On the Making of a Perma-Culture:
Tying Sustainable Land Systems and East Asian Traditions of Thought to a Holistically Sustainable Societal Model

by

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Introduction
An Owl

By 6AM it’s light out, and I’m coaxed out from under my warm fleece blankets to use the bathroom. I step over my sleeping brother, feet pattering on contact with the cold tatami, and try to slide the wooden rice paper panel door open as quietly as possible. I don’t push it exactly straight, and it bumps the other panel with a soft, monosyllabic encounter. But my brother does not wake. I leave it open to avoid any more noise, and I make my way across the next tatami room, past bags of eaten simbei and some empty Kirin cans, and the corner desk, there for as long as I can remember, with a tan cord telephone and desktop computer still running on dial-up.

The next set of rice paper doors clunk together again, and with each creaking footstep I make my way down the wooden hallway, the sound of the irrigation canal outside through the crisp air, just beyond the rice paper walls, my only accompaniment. I can’t hear any noise from the kitchen or the hose out back, so my grandparents don’t appear to be awake yet, though they rise early. Or perhaps ojichan is already out in the mini truck, on his daily morning drive through his hills (to sneak a cigarette).

When I make my way back to the room, after a brisk return walk (the heat my body had hoarded from the blankets all used up by now), I pull on all of the layers possible. The house is hundreds of years old, its traditional architecture uninsulated
and open; it’s a miracle I made it to my bed last night and didn’t sleep under the kotatsu again.

Layered to full potential, mittens strung through my down jacket, I wrestle to pull on my boots and head for the front door, nearly the same route to the bathroom the moment before. The sun shines right on the front doorway, and as I close the door behind me the sound of the creek is now full and unobstructed.

I start right, walking across the wooden bridge that is my grandparents’ driveway, and to the road, past the burnt orange mail post, past the vending machine with grape soda, past the rice patties with electric fences, and finally to the path through the mountains that I take every morning, a larger-than-me wild boar trap marking the trailhead. By this point bamboo and tall, thin evergreens surround me on both sides, with moss and ferns creating the understory. Here and there, as I make my way up the mountain, there are piles of logs with speckles of fungus, some bits and pieces of ceramic, and splashes of water from the mini rivers running through. Sometimes a mini truck just like my ojichan’s will pass me, but not today. All is quiet. The creatures must still all be sleeping, or wary of making a move hearing my footsteps along the trail.

Upon my last descent of the hill, back to the road to walk the last mile of the loop, I hear the rustle of just one tree to the right of me. Something had taken flight, and was now out of the forest as I make my own way out, too. Turning right, back to the road, I find the flying creature perched on a select evergreen just beyond a small
dirt clearing of fallen logs. I try to approach it, its large eyes blinking slowly, but in a few steps it takes powerful flight to the mountains opposite me, and perches softly on a thin-trunked tree that sways ever so slightly as it lands. As far away as it now is, I can still make out that it’s surveying the area around it, in a smooth, swiveling motion of its head. For danger (me)? For food? For everything, all at once. Its still elegance is ineffable; more than incredible, a surreal image in a world where something so natural is spectacle.
One
The Fact of the Matter

“We have come to the point at which there is no other way than to bring about a ‘movement’ not to bring anything about”.
- Masanobu Fukuoka, One Straw Revolution

Let us get this out of the way: this paper, despite what the title or the rest of it might seem to say, is not to recommend that we “become like East Asia”; besides there being a lot implicated in that statement as is, from cultural to racial conflicts, this is not the point to begin with. So let’s put that aside. What is more pertinent, and what we do know is that we are in a sort of ‘environmental crisis’, in summation of all of our environmental irresponsibility, and we know there is a lot we can and need to do in hopes of a healthy future, or future at all. As globalized as the world is today, no one is in any position to point any definitive fingers at anyone else, unless they point another at himself at the same time, and we must all work together on every issue, due to the holistic nature of every environmental concern (in tune with environmental actions as a whole). It can’t be ‘the East is right, the West is wrong, so we all need to be Buddhists’ – nor should it be. And, anyway, East Asia today is, essentially, the rest of the developed world’s equal in environmental problems.

We do not, likewise, have to “take back to the land” in order to remedy our ills. The world is full of established and establishing societies, and that is simply the course of human development: we will develop, and what that means today in the course of modern technological progress is electronics, synthetic products, perceived
efficiency in mass production, and a digitalized world from a desk job. This, again, is not objectively “bad”, per say.

But the fact stands that we – as a world, not just the West – are simply functioning at a highly unsustainable level of production, consumption, and frame of mind that no new “green” technology, no matter the magnitude, will be the cure for. That is a skirting around of the problem, based on an unsustainable system to begin with. It’s an attempt to support our current intensive consumption patterns and engrained mentalities that are, ultimately, unsustainable no matter how they’re done.

This is where we come to a possible solution that could be as effective as it is unoriginal, unprogressive, and lacking in innovation: changing our frame of mind, to one reflecting a (very) traditional East Asian framework, one that is, to make a generalization (that will be explored), inherently more ecocentric and holistic than our current system. Though this may sound religious or spiritual, call it what you will, but it is no different from having a “secular” ego- or anthropocentric point of view (that is, of course, besides it not being either of those things specifically).

Thinking holistically is not somehow more inherently spiritual. It’s not all about the cherry blossoms and Mother Earth and the dolphins, “man”. It is, however, not necessarily in line with our current consumption patterns, and might therefore seem regressive or counter-productive. But that is specifically why we might need to reflect on these East Asian traditions - the constant fighting that we do against nature with mechanization, manipulation, chemicalization, and compartmentalization to make it as faced-paced as the human population is now is more counter-productive
and time-wasting than we think, and to continue to do so might not be an option much longer.

What this paper will serve to do, then, is to highlight some of the larger principles behind a few main East Asian traditions: Shintoism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism, largely from the Japanese context due to the particular situation of my personal research, and trace the mindset created by thinking in line with these principles and their curious overlap to permaculture principles which, when applied to the world at large, both lead to a more sustainable, or “ecocentric” society, through my current “environmental project” and beyond; it’s one that benefits us as humans, and ultimately is arguably only necessary.
Two
Historical Traditions Background

The main East Asian traditions that I will be covering,¹ which are Shintoism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism, are usually referred to as “religions” or “philosophies” in the global context. But, this notion isn’t all too accurate in the Western sense of these words.² Much of this compartmentalization of ‘this is Shintoist, this is Buddhist’ was a product of Western contact³ and its perceived understanding of East Asian culture. The assignation of “religion” to, say, Buddhism as a whole in Japan, was done from both sides, though for different reasons.

By Japan itself, it was done most frequently for nationalistic purposes, to unify the country under the central leader (such as in times of war). The West used “religion” to tag Buddhism in order to “understand” a foreign ‘other’ in its own terms, the Eastern cultures having their own incomparable practices that the West did not hesitate to syphon into its own Western molds of “religions” that therefore (inappropriately) skewed its terms for its own purposes, from colonialism and beyond.⁴

Before this happened, much of the so-called East Asian religions and philosophies were more along the lines of ways of life, basic morals, and inherent parts of the community. “Shintoism” presents an especially telling example:

¹ This is not meant to be a comprehensive examination; rather, it is more of a brief overview to give what context is necessary for the purpose of this work and its arguments.
² “Philosophy” comes with the meanings from its ancient Greek origins...associated with particular aspects of one civilisation”, from Karyn, An Introduction to Chinese Philosophy, 272.
³ “...the Chinese phrase denoting philosophy, zhexue, was coined only in the nineteenth century by a Japanese scholar. Thus the phrase ‘Chinese philosophy’ is applied retrospectively to a field of enquiries and debates that arose in China around 500 BCE among thinkers who did not know that term”. Ibid, 272.
⁴ Dean Accardi, “Buddhist Modernism, Theosophy, Dharmapala, and the Sri Lankan Civil War” (lecture, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT, November 10, 2014).
From the outset one point needs stressing: there is no suggestion that, when early modern Japanese engaged with the kami at shrines, local or remote, they understood their actions to constitute something called ‘Shinto’; the world has simply no explanatory value for popular kami practice in early modern Japan.5

Our current conception of “Shinto” is really, then, a non-existent misconception of something that is more accurately described as a way of life, or sometimes seen as an extension of Buddhism,6 or perhaps an ever-changing essence of Japanese culture. Really, it may be anything besides a “religion”.7 8

While Shinto shrines, spirits, and gods existed which were associated with Shinto, most Japanese only spoke of kami -- the spirits of “nature”, in everything from trees, to mountains, to rocks -- and not a “Shinto” that umbrellas all of these aspects which may or may have not simply been a part of their daily lives.9 However, even after Western influence on language and the culture forced and mutated Japanese daily life into a concept of Shinto,10 it still remained and remains today a vague, eclectic mix of things which could not be contained by the bounds of language:

...a political construct designed to instill a ‘national spirit’ in the people...a bottom-up complex of local rituals and festivals with little internal coherence...a number of religious groups that adhered to universalistic teachings.11

5 Breen, John and M. Teeuwen. New History of Shinto, 57.
6 Ibid., 19.
7 Shintoism is Japan’s largest religion; there are more than 100 million ‘adherents’ (well over 80 percent of all Japanese), but most Japanese don’t necessarily identify as “Shintoists”. “This reflects the fact that while many Japanese participate in shrines, only very few regard Shinto as their religious identity.” Ibid., 1.
8 “‘Religion’ and ‘faith’ have little to do with it.” Ibid., 5.
9 Ibid., 57.
10 When the Allied powers arrived and dissociated what they saw as “Shinto” practice from the state, people still wanting to “practice” or simply identify kami as they always had were forced to recognize it as a “religion.” Ibid., 13.
11 Breen and Teeuwan, A New History of Shinto, 7.
From a basic inability to define what Shinto really is, for what, and for whom, is the simple indication that it does not follow a system or convention of a Western ‘religion’ or ‘philosophy’. We can try to classify it as such by reasoning that something “supernatural”, like a rock spirit or mountain deity, must necessarily be a religious belief, but again - we’ll catch ourselves in realizing that that is confining it to conventions set up in Western language, irrelevant to the realities of old East Asian daily life and tradition.

Buddhism developed in much of the world through many mutations, through just as many outlets, and, as a result, many strains developed during a more globally aware period of time. Therefore, in many Asian countries, from Japan to Vietnam, it was at times actively anti-ideology, especially prevalent in Thich Nhat Hahn's\(^\text{12}\) work:

> If you have a gun, you can shoot one, two, three, five people; but if you have an ideology and stick to it, thinking it is the absolute truth, you can kill millions.\(^\text{13}\)

Conscious of the destruction caused by strict faith practice, Hahn was adamant on making sure that his practice, in the Zen school, was not seen as any kind of hard-set principles one is to adhere to.\(^\text{14}\) One had to be flexible in mind, knowing that there is always more to learn, and no one way to think, and to not lose sight; “human life is more precious than any ideology or doctrine”,\(^\text{15}\) wrote Thich, centering his practice

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\(^{12}\) Thich Nhat Hanh (born 1926) is a Vietnamese monk who started practice at the age of sixteen, and is now known for his work as a speaker, poet, and university professor in spreading Buddhism and peace activism throughout the West. From “Thich Nhat Hanh,” Plum Village Mindfulness Practice Center, http://plumvillage.org/about/thich-nhat-hanh/ (accessed March 21, 2015).


