

Gary Snyder's Eco-cosmopolitanism and Chinese Complex

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ABSTRACT

Gary Snyder, as a noted figure in the integration of Eastern and Western philosophical thought, has maintained an eco-cosmopolitan attitude towards co-existence between humans and species. His experience of learning Chinese and practice of Chinese philosophy has enriched his nature wisdom. In his learning by translating and writing, he embodies such principles of harmony with nature and respect for all beings. His translation of Hanshan Poem lays a foundation of his Chinese Complex, while his poetry and essays reflect a profound understanding of Chinese ecological wisdom, which he incorporates into his eco-cosmopolitan vision. This vision emphasizes the rootedness in place, the interconnectedness of all life, the importance of preserving biodiversity, and the need for a global perspective in addressing environmental challenges. Snyder's Chinese complex not only enhances the cultural depth of his work but also contributes to a more inclusive and holistic understanding of environmentalism.

Keywords: Eco-cosmopolitanism, Chinese Complex, Gary Snyder.

1. INTRODUCTION

Eco-cosmopolitanism, as discussed by Heise, advocates for an environmental commitment that transcends local and national boundaries, encouraging individuals and communities to consider their ecological impact and responsibilities within a global context. Heise argues that in an era marked by extensive global connectivity and the widespread influence of human activity on the environment, traditional environmentalism that focuses solely on local or national issues is insufficient. Instead, she calls for a more inclusive, global approach to environmental ethics and action, one that acknowledges the interconnectedness of all life forms and ecosystems across the planet.

Gary Snyder, a prominent figure in American literature and environmental activism, stands as an exemplar of eco-cosmopolitanism—a philosophy that advocates for rootedness in place, recognizing and preserving the interconnectedness of all living beings across the globe. Snyder's profound engagement with Eastern philosophies, particularly those derived from Zen Buddhism and Daoism, alongside his deep-rooted connections to the natural world, has positioned him as a leading voice in the

ecological movement. This synthesis of global perspectives with a reverence for nature forms the cornerstone of his eco-cosmopolitan stance.

Born in 1930, Snyder's early life in the Pacific Northwest of the United States instilled in him a profound appreciation for the natural environment. This connection deepened through his academic and personal explorations of Asian cultures and languages, which he later integrated into both his literary work and his environmental activism.

Snyder's engagement with Chinese philosophy—particularly through his translations of ancient poets like Han Shan—enriches his eco-cosmopolitan perspective. He draws upon the Daoist view of living in accordance with the Dao (the Way), which signifies a path of simplicity, spontaneity, and harmony with natural processes. This East Asian influence further amplifies his call for a global ecological consciousness that transcends cultural and national boundaries.

Gary Snyder's eco-cosmopolitanism doesn't merely advocate for environmental preservation; it calls for a transformative shift in how humans perceive themselves in relation to the rest of the biosphere. He sees environmental problems not just

as issues of policy or science but as manifestations of deeper spiritual and philosophical failings. For Snyder, the path forward requires a cultural and spiritual reawakening—a return to a more symbiotic, respectful, and mindful existence with the natural world.

In essence, Gary Snyder exemplifies eco-cosmopolitanism by blending a global perspective with a profound commitment to living in equilibrium with the Earth. His life and work offer valuable insights into how cultural exchange and an appreciation for the intrinsic value of all life can inspire a more ecologically balanced and harmonious world.

2. ROOTEDNESS IN PLACE

"The Rootedness in Place" refers to the profound connection and sense of belonging individuals or communities feel towards a specific geographical location or environment. It's about the deep ties that bind people to their surroundings, where the essence of a place becomes intertwined with personal identity, history, and culture.

In a world where globalization and mobility often uproot individuals from their origins, the sense of being deeply rooted in a place offers stability, continuity, and a sense of belonging. It fosters a relationship with the land and environment that is reciprocal – one nurtures and cares for the place, and in return, the place provides a sense of identity and belonging.

The rootedness in place also plays a critical role in environmental stewardship and sustainability. When people feel a strong connection to their environment, they are more likely to act in ways that preserve and protect it for future generations.

