

# An Analysis to the Poems and Life of Tao Yuan-Ming (365-427)

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**Abstract:** *A man that was not appreciated during his life time has risen to be one of the greatest poets of Chinese History. His works echoes the uneasiness and fretfulness that overwhelmed the Chinese society at his time while living during the era of disunity of the six dynasties. His ability to put his thoughts about nature, society, sages and agriculture expresses a beautiful and vivid literary work that other poets has looked up to and admired. This work sets out to examine the life and great works of Tao Yuan-Ming (365-427) while living through a life of reclusion was able to transcend his thoughts into poetic works that stands in modern time; it also sets to analyze his profound thoughts within the era of his lifestyle to understand his linguistic conceptualizations.*

**Keywords:** Reclusion, Drinking wine, Tao's philosophy, sages

## 1. Introduction

Tao Yuan-Ming lived at a time when Northern China was under non-Chinese rule during the latter part of the Eastern Jin Dynasty (317-420). The Jin Dynasty faced a lot of uprisings and rebellions until a general Liu Yu (420-422) who had suppressed previous rebellions took over the mantle of leadership with his own regime. Tao Yuan-Ming was born to a well-known family; his grandfather was Tao Kan (259-334), a national of the south and one of the most prominent political and military figures in the early Eastern Jin. Before the birth of Tao Yuan-Ming, the Tao family had already lost most of its influence, though it still maintained some contacts in the court and was obviously considered a prominent southern noble family. Tao Yuan-Ming served in several official posts during his lifetime, but never rose to any high position. His last appointment was that of a country magistrate at Pengze, a place not far from his native town Xunyang in present day Jiangxi Province. He was not happy in his post and in 405, upon the death of his elder sister, he resigned and went home. He spent the rest of his life at home estate in quiet reclusion although he apparently kept up his friendships with local and court officials, drinking and exchanging poetry with them. These friends included the contemporary literary celebrity Yan (384-456), who wrote an elegy for Tao after his death in 427. [1]

Tao Yuan-Ming also called Tao Chien, Tao Qian, daoist poet Tao Qian can be dubbed a "scholar-gentleman" or government official, clashed with his propensity for solitude, and he became a loner in the Chinese manner, in a rural area with his family. As a poet he projects warmth, humankind, and personal susceptibility. He was different from his contemporaries and predecessors as he neither wrote in a lofty manner nor exaggerated the virtues of reclusion. He is at once loyal to friends and family, skeptical philosophically, a realist about daily life and its hardships, but also rueful and wistfully romantic in his struggle to be worthy of the hermits and sages of the past. [2]

## 2. Research Questions

- What are those factors that influenced the life of the Poet?
- What influence did Societal Factors have on the life of the Poet?
- What role does Reclusion facilitates in the creation of Ideas for the Poet?
- What Cultural undertones can be found in the numerous verses of the Poet?
- What influence does the Poet have on Modern People of China?

### 2.1 Insight and Analysis of Tao Yuan-Ming's Poems

Tao Yuan-Ming's withdrawal from public service and sector was clearly evident in some of his most renowned poems "Return Home" and "Returning to Live in the Country," First, this scene from "Returning Home":

My boat lightly tosses on the broad waters,  
The wind, whirling, blows my robe about.  
I ask a traveler of the way ahead.  
I am impatient with the dawn light's faintness.  
Then I espy my humble house:  
I am glad, so I run.  
The children wait at the gate.

Tao elaborates on reclusion in "Returning to live in the Country":

In youth I could not do what everyone else did;  
It was my nature to love the mountains and hills.  
By mistake I got caught in the dusty snare,  
I went away and stayed for thirteen years.

**He speaks of his house:**

My house measures ten *mou* or more,  
a thatch roof covers eight or nine spans.  
Around my door and yard no dust or noise.  
In my bare rooms, no busyness  
After so long a prisoner in a cage  
I have returned to things as they are [i.e., Nature].

