Reflections on Waterscape Aesthetics in Chinese Tradition

WANG Keping*

Abstract

Philosophy is akin to poetry due to their respective endeavour to express the ultimate good sense which we term civilization. This can be exemplified through the Chinese vision of waterscapes which is found running through Chinese philosophy and poetry alike. As observed in Chinese tradition, the Daoist water allegory is referred to “the supreme good”. It can be further explicated with reference to the Confucian appreciation of “huge waterscapes” in terms of moral symbolism. All this permeates through the poetic depictions of waterscapes in the beautiful, majestic, and musical categories from an aesthetic perspective. Such depictions bear philosophical, moral, and aesthetic values altogether as a result of their underlying linkage with “the ultimate good sense”, and therefore have played an important role in human life from past to present. They are often employed as aesthetic objects as they delight the sight, hearing, mind and spirit. Moreover, they are utilized to revive the sense of Being and homeliness in closer contact with the nature in which we reside.

Keywords: water allegory, moral symbolism, beautiful waterscapes, majestic waterscapes, musical waterscapes

Razmišljanja o estetiki vodnih prizorov v kitajski tradiciji

Izvleček

Filozofija je podobna poeziji, predvsem zahvaljujoč njenemu skupnemu prizadevanju izraziti najvišji dobri smisel, ki ga imenujemo civilizacija. To je mogoče ponazoriti s pomočjo kitajski pogledov na vodne prizore, ki jih lahko najdemo tako v kitajski poeziji kot filozofiji. Z vidika kitajski tradicije se daoistična vodna alegorija obravnava kot »najvišje dobro«. Nadalje jih je mogoče razlagati tudi z nanašanjem na to, kako »velike vodne prizore« v smislu moralnega simbolizma cenijo v konfucijanstvu. Vse to prežema poetične ponazoritve vodnih prizorov znotraj kategorij lepega, veličnosti in glasbe, če so le-te obravnavane s stališča estetike. Tovrstne ponazoritve nosijo filozofske, moralne in estetske vrednosti kot rezultat njihove temeljne povezave z »najvišjim dobrim smislov«, zaradi česar so igrale pomembno vlogo v človekovem življenju od preteklosti do sodobnosti. Takšne ponazoritve so pogosto uporabljene kot estetski objekti, saj kot

* WANG Keping, Senior Fellow of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), Emeritus Professor of Beijing International Studies University. Email address: wangkeping55(at)163.com
As acknowledged conventionally from past to present, Chinese cultural heritage features a trinity of literature, history and philosophy (文史哲) owing to their internal interaction and inseparable linkage, especially in the scope of heuristic verbal expression that sheds light on cognitive experience and reflective thinking. All this is largely embodied in the wide use of literary allegory, historic allusion and philosophic aphorism, among many other features of Chinese culture. As to the linkage between philosophy and poetry (typical of literature), for instance, it so happens to be strongly affirmed by Alfred Whitehead, for his own reasons. When reconfirming the purpose of philosophy in a conclusive statement, he claims that it aims to rationalize mysticism by the introduction of novel verbal characterizations that are rationally coordinated. In his observation, “philosophy is akin to poetry” as “both of them seek to express that ultimate good sense which we term civilization. In each case there is reference to form beyond the direct meanings of words. Poetry allies itself to meter, philosophy to mathematic pattern” (Whitehead 1968, 174).

To my mind, what is meant by “the ultimate good sense” here pertains to at least two domains: one is the epistemological with regard to the human cognitive repertoire, and the other is the ethical with respect to human moral conscience. Under such circumstances, it tends to strengthen the connection between philosophy and poetry up to the degree that it will enhance, if not determine, the level of both human cognition and human morality. As to the “reference to form beyond the direct meanings of words” in each case, it implies something more meaningful and significant than words themselves in philosophy and poetry altogether. More specifically, it entails highly suggestive and symbolic significance outside of the literal meanings available in the dictionary coverage. In the case of philosophy, it points to the thought-provoking mechanism of the philosophic message concerned; and in the case of poetry, it is related to the polysemic organic context of the poetic realm engaged. When both of them strive to express “the ultimate good sense”, they tend to manifest the inherent and interactive linkage between them.

As discerned in their respective discourses, philosophy can be both mysterious and poetic to the extent that it goes beyond “mathematic pattern” alone, and correspondingly, poetry can be both mysterious and philosophic to the extent that it
goes beyond “metre” alone. That is to say, philosophy can be poeticized, and poetry philosophized. For philosophy cannot do without the exercise of cross-questioning, critical reflection, dialectic pondering, intellectual intuition and even mystical fantasy if it endeavours to “maintain the active novelty of fundamental ideas illuminating the social system” while “reversing the slow descent of accepted thought towards the inactive commonplace” (ibid.). Likewise, poetry cannot do without the use of human emotion, in-depth intention, powerful imagination, intriguing imagery and aesthetic intuition when it strives to create the poetic realm par excellence so as to illuminate the human condition and enlighten the human spirit per se. All this is, for example, deeply set and typically embodied in the Chinese vision of waterscapes. Looking into it from an aesthetic viewpoint, we find the vision in its own right threading through Chinese philosophy and poetry alike.

In Chinese tradition, the natural landscape is known as shan shui (山水), comprising mountainscapes and waterscapes. It often plays an important part in human living, because it offers natural beauty and provides the sense of being at home in nature. It is for this reason that poetic couplets and philosophical expressions are seen inscribed on huge rocks spreading over the scenic spots and tourism attractions across China. It therefore enjoys an intense and constant affinity among Chinese people in general. This can be traced back to the aesthetic ideas of both Daoism and Confucianism on the one hand, and to the picturesque images of Chinese classical poetry on the other.

As regards waterscapes in particular, they appear in various forms of water sources as a consequence of aesthetic contemplation. They are considered to be dynamic by nature and thus perfuse emotional vitality to natural landscapes at large. To the extent that both Daoism and Confucianism are preoccupied with the moral aspects of water, Chinese poets in history, particularly those during the span of Tang and Song dynasties ranging from the 7th to 13th centuries, have been inspired to create fascinating images of waterscapes according to their individual contemplations, feelings, intentions, imaginations and even fantasies. They have therefore composed numerous poems and left behind a rich legacy for later generations of readers. Such poems have been widely read and appreciated from past to present mostly because of “the ultimate good sense” expressed. It you encounter school children anywhere in China and ask them to recite some of these poems—which are usually well-known for being short, rhythmic and picturesque—then you’ll find they can do so easily, as a result of having learned these classical pieces from their parents, teachers and relevant anthologies.

