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## Thinking like a Stream

*Tristan LI*

At 35 degrees north latitude on the Eurasian continent, the winter wind is absolutely daunting. It howls from the mountain tops to the valley bottoms, spreading its suffocating cold among the streams at the base of the valley. The deafening whistling sounds burst out against the whole of nature and manifests resentment at the wanton destruction of the environment.

The winter wind is like a predatory general. Its shrill roar and ferocious cold takes away the temperature and surviving hope from all animate and inanimate species. If anyone does not listen to its words or ignore its existence, even a mole cricket or an ant, they will be ruthlessly blown into the air. The winter will use the strong gale and low temperature to torture them to death. Therefore, hibiscus and sorbaria sorbifolia end their yearly mission before it comes, and they throw off their pale pink and white clothes, leaving only sere branches and a few dead leaves to await this general's arrival.

The same is true for poultry. About a week before the winter wind comes, hens, ducks, and other poultry have heard the general's order. Poultry will stay in the warm nests that people build for them, unwilling to set foot outside.

Poultry and humans are afraid of the winter wind, but winter does not simply signify withering and loneliness. The stream does not mind the winter. The stream simply accompanies the winter wind on its journey quietly, observing the changes it brings. It just flows silently and endlessly. The unswerving stream lays there, drawing the water from the top of the mountain to the bottom of the valley day after day.

The stream does not blame the cold wind, it just quietly spends the winter with the wind, and ac-

companies those species which are desperately trying to survive in winter.

When we were on the Tibetan plateau that winter, the first thing that caught our eyes was the blanket of snow that covered the entire mountainside. What attracted me most was the animals' footprints in the snow.

Those footprints were the traces of sparrows and voles. Further on, we saw sparrows were resting and voles were basking in the warm sunlight. There were also goshawks, but they stayed all alone in the rocks and mounds. They would ride the winter wind arrogantly, close to the ground, as if to show their unique, superb flying skills. The high grass on the snow field was dancing with the wind. They were holy and mysterious against the blue sky. I couldn't bear to break this tranquility. Every rock scattering on the grass was like statues of the Buddha quietly observing the true meaning of life in the cold winter. Even when the winter wind blew, those creatures could still live in their own style.

Gazing at the stream in the frozen ravine, I knew it held potential life beneath its sapphire surface. At that moment, volatile liquid became a solid umbrella for creatures in this stream.

We all want to establish satisfying living conditions in a harsh environment. Plants want a greenhouse, birds want a warm nests, and human beings want a warm city. However, I would like to be like a stream. During the process of pursuing my own goals, I just observe and appreciate. Hoping the whole of nature will be safe and sound.







## A Weather-Beaten Stone Lion: Silent Telling

*Tristan LI*

There was a piercingly cold and howling wind, sweeping from the top of the mountain to the, diffused to the boundless horizon. It was the wild wailing for desolation and the raging roar for nature's acquisitiveness (Leopold 129).

The cold wind poured in through my collar and swept across my chest and limbs like a razor. Standing on the bank of Yong Ding River, my ankles were pricked with withered grass. Staring out Lugou Bridge in a short distance, my eyes were drawn to one of a number of stone lions on the bridge. I was quite sure those stone lions were also suffering from the same cold wind. These stone lions always stand at the same distance and in the same position on this bridge, witnessing every sunrise and sunset, every footprint, and even every breath of every creature that moves on this bridge.

Among this group of stone artifacts that seemed to be endowed with the tinge of living creatures, a slightly mottled stone lion is deeply engraved in my memory.

Essentially, the lion is just a polymer of calcium carbonate and some impurities. It might have been a stone lying quietly in the forest, one that would not be easily shaken by any animate or inanimate objects, a stone that enjoyed the beautiful singing of birds and the nourishment of the rain, or a stone that had been battered by the formidable storms and the relentless baking of the parched sun.

The passage of time has been too long for this sedate Mr. Silence. It might have forgotten the exact day, only to remember that the cloth-clad, muscle-bound humans carried it out of this quiet place with great effort.

At that time, it was just like an insect in amber, still encased in irregular stone embryos, having no eye to scrutinize a corner of the world. But it could definitely feel the body temperature of those humans, the heaviness of their muscles, and the coarseness of their clothes, just as it could feel the claws



of birds against its shoulder and the breeze over its head.

The existence of this Mr. Silence itself would not be as frightening as the cold wind, or as colorful and charming as the twilight at the end of the horizon. The stone lion itself was a steady and reliable existence. It was not as imposing as a mountain, but it was an artificial observer with unique and exquisite affection. The stone lion, as an outsider in nature, speechlessly listened to every blade of grass, every honk of crickets, every flap of sparrows, and every twinkle or smile of passengers. No animate or inanimate objects would strike fear into a stone lion. It was more like an ocean that accommodated fish to roam freely. Therefore, sparrows could climb on the stone lion peacefully with their claws without slipping; sycamores' leaves could fall unnoticed on it without being bounced off; the flowing water and cold wind could play havoc with its carvings without suffering any revenge.

That was the reason that the iron cable could penetrate the pedestal of the stone lion, but not through its soul. Because the iron cable was also impressed by the stone lion's toughness and composure, it finally did not want to leave too many traces of rust, and together with the Lugou Bridge to become a part of the landmark in the desolate valley.

The emergence of the stone lion was credited to those ingenious people. The skilled craftsmen carved it with sharp tools that were as stiff as the stone, and polished it with paper that was as rough as the stone lion's exterior. As a result, the stone lion was endowed with graceful curves, a well-proportioned body, and striking features. Just like God created human beings, it also seemed that human beings had given the significance of living to the stone lion.

But the stone lion, no matter how rich in the artistic beauty of curves and colors, no matter how gorgeous it looks, was just a stone lion. In the end, it only just silently carried out the duty of witnessing the environment without saying a word. The dappled patterns of wind erosion on its body were the pieces of evidences that it watched the change of dynasties, and the scars of social transformation representing a large population country.

