

Leisure Farming: A Wild Flower Since Ancient Times^[1]

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Introduction

Chapter One

Over the past two decades, leisure farming in China has developed rapidly. The industrial format formed by the intersection of "leisure + agriculture" is thriving in developed regions; in less developed regions, it is currently becoming an important pathway for "revitalizing rural areas," "enriching farmers," and "green living." Leisure activities such as tourism, sightseeing, rural tours, B&B (bed and breakfast), farm stays (农家乐-nong jia le), fruit/vegetable picking, parent-child parks, wellness retreats, leisure vacations, nature-oriented summer camps, cycling, off-roading, RVs, camping, waterfront activities, and hiking have mutually promoted the integration of tourism, sports/outdoor activities, cultural performances, cultural creativity, public services, and leisure agriculture. As of 2019, rural leisure tourism in China alone received approximately 3.2 billion tourist visits, generated operating revenue of 850 billion RMB, and directly drove the employment of 12 million people. According to incomplete statistics, there are currently 300,000 "farm stay eateries" (农家乐-nong jia le) nationwide. This has become one of the most dynamic economic forces in contemporary China and a key driver for industrial transformation and upgrading.

Dutch urban planner Reinier de Graaf (often associated with Rem Koolhaas and his think-tank AMO) had keenly observed this trend as early as over a decade ago. From February to August 2020, he and his team creatively held a six-month exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, titled "Countryside, The Future." They sought to explore the changes and directions of future rural and remote areas through an urbanist's angle. He observed: *"Leisure agriculture, as a consumption method for improving quality of life, has spawned a health industry worth \$4.5 trillion globally and is also transforming entire rural areas. In Italy, Switzerland, and China, old villages are being converted into health/ holiday resorts."*

Today, leisure farming is presenting colorful landscapes and diverse models worldwide. In the "convergence of nature and humanity" and the "marriage of countryside and city," people universally experience a fresh sense of life's texture and temporal rhythm, enhancing the quality of humanistic exchange and socio-economic activities in the context of globalization. This phenomenon has ignited our passion to explore the origins of leisure farming and to contemplate its relationship with nature, life, existence, and the history of civilization.

What is leisure farming? What is its relationship with nature, life, existence, and traditional agriculture? What did the ancients mean by civilization? What is the significance of leisure farming against the backdrop of life? What do we discover when reconstructing the relationship between agricultural history and cultural history? These questions lead us to seek unseen answers within the framework of human evolution. As non-historians, exploring the origins of leisure farming nonetheless

leads us deep into history, enabling us to seek historical sources, the ideals and pursuits of the ancients, and their daily life practices and experiences. Modern knowledge possesses systematic and cross-disciplinary structural characteristics, requiring us to project our research subjects onto a larger framework to understand and discover their intrinsic mechanisms of interaction.

Chapter Two

Each historical figure and their surviving writings presented before us attract us with immense power. Within the contexts of life's background, the brilliance of the earth, the power of nature, the "unintentional person," and "a wild flower," they initiated humanity's contemplation of eternal questions and eternal values.

We are familiar with the ancient sages: Aristotle, Cato, Confucius, Laozi, Zhuangzi, Jia Sixie, the pastoral poets, Washington, Marx, Engels, and so on, along with their works: Aristotle's "Metaphysics" and "Nicomachean Ethics", Hesiod's "Works and Days", M.P. Cato's "De Agri Cultura", the "Book of Songs of Shijing" the "Tao Te Ching", Jia Sixie's "Qimin Yaoshu" (Essential Techniques for the Welfare of the People), Lucretius' "De Rerum Natura", Augustine's "Confessions", Ebenezer Howard's "Garden Cities of Tomorrow", Lewis Mumford's "The Culture of Cities" and "Technics and Civilization", Burns & Ralph's "World Civilizations", Engels' "Dialectics of Nature", and works by contemporary thinkers such as the Club of Rome's "The Limits to Growth", E.F. Schumacher's "Small Is Beautiful", Barry Commoner's "The Closing Circle", Holmes Rolston III's "Philosophy Gone Wild", Peter Thompson's "Seeds, Sex and Civilization", William Rathje's "Rubbish!", Michiel Korthals' "Before Dinner: Philosophy and Ethics of Food", John Kelly's "Freedom to Be: A New Sociology of Leisure", and Christopher Edginton's "Leisure and Life Satisfaction".

These books and figures span up to 5000 years to the present. Although the eras they lived in and the fields they focused on differs, when we approach them with our specific research goals, we can see a systematic, complete, and clear human cognitive knowledge system of nature. This system reveals the intricate connections between life, humanity, existence, civilization, and nature, leaving behind questions that humanity must permanently face and answer.

