＜托斯卡尼艷陽下＞書中對地方與自我的追求

黃永裕 / Yung-yu Huang

淡江大學英國語文學系 副教授

Department of English, Tamkang University

【摘要】

面對工作壓力和婚姻挫折，如何找到安身立命的處所，正是＜托斯卡尼艷陽下＞描繪的過程。梅耶思是詩人作家兼大學教授，住在舊金山，卻到義大利鄉下買一棟百年古厝，看似突發奇想，實爲一段療傷止痛的追尋過程；在文明與荒野的中間地帶，過著梭羅式的邊界生活。本文先從生態批評與道家思想的角度，釐清在地感、邊界生活和人與自然之關係，探討作者如何跳脫個人困境，追求地方歸屬感與自我定位，以中庸之道進入天、地、人合一的生活境界。

【關鍵詞】

在地感、自我、生態批評、邊界生活、平衡、天地人合一

【Abstract】

How an urbanite responds to the impact of stressful workload and marital setback is portrayed in Frances Mayes's *Under the Tuscan Sun* as a therapeutic process for the rehabilitation of personal integrity. As a professor and writer living in San Francisco, Mayes intends to buy a century-old house in Italy. It proves to be a fruitful venture for her to achieve equilibrium between mind and body by living a border life in the middle landscape between civilization and wilderness. With a basic account of the concepts of sense of place, border life, and man-nature relationship, this paper explores the process of Mayes's quest for place and identity.

【Keywords】

sense of place, identity, ecocriticism, border life, equilibrium, unification of heaven, earth and humanity

I. Introduction

Right at the outset of *Under the Tuscan Sun* the narrator makes a straightforward announcement, "I am about to buy a house in a foreign country. A house with the beautiful name of Bramasole.… Bramasole: from *bramare*, to yearn for, and *sole*, sun: something that yearns for the sun, and yes, I do" (5). Such a beginning sounds like an inner voice uttered from the dark corner of a suppressed heart; it also conveys a ring of heartfelt invitation to the reader to participate in a fabulous journey to an exotic country. This is the strategy adopted by Frances Mayes, the writer and supposedly the narrator of the memoir. As a professor and writer living in San Francisco, Mayes successfully stirs up our curiosity about her whim of buying a house in Italy. We soon find it irresistible to join the writer to uncover the mystery of an ancient house and share the sensuous feasts of living a simple life close to nature.

Part of the reason why Mayes yearns for a house in Italy lies in the balance she can achieve to rejuvenate her hectic life in America. "Spending time here," as she puts it, "lets me escape the craziness and violence and downright surreal aspects of America and my own overscheduled life" (93). On the other hand, that she has just ended a long marriage and is establishing a new relationship may account for the urgency of her "house quest." She asserts that "the house is a metaphor for the self" and that she would manage to forge a "new identity" (17). She remembers dreaming over Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*, and the philosopher's words are echoing in her ears when she writes about "the house as a 'tool for analysis' of the human soul" (103). Like most southerners of the United States, Mayes is convinced that they have a gene "that causes them to believe that place is fate. Where you are is who you are…. Never casual, the choice of place is the choice of something you crave" (104). It is this deep-rooted sense of place that permeates throughout the book and invites our investigation from the perspectives of ecocriticism and Chinese Daoism.

This paper starts with a basic account of ecocritical and Daoist discourses on sense of place and human-nature relationship. Some major ideas—Henry David Thoreau's border life, Yi-Fu Tuan's middle landscape, and Andy Fisher's experiential approach--will serve as the critical framework for our elaboration of Mayes's determination to spend four years on the renovation of a century-old house in the

countryside of Italy. I will examine what factors lead Mayes to buy a house in Italy, why the house restoration project is intertwined with her quest for place and identity, and how she exemplifies Fisher's experiential approach to the solution of her existential plight. The conclusion will be reached with the completion of her quest, along with her final recognition of a proper stance of living.

II. Thoreau's Sense of Place and Border Life

Many readers, especially those working hard to scrape a living in the city, are fascinated by the simple life described in Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*. Some may start dreaming about the feasibility of personally experiencing Thoreau's way of life, while others may raise the frequently asked question about why he decided to live in the woods. In the chapter titled "Where I Lived, and What I Lived For," Thoreau explicitly gives the answer: "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived" (67). On the surface, that Thoreau attempted to live purposefully at Walden Pond proved to be a fruitful experiment with the publication of *Walden* and other essays on his life during that period. But throughout his writing Thoreau endeavors to reiterate the significance and possibility of living an authentic life, a lifestyle that focuses more on spiritual elevation than on material satisfaction. This attitude is similar to one of the fundamental concerns of existentialists—what it means to exist. Moreover, Thoreau never hesitates to reveal his sense of place and his insistence on the pursuit of a simple and comfortable way of life.

A sense of place, according to Neil Evernden, is "a sense of knowing and of being a part of a particular place. There's nothing very mysterious about this—it's just what it feels like to be home, to experience a sense of light or of smell that is inexplicably 'right'" (100). Yi-Fu Tuan also asserts that "[p]laces are centers of felt value where biological needs, such as those for food, water, rest, and procreation, are satisfied" (1977: 4). Tuan's description refers to one's experiential accumulation of intimate and progressive encounters with the familiar places where he or she has resided since childhood. Similarly, believing that "there is some connection between the individual and his particular place," Evernden cites Paul Shepard's idea in these words—"knowing who you are is impossible without knowing where you are from"

(101). Both Tuan and Evernden point out the intrinsic close tie between the context of place and the formation of identity. In other words, the external landscape of place plays a crucial role in the forging of one's internal mindscape. This interrelatedness between place and identity serves as the cornerstone for our analysis of the experimental choices of Thoreau and Mayes.

