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Arnold Berleant's Environmental Aesthetics and Chinese Ecological Aesthetics

Cheng Xiangzhan

Abstract

Professor Arnold Berleant has visited China academically several times since the early 1990s, becoming more and more popular in Chinese academia. Almost all of his books have been translated into Chinese, which produced a significant impact on Chinese scholars, especially on the development of Chinese ecological aesthetics, or ecoaesthetics. They generated a hot topic on the similarities and differences between Western environmental aesthetics and Chinese ecological aesthetics, in view of which this paper first outlines Berleant's academic activities in China, then focuses on the impact of his environmental aesthetics on the ecological aesthetics mainly advanced by the Chinese scholars Zeng Fanren and Cheng Xiangzhan. With these discussions, the paper primarily aims at analyzing the relationship between Western environmental aesthetics and Chinese ecological aesthetics, determining that Berleant's environmental aesthetics is viewed generally as a part of the whole picture of ecological aesthetics because it fits so well with the definition of ecology.

Key Words

Arnold Berleant; Chinese ecological aesthetics; ecoaesthetics; Western environmental aesthetics

1. Introduction

It is reasonable to point out that international academic communication is becoming more and more important in this

increasingly globalized era, especially when scholars worldwide commit themselves to common crucial issues, such as the global environmental (or ecological) crisis. With this background in mind, it is no longer surprising to find that Arnold Berleant has played an active and meaningful role in environmental aesthetics and ecological aesthetics in the Chinese academic community for the past two decades. His works both in English and Chinese translation have attracted a wide readership and stimulated significant achievements.

This paper will focus on a historical aspect and also a theoretical one. The first section will introduce Arnold Berleant's academic activities in China historically, in which Berleant's communications with his Chinese colleagues will be illustrated and introduced by year, including his chief lectures at Chinese institutes, his participation in conferences held in China, his works translated into Chinese, and his ideas introduced into the Chinese academic community. The second section centers on the theoretical aspect, especially on the question of how scholars in China absorb Berleant's environmental aesthetics to construct Chinese ecological aesthetics. Through the discussion, the paper will show the similarities and differences between environmental aesthetics and ecological aesthetics, or ecoaesthetics, which is now a pretty hot topic in both China and the world.

2. Arnold Berleant's activities in China

Berleant's first visit to China occurred in 1992, when Professor Chen Wangheng of Zhejiang University invited him to visit. Berleant presented a copy of his newly published book, *The Aesthetics of Environment*, to Chen as a gift.[1] Two papers on urban aesthetics were sent to Chen by Berleant at the same time. From then on, Chinese scholars began to realize that there was a new international discipline called environmental aesthetics. In 1993, on the invitation of Professor Zhou Laixiang, of Shandong University, Berleant visited Shandong for the first time. His lecture was entitled, "Deconstructing Disney World," and was translated into Chinese. It was later collected in his book, *Living in the Landscape: Toward an Aesthetics of Environment* (1997), as Chapter 3.[2]

The year 2004 was an important one for Berleant's communications with scholars in China. He was invited to take part in an international conference entitled, "Beauty and the Way of Modern Life," held at Wuhan University in May. He took the name of the conference as the title of his paper, "Beauty and the Way of Modern Life." Berleant was invited to co-edit, with Chen Wanghen, a series of books entitled, "A Series of

Translated Books on Environmental Aesthetics.”[3] Berleant selected the chief works for the series, with the Chinese versions published by Hunan Science and Technology Press in 2006.[4] The book series has played a fundamental role for Chinese scholars in forming the basic picture of Western environmental aesthetics. In his general preface to the series, Berleant points out that environmental aesthetics had been an active and important area in the field of aesthetics since the 1960s, and it was also one of the chief themes of 2004 Wuhan University conference. The program of editing and publishing the book series represents a model of international communication from which both Chinese and Western scholars are benefiting academically. In 2004, Zhang Min, a PhD student under the supervision of Chen Wangheng, published a paper to introduce Berleant’s theory into China.[5] This was the first important paper in spreading Berleant’s influence on Chinese scholars. At the same time, one of Berleant’s papers, “The Environment as an Aesthetic Paradigm,” was translated into Chinese and formally published.[6]

In 2007, Berleant took part in an international conference, “Environment, Aesthetic Engagement and Public Sphere: The Stakes in Landscape,” held in Paris, where he gave a speech entitled, “Aesthetic Engagement and Human Environment.” I also took part in the conference and reported the conference and Berleant’s basic ideas to a Chinese audience in a newspaper soon after the conference.[7] In the same year, Berleant’s next book, *Environment and the Arts: Perspectives on Art and Environment*, was translated by Liu Yuedi and published in China.[8] Two more papers were published then in China, in which Berleant’s aesthetics was viewed as an “aesthetics of engagement” and its model was called “emotional participation,” compared with Allen Carlson’s model of “scientific cognition.”[9] The first systematic book introducing Western environmental aesthetics was published in the same year, in which Berleant’s theory occupied a significant place.[10] In sum, Berleant’s basic theory and ideas were becoming increasingly familiar to Chinese scholars.