For many, finding or maintaining this connection in a rapidly changing world is a challenge, yet it remains a fundamental human need – to belong, to feel connected, and to find meaning in the places we call home.

The concept of "rootedness in place," as it could relate to Hanshan's poems translated by Gary Snyder, embodies the profound spiritual and physical connection to a specific landscape. Hanshan, a legendary figure in Chinese literature, is often depicted as a hermit living in the cold mountains (Cold Mountain) of China. In these poems, "rootedness in place" is not merely about a physical location but a harmonious existence within the natural world. For Example:

一自遁寒山，养命餐山果。平生何所忧，此事随缘过。

日月如逝川，光阴石中火。任你天地移，我畅岩中坐。¹

If I hide out at Cold Mountain

Living off mountain plants and berries -

All my lifetime, why worry?

One follows his karma through.

Days and months slip by like water,

Time is like sparks knocked off flint.

Go ahead and let the world change -

I'm happy to sit among these cliffs.²

This connection transcends mere living or surviving in a place; it represents a unity and understanding of nature's rhythms, a deep ecological awareness, and a way of living that is in tune with the surrounding environment. Hanshan's poems often reflect moments of joy, enlightenment, and melancholy derived from his experiences in the mountains, showcasing a spiritual homeland that nurtures his soul.

Gary Snyder, who has himself been deeply influenced by Zen Buddhism and a profound respect for nature, captures the essence of Hanshan's connection to Cold Mountain with a vividness that resonates with many who seek a deeper relationship with the natural world. Snyder's translations highlight the significance of a life deeply rooted in one's surroundings, where solitude and the natural landscape foster a profound understanding and insight into life's mysteries. In many of his poems, he sings this sense of belonging, especially the collection *Turtle Island* exhibits the joy. For Example this *By Frazier Creek Falls*:

Standing up on lifted, folded rock

Looking out and down--

The creek falls to a far valley.

Hills beyond that

Facing, half-forested, dry

--clear sky

Strong wind in the

Stiff glittering needle clusters

1. Hanshan, Annotations to the Poems of Cold Mountain, Xiangchu, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2000, p448.

2. Gary Snyder, Riprap and Cold Mountain Poems, Berkeley: Counterpoint Press, 2009, p55

*Of the pine-their brown
 Round trunk bodies
 Straight, still;
 Rustling trembling limbs and twigs
 Listen.
 This living flowing land
 Is all there is, forever
 We are it
 It sings through us---
 We could live on this Earth
 Without clothes or tools!*³

This poem vividly captures the essence of "rootedness in place" by immersing the reader in the tranquility and steadfastness of the natural landscape. The poet's vivid depiction of standing upon "lifted, folded rock" and gazing upon the expanse — from the cascading creek to the distant, half-forested hills under a "clear sky"— creates a profound sense of belonging and unity with the Earth.

The strength of the wind in the "stiff glittering needle clusters / Of the pine" and the stable presence of their "brown / Round trunk bodies" evoke a feeling of resilience and timelessness. Nature, in its unyielding and ever-vibrant state, stands as a testament to the enduring connection between the land and those who inhabit it. The "rustling trembling limbs and twigs" invite the reader to "Listen" - a simple yet powerful call to attune oneself to the subtle, yet profound, language of the Earth.

This "living flowing land" is presented not just as a backdrop to human existence but as the very essence of life itself. The declaration "We are it" underscores the inseparability of humanity and the natural world, suggesting an innate kinship that transcends physical and temporal boundaries. "It sings through us" illustrates that this connection is not merely physical but spiritual, as the land's ancient melodies resonate and find expression through our existence.

The poet's musing that "We could live on this Earth / Without clothes or tools!" points to a primordial harmony with nature, where material possessions and human inventions become superfluous in the face of the profound sustenance

and fulfillment provided by the Earth. This line harkens back to a time or ideal state where humans were fully integrated into the ecosystems around them, living in balance without the need for the barriers and aids that modern life imposes between ourselves and the natural world.

