



Fordham University  
**Fordham Research Commons**

---

Student Theses 2015-Present

Environmental Studies

---

Spring 5-8-2024

## **Unnatural Climate Solutions: The Naturalizing Practice of Traditional Chinese Medicine**

Ryan Chen Mx.

Follow this and additional works at: [https://research.library.fordham.edu/enviro\\_2015](https://research.library.fordham.edu/enviro_2015)

---

Unnatural Climate Solutions

The Naturalizing Practice of Traditional Chinese Medicine

Ryan Chen

*Abstract*

Can we really save the world with trees, solar panels, and ‘net zero’ sustainable business? These are the mainstream solutions proposed by powerful actors—however these are largely false ‘Natural’ solutions that embrace greenwashing and ignore environmental justice. The rhetoric of ‘Nature’ has led to the violation of indigenous sovereignty and urban green gentrification in the name of ‘Conservation’ and carbon offsets. But what does ‘Natural’ truly mean, what is at stake when we use the word, and what does it mean for humanity? Through interviews and public observations in Flushing, Queens I learned how the Chinese diaspora naturalizes the city through the lens of Traditional Chinese Medicine and how these practices can create the political and cultural will to change in light of the climate crisis. This paper explores what their knowledge has to offer in the fight for our planet and for urban environmental justice. Chapter 1 explores the impacts on marginalized people of false solutions for the climate crisis and why they are in-fact false solutions. Chapter 2 analyzes the sociological and political context of why these false solutions are pioneering the mainstream narrative of climate solutions. Chapter 3 discusses the theory of Chinese medicine as well as the history of it in the United States. It also dives into my study of the naturalizing practice of the Chinese diaspora in the city. Chapter 4 unveils the environmental injustice in Flushing and how the diaspora ‘practices’ nature. Chapter 5 outlines how the natural practice of Chinese medicine can create the political will needed to address the root issues of climate change.

Keywords: Climate Change, Nature Based Solutions, Traditional Chinese Medicine, Urban Environmental Justice, Acupuncture Activism, Flushing

*Table of Contents*

Introduction: Writing the Narrative of Nature

Chapter 1: False Solutions

- a. Un-natural Climate Imbalances
- b. Nature Based Solutions
- c. Green Gentrification

Chapter 2: Constructing Nature, Demonizing The City, and Climate Realism

- a. Prestigious Wilderness
- b. City Wilderness
- c. Climate Realism

Chapter 3: The Telling of Urban Nature in Chinese Medicine

- a. Traditional Chinese Medicinal Theory
- b. Chinese Medicine in America
- c. The Question of Nature
- d. The Struggle of the City

Chapter 4: Healing, Justice, and Reimagining Urban Environmental Justice

- a. Flushing's Environmental Injustice
- b. Chinese Medicine for Healing Justice
- c. Practicing TCM, Practicing Environmental Justice, Practicing Nature

Chapter 5: Just Solutions

- a. A Paradigm Shift
- b. The Political Will

## Introduction: Writing the Narrative of Nature

I finished reading *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer on the plane to Banff in Alberta, Canada. It's a beautiful book of indigenous stories and knowledge that left me hopeful for the future—ready to fight for the earth with love and compassion. Kimmerer taught me to see the personhood of plants and how to honorably care for the land. It was a perfect segway to a weekend of exploring the famous lakes and mountains. We stayed in a cabin resort and rented a car for our four night stay. On our first day we visited Lake Louise. The water was lightning blue and the surrounding fauna embellished the landscape—leaving us all in awe. We explored the cosmic mountains that sat in front of a painted sky. It was truly breathtaking. However, throughout the trip I found myself agitated and angry. The lakes were bustling with tourists taking pictures, and the mountains were no less busy. I was angry that the land was commodified and fetishized by these tourists because *I* wanted to reconnect with 'nature'. I remember having my parents pull over by the side of the road because the mountain ranges were just so majestic against the backdrop of the sunset. And I wept in grief.

That fall I read William Cronon's *The Trouble With Wilderness* in class and the professor told us that it should make us feel weird. It did. Since I cried in front of a mountain in Banff, I felt like I was slapped in the face. The fundamental argument of Cronon's paper was that wilderness and nature is a cultural byproduct of the west. The 'Natural' wild acts as an emblem of untouched purity, and to it, we must return to escape the tragedy of mankind. What this ideology fails to recognize, however, is that the 'Natural wilderness' has always been stewarded by indigenous peoples until they were forcibly removed from the land. Even today, Big Green groups like the World Wildlife Fund and the International Union for Conservation of Nature are engaging in violent land grabs in the global south in the name of 'conserving nature' for carbon

offsets. Indigenous peoples are forced off their ancestral lands in using military equipment leading them traumatized and displaced. Additionally, the increased call for ‘green cities’ is rationalized by lurking developers whose only motivation is profit. Green gentrification is a false solution that has led to the displacement and policing of low-income and marginalized local communities. And finally, billionaires are championing the facade of GMOs as a resilient solution to our dying planet. They then infiltrate their false solutions illegally onto farmers and replace local knowledge. We must recognize this living history and reorient what we consider as natural. Cronon correctly advocates that including humans in the ‘natural’ sets a precedent for urban environmental justice.

Conversely, or maybe complementary, my previous learnings from other major climate advocates and authors taught me that reconnecting with ‘nature’ is fundamental to restoring planetary balance. To see ourselves as integral to the landscape and to nature, is to heal our relationship with the earth. Although these two initiatives are rooted in the cause for climate justice, it felt as though they were clashing. Something was missing. So I pondered and asked myself *what does nature and natural really mean and how do we find it in urban settings?*

I began to wince when people would say ‘I love nature’, ‘in nature...’, or ‘the natural world’. When I spoke to others who shared the same class as me, we struggled to find alternative words to use in place of ‘natural’ or ‘nature’ when we talked about environmental issues. In search of an answer I looked towards home—my Chinese heritage. Daoism and Buddhism have strong roots in ecological respect and have basic principles of ecological balance. Its teachings are thousands of years old and have had a lasting impact on Chinese culture and practices—one of them being Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). TCM, as not only a medical practice but a way of life, is integral to the culture of Chinese people across the world and in New York City. Thus

began my inquiry to understand how the Chinese diaspora naturalizes the urban environment through TCM. I chose Flushing, Queens as my case study and through interviews and observations I began to experience, through their practice, the natural in the urban environment. In this paper I will mend the gaps between the human and nature rhetoric using TCM and provide an in-depth framework for climate justice in urban environments.

Chapter one will explain the current crisis—how is climate change impacting our ecosystem services? It'll also explain Nature Based Solutions greenwashing attempts to mitigate the crisis and the human rights violations married to them. Urban green gentrification will also be discussed. Chapter two exposes the complexities of the term 'Nature' and the limitations it has on solutions to climate change. There are sociological implications that surround the term that utilizes race and class as modes of social control. It ends with an explanation as to why we are so stuck in this cycle of false solutions. Chapter three begins to explain TCM theory, the history of Chinese medicine in America, and my own research. I will solidify the meaning of nature based on my interviews and within the Chinese cultural context. Once that task is fulfilled, the chapter will explain how the Chinese diaspora naturalize the urban environment in Flushing. Chapter four brings everything together. I'll explain the green gentrification that is unfolding in Flushing, historical TCM activism, attitudes, and lifestyle applications, and how we can utilize this to reframe the concept of nature for urban environmental and climate justice. Chapter five will conclude with how TCM can institutionalize and create grassroots, cultural, and community based solutions to climate change.

## Chapter One: Climate Imbalances and False Solutions

Growing up, I've always learned about climate change as a distant reality that our world governments and leaders are taking care of. I vividly remember my sixth grade science teacher teaching us about climate change and saying, "We need to reverse the impacts of climate change, and I think we will." It gave me a few years of solace. I rested my hope on our world leaders. Now, I've witnessed the tragic floods and wildfire smoke in New York City, I've observed the decrease in snow every year, and I've heard the stories of climate disasters across the country and the globe. Climate change is *already* here. But our world governments and corporations continue to market false solutions to the public to nullify and suppress the innate knowledge that exists in our very bodies as a reaction to the issue. We are witnessing and experiencing climate imbalances that infiltrate into our daily lives.

For the past 11,000 years, our planet has been the geographical epoch called the Holocene. The carbon in the atmosphere during this time has hovered comfortably around 220 parts per million (PPM) to 280 PPM, providing a climate that has allowed our ecosystems and life on earth to thrive. This was prior to the industrial revolution. Since then, atmospheric carbon has risen to its current level of 424 PPM—with no end currently in sight. Our ecosystems and our lives are at risk because the changing climate is affecting the systems that provide the conditions for life. But how exactly is the warming climate impacting our ecosystem services?

Provisioning services provide the material outputs that are used by humans and other organisms. One such service is vegetation. Vegetation requires multiple conditions for optimal growth and quality. Proper soil nutrients are supported through balanced nutrient cycling and diverse vegetation coverage that fix nitrogen and carbon into soils. Adequate water saturation



enables plants to absorb water without needing a high water potential. Conjunctionally, sufficient light—depending on the kind of vegetation—is equally important for the light reaction portion of photosynthesis. Other factors such as temperature, other abiotic and biotic features, and soil microbial activity are equally important. However, due to increased drought, sudden rainfall events, heat waves, and warmer winters, vegetation and agricultural crops are increasingly at risk of crop failure. The stomata of a plant closes when temperatures are too hot in order to prevent water loss, thereby disrupting photosynthesis. Because of this, plant growth is hindered or damaged when they endure prolonged heat stress events.

Warmer winters have also impacted flowering events. For example, apples need to accumulate between 800 to 1800 hours of exposure to temperatures just above freezing—which are called chilling units. During warmer winters, however, apple trees accumulate extra chilling units instead of going into dormancy. The tree, now mixing up the seasons, flowers earlier and are at risk of sudden frosts that could wipe out an entire farm of apples. (Little 2021, 43) Drought has yielded crop loss in 75% of global harvested areas. Drought and heat combined have decreased global average yields of maize, soybeans and wheat by 11.6%, 12.4% and 9.2%, respectively. Heavy rainfall events, along with unsustainable farming practices, cause fertile soil to erode when no vegetation is present as well as delaying sowing season. (Bezner Kerr, R. et al., 5.4.1) The planet's crops and uncultivated plants have evolved and adapted to the climatic conditions present over the past 11,000 years and the changing climate is disrupting their ability to provide provisioning services.

Regulating services act as regulators of climate, air and water quality, and soil health. Climate change has disrupted regulating services and will impact disease regulation, overall health, as well as the growth of medicinal plants. In chapter seven of the latest IPCC report, it is,

“estimated that the climate change projected to occur by 2050 (compared to 1961–1990) could result in an excess of approximately 250,000 deaths yr<sup>-1</sup>, dominated by increases in deaths due to heat (94,000, mainly in Asia and high-income countries), childhood undernutrition (85,000, mainly in Africa but also in Asia), malaria (33,000, mainly in Africa) and diarrhoeal disease (33,000, mainly in Africa and Asia).” Climate change puts bodily regulations at risk and requires humans to create adaptive infrastructure to deal with things like excessive heat. Communities and countries without the resources to adapt are at higher risk of life threatening imbalances. Vector, waterborne, and mosquito-borne diseases are growing in the conditions created by climate change such as heat, humidity, acidity levels, and precipitation. One of the recommendations to prevent outbreaks is to support biodiversity which is noted to act as a buffer for these diseases. But even biodiversity loss is at high risk with increasing temperatures.

(Parmesan, C. et al., 2.6.4)

Biodiversity, another ecosystem service, is predicted to decrease as global temperatures rise. The IPCC report predicts that with an increase of 1.5°C, 2°C, and 3°C in average global temperatures 14%, 18%, and 29%, respectively, of the planet's species would be at risk of extinction. Biodiversity is crucial to planetary cycles and plays a huge role in sequestering carbon. Without tenacious biodiversity, the climate would fall into disastrous positive feedback loops. Biogeochemical cycles would be heavily disrupted, more so than they already are. (Levin et al. 2022)

All these combined effects will pose a major threat to human ways of life—disrupting the cultural services of our ecosystems. Coastal communities are subject to sea level rise potentially displacing tens of millions of hundreds of millions depending on myriad factors. (Cissé, G. et al., 7.3.2.1) Small island countries could be completely wiped out and NYC could be completely

submerged by the end of the century if no significant action is taken on climate. Wildfire land burnings are also expected to increase by 40% at the lowest and 187% at the highest. (Levin et al. 2022) The tropics could become completely uninhabitable due to prolonged high temperatures and humidity which is unsuitable for humans and other species. Increased floods and monsoons pose a major threat as well to cities and farmland. These extreme weather events are already increasing. We saw this with the devastating wildfires in Maui, the catastrophic floods in Pakistan and China, the heat waves in Arizona, and the freezes in Texas. Communities across the world who have built their homes and cultures are at risk of completely losing everything they've built. Those most responsible for the climate crisis owe it to them to stop the climate crisis so we can save our homes, cultures, stories, and families.

But what solutions *are* our world leaders and powerful institutions proposing to address this issue? Is it to rapidly phase out all new and old fossil fuel projects? No. Is it to completely transition to renewable energy in the next five years? No. Is it to deindustrialize our economies? No. Is it to put an end to capitalism? No. There are many solutions proposed, none of which I just mentioned. Instead they champion market based solutions, geoengineering, carbon capture technology, and Nature Based Solutions. None of these solutions truly tackle the crisis nor does it address the deep rooted intersectional injustices that have created the illness of climate change. It merely skims the surface while potentially exacerbating the issue. For the purposes of this paper, I'll be focusing on how Nature Based Solutions, reinforced by the rhetoric of the word Natural, are not only false solutions, but also violate human rights.

### *Nature Based Solutions*

The Conservation of Nature is often looked upon as a necessary task that protects our resources and the beauty of our planet. To an extent, I agree with these sentiments. Our earth is

endlessly stunning and we all have a role to play in protecting her. However, the western view of Conserving Nature is a colonial one that has permeated throughout climate solution discourse. It works in conjunction with market based solutions like cap and trade. In 2005, The European Union's Emissions Trading System was launched. Arising out of the Kyoto protocol, it created a program that delegated a fixed amount of emission permits or carbon credits to corporations to use and sell if they don't need it. The scheme found many loopholes that allowed companies to qualify for additional carbon credits that they could sell for a profit. Burning or destroying gasses (where some companies even overproduced fuels so they could claim the credits for destroying it), carbon capture equipment, planting trees, and 'Conserving Nature' were characterized as projects that would neutralize their carbon emissions—meaning that there would be no net increase in atmospheric carbon because the industry's emissions would be nullified by these carbon 'offsets'. Thus, these industries engaged in these practices to qualify for *more* carbon permits that they could profit from. It left no incentive for real emissions reductions. (Klein 2014) When Nature Based Solutions were first introduced by multiple Conservation organizations, they argued that the carbon stored in Canada's Protected Areas was worth \$39-87 billions dollars that could be *sold* as carbon offsets. The logic of this argument is appalling. How could existing forests of *stored* carbon combat the carbon released by industry? It doesn't. (Dawson, Longo, and International 2023, 93) Verra, the world's leading certifier of carbon offsets, is used by companies like Disney and Shell. In an article by the *Guardian*, it was revealed that 90% of rainforest carbon offsets certified by Verra are worthless. According to Verra's formula, if a conservation project successfully protects 100 hectares of forest from deforestation, then it constitutes 40,000 CO<sub>2</sub>e of 'saved' carbon emissions. A company who has brokered these projects could then claim 'carbon neutrality'. However, two major studies by the

University of Cambridge and Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS) found that many of the carbon credits approved had no significant impact on emissions reductions and did not lead to notable deforestation mitigation efforts. Additionally, there are reports of human rights violations in Peru where residents of a ‘protected area’ were forcibly evicted. (Greenfield 2023) Given that a company like Shell, who *had* plans on investing \$100 million per year in Nature Based Solutions, has carbon credits approved by Verra, it is likely that Verra is merely another greenwashing scheme.

These tactics don’t materialize into actual emissions reductions—it’s just a series of profitable green washing scams. Large extractive and polluting industries fund or work in collaboration with Big Green non-profit organizations like the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to pull off their green schemes. Big Green, the United Nations, and western nations aim to Conserve thirty percent of terrestrial and marine wildlife by the year 2030 (30x30) via highly secure and militarized Protected Areas or, in other words, Fortress Conservation. One study from 2017 seemingly supports this endeavor by claiming that 37% of all carbon emissions could be mitigated through Natural Climate Solutions (NCS) like Conservation and reforestation by 2030. (Griscom) The study concludes that two-thirds of NCS pathways include forests. However, to genuinely meet targets indicated, we would need to plant seven to eight hundred million hectares of *new* forest, which is roughly the size of Australia. (Dawson, Longo, and International 2023, 91) What they suggest as a cost-reducing strategy to achieve this goal is to have the private sector grow *plantations* of ‘forests’ for initial commercial harvest—completely neglecting the cost it would have on biodiversity. These kinds of solutions Fortress Conservation and Natural climate solutions simply perpetuate a surface level solution to deep economic and social

inequalities and then continue to exacerbate those problems by committing major human rights abuses on indigenous land.

The Kahuzi-Biega National Park located in the Democratic Republic of Congo is one example of egregious human rights violations in the name of Conservation. Categorized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and a tourist attraction, the park is known for its biodiversity and gorillas. Tragically, however, the displacement of the Batwa people from their ancestral lands remains insignificant to park tourists. Between 2019-2021, investigative journalist Robert Flummerfelt documented and exposed the violence committed against the Batwa after they attempted to return to their ancestral lands after almost half a century. They were subjected to shoot-on-sight protocols, group rape, village burnings, bombs, terrorization, executions, and much more. Eye-witness testimonies and material evidence described incidents where children were locked inside a house as park guards and soldiers burned it down. People fleeing into the forest dying of starvation and women dying days after group rape atrocities were also reported. Funding for the park's enforcement and maintenance came from the US Department of the Interior, Germany, WCS, KfW Bank, and Congolese Institute for Nature Conservation (ICCN). (Flummerfelt 2022) Western Conservation institutions make up a large portion of funding for these 'Conservation' efforts. The west's mechanical mind believes that violence and policing are the elite solutions to protect their fetishization of Nature; and by throwing money at these 'Conservation' efforts, they directly perpetuate their monolithic perception of the world. Instead of viewing humanity and the earth as one, they continue to divorce the two from each other through violent means.

