

# Peach Blossom Spring: A Mythic Arcadia

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In the story of "Peach Blossom Spring" written by T'ao Ch'ien (陶潛; also known as T'ao Yüan-ming 陶淵明, 365-427) – one of the greatest nature poets in China – a fisherman aimlessly rowing upstream accidentally comes upon a mysterious world, the Peach Blossom cave.<sup>1</sup> The inhabitants welcome him, play host to him, and ask him about the outside world. After several days, as the fisherman is taking his leave, the inhabitants of the Peach Blossom cave ask him not to tell about his visit or to disclose their location to anyone. Nonetheless, upon returning to his hometown, the fisherman reveals their secret to the county magistrate. A search is made, but the cave cannot be found; it has disappeared. At the end of the story, a hermit, who upon hearing of the fisherman's adventure wishes to visit the Peach Blossom cave, dies before he can start out. This short narrative – less than 350 words – and its prefatory poem are written in a relaxed and direct style. Yet this seeming simplicity has baffled the interpreters who have tried to grasp the poet's intentions and the symbolic meaning of the story.

Western scholars who have included T'ao Ch'ien's poetry in their reading, never fail to recognize that the "Peach Blossom Spring" stands at a critical point in the Chinese history of pastoral retreat. One writer, for example, claims that T'ao Ch'ien reaches the heights of "romantic escapism" in the Six Dynasties.<sup>2</sup> Another describes T'ao's work in relation to the supernatural origin of Chinese literature and therefore holds that it is about "the pastoral paradise of the lost valley."<sup>3</sup> For a third, the world of Peach Blossom Spring is an imagined or fanciful utopia.<sup>4</sup> To risk an oversimplification, these views coincide with the three major categories of interpretation of Chinese literary critics of this work: historical, supernatural,

and metaphorical.

Quite a few Chinese critics have attempted to prove that the piece is about a historical incident. In T'ao's prefatory poem and story, the mention of the refugees fleeing to a place of security in the third century B.C. is a historical reflection of social and political instability during the Six Dynasties. Ch'en Yin-ko (陳寅恪) and T'an Chia-chien (譚家健), two recent Chinese critics, have cited the *History of Tsin* and *History of Three Kingdoms* to support their argument: The people in T'ao Ch'ien's time built fortresses and bulwarks in the isolated mountains where they established a self-sufficient economic order.<sup>5</sup> Critics and literary men have meticulously discussed the historicity of the fisherman, Liu Tzu-chi (劉子驥) the hermit, and the geography of T'ao-yüan county in Hunan recorded in gazetteers and *pichi* (筆記, miscellaneous notes) to show that T'ao's work can be seen in the perspective of history.<sup>6</sup>

Other commentators favor a *fairyland*, because the traditional belief in the supernatural world was dominant for centuries. The proponents of the mythico-religious school maintain that T'ao's work recapitulates the religious Taoist immortality cult. The inhabitants in the Peach Blossom land are immortals who know how to transmute cinnabars and practice gymnastics and breathing techniques so as to attain to the divine process. Wang Wei (王維) and Liu Yu-hsi (劉禹錫), for example, are the two earliest poets to recount the strange adventure of the fisherman in the magic cave.<sup>7</sup> Whereas Wang Wei emphasizes in his poem spiritual quietism, Liu Yu-hsi concentrates on how the fisherman sees a strange sight of smoke and mist in front of the cave and how the fairies are shocked by fisherman's physical form. With Liu Yu-hsi as with others, the inhabitants are involved with the planting of jade stones and magic herbs so that they become the archetypes of earthly transcendents as spoken of by Ko Hung (葛洪) in his famous *Pao-p'u-tzu* (抱朴子).<sup>8</sup>

To some critics supernatural power has enabled the inhabitants of the Peach Blossom Spring to enjoy nature's plenty:

Their hills and streams are not impassable, but how could they isolate themselves and not be found? They must have lived a long span of life and been populous, but how could the limited sources of land provide sufficient food? They must have used cooking utensils, metal ploughs, and clothes, but how could materials be inexhaustible? If they were not supernatural beings, how could all these happen?<sup>9</sup>