In the autumn of 1998, I was invited to work as an English translator and help a crew from a TV station in Bavaria (Germany) make part of a documentary series entitled Poetry and Children in the World. I escorted the crew headed by Dr. Richard Blank to visit more than ten cities, towns and
The Sense of Nostalgia qua Homeliness

Recent years have witnessed a new phenomenon as part and parcel of the cultural creativity enterprise across China, chiefly spurred by a Chinese poetry recitation contest, televised nationwide and at primetime during weekends. It is extremely popular with numerous audiences as it involves an enormous number of participants from all walks of life, ranging from kindergarten kids, elementary pupils, and college students to public servants, traffic policemen, railway workers, geological fieldworkers, rural peasants and the retired. Moreover, audiences enjoy giving their own responses to the questions that are asked in the show, and reciting the poems themselves. The program in this way provokes what is effectively a tri-way form of communication among the contestants, hosts and viewers, and therefore continues to attract large audiences from all over the country.

Why is a show about reciting poetry so popular? It is assumed that those preoccupied with classical Chinese poetry are seeking “the ultimate good sense”. Moreover, such a sense can be situationally extended, in my opinion, to the sense of nostalgia as a form of homeliness among the Chinese populace at large. In their mentality, the sense of this type is not merely deep-rooted owing to the influence of their cultural tradition, but also growing fast due to the magic power of landscape poetry associated with people’s imagined homelands in “the good old days”. It is essentially attributed to the aesthetic charm of picturesque scenery in the poetic characterization of the past, and also to the rare presence of such scenery in the face of eco-environmental deterioration, not to speak of technological dominance, urban expansion and interference from other civilizations, among other factors.

As luck would have it, there has recently been a progressive improvement in the eco-environment in recent years across China, which has increased popular enthusiasm for reciting classical poetry, and thus strengthened the sense of nostalgia as a form of homeliness among the people with varied backgrounds. Accordingly, more and more Chinese citizens are becoming highly aware of the great importance of having a beautiful home with green mountains and blue waters, which leads them to embrace the natural beauty of their homeland that is considered villages across China. According to the prerequisites of the fieldwork, we planned to ask the children we encountered by chance in all these places to recite their favourite poems in order to render the documentary as natural and authentic as possible. The age of the children ranged from 4 to 12 years old. Most of them were from primary schools, and some from kindergartens. Their performance was so impressive that the whole group was delighted throughout the entire journey. One of my German colleagues was so amazed by one of the landscape poems recited by a kindergarten kid, and requested me to write down the English version because he would like to share it with his girlfriend as a reminder of his good experience in a scenic spot with a poetic ambiance.
to be the fundamental source of real joy, a happy life, health, security, and even longevity. This awareness helps people live poetically in some ways by virtue of reviving the old poetic descriptions, and encourages them to build up an environmental consciousness for the sake of both the earth and their own quality of life.

Quite incidentally, this growing sense of nostalgia as homeliness reminds me of Heidegger’s concern with the idea of “homeliness” itself. For his concern can serve as a thought-provoking inspiration that carries in itself some in-depth relevance to the current discussion. As noted in Heidegger’s critical ponderings, the dominant function of technology sees nature as “equipment” for people to gratify their practical needs and utilitarian purposes. For example, a river is revealed as a source for generating electricity aside from its attraction to the tourism industry. To his mind, the emergence of “homelessness” is so problematic that it goes as far as to drive humans into “the forgetfulness of Being”, which is accordingly conducive to losing the sense of the mysterious source of things and beings. This sense itself once sustained human beings in their confidence that their lives had something to answer to and be measured by. Now it is a critical necessity to restore this sense as an alternative to ameliorate the human condition. As noted in one of his essays, Heidegger pays much attention to the “great hidden stream which moves all things along and makes a way for everything” (Heidegger 1971, 92). “This reflects his fascination with Daoism” according to his son who relates it to a “well” with respect to his father’s metaphor for the “great hidden stream”, a metaphor that has special significance due to its link with the Way or Dao for everything (Cooper 2012, 31). In fact, the “well” in question is found in the garden of a small chalet on the edge of a village high in the mountains of the Schwarzwald. It is extended to a pumping pipe from which its water source keeps flowing down into a rectangular container lying amid the grass beside a flower-lined path.

The chalet was built in 1922, and over the next 50 years most of Heidegger’s writing was done there. It was not simply that the place afforded peace and quiet in which to work. More importantly, as Heidegger once explained in a radio broadcast, his work up there was “sustained and guided” by the landscape, where he “experienced the great comings and goings of the seasons”, and where mountains, trees and lakes “penetrated daily existence”. According to Heidegger,

As soon as I go back up there … I am simply transported into [my] work’s own rhythm … People in the city often wonder whether one gets lonely

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2 In 1946, Heidegger worked, with a native speaker of Chinese, on a translation—never completed and now lost—of the Dao de jing. The “native speaker of Chinese” is said to be Xiao Shiyi who studied Western philosophy in Wiener by then.
up in the mountains … But it isn’t loneliness, it is solitude … Solitude has the peculiar and original power of … projecting our whole existence into the vast nearness of the presence of things. (Cooper 2012, 64–65)

What is noteworthy in Heidegger’s personal experience is that it is multifaceted as regards its underlying implications. In my understanding, he feels very much at home up there in the natural surroundings that are conducive to his agreeable sense of homeliness. He seems to perceive the landscape from an ontological viewpoint. The landscape as such appears to provide solitude so as to meet his spiritual needs, enrich his own aesthetic experience, evoke his philosophical inspiration, assist him with his productive output, and above all, commune with his whole existence. Made up of the mountains, trees and lakes altogether, the landscape in Heidegger’s favourite spot provides solitude, as it is above the hectic, urban world, but still dynamic as it changes through the cycle of the four seasons. Moreover, “the mountains” in this context strike me as a reminder of the Chinese notion of *shan shui* qua natural landscapes.

As seen in Chinese cultural tradition and the phrase itself, the notion as such is literally a synthesis of mountains and waters. These two types of natural entities are inseparable insofar as the structure of scenic beauty is concerned. Mountains would look as though they were dead without waters flowing through them, while they come to live with streams, rivers, waterfalls and lakes. For they tend to mirror each other and make an organic compound in certain aspects of the beautiful in nature. Being aesthetically engaging, mountains turn into mountainscapes and waters into waterscapes in accord with their specific context and atmosphere. Even though they are interactive and complementary from the perspective of natural landscapes, they can be approached and appreciated for two main reasons: in some scenic spots waterscapes are more engaging than mountainscapes, and in some other attractions, mountainscapes are more inviting than waterscapes. This distinction does not violate the fact that both of them demonstrate distinctive traits, symbolism, and aesthetic values. Nor does it take into account the preference of those who come to contemplate them for aesthetic pleasure.