The year 2008 was an important time for Berleant’s impact on China. Upon my invitation, Arnold Berleant took part in a China National Grant for Social Science Program, directed by me, at Shandong University, entitled “Ecological Aesthetics in the West: Its Theory and Practical Application.” Berleant’s role in the program was to dig out the ecological significance implied in Western environmental aesthetics, mainly in his own works.[11] This may be regarded as a significant turn in Berleant’s academic attention: a turn from environmental aesthetics to

ecological aesthetics. The final achievement of the project is the co-authored book, *Ecological Aesthetics and Ecological Assessment and Planning*, to which Berleant contributed chapter 2, "An Understanding of Environment and Ideas for an Ecological Aesthetics." Berleant's chapter suggests that the idea of environment as an all-inclusive context is central to an ecological understanding. Accordingly, humans are wholly interdependent with natural forces and other organic and inorganic objects. Such relationships apply to urban environment and also to natural environment. Further, introducing an aesthetic dimension into an ecological model is both illuminating and important because the ecological concept of an all-inclusive, interdependent environmental system also exists in the experience of aesthetic engagement.

It is clear that terminology is critical in these matters, and Berleant's chapter reconsiders the basic concepts involved: aesthetics, environment, ecology, and experience. The chapter then discusses two ways of relating these ideas, one logical and the other experiential. It determines that the experiential order of environmental aesthetics leads to the largest perceptual context, the concept of ecology. The implications of this approach are considered for cultural sensibility, urban ecology, aesthetic engagement, and translating ecology into experience. It then concludes by recognizing that the aesthetic experience of environment is the perceptual counterpart of ecology.[12]

Shandong University Research Center for Literary Theory and Aesthetics held an international conference, "Ecological Aesthetics and Environmental Aesthetics in Global Perspective," in 2009. The conference topics suggested were (1) the significance of the emergence of ecological aesthetics in China, and its theoretical focus and future; (2) the theoretical development of environmental aesthetics in the West and its relationship with Western ecological aesthetics; (3) the oriental resources of eco-wisdom and today's construction of an ecological aesthetic conception; (4) the Western resources of eco-wisdom and today's construction of an ecological aesthetic conception; and (5) ecoaesthetics and ecocriticism. Along with Professor Zeng Fanren, Arnold Berleant was invited to co-chair the organizing committee. In his "Opening Remarks," on behalf of international scholars, Berleant stated:

We find ourselves today at an interesting point in world history where the irresistible forces of technology, population growth, and political evolution have combined to produce a world in which no nation stands apart from their influences. Moreover, these are global influences, factors that affect all nations and all people. Human well being, indeed human survival, is bound up

with the operation of these global forces. The question, then, is how can we best understand them, and how can we make decisions and act in the light of such understanding.

In such a condition it is essential that communication takes place. It is essential that such communication does not take the form of acrimonious debate with the goal of hegemony and domination. Rather, the common interest of all nations and all peoples makes it necessary to recognize that our survival demands that we leave the stage of global barbarism. Instead of relying on power politics it is essential to construct a platform on which we accept differences and respect our common needs. If humans are distinguished by the capacity for rationality, which we have congratulated ourselves on having since the time of Aristotle, we are forced to acknowledge that this is the only means by which we can hope to have a future. There is no future for some at the expense of others.

Many things follow from such an understanding, but this is not the place to elaborate on them. Their precondition, however, is open communication, and it is the happy fact that one way that can be promoted is through international conferences like this one. It is gratifying that China, one of the great nations and cultures of the world, has in recent years supported and hosted international conferences with increasing frequency. Such gatherings should cut across disciplines as well as nationalities so that we can develop a broad understanding of the problems that we all confront.

Urban environmental issues are surely one of the major areas of global concern, and this conference may help us come to a better understanding of not only the problems of urban living. We hope that the dialogues generated in this conference will help to develop fresh ideas and ways of thinking that can suggest creative ways of dealing with the problems produced by the growing urbanism throughout the world. We desperately need new thinking and new social and political techniques to ensure the continued survival of the human species and the promotion of the many rich and diverse cultures that have evolved.

Our survival demands that we leave behind the mechanisms of barbarism— force, conquest, subordination, and exploitation that have led to our present precarious condition. Instead, free and open discussion is the key to global communication and the prerequisite of global cooperation. I hope that this conference will stand as a model of such discussion and that in our exchanges we shall share ideas that can serve the interests of us all.[13]

Berleant's "Opening Remarks" to the conference very clearly explained his thoughts about international academic communication and its importance, and may be viewed as a summary of the ideas promoting his activities in China. His presentation for the conference was entitled, "An Aesthetics of

Urbanism," which states that the idea of ecology embraces more than the biological world; it extends to the cultural world, too, including the built environment. At the same time, our understanding of environment has extended to include its human participants, not just their external surroundings. Furthermore, humans engage in their environment perceptually, and this introduces the aesthetic dimension. Shaping the urban landscape requires both an ecological and an aesthetic understanding, and an aesthetic ecological model based on artistic-aesthetic engagement offers a guiding vision for constructing and living in an urbanized environment. Berleant's two close friends, Canadian scholar Allen Carlson and Finnish scholar Yrjö Sepänmaa, also attended the conference. Carlson's presentation is entitled, "Contemporary Environmental Aesthetics and the Requirements of Environmentalism," and Sepänmaa's is, "Cultural Heritage, or the Human Footprint, as Seen from the Aesthetic Point of View."

