vignette titled “Weida de gushi 伟大的故事 (The Great Story)” to praise Tolstoy’s life and writing, a vignette titled “Feibaoli zhuyi de keneng 非暴力主义的可能 (The Possibility of Nonviolence)” to introduce Tolstoy’s advocacy of non-violence, *Dadi* 176-177, and another Vignette “Leo Tolstoy and Bernard Shaw 托尔斯泰与萧伯纳” to talk about Tolstoy’s literary view and his relationship with Shaw (*Dadi* 117, 170-171, 176-177). Wei An also mentioned Tolstoy’s ideas in other articles (71, 117; *Dadi* 178, 180, 183).

Tolstoy’s impact on Wei An can be seen from several considerations. The first aspect is Tolstoy’s non-violence, which became one of the main principles of Wei An’s life. This issue will be discussed later, in Chapter 3. The second aspect is Tolstoy’s pursuit of a rich spiritual world and simple living. Similar to Thoreau, Tolstoy emphasized the spiritual world while belittling material satisfaction. Tolstoy led a simple life, particularly in his later years. Wei An admired Tolstoy’s saying that spiritual progress, namely, self-realization of individuals was the only kind of unquestionable progress in human history (*Dadi* 180). Tolstoy’s principles of living a simple life and view of human “progress” helped Wei An to arrive at his worldview. Thirdly, Tolstoy’s view of nature also inspired Wei An. Wei An agreed with Tolstoy that nature was the most direct embodiment of truth, goodness and beauty and that lovely nature was the best

place for people to eliminate their evil and hatred (*Dadi* 178). Fourthly, Tolstoy became a vegetarian in his later life, and served as a good example for Wei An (117). Fifthly, it is likely that Tolstoy's literary view also impacted Wei An. Tolstoy thought that literature should have a noble and serious aim. Wei An mentioned that Tolstoy did not like Johann Wolfgang von Goethe or Shakespeare, for he thought that Goethe brought harmful bourgeois selfishness to the people and Shakespeare was hypocritical and despicable (*Dadi* 183). Similarly, Wei An thought that his purpose of writing prose was to fulfill his responsibility toward the world by educating and edifying people. Wei An did not consider literature as entertainment, but as having a serious aim (137). Tolstoy was probably the second most influential person in Wei An's spiritual world. Wei An regarded Tolstoy as his moral mentor.

4. Other Western Writers

Besides Thoreau, Jammes and Tolstoy, a number of other Western writers played an important part in shaping Wei An's deep ecological views such as Aldo Leopold with his land ethic, which will be discussed in Chapter 2.

Two American ecological writers, John Robinson Jeffers (1887–1962) and Gary Snyder (born in 1930), impressed Wei An by their love for nature and rejection of modernization. John Robinson Jeffers is known for his work about the central California coast. He was deeply repelled by modernization. His short verses demonstrate a preference for the natural world over what he saw as the negative influence of civilization and mankind. He thought that mankind was too self-centered and too indifferent to the astonishing beauty of the world around it. Jeffers's preference of nature over civilization and his critique of human nature supported Wei An's anti-modernism. Wei An agreed

with Jeffers that the ultimate aim of life was to pursue goodness and beauty and not to seek comfort. Wei An also appreciated Jeffers's isolated rural life in California. Wei An thought that Jeffers was a particularly good example to show the rightness of anti-modernism, for Jeffers was American and America was the most modern country in the world (*Dadi* 171).

Gary Snyder is immersed both in Buddhist spirituality and nature. He translated ancient Chinese and modern Japanese literature into English and was greatly influenced by Han Shan 寒山, a Chinese poet who lived during the Tang Dynasty. Snyder has urged people to give up the corrupt industrial civilization and to return to nature (X. Chen 98-102, 168; Zhao 132-133). Wei An was interested in Snyder's affection for nature and his rejection of modernization. Wei An spoke briefly of Snyder's experiences and emphasized that Snyder lived in a house built by his own hands and that he refused to use any industrial product that might harm nature. Wei An also greatly appreciated Snyder's saying: "among the most ruthlessly exploited classes: animals, trees, water, air, grass (Snyder 39; *Dadi* 172)."

In addition to these two American writers, some Russian and Soviet writers gave Wei An the inspiration to condemn modern civilization. One of these was the Fyodor Aleksandrovich Abramov (1920–1983), a Russian novelist and literary critic. Abramov's work focused on the difficult lives of the Russian peasants. Abramov advocated preserving the existing countryside, but sought to bring certain city benefits to the country. Wei An paraphrased Abramov's words as follows: rural villages should exist for ever because the land, animals, and human relationship with them are the best places for

human nature to flourish (*Dadi* 173). Like Abramov, Wei An thought that villages could preserve the goodness of human nature.

Another Russian writer Wei An admired was Aleksandr Isaevich Solzhenitsyn (born 1918), a novelist, dramatist and historian known for his writings about the Gulag, the Soviet labour camp system. What interested Wei An was not the Gulag writing but Solzhenitsyn's "Commencement Address", which was presented in "A World Split Apart" when Solzhenitsyn was given an honorary Literary Degree from Harvard University in 1978. In this article, Solzhenitsyn criticized that modern Western civilization was on the dangerous trend to worship man and his material needs, and that it made people ignore everything except physical well-being and accumulation of material goods, as if human life did not have any superior sense. Wei An paraphrased Solzhenitsyn with approval that the improvement of the moral level of society was more important than development of economics or other institutions and that greedy civilization and the limited ideas of progress should be opposed. Wei An appreciated Solzhenitsyn's critique of the problems brought on by modern Western civilization (*Dadi* 180).

Another Western writer who influenced Wei An is Arnold Joseph Toynbee (1889 – 1975), a British historian. Wei An read Toynbee's *A Study of History*, and agreed with his idea that people should control their greed and consumerism, both of which he said had been stimulated by the industrial revolution (118). Tokutomi Roka (1868-1927), a Japanese Meiji-period novelist known for his nature writing such as *Shizen to Jinsei* (Nature and Man) (12; *Dadi* 111), Philip Roth (born in 1933), an American writer living in the country with his wife, known for his *Goodbye, Columbus* (*Dadi* 184), and Jerome

David Salinger (born 1919), another American writer best known for his *The Catcher in the Rye*, living in the natural environment in the country (Dadi 201) were also praised by Wei An in his writing. This list would be longer if we consider Wei An's own list of the writers who heavily influenced him and the numerous Western writers he commented upon or mentioned with admiration in his literary reviews and other articles. Many of these writers have a preference for nature over modernization, and this enhanced Wei An's love for nature and his rejection of modernization and contributed to the formation of Wei An's ecosophy.

In general, Wei An absorbed many ideas from the Western literary and philosophical works that he had read. Through his reading of Western texts, Wei An learned about anti-modernism, the focus on spiritual progress instead of economic progress, the pure love for all the beings on the earth, fondness for country life and wild nature, nonviolence, vegetarianism, simple living, and so on. Nearly all that makes up Wei An's ecosophy can be traced back to his reading of Western literature. Western literature provided Wei An with the rich spiritual resources he needed and contributed greatly to the deep ecology that he espoused and sought to teach.

III. Experience and Personality

In addition to the factors discussed above, Wei An's own experience and personality also helped in shaping his deep ecological views.

1. Close Contact with Nature

Since Wei An grew up in a peasant family in a village, he had various experiences of rural life and close contact with nature. He considered his rural experience as very

precious. He cherished many memories of his childhood: mowing grass with his Fourth Aunt, swimming in the river near his village, observing the sparrows living in the cracks of the inner wall of a well, etc (*Dadi* 159-160). Wei An's impressions in the country since childhood gave him an affection for nature and the country, and not surprisingly he tended to embrace the values and ideas of traditional rural culture.

After Wei An graduated from university, he lived in a condominium on the outskirts of a county near Beijing City. He often walked around and observed small animals and plants in the field of his neighbourhood. His daily observations in the field inspired most of his writing about small animals and plants (158-159). Wei An even planned to write about the changes of nature through 24 *Jieqi* (24 solar terms of traditional lunar calendar throughout a year) by observing the same spot near his residence every *Jieqi* (159; Yuan, "Introduction" 14). Also, as mentioned in the Introduction, Wei An traveled around northern China on school holidays. He was very interested in experiencing various natural places such as the Gobi desert and the grasslands. The natural beauty of these places broadened Wei An's vision. These close contacts with nature provided him with the materials and opportunity for the reflection on what led to his deep ecological approach to all of life.

2. The Influence of Wei An's Fourth Aunt

His Fourth Aunt was a very important person in Wei An's life. Wei An wrote an article "Sigu四姑 (Fourth Aunt)" about her. In Wei An's description of her, Fourth Aunt has several characteristics. Firstly, her appearance was close to nature in the country in Wei An's opinion. She was not pretty, but Wei An thought that her appearance was very suited to the soil, the rain, wind and labour of the country and that she was born to be a

part of this natural world. Secondly, Fourth Aunt cared more about her spiritual world than material satisfaction. For example, she liked reading a lot, but did not care about what she ate. “She never ate at the table. She liked to take her bowl into an inside room and ate while reading. The rice and various dishes were often gone when she came out, but she did not mind. She was the last one of the family to go to bed at night; she often fell asleep while reading, so the light was on until dawn (*Dadi* 84-85).”¹⁰ Thirdly, Fourth Aunt was a spontaneous adherent of the theory of nonviolence. Like Wei An and his exemplar Leo Tolstoy, Fourth Aunt tried her best to make sure that no one hated her. Her carefulness in daily life seemed to be a little extreme. She never quarrelled with others. If a quarrel happened between her and her sisters or neighbours, she would apologize first, even if she was not at fault. “There seemed to be always an apologetic expression on her face all the time. She was the kind of person who gave up profits and was worried that her behaviour would harm others, and the kind of person who felt uneasy even if she received a little help from others (*Dadi* 85).”¹¹

Unfortunately, Fourth Aunt did not seem suited to life in the current society. According to Wei An, she could not find a person who was truly able to appreciate her, so she did not marry well, and suffered from what her good human nature brought to her. Wei An sighed: “I do not know how she accepts this unmerciful truth that the cold commercial clouds have spread from the city to the rural area, and how much her

¹⁰ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 她从不在饭桌吃饭，她喜欢端上饭碗，趴在里屋炕上边看边吃。等她从里屋出来，桌上饭菜，大多已经全无，但她并不在意。每晚，她在全家睡得最迟，经常在看书中睡去，而使灯亮到天明。

¹¹ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 她的脸上，似乎总是歉意的表情。她是那种遇利退让，唯恐自己的行为不慎而有碍外界；乐于奉献，得到些许帮助便坐卧不安的人。

traditional and warm human nature will pay for this (*Dadi* 87).”¹² From Wei An’s perspective, Fourth Aunt’s ideas could not prevail in society, for they were so very different from what the industrial society valued. Like Fourth Aunt, Wei An too felt that he could not be well accepted because his views on nature and society were very different from the dominant views.

In Wei An’s opinion, Fourth Aunt was the ideal person. “I feel that Fourth Aunt is the most desirable person for the country, whom the country uses all the essence of its history and beauty to raise (*Dadi* 86).”¹³ As an actual role model for Wei An, Fourth Aunt’s characteristics gave Wei An the first lesson on which he built his future deep ecological thought. Later, Wei An’s comprehensive reading of Western literature and reflections on the crisis of modernity finally affirmed and helped him systematize his deep ecology view.

3. Strong Compassion

Wei An said that he was very tender-hearted, even to the point of being a little extreme, and that he could not stand watching others killing even a chicken (*Dadi* 160). To many people killing a chicken, pig or sheep is a demonstration of masculine courage, while someone who does not kill animals is often mocked as a coward. Different from most of his peers, Wei An was very empathetic to every creature on the earth. He cared about the fate of wasps whose nest was destroyed (18); he felt very sorry for his putting honey near their nest which resulted in several wasps’ death (49-50); he criticized his

¹² This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 我不知在冷漠的商品烟云已由城市向乡村弥散的今天, 她将如何接受这一无情的现实, 她的传统的温暖人性将为此付出什么代价。

¹³ My translation, original Chinese: 我觉得四姑是乡村用它的历史和全部美的因素, 塑造的最为合乎它心愿的人。

friend's vicious killing of a sparrow (*Dadi* 161-162). Because of his compassion, Wei An would easily accept the thought that every life on the earth has its inherent value and right to survive. His strong compassion for all life also led him to accept nonviolence and vegetarianism. As the critic Lin Xianzhi said, Wei An's love for all beings was not only the result of some theories, but also came from an inborn trait and a gift from heaven (X. Lin, "Wei" 166).

4. Unable to Adapt to Modern City

Wei An's critique of the city also had something to do with his feeling ill-adapted to modern cities. What Wei An experienced in the city of Beijing was quite different from what he had in rural areas. Although he studied at a college in the city of Beijing for about five years, Wei An never seemed to fully adapt to the city style of life, or to physically and psychologically fit into the city.

In terms of the physical environment, Wei An could not endure the cloudy and foggy sky of the city of Beijing, where he could not see the stars and breathe deeply, so he seldom stayed overnight in the city of Beijing but returned to Changping even if it was quite late in the night when he did so (159).

Regarding his lifestyle, since he was used to the fun of the country activities, such as picking fruits from the trees, Wei An appeared uninterested in modern entertainments such as singing Karaoke, ballroom dancing and bowling. Wei An said that the city mainly meant bookstores, museums, theatres, literary activities and chats with friends to him. It seems that he did not care for any other aspects of city life or give the city much credit.

In terms of interpersonal relationships, Wei An was not a very sociable person or well-adapted to modern social life. Wei An was not good at communicating with people

on a daily basis. As one friend of his, Han Xiaohui韩晓惠, says, “it looked like he was not good at communicating with people at all. He was restrained, or he was dull, in a more precise word. He stuttered that he did not mind...I felt that, though he was among us, he was a unique and inharmonious note. His soul wandered outside our group all the time. No, his soul wandered even outside this crowded world (Han 219).”¹⁴ Other friends, like Zhou Xiaofeng周晓枫, had similar opinions. Zhou mentioned that Wei An’s talking speed was very slow, for he spoke with careful consideration both because he chose his words carefully and as a rhetorical strategy. Zhou said that she could not have an easy, smooth conversation with him because she could not tell where Wei An’s sentences ended (X. Zhou 224). In addition, Wei An was very sensitive to interpersonal relations; he cared much about what people thought of him, and he did not want to hurt anyone’s feeling. As a result, he was easily hurt and often felt unhappy or guilty in his interpersonal relationships (X. Zhou 228; M. Lin 185). Wei An’s personality probably made him feel claustrophobic with the crowded and complicated modern life of the city, and made him prefer the rural life with its simple and open interpersonal relationships.

In career terms, Wei An’s life was not very successful by ordinary or conventional standards. Wei An did not gain fame from his writing. He only published one collection of essays before he died and that did not bring him much attention from the public. Moreover, he did not earn much money: his condominium belonged to his mother-in-law; he only had about 7000 Yuan (around 1000 Canadian dollars) saving when he was diagnosed with cancer. He was divorced and he had no children (Yuan, “Introduction” 3-

¹⁴ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 看来他极不善于和人打交道, 有克制不住的拘谨, 或者准确地说是木讷, 结结巴巴地向我表示不介意……我感觉, 他是我们兄弟姐妹当中的一员, 可他又是一个独特的不和谐音, 他的灵魂始终游走在群体之外, 不, 是游走在这个喧嚣的红尘之外。

27). Undoubtedly these aspects of his life only added to his disappointment with the contemporary industrial society.