Ultimately, this poem serves as a meditative reflection on the concept of "rootedness in place," celebrating the deep, intrinsic connections between land and self. It invites us to reevaluate our relationship with the Earth, encouraging a return to simplicity, attentiveness, and respect for the natural environment that sustains and defines us.

Thus, through Hanshan's verses, as brought to life by Snyder, "rootedness in place" becomes a metaphor for the spiritual journey and the quest for inner peace and wisdom, achieved through a life that celebrates and honors the deep bond between humans and the natural world.

3. THE INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF ALL LIFE

In her book *Sense of place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global*, Ursula.K. Heise proposed an eco-cosmopolitan attitude toward current problems of environment. By borrowing Ulrich Beck's definition of risk society, she emphasizes "such risk awareness has also come to reshape the imagination of the global in its environmentalist as well as other dimensions."⁴ In this risk society, all living things are interconnected.

Hanshan's poetry intertwines observations of nature with philosophical reflections. Snyder's translations of his poems, which began in the 1950s, introduced English-speaking readers to a poetic vision where human beings, nature, and the cosmos are seen as deeply interconnected. Such poems, with their vivid imagery and contemplative depth, align closely with Daoist and Chan (Zen) Buddhist principles, emphasizing harmony with the natural world and the underlying unity of existence.

For example, Hanshan's verses often depict serene mountain landscapes, flowing streams, and the simple life of a recluse as manifestations of Dao, the fundamental principle that governs the universe in Daoism. For example,

3. Gary Snyder, *Turtle Island*, New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1974, p41

4. Ursula. K. Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The environmental Imagination of the Global*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008, p121

鸟语情不堪，其时卧草庵。樱桃红灼灼，杨柳正
 耗耗。

旭日衔青嶂，晴云洗禄潭。谁知出尘俗，馭上寒
 山南⁵

*I can't stand these bird songs
 Now I'll go rest in my straw shack.
 The cherry flowers are scarlet
 The willow shoots up feathery.
 Morning sun drives over blue peaks
 Bright clouds wash green ponds.
 Who knows that I'm out of the dusty world
 Climbing the southern slope of Cold
 Mountain?*⁶

Through Snyder's translations, the profound connection between humans and nature, as celebrated in Hanshan's works, found new resonance in the context of modern environmentalism. As in Riprap:

*Lay down these words
 Before your mind like rocks
 Placed solid, by hands
 In choice of place, set
 Before the body of the mind
 In space and time:
 Solidity of bark, leaf, or wall
 Riprap of things:
 Cobble of milky way,
 Straying planets,
 These poems, people,
 Lost ponies with
 Dragging saddles
 And rocky sure-foot trails,
 The worlds like an endless
 Four-dimensional
 Game of Go
 Ants and pebbles
 In the thin loam, each rock a word
 A creek-washed stone*

5. Hanshan, Annotations to the Poems of Cold Mountain, Xiangchu, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2000,p336

6. Gary Snyder, Riprap and Cold Mountain Poems, Berkeley: Counterpoint Press, 2009,p51

*Granite; ingrained
 With torment of fire and weight
 Crystal and sediment linked hot
 All change, in thoughts,
 As well as things.*⁷

"Riprap" metaphorically uses the idea of laying stones to stabilize a slope to symbolize the interconnectedness between human efforts and the natural world, emphasizing stability and harmony.

Gary Snyder's engagement with Hanshan's poems and broader Chinese culture significantly contributed to his understanding and articulation of "the interconnectedness of all life." This concept, deeply rooted in Chinese philosophical and poetic traditions, resonates throughout Snyder's work, merging with his own ecological insights and beliefs.

Snyder synthesized these influences into a unique eco-cosmopolitan vision that combines respect for local landscapes and traditions with a global awareness of environmental issues. His concept of the "practice of the wild" draws on both Hanshan's poetic isolation and Zen's mindfulness to advocate for a way of life that acknowledges the profound interdependence between human beings and the Earth system.