The blackened dust stains of gunpowder on its body were the proof that it had witnessed the greedy and evil souls blowing the horn of invasion here, and the countless souls willing to give their flesh and blood to protect their homeland. Its re-enforced and polished pedestal was a sign that it has witnessed the reconstruction and revival of a human community. Even though there were sudden changes inside and outside the bridge, this stone lion was still performing its duty as an observer.

As I approached the stone lion, I discovered another covert secret, a sign that mankind had committed sins and suffered karmic retribution.

The scene resembled an abstract painting of a diffused brown and black rendering, but it was more like the mottled paint and cement draped on the walls of a dilapidated town, or the rusted iron pipes blotted onto the walls with permeable rust. In addition to the colour, there were also patterns. The surface of the stone lion had irregular compositions of natural erosion besides the traces of artificial.

The brownish-black iridescence resembled the main colours of The Dove and the Pea; these grooves looked like the textures on Ayers Rock; and these holes were similar with the recreation of wave point art. These extremely artistic visual matches attempted to confuse visitors by attracting them to just experience the feast of aesthetic masterpieces, while hiding their story behind these dazzling details.

This was not the masterpiece of wind erosion, but the product of acid rain. The stone lion witnessed the sky above it changing from pure blue to greyish yellow; the gloomy and thick clouds kept emitting these pollutant-filled drops, cruelly slapping on the stone lion; the horrible chemical reaction stained the greyish-white of the stone lion itself with a brownish-black coat, destroying its graceful curves, as crooked and strange as a field snail.

Humans, for nature, are like the magicians in the Tarot. Their behaviours bring unpredictable changes to the whole of nature, and all other living beings would be redefined and reconnected in their actions. For this stone lion, it could never have been born without the technology of human beings. Human beings take advantage of nature by any methods to achieve their own goals.

But likewise, mankind would also lose, by heading in the wrong direction. When human beings wantonly expand factories and reclaim land; when human beings use machines to capriciously destroy forests and burn wood; when human beings freely drive cars and emit exhaust fumes, those liquids with sulphuric acid and nitric acid have come quietly. That is nature's revenge, a descending blow to the whole ecological region, and those scars on the stone lion are the best proof of this karmic reincarnation.

When I was an ignorant child, I saw how more and more factories were taking over the green meadows and forests; more and more smokestacks were emitting pungent gases; more and more cars were filling up every road. Acid rain destroyed every single tree, every single statue and every single town.





Sycamore leaves and grape vines had yellow spots like herpes after the acid rain had plundered them; some soils had lost nutrient-rich organic matter due to the irrigation of acid rain; the torsos of stone statues on the streets were stained like corrosion after a drenching in acid rain (Likens et al. 245).

I was immersed in my own thoughts. Just as the cold wind lamented to the wilderness, the stone lion also lamented to the sky. It was not only a complaint against the sky itself, but also a complaint against why mankind has been taking from nature without limits. When acid rain drenched dozens of acres of soil in few hours, it could take up to five years for that soil to become enriched again. In the way of the stone lion, if there was no specific repair measure, then these scars would be etched on it forever, like ugly birthmarks.

However, humans who were engaged in industrial production and drove around in their cars did not witness this horrific scene of withering. Likewise, they did not understand the anger and humiliation of natural creatures that were being eroded by acid rain. It wasn't until acid rain harmed humans themselves, with chronic pharyngitis, bronchitis and various respiratory illness becoming prevalent, that humans became aware of the dangers of acid rain.

We all strive to create an environment in which we can live comfortably (Leopold 133). Fish strive with their fins, soldiers strive with their guns and cannons, workers strive with their machines and hands. Most of us just watch silently like stone lions and suffer the results of this so-called striving. All these efforts are for two purposes: safety and comfort. Considering these purposes, all efforts are reasonable. However, too much pursuit of comfort and even luxury can threaten the fragility of the survival of other objects, and we need to give other objects some leeway to live peacefully at the right time. This may be the meaning of the silent vigilance of the stone lion, but few humans can understand.





# Thinking like a Donkey

*Fran REN*

We looked around everywhere for the donkey when we needed him to work, and the animal always disappeared somehow. The shed was empty. Grandpa took me to investigate the donkey's whereabouts—a line of plum blossom-shaped hoof prints in front of the door was a hot clue, as were a few fresh black dung lumps, which were his signature. Grandpa picked one up and put it under his nose and sniffed, “Yes, it was him, our he-ass. He has been running to the west of the village for quite a while lately, so he must have fallen in love with someone's she-ass again.”

“Again?” I looked down to those hoof prints and started to laugh.

When I returned to my grandpa's house, I was reminded it was a busy season for people to plant seeds, and it was also a critical period for donkeys to go into estrus. These periods were two very important coinciding times. When people are busy using donkeys in the field, donkeys are also busy with their own affairs. The weather allows villagers to sow the land in Southern Xinjiang once a year, and it is useless to plant anything if you miss this season. At the same time, it is the only season of the year that female donkeys let male donkeys approach. Once the heat is over, the male donkeys will struggle to lure the ladies in vain. Both field-sowing men and eager male donkeys get only one shot for their big event.

I have never been a donkey. I don't know what our donkey thinks about during these days. The donkey has never been a human, either. We are animals at the two ends of a rein, and we can't say who is leading whom. People's footprints and donkey's hoof prints seem to be carved on the same road, but in the end they can't go together. Every day the donkey watches us busy being human, and we watch the donkey work hard as a beast. We are bystanders and interveners in each other's lives. If the donkey becomes fatter, my grandpa is much happier than the donkey. Once grandpa's crops withered, the donkey is more disappointed than my grandpa. When the donkey climbs up a steep slope and sinks into the mud, grandpa would put a rope over his shoulder without hesitation and crawl around on all fours to be a donkey himself for once. Their relationship seems simple but, in some ways, it's very complicated. When the scent of grandpa's cooking floated into the donkey shed, the smell of its feces and urine also rushed through the cracks into our home.