Apparently, Wei An neither liked or tried to like urban life unlike some other nature writers. Take Liu Liangcheng, another nature writer, for example; he loves the country and agricultural way of life, but he fits into the city and also enjoys the bright side of modernization. To Liu the city is just another village, since what happens in the city also happens in the country except in a different form. For example, urban people are much like rural people: some of them are kind, others are not. In Liu's opinion, the city is wonderful, since it has so many wide roads, big lights and beautiful parks, and all of them are provided free of charge, while rural people need to build every narrow road and put up all the electricity poles by themselves. Unlike Wei An, Liu looks at both sides of modernization and tries to fit in the city (Liu 163, 169, 176-179). However, unlike Liu, throughout his life, Wei An never seemed to have much feelings of fitting into the city.

In general, Wei An seemed very discontented with life in modern cities. He appeared lost in the modern city's physical environment, its lifestyle and intense interpersonal relationships. He was probably dissatisfied with his career, also. His claim that he was not suited to living in the 20th century suggests a great disappointment with his life in modern society as well as a condemnation of industrial civilization itself.

In a nutshell, Wei An's pleasant memories of the country, the influence of his Fourth Aunt, his own strong affection and concern for nonhuman beings, his personal experience and character, and his inability to adapt to the city all played an important role in helping him develop an appreciation for nature and pre-modern culture, and to become an acute critic of modern civilization.

Chapter 2: “Son of Nature”: Wei An’s Views of Nature

A pure and humble son of nature

A dedicated observer on the land and rare listener to the land

A troubadour and romantic thinker strolling on the broad land

--Comments on Wei An by his friend ¹⁵(Yuan, “Introduction” 26-27)

Wei An’s writing is known for his great appreciation of nature, so much so that some critics called him a “son of nature” (Yuan, “Introduction” 26; Peng 189). In this chapter, three aspects of Wei An’s views on nature will be discussed: 1. Nonhuman creatures have inherent and intrinsic value; they are not human instruments or slaves; all of creation deserves respect from people. 2. Nature is beautiful and harmonious; animals are kind and lovely; people should appreciate nature. 3. The land ethic and vegetarianism should be advocated.

I. Respecting Nature’s Intrinsic Value

As Lin Xianzhi said, in Wei An’s works, human and nonhuman beings are given an equal status, and there is an interactive dialogue between humankind and nature (X. Lin, “Wei” 169). When Wei An depicts the lives of tiny creatures in nature, he seems to look at them through their own eyes and tries to speak on their behalf. And he describes, every creature and living thing in the world including the ant, the sparrow, the wasp and grass as having its own life, its own value, and unique experience, as able to sense, reason and feel emotions. On the basis of this belief, he attributes value and respect to all life.

¹⁵ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 大自然质朴谦逊的儿子——
大地上悉心的洞察者与罕见的倾听者——
茫茫大地上漫游四方的行吟诗人和浪漫主义思想家——

1. Writing on Animals

Take, for example, a paragraph depicting sparrows:

Sparrows stay longer on the ground than in the trees. They fly to the trees only after they have eaten enough food. They rub their short hard beaks on branches over and over again, as northern peasant women grind their knives on the brims of big urns. Sparrows squat on the branches and twitter just as children cry out loudly when they ride on their fathers' shoulders. The sparrows' voices convey dependence, trust, happiness and safety. Sparrows in the trees behave in the way children do on the ground. Their jumping is like children's running, while the trees' intention in stretching out their branches is to give birds one playground after another on which to play. (13)¹⁶

In Wei An's description, sparrows distinguish between work time and relaxation time. During relaxation time after feeding themselves, they enjoy life in the trees, much as humans have fun after work. But before relaxation, they also work hard. Their lives are similar to human life. Additionally, Wei An compares the sparrow's rubbing of beaks to northern peasant women's grinding of knives. This comparison emphasizes the similarity between sparrows and humans: The sparrows sharpen their beaks or their tools just as peasant women sharpen their knives or their tools. The difference between humans and sparrows is that sparrows' tools are part of their bodies and human tools are made of separate materials. Shortly after this association, Wei An likens sparrows to children

¹⁶ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 麻雀在地面的时间比在树上的时间多。它们只是在吃足食物后，才飞到树上。它们将短硬的喙像北方农妇在缸沿砺刀那样，在枝上反复擦拭。麻雀蹲在枝上啼鸣，如孩子骑在父亲的肩上高声喊叫，这声音蕴含着依赖、信任、幸福和安全感。麻雀在树上就和孩子们在地上一样，它们的蹦跳就是孩子们的奔跑。而树木伸展的愿望，是给鸟儿送来一个个广场。

playing on their fathers' shoulders. Here, like humans, the sparrows have their "fathers"; the sparrows depend on and trust their fathers; the sparrows love yelling on the shoulders of their fathers; the sparrows love playing games; the sparrows love running on the playground; the sparrows feel just more or less the same way as children feel; the sparrows have feelings as complex as those children have, such as reliance, trust, happiness, and security. In brief, sparrows are independent intelligent creatures that have their own colourful and wonderful lives just like human beings do.

Wei An also had a poem to describe sparrows as follows:

They keep their word:

waking up earlier than the sun wakes every day.

They get up very early,

in order to wait for the sun in the middle of the road,

and travel with the sun together.

They seem to be the children of the sun.

They play around the sun every day.

They are used to gathering before they sleep and telling each other news about what they saw outside.

Because sparrows do not know what the order is,

they give outsiders an impression that they seem to be quarrelling when they are talking.

Their colour makes me think of the colour of the soil.

Their clans are as ancient as soil.

They are stay-at-home birds.

From their birth,
they never stray far away from their villages. (23)¹⁷

Wei An observed the life of sparrows, and tried to understand the sparrows through the sparrows' own eyes. He enumerates the sparrows' personality traits such as punctuality, industriousness, familial love and communal feeling. Also, Wei An thought that sparrows' loud chirping was similar to human gregariousness and chatter when in groups and therefore that the birds should not be blamed for their noise. Besides the paragraph and poem quoted above about sparrows, Wei An had several other vignettes to depict sparrows as lovely, smart, brave and kind creatures. And, like sparrows, most animals' lives and characteristics are represented in a vivid and objective way with understanding and respect for their intrinsic value and inner lives. As Lin Xianzhi commented, Wei An spent a lot of words describing the minutiae of animals' lives, always showing great love and care in doing so ("Wei" 170). Wei An's great appreciation of tiny and ordinary creatures like the sparrows reflects his reverence for the life of nonhuman beings.

2. Writing on Plants and Non-living Beings in Nature

Wei An also looked at plants and natural non-living beings with love and respect. He often described plants and non-living matters as having vivid lives and even the ability to sense and reason. For example, in the paragraph about the sparrows quoted above Wei An compares the tree to the father of the sparrows, and assumes that the trees

¹⁷ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 它们很守诺言每次都醒在太阳前面它们起得很早在半道上等候太阳然后一块儿上路它们仿佛是太阳的孩子每天在太阳身边玩耍它们习惯于睡觉前聚在一起把各自在外面见到的新鲜事情讲给大家听听由于不知什么叫秩序它们给外人的印象好像在争吵一样它们的肤色使我想到了土地的颜色它们的家族一定同这土地一样古老它们是留鸟从出生起便不远离自己的村庄。（《麻雀》）

stretches to provide the sparrows with playgrounds. The tree seems to have emotion, a mind and a personality, and a close and warm relationship with the sparrows. For Wei An, a tree was not merely an unfeeling thing but kind and intelligent living being. Similarly, Wei An wrote about the chestnut as follows: “if no one picks them, chestnut trees will return their pretty children to the earth, like all the other plants (21-22).”¹⁸ In this sentence the chestnut tree is like a kind mother, and the way it bears fruits is similar to the way a woman bears children. Also, in Wei An’s narrative, it is as if the tree itself decides to let its fruits fall onto the earth not the pull of gravity. The chestnut tree is grateful to the land. Likewise, Wei An described the fallen leaves as follows: “beside human beings, fallen leaves say farewell to their mother tree solemnly (17).”¹⁹ Wei An uses the word “solemnly” to modify the fallen leaves’ mood and attitude, a word which is often used for describing significant human actions, thereby assuming that the seemingly tiny event--old leaves leaving the tree--is indeed as vital an event for the leaves and for the trees themselves, as children leaving their mothers forever.

Furthermore, inanimate natural phenomena in Wei An’s essays are also described as having their own vivid life force, sense and sentiment. Take late winter as described by him for example:

Seasons also have lives. ... The late winter looks like a traveler who arrives at his destination and settles down after his long journey. It makes me think of the old horse in the village which has lost its luster and vitality and cannot drive a carriage any more; it also makes me think of the rooster older

¹⁸ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 如果没有人采集, 栗树会和所有植物一样, 将自己漂亮的孩子自行还给大地。

¹⁹ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 在人类身旁, 落叶正悲壮地诀别它们的母亲。

than three years in the village. The lively, impetuous, bright, sensitive and mutable winter has gone and will never come back, while another dilatory, stable, gloomy, dark and cold winter has come to us. This is a tragic turn in life. The hardest time in the winter begins. The mood it brings to us is almost the same as what we get from a middle-aged adult who has no book in hand, no poetry in heart but only fortune and power. (31-32) ²⁰

Wei An compared winter to four living beings: a tired traveler, an old horse, an aged rooster, and a middle-aged adult. Wei An also employed a series of adjectives to modify late winter's personality, to endow winter with a vivid life. Thus, late winter is not depicted as a simple time period or a passive and inanimate phenomena but a living being which has feelings, vitality and personality like a human being.

Actually, such anthropomorphism as that used for winter is common in Wei An's articles. For example, Wei An personalizes the sun, the moon, the wind and many other non-living beings in his prose. As Wei Qingqi says, in Wei An's eyes the land itself is not an inanimate and passive object but is full of life force, and it can communicate and interact with human beings ("Zouxiang" 85). Wei An appreciated the words spoken by Melquiades, a gypsy in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez: "things have a life of their own, ... It is simply a matter of waking up their souls (García Márquez 2; Wei An 31)." To Wei An the natural world was similar to the human world, and nonhuman beings had similar feelings and thoughts as human beings, and had as

²⁰ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 季节也是有生命的。……此时的冬天，就像一个远途跋涉后终于到达目的地的、开始安顿下来的旅人。它让我想象乡村的失去光泽和生气，不再驾车的马和 3 年以上的公鸡。一个活泼的、冲动的、明朗的、敏感的、易变的冬天，已一去不返。而另一个迂缓的、安稳的、沉郁的、灰暗的、阴冷的冬天，已经来到我们身边。这是生命悲哀的转折。由此开始的，是冬天的一段让我们最难耐的时期。它给我们造成的心境，与我们从手上不再有书籍，心中不再有诗歌，已获取了一定财富或权利的人到中年者那里，领略的大致相同。

intrinsic value as humans. By stressing this, Wei An indicated that humans were not the center of the world and that there was no important substantial difference between human and non-human beings. Wei An's writing tries to cross the boundary between humans and nature and reminds us that everything on the earth has its own life and inner value, just like humankind.

While respecting nature's inner life is the essence of Wei An's writing, such non-anthropocentric ideas are not well accepted in contemporary Chinese literature and society. In many people's opinion humans should conquer nature and make use of nature without regard to nature's rights, and they think that the value of animals, plants and non-living beings in nature should be measured merely by their utility for human beings. And many say that whether animals should live or not depends on whether they are useful to human beings. Take the images of sparrows, honeybees and wasps in some other literary texts for example.

Sparrows are not lovable but annoying in some Chinese people's minds. Sparrows were considered as one of "the four pests" (rats, flies, mosquitoes, and sparrows) during "Great Leap Forward" (1958-1960). It was said that they should be eliminated because people thought that sparrows eat grains (Shapiro 86-87). Sparrows' value was decided by their use to humans. In 1958, a people's war on sparrows was organized by Mao Zedong; it is said that at least 200 million sparrows were slaughtered in this campaign. For example, 3 million people in Beijing were organized to eliminate sparrows and they killed more than 400,000 sparrow in only three days (April 19-21, 1958) (Meng and Li; Zheng 30). Corresponding to this kind of view, the image of sparrows in literature is also entirely different from that shown in Wei An's writing. For instance, during the "Great

Leap Forward” there was a well known poem about sparrows by Guo Moruo 郭沫若, then the most famous writer in China, titled “Zhou Maque 咒麻雀 (Cursing the Sparrow)”

Sparrow you're too pompous a thin'
 You'd not even blink should the sky cave in
 Sparrow you're too lavish a thin'
 You eat up our grain like a whirlwind
 Sparrow you're too shiftless a thin'
 You're so lazy you don't do nothin'
 Sparrow you're too bumptious a thin'
 You're scared of Red and fear the din
 Sparrow you're too sickly a thin'
 You never soar high when you take wing
 You are a real bastard with wings
 Hopping around infested with sins
 For thousands of years you've been wicked
 Now it's time for a final reckonin'
 We'll shoo-n-crush-n-bang you and use toxin
 And finally commit you to the flames
 And lay you in ashes with your [five bad traits]
 Once free from Four Pests the world will grin²¹

²¹ Translated by Ye Cao 野草. The original poem in Chinese is:

麻雀麻雀气太官，天垮下来你不管。麻雀麻雀气太阔，吃起米来如风刮。
 麻雀麻雀气太暮，光是偷懒没事做。麻雀麻雀气太傲，既怕红来又怕闹。

(The Peking Evening Paper, April 20, 1958: 1)

In Guo Moruo's Great Leap poem sparrows are depicted as enemies of humans that should be destroyed. Sparrows are simply viewed on the basis of human interests. Sparrows are considered "pompous", "lavish", "shiftless", "bumptious", "sickly", though there is not enough evidence to support these characteristics of sparrows in the poem. Also, it should be noticed that the five bad traits of sparrows are not ordinarily bad characteristics but "*Wu qi* 五气 (five bad human characteristics)" used to criticize undesirable officials by the central government during the Great Leap Forward. It is clear that sparrows are deprived of their own characteristics as birds but were attributed an imaginary and false conception as victims of a political campaign. Sparrows are not portrayed as what they are but distorted for human economical and political purposes. Obviously Guo Moruo's poem shows an opposite attitude towards sparrows to that of Wei An.

Another example of this in literature can be seen with the wasps and bees. In Wei An's articles, wasps are described as intelligent, loyal, independent and lovable creatures, of which more will be said later, and bees are acclaimed for their contribution to their own families (18, 49-50, 65-67, 80-86). Differently, in "*Lizhi mi*荔枝蜜 (Lychee Honey)", a well-known essay written by a famous Chinese writer, Yang Shuo杨朔, in 1961, wasps and honeybees are written about and assessed in a very dissimilar way. In "*Lychee Honey*", wasps are condemned as invaders and pests, because they indirectly harm human welfare by sometimes killing honeybees. Thus in the author's opinion wasps

麻雀麻雀气太娇，虽有翅膀飞不高。你真是些混蛋鸟，五气俱全到处跳。
犯下罪恶几千年，今天和你总清算。轰打毒掏齐进攻，最后放把烈火烘。
连同五气齐烧空，四害俱无天下同。

should be killed. Wasps have no intrinsic value; human ends are the only measure for judging their value. Comparatively, honeybees are glorified because “they have no request of human beings, but they give the best things to human beings (Yang 180-181).”²² In reality, honeybees work hard not for humans but for their own families, but the author suggests that the honeybees voluntarily work for humankind. This description and value assessment are obviously human interest oriented and centered. Yang’s essay has been selected for inclusion into official middle school Chinese texts, which indicates that the kind of view of nature that is evident in “Lychee Honey” is rather popular in contemporary China.

