

**Urban Image and Urban Aesthetics:  
Urban Aesthetics in Cross-Cultural Perspective\***

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**Abstract**

Environments can be divided into natural environments and constructed ones. Although urban environments are the most important and complex built environments, works about urban aesthetics are fewer and less comprehensive. The paper argues that the urban image is an object of urban aesthetics, which can respond to the two fundamental questions, “what and how to aesthetically appreciate,” proposed by Allen Carlson in his aesthetics of natural environment. In this study, Kevin Lynch’s idea of the “city image” is taken as a starting point for the response, and then the focus moves onto the urban aesthetics that are mainly implied or reflected in the aesthetic characters of traditional Chinese cities and the philosophy of design behind them. In his outstanding book, *The Image of the City*, Lynch develops his theory of the city image, concentrating on the city’s “environmental image” and its three components: identity, structure, and meaning. In view of Lynch’s theory of the city image, the traditional Chinese cities were typically structured and shaped as squares, and the basic orientation was sited north and faced south, with the North-South avenue as its axis. The paper traces the philosophical and cultural reasons for this kind of structure and its orientation, pointing out that the principle of traditional Chinese-city design is “to imitate the images that cleave to Heaven and the forms manifested on Earth” (*Xiang-Tian Fa-Di*) recorded in Chinese classic *Kaogongji*. Ancient Chinese people thought that Heaven is round and the Earth is square. The main reason for imitating the images that cleave to Heaven is to ensure the ideal orientation. With this cosmological symbolism, the city is perceived as being a condensed representation of the world. Meanwhile, the ancient Chinese perceived the earth as a square checkerboard, the form of a square was obviously taken to be a prerequisite for

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the general morphology of an ideal capital city that would be a replica of the earth. The main goal of doing so is to establish a harmonious link between the world of man and the world beyond. Through the analysis of the metaphysical significance of this goal and the author's two personal experiences of disorientation, the paper declares that it is impossible to appreciate environments aesthetically without metaphysical insight, and urban aesthetics viewed with metaphysical insight can be taken as the philosophical reflection of the crisis of modern urbanization.

**Keywords:** environmental image, urban aesthetics, city image, *Xiang-Tian Fa-Di*, metaphysical insight

### Öz

Çevre doğal ve inşa edilmiş olmak üzere ikiye ayrılabilir. Kentsel çevre inşa edilmiş çevrelerin en önemlisi ve en karmaşığı olsa da, kent estetiği üzerine çalışmalar daha az sayıda ve daha az kapsamlıdır. Bu çalışma kent imgesinin, “estetik olarak neyi ve nasıl takdir etmeliyiz?” temel sorularını yanıtlayabilecek olan kentsel estetiğin konusu olduğunu öne sürer. Bu soru Allen Carlson tarafından Carlson'ın doğal çevre estetiğinde önerilmiştir. Bu çalışmada, Kevin Lynch'in “kent imgesi” yanıt için çıkış noktası olarak alınır ve daha sonra geleneksel Çin şehirlerinin estetik özelliklerinde ve bunların arkasında yatan tasarım felsefesinde esas olarak ima edilen ya da yansıtılan kent estetiği üzerine odaklanılır. Lynch önemli kitabı *The Image of the City*'de (Kentin İmgesi), kentin “çevresel imgesi” ve onun üç bileşeni olan kimlik, yapı ve anlam üzerinde yoğunlaşarak kent imgesi kuramını geliştirir. Lynch'in şehir imgesi kuramı Çin şehirlerinin analizine uygulanır. Geleneksel Çin şehirleri tipik olarak kare biçiminde inşa edilmişlerdi ve temel yönlendirme, Kuzey-Güney caddesi ekseninde, kuzeye konumlandırılmıştı ve güneye bakıyordu. Bu çalışma bu tür yapı ve yönelimin felsefi ve kültürel nedenlerini izleyerek, geleneksel Çin şehir tasarımındaki prensibin, Çin klasiği Kaogongji'de yazıldığı üzere, “Göğe bağlı ve Yeryüzünde kendini gösteren imgeleri taklit etmek” olduğunu gösterir (*Xiang-Tian Fa-Di*). Eski Çinliler göğün yuvarlak yeryüzünün kare olduğuna inanırlardı. Göğe bağlı imgeleri taklit etmenin temel amacı ideal yönlendirmeyi sağlamaktı. Bu kozmolojik simgecilikle, kent dünyanın yoğunlaştırılmış bir temsili olarak görülür. Aynı zamanda, eski Çinliler yeryüzünü kare bir dama tahtası olarak görüyorlardı ve karenin biçiminin, yeryüzünün kopyası olacak olan ideal bir başkent genel biçimbiliminin bir ön şartı olarak kabul edildiği açıktır. Bunu yapmanın temel amacı bu dünya ile ötesi arasında uyumlu bir ilişki kurmaktır. Bu amacın metafizik anlamının ve yazarın iki şahsi yolunu kaybetme (disorientation) tecrübesinin analizi yoluyla, bu çalışma çevrenin estetik olarak takdir edilmesinin metafizik kavrayış olmaksızın mümkün olmadığını öne sürmektedir ve metafizik kavrayışla bakıldığında kent estetiği modern kentleşmenin krizinin felsefi yansıması olarak görülebilir.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** çevresel imge, kent estetiği, kent imgesi, *Xiang-Tian Fa-Di*, metafizik kavrayış