Through his creative and intellectual endeavors, Gary Snyder bridges the wisdom of ancient Chinese culture and contemporary ecological thought, highlighting the timeless relevance of recognizing "the interconnectedness of all life." His work not only pays homage to the cultural sources from which it draws inspiration but also serves as a poignant reminder of the universality of these themes across time and cultures.

Gary Snyder's literary corpus is rich with explorations of the theme "the interconnectedness of all life." For Example, the poem "The Hay for the horses"

*He had driven half the night
 From far down San Joaquin
 Through Mariposa, up the
 Dangerous Mountain roads,
 And pulled in at 2 AM
 At our covered bridge home.*

7. Gary Snyder, Riprap and Cold Mountain Poems, Berkeley: Counterpoint Press, 2009,p32

*In the morning
After chores, we walked
Together around the meadow
To disentangle the mare
From a mess of barbed wire
Someone's fence had come
Unstrung in the night.
Sequoias stood big and good
In quiet light,
From our grove to the peak
Was one of their ageless morning's
Walks for tough old gods.
I fed the cow first,
And the sows,
Then cut the fence
Picked up a back-log of stove lengths
And carried them home
To build up the fire
And cook breakfast and hay
The horses.*

This poem illustrates Snyder's keen ability to encapsulate the vivid experiences of rural, natural-American life and the routine yet profound interactions between humans and the environment. It draws attention to the labor and care that go into working the land and tending to animals, speaking to broader themes of stewardship, the cycles of life, and the interconnectedness between humans and nature.

Through such contemplation, Snyder advocates for a deeper understanding and respect for the living systems we are part of, urging a harmonious coexistence with the earth and all its creatures.

4. THE IMPORTANCE OF PRESERVING BIODIVERSITY

Eco-cosmopolitanism stems from the understanding that humans are part of a larger global ecosystem, and our survival and well-being are deeply intertwined with the health and diversity of this system. It calls for a broadened sense of community that includes not only all human beings regardless of nationality or culture but also encompasses all non-human life.

The preservation of biodiversity under the lens of eco-cosmopolitanism is seen not just as an ethical duty but as a necessary condition for the sustained health of the planet and, by extension, the long-term survival and flourishing of human societies. It emphasizes the need for global cooperation and collective action to address environmental challenges such as climate change, deforestation, and species extinction that threaten biodiversity. Hanshan's poetry though not directly states the biodiversity of the Cold Mountain, it describes the harmony of their living together and man's interrelationship with the all living beings. For example:

粤自居寒山，曾经几万载。

任运遁林泉，栖迟观自在。

寒岩人不到，白云常暖键。

细草作卧褥，青天为被盖。

快活枕石头，天地任改变。⁸

I settled at Cold Mountain long ago,

Already it seems like years and years.

Freely drifting, I prowl the woods and streams

And linger watching things themselves.

Men don't get this far into the mountains,

White clouds gather and billow.

Thin grass does for a mattress,

The blue sky makes a good quilt.

Happy with a stone under head

Let heaven and earth go about their changes.⁹

This verse translated by Gary Snyder, inspired by the tranquility and untouched beauty of nature at Cold Mountain, highlights the essence of preserving biodiversity. The poet's deep connection and contentment in the natural world underscore the importance of conserving our planet's diverse ecosystems. By capturing the serenity found far from human reach, where the simplicity of grass serves as a bed and the vast sky as a cover, the poem serves as a poignant reminder of the natural world's intrinsic value. It is a world teeming with

8. Hanshan, Annotations to the Poems of Cold Mountain, Xiangchu, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2000,p 430

9. Gary Snyder, Riprap and Cold Mountain Poems, Berkeley: Counterpoint Press, 2009,p45

life and natural cycles, undisturbed by human interference, a sanctuary where biodiversity thrives.

The mention of "Men don't get this far into the mountains" subtly indicates the untouched, pristine condition of such habitats, critical for maintaining ecological balance and conserving biodiversity. The poet's admiration for this landscape, "Happy with a stone under head," suggests that true contentment and harmony come from embracing and preserving the natural world in all its diversity. It acknowledges that while "heaven and earth go about their changes," there is a profound beauty and importance in ensuring the continuous flourish of diverse ecosystems untouched by human development.