As regards the well metaphor from Heidegger, it implies the mysterious source of water in view of the Way or Dao for the myriad things. One assumes that all this creates an engaging atmosphere that helps the German philosopher attain his working rhythm, become engrossed in pleasant solitude, and get into the union of his “whole existence” with “the presence of things”. In short, it facilitates “the vast nearness” of natural beauty to his living *Dasein*, contemplative life, immersive expounding, aesthetic ecstasy, and philosophical inspiration, so to speak.
In addition, Heidegger’s conjecturing of the well as “the great hidden stream” occurs to me as being suggestive of the Daoist worship of the “water allegory” allied with “the supreme good”. More specifically, it is Laozi, the founder of early Daoism, who likens “the supreme good” to the nature of water per se. Generally speaking in terms of modern perception, water is claimed to have three forms—solid, liquid and gaseous. Judging from a positive viewpoint proper, we find water becomes solid when frozen in cold winter. It can be as hard as rock and used for skating, sculpture and other practical purposes. For example, it can be cut into ice blocks of varied size, stored, and utilized in summer. Moreover, water in liquid form flows through valleys into lakes, rivers and seas. As it facilitates the growth of the myriad things, it provides such advantages as agricultural irrigation, fishery, shipping and other transportation services. Moreover, water changes into gaseous form under certain weather conditions. It thus evaporates into the air and gives us the moist climate we need. However, what is meant by “the supreme good” is the most fundamental of all goods with which water is bestowed in Laozi’s consideration. This point is to be further formulated later when looking into the “water allegory” in early Daoism.

Apart from Daoism, the well metaphor on this account needs to be explicated with reference to the Confucian appreciation of the “huge waterscapes” on the one hand, and on the other, to be reflected in light of the waterscape symbolism in morality. It is actually owing to the Daoist and Confucian influence that the contemplation of waterscapes remains intriguingly meaningful, and runs through many philosophic analogies, poetic compositions, landscape paintings, literati gardens, music creations, and literary theories, among other forms. It therefore gives rise to varied types of imagery and value in these domains. All this elicits a more detailed consideration of waterscapes in traditional Chinese philosophy and poetry alike. Such consideration is to be mostly conducted from aesthetic and moral perspectives. However, what is to be articulated below does not necessarily mean what is signified in Heidegger’s inferences from the well metaphor, even though his interesting observation in this regard is employed as an eye-catching reminder of the water allegory and the waterscape aesthetic in focus.

Conventionally, waterscapes as aesthetic objects have been highly appreciated across China from antiquity onward, sensuously involving and intellectually inspiring to Chinese thinkers, poets and painters altogether. Their distinctive values not only appeal to aesthetic contemplation, but also stimulate philosophical reflection due to their heuristic and symbolic significance. These dimensions can be found at least in three leading spheres: the philosophical implication of the water allegory in Daoism, the moral symbolism of the river image in Confucianism, and the aesthetic significance of picturesque waterscapes in landscape poetry. Since
landscape poetry is often identified with landscape painting in both theory and praxis, the focus is therefore retained on the former instead of the latter in this discussion from an aesthetic standpoint. Moreover, such poetry is characterized by rich images and philosophic implications as it appeals to both poetic and philosophic reflections. It is in a way conceived as the expression of “the ultimate good sense” as it enjoys a wide range of readership in China and elsewhere.

The Water Allegory

Daoism is renowned for distinguishing between such binary categories as the Yin and Yang, soft and hard, weak and strong, and inactive and active, among many others. It treats them as opposite forces or aspects that co-exist, interact, and interchange within the myriad things between Heaven and Earth. However, it is inclined to pay more attention to the potential power of the Yin, the soft, the weak and the inactive rather than their opposites in order to demonstrate the dialectical mode of thinking and functioning. It has kept this tendency ever since Laozi, the founder of early Daoism.

As read in Laozi, the soft is, for instance, often allegorized to a water image because of its special character that denotes something more than its surface. What is noteworthy is the water allegory below:

The supreme good is like water.
Water is good at benefiting all things
And yet it does not compete with them.
It dwells in places that people detest,
And hence it is so close to the Dao. (Laozi 2011, 143)

Water is hereby analogized to “the supreme good” because it pertains to such merits as altruism, selflessness, modesty, receptiveness, powerfulness and so forth. As the argument reveals, these merits underlie the positive features of water itself. More specifically in the context given, water is first and foremost altruistic by nature, benefiting all things in growth without asking for anything in return, and thus corresponding to the Dao of Heaven; secondly, water is selfless in principle, serving all things but never competing with them, and thus corresponding to the Dao of the sage who works for the advantage of others but never competes with them for fame or reputation; thirdly, water appears modest, always flowing down to and dwelling in the low or humble places, and thus corresponding to the Dao of natural spontaneity that retains the origin of all things; fourthly, water joins huge rivers and merges
into vast oceans that stay open to all resources from the entire world. These oceans bear the great virtue of boundless inclusiveness, thus corresponding to the Dao of unlimited receptiveness and ready to accommodate whatever comes. Overall, water appears as though it is gentle rather than strong, but remains potentially powerful when becoming dynamic under certain circumstances, thus able to overcome all sorts of obstacles or blockages. It is therefore very similar to the nature of the Dao, which is claimed to be invisible in form but invincible in essence.

Along this line of thought, there arises a historically prevailing insight into the symbolic virtue of water. It is found inscribed on a big stone built into a bulletin wall in Lijiang, an ancient town in Yunnan province. It proclaims,

> The wise are like water, for the water benefits all things without contending with others; it flows shallow around stones and thus forms a stream; it stays on in a lower pit and thus forms a pool; it stumbles down with natural circumstances and thus forms a cataract; it moves into a great valley and thus forms a broad sea. It varies in shape but retains its same nature wherever it appears. That is to say, it has few desires and wants such that it changes itself in accord with the situations involved and enjoys its freedom of movement with no obstacles in its way.

This inscription has been there for centuries as a form of moral teaching and intellectual guidance. It has been read and reconsidered repeatedly by local residents, passers-by and tourists from all over China and the rest of the world. On the account of this historical duration, it is considered to be a kind of living wisdom passed on from generation to generation, if not sanctified as something sacred from the ancients. It is at any rate an embodiment of pragmatic wisdom related to Daoism as a lifestyle. For it is not confined to the ivory tower of pedantic scholars, but transmitted to the grass roots of the common people.

Now let us turn to the water analogy again. Elsewhere Laozi goes on to advocate more explicitly a heuristic message derived from water through such a eulogistic statement:

> Nothing in the world is softer and weaker than water, but no force can compare with it in attacking the hard and the strong. Everyone in the world knows that the soft can overcome the hard, and the weak can overcome the strong, but none can put it into practice. (Laozi 2011, 172)
Ostensibly, the water image is transfigured into something incomparable and unconquerable even though it seems softer and weaker than anything else. It is so unique and irreplaceable as a result of its twofold character: it helps things grow and flourish by virtue of its vital function on the one hand, and conquers all by means of its hidden power on the other. All this turns out to be an evident justification of its being “close to the Dao”, as Laozi states.