Walden Pond serves for Thoreau as a temporary retreat from society; living there enables him to enjoy a close contact with nature. In addition to living a deliberate life, he strives to achieve a state of equilibrium between the worldly concerns of human civilization and the pristine freedom of natural wildness. His personal contact with nature, together with his enunciation of sense of place, is precisely delineated in "Walking." The beginning sentence of the essay forcefully declares his purpose, "I wish to speak a word for Nature, for absolute freedom and wildness, as contrasted with a freedom and culture merely civil" (592). Thoreau further illuminates his belief that he cannot preserve his health and spirits unless he spends four hours a day "sauntering through the woods and over the hills and fields absolutely free from all worldly engagements" (594-95). Only in the afternoon walk can he "forget [his] morning occupation, and [his] obligations to society" (597). The next step is to determine where he will walk. "I will walk into the southwest or west. Eastward I go only by force; but westward I go free. . . . Let me live where I will, on this side is the city, on that the wilderness, and ever I am leaving the city more and more, and withdrawing into the wilderness" (603). Having identified the West with the Wild, Thoreau further asserts "that in Wildness is the preservation of the world" (609). This statement advocates the importance of freedom and wildness which can be felt only by sauntering from the city into the wilderness.

But what actually constitutes the boundary of the city and the wilderness? Roderick Nash provides a seemingly clear-cut proposition:

> A possible solution to the problem is the conception of a spectrum of conditions or environments ranging from the purely wild on the one end to the purely civilized on the other—from the primeval to the paved. . . . In the middle portions of the spectrum is the rural or pastoral environment (the ploughed) that represents a balance of the forces of nature and man. (6)

Nash's explanation serves as a simple standpoint for us to understand Thoreau's

choice of building a cabin on the shore of Walden Pond as a residence and his attempt to strike a balance between society and nature. It is definitely mistaken to see Thoreau as a hermit living in seclusion at Walden and isolating himself from society. When he writes that "all good things are wild and free" (Thoreau 1977: 618), he intends to praise the "vast, savage, howling mother of ours, Nature, lying all around, with such beauty, and such affection for her children, as the leopard; and yet we are so early weaned from her breast to society, to that culture which is exclusively an interaction of man on man" (621). Walking in the wilderness is the most direct and effective way for him to be immersed in the beauty and vitality of nature, which is crucial to his physical health and spiritual integrity. But in the end he is obliged to return to society to carry out his human obligations. It is in this sense that Thoreau confesses, "with regard to Nature I live a sort of border life, on the confines of a world into which I make occasional and transient forays only" (625). Thoreau's self-confession of living a sort of border life can be further expounded from Yi-Fu Tuan's viewpoints about escapism and middle landscape.

Tuan asserts that escapism is human and inescapable because "[m]uch of the human story can be told as one of migration [which] is clearly a type of escape" (1998: 8-9). Primitive people migrate to secure and fertile places to escape from the danger and scarcity of wild nature, while modern people sometimes seek to go back to nature to escape from the intricacy and stress of city. However, Tuan agrees with other environmental theorists on the widely accepted viewpoint that nature is culturally defined or humanly constituted. "What we wish to escape to is not 'nature' but an alluring conception of it." As a result, "'escape to nature' is a cultural undertaking, a covered-up attempt to 'escape from nature'" (1998: 19). The issue of nature/culture dichotomy is merely our mental/cultural construct. Tuan thus concludes, "Between the big artificial city at one extreme and wild nature at the other, humans have created 'middle landscapes' that, at various times and in different parts of the world, have been acclaimed the model human habitat" (1998: 24). This depiction rings similar to Nash's description about the middle portion of the spectrum and fits perfectly well with our discussions of both Thoreau and Mayes.

In the case of Thoreau, as we have pointed out, he takes a wise position to live

in the middle ground described by Nash. "Occasionally he sought the wilds for nourishment and the opportunity to exercise his savage instinct, but at the same time he knew he could not remain permanently. . . . For an optimum existence Thoreau believed, one should alternate between wilderness and civilization" (93). Schneider also holds that "a walk in the woods for Thoreau is not a rejection of civilization but a religious exercise by which the walker is enabled to return to society" (49). This idea is clearly expressed by Thoreau when he writes that "the natural remedy is to be found in the proportion which the night bears to the day, the winter to the summer, thought to experience" (Thoreau 1977: 517). In a word, Thoreau seems to propose that it is essential to keep contact with both ends of the spectrum, wilderness and civilization, in order to achieve the state of equilibrium between body and mind. This strategy proved to be effective and beneficial for Thoreau one hundred and fifty years ago; it is now equally feasible for people living in the hustle and bustle of urban life, especially Frances Mayes.

Spiritually, Thoreau attempts to retain his inner balance either by his daily walking through the woods or his deliberate living at Walden Pond. This attitude toward living is adopted as a wise practice for survival, but, taken a step further, it can be seen as a revolt against the conventional Western concept of man-nature relationship. Positioned above animals and plants at the Great Chain of Being, man is entitled to the exploitation of all natural resources on earth. This religious belief, according to Carolyn Merchant, is forcefully advocated by the seventeenth-century philosophy and science with emphasis on God's will and mechanism. Merchant observes that "[t]he new image of nature as a female to be controlled and dissected through experiment legitimated the exploitation of natural resources" (189). The organic world view of nature with intrinsic value in the sixteenth century made way for the mechanical world view of nature with instrumental value only. "The rise of mechanism," adds Merchant, "laid the foundation for a new synthesis of the cosmos, society, and the human being…[and] rendered nature effectively dead, inert, and manipulable from without" (214). Besides, Lynn White Jr. attributes the current ecological crisis to the Christian dogma of creation by saying that "Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion" (9), which entitles man to the privilege of "the exploiter of nature" (8). This egoistic and instrumental viewpoint manifests man's

power and dominion over nature; it also gravitates toward a confrontation of man/nature dualism. Man assumes the status of the master, as Val Plumwood has written, and treats nature as a place of resources in the service of his needs. Plumwood further expounds this dualistic human-nature relationship as follows:

> The dominant traditions of western culture have viewed relationship to plants, rivers, animals, places and ecosystems as entirely instrumental, and defined human relations to others in nature in the same terms as the egoist defines his relation to others—humans stand apart from a nature conceived only as a means to satisfy essentially self-contained human interests. (147)

The above statements of Merchant, White, and Plumwood can be reduced to one fact that man/nature, or self/other, dualism accounts for man's unceasing exploitation of natural resources and his confronting position to nature. Staying apart from nature, human beings are indulged in the smug satisfaction of being able to carve out ways of living from the intricacies of society. Only when they are hurt by or confronted with personal predicament, do they go back to nature for temporary consolation or inspiration. This is the traditional and utilitarian relationship with nature which Thoreau endeavors to replace with a closer and more reciprocal one.

III. The Daoist Concept of Nature—Heaven, Earth, and Humanity

Unlike the Western dualistic relationship with nature, traditional Chinese philosophy holds that humanity comes from nature and will return to it sooner or later. This concept is mostly derived from the Daoist cosmology defined in Chapter 42 of Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching*, "Tao gave birth to the One; the One gave birth successively to two things, three things, up to ten thousand" (Waley 45). In other words, man is regarded as an equal part of all the other creatures of the cosmos created by Tao. It is different from the Western belief that man is created by God and placed above the other creatures of the Great Chain of Being. "In Western natural philosophy," as Aimin Cheng has so aptly pointed out, "the relationship between humanity and nature exists often as the confronting 'I-Thou' relationship, while in Chinese philosophy it presents a harmonious 'part-whole' relationship" (207). This concept of nature as a whole and man as a part of it has been deeply rooted in Chinese culture. It has also formulated a unique triadic relationship of Heaven, Earth, and humanity, thus influencing or dominating the perspectives of the

Chinese for thousands of years.

Chinese Daoist (Taoist) cosmology claims that human beings are created and put in nature with Heaven and Earth being respected as "heaven father" and "earth mother." Seeing themselves as a part of divine nature, the Chinese have been educated to seek and practice the supreme wisdom of achieving a harmonious unification with Heaven and Earth. These ideas are originally conveyed in the ancient classic, *The Huangdi yinfu jing* (＜黃帝陰符經＞; *The Yellow Emperor's Scripture on "Unconscious Unification"*). According to the *Yinfu jing,* human beings steal from Heaven and Earth, meaning that they depend on Heaven and Earth for their survival. Zhang Jiyu and Li Yuanguo have made a very detailed and articulate interpretation of the triadic relationship. Heaven, Earth, and humanity are viewed as the three powers of the universe. "To ensure a peaceful world, these three powers must remain in a state of coordinated harmony" by the principle of "mutual stealing among the three powers" (114). In the third chapter of *Taoist Ecology*, Lee Ai-kuo takes the unification of Heaven and humans as the logical basis of Taoist ecology, which is best illustrated in the early Daoist classic, the *Taiping jing* (＜太平經＞). But it is in the *Yinfu jing* that the concept of the unification of Heaven, Earth, and humans is explained most explicitly and comprehensibly. In this triadic relationship humanity is granted with a dominant and decisive role to show gratitude and awe to Heaven and Earth personified as Father and Mother. The Chinese are convinced that they will be punished if Heaven and Earth are not treated respectfully like family elders and prevented from being harmed on purpose.

The triadic relationship in the Daoist cosmology is also lucidly defined by E. N. Anderson. Having examined the classic Daoist works and the *Liji* (＜禮記＞), Anderson concludes, "All agree that humanity is part of a greater whole; that humans have an inner nature, related to outer natures; that this nature must be harmonized with the cosmos; and that the cosmic order must be preserved, with some degree of human help" (170). That the cosmic order must be preserved with human help designates man's decisive position in his "part-whole" relationship with the cosmos. Human beings are not entitled to any willful exploitation of all the beings and nonbeings in nature. Instead, the Chinese are always reminded by their culture to show piety, respect, and compassion for Heaven, Earth, and all the

creatures in between. A close bond between man and the environment is thus developed in the small world in which he is born to spend his lifetime there. This way of thinking accounts for the strong sense of place, the deep-rooted attachment to homeland, in traditional Chinese philosophy. Yi-Fu Tuan has made a penetrating observation on this concept as follows:

> Human groups nearly everywhere tend to regard their own homeland as the center of the world. A people who believe they are at the center claim, implicitly, the ineluctable worth of their location. In diverse parts of the world this sense of centrality is made explicit by a geometrical conception of space oriented to the cardinal points. Home is at the center of an astronomically determined spatial system. A vertical axis, linking heaven to the underworld, passes through it. The stars are perceived to move around one's abode; home is the focal point of a cosmic structure. Such a conception of place ought to give it supreme value; to abandon it would be hard to imagine. (1977: 149)

Tuan's discourse about human attachment to homeland is not limited only to the Chinese. Instead, it "appears to be a worldwide phenomenon" and "is not limited to any particular culture and economy" (1977: 154). This viewpoint is perfectly in tune with the pivot of our investigation of Frances Mayes's quest for a primordial homeland. Like Thoreau, Mayes strives to live a sort of border life to "strive for a balance between civilization and wildness" (Schneider 55). This dominant motif runs throughout *Under the Tuscan Sun,* a memoir about a detailed and faithful record of renovating and living in an old house in the countryside in Italy for four years. It is also an honest description of Mayes's persistent quest for a sense of belonging and personal identity. The journey falls into three parts: Mayes's personal predicament, her quest for place and identity in Italy, and the completion of her quest.

