

## ■ The Chinese Taoism of Fred Faulk in Tennessee Williams' *The Night of the Iguana*

Xuding Wang  
Tamkang University

### Abstract

This paper explores the Chinese cultural influence on the character of Fred Faulk in Tennessee Williams' *The Night of the Iguana* via a comparative approach. Departing from the traditional Christian interpretations of the play and its characters, the paper argues that Tennessee Williams' creation of Fred Faulk is influenced by Chinese culture in general and by Taoism in particular. Faulk's Taoist lifestyle is an integral part of his character and helps establish the play's Taoist theme as a philosophical framework. A critical evaluation of Faulk's character from a Taoist perspective rather than a traditional Christian approach can show how he fulfills a distinct function within the play's larger dramatic structure. Tennessee Williams shows the Chinese influence on Faulk in three ways. First, Faulk is directly influenced by his Chinese cook's philosophy of "Mei yoo guanchi," (沒有關係) or "no sweat." Second, Faulk's personality is strikingly similar to that of Hannah Jelkes, who has obviously been much influenced by Chinese philosophy and so points us to Faulk to foreshadow Hannah, who then reminds us of or points back to Faulk part of Tennessee Williams's dramatic strategy. Third, Faulk's lifestyle perfectly mirrors that of a Taoist sage and hermit such as Jiang Taigong and Chuang Tzu. The paper first establishes the clear connections between Chinese Taoism and Tennessee Williams, and then analyzes Faulk's personality via

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**Xuding Wang** received his B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. from three different Canadian Universities. Currently, he is an Associate Professor of American Literature and English Literature in the Department of English, Tamkang University, Taiwan. His articles appear in *Tamkang Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, *The Journal of National Kaohsiung Normal University*, *Fiction and Drama*, and *TELL Journal: Teaching of Languages, Linguistics and Literature*. In addition to articles on Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, he has published articles on Kate Chopin and Eugene O'Neill. His current research project is a book-length study on Chinese cultural influence on Tennessee Williams. He also has a research interest in English Renaissance Poetry.

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concepts of parallelism favored by American comparative literature scholars. Although Fred Faulk is an “absent” character, he is an important symbolic figure and an organic part of Tennessee Williams’ Oriental theme—one which has not yet really been studied. The importance of Faulk becomes clear through an in-depth analysis of his personality and comparison with the play’s main characters. As a character in absentia, it is not surprising that critics have not paid sufficient attention to him, let alone to the Chinese Taoist theme he and Hannah embody. Yet, Williams has given Faulk a unique lifestyle that not only resembles that of Hannah but that sharply contrasts with the lifestyles of his wife Maxine and his friend, the Reverend T. Lawrence Shannon. Such comparisons make Tennessee Williams’ own Taoist attitudes toward life as reflected in the play all the more clear.

**Keywords:** Tennessee Williams, *The Night of the Iguana*, Fred Faulk, Chinese Taoism, influence, comparative studies

The notion of influence must be regarded as virtually the key concept in Comparative Literature studies.

—Ulrich Weisstein (29)

## Introduction

This paper explores the Chinese cultural influence on the character of Fred Faulk in *The Night of the Iguana* via a comparative approach. Tennessee Williams's creation of Faulk was influenced by Chinese culture in general and by Taoism in particular; hence, Faulk's lifestyle reflects Chinese Taoist doctrines and themes and becomes an integral part of the play's philosophical framework. Thus a critical evaluation of Faulk's character helps to support an interpretation of the play that takes a Taoist perspective rather than the traditional Christian one. The paper first establishes the factual connections between Tennessee Williams and Taoism; it then demonstrates the Taoist influence on Fred Faulk's lifestyle in the light of French influence theory, and analyzes Faulk's personality by using American concepts of parallelism in comparative literature.

Although Faulk is an absent character in the play, he is an important symbolic figure and an organic part of Tennessee Williams's Oriental theme, one which has not yet been systematically studied. It is perhaps not surprising that no critics have really paid attention to Faulk, let alone the Chinese cultural influence which has helped to form him, given that his is—as perhaps befits the Taoist *wu-wei* (無為), inaction—a character *in absentia*. Yet Tennessee Williams has nonetheless given Faulk a unique lifestyle, one quite unlike the more predictable lifestyles of other characters—his wife Maxine for example or his friend the Reverend T. Lawrence Shannon. Thus Faulk's attitudes toward life and death compare favorably with those of other characters, especially Shannon. If the latter's lifestyle reflects “the Western preoccupations with guilt and suffering,” Faulk's mirrors “the Eastern attitudes of stoicism and fatalism [which] are offered as a positive alternative to the Western” ones (Embrey 72).