Some people simply maintain that the confrontation of the fisherman with the supernatural beings results from the mysterious Buddhist *yin-yüan* (因緣 causal chain):

This place is nothing but an immortal land. The supramundane world does not separate itself from the world. It exists between being and non-being, between illusion and reality. If one has the opportunity he would come upon it without much ado. This is the reason why the fisherman could chance upon the place. When the causal chain is broken, none could seek and find it. This is the reason why the fisherman failed to recover it.<sup>10</sup>

The third school deals with the land of Peach Blossom Spring as the landscape of a *metaphor*. According to this interpretation, T'ao Ch'ien's pastoral world is a political allegory in which the poet attacks the Sung dynasty established by Liu Yü (劉裕). The poet creates a pastoral world in which he can find consolation:

With ingenuity T'ao Yüan-ming opens up in this dusty world a new universe in which people could make a mental travel to the golden reign of Yellow Emperor and Shen-nung. T'ao Ch'ien's distaste for the "dusty net" and yearning for simplicity is certainly evidenced by his viewing himself as one who lived in the time of Wu-huai (無懷) and Ko-t'ien (葛天). This story is indeed a record of his wishful fulfilment.<sup>11</sup>

Evidently, the poet has a strong emotional attachment to the ideal world, because he wishes to "rise up high to find my own kind" which he can find in the Peach Blossom land.<sup>12</sup> Chang Wei-ch'i (張爲騏), a recent critic, coins a term *hsin-ching* (心境), the world of the mind as opposed to *shih-ching* (實境), the realistic world, and *hsien-ching* (仙境), the supernatural world. In an article published fifty years ago, Chang asserts that "Peach Blossom Spring" is "a short story which expresses the poet's idealism. In the final analysis it is none other than a fable, a *hsin-ching*, state of the poet's mind."<sup>13</sup> In an attempt to refute the realist and supernatural views Chang proposes that T'ao Ch'ien's Peach Blossom Spring is a fictitious narrative. While reflecting a general predilection for metaphorical explanation Chang does not, however, give a detailed analysis of how T'ao Ch'ien's work embodies

a landscape of the mind. He simply suggests some possible literary and historical sources from which the story might have derived and emphasizes that the happy land recapitulates the old pastoral felicity and simplicity as sung of by the "Song of the Peasants" of the third millennium B.C.:

We work when the sun rises,  
We rest when the sun sets.  
We dig wells for drink,  
We plow the land for food.  
What has the power of the Emperor  
to do with us?<sup>14</sup>

That such a variety of interpretation is possible demonstrates the richness of "Peach Blossom Spring." The present essay intends to give a fuller exposition of T'ao Ch'ien's ideal landscape by suggesting that the value of T'ao's work lies not only in the poet's mythic imagination — which transforms the world of reality set in historical time into a timeless Arcadia, a microcosm of a lost horizon — but also in the poet's vision of an inevitable return to the mundane world. In spite of its terse classical style and single plot development, the story has the mythic pattern of separation-initiation-return as described by Joseph Campbell.<sup>15</sup> Although one does not see an explicit life-enhancing return on the part of the fisherman, the passage to the Peach Blossom land implies the "symbolic action" raised by the poet: Where is the happy land? What is the significance of the fisherman's initial bewilderment in the upstream journey? What is the importance of the oathlike promise followed by a "paradise lost"?

We can approach this story through the biographical and mythopoetic points of view. From the historical perspective, T'ao Ch'ien encounters the cultural frustrations of medieval China and creates an ineffably charming, serene, and beautiful *shih-wai t'ao-yüan* (世外桃源), a pastoral locus, to satisfy his own arcadian dreams. At the same time, the Peach Blossom Spring presents man's deep-rooted aspiration for the Golden Age, Earthly Paradise, or the Isle of the Blest, which have appeared in the folklore of many lands. The story thus suggests a myth-making process in which the poet expresses "visions of eternal principles or characters of human life" recurrent in all ages.<sup>16</sup> "Peach Blossom Spring" has a modern relevance when we view this work as a bridge along which the mythology and legend moves from the cosmogonic and cultural into the personal and allegorical level.<sup>17</sup>

While the poet tells of some half-forgotten myths of a subterranean journey into the other world, he also initiates a literary tradition for poets, story writers, dramatists, and painters to render various versions of ideal worlds.