But reclusion was not to be without hardship. At first, Tao's poverty was so thorough-going that he served the plow as ox while his wife served as the plow head. He composed a series of "poverty" poems:

Man's life is a matter of possessing the Way,  
But food and clothing truly are its beginnings.  
How can one make no provision whatsoever for these  
And yet seek contentment for oneself? ...  
To be a farmer is surely a harsh lot;  
One cannot refuse these hardships.  
I only wish that I might continue like this;  
At plowing with my own hand I have no complaint.

#### Tao's poverty shapes his thoughts on reclusion and life.

Living in poverty I have little human contact,  
And at times forget the cycle of four season.  
In my courtyard there are many fallen leaves.  
Moved by these I know it is already autumn.  
New sunflowers grow thick by the northern window,  
Fine ripe grain has been raised in my southern fields.  
If I am not happy now,  
How do I know there will be another year?  
I call my wife and take the children by the hand;  
This fair day we will go wandering in the hills.

Unlike previous poets who had written about bucolic scenes and idyllic rural life, Tao had lived it first-hand. Despite hardships, Tao affirms that farming is not merely an avocation but a safeguard to reclusion, and therefore constitutes his life and identity. This was the insight of maturity, however. In the early years, poverty oppressed Tao, despite his protestations. Perhaps it caused his apparent alcoholism. He used the family's meager grain for brewing, attaching himself to visitor's bringing gifts of wine, or eagerly following up party invitations.

**As his autobiographical "Five Willows" owns:** By nature he is fond of wine, but his family is poor and he cannot usually get it. His relatives and friends know this, and sometimes set out wine and invite him. Many personal poems are labeled "Drinking Wine," written in moments of despondency or with a visiting companion with whom to drink. But at least one commentator has viewed Tao's drinking as a pretext for avoiding service and a grand metaphor for reclusion itself, the "drinking" of poverty's bitter dregs that is nevertheless to be preferred to serving the corrupt lords of the present, as this passage suggests:

The Way has been lost nearly a thousand years;  
All men are careful of their feelings.  
Though they have wine, they will not drink it.  
As he grew older, Tao grew more reflective, and more convinced of the virtue of reclusion:  
Uneasy was the bird which had lost the flock;  
In the evening of the day it still flew alone.  
Uncertain, with no fixed resting place ...  
Now it has alighted on this solitary pine,  
Now, it has folded its wings and come home from afar.

Tao Yuan-Ming could not accept the ritualism of Confucianism. Nor could he accept the teachings of esoteric Taoism concerning karma and immortality. A number of

poems express the vanity of pursuing life-prolonging practices when one sees the inevitability of death everywhere. Hence Tao Yuan-Ming works out a philosophy of life that is intensely personal, mingling images of nature, experience, solitude, and personality. This, in short, is his unique voice in Chinese poetry and thought and Tao's philosophy of life is epitomized by his house or hut as a central metaphor for self and universe.

I built my hut within where others live,  
But there is no noise of carriages and horses.  
You ask how this is possible:  
When the heart is distant, solitude comes.  
I pluck chrysanthemums by the eastern fence  
and see the distant southern mountains.  
The mountain air is fresh at dusk.  
Flying birds return in flocks.  
In these things there lies a great truth,  
But when I try to express it, I cannot find the words.

The deep and moving experience of nature and solitude conveys to Tao an unspeakable reality. As the *Tao te ching* says, however, "The Tao that can be named is not the Tao," and Tao Yuan-Ming comes to understand this. The insight he experiences cannot be expressed.

#### Tao Yuan-Ming has a profound affinity for the recluses and sages of the past:

Far off, I gaze at the white clouds,  
I think deeply of the ancients ...  
I think of you, recluses:  
A thousand years after, I cherish your principles.  
Searching their essence, I cannot exhaust it. ...  
That the ancients cannot be with me  
only I can know how sorely I regret it.