\(^{14}\) “…when you ask whether Zen is a philosophy or a religious faith, we cannot say it is either, as long as we understand these two terms in their usual sense,” from Hanh, *Being Peace*, 122.

\(^{15}\) Ibid, 91.
not on a devotional life to a/the gods, but the compassionate morals of Zen practice.\(^\text{16}\)

Taoism presents another subtlety in East Asian thought patterns, tracing back to “natural” modes of thought and ways of life rather than a prescribed way of life or salvational devotion to a deity:

People in the small, humble villages of which Lao-tzu spoke were unaware that the Great Way of man lay in living independently and self-sufficiently, yet they knew this in their hearts. These were the farmers of old.\(^\text{17}\)

This is perhaps to say that Taoist thought drew from what was a rural, “nature-centric” culture, and not the other way around. Only when there was more “developed” or “city” culture did “Taoism” become a more foreign or distinct and alternative way of thought, and therefore started to be spread as one. However, it was still not otherworld or other-worldly-being focused, but rather thinking of the here and now in “[drawing] upon self-perception and the appreciation of the other”.\(^\text{18}\)

Confucianism, the final tradition to be examined, also focused on self-awareness and functionality in a community,\(^\text{19}\) a part of a whole -- that is, a whole much larger than one might even be able to fathom. A passage of Han Confucian text highlights this especially well:

\begin{quote}
...thinkers of the Han sought to understand phenomena in the human world in terms of their concordances and connections with cosmic processes and phenomena, including those of heaven and earth, other
\end{quote}

\(^\text{16}\) Though, of course, not all Buddhist practice was like this, and some focused greatly on Buddhas and Buddha Lands; the intricacy being that there exists the option within “Buddhism” to perhaps ultimately not be concerned with other-worldly deities is the essential component. One could potentially (and decently) argue that this same notion can be applied to the Western, monotheistic religions, but hardly as clearly and certainly less prevalent is this “practice”.


\(^\text{18}\) Lai, An Introduction to Chinese Philosophy, 108.

\(^\text{19}\) Many Confucian traditions were syntheses of other traditions (not unlike these other traditions themselves), from Lai, Intro to Chinese Philosophy, 207.
planetary bodies, the weather and climate, and even heavenly and spiritual beings.\textsuperscript{20}

Though quite human-centric in application, Confucianism (like Taoism, Buddhism, and Shintoism), factored in the natural component around the human component, which heeds to some idea of environmental responsibility and the place that we have within the greater environment; beyond the earth, it was all of everything existing, boundless beyond concrete comprehension, that one had to live with enough awareness in thought and action to take care of.

In the context of many of these traditions, “nature” was hardly a term to begin with, as nature inherently means that there is something “other” from nature, that “other” being us, or the human. In many East Asian countries there was no such separation. Such a mindful, inclusive way of thinking is naturally more sustainable; every action an individual takes will be considered in context to the greater environment, not just for the human or an other-worldly benefit.

... An attempt to briefly trace the base of these traditions is difficult and, moreover, a bit inherently contradictory. They are not distinct, definable entities. There isn’t a definitive string to pull in order to trace the beginning to the end. Of course, it’s not to say that they were all of the same mother, either. There were certainly differing perspectives even within these traditions, and were born of different nations. Within a single tradition itself, through time and/or geographical

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 207.
spread, it could have found some conflict in principle or focus, or transformed quite incredibly from its original context. It is, to put it simply, too complex.

But the ultimate point is that these traditions found common ground in drawing from a more holistic, lenient center, freely flowing at times into each other for political,^{21} nationalistic, or cultural^{22} application; or, of course, when individuals didn’t realize they were “adhering” to any thing(s) in particular, but simply living as society had conducted itself. The majority of the time, we only have these concepts like “Shinto” and “Taoism” because the majority of society has drawn away from the lifestyle in which they naturally flourished, and therefore became somewhat of idealistic or novel concepts, something “else” in a more systematized modern society. Whether arbitrarily or accurately assigned to a designated name, there are some similarities that need highlighting as in their overlaps they are also the foundational components of the more holistic, and therefore sustainable, ways of thinking.

^{21} The Prime Minister of Japan goes to shrines, Buddhist temples, and Christian churches without religious or ideological controversy. From Breen and Teeuwan, *A New History of Shinto*, 216.
^{22} New combination Pizza Hut and Taco Bell (Shinto and Buddhist) practice: Shinbutsu Reijokai, Association of Combined Shinto-Buddhist Sacred Sites. Ibid., 220.
Three Principle Foci of East Asian Traditions

Now that a brief overview of the traditions of thought has been established, we can now work through some of the main principles and themes that exist within them; from a criticism of the nature of human language to recognizing the position of “self” – that is, if “self” exists.\(^\text{23}\)

The Abstract and Obscure Nature of Language

Seen in Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism is a discussion on human language. It is a criticism of (any) language’s ability to properly communicate with words what it is we see, do, or think in the concrete world, and additionally a warning of how complex and divisive language can be, permanently trapping ideas into concepts of “bad” and “good”, “right” and “wrong”, problematizing the ways in which we then inflexibly view them. Without even crossing cultural or linguistic borders, within a single region’s linguistic patterns, we can obscure concrete objects, blur concepts, lost in interpretation and forever assigned a descriptor that can be more dangerous and powerfully deterministic than what we may analyze.

From Zhuangzi,\(^\text{24}\) of “Taoist” orientation:

\(^{23}\) As touched upon, most of these traditions were, due to their temporal locations, not so explicitly concerned with the realm of “environmentalism” or “nature” as concepts that exist today. That being said, and hopefully clear due to the fact that this is my written work, the views below are my own, and my own in light of viewing these texts in a context -- of “sustainability” or ecocentrism -- that was perhaps not specifically in mind of the author and/or tradition of that time. Some traditions via the specific works that I have selected have been reframed for this purpose (and the purpose to ponder our “sustainability” options), so I hope that we will not get caught up on the rigidity of a passage’s most specific context at the time it was written or recorded.

\(^{24}\) Zhuangzi (circa 4th century BCE) is actually a compilation of multiple authors’ work (including, yes, the work of Zhuangzi himself). It is thought to be one of the most influential written pieces of classical Daoism. From “Zhuangzi”, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/zhuangzi/#ZhuangzisLifeand (accessed March 21, 2015).
When [people say], ‘All right’, [things are] all right. When [people say], ‘Not all right’, then [things are] not all right. A road becomes so when we walk on it, and things become so-and-so [to people] because people call them so-and-so. How have they become so? They have become so because [people say they are] so. How have they become not so?...

Here, Zhuangzi focuses on the oppositional forces that we have created in language, and additionally the real-life impact that such distinctions can have. If we say or think to ourselves that we are “not okay”, we are or become “not okay”. If we decide that something is “pretty” or that someone is “ugly”, those terms tend to become imbedded in the object itself, and are disseminated into society as such. We set standards for “pretty” and “ugly”, and these standards can be destructive. Perhaps there is some human predisposition to (the eventually) domesticated dog that is “man’s best friend” and not insects, but “creepy crawlies” has more of a negative impact than we might think about.

Confucian texts often examine linguistic ideas along the same lines, more particularly concerned with the human realm and names. Xun-zi, recognized as a “Confucian philosopher”, noted that, “…names have no intrinsic reality.” It was concerned with what something (or someone) was named, and whether or not that aligned with its reality. It was concerned with a naming of something that didn’t line up with what it actually was, a misrepresentation of a person (or thing), and therefore, potentially, a misunderstanding of the name itself or the thing that was named as

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26 Lai, An Introduction to Chinese Philosophy, 103.
such. It is not unlike the distinctions made in language for terming things “pretty” or “ugly”.29

Further, in a more general sense, it emphasized the futility of language in accurately explaining the world; events and concepts may exist, but the ability to convey them through the confines of language -- with any accuracy -- may not:

The highest and most fundamental experiences are best communicated without words; in the face of such experiences we become speechless and stand almost aghast.30

Sometimes, as I am sure most of us have experienced at one point or another in our lives, events happen that we feel we cannot do justice to explaining. It can be anything from a view of the Grand Canyon to a funny moment where, after it doesn’t come out right after explaining, you realize that “you just had to have been there”. This is similar.

The Position or Existence of “Self” and Interconnection, Interdependence

The next big topic addresses the gradual separation of “man” from “nature”31 and, even further, the individual versus the rest of the human population within “developed society” itself. As once we were so in tune with seasons, and therefore seasonal foods, temperatures, and bodily changes, we -- in modern America -- are now living in a very much artificial ‘landscape’, dictated almost solely by what we

29 “When the people of the world all know beauty as beauty, there arises the recognition of ugliness,” from Lai, The Japanese Mind, 126.
30 Ibid., 126.
31 “There was no word for Nature, as something apart and distinct from man, something that might be contemplated by man, the ‘thinking reed’. Man was treated as an integral part of a whole, closely associated and identified with the elements and forces of the world about him,” from Lai, The Japanese Mind, 24.
humans want where and when, and the chemicals and modern technology that we have created help us accomplish this. *Man vs. Wild*, the reality show depicting the ‘harsh’ conditions of survival sans modern conveniences, is a good example of the separation between humans and all else, a given at this point. Outside, apart, alien; “versus”. Against.

But, even before any of this extreme “progress” occurred, there was much writing on the “Self” -- or the lack of existence of such -- in many of the East Asian traditions. An understanding of “Self” in these lights would help to position us in a more self-aware position in terms of how we relate (and impact) everything around us.

In Shintoism, *kami* can die and decompose, are invisible and countless, and some are even human. All people, things, and even places are or can be or can have *kami*, helping to foster a holistic understanding of all elements positions and existences in the world, “living” or not.

All things are bound together in a kind of spiritual family, and it is natural therefore to try and relate with the world emotionally, as well as materially and scientifically….After a person dies, they simply merge with their ancestral *kami* and have no individual soul.32

Many trains of Buddhist thought wrote extensively on a “self”, or lack of such. It came into doctrines such as Thich’s Mindfulness Trainings, Indra’s Net, the Avatamsaka Sutra, Heart Sutra, Five Recollections, and more.33 Essentially, the idea was that the/an individual simply does not exist.34 There cannot be an individual

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33 Dean Accardi, “The Sangha” (lecture, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT, September 22, 2014).
without everything that exists around it, because everything’s existence is dependent upon on the existence of everything else.

From Thich, “there is no such thing as an individual”. Everything has a relationship with everything else; everything becomes and fades into one:

Aware that great violence and injustice have been done to our environment and society, we are committed to not live with a vocation that is harmful to humans and nature. We will do our best to select a livelihood that helps realize our ideal of understanding and compassion. Aware of global economic, political, and social realities, we will behave responsibly as consumers and as citizens, not investing in companies that deprive others of their chance to live.

The idea of “self” here is addressed in a much more contemporary context, one very relevant to our current situation (where things like “markets” and massive globalization are realities). In these terms, everyone has a duty to act in a way that is mindful of all else around us; that is, because “all of that” is “us”, too.