IV. Mayes's Personal Predicament

The beginning sentence of *Under the Tuscan Sun* immediately elicits our curiosity to wonder about why Frances Mayes, an American professor, intends to buy a house in the countryside seven thousand miles away from home. Then we may find it fascinating and irresistible to join her sensuous journey in Italy "like a friend who comes to visit" (4) as she puts it in the Preface. As soon as we finish reading the whole book, we are thus able to get a holistic understanding about why

she embarks on such a big switch in life, how many hardships she has suffered throughout the process, and what sweet rewards she earns at the end of the project. But we may still be curious about the driving momentum for her seemingly whimsical venture. The clue to the answer is given in the sentence below the book title on the cover, "Life offers you a thousand chances . . . all you have to do is take one." In other words, the book is intended for a plain depiction of the author's seizing a chance to stay away from her personal predicament in life and then start a long quest for a new identity. Upon further investigation, we find that her personal plight primarily stems from her strong attachment to houses since childhood, her current marital status, and her overscheduled life in San Francisco. These factors account for her decision to buy a house in Italy.

Mayes first gives an example of her family tradition to illustrate her thrall for houses. She comes "from a long line of women who open their handbags and take out swatches of upholstery material, colored squares of bathroom tile, seven shades of yellow paint samples, and strips of flowered wallpaper" (21). Besides, the family motto given by her grandfather is "Packing and Unpacking" (22). This family tradition is further supported by the fact that Mayes has "bought and sold a few houses before," and all that she has to do is load up the car with everything and set off for "the five- or five-thousand-mile drive to the next doorway where a new key would fit" (7). The feeling of being always on the move is complicated "since to sell is to walk away from a cluster of memories and to buy is to choose where the future will take place. And the place, never neutral of course, will cast its influence" (7). Mayes's early experience can be verified by Evernden's remark on how the artist makes the landscape of someone's place personal—"known, loved, feared, or whatever, but *not neutral*" (100). The impact of place on Mayes's identity has evolved into a solid ground for her intense attachment to houses and an inexplicable sense of place.

Mayes makes a lucid account of houses when she cites from Bachelard, who "wrote about the house as a 'tool for analysis' of the human soul," and "the houses that are important to us are the ones that allow us to dream in peace" (103). As a Southerner, Mayes is convinced that they all "have a gene, as yet undetected in the DNA spirals, that causes them to believe that place is fate. Where you are is who you are. The further inside you the place moves, the more your identity is

intertwined with it. Never casual, the choice of place is the choice of something you crave" (104). Feeling not so much at home in San Francisco, Mayes says that she often dreams of former houses she has lived in. She also reminisces about her childhood memory of a summer night when she is three or four years old. After everyone has gone to bed, she is leaning on the windowsill and looking out at the backyard. Then, she is climbing up the sill and jumping out into the dark, running around on the wet grass and feeling a quick rush of freedom. This early childhood experience, deeply imprinted on her psyche, is recurrently reflected on her sentiments of place and her later quest for a free lifestyle in Italy. As Lawrence Buell aptly puts it, "The places that haunt one's dreams and to some extent define one's character can range from versions of actual places to the utterly fictitious" (73). To Mayes, the interrelated tie between place and identity is self-evident, and the formation of her character, together with her place-attachment, is the natural outcome of living at the actual places since childhood.

Another crucial setback of Mayes's life is that she "had ended a long marriage that was not supposed to end and was establishing a new relationship" (17). The new relationship, though not mentioned explicitly throughout the whole book, is obviously developing with Ed, an Italian American teaching at a university in San Francisco. "Although divorce was harder than a death," writes Mayes, "still I felt oddly returned to myself after many years in a close family. I had the urge to examine my life in another culture and move beyond what I knew" (17). Hence, Mayes feels the urgency of buying a house so as to forge a "new identity." Even after she has bought the house in the countryside of Cortona in Italy, she still has some reflections on the significance of marriage and existence. "You must change your life," the words of the poet Rilke are ringing in her ears. "What I feared was that with the end of my marriage, life would narrow. . . . And, I think, for those of us who came of age with the women's movement, there's always the fear that it's not real, you're not really allowed to determine your own life" (230-31). However, with unremitting effort and perseverance, she is extremely positive that gods are not going to snatch her happiness if she is determined to seek it. In this sense, Mayes sounds more like a steadfast feminist making an assertion of her personal integrity.

The third factor that pushes Mayes further in the quest of a house in another

culture is the status quo of her life in San Francisco. She describes her life and job plainly: "My job at home is hard but I really love it—I'm pushed by it. And San Francisco is not home at the blood root, but it's a lucky, even beautiful place to live, earthquakes and all" (93). Another sincere confession is heard near the end of the book. "At home in San Francisco what wakes me is the alarm at seven, or the car pool horn blowing for the child downstairs, or the recycle truck with its crashing cascade of glass. I love the city and never felt really at home there" (313-14). Obviously, these words can be interpreted this way. Mayes loves her job in that she can make contribution to the academic world and earn a substantial living at once. She loves San Francisco because it offers her the modern facilities and comfortable conveniences of city life. Deep in her psyche, however, she lacks a sense of belonging congenial to her aptitude, so she "wanted something of a physical dimension that would occupy the mental volume the years of [her] former life had" (17). Besides, she needs a place to dream in peace and "escape the craziness and violence and downright surreal aspects of America and [her] own overscheduled life" (93). A desire of this nature reminds us of Thoreau's insistence on the necessity of a middle ground for the balance of physical living and spiritual integrity. When David Robinson observes that "Thoreau's difficulties with modernity are in part a reflection of his growing discomfort with the commercial, competitive, and exploitative society that America had become" (86), his description is strikingly apt for Mayes even though there is a time gap of more than one and a half centuries between her and Thoreau. Obviously, the middle ground for Mayes lies in the countryside of Italy.