When I was at Harvard University as a visiting scholar in 2007, Berleant invited me to visit his home in Castine, Maine to conduct an interview. Some key points of the three-day discussion were published as a paper, in Chinese, in 2009.[14] Berleant's interest in ancient Chinese environmental aesthetics was expressed in his Preface to my 2009 book, *A Study of Chinese Environmental Aesthetics*. Berleant argued that environmental disregard and abuse throughout the planet are threats to human health and well-being. The ethical and aesthetic issues that are raised by these conditions are fundamental to understanding environmental values. He continued:

As an ancient and rich civilization, China has a long tradition of environmental awareness and interest as found in painting and poetry, as well as in cultural history and traditions, such as that of the literati. Now it is important to communicate this knowledge both more widely through Chinese educational institutions and also in those of Western countries.

Professor Cheng's book is an important effort in this direction. Indeed, it is especially helpful in the effort to bridge cultures, for he develops his account of traditional Chinese environmental aesthetic thought by presenting it in a framework that is familiar to Western scholars. The better we can understand and benefit from different traditions of environmental thought, the better we shall be able to deal constructively and cooperatively with the environmental problems that confront all parts of the planet.[15]

In 2011, I invited Berleant to co-edit the "Chinese Translation Series on the Frontiers of International Aesthetics," for Henan University Press. The series contains the following eight books in

total: (1) Arnold Berleant, *Aesthetics and Environment: Variations on a Theme* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), translated by the author of this article and Song Yanxia and published in 2013; (2) Glenn Parsons and Allen Carlson, *Functional Beauty* (Oxford, 2008), translated by Xue Fuxing and published in 2015; (3) Nathalie Blanc, *Towards an Environmental Aesthetic* (Quae, 2008), translated by Yin Hang and published in 2015; (4) Wolfgang Iser, *Blickwechsel: Neue Wege der Ästhetik* (Philipp Reclam jun. Verlag GmbH, 2012), translated by Yu Yang; (5) Arnold Berleant, *Sensibility and Sense: The Aesthetic Transformation of the Human World* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2010), translated by Song Yanxia; (6) Arnold Berleant, *Aesthetics beyond the Arts: New and Recent Essays* (Ashgate Pub Co., 2012), translated by Li Sujie; (7) Emily Brady, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy, Aesthetics, Ethics, and Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), translated by Su Bing and published in 2019; and (8) Thomas Leddy, *The Extraordinary in the Ordinary: The Aesthetics of Everyday Life* (Broadview Press, 2012), translated by Zhou Weishan and published in 2019. Books 4, 5 and 6 will be published by the same press soon. Berleant's three books are in the list, which means that most of Berleant's books have been translated into Chinese.

In 2015, Zeng Fanren and I co-organized an important journal, *Seeking Truth*, which launched a special topic about the research – in ecological aesthetics. Berleant was invited to contribute a paper entitled, “Environmental Aesthetics West and East,” in which he states that the future of environmental aesthetics would be enhanced by applying the Chinese understanding of harmony to the relation between Eastern and Western environmental aesthetics. Both orientations contribute important insights and offer a direction for further inquiry. Such a harmony need not submerge the distinctiveness of both orientations but, at the same time, would enhance both. Western environmental aesthetics could continue the specific directions and extensions of inquiry while being informed by a philosophical vision of its larger human and planetary context and implications. Chinese ecological aesthetics could develop specific inquiries from the perspective of its rich traditions and scholarly history. The main emphasis of such a convergence of traditions could center on the value of emphasizing the contextual character of aesthetic experience and appreciation. Such an approach would unify the aesthetic appreciation of the arts and the aesthetic appreciation of environment. And it is in dealing with environment that an ecological aesthetics can exemplify its harmony.[16]

These statements show clearly Berleant's close academic relationship with his Chinese colleagues, which has generated productive effects in China. The most striking point is his impact on Chinese ecological aesthetics, mainly proposed by me and Professor Zeng Fanren of Shandong University, both leading scholars in the field.

Many Western scholars are familiar with environmental aesthetics but not with ecological aesthetics, especially the relevant research works in China. In reality, a lot of papers and books on ecological aesthetics have been published in China since the early 1990s. At least four national conferences, in 2001, 2003, 2004, and 2007, and four international conferences, in 2005, 2009, 2012, and 2015, on ecological aesthetics were held in China during the past two decades. It is impossible and unnecessary to report all the related works. The following section's focus is on the relationship between environmental aesthetics and ecological aesthetics.

3. Environmental aesthetics or ecological aesthetics?

Although there were some papers related to ecological aesthetics in China published in early 1990s, it is reasonable to declare the official birth of ecological aesthetics in China as 1994, the year Li Xinfu's paper, "On Ecological Aesthetics," was published. Li's paper proposes that ecological aesthetics is a newly emerging discipline accompanying the global environmental movement. Its chief task and subject matter are to research "global ecological environmental beauty," and it is the core part of "environmental aesthetics."^[17] Many scholars in China have referenced the paper on many occasions but, unfortunately, almost nobody notices that before his 1994 paper, Li had published an earlier paper, in 1993, entitled, "On Environmental Aesthetics." In this paper, Li proposes that environmental aesthetics researches "the position and role of temporal and spatial environment in subject-object aesthetic activities of communication," and its "role in the emergence, construction and value of beauty." With this kind of content, task, and remarks, he holds that environmental aesthetics is different from aesthetics, in general, and its other branches.^[18] Briefly put, Li Xinfu hopes to examine ecological aesthetics within the framework of environmental aesthetics, taking the former as one intrinsic part of the latter.^[19]