By analyzing the images of sparrows, wasps and honeybees, it is apparent that in some writings animals are considered as non-living objects good only for human ends, that they can be disregarded, mistreated and even killed without much concern for their own existence; more succinctly, that they are valued only for their usefulness to humankind. Nevertheless, Wei An adopted a different way of looking at nature. In Wei An’s writing, sparrows are applauded not merely because they eat pests that bother humans, nor are they blamed for their eating of grains or for being noisy. Sparrows are not dumb, unfeeling non-human creatures that are less developed, inferior, and more primitive and of lesser importance than humans, rather they are living beings that enjoy the same rich and colourful inner life as humans, and are therefore valuable in themselves. As with sparrows, Wei An esteemed the fate of nonhuman beings and sympathized with them. He quoted Gary Snyder’s words: “among the most ruthlessly exploited classes: animals, trees, water, air, grass (Snyder 39; *Dadi* 173).”

²² This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 对人无所求，给人的却是极好的东西。

Altogether, Wei An's view of respecting nature's intrinsic value in contemporary Chinese writing is rare, but that is the core of his nature writing. His nature writing was classified as belonging to the canon of ecological writing and consequently he was called the humble and pure son of nature (Q. Wei, "Zouxiang" 94; Yuan, "Introduction" 26).

II. Appreciating Nature's Beauty, Divinity, Virtues, and Harmony

While esteeming nature's intrinsic value, Wei An also highly appreciated the beauty, divinity, virtues, and harmony of nature, and highlighted them in his writing. He depicted a beautiful, wonderful and harmonious natural world in order to remind people of the greatness of nature, which he felt was too often ignored by many people.

1. The Beauty of Nature

As a nature-loving person, Wei An tried to depict the attractive side of nature by revealing the beauty of animals, plants and natural scenes in daily life. Most animals were depicted as beautiful and lovable. For example, common sparrows were very cute in Wei An's eyes. Even sparrows' "noisy" chirp was enjoyed and treasured by him (14-15). Likewise, the magpie, the ant, the wasps and the caterpillars were portrayed in a loving way. Wei An seemed to lure the reader into finding beauty in some seemingly plain natural scenes.

In the same way, Wei An highlighted the splendour of plants and natural scenes. For instance, "wheat is growing. Its height is one-third of the height it has when it grows up. It stands out on the ground, like a twelve or thirteen year old boy who begins to

demonstrate the heaven-born beauty of his tall and straight figure (10). ”²³ “Wheat is the most graceful, the most elegant, and the most affecting crop on the earth. The wheat fields are neatly laid on the broad earth, like pieces of shiny gold. Wheat fields are the most valuable treasures of May, the stored-up essence of the land (15).”²⁴

Wei An also tended to describe other natural scenes with words of gracefulness, e.g. the sunrise, the sunset, the river and the clouds. He compared the land after snow to a spotted cow eating grass on the ranch (16); he likened the sun to a millstone in the country (18); he highlighted the magic bend of the sunshine on the ground (19); he pictured the beautiful starry sky over the field (38); he captured the exquisiteness of different seasons in the country (27-28, 31, 34).

In brief, Wei An liked to discover and describe beauty in common natural scenes around us. He eulogized beautiful snow, graceful wheat, a splendid sunset, a lovely sparrow and many other beautiful phenomena of the natural world. The readers may see these similar nature scenes every day, but may ignore the beauty in the hustle and bustle and stressfulness of modern life. With his pen Wei An opened the readers’ eyes to show them how beautiful nature really is.

2. The Divinity of Nature

In Wei An’s writing, nature is also gifted with divinity and purity. For example, snow is described as a beautiful fruit blown around by a wind that comes from outside the human world, and brings the human world harmony, purity and beautiful flowers.

²³ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 麦子拔节了，此时它们的高度大约为其整体的三分之一，在土地上呈现出了立体感，就像一个十二三岁的男孩开始显露出了男子天赋的挺拔体态。

²⁴ The quoted is my translation. Original Chinese: 麦子是土地最优美、最典雅、最令人动情的庄稼。麦田整齐摆在大地上，仿佛一块块耀眼的黄金。麦田是 5 月最宝贵的财富，大地蓄积的精华。

The snow is a great benefactor to human beings and it is more beautiful, harmonious and purer than anything humans already have (11-12). Also, “the snow endows the earth with divinity. The snow blows away those things which are usually hidden inside human bodies, but entrap and engulf the human soul...Everything that happens in mankind’s sweet wishes involves snow (22).”²⁵ To Wei An, there is a strong contrast between the snow and humans. Humans are mortal and world-minded; their spirit is constantly being engulfed. However, snow is pure, white, divine, and unpolluted by the human world. It seems that the human spirit needs to be saved by heavenly snow, and only through the holiness of snow can humanity regain its joy and happiness. Not only snow, but also hares, owls, wasps, and nature itself connote divinity in Wei An’s writing (31, 45, 50, 80). In general, to Wei An, nature is innocent, pure and divine just like snow, while human spirit is corroded by the sophisticated falseness of modern society.

3. The Virtues of Nature

In addition, Wei An appreciates the goodness, courage, loyalty and other virtues represented by animals. A case of this can be seen in his two articles about wasps: “Wo de linju hufeng (yi) 我的邻居胡蜂 (一) (My Neighbours the Wasps (I))” and “Wo de linju hufeng (er) 我的邻居胡蜂 (二) (My Neighbours the Wasps (II))”. While wasps are often criticized as ugly, aggressive, and dangerous to humans in other literary works, wasps are described as lovely, hardworking, loyal, independent, respectable and well-organized creatures in Wei An’s articles. In Wei An’s description, wasps work very hard

²⁵ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 雪赋予大地神性; 雪驱散了那些平日隐匿于人们体内, 禁锢与吞噬着人们灵性的东西。…… 在人类美好愿望中发生的事情, 都是围绕雪进行的。

for their big families: “they begin to work from dawn and do not stop until dark (84);”²⁶ “even under rainy or cloudy weather they do not stop their work (84).”²⁷ Also, wasps are intelligent and well organized: “they collect materials for nests, hunt, and fetch water; they do their designated jobs; they come and go without rest (84).”²⁸ Thirdly, wasps are brave. Wei An recorded and applauded wasps’ preparation for a fight when a pigeon fell onto his window-sill and immediately flew away. Because of his love and respect for wasps, Wei An affectionately called the wasps his neighbours and thought that it was a gift from divine heaven that these two nests of wasps chose to live around him (80, 86).

Similar to wasps and sparrows, most animals are represented by Wei An as lovely, kind, courageous, loyal and peace-loving. For instance, Wei An acclaimed an ant’s courage when it tried to move a worm and refused to give up when the task was hard (15); he praised highly the peaceful attitude sheep showed even when they were being led to slaughter, for he thought that non-violence was the best attitude for humans and the world (69-72); he wrote that “[honeybees] are our amiable and honourable neighbours. They live in the same world as we do. Their intelligence and self-sacrifice is the skeleton supporting the happiness and harmony of our society. They are all around us, like the sunshine, and they affect and influence us all the time; they all make us often think of our own ordinary workers and heroes (67).”²⁹

²⁶ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 它们天一亮即开始工作，直到天黑才会停止，

²⁷ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 即使一般的阴雨天，也不能把它们的热烈工作中断。

²⁸ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 它们采集巢材，猎食，取水，各司其职，往来不息。

²⁹ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 它们是我们可钦可敬的邻居，与我们共同生存在这个世界上。它们体现的勤劳和忘我，是支撑我们的世界幸福和和睦的骨骼。它们就在我们身边，似一种光辉，时时照耀、感动和影响着我们，也使我们经常想到我们自己的普通劳动者和舍生忘死的英雄。

Furthermore, Wei An even thought that animals in general are kinder than human beings. “Through the films, books and life experiences, people can learn many stories about how animals help others....If people believe that human nature is really ‘animal nature’ and that this is the excuse to do anything bad without feeling remorse, this just bears out an old Chinese folk expression: worse than animals [because animals are supposed to be less moral than human beings in the folk saying, but animals are actually kinder than mankind] (32).”³⁰ Wei An was also against applying value-laden human terms to describe animals, like the word “spy”. He wrote: “any word made by humans should be only applied to humans themselves (20).”³¹ To Wei An, animals are more naïve, innocent and kinder than humans and people could and should learn much from animals.

4. The Harmony of Nature

In his writing, Wei An emphasized the harmonious relationships between all creatures on the earth. For example, in the 38th vignette of “All that Happens on the Earth”, the land is depicted as a kind mother who loves her children and rewards her hardworking offspring generously. The plants are also very agreeable. They “show kind faces (27)” to the world and are grateful to the land. The field in the fall in general is depicted as ideal as Eden, teeming with love, humility, gratitude, goodness, pleasure and care.

³⁰ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 在影视上或书本里或生活中，人们知道了多少动物互助和利他的感人事迹！……如果人抱定人类的本性就是动物，从而做任何事情都心安理得，原谅自己，那么他其实是应验了中国民间的一个说法：禽兽不如。

³¹ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 人类制造的任何词语，都仅在他自己身上适用。

As Lin Xianzhi commended, “[Wei An’s *All that Happens on the Earth*] is a apocalyptic book and as well an anthem. In the world in this book, all the creatures in the world shine upon each other, so dazzlingly, so warmly and so beautifully” (“Wushi nian” 59).³² Wei An elaborated and highlighted the beauty, divinity, virtue, and harmony of nature, and represented an ideal world where all beings, including humans, animals, plants and non-living beings live pleurably, peacefully and affectionately together.

III. Advocating the Land Ethic and Vegetarianism

As discussed above, Wei An respected all nonhuman members of the biotic community and valued their beauty, virtue and harmony. On the other hand, Wei An’s view of nature is also expressed by his advocacy of the land ethic that originated from Aldo Leopold, and his vegetarian concern with animal protection and simple living.

Wei An learned about the land ethic from a translated version of Leopold’s *A Sand County Almanac* published in China in 1992. Wei An then wrote an essay “Tudi Daode 土地道德 (The Land Ethic)” to introduce and explain Leopold’s land ethic to the reader in 1993. Aldo Leopold (1887-1948) was an American ecologist who is influential in the development of modern environmental ethics and in the movement for wilderness preservation. Leopold stated the basic principle of his land ethic as: “a thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise (Leopold 240).”

Wei An to a great extent appreciated Leopold’s land ethic. He summarized Leopold’s idea that human ethics should be expanded to include nonhuman members of

³² This is my translation; the original Chinese is: (《大地上的事情》) 是一部启示录, 也是一部赞美诗。在这里面, 世界上的众多生命互相照耀, 那么光辉, 那么温暖, 那么美好。

biotic community and that mankind is just one of the members in this community rather than its conqueror. Wei An thought that the land ethic required human respect for every member in this biotic community and for the integrity of this community. Wei An thought that the land ethic was a significant development in human history and that *A Sand County Almanac* was the first book specifically written for the land, and had revolutionary significance for the land (113-114).

In addition to the land ethic, another practice that Wei An strongly supported was vegetarianism, which reflected his concern for animal rights and voluntary simple living. Wei An's vegetarianism was inspired by the influence of Henry David Thoreau, Leo Tolstoy and Bernard Shaw (115-117; *Dadi* 199). In his essay "Sushi zhuyi 素食主义 (Vegetarianism)", Wei An wrote a brief history of Western vegetarianism whose definition and theoretical base originated in England in the 19th century and spread over the world. He elaborated on the core ideas of vegetarianism as follows: on the ethical level, highly-evolved animals should not eat less-evolved animals; or rather highly-evolved animals should protect less-evolved animals. On the scientific level, the human body is not suited for the consumption of meat. Vegetarian diet is good for human health. On the level of living expense, a vegetarian diet is the most economical. So it is good for human lives. On the level of life style, "apart from being an expression of love and empathy for nature, conscious vegetarianism is an exercise in restraint and self-control (117)."³³ Vegetarianism can help people pursue better spiritual values rather than physical enjoyment (115-117).

³³ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 除了对一切生命悲悯的爱以外, 自觉的素食主义本质就是节制与自律。

Besides the advocacy of vegetarianism in writing, Wei An also persisted with a vegetarian diet in his personal life. Wei An mentioned that three types of vegetarian diets might be considered as vegetarian diets, including those diets that excluded meat and poultry but included fish and sea animals, and he did not explain his own vegetarian diet in his writing, so it is not entirely clear whether Wei An ate fish or not (116). He seemed to adopt a vegetarian diet without fish or sea animals according to his friends. In China, however, being a vegetarian is difficult for several reasons. Firstly, since vegetarianism concerned with animal rights is totally strange to most Chinese, vegetarians are often automatically viewed as Buddhists, because only a few Chinese are vegetarians, most of whom are adherents of Buddhism. Nonetheless, though religious freedom is normatively allowed Chinese Buddhists are a small and weak group in Chinese society, because the mainstream ideology practically requires atheism. For example, almost every middle school student is requested to join the Communist Youth League and adhere to atheism. Adherents of Buddhism are consequently often regarded as unorthodox because of their “superstitious” beliefs. Non-Buddhist vegetarians, who are thought of as “superstitious” Buddhists most of the time, are like them despised or avoided by some people. To prevent this misunderstanding and unpleasant prejudgement, Wei An stated that the vegetarianism he advocated was not a vegetarianism associated with any religion (115). Secondly, sometimes being a vegetarian is more embarrassing after one explains that one’s diet has nothing to do with religion. If one is a vegetarian due to religious belief, the others will think that he or she is a vegetarian merely for the religious reasons, and no further explanation will be required. If one is a vegetarian because of animal rights, others may feel uneasy, because this form of vegetarianism shows a higher ethical

sensitivity or development than they have. Few are willing to admit that they themselves are cruel people that ignore the suffering of animals and approve of animals' being slaughtered for the meat. Adopting a strategy of self-defence, perhaps consciously or unconsciously, people are disposed to think that the vegetarian is an extremist or even a freak of some sort. Few, however, will say this openly. Wei An was occasionally mocked in a friendly way for his vegetarian diet by his friends. His friends also mentioned that he was criticized for his restricted life including his insistence on vegetarianism (X. Zhou 230, 232). Not surprisingly, to make others feel comfortable, sometimes Wei An explained his vegetarianism by claiming that his body was not suited for meat, and he also cooked meat for his visiting friends (Yuan, "Introduction" 7). Thirdly, on the practical level it is not easy to be a vegetarian. Since the number of vegetarians is very small, vegetarian food choices in restaurants are incredibly limited, and it is not convenient for a vegetarian to be invited or to invite people to personal or formal social functions. It may also be a dilemma for the vegetarian's family members. For example, Wei An told his friend that his vegetarianism caused problems for his ex-wife and that he was sorry for that (Yuan, "Introduction" 17).

Though difficult, Wei An insisted on vegetarianism for a long time and he deeply regretted his giving it up at the end of his life. When Wei An became very sick, his friends, relatives and doctors persuaded him to eat meat (X. Zhou 229). In his "Zuihou jiju hua最后几句话 (A Couple of Last Words)", Wei An wrote this with regret: "the greatest shame and regret in my life is to give up practicing vegetarianism (on this matter, there are those who did not trust me). Due to the persuasion of doctors, relatives and friends, as well as my own compromise, I did not insist on practicing vegetarianism up to

the end of my life. I think this is a kind of depravity of my belief. The will to survive won over belief (161-162).”³⁴ Wei An’s encouragement of and persistence with vegetarianism reflected his love and respect for nonhuman lives, the concern for environmental crisis, and his ideas of a simple living.