Pranab Doley, an indigenous activist from the Mising Tribe is another victim of the violence committed at Kaziranga National Park in India. Doley argues that the forest biodiversity

and recuperation of the Indian one-horned rhinoceros, post British colonialism, is because of indigenous ways of life and the oneness between the land and humanity—not because of Big Green. However, because of 30x30 goals, in 2010 the Assam government granted wildlife authorities permission to shoot on site without any legal proceedings or human rights due diligence. In 2015, seven year old Akash Orang was killed in broad daylight. Activists were sent to jail for speaking out and media attention surrounding the issue was banned in India. (Dawson, Longo, and International 2023, 44) The IUCN India program is in business with mining companies like Tata Steel, Tata Power, and others to increase their ‘biodiversity portfolios’ that then grants them justification for more mining permits. Big Green and industry is in bed with the political violence surrounding land grabs from indigenous peoples. This further proves that we cannot view climate and the environment as apolitical issues. They must be addressed through revolutionary structural changes that end this cycle of violence and reimagines our relationship with the world. (Dawson, Longo, and International 2023, 108-111)

Kahuzi-Biega and Kaziranga National Parks are only two of many cases in the global south of militarized violence for western style Conservation. It stems from a narrative that deems humans as unnatural, needing to be eradicated from the planet's most vulnerable places. The narrative runs dry when 80% percent of earth's most biodiverse places are protected by indigenous people. It runs drier when despite conservation efforts since the 1970's, according to a study by the WWF, biodiversity has decreased by 68% . (“A warning sign: where biodiversity loss is happening around the world”, n.d.) It runs into drought when Conservation groups like WCS and WWF are funded by companies—who are notorious for environmental degradation—like, but are not limited to, Chevron, Citibank, Coca-Cola, and Chase bank. It

becomes ironic when these ‘Protected Areas’ are not protected from developers building hotels in or near the parks or western corporate tourism.

Nature Based Solutions are a facade. It is greenwashing us into believing that they care about climate when their bottom line is to make short term profits with good PR. Biodiversity is not being increased under these practices—it does, however, strips indigenous peoples off their ancestral lands and their cultural identity. Big Green dehumanizes nature and perpetuates the rhetoric deep into daily discourse. We divorce ourselves from our built environments and believe the only way forward is in the Natural forests: it absolves us from our responsibility to address the real issue of industrial capitalism. It allows us to turn the other way. As Naomi Klein writes, “Polluting smoke may not be billowing from the tops of its trees but it may as well be...” But it may as well be.

### *Green Gentrification*

Conservation has its ideological foundations in resentment for urban and industrial life. They long to return to a time that ‘predates’ them. In chapter two, I’ll delve deeper into the sociological and historical conditions that give rise to this sentiment; but, for now I’d like to parallel Fortress Conservation with urban green gentrification. Gentrification is the process in which a historically marginalized low-income community becomes affluent while displacing the local inhabitants. Green cities seek to create sustainable practices in the city to address climate change and to create a more livable environment. Unfortunately, it has created a new brand of gentrification in the process. Similar to Fortress Conservation, greening cities are intended to mitigate climate change and Conserve Nature but in the process dispossess people of their homes.



In a journal titled *Improvement, not displacement: A framework for urban green gentrification research and practice*, the authors develop a general process of green gentrification. First, discourse surrounding sustainability produces a form of green hegemony where the prospect of green spaces is seen as neutral solutions to ecological issues. ‘Underutilized’ spaces are categorized as potential spaces for sustainability projects but the characterizations are often based on colonial and racist tensions of urban spaces. Second, the implementation of these projects restrict the voices of the local marginalized communities and those with the most money and power are the ultimate decision makers. The needs of the community are not addressed but rather cater to potential *new* residents instead. Third, a socio-spatial change occurs leading to physical and psychological displacement. As new residents move into the neighborhood, who are attracted to the low-cost of living and accessible green spaces among other factors, it creates opportunity for new commercial investments in the surrounding area. Thus, living costs are increased and the community is infiltrated with external private economic interests. With the knowledge that new green spaces are not made for the community but rather new residents, a sense of alienation from the space arises. New upper class and white residents also forge new social norms in public spaces and relegate the historic norms to second class social structures. The journal emphasizes that it is not the inherent implementation of green spaces that exacerbate gentrification, but rather the inequitable process and intentions in which it unravels.

Another study that analyzed 212 peer-reviewed articles addresses the issue of green gentrification between 1977 and 2021. It found that a broad range of the intentions behind urban parks, gardens, and site clean ups are motivated by private interests rather than actual local needs nor is it motivated by climate mitigation or adaptation. For example, some extractive companies

develop green spaces in urban areas as carbon offsets in order to gain more carbon credits. It also found that even with ecological concerns as the motivation, the lack of community representation in the procedure to implement projects is another driving factor. Local people, after being left behind the decision making process, feel a sense of alienation and lose a sense of belonging in the community. (Cucca, Friesenecker, and Thaler 2023) Even the implementation of urban gardens in the name of food justice can create white dominated spaces that perpetuate ‘civilized’ social control in communities of color. White liberals attempting to do good in marginalized communities buttress their vision of what food sovereignty looks like and don’t engage the community in the process. (McClintock 2018)

Urban implementation of green spaces and sustainable practices, while sometimes well meaning and necessary, don’t thoroughly consider environmental justice. As mentioned previously, green spaces peak the interest of corporate businesses which promote more consumerism of wasteful products. Instead of creating lifestyles that are more aligned with planetary boundaries, it stimulates a capitalist economy where I identify as the core issue of climate change. Property values increase and rent costs become unbearable for low-income folks. Later on I’ll shed light on how Flushing, Queens is also a victim of green gentrification.

Nature, as we know it, is a deception. Most people, on either side of the political spectrum, would say they care about the environment. However, it is used by capitalists to generate apolitical, neutral, and apathetic sentiments about it even though these are undeniably political issues. Conserving Nature is a greenwashing capitalist scam served on a platter to distract us. The true essence of nature is not captured in the telling of its story. Reduced to merely material and place, Nature is indicative of an ideology that is linear and flat. It normalizes and naturalizes a system of inequality, of mechanicalism, and of alienation. The way we

understand it doesn't capture a story of process, of resilience, of balance, of interconnectedness, and of complexity. It divorces humanity from it and divides a hierarchy of landscapes—the industrial city is a stain and Nature is the paint that covers it and vice versa. Nevermind the tireless effort needed to scrub our wounds, we'll just paint over it. This paper aims to understand what true nature is so that we may reorient the cultural and political discourse for our planet.

The threat of climate change is already a major issue in it of itself. But climate change is rooted in sociological and historical inequalities that requires a contemporary analysis to fully address the issue. The next chapter will discuss how the corporate mainstream discourse of climate change has historical precedents. My general approach to this issue is not to propose new policy because the solutions are already there, defunding Big Green, ending all new fossil fuel infrastructure, the Green New Deal, and many other policy proposals. Instead, I look at the issue from a cultural and sociological perspective and I hope to contribute to existing efforts of building the *political and cultural will*. We cannot merely address climate change as a scientific issue but rather as a symptom of social structures that are deeply embedded into the fabric of humanity. This paper aims to understand Chinese Medicine as a *political* and *bodily* practice that can envision a way forward without fetishizing a possible future—because it is grounded in an existing reality.

## **Chapter 2 Constructing Nature, Demonizing The City, and Climate Realism**

Nature, the word as we know it, has its origins in philosophy. Aristotle held three notable definitions of the word nature: one being the essence of things (i.e the essence of a tree is wood), the second being order—which includes the harmony of ecological systems and the 'civilized' people of Greece, and the third being things that generate and grow. Ancient Rome continued the definition but amended it as things devoid of human influence that contrasts the evils of human

culture and society. In modern history, this definition pioneered the practice of Conservation and has created a cultural byproduct of wilderness. Christian religion and enlightenment thinkers like Comte Buffon and Francis Bacon enforced and radicalized the dehumanization of 'nature' by relegating the earth to a mere resource sanctioned by God and the metaphysical. (Ducarme 2020) In the Chinese context, 'nature' has many words that are ascribed to many meanings. In between the heavens and the earth (天地之间), ten-thousand things (万物), and 'that which is so by itself' (自然) are some examples. (Hahn 2001, 204) Nature is such an abstract concept that has no concrete meaning; yet, it is paramount in day-to-day and political environmental discourse. It has shaped humanity's relationship with the world around us. We juxtapose ourselves with it to contest the essence of who we are. With this, the study of environmental sociology examines the way these concepts have shaped our environments, our societies, and the ongoing ecological crisis that our planet faces.

### *Prestigious Wilderness*

Definitions matter. Words matter. Culture matters. As mentioned previously, the split between humans and nature produced a humanless wilderness as a cultural byproduct where the Conservation of it is idolized. Western culture views the 'wild' forests, oceans, and prairies as a beacon of purity, while the industrialized city is a stain on its beauty that the whole of humanity has vandalized. Which is, to an extent, true. Rampant consumer capitalism has created the climate crisis. Its economic model of eternal monetary accumulation accrued by the selling of goods extracted from the earth has undeniably caused the destruction of our planet. However, on the other hand, the development of this economic model has been supported by relegating the earth to mere resources in the name of God and human potential. Nature, in this instance, is nothing more than a means to an end. If we look at these two contrasting ideologies of Nature,

we unveil the contradiction that makes the narrative of Nature so difficult to define and utilize to save our planet. As chapter one illustrates, Conserving Nature forces blame onto the inherent beings of humanity itself instead of a corrupt system created by a minority. Indigenous people all over the world are paying the price for this misrepresentation. The creation of the United States famous national parks was achieved by the forceful removal of native tribes that lived off and inevitably conserved the land through their practices. It was human-full landscapes that led to the conservation of it, not human-less ones.

William Cronon writes about what exactly constructed the 'wild' sensations of American national parks. He cites two words that describe it: the sublime and the frontier. The sublime manifests the sacredness of the mountains or the forests. Romantics and religious people in the past 250 years professed the cathartic nature of the wild. It was where you were most likely to come face to face with God and be most in touch with your spiritual self. Writers like John Muir illustrate in passionate detail the beauty of places like Yosemite and Sierra Nevada that helped develop the culture of a sacred landscape. The frontier paints the image of the American cowboy. Individualistic and masculine in essence, frontier culture of the wild paved a way for individuals to escape to the margins of society and live an unconstrained life. Anti-modern and anti-urban sentiments felt by frontier individualists, who usually came from privileged urban backgrounds, drove their desires to 'escape'. Indeed, they would advocate for the preservation of a humanless landscape with themselves as the exception to the rule. What was not acknowledged, or more accurately erased, was the violent conflict that took place to literally produce the uninhabited wilderness. The displacement of indigenous peoples required coercive force sanctioned by the state to 'return' the land to its post 'savagery and most 'pure' form. Thus, the American culture of the sublime wilderness was manufactured by this cruelty to cater to urban elites seeking to

escape. It was through these efforts that Nature shifted from a mere resource meant to be dominated to a romantic place of solace. It's opposition to the urban environment alienates, underappreciates, and ignores the work and sorrows of urban life.

Commodity fetishization contributes to the lack of credit given to the people who do labor in the urban environment. While wilderness enthusiasts and frontier individuals frolic around in the woods, factory workers are making their boots, their clothes, their tents, their supplies, and the opportunity for them to do so. They view their presence in the wild as an exception to the rule while exploited industry workers are only meant to serve their interests. They escape into the woods to romanticize their own lives while leaving behind the rest of society. Wilderness permits them, and us, to forgive our history without tending to its wounds because they are returning to a more pure world. People working in sweatshops, living in shoe boxes, and exposed to pollution are forgotten about as they 'return' to a Nature embedded with political violence. (Cronon 1995)

Theodore Roosevelt, the United States' most notable Conservationist and youngest president, was an infamous hunter. Every step you take in his home in Sagamore Hill has the remains of a taxidermied non-human animal proudly displayed. To offer a glimpse into his career as a hunter, in eleven months alone between 1909-1910, he collected 11,400 specimens in Africa to bring to the Smithsonian. Yet, he was an avid Conservationist and strived to protect species from extinction, even as he hunted them. The president's view on Conservation and restoration was largely influenced by his dominionist view of Nature and felt that the land should be protected for the use and enjoyment of current and future generations. Motivated by this frontier and utilitarian outlook, he established five national parks, eighteen national monuments, fifty-one federal bird sanctuaries, four national game refuges, and designated 230 million acres of land

under federal protection during his presidency. But for whom did he preserve these lands for? It certainly was not for Native American tribes. (Tobias, 2019) On his quest to Conserve and restore the American lands, he transferred 86 million acres of tribal land to the national forest system. (Evans, 2022) Land that was intimately known by indigenous peoples was forgone for the use of upper class white individuals for their frontier leisure. Roosevelt's and western Conservationists' outlook on the wild and on nature fails to encompass the oneness of everything. They have divorced our bodies from the thing that created us and manufactured an ideology that demeans the earth and alienates humanity.

### *City Wilderness*

The Conservation of wilderness is not limited to the boundaries of national parks or protected areas—it is also constructed within urban environments. Utilizing the same justification of the sublime and the frontier, the creation of urban parks and green spaces was motivated by a civilizing mission. Frederick Law Olmstead and other park advocates wanted to create a space for urbanites to seek refuge in after a long day of unhealthy industrial work. A park would offer an escape from the grievances of the city and produce better health and mediate inter-class conflicts. This goal, however, did not directly address the working conditions of the time or the class struggle that produced animosity and tension. Exemplified here, is the use of Nature and green spaces to neutralize and conceal political and socioeconomic issues. Once parks were created, the health benefits and inter-class mediation impacts of it were left to luck. The creation of parks only perpetuated an elitist intention of social control on working class people. Dorceta Taylor presents the early years of Central Park as evidence of the civilizing mission of parks. Between 1858 and 1860 Olmsted hired 55 park keepers to police the park where they had jurisdiction to arrest people who violated park rules. By 1859, 228 arrests were made where,

“Almost half of the arrests were for violations of the ordinances, i.e., walking on the grass; picking flowers, nuts, twigs; using foul language, etc. Another 33% of the arrests were for drunkenness and disorderly conduct.” (Taylor 1999, 444) People were really only permitted to walk, stand, talk, and sit. But why shouldn't we be able to dance, pick flowers, and participate in recreation? Shouldn't we be able to engage with the land and with each other? It proves that the construction of Nature is meant to produce a very specific set of behaviors and identities rather than actually mediate tensions and increase health benefits.

Tensions arose as more parks were modeled after Central Park and as 28.5 million immigrants came to the U.S. between 1860 and 1920. With rapid industrialization and urbanization, the demand for improved outdoor recreation increased, but so did the desire for social control. Parks were oftentimes the only places where low-income families could go to for recreational activities due to the lack of living space. Of course this was not acceptable to the standards of white America. Middle class white elites got involved in parks and playgrounds to police the behavior of mostly immigrant and low-income children with the intention to ensure they grew up to know good 'morale'. For example, mothers part of the Massachusetts Emergency and Hygiene Association used the 'sand garden' as a paternalistic method to teach kids to be hygienic and sometimes to spread the message of the 'return to nature'. The children, however, felt a deep disdain for their attempts to dictate their behavior (Taylor 1999, 454-457).

Creating 'natural' landscapes and dictating human behavior are deeply intertwined. Olmstead's work, as Anne Whiston Spirn puts it, a 'double edged sword': “Even as he established and expanded the influence of his profession, landscape architecture, in his own time, he planted the seeds of its invisibility.” (Spirn 1995, 111) His creation of green landscapes were done so well that we see it as natural rather than constructed. Olmstead neglected to



communicate these landscapes as man-made. The human labor that contributed to these landscapes was invisibilized, erasing the blood, sweat and tears that it took to build it. His work, along with other park advocates during this time, was undeniably linked to their mission to ‘civilize’ immigrant and working class populations. The very material construction and design of parks plays an immense role in the socialization of humanity. It produces and reproduces social norms that dictate the way we move and interact in our environments—whether we walk or drive, sit or play, isolate or commune. By naturalizing the constructed landscape, we naturalize the social consequences and systems for future generations that only recognize its current reality as the only legitimate way to live. It’s how colonial history justified the enslavement of ‘inferior races’ by utilizing their proximity to ‘Nature’ to naturalize their oppression. The way indigenous people lived were deemed barbaric and incapable of rationalism and civility. Enslaving them and stealing from them was therefore an inevitable occurrence in order to fulfill religious and enlightenment doctrine of using the world for the advancement of white humanity. Comte Buffon, for example, wrote about the role that hotter climates in Africa produced an inferior race of people incapable of utilizing Nature to develop European style civilizations. This illuminates the way nature, the way our environments, is utilized to forge natural identities of oppression. It is how the suffering of humanity has become invisible (Moore, Kosek, and Pandian 2003).

Solutions to the climate crisis are gripped by the sheer success of capitalism’s naturalization. We are so accustomed to these modes of thought that we cannot imagine any other way of life. The essence of capitalism is reductionistic. Humans are reduced to labor. Emotions are reduced to chemical imbalances. Chronic pain is reduced to physiological imbalances. The Earth is reduced to a mere resource. Nature is reduced to a romantic

fetishization. The restoration of ecosystems is reduced to a monolith. And to us, all of these definitions make sense to us because they are precisely so Natural to us.

### *Climate Realism*

The term 'climate realism' has varying meanings in the media. Some use climate realism to separate themselves from alarmists and some use it to understand the aesthetics and culture of climate change. I, however, was inspired by Mark Fisher's *Capitalist Realism*. The thesis of the book was to explain why there is a widespread sense that capitalism is the only viable system and there is no way out of it. For me, climate realism is the mainstream sense that there are only monolithic solutions to climate change and ecological disaster which arises from the perpetual motion of capitalist realism. Solutions like solar geoengineering, GMO's, carbon capture, Conservation, and market based solutions are pioneered by wealthy elites and world leaders who are simply out of touch. They don't know humanity. They don't know the land.

