Tuan's *Topophilia*: The Making of a Citation Classic

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ABSTRACT

First published in 1974, Yi-Fu Tuan’s work *Topophilia* has become one of the most cited works in human geography. Using the method of citation analysis and data from the Citation Indexes, this paper explores the frequency of *Topophilia*'s inclusion as a reference in scholarly literature. A temporal trend is identified, which indicates that citation to *Topophilia* rose in the late 1970s, dropped in the early 1980s, but rose again in the late 1980s. Within journals, the references to *Topophilia* by geographers has declined since the 1980s while citations in literature in the humanities has increased since the late 1980s. A four stage life-cycle of a "citation classic" is put forward: (1) Publication Stage; (2) Consolidation Stage; (3) Implementation Stage; and (4) Incorporation Stage.

KEY WORDS: citation analysis, Yi-Fu Tuan, Topophilia, geographical literature.

INTRODUCTION

What are our private views on the physical environment, natural and man-made? How do we perceive, structure, and evaluate it? What have been, and what are, our environmental ideas? How do economy, life style, and the physical setting itself affect environmental attitudes and values? What are the links between environment and world view?

These are some of the questions that I wish to explore.

From the Introduction to *Topophilia*. (1974)

In 1974, a short book with a strange title appeared which drew upon a wide range of sources, including drama, poetry, art, music, psychology and the Bible. It’s purpose was to construct an argument about environmental perception, attitudes, and values. Yi-Fu Tuan’s *Topophilia* (1974) is both engaging and engrossing, and firmly centers the human in humanistic geography. And even though the book bears scant resemblance to other work in geography, it is one of the most cited books in geographic literature. It has
become, in the words of one study, a "citation classic" (Wrigley and Matthews, 1986). This paper explores the frequency of *Topophilia*’s inclusion as a reference in scholarly literature to better understand how a major work in geography becomes a citation classic. Three basic issues are explored in the analysis of the work’s citation history: (1) the temporal trend of citations; (2) the disciplinary trend of citations; and (3) the spread of Tuan’s work into the larger stream of social science.

These issues will be addressed using citations included in the Institute for Science Information (ISI) Indexes. Like any source of data, the ISI Indexes have limitations. Yet, as Garfield (1984) notes: “Since their inception [the Indexes have been] recognized by information scientists and sociologists as important tools to help study the history, evolution, and sociology of science” (p. 3). Geographers have used citation analysis, the systematic examination of the citation record, to gain insight to the understanding of the structure of geographic knowledge. The study of the citation history of Tuan’s *Topophilia* provides insights into the making of a citation classic and the impact of geographic knowledge on the larger realm of human understanding.

**TUAN AND TOPOPHILIA**

The term “topophilia” literally means love of place. It was introduced into geography by Tuan in 1961 and drew on the work of French physicist and phenomenologist Gaston Bachelard. Bachelard was exploring the “images and pleasant reveries that are prompted by certain types of space, especially enclosed space . . .” (Tuan, 1961, p. 30). Tuan extended his original 1961 essay in the book *Topophilia* (1974) to incorporate a much broader range of emotions and experiences between people and place, defining topophilia as “. . . the affective bond between people and place or setting,” not just the feelings towards enclosed spaces expressed by Bachelard.

Yi-Fu Tuan brought a broad range of experience to his study of the complex relationships between people and places. He was born in Tientsen, China in 1930, and as a youth was educated in China, Australia, and the Philippines. He received his undergraduate and Master’s level training at the University of Oxford, and his doctorate from the University of California (Berkeley) in 1957. After holding teaching positions at Indiana University, the University of New Mexico, and the University of Toronto, he arrived at the University of Minnesota in 1968. He was teaching at the University of Minnesota when *Topophilia* was published in 1974.

Much of Tuan’s early work dealt with physical geography, particularly landforms, as exemplified by such titles as “Types of Pediment in Arizona” (1954), “Soil Evolution and Land Form Development” (1958), and “Structure, Climate, and Basin Land Forms in Arizona and New Mexico” (1962). Despite this physical orientation, there was a diversity of thought in his publications, with titles including “Use of Simile and Metaphor in Geographical Description” (1957) and “Topophilia, or Sudden Encounter with the Landscape” (1961), that would come to fruition in his first major work, *Topophilia*.