From the angle of Taoism, we find the same themes: “relations between entities are primary and not reducible to the individuals, events or even processes”, and “individuals are inextricably relational and are contextually situated”...further and further we find it reinforced in Taoist texts.

Lastly, Han Confucianism makes mention of self; particularly relevant is Lord Bao Xi’s comment on the subject:

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35 Ibid., 51.
36 Ibid., 52.
37 This is one of the Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings, usually stated as a vow when joining some Buddhist communities. That being said, “we” is used here to refer to the new member and his new community, in case the use of that term was confusing. Ibid., 100.
38 Lai, An Introduction to Chinese Philosophy, 88.
39 Ibid., 77.
40 Lord Bao Xi/Bao Zheng (999-1062) was a government officer during the Song Dynasty, later appointed and recognized for his exceptional honesty and strict upright governance. From “Bao Zheng”, World Public Library, http://netlibrary.net/articles/bao_zheng (accessed March 21, 2015).
...one should be deeply aware of the sources of imminent change that are external to the self, but that may nevertheless have a significant impact on it. What underlines this belief is a broad cosmic vision of all things that may impact on one entity, and of how one entity may impact on others in turn. Given this concept of self, it is critical for a person to understand his or her place in an environment that has many interconnected dimensions and, within them, a rich diversity of beings and entities.\textsuperscript{41}

This is a call to self-awareness, in a way, and the impact that you as an individual have on your outside environment, from other people to the microbes in the soil underneath you (and likely underneath a layer of concrete too, of course).

\textit{Situational Dependency}

The context of an event, situation, or simply the environment in which a being exists is a prominent topic in a few of these East Asian traditions. Situational dependency emphasizes the particular conditions in which something “is”, taking into account all interdependent factors and mutual influences continuously taking place and therefore what is responsible for creating the unique situations in which anything exists -- it is a highly aware, conscientious form of analysis, undoubtedly important in the ‘environmental realm’, where situation is everything in terms of species, and species growth and death. Then, depending on the more thoughtful analysis of the unique situation, one is able to choose the “best fit” action to take. Unlike other models, ‘hard and fast’ rules, or blanket rules, make no sense in each particular context.

\textsuperscript{41} Breen, John and M. Teeuwan, \textit{Intro to Chinese Philosophy}, 214.
Taoism emphasizes a stepping away from “conventional” views, since these tend to hinge on assumptions and standardized rules that, in reality, make little sense when situations are critically examined for what they are. Conventional views are cumbersome, leading to “failure” in Taoist views.\textsuperscript{42} The \textit{Te Tao Ching} gives a great example of situational dependency through one of its analogies:

You can’t discuss the ocean with a well frog - he is limited by the space he lives in….You can’t discuss the Way with a cramped scholar - he’s shackled by his doctrines.\textsuperscript{43}

Just as a (well) frog has no authority to speak of the ocean, having no knowledge of or experience with it, a “scholar” is similarly confined to his mental space outlined by his “learned” doctrines that keep his point of view within certain limitations set by them. Sure, a scholar may have his generated ideas about situations informed by these doctrines, but they may hold hard, fast, and blind to the unique intricacies of a particular situation.

Confucianism views situational dependency in a light of ethics (as it very well should be). By taking into account the unique factors in a situation, one is more able to hold accountable what should be (and what should not be) in a given situation:

...ethics is a dynamic process; the important question in ethics is not, \textit{what} the norms are, but \textit{which} are the appropriate considerations to apply, and \textit{how} they might be applied….Although it is complicated, it presents a realistic picture of the person who is at the centre of the ethical decision.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{42} Lai, \textit{An Introduction to Chinese Philosophy}, 150.
\textsuperscript{44} Lai, \textit{An Introduction to Chinese Philosophy}, 275.
Instead of applying a sort of normative evaluation of a situation, Confucian views are such that there is a “right” that is to be found per situation, and in no way associated with some rule or “norm”, because the context is confounding. By engaging more contextually, basic morals are flexible -- serving more of “guideline” roles -- in order to create the most optimal outcome possible, or at least the most optimal of the possible options.

**Perception and (therefore?) Relativity**

Realistically, we can only ever *really* understand things from each of our particular spaces, from our particular perspectives, and entirely unique situations. We can experience *similar* things, like sharing a childhood location, but there are infinite differences on a day-to-day basis. We can even share a pizza together, and yet, depending on our sensory perceptions (and feelings toward/memories associated with such a thing, if such exists), we can have completely different experiences across the table from one another. Though these examples are quite small and ‘insignificant’ in scale, they give an idea of how this applies to *all* of our views, perceived knowledge (which will follow), our relation to others and the world around us, and, ultimately, our perceptions in general -- even of ourselves.

Thich Nhat Hanh, of Buddhist orientation, stated “pleasant or unpleasant depends on our way of looking”, and rightly so. How else do we make such a judgment? In line with a linguistically constructed distinction discussed earlier, the labeling of “good” and “bad” (or “pleasant” and “unpleasant”) comes from our own

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viewpoints as well (in the case that, say, one is in a socially or societally-isolated position, and is therefore making judgment calls for him/herself independently of the already socially-constructed ones). We can only see others from where we stand, the decisions they make, and the attitude(s) that they have made visible on the surface; “we are not capable of understanding each other”.\textsuperscript{47} Perhaps this is to say that we will never really be able to understand each other, but at the same time that encourages us to just keep trying, to think deeper, and constantly work towards achieving a closer understanding of where others are coming from. To, as they say, keep an open mind.

Taoist texts write on the same idea: “...each individual can only understand the world from within his or her place”.\textsuperscript{48} The specific place that we exist in is the only view from which we can see other things, as far as they appear to us. Therefore, existing elements in the world are never one way - they are what they are only to the individual that is looking.

\textit{Knowledge}

Lastly, the idea of “knowledge” is brought into question in many of these traditions. What is “knowledge”? What do we “know”? Can we really say that we fully-comprehend, fully-understand anything, definitively? Do we even know ourselves? Many of these traditions hit on this important concept and evaluate the curious notion of “knowledge”.

\textsuperscript{47} Hanh, \textit{Being Peace}, 41.
\textsuperscript{48} Lai, \textit{An Introduction to Chinese Philosophy}, 151.
In Chinese Buddhism, there is a general emphasis on the limitations of all forms of knowledge.\(^4\) There is only so much that we can come to understand, because the extent of our possible understanding is limited by situation, perception, place, and time. Knowledge does not hold steady, and knowledge does not hold “still”, because the people, places, and things that we are “knowledgeable” about are constantly morphing themselves and each other.

Japanese Buddhism breaks the idea of “knowledge” into two forms, “discriminating knowledge” and “non-discriminating knowledge”, not unlike concepts of compartmentalization and identification as examined above. “Discriminating knowledge” is, as you have probably guessed, the one that puts self and other (or “object”) on opposing fields, while “non-discriminating knowledge”, also termed the “highest form of knowledge”, is one that makes no separation or distinction between the two; you are a unified “one” with everything else around you, and knowledge as such is the most comprehensive sort of knowledge.\(^5\) When we understand something not only in relation to us but a part of us, we are better able to understand its importance.

With “knowledge” as such tricky ground, we would be doing ourselves a disservice to be so attached to what we (think to) know. What we do and can know is limited -- by time, space, and the like, ultimately an arbitrary function. But there seems to be an incredible drive behind “knowledge”, which may be an extreme discomfort and shared anxiety about not “knowing” things. When we don’t know things, the options we can imagine are endless; they can be scary, they can be

\(^4\) Ibid., 237.
\(^5\) Fukuoka, *One Straw Revolution*, 54.
dangerous, they can be big and towering voids. But not “knowing” does not have to be scary, because it is only going to harm us to invent knowledge for a sense of comfort. We’ll explore this more in the last section, as it applies to modern, “progressive” and science-based societies as it has come to be more of an issue (as “knowledge”, specifically scientific knowledge, has become the foundation of the world, but the ultimate idea revolved around the concepts of science and technology).

With a common thread in a belief that there is no definitive, attainable reality of knowledge, these traditions also were very open to transformation over time, in time with how environments and societies have changed, and why there is now such a large, undefinable array of schools and practitioners with all different sorts of focuses, and a lack of serious contention amongst them. Having generally open ideas about knowledge’s realistic uncertainty allows them to easily adapt to changing societies, cultural values, and made the basic frameworks, well, work for whatever situation is at hand.51

More Targeted Approaches to “Nature” and “the Environment”

Once “nature” became more of a concept in East Asian nations, or at least one that the East Asian nations recognized was becoming a notion in the world, the traditions started to acknowledge and address this fact in a way that followed the traditions when this distinction was not made.

In the Te Tao Ching, we see mention of ‘nature’ as the ineffable, incredible existing -- not thing, nor person, nor place:

“Nature” or the environment in Taoist texts was a ‘magical’, bigger-than-us existence. It is everything around us: unidentifiable, powerful, and immeasurable. In these terms, we could not claim nor assert control over such a presence (unlike the system we’ve found ourselves in now, dominating nature). We also find the concept of ziran (which loosely “means” nature) in Taoism, where “nature” is this being that we are not to manipulate, but instead understand our mutual, equal relationship with, and to practice wu-wei in relation to it. We are not to interfere with, not to manipulate it.

In a country like Japan…production is of vital importance; hence, stress is placed upon the ethics of labor in the various professions. Government and production, therefore, could not be in contradiction with the True Aspect of Reality. Some Japanese Buddhists were thus led to recognize the particularly sacred significance of physical labor.

“True Aspect of Reality” aside, so that we do not delve too deeply into East Asian traditions on tangents, this brings up the very relevant and very important consideration that Japan was, and still very much is, a country of little arable land, now only about 40% self-sufficient, and as such always had to be extremely conscious of its land and resource consumption. Therefore, manual labor in agricultural production was a more valued occupation than we find it to be in modern

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52 Lai, An Introduction to Chinese Philosophy, 86.
53 Lai, An Introduction to Chinese Philosophy, 105.
54 Ibid., 106.
55 Fukuoka, One Straw Revolution, 40.
America, and there was a greater conscientiousness of sustainable practice.\textsuperscript{56}

Regardless of “philosophical” traditions (or what have you), this was, and still is, a reality of Japan’s environment, necessitating a greater awareness of the natural landscape and its importance.

Next, Han Confucianism also touches base with the human-nature relationship, where:

\begin{quote}
...it broadened its humanistic vision to incorporate correlations between the human, natural, and cosmic realms. The belief that the natural world was implicated in human affairs would have generated a heightened sense of responsibility on the part of humankind.\textsuperscript{57}
\end{quote}

It made frequent connections between “natural” events and patterns (such as weather) and the human civilization,\textsuperscript{58} even explaining the king’s emotions with the seasons and weather:

\begin{quote}
...the master’s love, hate, happiness, and anger are tantamount to Heaven’s spring, summer, autumn, and winter, which, possessing warmth, coolness, cold, and heat, thereby develop, transform, and complete their tasks.\textsuperscript{59}
\end{quote}

It is not far off from today’s “happy lamps” and vitamin D, as we come to recognize “nature’s” connection and vital importance to us as creatures of nature ourselves.