In *Oneness vs. The 1%: Shattering Illusions, Seeding Freedom*, Vandana Shiva and Kartikey Shiva write about the ways in which the world's wealthiest one percent of people are advocating for climate and environmental solutions that are reductionist and mechanistic. She cites the impacts GMOs have on our ecosystems where corporations deny the complex systems that actually create the conditions for flourishing life. Corporations are shrouded in the mindset of linear causality, where only one cause has one effect, to ensure they get away with the risks of their harmful products. Bill Gates seemingly cares about the climate yet champions solar geoengineering as a viable solution and funds GMO projects that have devastating consequences on farmers and ecosystems. Politicians and the rich praise him and his 'mind' when in reality, he knows nothing about the complexity of our planet and our people.

Our world is diverse, interconnected, complex, and beautiful embodied by oneness. Yet because of our hegemonic capitalist ideology, we have been coerced to believe that this is not the case. Through violent colonialism, motivated by capitalist profits, Europeans have created a world where we are divided by race, religion, and gender. We are severed from the earth in the pursuit of resources for our extractivist economy. We are alienated from ourselves and our interconnected ways of being. Shiva cites Lily Kay's *The Molecular Vision of Life* to explain how this separationist ideology has infiltrated science and western epistemology. Molecular biology was coined in 1938 by Warren Weaver, who was working under the Rockefeller Foundation, to reconstruct our knowledge of the gene, of science, and of our bodies to fit the social order of industrial capitalism. Eugenics arose to restrict the reproduction of the 'feeble minded' who were unable to adapt to rapid technological change and thus trickled down into racist and sexist understandings of the human body. (Shiva 2020, 64-65) Even the terminology of biomedicine and human anatomy, like the heart pumps or viral infections that 'invade' the body, can be traced back to this period of industrialization. Psychologists and anthropologists, 'trace the rise of a mechanical metaphor for the functioning of the human anatomy, the body-as-machine, to the shift from a rural, farm economy to an industrial economic base.'" (Joralemon 2017, 4)

The attempt to mechanicalize our bodies through our medical terminology and the science of genes have paved a path towards genetic reductionism and genetic modification of plants (for example transferring one desirable genetic trait from one plant to another to produce a climate resilient plant product) to serve as climate adaptation solutions. "Climate resilience is a complex trait and cannot be 'engineered'..." however, "What corporations and the Gates Foundation are doing is taking farmers' varieties with known climate resilient traits from public

gene banks, mapping their genome, and taking out patents on the basis of guesswork...” GMOs as a mainstream solution are a result of climate realism mired in centuries of colonial violence and social conditioning. Whether subconsciously or consciously, they know our current system is incompatible with life on this planet. GMO’s, solar geoengineering, and technology is their moral scapegoat—a lame attempt to control what is free. It upholds the facade of innovation to combat a crisis created by ‘innovation’.

Suzzane Simard, renowned scientist who scientifically uncovered the secrets of mycorrhizae, shares with us her experience working with a logging company in her book *Finding the Mother Tree*. The logging company was obligated to replant forests that they clearcutted. No, it was not for altruistic reasons, but rather done with the intention of profiting off the trees decades later. Simard was tasked with ensuring that the trees would grow back. However, the conifers and douglas fir were rotting and their growth was stunted. However, unbeknownst to her at the time, the soil was stripped of a vital fungus—mycorrhizae. Mycorrhizae attaches to the roots of trees and plants and forms a symbiotic relationship: the mycorrhizae benefits from the carbohydrates that trees gifts them and in return the mycorrhizae funnels nutrients to the trees and helps them form a network of communication. Because the trees were planted as monocultures, the biodiversity of the soil and ecosystem were reduced and the mycorrhizae was stalemated. Monocultures are a byproduct of capitalist ‘efficiency’ that aims to grow and accumulate as fast as possible while forfeiting the very thing that nourishes it. Simards work illustrates the deep ecological grief that the earth is experiencing as a result of our climate and capitalist realism. Plantations of trees won’t sequester enough carbon to save us but rich biodiversity will. Real climate solutions require us to return to an ancient understanding of interconnectedness, mutualism, and diversity.

Climate realism absorbs us into the naturalized logic of capitalism. It has a grip on our climate discourse and solutions and the earth is reduced to a linear causality in the name of profit and efficiency. Even in the midst of the congestion of climate and capitalist realism, the earth exhibits visceral symptoms of false climate solutions and our bodies and spirits feel the pain of our deranged economic and social systems. Our minds and our environments might not explicitly identify realism as the issue but our bodies, our souls, our soils, and our ecosystems know. So how do we fix this? How do we step out of this cycle of madness? How do we un-Naturalize the ‘Natural’? How do we end the villainization of the city and how do we naturalize it? The next chapter will outline the potential traditional Chinese medicine has in moving the needle—overcoming inertia, overcoming place, and overcoming climate realism.

### **Chapter 3 The Telling of Urban Nature in Chinese Medicine**

When the average person thinks of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), they would likely associate it with acupuncture and herbal medicine—usually practiced by professionals. This doctor-patient relationship is not incorrect and is crucial to its practice. However, TCM is one of the oldest medical practices in the world with around 5,000 years of history: so, it’s reductive to compartmentalize it into a professional field of healthcare. TCM is more than that, it is a daily practice that is integral to the lives of everyday Chinese people. Which is why I turned to TCM to discover how we can reconnect with nature without fetishizing the forest or rejecting our urban environments. In my introduction, I wrote about the anger I felt with humans ‘infiltrating’ a majestic landscape. I wanted to appreciate the trees and the dirt, and these humans were ‘disrupting my process’. Appreciating mother earth, honoring the spirituality of the land, and restoring the animacy of plants and non-human animals are all crucial to restoring our kindredness with our planet. But there is more to that and we need to consider how urbanites are

able to participate in this process. TCM has the power and potential to reconnect us with nature and dismantle the oppressive force of 'Nature'.

In this chapter, I'll introduce the very basics of TCM theory. We'll also briefly look at the history and use of TCM in the United States and its professional and quotidian practices. This will provide the background information necessary to understand how TCM manifests itself into the material reality of our bodies and how it can be used to 'naturalize' the urban environment. I use Flushing, Queens, New York, home to a huge population of Chinese immigrants, as a case study. Through interviews of TCM doctors, Chinese immigrants, and public observations I will define what nature should really mean and how TCM makes it applicable for urban environmental justice and climate justice.

### *Traditional Chinese Medicinal Theory and Practice*

Traditional Chinese Medicinal theory is complex. There are myriad layers and concepts that interact with one another in TCM theory; however, for the purposes of this paper I will cover the very basics of its theory. Many Americans are now turning to eastern medicines because of its more holistic nature compared to western biomedicine. 'The organism as a whole' represents the underlying approach for treatment in TCM. Practitioners consider all aspects of the person's body, symptoms, life condition, environment, and daily habits and practices in order to make a proper diagnosis for treatment. Compared to western medicine, the diagnostic process is more intimate between a doctor and patient. Considerable time is taken to account for the integrated aspects of a person's life in order to view the person as a whole entity. This paves the way for the next consideration. One's environment plays a vital role in their health because humanity is in 'unity with nature'. Climatic conditions, precipitation frequency, exposure to green space or pollution, time of day, seasons, and even astrological phenomena impact a person's cycle of

health. Albeit, as our societal systems have evolved, our social environments impact our health as well—I'll discuss this more in chapter four. The original language for this concept did not explicitly refer to 'nature', as there was no word for it, but rather the cosmos. The cosmos, in this instance, represents *everything*. Everything impacts the human body.

Qi (气 qi4), five elements (五行 wu2 xing2), and yin and yang (阴阳 yin1 yang2) act as principles of TCM. Qi is the energy or life force within the body, but it also constitutes the matter of growth and change in the world. There are six different kinds of Qi: wind, cold, heat, dampness, dryness, and fire. This concept is most likely what most Chinese people are most familiar with when it comes to understanding TCM theory. In my personal experience, for example, if one has a sore throat or fever—characterized as having fire qi—it is recommended to eat something with a more cooling qi like watermelon or congee. The six qi's are meant to restore a balance to the life force within the body. Qi is meant to be practiced and nurtured.

The five elements consist of wood, earth, fire, metal and water. These five elements are what constitutes the basics of material reality. Each element has a corresponding organ and emotion depending on their different functions and properties. For example, your heart and tongue correspond with fire, your liver and eyes correspond with wood, your stomach and mouth correspond with earth, your lungs and large intestine correspond with metal, and your kidneys and bones correspond with water. The five elements also correspond with seasons, temperature, taste, orientation, types of 'growth' (like germination or transformation), and even color. Among the five elements exists relationships of generation and restriction. Generation is concerned with what produces what; for example, wood generates fire and water generates wood. On the other side we have restriction. It is concerned with control and restraint—where water restrains fire and metal restrains wood. There are also relationships of subjugation and reverse restriction which

occurs when there is excess of certain elements. A theory like this inherently accounts for the correlation between one's body and one's surrounding environmental processes. It surpasses the compartmentalization of our reality.

Yin and yang is the most well known concept in TCM as well as Chinese philosophy. Yang represents things in the presence of light and yin represents things devoid of it. They are not mutually exclusive but rather exist in a way that interactively opposes one another while creating the conditions for development and transformation of all things. They are always in equilibrium, always in a dynamic balance. Just like everything is characterized by the five elements, everything and all phenomena contain yin and yang components. For example: heaven is yang and earth is yin, heat is yang and cold is yin, day is yang and night is yin, and activeness is yang and passiveness is yin. In regards to the human body, organs that provide vital stability (i.e the heart and the lungs) are characterized by yin and the organs that process and digest (i.e the stomach and the intestines) are characterized by yang. Even the time of day impacts the function of the body—your energy or illnesses might feel different in the morning compared to the night and thus dictates what should or shouldn't be done during specific times.

A TCM doctor uses this theory to restore balance within the body—just as our planet is able to restore balance within our ecosystems. Qi, the five elements, and yin and yang inform the meridians, which are the energy pathways that link different organs and areas within the body, and acupoints (or pressure points). Pulsology, the practice of feeling the texture and speed of the pulse, is used, in part, to determine what sickness the patient has. From there, myriad methods are available to restore balance and proper regulation. Herbal formulas or certain foods can supplement what is lacking or restrict what is in excess in the body. Acupuncture, the practice of puncturing thin needles into the skin, triggers neurons and electrical signals to heal the body.



Moxibustion, tui-na (massage), cupping, exercise, qi-gong (simply described as a meditative breathing exercise) and many other methods encompass the practice of TCM. It is a dynamic and holistic practice capable of treating many illnesses—including the ones we might not be aware of.

Chinese medicine is modeled and rooted in Chinese philosophy. It is heavily shaped by the transformative and dynamics of doaism. The way of being in the world in doaism, requires one to embody the material reality we exist in. From there we observe and transcend it into a way of being in the world. Chinese medicine is one such way of learning to *be* in the world.

养生 (yang<sup>2</sup> sheng<sup>1</sup>), or nurturing life, is a crucial component of the practice of TCM.

‘Nurturing life’ does not end with treatment from a doctor but expounds into the daily life of individuals and communities. Fundamentally, it is the practice of maintaining one’s health, both physically and mentally. It utilizes one's surroundings, one's body, and one’s social environment to manifest a way of being that nurtures life. Methods of nurturing life are malleable and diverse allowing for individualized practices that can be collectivized into group efforts. I’ll explain why this is important in chapter four.

So far, this paper has communicated the dangers of using ‘Nature’ based solutions and the cultural rhetoric surrounding it. Racism and violence are embedded into it—marginalized people are dehumanized and the earth is dehumanized. The reason why I chose TCM as a method to break this narrative is two fold. First, it takes things that we often associate with nature and expands it. We’re all likely to associate wood, water, fire, heat, cold, metal, etc. as things found in the ‘natural world’—these are familiar to us. TCM theory takes these seemingly basic ‘objects’ and places them into a *process* and *system* that is interconnected. Second, the elements and other characteristics that we perceive as our surroundings are brought *inside*. Our bodies are not surrounded by them but we *are* them. We both embrace them and are embraced *by*

them in our very bodies. The theory alone begins to re-humanize nature and views everything as a sacred oneness. And once it's put into practice, there are physical and social manifestations that enable us to reorient the narrative of nature.

### *Chinese Medicine in America*

TCM is indigenous to China but has made its way across the world. The United States has a history of TCM that is older than the country itself. The use of medicinal herbs was widely used in the Americas before the United States was founded. White people often appropriated, grew, and used indigenous, African, Middle Eastern, South American and Chinese knowledge of medicinal plants. Although, they were no stranger to the use of medicinal herbs. There was a global network of imports and exports in the colonies of these herbs—even Benjamin Franklin was a user of Chinese rhubarb. (Shelton 2019, 29-35)

Ginseng, a widely used root herb in Chinese medicine that is indigenous to China, also has an indigenous cousin in the United States. The Iroquois used *Panax quinquefolium* for its healing properties. A Jesuit missionary, Joseph-Francois Lafitau, noticed this plant in Canada that looked similar to the Chinese ginseng plant in 1717. Once this information began to be well known, ginseng hunting spread to New England and Appalachia. French and British merchants relied heavily on the labor of Native Americans for the business of exporting wild ginseng to China. It became such a profitable business that eventually caused its population to plummet. When I came upon this history, I found it extremely fascinating to know that there are Chinese herbs, like ginseng and mugwort, that are indigenous to both North America and Asia. As I mentioned in my introduction, indigenous and environmental writers advocate for humanity to regenerate our relationship with the land—to *become* indigenous. However, there is an obstacle to this goal in urban areas: which is why I looked to TCM to re-understand how we can reconnect

with nature. Ginseng and mugwort are perfect examples of how the Chinese diaspora can 'become' indigenous to the land.

However, as western biomedicine attempted to monopolize their legitimacy, Ginseng, and TCM in general, became a tool of racism. Western doctors wrote that the medicinal properties of ginseng were conflated and compared the admiration of ginseng to religious adoration. Religion, according to them, was second class compared to secular science for healing. Chinese medicine and doctors were exploited in creating the image of the mysterious oriental. The practice was often compared to mystical or religious rituals that were not rooted in 'science'. Western doctors used this quasi-religious rhetoric to relegate Chinese people and medicine to second class citizens and to legitimize the use of western biomedicine. Chinese doctors were consistently targeted and arrested for practicing illegal TCM, practicing without a license, or practicing without a 'legitimate' medical degree (that being a degree from a western institution). The American Medical Association supported these attacks on TCM doctors because they were in the midst of consolidating medical power and becoming a legitimate institution. Chinese doctors were the perfect step stool for them.

Chinese doctors played a pivotal role for Chinese immigrants when they first came to the states in the nineteenth century. Chinese clinics and apothecaries served the community not only as healthcare centers but provided other culturally significant goods like food, incense, and clothing. They served as a connection to the mainland and kept the culture afloat. Herbalists and doctors congregated mostly in California during the nineteenth century, where the Chinese population was the highest. However, most of them were scattered in various mining and railroad towns across the state serving the Chinese, and non-Chinese, miners and railroad workers. The dangers of mining and railroad construction exposed them to immediate physical risk as well as

various environmental toxins—the large concentration of Chinese people doing these jobs was a product racial capitalism and environmental racism. Chinese doctors, as well as other undocumented Chinese healers, served as the remedy to the environmental risks. (Shelton 2019, 67-70) Although the modern day environmental justice movement began almost a century later, these doctors were serving a community who were victims of environmental injustice.

After decades of persecuting the illegal practice of TCM, it slowly became acceptable and legalized across the United States by the twentieth century. Indeed, it required a lot of convincing. The rise in appeal towards TCM was rooted in a desire to feel better in ways that compensated for what biomedicine lacked. Patients were attracted to its lack of surgery and less invasive nature of practice. Diagnoses were conducted using methods of 望闻问切 (wang4 wen2 wen4 qie4) or sight, smell, inquiry, and pulsology with treatment based on the theory I described in the previous section. (Shelton 2019, 125-126) Treatments were described as adaptive and dynamic compared to the rigid and localized treatment of western biomedicine. Later in the century, acupuncture began to develop political undertones. The political ‘pain’ associated with drug addiction and HIV were treated by acupuncturists and TCM when western medicine proved to be insufficient and borderline apathetic. Patients felt TCM was more holistic and empathetic because doctors would really get to know the patient as a person. (Hare 1993) In chapter four, I’ll explore the political nature of acupuncture and its role in expanding the methods of healing in the west.

### *The Question of Nature*

As I concluded in chapter two, ‘Nature’ is difficult to define. It is loaded, complicated, and has a violent history of racism and dispossession. However, given the weight of the concept, it is evermore important that we solidify it into something more tangible. In this section I plan to

articulate a more ‘grassroots’ oriented definition of nature through interviews I conducted with nine members of the Chinese immigrant diaspora in Flushing, Queens and others in the surrounding area with close ties to Flushing. I will pair their answers with Chinese philosophical precedents on nature and contextualize their answers in the material and physical practice of TCM. This will then inform the broader question of ‘how TCM naturalizes the city’ in order to build a framework for urban environmental and climate justice.

I interviewed professional TCM doctors, holistic health practitioners who are knowledgeable in TCM theory, and everyday Chinese-American residents with varying knowledge of TCM theory. My subjects were some of my personal family members who then connected me with their network as well as one subject who I met directly. Their names are: 陈德仁 (Chen<sup>2</sup> De<sup>2</sup> Ren<sup>2</sup>), 董国良 (Dong<sup>3</sup> Guo<sup>2</sup> Liang<sup>2</sup>), 王水娥 (Wang<sup>2</sup> Shui<sup>3</sup> E<sup>2</sup>), 陈昌华 (Chen<sup>2</sup> Chang<sup>1</sup> Hua<sup>2</sup>), 高中 (Gao<sup>1</sup> Zhong<sup>1</sup>), 胡飞燕 (Hu<sup>2</sup> Fei<sup>1</sup> Yan<sup>4</sup>), 胡春秀 (Hu<sup>2</sup> Chun<sup>1</sup> Xiu<sup>4</sup>), Julie Liu, and Nancy Zhang. Their names are listed with their last name first followed by their first name

Earlier in this chapter, I mentioned that there was no word for nature in the early Chinese language. It wasn’t until the nineteenth century that a definitive word for Nature was created in response to the political context of our physical surroundings. Even now, the translation between the two languages of nature leaves room for ambiguity and interpretation.