We benefit from the historical clues laid out by numerous classic texts and figures, wandering through the insightful discussions of ancient and modern sages from China and abroad, sharing the vivid flavor of life that emerges when opening historical data, and marveling at the profound reflections and critiques of contemporary intellectual mentors who see through millennia. Through reading, we enter their world, approach their inner thoughts, and gain different interfaces and perspectives for observation.

Chapter Three

How did the ancient sages view nature, life, existence, and agriculture? What eternal spiritual heritage did they leave for us? Following these questions, we begin the first page of our reading of sages and history.

Nature and the earth held a supreme place in their minds. As early as ancient Greece, people called the Earth "Mother." Aristotle was the first to establish the Western view of nature – moving from nature as mystery to symbiosis with nature, and to ontological health, and from ontological health to the soul being the origin of life. Lucretius said: *"This terror then, this darkness of the mind, not sunrise with its flaring spokes of light, nor glittering arrows of morning can disperse, but only nature's aspect and her law."* Engels stated: *"We, with our flesh, blood, and brain, belong to nature and exist within it."*

Mother Earth, in aiding humanity's transition to settled agriculture, not only selflessly provided food but also fundamentally changed the relationship between labor time and free time. Moreover, she guided the "biological human" towards the thinking and pursuit of "truth, goodness, and beauty." *"First, people discovered that while adapting to the rhythms of nature and the seasons, they needed a better understanding and grasp of time. In this process, there existed a mysterious new connection to the growth cycles of plants: the concepts of fertility and fecundity. Humanity also participated in nature's cycle from birth to death to rebirth. This new cyclical time was divided into two aspects crucial to the human spirit: sacred time and secular time, and great ancient civilizations began to develop."*^[^2]

Laozi's *Tao Te Ching* (道德经 The Book of Ethics) has been the "fertile soil" cultivating the traditional Chinese view of nature for millennia. The natural law left by agrarian civilization is that "humans rely on heaven for food"; when nature thrives, humanity thrives! Hence, "the Tao follows nature" (道法自然-Dao Fa Zi Ran), urging us to maintain "humility," "reverence," and "benevolence" in the face of nature. This is also a law of civilization. In the eyes of Westerners, the "Tao Te Ching" stands alongside the Bible, praising Laozi as a "true philosopher, insightful ethicist, eloquent theologian, and metaphysician."

The ancient sages held "leisure time" in high esteem for its creation of spiritual value. Ancient Greeks believed "leisure is the center of all affairs." In ancient China: *"Stretching without relaxing is beyond even Wen and Wu (Civil and Martial pursuit); relaxing without stretching is something neither Wen nor Wu would do. Alternating stretching and relaxing – that is the way of Wen and Wu."* The sages held leisure in awe. Leisure is an essential element for generating life's meaning. Its primary characteristic is its biological attribute, not only a patent of humanity but also a patent of the earth and all things. This reminds us that both human leisure and the earth's rest must maintain necessary tension for survival to continue. This is the power of nature, the law of nature. Labor created and evolved humanity, also created leisure, and placed leisure and labor within the same category. Like two sides of a coin: without leisure, there is no labor; without labor, there is no leisure. With leisure, humanity can achieve higher forms of creation. Leisure is also a component of nature; the cycle of four seasons – spring sowing, summer growing, autumn harvesting, winter storing – nature's timing has rhythm and order.

Humanity's possession of leisure time created conditions for spiritual and natural attributes to progress side by side. In the Chinese character "休" ("xiu"- rest), the character itself emphasizes the human-nature relationship: "leaning on a tree to rest,"

symbolizing that life and humans originate from and depend on nature, and also need to follow the Dao (ethic) of nature. It expresses the inseparable relationship between humans and nature; "unity of heaven and humanity" (天人合一 Tian Ren He Yi) became the highest realm of traditional Chinese culture. "閑/閒" ("xian" - leisure), meaning elegance, correct speech and behavior, not overstepping bounds; achieving peace of mind, tranquility, joy, and righteousness. Hence, there was once the concept in Chinese history of 鸣琴而治(ming qin er zhi), which resonates with the Confucian ideal of "flourishing in poetry, establishing oneself by ritual, and achieving success through music." The "land of ceremony" and "respecting teachers and valuing education" are the civilized result of agrarian society.