Careful readers will find that Faulk is mysterious and unique, just as his wife Maxine says: “Dear old Faulk was always a mystery to me.”<sup>1</sup> The Reverend Shannon also says, “The mystery of old Faulk was simple. He was just cool and decent” (*Iguana* 22). But what exactly is the “mystery of old Faulk”? Faulk is dead when the play starts, so the general audience may not know much at all

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<sup>1</sup> Tennessee Williams, *The Night of the Iguana* (New York: New Directions, 1962), 22. Hereafter cited in text as *Iguana*.

about Faulk. Yet from what his wife Maxine and his friend Shannon say about him, we know he has had an important influence on both of them. A close reading of the play reveals that this has something to do with traditional Chinese culture and philosophy, especially Taoism. Thus Faulk is an organic part of Tennessee Williams' Oriental theme in the play, to which no critic has hitherto really paid attention.

To unveil the mystery of Faulk and to know the importance of the Chinese cultural influence on him, we should examine his lifestyle, his behavior, and his own attitudes toward both life and death, beginning with his request that he be buried at sea after death.

### Faulk's Destiny—the Sea

Through Maxine's conversations with both Shannon and Hannah, we know that Faulk loves fishing: "He'd go night-fishing, all night, and when I got up the next day, he'd prepare to go fishing again" (*Iguana* 22). Faulk does not only love fishing, but is also "the greatest game fisherman on the West Coast of Mexico—he'd racked up unbeatable records in sailfish, tarpon, kingfish, barracuda" (*Iguana* 44). Faulk's love of fishing reveals that his life is closely connected to the sea, while his "unbeatable records in" fishing contests suggest that he is a skillful and intelligent man. The fact that Faulk finally died of a fishhook cut while fishing in the sea further proves that the sea is Faulk's destiny: "Faulk cut his hand on a fishhook, it got infected, infection got in his blood stream, and he was dead inside of forty-eight hours" (*Iguana* 9). The importance of the symbolic meaning of the sea is further suggested when, "on his death bed . . . , he requested to be dropped in the sea . . . , not even sewed up in canvas, just in his fisherman outfit" (*Iguana* 44).

Faulk's sea burial is Tennessee Williams' trademark symbol of purgation, which suggests a strong wish for a purification ritual that could complete his whole life with his body cleansed and his soul purged, not unlike the fire purgation in Tennessee Williams' one-act play about D. H. Lawrence's death, "I Rise in Flame, Cried the Phoenix." Tennessee Williams often uses the sea as a metaphor of purgation, and sometimes he gives the sea a mysterious power of both life and death. This is strikingly indicated in the scene of the new-born sea turtles, just coming out of their shells and crawling for their lives towards the sea in *Suddenly Last Summer*. The scene naturally reminds readers of Nonno Jonathan Coffin's remark about the sea: "It's the cradle of life . . . . Life began in the sea" (*Iguana* 30), though it is fraught with great danger as the predatory eagles are hovering

over the new-born sea turtles and taking the lives of some of the unlucky ones. The metaphorical importance of the sea is also shown in Fred Faulk's case in *The Night of the Iguana*. His devotion to fishing in the sea but not for the fish themselves does not only imply his spiritual freedom from material desires, but also indicates his wish to choose the sea as his own destiny. The facts that Faulk has died of an infection by a cut from his own fishhook while fishing in the sea, and his own request for a sea burial after death, convincingly prove that the sea is indeed his destiny, and his choice of the sea, of course, metaphorically foreshadows Nonno's final choice of the sea as the destiny of his life. And Nonno's final peaceful death on the veranda of the hotel on the hilltop overlooking the sea helps complete the symbolic cycle of life, death and rebirth in the play. Although the event of Faulk's infection from a cut suggests that death can be accidental in life at the realistic level, Faulk's own sea-burial request implies a romantic and ritualistic choice at the spiritual level.

Faulk's request for a sea burial also reminds us of Blanche Dubois' talking about being buried in the blue sea towards the end of *A Streetcar Named Desire*:

And I'll be buried at sea sewn up in a clean white sack and dropped overboard—at noon in the blaze of summer—and into the ocean as blue as [Chimes again] my first lover's eyes! (*Streetcar* 136)

Blanche's wish for a sea burial clearly reveals her desire for a sacred ritual through which all her earthly stains could be cleanly washed away and her soul could be purged at last. Her longing for a sea burial ritual perfectly reflects Faulk's request for a sea burial. It is perhaps the spiritual purification of Faulk's sea burial that influences Shannon to choose the sea as the place of his intended suicide, where he can finish off all his life anxiety and misery.

Faulk's wish for a sea burial reflects Tennessee Williams' own desire for such a purification ritual, as Harry Rasky points out: "He requested that when he dies he be buried at sea. He wanted his body dumped over at a point near where Hart Crane drowned. He said exactly that he wanted to have his body returned to the sea from where all life originated" (Rasky 62-3). Tennessee Williams also mentioned several times in interviews that he had a codicil in his will that he should be buried at sea near where Hart Crane jumped overboard (Devlin 267, 293). Tennessee Williams' mysterious and romantic obsession with the sea in both his life and his plays is not only influenced by Hart Crane, but also influenced by Taoist philosophical concepts of the sea. While the influence of Crane's life and poetry on Tennessee Williams is more emotional and romantic, the influence of the Taoist philosophical concepts of the sea on him is more intellectual and philosophical.

