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ORIGINAL PAPER

Deism and Daoism in Washington Irving's "Rip Van Winkle"

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Abstract Critics have noticed the Daoist gist of the 1872 Chinese version of "Rip Van Winkle" by Washington Irving. The present study discovers that Irving's tale itself is wealthy with deist and Daoist messages. From three aspects, including Irving's access to deism and Daoism, deist and Daoist ideas exemplified through a contrast between nature and humans, and deist and Daoist ways of thinking embodied in the hero, this paper demonstrates how the philosophical ideas are redefined through the text and the hero to function as ways of examining the new nation and articulating the self.

Keywords Rip Van Winkle · Deism · Daoism

1 Introduction

Over the past years, American literature has been increasingly recognized as "a multilingual and intercontinental domain" (Dimock 2007, 13). This outlook has extended the horizon for rethinking authorship in American literature and reinterpreting American literature formed under "multilingual and intercontinental" contexts. It also applies to the study of established American writers, a number of whom weave stories out of multilingual and intercontinental sources to examine the nation in the others. It is the case with Washington Irving, whose "Rip Van Winkle" is viewed as an Americanized European tale. Irving's recreation reflects a feature common in nineteenth-century European fiction, namely the use of material from other languages and cultures. Irving continues to be the object of sustained attention

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when scholars speak of the Daoist (or Taoist) gist, or discuss the ways of rewriting at the story and the discourse levels, of "A Sleep of Seventy Years" (*Yi shui qi shi nian*, 一睡七十年), the 1872 Chinese version of "Rip Van Winkle."

Carried in the second page of *Shen Bao* (or *Shen-pao*) 24 (22nd of the fourth lunar month 1872, namely May 28, 1872, A.D.), "A Sleep of Seventy Years" is a Sinicized tale whose author is anonymous. Mr. Wei, the protagonist, is a scholar. However, he feels disgusted with the classics, casts aside them, and takes to Kung fu, in which he loses interest soon. Then, he becomes fascinated with "Daoist teachings" and "fixes his thoughts on otherworldly things" (Hanan 2004, 112). At length, he leaves his family behind and goes to the mountains. There, he meets three old men, or "Daoist saints" (Da 2013, 271), with white hair and white eyebrows, has drinks with one of them, and falls into such a profound slumber that he wakes up after seventy years. He goes back home, finds nothing interesting, and returns to the mountains. This tale was a little bit revised in wording, but the story and the gist remained the same when republished in the fifth page of *Shen Bao* 15884 (16th of the third lunar month, namely May 6, 1917).

This essay argues that Irving's tale itself is wealthy with Daoist as well as deist messages. By reviewing deism and Daoism prevalent in America in Irving's day, and presenting evidence, in particular, to show the ways Irving came to know Daoism, it demonstrates how the philosophical ideas are redefined in narrative and story to function as ways of meditating on moral deterioration incurred by burgeoning commercialism, tobacco-based profit-making as well as political wrangling.

2 Irving's Access to Deism and Daoism

"Rip Van Winkle" is set in an age when America was undergoing intense multicultural encounter and social transformation. First, particularly among the European descendants, commercialism was increasingly emphasized. Second, religious beliefs and philosophical conceptions that existed were experiencing changes and playing roles in different communities. For instance, with the progress of Enlightenment, especially with the political power of the clergy declining, "the tenets of Calvinism had been yielding to Deism and Arminianism" (Adams 1923, 169). Arminianism emphasized man's responsibility; deism, as a more influential system of belief, was to a high degree a secularized religion that was especially endorsed by many of the educated prior to the revolution as well as in the revolutionary age. In his *Autobiography,* Benjamin Franklin says that he "became a thorough deist" when he "was scarce fifteen" (2008, 69). The lexicographer Noah Webster "became a deist as a student" (Matthews 1991, 30). Deism was gradually noted for its rationalist thoughts needed for enlightenment, independence, and liberty in the new world.

Two books were typical of deist thinking in this age. One was Ethan Allen's *Reason, the Only Oracle of Man* (1836), which was first published at Bennington, Vermont, in 1784. As the title suggests, reason is man's oracle: God gives man the ability to reason; man should depend on this ability to know about nature, of which

