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Because of Thoreau's absorption of Chinese ancient philosophy, *Walden* and its author have a special appeal to Chinese readers, and Walden Pond has become a kind of sacred place tinted with a mythical story of a modern literary giant. Since the first publication of the Chinese translation of *Walden* in China in 1949, especially since the 1980s and 1990s, *Walden* has become known not only to critics but also to a large number of college students and ordinary readers in this country. Today *Walden* is often among the different lists of Western or world classics recommended by China's educational or publishing institutions.

Publication of *Walden* in China:

A) Chinese translations

Chenguang Press in Shanghai published the first Chinese translation of *Walden* in 1949. The translation was done by Xu Chi, well-known Chinese scholar and translator of foreign literature. In 1982, Shanghai Yiwu Press republished Xu Chi's translation and printed 13,000 copies. This version, now the most popular one in China, was reprinted in 1993, 1997 and 2003 and was included in the *Green Classics Library* published by Jilin People's Publishing House in 1997. The version was also chosen as one of "the hundred books influencing the world" by Shenyang Press and published in 1999. There are three other Chinese versions published in mainland China:

Chen Kai (trans), *Walden or Life in the Woods*. Beijing: Sanlian Bookstore, 1996.

Liu Fei (trans), *Walden*. Shijiazhuang: Huashan Wenyi Press, 1996.

Wang Guanglin (trans), *Walden*. Beijing: Zuoqia Press, 1998.

So far as our research goes, *Walden* also has a Chinese version in Hong Kong, translated by Wu Mingshi and published by Today's World Press (eighth ed., 1977). In Taiwan, Kong Fanyun did her translation and published it by Zhiwen Press in 1984.

Moreover, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, *The Maine Woods*, *Cape Cod* were also translated into Chinese by Chen Kai and published by Sanlian Bookstore in 1996. There are two other books on Thoreau that were translated into Chinese and published respectively in 2001 and 2002.

B) English editions

With the growing enthusiasm in learning English in China, many Western classics in English have been published, among which is *Walden*:

*Walden*. Beijing: Chinese Translation Publishing Company, 2000.

*Walden*. Haikou: Hainan Press, 2001.

*Walden*. Huhehaote: Inner Mongolian People's Publishing House, 2001.

In addition, over thirty book series, anthologies or books on American literary history or philosophy have included either different adapted versions, English-Chinese versions or excerpts of *Walden* or an introduction to Thoreau. The most frequently selected section of *Walden* is "Where I Lived, and What I Lived for." The following are some books of that include *Walden*:

*Life in the Woods*, adapted by Ralph Andrist, with notes by Wei Xiaolong and Huo Jianqiang. Beijing: Beijing Normal UP, 1994.

*Walden*. English-Chinese edition. Trans. Yuan Wenling. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2000. (Selected reading series of world classics)

Cheng Aimin, ed. *Reading American Literature*. Nanjing: Nanjing Normal UP, 1996.

Li Gongzhao, ed. *New Selected Readings in American Literature*. Xi'an: Xi'an Jiaotong UP, 2000.

Wu Dingbo, ed. *Appreciating American Literature*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2002.

Wu Weiren, ed. *History and Anthology of American Literature*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 1990.

#### Criticism and Research:

In our recent research, we have found about fifty articles in Chinese journals, newspapers or books, discussing *Walden* and Thoreau. The first criticism we have had on *Walden* appeared in *Literature, History and Philosophy* (third issue, 1983), entitled “Thoreau’s *Walden*: the Great Production of Nineteenth-Century American Romanticism” by Cheng Xing (Because of the historical reasons, articles published in China before the 1980s are difficult to locate.)The article is in fact a brief introduction to *Walden*, which helps introduce the book to Chinese readers after the republication of Xu Chi’s translation. Most criticism focuses on two areas: the relation between Thoreau and ancient Chinese philosophy and Thoreau’s contact with nature and its significance. The first is an everlastingly interesting topic for Chinese scholars and critics. On reading *Walden*, Chinese readers can hardly ignore the citations from the works of Confucianism. Words like “To know that we know what we know, and that we do not know what we do not know, that is true knowledge” or “Virtue does not remain as an abandoned orphan; it must of necessity have neighbors” do attract Chinese readers’ attention at the first sight. Hu Yamin analyzes Thoreau’s interest in and interpretation of *The Four Books* in her “Thoreau’s *Walden* and the Confucian Classical Four Books” (*Journal of PLA Institute of Foreign Languages*, 1997). In “Confucianism in H.D. Thoreau’s Experiment,” a chapter in *A Rainbow over the Pacific: American Writers and Chinese Culture* (Yinchuan: Ningxia People’s Publishing House, 2002), Zhang Hong analyzes all the ten citations in *Walden*<sup>1</sup> and gives a comprehensive view of Thoreau’s unique understanding of Confucianism and its influence on his philosophy and lifestyle. Chen Changfang, in *Thoreau and China* (Taipei: Sanmin Press, 1991), concentrates on Thoreau’s relation with both Confucianism and Taoism by giving detailed discussion of the similarities and differences between Thoreau’s ideas and ancient Chinese philosophy.