Our life can accommodate a donkey, or a dog, a flock of chickens, a few long-bearded goats, and a few family members. We build a big house and a home with mud, bricks, and reinforced concrete. There will be more lives coming into this home: the birds on the trees, the swallows under the eaves, the hares quietly visiting in the winter nights. Our lives are dispersed into the many lives of many other animals. We can find a little bit of ourselves in each other and gradually we become lighter and lighter.

We no longer exist as discrete entities. We are now a collectivity of animals. When they are scattered around, some parts of our body also follow them and go away. Once they do not come back, or come back late, we no longer fall into sleep at night as a whole. Our years have become a shed for these living creatures. In feeding, using, or killing, our life is also their life. We feed them with years, and they feed us with bones and flesh.

We are in a completely different era from the donkeys. Changes in the society? The world has nothing to do with them. Donkeys don't participate or intend to change themselves. When human beings become more and more intelligent and selfish, donkeys still look honest and simple, they even refuse to evolve to a more advanced creature. They are a group of old things, their bodies and minds stay in the ancient times. When people start to abandon everything and enter the modern era, they remain obscure to us, maintaining the simplest quality of being. We have to feed them and let them live with us. Similarly, we also need to kill them at the end. While our minds ignore them, our stomach cannot leave them.

In other words, we take away everything that is left of the donkey, from birth to death, completely. In addition to arranging their mating and birthing schedule in order to have the benefit of the same honest and lovely offspring, the human leaves nothing to the donkeys, while the donkeys leave us the meat and their beautiful coat for many years after. Also, they leave their thoughts—thoughts we imagine but can never explain clearly.

Many a long winter's nights, I sit in my warm bedroom, drinking hot tea, watching TV, and occasionally thinking about the donkey in the cold shed, what he is watching and who he is talking to, I wonder.

I always feel that those donkeys, with their eyes closed one night after another, are actually conceiving of something great and big. I imagine they are thinking things over deeply and thoroughly. When I watched my grandfather lead our donkey to work after daybreak, I actually didn't realize that grandpa was leading a wise man or a saint who had fully understood the vicissitudes of life for thousands of years, but was willing to be led by us vulgar people who only knew how to live in the present. Fortunately, we stupid human beings are not aware of this, and what could we do even if we know it? Could it be that we kindly invite the donkey into our warm house, and we ourselves draw the cart and spend all our lives in a cold shed?

Never.

I always want to think like a donkey. And I know that only by thinking like a donkey can a person find more and finally start to understand human nature. We might as well stand on the side of the donkeys to think about human beings, and, only afterward, turn back to stand on the side of humans and think about the donkeys. After thinking about these two things together for a long time, we can naturally integrate them into one thing. The donkey's business has become my business, and my business has become the



donkey's business. In fact, the circumstances of life often make the relationship between humans and the beast difficult to separate. We are all the same, men and beasts.

The donkey's resistance to the human is just as invisible. It doesn't run away, it doesn't get angry or happy so easily. (I always wonder what the donkey looks like when it laughs.) You can't actually see when or where it rebelled against you, rejected you, or hurt you. For the donkey, there is no honor or accomplishment to celebrate in one's life, and of course there are no regrets either. When you feel down or depressed at some moments, or you think you are not good enough as a human being, look at the donkey beside you, you'll feel released immediately.

In fact, looking at it this way, the donkey balances our lives. The donkey is a good weight that is neither light nor heavy. If you think that your life is not as good as the donkey's, then there's nothing the donkey can do anymore. We see that a donkey never compares itself to you. So when you compare yourself to a donkey, you must think of the donkey as someone else or you yourself as a donkey. The donkey becomes a reliable coefficient, a reference object between you and the world. You see the world on the back of the donkey, the world sees you under the belly of the donkey.

Therefore, the humble man always needs to keep some livestock beside him to sleep soundly at night. The noble ones never keep livestock, but they do keep a flock of humble men underfoot so as to sleep soundly at night.

The world is so powerful and threatening to every human being, but not to the donkeys. The donkeys do not recognize the world, they only believe in their small shed. Donkeys have a relationship with the world through humans, and humans get along with the world through other humans. No human dares to face the whole world alone. But the donkey does, their bray is the strong response and warning to the whole world.

Grandpa and I looked for our donkey for the whole afternoon, but, when we went home, the donkey was standing right there in our yard. It looked like it was him that was waiting for us all afternoon. The donkey gave me a stare, and I gave the donkey a stare back. Suddenly the dark was falling. The night filled the invisible distance between me and the donkey, and the dark fur of the donkey grew even darker. When I turned to go into the house, the donkey went straight back into the shed. So neither of us went wrong and were lost in the night.

No matter how dark the night is, the knowing stare of the donkey is always as clear as a starry night sky.

# Cherish the Lonely Species

Iris WANG

A famous wildlife ecologist George Schaller once said, “for many centuries to come, those peaks will still stand in this lonely landscape, but when the last snow leopard disappears among the cliffs a cluster of life sparks will pass away, and the mountain will become a silent stone.” With the continuous hunting, possession, and illegal trade of snow leopards, the numbers of this species are rapidly declining and are on the verge of extinction. If we cannot have the awareness of cherishing this species from now on, human beings will become a lonely desolated species.

People called snow leopards: “The king of the snow mountain.” They are rock-dwelling animals in plateau areas, living in the environment of permanent ice and snow, bare rocks, and cold deserts. Their habitats are far away from humans. They are free and always alert. Describing them, George Schaller notes that, “the smoky gray fur of the snow leopard is dotted with dark spots. In this rocky kingdom, their tracks are secretive and exist like spirits.” In the eyes of humans, snow leopards are elegant and mysterious predators with beautiful and rare fur. They are precious and difficult to obtain.