The first book in China with the title "ecological aesthetics," perhaps the first global one, is Xu Hengchun's *Ecological Aesthetics*. Xu takes the "ecological aesthetic conception" as his starting point, then he takes "ecological beauty" as the subject of ecological aesthetics and concentrates on discussing this issue

within the theoretical framework of contemporary China's aesthetics. The second part of his book talks about environmental issues, such as Chapter 4, "The ecological aesthetic shaping of living environment," and Chapter 5, "Ecological environment and urban landscape." [20]

A dramatic development in ecological aesthetics occurred in 2001, when the first Chinese national conference on ecological aesthetics was held in Xi'an, Shanxi Province. The most noticeable production of the conference was Zeng Fanren's paper, "Ecological Aesthetics: A New Aesthetic Conception of Ecological Existence within the Context of Postmodernism," which was published soon after the conference. The paper points out that there are two understandings of ecological aesthetics. Ecological aesthetics, in the narrower sense, is a study of "ecological aesthetic relationship between human and natural environment." In the wider sense, ecological aesthetics "includes three kinds of ecological aesthetic relationships among human and nature, human and society, human and himself, which is an aesthetic conception of existence in accordance with ecological law." Zeng Fanren prefers the wider sense. [21] Based on this paper, Zeng Fanren published a series of papers to develop his theory of ecological aesthetics. Briefly speaking, he considers ecological aesthetics as an aesthetic conception of "ecological existence" under the post-modern condition, taking "ecological civilization" as its social background. He defines ecological aesthetics several times in his papers. The one below may act as the representative definition:

Taking the aesthetic relationship between man and nature as its starting point, dealing with multiple aesthetic relationships between man and nature, society and himself, ecological aesthetics is an aesthetic conception of today's theory of existence containing ecological dimension. [22]

Without any doubt, – China ecological aesthetics, in the narrower sense, is equal comparable to the early stage of Western environmental aesthetics, or the most important part of it, the aesthetics of nature. Both of them are a study of "ecological aesthetic relationship between human and natural environment." Zeng Fanren's unique contribution is his emphasis on the conception of ecological existence, a philosophical thought absorbed from the German philosopher Martin Heidegger, which is taken as the philosophical foundation of Zeng Fanren's ecological aesthetics. In this sense, ecological aesthetics is a more comprehensive concept, in which environmental aesthetics plays an important role as a part. But it is well known that environment includes not only the natural one but also the built one, such as the increasingly

overspreading urban environments. So environmental aesthetics consists at least of aesthetics of nature and urban aesthetics.[23] It is not easy to include urban aesthetics into Zeng Fanren's above definition.

Although Berleant used the term 'ecology' as early as 1978 in his paper, "Aesthetic Paradigms for an Urban Ecology,"[24] his works have concentrated on environmental aesthetics during recent decades, not on ecological aesthetics. But, interestingly, when Zeng Fanren tries to construct his theoretical system of ecological aesthetics, he adopts Berleant's key concept of engagement as the sixth category of seven basic categories.

Based on the philosophical concept of ecological existence as its foundation, Zeng Fanren's main academic purpose is to overcome the traditional Western dualism of subject-object by rediscovering the traditional Chinese thought of "the Union of Heaven and Human" and giving it a contemporary shape. Zeng's paper clearly declares that the aesthetics of engagement is proposed by Berleant. It quotes the key idea of engagement from Berleant's *The Aesthetics of Environment* (2006 Chinese version) and *Environment and the Arts: Perspectives on Art and Environment* (2007 Chinese version). Zeng argues:

Originally, the "aesthetics of engagement" is the basic character of today's aesthetics of existentialism, because today's aesthetics of existentialism is a breakthrough of traditional aesthetic theories with a dualism of subject-object. Shared with it together, today's ecological aesthetics is a breakthrough of Kant's aesthetics of disinterestedness, which must result in the contradiction between human and nature.[25]

It is well known that Berleant himself calls environmental aesthetics "an aesthetics of engagement." His approach to environmental aesthetics considers humans as active contributors in a context that includes and is continuous with the participant. A person is the perceptual center, both as an individual and as a member of a socio-cultural group, of his or her life-world whose horizons are shaped by geographical and cultural factors.[26]

The key word, 'engagement,' appears early in Berleant's writings. The earliest occurrence is in a paper, "The Experience and Criticism of Art," published in the *Sarah Lawrence Journal* in 1967, that became the final chapter of his first book, *The Aesthetic Field: A Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience* (C.C. Thomas, 1970). 'Engagement' appears a number of times in chapters 4 and 6. In this book, he wrote in several places about "appreciative engagement." In fact, the idea of aesthetic engagement was the motivating force behind the concept of the

aesthetic field that he developed in that book and that provides the underlying theoretical framework for all his writing that followed.