## The Role of Chinese Taoist Philosophy and Culture in the Play

Philosophers and thinkers have often exerted an influence upon writers.

—Joseph T. Shaw (66)

In what specific ways are Faulk's attitudes toward both life and death influenced by Chinese culture and philosophy? In the play, Faulk's carefree personality may well be influenced by their "cook who is a Chinese imported from Shanghai by me [Shannon]" (*Iguana* 17). Maxine claims that their Chinese cook often says: "No sweat' . . . All the Chinese philosophy in three words 'Mei yoo guanchi'<sup>2</sup> which is Chinese for 'No sweat'" (*Iguana* 82). The Chinese cook's simple but philosophical phrase literally means "it doesn't matter," "never mind," or "that's all right." Tennessee Williams translates the Chinese phrase with the American idiom "no sweat"; while this usually means "Don't worry about it" or "I can do that easily," here the cook gives it an extended meaning as "take it easy" or "just let it go" or "let nature take its own course"—that is, he lets it echo the fundamental Taoist principle of *wu wei* in Chinese, "inaction," "do not do things against nature." In other words, one should do things according to the law of nature, rather than deliberately and stubbornly struggle against their natural developments. The Chinese cook's simple phrase clearly has its trace marks in *The Tao Te Ching* by Lao Tzu—the founder of Taoism.<sup>3</sup> In Chapter 64, Lao Tzu says, "[The sage] supports all things in their natural state but does not take any action" (Chan 214). Throughout *The Tao Te Ching*, Lao Tzu emphasizes this key concept many times. More importantly Lao Tzu concludes *The Tao Te Ching* in Chapter 81 with the same idea: "The Dao of the sage acts but does not contend" (Richter 151).

Obviously when Tennessee Williams makes Maxine explain and use the Chinese phrase, he humorously reveals important Taoist attitudes towards life and death, and this is one of the references in the play suggesting that Tennessee Williams is indeed influenced by Chinese culture, especially by Taoism. Even if he may not know the details of Lao Tzu's *The Tao Te Ching*—the cornerstone of Taoism, Tennessee Williams is tellingly aware of the Taoist fundamental principle

<sup>2</sup> Actually, the phrase "Mei yoo guanchi" does not consist of three Chinese words (characters), but four: 沒有關係

<sup>3</sup> To avoid confusion, I provide a list of the quoted Chinese proper names and book titles with their *pin yin* spellings in brackets here: Lao Tzu (Lao Zi), Chuang Tzu (Zhuang Zi), and Kuan Tzu (Guan Zi), *The Tao Te Ching* (*The Dao De Jing*), Tao (Dao). I keep all the original proper names and book titles in published translations in this essay.

of *wu wei*—to let nature take its own course. In the play, Maxine twice uses this philosophical concept to convince Shannon to take the inevitable consequences and let things go their own natural ways instead of struggling against them stubbornly and futilely. The first time she uses it to convince Shannon to give up his futile attempt to go back to the Church just when “Shannon is working feverishly on the letter to the Bishop . . . shiny with perspiration”: “No sweat. . . . With your record and a charge of statutory rape hanging over you in Texas, how could you go back to a church . . . ?” (*Iguana* 82). The second time she uses it to urge Shannon to give up his tour-guide job when Jake Latta is assigned by his employer to replace Shannon: “Well, let him do it. No sweat! He is coming here now” (*Iguana*, 83). Both cases indicate that Tennessee Williams is indeed influenced by the Taoist philosophy which also seeps into Maxine’s psyche. No wonder Maxine can properly apply it to convince Shannon to take the inevitable consequences.

Even the less intelligent Maxine is very much influenced by the philosophy of the Chinese cook, and so naturally her highly intelligent husband Faulk, the record holder of many fishing competitions and “the greatest game fisherman on the West Coast of Mexico” (*Iguana* 42) must be also influenced by the Chinese cook’s Taoist philosophy. That is perhaps why Faulk is very much like a Taoist sage hermit. He does not take any action in managing his hotel business, nor does he do anything to interfere with his wife’s “night swims” with the two hired young Mexican men; rather, he just lets things go their own natural ways in his life. To some extent, Faulk’s lifestyle strikingly reflects Lao Tzu’s teaching in *The Tao Te Ching*: “The Dao does not act, but there is nothing that it does not achieve” (Richter 90). Faulk seems to understand the core principle of Taoism—*wu wei*; therefore, like a Taoist sage, he is able to enter the ideal world of spiritual serenity and peace simply because he does nothing against the natural development of things and events in his life, nor is he greedy and pretentious; he does not do anything for material gains with vainglorious purposes. In so doing, Faulk’s behavior strikingly accords with Lao Tzu’s teaching, “He [the sage] assists all things to exist naturally, but dares not act” (Richter 122). “The way of the sage is to act, but not to compete with others” (Wu 286). It is exactly his non-(re)action that not only helps to safeguard his own emotional and spiritual peace, but also effortlessly wins both Shannon’s and Maxine’s respect for him. The former says, “I loved ole Faulk” (*Iguana* 20); “You know damn well that Faulk respected me, Shannon, like I did Faulk” (*Iguana* 80), while the latter says, “The mystery of old Faulk was simple. He was just cool and decent” (*Iguana* 22).

