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Ecocriticism, a field in which literary studies meets ecology, has been constantly evolving, demonstrating its richness, creativity, and versatility. Published in 2022, the volume *Ecocriticism and Chinese Literature. Imagined Landscapes and Real Lived Spaces* is yet another important proof of the complexity of this field, exploring the way in which modern and contemporary Chinese literature reflects the changes brought to the environment by the development of technology, irrational exploitation of natural resources, overpopulation, and colonization.

The different essays reading Chinese poetry and prose from a variety of angles have a very important common point, that is “examining the environmental and ecological dimensions of notions such as *qing* (情) and *jing* (境)” (xvii). Professor Yinde Zhang defines the notion of *qingjing*, in the preface of the volume, as “an indissociable dyad” (xiv) of landscape and emotion, a term in which subjective perception and objective reality are no longer two elements that exist independently but absorb and modify each other. By means of such a concept, the ecocritical perspective is enriched with a term that, from an ethical point of view, explains the departure from anthropocentrism, and from an aesthetic point of view, emphasizes the continuous communication, through emotions, between nature and human. At the same time, “the *qingjing* of ecocriticism reveals the fragile, unstable, and uncertain beauty of the ecosystem” (xiv).

The volume is divided into two main parts, namely *Ecocriticism and Chinese Literature* and *Imagined Landscapes and Real Lived Spaces*, which explore the unique way in which the connection between man and the environment is reflected in Chinese literature, reinterpreting concepts that are part of Chinese cultural heritage. The chapters of the first part have in common the comparative approach, while in the second part, the approach is mainly monographic.

The strong connection between emotions and landscapes, which erases the boundaries between the subject and object, is linked, in the first two chapters, to the temporal coordinate. Time is the element which changes both landscapes and human sensibility. Analyzing the works of Chu T'ien-hsin 朱天心, Dung Kai-cheung 董啟章 and Alai 阿來, Astrid Møller-Olsen observes that trees, defining elements for the real space, become an important indicator in the construction of temporal perception. As “organic marker[s] of temporality” (4), trees

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can connect one character or one community to past events or they can embody one's memory and continue to exist after a character is no longer a part of the story.

Over time, the poetic sensibility changes, and this metamorphosis triggers the need for a new artistic form. This is the case of the modern poetry of Feng Zhi 馮至, an author who sees the sonnet as an appropriate form to convey his ideas. In a complex stylistic and prosodic analysis, Victor J. Ulysse Vuilleumier traces how Feng Zhi's poetry relates to the Chinese poetic tradition, represented by Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 and Ouyang Xiu 歐陽脩, but also to romantic and modern European poetry, illustrated by the works of Goethe, Novalis and Reiner Maria Rilke. In this comparative context, Feng Zhi's sonnets are seen as "a cross-cultural reinvention of a poetics at the crossroads of internal and external, ancient, and modern references, which provides a new answer to (...) the existential problem of the attitude to be adopted in front of death, and of the silence of nature" (30). The poet correlates the changes he observes in nature with those of his own voice, and "the imported constraining form" (34) of the sonnet is, for him, the most suitable to make them known to the readers, in a language, *baihua* 白話, that fits his modern communication needs.

Chapters 3 and 5 of the book also refer to the adaptation of the artistic expression to a new affective content. A critical study, Wang Guowei's 王國維, *Remarks on Lyrics in the Human World* (*Renjian cihua* 人間詞話) and Zang Di's 臧棣 poetic work reveal what is the place occupied by the nonhuman in the *jing*. In his analysis, Christopher T. Kong compares Wang Guowei's critical study with Theodor W. Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, to discover how the nonhuman is depicted in a critical text, starting from the premise that Chinese poetry frequently refers to nonhuman reality, while in Chinese critical discourse nonhuman entities are rarely discussed. Clarifying the critical concepts used by Wang Guowei, such as *zaojing* 造境 (the "creative realm"), *xiejing* 寫境 ("descriptive realm"), and *ge* 隔 which connotes "separation, distance, obstruction, opacity, and obfuscation" (49), Kong demonstrates that the nonhuman begins to be represented in Chinese critical discourse through the work of Wang Guowei. Poetry, understood through this critical filter, grants a special ontological status to the nonhuman beings. Kong's conclusion is that, by way of Wang Guowei's aesthetic thought, dissociating between reality and its aesthetic representation, "we can begin to take nonhuman entities seriously, including their stakes in what we would otherwise consider to be a 'human world'" (51).

Shuang Xu, in the chapter about the poet Zang Di, demonstrates that contemporary poetry presents the human and the nonhuman to the same degree. Moreover, Shuang Xu observes that in Zang's writing, "humans often withdraw from the central position and become supporting characters" (74), his poetry becoming one of "fusion of the Object and the Self" (78).

