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Dwelling in the Vision of Utopia: A Politico-Religious Reading of Tao Qian

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**DWELLING IN THE VISION OF UTOPIA:
A POLITICO-RELIGIOUS READING OF TAO QIAN**

A Thesis Presented

By

JIANI LIAN

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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Asian Languages and Literatures

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A POLITICO-RELIGIOUS READING OF TAO QIAN**

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ABSTRACT

DWELLING IN THE VISION OF UTOPIA:
A POLITICO-RELIGIOUS READING OF TAO QIAN

MAY 2015

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The present work offers a critical analysis of Tao Qian's political and religious thought from readings of his poetic works. Focused on Tao Qian's writings about the "Way" and the crisis of the "Way", I examine how he constructs his political utopia and religious utopia that stand out as his response to the multidimensional existential crisis. Chapter 1 provides a summary of Tao's depictions of the "Way" and the crisis of the "Way", which serves as the textual ground of this study. Chapter 2 introduces the interdisciplinary methods that I have adopted to read and understand Tao Qian. Basically this study is informed by ideas and insights from modern disciplines of political thought and religious studies. Chapter 3 focuses on Tao Qian's political utopia and discloses the philosophical traditions and personal innovations of Tao's political thought. Chapter 4 introduces Tao Qian's religious utopia, with focus on how he manifests the sacred world and how he proposes to get to the sacred.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
ABBREVIATIONS	vii
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER	
1. THE “WAY” AND THE CRISIS OF THE “WAY”	11
2. TOWARD A METHOD OF READING	19
2.1 A Method of Language	19
2.2 A Method of Political Thought	22
2.3 A Method of Religious Studies	23
2.4 A Method of Utopian Studies	25
3. TAO QIAN’S POLITICAL UTOPIA	29
3.1 Conventional Views Based on Biography	29
3.2 A Literary-Philosophical, Utopian Analysis	43
3.2.1 Pre-More Utopia VS Post-More Utopia	43
3.2.2 Daoist Utopia VS Confucian Utopia	49
3.3 Tao Qian’s Innovative Political Thought	58
3.3.1 On Farming	59

3.3.2 On Political/Social Institutions	66
4. TAO QIAN’S RELIGIOUS UTOPIA	72
4.1 The Way of Heaven and the Way of Man	72
4.2 The Personal, Existential Crisis of the “Way”	74
4.2.1 Poverty	74
4.2.2 Laborious Farm Work.....	75
4.2.3 Social Frustration.....	77
4.2.4 Longing for Fame	81
4.3 A Religious Utopia in the Sacred World	84
4.3.1 The Profane and the Sacred	85
4.3.2 Sacred Space and Time	87
4.3.3 The Sacredness of Nature	89
4.3.4 Tao Qian’s Sanctified Life.....	90
4.4 The Way to Approach the Sacred.....	92
CONCLUSION.....	100
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	102

ABBREVIATIONS

All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

Works most frequently cited have been abbreviated according to the list below:

- A *Lunyu yi zhu* 論語譯註(*Analects of Confucius*).trans.Yang Bojun 楊伯峻. Beijing: Beijing Zhonghua shuju, 2006.
- DDJ *Laozi Dao de jing* 老子道德經. trans.Wang Yunwu 王雲五. Taipei: Shang wu yinshuguan, 1965.
- M *Mengzi yi zhu* 孟子譯註 (Mencius).trans.Yang Bojun 楊伯峻. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960.
- TYMJJJ *Tao Yuanming ji jiaojian* 陶淵明集校箋.ed. Gong Bin 龔斌. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1999.
- ZZJS *Zhuangzi ji shi* 莊子集釋.ed. Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961.
- PTC *The Poetry of T'ao Chi'en*, trans. Hightower, James Robert. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis originated from a simple textual observation. From my close reading of Tao Qian's 陶潛 just over 150 works, including poems and various prose works, I notice that he explicitly or implicitly writes about the "Way" 道 for many times. Prevalent in his poetry are the depictions of the multifaceted "Way" he intended to pursue and guard, the multidimensional crisis of the "Way" in his times and his personal life, and more importantly, his reconstruction of the "Way" as a response to the existential crisis triggered by a crisis of the "Way".

Basically Tao's writing on the "Way" embraces the following three facets: the "Way" in accord with which the cosmos and nature works, the "Way" in accord with which human affairs operate and develop, and the "Way" in accord which an ideal political society as well as an individual should act upon.

From this discovery, and considering that the "Way" is a recurrent element in literary and philosophical discourse in early Chinese civilization, many questions naturally follow: how does Tao's writing on the "Way" reflect his philosophical inquiry towards the "Way"? How does he think of the "Way" operated in the cosmos, in history, in politics, and in religion? Moreover, how should we place Tao's thought on the "Way" in those inherited philosophical traditions, such as "Daoism," "Confucianism," and so on?

Similarly, the crisis of the "Way" that Tao Qian depicts has also exemplified itself in

multiple dimensions. Ample textual evidence can be drawn from Tao's literary works, and one can see that the crisis is expressed both on a political level as well as a personal level. This, in my view, is essential to understand Tao Qian's philosophical thought.

As I will argue later, the crisis of the "Way" stands out as a philosophical metaphor of Tao Qian's existential plight, which ultimately has to do with the loss of the ideal "Way" that he believes a political society and an individual should and could follow. To be more specific, the loss of the "Way" confronts Tao with questions such as how he should place his position as a literati in the society, whether or not he should adhere to his sense of morality even though the good people are no longer favored by Heaven, how he should deal with the relationship between the "Way" and poverty, and whether or not there is a sacred order and how he could achieve immortality. To me, while the first few considerations can be approached in a focalized way through Tao Qian's inquiry into the political world, the last consideration brings the need to embrace a religious perspective into understanding Tao's literary works. Thus this dual crisis of the "Way" offers the entrance to look into Tao's political thought and religious thought. These two strains of philosophical thought also constitute the main connotation of Tao Qian's "Way".

In addition to this, I am also concerned with the way Tao Qian establishes his ideal "Way". The answer is quite obvious—through writing. Furthermore, I argue that Tao Qian actually constructs a political utopia and a religious utopia where the "Way" will never be threatened or destroyed. What is also remarkable to me is that the "Way" that Tao constructs in his vision of utopia does not bear the exactly identical set of

philosophical ideas with the existing “Way” in coherent with Daoist or Confucian thought. If we take a close look at Tao’s reflections towards the crisis of the “Way”, we can see that there are different stages. In the first stage, Tao seems still have belief in maintaining and restoring the established “Way” in his living world; while in the next stage, he is completely disappointed and strives to establish an ideal “Way” in his own world. From this perspective, I present another strand of discussion on Tao Qian’s political thought and religious thought, with focus on his own philosophical innovations embodied in his ideal “Way”.

To me, the crisis of the “Way” or the constructed multidimensional utopia is not a stone water tank that contains Tao’s fixed politico-religious thought, but more like a flowing river which serves as witness to Tao Qian’s dynamically changing, developing, synthesizing thought. On the one hand, this process has to do with the crisis of the “Way”, which challenges Tao Qian with existential questions in different aspects, at different stages of life. On the other hand, it is also rooted in the need to resolve the innate inconsistency of the two main strains of thought that have shaped Tao Qian’s mind, namely the Daoist and Confucian thought. As I will elaborate in Chapter 1, neither Daoist or Confucian thought can give the best means for Tao Qian to manage his existential plight, and it is worthy noting that in retirement, Tao gradually constructs his own “Way” that innovatively blends in both Daoist and Confucian thought.

To summarize, there are two lines in my analysis of Tao Qian’s philosophical thought. The basic line will focus on examining the two main aspects to understand Tao

Qian: political thought and religious thought. The subordinated line will focus on revealing the inherited philosophical traditions, dynamic synthesis and self-constructed innovations in Tao's politico-religious thought.

Having defined the focus of my study, now I will move to delineate the ground of scholarship that I have relied on to stake out my inquiry.

The connection between Tao Qian's literary works and his philosophical thought has been the object of intense study for many decades, both in China and elsewhere. One of the bedrock assumptions that most of these studies are grounded in has to do with one important Chinese poetic tradition. As it is first stated in the "Great Preface" to *Shi Jing*,

As for poetry, it is what expresses the heart's *intent*. When it is within the heart it is *intent*. When expressed in words, it becomes poetry.

詩者志之所之也,在心為志,發言為詩。¹

This tradition has created a largely unquestioned model that assumes the persona in the literary works is the genuine representation of the poet. Thus in this view, the poem is essentially conflated with the poet, which in other words, tends to regard the literary language as an authorial embodiment of the poet's intent.

Another ground that has contributed to the tangible relation between Tao's poetry and his thought is the ostensibly spontaneous and authentic presentation of his world, exemplified by his plain language and the "autobiographical" voice in his works. Unlike

¹ *Maoshi zhengyi: Shisanjing zhushu* 毛詩正義:十三經注疏, annot. Mao Heng 毛亨, Zheng Xuan 鄭玄, and Kong Yinda 孔穎達, ed. Li Xueqin 李學勤, 4 vols. (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 1999). 13.

most of his contemporaries, Tao Qian's poetic works feature in a style of simplicity and naturalness, which in part results in the degradation of the aesthetic merit of his works in particular eras. Moreover it also in turn encourages the traditional literary critics to read his poetry as biographical, historical-cultural texts.

In the framework based on these notions, many studies, both traditional and modern, have focused on examining Tao's political thought from a biographical approach and looked into more empirical and general issues, such as whether he was loyal to Eastern Jin 東晉(317-420) or how he identified his political ideals with strains of Confucian, Mencius and Daoist thought, with alongside efforts to determine which political camp he belonged to.

The core problem of these established assumptions and approaches is that they tend to take Tao's literary figurations and forms of literary techniques as footnotes of his empirical life. Undeniably, considering the long tradition of "poetry expresses intent" 詩言志 in Chinese classical poetry and Tao's ample use of factual information in his works,² this approach has gained its ground. Nonetheless, one may still ask: to what extent can we define the characteristic of Tao's personality based on interpretations of his works, and more specifically, to what extent can we regard the unadorned language and autobiographical voice in Tao's works as solid proof of the simplicity of his poems and the authenticity in his self-presented image?

² For a through discussion of this, see Wendy Swartz, *Reading Tao Yuanming: Shifting Paradigms of Historical Reception (427-1900)* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2008), 7.

A case in point is Kang-i Sun Chang's study on Tao Qian. Placing his uniqueness in the history of Six Dynasties Poetry, Sun analyzes Tao's originality in expressing himself and depicting nature, and argues "Poised between the poles of factuality and fiction, T'ao Ch'ien turns Chinese literature into something more complex and multifaceted. And the power of T'ao Ch'ien's poetry lies precisely in this dual function."³ By implying this dualism as well in Tao's autobiographical voice, Sun undermines the traditional characterization of Tao as a simple poet who employs simple and transparent language to tell the readers what he experiences, thinks, feels and who he is. Stephen Owen more straightforwardly points out that, the attractiveness of Tao Qian lies in "a complex desire for simplicity rather than simplicity itself."⁴ As Robert Ashmore summarizes, there has evolved an instructive debate around the issues of autobiography and the immediacy of Tao's poetic voice, and scholars including Kang-i Sun Chang, Stephen Owen, Charles Yim-tze Kwong, Longxi Zhang have all came up with many illuminating, different and somewhat interrelated ideas.⁵ The discussion over the misunderstanding "simplicity" of Tao's poetic legacy and the authenticity of his self-presentation still continues, yet I believe the new door to reread Tao Qian and explore the relationship between his poetry and his thought has been opened.

Another strand of scholarship that has also brought new angles to understand Tao

³ Kang-i Sun Chang, *Six Dynasties Poetry* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 16.

⁴ Stephen Owen, "The Self" Perfect Mirror: Poetry as Autobiography," in *The Vitality of the Lyric Voice*, ed. Shuen-fu Lin and Stephen Owen (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 77.

⁵ For a detailed discussion of this debate, see Robert Ashmore: *The Transport of Reading: Text and Understanding in the World of Tao Qian (365-427)* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2010), 11-15.

Qian and his works arises from a communal concern on the reception and construction of Tao Qian in different historical backgrounds. Wendy Swartz examines “the very different pictures of Tao and the divergent ways of reading his works across time,” with a focus on three categories that she believes are lying at the heart of Chinese literati culture: reclusion, personality, and poetry.⁶ Through Swartz’s detailed analysis, one can know that Song Dynasty 宋朝(960-1279) stood out as the most critical era in the process of the canonizing Tao Qian as *the* literary iconic, moral ideal, and archetypal recluse. Moreover, according to Tian Xiaofei’s study on Tao Qian’s manuscript culture, it was also in the Song Dynasty that the first collected works of Tao was printed. This edition, as Tian quotes a contemporary Chinese scholar Yuan Xingpei’s research,⁷ has experienced various editing in the followed generations, in accord with “a steady pattern of reducing and limiting the number of variants, a process that parallels the increasing stabilization of the image of Tao Yuanming.”⁸ Swartz’s and Tian’s study, by taking into account the influence of the factors that are beyond the parameters of Tao’s works, such as reading habits, cultural demands, political environment and so on, further weaken the established image of Tao and his works.

At this historical point, what we could agree with is: first, Tao Qian is more complicated and “much more innovative, playful, quirky, and wistful than his accepted

⁶ Swartz, *Reading Tao Yuanming*, 5.

⁷ For more detailed research on different versions of Tao Qian’s collected works, see Yuan Xingpei’s 袁行霈 *Tao Yuanming yanjiu*. 陶淵明研究 (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 1997).

⁸ Tian Xiaofei, *Tao Yuanming & Manuscript Culture: The Record of a Dusty Table* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 15.

image.”⁹ Undoubtedly this has much to do with the lack of examination on the way he presents and constructs his “autobiographical” self; and second, Tao Qian is more elusive to understand than what we have assumed, considering how the paradigms of his historical receptions shift and influence his original identity.

Thus scholarly efforts through the years have been made to reevaluate Tao’s literary merit and recapture the “authentic” Tao (if indeed we believe that a “true” Tao can be restored, or a “true” Tao does exist in the first place), and consequently these studies generate various waves to newly approach Tao’s realm of texts and reshape his image.

It seems clear to me that the “autobiographical voice” in Tao Qian’s writings is not merely used to reveal the real, autobiographical self of Tao, but more importantly, it presents the ideal picture of the existential self. In other words, Tao Qian’s works should not only be regarded as a footnote to his biographical experience, but also as an autonomous realm of philosophical texts where he employs literary-philosophical language including but not limited to Confucianism and Daoism to express his philosophical thought.

From this perspective, the little textual analysis as I mentioned in the beginning of this chapter is surely to serve as the ground for my literary-philosophical analysis of Tao Qian. Moreover, bearing the multidimensional nature of the “Way” and the crisis of the “Way” in mind, a politico-religious approach will be adopted in order to examine Tao’s political thought and religious thought that are embodied in his construction of a political

⁹ Ibid.,14.

“Way” as well as a religious “Way”.

In Chapter 1, I outline the multidimensional “Way” in Tao Qian’s writing with detailed textual examples and trace it from the early Chinese philosophical traditions. More importantly, I present the crisis of the “Way” as Tao Qian depicts in his literary works, claiming that the crisis has to do with both its split nature and exterior factors.

In Chapter 2, I mainly introduce the ideas and insights I have adopted from the modern disciplines of political thought and religion to shape a new methodology to read Tao Qian.

In Chapter 3, I present a close analysis of Tao Qian’s political utopia. Based on a brief sketch of his political life, I first offer a review of some conventional views on Tao Qian’s political thought. Then after pointing out the drawbacks and insufficiency of existing discussions, I continue with a literary, philosophical, utopian analysis of Tao Qian. In this framework, I first examine Tao’s political utopia in the West context, and then discuss it in the Chinese tradition. On the one hand, I argue that Confucian thought has played a vital role in establishing Tao’s ideal political way. On the other hand, I argue that it is more remarkable to notice Tao’s own critiques concerning political/social institutions and farming tradition in literati, which actually represents his innovations through synthetically absorbing Daoist and Confucian political thought.

In Chapter 4, I discuss the religious utopia as depicted and constructed in Tao Qian’s writing. I start out with descriptions of the personal existential plight Tao confronts in his life, and look into the approaches he has come up with to solve it. Next, I focus on my

analysis of Tao Qian's construction of the "sacred" order, and argue that there is the religious vision in Tao Qian, which he ultimately regards as unattainable. However, he offers another way to live in accord with the sacred order—to undertake "transformation" and submit to the sacred order naturally.

Finally I conclude by returning to the textual finding that initiated this study in the first place. I give a summary of Tao Qian's politico-religious thought from his writings of the multidimensional "Way" and the crisis of the "Way".