Published at a time when the reverberations from the quantitative revolution were still rumbling through geographic thought, *Topophilia* was greeted by generally favorable though somewhat uncertain reviews. Writing in the *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Douglas K. Fleming (1975) felt that *Topophilia* was a “quiet book” with “the psychoanalyst’s air of calm detachment” (p. 315). On the other hand, Fleming stated that “the main theme itself, however recurrent and vividly illuminated, cannot create a cohesive framework” (p. 315) and that “. . . the author’s performance has been rather analogous to a juggling act with too many balls in the air” (p. 316). In the end, however, Fleming found that “the subtle, complex sentiments which Tuan emphasizes may not always remind us of our own feelings about place, but they may induce us to reevaluate our own” (p. 316). A somewhat more critical review appeared in the *Professional Geographer* by Dan Stanislawski
(1974). The author stated that "Topophilia is a suave, seductive, provocative volume" (p. 457) and that "one wants to be convinced [by the book], but in places one is disheartened by dubious examples" (p. 457). Nevertheless, Stanislawski asserted that "the criticisms made here refer to sources used and to some conclusions, but in no way should they be construed as critical of the spirit of the book" (p. 458).

The book received a glowing review from David Lowenthal (1975): "Topophilia evokes many comments but few criticisms" (p. 424) and that "[Tuan’s] success is a consequence of his ability to make whatever interests him very much his own, and to eschew formalism and jargon in favor of compassionate and literary vision" (p. 424). As Lowenthal states in his review, much of the book’s power comes from its style, which is clear yet challenging and thought-provoking. In a typical passage which gives a taste of the work’s lyrical flavor, Tuan writes:

A large city offers many types of physical environment. Let us focus on the street scene. The street would seem to be a fairly specific type of physical environment but in fact its character and use can vary enormously. At one extreme, it is a narrow crooked lane, unpaved or paved with cobble, packed with jostling people and cars, a place that assaults the senses with noise, odor, and color. At the other, it is a wide straight avenue, bordered by trees or blank walls, an imposing space that is almost devoid of life (p. 174).

The ideas presented in Topophilia and the clarity of their presentation combine to make this a powerful book that has weathered the passage of time. Since its publication in 1974, Topophilia has been widely cited both within and outside Geography. In a study of citation levels in geography by Wrigley and Matthews (1986) Topophilia was the only work in humanistic geography identified as a citation classic according to their criteria. The question then becomes when and where has Topophilia been cited, and does the citation history tell us something about Topophilia and its role in the world of ideas.

THE METHOD OF CITATION ANALYSIS

Likened by one prominent English geographer and practitioner of citation analysis to “navel gazing” (Wrigley, 1983), citation analysis has been pointed to a variety of ends, many worthwhile but some more dubious. Citation analysis has been used to identify “centurions” (Whitehand, 1985), “new centurions” (Wrigley and Matthews, 1987), and “weavers of influence” (Bodman, 1991). It has been used to track heavily cited books and articles published in the geographical literature (Wrigley, 1985; Wrigley and Matthews, 1988), as well as to model the intellectual structure of a research specialty (Gatrell, 1984). In the United States citation analysis has been utilized in an effort to rank the “prestige levels” of geography programs (Turner and Meyer, 1985) and to track the rising importance of journals published by the Association of American Geographers at the expense of journals such as Geographical Journal and Geographical Review (Gatrell and Smith, 1984). Many of these articles have generated considerable heat, as a particular ox has been gored, prominent names left out, or cherished traditions trampled upon (Lowenthal, 1992a; Lowenthal, 1992b; Whitehand, 1992; Bodman, 1992).

The data to examine the citation history of Topophilia are taken from three of the Citation Indexes published by the Institute for Scientific Information: Social Science Citation Index (SSCI); Science Citation Index (SCI); and the Arts & Humanities Citation Index (AHCI). The citations will be analyzed for the years 1974 (year of publication) to 1992, the last year of complete information. The majority of the citations to Topophilia during this period were from the SSCI, with fewer in the AHCI, and fewer still in the SCI.

The limitations of the Citation Indexes are well documented (Curry, 1991; Lowenthal, 1992; Matthews, 1993). The major limitations involve the temporal nature of the data as well as the choices of journals covered. In addition, the spatial coverage
of the three indexes has largely been restricted to English language journals published in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. Other problems include the exclusion of an article's co-authors in a separate citation record, misspellings of authors, citations placed in the wrong journals, and missed citations. Another major area of concern is the exclusion of books and other types of media in the Indexes, giving greater weight to periodical literature at the expense of other types of information.