In a famous poem, Tao muses on how he shall pass the evening -- plowing and chores finished -- browsing through the pictures in the *Classic of the Hills and Seas* -- a collection of stories about Chinese kings and sages. One day not far distant Tao will join those sages. He reflects:

The days and months are not able to linger;  
The four seasons press upon one another.  
A cold wind shakes the withered branches;  
Fallen leaves cover the long road.  
My feeble constitution declines with the passing of time.  
The black hair on my temples is early winter:  
The white sign is now set upon my head.  
The road before me gradually narrows.  
My hut is an inn for a traveler,  
And I am like a guest that must depart.  
Away, away, to where am I going?  
On the southern mountains is my old home. [3]

Nowadays there are a number of private and official editions of Tao Yuan-Ming's work, all different from what is documented in the two historical records [i.e. The Sui History and the old Tang History]. The one divided into eight juan [originally a scroll, later a unit of division for a Chinese book] was edited by the crown prince Zhaoming of Liang. Tao Yuan-Ming poetry was already disseminated during his

lifetime at least among his friends. In his preface to the series of poems "On Drinking" (Yinjiu), he recounts how he "asked my old friend(s) to copy the poem out, so as to provide some diversion". By the beginning of the northern song, there existed a large number of manuscripts copies of Tao Yuan-Ming writings, according to a colophon written to Tao Yuan-Ming's collection by Song Xiang (996-1066). Another northern scholar, Cai Qi (Cai Jujou, ca 1109) gives us to understand that "there are so many editions of Tao Yuan-ming's poetry these days that collators encounter endless variants. Liu Kai (947-1000) an aggressive editor in trying to sort out the bewildering manuscript of Tao Yuan-Ming tampered with more than five thousand and seven hundred characters when he was collating the Tang write Han Yu's collection. Tao Yuan-Ming's writings like the rest of the pre-song literary output have come down through the mediation of the song literary values. [4]

Nevertheless, Tao Yuan-Ming was regarded as China's first great landscape poet, and in his work an opposition develops between nature's purity and simplicity (exemplified by his own self representation as a farmer sage) and the "dusty" world of the court and the marketplace: "After all those years like a beast in a cage / I've come back to the soil again." Like Thoreau in his bean field for the American literary tradition, Tao Yuan-Ming came to represent for later Chinese poets the quintessential model of the official who has escaped "the world's net" for a life closer to spiritual values, and countless later poets (notably Wang Wei) echo his lines when they write about the country life. In his own time, however, he was not appreciated. The dominant mode of poetry in his day was flowery and artificial. The great poets of the Tang and Song Dynasties, however, came to treasure Tao's poetry for its measured simplicity, its lack of adornment, and for its conscious use of common words. Around 130 of his poems survive.

It has often been said that Tao Yuan-Ming's poetic language, unlike his contemporaries, is simple and unadorned. This does not mean that he is incapable of expressing profound thought. However, when his thought verges on mysticism or his idea grows out of his Taoist vision, words are inadequate for full expression of the concept. The reader can either confine himself to appreciating the surface meaning of the poem or he can attempt to read between the lines, and try to grasp its meaning though his intuitive power. The following poem is a good example of the intrinsic complexity of Tao Yuan-Ming's thought behind his deceptive simple expressions:

I built my cottage in the human world,  
yet there is no noise of horse and carriage.  
How then did you manage to achieve this?  
When the heart is far away,  
the locale naturally becomes remote  
Picking chrysanthemum flowers by the eastern hedge,  
I gaze at the South Mountain in the distance.  
The mountain air is lovely at dusk,  
And the birds fly back with one another,  
In this return there is a fundamental truth,  
I am going to explain it, but already forgot the words.

The concrete imagery and realistic description in these lines seem to have such a strong impact on the reader, that he may feel transported from a mundane world into a rare world of beauty and tranquility, momentarily sharing and experiencing the poet's vision. The juxtaposition of the Southern Mountain ( a symbol of immutability) and the chrysanthemums ( a symbol of impermanence but recurrence) could by their contrasting yet harmonious presence, lift the reader out of existential level to a metaphysical plane of perception approaching to a universal harmony, or an infusion between subject and object. At the same time, one is kept in touch with the reality of the present – heightened by the feel of the mountain air and the sight of the birds flying home at sunset. If this is subjective and perhaps limited response to the poem, it is because one can hardly find adequate words to explain the full import of that which the poet himself has left unexplained because words have failed him. The last line of this poem in particular is reminiscent of the first line in chapter one of Lao-tzu which says "The Tao can be explained is not the eternal Tao (or truth)". [5] However, if one can grasp the truth through one's intuitive power, there is indeed no need for words as Chuang-tzu explains: "The fish trap exists because of the fish; once you've gotten the fish you can forget the trap. The rabbit snare exists because of the rabbit, once you've gotten the rabbit, you can forget the snare. Words exist because of the meaning; once you've gotten the meaning, you can forget the words. Where can I find a man who has forgotten words so I can have a word with him?" [6]