According to his empirical intuition, Laozi infers from the natural phenomenon of flowing water such external traits as softness, weakness and humbleness. However, these traits are conducive to gains instead of losses since they are able to bring down whatever water meets with. In other words, being a symbol of the soft and the weak, water has such potential power that it can easily defeat the hard and the strong. And this power is largely determined by the perseverance of hydrodynamics itself. Viewing the text as a whole, we can most likely conclude that Laozi’s depiction of water in terms of its function reflects his philosophy of “sticking to the soft and the tender”, and accords with his dialectic principle that “weakness is the function of the Dao”. To illustrate the great potential of water, we can turn to an old Chinese saying—“A drop of water can make a whole through a rock”. Naturally, this “drop of water” is one of countless and successive drops. It signifies a kind of continuation performed by virtue of unyielding endeavour and consistent perseverance.

As a matter of fact, Laozi himself appreciates the wisdom and power exemplified by the hidden virtues of water, and intends to apply them to personal cultivation in general and to political leadership in particular. To his mind, the best personality is expected to learn from the aforementioned qualities of water. For in reality, only those who are modest and selfless are most able to enjoy companionship or friendship from others. Likewise, only those who take up what others find too insignificant, unpleasant or difficult to do are most likely to succeed in their careers. This is also true of those leaders who are able to establish themselves and then keep their good positions, providing they manage to avoid being arrogant, dominant or autocratic with peers and subordinates alike. Hence Laozi advises people, and especially leaders, to draw wisdom and virtue from what is seemingly humble, soft and weak, like water. As he states: “In dwelling, [the best man] loves where it is low. In the mind, he loves what is profound. In dealing with others, he loves sincerity. In speaking, he loves faithfulness. In governing, he loves order. In handling affairs, he loves competence. In his activities, he loves timeliness. Since he does not compete, He is free from any fault” (Laozi 2011, 143–44).

It is also noteworthy that Sunzi, a contemporary of Laozi, also makes use of the water allegory in The Art of War (孙子兵法). As he writes:

3 The old saying in Chinese is *di shui chuan shi* (滴水穿石).
The laws of military operations are like waters; the tendency of waters is to flow from heights to lowlands. The law of successful operations is to avoid the enemy’s strength and strike his weakness. Waters changes its course in accordance with the contours of the land. The soldier works out his victory in accordance with the situation of the enemy. Hence, just as the flowing of waters retains no constant shape, so in war there are no constant conditions. He who can modify his tactics in accordance with the enemy situation and thereby succeeds in winning may be said to be divine. (Sunzi 1993, 41–42)

Obviously, Sunzi recommends a close observation on the dynamic features of water. For the key substance of the art of war emphasizes the strategy of adaptability based on in-depth knowledge of the two sides engaged in a battle. This is not only strength-wise, but also scheme-wise. For any military operation is as situational as the flowing waters, nothing therein is constant but instead forever changing. If a commander sticks to a campaign scheme rigidly and develops no alternatives to deal with unforeseen issues, then he is prone to be trapped and defeated. Interestingly, Sunzi is not war-like at all in spite of being a historically famous strategist and war theorist. Instead, he is highly aware of the fatal destructiveness of warfare, and thus keeps warning the state leadership not to launch any military actions unless there is no other choice. Moreover, he holds that the best stratagem is to undermine the offensive conspiracy of one’s rivals and succeed in scaring them away without direct confrontation on the battlefield.

The Moral Symbolism

The Confucian appreciation of waterscapes results in a kind of moral symbolism in essence. A waterscape is aesthetically engaging. Moreover, it is heuristically appealing because it gives much food for thought. According to the morality-based tradition, it is philosophically provocative and morally symbolic in kind. Confucius himself takes the lead in having a moral reflection on the flowing current in a big river. As recorded in some classical texts, the method of appreciating waterscapes initially stemmed from his affirmation, as follows:

The wise are delighted in waters while the humane in mountains. The wise are active while the humane tranquil. The wise are feeling constantly joyful while the humane enjoying longevity. (Confucius 1995 [1979], 6.23)
Herein “waters” refer to a running river or swift current, and “mountains” to a huge ridge and high peak. They are distinguished in terms of their respective features or physical virtues. The former is flowing and active in kind, transparent when shallow while unfathomable when deep, looking as if it is quick, witty, sensitive, observant and progressing all the time. The latter stays still and quiet by nature, ready to accommodate the myriad things and provide them with what facilitates their growth, appearing as though it is firm, stable, reliable, consistent and benevolent in any case. Likewise, the distinction between the wise and the humane is made according to their respective characteristics and personalities. In comparison, the wise somewhat correspond to the physical virtues of waters, whereas the humane correspond to the physical virtues of mountains. The wise are inclined to feel delighted with the symbolism of the river image because they are intelligent and quick-witted, acting like the swift currents when perceiving things and handling any problems they encounter. Moreover, they tend to find joy instead of confusion because they are able to attain the most insightful understanding and knowledge of what human life means and where it proceeds. With respect to the humane, they are saturated with the consciousness of reciprocal love and kindness for other beings. They seem to go beyond such social bondages as fame and profit. They remain therefore peaceful and tranquil to the extent that nothing can disturb or distract them at all. They are well positioned to experience “the timeless time” that is metaphorically identified with longevity and eternity. At this stage, both the wise and humane have returned to nature as a consequence of having succeeded in freeing themselves from social alienation. This state of being is not only psychical, but also physical. It is actually the outcome of “naturalized humanity” (人自然化) (Li 1998, 161–62).

There is an extended comment on the wise delighting in waters that appears in the Shuo Yuan (说苑) by Liu Xiang (刘向 77–6 BC). It is summarized as follows:

The reason why the wise are delighted in waters lies in these features: Waters originated from streams flow continuously day and night as though they are full of dynamic power; they follow natural courses, run through all the small gaps, and make them equal to the same level; they move into the lower places as though they demonstrate the modest virtue of propriety; they never hesitate to meet with the deep valleys as though they are filled with incredible courage; they enter into the ponds or lakes when turbid but come out of them clean as though they bear the virtue of transformation. Many people learn from this virtue so as to become righteous, and the myriad things attain it so as to keep alive. When assembled in valleys and seas, waters are so profound that they appear as
fathomless as the sage of divinity. Hence the wise get delighted in waters that moisten and nurture all beings between Heaven and Earth apart from their capacity of helping the state and family accomplish and develop. (Liu 2019, Ch.17)

Along this line of thought, the Confucian attitude towards the contemplation of waterscapes is further extended when Zigong asks his master, Confucius, why he has to observe them when meeting each big river. He replies:

As regards the water flow of a torrential river, it is in a way like virtue (de) because it benefits all beings without a deliberate purpose for itself; it is in a way like righteousness (yi) because it flows into low places according to the natural courses; it is in a way like fundamental principle (dao) because it runs ceaselessly forward; it is in a way like courage (yong) because it is resolute and fearless while cutting through deep valleys; it is in a way like justice (fa) because it keeps the same water level when it fills into low pits; it is in a way like uprightness (zheng) because it spills over any container without being coerced when it is full; it is in a way like sensibility (cha) because it is soft and reaches the minute wherever it goes; it is in a way like moral transformation (shan hua) because all things that grow out of water are fresh and clean; it is in a way like volition (zhi) because it zigzags here and there but continues eastward with unshakable determination. It is due to all this above that a superior man finds it necessary to gaze at the water flow encountered each time. (Xun 1995, 593)

This passage is further extended elsewhere with some modifications in accord with the moral values highly recommended in Confucianism. It reads:

A superior man compares the water flow of a torrential river to moral qualities. For instance, the water flow is in a way like a kind of virtue (de) as it benefits all things selflessly; it is in a way like a kind of benevolence (ren) as it brings about life wherever it goes; it is in a way like a kind of righteousness (yi) as it flows to low places according to its natural principle; it is in a way like a kind of wisdom (zhi) as it moves observably when shallow but cannot be fathomed when profound; it is in a way like a kind of courage (yong) as it never hesitates and fears to cut through deep valleys; it is in a way like a kind of observance (cha) as it appears soft but nourishes all things; it is in a way like a kind of uprightness (zheng) as it accepts all sources and never rejects the polluted; it is in a way like
a kind of moral transformation (shan hua) as it receives unclear water but produces clear water; it is in a way like a kind of justice (zheng) as it holds its equilibrium even in its container; it is in a way like a kind of measure (du) as it spills out when it is full; it is in a way like a kind of persistent volition (yi) as it zigzags its way towards the east. Therefore, a superior man finds it worthy to contemplate it. (Liu 1992, Ch. 17.47)

Judging from the analogical characterization given above, what is noticeable is an evident correspondence between the natural phenomena and moral symbolism. It is assumed that human nature as a result of being human as human is fostered and shaped by human culture, but it preserves some resemblance to how it originated from the natural world. This is due to people’s observing and imitating what has been happening in their surroundings. In other words, when finding out what is going on in the natural world, humans would be aesthetically stimulated, intellectually provoked and morally enlightened one way or another. This is noticeable in the Confucian delight from contemplating waters and mountains. Such being the case, Qian Mu (钱穆 1895–1990) makes a remark from a moral and artistic viewpoint. He assumes that human morality is rooted in human nature, and that human nature stems from the natural world. The beautiful in the natural world is perceived and rethought through the human mind. The beautiful as such is transformed into art when expressed by relevant media. Therefore, the morally virtuous tend to know and enjoy art more than others. All this is in line with the natural world, because the ancient thinkers in China would equate the oneness between Heaven and humans with the oneness between goodness and beauty (Li 1998, 161).

There are at least four points to make with regard to the moral symbolism of the river image. First and foremost, the delight drawn from waters and mountains is not simply an aesthetic reaction to the sensuous aspects, but also a spiritual feeling of the moral import. It reveals a vicarious experience of the natural beauty in landscapes that is parallel to a moral assessment. Secondly, the Confucian stance towards both waters and mountains manifests a special kind of affinity with nature, which is further developed into the conscious oneness between nature and human-kind. It is then incorporated into the Chinese way of contemplating the beautiful both aesthetically and spiritually. Thirdly, it is peculiar to the landscapes across China that contain rich cultural elements and historical traces, comprising an important part of Chinese aesthetic phenomenology and art creation, poetry and painting, in particular. Fourthly, the way of appreciating the beautiful in landscapes involves a hierarchy of value judgment in light of three different attitudes. According to Confucius, “Those who know it are no better than those who like it; those who like it are no better than those who are delighted in it” (Confucius 1995, 6.20).
Why is this so? Those who know it just as it is do not feel as strongly as those who like it. However, those who like it are simply fond of it but have not yet got a full appreciation of it. In other words, they are unable to put it into real practice in a joyful manner. As for those who are delighted in it, they are those who both know it and like it, and in addition, they have mastered it and thereby take pleasure from it in effect. In contrast to those who know it and those who like it, those who are delighted in it stand out as they are able to appreciate it with aesthetic sensibility and experience the free state of being in an ontological sense. For they enjoy the spiritual freedom that comes with such an enjoyable engagement, and go so far as to live an artistic life in essence.

Talking about the beautiful in nature, we can find much evidence from the picturesque imagery of landscape poetry in particular. Poetry of this kind holds a most important position in Chinese art and literature. Its richness and attractiveness demonstrate not only the magic power of words and the aesthetic wisdom of ancient times, but also the tremendous beauty of natural scenery. As detected in the Chinese literary legacy, the general output of the poets in the Tang and the Song dynasties contributes a great deal to the development of picturesque waterscapes through philosophical reflection and poetic creativity. As a result, the value of waterscape aesthetics in particular has been promoted and disseminated far and wide ever since, due to “the ultimate good sense” they express. It is generally the case that the aesthetic significance of the picturesque waterscapes boasts such four cardinal features as being verbally expressive, visually evocative, thought-provoking, and able to impact one’s mood. It is poetically represented in differing modes that can be displayed by at least three broad categories, including the beautiful, the majestic, and the musical.

**The Beautiful Waterscape**

In accord with their aesthetic properties, the beautiful waterscape (秀美型水景) is thus conducive to the harmonious interaction and joyful convergence between the subject and object. It is therefore seen in a tranquil stream, a transparent pond, and an attractive river in particular. In actuality, waterscapes appear as the main scenes of poetic descriptions due to their visual appeal and suggestive significance.

First and foremost, as regards the tranquil stream, typical examples can easily be drawn from Chinese poetry ever since the Tang dynasty. For instance, we can perceive it first in a poem by Wang Wei and then in another piece by Su Shi,
Fresh rain has fallen on the vacant mountains;
When autumn’s evening approaches.
The bright moon is shining through the pines,
The clear stream flowing over the stones.
Bamboos rustle, as washing maids return.
Lotuses stir, a fishing boat descends. (Zhang and Bruce 2008, 37)\(^4\)

As noticed in the above description, the waterscape is associated with the “fresh rain”, “clear stream”, “washing maids” and “fishing boat”, all of which are soaked in “the bright moon” and rounded out by the “pines”, “stones”, “bamboos” and “lotuses”. The tranquillity is indicated by the “vacant mountains”, which are devoid of any other intruders and noises. What could be heard are the sounds of water flowing over the stones in contrast to the rustling of bamboos and a row boat. The depiction invents a verbal painting that pleases the sight, hearing, mind and spirit altogether.