In English, "leisure" evolved from the Latin word for "school" and "education," implying that leisure is the source of human richness and comprehensiveness. The pragmatist philosopher Dewey's "laboratory philosophy" began with children's observation and practice lessons on "clothing, food, housing, and transportation." In the West, the value concept that "leisure is the center of all affairs" has never been interrupted. Marx's proposal in the Communist Manifesto of the free and comprehensive development of the individual embeds the shaping of "free" and "comprehensive" human nature within the "unity of nature, society, and the human self," connecting to nature's "primitive richness." This is the spiritual essence of leisure.

Regarding the Earth, it also requires biological (physiological) rest. Therefore, humans invented various methods to let the land recuperate and conserve energy, such as China's fallow land system (alternating crops, intercropping). As early as the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods in China (almost 2500 years ago) the concept of "nurturing the land" was established. People knew that decaying weeds and fallen leaves could make crops grow more lush, used manure as fertilizer, and paid special attention to maintaining the balance of the soil ecosystem. The ancients also discovered the sequence of the 24 Solar Terms, celebrating "harmony with heaven" at the arrival of each major solar term. Europe had the two-field system, three-field system, and crop rotation to maintain soil fertility and ensure the natural world's virtuous cycle.

Chapter Four

A shared emotional expression among the sages was their deep love and devotion to agriculture. Aristotle said: "Agriculture is natural," "Agriculture is most beneficial for cultivating manly vigor." The Roman statesman Cato personally participated in agricultural production activities and strongly advocated for the simple rural life. He believed: "The strongest men and the bravest warriors come from farmers; the farmer's profit is the most honest, the most stable, and the least envied." Many social elites at the time also believed that "life force and virtue are rooted in agriculture." Many people were named after crops, for example, Cicero (from "cicer", chickpea), Lentulus (from "lens", lentil), Fabius (from "faba", broad bean), etc. "Good farmer" and "Great cropsman" were high praise.

George Washington, the founding father of the United States, had a special fondness for agriculture and farming: "*The life of a farmer requires great perspicacity; how*

noble, how pleasing it is... To see plants break through the ground, grow strong under careful care, and bestow abundant fruit upon the laborer... The more I know of agricultural affairs, the more I delight in them." This understanding not only laid the value foundation for the US becoming an agricultural giant but also elevated the social status of farmers.

Yan Di (the Divine Farmer), the legendary ancestor of the Chinese people, tasted hundreds of herbs and taught agricultural techniques to the people. Lei Zu raised silkworms and invented silk weaving. Li Bing and his son built the Dujiangyan irrigation system, creating the "Land of Abundance." Zhang Qian's mission to the Western Regions introduced many exotic seeds. Jia Sixie compiled the "Qimin Yaoshu" (齐民要术-Essential Techniques for the Welfare of the People) leaving behind the earliest and most complete large-scale agricultural encyclopedia for later generations. At the national governance level, from "Among the eight government principles, food is the primary one" to "China's Farmers' Harvest Festival," and then to "holding the rice bowl firmly in the hands of the Chinese people, filling it with China's own grain." Agriculture, farmers, rural areas, agrotechny, and agronomy are the "fresh spring water" nurturing and connecting urban and rural culture and roots. Numerous classic texts also contain epic works on agricultural affairs, such as the "诗经-Book of Songs", Jia Sixie's "Qimin Yaoshu", Song Yingxing's "Tiangong Kaiwu" (天工开物- Exploitation of the Works of Nature), Tao Yuanming's "归田园居-Returning to the Garden" poems, Wang Wei's "辋川集-Wangchuan Collection," Zhang Zeduan's painting "清明上河图- Along the River During the Qingming Festival", Huang Gongwang's grand scroll "富川山居图- Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains", all demonstrating a truth: human life cannot be without the pastoral idyll.

"Leisure" and "agriculture" possess a high degree of consistency in their inherent meanings in both Chinese and English. Both imply reverence and worship of nature, and also exist as a "form" and a "mentality" within nature and human life. China has poetic works like the *Book of Songs* depicting farming life, while ancient Rome had the pastoral poet Virgil with his "Eclogues"(Bucolics) and "Georgics". China has the Sages, such as: Confucius, Mencius, Laozi, Zhuangzi; ancient Greece has the "Three Philosophers": Socrates, Plato, Aristotle; they are the spiritual mentors of the human "Axial Age."

Chapter Five

The revelations of the "Axial Age" history are profound: Why, after only about two hundred years of urbanization and industrialization, is the Earth humanity inhabits already in peril? Why, when information exchange was extremely underdeveloped 5000-10000 years ago, could common views on nature, life, and values emerge? From the perspective of our research direction, handling the "relationship between humans, nature, and leisure" is the most important wisdom within the body of human knowledge.