## Introduction

Theoretically speaking, environments can be divided into natural environments and constructed environments. The most important and complex constructed environments are urban environments, which include cities and metropolitan regions. Correspondingly, what we call environmental aesthetics in general should include natural environmental aesthetics (or the aesthetics of nature) and urban aesthetics. Unfortunately, compared with many works about the former, works about urban aesthetics are fewer and less comprehensive. More importantly, the cross-cultural research on urban aesthetics has not entered sufficiently into our academic horizon.

For a more sufficient orientation of this situation, this paper will take Kevin Lynch's idea of "city image" as its starting point. The basic points of the urban aesthetics mainly implied or reflected by the aesthetic character of traditional Chinese cities and the philosophical design behind them will be used. The basic points are: 1) the urban image is an object of urban aesthetics, which can respond to the two fundamental questions of "what and how to aesthetically appreciate" proposed by Allen Carlson in his aesthetics of natural environment; 2) with an idea of "cross-cultural aesthetics" in mind, the paper will introduce the principle of traditional Chinese-city design, which is "to imitate the images that cleave to Heaven and the forms manifested on Earth" (*Xiang-Tian Fa-Di*) recorded in Chinese classic *Kaogongji*. Through an analysis of its metaphysical significance and two personal experiences of disorientation, I will argue that it is impossible to appreciate environments aesthetically without metaphysical insight, and that urban aesthetics, perceived with metaphysical insight, can be viewed as the philosophical reflection of the crisis of modern urbanization.

## Kevin Lynch's Theory of the City Image and the Subject of Urban Aesthetics

The beginning of today's environmental aesthetics goes back to a classic paper entitled "Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of Natural Beauty" by R. W. Hepburn (1984, pp. 9-35). Since the German philosopher Hegel (1770-1831), the dominant Western aesthetics has almost been equalized with the "philosophy of art." It has virtually ignored that the natural world may also be viewed as an aesthetic object. Hepburn's paper focuses attention on natural beauty and demonstrates that there could be significant philosophical investigation of the aesthetic experience of the world beyond the artwork. From then on, the natural world (natural environment or nature) became increasingly important in Western aesthetics. Compared with the appreciation of art, with some artistic models in mind, the Canadian philosopher Allen Carlson tries to answer two questions which are at the heart of today's environmental aesthetics: "what

and how to aesthetically appreciate concerning nature?” (2000, pp. 41-53).<sup>1</sup> In this regard, these two basic questions of environmental aesthetics are insightful and can be applied to the various kinds of urban environments, through which, we might propose a kind of “urban aesthetics.”