The expression 'aesthetic engagement' appears frequently in his book, *Art and Engagement* (Temple University Press, 1991). It is the central theme that he develops at length, theoretically and in relation to a number of different arts. At that time, Berleant began writing about engagement as an alternative to disinterestedness. He introduced the expression 'aesthetic engagement' in order to more explicitly specify the kind of experience he has tried to describe and the characteristic context in which it occurs. Berleant thinks that aesthetic engagement is the aesthetic appreciation of environmental situations. In fact, environmental experience is one of the clearest and most accessible examples of experience, best described by the expression 'aesthetic engagement.' Among the arts, such experience is most characteristic and obvious in appreciating film and fiction and, perhaps to a lesser apparent extent, dance. But in experiencing environment aesthetically, engagement is widely accessible and it occurs outside of an artistic context, which leads to the necessity of expanding the aesthetic to include the wide range of environmental situations. Thus, its theoretical implications are enormous.

Berleant's academic effort has been to recast traditional aesthetics in a way that absorbs its insights within a larger scope that replaces disinterestedness with engagement, separation with continuity, and the constriction of aesthetic value with its pervasiveness. His intent is rather to return art and the aesthetic to the integral place it has occupied in most human cultures throughout most of human history, while preserving the acute awareness of aesthetic value that this so-called modern aesthetics of disinterestedness has had such a hand in developing. His intent in revising aesthetic theory was in response to appreciative experience that the tradition would not allow. In summary, an aesthetics of engagement is more permissive, encompassing both the art canon and its vanguard.

[27]

With the above introduction, we may find that Zeng's ecological aesthetics has absorbed Berleant's key notion mainly from his books on environmental aesthetics. But the further question is: What is the difference between the two kinds of aesthetics, the ecological one and the environmental one? As for this point, Zeng has his own understanding and discussion. His basic points are: 1) both are a breakthrough in the traditional aesthetic conception, "aesthetics is the philosophy of art," and

they ought to be unified as an alliance; there is no need to draw a very strict boundary; and Western environmental aesthetics has become an important reference and resources for the construction and development of Chinese ecological aesthetics; 2) the dominant idea implied in the Western environmental aesthetics, "ecocentrism," and some works were affected by the limits of anthropocentrism, whereas the theoretical base of the Chinese ecological aesthetics is eco-humanism and eco-holism. [28]

It is quite meaningful to note that while he was criticizing some Western scholars' environmental aesthetics, with an obvious tendency towards anthropocentrism, Zeng praised Berleant's environmental aesthetics and took it as a "proposal of a new natural ecological aesthetic conception." [29] He quoted the following section from Berleant's *The Aesthetics of Environment*, in its Chinese version, published in 2006, to justify his statement:

Environment, in the large sense, is not a domain separate and distinct from ourselves as inhabitants. We are rather continuous with environment, an integral part of its process. The usual tradition in aesthetics has difficulty with this, for it claims that appreciation requires a receptive, contemplative attitude. Such an attitude befits an observer, but nature admits of no such observer, for nothing can remain apart and uninvolved. [30]

In his interpretation of this section, what attracted Zeng most is Berleant's conception of environment. The Chinese translation called it "the large view of environment," and translated the relevant sentences as literally "there is nothing outside nature." Nature, in Berleant's book, is called "natural system" by Zeng. He clearly argued that both the opinion that "there is nothing outside nature" and the "aesthetics of engagement" could function as important resources and reference for the construction of Chinese ecological aesthetics. [31] In sum, Berleant's environmental aesthetics is viewed as ecological aesthetics by Zeng, to some extent.

My own theoretical train of thought of in developing ecological aesthetics is to consult the more mature discipline of environmental aesthetics. I think that the objective of the study of environmental aesthetics is environmental appreciation, which is clearly different from art appreciation. I critique and transcend the Hegelian philosophy of art, which views an artifact as an object of study. For scholars of environmental aesthetics, the main issue concerns the distinction and relationship between environmental appreciation and art appreciation. As for the study of ecological aesthetics, it concerns how to appreciate aesthetically and ecologically. While it disapproves of

traditional aesthetic appreciation that is not ecologically oriented or without an ecological awareness, it does not necessarily oppose a form of aesthetic enjoyment based on artistic form. The argument of environmental aesthetics mainly centers on the issue of the aesthetic object: Is the object for the study of aesthetics an artwork or the environment? By the same token, the argument of ecological aesthetics concentrates on the issue of the aesthetic way (or manner) and asks how to engage an aesthetic activity governed by an ecological awareness. In other words, it asks how to form an ecological aesthetic way (or manner) by letting ecological awareness play a leading role in human aesthetic activity and experience. So, my major argument is that ecological aesthetics is different from non-ecological oriented aesthetics, or modern aesthetics. It is a new type of aesthetic way and concept, responding to global ecological crises, using ecological ethics as its theoretical foundation, relying on ecological knowledge to inspire imagination and elicit emotions, and aiming at conquering conventional, anthropocentric aesthetic preferences. I assert that

The first keystone of ecological aesthetics is that it completely abandons a conventional aesthetics that is predicated on an opposition between humanity and the world. Subsequently it is replaced by the model of aesthetic engagement that promotes the idea of the unity of humans and the world.[32]

By taking Berleant's aesthetics of engagement as my theoretical support, I argue that only through an aesthetics of engagement that transcends the subject-object opposition can an intimate relationship between humans and the world be established, through which to experience the interconnectedness of all life explained by ecology and deep ecology. I even declare that this is the fundamental contribution of aesthetic activity to ecological awareness.