Agriculture, as the first cultural form created by humanity, is both a gift of nature and a product of cooperation between nature and humans. Human agency gave rise to agriculture, creating "artificial natural objects" within pristine nature. This means agriculture is not nature's original ecosystem but rather an artificial state and artificial natural form derived through human production practices. Agriculture is the most direct and intimate productive activity between humans and nature, adapting to nature, treating nature well, and restraining human "transgressive" behavior – these were the ideological trajectories and behavioral markers of the initial stage of human civilization.

Agriculture is the foundation of human survival, production, and existence, a role irreplaceable by anything else. Therefore, in farming practice, humans adhered to following nature, letting things take their natural course, self-sufficiency, and light self-reliance. They learned dexterity, intensive cultivation, thrift, and "governing by non-action" (无为而治 Wu Wei Er Zhi). They curbed excessive (索取) from natural resources, as it was unnecessary and encouraged extravagance. These practical behaviors provided subjective and objective foundations for natural ethics, land ethics, and food ethics within the human knowledge map.

Leisure farming, as an adjunct (or one form) of agriculture, has an extremely close relationship with humans. The reason ancient people developed leisure farming was that it incorporated human emotions, interests, innocence, and romance. As the title of this book suggests: a wild flower since ancient times. Humanity's transition from ignorance to agrarian society benefited from "the textured rocks glistening under the sun on the wildflower-strewn meadow. Dark red poppies, bright red buttercups, beautifully flowering Juno irises, colorful anemones, orange marigolds, chrome-yellow chrysanthemums, purple lavender, and pale pink wineglass-shaped bindweed tempted us to stop and wander. The unintentional step a person took, lured by wildflowers, led generations of descendants into agrarian society." We realize that agriculture and humanity were imbued with a leisurely disposition from the very beginning. That is, the "leisure time" when "a person was unintentionally lured by a wildflower" enabled humanity to "stand out" – evolving from Homo Erectus, developing larger brain capacity, and fostering curiosity, imagination, and creativity regarding new things. This triggered the evolution from "Homo Erectus" to "Homo Sapiens".

Humanity unintentionally admired "a wild flower," tasted its fruit, discovered seeds, leading to infinite reproduction and creation. Seeds, in the Chinese mind, represent life, great trees, strength, hope, and the future. We often see this miracle on earth: from the cracks of a pile of rubble and rocks, a sprout breaks through the soil, reaching for the sun, facing the wind and rain, and multiplies into clusters, patches, covering mountains and plains with flowers, grasses, saplings, slowly growing into leafy trees, eventually becoming forests... Westerners connect "seeds" with "human civilization," attaching great importance to the role of seeds in the survival of wildflowers and the production of crops. This replaced the nomadic lifestyle of hunter-gatherers with stable agricultural societies, giving birth to different groups like farmers, landowners, and gardeners, establishing villages, towns, trading markets, and cities, cultivating gardens, pastoral lands, farms, and plantations, and breeding human cognitive systems and spiritual homelands.

Human ancestors cultivated agriculture with a sense of romance, obtaining more food, and for the first time possessing surplus products and leisure time, thereby enriching social interaction and learning opportunities, changing production and lifestyle. Leisure activities within free time also connected humans with nature, all things, and creativity. Karl Marx considered free time as true economy and a higher law. Western leisure scholars believe: "Without agricultural progress, there would be no leisure class, then there would be no standards of taste, nor encouragement for artistic creation, and thus no civilization. Hurried people cannot achieve high civilization and high progress." Many archaeological sites reveal "grain," "granaries," "food vessels," "exquisite crafts," and "ornaments," confirming the symbiosis between nature and human leisure life in agricultural evolution.

Chapter Six

Several millennia of agrarian civilization represent humanity's "childhood period" – innocent, pure, and romantic – deconstructing the evils of human complexity, greed, and gluttony. Confucius was truly insightful when he said in the Book of Songs* "*The three hundred poems may be covered by one sentence: 'No evil thoughts.'*" (诗三百，一言以蔽之，思无邪)."

The narrative of the history of leisure farming reflects agricultural progress and humanity's pursuit of an "aesthetic life." Generally speaking, agriculture implies a demand for food and sustenance, requiring arduous labor demanding significant physical strength and energy. Leisure farming implies that humans possess a more advanced mode of labor, have leisurely ease, share life with beauty, and have the conditions and motivation for comprehensive and free human development. Of course, since industrial society, technology has transformed traditional agricultural production methods. Today, two percent of the U.S. population can feed the other ninety-eight percent, with significant grain left to export. This frees more people to spend more time sharing the physical and mental joy of integrating with nature. Leisure farming possesses both the essence of natural things and can uplift human emotion and spirit.