The noise of horse and carriage is not that of common traffic: it refers to the coming and going of aristocrats and officials. He also says that "When the heart is far away, the locale naturally becomes remote". This is pure Zhuangzi (late fourth century B.C.E), it doesn't matter whether the location is distant from the "human realm" or not; it is all about one's state of mind, one's perspective.

Then, as he is picking chrysanthemum flowers, the poet raises his eyes to South Mountain in the distance. This has been regarded as Tao Yuan-Ming's hallmark image to conceptualize the blooming of flowers in the chilly season as a natural symbol of the poet's ability to preserve moral adversity in adverse circumstances. Perhaps it should be stated that is because of Tao Yuan-Ming's that chrysanthemum flowers acquire such significance. Furthermore inference can be drawn from Wang Yao (1914-1989) immediate connotation of chrysanthemums as signifying "longevity".

The third and fourth couplet skillfully weaves together the images of permanence and immensity with that of delicateness and evanescence: while the mountain is massive and majestic, the flowers and birds, in the descending darkness, seem small, frail and transient.

The last couplet echoes Zhuangzi: "The fish trap exists because of the fish, once you've gotten the fish, you can forget the trap. The rabbit snare exists because of the rabbit, once you've gotten the rabbit, you can forget the snare. Words exist because of the meaning, once you've gotten the meaning, you can forget the words. Where can I find a man who has forgotten the words so that I can have a word with him?"

The allusion to the Zhuangzi passage in the last couplet implies that the poet can now afford to discard words only because he has acquired the essential message, the fundamental truth (deyi wangyan). Certainly the irony does not escape us that the poet has to use the words (yan) to tell us this, but what kind of "fundamental truth" the poet "acquired" (de) remains a mystery. He withholds it from us just as he refers to his acquisition only indirectly by way of a Zhuangzi allusion.

### 3. Tao Yuan-Ming's Philosophical Ideals

Tao Yuan-Ming did not seem to have to toil to find the truth, in his life. He simply lived it by returning to nature. Since his resignations from public service, and his rejection of those social values which tied him down, the poet was able to "return home" to his natural habitat, free from all outside pressures or the need to conform, free to follow the dictates of his own nature. He was content in adversity with the life he chose to live. Although he experienced hunger and cold as attested to his poem "Ch'i-shih" (Begging Food), [7] he never complained and never lost heart. He didn't choose the deliberate asceticism practices by certain Taoist and Buddhist religious sects. He never denied himself the pleasures of wine whenever he could afford it; he enjoyed family life and the company of his rustic friends and neighbors.

Two thirds of Tao Yuan-Ming's extant poems were written after his resignation from the office on P'eng-tse magistrate. They are a record of his life as a farmer, eking out his livelihood from the soil. He left us with his first hand experiences and a record of his innermost thought and feelings. Occasionally, Tao brooded upon such ontological questions as life and death. One philosophical reflections is "Hsing, Ying, Shen" (variously translated as Substance, Shadow and Spirit or Body, Shadow and Soul").