In addition to the limitations of the data, there are problems in the way citations have been used. Self citations are a problem in many studies, inflating an author's citation count. Short works such as book reviews and short notes which generally do not contribute greatly to the knowledge base can also inflate an author's count. There have been instances of double counting of citations from different indexes, which can also inflate an author's count. In addition, in most studies using a citation analysis approach the citations themselves are simply counted and the value of the cited work to the new research is not considered. Thus whether the cited work is of substantial importance to the new work or is included as a "courtesy citation" by the author to cover all bases is left unexplored.

Many of the problems associated with the use of citations—particularly citation inflation through self-citations and book reviews—can be avoided in a careful analysis of one work such as Topophilia. In addition, book reviews of Topophilia and the citation of this work in reviews of other works are designated in the indexes and thus can be analyzed separately. However, a full analysis of the type of citation, whether it is a substantive citation or a "courtesy citation," is not being explored in this study because of the sheer number of total citations.

For the purposes of this analysis, journals will be grouped into six categories: (a) Association of American Geographers (AAG)-Institute of British Geographers (IBG) Journals; (b) Other Geography Journals; (c) Environmental Studies; (d) Behavioral Studies; (e) Planning and Urban Studies; and (f) Other Literature. Except for the category "AAG-IBG Journals," the categories are based on the groupings within the ISI publications. Previous citation research (Wrigley and Matthews, 1986) has separated out the journals published by the Association of American Geographers (Annals, Professional Geographer) and the Institute of British Geographers (Area, Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers), as worthy of independent study. For the purposes of this analysis, then, it is worthwhile to split out these four publications to examine how authors in these journals have used Topophilia in their work as compared to authors in other key geography journals. The category of "Other Literature" is a wide ranging category of 57 different journals, mainly from the humanities, such as Ariel, Diogenes, South African Historical Quarterly, and Folklore. These journals generally include only one or two citations to Topophilia over the period 1974 to 1992. It should also be noted that several of the journals in the "Environmental Studies" category, such as Environment and Behavior, are strongly influenced by geography.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Recently, Matthews (1993), in an article highly critical of past citation analyses, acknowledged many worthwhile uses for citation analysis. Paraphrasing his research questions, the questions to be explored in this citation study of Topophilia are as follows:

(1) What is the overall time profile of the citation of Topophilia?
(2) Which journals/disciplines carry articles citing the work? and finally,
(3) What are the time trends of the various journals/disciplines citing Topophilia, and are these trends different?

ANALYSIS OF THE CITATIONS

Between 1974 and 1992 Topophilia was cited in publications indexed by ISI a total of 242 times (Table 1). None of these
242 citations were penned by Tuan. A total of 117 indexed journals have at least one citation to *Topophilia* during this period. Of the 242 citations, 24 (11%) were from book reviews either of the work itself or of related works. In addition, 20 citations (8%) were in review essays, notes, letters, or other commentary type pieces. In this study, all of the 242 citations from the ISI Indexes are included in the analysis. The average citation rate of *Topophilia* in the 19-year period between 1974 and 1992 was 12.7 citations per year. When compared with the levels proposed by Wrigley and Matthews (1986) of 70 to 80 citations with an average of 5 citations per year as the definition of a citation classic, it is clear that *Topophilia* far exceeds the requirements to earn that title.

**Temporal Analysis**

*Topophilia* has been heavily cited since its publication in 1974. When the temporal trend of citations is graphed, an interesting pattern emerges (Fig. 1). Looking at two-year periods between 1974 and 1992, in the period immediately following its publication the citation totals were high. By 1980, the number of cites had decreased. However, after 1980 the level of citation remained relatively steady until 1984–85, when the number of citations rose precipitously. In the period from 1986 to 1987 there was a surge in the number of citations of *Topophilia*, with the text generating more cites in this period—more than a decade after its publication—than in any of the previous periods. After 1987, the citation counts began to decline, recovering slightly in the 1990–91 period before plunging in 1992.

Citations to *Topophilia* have a definite temporal pattern. The early peak followed by a trough followed by an even higher peak so long after publication seems to suggest that *Topophilia’s* impact was greatest many years after its publication. In addition, the relative decline in the 1990s suggests a change in the perception of Tuan’s work in recent years.

**Journal Analysis**

Tuan is a geographer, and geography can be considered as the originating discipline of *Topophilia*. Nevertheless, it is a wide ranging work that has broad appeal in many different disciplines. The broad appeal of the ideas contained in *Topophilia* is clear from the many journals in which the work has been cited.