God is the architect. For this purpose, man has to go into nature, which has its intrinsic laws characteristic of universality, immutability, and eternality. Then, by correctly synthesizing his ideas he has got in nature, man is able to draw conclusions about the laws of nature, acquire a consistent system of knowledge, and cultivate the capability of telling virtue from vice. Virtue and vice are "the only two things in this world," the former being "the rational and only procuring cause of all intellectual happiness," and the latter being the cause "of conscious guilt and misery" (100). Indeed, Allen's advocate of going into nature is grounded in Enlightenment philosophy. John Locke, an initiator of Enlightenment, says in *An Abridgment of Mr. Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1752) that "all the materials of reason and knowledge" come "from *experience* and *observation*" (13; original emphasis). Washington Irving's 1809 book published under a pseudonym brings forth a similar sense of respect for nature, where standards of judging can be found: "Finding the world would not accommodate itself to the theory, he widely determined to accommodate the theory to the world" (Knickerbocker 1821, 7). Allen, whose book particularly appealed to the educated class, was seen as a "Vermont patriot leader" (Persons 1975, 105). When Allen was jailed for his patriot activities, Thomas Jefferson wrote a proposal in support of him, declaring that he was a person "fighting bravely" in his country's cause (1943, 27). No doubt, Allen's book reflects the common deist mood of the day.

The other book was Elihu Palmer's *Principles of Nature* (1819), which was first published in 1802. Palmer, who founded a deist newspaper *The Temple of Reason* in 1800, emphasizes in his book, as Ethan Allen does, the use of reasoning ability. In many aspects, however, this book goes further than Allen's book. In Palmer's view, man is equipped with intellectual powers, which must be "developed," "directed to the discovery of correct principle," and applied to social life so as to cleanse the society of errors and vices. Meanwhile, society should respect an individual's dignity, and an intellectual must "depend upon himself" by resting upon "his own energies" and being "responsible for himself" (3, 89). This book is a recognized and "popular handbook for deists" (Kull and Kull 1952, 79). It obviously echoes the European idea of individual independence and liberty. For example, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing thinks that God creates from eternity beings as perfect as himself, and that these simple beings are in fact limited gods themselves. Therefore, a law that can be derived from a being's own nature is: "Act according to your individual perfections" (1994, 29).

Naturally, liberty, independence, and dignity as the spirit of the age in the new world reflected deist teachings, including deist emphasis on nature's performance in line with its intrinsic laws rather than with the decrees of God. This spirit resided in many intellectuals and statesmen in the revolutionary age and the new republic. The earliest and most important institutional embodiment of deist ideas, *The Declaration of Independence*, is, so to speak, a deist document, claiming that people are created to be equal, and that people's unalienable rights to life and liberty should be respected. Underlying these ideas is a belief in God. Thomas Paine in his *The Age of Reason* (1880), a book published in two parts, respectively, in 1794 and 1796, continues to emphasize this belief by saying that a true deist should contemplate

"the power, wisdom, and benignity of the Deity" and try "to imitate him in everything moral, scientificial, and mechanical" (38).

What is worthy of particular attention is that deism played a role in "the emancipation of the rising commercial class" (Muelder and Sears 1940, 66), in political disputes as well as in political emancipation. These emancipations gave rise to the following problems. On the one hand, the commercial class, which rose in the 1660s in Europe, sought broader space for development in the new world and became business rivals, which was causing cut-throat competition and undermining social morality. On the other hand, one of the by-products of deism was a number of political disputes the post-Revolutionary days were witnessing. Some "apparently trivial matters" were likely to provoke passionate public debates. On issues such as liberty, order, economic growth, war, and foreign affairs, opinions were often widely different throughout Washington's two terms of presidency and during Adams' presidency. As a result, the two presidents were either placed "in a terrible dilemma" or treated with "open contempt" (Divine et al. 2011, 140, 189). In a letter of February 12, 1810, included in the biography by his nephew Pierre E. Irving, Washington Irving tells his friend Mrs. Hoffman that he is disgusted by "the servility, and duplicity, and rascality" he has "witnessed among the swarm of scrub politicians who crawl about the great metropolis of our State, like so many vermin about the head of the body politic" (139–140).

This is reconstituted in the progression of the tale. Rip, after a 20-year sleep in the mountains, comes upon a similar scene with fierce political wrangling. There is clear evidence that the tale reflects the author's effort to highlight his mental state with the help of Daoist philosophy.

Daoism is both a religion and a sect of philosophy. As a religion, Daoism dates back to around 150 A.D., and its founder was Zhang Daoling (34–156); as a sect of philosophy, Daoism had appeared a few centuries earlier. Its founders were Lao Tzu (Li Erh), a contemporary of Confucius (551–479 B.C.), and Chuang Tzu (fl. 350–320 B.C.). The canonical works of philosophical Daoism *Tao Te Ching* (*Lao Tzu*) and *Chuang Tzu* contain similar but differing conceptions. "Dao" in "Daoism" means "the Way," namely the essence of the universe.