V. Mayes's Quest for Place and Identity

The ways adopted by Mayes in her quest can be seen as a forceful illustration of the perspectives advocated by Andy Fisher, who strives to explore the roots of ecological problems and possible solutions from the approach of ecopsychology, a fusion of ecology, psychology, and phenomenology. With the observation of the modern society "in an extreme, pathological state of rupture from the reality of the natural world" (7), Fisher tries to go beyond "the presumed dichotomies that underlie the modern enterprise, especially the human/nature and inner/outer splits" (9). Rejecting the conventional distinction of "mind is all 'inside' and nature all 'outside," Fisher asserts that we should "'turn the psyche inside out,' locating mind

in the world itself—healing our dualism by returning soul to nature and nature to soul" (9-10). Fisher holds that every inner experience is obtained through a direct contact with the outer world in terms of the phenomenological viewpoint of "being-in-the-world." Only when we are free from the subject/object dichotomy, can we achieve an inter-subjective unification with nature through the lived experience of interrelationship with nature. This experiential approach is best exemplified by Mayes's real-life involvement in the local ecosystem.

Mayes's quest for identity begins with her strong sense of place manifested in her undying devotion to Italy, specifically to the sun, landscapes, culture, food, and people in Tuscany. To justify that buying a house in Italy is absolutely not a whimsical idea, Mayes declares, "Italy always has had a magnetic north pull on my psyche. Houses have been on my mind for four summers of renting farmhouses all over Tuscany" (8). During the first summer vacation, Mayes and her partner Ed travel around Tuscany with friends, but only they keep visiting the place for the following three summers. Looking for a summer home thus becomes a quest for them and gives them an intense focus. They usually visit weekly markets not just with purchase in mind. They may spend hours "sitting in piazzas or sipping lemonade in local bars, secretly getting a sense of the place's ambiance" (8). Each time they step out of the hotel and walk around Cortona, their obsession with the town increases. Hence, even though their home in San Francisco is seven thousand miles away, Mayes is positive that plunking down her life savings onto a house in Italy is not a whim at all. "It feels very close to falling in love and that's never really whimsical but comes from some deep source" (11).

After three years of searching around, Bramasole, the house that they previously feel interested in, has been waiting all along. Mayes says that she has "never heard a house say *yes* so completely" (17). They "both love the setting, the town, the house and land" (18). The only thing wrong with the house is that it will cost them a fortune. On a second thought, however, Mayes says to herself, "Wouldn't we be crazy not to buy this lovely house called Bramasole?" (19) As for Ed, Mayes adds, "He has never wavered from his belief that this is a brilliant idea, that this is heaven on earth" (19). After they have bought the house and started its restoration due to being deserted for the past thirty years, they find the bargain

worthwhile. "The house must be in some good alignment," Mayes declares, "according to the Chinese theories of Feng Shui [風水]. Something is giving us an extraordinary feeling of well-being" (32). Even though the restoration is extremely exhausting, "Ed has the energy of three people" (32). Similarly, a lifelong insomniac as she is, Mayes sleeps "like one newly dead every night and dream[s] deeply harmonious dreams of swimming along with the current in a clear green river" (32). All these satisfactory findings indicate that she has discovered the right place for her new home and new identity.

Reflecting upon what a guidebook says about a place, Mayes asserts that "a sense of the place is entirely a matter of smell and instinct" (172). This recognition echoes the definition of sense of place made by Tuan and Evernden. To Mayes, it is the tangible smell of Tuscany, together with her personal instinct, that leads her all the way up to the journey of her quest. Throughout the three years of house restoration, Mayes continuously figures out direct and effective ways to forge a new self from her daily activities, such as doing housework, dreaming, living, cooking, and traveling. At the outset, for example, she is convinced that the house quest is essential to the new identity she would manage to forge and that she would thus be able to reexamine her life in another culture. It is there in Italy that she discovers something positive in working. Doing chores at home in San Francisco is "wasting time" to her. She is supposed to do "something more important—memos, class preparation, papers, writing"--because her job at the university is all-consuming and housework becomes a nuisance to her. (102) But in Cortona Mayes finds herself humming while "washing windows--one of the top ten dreaded chores" (102). She is even more amazed to find that both she and Ed have great zeal for the work. The secret to this difference lies in the key word—restoration. "I like the word." Mayes says. "The house, the land, perhaps ourselves" (102). While renovating the house, she is in effect carrying on the restoration of her identity.

Exhausting housework is usually followed by sweet dreams. Mayes keeps thinking of Bachelard's "idea that the house protects the dreamer; the houses that are important to us are the ones that allow us to dream in peace" (103). The original wording of Bachelard's remark goes this way: "if I were asked to name the chief benefit of the house, I should say: the house shelters daydreaming, the house protects

the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace" (6). Escaping far away from the craziness and heavy workload of San Francisco, Mayes feels totally free to dream in her sanctuary in Cortona, the only place in the world where she is allowed to take a nap at nine in the morning. At home in San Francisco she dreams of houses she has lived in, but here in Cortona she no longer dreams of houses. Instead, she is "free to dream of rivers" because she is "restored to the basic pleasure of connection to the outdoors" (106). In a sense, she has completely integrated into the local ecosystem when she states, "The windows are open to butterflies, horseflies, bees, or anything that wants to come in one window and out another. We eat outside almost every meal" (106). Being totally immersed in the therapeutic power of nature is beneficial to Mayes's forging of her new identity. This is supported by Joseph Meeker's remark on the distinction between living in the city and that in the country. "The city degrades people and the country restores their sense of power and dignity; in the city we are controlled, but in the country we control" (53). In other words, Mayes's life in San Francisco is mostly controlled by her job, but she is able to retrieve her control of life in Cortona. Or in Yi-Fu Tuan's term, Cortona functions as the middle landscape for Mayes which "earns laurels because it can seem more real—more what life is or ought to be like—compared with the extremes of nature and city" (25). Cortona provides her with a house to dream in peace.