Thus, some people thought once they possessed a snow leopard, it would demonstrate their wealth and status.

Humans like to take control of nature and other species. Because of the extremely high price of their fur, snow leopards have long been hunted and killed by humans, which is the biggest threat they face. Apart from their fur, their claws and teeth are the traditional gifts and collector's items in many areas. What's more, according to traditional medicine in some countries, snow leopards' bones can cure pain and disease. As a result, the poaching trade of snow leopards continued to increase, from the 1970s into the 1980s. News reports indicate that the number of snow leopards poached in Qinghai, China reached 60.

In addition to using snow leopards' skins and bones for illegal trade, capture by zoos also bring harm causing their population to decline. From 1968 to 1984, one zoo in China bought 73 snow leopards from Qinghai Province. However, there are few statistical reports of the successful breeding of snow leopards in zoos. To be sure, the number that are bred is far less than the number caught in the wild. Human beings enjoy the possession of this precious animal and see themselves as having conquered this lonely and proud species.

If the snow leopard were to disappear, it would mean the total collapse of the alpine ecosystem. As the top predator in alpine ecosystem, the snow leopard is an important species in Central Asia and Qinghai-Tibet Plateau. In other words, the number and variety of snow leopard populations are important indicator of the health of ecosystems and biodiversity in these areas.

The world is diverse, and the earth is rich and colorful. Humans struggle to save nature, but also degrade it. Many humans think that, living—as they do—in the remoteness of the natural world, endangered animals are lonely and pathetic. However, if biodiversity continues to decline, the loneliest species will eventually be humans. There is no time to delay in protecting these endangered species. Indeed, when the wild animals and plants are gone, how can we lonely humans have a future?



# A Cat Living in the Jordan Valley

*Amber HU*

Living in a rose-colored canyon surrounded by desert, cats are fierce animals, like tigers. The cat's home is in the ancient decaying city of Petra, with its natural cliffs. This ancient city soon fell into disuse after being conquered by Romans. That quick change is much like the temperature of the desert sand, which shifts from hot and sunny in daytime to a sudden cold at night. "Luckily my fur is long enough to withstand the cold wind", the golden orange cat says celebrating itself.

There are always some bizarre-looking, creatures trying to get close to the cat, and the cat feels comfortable being stroked on the right parts of its body at the right time. But most of them fail to find the right spot. The cat finds that its fur sheds a lot due to being overly stroked, and it gets bored, before moving to a more isolated area of the valley.

Gradually, the amount of strange, large creatures increases, running through the canyon on some fast-moving machines, raising a great deal of dust, speaking in different voices, disturbing the beautiful dream of the cat bathed in sunlight.

"Look, that cat is so cute!", exclaims the humans who notice it, and I am one of them, unable to resist picking up my camera to photograph it, but I don't think it wants to look at my camera. A strong wind blows. My hair is a mess like a ball of knotted seaweed. However, the way it looks in the wind makes me believe that it is really a king looking down on its kingdom—the whole valley.

Some mules in the valley often carry straw of different colors. Sometimes, it's dull and dry. Sometimes, it's golden. Most of the time the cats walk slowly and rhythmically, with staccato sound. But their patience is reserved exclusively for their owner: a middle-aged Arab man with a moustache who likes to wear a hat. For the mules, the running cat is a pain in the ass, since the mule hates dodging obstacles on the road, especially an inconspicuous dwarf.

"He should be allowed to live freely. None of our family members are going to take him home", says a local young boy. This little boy is shy in front of the camera—a little scared, but more

excited. He is one of the few humans that the cat is willing to get close to, along with several other children.

The cat finds some strange creatures approachable since they don't hold odd machines against it or touch its head all the time. It loves to run and lie down when it feels tired. The sands doesn't stick to its body and it is easy for it to shake the sand off every time it gets up. In this strange group of tall two legged creatures, some of the shorter ones also tend to roam around. "Perhaps they're coming to join me," the cat thinks.

As time passes, memories of cats, mules, children's stories are fading away, but when I think of things like nature, joyousness, running, love, those memories pop up again and again.







## Be Water

Carol ZHONG

### 1. Inspiration from Aldo Leopold

Whenever I read Aldo Leopold's work new ideas fill my mind. "Thinking like a Mountain" is an episode from Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac* that gave me the inspiration to examine nature. From the intuitive life of wolves, Leopold finds hope and highlights the fear he feels for the integrity of the ecosystem. The discoveries he makes studying wolves triggers his compassion and spurs his anxiety regarding the manmade slaughter occurring in the natural world. In "Thinking like a Mountain," the cowman learns wolves help balance the range ranchers use to graze their cattle, and the hunter learns that a tiny bullet can have an outsized, negative impact on nature. Leopold's readers come away from his work having learned a deep lesson from nature.

### 2. Memory about water

Compare Leopold's article to a distant and lofty mountain, every time we read it, we take a step closer to it. His words give me a new perspective. The continuity of my thought feels like the clear stream pouring off a huge mountain, flowing out of my mind and bringing me back to that summer in my childhood.

I remember how I made dried flowers. At that time, we were babbling kindergarten children. We were taught to turn off the tap after and save water, to avoid trampling the grass or picking the flowers to respect and cherish the creatures in the garden, and to shorten television time to take care

of our eyes. During a winter break, we were encouraged to make dried flowers as an extracurricular activity. The activity manager told us that we could develop a deep relationship with other kids and learn to become more dexterous. However, we learned one of the most crucial steps for a successful dried flower production was to separate the water from the flowers and leaves. What impressed me the most was the process of dehydrating them. We used a hairdryer to make the petals fragile and then used desiccant and colorants to dye them.