The major reason for both Zeng Fanren's and my own interest in Berleant's aesthetics of engagement is one key point, the criticism and objection of the model of the modern philosophical dualism of subject-object that is mainly proposed by Berleant's criticism of Kant's notion of disinterestedness. So, both of them reinterpreted Berleant's ideas from the perspective of ecological awareness so as to construct their own ecological aesthetics. However, Berleant doesn't agree with this new development in China because he thinks that ecological aesthetics should focus on aesthetic issues to guarantee that it is really a new aesthetics, not an ideology. He hopes to see more evidence of the application of ecological aesthetics to questions and issues in aesthetics elsewhere. So, Berleant clearly criticizes

my own ecological aesthetics in his 2016 paper. Berleant asserts that

Unfortunately, Cheng is guided here by ecological and ethical values rather than by aesthetic ones.... Indeed, it seems that by emphasizing biodiversity and ecosystem health as principles of ecological value, Cheng has entirely overlooked the aesthetic..... This critique of the important theories developed by Koh and Cheng can help us identify the conceptual errors and methodological misapplications that occur in some recent efforts to develop an ecological aesthetics. None of these values—ethical, scientific, or aesthetic—is necessarily dominant in any particular environmental complex.[33]

As a response to Berleant's criticism, I separately published two papers, in 2016 and 2017, to explain my approach. The first one, "Ecological Aesthetics: The Rational Connections between Ecology and Aesthetics," asserts that ecological aesthetics defines its subject matter as ecological aesthetic appreciation aiming to answer a core question, how to appreciate aesthetically and ecologically? So, aesthetic issue is still the core of my work. There are six ways to link ecology to aesthetics: 1) the ecological crisis revealed by ecology and the ecological awareness stimulated by ecology promotes the ecological transformation of the theme of aesthetics and appearance of ecological aesthetics; 2) ecological knowledge offered by ecology has a great impact on aesthetic experience and even may change aesthetic objects and reshape aesthetic experience; 3) ecology changed human ethical ideas and promotes the birth of ecological ethics, which reshapes the aesthetic attitude and experience; 4) the ecological value revealed by ecology leads the appreciator to view a thing's aesthetic value from the new perspective of ecological value, which promotes the reflection and critique of aesthetic destructive powers shaped by the dominant trend of modern aesthetic appreciation; 5) the keyword of ecology, 'ecosystem,' reveals that human nature is ecological existence and the source of life is ecosystem's function and virtue of creating life, which offers a new ontology, that is, an ecological ontology, for ecological aesthetics;[34] and 6) the research paradigm of organism-environment established by ecology transcends the dualism of mind-body and enlightens a new framework of trialism of mind-body-environment for ecological aesthetics. So, ecological aesthetics can be defined briefly as "aesthetics based on ecology." [35]

My 2017 paper was invited by the Slovak journal named *ESPES*, which organized a special topic, "Aesthetics Between Art and Society: Perspectives of Arnold Berleant's Postkantian Aesthetics of Engagement," edited by Aleksandra Łukaszewicz Alcaraz. I

assert that in order to develop environmental aesthetics, Berleant takes environment as an aesthetic paradigm. His understanding of the nature of environment decides the nature of his aesthetics of engagement, which emphasizes the experiential continuity and rejects the separation between subject and object. Based on these ideas, he criticizes Kant's core idea of disinterestedness in his series of books. Berleant's environmental aesthetics has a significant impact on ecological aesthetics in China. However, Berleant's criticism of Kant's core idea of disinterestedness is a misunderstanding, and his concept of environment is not fundamentally sound. The future of ecological aesthetics is taking ecosystem, not environment, as a new aesthetic paradigm.

Briefly speaking, the paper's thread of thought is to reflect on Berleant's critique of Kant's idea of disinterestedness, from the perspective of Chinese ecoaesthetics. The purpose of the paper is to search for new directions for the future development of ecoaesthetics based on this reflection. I believe that ecoaesthetics is different from environmental aesthetics because it takes ecosystem, not environment, as its aesthetic paradigm. 'Ecosystem' is one of the keywords in ecology as a branch of science. It shows that humans are only one species in the whole system. Without the healthy system as precondition, it is impossible for human beings to emerge, to exist, and to survive. In this sense, ecological aesthetics is a new type of aesthetics facing the global ecological crisis. If we say that saving the global ecological crisis is primarily an ethical consideration, we can say that ecological aesthetics should reflect the close relationship between ethics and aesthetics, between ethical norms and aesthetic norms, and between ethical judgment and aesthetic judgment. To some extent, ecological aesthetics is an ethical-aesthetic theory with what Cheng calls the "ecological aesthetic appreciation" as its core.[36]

4. Conclusion

Arnold Berleant's significant influence on Chinese ecological aesthetics is ongoing with many papers and books and dissertations devoted to his work. What should be pointed out here are three facts. The first is that not all of Berleant's books have been translated into Chinese, and the qualities of some Chinese translations are questionable. So, a systematic and comprehensive picture of his work has not been researched and constructed in China. Second, not all Chinese scholars can read his books in English directly, and his key term of 'engagement' has been translated into Chinese in four different ways, such as *Jiehe* (结合), *jieru* (介入), *canyu* (参与), and *jiaorong* (交融). It is

easy to imagine that various translations may quite easily cause confusion and misunderstanding for Chinese readers. Finally, some scholars strongly criticize Berleant's environmental aesthetics, declaring that "his so-called anti-anthropocentric environmental aesthetics proves only to be a beautiful illusion, which is dominated by the hidden anthropocentric spirit. His ideal construction of urban view shows the nature of anthropocentrism of his environmental aesthetics." [37] This point should be carefully analyzed with a more comprehensive grasp of Berleant's whole works.