Cooking, like housing, serves as another tool for analysis of the human soul. A striking contrast in what cooking means to Mayes reveals a subtle and significant transformation of her life perspective. In San Francisco she plans a menu ahead before shopping, whereas she buys out of impulse what is ripe of the moment in Cortona. Cooking is such a dominant gene in her family that Mayes even claims, "Cooking is destiny" (137). Unfortunately, however, cooking sometimes becomes a chore in her daily life owing to the heavy workload in San Francisco. In Cortona, on the contrary, cooking is a different story. "The leisure of a summer place," Mayes tells us, "the ease of prime ingredients, and the perfectly casual way of entertaining convince me that this is the kitchen as it's meant to be" (138). As a result, upon the completion of the renovation in the kitchen, Mayes thinks of her mother's summer table. She then has a long table made and placed outdoors under the trees. "You're your own guest, which is the way summer ought to be" (142).

With all the food on the long table outdoors, her "idea of heaven is a two-hour lunch with Ed" (143) followed by a three-hour siesta. Cooking thus becomes not only a daily delight but a substantial and indispensible way to enjoy an authentic living. Besides, a cooking teacher, in replying to a student's question about cooking, affirms that "[t]here *is* no technique, there is just the way to do it" (149). From the teacher Mayes has learned "that simplicity is liberating" (149). In other words, she learns from cooking how to live a simple country life, one without the pressure and intricacies of San Francisco. Wild, simple, and free, it is also a life defined by Thoreau, being closer to nature and more congenial to her true self.

Traveling, on the other hand, also plays a key role in the process of Mayes's quest for identity. Joining the house restoration helps her accomplish and concretize the ideal of her dream house. Working on the farmland, harvesting the olive oil, cooking favorite dishes, inviting friends for meals—all these are the real things for her to experience the intimacy of nature, feel its therapeutic power, and thus grasp the meaning of life. They bring her material satisfaction and spiritual ecstasy. But it is through traveling that Mayes further broadens her intellectual horizon and achieves a spiritual consummation with local culture. Her trips start with the ancient Cortona and end at the wildest Tuscany.

Before embarking on a one-week trip, Mayes first gives us her reflection on the significance of traveling. She holds that "most trips have an underlying quest. We're looking for something. What? Fun, escape, adventure—but then what?" (173) To this question, she provides three examples to justify that people travel for different reasons. Some people take traveling as an escape from the misery that has been weighing them down. Others travel just for fun or for a dream come true; they are satisfied to say, "I'm glad I went to America, so I don't have to go again." As for Mayes, she believes that "[o]nce *in* a place, that journey to the far interior of the psyche begins or it doesn't" (175). Therefore, Mayes says firmly that "[t]he ideal approach to [her] new hometown is first to see the Etruscan tombs in the flatland below the town" (175). Around Cortona, there are tombs of the mysterious Etruscans from 800 to 200 B.C. A considerable amount of the Etruscan culture remains unearthed, so her knowledge of the Etruscans is "limited to the fact that they preceded the Romans and that their language was indecipherable" (176). The

following spots of Mayes and Ed's trip include historical sites, piazzas, churches, theaters, museums, castles, cafes, and so on. The personal visits to these places come out with awe-inspiring wonder and admiration, along with the impression that "Tuscans are of this time; they simply have had the good instinct to bring the past along with them" (180). Past and present coexist harmoniously there. "A park has a timeless quality." Mayes discovers. "Clothing, flowers, the sizes of trees change; otherwise it easily could be a hundred years ago" (189). Then she draws the conclusion that "this is one of the most civilized towns on the globe" (189). Besides, after walking along a dusty road toward home for about a kilometer, Mayes finds that one section of Etruscan wall is known as Bramasole. Her house takes its name from the wall, indicating a further connection with the place and its culture. She even thinks of Henry James about his description of walking on the same road in his *The Art of Travel*. All the connections that she has explored in the vicinity of Cortona seem to convey a natural, harmonious unification of culture and nature, past and present. In the traditional Daoist concept presented in the first part of this paper, it is also a harmonious unification of Heaven, Earth, and humanity.

Having traveled around Cortona, the noble city, Mayes and Ed plan to take short journeys to the other places of Tuscany. "Along the way," Mayes tells us, "we plan to taste as much of the Maremma cuisine as possible, bake in the sun, track down other Etruscan sites" (192). During the one-week forays into the concentric circles around Cortona, they enjoy the hot waterfall, the sunbath at the beach, and the "utter simplicity and dignity of Tuscan food" (193). They visit Pitigliano, the strangest town in Tuscany, and Tiny Sovana, which "has the feeling of a ghost town in California" (198). Overwhelmed further by the other places with antique historical remnants, Mayes says to herself, "I have the feeling that this is a place I will think about on nights of insomnia. . . . I always have the odd and somber consciousness of how time peels us off, how irretrievable the past really is. . . . It's a deep wish of philosophers and poets to search for theories of eternal return and time past being time present" (199). When they go back to the hotel after a tiring day, they "shower, change, and take glasses of their own white wine out to the comfortable chairs and watch the sun drop behind the hill, just as two Etruscans might have in this exact place" (200). Returning home after a week away, Mayes

has obtained new initiation from both ancient and present Italians. "Qualities those of us with northern blood envy—that Italian insouciance and ability to live in the moment with gusto—I now see came down straight from the Etruscans" (214). She has learned from Italians the "means of life," namely, the secret of authentic living. She thus concludes, "The Etruscan had it. In certain times and places, we find it. We can run full out, if not fly" (215). The journey obviously turns out to be fruitful and beneficial to the restoration of Mayes's identity. During the journey Mayes is thoroughly immersed in the realm of ancient people and the daily activities of Tuscans as well, thus achieving a unification of past and present. Besides, there exists no dualistic opposition between culture and nature, or past and present.