Today, however, we do this with “science”. This topic, the very important one that it is, shall be revisited in the last section.

\textsuperscript{57} Lai, \textit{An Introduction to Chinese Philosophy}, 203.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 203.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 211.
...one should attune oneself to others, or aspects of the environment, in order to respond appropriately.\textsuperscript{60}

\textsuperscript{60} Lai, \textit{An Introduction to Chinese Philosophy}, 218.
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Practical Application on Wesleyan University Campus

Now that a basic framework of the East Asian traditions’ principles of concern has been established, we will move onto the next topic at hand: examining the similarities in East Asian traditions and permaculture principles -- or ”sustainability” -- more directly, and my site design specifically. The foundation and basic ideas of permaculture will be introduced first.61

“Permaculture” is not a recent development, or really a “development” at all; rather, it is only recently gaining attention in a fairly bizarre, necessary return or reintroduction of basic, natural growing patterns and how nature simply “works”.

First, let’s look at Bill Mollison, the human who is supposed to have coined the term “permaculture”. From his work Permaculture: A Designer’s Manual, permaculture is defined as follows:

Permaculture (permanent agriculture) is the conscious design and maintenance of agriculturally productive ecosystems which have the diversity, stability, and resilience of natural ecosystems. It is the harmonious integration of landscape and people providing their food, energy, shelter, and other material and non-material needs in a sustainable way. Without permanent agriculture there is no possibility of stable social order.62

Now, let’s look at the basic principles Mollison structures his definition of permaculture on:

1. Work with nature rather than against

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61 I am inclined to state that these, permaculture and East Asian traditions of thought, are largely more of independently grown ideas stemming from how “nature” works, than one depending on another (or rather the latter on the former), and as with such global complexities, it’s therefore the ‘chicken and the egg’ scenario. Which came first? Likely, neither? As all Ten Thousand Things became in Taoism, so did these. But anyway.

2. The problem is the solution.

3. Make the least change for the greatest possible effect.

4. The yield of a system is theoretically unlimited (or only limited by the imagination and information of the designer).

5. Everything gardens (or modifies its environment).

Additionally, two of the “moral” principles from Mollison are “care of the Earth” and “care of the people”. Though Mollison’s permaculture courses and the rest of his works get much more detailed about specific permaculture methods, these are the ultimate, underlying foundations that Mollison bases his more specific permaculture guidelines on, and what will be the focus for my purposes (much like the “original” or underlying principles of the East Asian traditions of thought are the focus on that end).

Basically, then, permaculture boils down to the (creation, maintenance, and) utilization of natural systems for human purposes, in order to sustain or enhance the health and life of both. It is a continuous process of experimentation and problem solving, involving intuition and judgment via awareness within the context of the particular situation at present -- which is, say, the particular plot of land that you are looking at to re-landscape or repurpose for whatever one aims, from purely aesthetic to off-the-grid, self-sustainability.

There are many more names in the global permaculture movement, from the co-founder Holmgren to the “activist” permaculturist Sepp Holzer. While of course great additions with more nuances to add as they uniquely apply the permaculture

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63 A matter of (changing) perspective.
65 Ibid., 2.
system to their own work and perspectives of time and place, let’s move on to Fukuoka, a more targeted fusion of the intertwining between East Asian tradition of thought and the permaculture principles we have now examined.

Fukuoka (born 1913) grew up into a fairly conventional modern-life situation, finding his grown adult self in a laboratory job manipulating chemicals.66 A realization of his lack of fulfillment through this work, coupled with a particularly bad spell of illness, prompted a reevaluation of his contentment in his current form. He then changed course.67

After escaping his city existence, he then spent the last decades of his life re-landscaping, teaching, and nearly self-sustaining on his permaculture plot, which had previously belonged to his family before him, and also used to be a conventionally farmed plot of land. Using what he called “natural farming” principles to re-landscape the land, he often referenced East Asian traditions in his work, most notably Buddhism and Taoism, as basic elements for the framework for his approach to alternative farming methods.

However, Fukuoka wasn’t a strict adherent to Buddhism or Taoism, and therefore didn’t design his life’s work upon these traditions. Rather, he did not identify himself with either of these traditions, or any others, but believed solely in a system of sustainable agriculture and natural farming, and only likened it to these East Asian principles in times of useful comparison. Natural farming methods, he

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66 Fukuoka, One Straw Revolution, 5.  
67 Ibid., 11.
claimed, were something beyond a religion or philosophy. With this in mind, we can revisit the topics from the previous sections, and briefly take a look at the relationships between them.

*Language (and its Abstract and Obscure Nature)*

Language presents a great danger to the natural world. When we decide that something is “good” or “bad”, it tends to stay that way, hard and fast, despite the fact that there are always exceptions to everything -- as in, in this case, whatever we deemed “bad” isn’t always, one hundred percent of the time, purely “bad”. Fukuoka emphasizes this linguistic, determinant danger, an example of which follows:

> The concept of ‘raising plants’ and ‘harmful insects’ are just words coined by man based on subjective criteria grounded in the self; viewed in terms of natural order, they are meaningless.

Once we make these arbitrary assignations, we move with them through time and our own personal progression, getting us places counter-productive and unhealthy. When we designate something across the board as “bad”, as we do with, say, terming things “weeds”, and then start using herbicides to kill these weeds, and then render the land useless from the abuse of these chemicals, we will only then realize the problems we have caused ourselves by making this designation in the first place; maybe, “weed” made sense in that one place there, because it was becoming invasive and unhelpful, but then presented no danger down the road.

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68 “I do not belong to any religious group myself and will freely discuss my views with anyone at all. I do not care much for making distinctions among Christianity, Buddhism, Shinto, and the other religions…” from Fukuoka, *One Straw Revolution*, 116.
69 Ibid., 120.
70 Pun intended.
The Position or Existence of “Self” and Interconnection, Interdependence

When the human spirit and human life blend with the natural order and man devotes himself entirely to the service of nature, he lives freely as an integral part of the natural world, subsisting on its bounty without having to resort to purposeful effort. When man becomes one with nature...[he] transcends time and space and reaches the zenith of understanding and enlightenment. This relationship between man and nature is like an ideal marriage in which the partners together realize a perfect life without asking for, giving, or receiving anything of each other.... The very embodiment of life in accordance with nature.71

Getting a little into “Buddhist” terms here, Fukuoka emphasizes the need for human and nature to not be separate concepts, in order to create a life of mutual benefit and lacking in unnecessary effort. When we do not make ourselves this “other” and operate on those terms, being a mutual “giver” and “taker” to the rest of the world’s workings, we can work with what we already have.

Bill Mollison has a rather famous quote from one of his works regarding this same matter, which is “let interdependence and personal responsibility be our aims”.72 Coming from a similar view of the world as a whole, Mollison reasons that, from our connection to the natural world to smoothing the rifts/differences between each other (as human beings), we need to realize, embrace, and work to create these all-important connections we have that are only necessary for survival. This is done through first taking responsibility for the self in the midst of the world community.

71 Fukuoka, One Straw Revolution, 81.
Situational Dependency

“Nature is always showing man, somewhere and sometime, situations in which pests are not pests and do not cause real damage. Instead of holing up in laboratories, people can learn directly in the open classrooms of nature.”

Similar to our examination of language above, Fukuoka hits on the concept of situational dependency. That is, in this context, how a “pest” is not a “pest” all of the time, because it is entirely up to the particular space, time, season (and the like), that one is to evaluate from. A pest here is not a pest there, nor is it necessarily a pest here, either, perhaps two years from now.

You can hit a nail on the head, or cause a machine to do so, and get a fairly predictable result. Hit a dog on the head, and it will either dodge, bite back, or die, but it will never again react in the same way. We can predict only those things we set up to be predictable, not what we encounter in the real world of living and reactive processes.

Mollison makes a very important point here. Why we may be so inclined to make these generalized rules in the modern day is because they can apply to some things more often than not. That is, we may be able to apply them to the highly mechanical, systemized items of our creation, to work off of a programmed template that will operate on its own pre-determined accord despite its outside environment. So the trouble here is when we get too comfortable with our own creations and the rules that we apply to them, and then decide that these static assumptions also apply to things and beings that we do not control, have never controlled, and will never be able to control. We may try and succeed temporarily, but we can’t control the natural

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73 Fukuoka, *One Straw Revolution*, 120.
74 We can, perhaps, think of language as arbitrary in part because of its situational dependency.
75 Fukuoka, *One Straw Revolution*, 86.
environment indefinitely. That being said, we need to be more careful with our attitude towards it, acknowledge its own agency, and the nuances of it as it is in each of its unique locations and settings (as a “piece” of the much, much larger whole).

Perception and Relativity

“The reason that man’s improved techniques seem to be necessary is that the natural balance has been so badly upset beforehand by those same techniques that the land has become dependent on them”.

At this point, we are pretty blinded to what we have done to the land, and where we stand in relation to it now, and that we have done “bad things” to our external, natural environment, and that’s why it might not “work” anymore. What we see now is that the health of the land, air, and water are out of control, but not necessarily that we humans are the ones most responsible, or that we continue to harm it by the second. There is a growing awareness that we are, in fact, responsible for these things, and that they are “unsustainable”, but not scoped widely enough that we’re capturing the extent to which we’ve destroyed it. We then “discover” “new” techniques and methods for the land, to remediate said land that is seemingly acting up, when we are really simply “remediating” with methods that are, say, more chemical inputs or artificial processes that get us further from the real, natural, fully-functioning processes that were, that will then only take longer to get back to its healthy self.

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77 Fukuoka, One Straw Revolution, 15.
is a never-ending path we are forging, because it is the only path that we can see from our shoes on this (artificial) ground.

**Knowledge**

“But all I have been doing...is trying to show that humanity knows nothing”.

Fukuoka does not mince his words with on topic of knowledge (which we have discussed earlier). Ultimately, we just don’t know anything. From our previous discussion (in the previous chapter), we have touched upon reasons that mirror Fukuoka’s, but, point being, a full understanding of something -- anything -- that holds 100% in both time and space, is just not something we can possess. That being said, we always have to keep our awareness keen and adaptation abilities moving, because we have to change and be open to questioning what we “know” as everything else around us morphs.

Scientists who ‘know’ and observe, don’t usually apply their knowledge to the world. Those who ‘act’ often don’t know or observe. This has resulted in several tragic conditions, where productive natural ecosystems have been destroyed to create unproductive cultivated systems, breaking every sane environmental principle to do so.

Similar in message, actually, to Fukuoka’s quote examined one above, Mollison here points out the disconnect between action and knowledge. We usually don’t possess a necessary level of both, in that those who “know”, only know from a very nearsighted scope (and therefore don’t really know, hence the quotations), where those who are acting don’t take the time to think about what they are doing, or how their actions apply. And this has destroyed a lot of the natural world. The way that we can “know”,

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then, in a sense, is by *consciously* doing, or being keenly aware of personal actions and how they’re received by what you are acting on, and how they come back to impact you and those around you. “Knowledge” that we have is usually a fairly static entity, which causes problems for real-world application. “Knowledge”, or perhaps an understanding, is a process that involves an interaction and a mutual transference of constant action, reaction, and reevaluation.