Before I delve into their responses, I’d like to make a note on the translation. In this paper, I will provide both the original Chinese text alongside the English translation of it. Translating Chinese into English is a difficult task and many nuances may be lost in the translation. When reading the English section it is worthy to note that it is based on my own interpretation—other Chinese speakers may interpret their responses differently.

When I asked the question, “According to you, what is nature?” to my interviewees, I received varying responses. However, every one of their responses built upon each creating a complete narrative of nature. What I found most intriguing about their responses was that ‘trees’, ‘forests’, and the ‘wilderness’ were not fundamentally important in their answers. Certainly, some mentioned urban parks and the mountains as part of their answers, but was only a part of their response. I organized their responses into three categories: nature as a lack of surplus human labor, nature as a systems based approach, and nature as the human body.

*Nature as a lack of surplus human labor.* Most of my interviews had at least part of their response falling under this category. Julie Liu is an aromatherapist who does massage therapy and facial treatments and utilizes TCM concepts like acupoints and meridians within her practice. She immigrated to the United States from Taiwan in 1998 and has practiced primarily in Flushing. Her practice, as she describes, is a mode of healing to deal with the everyday struggles of modern life. As of the date of the interview she was 55 years old.

自然就是原始嘛，它是不被破坏。是不被人工加工的。是—自然就是。。。就是原始的东西嘛。包括—这个，对呀—就是所有的能看得见的东西都是没有被破坏的就是自然。不被加工的，原始的东西都是自然的—对。

Nature is the original, it is unable to be destroyed. It is without the addition of human labor. This—nature is just...it’s just the original state of things. It includes—this, right—just everything you can see that has not been destroyed, this is nature. Not impacted by additional human labor, the original state of things is nature—right.

Hu Chun Xiu is a resident in Flushing who immigrated to New York in 1987. She was born two years after the founding of the People’s Republic of China and lived through the Great Leap

Forward and the Cultural Revolution. Currently, she lives with her husband in an apartment in Flushing. During the day she works a regular office job but at night and on weekends she participates in Chinese dance and music groups.

自然就是。。。大自然里面。自然长出来的东西嘛，不是说特意去弄它出来的东西。就是他自然成长的东西就是自然。能不能这样理解？就是大自然—他自己长出来的那些东西就是自然。

Nature is...within mother nature. It grows naturally, they are things that are created without intentions of its creation. It's just things that grow naturally. Can it be understood in this way? It's just mother nature—it's the things that grow by themselves that are nature.

Hu and Liu explain their conceptions of nature in relatively ambiguous terms. 'Things that grow' leaves us with much to unravel to understand the meaning of 'growth'—more specifically things that grow without explicit intention. Forests come into existence without permission, they simply become. For some, like the Batwa people in the DRC, the forests are still a vital place of their livelihood. For others, the forests are a place of majestic fetishization—a place to experience the growth of Nature. But what of the dandelion 'weeds' that grow on our suburban lawns that homeowners desperately try to eradicate? What of the mugwort that generates on the side of the road that is often left ignored? What of the horseweed that sprouts from the cracks of our sidewalks? What of our bodies that desire to grow but are stunted by pollution and static lives? What of our cells that generate and regenerate every second for every single living being on this earth? There is a growth and regenerative existence that is within us and surrounds us. The theory of generation and restriction in TCM theory embodies a tradition of knowing the relationship between beings and between elements that make or break one another.

Through relationships, the world is formed. It is up to us to determine what kind of relationships are created that form a world of ecological and social harmony.

What stands in the way of producing the world we want to see is labor. Seemingly, the responses by Liu projects the rhetoric that nature is devoid of human influence and contrasts against the backdrop of the ‘pure’ wilderness. However, Liu mentions two other points: nature is that which is not destroyed and nature is the original state of things. She recognizes the destruction that humanity experiences and perpetuates; but, there is an attempt to reconcile it through labor. Labor is also a loaded word: one with many definitions and socioeconomic implications. Labor could simply mean doing physical or mental work to achieve a product of some kind; but, it could also be defined, as Marxists do, as the physical work done by the working class to create goods sold by and benefited by the owners of capital. Through this system, we are alienated from our own bodies. We labor away and destroy the earth for the capital accumulation of the richest people on earth. Private equity firms, developers, venture capitalists, billionaires, the fossil fuel industry, and more are responsible for the destruction of our planet. They exploit the labor of the working class and divorce them from their bodies, their communities, and their environments. Disconnect is the root of our toxic relationship with nature. TCM has the potential to reconnect us.

If we recognized this alienation as the root of the problem and ended the capitalist structure of labor, we could begin the return to the ‘original state of things’. To be clear, I am not advocating for all industrialized countries to become hunter-gatherer societies again— it’s much more nuanced. Chinese medicine and philosophy is not a struggle to consistently return to primitive life as we swim against the current of modernity. It is, in actuality, a way of being dynamically balanced within an ever changing world. Therefore, ‘the original state of things’ is



an interpretation of balance in an unbalanced world. It is resilient, is interconnected, is anti-capitalist, and is human. It recognizes the necessity of body and being unity to produce a world that meets our needs.

Doctor Chen De Ren is an acupuncturist who has licenses in both Chinese medicine and Western medicine. He earned his degrees in Chinese and American universities and has worked in New York since the 1980's. Patients come to him for myriad reasons and he boasts about the benefits of TCM along with his ability to treat patients. For him, nature is 天然 (tian1 ran2). The word's translation is complicated but mostly has to do with the quality of a thing (whether or not it has been influenced by human labor). He stated that various Chinese herbal medicines like goji berries and chrysanthemum are natural. Chinese medicine has thousands of years of history with about ten-thousand different herbs that are all natural—they come from the earth and from the sky. Western medicine, in contrast, is made with chemicals through technology and machinery. It's tested on animals regardless if they live or die. The two are completely different, according to Doctor Chen. He also explained that western medicine treatments are isolated to areas of pain and rarely considers the whole person. Chinese medicine on the other hand is holistic and treated through experience and adaptability, not chemicals—not machines.

'Chemicals', in this instance, is the surplus human labor. Doctor Chen believes that nature and natural are embodied in the practice of Chinese medicine because of its lack of chemicals. Looking at the history of how the undermining of TCM's legitimacy was used as a racist tactic to validate the supremacy of western biomedicine, we can see how it parallels with the enlightenment era of colonialism. As I noted in chapter two, Nature was used to racialize and relegate indigenous people by categorizing them into an exploitable concept of Nature. Thus they *naturalized* the legitimacy of racial capitalism and white supremacy. It classified the earth as

only a means to the end of a eurocentric way of life—an end unachievable by indigenous peoples. TCM was used in the same way Nature was used—to render different epistemologies and ways of living as second class. In this instance, relegating TCM was a means to support the legitimization of western biomedicine. Western hegemony on indigenous populations and epistemology *is* the surplus human labor unnecessarily infiltrating an already natural way of life. If TCM is *true* nature, reclaiming it is inadvertently reclaiming the definition of it. It is not to say that western medicine is a fraudulent practice, but the use of a historically suppressed indigenous form of medicine begins to create cracks in our perception of what the world is and can be, what is natural and what isn't.

Nancy Zhang is a working class single mother in Flushing. She has worked as a writer and as a health management practitioner. She compared her healing work as the repair person after a house fire is put out—the doctor being the firefighter and her being the repair person. She immigrated here from China in 2004 and is dedicated to living life with the intention to help others. Nancy was passionate about food. Not exactly about cooking, but the way we eat and things we eat. As part of her answer, she stated the use of chemicals, GMO's fertilizers, and pesticides to grow food is not natural. It reduces the nutritional value of our food, stunts human health, and contributes to pollution. She is absolutely right. The additional technological labor implemented in the growth of our food for industrial agriculture is not natural. Industrial agriculture depletes soil nutrients through monocultures, contributes to eutrophication, kills biodiversity, leaves organisms vulnerable to disease, destroys soil microbial activity, and contributes to climate change. Food forests and regenerative agriculture have been replaced by machines and chemicals that are destroying the systems and balance of our planet. Nancy advocates for a better way of eating—not only for our health but for our planet.

*Nature as a systems based approach.* Nature, as our society knows it, is reduced to place. To many, Nature is a place you go to—like the forest. It's a place we can drive to for a day hike or a week-long camping trip. They say it keeps you grounded when you 'go out into nature'. What most fail to recognize is the systems that make their Nature. They neglect nutrient cycles, succession, solar paths, hydrological cycles, and mutualistic relationships. They forget that *everything*—from the city to the tropics—is interconnected.

Chen Chang Hua and his wife Wang Shui E are a couple living in Flushing who I interviewed together. They both immigrated from China in 1983 and both lived through the Cultural Revolution that has heavily impacted their attitudes on Chinese culture and society. Both are retired and are enjoying their lives in New York. They were both unsure of how to answer the question of 'what is nature'? However, after some thinking, Chen Chang Hua said

太阳早上从东方升起，对吧。晚上从西方落下去。天暖的，菜—什么东西—都好长。天冷的菜就不行了，人老也不行了。刚刚出生很有生命力，现在时代时间过去人就摔倒了。最后走向死亡。这就是自然。

The sun rises from the west in the morning, right. At night, it sets in the east. When temperatures are warmer, vegetables—or whatever—grow easily. When the days are cold vegetables don't grow well, when people get old they also don't function well. Right after you're born you have a lot of vitality, but now as time goes by people are going to fall. At the end of the day, we move towards death. This is nature.

Wang Shui E stated that she agreed with him but gave an additional definition that I will mention in the third category. Chen Chang Hua recognizes the melding of environmental systems that create the conditions for life to flourish and for life to end. The growth and death of plants

corresponds with the vitality and wither of humans. Life on earth is deeply intertwined with many systems that arise into a complex web. Why should we ignore this? Earlier I listed many environmental processes that are crucial to creating life but so far when governments and corporations talk about Conservation, it's only about planting trees. But trees won't solve the climate crisis. It takes multiple lifetimes for a full succession of hearty forests and ecosystems to develop. What makes us think that solely planting trees is going to secure our future? We need to acknowledge and act upon the *systems* that create life. We can do this through sustainable landscape design and ensuring disturbed areas are able to undergo succession. Equally important, however, is the implementation of *human social* systems into our solutions.

Nancy Zhang also explains that nature is based on the seasons. She explains that the way we consume food is not natural and leads to bad health.

比如说植物，他有一个季节。我讲的自然就是季节生长的东西，按季节生长出来的。就是，比如说，春天应该是韭菜吧—我们就取个韭菜。春天是韭菜长出来的，对吧。每一农作物有不同的季节生长，不能吃反季节的食物。要遵行自然。。。南瓜是秋天嘛。九十月份，南瓜现在开始了，要出来了。。。可他搞到一月二月在吃南瓜。三月四月的开春的南瓜是不能吃的，很多人不懂。吃了就生病—他就反季节。(26 min)

For example, chives—it has a season. The nature I am talking about is the seasonal growth of things, following seasonal growth. It's like, for example, the spring is for chives—we'll use chives as an example. The spring is when chives grow, right. Every crop has its own growing season, we can't eat foods that are not in season. We have to obey nature... Pumpkins are for the fall. September and October, pumpkins are starting now, it's ripening... But people are eating them in January and February. We cannot eat pumpkins that are produced in March and April. A lot of people don't understand, they get sick.

The grocery stores no longer have seasons. At any time of year, you'll see the same fruits and vegetables fully stocked across the country. Isn't it wonderful? We're able to eat such a wide array of food at our discretion. But what is the cost? Every year, 40% of all food in the United States ends up in a landfill—that's enough to fill an entire football stadium every single day. We trade food all across the country and across the world which account for 19% of carbon emissions in our food systems. (Li) 71% of water usage and one-third of land use (which is the size of South America) is designated for agricultural production. Our food systems are unsustainable. They rapidly produce food to cater to industrialized nations and destroy forests and ecosystems—and then we waste 40% of it. Additionally, major human rights and labor rights are violated by major food companies like Monsanto and Nestle. This is the cost to have our grocery stores stocked with the same produce all year long. There are no seasons anymore and we are out of touch with local environments. We fetishize the grocery stores as we indulge in a seemingly limitless landscape of produce. There is no inherent connection to food anymore. This is not natural.

Humanity as a species once ate a wide variety of foods that were based within the seasons. Since the Green Revolution, much of that history and culture has been lost. So how do we reclaim it? Nancy believes that because nature is seasonal, an alignment of humanity with the seasons is nature. Eating seasonally would force us to eat more locally, forcing us to find more diverse foods, forcing us to reduce our reliance on imports, and forcing us to be in sync with nature as a process. It requires a deglobalization and decapitalization of our economy.

Conservationists dress up in their tuxedos and dresses to attend fundraising events that serve tomato and cheese hors d'oeuvres in the winter. They fundraise to 'protect the forest' while they remain complicit in the very thing that is destroying them. They ignore the system. Part of

this return to nature requires humanity to realign ourselves with natural processes, and it starts with changing our human systems.

*Nature as the human body.* Often, the human body is neglected in the discourse surrounding nature. Humans are not merely part of nature, but we *are* nature. Our bodies are a reflection of our surroundings. Accounting for this is crucial in shifting the definition of nature for real climate solutions. Nature as the human body is elaborate, is grand, is not a monolith and is enlightening. All interview responses expressed a social grievance or need for social change in conjunction with their responses on what nature is. Thus, nature based solutions irrevocably require social based solutions too. The human body as a response from my interviews were not necessarily a direct answer from the question of ‘what is nature’? Some of them arised organically in conversation. Here are their responses.

Gao Zhong, along with his wife, is a bookstore owner in Flushing. Their store sells a majority of Chinese books and, to my knowledge, it is the only one in Flushing. They immigrated from Shanghai in 1990 and opened up their book store shortly after. I met him when I was looking for books to buy with a friend and we ended up having a conversation about TCM. I asked if I could interview him another time and he gladly agreed. Although he was not a practitioner of TCM, he was very knowledgeable on its theory and culture. During the interview he told me that TCM had no strong relationship with American life. I asked him to clarify and he said:

西医是一种科技医学, 你同意还是不同意?。。。我为什么这样说? 第一, 西医他的诊疗的手段是机器对不对。西医通过仪器去诊断你的疾病。它的治疗, 他用的是西药-西药是什么? 西药是通过化学的分解跟提纯的方式组成的药。他一定是通过一个化工的过程。。。那我说中医是自然医学。我为什么说他是自然医学? 第一, 我说他的诊断的手

法是望闻问切。望闻问切，我也说了，这是人跟人之间的一种交流—直接交流。我说了最简单的通过切脉。我跟据你的脉象变化，你的脉象我去判定你有什么病。这是人跟人之间的直接交流，对不对？这是一种自然行为吧，是人本体的东西呀。

Western medical practice is a technological medicine, do you agree?...Why do I say this?

First, western medical diagnosis methods are done with machines, right? Western medical practice goes through machines to diagnose your sickness. Its treatment uses western

medicine—what is western medicine? Western medicine goes through chemical

decomposition and purification methods to create the medicine. It must go through chemical

engineering processes...So I say Chinese medicine is a natural medical practice. Why do I

say Chinese medicine is a natural medical practice? Firstly, I said that its diagnosis methods

utilizes sight, smell, questions, and pulsology. Sight, smell, questions, and pulsology, like I

said earlier, is an interaction between people—a direct interaction. The most simple example is

pulsology. I follow the changes of your pulse, your pulse is used to determine what illness

you have. This is a direct interaction between people, right? This is a natural behavior, it is a

type of human ontology.

Gao Zhong's critique of western medicine emulates the critique of western individualism and culture. Hyper-individualism and liberalism has penetrated every aspect of life in western societies. We're constantly told a tale that rugged hard work leads to success and innovation for the betterment of society. But where has this led the vast majority of Americans? We isolate ourselves and glue our eyes to smart phones with the hope of numbing the loneliness we feel. We indulge in the hopes that technology will save us, but it won't. We've made great strides in medical technology and I am not discrediting western medicine's achievements. However, the essence of it, as Gao Zhong explains, lacks intimacy and prioritizes technology over the patient

and prioritizes objectivity over subjective experience. With the rise of the industrial revolution, the clinical gaze began, “treating the patient increasingly as a body, a series of anatomical objects, and ignoring the social and personal realities of the patient, the person.” (Holmes 2013, 115) This collective shift in our consciousness, the way we view ourselves in this world, emerged out of an ecologically destructive material shift. And so this is why we prioritize carbon capture instead of mother earth. This is why we need a paradigm shift. Time and time again we hear about the medical neglect and distrust of a patient’s chronic pain and the racism within the industry. My friends, family, and I have all felt the lack of care from western medical clinics. They ask us a couple questions, do a couple tests, and tell us to go home and take tylenol. So often there is no adequate treatment plan, no sense of care, no form of real treatment for us unless it is life threatening. Rugged individualism defines the way patients are treated in the medical industry—or lack thereof. It treats the symptoms but not the underlying wound

TCM, conversely, is a direct interaction between people. Pulsology literally requires the doctor to touch the patient’s wrist to make a diagnosis. The relationship between a patient and doctor relies on connection and empathy to recognize the pain. TCM reflects the way societies are naturally supposed to be—robust in social and ecological communities. We’re all longing for and grieving for something we’ve lost. Our society is in pain. Our planet is in pain. But what policy-maker or politician has proposed a solution to this pain? They have none. They are coddled by corporate interests and aim to preserve the dying sanctity of capitalism. In chapter four, I’ll talk about how TCM and acupuncture has been used in the United States by the Black Panthers and other leftist groups to treat pain and build political networks of care and revolution. Because we need a revolution to save the planet, and it starts with community.



Wang Shui E, Chen Chang Hua's wife, gave an extended definition of what nature is. Part of this response was also part of the question of whether or not the city is nature.

就是平平淡淡, 就这样就自然吧, 对不对。。。平常的就是早上起来弄个东西吃, 这里那里话的, 摸一摸就够了。很平常的。。。现在我觉得这个城市不怎么好。可能现在有了那个病以后了可能工都没有了, 你知道吗? 生活条件又差了, 所以自然也不好了。。。我很少法拉盛, 现在。我一去法拉盛我就感觉了: 一个人多, 第二个话—还很多乞丐, 要饭的。你看他们都很年轻, 对不对? 还有小偷, 我跟你讲我都看过好几次了。所以我感觉到乱。

Simplicity is natural, right. Usually you wake up to make food to eat, here and there you casually touch, this is enough. It's very simple... Now I feel that this city is not that great. Maybe it was after the pandemic people don't have jobs anymore, you know? People's living situations are not as good, so that is why nature is not good anymore... I rarely go into Flushing anymore. When I go there I just have this feeling: first, there are too many people, secondly, there are a lot of beggars. You see they are all so young, right? There are also thieves, let me tell you I've seen so many. So I feel like it's very messy.