This paper's aim is to analyze the similarities and differences between Western environmental aesthetics and Chinese ecological aesthetics. It proposes that Berleant's environmental aesthetics can be interpreted from the perspective of ecology and viewed as an important theoretical resource for the construction of Chinese ecological aesthetics. Furthermore, the paper asserts that Berleant's environmental aesthetics can even be viewed as a part of the whole picture of ecological aesthetics because it concentrates on humankind's aesthetic appreciation of environments, which expresses the human aesthetic relationship with environment and fits the following definition of ecology perfectly: the study of the relationships between organisms and their environment.

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and Art Press, 2020), *A History of Ecological Aesthetics in the West* (Jinan: Shandong Literary and Art Press, 2020), and *An Introduction to Environmental Aesthetics* (Jinan: Shandong Literary and Art Press, 2020). He translated Arnold Berleant's *Aesthetics and Environment: Variations on a Theme* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005) into Chinese, published by Henan University Press in 2013. His forthcoming book is *An Ecological Interpretation and Reconstruction of Kant's Aesthetic Theory*.

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Endnotes

[1] Arnold Berleant, *The Aesthetics of Environment* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992).

[2] The paper was translated into Chinese by Niu Hongbao and published in the *Journal of Literature, History, and Philosophy*, 2 (1994), 97-103. Arnold Berleant, *Living in the Landscape: Toward an Aesthetics of Environment* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997). I met Berleant for the first time when he was a PhD student at Shandong University.

[3] Chen Wangheng moved to Wuhan University from Zhejiang University in 1994.

[4] The series consists five books in total, which are Arnold Berleant's *The Aesthetics of Environment* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992) and *Living in the Landscape: Toward an Aesthetics of Environment* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997), Yrjö Sepänmaa's *The Beauty of Environment: A General Model for Environmental Aesthetics* (Environmental Ethics Books, 1993), Allen Carlson's *Nature and Landscape* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008) and Michel Conan's *The Crazannes Quarries by Bernard Lassus: An Essay Analyzing the Creation of a Landscape* (Washington, D.C.: Spacemaker, 2004).

[5] Zhang Min, "Arnold Berleant's Construction of Environment Aesthetics," *Literature & Art Studies*, 4 (2004), 90-94.

[6] Arnold Berleant, "The Environment as an Aesthetic Paradigm," *Dialectics and Humanism*, XV, 1-2 (1988), 95-106.

Translated by Li Dongni, with the revised title "Environment: Challenges to Aesthetics," published in *Jiangxi Social Sciences*, 5 (2004), 204-208.

[7] Cheng Xiangzhan, "Global Scholars Are Concerned about Landscape Aesthetics," *Social Sciences Weekly*, May 31, 2007. Berleant's conference paper was developed into a new version entitled, "Aesthetic Ecology and the Urban Environment," translated into Chinese by Cheng Xiangzhan and published in *Academic Monthly*, 3 (2008), 21-26.

[8] Arnold Berleant, ed., *Environment and the Arts: Perspectives on Art and Environment* (Ashgate, 2002). Its Chinese version was published by Chongqing Press in 2007. The introduction of the book was translated into Chinese as an independent paper by Liu Yuedi, with the title, "The Development of Environmental Aesthetics and its New Issues," published in *World Philosophy*, 3 (2008), 22-36.

[9] Wu Xiaotao, "Aesthetics of Engagement and Its Critique of the Idea of Disinterestedness," *Beauty and Age*, 12 (2007): 32-34. Liu Qingping and Wang Xi, "Environmental Appreciation: Scientific Cognition, or Emotional Participation?" *The Journal of Zhengzhou University*, 5 (2007), 84-87.

[10] Yang Ping, *The Genealogy of Environmental Aesthetics* (Nanjing: Nanjing Press, 2007).

[11] The other two members of the program were Paul Gobster, USDA Forest Service, Northern Research Station, US; and Xinhao Wang, School of Planning, University of Cincinnati, US.

[12] Arnold Berleant, "An Understanding of Environment and Ideas for an Ecological Aesthetics," in eds. Cheng Xiangzhan, Arnold Berleant, Paul Gobster, Xinhao Wang, *Ecological Aesthetics and Ecological Assessment and Planning* (Zhengzhou: Henan People's Press, 2014), pp. 54-72.

[13] Arnold Berleant, "Opening Remarks" for International Conference on "Ecological Aesthetics and Environmental Aesthetics in Global Perspective," Shandong University, October, 2009.

[14] Cheng Xiangzhan and Arnold Berleant, "From Environmental Aesthetics to Urban Aesthetics," *Academic Research*, 5 (2009), 138-144.

[15] Cheng Xiangzhan, ed., *A Study of Chinese Environmental Aesthetics* (Zhengzhou: Henan People's Press, 2009).

[16] Arnold Berleant, "Environmental Aesthetics West and East," *Seeking Truth*, 1 (2015), 111-114. This paper is translated into

Chinese by Zhao Qing.

