

Reflecting on Chinese tradition and bringing it into the “global discourse” is a notable trend in both today’s China and the West. Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803~1882) is a significant contributor to this idea of combining Eastern and Western inspirations.

According to Emerson, language was once “all poetry” in its infancy. However, in Emerson’s modern times, the radical connection between language and nature seems to become more and more obscure. He returns to his reality and urges man to depend on the simplicity of his character and his desire to communicate it without loss and therefore to regain the capability of discovering those metaphors in both matter and mind.

Interestingly, Chinese language still keeps a unique and fascinating fusion of natural elements till today. Each character or ideogram boasts a centuries-old history representing a repository of the aesthetic values and shared themes underlying nature. Also, the characters can be combined to reveal or describe things beyond their singular meaning. One of the important qualities of Chinese language is that the basis of the written character is taken from nature. In Emerson’s words, language becomes more picturesque as we go back in history: he calls language the “fossil poetry”.

In my paper, I will reveal the similarity (or coincidence) of Ralph Waldo Emerson’s idea on language and Chinese characters. In order to do so, I will present a series of proofs (both of Emerson’s and Chinese characters), hoping to find that between

wor(l)ds there actually exist endless possibilities.