Regarding Thoreau’s ideas of nature and the Taoist philosophy of nature, especially the concept of “Oneness between humans and nature,” Cheng Aimin has made a resourceful and inspiring interpretation and comparison in his doctoral dissertation (*Nature in Thoreau*, Nanjing University) as well as in his “Humans as a ‘Part and Parcel of Nature’: A Comparative Study of Thoreau’s and Taoist Concepts of Nature” (*Thoreau’s Sense of Place*, U of Iowa P, 2000). Besides Cheng’s study, Cui Changqing’s “On Lao Tzu and Thoreau” (*Journal of Nanjing International Studies Institute*, 1994), Yan Xiaochuan’s and Fu Ling’s “Taoist Elements in Thoreau’s Writings” (*Journal of Dongbei University*, 2003) also discuss Thoreau’s affinity with Taoism rather than Confucianism, even though there is hardly any evidence of Thoreau’s reading of *Tao Te Ching* or *Chuang Tzu*.

Thoreau’s contact with nature—his life at *Walden*—fascinates present-day urban readers in China as it does in the West. We think that *Walden Pond* occupied a special position in Thoreau’s life and career. It was at *Walden* that Thoreau wrote one of his major works, *A Week on Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, and the essential part of *Walden*; it was at *Walden* that his philosophy of nature matured; and it was at *Walden* that he lived the highlight of his life. In short, *Walden* is monumental for Thoreau, just as Henry S. Canby summarized long ago in his biographical study of Thoreau: “The name of Henry Thoreau will always be associated with *Walden Pond* because he carried out successfully there one of those experiments in living which have caught the imagination. . . . and Thoreau’s sojourn there in his cabin by a cove, if less than St. Francis’ retirement among the birds and beasts, or Christ’s retreat to the wilderness, is nevertheless, one of the memorable gestures of the spirit of man.”<sup>2</sup>

However, there is much more about *Walden* to be discovered. To present-day readers of Thoreau as well as to Thoreau himself, *Walden* is not just a concrete place to live, write and meditate, but a symbol, a symbol of a mode of living, a defense of a principle, a pursuit of an ideal, a romance and a union of humans with nature as well as a revelation and reification of a concept of nature. It is all these, we assume, that make *Walden* a monument and Thoreau’s sojourn there a modern myth. Therefore, Thoreau’s stay at *Walden* suggests significantly to us that if we succeed in keeping this relationship with nature, we will at last develop the capacity of better adjusting ourselves to the natural surrounding in which we are born and grow up, better fitting ourselves into the ways of nature and the universe, and better fulfilling our potentialities in life. We will become at least partially “naturalized” or “universalized.” Many Chinese critics expressed their ideas about Thoreau’s contact with nature and life at *Walden*. Liu Haiyan advocates

a simple life in her “Life in the Open air: Thoreau and his *Walden*” (*Journalism Lover*, 1999). Li Zhihong depicts a beautiful picture of “Walking in Shrine of Soul: Reading Thoreau’s *Walden*” (*Forest and Humankind*, 2000). Chen Yinghong considers *Walden* as a modern legend of the harmony between humans and nature in “Myth of *Walden*” (*Reading*, 1996). Wang Yuehua interprets *Walden* in “Two *Waldens*” (*Reading*, 1996) as one in reality and the other in the mind and marvels at the power of nature in sublimating one’s spirit and simplifying one’s life style. Zhu Guoliang admires the beauty of solitude in his namesake article in *People’s Daily* (Overseas ed., 18 July 2001).