Geography, however, is the single discipline that has most cited *Topophilia* (Table 2). Over 40 percent of all the citations to *Topophilia* between 1974 and 1992 were in geographic journals. A much smaller percentage of the total cites (13%) was in the “AAG-IBG Journal” category, and over half of these citations were in the *Annals*. In the “Other Geography...
FIGURE 1. Citations to Topophilia, 1974–1992

Journals" category, the three journals which were most active in the citation of Topophilia included Progress in Human Geography (13 cites), Canadian Geographer (12 cites) and Geographical Review (11 cites). This accounts for more than half of the total citations in this category. Geography and the Journal of Geography, with eight citations each, are also significantly represented in the citation record.

After geography, the journal category "Environmental Studies" contains the second highest concentration of Topophilia citations. In this broad category, the four journals Environment and Behavior (7 cites), Environment and Planning D-Society and Space (4 cites), Environment and Planning A (3 cites), and Human Ecology (3 cites) total well over half the citations to Topophilia in this category. Several journals of leisure research which are

TABLE 2
Citations to Topophilia by Journal Category, 1974–1992

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Journal</th>
<th>Number of Citations</th>
<th>Percent of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAG-IBG Journals</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Geography Journals</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Studies</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning and Urban Studies</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral Studies</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Literature</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ISI Indexes.
included in this category have also drawn on Tuan’s work. Many of the journals in the “Environmental Studies” category have strong disciplinary links to geography, which may explain the strong citation record.

Planning and Urban Studies literature has also drawn on Tuan’s work. There are a total of 16 journals in this category, though the majority of these journals contain only one or two citations and only one journal in the category, *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research*, had four citations.

The impact of *Topophilia* on the literature in Behavioral Studies has not been as great as might be expected given its emphasis on human perception and attitudes. There were 15 total citations in the psychological and psychiatric literature, and five of these cites (33%) are found in the *International Journal of the Addictions*. Two other journals, the *Journal of Environmental Psychology* and the *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, have two citations each, which accounts for more than half the total citations in this category.

The “Other Literature” category is difficult to characterize because of the wide range of journals included. Many of these journals are in the humanities, which seems to have found considerable salience in Tuan’s ideas. Several folklore journals, such as the *Journal of the Folklore Institute, New York Folklore, Folklore*, and *Western Folklore*, are represented, as are journals of literature, art criticism, sociology, and history. The overriding impression is one of eclectic interest in the ideas expressed in *Topophilia*, though in most of these journals there is only one or at most two citations to Tuan’s work.

One interesting absence from the list of journals citing *Topophilia* is literature in archeology and anthropology. Only two anthropology journals, *Annual Review of Anthropology* and *Anthropological Linguistics*, and one archeology journal, *World Archeology*, are represented with only one citation each. This suggests that Tuan’s ideas of culture, perception, and the making of place as expressed in *Topophilia* have had less impact on this academic community.

Citation Over Time by Journals

It is clear that Tuan’s *Topophilia* has been regularly cited over time and in a wide variety of journals. This does not, however, address changes over time within journals. With total citations taken at four-year intervals within journal categories for ease of analysis (except for the three-year period 1990–92) some interesting patterns emerge (Fig. 2). In many of the journal categories citations to *Topophilia* increased slowly but steadily through the 1970s and 1980s until peaking in the late 1980s, long after its publication.

The citation trend in the geographic literature runs slightly counter to the general trend. In the “AAG-IBG Journals” category total citations declined slightly from 1974 to 1985, at which time there was an increase in citations to the levels reached soon after its publication. This increase was followed by a marked decrease in citations in the 1990s. The trend for citations in the category “Other Geography Journals” is somewhat different, peaking at a very high level in the period 1978–1981, then stabilizing at a somewhat lower rate throughout the 1980s, followed by a substantial decline in the 1990s.

Citations in the “Environmental Studies” category over time shows slow growth in the 1970s and early 1980s, peaking in the late 1980s, and, like the geography journals, falling off in the 1990s. The “Behavioral Studies” category rose during the late 1970s, then stabilized in the early to mid 1980s before increasing in the late 1980s and dropping precipitously in the 1990s. Citations in the “Planning and Urban Studies” category follow a similar trend, except with a more moderate decline in the late 1980s.

The “Other Literature” category stands in sharp contrast to the previous journal categories. Starting at a relatively moderate level, the citations to *Topophilia* increased steadily throughout the period, even into the 1990s. This suggests that as citations to *Topophilia* were beginning to drop in literature of the original target audience—particularly geography and environmental studies—it was steadily ris-
ing in a wide range of journals in the humanities and other disciplines.