A possible answer to these two questions related to urban aesthetics can be inspired by American city designer Kevin Lynch’s work. In his outstanding book *The Image of the City* (1960), Lynch discusses the question of “the image of the city” (city image or urban image) in detail.<sup>2</sup> This book was originally a book about city design, and was considered as “the most important and influential study of American urban design in the second half of the twentieth century” (Gosling, 2003, p. 59). This book has had a significant impact on the development of anthropology, sociology, geography, and environmental psychology. Lynch explains his motives in writing this book in his paper, “Reconsidering the Image of the City.” The motives are: 1) an interest in the possible connection between psychology and the urban environment; 2) fascination with the aesthetics of the city landscape, at a time when most US planners shied away from the subject, because it was “a matter of taste” and had a low priority; 3) persistent wonder about how to evaluate a city; and 4) the hope of influencing planners to pay more attention to those who live in a place, to the actual human experience of a city, and how it should affect the city policy (Lynch, 1990, p. 247). The second motive, “fascination with the aesthetics of the city landscape,” connects his work with urban aesthetics. Especially, he displays the academic background of his study. He states that these motives found an early outlet in a seminar on the aesthetics of the city in 1952, which considered, among several other similar themes, the question of how people actually found their way about the streets of big cities. Various other unconnected ideas sprouted during a subsequent fellowship year spent walking the streets of Florence, which were recorded in his brief and unpublished paper entitled “Notes on City Satisfactions.” These

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<sup>1</sup> I don’t quite agree with Carlson’s “natural environmental model” based on scientific knowledge as I think his main weakness is his confusion of the cognition of nature and the aesthetic appreciation of nature.

<sup>2</sup> It is a pleasure to acknowledge the support of Professor Arnold Berleant of Long Island University, US, for sharing academic information and for his insightful advice, with whom I started corresponding in October 2006. In answering my questions about urban aesthetics, he provided me with a list of references, including Kevin Lynch’s *The Image of the City* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1960) which according to Berleant “is the classic source in this area. The entire book is an insightful development of the experiential aspect of the urban environment.” My research on urban aesthetics began with this book and my basic ideas also came from it. After reading the draft of my paper, Professor Berleant suggested that I “explain the relation of image or orientation to environmental appreciation,” which is one of the improvements in my paper today.

ideas matured during 1954, when he had the opportunity of working with his colleague, Gyorgy Kepes, at MIT, on a Rockefeller grant devoted to the “perceptual form of the city.”

Lynch has two theories of the city image. The first one can be called the “city image theory A,” containing five types of elements: paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks, with which we are familiar. The second kind of image theory discusses three components of city image, which may be called “city image theory B.” Lynch himself introduces it very briefly in a short paragraph in the section entitled “Structure and Identity” in his *The Image of the City*. Lynch states:

An environmental image may be analyzed into three components: identity, structure, and meaning. It is useful to abstract these for analysis, if it is remembered that in reality they always appear together. (1960, p. 8)

The key term here is “an environmental image.” It reminds one of the title of the first chapter in his book, “The Image of the Environment.” Lynch analyzes the environmental image from the perspectives of his three elements:

A workable image requires first the identification of an object, which implies its distinction from other things, its recognition as a separable entity. This is called identity, not in the sense of equality with something else, but with the meaning of individuality or oneness. Second, the image must include the spatial or pattern relation of the object to the observer and to other objects. Finally, this object must have some meaning for the observer, whether practical or emotional. Meaning is also a relation, but quite a different one from spatial or pattern relation. (1960, p. 8)

This analysis is very different from the analysis of “image theory A,” which consists of five elements. The key question here is how to understand these three components and their relationship with five elements of “image theory A.” It is helpful to think about the basic idea of structuralism, which is a theory that uses culturally interconnected signs to reconstruct systems of relationships rather than studying isolated, material things in themselves. Structuralism thinks that every system has a structure and the structure is what determines the position of each element of a whole. No single element in such a system has meaning except as an integral part of a set of structural connections. Therefore, we can say that those five elements in Lynch’s “image theory A” are concrete, whereas the three components in his image theory B are abstract. Thus, all of the three components come from the intrinsic relationship among the former five elements. Structure and meaning exist in the structured whole.