Like deist teachings, *Tao Te Ching* tells people to follow the universe's Dao, i.e., "the Way" or the essence. The book begins by discussing the origin of the universe, regarding the Way as something most elementary to form the universe. The Way could by no means be verbalized, so Something can be seen as Nothing. However, it "was the beginning of heaven and earth" and "was the mother of the myriad creatures." Therefore, one should always rid oneself "of desires in order to observe its secrets" and always allow oneself "to have desires in order to observe its manifestations." Otherwise, one is able to observe only the outer appearance. This is partly in conformity with deist teachings, according to which one has to return to nature to apprehend its laws. Lao Tzu, then, turns attention from nature to human affairs, preferring inaction to action: "Something and Nothing produce each other," and so "the sage keeps to the deed that consists in taking no action and practises the teaching that uses no words" (57–58).

Chuang Tzu shares some ideas with Lao Tzu and deist teachings. Lao Tzu emphasizes inaction; Chuang Tzu likewise holds that actions "easily lead to danger"

since they are "a matter of gain and loss," that with inaction you "may make the world work for you and have leisure to spare," and that with action you will find yourself "working for the world and never will it be enough" (61,144). On one point, in particular, Chuang Tzu agrees with deist teachings: liberty. What the book stresses, however, is a rather negative philosophical idea of liberty. In light of this idea, an ideal life is characterized by such traits as being "constrained in will, lofty in action, aloof from the world, apart from its customs, elevated in discourse, sullen and critical, indignation his whole concern" (167). Daoists consequently think it necessary to shuffle off the mortal coil and tear themselves away from social commitment so as to live what they view as a simple, solitary but honest and fulfilled life by becoming hermits in the mountains because the world, as they see, is tortured by bondages, lust, and sufferings. Compared with Confucianism, which used to be a sect of philosophy of the literati, Daoism produced farther and wider influence on the Chinese people's ways of living and thinking in ancient times.

"Rip Van Winkle" is a tale of a good-natured but ne'er-do-well farmer, who escapes his nagging wife, goes to the woods and the mountains, meets an old man and odd-looking people, falls asleep after drinks, wakes up after 20 years, and returns home only to find the change of regimes. Narratives with similar plots abound in many countries' literatures. The Chinese prototype of Rip Van Winkle was Wang Zhi (or Wang Chih, 王质) of the Western Jin dynasty (265–316 A.D.). This is the so-called practice of "putting new wine into old bottles" in weaving stories, which was common not only in the Qing dynasty but also in the previous ages. What is particular about such stories late in the Qing dynasty is the presence of more Western elements, including the "rifle" (火枪) instead of an axe in "A Sleep of Seventy Years" (Fang 2012, 64).

A number of intellectuals in the age of American Revolution and the early days of the new republic turned to the Orient to look for possible ways to speculate about moral and social construction. There were a few channels for them to know about China and Daoism. The first was trade with China. It had begun in colonial America; the colonies' independence occasioned new interest in trade and direct contacts with the Oriental country. By 1820, when *The Sketch Book* came out in book form, "the commerce of America with China exceeded that of every other Occidental nation, with the exception of Great Britain" (Paullin 1971, 23). Washington Irving's two letters mentioned in the biography by Pierre E. Irving provide evidence of his knowledge of China. In July 1806, he wrote to Henry Ogden, a friend who had recently sailed for China, asking to buy for him, while in Canton, "the mandarin's dress," "two or three drawings of the most superlative tea put up in a little quizzical box," and "two or three queer little pretty things, that would cost nothing, and be acceptable to the girls"; after Ogden's return they had a supper "in true Chinese style, in which none were permitted to eat except with chopsticks" (96–97). Meanwhile, some porcelain imported from China carried Daoist motifs, such as "the Daoist Eight Immortals," a Daoist image and the pine tree, a Daoist symbol of longevity (Frank 2011, 14–15). Three periods in the fifty years from 1785 to 1835, namely 1785–1795, 1795–1812, and 1815–1835, witnessed the unprecedented volume of porcelain trade between the two countries, and by "the latter part of the third period…Oriental forms" were "increasingly

evident" (Mudge 1962, 181). The Daoist motifs on the porcelain imported from China became more familiar to the Americans. The contacts mentioned above as well as the paintings and decorations on Chinese porcelain helped cultivate a keen interest in Chinese culture and the Chinese people's ways of thinking about nature and life.

The second was the printing industry as well as the media, including newspapers and books coming out both in colonial America and after the Revolution. Even after the *Copyright Act of the United States* came into effect in 1790, many books published in Britain would soon be illegally printed in America. The situation, which continued until 1891, was helpful for the transmission of ideas on both sides of the ocean. *Tao Te Ching* is said to have "attracted first attention" in the West when its Latin version by Jesuit missionaries was presented to the British Royal Society in 1788. As Livia Kohn points out in her book *Introducing Daoism*, this rendition was intended "to show that the mysteries of the Christian faith were known to the ancient Chinese, matching Dao with God, like logos conveying the triple sense of supreme being, reason, and word" (2009, 209). There is no evidence for the publication of this rendition in America, but relevant conception was made known beyond the ocean.