However, we were all becoming the murderers of flowers without knowing it. We were taught to love every plant's life in the garden, but we deprived plenty flowers of their lives. From a child's perspective, we were delighted with our success in making dried flowers, yet it should not be so if we were thinking like water. If we were water in a flower's life system, we might not endorse such behavior.

Perhaps it is time for us to slow down and change our patterns of thought.

So why can't we make another trans-positional consideration: to think like the water, to sense its wisdom, and use it to reflect on ourselves.

### 3. Sensing water

Water builds in, what I term, a flow-to-flow connection. A stream knows how many fish swim across stones each day; a lake knows how many times the wind stirs up its surface; a river knows how far it nourishes the plants and soil; and an ocean knows how many times the tide rises and falls. But without the water, as we know, fish in the stream would never meet the magnificent sea; a stream would not meet with the river, nor would it flow into the ocean. With a long way to go and a further destination to reach, water keeps flowing along. Rocks in the stream cannot stop the running water. Winds cannot disturb the steps of the current. Water fills space in every crack to continue flowing. Thinking like the water will stop distracted thoughts, so that we can feel every second and enjoy life's moments.

### 4. Thinking like water

Water doesn't have a fixed mindset. It just keeps flowing from high to low, from where it is to where it wants to go. It can make a quick turn wherever there is a barrier. It can move forward and find an exit. We always believe that we have come to this world to find a destination, purpose, and mission. We call these "goals." Programmers aim to write valid code; writers aim to write evocative words; fishers aim to catch much desired fish—all people live, therefore, in an intangible circle. The circle is made out of overlapping aims and desires: they seem to exist in a unified paradigm.

Nonetheless, upon reflection, we may realize that life is not, in fact, prescribed when they think like the water. Robert Frost's poem "The Road Not Taken" demonstrates the roads of life present endless possibilities. Thus, we may consider stepping out of the imposed circle and embrace the unknown. The water teaches us that we can choose whichever road we want to take. We should know there is no such thing as a fixed pattern or paradigm in our identity, nor to our life.

## 5. Talking about changes

Every time I reflect on my changes, I feel strange about this person who deviates from her original intention of growing. As teenagers, we invariably try to keep up with trends to have something in common with others in order to be included and feel a sense of belonging. Therefore, I constantly changed myself to be congruent to the changing environment. I tried different clothing as fashion changed. I was fascinated by Korean dramas when they were suddenly popular among the younger generation. I tried making vlogs when I saw my peers were doing this on the internet, and I have to admit that I am neither interested in making videos, watching dramas, nor am I fascinated by fashion trends.

My experience makes me wonder why people unconsciously turn left in their final decisions when they hold the desire to turn right.

If I manage to think like the water, then the perspective will change totally. While two drops of water may be separated along the way, they somehow meet each other when they arrive in the ocean. The ocean is a container for every drop of water, and society is an extended collection of diverse individuals. So why can't we accept ourselves and be who we are. We do not have to prove our existence by developing multiple interests. Our existence is the embodiment of value, and we are therefore invaluable. In Beckett's "Waiting for Godot," the savior might never come, but we are the ones who take control of our own destiny. Perhaps that's the meaning of what was said by Bruce Lee: "if you put water into the cup, it becomes the cup; if you put water into a teapot, it becomes the teapot." Be water, my friend.

## 6. Ending

All things have their natural laws, so we should let nature take its course. Different life stage has its rule. We should leave the past alone and enjoy the future. So whenever we are stuck in a certain period or excessive pride in a certain achievement, just take a step back and think like the water. Understanding the natural law of the tide's rise and fall is the same as knowing that life has its ups and downs. By sensing water, by thinking like the water, we can find the way to go.





## **Daming Lake: Paradise of Lotus and Willow** **— A Travel Guide for Lovers Seeking to Take a New Journey** *Max MA*

Pink lotus flowers, light green willows, and fresh, sweet lake water make up the particular summer scenery in my hometown of Jinan. Daming Lake, as one of the 5A level scenic spots in Jinan, is a paradise that contains these natural beauties, and the lake is located near Jinan's east train station. So if, as a traveler, you are tired of sitting in a glass office reading and want to experience a slower pace of life, why not take a train and come to Jinan? By train, it is two hours from Beijing. Once getting off at the Jinan East Train Station, just walk south for ten minutes soon you will see a peaceful lake lying in the middle of town and surrounded by numerous vibrant willows. You may look the lake up on a map, and see that it is just behind Quancheng Road, a pedestrian street famous for various local cuisines and world-famous restaurants. Thus, you can smell the spiciness of barbecue, the light taste of oil and salt, and the sweetness of popcorn while walking along the lakeshore. Eventually, the lotus fragrance will cover all the smells, but only in the summer time.

Many hostelrys surround Daming Lake. You can take a room on a local courtyard, where it is cool in summer and warm in winter. In this way, you may follow the natives in experiencing the Jinan lifestyle. The courtyards in Jinan have a history of more than a hundred years. Their low roofs and the smell of wooden furniture creates an ambiance of rusticity and makes for a sound sleep. A rooster that crows in the morning may wake you up at 7 am, and the owner of the courtyard may invite you for a jaunt along the lake. Both of you bathe in the morning sunlight, and, at first, walk slowly on the grey slate road. After a while, you might look at the still lake surface. During the summer time, you will see

the adorable pink and snow-white lotus flowers blooming proudly among the big round lotus leaves. Pink flowers mingle with green leaves, like smart pink elves hiding in the thick forest.

Through conversations, you may find that your courtyard owner runs a cruise business on the lake. If, as a traveler, you are exhausted from your non-stop exploration, you can try sailing a brown wooden boat, touching the lake water which feels cool—even a little cold—and enjoy the sensation of the rough lotus leaves rubbing your fingers. The owner will likely give you some fish food, and you can scatter some at the lake, which causes splashing ripples. Then, some golden carp swim towards your small brown wooden boat, and kiss your hand which is playing in the water. Steering a boat will take some skills. You may drive the boat to a dead end, and the lotus' leaves will surround your boat in a tight circle. Sometimes in the morning, a few round and tiny water drops will gather on those lotus' leaves. They reflect the bright sunrays like clear crystals flashing with dazzling light.