By Sandy River pond the new-lit lamps are bright.
Who sings “the Water of Melody” at night?
When I come back, the wind goes down, the bright moon paves
With emerald glass the river waves. (Xu 2008, 121)\(^5\)

What is noteworthy in the stanza given above is the image of the pond in particular. It is similarly placed against the background of the “bright moon”. The water surface serves as a mirror as if it is like “emerald glass”. The song fitting the tune of “the Water of Melody” is accompanied by the rhythmic ups and downs of the “river waves”. They interact to produce a symphonic effect. The entire setting strikes out the quietude “at night” in the moonlight. It is not only agreeable to the eyes, but also delightful to the ears of anyone present.

Next, let us turn to the prominent scene of a small pond. It is portrayed by Liu Zongyuan in one of his poetic travelogues, which reads:

Walking westward 120 feet from the small hill, I heard water sounds behind a bamboo grove. The sounds were similar to those of the jade ornament on the body in ancient times. I was feeling so delighted that I made a short cut through the grove. Right there I found a small pond,

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4 This poem by Wang Wei (王维) is originally titled 山居秋暝 (My Mountain Villa in an Autumn Evening).

5 This ci poem by Su Shi (苏轼) is called 有美堂赠述古 (Tune: The Beautiful Lady Yu—Written for Chen Xiang at the Scenic Hall).
and saw its bottom rock through the clear and cool water … Down in the pond were nearly a hundred of little fish swimming about so freely. The sunlight shot through the pond and projected the shadows of the fish over the bottom rock. The fish seemed too happy to make a move. All of a sudden, they dashed afar and near, back and forth, as if they were playing joyfully with me as an onlooker. (Ni 2000, 111)

The pond is situated in a place undisturbed by any others. Its water is transparent to the extent that one can see through it to its bottom rock. Reflected there are the shadows of some little fish remaining at rest for the moment. Sure enough, the transparency is conditioned by the clearness of the water and the isolation of the location. It thus makes the tiny creatures feel as if they are free, happy and safe when enjoying their leisure time. Then, at this moment, a human visitor comes along as a seeming intruder, disturbing them a bit and causing momentary confusion. But very soon they resume their peace, and commence to play joyfully with the visitor when they seem to find him contemplating their lifestyle with good will and appreciation, if not curiosity.

In line with the above-cited extract is a poem with the title of *The Rear Buddha Hall of the Broken Hill Temple* (题破山寺后禅院) by Chang Jian (常建 fl. 749). It reveals some similar substance and ambiance (Zhang and Bruce 2008, 135).

Once again we see a water pond situated in “mountain scenes”. Over it are the singing birds, and away from it is a temple sending off “the sounding bell and chime”. In “the heart of silence”, the “images in the pond” are perceived as a result of the crystal-clear water. These images may be composed of the overhead plants, passing clouds, and even the contemplative visitor. They therefore serve to “empty the human mind” by purifying it of secular cares and worries altogether. This in fact reveals the main reason why the visitor goes into the deep mountains and gazes at the pond in solitude. What he does is something more than a simple trip for aesthetic satisfaction. It can be considered as a spiritual quest for mental purification in this case. Chinese literati are very often said to take up this habitual action in search of spiritual freedom and mental tranquillity.

Next, let us look into the essential aspects of an attracting riverscape, as illustrated by three exemplary poems by different poets who happened to live at adjacent periods in the Tang dynasty. The first piece is the *Spring, the River, Flowers, the Moony Night* (春江花月夜) by Zhang Ruoxu (张若虚 c. 670–c. 730) (Zhang and Bruce 2008, 17). As detected in its outset, the river becomes so widened and blurred at night that its surface appears sea-like, with its visual

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6 It is quoted from a short travelogue of 至小丘西小石潭记 (The Little Stone Pond at the Westside of the Hill) by Liu Zongyuan (柳宗元).
space extending far in the springtime. What actually surrounds it encompasses
the dynamic waves mingled with fragrant flowers and so forth under glistening
moonlight. It thus brings out not only a beautiful scene that is perfused with
aesthetic temptation, but also spurs a vicarious response on the part of those
who contemplate it obsessively. Perceptually through imagination, it turns out
to please such senses as sight, hearing, smell and even taste on the account of
its diverse imagery, up-and-down movement and blooming flowers, quite apart
from the other elements involved. The second example is the Song of Green
Water (绿水曲) by Li Bai (李白) (Xu 2007, 43). As observed in his picturesque
depiction, the green water and the autumn moon are set out in a phenomenal
contrast. The white lilies in the lake are reflecting the moonlight. The lotus
flowers are blooming and shining in fresh red, turning out to be more attractive
than the fair cheek of the bashful oarswomen. All this contributes to the magic
spell of the riverscape as such. Finally, the third sample is the Bamboo Branch
Song (竹枝歌) by Liu Yuxi (刘禹锡 772–842) (Xu 2008, 25). As read in the
alluring setting saturated with poetic charm, the red mountain cloaked in peach
blossoms appears as the background of “the shore washed by spring water be-
low”. Even though the poet gets emotionally drunk and infatuated in a sensu-
osous ambiance, he wakes up with a profound enlightenment in a philosophical
sense. That is, the red blossoms are passionate and engaging indeed, but they
are short-lived and not permanent at all, because they are bound to fade away
like a romantic fantasy of loving pathos. With this pessimistic state of mind, he
likens the river to his sorrow that flows on forever. The shift of the sentimental
tone herein seems to be a bit sad, but it tells of the fact that it is deep-rooted in
human consciousness and existence. Moreover, it discloses, from past to pres-
ent, the psychology of Chinese literati who in reality are often confronted with
more socio-political pressure and suppression.

The Majestic Waterscape

In comparison with its beautiful counterpart, the majestic waterscape (壮美型水
景) becomes what it is owing to its dynamic, amazing and even awesome prop-
erties, including rapidness, powerfulness, greatness, vastness and so forth, all of
which seem to resemble some key features of the sublime in nature. In most cases,
the majestic waterscape will likely lead to opposing interaction and even conflic-
tive tension between the subject and the object. As a rule, it is exemplified in the
overwhelmingly rapid torrents, powerful waterfalls, great waves, vast lakes and
the like.
In most cases, the experience of the majestic waterscape can be greatly intensified when obtained through a traditional form of sightseeing, such as by avoiding modern transportation. This is simply because the poets who described these scenes gained access to them in such traditional ways as hiking, or on a boat or horse. They would have felt something rather different if they had arrived by car or helicopter.

Firstly, let us review what Li Bai experienced on an old-fashioned boat along the Yangtze River.

Leaving at dawn the White Emperor crowned with cloud,  
I’ve sailed a thousand miles through Three Gorges in a day.  
With monkeys’ sad adieux the riverbanks are loud,  
my skiff has left then thousand mountains far away. (Xu 2007, 195)

The rapid torrents are not directly mentioned in the poem. However, they are implied by the fast speed that carries the person aboard “a thousand miles” away from White Emperor Town down to Jiangling City. The distance between the two places is actually a hundred miles or so, but is exaggerated to strengthen the sensational experience of this unusual journey by boat. A skiff winding through the Three Gorges is always an adventure, both in the past and at present. It requires morals rather than courage to face its tremendous risk. Furthermore, the atmosphere in the poem is immensely magnified by means of the fragile skiff moving along the swift river, and the sad adieux of the monkeys amidst the high mountains over the riverbanks. It is breath-taking and heart-stirring, not merely for the traveller inside the scene, but also for the onlooker outside it.