CHAPTER 1

THE “WAY” AND THE CRISIS OF THE “WAY”

In one poem of the “Drinking Wine” 飲酒¹⁰ series, Tao Qian writes, “Cold weather and hot weather have their arriving and departing/And the way of human lives is also like this.”寒暑有代謝,人道每如茲, implying that the “Way” of human affairs are just like the coming and going of the four seasons.¹¹

Any attentive reader may find that many of Tao’s poems open with such a referring to the “Way” of the nature, and then move to express his ideas as to either personal human affairs or greater issues such as history, politics, and religion. According to his view of nature, everything is temporary, changeable, and moves in a cyclical order. Based on this notion, Tao Qian develops several consistent views on basic human affairs, including life and death, fame and wealth, and so on.

Perceiving nature as such, Tao holds a quite open attitude to death, fame and wealth. A case in point would be his famous poem series, “Form, Shadow, and Spirit” 形影神, which I shall elaborate more later. According to Kang-I Sun Chang, “T’ao Ch’ien’s stoical acceptance of death in fact originates in the idea of ‘transformation’ (*hua*) in Chuang Tzu’s Taoism,”¹² which can be supported by Tao’s ample literary allusions to

¹⁰ As for the translation of “jiu”酒, I adopt the most accepted one, “wine”, though we have to note that “jiu” in the Chinese tradition, is a type of brewed drinking, while in the West, “wine” is fermented.

¹¹ TYMJJJ, 224.

¹² Chang, *Six Dynasties Poetry*, 39.

Daoist texts, particularly when it comes to the writing of the “Way” in nature.

For instance, in “In Praise of the Two Tutors Surnamed Shu”詠二疏, Tao writes, “Great Image turns the seasons /The one with achievements takes leave himself”大象轉四時, 功成者自去.¹³ In this case, “大象” actually alludes to the line “Great image has no shape”大象無形¹⁴ in the Chapter 41 of *Dao De Jing*, which belongs to a more inclusive articulation of the “Way” under Daoist views.

Moreover, in one of his “Returning to Dwell in the Garden and Field”歸園田居 poem series, Tao records the inter contradiction he faces when serving in government, and expresses his desire to return to nature 返自然:

In my youth, I didn’t possess rhythms that suit the *su* world,¹⁵

My human nature originally prefers mountains and hills.

Mistakenly I fell into the net of dust,

Once I left, it’s been thirteen years.¹⁶

The trapped bird longs for its old forest,

The fish in pond yearns for its former river.

I open wasted land to the boundary of the south wilderness,

To guard my clumsiness I return to garden and field.

¹³ TYMJJJ, 344.

¹⁴ *DDJ*; translation from D. C. Lau, *Tao Te Ching* (New York: Penguin Books, 1963).

¹⁵ In this case, *su* 俗 means “common, vulgar,” indicating the opposite side of *ya*, 雅, which represents education and elegance.

¹⁶ As noticed by many scholars, the “thirty” in the line should be “thirteen”.

My square farm shed has ten and a little more *mu*,¹⁷

My thatched house has eight or nine rooms.

Elm and willow trees shade the back eave,

Peach and pear trees are arrayed in front of the hall.

In the dim light is the village in distance,

Gently rising is the smoke above the village.

Dogs bark in the deep alley,

Cocks crow at the peak of mulberry trees.

Windows and courtyards have no dusty impurities,

Empty room has surplus leisure.

I've been in the fence for a long time,

Once again I get to return to my nature.

少無適俗韻,性本愛丘山.誤落塵網中,一去三十年.

羈鳥戀舊林,池魚思故淵.開荒南野際,守拙歸園田.

方宅十餘畝,草屋八九間.榆柳蔭後檐,桃李羅堂前.

曖曖遠人村,依依墟裏煙.狗吠深巷中,雞鳴桑樹巔.

戶庭無塵雜,虛室有餘閑.久在樊籠裏,復得返自然.¹⁸

Here, as we can see, to Tao Qian, nature 自然, also means the state of being like oneself. By returning to his nature and guarding his clumsiness 守拙, Tao proposes his

¹⁷ mu 畝, is an ancient unit of land area in China. At Tao's times, a *mu* is somewhat less than 200 square meters.

¹⁸ TYMJJJ, 77.

way to cultivate one's mental world, in order to stick to the "Way" he regards as the ideal model of being. Similarly, Tao Qian's idea on "clumsiness" and "nature" also echoes strains of Daoist thinking, as in the Chapter 45 of *Dao De Jing* 道德經, "Great honesty seems corrupt, Great skills seem incompetent, Great orations seem inarticulate." 大直若屈, 大巧若拙, 大辯若訥.¹⁹

As many critics have argued, Tao's perception of nature has to do with the widespread "Neo-Daoism" in Wei-Jin period.²⁰ But when it comes to the "Way" in accord with which an ideal political society and an individual should act upon, it is noticeable that another significant strand of Tao's thought characterizes features of Confucianism.

Here are two examples. In his poem "To Be Shown to the Three Gentlemen: Zhou Xuzhi, Zu Qi, and Xie Jingyi" 示周續之祖企謝景夷三郎, Tao writes in the fourth and fifth couples:

Master Zhou transmits Confucius' teachings,

Zu and Xie follow like an echo.

The Way has been lost for a thousand years,

And now this morning it is heard again.

¹⁹ DDJ, translation from D.C.Lau, TTJ.

²⁰ See Ying-shih Yu, "Individualism and the Neo-Taoist Movement in Wei-Chin China," in *Individualism and Holism: Studies in Confucian and Taoist Values*, ed. Donald J. Munro (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1985), 121-156; Charles Yim-tze Kwong, *Tao Qian and the Chinese Poetic Tradition: The Quest for Cultural Identity* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 167-182.

周生述孔业,祖谢响然臻.道丧向千载,今朝复斯闻.²¹

Another example is drawn from the second one of Tao Qian's "Meditation on the Ancient Cottages at the Early Spring of 403 A.D." 癸卯歲始春懷古田舍二首 poem series.

The Ancient Teacher left a teaching,

It is the "Way" not poverty that man should care about.

As I look forward it is hard to reach,

I change my mind and strive to do farming for long.

先師有遺訓,憂道不憂貧.瞻望邈難逮,轉欲志長勤.²²

As easily noticed, the second line here alludes to *Analects* 15.31, in which Confucius makes a clear statement that a gentleman should be anxiously concerned with the Way, rather than making a living.

Confucius said: "A gentleman seeks out for the Way, but not a living. As for farming, it entails insufficiency. As for learning, it leads to salary. A gentleman cares about the Way but not poverty."

子曰:君子謀道不謀食.耕也,餒在其中矣;學也,祿在其中矣.君子憂道不憂貧.²³

In the two poems above, it is worth noting that Tao Qian's thought on the "Way" that

²¹ TYMJJJ, 95.

²² Ibid.,191.

²³ A, 190.

operated in an ideal society and should be obeyed by a moral individual is embedded in the tradition of Confucianism. In more than one occasions, Tao declares to be a disciple of Confucius, inherited basically the same beliefs about how an ideal political society should look like and how an ideal individual should act in the world, even though he might be inflicted by impoverishment himself.

However, it is not hard to find that sometimes the Confucian “Way” that Tao Qian strives to adhere to is contradictory with the Daoist “Way” that encourages Tao to return and guard his nature. It is also worth noting that Tao Qian himself swung between the two sides from time to time.

On one hand, Tao Qian always expressed his reluctance to engage himself in official service, examples can be drawn from the poems he wrote when he was about to leave his official post, sometimes even when he was on an official business trip. For instance, in the poem “At Tukou at Night during the Seventh Moon of the year of 401” 辛丑歲七月赴假還江陵夜行塗口, Tao Qian writes,

The Shang Lyrics are not my affairs.

I yearn to plow in double harness.

商歌非吾事, 依依在耦耕.

As for the first line in this couplet, it alludes to a story recorded in *Huainanzi* 淮南子. In that story, a gentleman named Ning Qi 甯戚 wanted to serve of Duke Huan of Qi 齐桓公 and successfully caught Duke Huan’s attention through “Tapping on his ox’s horn

and sings the Shang Lyrics.” 擊牛角而疾商歌²⁴ Clearly we can see “the Shang Lyrics” 商歌 stands out as political symbol that reveals Ning Qi’s ambition and desire to seek office from Duke Huan. However in Tao Qian’s case, by adding “not”非 in front of “my affairs”吾事, Tao Qian expresses his unwillingness to serve those in power. In the second line, the two characters “double harness” 耦耕 refer to the two famous recluses Chang Zu 長沮 and Jie Ni 桀溺, who were yoke-mates pulling a plow together when Confucius encountered them. Actually they are the exact roles appearing in *Analects 18.6*. I will come back to this text later.

On the other hand, it is also noticeable that when Tao retired from the political world, he was not a total recluse as those in Daoist or Buddhist paradigms. The writing of his life as a recluse has already been a tenable footnote that says a lot about Tao’s incomplete reclusion state.

To this point, it becomes clearer that in Tao Qian’s system, the “Way” in accord with which how an individual should act upon is twofold. First, it encourages Tao to live as his nature is, just like Daoist thinkers would argue. Second, it projects hopes onto Tao to act in a political way in his times, bearing features of the “going into the society” 入世 attitude of Confucianism. Thus, from this discovery, we can conclude that the “Way” that Tao Qian attempts to pursue and guard is split in essence.

Based on this notion, when interpreting the crisis of the “Way” in Tao Qian’s writing,

²⁴ For a detailed description along with a translation of this story, see Major, John S., Sarah A. Queen, Andrew Seth Meyer, and Harold D. Roth, *The Huainanzi: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Government in Early Han China* (New York: Columbia University, 2010), 450.

we should bear the following questions in mind: by claiming that “The Way’s been lost for a thousand years,” which strain of the “Way” is Tao Qian referring to? In his response to the crisis of the “Way”, what is his attitude towards the Daoist and Confucian features embodied in the “Way”? Does he accept all and try to restore the original “Way” or does he critically transform the “Way” with his own philosophical ideas?

More importantly, as it seems to me, the duality the “Way” also causes an internal existential crisis to Tao Qian. In other words, to Tao, the crisis of the “Way” is first rooted in the split nature of the “Way”, and then intensified by other external factors, such as poverty, political chaos and the like.

Thus in examining Tao Qian’s response to this crisis, two angles are indispensable. The first one focuses on the interior sphere and examines how Tao Qian reconciles the conflict between the Daoist “Way” and the Confucian “Way” in his constructed “Way”, which as I have identified in the Introduction Chapter, serves as the subordinate line of my analysis. The second one, as standing out on the main line of my analysis, focuses on the exterior sphere and strives to see how Tao deals with the crisis of the “Way” as exemplified both in his political life and personal existential life. As the following chapters will show, in Tao Qian’s constructed political utopia and religious utopia, he manages to solve the multidimensional crisis of the “Way” and also, establishes his own “Way” that blends in Daoist and Confucian thought.

CHAPTER 2

TOWARD A METHOD OF READING

As I have pointed out before, my analysis of Tao Qian's philosophical thought is first based on his writing of the multidimensional "Way" and second, based on the multidimensional utopia he constructs to solve the crisis of the "Way".

For me, a key aspect to understand the crisis of the "Way" is that due to the inconsistency of the two different strains of thought that have jointly shaped the "Way", the crisis of the "Way" exists by nature. In this regard, when we examine the "Way" Tao Qian constructs in his utopia as a response to the crisis, we cannot use the traditional paradigms to analyze, since the embedded Daoist or Confucian ideas are also part of the problem.

Thus My focus not only emphasizes the philosophical depth of the "Way" in Tao's writing and its place within the existing philosophical traditions in early Chinese civilization; but also it emphasizes a more interdisciplinary, comparative and theoretical approach to examine Tao Qian's politico-religious thought. In this chapter, I will introduce the methodologies I have adopted in reading and understanding Tao Qian.

2.1 A Method of Language

The first has to do with language. The tendency of regarding literary language as a

self-contained aesthetic entity and that of viewing it as a subservient vehicle encompassed with concrete historical, political or moral message have alternatively appeared throughout the history of literature and literary criticism.

An excellent case in point would be the Wei-Jin period when Tao Qian lived. As we know, before Tao Qian entered into the prime of his literary creation, the dominating literary style at that time was represented by *xuanyan* poetry 玄言詩, which as Kang-I Sun Chang argues, “It is primarily discursive, a deliberate mimesis of ‘pure conversation.’ 清談²⁵ It is not hard to imagine that when the purpose of a literary work were to function as a discursive and philosophical discourse, the literary work itself would tend to lose its aesthetic merit. Later as a reaction to this literary taste, there emerged a new aesthetic movement that to a large extent gave rise to a different type of poetry that characterized by verbal ornament and literary embellishment. In the West, the most famous example might be drawn from the shifting from Romanticism and Realism. Even in nowadays proponents of each side are still arguing about to what extent language can be and should be regarded as an autonomous object, and to what extent the factors beyond the parameters of literature itself can be applied to interpret and evaluate a piece of work.

Here I am not interested to engage myself in the debate, but I would like to point out that the mere fact that this debate over the nature of language has evolved for centuries has perfectly demonstrated the nature of language, which as I would maintain, is essentially dual and ambiguous. The duality of language lies in that its vitality has to do

²⁵ Chang, *Six Dynasties Poetry*, 5.

with both its internal aesthetic merit and its external philosophical message. Therefore it becomes an ambiguous process to get close to literature since both powers are tightly interacting beyond the surface of language.

Again, take Tao Qian as an example. Even if we disregard all the autobiographical and historical information annexed to his writing, when we look at the language itself, it is hard not to think about the identifiable written sources that Tao Qian has alluded to, or not to think about the philosophical message implied by using or modifying the existing the figurations or allegories that rooted in the common linguistic context shared by former generations.²⁶ In this sense, I would agree with the idea that literary language is not autonomous, in terms of the processes it is composed, transcribed, and received. On the other side, we have to acknowledge that once a piece of literary work is completed, it is just *the* autonomous entity, which more than legitimately, can be analyzed as an independent structure of words, images, scenes and so forth.

For me, the ideal way to approach any literary work would be: first, focus on the language and look for any analytical tools that could be used to treat literature as literature itself in a detailed way; and second, think beyond the surface of literary language and explore possible philosophical depth contained in the linguistic tradition as revealed in the specific literary works. In the case of Tao Qian, based on a close textual analysis, I am interested to shed light on the ground in the nexus between literature and

²⁶ For a detailed analysis, see James Robert Hightower, "Allusion in the Poetry of T'ao Ch'ien," *Harvard Journal of Asian Studies* 31 (1971): 5-27.

politico-religious philosophy.

2.2 A Method of Political Thought

My second reading methodology has to do with political thought.²⁷

J.G.A. Pocock's argument on the historical view of language is essential to my study. In his work, Pocock analyzes the political meanings in the language of the *Analects* 論語, *Zhuangzi* 莊子, *Mencius* 孟子, *Han Feizi* 韓非子, the *Book of Lord Shang* 商君書, and so on. Based on his own critical study to employ angles from political theory to read these classical Chinese texts, by acknowledging his lack of knowledge of Chinese and the historical periods of these texts, Pocock actually raises the credibility of his finding that—these texts contained “a definite political meaning and as coalescing to form a definite pattern of ideas about political values, political authority and the changes contingent on their transmission by linguistic or non-linguistic means.”²⁸ Therefore I stake out my inquiry on Tao Qian's political thought on the linguistic ground as Pocock has lain out, “The language of politics is obviously not the language of a single disciplined mode of intellectual inquiry. It is rhetoric, the language in which men speak for all the purposes and in all the ways in which men may be found articulating and

²⁷ I especially credit David K. Schneider's book *Confucian Prophet: Political Thought in Du Fu (752-757)* (Amherst NY: Cambria Press, 2012) for setting out as an inspiring model and introducing with several vital scholarships to stake out my inquiry about the political thought in Tao Qian.

²⁸ J.G.A. Pocock, *Politics, Language and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (New York: Atheneum, 1971), 31.

communicating as part of the activity and culture of politics.”²⁹ In this sense, according to Pocock, it is the nature of rhetoric and that of political rhetoric that the same utterance will simultaneously perform a diversity of linguistic functions.³⁰

Similarly, Garret Ward Sheldon’s study has also been a contributive factor to the methodological groundwork. According to Sheldon, “Political Theory asks the basic questions that establish the foundation for all social and political systems. What is the nature of man? What is the nature of political society? And, what are good social relations? Every great political theorist explicitly or implicitly gives specific answers to these fundamental questions of human life and social existence.”³¹ While Pocock’s study encourages me to examine Tao Qian’s poetry as a means of political rhetoric, Sheldon’s study offers me more specific perspectives to sort out the political aspects of Tao’s literary works.

2.3 A Method of Religious Studies

The third group of scholarship that has helped shape my methodology is concerned with religious study. There is a rich body of literature on the study of religion in the West. And considering that people today are still arguing about whether religion did exist in

²⁹ Ibid., 17.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Garret Ward Sheldon, *The History of Political Theory: Ancient Greece to Modern America* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 1.

ancient Chinese civilization or not, it is interesting to note that even in the West, the autonomy of religion is still under debate. Among the various discussions, two studies are particularly remarkable to me.

According to Mircea Eliade, “sacred and profane are two modes of being in the world, two existential situations assumed by man in the course of his history.”³² This point turns out to be crucial to my study since it provides a more conceptual framework to see how Tao Qian solves the existential crisis in his utopia.