... 

Now that we have familiarized ourselves with some East Asian traditions of thought and permaculture basics, and the curious connection that can be seen between the two, it’s time to take a timeout to look at the more concrete\textsuperscript{81} aspect of the fusion of them. Demonstrating the practical application of the ideas examined in this written work is the re-landscape -- or permaculture -- design for 160 Cross Street.

Using a fusion of East Asian (mostly Japanese) species and landscape design influences, with the meshing of both East Asian traditions of thought and permaculture principles at its backing, I have designed the initial site plans for the re-landscaping. Through these plans I intend to make the site more resource efficient in itself, beneficial to the human, animal, and insect components, and, hopefully, a more aesthetically-inclined space for the university as it is wished.

*My Site*

I have been involved in the permaculture group at Wesleyan, WILD Wes, since my freshman year, and have led this group and its accompanying student forum on and off for about a year and a half up to this point. (“WILD Wes” is an acronym

\textsuperscript{81} Or the opposite of that, rather….
for Working for Intelligent Landscape Design.) This past summer, while on campus leading the WILD Wes summer interns, a professor in the Dance department approached me with the new dance studio location and requested a re-vamp. Just in time with my thesis, while I wanted to do something more substantial than a large paper on a shelf (that means this!), I happily accepted. The site has grown over time since its first inception with, for instance, the photo exhibition, the fieldwork trip to Japan, and the ideas developed through this written portion.

Unlike WILD Wes’ past re-landscaping projects, this particular site has a substantial amount of existing elements (both live and inanimate/structural), especially those existing as cultural, domestic, and basic standards of aesthetics. While the latter makes it a bit inherently flawed or potentially contradictory, “nature”, in the end, has a way of working out, even if there is still some more or less stringent exercised human control. Moreover, we don’t need to have two extremes in the first place. We don’t have to have a complete, hands-off “wildlands” where anything goes, anything grows, and if we so much as touch it, we soil it with our toxic human filth. This is not really permaculture, anyway. Indeed, Fukuoka stressed just how much he worked on his plot of land, mainly because he slanted it most towards “food” and “farmecuticals”, as his aim was for a human-productive establishment, and therefore it was of benefit to tend to it more often than not.

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82 Trying to create a self-sustaining landscape within a confine of strict, conventional aesthetic standards can prove difficult and compromising. Though not an impossible task, it is the hope that a slow movement towards an understanding and acceptance of natural landscapes will be achieved, in order to maximize the environmental benefits of such sites.

The beauty of permaculture lies in its versatility, the holistic awareness that lends itself to understanding it as a special case all to itself, giving and taking on these principles with different emphases as they best fit the situation at hand. Really, as long as the principle of self-awareness exists at the base of it, we are going to be okay. So that is what my site is. It is a give and take in this particular situation, and what ultimately matters is that it’s so adaptable and conscious of its place and purpose that, along with the other two existing sites on campus (and the larger theme of standard university campus aesthetic, AKA a manicured lawn), in very different areas for very different purposes – it shows that permaculture works, and more importantly that permaculture makes the land once again productive and healthy. “Nature” works. Even in areas so destitute from past human utilization and abuse, nothing is wholly unrecoverable.

What I chose to base this site off of primarily is an evergreen forest-like landscape. While I am cognizant of the fact that I can’t make a mini forest in this confined space nor would that be appropriate, it will “mimic” a coniferous forest in terms of theme, appropriate for the space: dwarf evergreens, ferns, and the like, some of which already exist on the site. Species “inspiration” came from my trip abroad, but in the actual selection, species that are locally available will be selected, up to the future interns. (More will be outlined below.)

Additionally, I am going for an emphasis on sustenance, pulling from East Asian (or more specifically, Japanese) crop influences both for human and nonhuman beings. Using East Asian/Japanese food crops on the site not only widens the small
winter crop variety, but also then helps with diet diversity, something severely lacking most specifically in the States.\textsuperscript{84}

Some species are also common in the US, as you will see in the outline below, but others are an attempt to open up the nutrient and crop options for both humans and the plant systems, based on some research on these crops and their growing viability in Connecticut. This crop-centric area will be most heavily concentrated on the right side of the 160 Cross building, where a more seasonal plot (think “vegetable garden” space) is to exist. Some more “edible” (and more “permanent”) elements will also be implemented in the front-facing regions of the site.

Lastly -- as the final point of focus, and related to the crop selections -- I am planning for a retention of aesthetic interest in the winter months, when most things go leafless, brown, and grey.\textsuperscript{85} The evergreen elements will be a part of this, in addition to some more color variations both already existing on site and to be implemented.

Below I have outlined the current site design’s species elements, and have provided my reasoning for the inclusion of the species, and/or their suggested uses. Most species selections were influenced by my fieldwork in Japan, but ultimately the specific species chosen for the site, either in the beginning or in its planting phases, will be left up to the future interns during implementation for more agency over the site (as learning through this site’s planning and implementation is a large component, for this purpose anyway.)

\textsuperscript{85} Not that these are “bad” things, of course, but sustainable color wouldn’t be either.
Figure I. Initial site design sketch for 160 Cross Street
Hand rendering.

Note: the original is available for viewing as requested from the WILD Wesleyan student group. Not all elements have been placed on this draft, such as additional ferns and crop elements (to the right and left of the building, respectively). Mushroom logs have not been placed on this design in their entirety as of now, but will likely reside near the front most length of wall and hold experimental placements elsewhere so that we may find the most opportune growing locations. This rendering is reflective of the site’s design between phases two and three, which are outlined later in this chapter.
Figure II. Key for initial site design for 160 Cross Street
Fall/Winter Crops

**Daikon** (Japanese term for this type of radish) (*Raphanus sativus*)

Not a very common crop in the States, daikon is one of the most prevalent root vegetables in Japan. Large, white, and an abundant cold-weather crop, it is served from finely grated garnish for grilled mackerel to sliced and simmered in miso. It has a light, unobtrusive flavor. It will be incredibly useful as a fall and winter crop, and also be useful to prevent run-off in “off seasons” where less plant life may be growing.

**Garlic** (*Allium sativum*)

Useful as a fall and winter crop, garlic is known as a flavoring component in a wide variety of dishes, as well as being helpful for a variety of health-related uses, notably as an anti-bacterial and for circulatory system functioning.

**Napa Cabbage** (*Brassica rapa*) (*hakusai*)

Another prominent crop in Japan (and East Asia more generally), I am most fond of it from the homemade kimchi of my friend’s wonderful family during a short stay in Korea, and my grandma’s semi-sun-dried cabbage side dish served with any to all meals of the day.

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86 They can also be less traditionally used to make latkes, as my brother most recently created.
Carrot (*Daucus carota*) (*ninjin*)

Another useful fall crop. Particular breed to be chosen by the interns.

Onions (*Allium cepa*)

One more useful fall and winter crop, already popular in the States. Breed again to be chosen by interns and local availability.

Additional suggestions: potatoes and yams, various

Spring/Summer Crops

**English cucumber** (*Cucumis sativus*)

With a different texture and taste than the more commonly used cucumbers in the States (which are shorter, wider, and have more prominent seeds), English cucumbers are often made into a vinegary side dish in Japan, and will be used as a spring crop for the crop plot.

**Scallion/Green Onion** (*Allium fistulosum*) (*negi*)

Used as a garnish in the States, it is more prevalent in Japan from ramen to potato salads and sukiyaki. Health benefits range from cardiovascular to blood sugar regulation.

**Shishito** (*Capsicum annuum*)

A pepper uncommon in the States, it is small, skinny, green, and glossy. Sometimes spicy, it is usually a grilled dish in Japan.
Additional suggestion: eggplant

**Ginger** (*Zingiber officinale*)

A delicious edible root with incredible nutritional benefit, ginger is well-known in the States but does not hold as prominent place in the market as it does in Japan; great for everything from medicinal tea to palate cleansing for sushi. Ginger is a shade crop.

**Other elements**

**Mushroom Logs**

Working with Physical Plant, we can acquire logs from felled trees on campus. Beech trees are the most available -- due to beech bark disease\(^{87}\) -- meaning that the mushroom option is large: Hericium (lion’s mane, a “crab-like” taste), oyster (a “meaty” mushroom), maitake (cancer fighting properties), and reishi (various medicinal benefits), among others.

**Rocks/Stones**

Useful for aesthetics, rock elements may be used as found on Wesleyan campus. There is a “refuse” pile out by Physical Plant, and if rock elements are used they may be sourced here.

\(^{87}\) The presence of beech bark disease on mushroom logs has not been shown to greatly affect the mushroom growing potential. From “Technical Guide: to help diversify forest products and their revenues”, http://www.umoncton.ca/umce-foresterie/files/umce-foresterie/wf/wf/pdf/Mushroomguide.pdf (accessed March 21, 2015).
**Ferns** (*Arachniodes saradishii, Dropeterus erythrosora, etc.*)

My personal favorite plant of all the plants is the fern, which will have a nice shady length to cover on the left side of the building, and can also find a home in the front-facing/entrance wall of the building (for the more sun-inclined types). Several options are available at Ballek’s Garden Center (a wonderful resource for a majority of WILD Wes’ plants over the years).

**Dwarf Evergreens** (such as *Abies cephalonica, Abies delavayi,* and/or *Picea abies*)

To further fill in the existing mulched area but not overwhelm the site, more dwarf evergreens will be planted to accompany the existing low-lying evergreens and existing bushes. They will further enhance the winter color of the site.

**Winterberry** (*Ilex verticillata*)

Native and already prevalent both on the 160 Cross site and around the campus (and, moreover, the larger Middletown landscape as well), it will be a good source of aesthetic continuity around the campus, as well as providing a bright red punch of color throughout the winter months.

**Sedum**

A reliable groundcover has been one of the biggest challenges for the WILD Wes sites thus far. However, we chose a large variety for the terraces in the Butterfields dorm area, and they are so far holding up quite well. With observation of that later
this spring, perhaps we can pull some of those species over for 160 Cross, and create another element of continuity.

**Dwarf Kumquats** (*Citrus japonica*)

Not too readily grown in the East as of now (but in basic terms highly compatible with the growing conditions), the dwarf kumquat will add a shade, sustenance, and color element to the site. It is cold hardy, and fairs well with pests. While there is not space for full kumquat trees, space for two small or “dwarf” kumquat trees exists in the front lawn space to the left of the stairway.

**(One) Rose**

“Each day 40,000 children die of hunger. The superpowers now have more than 50,000 nuclear warheads, enough to destroy our planet many times. Yet the sunrise is beautiful, and the rose that bloomed this morning along the wall is a miracle. Life is both dreadful and wonderful”.

... All of these implements, plus or minus modifications done by future WILD Wes members, or nature’s inclinations, will happen in three phases:

Phase #1: Plantings that can happen now, and phasing out grass and mulch.

Phase #2: More plantings (bushes and ground cover) in new, rich, healthy soil (in the places that used to be grass and mulch).

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Phase #3: If appropriate, experimentations with more plantings in the previously-grassy areas, e.g. under/around the existing trees and shrubs, newly planted dwarf kumquats, etc.; making more of the groundcover space into crop space.