Secondly, the majestic qualities are often manifested by powerful waterfalls in particular. Across the world there are a number of cataracts—very large waterfalls renowned for their overwhelming volume, threatening appearance and sublime waterscapes. They have thus developed into international tourist attractions. The creative representation of waterfalls plays a crucial role in some classical Chinese poetry, even though such scenes are uncommon. Notwithstanding this, we find the most familiar and outstanding image of all in *The Waterfall in Mount Lu Viewed from Afar* (望庐山瀑布) by Li Bai. It runs as follows:

The sunlit Censer Peak exhales incense-like cloud;  
The cataract hangs like an upended river, sounding loud.  
Its torrent dashes down three thousand feet from high,  
as if the Silver River fell from azure sky. (Xu 2007, 15)

7 It is under the Chinese title of 早发白帝城 (Leaving the White Emperor Town for Jiang Ling).
Geographically speaking, the Censor Peak is one of the summits amid the range of Mount Lushan in modern Jiangxi Province. According to the allegorical depiction, it is wrapped in sunlight while giving off purple clouds as though it were a huge incense-burner. Flowing down from its top is a gigantic cataract with a huge volume of water. It is hanging there “like an upended river” “sounding loud” enough to be heard miles afar. More amazingly, its unexpected length plunges down to the bottom of a deep valley, appearing as though the Silver River, a typical Chinese analogy for the Milky Way, was falling “from azure sky”. The hyperbolic rhetoric of the image stems from a unique imagination. Such features as the unusual height, volume, length, loudness and power of the waterfall are vividly synthesized to reveal what a majestic waterscape it is. More often than not, the poetic description cannot be identified with the real scene it claims to describe. For the poet tends to make an idiosyncratic judgment or comparison according to their personal experience and productive imagination. However, he still draws his inspiration one way or another from what he actually sees and feels.

Thirdly, certain traits of a majestic waterscape are reflected in the great waves or tides that occur with big rivers or vast seas. Many poets and painters alike are attracted to contemplate and portray them in their works, as in the following three examples, all of which are linked with the Yangtze River proper. The first sample is Li Bai’s *Farewell Beyond the Thorn-Gate Gorge* (渡荆门送别) (Xu 2007, 13). Herein the poet jots down his experience traveling along the river from Sichuan to Hubei. As he zigzags his way out through the narrow mountain valleys into the wide plain area, he is feeling at ease after taking a deep breath, so excited to observe the great waves rolling “to boundless main”. Right there he draws tremendous joy from the majestic waterscape, such that he claims the great river flowing from his hometown will escort him faithfully and in a friendly manner, wherever his boat is carried onward.

The second example is drawn from the *Watching the Tidal Bore* (望海潮) by Liu Yong (柳永 c. 984–c. 1053) (Xu 2008, 79). He is renowned for his *ci* poems about personal sentiment, sorrow and romance, but here he produces a very memorable image of a majestic riverscape that is quite rare in his literary output. Under his pen the “cloud-crowned trees” upon the riverbanks appear as huge umbrellas, down below are the great waves rolling up like snow, and pouring over the riversides in white foam. At the same time the waves are making a great noise that is not mentioned here, but can be heard from afar. The torrent runs faster as it is sped up by the pushing waves. The person in the poem is amazed at the scene, until it disappears from sight in the remote east.

The third example is the *Ode to Chibi with Nostalgia* (赤壁怀古) by Su Shi (苏轼 1037–1101) (Xu 2008, 149). It was presented in the form of a *ci* poem as well,
due to the popularity of this form during his era. Like Liu Yong, Su compares the swashing waves to “a thousand heaps of snow” as a result of their whiteness. But distinctly and clearly, he rounds out the great waves in sharp contrast to the “jagged rocks” instead of “cloud-crowned trees”. Right on the spot, huge waves are striking against hard rocks. The sounds burst out so loud, transmitting far and wide. They work together to render the waterscape even more majestic or magnificent. Accordingly, “many heroes” and their heroic deeds are embedded into the scene. They remind the reader of the very site where a historic battle once took place during the period of the Three Kingdoms (220–280). It was decisive with regard to the destiny of the whole country and its course of development over half a century. In the poem it is used as a foil to set out the natural power of the majestic waterscape. In return, this natural power helps to magnify the importance of the historical event.

Fourthly, what is sublimely majestic is represented by a lake some 800 square miles in size. It is largely aligned with a vast, broad, and seemingly boundless surface that extends beyond the visual threshold of man. It can be well illustrated with two famous poems. One is Du Fu’s *Climbing the Yueyang Tower* (登岳阳楼) (Zhang and Bruce 2008, 111), and the other is Meng Haoran’s *Watching Dongting Lake.* According to Du’s perception, the size of Dongting Lake stretches far and wide to cover “two states in the southeast” of China: one is known as the State of Wu situated in the modern province of Jiangsu, and the other the State of Chu situated in the modern province of Hubei. However, it is not mentioned (for obvious reasons) that the central part of the lake is in the modern province of Hunan. The lake’s extraordinary vastness goes beyond the ultimate stretch of human vision or sense of sight. In addition, its broad surface reflects “the universe of sun and moon” as though it is blended with infinite space, in which the sun, moon and lake are mirroring one another. This being the case, it gives rise to two interrelated images: one is above in the sky while the other is below in the lake. Nowadays Dongting Lake still remains vast, although its surface has shrunk a lot because of the lack of water and the construction of an enormous reservoir in the upper region of the Yangtze River.

As portrayed by Meng’s pen, the boundless vision of Dongting Lake is emphasized again in an even more startling image. It is hyperbolized to the degree that it can “meet the sky blue” when it reaches the highest water level. It is hot and sunny in the

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8 Meng Haoran, *Watching Dongting Lake* (临洞庭上张丞相). “In August Dongting Lake is full,/So boundless to meet the sky blue./Its vapours rising over the Cloud-Dream swamp,/And its huge waves shaking the Yueyang town.” The English translation is mine.
month of August, as mentioned in the poem. The water inside the lake warms up and evaporates into the rising air. This being true, Yueyang Town appears to be enveloped in a kind of steaming mist. A strange and mysterious sight, the mist moves back and forth with the huge waves across the lake. All this creates a majestic spectacle, and tempts traveller’s to climb up the Yueyang Tower so as to watch and listen to it.