Furthermore, according to Eliade, “these modes of being in the world are not of concern only to the history of religions or to sociology; they are not the object only of historical, sociological, or ethnological study.”³³ This point of view somewhat runs against Peter L. Berger’s, which treats the construction of the sacred, in a more plain way, religion, as human beings’ secular attempts to conceive the entire universe as being humanly significant.

According to Berger, “It can thus be said that religion has played a strategic part in the human enterprise of world-building. Religion implies the farthest reach of man’s self-externalization, of his infusion of reality with his own meanings. Religion implies that human order is projected into the totality of being.”³⁴ By projecting a sociological perspective into religion, Berger actually undermines the autonomy of religion.

³² Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1959), 14.

³³ *Ibid.*, 15.

³⁴ Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990), 27-28.

To summarize, from Eliade's standpoint, "Man becomes aware of the sacred because it manifests itself, shows itself, as something wholly different from the profane."³⁵ The core in Eliade's argument is that the profane world and the sacred world are both ultimately autonomous and distinctly different. While to Berger, the profane and the sacred are not necessarily opposite, if we realize that they are two supplementary modes of world-construction. To be more specific, in Berger's system, "The sacred cosmos, which transcends and includes man in its ordering of reality, thus provides man's ultimate shield against the terror of anomy."³⁶

The merits of these studies on religion lies in that it offers a more integrated ground to discuss Tao Qian's constructed "Way" on a more individual, existential level. Besides, the disputed nature of the "sacred" also raises a crucial question Tao's religious thought: which side does he take, Eliade's or Berger's?

2.4 A Method of Utopian Studies

A final note on the previous studies that I have gained ideas from has to do with utopian studies. There has evolved a rich scholarship on utopian studies in the West, yet the studies in China are somewhat limited. And it is also my hope to contribute to the field with my case study of Tao Qian's utopia.

³⁵ Eliade, *The Sacred and The Profane*, 11.

³⁶ Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 26.

Conventional wisdom has held that when Thomas More (1478-1535) first used “utopia” as the title of his book in 1516, he not only created a new literary genre, but also brought into any descendant literary figurations the most fundamental characteristic of utopia—a non-existent place. My examination of Tao Qian’s utopian vision is thus centered upon this core concept of “non-existence”.

Through literature review, it is the notion that utopia can be universal across cultures and perennial that infuses the legitimacy to my research. Meanwhile, the differences between cultures and individual choices generate the possibility of comparisons between the way Tao Qian constructs his utopian vision and that of the Western tradition, as well as other literary utopias in Chinese civilization.

While some literary critics maintain that utopia is a term that is largely exclusive to the Sixteenth Century Europe, others have made invaluable endeavors to interpret it in a much broader scope.

“The utopian writer looks at his own society first and tries to see what, for his purpose, its significant elements are. The utopia itself shows what society would be like if those elements were fully developed,”³⁷ says Northrop Frye, pointing out the shared mentality by different writers in the process of constructing literary utopias. If we realize that the psychological underpinnings of utopias generally suggest the vision of an alternative and better society beyond reality, then, it would not be unjustifiable to seek for

³⁷ Northrop Frye, “Varieties of Literary Utopias,” In *Utopias and Utopian Thought*, ed. Frank E. Manuel, 1966 (Boston: Houghton Muffin Company), 26.

the visions of utopia in a broader scope of time and space.

Many scholars thus regard utopia and the writings of utopia as a universal and perennial phenomenon. In the era of Greek and Roman myths, far ahead of More's *Utopia*, we have the Golden Ages, the Agrarian Arcadias, and various earthly paradises. If we turn our gaze upon the East, it won't be a futile attempt to search for equivalents. In Zhang Longxi's essay "The Utopian Vision, East and West," he looks into the tradition of Western utopias and traces through Chinese history for equivalent utopian visions.³⁸ His findings support Lyman Tower Sargent's argument that "Not every culture appears to have utopias brought about through human effort that predate knowledge of More's Utopia, but such utopias do exist in China, India, and various Buddhist and Islamic culture."³⁹ Zhang's study demonstrates it to us that though different linguistic and cultural traditions would have shaped specific paradigms of utopia, some of its core features are believed to be able to transcend these boundaries.

Another strand in this discussion attempts to expand the connotation of utopia by developing different dimensions of utopia. In Ruth Levitas' *The Concept of Utopia*, she argues that, "Utopian is the expression of the desire for a better way of being,"⁴⁰ and more specifically, as she maintains, the images of utopia may be "religious or secular,

³⁸ Longxi Zhang 張隆溪, "The Utopian Vision, East and West," in *Utopia Studies*, 13, no.1 (2002): 1-20.

³⁹ Lyman Tower Sargent, "Utopian Tradition: Themes and Variations," In *Utopia: The Search for the Ideal Society in the Western World*, ed. Roland Schaer, Gregory Claeys, and Lyman Tower Sargent (New York/Oxford: The New York Public Library/Oxford University Press, 2008), 8.

⁴⁰ Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 8.

literary or political,”⁴¹ but these forms are all embedded in “the existence of a fundamental utopia propensity in human beings.”⁴² Levitas’ argument is particularly important to my study since it offers the theoretical underpinning for me to look into the multiple dimensions of utopianism in Tao Qian. As I will frame later, in Tao Qian’s vision of utopia, his desire for a better way of being is also twofold. The first one is related with the crisis of the political “Way” in his times and strives to build a political order, or profane order in a broader view. The second one is related with the crisis of the personal existential “Way” for Tao, and reflects his hopes to establish a sacred order.

⁴¹ Ibid., 1.

⁴² Ibid.

CHAPTER 3

TAO QIAN'S POLITICAL UTOPIA

As noticed by many scholars, and also shown by Tao Qian's many literary works, the social turmoil, the collapse of the ideal "Way" and Tao's ambiguous attitude toward government service constitute the biographical root of his political crisis. Through close reading, it has also been remarkable to me that, in responding to the crisis, Tao Qian constructs a political utopia through writing, which opens the new ground to look into his philosophical thought from a more theoretical perspective. Before unraveling Tao's strains of political thought from this literary-philosophical approach, I will first offer a sketch of the conventional views on Tao Qian's political thought that have largely been shed light from the biographical approach, and then stake out my inquiry on the basis of existing debates.

3.1 Conventional Views Based on Biography

Tao Qian, a native of Chaisang 柴桑 in Xuyang 尋陽 (modern Jiujiang 九江 in Jiangxi 江西), was born during the Eastern Jin 東晉(317-420) dynasty. As one of the poets whose literary works strikingly characterize an autobiographical voice, a glimpse at Tao's poems and proses can offer us many clues of his political life. In the preface to his prose "Come Away Home" 歸去來兮辭, Tao Qian provides a quite clear outline of his

political life:

My family was poor, and what we got from plowing and planting was not enough to sustain ourselves. The house was full of children, and the jars have no stored grains. As for the necessities of living, I lack the means to supply. My friends and relatives from time to time advised me to become a magistrate. Without much worry I have this consideration, but when I seek for it there is no way of approach. It happened when there was chaos in four directions, and the princes regard patronage and generosity as virtue. My uncle considering my poverty and difficulty, therefore I was employed as a petty district official. At that time the disturbances were still undergoing, and I was afraid of long-distance travel. Pengze⁴³ is about a hundred *li*⁴⁴ from home and the revenue from public land is enough for my supply of wine. Therefore I applied for the post. A few days later, I began to grow disgusted and would think of home going. Why? My innate disposition is all about nature, and will not brook discipline or restraint. Hunger and cold may be sharp, but to work against myself really sickens me. Whenever I have been involved in official life, I was mortgaging myself to my mouth and belly. Because of this I was very upset, being deeply ashamed that I had so compromised my principles. But I was still going to wait out the year, after which I might pack up my clothes and slip away

⁴³ Pengze 彭澤 is a county under Jiujiang 九江 city in Jiangxi 江西 Province, China.

⁴⁴ li 里, a traditional Chinese unit of distance, is usually considered as a length of half-kilometer nowadays

at night. Then my sister who had married into the Cheng family died in Wuchang⁴⁵, and my only desire was to go there as quickly as possible. I gave up my office and left of my own accord. From mid-autumn to winter I was altogether in office for some eighty days. When events made it possible for me to do what I wished, I have entitled my piece ‘The Return’; my preface is dated the eleventh moon of the year of 405.

余家贫，耕植不足以自给。幼稚盈室，瓶无储粟，生生所资，未见其术。亲故多劝余为长吏，脱然有怀，求之靡途。会有四方之事，诸侯以惠爱为德，家叔以余贫苦，遂见用于小邑。于时风波未静，心惮远役，彭泽去家百里，公田之利，足以为酒。故便求之。及少日，眷然有归欤之情。何则？质性自然，非矫厉所得。饥冻虽切，违己交病。尝从人事，皆口腹自役。于是怅然慷慨，深愧平生之志。犹望一稔，当敛裳宵逝。寻程氏妹丧于武昌，情在骏奔，自免去职。仲秋至冬，在官八十余日。因事顺心，命篇曰《归去来兮》。乙巳岁十一月也。⁴⁶

This passage clearly records Tao Qian’s last official post, whose termination at the year of 405 actually marked the permanent retirement of his political life. Moreover, this passage also offers a hint at his motivations of serving in the government, as well as the inner contradiction he confronted between his nature and government service, which as I have argued before, is to a large extent resulted by the two contradictory “Way”

⁴⁵ Wuchang 武昌 is a district located in Wuhan 武汉, Hubei 湖北 Province, China.

⁴⁶ TYMJJJ 413.

embedded in his view of life.

As reader, we can see this contradiction has raised crucial questions to Tao Qian on different dimensions of life at different stages. Here, it is important to remember that this contradiction also engendered an inner crisis for Tao's political life. To serve, or to retire, that is a question. In no small measure, this vexation had been fermenting in Tao's life for decades, and finally culminated in his permanent retirement from government service.

A textual point in case would be his well-known "Returning to Dwell in the Garden and Field" 歸園田居 poem series. In the first poem of this series, Tao Qian uses the metaphors of "The trapped bird longs for its old forest" 羈鳥戀舊林 and "The fish in pond yearns for its former river" 池魚思故淵 to express his strong will to return to his nature and dwell in the garden and field. As for biographical information about his political life, it is also worth noting that in the second couplet of this poem, Tao suggests the entire length of time that he served in government, with the lines "Mistakenly I fell into the net of dust/Once left, it's been thirteen years." 誤落塵網中，一去三十年

To this point, we can have a general outline of Tao Qian's political life concerning the length of service, the motivation and the potential instability of his service. Besides, Tao also mentions the specific official posts that he took in some of his poems. According to Shen Yue's 沈約 biography of Tao Qian, Tao undertakes four official posts during his just over one decade political life, including the positions of Provincial Libationer 州祭酒, Aid to the General of the Stabilization Army 鎮軍參軍, Aid to the

Establishing Majesty General 建威參軍, and Magistrate of Pengze 彭澤縣令.⁴⁷

Based on works cited above, along with some other early biographies about Tao Qian,⁴⁸ a general picture of Tao Qian's political life has been sketched out. What is remarkable to notice is that during the transitions of these official posts, the political power under which Tao served was not the same one. As Wendy Swartz points out, "Among those under whom he served were almost certainly Huan Xuan 桓玄(369-404) and Liu Yu 劉裕(363-422), both of whom later sought to overthrow the Jin 晉 (265-420). Huan Xuan unsuccessfully in 403-4 and Liu Yu successfully in 420. These coups were typical of the political unrest that characterized the last decades of the Jin, which was finally replaced by Liu Yu's Song 宋 dynasty (420-79)."⁴⁹ From this discovery, a crucial question naturally appears: How should we understand Tao Qian's public service under Huanxuan, Liu Yu and Eastern Jin?

This, in my view, is essential to understand Tao Qian's political thought, as it has fostered the debate over whether or not Tao Qian was loyal to Eastern Jin. As Ch'i I-Shou summarizes, "Conventionally, there were two opposing schools viewing T'ao's inner reaction to the dynastic change and his attitude towards it in this period: One school took T'ao for an out and out loyal minister of Chin. The other school claimed that T'ao

⁴⁷ I adopt A.R. Davis's translation of these official posts. For a complete translation of Shen Yue 沈約's biography of Tao Qian, see A.R. Davis, *T'ao Yuan-ming (AD 365-427): His Works and Their Meaning*, Vol.2 (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press,1999), 163.

⁴⁸ According to Wendy Swartz, there are four extant early biographies, with dates ranging from the late fifth to the early seventh century, which discuss Tao's reclusion in historiographical rather than literary terms: that in the Song shu, compiled by Shen Yue 沈約(441-513); an independent account by Xiao Tong 蕭統; the version in the Nan shi, and that in the Jin shu. For a detailed account, see Swartz, *Reading Tao Yuanmin*, 27-48.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 6.

was a figure transcending Chin and Sung (Liu Sung).”⁵⁰ Although it has been argued by many scholars that both viewpoints are not exact, the debate between these two diverging schools has continuously evolved for almost two decades. In Wendy Swartz’s study, she again delineates the existing discussion over whether Tao Qian’s political withdrawal should be regarded as an expression of loyalty to the state or an attitude of transcendence of politics.⁵¹ Given the centrality of this issue to understand Tao’s political thought, I shall now take a look at the fundamental underpinnings of the two stances.

For the school that holds Tao Qian is an exclusive loyalist to Eastern Jin, the biography in the Song Shu 宋書 is of vital importance. In the “Biographies of Recluses” 隱逸傳, Shen Yue 沈約 adopts anecdotes as collected in Tao Qian’s “Biography of the Master of Five Willows” 五柳先生傳, “The Return” 歸去來兮辭 and “On Naming my Son” 命子, and presents a well-accepted image of Tao Qian as a recluse and a benevolent father. Furthermore, as Wendy Swartz has pointed out, in Shen Yue’s biography he also establishes the claim that Tao Qian is exclusively loyal to Eastern Jin by putting forward two influential arguments,

Because his great-grandfather had been a minister under the Jin, Tao felt that it would be dishonorable to serve the succeeding dynasty. After the beginning of Gaozu’s 高祖 [Liu Yu 劉裕 (r. 420-22), the found ruler of the Liu Song dynasty] ascendancy toward the throne, he refused to serve again. He dated all

⁵⁰ Ch’i I-Shou 齊益壽, *Tao Yuanming’s Political Standpoint and Ideal* (Taipei, Taiwan University, 1968), 1.

⁵¹ Swartz, *Reading Tao Yuanming*, 5-10.

his writings with the month and year. Works written before Yixi 義熙 reign period [405-18] are designed with Jin reign titles, but those written from the Yongchu 永初 reign period [420-22] on are merely marked by cyclical signs (jiazi 甲子).

自以曾祖晉世宰輔,恥復屈身後代,自高祖王業漸隆,不復肯仕.所著文章,皆題其年月,義熙以前,則書晉氏年號;自永初以來,唯雲甲子而已.⁵²

The first argument is presented in the first part of this passage, in which Shen Yue assumes that Tao Qian has inherited from his great-grandfather a loyal political attitude towards Jin, and then attributes Tao's refusal to serve under Gaozu's (Liu Yu) governing with his sense of dishonor. The second argument is based on Shen's findings about the way Tao Qian added dates to his works that were written after the Yongchu period, when Liu Yu was in power. According to Shen Yue, Tao's use of cyclical signs instead of reign titles firmly indicates his disapproving to Liu Yu's governing.

Many scholars, including Wendy Swartz, have propounded the view that it is untenable to assert that Tao Qian is loyal to Eastern Jin merely based on his family influence and his use of cyclical signs.⁵³ First of all, ancestral tradition doesn't necessarily have a decisive influence on one's political attitude. Second, as many have found, there were also many poems that Tao composed during Liu-Song period that used reign titles. Actually this assertion also contradicts with the fact that Tao Qian served

⁵² *Song shu* 宋書, comp. Shen Yue (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974). I adopt Wendy Swartz's translation from *Reading Tao Yuanming*, 31.

⁵³ Both Swartz and Ch'i have offered similar arguments on this issue.

under Huanxuan and LiuYu, as I have mentioned before.

However, a closer look at the later accounts of Tao Qian's political thought demonstrates that this assumption has been very influential. For one thing, it provides a set of biographical information that is at the heart of the constructing of Tao's image as a political figure.⁵⁴ More importantly, according to Wendy Swartz's study on the reception of Tao Qian in different dynasties, we can see that this current of thought was even more emphasized in Song Dynasty 宋朝(960-1279), when Tao Qian was finally iconized as "a moral ideal and Confucian sage" with an emphasis on his role as a loyal recluse.⁵⁵

This case is not rare. In the framework of Confucian thought, "loyalty" has always been regarded as a standard to differentiate and judge individuals' political position. And once the literary individual has been labeled as a loyalist, all his or her works must be in consistent with this political attitude, which precariously rules out the sense that the poet may have contributed with other strains of political thought beyond the parameters of the preconceived model. Examples can be drawn from the traditional perceptions of Qu Yuan 屈原, Du Fu 杜甫 and the like.⁵⁶

For another, it also sheds light on the literary interpretation of some of Tao Qian's poems. Among those, the poem "An Account of Wine" 述酒 is particularly

⁵⁴ Much evidence have been found that most later biographies on Tao Qian draw upon the biographical anecdotes that were first included or made up in Shen Yue's version. For a detailed analysis, see I-Shou Ch'I, *Tao's Political Standpoint and Ideal*, 15.