Then, you will notice a greenish tinge on the shore, and start to appreciate the willows that growing along the bank. The withes of the willows are like young girls' elegant long hair. Some withes are so long that they even touch the surface of the lake, while others dance in the wind and dazzles the tourists who are walking along the bank. It's likely the courtyard owner will notice that you feel a little tired after sailing a boat, so he may suggest you take a rest in a nearby teahouse. The owner of the teahouses around the lake use fresh, sweet lake water to boil the tea. As soon as the teahouse owner places the customized lotus tea in front of you, you will smell a faint aroma of the lotus flowers, which will relieve your fatigue.

Sitting by the lake, surrounded by lotus leaves and willows, and leisurely drinking the tea, you will start to become a real local. While you are enjoying this moment, the teahouse owner tells you that the lotus is the city flower of Jinan, and the willow is the city tree. The lotus lake combined with the willow bank form a picturesque view in Jinan, attracting tourists from all over China. As you sail back, a gentle breeze will be blowing, mingled with the fragrance of lotus and willow leaves, which may give you a sense of relief making you realize how peaceful nature can be and what a warm city Jinan is. A Chinese poet once wrote:

“Lotus all sides and willows three,  
A town of mountain, half of lake” (Liu 1).

This is exactly what Daming Lake looks like, and this is Jinan's finest attraction.



## Nature and Essence

Carol ZHONG

Have you ever felt pressure or helplessness as an individual being in the nature world? If you have, I would like to share with you the perspectives and themes in two literary works by undertaking a close examination of passages from *A Sand Country Almanac* by Aldo Leopold and *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* by Annie Dillard, both of which are profound reflections on the natural world.

“Thinking like a Mountain” is a section selected from Aldo’s work, wherein the writer uses the first person perspective as a witness to observe every inch of the landscape. He also takes wolves as a starting point to make a profound insight. Leopold reflects upon a wolf’s death, switching between the human perspective of the mountain’s perspective. People lack the sensibility of nature, so they fail to understand their role as part of nature in the way that a mountain is. Without the natural-world’s sensory awareness, human beings’ impact on and understanding of nature will not be as great as they imagine.

Similar ideas emerge in Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden*. By concluding with Thoreau’s sentiment that, “in wildness is the salvation of the world,” Aldo condenses the delicate relationship between human beings and nature. All the world



is made up of nature, and wildlife is one significant part of it. In nature a stronger animal hunts the weaker one. As a concept, this is commonly known as the survival of the fittest, which is an idea intimately related to Thoreau's belief that civilization improves the houses without simultaneously improving the people who dwell in them. Because of aspects of their culture, humans often imagine themselves to be distinct from nature, but Leopold asserted real ecology is not to be found in school, but in the field. By integrating ourselves into nature, instead of paying attention to machines, votes, and dollars, we can better understand nature and human society. This masterpiece takes it ethics from the land, viewing community concepts in a unique way.

The chapter "Seeing" from *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* completely calms my heart and brings me into a pure world of untouched nature. Reading the book is like talking to a wise scholar all night long, being surrounded with a fresh spring coming from the ground. Over the course of a year, the writer observes the birds in the sky, the plants on the ground, and the stars in the universe. She unveils the mystery of nature step by step combining her observations with deep metaphysical reflections. It is this book that made me realize how rapidly the seasonal turnover happens, a rapidity of change that we should attend to. Since we can't always attend closely to the transitions of the season, we should seize, enjoy, and cherish the present.

Conversely, human intelligence is quite limited, for it can only understand a small portion of reality, which is expressed in the human language that is conveyed to many people who, themselves, do not even have the chance to hear the voice of nature.

Annie Dillard lived in Listener Creek, Virginia for a year and had a profound life experience of the natural world. Each page of this book is filled with a beautiful mystery of its own, as it follows the year by glimpsing the secrets of creation. In her writing, she processes both life and death, shows their continuity, and connects her childhood experiences with the natural world. She is a great woman who enjoys seeking peace and examining natural life through her unique perspective, which affords a feast of imagery and a spiritual baptism.





## **Kim Noble: the artist with the most painting styles in the world**

*Shelia BAO*

Every artist has his or her own painting styles and each one is typically known for his or her strong personal style. But what if an artist has several styles?

Kim Noble is a British artist and single mom. She is an artist who has the most diverse painting styles in the world—14 different styles coming from one person. Kim has produced more than 200 works of different styles over the past years. She has held 27 exhibitions in art galleries of various European countries and her works have been bought and collected by many art connoisseurs at high prices. Although she has no fixed style, she has still become a sought-after painter.

The reason why Kim has so many styles is due to her disease, Dissociative Identity Disorder, which is a mental defense mechanism wherein the body automatically produces different personalities to defend itself. Kim was born into a poor working family in 1960. When she was a child, she was repeatedly sexually molested and subsequently abused in her foster family. Her mental state deteriorated during the ordeal. At the age of 14, she was sent to a mental hospital for treatment. However, it took until 1995 for her to be diagnosed and receive professional treatment because of underdeveloped therapy. During the time before the diagnosis, she suffered from tortures, both mental and physical. Due to the complex causes and long duration of her disease, various common therapies did not stabilize her personalities. Finally, in a suggestion of a psychologist who believes in

art therapy, Kim started to use painting as an adjuvant therapy. Now painting is not only a therapy for her, but a way of expressing her personalities and a form of emotional outlet.