Briefly speaking, the city image and its two important components, structure and meaning, can become the basis of urban aesthetics. In other words, in research on urban aesthetics, we should concentrate on the spatial structure of the city image and its meaning.

## The Spatial Structure of Traditional Chinese City Image and its Metaphysical Meaning

As a city designer, Lynch mainly limits his image theory to the value for orientation in the living space. However, Lynch is aware of the other functions of the environmental image. In *The Image of the City*, Lynch indicates that through skimming the references to the environmental image in various kinds of literatures, we can learn something about how such images “seem to play a social, psychological, and esthetic, as well as a practical, part in our lives” (1960, p. 123). As we can understand, *The Image of the City* focuses mainly on the practical part of the “city image,” which is orientation and way-finding. In addition, he takes examples from three American cities: Boston, Jersey City, and Los Angeles. At this point, Lynch’s theories of “city image” could be applied to the analysis of the Chinese cities, through which one can develop a kind of cross-cultural perspective. The following discussion will focus on how the city’s spatial structure is shaped in China; then, on the deep meaning behind the city’s spatial-structure.<sup>3</sup>

Generally speaking, there are some important features which characterize typical city planning in China: four-sided enclosure with brick wall, gates at each side, clearly articulated and directed space, defensive projections, cardinal orientation, and a cardinal axis. Much greater significance was given to the main processional axis running from south to north, than to any avenue running from east to west. The following message is the most representative and most important city layout in ancient China, which is summarized more than two thousand years ago in a passage of the *Kaogongji*<sup>4</sup> in *The Rites of Zhou Dynasty (Zhouli)*:

The artificers, as they built the capital, demarcated it as a square with sides of nine *li*, each side having three gateways. Within the capital there were nine north-south streets and nine east-west avenues, each of the former being nine chariot tracks wide. (Lin, 1985, p. 471)

Most traditional Chinese major cities followed this layout pattern. What we should pay attention to is that the ideal model of the city is square. Moreover, the city is sited north and faced south, and the orientation of the city is to the four cardinal points with emphasis on the north-south axis. The ancient Chinese emperors always placed their throne at the north, facing south, which indicates that the orientation of north-south is

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<sup>3</sup> I would like to thank Dr. John Gay for his advice and helpful comments. He suggested that I particularly focus on Chinese cities and Chinese urban aesthetics in my paper instead of introducing those in the West. This suggestion changed the direction of this research.

<sup>4</sup> *Kaogongji* means “The records of handcrafts,” which is the earliest historical literature on handcrafts in ancient China. Its author and date can not be exactly identified. Historically, it was contained in one of traditional Chinese classics, *The Rites of Zhou Dynasty*, and was viewed as one part of the whole book.

essential and has metaphysical connotations. The tradition continued for millennia, and it did not come to an end until traditional Chinese society collapsed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The most important examples are: Chang'an, the capital city of Tang Dynasty (618-907), today's Xian in Shanxi Province;<sup>5</sup> Bianliang, the capital city of North Song (960-1127), today's Kaifeng in Henan Province); Dadu, the capital city of Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), today's Beijing.

The questions that come to my mind here are: why were traditional Chinese cities structured and shaped as squares, and why was the basic orientation sited north and faced south? The first reason is its geographical feature. Most traditional Chinese capitals were built in the North China Plain, the nuclear area of Chinese civilization, where land is open and flat. The availability of flat sites made orientation to the cardinal points easy, and construction with pounded earth or mud brick was universal. But, the deeper and more important reason is the philosophical conception of Heaven and Earth as the principle of city design.