⁵⁵ Swartz, *Reading Tao Yuanming*, 9.

⁵⁶ For an example discussion in this case, see Schneider, *Confucian Prophet*, 1-44.

representative.⁵⁷

Double fire shines upon the southern land,
Singing birds hear each other's song.
Though the autumn grass is not yet yellow,
The vernal breeze is long since past.
White pebbles gleam along the long bank,
On the Southern Peak there are no surplus clouds.
Yuzhang rises against the High Gate,⁵⁸
Chonghua lies in his tomb.⁵⁹
With streaming tears I contain my inner sighs,
And strain my ears to hear the morning cockcrow.
The divine land offers auspicious grain,⁶⁰
The four auspicious beasts have submitted to us.⁶¹
When Zhuliang controlled the army,
Mi Sheng lost his life.⁶²

⁵⁷ I have mainly consulted Hightower's translation for this poem. See, PTC, 159-163.

⁵⁸ According to Hightower's and Davis' annotations, Yuzhang 豫章 represents Liu Yu 劉裕, who was made Lord of Yuzhang in 406. And also, since the High Gate 高門 is the King's Gate, altogether line 7 refers to Liu Yu's early pretensions. See PTC, 160-161; Davis, A.R. T'ao Yuan-ming: His Works and their Meaning, vol.2 (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1983), 99-105.

⁵⁹ Chonghua 重華, according to Hightower, refers to Shun 舜, the ancient legendary emperor, who was buried on the Hill of Nine Doubts 九凝山 in Lingling 零陵. Moreover, since the Emperor Gong of Eastern Jin 晉恭帝 was degraded to be the King of Lingling 零陵 in Tao's times, hence this line implies Liu Yu's gradual progress towards usurpation.

⁶⁰ Shenzhou, 神州 literally can be translated as "divine land", is an old name for China.

⁶¹ Xiling 西靈, the four auspicious beasts, include the unicorn, phoenix, tortoise and dragon.

The Lord of Shanyang was degraded and sent to his fief,⁶³

To make a name he failed to do his best.

Gentleman Bu was skilled at shepherding,⁶⁴

And happy enough not to work for the lord.

The Ping Lord left the old capital,

And from the straits sent strange perfume.

The double sun first began to grow,

When the Three-Foot showed the strange text.

Wangzi loved the pure flute tune,

And soared at noon above the River Fen.

For many years the Lord of Zhu refined,⁶⁵

And lives leisurely away from the world's helter-skelter;

High, high there in the Western Range,⁶⁶

Indolence and rest are what he always favored to.

⁶² Line 13 and 14 involve two historical figures in Warring States Period 戰國時代. The first one as appeared in line 13 refers to Shen Zhuliang 沈諸梁, a person from Chu 楚. Misheng 畢勝, also from Chu, was attached and killed by Shen Zhuliang on a plot of usurpation. According to Hightower, Misheng parallels to Huanxuan, who deposed the Emperor An of Eastern Jin 晉安帝 and was killed by Liu Yu. The latter also parallels to Shen Zhuliang.

⁶³ Lord Shanyang 山陽公 is the last ruler of Han, who was degraded the title Emperor Xian of Han 漢獻帝 to Lord Shangyang 山陽公 by Wei 魏. As conventional views hold, Lord Shanyang is an allegory for Emperor Gong of Jin 晉恭帝, who was also degraded to the fief of Lingling 零陵 as shown in line 8.

⁶⁴ Bu sheng 卜生 refers to 卜式, a very good in herdsman in Han dynasty.

⁶⁵ The Lord of Zhu here refers to Fanli 范蠡, who was also called as Lord Chu of Tao 陶朱公 when he distantly withdrew from the political world and later became a mogul in pottery industry. Jiuchi 九齒, as many argued, should be read as jiuqing 久齡.

⁶⁶ Xiling, 西嶺, the Western Ranges, represents the place where Emperor Gong 晉恭帝 was buried.

The form of Heaven will last forever on its own,

As Pengzu and the ultimately dead cannot be the same.⁶⁷

重離照南陸,鳴鳥聲相聞.秋草雖未黃,融風久已分.素礫晶修渚,南嶽无餘云.

豫章抗高門,重華固靈墳.流淚抱中歎,傾耳聽司晨.神州獻嘉粟,西靈為我馴.

諸梁董師旅,半勝喪其身.山陽歸下國,成名猶不勤.卜生善斯牧,安樂不為君.

平王去舊京,峽中納遺熏.雙陵甫云育,三趾顯奇文.王子愛清吹,日中翔河汾.

朱公練九齒,閒居離世紛.峨峨西嶺內,偃息常所親.天容自永固,彭殤非等倫.⁶⁸

What first strikes me after reading this poem is that its content seems to have nothing to do with wine or drinking. Moreover, unlike most of Tao's poems that are quite straightforward, this one is very difficult to approach and understand. Although many scholars have disputed the authenticity of this poem,⁶⁹ much of the current debate over Tao Qian's political stance still revolves around discussions on this poem. There is the overwhelming tendency reading this poem in the light of particular political events occurred in Liu Yu's Song dynasty. As Hightower concludes, "So the poem is about assassination, regicide, usurpation; and the wine in the title is a reminder of the preferred weapon for the dead."⁷⁰ In his line-by-line detailed translation of this poem, we can see the influence of this assumption that attempts to decipher all the factual information

⁶⁷ Peng 彭, refers to Pengzu, the Chinese Methuselah; 殤, means "dead infant".

⁶⁸ TYMJJJ, 272.

⁶⁹ As Hightower quotes Huang Tingjian's 黃庭堅 argument in his translation, "The poem 'An Account of Wine' is missing. The present poem seems to have been written by someone who had been reading odd books. Much of it is unintelligible." See, PTC, 160.

⁷⁰ PTC, 160.

underlying each line.

Actually I do agree that it is worthy correlating the poetic language with specific political events in some cases. This interpretation and the “intent-poetic” analytical mode behind it do offer readers an illuminating approach to understand Tao Qian. Besides, Tao also addresses his attitude in a quite straightforward way at the end of the poem, stating his claim to readers that he would prefer to “lives leisurely away from the world’s helter-skelter”閒居離世紛. Considering the historical discourse appeared before, it is not unjustifiable to infer that Tao’s retirement has something to do with his critical attitude towards Liu Yu’s political power. However, the problem is, is it legitimate enough to take Tao’s political withdrawal from Liu-Song dynasty as his political position of loyalty to Eastern Jin?

To me, the weakness of this approach lies in: first, it follows the tempting tendency to oversimplify and even tailor Tao Qian’s political thought in order to reach consistency with established conventional views of Tao Qian as a loyalist to East Jin; and second, it does not allow for a study that stakes out an inquiry about Tao’s political thought in a more abstract angle.

I am not alone in my view that Tao Qian should be understood in a more abstract and theoretical way. As a rebuttal to the previous view, the other school as the Ch’i I-Shou includes in his study, has argued that Tao Qian’s political attitude is more transcendent since he does not only limit himself to be a loyalist to the Eastern Jin. The basic premise of their arguments is that even though Tao holds a negative attitude towards Huanxuan

and Liu Yu, it doesn't necessarily mean that he regards the Eastern Jin as the exemplar of his political ideal.

Their most direct textual evidence is drawn from "Peach Blossom Spring" 桃花源記, with the lines "They didn't know the existence of Han/Not even to mention Wei and Jin." 乃不知有漢,無論魏晉. As many scholars have argued, "This symbolic statement was enough to expose T'ao's wrath and disapproval at the political hierarchies after the 'Three Dynasties'. Chin, although it was the fatherland of T'ao, still was established by force in the same way as other dynasties, hence was also subjected to T'ao's wrath and disapproval."⁷¹ I agree with the idea that Tao's political thought is more transcendent than what the first school has insisted.

As a matter of fact, this view also corroborates my finding that the multidimensional "Way" as depicted and constructed in Tao's works actually speaks to his ideal political "Way" and existential "Way". From many poems we can find that Tao's concern about the crisis of the political "Way" comes into play at every stage of his government service, which indicates that his political ideal may go beyond his living dynasty. What's more, the utopian vision of Peach Blossom Spring as Tao Qian portrays has also contributed to its characteristic of transcendence. On the basis of these findings, it seems fair to argue that Tao did possess a more transcendent view towards politics.

However, the major drawback of this school is that it misses two invaluable points to further explore the depth of Tao Qian's sense of transcendence.

⁷¹ Ch'i. *Tao's Political Standpoint and Ideal*, 2.

For one thing, as I have pointed out before, the way that Tao chooses to reconstruct his ideal political “Way” is to create a utopia. The “non-existence” nature of utopia in large part could be regarded as the literary expression of Tao’s transcendent attitude. More important, it also opens the door for the methodology that reads Tao’s poetry as a literary and philosophical construct, rather than delving into the search of direct political experience. In this regard, we should give more emphasis on “Peach Blossom Spring” and many other poetic works that Tao composes during his entire retirement from politics. In addition, considering the abundant critical studies on utopia, a closer look at the existing scholarship at both the West and the East is also necessary and invaluable to Tao’s case. From this comparative perspective, my discussion on Tao Qian’s political utopia will set out by answering the following two questions: what features of the Western utopian tradition could be seen in Tao’s figuration? What strain of Chinese political thought does Tao mostly identify with in his vision of a political utopia?

For another, this school also fails to answer a crucial question: what is underlying Tao Qian’s transcendent political attitude? For what should be our consensus view, “transcendence” is also a taking of political position. Thus in the light of political thought, I am particularly concerned with the following questions: is there a political ideal in “Peach Blossom Spring” and how is it depicted? How is the good society operated and is there an ideal king conceived? What is Tao’s understanding of human nature? Does Tao offer a way to get to the good society and where does he project his hope of this social ideal, in the past or in the future? To which extent could we trace Tao’s political ideal in

early Chinese civilization, such as Daoism, Confucianism and the like? What are his own considerations in reconstructing his political “Way”? These are the key questions that the following pages set out to answer.

3.2 A Literary-Philosophical, Utopian Analysis

Given the centrality of “Peach Blossom Spring” to understand Tao Qian’ political thought, I shall first unravel its vision of utopia and then examine the abstract political thought as embodied in the underpinnings of this literary work.

In the light of the Western tradition of utopian studies and strains of utopian thought in early Chinese civilization. I will stake out my analysis on Tao Qian’s political utopia by answering the following two questions first.

The first question is concerned with what aspects of the Western utopian tradition might be useful in analyzing Tao’s political-related utopian writing, particularly the prose “Peach Blossom Spring” and its supplementary poem. The second question attempts to examine the strain of Chinese utopian thought that Tao Qian may have identified with.

3.2.1 Pre-More Utopia VS Post-More Utopia

In the West, according to Gregory Claeys and Lyman Tower Sargent, utopias can be categorized into two sub-types: utopias of sensual gratification and utopias of human contrivance. As they summarize, “utopias of sensual gratification are myths that look to

the past of the human race or beyond death for a time when human life was or will be easier and more gratifying. While utopias of human contrivance are referred to those utopias that are invented after Thomas More, based on the assumption that every aspect of social order can be susceptible to human control.”⁷² Briefly, the first sub-type includes the ancient, mythical utopias such as Hesiod’s golden age, Eden, some versions of the millennium, and various Greek and Roman myths. They are regarded to “be achieved without human effort and are seen as a gift of nature or the gods.”⁷³, which Gregory Claeys and Lyman Tower Sargent identify as pre-More utopias. While on a flip side, the second group of utopias is more or less initiated and controlled by human beings, as identified as post-More utopias. Bearing this categorization in mind, I will discuss the case of Peach Blossom Spring by asking whether it is a pre-More utopia or a post-More utopia.

As the most widely studied classic Chinese literary utopia, “Peach Blossom Spring” starts out with a fisherman’s unintended adventure into an isolated place, followed by his witness of the scenario in the village, as well as his personal interaction with the inhabitants.

At first the passage was extremely narrow, barely enough for a person to pass.

He continued and walked dozens of paces; suddenly it opened up into an expanse. The ground was level and wide. The houses were neatly laid out in

⁷² Claeys and Sargent, *The Utopia Reader*, 2.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 2.

regular order. There were rich land, beautiful pond, mulberry and bamboo trees and the like. The paths intersected and led to each other, and the sound of chickens and dogs could be heard. The clothes of the men and women, who were going forth and back and cultivating things among the fields, all looked like outsiders'. Yellow-haired ones and hanging-band ones, together they were content and happy of themselves. The villagers saw the fisherman and were extremely amazed/wondered. They asked where he came from. The fisherman completely answered them. The villagers then invited him to return to their houses, set up wines, killed chickens, and made food. The other villagers heard of this man, all came to ask about the news. The villagers said that their former generation escaped from the turmoil in Qin Dynasty and led their family members and neighbors to this cut-off place and never came out of there again; therefore were separated from the outsiders. They asked the present is what generation. They didn't know the existence of Han, not even to mention Wei and Jin.

初極狹，纔通人；復行數十步，豁然開朗。土地平曠，屋舍儼然。有良田，美池，桑，竹之屬，阡陌交通，雞犬相聞。其中往來種作，男女衣著，悉如外人；黃髮垂髫，並怡然自樂。見漁人，乃大驚，問所從來；具答之。便要還家，設酒，殺雞，作食。村中聞有此人，咸來問訊。自云：“先世避秦時亂，率妻子邑人來此絕境，不復出焉；遂與

外人間隔。”問今是何世。乃不知有漢，無論魏，晉！⁷⁴

As in the body of this succinct preface, it portrays the society in reclusion as a simple, spontaneous, harmonious social ideal. The methods of production are based on an agrarian mode. There are no rulers or political organizations in this land of freedom, equality and amity. The people living there are ingenious and hospitable to others, even to strangers. They are not only cut-off spatially but also live a non-calendar life, which separates them from the course of temporal history.

From these elements of agrarian economy, self-governance, good human nature, spatial reclusion and the sense of timelessness, the ultimate non-existence of Peach Blossom Spring is in the first place revealed.

Second, the way it and its people comply with the “Way” of nature to achieve a more easier and more gratifying life bears some features of the pre-More utopias in the West, which as Gregory Claeys and Lyman Tower Sargent have generalized, “These eutopias have certain features in common-simplicity, security, immortality or an easy death, unity among the people; unity between the people and God or the gods, abundance without labor, and no enmity between human beings and the other animals.”⁷⁵ However it would be a little bit abrupt to conclude that all the utopian features embodied “Peach Blossom Spring” reflect the pre-More paradigm.

In the following I shall give some clues showing the post-More Utopia

⁷⁴ TYMJJJ, 425.

⁷⁵ Claeys and Sargent, *The Utopia Reader*, 2.

characteristics of Peach Blossom Spring. First of all, in the very beginning of the story, we can see that the way this fisherman gets to Peach Blossom Spring is through accidentally getting lost in his travel.

In the Taiyuan period of Jin Dynasty, a guy from Wuling caught fish as his occupation. One day he travelled along the creek, lost track of how far he had gone away. Suddenly he encountered a forest of peach blossom, which extended hundreds of paces on either side of the bank with no mixed tress of other kinds. The fragrant grass was fresh and beautiful, and the falling blossoms/pedals were scattered everywhere.

晉太元中，武陵人，捕魚為業，緣溪行，忘路之遠近；忽逢桃花林，夾岸數百步，中無雜樹，芳草鮮美，落英繽紛。⁷⁶

This actually echoes the classical beginning of some post-More utopian/dystopia literary variations, such as Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, William Dean Howell's *A Travel from Altruria* and so on. The accidents happened on the way of travel or voyage in a sense provides the pathway to that non-existent land.

Furthermore, there are also clues of “human effort” in this passage. Any attentive reader may have noticed that when the fisherman asks the villagers how they entered into this place, their answer is to escape from the turmoil of Qin. This might remind us of some late eighteenth century's utopias which “promised of a society of greater virtue,

⁷⁶ TYMJJJ, 425.

equality, and social justice that was now projected onto a national scale.”⁷⁷

Last but not least, it is also noticeable that in Tao Qian’s “Returning to Dwell in the Garden and Field” poems, he explicitly expresses his favor of communicating with the farmers.

From time to time at the edge of the village, the villagers and I push aside grass
come and visit each other.

When we met there’s no mixed talk, we only talk about the growth of hemp and
mulberry.

時復墟曲人,披草共來往.相見無雜言,但道桑麻長.