... Whether the site gets implemented “word for word” (or, rather, plant by plant), it is most ultimately meant to be a learning and experimental process. Each implementation is incredibly unique, due to everything from soil composition to the weather’s inclinations, and therefore how the species function -- independently, with others, where, how, and why -- we must observe and be in tune with closely. It will be a practical medium through which to practice the key principles that have been previously outlined. However, this doesn’t mean that we have to break it all down into a “scientific” understanding, or a “science”, and this understanding that usually leads to human manipulation of natural processes. Just spend time with it. Seeing it, interacting with it.

The whole picture is disturbed when we start to disturb one thing, and as small as our human knowledge is of the natural world around us, we don’t know just what we’re doing when we start the manipulative process. And this manipulative process has touched every space we occupy, so we don’t have to learn it all in order to do it “right”. Besides that being simply and fundamentally impossible, it’s also no fun. It needs to be a constant work in progress, because nature is always changing and evolving anyway, despite our best efforts of control, so it’d be fundamentally unnatural if it were a static landscape, and one that worked exactly as we had set out to make it. Therefore, it makes more sense to keep keenly aware of one’s
surroundings and to adapt, to work with it, and not to make every move to go in a strict direction.

These are, therefore, simply the plans as they exist now, and by no means anything set in concrete. They are what I would like to see and intend to function, by providing everything from food to a healthier microbe ecosystem, but who is to say what will really become of it more specifically. As the continuous process that permaculture is, it is entirely open to changes by new members, new leadership, and new class years of the WILD Wesleyan student group, which is the influence from which these came, and the future of implementation of this site plan. The natural systems, of course, have their own “plans” for this space, too. What this will look like in two, ten, or twenty-three years, then, we cannot say. But hopefully, whatever that is, it will be a productive, highly self sufficient, and beautiful landscape.
Five

In Conclusion

No one seemed willing to address the problem at its fundamental level.\(^{89}\)

Countermeasures are all based on too narrow a definition of what is wrong.\(^{90}\)

What I’ve meandered around in the entirety of this paper is how to frame what I’m advocating here. It, again, isn’t to be like East Asia -- being Shintoists, Buddhists, Confucian, what have you. But at the same time I truly believe in the inherent sustainability behind a lot of the more prominent East Asian traditions of thought that we’ve examined here. Perhaps it’s yet another huge contradiction in this project itself: where framing these common lines of thought into man-made categories in which we have created the terms for is incorrectly compartmentalizing, segregating, and pointing fingers while at the same time meshing complex, unique traditions and applying them in obscure ways and fostering a dichotomy in the midst of a commonality, either one used to my advantage as the situation demands. A mess of language, identification, and more, I may at times be an anti-example of everything this paper is supposed to convey. But whatever the situation may be, whatever mess I succeeded in making, what I intended to be at the heart of it, ultimately, was a walkthrough of some East Asian traditions of thought and principles targeted at landscape self-sustainability that, thorough some commonality, perhaps if we took notice to and realized value in, we’d be able to more sustainably conduct our lives.

\(^{89}\) Fukuoka, *One Straw Revolution*, 80.
\(^{90}\) Ibid., 84.
while reasonably still “progressing” as we wont to do. And again, this also includes the “East”. The East, as a part of the world, too, is just as much of a participant in the global market, that the East itself cannot claim nor will I claim that it is in a more environmentally sound position. Though the East was earlier to develop communities within stationary societies, and therefore held onto more aware, community-based societies longer that learned to adapt to – rather than “confront” -- nature, and was a model for Europe’s first gardens, we are far past the point at which “’glorifying” modern East Asia is helpful or accurate.

Indeed, some environmentalist thinkers in China are looking back to Buddhism to try to find a framework for more sustainable living practice. It is “our” problem, it is “their” problem, and it is therefore a common problem for all of man.

To conclude, we’ll examine the more prominent themes and obstacles in the modernized, “progressive” world, and approach ways in which we may reframe and refocus in a “sustainable” way based upon the concepts examined in this paper thus

91 “There are important values in Western society, such as the scientific way of looking at things, the spirit of free inquiry, and democracy. If there is an encounter between Buddhism and these values, humankind will have something very new, very exciting,” from Hanh, *Being Peace*, 85.
92 The East did away with nomadic life early on, thereby creating more society-centered (not individual-centered), and less violent, closer communities. “The Japanese have learned to attach unduly heavy importance to their human nexus in disregard of the individual,” from *The Japanese Mind*, 148.
93 “…The Western modes of human living is characterized, in a broad sense, by confrontation with external environments, whereas the Eastern mode is characterized by adaptation to them,” from Fukuoka, *One Straw Revolution*, 54.
94 “…the first informal gardens in Europe were called ‘Chinese gardens’. Although it would be historically inaccurate to say that the West literally ‘borrowed’ its late-blooming aesthetic receptivity to nature from the East, it is, nevertheless, true that Eastern natural aesthetic sensibilities played a significant historical role in the birth of Western natural aesthetic sensibilities,” from Callicott, J. Baird. *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought: Essays in Environmental Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), xvii.
far. Keep in mind, this is (still) not in an East versus West context, of course, but one based on basic principles that could, or just as well could not, be tied to a frame of thought, or permaculture at that – you know, depending on how you choose to look at it; such is the nature of East Asian modes.

*We Created a “Nature”, and In Doing So We Instantaneously Lost It -- and Ourselves*

As we’ve touched upon before, the idea of a “nature” wasn’t, well, an idea in much of East Asia all too long ago.\(^{96}\) This is because “nature” was something that we also belonged to, or at least didn’t exist outside of. There was no difference from the human and our environment or “us” and everything around “us”, especially when nature was our only environment. (That is to say, for example, that the “natural” world exists as a sort of optional “other” to the cityscapes that exist today, which creates multiple environments and therefore, with all of its other negative outcomes, a useful way to differentiate).

A debatable, very East-leaning point of view from Callicott in *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought: Essays in Environmental Philosophy* is that we have also lost a part of ourselves, a part of our health and spirit, in separating from the natural world.\(^ {97}\) As we further actively disengage from the natural world with material amenities to make life “safer” and “more convenient” and “fun” with “progress” and technology, we are debatably all very actively taking part in an elaborate form of self-

\(^{96}\) In the whole world, really, but East Asia held onto the connection a bit longer.

\(^{97}\) Callicot, *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought: Essays in Environmental Philosophy*, 75.
sabotage\textsuperscript{98} to our health and well-being when we could simply run around outside, or sit around a campfire.\textsuperscript{99} We’ve seemingly lost touch with this sort of nature-derived contentment, an often free and always plentiful source of the nutrients we need. According to Fukuoka, as we are “unable to extricate [ourselves] from schizophrenic development, [we] ultimately bring upon [ourselves] spiritual derangement and collapse”.\textsuperscript{100} Whether or not this is a universal “truth” that most of modern society has seemingly lost sight of, as impossibly tricky as it would be to “prove”, it is something to ponder.

Moreover, in a curious sort of current trend, there is a movement of office workers and the gainfully-employed (think finance and investments) to give up their desk jobs to farm,\textsuperscript{101} and finally find a strong sense of purpose in making one’s own living.\textsuperscript{102} You’re no longer working for the weekend (though, at tough times, you may have to work on the weekend), have to “exercise”, or, depending on how fruitful,\textsuperscript{103} not have to depend on others for anything in your own life. “Forest bathing” has

\textsuperscript{98} Adults have lost touch with, in Taoist terms, ‘The Way’, or otherwise simply the necessary relationship to nature and therefore they are “uprooted”. “As a result, adults constantly lost sight of who they are by nature and are constantly striving to be someone or something that they are not, and they do things that lead them to physical danger and harm”, from Hendricks, Robert G. \textit{Te-tao Ching}. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1989), xxii.


\textsuperscript{100} Fukuoka, \textit{The Natural Way of Farming: The Theory and Practice of Green Philosophy}, 129.


\textsuperscript{102} “All peasants were totally self-supporting and enjoyed the richest and safest possible diet. That they are seen as having been poor and hungry may well reflect the envy of modern man more than anything else. People today have never had the experience of living independently by their own devices, so they know neither spiritual nor material poverty and abundance,” from Fukuoka, \textit{One Straw Revolution}, 253.

\textsuperscript{103} get it
become a concept and a form of preventative medicine. “Science” recognizes dirt as an antidepressant. There are happy lamps because we simply don’t see the sun enough, and we need the sun’s nutrients. All of these – and more! – point to the bizarre backtrackings that we have made disguised as new “scientific discoveries”; remediations we’ve made in life because of the fact that we’ve turned our backs on “nature” or the natural lives we once lived, and naturally-derived, naturally-achieved good health. While in reality these are very primal concepts, they seem new and innovative as they return in prevalence today.

As individualistic a society as we are, I think many of us underestimate the gratification of actually being a functioning individual. That is, we are super lazy creatures, and often times can’t be bothered to prepare our own salad but would rather drive-thru to buy one that tastes like damp cardboard. But what is the feeling of hunting your own game, to dig for and wipe the dirt off your own potatoes, that golden, hidden treasure in the ground you grew yourself? That extra sort of special when you gather for a meal together, the food that you share your very own, taken care of from birth and/or death? I think we underestimate the pride we (can) have in our own work, of being self-sufficient, of being capable, what it actually means to make a living – that is, by sustaining our own lives with our basic human needs. As

104 Basically, “forest bathing” is capitalizing on the health benefits derived from being outdoors (and more specifically, the chemical compounds emitted from forest ecosystems). There are guided walks on “how to enjoy nature” and “be mindful”, AKA how to be a real human in the real world. Among many others, see the following for information on forest bathing: “Shinrin-yoku,” Shinrin-yoku, http://www.shinrin-yoku.org/research.html (accessed February 19, 2015).
“individualistic” a society that we now have, does this not make sense? The power that we currently have stock in\(^\text{107}\) is in the form of dirty pieces of paper, through work where there is little actual meaning.\(^\text{108}\) We’re a smart species indeed, and through our “new” preventative method techniques and individual choices to “take back to the land,” perhaps we are just now realizing the inherent flaw in our extreme separation from nature on a significant level and are learning best from experience, or learning the hard way.

*Consume, Consumer, and Consuming the Consumer.*

*For humans, the first and greatest enemy is the Self that they hold so dear.*\(^\text{109}\)

Competition. In Taoism and Buddhism it’s a big topic. When you break it down, capitalistic society is a competition of who can consume more\(^\text{110}\) and almost a direct contrast to basic sustainability. Who can pay so much money for a designer bag – or who can have five designer bags? Who can have a larger, most manicured lawn, and who can buy the biggest, fanciest place in the city, with your own home gym that you use for, realistically speaking, a solid 45 minutes a few days after New Years? A

\(^\text{107}\) no. 5

\(^\text{108}\) Argue if you must.

\(^\text{109}\) Fukuoka, *One Straw Revolution*, 176.

\(^\text{110}\) “Today, as few as 25 percent of the world's population in the industrialized nations has consumed 80% of the world's commercial energy, and the remaining 75 percent, living in 128 countries, consume only 20 percent of commercial energy. In modern society consumption of physical materials is usually regarded as the symbol of success and social status,” from Xia, Chen. “Daoism and Environmental Protection”, Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, http://www.crvp.org/conf/Istanbul/abstracts/CHEN%20XIA.htm (accessed October 14, 2014).
fundamental element, quite straightforward in contradiction to most principles that are “sustainable”, is this driving force of our society as it exists.