The prosperity of the American media increased the accessibility. To console himself, Rip frequents what seems to be a "perpetual club"—the discussions held before the village inn. The discussions will become more profound when the participants get "by chance an old newspaper" discarded by a traveler (*The Sketch Book* 33). This shows that in the villages in colonial America newspapers, including newspapers published elsewhere, were often available. Actually, in the first half of the eighteenth century, "American newspapers closely followed the papal denunciation of the Jesuits in China," and "almost all knowledge in America of the Chinese came from reports by and about the Catholic missionaries" (Frank 18, 93). In terms of books, A. Owen Aldridge in his *The Dragon and the Eagle: The Presence of China in the American Enlightenment* makes a list of 34 American imprints concerning China that appeared before 1826, acknowledging that this list might "not be complete" (269). This is true. The list does not include, for example, Samuel Miller's *A Brief Retrospect of the Eighteenth Century*, in which the author mentions Confucius's philosophy translated by a French missionary M. Couplet, who was therefore given "an honourable place in the list of oriental scholars" (1803, 84). In fact, many European books concerning Daoism were also available in colonial America. Johannes Nieuhof's illustrated publication *An Embassy from the East-India Company of the United Provinces, to the Grand Tartar Cham Emperor of China* (1673), which was first published in French in 1665, for example, was available in colonial America. In this book, Nieuhof, who was a steward to the British envoy to China, George Macartney, speaks of the Daoist ideas of "obtaining an Immortal Being in this World," the Daoist methods to achieve "Immortality," and the claimed ability to "cause" or "cease" rain and avert misfortunes (185, 191). Furthermore, engravings from the above book "were available for all to see as similar illustrations were mounted, framed and unframed, on colonial walls from Philadelphia to Marblehead" (Frank 70). This helped Americans to know what China was like and what was interesting about it.

Irving came to know more about China and Daoism through reading books of voyages and travels. According to Pierre E. Irving, Washington Irving began, at the age of eleven, to read a collection of such books by authors from different countries. These books triggered his interest in traveling around the world (1864, 13). As can be seen, by the time he published his history of New York he had read Marco Polo's book of travels to China in the thirteenth century, thinking of Marco Polo as a "dreaming traveler" (Knickerbocker 1821, 24). From his *Notes While Preparing Sketch Book & c. 1817* (1927), one can also see that on his trips in England and Scotland Irving was reading Macartney's journals kept during his embassy to China. Irving writes in his notes: "China—200 millions of inhabitants" (69). In *An Embassy to China: Being the Journal Kept by Lord Macartney during His Embassy to the Emperor Ch"ien-lung 1793–1794* (1962), Macartney does mention China's population estimated previously by his friend Father Amiot at "near 200 millions, exclusive of the province of Fukien." In addition, he mentions Daoism and Daoists, saying that Daoism is "the most ancient of all the superstitions" though Daoists "are not at present very numerous" (235, 245). In an abridged version of his account, *An Accurate Account of Lord Macartney's Embassy to China* (1797), Macartney speaks of the characteristic traits and the ideal livelihood the Chinese were enjoying: their manners are mild, their virtues sober; they "seem to enjoy as much liberty of action as is reconcilable to the well-being of society; and peace and contentment bless their lives" (46). No doubt, Macartney's journals and account left Irving a deep and favorable impression about China and Daoism.

3 Deist and Daoist Ideas Exemplified Through a Man vs Nature Contrast

Irving is concerned with the consistence of nature and the changeability of human matters. In his depiction of the scenes which he casts a fresh look at, and in his characterization of the people whom he carefully observes, he shows his keen interest mixed with philosophical ways of thinking he learned from deist and Daoist teachings.

His interest and philosophical ways of thinking can be perceived from the beginning of "Rip Van Winkle":

> Whoever has made a voyage up the Hudson, must remember the Kaatskill mountains. They are a dismembered branch of the great Appalachian family, and are seen away to the west of the river, swelling up to a noble height, and lording it over the surrounding country. Every change of season, every change of weather, indeed every hour of the day, produces some change in the magical hues and shapes of these mountains; and they are regarded by all the good wives, far and near, as perfect barometers. (*The Sketch Book* 30)

The river and the mountains, existing side by side, seem to be in harmonious motion. As John Locke says in *A Collection of Several Pieces of Mr. John Locke* (1739), "It appears, as far as human observation reaches, to be a Settled law of Nature, that *all Bodies have a Tendency, Attraction, or Gravitation towards one*

another" (58; original emphasis). Irving's depiction above is an echo of the Enlightenment idea. The Hudson river, the Kaatskill mountains and the surrounding country attract and support one another, forming a harmonious scene of nature.