The significance of *Walden* lies in humans’ increasing ecological consciousness caused by the deterioration of the environment. In fact, the relationship between humankind and nature has always been a central issue in human history of culture and civilization. As the world enters the twenty-first century, the call to reconsider the human relation with nature has become stronger and stronger in the West as well as in China. Many people hold that the relationship between humans and nature will be a fundamental problem that mankind has to resolve in the twenty-first century and that return to nature will be a central issue in human life and culture in the new century. Since the mid 1980s, many Chinese scholars and scientists have also showed deep concern for the deterioration of the environment and a strong desire for the reestablishment of the harmony between humans and nature. Books dealing with ecology and the environment have been continually appearing in China, and there has even emerged an “environmental literature” headed by such writers as Huang Zhongying, Wang Meng, Giang Zilong and others. Since the 1990s, Chinese scholars and critics have begun to study Thoreau’s ecological ideas. Cheng Aimin and Wei Qingqi explored Thoreau’s view of ecology and his contribution to the development of modern ecological culture (Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2001). Li Xiaozhong studied Thoreau’s ideas of environmental protection (*Journal of Distant Learning in Higher Education*, 2001.5). Su Xiangui investigated Thoreau’s thought of nature and its implications for ecological ethics and finds the transcendental idealist influence in the development of his ecological theories (*Journal of Beijing University*, 2002.2). Especially noteworthy is that in 1996 the Chinese Central Television Station and Northeast Forestry University Press jointly published a book series entitled *Man and Nature*, which is a conscious and typical effort in this trend in present-day China.

Thoreau and *Walden* first became topics for doctoral dissertations or masters theses in mainland China in 1994. In recent years a group of postgraduates wrote about Thoreau’s views on nature and natural protection, of which the following are some examples: Huang Shan, *Returning to Nature* (masters thesis, Guangxi Normal University, 2001); Li Xiaozhong, *In Wilderness Is the Preservation of the World: on Thoreau’s Environmental Consciousness* (masters thesis, Huazhong Normal University, 2001); Zhang Bojing, *Back to Nature* (masters thesis, Shanxi Normal University, 2003).

Reading *Walden* to Chinese readers today is both a rewarding experience and a challenge. In the preface to his Chinese version of *Walden*, Xu Chi asks his readers to calm down to read the book. He assumes that the reader needs a quiet place to read the book alone if s/he is to read it deeply. Yan Hao believes that *Walden* has its effect on at least two generations in China. He introduces several ways of reading the book in “The Ways to Read *Walden*” (*Monthly Reading and Writing*, 2002) and emphasizes the importance of reading the book as a manual to lead a simple life and as a holy book to improve oneself. In “Incompact Reading Notes of *Walden*” (*Network of New Literature*, E-Journal, 44<sup>th</sup> issue, 2001), Lei Ligang retells his experience of reading *Walden* in the jokul of Sichuan Province without finishing it because of his return to the city. Many anonymous writers on line share their experience of picking up *Walden* and quitting half way on account of their unsettled mind. Many agree that it is no easy thing to read *Walden* unless one is with a “deep heart.”

Today Thoreau’s closeness to nature and his mode of life at *Walden*, his speculative writings on nature and his sharing of the Chinese concept of nature in *Walden* not only magnetize us Chinese readers and critics, but they also lead us to reevaluate his contribution to an American philosophy of nature. Our belief is that Thoreau’s concept of nature marks a significant chapter in American thought. It had its roots deep in the scientific, philosophical and cultural movements of the modern world. It did not run its course without effect. And the nostalgic delight with which we reread *Walden* today not only rationalizes the myth of *Walden*, but also gives evidence of the attraction to nature which Thoreau felt and which we all have and will never entirely outgrow.

<sup>1</sup>According to Lyman V. Cady, there are altogether nine quotations from the Confucian Books in *Walden*. (“Thoreau’s Quotations from the Confucian Books in *Walden*.” *American Literature* 33 (1961): 20-32.

<sup>2</sup>Henry S. Canby, *Thoreau* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1939) p. 204.