To clarify this point, we may take Suzhou, in the Jiangsu Province, as an example. Suzhou has a very long history. Originally, it was called *Helu Dacheng* and was built in 514 BC. According to the history book, *The History of Wu and Yue (Wu Yue chunqiu)*, in 514 BC, Wu Zixu (?-484 BC) was commissioned by the king of Wu to rebuild the Wu capital:

[Wu Zixu] imitated the images that cleave to Heaven and the forms manifested on Earth [*Xiang-Tian Fa-Di*], and then constructed the great city wall [*dacheng*].  
(Zhao, 1999, p. 25)

There is a philosophy of design here, which is *Xiang-Tian Fa-Di*, which literally means “to imitate the images that cleave to Heaven and the forms manifested on Earth.” Then, a series of questions follow: what is the image of Heaven? What is the form of Earth? Why did Wu Zixu do so? Amazingly, ancient Chinese people thought that Heaven is round and Earth is square. The main reason for *Xiang-Tian*—to imitate the images that cleave to Heaven—is to ensure the ideal orientation. In other words, the reason for *Xiang-Tian* is connected with the way of orienting. To discover how the ancient Chinese people oriented themselves, the answer may be found in the following statement from the *Kaogong ji*:

They [the artificers] erect a post [at the center of the leveled ground], taking the plumb lines to ensure its verticality, and with it observe the sun's shadow [*riying*].  
(Lin, 1985, p. 471)

<sup>5</sup> Dimensions of Chang'an: north-south, 8651.7 meters, west-east, 9721 meters; population, 1 million at its peak; north-south (latitudinal) streets, 11, the middle one is the north-south axis, its width is 150-155 meters; east-west (longitudinal) streets, 14.

The artificers take it as the determiner of the shadows of the sun at its rising and setting, and discern their midpoint [indicating the true north]. In the daytime, they consult the sun's shadows at noon; in the nighttime, they study the pole star, so that [the orientation of] true east and west, [and south and north] is precisely fixed. (Lin, 1985, p. 471)

The pole was connected therein with a background of microcosmic-macrocosmic thought and thus corresponded to the position of the emperor on earth, around whom the vast system of the bureaucratic agrarian state naturally and spontaneously resolved. This was metaphorically stressed in a passage in *The Analects of Confucius*:

He who exercises government by means of his virtue may be compared to the north polar star, which keeps its place while all the stars turn round it. (Yang, 1980, p. 11)

With this cosmological symbolism, the city is perceived as being a condensed representation of the world in order to establish a link between the world of man and the world beyond. Briefly speaking, since the ancient Chinese perceived the earth as a square checkerboard, the form of a square was obviously taken to be a prerequisite for the general morphology of an ideal capital that would be a replica of the earth. The city of Helu based on the principle of *Xiang-Tian Fa-Di* can be viewed as the archetype of Chinese major cities.

The typical Chinese city's spatial structure is a square with the North-South avenue as its axis; and its metaphysical significance is to imitate the images that cleave to Heaven and the forms manifested on Earth, through which to maintain some form of harmonious order in nature. To this extent, any form of environmental aesthetics is natural environmental aesthetics: what is called urban environment is nothing but an intrinsic part of the whole natural system, and the basic way to design and to create a built environment is to put it into the whole universe.

### **Urban Experiences: The Conflicts Between Various Images and Disorientation**

The questions of "what and how to aesthetically appreciate" can be answered by appreciating the urban image, as well as analyzing its structure and meaning. But, it would be far from adequate. In reality, for inhabitants or travelers, the question is: how could they form or create an urban environmental image? Lynch takes up this question under the title, "Formation of the Image" in his *The Image of The City*:

The creation of the environmental image is a two-way process between observer and observed. What he sees is based on exterior form, but how he interprets and organizes this, and how he directs his attention, in its turn affects what he sees. The



human organism is highly adaptable and flexible, and different groups may have widely different images of the same outer reality. (1960, p. 131)

In discussing this idea, Lynch mentions “cultural differences” and their impacts on the observer. Furthermore, in the following section entitled “Directions for Future Research,” Lynch asks some questions: “How does the public image of a village differ from that of Manhattan?” “How do the different major groups tend to image their surroundings?” “How does a stranger build an image of a new city?” “How does an image adjust to change, when does the image break down, and at what cost?” and so on (1960, pp. 156-158).