Cosima Bruno mainly analyzes the poetry of Yu Jian 于堅, noticing two attitudes of the poetical persona in front of nature. On one hand, awe in front of *jing* is reminiscent of classical Chinese poetry; on the other hand, "disharmony, deformity and disgust" (61) are associated with a dystopian nature, which are frequently observable in the contemporary world. In front of a "devastated *jing*" (61), the poem is charged with a political and ethical subtext, becoming "a form of resistance that seeks to direct attention to the urgency of reacting to the galloping destruction of the environment" (61), and the poetical persona is a mere reflection of those



“physically and spiritually broken” (62). An important place in Cosima Bruno’s analysis is occupied by the concept of *can* 殘, taken from Du Fu’s 杜甫 aesthetics of the *canshan shengshui* 殘山剩水 (“devastated/broken landscape”) (62), which enriches the ecocritical discourse with a precious tool for understanding contemporary literature, “emphasizing the inhuman of the human-built environment” (64). Cosima Bruno argues that *qingjing* is a multifaceted concept, that views the relationship between emotion and the environment as virtually open to infinite possibilities.

A devastated *jing*, a world that becomes almost uninhabitable, is presented in the last two chapters of the first part of the book, which focus on Chinese Science Fiction. Mia Chen Ma, who compares Hao Jingfang’s 郝景芳 *Folding Beijing* (*Beijing zhe die* 北京摺疊) and Liu Cixin’s 劉慈欣 *Moonlight* (*Yue ye* 月夜), observes that in contemporary urban China, *jing* is a space ravaged by overpopulation and resource consumption. While Yue Zhou and Xi Liu compare the works of Liu Cixin, Chen Qiufan 陳楸帆, He Xi 何夕, and Chi Hui 遲卉, identifying two attitudes towards today’s technology: Liu Cixin believes technological progress can help promote humanity, while the rest see the threat that the excessively technological world represents to nature and humans alike.

The second part of the volume opens with Melinda Pirazzoli’s analysis of the novel *Bridge* 橋, written by Fei Ming 廢名, identifying its similarities with Chinese classical poetry. The same proximity to classical sources is observed by Nicoletta Pesaro in Can Xue’s 殘雪 texts, *Zui hou de qingren* 最好的情人 (*The Last Lover*, 2005) and *Bianjiang* 邊疆 (*Frontier*, 2008). In the case of these authors, *qing* and *jing* intertwine with strange events and characters, in a contemporary reinterpretation of the traditional concept describing the harmony between people and the world, *tian ren he yi* 天人合一.

Xu Ying Yu, researching the works of Liu Cixin and A Que 阿缺, identifies different attitudes in imagining the post-Anthropocene world. On one hand, Liu’s science fiction aims to renounce human superiority in the name of species equality, which it misses, precisely because the perspective remains human-centered. On the other hand, there is the solution proposed by A Que, who builds a world in which collaboration succeeds in replacing competition.

Liu Cixin’s work is also analyzed by Martina Codeluppi, through a particularly interesting critical perspective, linking “environment-oriented approach of ecocriticism and the emotion-bound field of affect theory” (xxiii). Very similar to the empirical ecocriticism approach, Codeluppi explores the way in which the emotions felt by the characters are transmitted to the readers.

Zhang Chengzhi’s 張承志 work, traced in its evolution by Alessandra Pezza, demonstrates that *qingjing* is a dynamic concept and its transformation can be seen even through the work of a single author. The same place, the grassland, can become the object of both wonder and fear, as the idyllic perspective alternates with the dystopian one.

The last two chapters view the interconnection of *qing* and *jing* through the lens of post-colonialist discourse. Gwennaël Gaffric talks about how the texts written by Wu Ming-yi 吳明益 illustrate the consequences of colonialism on nonhumans and landscapes, while Christopher N. Payne analyzes a short story *Allah’s Will* by Ng Kim Chew 黃錦樹, observing

a very interesting case, where *qing* and *jing* seem to split. *Jing* no longer designates an identifiable space, real or fictional, but dissolves into *placelessness* inhabited by a character facing an unfamiliar world, as he is geographically and culturally isolated from the Chinese world and forced to become a Muslim Malayan. *Qing* is therefore linked to an idealized world, which belongs only to the character's memories, while the real *jing* is almost impossible to be perceived.

Ecocriticism and Chinese literature: Imagined Landscapes and Real Lived Spaces is, first, a volume that demonstrates the complexity of the concept *qingjing*, which encompasses a variety of emotions, from awe to disgust, and places, from a park in the middle of a metropolis, to a pasture in northern China. Reinterpreted through a contemporary perspective, this concept also proves to be extremely elastic, as it can be applied to any kind of literary text, regardless of its belonging to one epoch or another. But probably the most interesting feature of the concept revealed in this book is its openness both towards humans and nonhumans, suggesting yet another possibility for the critical discourse to discard the anthropocentric view.

Secondly, the book speaks about the extreme permeability of ecocriticism to concepts that are rooted in backgrounds as different as the classical Chinese thought is from the most recent affect theory. As a result, each of the 14 essays takes a different approach, but, at the same time, the volume's unity is assured by the ability of the critical discourse to accommodate ideas that could be regarded, if taken by themselves, as divergent.

Finally, the ecocritical reading also manages to capture the plurality of the discourses about nature in modern and contemporary Chinese literature – from fixed-form poetry, to short stories, and science fiction novels – showing that the concern for the environment is an important dimension of contemporary Chinese literary texts.

A very important contribution to the ecocritical theory, the book is a fresh, compelling, and nuanced look at the Chinese literary space, being an essential tool for those who want to explore its connection to the environment.