In a word, regarding the natural world, Wei An’s writing shows a respect for the intrinsic value and rights of every nonhuman member of the biotic community, and it represents a call to appreciate the beauty, divinity and virtue of nature and harmony of nature, an advocacy of the land ethic and vegetarianism. Wei An’s nature writing goes beyond the limitations of anthropocentrism, and expresses a perspective of deep ecology principles.

³⁴ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 我平生最大的愧悔是在我患病、重病期间没有把素食主义这个信念坚持到底（就这一点，过去也曾有人对我保持怀疑）。在医生、亲友的劝说及我个人的妥协下，我没能将素食主义贯彻到底，我觉得这是我个人在信念上的一种堕落。保命大于了信念本身。

Chapter 3: A Faint Voice against Modernization: Wei An's

View of Society

This express of the 20th century has rushed to the doorstep of the 21st century. Several years ago, I already had a hunch that I was not suited to enter the 21st century and that it is even an error for me to live in the 20th century. I am not saying anything false. People can also find this point in my work. I love agrarian civilization very much, while deep in my heart, I had always a feeling of sadness and resistance towards the industrial civilization's existence and development. However, I cannot find a way of avoiding involvement in this industrial civilization. (161)³⁵

—Wei An “Zuihou jiju hua 最后几句话 (A Couple of Last Words)

Primarily because of his love for nature, Wei An approved of the agrarian but strongly disapproved of the industrial civilization. This stance lies at the center of his thought regarding human society. For Wei An, the agricultural civilization existed in traditional Chinese and Western villages, and part of it continues to exist in current rural areas, while the industrial civilization dominates the modern cities. Thus, Wei An sought to embrace the traditional rural ways of life and criticized the modern ways of life. In this chapter, two aspects in Wei An's views of society will be discussed: 1. appreciation for life in the country; 2. critique of modernization.

³⁵ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 20 世纪这辆加速运行的列车已经行驶到 21 世纪的门坎了。数年前我就预感到我不是一个适宜进入 21 世纪的人，甚至生活在 20 世纪也是一个错误。我不是在说一些虚妄的话，大家可以从我的作品中看到这点。我非常热爱农业文明，而对工业文明的存在和进程一直有一种源自内心的悲哀和抵触，但我没有办法不被裹挟其中。

I. Appreciation for the Country Life

1. Rural Life Preserves Natural Human Goodness

To Wei An, pre-modern society was the cradle of natural human goodness. For example, Wei An thought that the kindness of his Fourth Aunt and grandparents was derived from their rural experiences (29; *Dadi* 86). Wei An paraphrased Victor Hugo's words to support his idea that cities make people brutal, corrupt and degenerate, while the mountains, the sea and the forests broaden people's minds, and help people develop a free, authentic and benevolent nature (*Dadi* 173-174).

Almost every villager Wei An depicted is kind-hearted and friendly, such as his Fourth Aunt, his grandparents, the old peasant women cleaning snow from the road for others (29, *Dadi* 86, 93). His admiration of rural morality was especially tangible in his writing about three small towns of the back country: Jiayin嘉阴 (in the north of Heilongjiang Province), Qiemo且末 (in the south of Xinjiang Province) and Hairisu海日苏 (in the Inner Mongolia Province). For example, in Jiayin, Wei An wrote: "walking in Jiayin's streets, you will be moved by the friendly customs even if you are not sensitive. I can tell from their expressions and gestures, that they are willing to answer any question if you ask it, and that they will give you any help if you ask for it (59-60)."³⁶ In Qiemo as well, Wei An commented: "I am sure that this small town's peaceful appearance will

³⁶ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 走在嘉荫的街上，即使你的感官天性迟钝，你也会被这里淳朴的民风所打动。从人们的神态和表情我能够看出，只要你开口，他们会乐于回答你任何问题；只要你请求，他们会给予你任何的帮助。

make any visitor let go of their hatred and be ashamed of having had it (62).”³⁷ In Wei An’s writing, people in the rural areas seem to have ideal morals.

Wei An used quotations from Western literature to support his praise of villagers’ morals. He wrote: “in the past, agriculture and peasants were greatly acclaimed, whether in the West or East. In ancient Greece and Rome, people used ‘good peasant’ or ‘good farmer’ to compliment a good man (the one who was complimented would consider this as high praise) (7).”³⁸ Wei An also quoted a sentence by Marcus Porcius Cato, a Roman statesman: “the career of farming is the most incorrupt and stable; fewest people hate this profession; people undertaking farming have the least evil ideas (7)”³⁹.

2. People Live Harmoniously with Nature in Rural Area

In Wei An’s writing, another advantage of rural life is that people have a harmonious and pleasant relationship with nature in rural area. To Wei An, pre-modern society’s economic pattern was environmentally friendly and poetic: peasants working in the fields were rewarded by nature with abundant fruits; all crops and livestock seemed to be the villagers’ friends; there seemed to be no conflict between rural people and nature (27-28). Take a scene of traditional agricultural life in Jiayin for example:

On the bank of Jiayin River, people are netting fish, bathing and cleaning furniture; women are draping cleaned clothes on bright, clean stones by the river; ships transporting logs are berthing on one side of the river.... You can

³⁷ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 它显现的祥和的面貌，我可以肯定，会使所有到来的人惭愧地放弃仇恨。

³⁸ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 在人类的昨天，无论东方还是西方，农业和农民都曾备受尊崇。古希腊罗马时期，人们曾用“好农民”或“好庄稼人”来称赞一个好人（“受到这样称赞的，就被认为受到了最大的称赞”）。

³⁹ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 利益来得最清廉、最稳妥、最不为人所疾视，从事这种职业的人，绝不心怀恶念。

also hear dogs and desultory songs from the opposite bank of Jiayin River.

An intense atmosphere of domesticity and a sense of peaceful life spread on the wide space on both sides of river. (60)⁴⁰

In the scene, people's lifestyle is exactly as it was in the past, so they bathe, wash clothes and fish in the river, and dry clothes on the rock. Though some modern people would consider such behaviour as a sign of underdevelopment, Wei An appreciated these old lifestyles or modes of life, since they were in close contact with nature such as the river, the fish and the dogs, and thus gave people a warm domesticity.

Hairisu, another small town far from modernization Wei An described, was similar. Though living in the Gobi region is not easy, Wei An appreciated its distance from the city, and praised the people living there: "they are our brothers who live in the heart of nature; their skin colour shows the influence of the sunshine and the wind; their faces show expressions that they are unfamiliar with the towns and cities; they are closest to the root of the humans; their life itself is a miracle (89)."⁴¹ Wei An also described the ideal life in the village like this:

The village is an island in the ocean of grassland. Herds and clouds surround it; flowers dance around it. Shepherds herd outside the village in three seasons except winter; they return to the island to get rest in the winter.

They overcome difficulties generation after generation, and leave us herds,

⁴⁰ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 边民在这里网鱼、洗澡、冲涮家什, 妇女们将洗净的衣物晾在光洁的石子上, 拖运原木的江轮停泊在一旁, ……那里偶尔会传来几声狗吠或若断若续的歌声。一种浓郁的家园氛围, 一种和平的生活气息, 弥漫在河水两岸的寥廓空间。

⁴¹ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 这是生活在大自然心脏的兄弟, 有着阳光与风的肤色, 脸上浮现对市镇与人际陌生的表情。他们离人类的根最近, 他们的生活本身就是一个伟迹。

ballads and descendants. Their bloodlines, experiences and legends have been passed down from the parents to children' souls. (89)⁴²

Wei An described Hairisu as a place in the heart of nature, where people depend on nature, lead an idealized life in tune with nature, and are surrounded by natural beautiful things, such as herds, clouds, sunshine, wind, and ballads. The human relationship with nature in a back country like Hairisu is the ideal example of relationships which Wei An long sought.

3. Rural Area is the Most Suitable Place for People

To Wei An, perhaps the most suitable place for human beings to live is the rural area, because pre-modern society, as represented by rural areas today, especially the back country villages and small towns, enables people to gain real happiness. For Wei An, a rural area is like a reservoir of natural human goodness, and people can have pleasant interpersonal relationships, live in harmony with nature, and live a simple but meaningful life in villages.

The three towns Wei An described have a common feature: their people live happy lives. The villagers have good interpersonal relationships; they are constantly smiling; their lives are as beautiful as poems. In addition to these small towns, Wei An also mentioned and admired an example of another pre-modern society, Madeira, though he had never been there. Madeira is a Portuguese archipelago in the North Atlantic Ocean. Wei An probably heard or read about it and he considered it an ideal place. Wei An wrote: there were no automobiles, factories, competition or efficiency in this place;

⁴² This is my translation, the original Chinese is: 它是草原海洋中的一座岛屿，远处涌起牧群和云的波涛，花朵在四周舞蹈。三个季节牧人在外放牧，冬天他们回到岛上歇息。世世代代他们历尽沧桑，留下牧谣、牛羊和子孙。他们的血液、经验和传说，已由父辈传入孩子们的灵魂。

people got up with the sunrise and went to bed with sunset; people worked there with smiles on their faces, while singing long and relaxing songs. Even travelers from industrial society became relaxed and happy when they arrived at Madeira (*Dadi* 82). What Wei An described may not be the real Madeira, but a reflection of an ideal world located in his mind, a world whose people lead almost aboriginal lives and stay as far away from machines and manufacture as possible.

Obviously, Wei An preferred villages which are small, isolated from the virus of modernization and retain their pre-modern way of life. He thought these kinds of societies are most suitable for people to live in, and he tended to portray them as the models that all societies should emulate. Wei An commented on Qimo as follows: “Qimo may be a small town placed in the world by God to serve as a standard example for all to follow. Its existence humbles our commercial world (62).”⁴³

II. Critique of Modern Industrial Civilization

In contrast to his fondness for rural life, Wei An’s critique of modernization was almost savage. Unlike people who criticize the downside of modernization but do nothing to undo modernization, Wei An was completely opposed to the whole process of modernization. For example, though it is widely maintained that the invention of the steam engine was a big advance in human history, Wei An asserted that its invention was the start of mankind’s failure to survive on the land (47). Wei An’s rejection of modernization shows itself in two ways: firstly, as discussed above, his fondness for the

⁴³ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 且末也许是神作为标准安放在人间的一座小镇，它的存在，让我们这个喧嚣的商业世界感到卑微。

rural forms of life that have not been contaminated by modernism; and secondly, through his direct critique of the phenomena of modernity and the values on which they are based.

1. Modernization is a Threat to Human Survival and Nature

In Wei An's opinion, modernization is a threat to both non-human nature and human beings. Wei An pointed out that the modern lifestyle could not last long because it threatened to deplete the natural resources on which all depend. Wei An conveyed this with a simile:

The relationship between humans and the earth is very much like the relationship between a man and his life. At an early age when he has little awareness and knowledge, the life to him looks like an inexhaustible and inconsumable water well, it appears that he can employ and enjoy it as much as he wants and in whatever way he likes. One day, however, he senses something has changed, and suddenly he realizes that life is short and precious, and that a lot of its preciousness has already been wasted. (28)⁴⁴

Wei An realized that with modern life, people's exploitation of the earth had exceeded what was necessary for life to thrive and not just exist (28). Wei An warned the reader that, if all the people on the earth adopt the lifestyle of the West, the earth can only support 0.5 billion people (46-47). Wei An was worried that the modern lifestyle would eventually destroy human beings. Wei An said, "only 200 years after the industrial

⁴⁴ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 人类与地球的关系，很像人与他的生命的关系。在无知无觉的年纪，他眼里的生命是一口取之不尽用之不竭的井，可以任意汲取和享用。当他有一天觉悟，突然感到生命的短暂和有限时，他发现，他生命中许多宝贵的东西已被挥霍一空。面对未来，他开始痛悔和恐惧，开始锻炼和保健。

revolution, human beings have brought themselves onto the brink of a catastrophe (*Dadi* 82).”⁴⁵

Meanwhile, Wei An was also aware that modernization had brought disaster to wildlife such as sparrows, rabbits and magpies, and the soil, water and air. When he enumerated the environmental change in the past 20 years, he was very upset about the fate of nonhuman beings (13, 35, 39-40, 79). Judged in terms of humankind’s future, the welfare of nonhuman beings and nature itself, Wei An thought that modern civilization should be seen as a regress rather than a progress.

2. Modernization Corrupts Morals

Wei An wrote, “if [Marcus Porcius] Cato’s saying is right, the move from an agricultural civilization to an industrial civilization damages not only nonhuman nature, but also humanity (7).”⁴⁶ To Wei An, another main defect of modernity was that it degraded and corrupted people’s morality. Wei An asserted that scientific and technological development provided people with various temptations, and thus people become addicted to the enjoyment of the physical objects, consumption and accumulation of money, and thereby care less about morality, spirituality and natural humanity (96).

Wei An seemed to sense that the people in the city in general have less morality than those from the rural areas. Wei An often compared and criticized morality in the city and praised that of rural people. For example, while Wei An applauded an old lady

⁴⁵ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 工业革命发生仅仅二百年间，人类便为此走到了自身所造成的各种毁灭性灾难的边缘。

⁴⁶ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 如果加图的说法成立或得到我们认同，那么看来人类社会由农业文明向工业文明的转化，不光污毁了自然，显然也无益于人性。

clearing snow on public ground near her residence, he mentioned that in modern cities, people do not clear snow in public places, not even in front of their own homes (*Dadi* 93-94). He also emphasized that experiences of the country make people kind and considerate, which suggests that cities dulled or deadened people's sense of morality (29; *Dadi* 86). He quoted Victor Hugo's words as saying that cities make people brutal, corrupt and degenerate (*Dadi* 173-174).

While Wei An thought that urban people had less virtue than rural people, he considered the morals of contemporary society to be worse than those of past societies, because it was hypnotized and dominated by modernization, while rural areas were less influenced by the power of modernity. Wei An was deeply disappointed with the way the current society had distorted the potential of humanity, and he described the period since 1978 this way:

Our era is one whose spirit is depraved, one which does not need morality, conscience and dreams, one in which people become clever but not virtuous. It seems that overnight there is only money left in the world. The fear of being less wealthy than others and the pursuit of material enjoyment have turned living into a pure instrument: the whole meaning of life had become reduced to physical gratification. (156)⁴⁷

3. Modernization Alienates People from Nature

In Wei An's opinion, as more and more rural areas turn into cities, people find themselves becoming more and more distant or even cut off from nature. Wei An pointed

⁴⁷ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 这是一个被剥夺了精神的时代，一个不需要品德、良心和理想的时代，一个人变得更聪明而不是美好的时代。仿佛一夜之间，天下只剩下了金钱。对积累财富落伍的恐惧，对物质享受不尽的倾心，使生命变成了一种纯粹的功能，一切追求都仅止于肉体。

out that some people never set foot on bare earth throughout their lifetime (19). In “Xiandai de haizi 现代的孩子 (Modern Children)”, Wei An contrasted the children of the modern city and those of the villages. To Wei An, rural youngsters can really enjoy many kinds of activities available only in the country: they can enjoy the sunrise and the sunset; they can appreciate the horizon; they can listen to the song of the birds and watch the trees in the woods; they can enjoy picking fruits off the trees instead of the supermarket shelf; they can view variable colours of seasons; they can take pleasure in catching a caterpillar; they can climb trees....In general, children in the villages can enjoy nature and learn from nature. However, modern youngsters in cities lose such fun and precious experience because they lack contact with nature. They do not know what the dandelion is and what the cuckoo is; they do not know the different appearances of four seasons; they do not use their feet to walk but sit in cars; they cannot learn from nature; they cannot enjoy beautiful natural views; they are weak and often sick....In Wei An’s eyes this was a great pity. (*Dadi* 77-79). Furthermore, Wei An was also disappointedly aware that, under the influence of modern entertainment, even the children of the country were not as familiar with wild field as they once were; modernization gradually separated rural children from nature, too (36).