Meanwhile, deist messages are revealed through textual details. The diction, including "great," "noble," and "lording it over," is efficacious in presenting the scene with a holy atmosphere, and therefore, the author conveys an attitude that in colonial America nature, represented by local mountains, rivers, and their surroundings areas, exists in accordance with its own laws, and that things in nature therefore happen so regularly as to remain calm and settled. What is changing and unsettled are humans and humans' perceptions, which humans believe they may depend on to make judgments. As the story unfolds, a message comes to be revealed: humans' perceptions and judgments do not always work, even with technical appliances such as "barometers."

The tale is thenceforward concentrated on character trajectory. The obvious change that befalls Rip is his identity as a resident. Before his long sleep, he is a subject under the British Monarchy; after the sleep he becomes a citizen of the new republic. The narrator is deeply concerned with Rip's relationship with his family, especially his wife. He is no doubt dissatisfied with her, since she complains of his responsibility and restricts his liberty. Between the couple throughout the narrative, there is no direct speech presentation, which means to an extent that as a henpecked husband Rip dares not voice his opinion to his wife. The reader hears him speaking for the first time when he flees to the woods and says to his dog: "Poor Wolf … thy mistress leads thee a dog's life of it; but never mind, my lad; whilst I live thou shalt never want a friend to stand by thee!" After waking up from a long sleep, he decides to go back home rather than starve in the mountains, though he dreads to see his wife. When he arrives home and sees his house "empty, forlorn, and apparently abandoned," he discards his fears and calls "loudly for his wife and children." In the end, he feels, nonetheless, "a drop of comfort" when he is told that his wife has died (*The Sketch Book* 34, 39, 42). From Rip's vagarious attitudes toward his wife, the reader sees how the author understands inconsistence in the human world.

In this world, the changing feelings Rip and his wife have for each other cannot be easily controlled. Rip's wife makes frequent attempts to drag her husband to what she thinks is the right track by scolding him. Nevertheless, her attempts fail one after another. Rip is discontent with his wife, but after the long sleep he finds it difficult to sever ties with her. The narrator/author seems to awake to the fact that nature, which remains consistent by following the Way, is reasonable; humans, who keep changing and conflicting without following the Way, are in general unreasonable.

On the basis of his knowledge and conception, Irving gives his story a distinct and godly sense of Daoism in creating natural scenes. Such a sense as is presented in the depiction of the scene quoted above is equally familiar to the Chinese. Nieuhof observes: "Very curious, and indeed nice, even to Superstition, are the *Chineses* in the choice of Hills; for they say and believe all their Fortune depends upon it, being places inhabited, as they imagine, by Dragon, unto whom they attribute the cause of all their good Fortune" (207; original emphasis). Meanwhile, the harmony of the scene dynamically and perfectly blended by the mountains and the river agrees with

that of yang and yin, which are the two mystical Daoist elements: yang is the masculine element often represented by mountains and rocks and yin is the feminine element often represented by water. In consequence, the tale is credited with a deist and Daoist significance from the very beginning.

4 Deist and Daoist Ways of Thinking Embodied in the Hero

When Enlightenment arose in Europe late in the seventeenth century, the idea of the old order in life, particularly in man's way of thinking, was challenged, and the protection of one's natural rights was stressed. Rip Van Winkle is an allegorized figure representing a similar concept of resistance and independence.

In colonial America as well as in most traditional societies, men worked the field, and women kept house. As a husband and father, Rip is therefore expected to shoulder the responsibility of ensuring his family's material comfort. However, he does not like the work in the fields. The reason is not that he is lazy—he is "ready to attend to anybody's business but his own" (*The Sketch Book* 32), but that he is uninterested in anything "profitable":

> The great error in Rip's composition was an insuperable aversion to all kinds of profitable labor. It could not be from the want of assiduity or perseverance; for he would sit on a wet rock, with a rod as long and heavy as a Tartar's lance, and fish all day without a murmur, even though he should not be encouraged by a single nibble. (*The Sketch Book* 31–32)

Here, "profitable" is a significant word and so requires a brief explanation. It is often connected with economy, particularly commerce. In traditional society, labor is a means to get food, clothing, shelter, everything that one and one's family need, and so it is neither commercial nor economically profitable. In the above quotation, farm work for Rip's family is aimed to make money as well as to harvest grain for self-consumption. In New England, farming is restricted by the harsh climate, the limited arable land, and the thin and boulder-filled clay for the most part. Therefore, starting from the early days of colonial America commerce was an adjunct to farming: people made a living by trading, fishing, shipbuilding as well as growing crops. In the meantime, due to the above poor natural conditions, the chief crop of the planters was tobacco. As Thomas Jefferson Wertenbaker writes in his book *The First Americans 1607–1690* (1927), this crop was also intended to be more profitable, although the planting of it "quickly exhausted the soil, and there were no precautions taken to preserve its fertility by a rotation of crops or by the use of manures." The export of tobacco to foreign markets "passed chiefly through the hands of Dutch merchants" (37–38, 42). As a result of the above factors, commercialism grew and prevailed from the beginning stages. It was intensified all the way to the founding of the new republic when industrialization was becoming an important part of economy. Rip's resistance against "profitable" work is certain to make him hard to follow the prevailing commercialist way of thinking, and so he is becoming out of place.