Referring to Tennessee Williams’ first three-month trip to the East in the

fall of 1959, *The New York Times* reported that his “trip to the Orient left him ‘deeply impressed’ with Eastern philosophy.”<sup>4</sup> The Eastern philosophy is mainly Taoist, and it is proved by the well-known Tennessee Williams scholar Allean Hale in her essay “*In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel: Breaking the Code*”: “However, for more than a decade he had been studying Eastern religion. In these Noh-inspired plays, when he feared he was going mad, he seems to have been searching for absolutes in Buddha or Tao” (Hale 159). Hale even has the Taoist logo in her essay on page 152. Thus the fact that Tennessee Williams has indeed read Chuang Tzu’s philosophical work is further proved by the interviewer Dan Isaac later. After his interview of Tennessee Williams, Isaac claimed:

The first thing I had noticed when I walked into his hotel room was a copy of Merton’s translation of *The Way of Chuang Tzu*. (Because of his involvement with Eastern thought, Tennessee Williams’ plays have become increasingly recondite—but for those who understand him, increasingly beautiful.) Tennessee Williams told me later that his publisher had sent this book to him, along with a couple of others: collections of poems by Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Gary Snyder. But it was the *Chung Tzu* that he apparently was reading. (Isaac 137)

With all these factual references or the *rapport de fait* as the French comparatists term them, anyone would agree that Tennessee Williams has indeed read *Chung Tzu* and obviously the latter has influenced him. Moreover, this influence permeates Tennessee Williams’ writing and revision of *The Night of the Iguana*, and seeps into his portrayal of Faulk’s personality.

The Taoist influence on Faulk can also be shown by comparing Faulk and Hannah. Of all the characters in the play, Hannah is the one most influenced by Eastern culture, especially Chinese culture and philosophy. Hannah is twice called “Miss Thin-Standing-Up-Female Buddha” (*Iguana* 98, 99) in the play, and the Female Buddha is closely related to Chinese Buddhism. Critics have recognized that her positive values are closely connected with Eastern culture. Signi Falk claims: “Hannah . . . in her work and acquaintance with the Orient has learned that the deepest religion lies not only in the perception of another’s suffering and in a willingness to ease his pain but also in the peace that comes with the acceptance of the inevitable” (Falk 74). Falk also calls Hannah “an Oriental insight,” “a memorable figure” with “the courage to stand alone” (Falk 75). Glenn Embrey also calls her “the Oriental Hannah” (Embrey 73). Judith J. Thompson agrees with both Falk and Embrey that Tennessee Williams creates Hannah with “positive value . . . and Oriental attributes” (Thompson 170).

<sup>4</sup> “Milk Train” gets a Second Chance,” *The New York Times*, 18 Sept. 1963, late ed., 32.

Although all these critics recognize that Hannah's positive values are related to the Orient, no critics have recognized that her "Oriental insight" and "Oriental attributes" are mainly Chinese, as her moral or philosophy of life is mainly Taoist. When she declares, "Oh no, the moral is oriental. Accept whatever situation you cannot improve" (*Iguana* 115), she clearly echoes Chuang Tzu's teaching: "To realize that nothing can be done about them and to accept them as fated is excellence in its highest form" (Ware 42). This is also a textual reference in the play that clearly suggests Tennessee Williams has read the Taoist masterpiece known as the *Chuang Tzu*, whose influence seeps into his writing and his revisions of the play, especially in his portrayals of Faulk and Hannah.

It is interesting to note that Hannah's characteristics are strikingly similar to those of Fred Faulk in the play, especially her own virtues which implicitly echo Faulk's. It is quite obvious that both of them are more spiritual than physical beings, as both treasure human wisdom and spirituality more than worldly values, and neither of them shows a concern for material desires beyond those necessary to life. Both are intelligent and respectable, and both are culturally and aesthetically refined, facing a coarse and materialistic external world. Both are kind and helpful to those in need; particularly both play an important role in helping and influencing Shannon when he experiences mental or spiritual crises at the cross roads in his life. If Hannah is explicitly influenced by Taoism during her travel in China, Faulk is implicitly influenced by it even though the influence on Faulk is indirect and discursive compared with Hannah's case. Although Faulk has never traveled to China, as Shannon, Hannah and Nonno have, Faulk's behavior is strikingly similar to that of a Chinese Taoist hermit, and Faulk's hermitic lifestyle is not only influenced by the Taoist philosophy of the Chinese cook whom Shannon brought to Faulk's hotel from Shanghai in 1938, but also reflected in Hannah's Taoist philosophy. As Faulk's idealistic, spiritual and gentle qualities echo those of Hannah, it can be said that Tennessee Williams has created Faulk to foreshadow Hannah in the play. In fact, the Chinese cultural and philosophical influence on Faulk is subtler as it seems more metaphorical and mysterious.