Leisure farming certainly cannot replace agriculture (including forestry, animal husbandry, sideline production, and fisheries), which provides the basic materials for human survival. However, agricultural activities also enrich human leisure life, establishing a friendly relationship between humans and nature through cultivation, thereby enriching the spiritual world – treating the earth, nature, and all things well; maintaining distance from desires; knowing when to stop and renounce.

"Leisure + agriculture" is the most essential characteristic of agrarian civilization, which is why it sustained agrarian society for over ten millennia. Because humans had a state of leisure, they could discover and develop agriculture. As the saying goes, "When the granaries are full, the people know propriety." They could also go on to create science, technology, philosophy, art, literature, and religion. The abundance of agriculture gives people more "essence, energy, and spirit" to enrich natural instincts, human nature, and intellect. Westerners say: "Leisure is the source of all insight and creativity; leisure has always been, and will always be, the first foundation of culture." And the Chinese say: "The greatest truth is simple" (大道至简-Da Dao Zhi

Jian) and "steady progress ensures long-term success" (行稳致远-Xing Wen Zhi Yuan), full of rationality and discernment. This also provides the best annotation for the wisdom of five millennia of agrarian civilization.

The inherent quality of leisure farming has bequeathed humanity a "dual gene" – "natural gene" and "cultural gene." Referring to nature as "Heaven," "the Divine," or "God" was a common value criterion during the human "Axial Age." First, humans are part of nature; cherishing nature is like cherishing oneself. Second, intensive cultivation, careful harrowing, thrift, and the survival consciousness of "leaning on a tree to rest" (人倚木而休-Ren Yi Mu Er Xiu) were established. Third, follow nature, do not exhaust soil fertility, self-sufficient, well-fed and clothed, limit greed. Fourth, make the best use of everything, be vigilant in peace, prepare for dangers, have no worries. Understand that things change; fortune and misfortune are interdependent, nurturing humanity's early dialectical spirit. In interacting with nature, humans accepted the "natural gene." Here, "natural gene" has both biological meaning and elements transcending biology.

The "cultural gene" of leisure farming means that in labor practice, humans cast their leisure life into the embrace of nature, transforming and inspiring various visions beyond the goal of "filling the stomach with food," such as garden pieces, pastoral pieces, field pieces, and life pieces, accelerating the formation and development of culture and civilization. The ancient life of "rise at sunrise, rest at sunset, dig wells for water, till the fields for food – what power has the emperor over me!" nurtured more spiritual wealth and space for spiritual growth.

In China, with its vast territory and diverse customs (even varying ten miles apart), leisure farming nourished the aesthetics of life, creating different types of field and life works. The pre-Qin period gave us "Within ten acres wide, the mulberry pickers leisurely roam, come back with me home. Beyond ten acres seen, the mulberry pickers serene, come back, let us glean." The Han Yuefu songs: "South of the Yangtze you can pick lotus, lotus leaves lush and plenty. Fish play among the lotus leaves..." The Wei-Jin period had Tao Yuanming's "Returning to the Garden" poems: "*... Opening up wasteland at the southern edge, rustic by nature, I return to garden and field... No dust or clutter in the hall, empty rooms have spare leisure...*" The Tang Dynasty had Meng Haoran's "Visiting an Old Friend's Cottage": "*My old friend prepares chicken and millet, invites me to his farm home... We open the window facing the threshing ground, holding wine, talk of hemp and flax...*" The Song Dynasty had Su Shi's "A Dwelling in the Green Shade": "*One can do without meat to eat, but not without bamboo to live by...*" Yuan Mei, the "Owner of Suiyuan," transformed the dilapidated, weed-overgrown, "spring-flowerless" Suiyuan garden into a place where "*I released cranes seeking companion mountain birds, letting visitors come see the four-season flowers.*" Li Yu's "Jiezi Yuan" (Mustard Seed Garden) was less than three acres, yet meticulously built to achieve the realm of "a universe within a gourd" (壶中天地-Hu Zhong Tian Di). Zhu Xi's poem "Reflections on Reading": "*A half-acre square pond, opened like a mirror, where light and shadow of sky and clouds linger together. I ask how it stays so clear? Because living water flows from its source!*" Zhu Xi's insights from reading came from a beautiful landscape. Truly, heaven and humanity are not two, but a harmonious whole, showcasing the spirituality and wisdom brought by nature.

These poems are not pretentious, extravagant, or blustering; they even "turn the corrupt into magic." They reflect the aesthetic connotations of life, leisure, agriculture, and the spiritual homeland, as well as the love between heaven, humanity, and all things.