From the above investigation we find that Andy Fisher's experiential approach is feasible and essential to the solution of Mayes's personal plight. Devoid of "human/nature and inner/outer splits" in Fisher's term, Mayes is able to lead a life that best demonstrates Thoreau's proclamation--"all good things are wild and free" (Thoreau 1977: 618). Having a house to dream in peace, planting and harvesting on the farmland, cooking favorite meals, traveling to get in tune with the local surroundings—all these real-life experiences exemplify the phenomenological viewpoint of "being-in-the-world." Moreover, in Fisher's words again, "healing our dualism by returning soul to nature and nature to soul" is the key to Mayes's inter-subjective unification with nature. This direct contact with the local ecosystem is crucial to Mayes's quest for place and identity.

VI. The Completion of Mayes's Quest

The completion of Mayes's quest is indicated by her reflections on how much she and Ed have integrated into the daily life of local Tuscans. "I feel immersed here;" as Mayes puts it, "my 'real life' seems remote. . . . We feel so much at home, pale and American as we are. We could just stay here, go native" (147). The feeling of being thoroughly in tune with the local ways of life makes her "real life" in San Francisco seemingly remote, thus enhancing their awareness of going native. This is further illustrated by the change of their living habits. In San Francisco, for example, Ed rarely makes a grocery list while Mayes usually has her goals for each week. On the contrary, in Cortona Ed always makes lists of things to buy or things to accomplish, but Mayes usually does not have any goals. She simply wants to

live by the rule of Thoreau's "Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity!" (Thoreau 2004: 69) Besides, Ed has developed the habit of drinking a black espresso like the Italians, which wins the bartender's amazement to him, "Your life must be sweet to take your coffee so bitter" (217). Another cultural experience Ed takes to with zest is driving. Mayes notes that she has never seen anyone stopped for speeding in all her summers in Italy. Fascinated by the way people drive on the freeway, Ed is also impressed by the police driving Alfa Romeo. As a result, the first year after they return to San Francisco, he buys "a twenty-year-old silver GTV in good condition" and gets "three speeding tickets in six weeks" (220).

In addition to the subtle shift of living habits, Mayes notices that both she and Ed have been changed by the land at a fundamental level. At their home in San Francisco, they "have [their] tools in a shiny red metal toolbox—the small size," but in Cortona they have "innumerable hand tools that look pre-Industrial Revolution" (221). At first they suppose that they have to clear the land and prune the trees, along with an "occasional mowing, fertilizing, trimming" (222). What they have never expected, however, "is the tremendous resurgent power in nature. The land is implausibly regenerative" (222). This resurgent power in nature also serves as an inexhaustible momentum for them to work constantly on their farm. Otherwise, the land would return to its previous state of wild vines and weeds in months. The seemingly endless toil can be viewed as a fundamental and illuminating way of Mayes's self-realization in her quest when she reveals, "We could either feel burdened by this or enjoy it" (222). Undoubtedly, they take great delight in the farm work when Mayes spots an incredible but interesting change in Ed. He "never remembers to water the houseplants in San Francisco," but in Cortona he waters the new fruit trees, babies the special plants, and "reads into the night about compost and pruning" (223). In other words, working on the farmland enables them to get closer to nature and realize the significance of living. It is also the regenerative power of nature that facilitates Mayes's spiritual healing and accelerates her quest for identity.

The Tuscan sun, together with the therapeutic nature, plays an indispensable role in dispelling the cloud in Mayes's mind and rejuvenating her vitality for life. On answering a phone call from a reader, Mayes talks about the absolute joy and

freedom of pursuing her ways of life in Italy. Although not mentioned to the reader, she asserts that she has had "an incredible amount of fun here [in Cortona]" because the "Tuscan sun has warmed [her] to the marrow" (231). Thinking of Flannery O'Connor's saying about pursuing pleasure "through gritted teeth," Mayes confesses, "I sometimes must do that at home but here pleasure is natural" (231). She finds plenty of delight there in Cortona because "living again with nature [she] can taste the sun" (312). The consoling warmth of the Tuscan sun hits her in the face and wakes her up in the early morning; it also reconnects her life with nature. In a word, the Tuscan sun brings her not only a good harvest on the farmland but a substantial feeling of well-being in her mind. This is the best footnote to the significance of authentic living which Mayes has been seeking.

Finally, living in Cortona gives Mayes a strong sense of belonging due to a familiar ambience of her house in childhood. "Since I have been spending summers in Cortona," writes Mayes, "the major shock and joy is how at home I feel. But not just at home, *returned* to that primal first awareness of home" (311). She finds that people there test the ripeness of watermelons by the same way of the Georgians. Besides, Sunday is cemetery day for the Tuscans just like what people do in Mayes's hometown. This familiarity of hometown reconnects Mayes's childhood when she further thinks about her farming life in Cortona. "Nature: What's ripe, will the driveway wash away, when to dig potatoes, how much water is in the irrigation well? Early life reconnects" (313). She even dreams of her mother rinsing her hair with a bowl of rainwater—"the spill of free days" (313). This strong affiliation with early life, lost in San Francisco, is finally retrieved in Cortona. As Mayes bluntly declares, "I love the city and never have felt really at home there [in San Francisco]" (314). The reason for her lack of belonging sensation in San Francisco lies in the way that "[e]veryone seems to have cracked the door two inches to see who's there. I see you through my two inches; you see me through yours. We are monumentally self-reliant" (321). In other words, people in San Francisco do not have mutual trust. But in Cortona she embraces the intimacy of memory, "[t]he feeling of touching the earth as Eve touched it, when nothing separated her" (325). Pondering over the thousand chances that converge and bring her to Italy to recreate a place for herself, Mayes is convinced that her

blood “streams easily along a current of fate.” She thus concludes, “I’m here because I climbed out the window at night when I was four” (335). The long quest for place and identity is finally completed with the definite resurrection of childhood memory and experience, the dream home congenial to her inborn aptitude.