Another convincing reference to prove that Faulk foreshadows Hannah and is influenced by Taoism is his Taoist attitude toward his wife's "rapaciously lusty" relationship with her two hired young Mexican swimmers. Hannah and Faulk have no interest in sexual relations with anyone but are amazingly tolerant, understanding and forgiving abnormal sexual behaviors. While Hannah kindly forgives the young man who is "arrested for molesting" her as "a minor" in "the Nantucket movie theatre" by getting him out of detention (*Iguana* 113), Faulk tolerantly forgives his wife for her lusty attitude toward the two hired

young Mexican swimmers. When the salesman asks for her underwear to satisfy his sexual desire in Singapore, the tolerant Hannah gratifies the salesman's wish because she does not consider his behavior disgusting and dirty, as her life motto is: "Nothing human disgusts me unless it's unkind, violent" (*Iguana* 115-6). Faulk's incredible tolerance with Maxine strikingly mirrors Hannah's motto, and even Maxine herself is mysteriously mystified by it: "Dear old Faulk was always a mystery to me. He was so patient and tolerant with me . . . . I mean I hired those diving-boys . . . and did he care? Did he give a damn when I started night-swimming with them? No" (*Iguana* 22).

We should note that Hannah tells Shannon her Taoist philosophy: "Accept whatever situation you cannot improve" (*Iguana* 115), while she is talking to him about her so-called "love" experiences. Hannah's Taoist philosophy does not only teach Shannon to accept the inevitable but also retrospectively reflects Faulk's marriage life, for Faulk serenely knows that he is an old man with diabetes, ten years older than his wife (*Iguana* 9). Obviously Faulk can no longer sexually satisfy his "rapaciously lusty" wife who twice mentions that they have had no sex for a long time (*Iguana* 9, 80); therefore, he peacefully comes to terms with life by accepting the inevitable consequence of his wife's free sexual behavior simply because he cannot improve the situation in his marriage life anymore. The fact that Faulk shows no jealousy and does nothing to interfere with his wife's free sexual behavior clearly mirrors Chuang Tzu's teaching: "To realize that nothing can be done about them and to accept them as fated is excellence in its highest form" (Ware 42). Hence Faulk's behavior echoes both Hannah's philosophy and Chuang Tzu's teaching, and this is another example to prove that Faulk indeed foreshadows Hannah, and both are influenced by Taoism. Faulk's incredible Taoist tolerance is of course what prevents any tragedy from happening in his marriage, and for that matter Tennessee Williams may be suggesting that in any love triangle, tolerance is the only way to avoid tragedy such as the one in Tennessee Williams's first professionally produced play *Battle of Angels* in which both the protagonists Myra Torrance and Valentine Xavier are tragically killed at the end simply because Myra's husband Jabe Torrance cannot tolerate his wife's love of another man.

If Hannah and Faulk share very interesting qualities, Faulk and Shannon are very different. Here again we have the contrast between a spiritual life reality and a desire-based life enmeshed in the physical world. Shannon is driven by his desires, and his sexual cravings have dragged him into many scandals and made him suffer the pangs of a haunting guilt. His persistent desire to go back to the Church in the last ten years has also been torturing his soul, as he has never succeeded in doing it. But Faulk is free not only from the desires that

bedevil Shannon, but also from social, material, and even spiritual desires. Thus if Shannon “is torn between belief and disbelief, between sexuality and guilt” (Devlin 266), Faulk is free from them all. Shannon is deeply preoccupied with suffering and guilt, mentally “spooked” and spiritually desperate, while Faulk is a wise Taoist who is able to accept life on its own terms, and naturally be in harmony with the people around him.

### **The Fishing Stories of Faulk, Jiang Taigong and Chuang Tzu**

The value of the study of parallels, as with other literary phenomena, is in the light they cast on the qualities and merits of the individual works; they may also be of interest in indicating similarities and differences in national literary traditions.

—Joseph T. Shaw (65)

The next part of this paper is devoted to exploring the Chinese cultural influence on the personality of Fred Faulk, and the theoretical comparative pattern applied in this part is based on some parallel concepts by some well-known American comparatists,<sup>5</sup> including René Wellek who argues that rhetorical, linguistic, aesthetic, and ethical parallels “are perfectly legitimate and even important topics for literary scholarship. Nor can comparisons between works and figures that are unrelated historically be excluded” (Wellek 3). Thus in this part no attempt will be made to establish any direct factual connections between Chinese Taoism and Fred Faulk; rather, it will be argued that the Chinese Taoist influence on Faulk is based on ethical and aesthetic values and not historical relations. Thus Faulk’s, Jiang Taigong’s (姜太公) and Chuang Tzu’s fishing stories are “unrelated historically,” but the various parallels we may find between them “are perfectly legitimate and even important topics of literary scholarship” in comparative studies.