4. Modernization Cannot Help People Obtain True Happiness

Wei An also asserted that, although modernization brought people plenty of material possessions, it could not bring people happiness; instead, somehow modernization deprived people of happiness. In his “Xingfu 幸福 (Happiness)”, Wei An expresses his ideas as follows: happiness is not a privileged possession of a particular era, nation, district or class and is not decided by the amount of wealth. Though people in

the modern era have more wealth, they lose happiness instead. Although machines emancipate humans from physical work and computers free humans from brain work nowadays, human life is much more intense than that in any other era. People try their best, just in order to get several silver dollars for unnecessary consumption; they ignore wisdom in books, which is as valuable as gold; they ignore a beautiful sunrise and spring....Modern people are not happy. Only by returning to a pre-modern society, can people in industrial society gain real happiness (*Dadi* 81-82). Wei An's view of happiness is associated with his idea of simple living, pursuit of higher spiritual values, and worry about people's morality. He thought that modernism made people busier, addicted to physical enjoyment, and lose moral sense, and thereby stop people from obtaining real happiness on the earth.

5. Questioning the Rightness of Modernization and Hoping for a Return to Pre-modern Society

Wei An's attitude towards the modernization process is particularly expressed in "Progress". In this article, he recorded the changes happening in his neighbourhood over the past two years. He lived in a condominium surrounded by wild fields in the suburb of Changping city. To the east of his place, there is a village, crops, and the horizon behind the trees; to the west, there is a view of a small city, Changping, on the green plain. Wei An was very content with this place. He compared the place surrounding his building to a location in northern Europe, a place in which he believed the sky was clear and the land was quiet. Unfortunately, new residential high-rises and buildings of "New Technology Development District" took over the land where wild fields used to be. And Wei An lost

the beautiful view he used to enjoy. He sighed: “my vision will be completely taken away; my view will die out (*Dadi 97*).”⁴⁸

By pointing to these changes, Wei An said that changes surrounding his residence were the very microcosm of the whole process of modernization all over the world. He wrote: “I know that this process around me is just a tiny part of another powerful process, which can not be reversed; the whole world pushes and cheers this modern process except lovely environmentalists and poets who speak out and oppose it (*Dadi 97*)”⁴⁹; “some people are looking forward to earning money from real estate, and more people are hoping for an improvement of their living standard, and all the people in the city would welcome the prosperity brought on by the transition from a small city to a big city (*Dadi 97*).”⁵⁰ Wei An was aware of that the process of urbanization would never stop, but he questioned its legitimacy. He insisted that this “development” was not worthwhile if it destroyed the natural settings, and regarded modernization as a retrogression, though he knew that this idea would seem unreasonable to many people and out of step with modern values (*Dadi 97*). Wei An quoted two sentences to oppose this huge modernization process: “live according to the permitted conditions (resources) (*Dadi 97*)”⁵¹ in *Limits to Growth*, by the Club of Rome, a global organization that deals with a variety of international political issues, and “if it leads to damage and destruction of

⁴⁸ This is my translation; the original Chinese: 我的视野，将尽被剥夺；我的景色，将彻底熄灭。

⁴⁹ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 我明白，我身边呈现的这个进程，仅仅是另一不可逆转的大进程微乎其微的一部分。全世界都在欢呼和促进这一进程，唯有可爱的环境保护主义者和诗人，发出了与它对立的声音。

⁵⁰ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 有人在指望房地产业赚钱，更多的人期待着住房的改善，而全城的人都会欢迎小城走向都市的繁荣。

⁵¹ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 根据条件（资源）许可来生活。

mankind, all the progress is counteracted and retrogressed (*Dadi* 97)”⁵² by the Russian poet Andrei Andreevich Voznesensky.

In a nutshell, Wei An thought that modernization brought disaster both to nature and to human beings, and distorted people’s moral sense by pushing them away from nature, by making them addicted to consumption and wealth accumulation, ignorant of the true meaning of life and a higher spiritual value. For Wei An, the modern world was hopeless. He quoted an unidentified Western philosopher as saying: “only people living before 1789 could thoroughly taste life’s sweetness and have integrity as a person (156).”⁵³

Being disappointed with problems brought on by modern industrialized civilization, by threats to the natural environment and the human world, Wei An thought that returning to traditionally pre-modern society, like the three small towns and the island of Madeira where there were no cars or factories, would help people regain happiness, integrity and harmony with nature. Hence, Wei An praised the people in central Africa who objected to having electricity introduced into their jungle and the people in South America who stopped a new road from going through their residential area (*Dadi* 82).

In his “Macondo yu Laihuacun 马贡多与癞花村 (Village of Macondo and Village of Laihua)” and other parts of his writing, Wei An represented his preference for pre-modern civilization over the modern civilization. In “Village of Macondo and Village of Laihua”, Wei An commented on the changes both in the village of Macondo in Gabriel García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and in the village described in a

⁵² This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 如果最终导致人的损毁/那么，所有的进步都是反动和倒退。

⁵³ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 只有那些生活在 1789 年以前的人，才能体会出生活的美满和人的完整性。

contemporary Chinese author Xing Zhu 星竹's "Laihua Cun de bianqian 懒花村的变迁 (The Change of the Village of Laihua)". Wei An wrote: Macondo was a wonderful pre-modern society before the arrival of the gypsies. People in Macondo followed the principles of nature. In their natural condition, they were diligent, rich, joyful and happy. After Macondo was opened up, they got prosperity, but they also got noise, turbulence and war. Finally they realized, what they wanted was the peaceful life they had lived in the past, which would never come back. In "The Change of the Village of Laihua", the village of Laihua has a similar situation. After the small village was opened up to the outside world, they began to get wealthy and prosperous, but their lives also got complicated, turbulent and dirty. People in the village of Laihua became confused, for they did not know whether they should return to the past or look forward to the future. Wei An thought that what happened in the two villages revealed a universal human dilemma of the clash between the material and the spiritual world throughout history (*Dadi* 101-102). Wei An wrote this article in 1988. He was aware of the paradox and reflected on it, but perhaps he was not sure about how to address it nor did he dare to express his preferences, because they ran against the mainstream values. As time passed, Wei An seemed to become more certain and braver in expressing his preference for the pre-modern society. Wei An's radical critique of the current modernization appears in the preface and other articles in *All that Happens on the Earth*, published in 1994 (156). In 1999, a few days before he died, he clearly announced that he was not suited for life in modern society, and from deep in his heart he categorically rejected the modern industrial society (161).

6. Advocating a Simple Life, Pursuit of Spiritual Values and the Hope of Nonviolence

In order to oppose consumerism and materialism and to gain real happiness, while hoping for a return to pre-modern societies, Wei An advocated voluntary simple living. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Wei An strongly agreed with Thoreau's idea that most of material consumption was not necessary for people, and that people could gain freedom and dignity only after getting away from the desire for material wealth (121). He thought that only the principles of simple life could help people focus on spiritual values, lighten the burden on our planet and bring people the real happiness they so desperately sought. In practice, Wei An lived a simple life. And as he said, he tried his best to reduce his consumption of resources (109).

Meanwhile, Wei An focused on the significance of spiritual improvement. For Wei An, the true happiness for human beings was the improvement of the spiritual world. In "One Must be Loyal to oneself", Wei An elaborates on Thoreau's idea of spiritual improvement. Wei An mentions the concept of "being an integrated man". He thinks that life is incomplete if the peasant only sees his crops, or a merchant only sees his goods, since these are only a part of the whole and real man. Wei An asserts that an integrated man should think about the true essence of life, and should not be limited to his own profession and material items (129).

Nonviolence was another important idea that Wei An advocated in order to oppose corrupted and degraded morals and associated problems of modern times. Like many other supporters of deep ecology movement principles, such as Arne Naess, Wei An adhered to non-violence. It was an integral part of his worldview, relevant to his

egalitarian ideas for all creatures and to a critique of corrupted modern value systems.

Whether held as a moral philosophy or only employed as an action strategy, nonviolence rejects the use of physical violence in efforts to attain social, economic or political change. Wei An considered nonviolence as a principle for humans to handle interpersonal relationships and human relationships with nature.

Wei An expressed his reflection on nonviolence mainly in his “Shangdi zhizi 上帝之子 (Son of God)” and a vignette titled “The Possibility of Nonviolence”, and other parts of his writing (68-72; *Dadi* 170-171). Wei An considered nonviolence as “a great revolution in human spiritual history, and its meaning was no less than the first use of fire and the birth of written language (71).”⁵⁴ Wei An’s non-violence was drawn from Leo Tolstoy. Before reading Tolstoy, Wei An undoubtedly had spontaneous thoughts about non-violence, but Tolstoy helped these seeds germinate into a full-blown theoretical system. Wei An’s nonviolence was inspired by the sight of sheep going to the slaughter. Wei An was surprised by the peaceful attitude displayed by sheep when he saw them slaughtered in the bazaar in Xinjiang. In Wei An’s eyes, sheep could have fought against the butcher in order to escape, but they had totally given up their opposition, and accepted their deaths calmly and tamely (69-70). After he left Xinjiang, Wei An began to explore the significance of nonviolence and found that Tolstoy was the first person in modern times to thoroughly explain nonviolence (71). Tolstoy is well-known for his ideas on nonviolent resistance through such works as *The Kingdom of God is within You*. Tolstoy asserted that people should sympathize with criminals instead of hating them. Wei An referred to Tolstoy’s theory of nonviolence in his articles (71; *Dadi* 170-171). He

⁵⁴ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 我把这看做人类精神衍进中的一次伟大变革，它的意义不会亚于火的使用和文字的诞生。

greatly appreciated Tolstoy's saying: "as long as I think that I have even only one enemy, I will feel much suffering, and I cannot stand that (94).⁵⁵ Wei An agreed with Thoreau that only a noble soul like Tolstoy in Russia could utter words like this. He thought it was the very tolerance and ability to suffer pain that made Russia get through many difficulties through history (94).

Wei An also practiced the principle of nonviolence in his personal life. In his friends' eyes, Wei An was a very kind person, who like Tolstoy, made every effort not to hurt anyone, and hoped that no one was his enemy (X. Zhou 226; M. Lin 185). In a letter to a friend, Wei An wrote, "we can tolerate unhappiness and the harm others bring to us, but we cannot tolerate unhappiness and harm we bring to others. I thought, as you said, that this is our destiny,... (94)."⁵⁶ Wei An was willing to be a person who does not mind any bad history of others, and who has no hatred in his or her eyes (*Dadi* 162); he was also willing to use the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius' words to remind him every morning that he should forgive any evil or mistakes of others he might face by regarding the reason for people's bad behaviours was their ignorance of what they were doing (*Dadi* 162-163).

In addition to applying nonviolence to the human world, Wei An thought that nonviolence should also be applied to the human relationships with nature. Hence, he considered killing animals as very cruel behaviour (*Dadi* 160). He agreed with Thoreau that eating meat, which requires that animals being slaughtered, would eventually be

⁵⁵ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 想到我有一个敌人，我便痛心疾首，不堪忍受。

⁵⁶ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 我们能够容忍他人给我们带来的不快或损害，但我们无法忍受自己给他人造成不快或损害。我想，这大概就是你说的“命运”，……

abandoned by civilized people (117). His vegetarianism was the representation of his compassion for animals.

Wei An also appreciated nonviolence among animals. Wei An preferred to depict the peace-loving aspects of animals. For example, he claimed that the wasps never attacked people except when being attacked (81), and pointed out the fact that kind-hearted penguins did not fight even when gulls came and took their fledglings and ate them (*Dadi* 47).

On the other hand, Wei An knew that non-violence was the most difficult theory for people to understand and accept. Many Chinese think that when attacked it is not practical to employ non-violence to resist violence. They readily agree with an old Chinese saying “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth”⁵⁷. For Wei An, the fact that the two great advocates of nonviolence, Mohandas K. Gandhi and Martin Luther, King, Jr., were assassinated, showed the great difficulty of practicing nonviolence (71-72). He also pointed out the fact that the penguins’ kindness, which allowed seagulls to eat their fledglings, had not influenced the seagulls’ bad behaviours in the least for thousands of years (*Dadi* 47). However, Wei An still hoped that in the future nonviolence would prevail in the world. It might be the therapy needed to overcome the moral problems of human society.

⁵⁷ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 以牙还牙，以眼还眼。

III. Wei An's Ecosophy and Its Significance in Contemporary

China

Examining Wei An's view on cities and the country, it is clear that Wei An thought that modernization had many problems since it encouraged consumerism, hedonism, money-oriented values, anthropocentrism, it damaged nature and it estranged people from nature. He hoped people could break free from the bonds of material desire, live a life both simple and harmonious with nature, and be moral by following the principles of nonviolence. Hence, Wei An embraced the traditional agricultural society, believing that the ideas of simple living, nonviolence, the land ethic and pursuit of a rich spiritual world were still cherished and encouraged in such a society.

Wei An's views on society and nature constitute the main parts of his deep ecological worldview. Perhaps Wei An was not directly influenced by Naess, but Wei An agreed with the basic principles of the deep ecology movement, and developed his personal deep ecological life philosophy. Wei An held the non-anthropocentric view that all creation has intrinsic worth and favoured biospecies equality; he advocated harmony with nature; he also adhered to the land ethic and vegetarianism. Wei An warned people that the resources on the earth were very limited, and people would use up the earth's supplies in the near future if they continued with established modern lifestyles. Wei An opposed consumerism, and called for simple living. Moreover, Wei An not only noticed that modern industry damaged nature, but also saw the side effects of modernization on human spirit. Wei An thought that technological and scientific development was not as important as many people think, and it would lure people to immerse themselves in

consumerism and physical enjoyment. Wei An paid far more attention to spiritual aspects such as vegetarianism and nonviolence rather than material aspects in human life.

As Naess says, “one must avoid looking for one definite philosophy or religious view among the supporters of the deep ecology movement (Naess, “The Basics” 61)”. While Wei An’s deep ecological view represents the basic principles of deep ecology, it also has its own characteristics. Wei An seemed to object to the whole modernization process. By contrast some supporters of deep ecology assert that people should change the ideology and practices of the current society in order to achieve the right ecological aims, but not necessarily do away with the whole of modernization. Also, Wei An hoped for a return to the past agrarian society, while some prefer to reform and build new ecological communities. In its own way, Wei An’s deep ecological view is a little excessive.

As mentioned in the Introduction, the deep ecology movement is not easily accepted in contemporary China. Firstly, many Chinese people hold anthropocentric ideas on nature (He 19). They think that nature has a merely utilitarian value and that nature should be protected only if it is in the human interest to do so. Secondly, pursuing modernism is today’s common sense in China. People seldom question the rightness of the process of modernization, while being aware of few of the drawbacks of modernization. “Four modernizations”-in agriculture, industry, science and technology, and national defence- are familiar to every Chinese since they were begun by Deng Xiaoping in the 1980s (Grasso, Corrin, and Kort 235). Modernization represents the dream, the future and the hope of a better life to many Chinese. Moving from an “underdeveloped and uncivilized” country to a “developed and civilized” city is the goal

of most Chinese. China has been travelling without a stop on a high speed train towards modernization. As Wei An said, the change happening in his residential area was just a tiny part of another strong process which could not be reversed, and the voices against modernization are so faint that even a child's cry could cover them up (*Dadi* 97).