The Musical Waterscape

The musical waterscape (乐感型水景) is characteristically based on the intriguing power of water music that comes into effect in varied forms and volumes. It is not simply heard in the dynamic waterfalls, but also enjoyed in the murmuring creeks and bubbling springs in tranquillity. It is mysteriously alluring to the extent that some travellers in Chinese history prefer water music to instrumental music on certain occasions, and this is especially the case with the Gongan Group (公安派) in the Ming dynasty.

Being a leading member of the group, Yuan Zhongdao distinguishes himself from the others with his persistent indulgence in water music. He even goes so far as to assert that water music is more distinctive and delicate than stringed music. For he believes that water music is natural and pure, whereas stringed music is artificial and pretentious. On some occasions, he likens a wise mind with flowing water that changes both subtly and variably. On other occasions, he listens to the interactions between stones and water in a stream, and finds water sounds corresponding to what is produced either by the stringed instruments known as the qin (琴) and se (瑟) or by vocal singing with emotional expression (Yuan 1981, 171). What follows is one of his detailed descriptions of water music in a fascinating travelogue,

The Jade Spring Water splashes pearls of drops around at the outset, flowing down into a channel for a while, and then stumbling over a large rock in the middle all of a sudden, thus producing great sounds that can be heard from afar. I often come here and enjoy listening to it. There are stones by its sides, I put some cattail leaves over one of them, and sit on them listening from morning till night. Initially I am driven about by my impulsive mentality and rampant ideas. Consequently, my sense of hearing prevents an attentive and in-depth listening to the stream. For it is easily disturbed by the rustling wind in the forest and the singing birds in the valley. When dark falls and quietude comes, I stop watching and return to listening, I thereby feel the varied changes of the water sounds since I have regained my attention and tranquillity by cutting off all other connections. At this moment, I find the water sounding so
It can be seen that the water music that comes to the listener in this passage is not simply a matter of sight and sound, but also aesthetic and spiritual. It thus encourages the attentive listener to sit in forgetfulness and enjoy supreme happiness. The listener then listens carefully to the water sounds changing according to his extended imagination and association, but he also feels himself enter the water melody. He is thus encouraged to go beyond his self and even his conception of life and death in a delightful experience of absolute freedom. All this embodies his profound understanding of the naturalistic wisdom of Daoism. He therefore applies it to his way of life by identifying his being with the natural beauty in the water sounds. Beauty of this kind can superficially be seen as the creation of the water sounds, but it is in essence the outcome of musicalizing the cosmic rhythm in the traditional Chinese consciousness of space and life. The act of musicalizing as such is not confined to the water sounds alone. It is exercised extensively in the arts of harmonics, calligraphy, poetry and painting. On this account, the Chinese literati tend to appreciate natural beauty by infusing an ontological meaning into it. By so doing, they are able to achieve a transcendent experience of the oneness between Heaven and Man, an experience that is close to the ecstasy in a spiritual and religious sense. In order to achieve this, however, one needs personal cultivation as well as a rich imagination and high sensibility.

It seems that Yuan, as a member of the Chinese literati, enjoys a kind of ecstasy in his deep contemplation of water music. He tends to project his feelings and emotions and even himself into the aesthetic object as such. Therein he appreciates not only the melodic charm and varying sounds of the flowing stream, but also the life rhythm and mystical musicality of the universe, no matter whether heard or not. Eventually he frees himself from all cares and worries, and lives in joy, peace and even self-forgetfulness, as though he throws himself into a union with the waterscape he has encountered.

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9 Thus is cited from one of the travelogues that is titled Contemplation under the Cool and Tranquil Pavilion (Contemplation under the Cool and Tranquil Pavilion) by Yuan Zhongdao (袁中道 1570–1623).
Conclusion

To sum up, the consideration of the water allegory and waterscape aesthetics set out above is not merely provoked by the wealth of Chinese landscape poetry, but also evoked by Heidegger’s ontological interest in the hidden stream and the well metaphor. Now reconsidering this from the perspective of the Chinese thought and poetic heritage discussed above, we may arrive at a tentative conclusion that waterscapes in particular have played a significant role in human life from past to present, for they bear philosophical, moral, and aesthetic values. They can therefore be employed as aesthetic objects as they delight the sight, hearing, mind and spirit. Moreover, they can be utilized to facilitate the restoration of the sense of both Being and nostalgia *qua* homeliness, which are rediscovered in closer contact with the Earth in particular. In addition, the poetic expression of waterscapes in varied images and styles mirrors and corresponds to “the ultimate good sense” coupled with the sense of nostalgia *qua* homeliness, the sense that sheds much light on the contemplation of waterscape beauty, the development of aesthetic perception, the possibility of spiritual enlightenment, the sublimation of human living, and—above all—the nourishment of home-consciousness, among many other things.

As explained above, the Daoist support for the water allegory puts much stress on the altruistic and modest character of the flowing water that benefits all beings and things. It therefore calls for greater attention to be paid to the heuristic message of the allegory in one sense, and commends the supreme good of the water in the other. By so doing it lays down the philosophical grounds of the development of waterscape aesthetics in the Chinese tradition.

Parallel to the Daoist view, the Confucian preoccupation with vast waterscapes retains its focus on the moral symbolism of such images. Confucius himself is said to have enjoyed watching huge waterscapes, and likened the flowing river to the thought of the wise, due to the active and productive virtues of both. His personification of the running river is essentially oriented towards morality, due to its resolute and unyielding characteristics, which takes a further step towards consolidating the moral symbolism of waterscapes in particular. Its hidden impact has been passed on as part of the psychology and aesthetic awareness among Chinese literati from past to present.

With regard to the classical poems of picturesque waterscapes presented in various images, tones and styles, they are historically exemplified in demonstrating the aesthetic significance of such waterscapes, and characteristically divided into such leading categories as the beautiful, the majestic, and the musical, each of which have some relevant values, properties and effects. As for the water music,
it features varied forms and tunes in terms of changing situations and contexts. It is clearly audible when it comes to swashing waterfalls, but rather feeble when it comes to murmuring creeks and bubbling springs. Nevertheless, its aesthetic charm may tempt an attentive listener to feel himself into its rhythmic flow one way or another.

Moreover, the experience of waterscape aesthetics works chiefly in two modes: perceptual and mental. One is pleasing to both eyes and ears in an aesthetically perceptual sense, while the other to the mind and spirit in an intuitively contemplative manner. When it comes to aesthetic contemplation, the psychological reaction is initially aroused by the positive, halo effect of the scenery that attracts the attention of the viewer. During this process, there are at least two acts involved: one is aesthetic detachment, and the other is aesthetic engagement. The former pushes the viewer to free himself from cares and worries for a moment, directs his attention to the object alone. The latter advises the viewer to feel himself into the object they are contemplating. This leads the viewer to obtain an experience that could be either vicarious or empathetic. Empirically, the two acts offer an aesthetic attitude towards what is to be perceived and contemplated, thus serving as part of being among those who are inclined to hanker after the art of living in particular.

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