Davis comments that: "This poem stands out in Tao's collection as deliberately "philosophical" poem. Similar ideas can be found incidentally in other of his poems, but here alone in his surviving work are they developed to the point of dialectical treatment. The piece, however, remains a poem, a fine poem: it is not a philosophical essay. It has therefore, the obliqueness of reference, natural to the poetry and the poet's mind. Although there is in the few words of the preface a slight suggestion of polemic, the expressions is strongly personal, and I think that it is wrong to regard it too much as a document in the contemporary intellectual controversy...[8] In the head-note to his poem, Tao gives the following explanations: "Everyone, noble or base, brilliant or dumb, clings tenaciously to life, which is nothing but a delusion. Therefore, I have given voice to Substance and Shadow to express their grief, and let the Soul or Spirit resolve their problems by following the course of Nature. Those who are concerned with this matter understand my intention." [9] The poet's intention seems to present at first three different points of view regarding human life and mortality. The source of Tao Yuan-Ming's philosophical outlook is found in Chuang-tzu:

"Once a man receives this fixed bodily form, he holds onto it, waiting for the end. Sometimes clashing with things, sometimes bending before them, he runs his course like galloping steed, and nothing can stop him. Is he not pathetic?"

[10]. Further on, in the same book one reads: "Do not be an embodier of fame; do not be a storehouse of schemes; ... do not be a proprietor of wisdom... Hold on to all that you have received from Heaven (Nature) but do not thing that you have gotten anything. Be empty that is all." [12]

In this poem, he makes Substance speak for the hedonistic carpe diem concept of indulging in wine, since there is nothing for him to look forward to. He does not believe in the attainment of immortality as do some of the Taoists of the esoteric religious cults, nor does he believe in the transcendence of inevitable change as preached by the Buddhists of his time. The Shadow represents the transitory glory of name and fame or moral virtues from the humanist perspective adhered to by most Confucians. Tao Yuan-Ming's own philosophy, represented by the Spirit, is that man should follow the course of Nature, which is the essence of Tao. The poem quoted in full is one of the most revealing texts of the poet's philosophical bent.

#### Substance, Shadow, and Spirit

##### Shadow to Substance

Earth and heaven endure forever,  
Streams and mountains never change.  
Plants observe a constant rhythm,  
Withered by frost, by dew restored.  
But man, most sentient being of all,  
In this is not their equal.  
He is present here in the world today,  
Then leaves abruptly, to return no more.  
No one marks there's one man less --  
Not even friends and family think of him;  
The things that he once used are all that's left  
To catch their eye and move them to grief.  
I have no way to transcend change,  
That it must be, I no longer doubt.  
I hope you will take my advice:  
When wine is offered, don't refuse.

#### Shadow to Substance

No use discussing immortality  
When just to keep alive is hard enough.  
Of course I want to roam in paradise,  
But it's a long way there and the road is lost.  
In all the time since I met up with you  
We never differed in our grief and joy.  
In shade we may have parted for a time,  
But sunshine always brings us close again.  
Still this union cannot last forever --  
Together we will vanish into darkness.  
The body goes; that fame should also end  
Is a thought that makes me burn inside.  
Do good, and your love will outlive you;  
Surely this is worth your every effort.  
While it is time, wine may dissolve care  
That is not so good a way as this.

#### Spirit's Solution

The Great Potter cannot Intervene --  
All creation thrives of itself.  
That Man ranks with Earth and Heaven,

Is it not because of me?  
 Though we belong to different orders,  
 Being alive, I am joined to you.  
 Bound together for good or ill  
 I cannot refuse to tell you what I know:  
 The Three August Ones were great saints  
 But where are they living today?  
 Though P'eng-tsu lasted a long time  
 He still had to go before he was ready.  
 Die old or die young, death is the same,  
 Wise or stupid, there is no difference.  
 Drunk, every day you may forget,  
 But won't it shorten your life span?  
 Doing good is always a joyous thing  
 But no one has to praise you for it.  
 Too much thinking harms my life;  
 Just surrender to the cycle of things,  
 Give yourself to the waves of the Great Change  
 Neither happy nor yet afraid.  
 And when it is time to go, then simply go  
 without any unnecessary fuss.