Kim's talent is equal to her capacious output of work. Amazingly, every personality has unique talents and cultivates his or her own painting style. Kim has named each artist. They are Abi, Anon, Bonny, Dawn, Judy, Karen, Ken, Key, Mimi, Missy, No Name, Patricia, Ria Pratt and Suzy. Each style of personality shows a different side of Kim. Looking at the work of Dawn, Judy, and Ria Pratt's works, one may see the serious trauma caused by her previous experiences.

Dawn is the personality that always believes it is 1997. At that time, Kim's daughter, Aimee, was taken away as soon as she was born because her mother had a mental disease. Dawn's works show Kim's inner wound of losing her baby. In her paintings, there is always a goddess with broken body and who trapped in a given space. These scenes indicate that Dawn is helpless to change her condition and that she is manipulated by something else. The color Dawn uses most is desert yellow, and there is no obvious change in the color. The single color makes the frame monotonous. The figure and use of color in her painting express a desolate pain and a feeling of helplessness and loneliness.

Judy appeared at Kim's anorexia stage, when she suffered both anorexia and hunger sickness. According to her daughter Aimee's words, Judy is gentle and humble and she likes to play with Judy. Her paintings always show a half-length portrait of a woman with a sad expression and the color she used are mostly applied unevenly, which expresses a mottled set of broken feelings. As you look into Judy's works, you often see a face hidden in the picture or broken in half in the shadow. These images manifest her suppressed depression. The striking difference between her demeanor in life and the difficulty of her paintings appears most starkly in the intense sadness and depression of Judy's works.

Ria Pratt is Kim's least favorite personality. She always paints the bad memories of her childhood. In her paintings, there is one child or some children being sexually assaulted or abused by several adults. She uses strong contrasting colors like yellow and purple, or orange and blue. The adults and children's outlines are filled with these contrasting colors respectively. The content and colors create the visual stimulus and produce a strong sense of discomfort for the audience.

Apart from these three traumatized personalities, the styles of her other protective personalities



less dark. Some of them are muted and chic. Some of them are bright and warm. But they are all good painters. Kim said that she would continue to paint to express her mental condition to people and help these personalities to understand each other.

But they are all good painters. Kim said that she would continue to paint to express her mental condition to people and help these personalities to understand each other.





# The Process of Discovering Self-worth

Carol ZHONG

The process of discovering self-worth has been a long journey in my life. I am grateful that I have attempted to represent the significance of this journey by couching my reflections on the subject in quotations taken from three books: *Educated: a Mirror* by Tara Westover, *the Moon and Sixpence* by William Somerset Maugham, and *Becoming* by Michelle Obama. These three books each contain phrases that were important in my journey of discovering self-worth. I present my selected quotations under the thematic headings of formation, reflection, and reshaping. I have augmented my account of these three thematic headings and their associated phrases with selected paintings from certain periods of time in order to better express my state of mind, as I believe that to recall the past is to welcome a new life.

## a) Opening: formation

01

I began to respect pain, even to revel in it, to find it indispensable and elusive.

02

The past is a ghost, a phantom, of no significance, only the future has weight.

03

Find out what your strengths are and then decide who you are.

04

Flee as a bird to your mountain.

05

Education comes in different forms. These may include understanding different people, experiences, and histories. Education should broaden thoughts and deepen empathy. Education should not make you more prejudiced and stubborn. If people are educated, they should become more uncertain, not more certain. They should listen more but talk less, be





passionate about differences, and love ideas that are different from their own.

b) Developing: reflection

06

Perhaps one must be an actor in some way if one wants to experience the romance of life, and one must be able to take a detached and immersed interest in one's own actions if one wants to step out of the picture.

07

Art is an expression of feeling, and feeling speaks a language that most people can understand.

08

The pendulum swings back and forth, back and forth, and the circle keeps restarting.

09

Each of us is alone in the world. Each man is imprisoned in an iron tower and could only communicate his thoughts to others by means of symbols. These symbols may not have a common value, so their meaning is vague and uncertain. Pitifully, we still want to pass on the wealth of our hearts to others, but they may have no capacity to receive it, so we may often walk alone. Although the body is interdependent but remains separated from others, fundamentally, we do not fully understand others, and they do not fully understand us.

c) Changing: reshaping

10

"Becoming" is a long process that needs to be realized step by step. It takes patience as well as hard work, both of which are equally important. Becoming is never giving up on the idea of continuing to grow.

11

We were both, of course, products of how we'd been raised.

12

"My mother maintained the sort of parental mind-set that I now recognize

as brilliant and nearly impossible to emulate—a kind of unflappable Zen neutrality.” “She wasn’t quick to judge, and she wasn’t quick to meddle. Instead, she monitored our moods and bore benevolent witness to whatever travails or triumphs a day might bring.” “Every move she made, I realize now, was buttressed by the quiet confidence that she’d raised us to be adults”

13

If you don’t get out there and define yourself, you’ll be quickly and inaccurately defined by others.

14

“Just as it had been at Whitney Young, my intensity was spawned at least in part by a feeling of I’ll show you. If in high school I’d felt as if I were representing my neighborhood, now at Princeton I was representing my race.”

15

"Becoming" does not mean to reach a certain place or achieve a certain goal. Instead, I think becoming is supposed to be a state of progress, a way of evolution, a never-ending path toward a more perfect self.

#### d) Conclusion

The preceding citations and paintings reveal how I developed self-worth through a process of growth. This collection is derived from how I see myself—from my own view and experience. My perspective keeps changing and regenerating, which is also a part of my continual growth.

The first book, *Educated: a Mirror*, refers on the writer’s pathway of growth, which is about transformation and metamorphosis. It is also a reflection of the way my own values were formed. Tara, whose autobiography *Educated* is, has managed to distinguish what she needs through the process of her various experiences with her eccentric family. She also distinguishes what benefits her from what is bad for her. Both these elements are often overlooked, but they affect us deeply. For instance, the self-righteous, infinitely submissive, unrestrained, and overly opinionated personalities in Tara’s family.