Thirdly, the admiration of consumerism, especially the focus on physical enjoyment, is one of the main characteristics of current Chinese society. People are encouraged to accumulate wealth and to pursue pleasure. The increase of material wealth is considered as the indicator of social improvement or progress (He 21). Wei An's advocacy of simple living and vegetarianism is not easily absorbed by Chinese people. As Cheng Peng 彭程, one of his friends commented:

Today, while industrial progress greatly changes the appearance of everything in the world, the road Wei An chose is too unpopular. His effort is most likely to be in vain. After all people care more about profits than poetry. I think that he could not be clearer about this point, but he was also very clear about another point: if no one cries out and warns the people, the desolation of the earth will come even sooner. His voice is faint among the noise of material enjoyment, but it is absolutely necessary. (Peng 196)⁵⁸

Wei An's deep ecological thinking represents a new creative and inspiring trend appearing in contemporary Chinese literature. Although Wei An's support of a deep ecological view is a faint voice in contemporary Chinese society, it provides a distinct and powerful perspective from which the mainstream way of looking at nature and

⁵⁸ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 在工业化进程一日千里的今天，他所选择的是一条过于幽僻的道路，他的努力很可能徒劳，毕竟人们关心利润远过于诗意。我想，他是太清楚这样的后果了，但更清楚如果没有人为之呐喊告警，大地的荒芜就将更快地降临。他的声音在物欲的喧嚣声中是微弱的，但绝对是必要的。

society can be judged. The ideas like non-anthropocentrism, vegetarianism, the land ethic, critique of modernism, the simple life, and nonviolence advocated by Wei An are nevertheless very valuable for the contemporary Chinese society.

Chapter 4: Over-condemning and Romanticizing: A Critique of Wei An's Deep Ecological View

One day, mankind will look back at the start of its failure of survival on the earth, and he will find that it was, when in 1776, Thomas Newcomen, the precursor of James Watt in England, invented the steam engine. (47)⁵⁹

--“Dadi shang de shiqing 大地上的事情 (All that Happens on the Earth)”

Although Wei An's deep ecological view has much significance for contemporary China, it also has some problematic aspects, mainly involving his excessive condemnation of modernization, and urban life, and an idealization of pre-modern civilization, and rural ways of life.

I. Exaggerating Negative Characteristics of Modernization

As mentioned before, Wei An had a radical stance towards modernism. He objected to most of the modern civilization since the industrial revolution (47). However, his argument against modernization is not adequately supported by his writings.

1. Ignoring the Bright Side of Modernism

Modernization has been a disputable process in the past and nowadays. It has brought the world benefits as well as problems. Nevertheless, it is still a little arbitrary

⁵⁹ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 有一天，人类将回顾它在大地上生存失败的开端。它将发现是 1712 年，那一年瓦特的前驱，一个叫托马斯·纽科门的英格兰人，尝试为这个世界发明了第一台原始蒸汽机。

and somewhat unfair to object to modernization just because of its defects without acknowledging any of its benefits.

On the one hand, Wei An seemed not to pay enough attention to the bright side of modernization, though since the industrial revolution began, modernization brought a series of seemingly indisputable benefits to people, such as lower infant mortality rate, eradication of some fatal diseases, decreased death from starvation, and more equal treatment of people from different backgrounds. In Wei An's writing, it is difficult to find positive comments on modernism. Wei An tended to ignore these benefits, including claiming that the invention of the steam engine was the beginning of the human failure to survive on the land (47). He also disliked modern cities, the very representation of modernism in his mind. For Wei An, the city seemed to be no good except for bookstores, libraries, theatres and friends. Clearly Wei An did not try very hard to appreciate the bright side of modernism or the city.

On the other hand, probably negating modernism and returning to agricultural society is not the only way to solve the problems of modernization. It is possible for people to improve on modernism if they develop science and technology with caution, in thoughtful and ethical ways, following the principles of deep ecology. For example, new environmentally friendly energy development may assuage the resource problem; pollutant control technology may ameliorate the pollution crisis. Also, along with people's growing ecological awareness, more people could adopt a more environmental-friendly life style, which would reduce consumption and protect natural environment. In terms of alienation from nature in the modern era which Wei An was very worried about, there are also alternative methods, as modernism has not cut off or extinguished people's

love for nature, though it has limited people's access to nature. For example, the popularity of outdoor activities nowadays demonstrates that many people in cities are practicing various strategies to be with nature. It seems that Wei An tended to disregard the bright side of modernism and refused to extend the reform method to modernism itself.

2. Over-estimating Social Problems Brought on by Modernism

Wei An probably over-estimated certain problems in modern Chinese society and unreasonably blamed modernization for all of these problems, though undoubtedly modernism has brought some serious problems to China.

Firstly, the issue of excessive consumption existed not only in the modern society but in other eras as well, while it is good to point out that people should not be overly engrossed in the material aspect of life but also attend to its spiritual aspect. Modern civilization may enrich people's entertainment styles and magnify the lure of physical pleasure and enjoyment, but people in the past, who were not affected by modernism, still faced various kinds of lure of physical enjoyment. That is why philosophers throughout history have warned people of the dangers of unnecessary and excessive desire, as *Tao Te Ching* over 2000 years ago told people to restrain their desires. It is not reasonable to blame modernism for all of people's addictions to the satisfaction that comes from material consumption.

Secondly, Wei An's idea that people in the past were happier than people in modern times and that rural people were happier than people in the urban area is based on a supposition without enough factual support. It is true that the pace of modern life is much faster than before, but people gain more colourful experience from this fast pace. It is

arbitrary to assert that people nowadays are more contented than those in the old days, but it is also not reliable to assume the opposite. Likewise, the argument that rural people live a happier life than urban people is not well supported, either. Wei An arrived at such a conclusion by generalizing examples obtained from his impressions of certain small towns and big cities. This, however, is not a very accurate or credible method. People in the country may have their different serious issues, while people in cities may have their own happiness. Happiness is indeed an individual issue. On the other hand, cities may provide richer choices of jobs and life which villages cannot provide. Most of the nature writers including Wei An did not choose the rural life but the urban or suburban life, which suggests some degree of attraction to modernism and the city on their part.

Thirdly, Wei An's idea that modern people may be more decadent than those in the past could not be well supported, either. Wei An thought that this era was bad, because people only cared about money regardless of ethics. This was also his hypothesis and hard to prove. Normally, people tend to idealize the goodness of the old days and yearn for it. Even if it is true that Chinese people in the 1990s were not as noble as those of earlier times, the degradation of morals in general was also related to political events such as the Tian'anmen Square incident of 1989. It is not reasonable to pin the blame on modernization for all decadence of contemporary morals.

Similarly, the idea that rural people are kinder than people living in urban areas is also his assumption and questionable. For example, Wei An thought that rural people like his grandfather could have a basic trust towards strangers and that this trust was a precious human virtue. However, alertness is necessary side effect of life in urban China for there are more people in the city than in the villages and these people do not know

each other very well. It is natural that urban people are more watchful of strangers than country people. But there is no reason to discount the love and friendships urban folk experience as subtly as their country cousins. Wei An, however, too easily disvalued the rich emotional lives of modern city people.

3. Superficial Description of Cities

Furthermore, the image of the city in Wei An's writing is obscure, which affects Wei An's critique of it. In Wei An's writing, the "city" is not a complete existence but refers to an empty and meaningless symbol. Wei An rarely described city life in any detail, but invariably in general terms. The city's appearance, life in the city and the culture of the city are represented superficially, and that makes it hard to convince the reader about the defects of cities. The city's function seems only to act as a foil, an antithesis for the wonderfulness of the country: the city makes people morally wicked; the city life keeps people busy, fast-paced and lacking time to enjoy life; the city is ugly. Why is the city image so abstract and blurred? One possible reason is that Wei An did not deeply explore city life. As mentioned before, what interested Wei An in the city were only bookstores, theatres and chats with friends (159). Wei An did not experience a wide range of life in the city, and this made his description and critique of the city and modernization a little shallow and unimpressive.

Altogether, it is clear that modernization brings people significant benefits which should not be discounted. It is also not reasonable to accuse modernization of corrupting the people's morals and producing unhappy and stunted lives. In addition, though it is meaningful to point out the dark side of modernization, opposing the whole of modern civilization and advocating returning to pre-modern society may not be the only way out

of the predicament and may not solve the problem at all. In general, Wei An's arguments about the negative aspects of modernization cannot strongly support his idea of totally rejecting modernization and entirely returning to the agrarian society. His attitude toward modernization seems a little too pessimistic and his cure for its illnesses seems a bit too radical.

II. Idealizing the Rural Life

As mentioned before, Wei An thought that pre-modern society was better than modern society. He assumed that villages helped people retain the natural human goodness, keep harmony with nature and live a simple but happy life. Nevertheless, it should be noticed that Wei An sometimes idealized the rural life.

1. Neglecting the Downside of Rural Life

Wei An did not mention much about the negative aspect of pastoral life. The country lifestyle was presented as very desirable in Wei An's writing, while the life in reality may not be as desirable as he imagined it. Along with harmony, peace and warmth, there are numerous conflicts and problems in rural life such as famine, poverty and repression. For example, in Wei An's childhood, Chinese villages were under the pressure of the Cultural Revolution, a period of tyranny, poverty and violence, and peasants then lived a rather tough life. Yet, Wei An did not highlight this part of reality but merely showed the bright side when depicting villages. In a different way, another contemporary Chinese nature writer, Liu Liangcheng, wrote about villagers rather accurately. Liu was fond of countryside life like Wei An, but he did not only relate the bright side of rural life but a more balanced and more complete picture of rural living.

For example, he depicted his own heavy labour in the field in detail, which was painful yet meaningful. He pointed out that some villagers were kind but also selfish, lazy and sometimes even violent. Comparatively, Wei An's descriptions and assumptions of rural life are not drawn from wide and deep representative samples and studies, which make his writing a little too shallow and unconvincing.

2. Exaggerating the Goodness of Rural People

In the meantime, Wei An's admiration for natural human goodness in rural life is a little biased. Wei An tended to romanticize humanity in country life. For example, take a vignette about people's responsibility in the country:

Once, I was crossing the field. A group of countrywomen squatted in the fields weeding. While I was waiting for the next crow of the cuckoo with fixed attention, I heard a short conversation between two countrywomen:

Countrywoman A: "what time is it now?"

Countrywoman B: "It is time to go; it is past 12 o' clock."

Countrywoman A: "It is 12 o'clock already. The kids are out of school, and I have not made the lunch yet.

The two ordinary sentences I have heard accidentally shocked me unexpectedly. It is easy to know words such as "mother love" and "mission", but it is difficult to understand their meanings fully. The reason is that we do not often confront the original things hiding behind these words and embodying the meanings of those words; the reason is also that we are gradually going far away from "life" in its original meaning. I think of the exhibit of an American painter's work. There were a few words by the artist in

the prologue, which I agree with very much: “one of the most important expressions of beauty is the nobility and responsibility of people who shoulder heavy burdens. I found that this feature is especially shown among people who live in the countryside all over the world.”(21)⁶⁰

Wei An thought that the women’s dialogue was heavily laden with significance. He also supposed that such virtues were especially represented by people in the rural area. In fact, such attributes and feelings of responsibility for children exist not only in the country. Cooking for children on time is common among mothers or fathers in both the city and in the villages. People in the cities are also concerned about sending youngsters to school and picking them up after school. Indeed, the “responsibility” and “mother love” are everywhere, and people’s lives are filled with the original meaning. It is very much open to discussion whether country people are more responsible than city people.

Likewise, the harmonious scenes in three remote small towns are not very supportive of Wei An’s case for uncritical appreciation of the country. Wei An’s description of these villages is admirable at first glance, but if the readers carefully examine the text, they may find these wonderful aspects of the towns are doubtful. Wei An did not stay long in these places, and he just narrated his first impression of these

⁶⁰ This is my translation; the original Chinese is:

一次，我穿越田野。一群农妇，蹲在田里薅苗。在我凝神等待远处布谷鸟再次啼叫时，我听到了两个农妇的简短对话：

农妇甲：“几点了？”

农妇乙：“该走了，12点多了。”

农妇甲：“12点了，孩子都放学了，还没做饭呢。”

无意听到的两句很普通的对话，竟震撼了我。认识词易，比如“母爱”或“使命”，但要完全懂得它们的意义难。原因在于我们不常遇到隐在这些词后面的，能充分体现这些词涵义的事物本身；在于我们正日渐远离原初意义上的“生活”。我想起曾在美术馆看过的美国女画家爱迪娜·希博尔画展，前言有画家这样一段话，我极赞同：“美的最主要表现之一是，肩负着重任的人们的高尚与责任感。我发现这一特点特别地表现在世界各地生活在田园乡村的人们中间。”

towns. Shaking hands and greeting is only the surface of the town. The conclusion that “they are willing to answer any question if you ask it; they are willing to help you in any way when you ask for it (59-60)”⁶¹ was based on Wei An’s observation of expressions on their faces, which is not quite reliable. Wei An speculated about the small towns and idealized people’s lives there. What he described was heavily coloured with utopian elements of his own making. These utopian factors make the reader ready to admire the peaceful rural life but also make the description of towns skewed or biased and not very dependable in Wei An’s battle against the bewitchments of modernism. Similarly, Wei An greatly acclaimed his grandparents for opening the door to a stranger and an old peasant woman sweeping snow on the road. Despite the fact that these good deeds are in some sense not that significant, Wei An was deeply touched by them and wrote one vignette and one article to pay tribute to them. Wei An’s emphasis in such writing reveals that he had a subconscious predisposition to believe that country people were better than city people in a moral sense, and that he was eager to demonstrate the validity of such a belief whenever possible. His description and examples are too generalised.

3. Romanticized Harmony between People and Nature in Rural Areas

In addition, Wei An romanticized and magnified the harmonious relationship between people and nature in villages. For example, Wei An wrote: “the wheat fields sway as the wind blows. The waves of wheat carry happiness to the villages. When June arrives, peasants moved the wheat fields away before the storms (15).”⁶² Wei An used a

⁶¹ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 只要你开口, 他们会乐于回答你任何问题; 只要你请求, 他们会给予你任何的帮助。

⁶² This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 风吹麦田, 麦田摇荡, 麦浪把幸福送到外面的村庄。到了6月, 农民抢在雷雨之前, 把麦田搬走。

rhetorical expression to show that wheat is willing to please the peasant, in order to romanticize peasants' relationship with nature, though scientifically speaking, wheat cannot sense. Also, in Wei An's words, what peasants need to do is only to "move" the wheat field. Wei An did not use the word "mow" but "move" to describe the harvest scene. "Mow" connotes the meaning of taking the life of wheat, and indicates a painstaking task as well. The word "move" makes this process of cutting wheat sound more aesthetic and less callous, and it hides the fact of heavy work behind it. Moreover, Wei An comes close to suggesting that the villagers are doing the wheat a favour and not pursuing their own self-interest when they cut it. Through rhetorical and anthropomorphic strategies like this, Wei An often romanticized the relationship between humans and nature in villages.

Likewise, Wei An wrote that "the land will never let any work fail. It let all the workers see the fruit. It uses pure peasants to suggest to us: the land is the most suitable to raise intelligent, honest, and pure people with limited desire (28)."⁶³ This is also a romanticized description. Actually, not all work on the land is certain of getting its rewards. In the agrarian economic mode, whether people have a harvest and what sort of harvest they have depends on natural conditions, such as sunshine, rain and the fertility of the soil. The peasants' life might be tremendously tough. Wei An just highlighted the most harmonious and appealing aspects of the relationship between humans and nature in the country.