Hence, through the lens of a solitary figure finding solace and happiness in the simplicity and purity of nature, this verse beautifully articulates the significance of preserving biodiversity. It calls for an appreciation of the natural world, urging us to protect these irreplaceable ecosystems for generations to come.

Gary Snyder's translations of Hanshan's poems, coupled with the Chinese cultural elements he absorbed during his studies and time in Asia, subtly convey the importance of preserving biodiversity. Though ancient Chinese poems may not explicitly address contemporary environmental concerns, the reverence for nature inherent in these works, as well as in broader Chinese cultural practices that Snyder adopted, indeed foregrounds the interconnectedness and intrinsic value of all life forms. Snyder's engagement with Chinese culture—enriched by Daoist and Zen (Chan) Buddhist philosophies—reinforces themes central to ecological preservation, such as harmony with nature and the recognition of humanity's place within a broader ecological web.

Gary Snyder, with his profound connection to the natural world and environmental activism, has extensively written about themes that underscore "the importance of preserving biodiversity." For example, "The Bear mother":

*She veils herself
 To speak of eating salmon
 Teases me with
 "what do you know of my ways"
 And kisses me through the mountain
 Through and under its layers, its
 Gullies, ifs folds*

Her mouth full of blueberries

*We share*¹⁰

In this poem, the poet delves into a profound connection with nature, personifying it as a companion that both teases and embraces. The vivid imagery of "eating salmon" and having a "mouth full of blueberries" symbolizes a deep, nurturing relationship with the natural world, showcasing a shared existence that respects and cherishes biodiversity.

The use of "veils herself" speaks to the mysteries of nature, suggesting that understanding the full depth of our planet's ecosystems is beyond simple human comprehension. It highlights the respect we must have for nature's secrets and the humility needed to approach its vast complexities.

"Teases me with 'what do you know of my ways'" further emphasizes the intricate, often elusive knowledge of natural systems. This line reflects the multitude of ways in which biodiversity operates – unseen, powerful, and fundamental to life. It's a reminder of the limitations of human understanding and the continuous learning journey we are on to comprehend the intricacies of the natural world.

The phrase "kisses me through the mountain" metaphorically represents an intimate bond between humanity and nature. This connection traverses through "its layers, its gullies, ifs folds," symbolizing the diverse aspects of biodiversity from geographical formations, different species, to various ecosystems.

By ending on the communal act of sharing blueberries, the poem encapsulates the essence of living in harmony with nature. This simple yet profound action serves as a metaphor for sustainability and the mutual benefits that arise from preserving biodiversity. Through shared respect and benefits, the poem conveys a hopeful message about the possibility of coexistence where both humans and nature thrive.

Overall, the poem captures the beauty, complexity, and vital importance of biodiversity. It encourages readers to reflect on their relationship with the natural world, urging a deeper understanding, respect, and commitment to preserving the diverse life forms and ecosystems that sustain us.

10. Gary Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers without End*, Berkeley: Counterpoint Press, 1996, p115

5. THE NEED FOR A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Hanshan's poems often portray the rugged, untouched landscapes of Cold Mountain, capturing the enduring yet fragile essence of the natural world. Snyder's translations convey this dual nature, reminding us of Earth's resilience in the face of natural cycles and its vulnerability to human impact. This duality underscores the global need for stewardship to preserve these natural landscapes for future generations. For example, in this poem,

驱马度荒城，荒城动客情。高低旧雄堞，大小古坟莹。

自振孤蓬影，长凝拱木声。所嗟皆俗骨，仙史更无名。¹¹

I spur my horse through the wrecked town,

The wrecked town sinks my spirit.

High, low, old parapet walls

Big, small, the aging tombs.

I waggle my shadow, all alone;

Not even the crack of a shrinking coffin is heard.