Thus Faulk’s fishing story can be aesthetically and ethically compared to the famous fishing story of Jiang Taigong (ca 1088 BC-1016 BC), one of the most famous legendary Taoist stories in Chinese culture.<sup>6</sup> Like Jiang Taigong who had

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<sup>5</sup> Different from the French comparatists who favor historical and factual connections between literary works compared, the American comparatists promote rhetorical, linguistic, aesthetic, and ethical parallel studies without historical and factual connections.

<sup>6</sup> The famous legendary story of Jiang Taigong’s fishing at the Wei River with a barbless fishing hook becomes a popular proverb in the Chinese language. Jiang Taigong fishes only for the one willing to bite, and King Wen is the one who willingly comes to invite Jiang to be his chief councilor and mentor

been fishing in the Wei River with a barbless fishhook for many years until he became old, Faulk goes fishing day and night until he dies of an infection from a fishhook cut. Interestingly, neither man has any serious interest in real fishing, but both finally catch very big symbolic or metaphorical “fishes.” Jiang Taigong has finally caught the willing-to-bite King Wen who makes Jiang Taigong his mentor and chief counselor,<sup>7</sup> while Faulk finally has hooked the willing-to-bite Shannon who regards Faulk as his soul comforter and spiritual guide. Shannon becomes Faulk’s long-awaited willing-to-bite fish simply because it is exactly Faulk’s spiritually free lifestyle that has attracted and hooked him, mentally troubled and spiritually burned-out as he is. Thus Shannon comes to Faulk again and again, whenever he is “spooked,” seeking spiritual solace and serenity. Like a spiritual mentor, Faulk perfectly understands Shannon’s psychological troubles: “Faulk knew when I was spooked—wouldn’t have to tell him. He’d just look at me and say, ‘Well, Shannon, you’re spooked’” (*Iguana* 80).

Both Jiang Taigong and Faulk demonstrate a Taoist way of thinking by letting things happen naturally. Jiang Taigong has been waiting for many years for King Wen to come to bite his barbless fishhook rather than actively seek the King. Like Jiang Taigong, Faulk did not seek to become but just naturally became Shannon’s spiritual solace and guide. The only difference between the two men is that Jiang Taigong seems to wait for the wise king to recognize his strategic genius in warfare and brilliant statesmanship. But unlike Jiang Taigong, Faulk does not have this kind of genius. He either does not have any political ambition, so he does not look or “fish” for political power, social status, glory, or honor. In this respect, Faulk’s fishing story can also be compared with Chuang Tzu’s famous story about fishing in the Pu River.

Different from Jiang Taigong who has finally hooked King Wen with his barbless fishhook, the Taoist master Chuang Tzu, sitting by the Pu River, does not fish for any king, nor does he fish for any social status and political glory. “[W]hen the King of Ch’u sent two ambassadors to invite him, saying ‘We desire to enmesh you in our state affairs,’” Chuang Tzu, “still holding his rod, without looking back” (Ware 204) calmly declined the invitation by telling the two ambassadors an interesting allegorical turtle story. The story expresses the idea that for the Taoist master, personal and moral integrity and spiritual tranquility are much more important than any political power, social position, glory or honor. This may also easily be compared with Faulk’s fishing story, as Faulk

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who finally helps the king to establish the Zhou Dynasty that lasts more than 800 years.

<sup>7</sup> With Jiang Taigong’s help, King Wen has built the Zhou Dynasty that has become the longest lasting dynasty in Chinese history (ca 1000 BC-256 BC).

“just [catches] the fish and [throws] them back in the sea” (*Iguana* 22). Both Faulk and Chuang Tzu fish for the joy and tranquility of their souls rather than for the acquiring of any worldly or material values that the fish might metaphorically represent.

The fact that Faulk goes fishing day and night and catches the fish but just throws them back into the sea suggests that his behavior perfectly mirrors that of a Taoist sage and hermit like Chuang Tzu. Indeed, Faulk can be compared with a Taoist hermit, as he is free from any of the desires that afflict Shannon. Faulk's behavior and lifestyle characteristically reflect those of a Taoist sage who closely follows Lao Tzu's teaching: “Strive to the utmost to be empty; maintain tranquility and sincerity” (Richter 29). Or: “Emptied of desire, we see the mystery; filled with desire, we see the manifestation of things” (Hamill 3). Indeed Faulk's behavior strikingly fits in the definition of a sage given by the Taoist master Lao Tzu: “the sage desires to have no desire” (Chan 214). Unlike Shannon, Faulk has striven to the utmost to be empty of all desires, whether the desire for fish, for profit (via the hotel business), for sex, for political power or fame and honor. Thus, Faulk can maintain his spiritual tranquility and sincerity without any frustrations, anxieties, conflicts or jealousies. Naturally he could see through “the manifestation of things” and discover the “mystery” of the world and the truth of life, which are just the things that Shannon has been craving.