On the one hand, the representation of “farmers” actually reflects Tao Qian’s sense of primitiveness, which bears features of the *noble savages* in the utopias of sensual gratification.⁷⁸ However on the other hand, Tao Qian’s favor of “noble savages” is also in accord with some post-More philosophers, for instance, Rousseau, who maintains that society always corrupts man’s natural goodness and thus the status of “noble savage” should be placed over civilized man.⁷⁹ Tao Qian’s communication with the farmers, or

⁷⁷ According to Claeys and Sargent, the late 18th century’s utopian literature trend was matched by the transformation of socialism after 1848 in North America and France. Utopian writings at that time offered the imaginative aspiration for social and human improvement and provided models for forward movement. Representative works include but not limited to: William Godwin’s *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, Antoine-Nicolas de Condorcet’s *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind*. For detailed examples, see Claeys and Sargent, *The Utopia Reader*, 141-180.

⁷⁸ *The Noble Savage* is a representative of primitive humankind as idealized in Romantic literature, symbolizing the innate goodness of humanity when free from the corrupting influence of civilization. According to Claeys and Sargent, in some case, utopias of sensual gratification are also peopled with contemporaneous but little-known noble savages. For details, see *The Utopia Reader*, 3.

⁷⁹ For detailed accounts of Jean Jacques Rousseau’s political philosophy, see *A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality in The Social Contract and Discourses*, trans. by G.D.H. Cole (New York, Dent Dutton, 1973).

the *noble savages*, actually reveals a very profound message about his political thought. I will elaborate this point later.

Here, we can see it is hard to determine whether Peach Blossom Spring is a pre-More utopia or a post-More utopia. In a sense, it bears features of both paradigms. But it is important to acknowledge that the main theoretical underpinning behind both types is that it constructs a better way of being on a non-existent land—these two fundamental features of Peach Blossom Spring ultimately supplements Tao’s transcendent political discourse.

3.2.2 Daoist Utopia VS Confucian Utopia

Now that I have compared Peach Blossom Spring with the Western categorizations, I will discuss and answer the second question: how could we place Tao’s political utopianism in the Chinese literary tradition of political ideals?

In A.C. Graham’s study on Nongjia 農家, he examines the origins of peasant utopianism in China, and points out the relevance between the Chinese farmstead poetry and the Western pastoral tradition.⁸⁰ In the case of “Peach Blossom Spring”, as Charles Yim-tze Kwong has also maintained, “while bearing a certain affinity and outward resemblance to the golden-age concept in Western pastoral, ‘Peach Blossom Spring’ is best seen in the cultural context of the poets’ vision, both in configuration and in the

⁸⁰ A.C. Graham, “The Nung-chia ‘School of the Tillers’ and the Origins of Peasant Utopianism in China,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 42, no.1 (1979): 66-100.

attitude behind its creation.”⁸¹ As Zhang Longxi articulates, the “Great Unity”大同 in *Liji* 禮記, the poem “Big Rat” 碩鼠 in the *Book of Poetry* 詩經, the “Drinking Songs” 飲酒詩 by Cao Cao 曹操, and some later variations created on the theme of Peach Blossom Spring can all come into the recognition of utopias. ⁸²In fact if one agrees with the idea that “utopianism generally is the imaginative projection, positive or negative, of a society that is different from the one in which the author lives,”⁸³ then the authoritarian society described in the Chapter 81 of *Dao De Jing*, which claims to keep the state small and people few, also stands out as a type of utopia (or dystopia).

With all the precedents and followers centered upon Peach Blossom Spring, the following questions naturally appear: how could we place Tao Qian’s political utopianism in the Chinese tradition of political utopias? What Chinese political thinking is dominant in constructing it?

Plenty of allusions echoing the famous Chinese classic texts are adopted in the language of “Peach Blossom Spring”. By examining the traditional Chinese philosophical and political ideas that are embedded in these texts, a new perspective to analyze the utopian vision in Peach Blossom Spring is available. In this manner, with all these different schools of thought applied, one might ask, which one is dominant in constructing this utopia? Simply put, is it a Confucian paradigm or a Daoist paradigm, or

⁸¹ Charles Yim-tze Kwong, *Tao Qian and the Chinese Poetic Tradition: The Quest for Cultural Identity* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 62.

⁸² Zhang, “The Utopian Vision, East and West.”

⁸³ Claeys and Sargent, *The Utopia Reader*, 1.

maybe a paradigm Tao Qian creates himself?

Based on a close analysis of the major literary allusions that Tao Qian adopt in constructing Peach Blossom Spring, I maintain that in large part, this utopia is more a Confucian ideal society.

First of all, the orderly land layout and farmland, and the relationship between the young and the elder in Peach Blossom Spring share common features with the ideal societies presented in *Mencius* and *Lij*, which have long been regarded as the representatives of Confucian thought.

“Peach Blossom Spring”

There were rich land, beautiful pond, mulberry and bamboo trees and the like. The paths intersected and led to each other, and the sound of chickens and dogs could be heard. The clothes of the men and women, who were going forth and back and planting/cultivating things among the fields, all looked like outsiders'. Yellow-haired ones and hanging-band ones, together they were content and happy of themselves.

土地平曠,屋舍儼然.有良田,美池,桑,竹之屬,阡陌交通,雞犬相聞.其中往來種作,男女衣著,悉如外人;黃髮垂髫,並怡然自樂.⁸⁴

Mencius I.A.3

If the mulberry is planted in every homestead of five *mu* of land, then those who

⁸⁴ TYMJJJ, 425;

are fifty can wear silk; if chickens, pigs and dogs do not miss their breeding season, then those who are seventy can eat meat; if each lot of a hundred *mu* is not deprived of labor during the busy seasons, then families with several mouths to feed will not go hungry. Exercise due care over the education provided by the village schools, and discipline the people by teaching them the duties proper to sons and younger brothers, and those whose heads have turned grey will not be carrying loads on the roads. When those who are seventy wear silk and eat meat and the masses are neither cold nor hungry, it is impossible for their prince not to be a true King.

五亩之宅,树之以桑,五十者可以衣帛矣.鸡豚狗彘之畜,无失其时,七十者可以食肉矣.百亩之田,勿夺其时,数口之家可以无饥矣;谨庠序之教,申之以孝悌之义,颁白者不负戴于道路矣.七十者衣帛食肉,黎民不饥不寒,然而不王者,未之有也.⁸⁵

Liji: “Great Union”

When the Grand Course was pursued, a public and common spirit ruled all under the sky; they chose men of talents, virtue, and ability; their words were sincere, and what they cultivated was harmony. Thus men did not love their parents only, nor treat as children only their own sons. A competent provision was secured for the aged till their death, employment for the able-bodied, and the means of

⁸⁵ M, 5; translation for D.C Lau, Mencius (New York: Penguin Books, 1970), 51-52.

growing up to the young. They showed kindness and compassion to widows, orphans, childless men, and those who were disabled by disease, so that they were all sufficiently maintained... This was what we call the Grand Union.

大道之行也,天下为公,选贤与能,讲信修睦.故人不独亲其亲,不独子其子,使老有所终,壮有所用,幼有所长,鰥,寡,孤,独,废疾者皆有所养,男有分,女有归....
是谓大同。⁸⁶

Another textual point that lends support to the Confucian influence of Tao's political thought is the allusion to the *Analects* 18.6, which is the source of Tao's use of "wenjin" 問津 at the end of "Peach Blossom Spring".

"Peach Blossom Spring"

Liu Ziji, a high-esteemed scholar from Nanyang, heard of this, joyfully planned to go. Yet without a result, after a while, he got sick and died. After that there was no one who asked for the ferry ford.

南陽劉子驥,高尚士也,聞之,欣然規往,未果,尋病終.後遂無問津者。⁸⁷

Analects 18.6

Chang Zu and Jie Ni were at work in the field together, when Confucius passed by them, and sent Zi Lu to inquire for the ford. Chang Zu said, "Who is he that

⁸⁶ *Liji yizhu* 禮記譯註, annotator. Yang Tianyu 楊天宇, vol. 1 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1997), 265; translation from James Legge, *The Li Ki*, ed. Max Müller. *Sacred Books of the East*, vol. 28, part 4 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1885), 300.

⁸⁷ TYMJJJ, 425.

holds the reins in the carriage there?” Zi Lu told him, “It is Kong Qiu.” “Is it not Kong Qiu of Lu?” asked he. “Yes,” was the reply, to which the other rejoined, “He knows the ford.” Zi Lu then inquired of Jie Ni, who said to him, “Who are you, sir?” He answered, “I am Zhong You.” “Are you not the disciple of Kong Qiu of Lu?” asked the other. “I am,” replied he, and then Jie Ni said to him, “Disorder, like a swelling flood, spreads over the whole empire, and who is he that will change its state for you? Rather than follow one who merely withdraws from this one and that one, had you not better follow those who have withdrawn from the world altogether?” With this he fell to covering up the seed, and proceeded with his work, without stopping. Zi Lu went and reported their remarks, when the Master observed with a sigh, “It is impossible to associate with birds and beasts, as if they were the same with us. If I associate not with these people-with mankind-with whom shall I associate? If right principles prevailed through the empire, there would be no use for me to change its state.”

長沮桀溺耦而耕.孔子過之,使子路問津焉.長沮曰:“夫執輿者爲誰?”子路曰:“爲孔丘.”曰:“是魯孔丘與?”曰:“是也.”曰:“是知津矣.”問於桀溺,桀溺曰:“子爲誰?”曰:“爲仲由.”曰:“是魯孔丘之徒與?”對曰:“然.”曰:“滔滔者,天下皆是也.而誰以易之?且而與其從辟人之士也,豈若從辟世之士哉?耰而不輟.”子路行以告,夫子憮然曰:“鳥獸不可與同群,吾非斯人之徒與而誰與?天

下有道,丘不與易也。”⁸⁸

Besides the fact that the same linguistic meaning of “jin”津 in both contexts are identical, the way Tao Qian alludes to the *Analects* does convey a political message. Briefly, in the *Analects* 18.6, Confucius is regarded to know the “jin”津 by the recluses Chang Zu and Jie Ni, even though his individual efforts turn out to be futile in the end. However he does not quit and is determined to participate in reforming and constructing an ideal society.

But in “Peach Blossom Spring”, the sad thing is that after the death of Liu Ziji, there is even no one who inquires for the “Jin”津 towards the ideal society, let alone who knows. Based on this notion, I argue that the profound implication underlying Tao Qian’s yearning for Peach Spring Blossom is his disappointment about his contemporary statesmen, including the Eastern Jin, Huanxuan and Liu Yu.

Furthermore, Tao Qian also holds a passive view of dynasty changes and expresses his sense of loss towards the Sage generation like Confucius as well as the ideal society that exists in a remote era. In the twentieth poem of his “Drinking Wine” series, he writes,

Fuxi and Shennong have left me for long,⁸⁹

In the world today there is no more truth.

Tirelessly he worked, the old man of Lu,⁹⁰

⁸⁸ A, 218-219.

⁸⁹ Fuxi 伏羲 and Shennong 神農 were the two sages in ancient times.

To sew on the patch and make it pure again.
Though the phoenix didn't come to nest,
Yet for the time being rites and music were renewed.
In the area between Zhu and Si his teaching comes to an end,⁹¹
And the flood swelled to the reckless Qin.
The Odes and the History had what crimes?
In one day they were burned to ashes.
Only these old graybeards,⁹²
For this cause they worked with devotion and industry.
How come in the later times,
The Six Classics have not a single friend?
All day the swift carriages come and go,
But no one comes to ask about the ford.
If I fail to drink quickly again,
I will be indebted to the cap I wear.
Only I regret there are many inappropriate mistakes,
And hope you will forgive a man who is drunk.

⁹⁰ The old man of Lu 魯 is Confucius.

⁹¹ Zhu 洙 and Si 泗 are two rivers in the ancient land area of Lu State 魯國, in today's Shandong 山東 Province, China.

⁹² Here the "old greybeards" refer to men like Fu Sheng 浮生, Sheng Pei 申培, Yuan Gusheng 轅固生, Han Ying 韓嬰 and the like, who lived in the early years of the Han dynasty, and made great contributions to restore and reserve the classic texts that were burned out in Qin period.

羲農去我久,舉世少復真.汲汲魯中叟,彌縫使其淳.
鳳鳥雖不至,禮樂暫得新.洙泗輟微響,漂流逮狂秦.
詩書復何罪?一朝成灰塵.區區諸老翁,為事誠殷勤.
如何絕世下,六籍無一親.終日馳車走,不見所問津.
若復不快飲,空負頭上巾.但恨多謬誤,君當恕醉人.⁹³

In this poem, Tao Qian depicts three stages of decline as the dynasties replaced each other. By examining the words he uses to describe the social ethos of each transformation, it is clear that according to Tao's mind, each latter stage is even worse than the former one. To be more specific, as Tao implies, the beginning of decline starts with the passing away of the Sages Fuxi 伏羲 and Shennong 神農, which marked the ending of the Golden Age when there is "truth"真. In the next stage, we have "the old man of Lu", who is of course Confucius, who works tirelessly to make the world pure again. What is worth noting is that in the third couplet, Tao's diction choice of "although"雖 and "for the time being"暫 quite straightforward expresses his attitude to Confucius's age. Apparently, to him, Confucius's age is a decline from the Golden Age, as shown by the fact that "no phoenix came to nest". In early Chinese civilization, "phoenix" is regarded as a symbol of an ideal political leader and it only appears when the society is under perfect rule. On the other hand, Tao presents a twist by pointing out the fact that in Confucius's age, at least "for the time being rites and music were renewed." However, in the next stage, when he moves to Han dynasty, with a portrait of the disaster occurred in Qin dynasty,

⁹³ TYMJJJ 265.

we see a picture when the society was at more chaotic unrest and the Odes and History were all burned out. Compared with Confucius's age, the decline is obvious, yet Tao still hints at a slim hope of restoring the ideal "Way", through pointing out in the lines that "Careful and devoted, the graybeards/Truly served the cause with all their strength." Then when he moves to the last stage, which of course refers to his living times, the most desperate scenario is revealed. Through the lines "All day the hurried carriages dash by/But no one comes to ask about the ford," we see a society of hustle and bustle, a society where no one even cares about the "ford".

To this point, we can see that no matter how transcendent Tao Qian's political thought is, it does possess a deep root in the world of Confucian political discourse. Furthermore, the Confucian influence actually plays the primary part in shaping Tao Qian's political thought. However, we can still find that Tao Qian's political thought still encompasses many currents that are not in coherent with Confucian tradition. In the next section, I will discuss the inconsistency between Tao Qian's political "Way" and Confucian thought, identify the causes, and seek out to present Tao's innovations in political thought.

3.3 Tao Qian's Innovative Political Thought

As noticed by many people, in Peach Blossom Spring, Tao Qian's most integrated vision of political ideal, there is no ruler. While in a Confucian's social ideal, the sage or

the king is indispensable. To me, this inconsistency brings out the first clue that Tao may have innovatively constructed his own political “Way”.

3.3.1 On Farming

The first characteristic of Tao’s political “Way” lies in his advocacy of the literati’s participating in farming.

Previous scholarship, along with my findings, has suggested that according to Tao Qian, the ideal economical system should be based on an agrarian mode, which is actually not rare in early Chinese civilization. As we can see, in Confucian, Daist and even Legalist ideals,⁹⁴ the agrarian mode has been the mainstream economical form in their proposed ideal society. While in the case of Tao Qian, what marks his uniqueness is his encouragement of literati’s engagements in farming, which at least, is against with Confucian thought.

A case in point is an anecdote collected in *Analects* 13.4:

Fan Chi asked to study farming. The Master said, “For that, I am not as good as an old farmer.” Then he asked to study to become a gardener. The Master said, “For that, I am not as good as an old gardener.” Fan Chi went out. The Master said, “What a petty man is Fan Xu!” If those in position love ceremony, then none of the common folk will dare be disrespectful; if those in position love

⁹⁴ For a detailed Legalist 法家 argument on the importance of agriculture, see Shang Yang’s 商鞅 “Agriculture and War” 農戰, in Shang Yang 商鞅, *The Book of Lord Shang* 商君書, ed. Wang Yunwu 王雲五 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yin shu guan, 1965).

doing what is right, then none of the common folk will dare not submit; if those in position love keeping their word, then none of the common folk will dare not be sincere. If things are done in this way, then all the common folk of the four quarters will come bearing their children swaddled on their back—what use, then for farming?

樊遲請學稼,子曰:吾不如老農.請學為圃.曰:吾不如老圃.樊遲出.子曰:小人哉,樊須也!上好禮,則民莫敢不敬;上好義,則民莫敢不服;上好信,則民莫敢不用情.夫如是,則四方之民襁負其子而至矣,焉用稼?⁹⁵

From this passage, we can clearly see that Confucius holds a quite disapproving attitude towards farming, particularly among his educated disciples. Even if one lives in straits, Confucius still argues that, “As a gentleman, what you should be concerned with is the ‘way’, rather than poverty.” 君子憂道不憂貧.⁹⁶

As one of Confucius’ disciples, actually his favorite one, Yan Yuan 顏回 stands out as the strongest representative of this living philosophy. In *Analects 6.11*, there is a quotation like this:

Confucius said, what a fine man Hui was! One container of rice, one dipperful of drink, living in a back alley—others couldn’t have endured the gloom of these, but he never changed his feeling of happiness. As for a fine man, it must be Hui!
子曰:賢哉回也!一簞食,一瓢飲,在陋巷.人不堪其憂,回也不改其樂.賢哉回

⁹⁵ A, 151-152.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 190.