[17] Li Xinfu, "On Ecological Aesthetics," *Nanjing Social Sciences*, 12 (1994), 53-58.

[18] Li Xinfu, "On Environmental Aesthetics," *The Journal of Humanities*, 1 (1993), 104-112.

[19] It is very interesting to take some comparison between China and the West at this point. Western ecological aesthetics emerged in 1970s. The first paper is Joseph W. Meeker, "Notes Toward an Ecological Esthetic," *Canadian Fiction Magazine*, 2 (1972), 4-15.

[20] Xu Hengchun, *Ecological Aesthetics* (Xian: Shanxi People's Education Press), 2000.

[21] Zeng Fanren, "Ecological Aesthetics: A New Aesthetic Conception of Ecological Existence within the Context of Postmodernism," *The Journal of Shanxi Normal University*, 3 (2002), 5-16. Its English version can be found in Zeng Jun and Cheng Xiangzhan, eds., *Critical Theory*, 1.2 (2017), 8-31.

[22] Zeng Fanren, "A Conception of Ecological Aesthetics in the Perspective of Today's Ecological Civilization," *Literary Review*, 4 (2005), 48-55. Also see, Zeng Fanren, *Collected Articles on Aesthetics of Ecological Existence* (Changchun: Jilin People's Press, 2003, 2009).

[23] See Cheng Xiangzhan and Arnold Berleant, "From Environmental Aesthetics to Urban Aesthetics," *Academic Research*, 5 (2009), 138-144.

[24] Arnold Berleant, "Aesthetic Paradigms for an Urban Ecology," *Diogenes*, 103 (Fall 1978), 1-28.

[25] Zeng Fanren, "The Basic Categories of Contemporary Ecological Aesthetics," *Literature & Art Studies*, 4 (2007), 15-22.

[26] The resource of the introduction below, see Cheng Xiangzhan and Arnold Berleant, "From Environmental Aesthetics to Urban Aesthetics," *Academic Research*, 5 (2009), 138-144.

[27] Berleant's *Art and Engagement* (Temple University Press, 1991) has been translated into Chinese by Li Yuanyuan and published by The Commercial Press in 2013.

[28] Zeng Fanren, "A Review on the Relationship between Ecological Aesthetics and Environmental Aesthetics," *Exploration and Free Views*, 9 (2008), 61-63.

[29] *Ibid.*

[30] Arnold Berleant, *The Aesthetics of Environment* (Changsha: Hunan Science and Technology Press, 2006), p.12. See also this book's original English version, *The Aesthetics of Environment* (Temple University Press, 1992), pp.11-12. In order to prepare for the international conference on "Ecological Aesthetics and Environmental Aesthetics in Global Perspective," held by Shandong University in October, 2009, Zeng Fanren asked someone to translate his "A Review on the Relationship between Ecological Aesthetics and Environmental Aesthetics" into English. The translator did not check Berleant's original English book and translated Berleant's above section based on its Chinese translation, which contains a very interesting process of "English-Chinese-English." It is very interesting to take some comparison between the two versions. The Chinese one is as below:

"A comprehensive concept of the environment thinks that there is no separation between the environment and us, the so-called humankind. We are unified with the environment as an indispensable part for the environmental development. The traditional aesthetics is unable to understand this point thoroughly, for it claims that in the aesthetic appreciation it is necessary for the subject to have the keen sensory perception and the contemplative attitude. This attitude is helpful for the appreciator but not admitted by the nature, for there is nothing else outside the nature, and everything is contained in the nature."

[31] Zeng Fanren, "A Review on the Relationship between Ecological Aesthetics and Environmental Aesthetics," *Exploration and Free Views*, 9 (2008), 61-63. To my personal understanding, although the translation is not a misunderstanding, it is too strong.

[32] Cheng Xiangzhan, Arnold Berleant, Paul Gobster, Xinhao Wang, *Ecological Aesthetics and Ecological Assessment and Planning* (Zhengzhou: Henan People's Press, 2013), p.86.

[33] Arnold Berleant, "Some Questions for Ecological Aesthetics," *Environmental Philosophy*, 4 (Spring 2016), 123-135. This paper is translated into Chinese by Li Sujie and published in *Dong Yue Tribune*, 4 (2016,), 7-13.

[34] "Ecological Ontology" is a new phrase, which can be found in the following paper: Barry Smith, "Objects and Their Environments: From Aristotle to Ecological Ontology," in Andrew Frank, Jonathan Raper and Jean-Paul Cheylan, eds., *The Life and Motion of SocioEconomic Units* (GISDATA 8) (London: Taylor and Francis, 200 1), pp. 79-97.

[35] Cheng Xiangzhan, "Ecological Aesthetics: The Rational Connections between Ecology and Aesthetics," *Exploration and Free Views*, 12 (2016), 52-57. The paper is a Chinese one without English version.

[36] Cheng Xiangzhan, "Some Critical Reflections on Berleantian Critique of Kantian Aesthetics from the Perspective of Eco-aesthetics," *Espes*, 6, 2 (December 2017), 30-38. This paper can be reached at <http://www.casopisespes.sk/>

[37] Qiao Yanbing, "A Beautiful Illusion: On the Anthropocentrism of Arnold Berleant's Environmental Aesthetics," *The Journal of Foshan University of Science and Technology*, 5 (2009), 6-11.

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