Unlike Faulk, who has no desire for any political, social, financial and even religious achievements, Shannon has a strong desire to go back to the Church that “defrocked” him ten years earlier. In the last ten years, he has kept writing letters to the Bishop, asking to return to the Church, but he has completely failed not only because of his notorious scandalous affairs with young girls, but also because of “belief and disbelief” in the traditional Christian God whom he calls “a senile delinquent,” and an “angry, petulant old man” (*Iguana* 55). Yet Shannon still “want[s] to go back to the Church and preach the gospel of God as Lightning and Thunder” (*Iguana* 57), his own concept of God. Thus unlike Faulk who accords with the Taoist principle *wu wei* and lets things go naturally in his life, Shannon stubbornly tries to do things against their natural developments. Further, unlike Faulk who is able to manage his emotional and sexual desires because he wants to be free from “sexuality and guilt” for the sake of spiritual peace, Shannon is bedeviled with uncontrollable sexual desires that cause him to suffer, as his numerous inglorious scandals drive him down into the abyss of guilt. Hence he is hopelessly and endlessly torn between “sexuality and guilt.” Clearly all Shannon's troubles derive from untamed desires while Faulk's ability of being free from desires results in the tranquility of his soul. Faulk's way of life, his carefree manner and his “cool and decent” behavior strik-

ingly reflect the famous Chinese philosopher Wang Bi's interpretation of Lao Tzu's Taoist philosophy on desires:

From the infinitesimal all things develop. From nothing all things are born. When we are free of desire, we can see the infinitesimal where things begin. When we are subject to desire, we can see where things end. (Porter 3)

If Shannon's lifestyle reflects "the Western preoccupations with guilt and suffering," Faulk's way of life mirrors "the Eastern attitudes of stoicism and fatalism [that] are offered as a positive alternative to the Western" attitudes, as Glenn Embrey says (Embrey 72).

Faulk's fishing story also reminds the reader of another allegorical fishing story of Chuang Tzu, one described in Chapter 11 of *The Huainanzi: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Government in Early Han China*: "Huizi crossed the Mengzhu [Marsh] with a retinue of one hundred chariots. Zhuangzi [Chuang Tzu] saw him and threw away his leftover fish" (Major 424). Here again we have two contrasting attitudes towards power, glory and wealth. The Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Liang,<sup>8</sup> Huizi (Hui Shi) demonstrates his great socio-political power and glory by bringing a retinue of more than one hundred carriages with him across the area of Mengzhu. When the Taoist master Chuang Tzu sees this while fishing, he throws his extra fish back into the water to show how much he detests the excessive pride and vanity of people of high rank with their social and political power. As we may recall, Chuang Tzu even declined the position of prime minister offered him by the King of Chu, whose kingdom was larger, wealthier and more powerful than the Kingdom of Liang at that time. All of this power and wealth is vain and empty for the Taoist sage, something ultimately meaningless.

The throwing of their fish back into the water by both Chuang Tzu and Faulk is a vivid enactment of this awareness, this understanding. Faulk's particular fondness for the sea, then, also suggests the meaning of the sea for ancient Chinese philosophers. Chuang Tzu says, "Of all the waters in the world the ocean is the largest. All the rivers have flowed into it" (Ware 190). Another famous Chinese philosopher, Kuan Tzu, also claims, "The sea does not decline any water to flow in; therefore, it is the largest."<sup>9</sup> Like the open and broad sea described by the Chinese philosophers, Faulk is broadminded, tolerant, non-

<sup>8</sup> Liang became the capital city of the Kingdom of Wei in 361 BC, and from then on people also called the Kingdom of Wei as the Great Liang.

<sup>9</sup> There is no published translation of the work by Kuan Tzu, so the quotation is a translation of mine from the following work in Chinese. 《管子·第64篇形勢解》：「海不辭水，故能成其大。」

interfering, accepting. As the sea does not prevent the unclean water from flowing into it, Faulk does not interfere with his wife's affair with the two young Mexican swimmers. Rather, he is incredibly tolerant with Maxine even if "she has hired not one but two young Mexicans to serve her desires," as Glenn Embrey points out (Embrey 76). Only the sea-like sage can have this kind of tolerance, and Faulk is such a sage, so his sagely behavior has not only prevented any hostile conflict but has also preserved the mutual respect and peace between him and Maxine. The great Chinese Taoist also has several wise sayings about the philosophical features of water and the sea that mirror Faulk's personality. "Water is good at benefiting all things but does not compete with them. Because he does not compete with others, he will be free from blame" (Wu 28). Faulk does not compete with anyone for the hotel business, nor does he compete with anyone for his wife's love. Although as "the greatest game fisherman on the West Coast of Mexico—[and as] he'd racked up unbeatable records in sailfish, tarpon, kingfish, barracuda" (*Iguana* 44), Faulk is not really concerned about winning any prizes. The fact that he "just [catches] the fish and [throws] them back in the sea" (*Iguana* 22) clearly suggests that his mind is not on competing for prizes but on something more important, something closer to spiritual cultivation, inner peace and serenity than to the pride associated with winning.