### 3.1 Translated by: James Hightower [13]

This poem may be considered the testament of Tao Yuan-Ming's personal conviction, grown out of a long process of deliberation. Nowhere else in the poet's writing is his philosophical contemplation as succinctly enounced. Undoubtedly, like many of his contemporaries, Tao Yuan-Ming had felt the impact of sundry religious practices such as Buddhism and esoteric Taoism, in addition to orthodox Confucianism and Philosophical Taoism. If he had not been tempted by the popular practices of one school or another, he must have been familiar with their beliefs. He never succumbed to the pursuit of sensuous pleasures (even though he enjoyed the pleasure of wine); joined any esoteric cult promoting prolongation of life; nor tried to preserve his name and fame after death. Instead, Tao Yuan-Ming, represented by the Spirit in his poem, surrendered himself to the course of nature, and thus freed him from all worried and fear of death.

Throughout Chinese literary history, however, critics have disagreed about Tao Yuan-Ming's philosophical leanings due to lack of any detailed, accurate biographies of the poet. In all three dynastic histories, his biographies are placed in the category of "Recluses". [14] Moreover, they are all brief, sketchy, and short on facts and details. Even the dates of his birth and death are not precisely known, thus leaving room for speculation.

Some critics have pointed to the inherent conflict in Tao Yuan-Ming between his Confucian aspirations for social involvement and his personal inclination for love of nature and freedom. Could his early Confucian training in moral integrity and personal discipline have curbed some of the negativism of his Taoist beliefs? Although he renounced political ambitions in his pursuit of the Tao, he did not really abandon the world of man; his models were historical personages of high moral virtue whom he wished to emulate.

## 4. Biography of Mr. Five Willows

Tao Yuan-Ming's view of himself as a person is best seen in his short prose piece. "Biography of Mr. Five Willows" (Wu-liu hsien-sheng chuan), which is by consensus, a thinly distinguished self portrait:

"Mr. Five Willows is a native of one knows not where. Nor does one know his name. Since there are five willows by his house, he has been given the sobriquet of "Mr. Five willows." He is a man of few words, retiring by nature. He has no desire for money or for fame. An avid reader, he does not however, seek extraneous interpretations. Whenever he finds certain books arresting his interest, he forgets his meals. He has a special weakness for wine, but being poor he cannot always afford it. His friends, aware of this, often invite him to drink. Then he drinks to his heart's content. But when he is drunk, he takes leave at once. The walls surrounding his house are dilapidated, giving little protection from the sun or wind. His coarse gown is shabby and threadbare; his rice jar is frequently empty. Yet he lives in contentment, and writes poetry to amuse himself and to express how he feels. Worldly gain or loss does not concern him. This is his way of life."

[15] In the coda of Mr. Five Willows' biography (known as Tzan or Eulogy), and in accordance with the conventional style of Chinese biographical literature, Tao sums up his appraisal of Mr. Five Willows by way of an analogy. When Ch'ien Lou said, "One does not grieve over poverty or low station in life, nor does one strive for power or riches," did he have this man (Mr Five Willows) in mind? He drinks and writes poetry to please himself – unmindful of public opinion – such as man should belong to the time Wu-huai and Ko-t'ien (both legendary sage rulers of a deal era of high antiquity". [16] This indeed is a high self-praise coming from a man who is both truthful and honest. But if Mr. Five Willows was not a self-image of the poet, he was at least a model which he admired. That the persona in this biographical work with no known name of origin is nicknamed Mr. Five Willows is rather puzzling. If the nickname were meant to be merely a realistic description of Tao Yuan-Ming's own homestead, he could have names his fictitious character after the blue pines in his garden, or called him the "Master of Chrysanthemums", which grew along the eastern hedge. No one seems to question the significance of the appellation, Mr. Five Willows, which posterity has assumed is an alias for the poet. There seems to be no historical antecedent for the name, but the allusion of Ch'ien Lou, whose motto was "one grieved not over poverty or low station in life, nor does he strive for power or riches", may suggest that Tao is applying himself to Mr. Five Willows a motto equally applicable to the poet himself. This worthy man of the Ch'un-ch'iu period who has lived and died in poverty, was posthumously named "K'ang" (contentment), because of his moral richness. He is mentioned not only in Tao Yuan-Ming's own poems, but also appears later in the "Elegy for Tao Yuan-Ming", written by Yen-chih, a close friend and former neighbor of the poet.