What sense is there in importing oranges from the United States and exporting mandarins back? People of each land need only eat food grown close at hand and be contented. What has occurred is that a money-crazed economy has bred senseless competition.111

It’s not just food, of course. It’s everything we consume.112 The fact of the matter, however -- and before it sounds like I am trying to rid the capitalistic model from our society -- is that we are not going to nor is it reasonable to ask us to “cease” consumption because, after all, we cannot basically exist without it, and plainly would resist it completely (and rightly so). But as such, since consumption is a necessary part of our lives, after all, this means that we can and must find a way to do it reasonably sustainably. Not entirely sustainably, though, as far as we’ve come thus far and as far as our idea of “progress” goes (as we’ll examine later), but surely entirely more sustainably than we are at this moment. At the very least, we can be unsustainable at a much slower rate with a gradual change in consumption patterns, hopefully realizing when “enough”113 is really “enough”,114 making it not unreasonable to look forward to more of a future.115

112 When we were once a part of nature, we functioned in the sustainable cycle with reasonable consumption patterns in synergy with the world around. However, as we have separated from nature, we have thrown the give-and-take of our existence off kilter: “nature produces without calling for supplies or remuneration, but human effort always demands payment in return….man never knows when to stop,” from Fukuoka, One Straw Revolution, 39.
113 “…it is widely recognized that above a certain level, wealth has no direct relation with happiness,” from Xia, “Daoism and Environmental Protection”, http://www.crvp.org/conf/Istanbul/abstracts/CHEN%20XIA.htm.
114 “Know contentment”; “know when you have enough,” from Chih-tsu, Te Tao Ching, 24.
115 So perhaps a little pessimistic, but I’m not going to say we’re a savable society, for infinity. Perhaps when pressed no one really would, even those with the most faith in modern technology. Without some
Modern Morals, Education, and Technology: “Science”? 

“It is said that there is no creature as wise as the human being. By applying this wisdom, people have become the only animals capable of nuclear war”\textsuperscript{116}

There’s nothing wrong with what we’re doing as a society. Or there is everything wrong that we’re doing as a society. Who is to say, depending on individual perspective, environment, lifestyle, what have you. Lots of things. Many people perceive that they are fine never having a breath of fresh air, and who am I to tell them otherwise? What is the difference if you do not know it? What is a reality, though, a “fact”, is that our current educational model (and therefore societal model) is based on making things more efficient, creating more, and making it “better, faster, stronger”\textsuperscript{117} – if we can mechanize it, we should (or, anyway, will) do it. We’re replacing man with machine, sometimes resulting in less error and at other times creating more problems for ourselves. In order to do so, we are breaking the natural world down into pieces and compartments\textsuperscript{118} that in actuality make no sense in order to understand them, control them, and make them “better” -- because that is our power as humans. We’re based on flawed knowledge from sheer speculation and our large, crisis-type of event, I don’t think we will ever have enough motivation to really overhaul society as it stands, realizing that our consumption patterns and striving toward technological “progress” for its own sake is nonsense, inherently unsustainable model. Being as such, with a massive and ever increasing population, the two frameworks simply do not line up. The collective human mind has proven to be pretty inventive and creative, though, so who is to say.

\textsuperscript{116} Fukuoka, \textit{One Straw Revolution}, 156.


\textsuperscript{118} “The living and holistic biosystem that is nature cannot be dissected or resolved into its parts. Once broken down, it dies”, from Fukuoka, \textit{One Straw Revolution}, 18.

\textsuperscript{119} “In the eyes of nature, actions that arise from human knowledge are all futile….All is arbitrary delusion created by the false reasoning of man in a world of relativity. Man has learned and achieved nothing. He is destroying nature under the illusion that he controls it.” Ibid., 35.
discomfort with not knowing, and a belief in our dominion over nature, and therefore our technological advancements, even the “sustainable” ones, can only get so close to actually being as sustainable as the natural world. Replicating nature is just that – replicating, but not being. Being is what is important. But what I have done is made a lot of claims. Let me try to explain.

*Modern Morals*

Derived from Western religions, the United States is based on a societal model focused on good deeds and right living in order to move onto a better life, a life outside this one. Life on earth isn’t garbage, necessarily. But it just isn’t Heaven. Though debatable, it creates an ultimate focus on the future that is the next life, and leaving behind the environment we live in now, a life “...almost exclusively concerned with salvation in terms of divine-human interaction”.

Just don’t screw up, under God’s terms, and you’re golden. Though we could hope that “love thy neighbor” was really talking about loving all of your living neighbors, from the swallows to the tadpoles to the ferns (of course with the possibility that it might have been), it is certainly not the way that “we” have come to readily recognize or practice this rule. Ideally, perhaps, this rule could save us some environmental strife, but an anthropocentric model it has taken.

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120 “...these faults of modern farming were rooted in the basic illusions of Western philosophy that support the foundations of scientific agriculture.” Ibid., 35.
121 As with, realistically, the majority of this paper’s content. But no paper is without bias, and it is certainly clear that I have a strong one.
But the point is not to blame every ill on “religion”; that is not only realistically impossible but plainly wrong. Though Western religions no doubt have imprinted themselves into even “secular” practice today or, phrased differently, that there can be common core values behind “religions” and “secular living”, the fact of this matter is that the world is becoming more secular\textsuperscript{123} and, related or not, at the same time we’re having more and more environmental difficulties. Anyway, “God” isn’t burning the world, but some ways in which we have come to practice “God’s word” may be.

\textit{Modern Education: Science?}

As one claim I made earlier – and also examined through the traditions in Chapter One – I touched upon an understanding of the world around us: breaking everything down into their individual atoms so that we can “understand” them on such a “detailed” level that we can manipulate them for the “better”, giving them terms to differentiate and create these entities. But therein lies the inherent contradiction, because besides breaking a leaf down into all of its parts, creating such “parts”, where the parts are nothing without the whole, the whole (leaf) is nothing without the rest of the tree, nothing without everything around it in its surrounding environment, mutually interacting with each other at every level.\textsuperscript{124}


\textsuperscript{124} “Man can never truly know even a single leaf or a single handful of earth….Man is but an arrogant fool who vainly believes that he knows all of nature and can achieve anything he sets his mind to. Seeing neither the logic nor order inherent in nature, he has selfishly appropriated it to his own ends and destroyed it," from Fukuoka, \textit{The Natural Way of Farming}, 35.
“People study because they think it will help them understand, but studying is not going to help one to understand. They study hard only to find out in the end that people cannot know anything, that understanding [nature] lies beyond human reach.”

Everything (and everyone) works in ways entirely co-dependent on every other thing. And by generalizing and making far-reaching claims and by stating “facts” about how things work, we are obscuring the reality of it and of us. Sure, we can get to a certain point in understanding, and that is how we develop the technologies that we have, to try to do what nature does in some cases, but with a higher perceived efficiency. But acting on these incomplete understandings is where it goes awry. And then, because even Fukuoka says that we can’t understand anything and therefore, in my reasoning, it seems that we then shouldn’t act on anything, this isn’t the case I’m trying to make. What does matter, however, is the magnitude of assumptions we make (about, say, petrochemicals and pharmaceutical safety), and the stubbornness we have in our developed knowledge. Maybe, sometimes, we get something wrong, and that means we screwed up, and it’s really so much opposite that it’s hilarious, but we’re personally embarrassed or angry or disappointed, so we refuse to admit otherwise. Maybe there is a job riding on the conclusion. Or money. And then we teach our kids these things from these botched “discoveries”, ideas with religious slants, things paid for by big business, and the cycle keeps going. This is, then, what we know. It is our knowledge.

125 Ibid., 153.
126 “All of these faults are corrected...when we abandon our so-called common sense or logical attitude and effect a complete about-face, when we plunge right into the working of things as they move on before and behind our senses.” Ibid., 138.
127 “…‘natural’ qualities are destroyed in a sense by education and acculturation. As children grow up, they ‘learn’ from their parents and from others in society that some things and some types of behavior
From a scientific perspective, things are large or small, dead or alive, increasing or decreasing. But this view is predicated on notions of time and space, human cognitional capacities and emotional inclinations, and is really nothing more than a convenient assumption. In the natural world which transcends all of these there is, properly speaking, no large or small, no life or death, no rise or fall. Nor was there ever a conflict of opposing pairs: right and left, fast and slow, strong and weak.\textsuperscript{129} As we keep creating this world that we do, the further and further we walk away from a simple, sustainable model, and the more dangerous of grounds we tread upon.

Technological

“\textit{...from the time people undertook to explain this one drop of dew scientifically, they trapped themselves in the endless hell of their intellect}.”\textsuperscript{130}

From this education and knowledge base -- of “science” -- that we have created for ourselves, comes our technologies. While it isn’t reasonable to say that our developed technologies are anything less than inevitable,\textsuperscript{131} it is still somewhat of the crisis that we’re facing now. It -- “science” and its discoveries -- is the template for further

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
  \bibitem{128} "The knowledge that ‘there are germs in the soil’ is more ignorant than ignorance itself,” from Fukuoka, \textit{One Straw Revolution}, 35.
  \bibitem{130} Fukuoka, \textit{One Straw Revolution}, 65.
  \bibitem{131} “This is a natural and at the same time necessary outcome of the European mode of rational thinking, which has so far been so effective in establishing the machine civilization.” From Moore, \textit{The Japanese Mind: Essentials of Japanese Philosophy and Culture}, 54.
\end{thebibliography}
technological progression, and therefore the road we keep following. But where does that get us? What are we getting to? There isn’t an end. Nor is there a clear beginning. We will examine this concept further in the discussion of “progress”.

(Community) Awareness

As individualistic a society as we live in, we are really inescapably and inextricably linked to all else around us – not only other humans, but soil microbes, too. Though we wouldn’t regularly think of soil microbes as our community members, they most certainly are! Our influence on and interaction with all of our community members reaches to the “ends of the Earth”, and often we cannot see (or realize) all of the impacts that we have. It’s unavoidable, of course, but we can always work to moderate our negative influences on the world around us, now and in the future, right here with us and as far as we can’t see.

“Consumers generally assume that they have nothing to do with agricultural pollution”. At this point, we simply do not see “nature” in our daily lives. Seasonal produce and local goods, though both currently “trending” and on the upswing, are

132 “The farmer dreads nothing more than to be caught loafing around and despised by others for he will be told: ‘Don’t think that you can live all by yourself. There are days of darkness too. When you die, you’ll need the services of four people.’ However well we manage to get on without others in life, we always need four pallbearers at the funeral. Actually, it takes more than four people to dispose of a corpse. Countless microbes and small animals in the soil are engaged in what could almost be called an assembly operation…” From Fukuoka, *One Straw Revolution*, 221. Even if we run into the woods to die “by ourselves” – such is not the case.