Among the people, there are both improvised poems and ordinary days. In "entertaining with heaven," they also perceived nature's laws, rules, and principles: "*Pulling seedlings to help them grow – exerting effort in vain, ultimately gaining nothing.*" "*Haste makes waste; focusing on small gains prevents great achievements.*" "*The wren nests in the deep forest, needing but one branch; the mole drinks from the river, filling only its belly.*" "Reflect on the difficulty of every grain of rice, constantly consider the effort behind half a thread." "Looking through past sages' states and families, success came from thrift, defeat from extravagance." "Three feet above the ground, there are gods; fear not others' knowledge, but fear your own." These are both folk beliefs and components of family learning, education, and rules, as well as standards for self-discipline. This is the cultural root vein of "Chinese-style planting."

Abroad, there are English-style planting, European-style planting, American-style planting, Japanese-style planting, etc. In modern times, concepts like rewilding, garden cities, and preservation of places (time, space, meaning, emotion) have emerged, creating different ways of conversing with nature such as the Netherlands, the land of flowers, the beautiful and charming scenery of Switzerland, Italy, the paradise of Europe, the enchanting France, Denmark, the fairytale world, Austria, the capital of music, the White House Kitchen Garden, America, the big rural country, and Japan, the marriage of city and countryside.

Agrarian civilization has accompanied humanity for thousands of years. Although social systems, organizational forms, social structures, and religious beliefs differ across countries, nations, and regions, there is a high degree of consistency in qualities like revering nature, loving agricultural affairs, and simplicity, preserving the core values of the human "Axial Age" cultural heritage.

From these investigations, we must change one perception: leisure farming is not a product of modern society but is as ancient and enduring as human history itself!

Chapter Seven

Leisure farming declined under the impact of industrialization and urbanization. A few years ago, Israeli scholar Yuval Noah Harari, in describing the history of human evolution from "Homo sapiens" to "Homo deus" detailed humanity's trajectory "from imperialism, capitalism, to liberalism, consumerism; from animal lust, human desire to materialism; from animality, to humanity, to divinity," resulting in one species disappearing from the earth every 20 minutes... "Humans pursue success tirelessly. However, success often breeds greater ambition, and our latest achievements drive humans to set bolder goals. Humans dominate the environment, increase food production, build cities, and create far-reaching trade networks. But all creatures on Earth suffer as a result. Humans have acquired divine powers, but they are irresponsible and insatiably greedy. There is perhaps no greater danger than this."

Countries that industrialized early indeed paid a heavy price for it, essentially paying its dues for all human society. From the literature we reviewed, many insightful people as early as the 18th century pointed out the harmful effects of human transgressed behavior on nature and all things, which have become increasingly severe over the past century. Among the voices questioning and criticizing industrial civilization, Marx and Engels are undoubtedly key figures in ecological philosophy. Marx used the concept of "metabolic rift" to critique the deterioration of the ecological and human environment through observing the human-nature relationship within capitalist society. During his investigation journey from London to Manchester, Engels saw the severe destruction of nature caused by industrial development – evidence of pollution from industrial development everywhere: *"polluted air and toxic water, thereby harming workers' health and further worsening their lives."* Engels not only saw industrialization's destructive power on nature but also its lag effect, grasping nature's revenge on humanity from the perspective of the long-range adverse effects of human activities. *"Let us not, however, flatter ourselves overmuch on account of our human victories over nature. For each such victory nature takes its revenge on us."* This profound and far-reaching warning has yet to awaken humanity.

Modern agriculture is one of the most significant drivers of environmental pressure, especially the harm caused to the planet by climate change, habitat alteration, water scarcity, and toxic emissions. While creating miracles, modern agriculture is also causing humanity to swallow bitter consequences at the expense of the ecological environment. The heavy use of pesticides, herbicides, growth fertilizers, etc., in agricultural production destroys not only the natural system but also humanity itself. Nowadays, in many places, while developing leisure farming for rural revitalization, there are also "face projects," uniformity, and short-sighted profiteering. Some projects, in particular, deviate from the principle of naturalness, lacking the inherent natural and cultural genes of leisure farming.

Rapid urbanization has distanced people further from nature and the countryside. Populations are concentrated in limited urban spaces to an incredible degree; the land and countryside struggle amidst sprawling cities. Humanity's once natural and simple living environment – a rich and coherent historical text – has been submerged. Nature Deficit Disorder threatens the human body, mind, nerves, spirit, and behavioral system, accompanied by anxiety, burnout, and struggle. Data from the World Health Organization indicates that nearly 1 billion people worldwide suffered from mental disorders in 2020, with one person dying by suicide every 40 seconds. One of the root causes is our alienation from nature.