THE LIFE CYCLE OF A CITATION CLASSIC

Given the citation trend of Topophilia through time and within journals, a framework can be put forward to assess the making of a citation classic. Clearly, there are patterns to the citation history of Topophilia. Since its publication in 1974, four stages—a life cycle—of the citation record can be identified: (1) Publication; (2) Consolidation; (3) Implementation; and (4) Incorporation.

Publication Stage

The publication stage of Topophilia runs from the years 1974 to 1977, in which a substantial number of the citations were book reviews. During this phase well over half the citations were in the geographic literature, the originating literature of the work, and when the “Environmental Studies” category, with its strong links to geography, is included the percentage rises to almost three quarters of the total citations. Thus in the publication stage, the discipline of geography seemed to be digesting the ideas in Tuan’s book.

Consolidation Stage

The second stage in the life cycle of Topophilia, running from 1978 to 1985, was marked by a relatively steady number of citations over the two four-year periods, with around 50 citations per period, or well over 10 cites per year. This may represent a period in which the ideas expressed in Topophilia were bubbling under the surface of the intellectual debate while being consolidated into new as well as existing research programs. The slowly increasing use of Topophilia in the “Other Literature” category suggests that during the consolidation stage Tuan’s ideas were penetrating a variety of disciplines.

Implementation Stage

During this phase, from 1986 to 1989, over a decade after its publication, Topo-
philia's citations rose to their highest level. There was an increase in all of the journal categories, with by far the largest increase in total citations in the category "Other Literature." The increases within the "AAG-IBG Journals", "Environmental Studies", and "Behavioral Studies" categories are mirror images, albeit at slightly different levels. The increase in citations during the Implementation Phase suggests that Tuan's ideas which had been brought to bear on research programs during the consolidation stage bore fruit in the following four-year period. In other words, researchers and writers seem to have worked through Tuan's ideas during the late 1970s and early 1980s and put them into play in their own research activities in the latter half of the 1980s.

Incorporation Stage

In the three-year period 1990 to 1992 there was a dramatic decline in the citation of Topophilia. This was true in all categories with the exception of "Other Literature," which showed a reasonably healthy increase in citations. There are several possible explanations for the citation record during this period. One possibility is that the ideas contained in Topophilia were discredited and abandoned in favor of new ideas. A second, and more likely, explanation is that by 1990 the ideas in Topophilia had been incorporated into the broad fabric of knowledge and the work was overtaken or superseded by new research at least partially inspired by the ideas contained in Topophilia. This new research could well include Tuan's own subsequent efforts at understanding human interaction with and perception of place, such as Space and Place (1977), Landscapes of Fear (1980), and Segmented Worlds and Self (1982). Another aspect of the incorporation stage is the continuing spread of Tuan's ideas during the early 1990s into the broad range of Arts and Humanities literature represented by the category "Other Literature." It appears that in this literature Tuan's ideas still have strength and applicability, while in the disciplines to which Topophilia was originally addressed, the ideas have become accepted features of the intellectual landscape.

CONCLUSION

Even taking into account the limitations of citation data from the ISI Indexes, by any reasonable standard Tuan's Topophilia is a citation classic. In the making of a classic, however, there seems to be a life cycle as the work becomes a part of the fabric of knowledge. When first published to generally positive reviews in 1974, at a time when quantitative methods were the rage in geography, Topophilia was difficult to categorize. Nevertheless, with its wide ranging ideas and broad focus on human perception of the environment and emotional attachment to place, it appears that Topophilia has had a profound impact on geographic research as well as work in other disciplines. With its citations beginning to decline 20 years after publication, Topophilia may have become part of the stream of knowledge which new research in the realm of environment and perception does not cite because it is understood as a given. That may be the hallmark of a true citation classic.

Further work remains to be done. The four-stage life cycle identified here could be tested against other citations classics to see if it is a general pattern or unique to Topophilia. In addition, an examination of citations to Topophilia in other books, particularly geography textbooks, might be revealing as to the role of Tuan's work in the teaching of geography. Also, an examination of the citations themselves could test which ideas in Topophilia have been incorporated into the larger stream of human knowledge, as well as to distinguish between "courtesy citations" and substantive citations. Finally, a closer study of the literature outside geography which is citing Topophilia could be instructive in understanding when, where, and how ideas from geography flow into other disciplines. These questions could help shed light on the role of geography in the structure of human knowledge which shapes our understanding of the larger world in which we all live.
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