It is natural and sometimes necessary to idealize or romanticize human relationships with nature, particularly in literature. However, over-idealization of rustic aspects while

⁶³ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: (大地) 叫任何劳动都不落空, 它让所有的劳动者都能看到成果, 它用纯正的农民暗示我们: 土地最宜养育勤劳、厚道、朴实、所求有度的人。

neglecting also the dark side may make readers ready to admire rural life, but also casts doubt about the reliability of the rustic picture Wei An has portrayed, and this somehow weakens his argument about the advantages of pre-modern society.

4. Superficial Description of Rural Life from the Perspective of an Intellectual Outsider

Wei An's writing about rural life is also superficial, like his writing about cities. Wei An thought that the observer, also called as a philosopher, a by-stander, belonged to the highest class among people (155-156). Wei An seemed to enjoy being such a person, and he often played the role of an observer, a philosopher and an outsider in writing about country, instead of that of a rural man experiencing rustic life.

It seems that Wei An did not regard himself as a peasant or an insider in the country. He intentionally kept a distance from real rural life and wrote his narratives from an intellectual perspective. For instance, when he talks about the donkey, Wei An rarely used his own words or drew on his own experiences to talk about a donkey, even though it is highly likely that Wei An had first hand knowledge of donkeys. Instead, he adopted others' words and opinions on three occasions, two of which are drawn from written materials (9, 40-41). One of his resources for the donkey is a biology dictionary. Wei An looked up the word "donkey" in the biological dictionary and quoted the explanation therein (40). Another quotation is from the description of the donkey by a Spanish writer, Juan Ramón Jiménez, in *Platero and I* (41). The third one comes from a peasant's answer to Wei An's question about the donkey (9). Take the third source, for example; Wei An wrote that he asked a peasant passing by whether peasants liked donkeys or not. However, since Wei An grew up in the country, he might have been expected to know

whether or not peasants like donkeys. Or he could have asked his grandparents or other relatives in the country for more detailed knowledge about donkeys and to better understand them. Wei An did not use those potential materials, but instead he chose to put an answer of a peasant on the road into his writing instead. This might indicate that Wei An was not interested in talking about or experiencing rural life himself and that he tried to retain an intellectual stance on the matter by using quotations from scientific dictionaries, Western literature, or words from real “peasants”. Such details partly reveal that Wei An wanted to show that he was not an actual member of a rural community, but rather belonged to a higher class, the class of intellectuals, equipped with Western thoughts.

If compared with Liu Liangcheng’s description of the donkey, Wei An’s intention of writing from an outsider and intellectual’s perspective is more obvious. Liu Liangcheng appreciated beauty and harmony in the country, but he wrote about them from the standpoint of an insider. He always emphasized that he was a peasant among other intellectual writers even after he moved to the city and became a famous writer. Liu Liangcheng also wrote an article about the donkey he raised. In this piece, Liu did not quote any sentences from books to describe the donkey. All his narrative and reflection on the donkey came from his own life experience. Liu wrote about the donkey from the view of an insider as a peasant, and as an insider in the donkey’s life, too. Liu thought that the donkey and he were equal. He thought that they were two animals on the two sides of one rope while no one knew who actually led the other, and they watched each other’s life and lived in each other’s life as well (Liu 10-15). Similarly, Liu wrote about the dog, cattle and other livestock he raised or wild animals he was familiar with all in

vivid details, as if talking about his relatives or old friends. Compared with Liu's writing, Wei An's writing about the donkey and other nonhuman beings contains apparently intellectual characteristics and intentionally or unintentionally has a distance from the rural life.

Wei An seemed an outsider from the rural life in his practice, too. Although Wei An strongly hoped that he could do labour in the fields for at least one day every week (19), he seemed not to have taken action on this idea. Although Wei An appreciated and admired the life of the small towns and the villages, and he was opposed to modernization, he did not go back to villages nor refuse the convenience brought by modern techniques. He stayed in a modern concrete building and enjoyed modern utilities such as a microwave oven. He dwelled in suburbia where he could enjoy the convenience offered by modernization as well as the view of county in the neighbourhood. Apparently, Wei An could not drop his career as a teacher to go back to the villages or woods for even a couple of months as Thoreau did, for either he was not able to, or he did not want to. It seems that many aspects of modern civilization were still important to him, and accordingly he chose to live in the suburbs and lead a modern life. This suggests that although Wei An praised highly the agricultural civilization and condemned modern civilization, there was a distance between the life he led and the real rural life, and either he could not bridge the distance, or he did not want to bridge it. Wei An himself seemed to be aware of this problem, but he was not sure how to solve this paradox. In fact, he responded to the potential critics as follows:

However, you will get attacked if you doubt or criticize the process of modern civilization nowadays. They will say that you enjoy the fruit of

modern civilization on the one hand, but criticized modern civilization hypocritically on the other hand. Following their logic, no one is fully qualified to criticize modernization, because no one can totally get away from the environment of modern civilization. In terms of this point, I can explain myself like this: I am not the person who consumes the least in the world or the person who consumes the most, but I dare say that I voluntarily reduced my consumption as much as possible, for the sake of the planet's present and its future. (108-109)⁶⁴

While it is true that no one can escape the modern life totally, only the most insensitive critics will expect Wei An to do so. Most fair critics would only point out that Wei An had an inadequate knowledge of what is really involved in living the rural life and that is reflected in his ecological thought, particularly the proposals for how to deal with the problems created by the industrial way of life. Surely it is not insulting him to expect him to make a more serious attempt to practice what he believes.

Wei An's response to this sort of accusation is to say that he was trying to do his best to reduce his consumption as the interest of this planet. Although this could easily be seen as an excuse that anyone could use to escape from their responsibility, it is no doubt that Wei An did much more than the majority of Chinese people, for he tried to do his part by his vegetarian diet and by a simple way of life. However, it will be even better if Wei An could have had more experience with rural life and been as an insider of or familiar with the lowest levels of rural community in his life and writing. This would

⁶⁴ This is my translation; the original Chinese is: 但今天如果你对现代文明的进程提出置疑或批评, 是会招致攻击的。他们会说你一方面享受着现代文明提供的好处, 另一方面又虚伪地批评现代文明。按照这个逻辑, 没有谁完全有资格进行这种批评, 因为今天谁能完全摆脱现代文明的生活环境呢? 关于这一点, 我这样说明自己: 在这个世界上, 我不是消费最少的人, 也不是消费最多的人, 但我敢说我是一个为了这个星球的现在与未来自觉地尽可能减少消费的人。

have made his writing about appreciation of pre-modern society and condemnation of modernism more convincing.

Generally speaking, Wei An highlighted the wonderful side of rural living and neglected the undesirable or even the ugly side of it in his writing. He over-prized the bright side of human nature among rural people; he romanticized the relationship between humans and nature in villages. And this was made easier by the fact that as an intellectual and outsider he also tended to keep a distance from the full reality of rural life. Actually Wei An created a picture of an ideal agrarian society in his imagination. Although this may add to its literary value, it made his writing about rural life a little superficial and defective.

In a nutshell, Wei An exaggerated the negative characteristics of modern civilization, negated the whole of modernization and advocated a return to pre-modern society, all of which are a little too radical and not possible. Meanwhile, Wei An's writing on the city is also a little superficial as he was not deeply involved in the life in the city. Wei An also exaggerated the beauty and wonders of the rural areas. His writing on the rural areas is also superficial for he tended to write about them from the detached perspective of an intellectual outsider rather than someone emotionally and practically involved in the rustic life. These are questionable aspects in Wei An's arguments in his deep ecological view and they affect the persuasiveness of his claims.

However, although it has some weak points, Wei An's ecosophy is an important view because it points out some severe problems that contemporary China must address if it is to succeed in surmounting the troubles produced by the rapid modernization process. Perhaps he over-estimated some issues or unreasonably rejected the whole of

modernism because of these problems; nonetheless, it is worthy to warn Chinese people who are cheering the modern process on without regard to its negative side effects or costs. His views are perspicacious and timely, particularly in the context of China's present-day.

CONCLUSION

Briefly, the previous chapters examined the formative factors of Wei An's deep ecological view, his view of nature and society, and provided a critique of his deep ecological ideas. As discussed above, Wei An developed his ecosophy under the pressure of the current Chinese environmental crisis and its social problems. He was also greatly influenced by Western literature as well as his own life's experiences and personality.

As Arne Naess pointed out, individual's deep ecological views can differ, while having certain common principles (Naess, "The Basics" 61). Not surprisingly, Wei An's deep ecological life philosophy has its own characteristics. In terms of nature, he respected every creature's intrinsic value and its right to live and blossom; he appreciated the beauty and wonders in the natural world; he advocated the Land Ethic and adhered to vegetarianism. In terms of society, he highly appreciated agrarian society and disapproved of modern industrialization. He thought that pre-modern society preserved good humanity, harmonious human relations with nature and gave people real happiness, while modernism was dangerous to nature and to human survival, and made people morally corrupt, unable to attain real happiness and alienated from nature.

Meanwhile, it should be noticed that Wei An exaggerated the defects of modernization and idealized the rural life; his ideas of negating nearly the whole of modern civilization and advocating a return to pre-modern ways of life are questionable; his stance as an intellectual outsider also made his descriptions of both urban and rural lives a little superficial and his arguments less persuasive. However, Wei An's deep ecological view is valuable to contemporary China by providing a different perspective from the mainstream way of looking at nature and society. It warns people of the

negative side effects of the modernization process which need to be addressed. Its advocacy of non-anthropocentrism, respect and appreciation for nature, vegetarianism, the land ethic, close contact with nature, simple living, nonviolence, pursuit of spiritual and other important values, which are important but often neglected, will be cherished by the readers in the modern industrial world.

In general, Wei An's deep ecological view is a faint but, significant voice in contemporary Chinese literature and society. Although such a voice is not strong nowadays, it reflects important changes happening in contemporary China. Hopefully, this kind of deep ecological voice will become increasingly stronger in the future.

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Appendix

Appendix A: English Translation of Excerpts from “All that Happens on the Earth”

“All that Happens on the Earth”⁶⁵

By Wei An, Trans. Yulin Zhou

大地上的事情(节选) 文/苇岸

1

I observed that there are three ways that ants build their nests. When small ants build nests, they disgorge damp soil particles at the nest mouth, and pile them in the shape of a cup, a square oven, a grave, a fortress or a loose honeycomb, which stand erect above the ground. The mid-sized ants disperse soil particles evenly and gracefully around the mouth of their nest, in the shape of a bell or the mouth of a spring. It looks like a black flower blooming on top of the earth. Big ants build their nests as if they were northern people, casually, roughly, and with no regard for details. Big ants carry soil particles in their mouths to some faraway place, and then toss them without any consideration, like farmers rushing about in big strides as they scatter seeds. (11)

(一)

我观察过蚂蚁营巢的三种方式。小型蚁筑巢，将湿润的土粒吐在巢口，垒成酒盅状、灶台状、坟冢状、城堡状或松疏的蜂房状，高耸在地面；中型蚁的巢口，土粒散得均匀美观，围成喇叭口或泉心的形状，仿佛大地开放的一只黑色花

⁶⁵ This Appendix is my translation of several vignettes in Wei An’s prose, titled “Dadi shang de shiqing大地上的事情(All that Happens on the Earth)”(Wei An *Shangdi zhi zi* 11-54).

朵；大型蚁筑巢像北方人的举止，随便、粗略、不拘细节，它们将颗粒远远地衔到什么地方，任意一丢，就像大步奔走撒种的农夫。

2

When it snows, I always think of summer, when the ripeness-faded seed-pods of the elm trees are being blown from the treetops by the wind and scattered. The snowflakes fly everywhere, bringing a sense of harmony to the human world, which comes from the dancing snowflakes themselves. Perhaps the snowflakes are the fruit of a greater tree, blown about by a wind outside the world. The snowflakes drift all over the earth; the purity they carry soon grows into affecting blossoms of spring. (11-12)

(二)

下雪时，我总想到夏天，因成熟而褪色的榆荚被风从树梢吹散。雪纷纷扬扬，给人间带来某种和谐感，这和谐感正来自于纷纭之中。雪也许是更大的一棵树上的果实，被一场世界之外的大风刮落。它们漂泊到大地各处，它们携带的纯洁，不久即蕃衍成春天动人的花朵。

5

Sparrows stay longer on the ground than in the trees. They fly to the trees only after they have eaten enough food. They rub their short hard beaks on branches over and over again, as northern peasant women grind their knives on the brims of big urns. Sparrows squat on the branches and twitter just as children cry out loudly when they ride on their fathers' shoulders. The sparrows' voices convey dependence, trust, happiness and safety. Sparrows in the trees behave in the way children do on the ground. Their jumping is like children's running, while the trees' intention in stretching out their branches is to give birds one playground after another on which to play. (13)

(五)

麻雀在地面的时间比在树上的时间多。它们只是在吃足食物后，才飞到树上。它们将短硬的喙像北方农妇在缸沿砺刀那样，在枝上反复擦拭。麻雀蹲在枝上啼鸣，如孩子骑在父亲的肩上高声喊叫，这声音蕴含着依赖、信任、幸福和安全感。麻雀在树上就和孩子们在地上一样，它们的蹦跳就是孩子们的奔跑。而树木伸展的愿望，是给鸟儿送来一个个广场。

6

One time as I was passing through a field, I saw a sparrow-hawk. It circled quietly and floated in the sky for a long time. As if it had noticed something, it dove straight down, but then pulled up rapidly before touching the ground. I imagined that it must have seen a rabbit, an animal close to extinction because of human expansion on the Hebei plain, an animal foretold of in Thoreau's *Walden*: "What is a country without rabbits and partridges? They are among the most simple and indigenous animal products; ancient and venerable families known to antiquity as to modern times; of the very hue and substance of Nature, nearest allied to leaves and to the ground—and to one another; it is either winged or it is legged. It is hardly as if you had seen a wild creature when a rabbit or a partridge bursts away, only a natural one, as much to be expected as rustling leaves. The partridge and the rabbit are still sure to thrive, like true natives of the soil, whatever revolutions occur. That must be a poor country indeed that does not support a hare."⁶⁶

⁶⁶ This quotation by Wei An from *Walden* is missing a sentence: "If the forest is cut off, the sprouts and bushes which spring up afford them concealment, and they become more numerous than ever." This sentence is followed by the last sentence in this quotation.