VII. Conclusion

Having explored why and how Frances Mayes is devoted to her quest, we may conclude that she seems to follow Thoreau’s idea of carving out a middle ground for authentic living between wilderness and civilization. All the natural landscapes and ancient historical sites in Cortona, almost “purely wild” in terms of Nash’s definition, stand on the end of wilderness of the spectrum, while her overscheduled life in San Francisco, “the purely civilized,” is the epitome of modern civilization. Her house, along with the restoration itself and the work on their farmland, functions as the rural sanctuary in the middle portion of the spectrum between wilderness and city, or the “middle landscape” in Yi-Fu Tuan’s definition. In all the summer and winter vacations, Mayes and Ed take a temporary retreat from the “craziness and violence” of San Francisco and undertake a physical and mental therapy in their “heaven on earth” in Cortona. Mayes’s stance of living is clearly uttered that even though she likes her work and life in San Francisco, she is badly in need of that familiar belonging sensation of childhood home. This yearning for a cozy house, externalized by an authentic living in her chosen place, is eventually satiated in Cortona, where she has justified Thoreau’s words that “all good things are wild and free.” At the end of each vacation, however, both Mayes and Ed have to return to San Francisco to accomplish the “occupation and obligations to society” as phrased by Thoreau. In this sense, they are in effect living “a sort of border life.” “For an optimum existence,” as we have quoted Roderick Nash earlier, “one should alternate between wilderness and civilization.” Viewed from the Daoist cosmology, Mayes and Ed are practicing the supreme ideal of achieving a harmonious unification with Heaven and Earth in their daily life in Cortona. Their respect, wonder, and compassion for all the cultural relics and natural creatures indicate further the breaking down of man/nature and nature/culture dichotomies in Daoist thoughts. This mystic oneness with nature, or inter-subjectivity in Fisher’s term, is recurrently verified in their living as Mayes describes, “Now the night is big and

quiet. No moon. We talk, talk, talk. Nothing to interrupt us except the shooting stars" (148).

本論文於 2009 年 9 月 24 日到稿，2010 年 5 月 8 日通過審查。

Books Cited

Anderson, E. N. "Flowering Apricot: Environmental Practice, Folk Religion, and Daoism." *Daoism and Ecology: Ways within a Cosmic Landscape.* Ed. N. J. Girardot , James Miller, and Liu Xiaogan. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001. 157-183.

Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space.* Trans. Maria Jolas. Boston: Beason Press, 1994.

Buell, Lawrence. *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination.* Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005.

Cheng, Aimin. "Humanity as 'A Part and Parcel of Nature': A Comparative Study of Thoreau's and Taoist Concepts of Nature." *Thoreau's Sense of Place: Essays in American Environmental Writing*. Ed. Richard J. Schneider. Iowa City: Univ. of Iowa Press, 2000. 207-220.

Evernden, Neil. "Beyond Ecology: Self, Place, and the Pathetic Fallacy." *The Ecocriticism Reader.* Ed. Cheryll Glotfelty & Harold Fromm. Athens: the Univ. of Georgia Press, 1996. 92-104.

Fisher, Andy. *Radical Ecopsychology: Psychology in the Service of Life.* New York: State Univ. of New York Press, 2002.

Lee, Ai-kuo. *Taoist Ecology.* Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2005.

Mayes, Frances. *Under the Tuscan Sun*. New York: Broadway Books, 1997.

Meeker, Joseph W. *The Comedy of Survival: Literary Ecology and a Play Ethic.* Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1997.

Merchant, Carolyn. *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*. New York: Harper and Row, 1989.

Nash, Roderick. *Wilderness and the American Mind.* New Heaven: Yale Univ. Press, 1970.

Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature.* New York: Routledge, 1997.

Robinson, David M. "The Written World: Place and History in Thoreau's 'A Walk to Walchusett'." *Thoreau's Sense of Place: Essays in American Environmental Writing*. Ed. Richard J. Schneider. Iowa City: Univ. of Iowa

Press, 2000. 83-92.

Schneider, Richard J. "'Climate Does Thus React on Man': Wildness and Geographic Determinism in Thoreau's 'Walking'." *Thoreau's Sense of Place: Essays in American Environmental Writing*. Ed. Richard J. Schneider. Iowa City: Univ. of Iowa Press, 2000. 44-60.

Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden.* New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004.

_____. "Walking." *The Portable Thoreau*. Ed. Carl Bode. New York: Viking, 1977. 592-630.

Tuan, Yi-Fu. *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience.* Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1997.

_____. *Escapism.* Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1998.

White, Lynn, Jr. "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis." *The Ecocriticism Reader.* Ed. Cheryll Glotfelty & Harold Fromm. Athens: the Univ. of Georgia Press, 1996. 3-14.

Zhang, Jiyu, and Li Yuanguo. "'Mutual Stealing among the Three Powers' in the *Scripture of Unconscious Unification*." *Daoism and Ecology: Ways within a Cosmic Landscape.* Trans. Yam Kah Kean and Chee Boon Heng. Ed. N. J. Girardot, James Miller, and Liu Xiaogan. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001. 113-124.