I pity all those ordinary bones

In the books of the Immortals they are nameless¹²

Here, Hanshan contrasts the transient nature of material pursuits with the enduring value of living in harmony with nature. This mirrors contemporary concerns about unsustainable economic practices and their environmental impact, highlighting the need for a global shift towards sustainable living that respects.

Gary Snyder has been a prominent voice advocating for an ecological consciousness that transcends local and national boundaries to embrace a global perspective. His works reflect this ethos, urging collective action and a shift in mindset to address environmental challenges faced worldwide. In the poem "For the Children", he writes,

The rising hills, the slopes,

Of statistics

Lie before us

11. Hanshan, Annotations to the Poems of Cold Mountain, Xiangchu, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2000, p.42

12. Gary Snyder, Riprap and Cold Mountain Poems, Berkeley: Counterpoint Press, 2009, p.42

The steep climb

Of everything, going up

Up, as we all

Go down

In the next century

Or the one beyond that,

They say,

Are valleys, pastures,

We can meet there in peace

If we make it

To climb these coming crests

One word to you, to

You and your children:

Stay together

Learn the flowers

Go light¹³

In this evocative poem, the author confronts the daunting statistics of environmental degradation through powerful imagery and a global perspective on our collective journey towards sustainable living. The "rising hills, the slopes / Of statistics" serve as a metaphor for the overwhelming data that illustrate the precipitous challenges we face, from climate change to loss of biodiversity and beyond. This depiction underscores the dire trajectory of our current environmental impact, likened to a steep ascent, seemingly insurmountable, that humanity must navigate.

However, amidst the bleak outlook, the poem injects a hopeful vision for the future, suggesting that in the "next century / Or the one beyond that," there lies the potential for rejuvenation and harmony with nature. The mention of "valleys, pastures" symbolizes a future that, while uncertain, could be marked by recovery and peace, a stark contrast to the current uphill battle. This future, however, is conditional on our actions today and our willingness to "climb these coming crests" – an appeal for resilience in the face of adversity.

A poignant message to humanity underscores the importance of unity ("Stay together"), education ("Learn the flowers"), and sustainable practices ("Go light") as pillars for overcoming the environmental crises that loom large. By urging us

13. Gary Snyder, Turtle Island, New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1974, p.86

to "Stay together," the author emphasizes the necessity of collective action and solidarity among nations, communities, and individuals in addressing global environmental issues. "Learn the flowers" can be interpreted as a call to reconnect with nature, to educate ourselves and future generations about the richness of biodiversity, and to cultivate a deeper appreciation for the natural world that sustains us. "Go light" serves as a mantra for reducing our ecological footprint, advocating for a lifestyle that prioritizes minimalism, conservation, and respect for the Earth's finite resources.

This poem transcends mere observation, offering a blueprint for a sustainable future rooted in cooperation, knowledge, and mindful living. It resonates as a clarion call to all of humanity, highlighting the urgency of our environmental predicament while inspiring hope and action towards a more sustainable and peaceful coexistence with our planet. Through this global perspective, the author not only illuminates the challenges but also charts a path forward, urging us to rise to the occasion for the sake of our shared home and future generations.

In the "Ax Handles", Snyder draws on the metaphor of an ax handle to speak to the cycles of learning and teaching, showing how local practices and wisdom have broader implications for global sustainability.

6. CONCLUSION

By integrating the ecological wisdom found in Hanshan's poetry and Chinese philosophical traditions, Gary Snyder presents a compelling case for a global approach to environmental challenges. His work serves as a reminder that ancient insights into the nature of existence and humanity's role within it can inform modern efforts to address climate change, biodiversity loss, and other pressing ecological issues. In advocating for the interconnectedness of all life, Snyder's translations and interpretations become a call to transcend cultural and national boundaries in pursuit of a sustainable future for the planet.

Drawing from Gary Snyder's translations of Hanshan's poems to elucidate "the need for a global perspective in addressing environmental challenges" requires a bit of interpretive work, given that these poems predate contemporary environmental discourse. However, their thematic elements of solitude, unity with nature, and contemplative insight into human's place within the

natural world can certainly inform a modern, ecological consciousness.

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