The use of the simile "as long and heavy as a Tartar's lance" shows that Irving was reading about the Orient, particularly China. "Tartar" generally refers to a Mongol who invaded Western Asia and Eastern Europe and later ruled China in the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368 A.D.). This is obviously what the word means in Marco Polo's book of travels. However, "Tartar" in Westerners' concept has often multiple meanings. In Nieuhof's book and book title mentioned above, "Tartar" means "Manchu." In Macartney's journals of his embassy (1962), "Tartar" refers either to a Mongol or to a Manchu (111, 129). In Morse's *American Geography* (1789), "Tartar" refers both to the Chinese and to the Japanese (529). This book is listed among the American imprints concerning China that came out before 1826, only the name of the book in the list is: *The American Universal Geography* (Aldridge 1993, 270).

For Irving, "Tartar" in the above quotation from "Rip Van Winkle" means a Manchu soldier. A very possible reason for the use of the simile is that the author was reading the accounts of Macarteney's embassy to China. According to Æneas Anderson's *A Narrative of the British Embassy to China, in the Years 1792, 1793, and 1794* (1795a, b) published after the author's service of Macartney on the embassy to China, Macartney saw, on the way to an interview with the emperor Qian Long, Manchu soldiers drilling: "These were the only soldiers we had yet seen in China who possessed a martial appearance;…Their implements of war were various, comprising matchlocks, sabres, daggers, spears, halberts, lances, bows and arrows" (140–141). The word "halberts" is misspelled; according to the same book published in London in the same year, it should be "halberds" (130). According to the list made by A. Owen Aldridge in his book, the place of publication is, respectively, Philadelphia and New York (Aldridge 1993, 270). This shows that the book enjoyed marked popularity and a wide readership. Irving obviously trusted the English authors' travels, thinking that "their travels are more honest and accurate the more remote the country described," and that he "would place implicit confidence in an Englishman's description…of unknown islands in the Yellow Sea" (*The Sketch Book* 45). We may conclude that travel books such as those mentioned above brought Irving closer to the people, the landscapes and the religions in the Oriental country, and that Irving utilized these sources therein in his own writings. This is why Bayard Taylor dedicated his book *The Lands of the Saracen* (1859), which was first published in 1855, to Washington Irving, who, in his view, had "more than any other American author" confirmed him in his "design of visiting the East" and made him "familiar with Oriental life" (the dedication page).

It is noteworthy that the above quotation has a clear sense of Daoism. According to the narrator, Rip is averse to "all kinds of profitable labor," and so he will "sit on a wet rock…and fish all day without a murmur, even though he should not be encouraged by a single nibble." Such a conception of his way of living agrees with the Daoist idea of ascetic training by which a devotee hopes to live in harmony and order as a result of tranquility and knowledge. Chuang Tzu says:

> The men of ancient times who practiced the Way employed tranquility to cultivate knowledge. Knowledge lived in them, yet they did nothing for its sake. So they may be said to have employed knowledge to cultivate

> tranquility. Knowledge and tranquility took turns cultivating each other, and harmony and order emerged from the inborn nature. (1968, 171)

Chuang Tzu therefore implies that the men of ancient times, by reducing wants and making themselves unified wholes, were not contaminated by the lust for gain as people of modern times are. They "practiced the Way": when they were tranquil, they had knowledge; when they had knowledge, they were tranquil. While Foucault thinks that life is "a fundamental form of knowledge" (2002, 275), Aristotle holds that "the inquiry into the soul" should be placed "among the first kinds of knowledge" (1986, 126). On the whole, Foucault's view of knowledge does not contradict Aristotle's: one's knowledge of the essence of life can be best acquired after soul-searching; one is more likely to know oneself particularly when one holds oneself aloof from the crowd and its influence. Therefore, tranquility and knowledge of the soul depend on each other, and their combination gives rise to harmony and order. Chuang Tzu adds, "Virtue is harmony, the Way is order" (171). Tranquility and knowledge are, in consequence, the key means to achieve virtue, find the Way, and live a meaningful life. Then, in the above quotation from Irving's tale, Rip retires to quiet places, stays in tranquility, and has knowledge, which leads him to be better prepared for his future life.