## Conclusion

When Chuang Tzu was about to die, his disciples expressed a desire to give him a sumptuous burial. Chuang Tzu said, "I will have heaven and earth for my coffin and coffin shell, the sun and moon for my pair of jade discs, the stars and constellations for my pearls and beads, and the ten thousand things for my parting gifts. The furnishings for my funeral are already prepared – what is there to add?" "But we're afraid the crows and kites will eat you, Master!" said his disciples. Chuang Tzu said, "Above ground I'll be eaten by crows and kites; below ground I'll be eaten by mole crickets and ants. Wouldn't it be rather bigoted to deprive one group in order to supply the other?" (Watson 361)

Thus the Taoist sage is happy to be buried in the earth, beneath the sky and stars, and in this way fully return to that Nature which he has never left in the first place. Faulk, on the other hand, dreams of having the sea as his burial place, and indeed we know how both Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu also loved the sea. Just as Chuang Tzu was not worried about being eaten by crows, kites, mole crickets and ants after death, Faulk was not bothered at all by the thought

of being nibbled on and snapped at by fishes or other sea creatures when “he requested to be dropped in the sea . . . just in his fisherman outfit” (*Iguana* 44).

In reality Faulk’s death is accidental: “Faulk cut his hand on a fishhook, it got infected, infection got in his blood stream, and he was dead inside of forty-eight hours” (*Iguana* 9). His accidental death releases Maxine from the ethical and social obligations and restrictions of her marriage, offering her an opportunity to freely seek a new mate or life partner. However, Faulk’s request that he be buried at sea clearly has a spiritual and also a ritualistic force behind it, again reminding us of Chuang Tzu’s picturing of his own earth-burial. Like the Taoist sage, Faulk knows Nature is his destiny, the place he came from and will return to, and in his case this Nature is more specifically the sea. His feeling that the sea is his destiny also metaphorically foreshadows Nonno’s sense of his own destiny and his ritualistic death at the very end of the play. On the one hand, directly or indirectly, Faulk’s attitudes towards both life and death could have been influenced by the cook’s Chinese culture and philosophy rooted in the Taoism of Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu; on the other hand, his sagely lifestyle obviously influences Shannon. Faulk’s choice of the sea as his destiny also impacts Shannon’s choice of the sea as the destination of his own life-journey, for he plans to “take the long swim to China”—his metaphor for suicide. Thus Faulk is important in the dramatic development of the play as he has an important influence on both his wife Maxine and his friend Shannon, and this influence is closely tied to his own Taoist thinking and lifestyle.

In his reading of *The Night of the Iguana* from a traditional Christian perspective, George Hendrick finally concludes: “The Oriental themes become hopelessly confused” (Hendrick 405). Although Judith J. Thompson recognizes Hannah Jelkes’ “Oriental attributes,” she fails to see any Chinese influence on the play by saying: “Other Oriental allusions in the play, however, do not constitute a clear dichotomy between Eastern attitudes as positive and Western attitudes as negative; nor do they, at first sight, seem to form a coherent symbolic pattern” (Thompson 170). Moreover, critics like Glenn Embrey can recognize “the East-West theme” in the play only because “Hannah’s ‘Japanese Kabuki robe’ is a visual sign” (Crandell 150). These critics have failed to recognize the Chinese Taoist influence on the play in general and on Faulk in particular simply because they have read the play only from Western cultural perspectives.

However, through a careful reading of Faulk’s character and lifestyle from a Chinese Taoist perspective, we can easily see that the Oriental themes definitely do not “become hopelessly confused”; rather, they are very clearly, coherently and systematically developed. A Taoist reading of Faulk and indeed of the whole play enables us to see that Faulk fulfills a distinct function within the

larger dramatic structure of Tennessee Williams' *The Night of the Iguana*.

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## 中國文化對田納西·威廉斯 《鬘蜥之夜》劇中佛雷德·福克的影響

### 摘要

本文從比較文學角度來檢視中華道教文化對《鬘蜥之夜》劇中角色佛雷德·福克的影響。不同於從傳統基督教的視角來檢視福克這一人物，本文以福克受中華文化，尤其是道教影響的事實為切入點，從道教理念的視角來檢視此一人物，進而展示道教理念對全劇的重要性。田納西·威廉斯創作的福克這一人物是受了中國文化影響的，尤其是受了道家文化的影響。這一影響可從三個方面來論證：一、福克可以說是直接受到他們旅館中國廚師「沒有關係」處世哲學的影響；二、福克的性格和韓娜·基爾科斯非常相似，而韓娜顯然在中國旅行中受到中國文化影響，而在劇中威廉斯似乎以後者影射前者，這就間接暗示福克也受了中國文化影響；三、福克的生活方式極像道家著名隱士莊子。本文後段以美國比較文學平行理論來分析福克的性格和比較他與劇中主要人物的關係。雖然福克在劇中沒有出場，他對劇中主要人物的影響是顯而易見的，且具有重要的象徵意義。通過對福克性格進行深度分析以及對他與劇中主要人物進行比較就可以清楚地看到他在劇中的重要性，尤其是他在中國文化主題中的重要性，而此一主題的重要性到目前為止還沒有任何評論家提到過。

關鍵字：田納西·威廉斯、《鬘蜥之夜》、佛雷德·福克、中國道家文化、影響、比較研究