也!⁹⁷

From this, we can see that the reason why Confucius thinks so highly of Yan Hui is partly has to do with Yan Hui's resolved pursuit of the "Way" even though he was inflicted with poverty.

Actually in Tao Qian literary works, there are also many depictions of people, including recluses and some Confucius disciples, who firmly live by this teaching. In his "In Praise of Impoverished Men" 詠貧士 poem series, Tao Qian expresses his admirations of these gentlemen who in content to be poor and defend the "Way" 安貧守道. While with a closer examination, one can find that there is a nuanced difference among Tao Qian's attitudes on Confucius disciples and that on the recluses.

An example can be found in the eleventh poem of the "Drinking Wine" series. As Tao writes,

Yan Hui is praised for being humane,

Gentleman Rong is said to have the "Wsy".

The one who was often empty died young,

The one who was always hungry lived his life long.

顏生稱為仁,榮公言有道.屢空不獲年,長饑至於老.⁹⁸

Here we can see, the distinctive difference lies between Yan Hui and Gentleman

⁹⁷ Ibid, 65.

⁹⁸ TYPJJ, 248.

Rong⁹⁹ is that Yan Hui lives in complete “emptiness” 空, which resulted to his short life; while Gentleman Rong, although lives in straits, manages to live his life long. Who is Gentleman Rong? If we look at Gentleman Rong’s identity within a broader scope of the people alike, namely the recluses, we can see that the crucial difference between Yan Hui and these people is that Yan Hui keeps a complete distance from farming, while the latter group to some extent, participates in farming in their reclusion. Moreover, it is obvious to see that Tao Qian is more inclined to the living philosophy of the recluses.

A strong case that can show Tao Qian’s transformation can be seen in the second poem of the “In Early Spring of the Year 403 Two Poems in Praise of Ancient Farmers” series 癸卯歲始春懷古田舍二首. As I have quoted the first two couplets before,

The Ancient Teacher left a teaching,

It is the “Way” not poverty that man should care about.

As I look forward it is hard to reach,

I change my mind and strive to do farming for long.

先师有遗训,忧道不忧贫. 瞻望邈难逮,转欲志长勤.¹⁰⁰

The verb “change”轉 clearly suggests the transformation of attitude in Tao Qian about how a literati should deal with farming.

A close look at the first poem of the “In Early Spring of the Year 403 Two Poems in Praise of Ancient Farmers” series 癸卯歲始春懷古田舍二首 will be illuminating.

⁹⁹ Gentleman Rong refers to Rong Qiqi 榮啟期, a recluse in the Spring and Autumn Period 春秋(770-476BC).

¹⁰⁰ TYMJJJ, 191.

In the past, I have heard about farming in the southern land,

But at that time, I have not experienced.

There was the man who often went empty,

And how could I escape from spring's prodding?

At early dawn I hitch my wagon,

And start along the road, my mind detached.

The birds sing of their joy in the new season,

A gentle breeze brings surplus good.

Cold bamboo covers the overgrown path,

The place is so remote that other people are far away.

Therefore the Old Man with the Staff,

Was content that never returned to the world.

As for this I am ashamed of Confucius's teaching.

However what I am keeping is not wholly worthless.

在昔聞南畝,當年竟未踐.屢空既有人,春興豈自免.

夙晨裝吾駕,啟塗情已緬.鳥弄歡新節,冷風送餘善.

寒竹被荒蹊,地為罕人遠.是以植杖翁,悠然不復返.

即理愧通識,所保詎乃淺.¹⁰¹

As noticed by many readers, this poem was written when Tao Qian returned home

¹⁰¹ TYMJJJ, 187.

and for the first time in his life, engaged in farming.¹⁰² It is also worth noting that Tao expresses his admiration for the “Old Man with the Staff” 植杖翁, which as mentioned before, refer to the two recluses Chang Zu and Jie Ni.

Tao Qian’s adjustment of the Confucian idea “Being concerned with the ‘Way’ rather than poverty” 憂道不憂貧 is more straightforwardly shown in his poems that he depicts himself as a farmers, or explicitly advices people, particularly literati, to participate in farming.

From my standpoint, this transformation of Tao’s attitude has to do with three factors. The first one has to do with the chaotic political reality at his times, which Tao thinks as beyond help, considering the fact that the “Way” is hard to reach and there is even no one ask about the ford 津 to the “Way”.

Second, it is inspired by his thoughts on an ideal economical system based on a primitive, agrarian mode. In the poem “An Exhortation to Farming” 勸農, in which Tao Qian traces through the farming tradition in Sage generations, and claims the importance and prestige of taking agricultural as occupation. To me, Tao Qian actually restores the ancient farming tradition in literati that has been disapproved by Confucius.

Third, perhaps most importantly, it provides another “Way” for Tao Qian to dwell in the political world. In other words, “farming” has also become a taking of political position. In the end of the “An Exhortation to Farming” 勸農 poem, we see Tao Qian writes,

¹⁰² PTC, 108.

Confucius was dedicated to morality,
And Fan Xu was considered as base.
Dong rejoiced himself in music and books,¹⁰³
And never stepped inside his garden.
If you can be that transcendent,
Then embark on the lofty path.
Would I dare not to smooth my lapels?
And respectfully sing the praises of your virtue.
孔耽道德,樊須是鄙.董樂琴書,田園不履.
若能超然,投跡高軌.敢不斂衽,敬讚德美.¹⁰⁴

Here we can see, by proposing the “Way” of engaging in farming, Tao actually offers a concrete way to live upon when the society is no good, even though deep in heart he might still have admiration of Confucian’s transcendence in politics.

Taking “Farming” as a political position actually is not first invented by Tao Qian. If you still remember, in *Analects 18.6*, there are the two recluses Chang Zu and Jie Ni, who also recommend to Confucius that when the society is in disorder and beyond help, you should retreat and keep your own integrity. In Confucian thought, there are the two currents of thought concerned with how literati should act under different social circumstances. Simply put, when the society is in accord with the “Way”, you should

¹⁰³ Dong, refers to Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒, a Han dynasty Confucian scholar.

¹⁰⁴ TYMJJJ, 37.

advance 進 politically and fulfill your responsibilities. While when the “Way” is lost, you may just retire 退, and prevent your personal “Way” from collapse.

In Tao Qian’s literary works, he also mentions these two choices. In the poem “A Farewell to Yin Xian’an, Secretary at Jinan”與殷晉安別, there are the lines, “And loquacity and silence are different situations by nature/Still we should differentiate them.” 語默自殊勢,亦知當乖分. Here we can see, “loquacity”語 and “silence”默 are representations of the political advancement and retirement.

What is also remarkable to me is that in *Analects*, even though the society is in a mess, Confucius is still striving to restore the “Way”. In other words, he still takes the advance 進 role in a disordered society. Undeniably, this spirit of “knowing there is nothing that can be done but keeps on trying”知其不可而為之 reflects the highest virtue¹⁰⁵ possessed by the ultimate sage. However, not every literati can behave as morally and firmly as Confucius. So when it comes to common literati, it is Tao Qian who establishes the “Way” of being a Confucian recluse that solves the existential dilemma for numerous scholars, statesmen, and poets in late generations.¹⁰⁶

3.3.2 On Political/Social Institutions

The second characteristic of Tao Qian’s political “Way” has to do with his attitude toward political/social institutions.

¹⁰⁵ A, 138.

¹⁰⁶ Swartz has also provided illuminating ideas about Tao Qian’s influence as a recluse; see *Reading Tao Yuanming*, 23-48.

As argued by many people, in a Confucian's social ideal, the sage or the king is indispensable, yet in Peach Blossom Spring, there are no rulers at all. What's more, in the "Peach Blossom Spring" poem 桃花源記詩, one can easily find that many more institutional elements are missing his this political ideal. In the sixth couplet, we have the lines "From spring silkworms came the long silk thread/On the fall harvest there was no king's tax." 春蠶收長絲, 秋熟靡王稅法¹⁰⁷ In the eighth couplet, there are the lines "Their ritual vessels were of old design/And no new fashions in the cloths they wore." 俎豆獨古法, 衣裳無新制.¹⁰⁸ In the eleventh couplet, there are the lines "Although they had no calendar to keep records/The four seasons still filled out a year themselves." 雖無紀歷志, 四時自成歲.¹⁰⁹ Here we can see Tao Qian basically negates the necessity of tax, clothes-making standard and calendar in his ideal world.

In addition to this, it is also noticeable that Tao Qian's attitude towards social institutions is also very ambiguous. In his autobiography "Biography of Gentleman Five Willows" 五柳先生傳, he writes,

As for the gentleman, we don't know where he is from, nor do we know his name or surname. There are five willow trees nearby his house; therefore he styled himself as "five-willow gentleman". He is leisurely quiet and does not speak much. He pursues no glory or material goods. He is fond of reading, but

¹⁰⁷ TYMJJJ, 425.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

does not inquire about complete understanding extreme details.

先生不知何許人也,亦不詳其姓字.宅邊有五柳樹,因以為號焉.閑靜少言,不慕榮利.好讀書,不求甚解;每有會意,便欣然忘食.¹¹⁰

The line “He is fond of reading, but does not inquire about complete understanding extreme details” is of vital importance to this case. As Ashmore argues, “The phrase ‘*huiyi*’ 會意, or ‘meeting of minds/intentions,’ clearly plays a key role in that particular moment of spontaneity.”¹¹¹ As it seems to me, it discloses Tao Qian’s negative attitude towards formal education, which can also be a signal showing his anti-attitude towards political institution, since formal education back then was a politicized process to select the most fit for the people in power.

From above all, we can see that Tao Qian holds a quite disapproving attitude towards any political/social institutions. As many have argued, this can be attributed to his reflections towards the political environment in his times. As Chen Yinke articulates, it is the poor living circumstances of Tao and his contemporaries that shook their belief in government and tends to deny any form of political organizations.¹¹² This is not hard to conclude considering that fact that Tao Qian projects his political ideal in the primitiveness and when he realizes that the Sage generation has gone by he seems to become an anarchist.

¹¹⁰ TYMJJJ, 444.

¹¹¹ Robert Ashmore, *The Transport of Reading: Text and Understanding in the World of Tao Qian (365-427)* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2010), 16.

¹¹² Ch’ en, Yin-k’ o 陳寅恪 “Tan Yuanming zhi sixiang yu qingtán zhi guanxi” 陶淵明之思想與清談之關係. In Chen’ Yin-k’ o xiansheng wenshi lunji, 1:381-407. (Hong Kong: Wenwen Publications, 1972).

Moreover, to me, another strain of thought that has also shaped Tao's view on kingship has much to do with the influence of the Daoist "Way". This state of *laissez-faire*¹¹³ in Tao Qian's political ideal easily reminds us of the *wuwei* 無為 tendency in Daoism, which has been identified as the librarian strain of Daoist political thought by many scholars. However, it is important to note that Daoist tradition also encompasses an authoritarian strain. Hence when claiming Daoist influence on Tao Qian's political thought, it is crucial to point out which current of thought is identified with.

For example, In the Chapter 80 of *Dao De Jing*, there is a picture of a political ideal in Daoist paradigm.

Make the state small and make people few. Make the state possess tens of hundreds of instruments yet not use them. Make the people value death and not distantly move. Even though they have boats and carriages, there's no place to ride them in. Even though they have armors and spears, they have no occasion to use them. Make the people return to tying knots in rope and employ them. Let them think their food is delicious, their clothes is beautiful, their dwelling place is peaceful, and their customs are fun. The people in the small state can see the neighboring state, hearing the sound of fowls and dogs. The people grow old until death, they don't communicate with neighboring state.

¹¹³ The phrase *laissez-faire* is French that refers to an economical environment in which transactions between private parties are free from intrusive government restrictions, tariffs, and subsidies, with only enough regulations to protect property rights.

小國寡民.使有什伯之器而不用;使民重死而不遠徙.雖有舟輿,無所乘之,雖有甲兵,無所陳之.使民復結繩而用之,甘其食,美其服,安其居,樂其俗.鄰國相望,雞犬之聲相聞,民至老死,不相往來.¹¹⁴

Any attentive reader may notice that in this social ideal, there are similar underpinnings that also appear in Peach Blossom Spring. For example, the way people tie knots to keep a record of time. However, it cannot be ignored that this whole passage is addressed to the ruler, as implied by the verbs “make”使. Thus we know that unlike Peach Blossom Spring, which is a libertarian, natural society without any institutions, the one in *Dao De Jing* is more an authoritarian one where the ruler controls everything.

The discrepancy between Tao Qian’s idea on institution and the authoritarian strain of Daoist thought is also shown in their different views on knowledge. From many of Tao’s poems as well as his biography, we know that although Tao Qian is against formal education system, he is still in favor of learning knowledge and reading. But in Daoist thought, one can see a strong tendency of anti-intellectualism 反智, which is closely related with the ruler’s need to keep people simple and easy to use. For example, in *Dao De Jing*, there is a passage, “As for the ancient people who were good at acting the Way, they don’t rely on enlightening people, but relying on making them stupid.”古之善為道者,非以明民,將以愚之.¹¹⁵ Actually this tendency of “make people stupid”愚民 grows into an important strategy for later Legalist to employ the people to undertake agriculture

¹¹⁴ DDJ 73; my translation.

¹¹⁵ DDJ, 63-64; my translation.

and warfare. ¹¹⁶ Thus it is crucial to remember that Tao Qian's anti-institution attitude is based on the "Way" that how Daoism perceives nature and human affairs work, but not the authoritarian "Way" in Daoist thought.

Through close analysis, it becomes clear to me that in the framework of Confucian tradition, Tao Qian actually adjusts his political thought with considerations to his contemporaneous social situation, the lost farming tradition among sage people, and the librarian strain of the Daoist "Way". Thus, I argue that by selectively absorbing, critically refashioning, and innovatively synthesizing both strains of thought, Tao Qian constructs his own political "Way".

¹¹⁶ For detailed discourse, see Shang Yang 商鞅, *Shangjunshu* 商君書.

CHAPTER 4

TAO QIAN'S RELIGIOUS UTOPIA

Having discussed how Tao Qian solves the crisis of the political “Way” in his political utopia, I shall move to the second focus of this study—how does Tao deal with the crisis of his personal existential “Way”? In this chapter, I first look into the multiple aspects of the existential plight that is embodied in the crisis of the “Way.” While the crisis of the political “Way” is also related with the existential plights that Tao Qian has to face in his personal life, my analysis in this chapter is more focused on the concrete real-life problems Tao confronts as an ordinary person. First of all, I put forward that this crisis is ultimately rooted in the discrepancy between the Way of Heaven 天道 and the Way of Man 人道. Second, I discuss the concrete existential problems that Tao Qian faces in this crisis and how he deals with them. Third, as I notice that in Tao’s response to the crisis, the key for him is to find or construct a place where he can live in accord with the Way of Heaven, particularly with a focus on immortality. Thus I examine his efforts in establishing his religious utopia in a response to the core of this crisis.

4.1 The Way of Heaven and the Way of Man

As I have argued in Chapter 1, Tao Qian’s view on the “Way” operated in nature and cosmos is primarily identified with Daoist thought. In the section, I present with a more

detailed analysis to see what strains of Daoist thought on the Way of Heaven have influenced Tao Qian.

The first strain of Daoist thought is from *Zhuangzi*. Ample allusions to *Zhuangzi* can be found in Tao Qian's poetic works. According to the Chapter 11 of *Zhuangzi*, "What is this thing called the Way? There is the Way of Heaven and the way of man. To rest in inaction, and command respect—this is the Way of Heaven. To engage in action and become entangled in it—this is the Way of Man. 何謂道? 有天道,有人道。無為而尊者,天道也; 有為而累者, 人道也。¹¹⁷ In this framework, we can see that the Way of Man is carried out through action and entanglement. To be more specific and relating it with Tao Qian's works, I argue that to Tao Qian, the first aspect of his existential crisis has to do with the "entanglement" 累 in his life, basically including poverty, laborious farm work, social frustration and longing for fame.

The second strain of Daoist thought is of course from *Dao De Jing*, in which the Way of Heaven is depicted as a pre-existing, inexhaustible, multiplex, and abstruse order.¹¹⁸ As shown in Chapter 1, to Tao Qian, the core characteristic of the Way of Heaven is that it exists forever, so do the cosmos and nature that operate in accord with it. Moreover, it moves forward without stop. Based on this notion, Tao Qian expresses his open attitude toward fame, wealth and other human affairs, as he believes that in this aspect, the Way of Man should be in consistent with the Way of Heaven. Yet on the flip

¹¹⁷ ZZJS, 401; translation from Burrton Watson, *The Complete Works of Zhuang Tzu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 83.