We may say that the measurement of success is not about wealth or the perfect grade point average, but the integrity of one’s personality, which makes us invulnerable, like wearing a suit of armor. We will truly understand ourselves as long as we understand our value is infinite. Success, then, becomes something that will inevitably happen sooner or later. Ultimately, you will have flown over the mountain on the way to form your core values.

In the book *The Moon and Sixpence* written by William Somerset Maugham, there is a conflict





between reality and the imaginary. Do not be panicked or anxious if you fail to make everything stay on track. Your imperfections are parts of your perfection. Examining imperfections is a good way to review ourselves and gain something new by making mistakes and reflecting on them.

Michelle Obama's autobiography, *Becoming*, is on track to become the most successful memoir in modern publishing history. Her own experiences impress me a lot, although ages, races, career and social experience differentiate me from the Former First Lady. Being a mother, a daughter, and a member of the presidential family, she plays multiple roles simultaneously. Therefore, she feels a juggernaut inside herself, pushing her to grow from the inside out.

My perspective of self-value was transformed through Michelle's story. With the less self-doubt, I felt it is quite normal and suitable to reexamine myself. I managed to realize the inappropriate biases I hold as well as the shining parts of myself during the process of review. For example, family relationships and childhood experiences tightly connect and affect our growth and long-term development. Knowledge can change our destiny and sense of self-fulfillment. One needs foresight in planning for the future, though it certainly brings me some anxiety and self-doubt. However, this is the process to rebuild my value and self-recognition.

I did hesitate over the idea that, while being an individual, we should always choose to honor ourselves over others. I wondered whether others are just an attachment—even those we are close to. In time, I came to realize that, within the bounds of one's own identity, we should be ourselves first then put ourselves in the other's position. We ought to live in the moment and cherish every moment on our way to growth. Life is flowing like the river, and we are growing continuously. For in a second, the moment becomes the past.

Sometimes we care about which boat we're on and forget that we're on the river. In a situation where concrete measurements, such as prizes or wealth cannot measure self-value, how are we to evaluate ourselves as a complete individual? The way to achieve self-worth is the art of art-making itself.





## Pain and Love in Childhood

*Katherine DONG*

“The older you get, the more you nag.” This is particularly evident in my grandmother. When I was a child, I found her very garrulous and forceful, which was not the way a female elder should be. In my impression, girls should always be introverted and quiet, and be patient when problems came up – at least, that was the way I used to think.

When I was in elementary school, I was not as thin and small as other girls in our class. Actually, I was born almost as tall as the tallest boy in the class. Suffering classmates’ curious gaze and snickers, the seeds of inferiority sprouted in my heart. Because of my inferiority, I naturally attracted a lot of grandma's nagging.

“You had the advantage of height, so be strong and brave.”

“Do not bully others, but also do not be afraid of bullies.”

But at this time in my childhood, I could not listen to these "useless" exhortation, so I simply endured nagging torture every day. Her voice was like an invisible mosquito, buzzing around my ears as I tried to go to sleep.

As I got older and grew taller, the teacher had to put me in the back of the class to avoid obstructing other students’ view of the blackboard. As a result, I became a deskmate with a nasty boy who always liked to bully me. He took advantage of the last row of seats, drew a boundary line on the table – a trick used to divide the territory, and push me to the edge of the desk, while he laughed, as I curled up at the corner doing my work. He also doodled on my clean notebooks and gave me nasty nicknames, because he knew I was afraid to complain of him to our teacher.

If I could bear what he had done so far, the thing that drove me crazy was that he started hitting me. When I was sitting on the other side of the passageway, he often tugged my arm or pushed me suddenly to get out or get back to his seat, sometimes he even pinched me. Of course, teasing me was a joke to him, but for me, I couldn't stand it. As a young person who hadn't been bullied since early childhood, I wasn't used to these assaults, and I cried under the covers every night. When I came

home feeling unhappy, I still had to bear grandma's nagging as usual. Finally, one night before dinner, I cried loudly in front of grandma.

"I don't want to go to school tomorrow."

"Why? Who bullied you?"

At this moment, I was surprised to find my grandmother read my mind and understood what I was thinking. However, the feeling was quickly overwhelmed by sadness. That night, grandma was unusually silent—no nagging. She just dried my tears, and served me a bowl of hot rice, and then hugged me to let me have a peaceful sleep.

The next day, in spite of my strong resistance, grandma took me to school. It was a snowy day, and my old grandmother carried a crying girl on her back and moved in the wind step by step. All of a sudden, I felt that the road to school was so long that grandma's breath became louder and louder, and her back became warmer and warmer.

That morning, I sat in my seat, and the silence of the classroom contrasted sharply with the noise of my grandmother arguing with the teacher outside the door. Some classmates occasionally looked at me, and that disgusting guy quietly stayed in his place and clandestinely erased the line on the table. At that time, I realized that there was irony in the eyes of my classmates, because they thought an elder would not dare to shout at the teacher. I was a little embarrassed because of my grandmother's impoliteness, so I put my hands over my ears and buried myself in a book. Last night's crying made my headache and my eyes were swollen so that I did not know when grandma left for home, I only remembered the teacher came with a heavy face to the classroom, criticizing my deskmate seriously in front of the class, and arranging for a girl as my new deskmate.

After that, no one bullied me until high school. I had the strength to hold my own because my grandmother had taught me that, "Although sometimes it seems like a joke, as long as the joke is not proper, you should learn to fight. You are a girl, and you should not bear the injustice of the society. You should be strong and brave at the right time." Looking back on this childhood incident, I am more and more grateful to my grandmother, and I also accept her nagging as part of her strong character. Because everything she does, including nagging me, is a sign of her love for me. She is always thinking of what's best for me, and I feel guilty for my past ignorance. Now I have realized that this lovely old lady is just as lovely in the way she expresses her love to me.