Rising cost of living, unemployment, unaffordable healthcare, environmental inequities, and houselessness are contributing to this crisis. It's nearly impossible to live simply in the contemporary world. When everyone is in survival mode, there is scarcely any room for one to fathom a life of simplicity. Their bodies are constantly in motion, living pay-check to pay-check. Their bodies are alienated, unable to engage in the natural communion of humanity. Our cities are victims of neoliberal neglect and austerity politics while our tax dollars are sent to billion-dollar corporations. Even those who are affluent do not live simply. They indulge in

material consumerism. With more money, they have more flexibility to purchase luxury items and extra cars. Their consumption leads to the destruction of our planet—how unnatural. In *Unsustainable Inequalities*, Lucas Chancel cites that the richest 20 percent of individuals in France and the U.S. account for three quarters of their total emissions. He also cites that as income increases by 1%, emissions increase between a range of 0.6% to just over 1%. (Chancel 2020) The rich's tireless attempts to remain in control of their wealth, produces a culture of endless consumption. Living simply in industrialized societies is simply not an option. Nature is a life that is simple.

The following two responses are from Nancy Zhang and Doctor De Ren Chen respectively. They talk about the importance of experience in a human and its pertinence in Chinese medicine.

人是自然。但现在的人已经开始人工的试管婴儿，机器人阿—都来了。所以未来的世界很混乱。所以我们一定还是要坚持。为什么喜欢中医呢？中医有很多文化是几千年的经验。我是尊重经验的人，特别喜欢经验。因为只有经验才能让我们飞向天空。。因为别人没有经历过。我们从古代的书上和旁边的人—老一辈的人。像这阿姨，公公身上学到的经验。经验—因为是经过的。。这是一个知识。

Humans are nature. Now, however, people are already starting to use vitro-fertilization and robots. That's why the future is chaotic. That's why we have to persist. Why do we like Chinese medicine? Chinese medicine culture has thousands of years of experience. I am a person who respects experience, I really like experience. This is because experience has the ability to help us fly towards the sky...Because people have not experienced things before. We look to ancient texts and those alongside us—the older generations. We can learn from

aunties and grandfathers experiences. Experience—because they’ve experienced...this is a kind of knowledge.

中国有一个医生，最著名的一生，叫李时珍。李时珍写了一本本草纲目—神农本草—他自己亲自含。比如这个药有没有作用。比如头痛，他把川芎含到嘴头—你含了头就不痛了。呃，这个药有效。他是自己庆亲身验的。他不想美国的药，美国的药都是化验室搞出来的。这和天然和自然完全不同。所以我们的医学叫自然科学。

China has a doctor, the most famous doctor, named Li Shi Zhen. Li Shi Zhen wrote the Compendium of Materia Medica. He personally tested the herbs in his Compendium of Materia Medica. For example, does this medicine have any use? For example headaches, he harbored Ligusticum striatum in his mouth—if you harbor it your head won’t hurt anymore. Oh! This medicine is effective. He personally experienced it. He isn’t like American medicine, American medicine is produced in a laboratory. This and nature are completely different. That’s why we say TCM is a natural science.

Experiencing life through a first person lens is increasingly difficult. We watch life happen through our screens watching someone else live. We indulge in food, we don’t experience it. We numb ourselves with drugs to forget the sorrows of life. Medical practitioners don’t empathetically experience the pain of their patients, they analyze it. Politicians look at statistics, not stories. Scientists conduct experiments on the land, they don’t experience her knowledge. Society has become artificial and arrogant. Nature is supposed to be an experience of our bodies, of life, and of the land. Knowledge is produced and learned through experience and is inherently an act of defiance against normalized coercive industrial knowledge. By reclaiming

our intimacy with the world, we resist. TCM's quotidian practices are a testament to resilient intimacy which I will elaborate more on in chapter four.

Nature is a lack of surplus human labor, a system, and is human. My interviewees created a beautiful harmony that conveys a more solidified understanding of nature based. To summarize, nature lacks the capitalist system that commodifies the earth and humanity. Nature is a system that manifests the beauty of our earth and our world—humans must relearn to align with these systems. And nature is human. It is deep within us: it lies in the way *we live*.

Earlier I stated 'A way forward is a way of return'. Their responses all indicate that there is something we need to return to. In our current context, nature is a *process* of return. It is not simply moving back into the wild. Chinese philosopher Lao Zi wrote in chapter 40 in his famous Tao Te Ching that *Return is the movement of the Tao. Yielding is the way of the tao. All things are born of being. Being is born of non-being*. He also wrote in chapter 42 *The two gives birth to One. One gives birth to Two. Two gives birth to Three. Three gives birth to all things*. The Tao Te Ching has paramount importance in Chinese medicine and in all of Chinese culture and society. The poems are not saying that to return we must go backwards. In fact, to return we must move forward—forward to the original state of 'non-being', to fluidity of our rhythmic universe, and to the growth of our beating hearts.

### *The Struggle of the City*

New York City is notoriously known as a concrete jungle city that never sleeps. Even with its various parks and trees scattered throughout the city, one typically won't view the city as a go-to destination for rural country dwellers in search of Nature. In fact, these parks are meant to emulate the Nature that was lost within the city and serve as an escape from urban life for city dwellers. Nature in the city is *designated* and defined in patches. So how do we expand beyond

this sentiment of nature in patches? How do we find it everywhere we go? How do we embody and live in nature in an environment so precariously classified as a concrete jungle? I asked my interview subjects ‘Is the city nature?’. Two responses stated that the city was *not* nature and largely viewed nature as a place to go to in the city. However, all other responses either answered in the affirmative or had relatively ambiguous answers that dealt with the quality of life within the city, accessibility to parks and things that grew, people within the city, and some philosophical questions.

Julie Liu and Hu Chun Xiu provided that the city’s development and the labor utilized to excavate and build the urban environment is not nature. While their perception of nature is relatively aligned with western perceptions of nature, there is still nuance and ambiguity in their relationship with their environment, with nature, with the earth, and with their bodies. I’ll explain their process in the next chapter. Others, however, answered in unique nuanced ways—they dealt with the social conditions, the material reality, and philosophical questions of the city. Hu Fei Yan immigrated to New York City in 2002 and has worked laboriously for many years before she sold her laundromat recently. I asked her if the city was nature and this was her response:

对。是的。这里都。。。那些树阿。。。那些环境—环境都挺好。这里。。。那些路边有芦花—感觉比中国那边。。。都。。。空气好一点。

Yes. Right. Here...those trees...the environment—the environment is pretty good.

Here...on the side of the roads there is vegetation—feels better than China...it’s all...the atmosphere is a bit better.

那曼哈顿是。。。法拉盛分开很多地方。而且法拉盛那些人太多了。。。曼哈顿，那些地方空旷一点。法拉盛就是分开好多种—就是主街，这些地方人太多—那些。。。没这么好。

Manhattan is...Flushing is divided into many places. In fact in Flushing there are too many people...Manhattan, it's a bit more spacious. Flushing is divided into many types—like Main Street, places like this have too many people...it's not that great.

Hu Fei Yan deals with the physicality of nature—it exists where there are trees, vegetation, and healthy environments. Similarly, Gao Zhong—who is a TCM doctor—stated that there are *parts* of the city that are nature. *Parts* of the city with a clean environment and *parts* with trees and green space. Understanding that there are systemic inequalities that have led to *parts* of the city that don't experience healthy environments, environmental justice plays a huge role in the Chinese conception of nature—because of body and nature unity. Nature as one's environment grounds it in material reality and transcends the abstract romantic notions of an 'uninhabited wilderness'. Because of this, the practice of TCM has a major stake in environmental justice. To heal an individual is to heal their environment. Returning to nature is a return to a healthy environment. For some, however, the material reality of the city itself raised some questions.

我不知道怎么回答。应为它不像一个植物样的，是大自然生来就有的。他是靠人的健硕，所以有的怎么一个纽约。所以说这个人类的智慧健硕的发展纽约这个地方—就是。。。繁荣。但是同时有很多社会问题，就像舅妈刚刚江的。这个要饭的，治安的—很多问题。这个不能说是自然产生的。

I'm not sure how to answer. Because it (the city) isn't like a plant, it doesn't just exist from mother nature. It relies on the abilities of a human, that's why there is this place

called New York. So we say this place of economic vitality was developed by the knowledge and abilities of humanity. But there are also a lot of societal issues, just like Auntie here said a moment ago. Beggars and public security—there are a lot of problems. You can't say this was created by nature.

Chen Chang Hua parallels the city with growth. The built urban environment was *built* with human capabilities that serve the interests of capitalism. Because the city was not 'grown' Chen struggled to confirm that the city was nature. He also alludes to the social issues of the city and its place in defining whether or not the city is nature—I'll touch on this shortly. Dr. Chen, however, recognizes that the very existence of biological beings in the city makes it nature. It corresponds well with Peter S. Alagona's *Accidental Ecosystem: People and Wildlife in American Cities*. Alagona argues that although urban cities in America were not built with the intention of attracting non-human animals, cities were designed in a way that ultimately allowed animals like coyotes, rats, and raccoons to thrive.

城市当然是自然的。它是承载这么一个城市，这么多人啊。而且人。。。这个里头有植物，动物，各种各样的东西。这是肯定是自然的—天然啊。但是里头的人就不同。还有很多各种民主，各种地方来的人

Of course the city is nature. It is a city, so many people. In fact people...this place has plants, animals, and many diverse things. Without a doubt it is nature—nature devoid of human influence. But the people inside are different. There are many different ethnic groups from many different places.

Dr.Chen and Gao Zhong, respectively, also deal with the philosophical questions of nature. They touch upon materialism and what is the *essence* of nature.

因为我们有历史观。我们历史叫做唯物主义。。。世界上是物质为基础。这个物理学一有个。。。物质不灭。。。全世界，每一个都在成人这个物质存在。都是自然的。。。

Because we have a historical perspective. We (meaning China) have a history called materialism...the earth is based on the foundation of materials. In physics there is a concept called matter that cannot be destroyed. The entire world, every person must admit this. It is all natural.

你可以说发展到今天这个步，它是自然走到这步的。但是这里面当然有人为的东西在里面啊。。。这人文景观。我们通常的一般的分别上面有分为自然景观跟人文景观。何为自然景观，天然形成的。何为人文景观，有人力加上去的。你从大的脚步来讲我都可以说这全部是自然的。你就算，我今天用人文的东西改变了一些自然景观，但是你所有改变的东西—你的砖，石，你的钢及格，玻璃及格—你不都是至于自然的东西吗？

You can look at the development position we are in today, you can say that we naturally came to this point. But, ofcourse, there are things in the city that are man made...it is the human landscape. Our typical way of separating things is from the human landscape and the natural landscape. The meaning of the natural landscape is that it is formed through 'sky-like' forces. The meaning of the human perspective is that there is the addition of human ability. You can say from a broad perspective that everything is nature. If you consider the fact that we use man made objects to alter the natural landscape, but everything you change—brick, stone, steel, and glass—isn't this all natural?



Gao illuminates the tendency for humanity to categorize and compartmentalize the ‘natural landscape’ from the ‘human landscape’. However, everything is nature. Our material reality, even the ones created by human hands, can be considered nature because it is sourced from the earth. We run into murky waters, however, when we question the damage that urban environments, and the consumerism in it, have caused to the earth. All of our products rely on the mining and extraction of ‘natural’ resources that cause inconsiderable harm to ecosystems and life on earth. So how can we justify calling the city natural if the city is an epicenter of exploitation? In order to naturalize the city, we must look at our social issues to reflect upon the question. Chen Chang Hua also pointed out that urban social structures that create issues like poverty, houselessness, and environmental racism render a kind of suffering unbeknownst to nature. Right at the end of Chen’s response, Wang Shui E commented, “环境呗, 环境。(Environment right, environment.)” Our environment, the physical and social place in which one lives, is a measure of a city’s naturalness. In the last section, Wang explained that going into downtown Flushing was no longer as good as it used to be because of the social issues that have been exacerbated by gentrification. Hu Fei Yan also expressed similar sentiments.

那曼哈顿是。。。法拉盛分开很多地方。而且法拉盛那些人太多了。。。曼哈顿, 那些地方空旷一点。法拉盛就是分开好多种—就是主街, 这些地方人太多—那些。。。没这么好。

Manhattan is...Flushing is divided into many places. In fact in Flushing there are too many people...Manhattan, it’s a bit more spacious. Flushing is divided into many types—like Main Street, places like this have too many people...it’s not that great.

The congestion recently experienced in Flushing has always been a topic of contention amongst the community. It's a reflection of the economic standing of the world and of Flushing. Immigrants are coming to Queens for economic opportunity—either to be exploited or to exploit. I'll elaborate more on this in the next chapter.

While the physical construction and landscape of the city can be arguably considered *both* nature and not-nature, it is the social conditions and activity of the body politic that make or break its 'natural-ness'. This is because the social standing of the population directly reflects the 'nature-ness' of the urban environment. If there are higher levels of pollution there are higher levels of respiratory illnesses. If there is a lack of green space there are lower levels of physical activity. If there is a lack of third spaces there is an increase in social isolation and mental health disorders. If there is major disinvestment and no economic opportunity, there are higher rates of poverty. What I hope to understand through this paper is how the Chinese diaspora in Flushing, despite its gentrification and social issues, naturalizes their environment through the practice of Traditional Chinese Medicine. In the next chapter, I will discuss the history and green gentrification unfolding in Flushing, the political nature of TCM, and how the diaspora practices TCM in their environment.

#### **Chapter Four: Healing, Justice, and Reimagining Urban Environmental Justice**

Environmental justice is a relatively new field of academia. The movement emerged in the 1980's to expose the inequalities of exposure to environmental degradation based on race and class. We've found that people of color are exposed to disproportionate environmental hazards for reasons that cannot be reducible to economic class—although socioeconomic status still does contribute to these inequalities. People of color and those of lower socioeconomic status also have disproportionately less access to environmental amenities as opposed to their white upper

class counterparts. To better understand environmental justice, it should be looked at through distributive, procedural, corrective, and social lenses as a basic starting point.

Distributive justice aims to distribute environmental burdens and benefits equally across race and class. Procedural justice seeks to ensure decision making processes are accessible, well known, and actively democratic so the communities impacted actually make the final decision. Corrective justice ensures culprits are held accountable in order for them to bear the financial and social burden of correcting their wrongdoings while ensuring they reap no benefits from their crimes. Finally, social justice encompasses racial, economic, gender, sexuality, disability, and immigrant related issues that are pivotal in achieving environmental justice. In this chapter, I will explain the current environmental injustices facing Flushing and the organizations fighting for justice. In regards to TCM, I'll outline the historical uses of TCM to advance the cause for social justice and how it contributes to environmental justice.

### *Flushing's Environmental Injustice*

Flushing is where I'm from. I was born at the New York Presbyterian Hospital which is only a few blocks away from my grandparent's house in Queensboro Hill. I spent the first few years of my life there. Growing up, I'd spend every weekend with my grandmother and we'd often venture into downtown Flushing. Because Flushing has a predominantly East Asian immigrant population, especially Chinese immigrants, it was vibrant with family owned Chinese restaurants, herbal shops, acupuncture clinics, and stores. Being of Chinese descent myself, I feel a strong sense of peace when I am there. Even so, Flushing still has a diverse population of Black, Latino, and Jewish people. However, over the past ten years, multinational Chinese corporations and affluent Flushing 'locals' have been capitalizing off this demographic, erasing the diverse history of the community.

Flushing is currently on the land that originally belonged to the Lenni Lenape people of Algonquin nation. They called the land Mattinecock, which means ‘Place of the Rolling Hills’. In 1614, the Dutch colonized the land and established the New Netherlands. Over the years it became inhabited by the British, the Irish, Italians, and enslaved Black people. Flushing is considered the birthplace of the Quaker tradition in the 17th century and was a haven of religious tolerance. There is also a rich history of Black people in the area, especially after their emancipation in the 19th century. A large influx of Black and Irish people moved into the area due to its more tolerant culture. (Mohamed 2023) The Macedonia AME Church, located in downtown Flushing, was a historically Black church that was once active in the Underground Railroad. Its rich 200 year history was demolished in 2017 when the land was given to F and T group to create Flushing Commons. This isn’t the first time Black people have been displaced in Flushing, in the early 1950’s Black homes, stores, and organizational spaces were demolished to make a parking lot. (McLogan 2023) In the mid to late 20th century, waves of Chinese and Koreans immigrated to the area making them the biggest demographic of Flushing today. Flushing’s reverberant and beautiful history of acceptance, diversity, and liberation is being erased by F and T group (whose owners claim to be Flushing locals fulfilling their ‘American dream’), Young Nian Group, United Construction and Development Group, Steve Cohen, Sterling Equity, Blackrock, and corrupt politicians. The influx of luxury overseas Chinese and East Asian businesses is an attempt to turn Flushing into a monolithic Chinatown that exploits the working class Chinese population and renders the Black, Latino, Muslim and Jewish populations invisible.

Over the past ten years, Flushing has been burdened with increased luxury development. The culprits behind it claim to be helping the local residents—but the numbers and residents say

otherwise. According to the 2018 Community Health Profile for Flushing and Whitestone, 25% of residents live in poverty compared to 19% and 20% of Queens and NYC respectively and 57% are rent burdened compared to 53% and 51% of Queens and NYC respectively. (Hinterland et al.) Flushing and Corona are at the 90th percentile for those at risk for respiratory illnesses and cancer due to the surrounding highways. Only 11% of Flushing is dedicated to open space compared to the 23% NYC average with fewer trees per acre compared to the city average. I've spoken to and observed Flushing residents for this research paper and for my involvement in the Sunrise Movement (a U.S. based climate justice organization). Since the pandemic, I've noticed an influx of vendors selling goods on the streets. One woman I spoke to, along with others, are on the streets selling food and small objects to make rent and support their families. Sadly, many of them operate without permits so the police every so often will seize their products. In one video online, you see the police in Flushing confiscating an elderly person's goods while they helplessly pleaded with them. It shattered my heart. In one conversation I had, these two middle aged women explained that there are multiple families in Flushing who live in one apartment because they cannot afford rent. If the development happening in and around Flushing is so beneficial to the community, why are they still suffering?