¹¹⁸ See Chapter 1, 4,7, 21 of *Dao De Jing* for these descriptions.

side, Tao Qian also realizes that unlike nature and cosmos, human life is transitory. And to me, this raises the second aspect, as well as the most fundamental aspect, of the existential crisis to Tao Qian—the shortness of life in front of the infinite lavishness of nature. As shown in the fifteenth poem of Tao’s “Drinking Wine” series, “How endlessly vast the universe is/As for men few live to a hundred” 宇宙一何悠，人生少至百。¹¹⁹ Moreover, it also lies at the heart of Tao Qian’s response to this crisis, which ultimately strives to achieve immortality in accord with the Way of Heaven.

4.2 The Personal, Existential Crisis of the “Way”

In this chapter, I mainly discuss the concrete existential problems that Tao Qian is inflicted with the “entanglement”累 of the Way of Man. Basically, there are four themes: poverty, laborious work, social frustration, and longing for fame, the last two should be considered as mental entanglements.

4.2.1 Poverty

Throughout Tao Qian’s life, poverty was a recurring theme. As Tao writes in many occasions, it is poverty that spurred him to serve in government, even though it is against his nature; moreover, it is also poverty that has forced him to reconsider Confucian’s idea on agricultural labor and gradually shaped his own view on farming.

¹¹⁹ TYMJJJ, 255.

As I have argued in the previous chapter, in Tao Qian's political utopia, farming does not only stand out as a mode of production, it also represents a specific taking of political position. Similarly, in coping with the existential crisis of the "Way", Tao Qian also places much emphasis on farming. Moreover, from close reading, it is noticeable to see that farming has also performed a two-fold service for Tao on a personal level. First, it provides a way for him to live a self-sufficient life and second, it offers a way to solve the identity crisis of Tao Qian, since it is a way Tao Qian can use to cultivate his mind and guard the "Way". I will return to this point later.

4.2.2 Laborious Farm Work

While in most poems, it seems that Tao Qian quite enjoys his life as a farmer, here I would like to draw your attention to the poem "Written in the Ninth Month of 410 On Harvesting the Early Rice in the West Field" 庚戌歲九月中於西田獲早稻, in which Tao adopts a more realistic view and plainly presents the hardships he experiences during farm work. As he writes,

As for human life, it is geared to the "Way",
Clothing and food firm up its ends,
From early spring I undertook the ordinary farm work,
And now the yield of a year is here to be seen.
I left at dawn and tirelessly did my work,
Returned at sunset, with sheaves on my shoulders.

The hills are shrouded with frost and dew,

Here the air also first turns cold.

Is a farmer's life not bitter?

We can't get rid of these difficulties.

My four limbs are truly weary,

Other troubles should be spared us.

I washed and rest beneath the eaves,

With wine relaxing my face and breast.

Chang Zu, Jie Ni—so long ago,

A thousand years, and the heart is the same.

I only wish to go on like this;

Farming is not what I will complain.

人生歸有道,衣食固其端.孰是都不營,而以求自安.

開春理常業,歲功聊可觀.晨出肆微勤,日入負耒還.

山中饒霜露,風氣亦先寒.田家豈不苦,弗獲辭此難.

四體誠乃疲,庶無異患幹.盥濯息簷下,鬥酒散襟顏.

遙遙沮溺心,千載乃相關.但願長如此,躬耕非所嘆.¹²⁰

It is noticeable that in Hightower's translation, the first two lines are like this: Men are ready for morality/Only when they are fed and clothed. 人生歸有道,衣食固其端. While Hightower's translation of "dao" 道 as mortality does make sense with

¹²⁰ TYMJJJ, 217-218.

consideration to the general philosophical discourse represented, I translate it into “Way”. For one thing, “way” can mean “road”, which fits in the meaning of the metaphor of “clothing and food firm up its ends” in the next line. For another, it helps bring into the philosophical idea of “personal existential way” to the understanding of this poem, which actually can be regarded as Tao Qian’s allusion to Zhuangzi’s idea on Human Way.

Except for this diction issue, it is clear that the primary focus of this poem revolves around the struggles and hardship experienced by Tao Qian in farm work. Though somewhat unpleasantly, we have to admit that in the end Tao has coped with poverty and the living problems beyond it quite well. He even restates his admiration of Chang Zu and Jie Ni at the end of this poem, and claims his strong will to keep the profession of farming.

4.2.3 Social Frustration

For Tao Qian, as we can see from his literary works, the crisis of social frustration is mainly resulted from two causes. The first one, as I have discussed in Chapter 3, is rooted in the crisis of the political “Way” in his times, which culminates in his retirement from the political world and thus fails to fulfill his personal political ambition to “do deeds”立功, and achieves a worldly fame as a devotee of the Confucian school.¹²¹

An example can be found in his poem “In Praise of the Three Good Men”詠三良. In the first two couplets of this poem, Tao Qian actually depicts an image of a typical

¹²¹ In Confucian thought, there are “Three Immortalities” to achieve fame 三不朽, including “do moral powers”立德, “do deed”立功, and “do words”立言.

Confucian official.

I dusted my cap and came through the fords,¹²²

But I fear that I have missed the proper time.

I devote myself wholly to the government service,

And always worried that my deed is not enough.

彈冠乘通津，但懼時我遺。服勤盡歲月，常恐功愈微。¹²³

From this and other poems Tao Qian wrote during his government service, we can see that there is the slim implication of Tao's hope to "do deeds" 立功 in his times. Actually his expression of his disappointment about his living political world, as well as his efforts in establishing a political utopia, and the way he regards "farming" as a taking of political position, can all still be viewed as his implicit way of "do deeds".

The second cause that also results in Tao's social frustration has to do with his sense of isolation. In many poems, Tao has expressed himself as an outsider in his times. A vivid example can be seen from the metaphors he has used to represent himself. In the fourth poem of the "Drinking Wine" series, when describing his being in the worldly space, Tao Qian compares himself as "a bird that lost his flock" 失群鳥 and "a lonely pine" 孤生松. It is also noticeable to see that in the poem "A Homing Bird" 歸鳥, after Tao retires from the world and dwell in the garden and field, he depicts himself as "a homing bird" 歸鳥.

¹²² The "cap-dusting" 彈冠 gesture usually implies one's taking office, so does the action "going through the fords" 通津.

¹²³ TYMJJJ, 347.

A more direct example is drawn from the ninth poem of the “Drinking Wine” series.

In it, Tao Qian records or maybe makes up a conversation with a farmer.

In the morning I heard a knock at my door,
Put my gown on upside down I opened the door.
I asked who it was,
It's a farmer who has good intentions.
With a jar of wine he came from a distance to visit me,
Wondering why I was at odds with the times.
“Dressed in rags and live under the thatched roof,
It is not the place worth your dwelling.
The entire world values being the same with others,
I hope you also stir up the mud.”
“I am deeply thankful to what you have said,
As for my nature, it lacks what can be harmonized.
Though I can learn to pull the reins,
To work against my nature isn't it a mistake?
Well now let's just joyfully have a drink of this together,
My carriage cannot be turned back now.”

清晨聞叩門，倒裳往自開。問子為誰與？田父有好懷。

壺漿遠見候，疑我與時乖。“褴褛茅簷下，未足與高樓。

一世皆尚同，願君汨其泥。”“深感父老言，稟氣寡所諧。

紆轡誠可學,違已詎非迷.且共歡此飲,吾駕不可回.¹²⁴

For what has been noticed by many people, the character farmer in this poem actually alludes to the fisherman that appears in Chuci 楚辭. And his suggestion to Tao Qian echoes with the fisherman's to Qu Yuan 屈原(352-281BC)—If all the world is muddy, why not stir up the mud and beat the weaves. And if all the men are drunk, why not sup their dregs and swill their lees? Why get yourself exiled because of your deep thoughts and your fine aspirations? 世人皆濁,何不漚其泥而揚其波?眾人皆醉,何不哺其糟而歠其醢? 何故深思高舉,自令放為?¹²⁵ In this poem we can also see that Tao Qian, similar with his predecessor Qu Yuan 屈原, clearly states out his nature is no in harmony with the society, and rather than engaging himself in that muddy world as the well-intentioned farmer suggests, he prefer to live under the thatched roof, dressed in rags.

To this point, one can see that through retiring from the world and sticking to his nature, Tao Qian reconciles the crisis of the “Way” intensified by social frustration. Moreover, we also see that in his dwelling in the garden and field, he frequently communicates with local villagers, and greatly rejoices himself. This can also be viewed as an outlet for Tao Qian's previous social frustration, as it rebuilds his social circle, in which he is not an outsider any longer.

¹²⁴ TYMJJJ, 243.

¹²⁵ Chuci Jizhi 楚辭集注, Qu Yuan 屈原, Zhu Xi 朱熹, annotator (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1979), 113; translation from PTC, 138.

4.2.4 Longing for Fame

The longing for fame is perhaps one of the most important passions held by traditional Confucian literati. As I have pointed out before, there are three ways to achieve an immortal fame in history: moral powers, deeds and words (立德,立功,立言).

A case in point can be found in Cao Ci's 曹丕(187-226)'s discussion:

Therefore writers of ancient times engaged themselves in ink and brush, let their intent be seen in their compositions; without depending on a good historian's accounts nor a patronage of the powerful, their fames were handed down to later generations on their own.

是以古之作者，寄身于翰墨，見意于篇籍，不假良史之辭，不托飛馳之勢，而聲名自傳于后。¹²⁶

In the above passage, clearly “relying on writing” parallels with “words”立言, “relying on a good historian nor on patronage of the powerful” implies the idea of “moral powers”立德, and “relying on a reputation for their own force” hints at the idea of “deed”立功.

In the case of Tao Qian, first of all, we can find that although he depicts himself as a retiring recluse and usually claims that fame is transitory and unattainable, the longing for fame is still deeply embedded in his life philosophy. In the tenth poem of the “Drinking Wine 飲酒”series, he writes,

¹²⁶ Cao Pi 曹丕, “On Literature” 论文, in *Wenxuan* 文选, ed. Xiao Tong 萧统 (Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1960), 1128.

In the past I had a distant trip,
To the shore of the Eastern Sea.
The road was circuitous and long,
Beset by wind and waves in the middle of the road.
Who made me take this trip?
It seems to be forced by hunger.
I gave my all to arrange for a full eat,
When just a bit was surplus to me.
Fearing that it is not a way to get good fame,
I stopped my carriage and came back to my leisurely dwelling.
在昔曾遠遊,直至東海隅.道路迴且長,風波阻中途.
此行誰使然?似為飢所驅. 傾身營一飽,少許便有餘.
恐此非名計,息駕歸閑居.¹²⁷

As noticed by many people, in this poem, Tao Qian compares his political life as a “distant trip”, which is circuitous, long, always beset by wind and waves and forced by hunger. What is remarkable to me is that in the last lines, Tao Qian attributes his retirement from political world to his fear that “it is not a good way to get good fame”. Based on this, we can realize that Tao Qian does possess a keen pursuit in fame.

Moreover, we can see that “do deeds” 立功 is not a successful way for him to achieve a historical fame, though with my analysis of his abstract political thought, I do

¹²⁷ TYMJJJ, 246.

believe much more credits can be given to him in terms of his “deeds” on a theoretical level. Thus then, where can he project his hope for an enduring fame? The answer is quite clear—through “do words”立言.

While obtaining fame through writing is not rare in Chinese history, what really appeals to me is the way Tao Qian avoids direct self-praise and sophisticatedly establishes an ideal, trustworthy picture of himself for future readers in his writing. As I have argued in the introduction chapter of this study, this is related with the complex “autobiographical” self that Tao Qian constructs in his writing.

As Stephen Owen points out, “T’ao Ch’ien, the poet-autobiographer, perfected a new genre, apparent in his titles: he speaks of himself, as a particular historical being, to no one particular and hence to anyone at any time.”¹²⁸ To me, the anonymous readership that Tao Qian’s literary works address to does imply that his works possess the characteristic of futurity, which ultimately creates a reader group for his “words”. As he writes in the poem “For my Cousin Jingyuan, Written in the Twelfth Month, 403” 癸卯歲十二月中作與從弟敬遠, “I’ll let my intent ride outside the words/Who but you can interpret this?寄意一言外,茲契誰能別.”¹²⁹

Another feature as shown in Tao Qian’s “words” is that he pays close attention to infuse into an ahistorical sense of his “autobiographical” voice, thus makes it a universal and perennial discourse, which also appeals a larger readership. An example can be seen

¹²⁸ Owen, “The Self’s Perfect Mirror: Poetry as Autobiography,” In Lin and Owen, eds.71-102.

¹²⁹ TYMJJJ, 194.

in his famous autobiography “The Story of Five-Willow Gentleman”. From the very beginning he makes his identity ambiguous by saying “As for the gentleman, we don’t know where he comes from, nor do we know his name or surname” 先生不知何許人也，亦不詳其姓字。¹³⁰ Tao Qian has the instinct that biographical information may at the end wear off with the flowing time. However, the admirable nature and spirit may last forever, then that is what he should construct in his autobiography. As we know, history has proved that Tao Qian’s strategy works—he is perhaps one of the most read, talked, studied ancient Chinese poets, as well as one of the most important models for Chinese literati.

4.3 A Religious Utopia in the Sacred World

In the previous section, I have discussed how Tao Qian deals with the existential plights as to poverty, laborious farm work, social frustration and pursuit of fame. As it seems to me, Tao Qian develops an quite effective therapy for these real-life “entanglements” 累 in his political utopia, by means of his political discourse and literary writing. In this regard, I argue that the first aspect of the existential crisis has been well tended.

However, when it comes to the concerns about the shortness of human life, namely the second aspect of Tao’s existential crisis, the political utopia seems to meet its end.

¹³⁰ TYMJJJ,444.

For what is essential to note, the core of the political utopia is to reestablish an order, or the “Way” between human beings. In other words, it solves the crisis within the realm of the Way of Men. While in the second aspect of the crisis, Tao’s mission is to establish an attainable vision of immortality, that is to say, to reconcile the fundamental discrepancy between the Way of Men and the Way of Heaven. Thus this time, he has to look beyond earthly life, and seek out to establish an order in as much accord as possible with the Way of Heaven. As I have laid out in my Introduction chapter, this is the ground that opens a new door to understand Tao Qian—the religious perspective.

In this section, I will start out by examining if a vision of religion does exist in Tao Qian’s writing, then I analyze how Tao constructs or manifests his religious utopia. Finally I will introduce Tao Qian’s attitude towards his religious utopia and look into his attitude and approaches to the sacred world.

4.3.1 The Profane and the Sacred

Before examining Tao Qian’s religious utopia, I will first refresh your memory concerning the concepts of the profane and the sacred as I have introduced in the methodology chapter of this study.

Consensus views have held that the “sacred” refers to the realm beyond earthly life, the supernatural place that fulfills changeless perfection, order, power and beauty. While on the contrary, the “profane” refers to the entire changeable, chaotic, often dreary realm of ordinary human earthly life, stained by struggle and suffering and bordered by death.

In the connection, we can regard the “Way” that Tao Qian constructs in his political utopia as a profane order. As a matter of fact, while most people have achieved a consensus understanding towards of the “profane”, the “sacred” has been disputed for a long time. As I have included both Burger’s and Elide’s theories in the methodology chapter, now it’s time to answer the question: which side does Tao Qian’s religious thought take?

While Berger’s analysis is convincing to some degree, I am falling into Eliade’s argument and hold that to Tao Qian, the sacred order is a pre-existing phenomenon, but not something constructed, as Berger would argue it as an attempt to achieve a more solid self-externalization in the profane world.

According to Eliade, the sacred always manifest itself as a reality of a wholly different order from “natural” realities.¹³¹ Based on this notion, two elements are indispensable to determine the existence of a sacred world, with the first one being the ultimate independent existence of the sacred order, and the second being the multiplicity of the manifestation. This *act of manifestation*, as Eliade proposes, is *hierophany*. And to him, the history of religion is constituted by a great number of hierophanies, by manifestations of sacred realities.¹³² To be more specific, as he summarizes, the manifestations of the sacred mainly include the following aspects: first, the sacred time and space; second, the sacredness of nature; and last, the sanctified life of human beings.

¹³¹ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 10.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 11.

In the case of Tao Qian, it's obvious that he not only believes in the ultimate independent existence of the sacred order, but also in his literary works, there are ample manifestations of the sacred order, including but not limited to the sacred space and time, the sacredness of nature, as well as the sanctified life. In the following pages, I will offer a close analysis of these three aspects.

4.3.2 Sacred Space and Time

As argued by Eliade, for sacred experience, space is not homogeneous; he experiences interruptions, breaks in it; some parts of space are qualitatively different others.¹³³ On the contrary, for profane experience, space is homogenous and neutral; no break qualitatively differentiates the various parts of its mass.¹³⁴ Similarly, for sacred experience, time is also neither homogeneous nor continuous. In terms of the “non-homogeneous” characteristic of time, it refers to the fact that there are both the episodes of sacred time, for example the time of festivals; as well as the episodes of profane durations that are without any religious meaning involved. In terms of the “non-continuous” characteristic of time, it refers to the fact that unlike profane time, sacred time is “indefinitely recoverable, indefinitely repeatable”.¹³⁵

Bearing these in mind, when we look at the Way of Heaven and the Way of Men as

¹³³ Ibid., 20.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 22.