133 “...the fact that human actions could damage the environment on a large scale went unrecognized in the West until George Perkins Marsh pointed it out scarcely a century ago, and the information did not become common knowledge until very recently - the mid-1960’s,” from Callicott, *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought: Essays in Environmental Philosophy*, xix.

134 “If we only think of the nuclear bombs that may explode in the future and do not pay attention to the bombs that are exploding in the present moment, we commit some kind of error,” from Hanh, *Being Peace*, 76.

mostly things of the past.\textsuperscript{136} We can buy fresh pineapples all year in most any grocery stores, and eat fish in the city, shipped next-day air from Tsukiji. We’re “eating the bread”, \textsuperscript{137} and therefore have a direct stake\textsuperscript{138} and responsibility in it, and therefore must realize the impact that we have in making the choices that we do, from the unseasonal produce in the market, to driving our cars (instead of biking or walking) to get there.

... 

\textit{“We were never so dangerous as we are now. We should be aware. The most basic precept of all is to be aware of what we do, what we are, each minute. Every other precept will follow from that.”}\textsuperscript{139}

Like Hanh, I also find awareness to be the penultimate characteristic necessary for “right” (or, for my purposes, “sustainable”) living. To be aware of yourself and also every bit of your surroundings is paramount. We simply need to stay conscious of where we are and our actions, that our community does in fact include our little buddies underground that we may never be able to see without a microscope.

Because, with awareness, comes the consciousness of the impact that you have on everything else. Whether or not you are inclined to act “correctly” on this awareness can easily be “fixed” from there, but having awareness in the first place is surely the key to getting there.

\textsuperscript{136} To be fair, “Big Ag” and the industrial food system have done a good job of creating this barrier for their own profit, releasing sponsored studies on nutrition and “environmental responsibility”. But this is a topic for several theses all to itself.

\textsuperscript{137} “For instance, when you eat a piece of bread, you may choose to be aware that our farmers, in growing the wheat, use chemical poisons a little too much. Eating the bread, we are somehow co-responsible for the destruction of our environment,” from Hanh, \textit{Being Peace}, 69.

\textsuperscript{138} Had to keep myself from using “steak” here, figuring that the pun load is already quite heavy. Please excuse the amusement I have embedded in this paper that was for myself and the enjoyment of writing it as the majority of my senior year; or, I hope it has provided some amusement through this eighty-odd piece of work for you, too.

\textsuperscript{139} Just to hit the “awareness” nail on the head again. From Fukuoka, \textit{One Straw Revolution}, 70.
An Economy with Environmental Values

Living sustainably is ultimately for our own selfish benefit, when you think about it. We can live healthier, happier lives eating whole, unprocessed foods and being physically connected to the “natural” world that we really belong to, deriving nutrients and pleasure. But for one reason or another, we have managed to severely separate ourselves from this and only continue to do so. And in assuming dominance and manipulative control over the rest of the living creatures on this planet (as, likely, only inevitable), we have invented a lot of things, from objects to occupations, that were not accompanied with too much forethought, or the long-term implications of which were blatantly ignored (such as in exchange for profit). Some of us are even making millions of dollars playing a very aggressive pretend with pretend money every day, as a “career”.

When you start to break down modern society from a “real” (AKA “natural”) world perspective, it all just seems so silly. But anyway, this is not to say that this is wrong. Indeed, I am personally quite attached to many of life’s “modern amenities”, and do not think that everything we have done is destined directly for disaster. We can and will keep developing as a global force, and that’s fine. I believe that it is only inevitable. We can, however, do it better. There is a lot of waste in the “system”, from food prep to general consumption patterns, a too-convenient globalization of goods, and a lot of unnecessarily mechanized and chemicalized agricultural

\[140\text{ Say, for example, do we really need fresh-cut flowers flown in from Latin America yesterday? Is it worth the fossil fuel burning, killing off five species and polluting three rivers? Do we really? “...if you ask how important it is for human beings to have fruit a month earlier, the truth is that it is not} \]
methods that are, ultimately, counter-productive. We seem to like things best when they’re easy, and working with and not against the land (with the use of petrochemicals and the like) is really the easiest.

Moreover, I have done a good job demonizing “technology” and “science” thus far, but in all actuality, I like “technology”, and I suppose that science is okay. It has done some good, and nothing is perfect. What I am targeting, rather, is a smarter and more efficient use of the technologies that we have and some of the “scientific discoveries” that we have made. We can certainly use to our environmental advantage the power that these both have to connect people and to give a general understanding of resources. Take, for example, the fact that everyone and their children and pets have smartphones, making cellular applications an extremely valuable platform. From organizing food leftover pickups and exchanges to filling vacant house spaces and finding homes for unused furniture, we can “recycle” a lot of our existing goods rather than producing more, and divert much waste while being of great benefit and little to no cost. The list goes on.

We can do really smart things with our really smart brains and cool new inventions, every day. It’s just a matter of more intelligently applying them (or applying them for environmental reasons), with the understanding and awareness that we do, indeed, still need the “natural” world to really flourish, or most basically survive. Just because it’s Version Two-Point-Oh doesn’t mean it’s really getting us

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141 “To grow crops in an unplowed field may seem at first a regression to primitive agriculture, but over the years this method has been shown in university laboratories and agricultural testing centers across the country to be the most simple, efficient, and up-to-date method of all.” Ibid., 20.

142 Or, say, the iPhone 7U, or whatever’s on the horizon at the reading of this paper.
anywhere. Hence, let’s look at the current meaning of “progress”, and how a redefinition of it might be necessary to be more environmentally inclined (and to live a little longer).

A Redefinition of “Progress”

“The real question is whether to view it as a picture of primitive, economically disadvantaged life or as an organic partnership between man, animal, and nature”.  

Progress today largely means, in the developmental sense, getting as far away as possible from the natural world as we can. Maybe it’s because we think of it as dirty or scary, a “wild” life we can do better than to live in. Hospitals keep us “safe” from dying from minor injuries and infections, and their machines can even go so far as to artificially preserve human life. Build things taller, buy pre-rinsed and sliced veggies, the more concrete the better; now we don’t even have to get out of our vehicles and experience two seconds of “the outdoors” to pick up our synthetic life pills. God forbid it’s cold out and that air drafts into our vehicles when we roll up to the service window. Better blast that heat in preparation! This is where we are. Are we happy with this?

Where are we going?

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144 They can also, though, breed the nastiest of diseases. You might get your infection drugged out, but you could also pick up some fresh MRSA. Just something to consider.

145 I am, indeed, referring to prescription drugs (and the three other prescription drugs you take because the initial three caused side effects that the latter three are there to deal with. See: http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0089447).

146 “Why do we have to develop...is happiness going to double?” From Fukuoka, *One Straw Revolution*, 158.
The more that we discover (or claim to discover), the further we must go. And in light of everything that has been covered thus far, from a simple happiness achieved by re-joining our colleagues “in nature”, to the massive amounts of chemicals that we are using to, essentially, make our agricultural lives more difficult and perhaps nonexistent in the near future, are these developments and “progressions” really progressions anymore? If progress is to move forward to a destination, and, ultimately, that meaning a sense of happiness through contentment, accomplishment, what have you -- as that is what a human seems to strive towards -- I do think that questioning our current sense of “progress” it is worth consideration.

**Right Effort**

*No work, no food...one day without work, one day without food.*

A piece of the 8-Fold Path, “right effort”, I believe to transcend the place it holds in a Buddhist way of life – it is something we all need, and we all need now. Beliefs are only so much as they exist, but nothing more. We need to take action and act on our beliefs for anything to ever get done. If I have done well enough to convince you at this point that we need basic things like self-awareness and/or a

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149 “Buddhism must be engaged. What is the use of practicing meditation if it does not have anything to do with our daily lives?” Hanh, *Being Peace*, 116.
150 “Love and understanding are not only concepts and words. They must be real things, realized, in oneself and in society,” from Fukuoka, *One Straw Revolution*, 88.
modified consumption habit, this is good. But better, is where we now do something about it. It can be big or little; any and all of it really does help.

Thich Nhat Hahn brings up the idea of ‘Tiep Hien’ in Being Peace. What it says is, essentially, what I have written above – the action component, combined with an awareness on which to base those actions off of. “Tiep” is “being in touch with” .151 Here he addressed the fact that, sometimes, we don’t want to so much as face ourselves, so we occupy ourselves with other things: religion, sports, television.152 And it’s so easy to do in this life. But when we don’t even engage with ourselves, how do we possibly engage with the world around us? Relinquishing responsibility for ourselves disappears the hope to take responsibility for anything at all.

A second meaning for “tiep” is “to continue”.153 This is also very important. In order for a more sustainable world to be viable, we need to, well, sustain our efforts. It’s not a ‘one-and-done’ situation; we can’t compost for a day and consider it ‘done’, feeling good about ourselves for being “an environmentalist”. Certainly not. This is not something that we finish, nor something that can be finished. It is perpetual, not a means to an end, but a lifestyle. Only if we live sustainability can we have sustainability and be sustained.

152 “There are several ways not to face life: by taking drugs, watching television, becoming a fakir in a cave, or reading in pure science. All are an abdication of personal responsibility for life on earth (including, of course, one’s own life). Value- and ethic-free lifestyles are as aberrant in science as in society”, from Fukuoka, One Straw Revolution, 12.
“Hien”, now, completes the phrase, meaning both “the present time”, and “to make real, to manifest realization”. These emphasize acting on beliefs, and acting on those things now. This is where Buddhism’s (and most other East Asian traditions’) emphasis on the present life on earth is important. It isn’t about waiting for later, but being alive now: “only the present is real, only in the present moment can we be alive. We do not practice for the sake of the future, to be reborn in paradise, but to be peace, to be compassion, to be joy right now”.

Of course, there is a lot to do. No words could come close to conveying the magnitude of our current destructive habits and how engrained they are in our daily lives. Wasteful living is our standard of living. It is all very overwhelming. Though I have heavily emphasized the need to act now (as we do), what matters most underneath it all is that we keep trying – the effort, the “right” effort. We don’t have to “win” or “solve” everything, because likely we can’t, without a societal re-working of great magnitude, likely not accomplishable in a necessary amount of time. But we can keep working; we can keep doing.

If I lose my direction, I have to look for the North Star, and I go to the north. That does not mean I expect to arrive at the North Star. I just want to go in that direction.

- Thich Nhat Hanh, Being Peace

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154 Ibid., 88.
155 Ibid., 88.
156 See what I did there?
157 “I think that our society is a difficult place to live. If we are not careful, we can become uprooted, and once uprooted, we cannot help change society to make it more livable….Having lived for quite some time in this society, I myself feel that I cannot get along with this society very well. There are so many things that make me want to withdraw, to go back to myself. But my practice helps me remain in society, because I am aware that if I leave society, I will not be able to help change it. I hope that those who are practicing Buddhism succeed in keeping their feet on earth, staying in society. That is our hope for peace.” From Hanh, Being Peace, 55.
Its still elegance is ineffable; more than incredible, a surreal image in a world where something so natural is spectacle.

I should go, because the last time I doddled on my walk my ojichan took his mini truck out to go find me. But my feet in my green rubber boots on the gravel roadside don’t want to move - and I don’t want to look away from the owl. I think it’s watching me back, and I wonder what it thinks of me.
Bibliography