Actually, "knowledge" and "tranquility" became key words in the mainstream discourse in the new republic. The writer and diplomat Joel Barlow, for instance, says in his book *Advice to the Privileged Orders in the Several States of Europe* (1956), which was first published in 1792 and 1793, that laws, as the means to administrate justice in society, should be made by following nature, and that punishment is neither the most important means nor the end of enforcing laws. The most important means of enforcing laws are: (1) "to distribute knowledge to every person according to his wants, to enable him to be useful and happy" so as to "dispose him to take an active interest in the welfare of the state"; (2) "to induce every creature, by rational motives, to place his happiness in the tranquility of the public, and in the security of individual peace and property" (60). It can be seen that Irving here implies his criticism of the social and political disorders in the beginning days of the new nation, and expresses his wish that virtue and the Way would play a role in building the nation. As Chuang Tzu says: "When Virtue embraces all things, we have benevolence. When the Way is in all respects well ordered, we have righteousness. When righteousness is clearly understood and all things cling to it, we have loyalty" (171). Only in this way can the unity of a nation be well formed.

Commercialism, however, caused serious worries concerning the republic's prospect. Such worries were not in the least new. Though commerce in New England was sympathetic due to the limitation of natural conditions mentioned above, a boundless intoxication with it was harmful for society's healthy development. As Wertenbaker in his 1927 book says, by 1650 the spirit of commercialism had been growing too fast. People worried that New England was becoming "a plantation of Trade" and "a place of temptation and danger," which engendered the decline of moral standards and the rise of loose behavior such as "drunkenness" (112, 189, 201). In the era of the Revolution and the early days of the republic, every household did a form of manufacturing. Peddlers, in particular, used

their ready tongues and deceitful tricks to sell items including "barometers" (Wright 1927, 28), a type of instruments mentioned in the first quotation of this paper. Rip's wife dies when she breaks "a blood vessel in a fit of passion at a New England peddler" (*The Sketch Book* 42). Obviously, peddlers' tricks were common, and Rip's aversion to profitable labor forms a contrast with his wife's death from peddlers' tricks.

As has been said, Irving's meditation on trading and commercialism was rooted not only in his keen observation and consciousness of what was happening but also in what he was reading, especially travel books. The travel books provided him with panoramic views of situations overseas and helped him make comparisons. Actually, authors of travel books in Irving's day tended to make comments on locals, particularly on locals' morality. For instance, referring to the good folk custom in the peasants' villages in Tong-choo-foo (or Tongzhou fu), a place close to Peking (Beijing) City, George Staunton, who was secretary to Macartney on the embassy to China, says that the cottages there "were without fences, gates, or other apparent precaution against wild beasts or thieves" because robbery seldom happened (108). According to the abridged 1797 Macartney account, things were, however, different in Canton, the only place where international trade was allowed in China: "Degeneracy of manners evidently marks the characters of the inhabitants of Canton, and this reflection is the more melancholy, as there is too much reason to suppose the contagion of European example has infected the simplicity and honesty of the Chinese general character" (135).

Rip's unfortunate life originates in his failure to adapt to changes in his hometown, which has become a place bustling with commercial activities. His escape from his family to the mountains implies his/the author's disappointment at the collapse of an ideal. Rip is disappointed again after he returns to his village: "Rip's heart died away at hearing of these sad changes in his home and friends, and finding himself thus alone in the world." Some time passes before he finds himself in an ideal state in which "a man can do nothing with impunity" (*The Sketch Book* 41, 43). In his 1809 book, Irving visualizes his ideal in the depiction of his nostalgic Dutch community: "In those good days of simplicity and sunshine, a passion for cleanliness was the leading principle in domestic economy, and the universal test of an able housewife: a character which formed the utmost ambition of our unenlightened grandmothers" (Knickerbocker 1821, 112). Likewise, it is a Daoist political ideal for people to "return to the simple life in the primitive society" (Xu 1927, 252). Rip's wife keeps urging him to do what he dislikes, and so she herself is "unenlightened" and goes against Daoism, which appeals to the lower wants of nature. Therefore, the following indirect speech presentation has an allegorical meaning: "he declared it was of no use to work on his farm; it was the most pestilent little piece of ground in the whole country; everything about it went wrong, and would go wrong in spite of him" (*The Sketch Book* 32). Irving disagrees with St. John Crèvecoeur, an outright optimist who says in his *Letters from an American Farmer* (1904), a book originally published in London in 1782, that American farmers "are all animated with the spirit of an industry which is unfettered and unrestrained, because each person works for himself" (49–50).

