

Methodology

My project was primarily a historical and literature analysis.

Components:

- Strategies responsibly accounting for my positionality as a Western researcher throughout the project, including multi-language sources, deconstructing colonial concepts of nature such as “terra nullius,” and emphasizing agency over generalization
- Academic literature review
- Close reading of fundamental Transcendentalist texts and Eastern religious and philosophical scripture
- Visit to 2 historical sites key to the Transcendentalist movement



Fruitlands Farmhouse at Fruitlands Museum, the site of a Transcendentalist living experiment



Site of Thoreau's cabin at Walden Pond, where he lived alone for over 2 years

Nature in Transcendentalism: A Counternarrative to the Global Thought Binary

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How do the complex foundations of Transcendentalist attitudes towards nature challenge an East-West binary categorization of environmental thought?

Evidence and Argument Visualization

My argument presents the coexistence of 1) **dialogue** with Eastern thought and 2) **independent** Western ideological development as an explanation for the **convergence** between Transcendentalist and Eastern environmental principles.

Dialogue

*I described the **explicit** and **implicit** evidence for the exposure to scripture that catalyzed the infusion of Buddhist, Taoist, and Hindu environmental principles into Transcendentalist thought. “...in the morning I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonical philosophy of the Bhagvat-Geeta...in comparison with which our modern world and its literature seem puny and trivial...” – Thoreau, *Walden**

Convergence

I identified three points of resemblance between Transcendentalism and the Eastern traditions of environmental thinking.

- Sustainable living.** Subsistence, self-reliance, regenerative and place-based lifestyle
- Divine continuity.** Nature's inherent spiritual value and inextricable connection to humanity
- Respect for wilderness.** Preservationist belief in protecting natural landscapes

Independence

I outlined three factors that characterize Transcendentalist environmental principles as unique and Western-originated.

- Preceding European movements.** German Romanticism, Unitarian theology, and Utopianism were philosophical precursors to Transcendentalist reformism.
- Local influence.** Transcendentalism is defined and shaped by its geographical birthplace, namely Concord, MA and surrounding areas.
- Deep ecology.** While difficult to distinguish, the preservationist ideology of Transcendentalism is uniquely American.

Conclusion

Transcendentalist environmentalism both drew from Buddhist, Taoist, and Hindu attitudes towards nature and simultaneously achieved this resemblance through continuity with unprecedented, uniquely Euro-American strains of environmental thought. This phenomenon embodies a multifaceted critique of the East-West binary, including and beyond environmentalist discourse. This conclusion leads to several corollary contributions of my research:

- Complicate the perceived incompatibility of environmental thought and the stereotypically consumerist, individualist West.
- Demonstrate that originalism and appropriation are not mutually exclusive views of Transcendentalism in environmental contexts; providing a more nuanced and accurate framing of Transcendentalism.
- Promote more conscious analyses of thought development; warn against the intrusion of stereotypes into perception of environmental concepts.
- Suggest that a powerful philosophical view to human-nature conflicts pervades cultures across the globe.