Seeing a sparrow hawk that was fruitlessly hovering over the field, I think of the field's prosperity in the old days. (13)

(六)

穿越田野的时候，我看到一只鹞子。它静静地盘旋，长久浮在空中。它好像看到了什么，径直俯冲下来，但还未触及地面又迅疾飞起。我想象它看到一只野兔，因人类的扩张在平原上已近绝迹的野兔，梭罗在《瓦尔登湖》中预言过的野兔：“要是没有兔子和鹧鸪，一个田野还成什么田野呢？它们是最简单的土生土长的动物，与大自然同色彩、同性质，和树叶、和土地是最亲密的联盟。看到兔子和鹧鸪跑掉的时候，你不觉得它们是禽兽，它们是大自然的一部分，仿佛飒飒的木叶一样。不管发生怎么样的革命，兔子和鹧鸪一定可以永存，像土生土长的人一样。不能维持一只兔子的生活的田野一定是贫瘠无比的。”

看到一只在田野上空徒劳盘旋的鹞子，我想起田野往昔的繁荣。

9

At dawn, I am often awoken by the chirping of sparrows. In time, I find that sparrows always start chirping 20 minutes before sunrise. When the sun rises later in winter, sparrows also start chirping later; when the sun rises earlier in summer, sparrows also start chirping earlier. The sparrows' chirps before and after sunrise are different, too. Sparrows' chirps before sunrise are like "niao-niao-niao", but after sunrise they change to sound like "zha-zha-zha". I do not know what the relationship between their chirps and the sunrise is. (14-15)

(九)

黎明，我常常被麻雀的叫声唤醒。日子久了，我发现它们总在日出前 20 分钟开始啼叫。冬天日出较晚，它们叫的也晚；夏天日出早，它们叫的也早。麻雀在日出前和日出后的叫声不同，日出前它们发出“鸟、鸟、鸟”的声音，日出后便改成“喳、喳、喳”的声音。我不知道它们的叫法和太阳升起有什么关系。

11

Wheat is the most graceful, the most elegant, and the most affecting crop on the earth. The wheat fields are neatly laid on the broad earth, like pieces of shiny gold. Wheat fields are the most valuable treasures of May, the stored-up essence of the land. The wheat fields sway as the wind blows. The waves of wheat carry happiness to the villages. When June arrives, peasants moved the wheat fields away before the storms.

(15)

(十一)

麦子是土地最优美、最典雅、最令人动情的庄稼。麦田整整齐齐摆在辽阔的大地上，仿佛一块块耀眼的黄金。麦田是 5 月最宝贵的财富，大地蓄积的精华。风吹麦田，麦田摇荡，麦浪把幸福送到外面的村庄。到了 6 月，农民抢在雷雨之前，把麦田搬走。

12

Two sparrows perched on the balcony railing outside my window. There, it was a bay of sunshine, warm, quiet, and safe. The two sparrows were old. The world knew how many nestlings they had raised for it. They squatted in the splendid sunshine, looking as though they had all the necessities of life. Eyes half-closed, they turned their heads around freely, without a care in the world; they occasionally let out a few chirps; their

sound was honest and amiable. Their bodies were fleshy and big; their feathers were fluffy; they tucked their heads into their puffed-up necks, like a cart driver wears his sheepskin jacket in winter. (15-16)

(十二)

在我窗外阳台的横栏上，落了两只麻雀。那里是一个阳光的海湾，温暖、平静、安全。这是两只老雀，世界知道它们为它哺育了多少雏鸟。两只麻雀蹲在辉煌的阳光里，一副丰衣足食的样子。它们眯着眼睛，脑袋转来转去，毫无顾忌。它们时而啼叫几声，声音朴实而亲切。它们的体态肥硕，羽毛蓬松，头缩进厚厚的脖颈里，就像冬天穿着羊皮袄的马车夫。

20

It has been already a month, but wasps in that nest are still there. The temperature is gradually dropping. The wasps seem to know what is coming, so they huddle tightly together to wait for their final hour to come. Only when the sun rises high and the sunshine turns warm, do they occasionally take flight. They lost their nest long ago. Why did they not fly away the day when they lost their nest? Every day as I watched them, my heart grew heavy. In them, I saw something greater than life. You, the man who set a fire to the wasp's nest, why did you destroy an innocent home? Apparently, by doing this, you wanted to prove something, just because you are a man. (18)

(二十)

已经一个月了，那窝蜂依然伏在那里，气温渐渐降低，它们似乎已预感到什么，紧紧挤在一起，等待最后一刻的降临。只有太阳升高，阳光变暖的时候，它们才偶尔飞起。它们的巢早已失去，它们为什么不在失去巢的那一天飞走呢？每

天我看见它们，心情都很沉重。在它们身上，我看到了某种大于生命的东西。那个一把火烧掉蜂巢的人，你为什么要捣毁一个无辜的家呢？显然你只是想借此显示些什么，因为你是男人。

22.

As soon as *Lichun*⁶⁷ comes, there are signs and a sense that winter is disappearing and that spring is coming. The north winds, which lasted through the whole winter, have returned to the far reaches of the earth. The winds told me, while I stood by the road and watched them, which spring had been brought by them. Looking at the vast fields, I imagine that the ground is covered with crops. The sky has turned blue. Standing on the springy soil, I feel that my body is stretching, and my blood is surging. I wanted to shout or run about. I wanted to pick the hoe and work at full tilt. I often have this wish: to work on the field for at least one day every week. Emerson believed that everyone should retain a basic relationship to labour in this world. Manual labour is the lesson taught by God, which makes us maintain a fundamental relationship to the soil and to nature.

However, in this world, there are some people who never set foot on bare earth through their lifetime. (19)

(二十二)

立春一到，便有冬天消逝、春天降临的迹象和感觉。此时整整过了一冬的北风，到达天涯后已经返回，它们告诉站在大路旁观看的我：春天已被它们领来。看着旷野，我有一种庄稼满地的幻觉。天空已经变蓝，踩在松动的土地上，我感到肢体在伸张，血液在涌动。我想大声喊叫或疾速奔跑，想拿起锄头拼命劳动一

⁶⁷ *Lichun* 立春 is the beginning solar term of 24 solar terms in traditional Chinese lunar calendar..

场。我常常产生这个愿望：一周中，在土地上至少劳动一天。爱默生认为，每个人都应当与这个世界上的劳作保持着基本关系。劳动是上帝的教育，它使我们自己与泥土和大自然发生基本的联系。

但是，在这个世界上，有一部分人，一生从未踏上土地。

26

Once, I was crossing the field. A group of countrywomen squatted in the fields weeding. While I was waiting for the next crow of the cuckoo with fixed attention, I heard a short conversation between two countrywomen:

Countrywoman A: "what time is it now?"

Countrywoman B: "It is time to go; it is past 12 o' clock."

Countrywoman A: "It is 12 o'clock already. The kids are out of school, and I have not made the lunch yet.

The two ordinary sentences I have heard accidentally shocked me unexpectedly. It is easy to know words such as "mother love" and "mission", but it is difficult to understand their meanings fully. The reason is that we do not often confront the original things hiding behind these words and embodying the meanings of those words; the reason is also that we are gradually going far away from "life" in its original meaning. I think of the exhibit of an American painter's work. There were a few words by the artist in the prologue, which I agree with very much: "one of the most important expressions of beauty is the nobility and responsibility of people who shoulder heavy burdens. I found that this feature is especially shown among people who live in the countryside all over the world." (21)

一次，我穿越田野。一群农妇，蹲在田里薅苗。在我凝神等待远处布谷鸟再次啼叫时，我听到了两个农妇的简短对话：

农妇甲：“几点了？”

农妇乙：“该走了，12点多了。”

农妇甲：“12点了，孩子都放学了，还没做饭呢。”

无意听到的两句很普通的对话，竟震撼了我。认识词易，比如“母爱”或“使命”，但要完全懂得它们的意义难。原因在于我们不常遇到隐在这些词后面的，能充分体现这些词涵义的事物本身；在于我们正日渐远离原初意义上的“生活”。我想起曾在美术馆看过的美国女画家爱迪娜·希博尔画展，前言有画家这样一段话，我极赞同：“美的最主要表现之一是，肩负着重任的人们的高尚与责任感。我发现这一特点特别地表现在世界各地生活在田园乡村的人们中间。”

28

I begin to yearn for snow as soon as winter comes. It used to be normal to get several big snowfalls in a winter, but it has become a luxury nowadays (Who has deprived us of this divine right?). A winter with no snow is like land without crops, or a birdless forest. When the snow unexpectedly falls, the world is full of joy. The snow endows the land with divinity. The snow blows away those things which are usually hidden inside human bodies, but entrap and engulf human souls. I saw adults making snowmen along with their children in the open air. In the places where I cannot see, people must be carrying out many delightful snow-related activities.

One can go without wind or rain, but not without snow. Everything that happens in mankind's sweet wishes involves snow. (22)

(二十八)

进入冬天，便怀念雪。一个冬天，迎来几场大雪，本是平平常常的事情，如今已成为一种奢求（谁剥夺了我们这个天定的权利？）。冬天没有雪，就像土地上没有庄稼，森林里没有鸟儿。雪意外地下起来时，人间一片喜悦。雪赋予大地神性；雪驱散了那些平日隐匿于人们体内，禁锢与吞噬着人们灵性的东西。我看到大人带着孩子在旷地上堆雪人，在我看不到的地方，一定同样进行着许多欢乐的与雪有关的事情。

可以没有风，没有雨，但不可以没有雪。在人类美好愿望中发生的事情，都是围绕雪进行的。

30

I regard sparrows as the “ordinary civilians” among birds. Sparrows are the first representatives of birds in the world. Their honesty and vitality are found throughout the land. They are humble neighbours of humans. They continued to multiply throughout their history of being ignored and injured by humans. They voluntarily approach unfathomable us, with a fearless and self-sacrificing spirit. No other species of bird can build as intimate a relationship with us as sparrows do. After I compare them with many other species of birds, I found that I still like them the most. I wrote some words especially for them:

They keep their word:

waking up earlier than the sun wakes every day.

They get up very early,

waiting for the sun in the middle of the road,
and travel with the sun together.

They seem to be the children of the sun.

They play around the sun every day.

They are used to gathering before they sleep and telling each other news they saw
outside.

Because sparrows do not know what the order is,
they give outsiders an impression that they seem to be quarrelling when they talk.

Their color makes me think of the color of the soil.

Their clans are as ancient as soil.

They are stay-at-home birds.

From their birth,

they never stray far away from their villages

("Sparrows")(22-23)

(三十)

我把麻雀看做鸟类中的“平民”，它们是鸟在世上的第一体现者。它们的淳朴和生气，散布在整个大地。它们是人类卑微的邻居，在无视和伤害的历史里，繁衍不息。它们以无畏的献身精神，主动亲近莫测的我们。没有那一种鸟，肯与我们建立如此密切的关系。在我对鸟类作了多次比较后，我发现我还是最喜爱它们。我刻意为它们写过这样的文字：

它们很守诺言每次都醒在太阳前面它们起得很早在半道上等候太阳然后一块儿上路它们仿佛是太阳的孩子每天在太阳身边玩耍它们习惯于睡觉前聚在一起把

各自在外面见到的新鲜事情讲给大家听听由于不知什么叫秩序它们给外人的印象好像在争吵一样它们的肤色使我想到了土地的颜色它们的家族一定同这土地一样古老它们是留鸟从出生起便不远离自己的村庄。（《麻雀》）

39

The relationship between humans and the earth is very much like the relationship between a man and his life. At an early age when he has little awareness and knowledge, the life to him looks like an inexhaustible and inconsumable water well, it appears that he can employ and enjoy it as much as he wants and in whatever way he likes. One day, however, he senses something has changed, and suddenly he realizes that life is short and precious, and that a lot of its preciousness has already been wasted. Facing the future, he begins to feel regret and fear, and starts to exercise and care for his health.

The difference is, human beings are not a single person, so they are not a whole with a single mind. Today, the despoiling of the earth by many countries is not merely to provide for the livelihood of their own people. It's just like how the meaning of sports competitions has gone far beyond the original goal of exercising the human body; regardless of the sacrifices involved, people compete and rival, only to obtain the glory of a championship. (28)

（三十九）

人类与地球的关系，很像人与他的生命的关系。在无知无觉的年纪，他眼里的生命是一口取之不尽用之不竭的井，可以任意汲取和享用。当他有一天觉悟，突然感到生命的短暂和有限时，他发现，他生命中许多宝贵的东西已被挥霍一空。面对未来，他开始痛悔和恐惧，开始锻炼和保健。

不同的是，人类并不是一个人，它不是具有一个头脑的整体。今天，各国对地球的掠夺，很大程度上已不仅仅为了满足自己国民的生活。如同体育比赛已远远超出原初的锻炼肌体的意义一样，不惜牺牲的竞争和较量，只是为了获得一项冠军的荣誉。

51

In 1970s, movements aiming to flatten the land and build basic irrigation for farmland occurred in succession in northern plain

These movements happening in full swing in consecutive years had thoroughly changed the original appearance of the ancient plain: wastelands were cultivated; ponds were filled in; trees over 100 years old which densely covered the fields were felled; giant grave-mounds, with trees and grass on them, were moved away. The field became flat and orderly, which threw into crisis the survival of birds and beasts which lived and proliferated there for many generations. The footprints of rabbits had gone; the trace of the hawks had vanished. Birds, which could not find a place to drink and nest, became fewer and fewer. People could barely see any birds-nests in the fields for a long time.

10 years have passed. The new trees planted on both sides of straightened roads between the fields have grown up. It is gratifying that nests of the resident magpie dot these new trees in recent years, though the trees are not big or tall yet (In the past, magpies always chose the tall and big arboreal to build their nests). The reduced height of magpies' nests demonstrates magpies' courage for their survival. Meanwhile, it also means that country children, who are captivated by the products of modern civilization such as TV sets, have been alienated from the countryside. (35-36)

在 70 年代，北方的平原上曾相继开展过平整土地运动和农田水利基本建设运动。

这些连年进行的热火朝天的运动，彻底改变了古老田野的原始面貌：荒地开垦了，池塘填平了，密布田间的百年老树被伐倒，木草丛生的巨大坟丘被搬掉。田地的平坦和整齐，给世代繁衍其间的鸟兽，带来了灭顶的生存危机。野兔绝迹了，鹰也消失了踪影。无处饮水和筑巢的鸟儿，日渐稀少。很久以来，在田野人们已几乎看不到任何鸟巢。

10 年早已过去了，那时在调直的田间道路两旁栽下的新树，已经长起。令人欣慰的是，近年来在这些尚不高大的树上，又星星点点地出现了留鸟喜鹊的巢（喜鹊以往一直选择高大的乔木筑巢）。鹊巢高度的降低，表明了喜鹊为了它们的生存而显现出的勇气；同时，也意味着被电视等现代文明物品俘获的乡下孩子，对田野的疏离。

53

Of all creatures on the earth, the smallest and weakest usually have the richest life-force. For instance, grass--I call it great foundation of everything on earth. "It cannot be burned out by the wild fire; it grows again when the spring wind blows."⁶⁸ This is the best glorification of grass' durability since history began.

In the south of the small residential area where I live, which is under construction, there is a patch of open land slightly higher than the rest. In order to make the ground level, in spring the construction workers removed over one-meter of soil, covered with

⁶⁸ This sentence is quoted from a poem by Bai Juyi 白居易, a famous Chinese poet of the Tang Dynasty. Original Chinese: 野火烧不尽，春风吹又生。

withered grass, from the surface of the whole clearing by bulldozer and excavator.

However, when summer came, dense green grass miraculously sprung up on this bare and fresh layer of soil.

In the order that divine force creates on the earth, for the “supporters”, which are at the bottom of this chain, and are also the weakest, the Lord not only keeps the superiority of their number, but also endows them with stronger life-force than other creatures. That is the case with grass, ants, sparrows, and peasants among us human beings. (36-37)

(五十三)

在全部的造物里，最弱小的，往往最富于生命力。例如草——我称它们为万物伟大的基础。“野火烧不尽，春风吹又生”，这是有史以来，人类对草的坚韧生命最好的赞颂。

我居住的这个尚未完备的小区南侧，有一块微微隆起的空地。为了小区的地势一致，春天建设者用铲车和挖掘车，将布满枯草的整个地表，掀去了一米多。但是，当夏天来到时，在这片裸露的生土层上，又奇迹般地长出了茂密的青草。

在造物的序列中，对于最底层的和最弱小的“承受者”，主不仅保持它们数量上的优势，也赋予了它们高于其他造物的生命力。草是这样，还有蚁、麻雀，我们人类中的农民也是其中之一。