Gentrification is the process of developing and improving a historically low-income community that displaces them to make room for affluent people to move in. This is what is happening in Flushing. In 2013, city councilman, Peter Koo, approved the sale of Municipal Parking Lot 1 (which is the lot that displaced Black residents in the 1950's) to F and T group at a discounted price to build Flushing Commons. It includes luxury apartments, commercial and office space, and 'affordable' housing. (Pellegrino, Byeon, and Wang 2020) This was phase one of Flushing Commons. Since then, Flushing has seen the completion of Tangram Mall, One

Fulton Square, and Skyview Mall all of which has contributed to the rising cost of living and displacement of family businesses and low income residents. An entire strip of family owned restaurants have been replaced by high end ones on Prince Street. Residents have also complained that during the construction of these developments, they suffered adverse air pollution that was detrimental to their livelihoods.

In 2020, F and T, Young Nian Group, and United Construction and Development Group won the battle to rezone the waterfront district next to Flushing Creek to begin phase two. The community board, with the majority of them being white, approved their project for luxury apartments, a hotel, commercial space, a new road system, ‘public’ open space to the waterfront, and affordable housing (that would be built on a floodplain). (Kully et al. 2020) Currently, it is a site of industrial businesses that have polluted the creek along with sewage overflow. The three groups promised that along with the development, they would remediate the creek. However, I’ve heard from local organizers that they plan to simply have the city do the job. This exemplifies the neoliberal ideology that rules our governments: unless there is private financial interest, your neighborhood will be neglected. High luxury development coupled with ‘access to open green space’ and remediation efforts are causes of green gentrification. As I outlined in chapter one, green spaces or remediation efforts that do not adequately involve the local community leads to displacement—especially if they are done by private interests.

A new threat looms over Flushing and their neighbors in Corona. Steve Cohen, billionaire owner of the Mets, has his eyes set on 65 acres of public land next to the Citifield stadium in Corona Park. He plans to build ‘Metropolitan Park’, a plan that would include a casino, a hotel, a conference center, a concert venue, restaurants, improvements to the surrounding transportation infrastructure, and crumbs of green space and solar panels. This

doesn't sound much like a park to me. To build his plan, he would need legislation passed in the Senate and Assembly to alienate the parkland so that he can claim it as private property. Jessica Ramos, the state senator of district 13, represents the area where the threat of a casino would be built. She needs to introduce the legislation that decides the fate of 65 acres of an asphalt parking lot and the communities of Flushing, Corona, Jackson Heights, and Elmhurst. For the past few months I've been involved in the fight against this predatory casino and from my experience so far, Ramos, although she is labeled as a progressive, has been toying with the idea of having this casino built. Steve Cohen and supporters of the casino boast about the community 'benefits' that his Metropolitan Park plan would bring. It is a lie. It is a facade. He is attempting to expand his exploitive billion dollar fortune off the backs of working people. The crumbs of green space, solar panels, and transportation improvement coupled with this predatory development is another act of green gentrification and green washing. It is an attempt to trick the community into believing that all parties involved will benefit. But this space would not be designed for the community. It's not only the parkland that would be alienated, but the local residents as well.

This development would raise property values, raise rent, raise property taxes, bring more pollution, displace local businesses, and bring in more congestion. After years and years of public disinvestment, suddenly the government wants to act. Suddenly, they care about the community. Flushing for Equitable Development and Urban Planning (FED-UP) coalition is composed of groups like Guardians of Flushing Bay, Flushing Anti-Displacement Alliance, Flushing Workers Center, and Minkwon Community Action Group. The coalition has envisioned a different plan, a park plan that would keep the land public, connect their communities, bring good local jobs, increase green space and revitalize the floodplain. Phoenix Meadows is what they're calling it. It is a vision that is made for and by the people that will help shift the political

consciousness from the ground up. Green space and brown field remediation in these developers eyes simply acts as stepping stones to help reach their goal for profit and power. They use the rhetoric of nature as a weapon—like a trojan horse.

So how do we rebuild the narrative? Or has it already been built in a place like Flushing? According to my observations and interviews, it has. Nature is already in the city. The elderly men playing board games in the park, the group dancing in the park, the growing of plants and herbs in backyards and apartments, the abundance of TCM shops and doctors in the area, the desire of simple living already exists in Flushing. How can we tap into this to build a movement? How can we win?

### *Chinese Medicine for Healing Justice*

There is historical precedent surrounding TCM for political activism and revolution. The Cultural Revolution in China was a time of extreme political unrest and violence. It was a campaign of humiliation and violence against the historical bourgeois in order to safeguard socialist ideology within the masses. Art, literature, public humiliation, riots, and Chinese medicine were used during the Cultural Revolution. Before China industrialized, much of the country was still a rural agrarian society with limited access to healthcare. Mao's plan to bring healthcare and socialist revolutionary ideology to the countryside included the use of Barefoot Doctors (赤脚医生chi4 jiao3 yi1 sheng1) Government programs selected local and country doctors to train the barefoot doctors. They were trained in Chinese medicine and biomedicine in the span of eight months or up to two years. Barefoot doctors would spend their days working alongside farmers and treat minor illnesses using acupuncture and herbal medicine when needed. By the end of 1978, there were two million trained barefoot doctors around the country. Barefoot



doctors were a symbol of revolution. Portrayed as proletarian medicine, barefoot doctors were a model of self sacrifice for the greater good. (Li)

The barefoot doctors of the People's Republic of China inspired another kind of revolution in the United States—the Lincoln Detox. In the 1970s the opioid drug epidemic was at its peak while the medical industry failed to provide adequate treatment. People of color were disproportionately affected by the epidemic which characterizes the systemic racism of the medical industry. In November of 1970, with the vision of Mutulu Shakur, the Young Lords and the Black Panther Party established The People's Drug Program at the Lincoln Hospital in the South Bronx. Prior to the program, the hospital was run down and neglected until the Young Lords took over the entire hospital and renovated it. It was described as a place where people went to die, not to survive. (Ricciulli 2021) They developed a five point acupuncture technique that treated hundreds of people with addiction daily. Not only did patients receive acupuncture treatment, they also received leftist political education and community. It became a revolutionary hotspot. Patients praised the clinic for providing treatment that, “white doctors, in white coats, in white hospitals,” were unable to do. (Meng) The clinic was able to heal people and provide real, genuine care. Patients turned into volunteers, volunteers turned into practitioners, and the ‘barefoot doctor acupuncture cadre’ began to spread. People had a vision of self determination and their futures were reclaimed into the palm of their own hands.

In 1978, after eight years of operation, the clinic was forced to close with the help of 200 police officers—talk about excessive. Authorities claimed that the hospital was badly mismanaged and, as then Assemblymember Chuck Schumer put it, “[a] ripoff drug-treatment program.” (Ricciulli 2021) What the real reason was that the clinic was a threat to the security of the U.S.

government. Fearful of the clinic's ability to expose the wounds and failures of our society, they had to shut it down with their coercive power.

Since then organizations like the National Auricular Detoxification Association, People's Organization of Community Acupuncture, Black Acupuncture Advisory Association of North America, and the Harlem Chi Community Acupuncture have been developed. Acupuncture is not only an alternative medicine, it is also an alternative system—an alternative world. That is why the counter-culturalists and leftists of the late twentieth century were drawn to Chinese medicine as it was perceived as a system that was closer to a natural way of life—one closer to nature, closer to holisticness. (Shelton 2019, 232-233) If there already is historical precedent for the revolutionary characterization of TCM, there is also a future for it to revolutionize the narrative of nature for climate justice.

The 'Mother of Acupuncture', Mariam Lee, is another example of the potential TCM has for activism and revolution. Mariam Lee was an acupuncturist that fled to California after the Communist Party came to power and established the People's Republic of China. Working on an assembly line, many of her colleagues complained about muscle pain that led to Miriam treating them. Eventually she began an unlicensed acupuncture clinic out of her home treating numerous patients for varying illnesses. Eventually, she would train so many other acupuncturists that they named her the 'Mother of Acupuncture'. In 1974, Ronald Reagan vetoed a bill that would legalize acupuncture in the state of California. The next day, as Miriam was treating people out of licensed M.D. clinic, the police stormed the clinic and arrested her. Likewise, her supporters stormed the courtrooms of her trial to testify for the effectiveness of Miriam's acupuncture. (Shelton 2019, 235-236) What they showed was an illuminating demonstration of solidarity that Chinese medicine created. They showed up for a person practicing an unconventional form of

medicine that met the needs of a population. Slowly towards the end of the century, acupuncture would be legalized across the country,

Acupuncture and TCM, has expanded the definition of healing and medicine. It showed the western world an alternative way of understanding what pain is and how to treat it. Acupuncture became an inherently political form of medicine that has shaped the west, and continues to do so, over the past fifty years. It serves as a teacher to the powerful and effective nature of western medicine. However, this is not the first time Asian cultures or people have shaped and augmented the reality of the United States. Asian American activists have made major contributions to expanding the definition of what the environment is. Julie Sze highlights many cases of environmental justice organizing led by Asian Americans in the U.S. that reframed what environment means. In the early 1990's, Asians and Latinos in Sunset Park, Brooklyn came together to fight a proposed sludge treatment plant that was ultimately successful. They cited that the treatment plant would have health risks due to increased air pollution. New York City's Chinatown Justice Project of the Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence organizes around housing as an environmental justice issue because poor housing exposes residents to substandard living conditions that impact their health. The Asian Pacific Environmental Network and the Laotian Organizing Project in the Bay Area have also claimed that food is an EJ issue due to cultural practices and economic status. Many southeast asian communities fish for subsistence purposes; however, due to pollution, the fish have elevated levels of toxins that adversely impact their health. Their exposure to contaminated fish is a result of environmental racism and lack of language access. (Sze 2004)

There is immense potential here. TCM has the potential to be part of the ecosystem of movements in this country. It can reshape our relationship with nature, reshape our relationship

with our urban environment and land, reshape our relationships with one another, and reshape our relationships with the world. With this, we can further advance the cause for environmental justice and climate justice.

*Practicing TCM, Practicing Environmental Justice, Practicing Nature*

In chapter three, I concluded that it was the human activity that took place in a given region that defined an urban environment's 'naturalness'. In this chapter, I will explain how my interviewees practice nature in the urban environment and how the act of 'nurturing life' or '养生', as a particular cultural practice of TCM, is a form of practicing nature. More specifically, I'll explain how these practices fit into the three categories of nature as defined in chapter three: nature is the lack of surplus human labor, nature is a system, and nature as the human body. This semi-ethnographic study informs the context needed to explain how TCM can become an institution that creates a paradigm shift needed to address the root issues of the climate crisis.

Chen Chang Hua and Wang Shui E live in a suburban-esque area of Flushing. They live in a single family house with a backyard granting them the ability to grow their own crops. Every year they grow beautiful vegetables that they share with their family members. Chen's motivation for farming illuminates how their practice fits into the first category of nature: the lack of surplus human nature.

你看我们那边种菜, 你看看我们的菜园, 这就是一种回归自然的生活。你看我种这么多菜。。我种的很多菜。都是因为天气暖和嘛, 很多菜我基本上不要去买了。这就是一种回归自然。。现在来讲, 你看这个汽车都烧汽油, 烧 'gas'-什么东西啊-气味空气污染啊。你看我们住的这个地方啊空气污染很厉害的, 对吧。我们就希望回归自然, 用电。不要用 'gas', 这气味就不是没有了吗?

Look over there where I am growing crops, look at my crop garden, this is a kind of return to natural life. You see we plant so many vegetables...so many vegetables. It's all because when the weather is warm, there are a lot of vegetables that I do not need to buy. This is a kind of return to nature...Now i'll speak about this, if you see our cars, they burn gas—or whatever—the gas pollutes the air. If you look at where we live, the air pollution is extremely strong, right? We just hope to return to nature, to use electricity. If we don't use gas, then wouldn't there be no more gas pollution?

Chen and Wang's home is located right next to a highway where they have experienced adverse environmental impacts from gas cars driving next to them 24/7. They have endured years of pollution smells and rumbling in their house from the highway. In an attempt to curb the air pollution they experience, they grew evergreens facing the highway over ten years ago. However, cultivating evergreens and crops is not only a way to mitigate the impacts of this environmental injustice—it is also a method of self determination. Growing their own vegetables reduces their need to consume supermarket produce grown and transported on chemicals and fossil fuels. Instead, they're able to lay claim on their own labor and on their own consumption. Although their aspirations of a 'return to nature' are limited by governmental policies and capitalism, they still produced a pocket of self reliance and self determination. Wang also explained that growing vegetables is a way to nurture her own life—her heart. Witnessing the fruits of her own intentional labor brings her joy. At the end of the interview, I went out into the garden as they picked vegetables for their dinner that night. Wang brought the various vegetables inside the house to wash and even recycled the water to use for the garden. Their small system of growth and recycling was a testament to their small resistance to the status quo. It's a wisdom

that I have begun to adopt in my own life—albeit an unsuccessful one due to an unsuccessful garden.

对,也可以这样说吧。。。养生也就是找点事情做吧,大概就这样。。。养心吧,对不对。。。你有时候早上起来你看都那么多菜,都是绿色的,就觉得很舒服。看他们每一天,每一天的长大,你知道吗?也觉得蛮好玩的,你知道吗?

Right, you can also say that...Nurturing life is about looking for things to do, it's pretty much like that...Nurturing the heart, right...Sometimes in the morning you'll see so many vegetables, it's so green, it feels really comfortable. You watch it grow day by day, you know? It just feels like a lot of fun, you know?

Dr.Chen explains the connection that nurturing life has in TCM and how the medical practice might utilize the built environment to heal.

中医就很注意养生。比如说,这个,有的人湿气很重啊。。。我们中医就要他去养育。养—这个—莲子草药,还有秋萍阿,水仙草阿。我们叫他养这些东西,然后就是拿来煎水喝,喝了脸上就好了。而且又保护了环境。环境更绿化,清洁。中医是真的最好的医学。它能到帮助任何人,帮助世界。

Chinese medicine pays close attention to nurturing life. For example, this, some people have too much wet energy...Us Chinese medicine practitioners will instruct them to nurture and grow. Grow lotus seed, and also autumn herbs and daffodils. We'll instruct them to boil it in water, once you drink it their face is all better. In fact, it's good for the environment. The environment becomes more green, more clean. Chinese medicine is really the best kind of medicine. It can help anyone, help the world.

Nurturing life is not only a practice of nurturing one's own life. Rather, it is a practice of reciprocity: you nurture life for the earth and the earth will provide the ingredients to nurture yours. Dr.Chen considers TCM to be one of China's greatest contributions to the world—a unique form of knowledge that has the capacity to do great good. While the formation of this ancient form of medicine was not intended to be a contribution to mother earth, it certainly has the potential to do so. Cultivating the seeds of herbal medicines and various plants preserves our ancient knowledge of herbal remedies. Through these kinds of traditional knowledge, we're able to resist the western supremacy of biomedicine and, as I stated in chapter three, inadvertently reclaim the narrative of nature. When we rid ourselves of the surplus labor—the labor of alienation, the labor of industrial capitalism, the labor of racism—we can return to the practice of growth and regeneration.

There are, however, restrictions to Dr.Chen's dreams. Gao Zhong and Hu Chun Xiu pointed out in their interviews that it is difficult to alter the urban landscape without city approval. Any project, like a community center or urban garden needs to navigate the barriers to bureaucracy in a sea of competing neoliberal interests. It is difficult in a city mired in zoning policy to create spaces where community members are able to generate economies for self determination and self reliance. Nonetheless, as I observed the environment and private homes in Flushing, residents still found ways to nurture growth in this restrictive urban environment. In downtown Flushing, one apartment complex on Union Street had potted plants growing on almost every single fire escape. Many other publicly visible apartment complexes in Flushing also displayed plants growing by their windows or fire escapes. And inside the apartments of Hu Chun Xiu and Nancy Zhang were potted plants growing under a tiny nook of sunlight. Zhang stated that, "I don't have a balcony, I only have a window. On it I have three potted plants."

Many stores in Flushing sell house plants that can aid in the access to self determined ‘growth’ in the urban environment. Finally, virtually every other house surrounding Wang and Chen also tended to their own vegetable gardens—granted, they have some privileges because they live in single family homes with access to private gardening space. Despite restrictive policies and lack of soil in Flushing, residents demonstrate the intense value of vegetative growth as it pertains to their culture and perhaps the value of TCM. My theory is that this cultivation of plants is vital attempt to reclaim agency over their lives in the midst of private interests invading their homes.

Hu Fei Yan is another avid gardener of vegetables and herbs in her backyard. In China, she explains that there was a necessity to farm for subsistence; however, in the United States, it is something that she enjoys doing. She explained that she learned various farming techniques and herbal remedies from her elders as well as neighbors and friends.

保持健康。。。以前小时候，以前穷，在家里没什么东西。以前用土方法自己种菜阿—有些草药—都是这样来自己调养哪个身体。比如说以前乡下老人阿，那些祖母阿她会教你就是什么菜调什么。。。什么那个草。。。调什么都会叫我们。

Maintaining health...Before when I was young, before we were poor, at home we didn't have much. We used to use traditional methods to grow crops ourselves—some herbs—this is how we maintained our health. For example, before in the countryside, the elderly and those grandmothers would teach us about the vegetables that adjust...some herbs...to adjust whatever, they would teach us all of it.

The transfer of medicinal and technical knowledge from one generation to the next exemplifies the systems based approach of nature. It is the same way that whales teach their young to communicate, the same way mother trees transfer their nutrients to their young, and the



same way our water system constantly recycles and *remembers* itself in service of life. Hu's practice of gardening in her own home is merely another example of the succession patterns of nature and yet another example of how TCM practices naturalizes the urban environment. This continuation of knowledge is how we build resilience and memory in a world destroyed by western colonialism. Indigenous practices like this hold the key to our future ways of life that are contrary to the climate realism that has infiltrated our understanding of the world. To teach is to resist the hegemony of the individualist frontier of western Nature. To teach is to rewire ourselves in nature's succession. To teach is to learn how to live closer to nature in urban environments as explained in the following quote by Gao Zhong.