We forget that cities are also products of the earth. "Every aspect of rural life influences the city. The knowledge of shepherds, woodcutters, and miners is refined by the city into lasting elements of human history: textiles, cream, moats, dikes, wind instruments, lathes, metals, jewelry... ultimately all become content of urban life." The wrong path taken by urbanization is, in essence, the wrong path taken by humans.

The double-edged sword nature of science and technology is becoming apparent. People's addictive dependence on technology is alarming; people willingly cocoon themselves in the "nest" of electronic products. A single smartphone connects everything, from minor aspects like clothing, food, housing, transportation, shopping, sightseeing, to major things like "knowing everything in the world with one device."

However, what humanity gets in return is a deaf, dumb, and disordered spiritual world, where amidst "busyness" and "blindness," human emptiness and multi-faceted alienation become more apparent.

Many of us still believe in man can conquer nature and technology is omnipotent. In fact, philosophers have long warned us: *science cannot go too far, otherwise freedom and aesthetics will have no place* (Hayek). Science also teaches us humility. "*Humans are fundamentally incapable of omniscience and omnipotence, of knowing everything. Humans are not gods, nor can they ever become gods*" (Cohen). We know various successes and failures from past human history; yet facing the future, we are full of unknowns and uncertainties.

Chapter Eight

Since the beginning of 2020, billions of people worldwide have been confined by "lockdowns" and "quarantines at home." The "food problem" became the number one issue, with panic buying of food becoming a stress behavior for many. More people fled back to rural areas and began the traditional practice of food self-provisioning (growing their own food). As a powerful survival instinct, people tried to change their lives, needs, and psychological motivations. This might be the significance of urban designer Reinier de Graaf's ten-year effort to explore Countryside, The Future" and "reflect on the fallacious aspects of modernization.

Fortunately, food self-provisioning, farmers' markets, and gardening/horticulture— all preserved by agrarian civilization – are showing signs of resurgence. Although since the industrial age, their existence has been very microscopic and weak, often overlooked, becoming our "most familiar strangers." Nevertheless, after all, the genes of millennia flow in our blood, persistently growing robustly. The United States currently has over 70,000 large farmers' markets (excluding small community agricultural exchanges). The UK's market culture dates back to the 13th century and continues to this day. In European and American countries today, "farmers' markets" in large towns and small cities not only occupy an important urban space but also gather the historical splendor of human culture.

Western scholars began researching the value of food self-provisioning and its inseparable relationship with humans about twenty years ago. Surveys indicate that 10%-40% of Westerners grow their own food, and "farmers' markets" have never been absent from human life, whether in cities or rural areas, since their inception.

Chinese scholars participated in this international cooperation a few years ago. The survey showed that "self-provisioning" in China is a relatively common phenomenon in both urban and rural areas. In rural areas, almost every household has a legally designated "private plot." In cities, especially at the urban fringes, "self-provisioning" is very common. In large cities, people also use street corners, wastelands, offices, balconies, rooftops, flowerpots, and other spaces to grow plants, vegetables, or fruits.

Food Self-provisioning is an agricultural activity within leisure farming, possessing high potential for sustainable development. It not only satisfies the desire for fresh, healthy food and contact with nature but also fosters a joyful relationship between heaven and humans. In the eyes of practitioners, this behavior also constitutes a

precious time-space for human spiritual growth. With the rise of academic concepts like "quiet sustainability," "food and consumption ethics," "alternative food systems," "garden as home, home as garden," and "garbology," value goals for leisure farming and green living have been identified.

However, "farmers' markets," misunderstood by the concept of urbanization in China, have mostly retreated from the historical stage. Especially in large and medium-sized cities, "supermarkets" or "megamarkets" have largely replaced them. The drawbacks of those complex and lengthy "supply chains" were fully exposed during recent pandemic prevention and control efforts.

Undoubtedly, "self-provisioning" and "farmers' markets," as "micro" physical spaces, enrich human life, provide pathways for interaction with nature, enrich material goods, root a heart of reverence for nature, and connect the bloodline and cultural vein of city and countryside. They are an indispensable and important part of "grand history."

Why does humanity today seek "natural and cultural heritage" (tangible) and "intangible cultural heritage"? Why restore, or even rebuild or revive, decayed, destroyed ruins, artifacts, and sites? The significance lies in seeking those markers jointly created by humanity that embody cultural spirit and moral power. It is humanity's thirsty desire to intimately approach nature and the earth, a longing of the spiritual void for the unadorned authenticity of human nature.