¹³⁵ To illustrate this characteristic of sacred time, Eliade gives an example of religious festival in his book. According to him, every religious festival, any liturgical time, represents the reactualization of the sacred that even took place in a mythical past. See Ibid., 69.

depicted in Tao Qian's literary works, we can easily find that the time and space enlightened by these two sets of Way (order), also possess the characteristics of heterogeneity. To be more specific, the Way of Heaven represents Tao Qian's sacred order, and the Way of Men stand out as his profane order.

Let's take a look at the sacred space and its manifestations in Tao Qian's writing first.

The first example that directly implies the heterogeneous space is from fifth poem of the "Drinking Wine" series. As Tao Qian writes, "Gathering chrysanthemums by the eastern hedge/I catch sight of the Southern Mountain in the distance." 採菊東籬下, 悠然見南山. In this scene, it seems noticeable to me that Tao Qian delineates the existence of two space: the eastern hedge 東籬 and the Southern Mountain 南山. While the eastern hedge refers to the profane, earthly space he dwells in, the Southern Mountain, the place that is usually associated with a symbolism of longevity and immortality,¹³⁶ can be viewed as the manifestation of the sacred space. More examples are drawn from the poem series "On Reading the Seas and Mountains Classic" 讀山海經組詩, in which he alludes more often the certain immortals and their sacred realm of dwelling to express his thought on the sacred order. As for the names of specific manifested sacred space, they include "West Mountain" 西山¹³⁷, "Home of Heaven" 帝鄉¹³⁸ and so on.

Similarly, it is also noticeable to that that in his vision of religious utopia, Tao Qian

¹³⁶ Southern Mountain, refers to Zhongnanshan 終南山, a place that is regarded as the home to immortals.

¹³⁷ See the second poem of the "Drinking Wine" series; TYMJJJ, 228.

¹³⁸ See the preface-prose "The Return"; TYMJJJ, 413-424. "West Mountain" and "Home of Heaven" both are places where the immortal live according to ancient Chinese myths.

lives in two kinds of time, which are closely associated with the Way of Heaven and the Way of Men. In other words, he experiences intervals of sacred time and profane time.

As I have argued in the beginning of this chapter, the Way of Heaven embedded in Daoist thought exists forever and moves forward without stop. This echoes with the sacred time, which as Eliade defines, “appears under the paradoxical aspect of a circular time, reversible and recoverable, a sort of eternal mythical present that is periodically reintegrated by means of rites.”¹³⁹ Manifestations can be found in Tao Qian’s depictions of the immortals in history, which implies his belief in an immortal life that is in accord with the duration of the sacred time. On the flip side, the time as Tao Qian lives under the Way of Men works out as the profane time.

4.3.3 The Sacredness of Nature

According to Eliade, for religious man, nature is never only “natural”; it is always fraught with a religious value.¹⁴⁰ One of the most fundamental features of having religious value, as he argues, lies in the quality of transparency.¹⁴¹ It is clear to me that this characteristic again, echoes with the Way of Heaven as Tao Qian depicts. The next question is how is this manifested?

A good example is presented in his “Substance, Shadow, and Spirit” 形影神 poem

¹³⁹ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 71.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 116.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 117. He also gives two examples. For religious men, the sky, directly, “naturally,” reveals the infinite distance, the transcendence of the deity. The earth too is transparent; it presents itself as universal mother and nurse. What’s more, the cosmic rhythms manifest order, harmony, permanence, and fecundity. In other words, the key to understand the sacredness of nature is to see how sacrality is revealed through the very structures of the world.

series. In the preface of this poem, Tao writes,

Noble or base, talented or stupid, there is no one who does not tenaciously cherish life. And I am greatly confused about this. Therefore I present the complaints of Substance and Shadow and then make the Spirit the spokesman for naturalness to resolve this matter. Those who care about this will get the intent of these poems.

貴賤賢愚，莫不營營以惜生，斯甚惑焉；故極陳形影之苦言，神辨自然以釋之。好事君子，共取其心焉。¹⁴²

Here we can see, Tao Qian views “Spirit” as a solution of the sufferings accompanied with Substance and Shadow. The phrase “惜生”, literary meaning “cherish one’s life,” can be regarded as a sign for the longings of immortality. Bearing this in mind, it is important to note that the “complaints of Substance and Shadow” essentially are resulted from common folks’ longings for immortality, and on the other hand, “Spirit” possess immortality. In this regard, we may realize that the “Substance” and “Shadow” are actually the representatives of the Way of Men, while the “Sprit”, is the manifestation of the Way of Heaven.

4.3.4 Tao Qian’s Sanctified Life

Another important aspect of the manifestation of the sacred order, as Eliade argues, is shown in human’s participation in sanctified life. From my standpoint, while there are

¹⁴² TYMJJJ, 61.

different means to carry out sanctification, the ultimate function remains the same: to help human beings to communicate with the sacred order.

In the case of Tao Qian, as it seems obvious to me, he also undertakes several activities to sanctify his life in accord with the sacred order. One the one hand, his habit of “drinking wine”, “eating chrysanthemums” and “whistling” are particular remarkable.

Take “drinking wine” as an example. In dozens of poems Tao Qian shows us his strong favor of wine. One the one hand, this activity works as a method to vent his sorrows and provide a shelter from the suffering, impoverished life. One the other hand, it also opens the door and provides the passage to the sacred world for Tao Qian. In seventh poem of the “Drinking Wine” series, Tao writes,

The fall chrysanthemums have nice colors,
I pluck the petals that are wet with dew.
And float this this thing that can forget care,
To make more distant my detachment to the world.
Although I drink my solitary cup alone,
And when it's empty, pour myself another.
The sun goes down, and all active things rest,
Homing birds fly chirping toward the grove.
I whistle complacently beneath the east veranda,
By this means somehow I gained my life again.

秋菊有佳色,裛露掇其英.汎此忘忧物,远我遗世情.

一觴虽独进,杯尽壶自倾.日入群动息,归鸟趋林鸣.

嘯傲东轩下,聊复得此生.¹⁴³

Except for drinking, the sacrality is also shown through the symbolism of fall chrysanthemums 秋菊 and whistling 嘯.¹⁴⁴ And at the end of the poem, it is noticeable to see that Tao Qian claims “gain his life again”复得此生, which implies that he may have returned to the sacred life which is in accord with his nature.

Another activity that Tao Qian undertakes, as I have mentioned many times, is farming. Through farming, we know that Tao claims to return to his nature and guard his clumsiness, which is actually in coherent with the Way of Heaven. In this aspect, we can see that Tao Qian believes the sacred way to be the ultimate way that his nature adheres to.

4.4 The Way to Approach the Sacred

Undeniably, through writing, Tao Qian not only manifests the sacred world that he views as an ultimate existence, but also presents how he lives his sanctified life in order to arrive upon that sacred realm. However, what has also been very remarkable to me is that, Tao Qian also expresses his doubt in the attainability of the sacred world.

For example, at the end of the prose poem “Come Away Home”, Tao Qian writes,

¹⁴³ PTC, 239.

¹⁴⁴ As Hightower summarizes, this would make Tao Qian a believer (if not exactly a practitioner of) the current Taosim which went in alchemy, diet, and breath-control in the search for Long Life. See PTC, 44.

So little time are we granted human form in the world!

Let us then follow the inclinations of the heart:

Where would we go that we are agitated?

I have no desire for riches.

And no expectation of Heaven.

Rather on some fine morning to walk alone,

Now planting my staff to take up a hoe.

Or climbing the east hill and whistling long,

Or composing verses besides the clear stream:

So I manage to accept my lot until the ultimate homecoming,

Rejoicing in Heaven's command, what is there to doubt?

寓形宇內複幾時,曷不委心任去留?胡為胡遑遑欲何之?富貴非吾願,帝鄉不可期.懷良辰以孤往,或植杖而耘耔.登東皋以舒嘯,臨清流而賦詩.聊乘化以歸盡,樂夫天命復奚疑!¹⁴⁵

The line “Home of Heaven cannot be expected to reach” 帝鄉不可期, clearly shows us that Tao Qian has doubts or other concerns over approaching the sacred world. As Hightower argues, Tao “gives a not toward Taoist immortality, not rejecting it, but dismissing it as out of reach.”¹⁴⁶ Similar examples can also be found in his “On Reading the Seas and Mountains Classic” 讀山海經, in which Tao sometimes also expresses

¹⁴⁵ TYMJJJ, 413.

¹⁴⁶ PTC, 44.

doubts over the value of immortals, dismissing them as a source of salvation for ordinary people.

Moreover, in this prose poem, Tao also proposes another way to achieve the sacred order. The essential point to remember is that this time Tao Qian is not encouraging to go to the sacred world, but he is suggesting a means to live a life in accord with the sacred order in the profane realm.

This Tao's way, as shown in the last line of the above prose poem, can be summarized as the philosophy of "Delight in Heaven" 樂天. To be more specific, it also involves activities such as farming, whistling, and drinking wine. Yet the fundamental idea is to "transform" 化 and submit to the sacred order.

The poem series "Substance, Shadow, and Spirit" 形影神 provides a quite comprehensive discourse of this idea, particularly the last one "Spirit" 神釋.

The Great Potter has no private power,
All creation thrives on its own.
That Man ranks with Earth and Heaven,
Is it not because of me?
Though we are different beings,
Since we were born we have been bound together.
We are related in good or bad,
How can I not tell you!
As for the great sages of the Three Emperors,

Where are they living today?
Though Pengzu lasted a long time,
He still had to go before he was ready.
The old and the young all have to die,
Talented or stupid, there is no difference.
Being drunk everyday you may forget,
But won't it shorten your life span?
Doing good is always what I rejoice myself,
But who can praise you for it?
Too much thinking harms my life;
Just surrender to the natural order,
Give yourself to the great Transformation,
Without any necessary fuss.

大鈞無私力,萬理自森著。人為三才中,豈不以我故!
與君雖異物,生而相依附。結托既喜同,安得不相語!
三皇大圣人,今復在何處? 彭祖愛永年,欲留步得住。
老少同一死,賢愚無複數。日醉或能忘,將非促齡具!
立善常所欣,誰當為汝譽。甚念傷吾生,正宜委運去。
縱浪大化中,不喜亦不懼。應盡便須盡,無複獨多慮。¹⁴⁷

In the lines “As for the great sages of the Three Emperors/ Where are they living

¹⁴⁷ TYMJJJ, 68.

today/Though Pengzu lasted a long time/He still had to go before he was ready”三皇大聖人,今復在何處? 彭祖愛永年,欲留不得住, Tao restates the sufferings of human life., namely the “Substance”形. By pointing out the drawback of drinking wine, “Being drunk everyday you may forget/but won’t it shorten your life span”日醉或能忘,將非促齡具, Tao Qian indicates that drinking wine cannot be an eternal solution to the sufferings inflicted by the “Substance”. Next, he also points out the insufficiency of the Confucian doctrine “doing good” to achieve an immortal fame, as shown in the lines “Doing good is always what I rejoice myself/But who can praise you for it”立善常所欣,誰當為汝譽. Thus we can see, in the poem, Tao straightforwardly critiques the suffering of the “Substance” as well as the value of taking “Shadow” 影 as a solution. It is on this grounds he stakes out his proposal of the “Delight in Heaven” philosophy.

On the surface level, this philosophy seems to be related with the idea of “seizing the day and living at the moment,” and as shown in Tao Qian’s life after retirement, it usually encompasses activities such as drinking wine, hangout out with ordinary folks, farming, rejoicing in nature and the like. Take the fifth poem of his “Returning to the Garden and Field to Dwell” 歸園田居 series as an example.

Depressed, I come back alone, staff in hand,

Up and down the path that twists through bushes.

The mountain brook runs clear and shallow—

It will serve to wash my feet.

At home I strain the new-brewed wine,

Prepare a fowl, and call my neighbors.

As the sun sets, the room grows dark,

A torch will do in place of candles.

When happy, we regret the night is short,

And the day has dawned already.

悵恨獨策還,崎嶇歷榛曲。山澗清且淺,可以濯吾足。

漉我新熟酒,隻雞招近局。日入室中闇,荊薪代明燭。

歡來苦夕短,已復至天旭。¹⁴⁸

The last couplet of this poem records an experience when Tao Qian just forgets about time and enjoys the moment with his peer villagers. As many scholars have pointed out, it is necessary to read this one as a sequel to the previous one.¹⁴⁹ This, in my view, is essential to explore the philosophical depth of Tao Qian's philosophy of "Glad of Heaven" 樂天. Below is the fourth poem.

For long I left the joys of hills and lakes,

Deprived of the pleasures of woods and fields.

Today I led my children and their cousins,

And made a path to a deserted town.

We walked around among the grave mounds,

And lingered by a dwelling from the past.

¹⁴⁸ TYMJJJ, 87; PTC, 55.

¹⁴⁹ PTC, 55.

There were traces of the well and fireplace,
 And dry bamboo and stumps of mulberry trees.
 I asked the man who gathered firewood there,
 “Where are the people now who used to live here?”
 The gather of firewood answered me
 “Dead and gone, none of them are left,
 In one lifetime court and marker change”
 This in truth is not an idle saying.
 Man’s life is life a conjuror’s illusion,
 That reverts in the end to empty nothing.
 久去山澤游,浪莽林野娛。 試攜子姪輩,披榛步荒墟。
 徘徊丘壟間,依依昔人居。 井灶有遺處,桑竹殘朽株。
 借問採薪者,此人皆焉如。 薪者向我言,死沒無復餘。
 一世異朝市,此語真不虛。 人生似幻化,終當歸空無。¹⁵⁰

As we can see, this poem starts out with an account of the persona’s visit into a deserted and primitive land, accompanied by his children and nephews. Dramatically, at the end of this poem, it talks about the shortness and emptiness of life. If we look again at the first couplet in the fifth poem, it seems justifiable to relate these two poems together. In the fourth poem, a philosophical prompt has been made by the firewood man, in the lines “Man’s life is life a conjuror’s illusion/That reverts in the end to empty nothing.”

¹⁵⁰ TYMJJJ, 84; PTC 53.

人生似幻化, 終當歸空無. Then in the beginning of the fifth poem, Tao Qian first presents an image of an alone, deeper thinker, who presumably echoes with same persona in the fourth poem. In this manner, we can take the fifth poem as a response to the former one. Thus, one can realize that the philosophy of “Delight in Heaven” is not only regarded as a way to deal with real, concrete miseries, it also attempts to solve the ultimate dilemma of human life.

As it may be confusing to some readers that the activities that Tao Qian undertakes in “Delight in Heaven” seems have nothing to do with the sacred order, yet I argue this is actually the essence of his “Delight in Heaven”. Here, we can see, these activities are not regarded as a means to get to the sacred world, but rather establishing the profane world in accord with the sacred.

CONCLUSION

This study starts from the textual finding I came across in reading Tao Qian's poetic works. The multidimensional "Way" offers the first trigger to consider the possibilities of reading Tao's literary works as an abstract discourse embodied with political and religious thought. Examining Tao Qian's political thought and religious thought in the West as well as the East contexts, I identify the traditional strains of thought that shape Tao Qian's idea on the ideal "Way" in his political and personal life. Moreover, the multidimensional crisis of the "Way" and Tao Qian's response to this works as the second trigger for me to further my analysis of his politico-religious thought. On this ground, I find Tao Qian's literary-philosophical writing is not a simply transport of the existing traditions, but more an innovative, synthesizing construct that reflects his own critiques on politics and religion.

To sum up, the political utopia that Tao Qian depicts in response to the crisis of the "Way" stands out as an independent construct to examine Tao's political thought. From a comparative perspective, if one examines Tao's utopia within a broader realm of utopias, one can find that Tao Qian's vision of utopia features of both pre-More and Post-More utopias, indicating his transcendent political attitude. Moreover, when examined in the strains of early Chinese political philosophy, one can see many currents of thought have played a role in constructing Tao Qian's political utopia, which primarily identifies itself with the Confucian school. Also, this utopia presents Tao Qian's own innovative political

thought as well, mainly embodied with his philosophical discourse on farming and political/social institutions. Basically in establishing his own political “Way”, Tao Qian selectively absorbs from certain currents of both Confucian and Daoist thought, refashion and synthesize them, and blend into his own political thought.

As for Tao Qian’s political thought, first of all, based on his discourse on the Way of Heaven and the Way of Man, as well as the literary manifestations of the sacred order, I argue that Tao Qian believes in the autonomy of religion. In other words, for him, there are two kinds of space, the first one in profane, and the second one in sacred. Moreover, Tao Qian projects his hope to solve his personal, existential crisis onto the realm of the sacred. For what is remarkable to notice, although Tao Qian undertakes lot of religious practice to live a sanctified life, he places more emphasis on the “Delight in Heaven” philosophy. To him, the sacred world, though exists, is unattainable. Yet if one strives to live in accord with the Way of Heaven and submit to nature, there’s always to hope to rejoice in the present life.

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