你竟然是一个城市化的生活，它就不是一个完全自然的生活。非常简单。。。我现  
 在在这个房间里面是有空调的吧？对不对？你现在跑到外面去是什么温度？现在外  
 面的温度是自然的温度，我室内的温度是不自然的温度。我们实在违背自然。  
 从总体来说，比较难。。。你比如说我在这个大夏天的时候，OK，我不开空调。对  
 不对？我到冬天的是我不用暖气。我到了晚上天黑了，我就休息了。我就睡觉了。然  
 后到天亮了我才起来。你可以按照这个方式生活的。

Because you are living an urban life, it is not a completely natural life. Very  
 simple...Right now, aren't I in a room with the air conditioner on? Right? If you went  
 out, what is the temperature? The temperature outside is the natural temperature, the  
 interior room is not the natural temperature. We are contradicting nature. In general  
 terms, it's harder to live close to nature in the city...For example during the summer, Ok,  
 I don't turn on the air conditioner. Right? In the winter, I don't turn on the heater. When it  
 gets dark outside, I rest. I go to sleep. And then when the day time comes I wake up. You  
 can live your life in this modality.

The rhythms of the universe are reflected in our bodies. In TCM theory, as I explained in the last chapter, the morning and day, warm climates and cold climates, affect the body differently than the night. Your pulse, oxygen intake, and hormone levels vary throughout the day and you're more vulnerable to different illnesses during different seasons. It requires surplus energy to move against the currents—using additional resources that harm the earth. Gao offers a method to live *closer to nature* by living in relation to time (resting at night and being lively during the day). The practice of TCM in daily life innately recognizes our natural systems as part of our bodies. Living in such a way reduces our energy usage in technological aspects and in nutritional aspects. Additionally, as mentioned in the last chapter, eating seasonally is another method of living in accordance with the systems of nature. It's a nutritional value that we have lost in our globalized economy. For many of their responses, nurturing life means eating healthy and nutritious foods. Flushing's many, many Chinese supermarkets are certainly not exempt from the grip of our globalized economy and industrial agriculture. It does demonstrate, however, the cultural need for fresh produce and diverse foods.

Movement and exercise, as a vital practice for nurturing life, is robustly part of the atmosphere of Flushing and a naturalizing practice and is in accordance with my third category of nature—the human body. Julie Liu and Hu Chun Xiu, respectively, explain the way they implement exercise and movement into their daily lives as a method of nurturing life.

包括你的饮食还有你的心情的调试—你的作息, 你的视为, 各方面—都要调整。对。所谓的养生也要个自己一个礼拜—根据你个人的时间—可以去运动啊或者去爬山接受大自然。这个都是很好的养生。

Your diet and your mental health—your routine, your outlook, many different parts—all need to be adjusted well. Right. Nurturing life requires your week—in accordance to your personal schedule—to have exercise or mountain climbing to receive mother nature. These are all great ways to nurture life.

他们说在这个树下面有那个对身体好。去公园走，那个空气好—大自然的空气。然后下了雨他们说有负离子—就是空间里有负离子。所以想今天下大雨我也在公园走了一圈。。。然后夏天去公园，她们说那个树下面对身体好。也要在树下面，每一周可以坐两三个小时。。。还有说去用那个身体，背阿，撞那个树阿。那也是属于自然。比如说你的脊柱痛就撞那个树。应为他那个有地气嘛，接地气的东西嘛。。

People say that trees have health benefits. Going for walks in the park, the atmosphere is good—the atmosphere of mother nature. And when it rains people say that there is good ion air therapy. That’s why on rainy days like today I will go to the park for a walk...

And going to the park in the summer, people say the trees are good for your health. You have to sit under the tree every week for two to three hours...Also they say you should use your body, your back, to strike a tree. That is also nature. For example, if your spine hurts you can strike the tree. It’s because it has earth energy—receive things that have earth energy.

Hu’s daily life implements robust movement and couples it with direct contact with trees. Many of my interviewees told me that 散步 (san4 bu4) or going for walks was a part of their daily practice. Walks, as a method of nurturing life, enables us to interact with our own bodies, with our environment, and the people around us. Hu’s active lifestyle to nurture life interacts with her environment that brings her closer to nature.

I also observed a practice called ‘广场舞’ (guang2 chang2 wu3) or plaza dance in many peculiar places in Flushing. Although congestion is a huge issue of concern for Flushing residents, open space is still relatively accessible in parks as well as certain particular areas. When the weather is warm, or sometimes even cold, many people of the diaspora will convene in parks or plaza’s to dance together. One popular spot is in Flushing Commons which is owned by F and T group. Over the summer, its publicly accessible private space is bustling with middle aged men and women dancing collectively. Many of the various parks will have morning and night time dancers seeking to exercise–nurture life–in communion with one another. Nature as the human body exhibited in these gatherings because of its direct human to human interaction. Their dancing and gatherings is a testament to the resilience of the diaspora amongst the city’s gentrification unfolding.

This direct human to human interaction is also experienced by uncles playing Chinese chess together in the park. Some played, some watched, and some were smoking cigarettes doing either or in relative silence. One man I spoke to, who was about middle aged, told me he was usually working and unable to attend their park gatherings. But on his day off that day, he went to take a look. The other uncles playing the games told me that the atmosphere was good in the park which is why they enjoyed playing board games there in particular. For them, the atmosphere and human interaction was a way to nurture life. They found joy with each other in their games rather than indulge in material consumption. It was simplicity that they found serenity in a chaotic environment. In simple joys we nurture life. In the following quote Dr.Chen explains his view on nurturing life and Wang Shui E reinforces the city’s difficulty in doing so.

养生就是心情平静–不生气啊。。。我们也不追求名利。我们有很多都想发财，升官，登报纸。哎呀很多人想要当会长。很多人都想要发财，赚很多钱。我们不想。我们

只是想日三餐, 有饭吃, 为人民服务, 安安静静的过这一生。。。所以人在这个世界上是个零, 是空的。整整万物世界还是留给世界。世界让人家长大。比如说这个房子, 我现在住在这里。我要死了, 我先只是个管理员啊。我死了还不是给你爸爸了? 给你爸爸来接管啊。是不是? 这也不是我的财产啊。

Nurturing life is serenity—not getting mad... We won't chase fame and fortune. There are a lot of people who want to get rich, get promoted, get on the newspaper. Aiya, so many people want to become president of something. So many people want to make so much money. But we don't. All we want is to have three meals a day, food to eat, to serve others, to live life peacefully... Humanity on this earth is zero, is empty. All things in this world belong to the world. The world let's people grow. For example, this house is where I live currently. If I die, I'm just a maintenance person. If I die, won't this house go to your father? Let your father assume control. Right? This simply does not belong to me.

好像没有以前那嘛好咯。。。因为现在的话, 我就觉得近几年的话。。。美国的经济条件, 很多东西, 退了—你知道吗? 没有以前那么好。。。不过我们两是没有什么影响因为我们已经退休了嘛。不要去外面去奔波, 你知道吗? 一日三餐就OK了。特别想你们年轻人, 对不对, 要有的话要想找个很好的 'job' 的话, 就没有那么容易。

I don't think it's as good as it used to be. Because now, I feel like in the last few years, America's economic state has regressed, you know? It's not as good as before... However, us two don't have that much of an impact anymore because we are retired. We don't go out much, you know? Everyday we have three meals and that's okay. Especially for you young people though, right, if there is any they want a good job, it's not easy to find anymore.

One day, three meals. Temperance. Simplicity. The act of nurturing life isn't to chase massive fortunes or prestigious positions. It's as simple as having three meals a day. Our economic and political systems have taught us that fulfillment is pursued through financial and material means. We believe that if we chase our dreams and work hard enough for them, we'll be happy. Yet, each generation is increasingly more and more depressed and isolated. They chase after material consumption to remedy the tragedy of the soul—or like others like to call it, retail therapy. Our desires of consumption perpetuate our extractivist economy that destroys the earth. The man I met at the park, despite working most of the time, decided to enjoy the simplicity of a board game in the park. Nancy Zhang, despite expressing many hardships in her life, believed the first step to nurturing life was to nurture the heart. The Flushing diaspora is mired in consumeristic opportunities from the newly created Tangram Mall, Flushing Commons, and many other chain retail stores. Yet, the older generations in Flushing resist the temptations and find happiness in themselves and each other.

Nurturing life paves the resistance against consumerism. Nurturing life views simplicity, love, and community as the beating heart of our collective humanity. Nurturing life requires us to find the joy in the small things in life and to *nurture one another*. It builds a sense of duty for all to live a good life and thus will pave the institutions necessary for all of humanity to thrive in service of one another and for the earth.

This chapter explained the environmental injustice and green gentrification unfolding in Flushing, the political precedence of TCM and the role of Asian Americans play in expanding definitions in America, and the anthropological practice of naturalizing the city through TCM. This provides the context needed to explain how TCM can act as an institutional driving force to build resilience against the cultural, political, and material consequences against the climate

crisis. Flushing exemplifies a community impacted by the sociological implications of the narrative of nature and the broader socioeconomic system of neoliberal capitalism. However, because of the deep cultural resilience of the Chinese diaspora in regards to TCM, there is great potential for the institutional resistance that can be built upon this. There simply—although not really that simply—needs to be a way to intentionally use TCM to create a paradigm shift and build the political and revolutionary will to change in our societies. The following chapter will develop the process in which TCM can create networks of change starting in local communities.

### **Chapter Five: Just Solutions**

I began this paper detailing the impacts climate change will have, and already has, on our planet. I walked us through the horrors of corporate ‘Nature Based Solutions’ and its failure to properly address the crisis. We are living in unprecedented times and the need to act is steadfastly more urgent every single day. But climate change is a symptom of a much larger problem. Climate change is the planet screaming at us to stop the killing, to stop the racism, to stop the colonialism, and to stop the endless linearity of capitalism. Merely government policy will not put an end to these power structures. While I urge governments to enact legislation to combat this dire crisis, we need a fundamental paradigm shift in our societies—a shift in our collective consciousness.

#### *A Paradigm Shift*

When I finished reading *Braiding Sweetgrass* on the plane, I was determined to connect with the land. I went into the forest of Banff away from all the tourists, knelt down, and felt the dirt with my bare hands. The tall standing trees embraced me with a feeling of solace and love. For a moment, I truly did feel a deep connection with the land. Robin Kimmerer taught me a Native American way of connecting with nature to heal our wounds. Plants, trees, and forests are

teachers. They are a reminder of how we *once lived* and how we *can live* to heal the wounds of our ecological crisis. But I don't live in the forest. Nor will 80% of the population by 2050. How do we connect with mother earth—with nature, with the land—when we live in concrete jungles? This is not to say that indigenous teachings are inadequate, they are, but we need diverse solutions to this crisis. We cannot fall into the trap of 'one size fits all' because it leads to the erasure of local knowledge where only the rich and powerful have a say in what gets done. What I *am* saying is that indigenous teachings are a huge part of healing the earth; but so is Black liberation, so is disability rights, so is a free Palestine and a free Congo, so is decolonization, so is feminism, and so is Chinese medicine.

The past few chapters have reframed the meaning of nature according to the practice of Chinese medicine. I've also laid out the historical precedent of how Chinese medicine and the Asian American diaspora have shaped our perception of the world and the reality of the world for the better. Chinese medicine and acupuncture is now a more accepted practice of medicine and urban environmental justice is now a mainstream concern in environmental discourse. There is a clear role for the Chinese diaspora in this fight: to contribute to the facilitation of changing our culture that lives and breathes nature as an integral part of our lives no matter where we might be.

Western industrialized countries are major players of imperialism and colonialism in the global community. As I write this paper, the United States is actively sending money to Israel while they commit a genocide against the Palestinian people on occupied land. The United States has also played key roles in undermining leftist governments in Latin America and in the Global South. Their goal is to maintain their position as a global superpower in order to keep billionaires and the one percent rich. Our governments will seize resources for corporations to freely use for



their products produced in China, Vietnam and Bangladesh that are then sold to us in the west. Citizens of the west are now consumeristic zombies, constantly fed new trends to fulfill the void in our souls. Having more ‘stuff’ and owning luxury items and housing are symbols of hardwork and success in our country. We’re told, here, we can have the American dream. But it is all a lie. Our societies are hyper-individualistic and lack a fundamental culture of caring and natural living. We are not in communion with one another, just a gathering of individuals living in proximity to each other. We feel lonely, isolated, and hopeless, so we turn to consumeristic distractions that feed into the hands of the rich and powerful while they destroy our planet. We then romanticize the forests and the wild as an ‘unstained’ sanctuary of romantic life. Through this romanticization, we perform our sorrows while we continue to engage in extractive behaviors. Changing our culture breaks out of this paradigm.

The nature of Chinese medicine (the lack of surplus human labor, a systems based approach, and the human body) is a vision and practice of how we can live in urban environments that forces us to confront our pain and wrong-doings. It is a methodology of alignment with nature that seeks to relinquish the desire to fetishize and romanticize the forest while building the political will to change. A paradigm shift in accordance with my three categories of nature would be facilitated by building institutions inspired by the concepts, theories, and practices of TCM. I will first lay out what the paradigm shift would look like under the three categories and then outline a plan to galvanize an institutional political will to change using TCM.

*Lack of surplus human labor.* The labor the majority of us perform is in service of the capitalist class and their profits. Our bodies, our hands, and our intellect are exploited in surplus to create surplus value for them while we alienate ourselves from our bodies. Chen Chang Hua,

Wang Shui E, Hu Fei Yan, and the down residential housing in Flushing exemplifies their resistance to the status quo by nurturing vegetation and plants to nurture life. It's a pocket of self determination and self reliance. Similarly, the opioid patients in the Lincoln Detox expressed that their acupuncture treatment gave them a sense of self determination and individual agency. By returning choice and voice in how they receive healthcare, they too created a pocket of self determination resistant to the exploitative nature of biomedicine. Reclaiming that surplus labor looks like growing our own vegetables, herbs, and medicinal plants to reduce our reliance on industrialized agriculture and western biomedicine. Tending to native vegetation and foods by our own hands not only contributes to healthier ecosystems but also empowers us to view our hands differently. Our hands, binded to the soil, plant the seeds of our self determination and self reliance. As we watch our vegetation grow, tended to by and for ourselves, we can see a new vision for what the future can and should look like. While most TCM clinics and herbal shops are limited to illness treatment and herbal prescriptions, a new kind of TCM practice can engage in a healing practice of greater communion, greater learning, and greater agency. I imagine TCM clinics becoming hubs or pockets of agency and self determination by means of growing its own herbs and vegetables that would revolutionize the way we labor and view ourselves in this world. This is not to discredit the amazing work already being done by myriad institutions that are working to create a greater culture of community gardening and self reliance in food–TCM simply offers another avenue.

*Systems Based.* This category of nature requires a paradigm shift in two ways. First, it is a shift of the mind. Chinese religions like Daoism and Buddhism, as well as political thought like Confucianism, focus on how the mind can be a powerful tool for peace and action. It forces us to see *ourselves* as not merely individuals, but rather individuals part of a great ecosystem of

people, planet, and cosmos that is constantly regenerating and reshaping. We are an interconnected, complex, and diverse world. And in light of this, not in spite of, the world has engendered a magnificent system that lives and dies, births and rebirths, suffers and cures, unravels and rewinds. Even in our own bodies, as TCM theory theorizes, every organ, every environmental factor, and every emotion generates or hinders another, producing the whole of our being—between each being there is a relationship that exists. Despite colonial attempts of severing generational ecological and medicinal knowledge, indigenous people and ethnic minorities continue to persevere. The succession of knowledge from elders to young is an act of nature just like the transfer of nutrients from mother tree to child. The Lincoln Detox offered political education to patients in addition to medical treatment that fostered a revolutionary politic. In my personal experience with acupuncture, doctors would often teach me certain techniques to alleviate my lower back pain and what kinds of food to consume to boost my health. What if TCM clinics transferred knowledge—specifically political, ecological, and medicinal knowledge—to clinic participants as an integral part of their practice? So often western biomedicine doctors divorce themselves from their patients and seemingly gatekeep critical information from them. It strips patients of their agency as doctors invade their bodies with metal and pills. For 5,000 years, the TCM medical system has been used by Chinese people as well as non-Chinese people all over the world. It has been standing strong for a millennia. Second generation Chinese Americans are losing touch with this tradition and are monopolizing on the legitimacy of western biomedicine. Immigrants come here chasing the ‘American dream’ and place their hopes and dreams upon their children. The children grow up believing that they must climb the ladder of capitalism to achieve this ‘dream’ and they then assimilate into American culture and lose touch with Chinese traditions, culture, and values. Acculturating into American

capitalist culture severs the transferring of traditional knowledge—and in this case the traditional knowledge of true nature. The younger generations of Chinese Americans have a duty to preserve these traditions as a mode of reclaiming their identity and fighting for climate justice.

Second, recognizing the cyclical and interconnected nature of life on earth teaches us to be in alignment with it. Transcending the egotistical mind of capitalism creates the humility needed to alter our relationship with the earth. In practice, it means eating seasonally as advocated by Nancy Zhang. Our specific geographical regions in which we exist once generated diverse diets independent of global economic systems and industrial agriculture. Finding nature in urban environments looks like learning the knowledge of the land's indigenous crops, learning to cultivate and preserve them by means of urban agriculture and soil restoration, and relearning how to eat. There is an immense potential to reimagine what urban agriculture really means. The acquisition of food is more than just an increase of fresh produce but rather a reorientation of our relationship with food and therefore the land. Beyond that, the practice is also in the way we live and how we design. Our urban environments need to be redesigned in such a way that considers biogeochemical cycles, solar paths, and wind patterns to optimize energy usage and recycling systems. They also need to be designed to prioritize the movement of people. As Gao Zhong believed, humanity should be active during the day and resting during the day. Urban environments should be designed to facilitate this. Environmental design would reduce unnecessary energy consumption and thus a collective carbon footprint. TCM clinics, and as an institution, should be designed in accordance with this. It should also act as a teacher: a teacher of healing, knowledge, food, life, and community.