From the viewpoint of cross-cultural research for urban aesthetics, we can abstract, or sum up, three dichotomies from Lynch’s work: the dichotomy of village image and city image, implying urbanization; the dichotomy of traditional city image and the modern city image, implying modernization; and the dichotomy of the Chinese city image and the Western city image, implying globalization. Only by a detailed analysis of the three dichotomies can we understand the nature of urban experience.

I have had the personal experience of two occasions of disorientation in adapting to new cities. The first time was my move from my hometown Chengzhuang, a very small and poor village, to Zhengzhou, the capital city of Henan Province. The second time was my move from Jinan, the capital city of Shandong Province in China, to Boston, the capital city of Massachusetts in the US. On three dichotomies introduced above, from the perspective of the conflicts among various types of environmental images, let me try to analyze the reasons for my two times of disorientation. My hometown Chengzhuang is a very small and poor village. In 1970s, there were only about 70 families in it. The village extended no more than 200 meters from the west to the east. All the major houses are sited north and faced south. As we know, one of the most important elements shaping an environmental image is a path, which has many functions: 1) to give the existential space a particular structure; 2) to act as an organizing axis for the elements by which it is accompanied; 3) to divide human environment into areas; and 4), to lead to a particular goal. For my village, the basic spatial structure is a cross in the center, consisting of the north-south axis and the west-east axis. The basic shape of my village is a square. As we know, since remote times the door has been one of the important symbolic elements of architecture. All the major houses are sited north and faced south, which means that the door is facing south.

What I want to emphasize here is direction or orientation, which is neglected in Lynch’s image theories. In order to name our existential space, the direction or orientation plays a fundamental role. The names of the paths and fields of Chengzhuang show the importance of orientation very clearly: the northern channel, the southern ditch; the eastern field, the northern field, the western field and the northern field. Furthermore,

the central north-south path acts as the boundary to distinguish the two main domains of dwelling, the two families of Cheng and Ma, the west group and the east group. In fact, one domain is a family tree; the relationship is a blood tie, which differs from those in the cities.

I was born in the beginning year of the so-called Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) led by Chairman Mao Zedong. During that special political period, the most popular and most important song was one glorifying Mao, entitled *The East is Red*. It spread every corner of China and everyone could sing it. It reads like this:

The east is red, the red Sun is rising.  
The Savior is born in China, who is Mao Zedong.

Without doubt, this song strengthened my awareness of orientation. Interestingly, the word “orientation” coming from *Orient*, means “the direction of sunrise.” So, my orientation was shaped firmly by my childhood life experience.

My first time to be disoriented was my move from a small village to a modern city: from Chengzhuang to Zhengzhou. For a youth who had never experienced city life, the city was too big to recognize as a whole image, and the environmental complexity made everything unfamiliar and strange. Moreover, the streets in Zhengzhou are not regular straight north-south or west-east. Therefore, the major feeling of my first four years of city life in Zhengzhou was alienation. This may be viewed as the conflict between the village image and the city image.

Compared with Zhengzhou, the city of Jinan is more regular in orientation. Jinan literally means “the city in the south of Ji River.” Historically speaking, the Ji River is today’s Yellow River. During the past hundreds of years, the Yellow River has changed its way to the sea many times, because of the big floods during the summer period. When Jinan was initially constructed in about 313, the Ji River was not overtaken by Yellow River, so, according to the traditional Chinese name-giving, the city in the south of Ji River was named Jinan (*nan* literally means south). The city of Jinan was a standard square, just the same shape of ancient capitals in China. In the 1950s, most of the city wall was demolished, and the city itself was overspread and sprawling quickly. But, because of the age of the city, the basic structure and orientation are in the traditional style, just the same as my hometown village. As such, I did not lose my orientation when I arrived at Jinan in 1989.