The modern revival of leisure farming began with the wealthy classes in 19th-century Europe and America. Thorstein Veblen, in "The Theory of the Leisure Class", critiqued "conspicuous consumption" and proposed institutional economics, yet identified "quasi-academic" and "quasi-artistic" consumer behaviors as noble and meaningful, marking the birth of Western leisure studies.

By the 1930s, the "paid vacation" system emerged in Europe as a universal welfare benefit. In 1936, twelve European countries legislated for the right to paid leave. In the 1960s, European and American countries launched the "tourism arcadia movement," with the slogan "spiritual value and tourism." People flocked to the countryside, seaside, mountains, and forests. It was *"of historical significance for changing lifestyles; it was a great step forward for human nature, bringing humans into direct contact with nature."*

The revived leisure farming, accompanied by the initial leisure quality of humanity, returned to the world with a "nature + humanities" face. "It stimulated economic activities in various countries, including municipal engineering, construction, transport, agriculture, industry, services, inns, resorts, villas, hot springs, religious sites, forest trails, etc., and infused profound humanistic characteristics into tourists and the tourism industry. Furthermore, the rise of various leisure activity clubs, leisure bases, and campsites encouraged people to move towards natural environments like farms, fishing, and pastures, and put forward the 'natural-human environment' as a subject for future consideration."

Humans are the species with the most moral attributes on Earth. In recent years, humans have tried to correct themselves through self-provisioning, vegetarianism, the food revolution, waste sorting, the sharing economy, recycling, garden pieces, animal

protection, preserving biodiversity, returning to the wild, reducing plastic bag use, shared bicycles, and other behaviors, undertaking the "intrinsic value within the small self," aligning subjective preferences with objective obligations, and constructing a "small self environmental ethics system."

While leisure farming attracts widespread participation and generates economic value, we must not forget its traditions: natural attributes, leisure attributes, and the attribute of nurturing the spirit. Humanity has known since ancient times that *if matter has no soul, humans cannot love; Athens produced not only grain, fruit, and laws but also gave birth to Epicurus, the discoverer of truth. They are an endless ray of dawn light piercing through the tunnel of history.*

Chapter Nine

Today, humanity is in the era of the Anthropocene. On one hand, humanity's excessive transgressive behavior has caused irreversible damage to the planet, leading to the convergence of "climate change," "loss of biodiversity," and "pandemic outbreaks." On the other hand, humanity is forced to show sincerity in changing its behavior. The international community is busily discussing or negotiating global conventions such as the Climate Change Convention, Wetlands Convention, Convention on Biological Diversity, and Carbon Emissions Convention to address threats to food security from uncertainties, unpredictability, and many complex factors brought by climate change and the post-pandemic era.

To secure the rice bowls of 1.4 billion people, grow grain for 1.4 billion people, manage the seeds for 1.4 billion people, and cultivate the land of China for 1.4 billion people, the continuity of Chinese cultural wisdom is needed. Whether looking at the source of Chinese history or the source of human history, maintaining humility, reverence, and benevolence before nature is necessary for humanity's sustained growth, civilization, and progress.

The Chinese people's five-thousand-year-old principle is *taking heaven as the model* (以天为则-Yi Tian Wei Ze). This principle, permeating life practices and individual cultivation, once shaped a powerful agrarian civilization and the tradition of leisure farming. Nevertheless, we must acknowledge that 200 years ago, when leisure farming was being revived in the West, China was suffering cultural ravaging and plundering. After several revolutions, the original cultural traditions lay fragmented. Over the past forty years of reform and opening-up, China has moved from standing up, becoming prosperous, becoming strong, to striving for a better life. Today, our country is the world's second-largest economy and the largest contributor. GDP per capita exceeds \$10,000. Consequently, people participate in leisure farming through various means, creating considerable economic value. However, the cultural value chain is still quite fragile. Phenomena like "environmental unfriendliness, insufficient human care, excessive commercialization, lack of cultural/spiritual attributes, and even forced, imitative copying of Western models without local adaptation are widespread. Particularly, there are significant limitations and one-sidedness in understanding the connotation and extension of leisure farming.

The process of human civilization tells us: Many histories can be interrupted or distorted, but only the history of the friendly relationship between natural things and

humans cannot be interrupted or distorted; otherwise, human history will be terminated.

(Introduction author: Huidi Ma)

[1]: This text is the introduction to the book “Leisure Farming: A Wild Flower Since Ancient Times”, co-edited by Sun Hongwu and Ma Huidi, published in Chinese by China Agriculture Press in 2022. Ma Huidi, hereby noted, wrote the “Introduction”.

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