*The Human Body.* This category states that nature is direct human to human interaction, simple living, and first hand experience. In *What Every Environmentalist Needs to Know About*

*Capitalism*, the authors advocate for sustainable human development rather than prioritizing market based technological solutions to climate change. Fighting climate change is not simply about transitioning to ‘green’ energy but rather about reducing consumption—which is currently especially difficult in capitalist structures of profit accumulation. The authors write that we need a, “...transformation in social relations: in community, in culture, and economy, in how we relate to each other as human beings, and how we relate to the planet. What is needed, in other words, is an ecological revolution.” (Magdoff and Foster 2011, 122) A world that excavates mountains in search of oil is not a world that is nature. A world that is consumed by luxury and profit is not a world that is nature. A world that mines for lithium charge solar powered batteries is a world that is not nature. Sustainable human development seeks to transform our social relations and our economy to generate a community grounded world beyond capitalism. We need to build relationships that foster human interactions of belonging and connection—because a world rooted in connection negates the need for material consumption to fill the void in our souls. A world built on reciprocal relationships contradicts the hyper-individualistic competitive nature of capitalism and instead makes self sufficiency possible. When all of our needs are met and our social circles are robust with love and connection we begin to live simply again. It disengages our minds from useless consumerism of material goods and digital distraction. This beautiful and majestic world of communion is the kind of culture we need to remedy the root issues of climate change.

The practice of TCM inherently holds a practice of building community and connection—whether that be the direct relationship between a patient and doctor or the practices of nurturing life. We can leverage this practice to inspire and create the political will into an

expansive body politic. It can act as a center of organizing—similar to the Black Panthers in the Lincoln Detox.

### *The Political Will*

The cultural shift I've envisioned is seemingly arbitrary. A change in culture isn't a single endeavor of an individual—it requires many years of collective development and infrastructure that shape the culture of a society. Luckily for us, the infrastructure already exists. The acupuncture clinics, the herbal medicinal shops, the practitioners of TCM health, and ordinary people are the starting point of unifying it as an institution of change. My vision of facilitating this cultural shift to produce the political will to change is largely inspired by the Black Panther Party's Lincoln Detox program, Miriam Lee, and the Asian American organizers who contributed to the expansion of the definition of 'environment'.

To put it simply, we can start a new clinic that intentionally outlines a plan to facilitate the paradigm shift (as explained in the previous section) and institutionalize TCM as an agent of politics. This is not to use health as a tool for propaganda but rather recognizes that our health is always an outcome of a specific political or social context. Confucian democratic theorist Brooke Ackerly writes, "A Confucian democracy must foster a Confucian life understood as being cultivated through the rites and practices of social, economic, and political institutions." (Ackerly 2005, 562) I am not advocating for a Confucian democratic society in this paper, but Ackerly does offer insight into how democracy can and should be utilizing various institutions beyond the political system itself to foster democratic engagement. TCM's role in this context would act as a grassroots institutional agent of change. It would function independently from the state and grow from the bottom up to shift our collective consciousness and being. From there, we would build

the revolutionary will to change—similar to the Lincoln Detox. But what exactly would this institution look like?

The American Medical Association is an institution created to legitimize the institution of western biomedicine. They did this by stepping on the backs of traditional knowledge, consolidating power, and creating bureaucracy. TCM institutions must be formulated on the basis of anti-capitalism, anti-racism, anti-colonialism, and instead be rooted in healing, nature, and reimagining. What I imagine taking place is the creation of an urban clinic that embodies the paradigm shift outlined in the previous section that then expands by coalition building. This clinic would have four primary functions: TCM medicinal healthcare, growing herbal medicines and vegetables, transferring knowledge, and building community.

I envision a group of TCM acupuncturists, herbalists, and healthcare practitioners engaging with community patients to directly treat illnesses beyond the scope of western biomedicine. The treatment would embody the traditional practices of TCM—pulsology, tui na (massage), gua sha, acupuncture, herbal remedies, and more—but would go one step further. Capitalism has created extreme social inequalities that have created the symptom of climate change and the symptom of health inequalities manifested in our physical bodies and our mental health. Since the practice of TCM is inclined to address the root issue of the illness by taking a holistic approach, it needs to go beyond the treatment itself—it needs to remedy the tragedy of capitalism. The clinic would include a creation of urban gardens by means of hydroponics, aeroponics, greenhouses or your classic ground soil if space permits. Growing herbs and vegetables would not only provide a material product to address illness and nutrition but also produce a pocket of self determination. Most herbs sold in Chinese herbal shops are imported from China or from farms in different regions of the United States—growing them directly in the

clinic would reduce our reliance on imports and teach people about the growth and preservation process of various herbs. To go one step further, the clinic would indigenize TCM herbs. In chapter three I mentioned that there is a cousin of Chinese ginseng indigenous to North America called *Panax quinquefolium*. This offers exciting new avenues to uncover the parallels between North American indigenous herbs with Asian indigenous herbs to preserve a diasporic culture whilst ‘becoming’ indigenous to the land. This kind of gardening would engage community members to foster a sense of self determination, agency in knowledge, and community building.

Further programming would take more inspiration from the Lincoln Detox’s political education program. The services provided by the clinic would meet the needs of people that are struggling to fill a void in their lives. The epidemic of isolation, of grief, of depression, and of chronic illness is directly attributed to our capitalist economy. This pain is synonymous to the opioid epidemic experienced in the 1970’s where the treatment provided by Lincoln Detox alleviated and treated it. At the same time, their political education was thriving and gradually produced a revolutionary body politic that shifted the way they saw themselves in this world. Inspired by this, my outline for a TCM clinic would utilize the effectiveness of TCM’s ability to address illness’ over caste by the shadows of victim blaming to reveal a forgotten wound. Because holistic diagnosis needs to consider the entire context of one’s life—which includes the socioeconomic status of the individual—treating a patient requires an awakening to their political potential. In addition to teaching and transferring traditional knowledge, it would provide political education and discussion of a wide spectrum. Discussion would occur between doctors and patients as well as horizontal discussion across patients. Through discourse, we shift our social dynamics and shift our perception of what nature is and what natural is.



TCM clinics should essentially become third spaces of not only medical treatment but social programming—as outlined above. Medical anthropologist, physician, and founder of Partners in Health is a prime example of how community based medical treatment in Haiti was key to ensuring that the health needs of an impoverished community was met. Instead of blaming individuals with ‘non compliance’ to medical instruction, community members were deployed to villages to ensure that patients had enough to eat, had taken their medication, and had the proper emotional support to maintain their will to persevere. TCM clinics could take a similar approach by creating a social network of accountability and duty through community members. Community members would play a significant role in organizing events, maintaining social relationships with patients, and act as familiar faces within a community.

The motivation behind this thinking is due to the historical precedent of activism that follows acupuncture. Miriam Lee’s beneficial impact on her community in California led to strong public support for her release after being arrested for illegal acupuncture. The protests that followed the closure of the Lincoln Detox demonstrates how the community shows up for things that they care about. A TCM clinic that creates an actual physical, intellectual, and social change for the better is bound to have significant public support. And beyond acupuncture activism, as I write this paper, waves of university encampments to protest the complicity and investment into the genocide of Palestinians has altered our psyche and produced a new political consciousness. In turn, new ‘vanguard’ communities are manifested and ripples across the fabric of society.

To conclude, I'd like to provide a vision for the future of TCM in the United States. The clinic opens in the morning. The sun fills every corner of every room and provides the various plants energy for photosynthesis. When you walk in, the first room is the general room used as a third space for anyone to use as a space for leisure. In the next room is for community

acupuncture—patients come in for treatment but are placed in a proximity to one another so that there is room for conversation. Each acupuncturist or TCM practitioner will individually speak to each patient and assess what the best treatment plan is. They'll ask a series of questions pertaining to their social factors, medical history, environmental factors, socioeconomic context, and other questions to understand the person as a whole being. The next room or the outdoor plaza would grow ginseng, mugwort, bergamot, goji, and many other varieties of herbs and foods. Patients and volunteers would be invited to tend to the garden with weekly educational programs on seasonal cultivation, preservation, and preparation of herbs for consumption. Patients prescribed certain herbal formulas would learn the properties of it and learn the proper preparation methods. Every night would hold free events for all community members. These events could be about recent learnings in TCM practices, political education, community feedback and implementation, exercise or health modules, or simply community gatherings. The clinic would be a local hub of robust community engagement, discussion, organizing and relationship building. As it becomes stronger, the anticipation is that it would permeate into the daily lives of the community. This is the nature I hope to see for the world.

At the same time, TCM doctors across the particular region would convene to expand programming of this new vision of TCM and institutionalize it in a similar, but different, manner to the way western medicine has institutionalized its own legitimacy. Instead of defaulting to the liberal supremacy of western biomedical science as the ultimate mode of knowledge, we'd invite nuance and diversity. Instead of individualizing healing and stigmatizing illness, we'd view it contextually. Instead of seeing nature as the romantic wilderness, we'd recognize it everywhere we are. Instead of glorifying industrial 'innovation', we'd appreciate the humility of life. When we envision a world beyond our current one, when we dare to dream differently, we change our

culture and we cultivate the political will to change. And with this collective shift and the wielding of political power, we can produce the necessary resources to address climate change, environmental degradation, and social inequality. And at the end of the day, we'd find that nature has always been and always will be right here next to us, so long as we have the will to see it.

## Bibliography

“A warning sign: where biodiversity loss is happening around the world.” 2021. World Wildlife Fund.

<https://www.worldwildlife.org/magazine/issues/summer-2021/articles/a-warning-sign-where-biodiversity-loss-is-happening-around-the-world>.

Ackerly, Brooke A. 2005. “Is Liberalism the Only Way Toward Democracy? Confucianism and Democracy.” *Political Theory* 33, no. 4 (August). 10.1177/0090591705276879.

Bezner Kerr, R., T. Hasegawa, R. Lasco, I. Bhatt, D. Deryng, A. Farrell, H. Gurney-Smith, H. Ju, S. Lluch-Cota, F. Meza, G. Nelson, H. Neufeldt, and P. Thornton, 2022: Food, Fibre, and Other Ecosystem Products. In: *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [H.-O. Pörtner, D.C. Roberts, M. Tignor, E.S. Poloczanska, K. Mintenbeck, A. Alegría, M. Craig, S. Langsdorf, S. Lösschke, V. Möller, A. Okem, B. Rama (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK and New York, NY, USA, pp. 713–906, doi:10.1017/9781009325844.007.

Chancel, Lucas. 2020. *Unsustainable Inequalities: Social Justice and the Environment*. Translated by Malcolm DeBevoise. N.p.: Harvard University Press.

Cissé, G., R. McLeman, H. Adams, P. Aldunce, K. Bowen, D. Campbell-Lendrum, S. Clayton, K.L. Ebi, J. Hess, C. Huang, Q. Liu, G. McGregor, J. Semenza, and M.C. Tirado, 2022: Health, Wellbeing, and the Changing Structure of Communities. In: *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [H.-O.

- Pörtner, D.C. Roberts, M. Tignor, E.S. Poloczanska, K. Mintenbeck, A. Alegría, M. Craig, S. Langsdorf, S. Löschke, V. Möller, A. Okem, B. Rama (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK and New York, NY, USA, pp. 1041–1170, doi:10.1017/9781009325844.009.
- Cronon, William. “The Trouble with Wilderness.” 1995. Essay. In *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*. W.W. Norton.
- Cucca, Robert, Michael Friesenecker, and Thomas Thaler. 2023. “Green Gentrification, Social Justice, and Climate Change in the Literature: Conceptual Origins and Future Directions.” *Urban Planning* 8, no. 1 (March): 26.  
<http://dx.doi.org.avoserv2.library.fordham.edu/10.17645/up.v8i1.6129>.
- Dawson, Ashley, Fiore Longo, and Survival International, eds. 2023. *Decolonize Conservation: Global Voices for Indigenous Self-Determination, Land, and a World in Common*. N.p.: Common Notions.
- Ducarme, Frédéric, and Denis Couvet. January 31, 2020. “What Does ‘nature’ Mean?” Nature News. <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41599-020-0390-y>.
- Evans, Tony T. 2022. “Teddy Roosevelt Championed Conservation Efforts—That Also Displaced Native Americans | HISTORY.” The HISTORY Channel.  
<https://www.history.com/news/theodore-roosevelt-conservation-national-parks-native-americans#>.
- Fisher, Mark. 2009. *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* N.p.: Zero Books.
- Flummerfelt, Robert. 2022. “To Purge the Forest by Force: Organized violence against Batwa in Kahuzi-Biega National Park.” Minority Rights Group.

[https://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/MRG\\_InvRep\\_DRC\\_EN\\_Apr22v3\\_1.pdf](https://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/MRG_InvRep_DRC_EN_Apr22v3_1.pdf).

Greenfield, Patrick. 2023. "Revealed: more than 90% of rainforest carbon offsets by biggest certifier are worthless, analysis shows." *The Guardian*.

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/jan/18/revealed-forest-carbon-offsets-biggest-provider-worthless-verra-aoe>.

Hahn, Thomas H. 2001. *Daoism and Ecology: Ways Within a Cosmic Landscape*. Edited by N. J. Girardot, James Miller, and Xiaogan Liu. N.p.: Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard Divinity School.

Hare, Martha L. 1993. "The Emergence of an Urban U.S Chinese Medicine." *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 7, no. 1 (March): 30-49.

Hinterland K, Naidoo M, King L, Lewin V, Myerson G, Numbissi B, Woodward M, Gould LH, Gwynn RC, Barbot O, Bassett MT. Community Health Profiles 2018, Queens Community District 7: Flushing and Whitestone; 2018; 49(59):1-20.

Joralemon, Donald. 2017. *Exploring Medical Anthropology*. N.p.: Taylor & Francis Group.

Klein, Naomi. 2014. *This Changes Everything: Capitalism Vs. The Climate*. New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks.

Kully, Ali, Henry Garrido, Tatyana Turner, Sue Susman, Edward Ratliff, and Daniel Parra. 2020. "Flushing Waterfront Rezoning Plan Moves to City Council Vote, Despite Local Dissent." *City Limits*.

<https://citylimits.org/2020/11/11/flushing-waterfront-rezoning-plan-moves-to-city-council-vote-despite-local-dissent/>.

- Levin, Kelly, Sophie Boehm, Rebecca Carter, and Marcus Kauffman. 2022. “6 Big Findings from the IPCC 2022 Report on Climate Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability.” World Resources Institute.  
<https://www.wri.org/insights/ipcc-report-2022-climate-impacts-adaptation-vulnerability>.
- Li, M., Jia, N., Lenzen, M. *et al.* 2022. Global food-miles account for nearly 20% of total food-systems emissions. *Nat Food* 3, 445–453.  
<https://doi.org/10.1038/s43016-022-00531-w>
- Li, Lan Angela. “The Edge of Expertise: Representing Barefoot Doctors in Cultural Revolution China.” *Endeavour* 39, no. 3–4 (2015): 160–67.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.endeavour.2015.05.007>.
- Little, Amanda. 2021. *The Fate of Food: What We'll Eat in a Bigger, Hotter, Smarter World*. N.p.: Harmony/Rodale.
- Magdoff, Fred, and John B. Foster. 2011. *What Every Environmentalist Needs to Know About Capitalism*. N.p.: Monthly Review Press.
- Meng, Eana. 2018. “Patients in Pain: The Rise of Acupuncture in the Opioid Epidemic.” *The Opioid Epidemic in Historical Perspective: An Anthology*. Harvard University
- McClintock, Nathan. 2018. “Urban agriculture, racial capitalism, and resistance in the settler-colonial city.” *Geography Compass*, (May). 10.1111/gec3.12373.
- McLogan, Elle. 2023. “Black History is American History: Spotlight on Flushing's "Black Dublin.”” CBS News. <https://www.cbsnews.com/newyork/news/black-dublin/>.
- Mohamed, Carlotta. 2023. “A trip down memory lane: Revisiting the rich history of Flushing, Willets Point – QNS.com.” QNS.com.  
<https://qns.com/2023/07/flushing-willets-point-history/>.

- Moore, Donald S., Jake Kosek, and Anand Pandian, eds. 2003. *Race, Nature, and the Politics of Difference*. N.p.: Duke University Press.
- Pellegrino, Zander, Seonae Byeon, and Jane Wang. 2020. "Green Gentrification and Environmental Racism in Flushing." *Gotham Gazette*.  
<https://www.gothamgazette.com/130-opinion/9928-green-gentrification-environmental-racism-flushing-special-waterfront-district>.
- Parmesan, C., M.D. Morecroft, Y. Trisurat, R. Adrian, G.Z. Anshari, A. Arneeth, Q. Gao, P. Gonzalez, R. Harris, J. Price, N. Stevens, and G.H. Talukdarr, 2022: Terrestrial and Freshwater Ecosystems and Their Services. In: *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [H.-O. Pörtner, D.C. Roberts, M. Tignor, E.S. Poloczanska, K. Mintenbeck, A. Alegría, M. Craig, S. Langsdorf, S. Löschke, V. Möller, A. Okem, B. Rama (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK and New York, NY, USA, pp. 197–377, doi:10.1017/9781009325844.004.
- Shelton, Tamara V. 2019. *Herbs and Roots: A History of Chinese Doctors in the American Medical Marketplace*. N.p.: Yale University Press.
- Shiva, Vandana, and Kartikey Shiva. 2020. *Oneness Vs. the 1%: Shattering Illusions, Seeding Freedom*. N.p.: Chelsea Green Publishing.
- Simard, Suzanne. 2022. *Finding the Mother Tree: Discovering the Wisdom of the Forest*. N.p.: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group.
- Sze, Julie. 2004. "Asian American Activism for Environmental Justice." *Peace Review* 16, no. 2 (June): 149-156. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1040265042000237680>.



Spirn, Anne Whiston. 1995. "Constructing Nature: The Legacy of Fredrick Law Olmsted ."

Essay. In *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*. W.W. Norton.

Taylor, Dorceta E. 1999. "Central Park as a Model for Social Control: Urban Parks, Social Class

and Leisure Behavior in Nineteenth-Century America." *Journal of Leisure Research*

31:420-477.

Tobias, Ronald B. 2019. "Theodore Roosevelt's Last Hunt: How to reconcile the President's

protection of nature with his seeming desire to destroy it?" *Natural History Magazine*,

(March).