

## Final Podcast Transcript

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### 1. Introduction

*(Music) Music of nature*

- B: Hi everyone, I'm Bill.
- K: I'm Kun. We are students of Lafayette College. This is a podcast for First Year Seminar 18-- ten ways to know nature.
- B: We both come from China and now studying here. Having different cultural background, Kun and I understand nature in a different way.
- K: So now, we are going to discuss the differences and similarities of understanding nature in Chinese and American culture.

### 2. Personal experience

- B: Talking about nature, Kun, how do you see and understand it? Do you have any stories to share with us?
- K: Well, my understanding of nature changes as I grow up. I live in the city. However, my hometown is in the countryside and every year I go to my hometown to see my grandparents. When I was 6 years old, the road conditions were really bad. Sometimes heavy rain and mud-rock flow would destroy the road. Nature has the mighty power to destroy artificial things. And that was my first impression of nature. While my father was driving back to the country, sitting in the car did not bore me. I always looked out the window of the car and saw the nature scenes. The roads were usually built in the middle of the mountains. I would look up through one side of the window, and there were so many mountains that I could not see the top of them. I would look down the other

side of the road, and I would see long rivers with abundant water. Small trees and shrubs were beside the rivers. Looking further through the same side, I could see the full views of large mountains covered with green shrubs. Though the car ride took more than two hours, I still enjoyed it a lot. When I arrived at the countryside, I remembered that I used to herd sheep with my grandma and it was great fun. My grandparents kept chickens and pigs in their yard at that time. As such, I regarded the countryside as nature, and saw it differently from the city, which only has roads and buildings. Unfortunately, things have changed a lot.

- B: So what is it like now, why has it changed a lot?
- K: Now when I go back to the countryside, it only takes half an hour to drive there by the highway. However, I become bored because there is nothing interesting to see while looking outside the window. The rivers have gradually dried up, and the trees beside the river have disappeared. In my grandparents' home, they are no longer keeping the sheep, chickens and pigs. The contrast makes me feel that nature is the way that everything used to be.
- B: You are saying that landscapes, animals, and humans make up nature, but as humans exploit the part of landscapes and animals, nature becomes less natural.
- K: Yes, that's right. Do you know any stories that can provide us a western view of nature?
- B: Sure, do you know the novel *Walden* written by Thoreau (|θə'rou|)?
- K: Yeah, is his thought different from or similar to mine? Tell us about it.
- B: It is different. The novel *Walden* contains his thoughts and personal experience of nature. While living alone in the forest for over two years, Thoreau did many observations and he learnt so much about nature. For instance, he observed nature so often that he knew the opening time of the Walden Lake during 1845, and he took the day to day changes of the lake to be indicative of the yearly changes. Staying in the forest for a long time, Thoreau also held the attitude that

people should cherish and keep nature untouched from human being's civilization, in other words, he thought that wilderness is true nature.

- K: As we can see: (comparison) While both Thoreau and I cherish nature, we understand it differently: I see nature as a place that I can interact with, but Thoreau understands nature as true wilderness. In other words, a place can be called nature until it is touched and civilized by human. This might be a cultural difference that people from different background seeing nature.
- B: That's right, I also found an article named *The Wilderness Letter* written by Wallace Stegner holds the notion that we need to consider wilderness as nature. Seeing through these examples we may get that the main difference is whether human's activities exist affect the definition of nature.

*(Music) Music of a traditional Chinese musical instrument*

### 3. Art

- B: Art works are always one important part of how people understand nature. Do you know something about Chinese painting? How do Chinese artists depict nature?
- K: Chinese painting, generally speaking, are divided to three types: mountain-and-water painting, which focuses on the relationship of natural landscapes and human; flower-and-bird painting, which stresses on the relationship of plants and animals in nature and human; and figure painting, which emphasizes on relationship inside human society. These three parts altogether make up the nature. Chinese artists observe the nature first, then draw the paintings with reflections and skills. Banqiao Zheng was a Chinese painter and a magistrate at Shandong Province in Qing Dynasty. He as a painter was famous for his bamboo painting. His paintings also reflected his personal belief and principles.

One of his famous work called “*Bamboos and stones*” demonstrate that people should not change their belief even if they suffer from heavy pressure or encounter great difficulties, just like the bamboos keep straight between the hard stones and in the harsh wind.

- B: That’s interesting. We also have learnt some American painters’ concept of nature in class. For example, the article Hudson River School written by Mark Barrow talked about how a group of landscape painters were affected by nationalism and romanticism appreciated the wilderness-- the author wrote in the book (quote) “But America did still have something that Europe no longer possessed-- an abundance of majestic wilderness, where sublime encounters with the divine might still take place” (unquote). This showed these artists’ love of wild nature. They depicted and loved the wilderness in their art works. Moreover, through Thomas Cole’s *The Course of Empire*, the author used five drawings to show the same imaginary harbor city and depicted the growth and the decline of a city to illustrate that human beings are too tiny and insignificant to compared with the great nature.
- K: Through Chinese and American paintings we can see the differences between the artists’ concept of nature. While Chinese artists used the natural scenery and objects to not only show the beauty of nature, but also express their emotions or beliefs; however, the American artists draw nature to admire its sublimity.
- B: Yes, exactly, I think we can conclude it as Chinese artists seeing nature more personally while the American artists take nature more impersonal. We can also see through the different styles of Chinese and American paintings, while American artists try to draw the exact scene of nature using oil painting; Chinese artists depict nature more abstractly.

*(Music) Bird song Intro - by Florence and the machine*

#### **4. Conclusion**

- K: It is probably the time to say goodbye. Although there are a lot more aspects can show the comparison of Chinese and American culture, such as value, food, and religion, due to the time limit, we are unable to talk about them today. However, through personal experience and art we can already see the distinctions of understanding nature of each culture.
- B: If you are interested and want to know more. We also provide some additional articles in the reference list. Thank you for listening. Goodbye.
- K: Bye.