## 5. Peach Blossom Spring

Nowhere, however is Tao Yuan-Ming's Taoist vision more clearly manifested than in his famous utopian tale – "Tao-hua

yuan-chi" (Peach Blossom Spring), a poem of thirty-two lines which is prefaced by a prose narrative. This prose narrative is frequently anthologized as an independent piece of work. The story is about a certain fisherman of Wuling, who by chance discovers an idyllic world of peace and tranquility, whose inhabitants are uncontaminated, by modern civilization:

"During the T'ai-yuan period of the Chin dynasty, a fisherman of Wuling once rowed upstream, unmindful of the distance he had gone, when he suddenly came to a grove of peach trees in bloom. For several hundred paces on both banks of the stream there was no other kind of tree. The wild flowers growing under them were fresh and lovely, and the fallen petals covered the ground... He went on for a way with the idea of finding out how far the grove extended. It came to an end at the foot of a mountain whence issued the spring that supplied the stream. There was a small opening in the mountain and it seemed as though light was coming through it. The fisherman left his boat and entered the cave, which at first was extremely narrow, barely admitting his body; after a few dozen steps it suddenly opened out onto a broad and level plain where well-built houses were surrounded by rich fields and pretty ponds. Mulberry, bamboo and other trees and plants grew there, and criss-cross paths skirted the fields. The sounds of cocks crowing and dogs barking could be heard from one courtyard to the next. Men and women were coming and going about their work in the fields. Old men and boys were carefree and happy." [17]The simple description of agricultural pastoral and the use of animal imagery of cocks and dogs is an ideal primitive society. However, Tao's narrative does not end with his description of his ideal society; it goes on to tell of its inaccessibility at the end of the tale:

"After the fisherman had gone out and recovered his boat, he carefully marked the route. On reaching the city, he reported what he had found to the magistrate, who at once sent a man to follow him back to the place. They proceeded according to the marks he had made, but went astray and were unable to find the cave again. A high-minded gentleman of Nan-yang named Liu Tzu-chi heard the story and happily made preparations to go there, but before he could leave he fell sick and died. Since then no one has been interested in trying to find such a place." [18]

This short story with its straightforward style and simple language, has established a tradition of utopian literature in China. It has so stirred the creative imagination that for generations the story has been told and retold by creative men of letters in various forms. Aside from being a source of imagination for creative mind, Tao's "Peach Blossom Spring" has been the subject of various critical works. Some consider it a charming fairy tale; others claim it is a political satire or a social protest against the chaos of the author's own times.

Tao Yuan-Ming has stressed that his "Peach Blossom Spring" is unattainable in this mundane world for men who have lost their pristine innocence or the Tao. But it did exist for the poet, not only in his imagination, but in the reality of his being/ For utopia is, after all a state of mind, not to be found in the outside world, as Tao Yuan-Ming has told us, "When the heart is remote (free and detached from the dirty world) it creates its own hermitage". [19]

## 6. Conclusion

Tao Yuan-Ming's lived in a time of turmoil like most great philosophers in China, dissatisfied with the affairs of the state he withdrew and set his mind on poems. His work in records today are vast, he was a man that favored concepts about drinking and rustic life, succinctly his literary concepts are embedded in drinking poems, expressive poems and pastoral poems. His poem is a full work of expressing his emotion and aspiration. A pastoral poet that was able to combine farm life with literary works comes out in expressing his enthusiasm for the unsophisticated farm life. Despite Tao's love of wine, he was a philosophical poet and a meditative one, the influence of Confucianism and Taoists are seen in his works. Today his work is recorded in history and compared with great poets of the American literary tradition, Transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau who worked a path of personal declaration of independence, social experiment, voyage of spiritual discovery, satire and manual for self reliance. He was a poet that formed his own simple and natural style of poetry therefore creating a classical poetry that still stands the test of time, his ability to use his poems to reflect the ills of the society and his recluse life is a work of brilliant artistic literature. The Brilliance of his work shows that ancient Chinese Poets were literate and had poetic minds and expression of speech. His ability to use and adapt cultural factors within his speech reveals the undertones and the reality of Poets.

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## Author Profile



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