For me, the visit to Boston was the first time to go abroad. I became disoriented for the second time in my life. I suppose the layout of Boston was based on the Western tradition of city design. As such, my disorientation in Boston may be viewed in relation to the cultural shock between China and the West, the conflict between the Chinese city image and that of the city in the West.

Environmental image refers to existential space, symbolizing man's "being in the world," in Heidegger's words. We may be "at home," "away" or "astray." The term, "lost" expresses that we have left the known structure of existential space. From here, we can understand the relation of orientation to environmental aesthetic appreciation. As we discussed above, to some extent, environmental appreciation aesthetically means to create an environmental image with "aesthetic imageability." Lynch also gave a definition of imageability:

[It is] that quality in a physical object which gives it a high probability of evoking a strong image in any given observer. It is that shape, color, or arrangement which facilitates the making of vividly identified, powerfully structured, highly useful mental images of the environment. It might also be called *legibility*, or perhaps *visibility* in a heightened sense, where objects are not only able to be seen, but are presented sharply and intensely to the senses. (1960, pp. 9-10)

My purpose in putting a determiner "aesthetic" before the key word "imageability" is to transfer it from the practical purpose of way-finding into the aesthetic purpose of appreciation. Because of different cultural backgrounds and various life experiences, although in the same environment, the environmental images with "aesthetic imageability" created by different perceivers are very different. We could imagine how strange it is to form an urban image of Boston with the sunrise from the North and with the sunset in the South, which are my urban experiences during my stay at Boston.

From the perspective of natural sciences, sunrise or sunset is only the result of natural law. But, in an environmental aesthetician's eyes, the sunset can suggest "the possibility of combining a human identity for the city with recognizing its place in a series of orders." It can tell us "that the city retains its own character while being integrated into a series of natural orders, utilizing and responding harmoniously to the forces, rhythms, conditions, and opportunities of nature" (Berleant, 1992, p. 77). If we associate the statement here with the principle of the traditional Chinese city-design introduced above, we can understand why traditional Chinese city-design philosophy emphasizes the harmonious relation between city and natural order, and what kind of metaphysical implications and significance it may convey. Therefore, for me, disorientation means the disorder of nature: it means alienation from nature, as the greatest shocks can happen in different life styles and different cultures.

## Conclusion

In the light of the fast growing global environmental and ecological crisis shown mainly by increasingly global urbanization, we can realize that the modern man, to a large extent, has lost the dimension of nature, which means that we have been separated or "alienated" from the natural world, living in the "forest of high buildings of concrete

and iron.” In this sense, we can say that we are living a kind of modern “alienated” life. Bookchin’s book, *Urbanization Without Cities* (1996), shows the main trend of worldwide urbanization clearly: urban areas are sprawling and overspreading without design and control. Lynch expressed a kind of worry about the growing metropolitan region half a century ago, thinking it “seems hopelessly beyond our perceptual grasp” (Lynch, 1960, p. 157). This suggests that the big scale of urbanization can no longer be given concrete expression in an environmental image.

Therefore, in the face of the increasing featureless and sprawling global urbanization, we should ask a question based on urban aesthetics, which is: what should we demand in order to make the environment a satisfactory part of human existence? As we can understand, any environmental design is based on a kind of notion. Any notion can reflect human beings’ idea about himself. Designing environments may mean designing Man himself. Just as Norberg-Schulz’s insightful statement shows, “Man cannot plan the world without designing himself” (1971, p. 15). In the face of increasing global environmental crisis, one of the most important philosophical issues for us to inquire is human beings’ position in the universe, or our relationship with Nature. The issue may be viewed as a “metaphysical one.”

Traditional Chinese city-design philosophy emphasizes the harmonious relation between city and natural order. The metaphysical implication and significance which it may convey is that, the historical and cultural root of today’s ecological crisis is our modern alienation from nature. To this extent, any form of environmental aesthetics is natural environmental aesthetics. What is called the urban environment is nothing but an intrinsic part of the whole natural system or ecosystem, and the basic way to design and to create a constructed environment is to position it in the whole universe philosophically and ecologically.

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