Rip's indirect speech, as it is, sounds an echo of Chuang Tzu: "the world has lost the Way, and the Way has lost the world; the world and the Way have lost each other (Chuang 1968, 173). Of course, to resume virtue and order in the family and the nation, it is definitely inadequate for an individual alone to cultivate knowledge in tranquility. As Arnold thinks, one who remains isolated cannot achieve perfection; one achieves perfection only when one is able to "carry others along with him in his march towards perfection" (1909, 9). As an ordinary man, however, all Rip can do is content himself as a story teller, feel at home, and turn a deaf ear to political disputes. Anyway, Irving's conception of the life style of simplicity, cleanliness, order, and virtue grows out of a deep meditation on the situation in his day.

5 Conclusion

"Rip Van Winkle" is a conscious articulation of the self. First, it reflects the author's personal dilemma and perplexity. Although he was born into a businessman's family, he was unhappy to shut himself in the world of commerce. This explains, to some degree, why in his writings he says little about his father and reveals a deep feeling for his mother and sisters (Bowden 1981, 13). Commerce filled him with nausea all the more when situations deteriorated. In the winter of 1810, many merchants were afraid that their commercial interests would be seriously affected by the measures of Congress. Washington Irving was sent to the capital to collect further information. In addition, the war that broke out between the UK and the USA in June 1812 caused merchants to worry much about their interests. Rip's dislike for work in the fields was matched, to some degree, by Irving's enjoyment of life in defiance of commercial concerns. Second, through this tale he voices his opinion about social construction. Paine in his *Common Sense* (1776) points out "the necessity of establishing some form of government to supply the defect of moral virtue" (4). What Irving implies in his tale is that the establishment of government alone is an inadequate remedy for the defect. As the deist thinks, virtue as well as evil is "mental and personal" (Allen 1836, 60). When virtue, alongside liberty, equality, community, and difference, continues to be a key term in the vocabulary of the new republic (Cahill 2012, 3), the author calls readers' attention to the pursuit of intellectual virtue. Egregious commercialism, overemphasized tobacco-based profit-making, and debilitating political wrangling are eroding this value.

As narrative exemplifies a way of thinking about being and order, the textualized deistic and particularly Daoist ideas in the tale are viewed as capable in some measure of remedying the situation. With less commercialism, profit-making, and political restlessness, tension of different kinds will be reduced; with more intellectual virtue, a society will become good. Such a society consists of members who are credited with correct thinking, right action, and tolerance. They know the Way and are good, and the Way, as Lao Tzu says, "is forever on the side of the good" (1963, 141). Such an individual as Rip, who is, traditionally speaking, irregular as a farmer, should be tolerated and respected. Life is divine,

wealth, and political power illusory. Therefore, Emily Dickinson says in her poem:

To be alive—is Power—
Existence—in itself—
Without a further function—
Omnipotence—Enough—(1960, 335)

By utilizing multilingual and intercontinental sources, Irving creates a world in which what matters, as he shows, is not commerce, not gain, not political power, but the freedom to gather one's wits and develop agreeable habits. This freedom is one of the fruits of great cultivation, arising on the basis of what Irving calls in his *Bracebridge Hall* (1822) "genuine national character" (30), and what Montesquieu calls in his *My Thoughts* (2012) "the genius of a nation" (138). Any nation, particularly a nation in the making, ought to emphasize the cultivation of such character and genius. It builds not simply on a victory over tyranny, but more on the nation's inquiry into itself, on its pursuit of intellectual virtue, and on other nations' knowledge.

Rip is an image that the author creates to warn of the necessity to loosen the shackles of commercialism, tobacco-based profit-making as well as political wrangling. Lao Tzu is voicing his views on manner of behavior, particularly ways of ruling a country when he discusses the Way. He prefers inaction to action and thinks the former is good for a citizen, particularly for a ruler: "It is because he does not contend that no one in the empire is in a position to contend with him" (128). Rip is not the image of a sage in Lao Tzu's book, but the image reflects the author's examination of the self and the country. Therefore, Rip's return to his village after a profound sleep in the mountains shows the author's complex attitude toward life and society. While embracing some aspects of Daoism, he takes a deist attitude; while depicting manners and characters of various kinds in a negative manner at times, he highlights the new nation's strengths as a bedrock of progress and suggests stealing "away from the bustle and commonplace of busy existence," effecting "that union of commerce and the intellectual pursuits," and preserving "the purity of the public mind" (*The Sketch Book* 18, 19, 51). Unfortunately, when the republic was stepping on its course, people's ambitions caused them to be neglectful of Irving's concern. This can be seen from Thomas Jefferson Wertenbaker's *The Founding of American Civilization: The Middle Colonies* (1949): About twenty years after *The Sketch Book* was published, foreign visitors to New York were confounded by people hurrying and hustling in the streets and thought that "Big profits overshadow liberty in all its forms" (4).

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