### The Myth of the Golden Age:

"Peach Blossom Spring" is related to the Chinese myth of the Golden Age that existed *in illo tempore*, once upon a time. The universal remembrance of a better time with which T'ao Ch'ien has identified is found, for example, in the legendary Three Augusti and Five Divi.<sup>18</sup> During the time of good rulers in Chinese history, the world was happy and peaceful:

The world was abundant: millet sold for only a few pennies. The cooking smoke issuing from the chimneys extended thousands of miles. This is a peaceful and harmonious world.<sup>19</sup>

In the golden age the sage-kings guided the people to follow nature or Tao. All creation worked together in harmony: "Nature and Auras are favorable and afford protection. Thus, then, wealth will be enough and men will be contented; neither cupidity, avarice, strife nor war will arise."<sup>20</sup> In Lao Tzu's (老子) celebrated Taoist utopia, Tao prevails and the natural integrity of men is revealed through a simple and harmonious life:

The people are back in the time when knotted cords  
were used to record things.  
They enjoy their food and clothing.  
They are satisfied with their homes and take  
pleasure in their rustic tasks.  
The next place might be within sight  
one could hear the cockcrow and dogsbark.  
The people live their whole lives without  
traveling to and fro. . . .<sup>21</sup>

T'ao Ch'ien often writes about his dream of the golden age. In a prose work, "The Gentleman of Five Willows," he compares himself to one of the people living in the time of Wu-huai and Ko-t'ien, two ancient sage-kings whose rule is said to have been a pious, peaceful, and fruitful one.<sup>22</sup> In the

"Testament" which T'ao Ch'ien wrote for his son, there also is a passage describing how he loves quietude, books, and how he projects himself to a wishful time: "Lying under the north window in the fifth or sixth month with an intermittent cool breeze coming through, it seemed to me that I was living in the time of the sage Emperor Fu-hsi."<sup>23</sup>

Living in a disconcerted age, T'ao Ch'ien is conscious of the loss of the golden age. He reminds himself that "the Way has declined [for] almost a thousand years" ("Twenty Poems After Drinking Wine, III") and that he cannot but "think with longing of the ancient kings" ("To Clerk Yang"). In his mind the golden age is a time

When the people were born  
Proud and self-sufficient  
They embraced the plain and held the true.  
(*"An Exhortation to Farmers,"* I, lines 2-4)

The poet refers the happy inhabitants in the Peach Blossom land to the class of ideal characters he admires. In the prefatory poem he praises the primitive brightness enjoyed by the people in the legendary time of Wu-huai and Ko-t'ien and by such high-minded recluses as Po-i (伯夷), Shu-ch'i (叔齊), and the Four White-heads at the Shang Mountain. The blessed people in the Peach Blossom Spring engage not only in agriculture but in spiritual cultivation. Like the simple people in the Taoist utopia, they are

Joyous in their ample happiness  
They have no need of clever contrivance.  
(*"Prefatory Poem to Peach Blossom Spring,"* lines 23-24)

These people came from nowhere and have lived in the Peach Blossom land for several hundred years. They do not know what has happened in the outer world. Although the days are counted by natural light, the inhabitants have no timepieces, just as the woods of Arden in Shakespeare's *As You Like It* are without clocks. In this timeless world they follow the seasonal change and let the sun guide them to work and to rest. This land of Peach Blossom Spring is a pastoral world where the inhabitants know nothing of history. The life pattern there is closer to that of the hero of Herbert Read's *The Green Child*, who wanted, too, "to escape from the sense

of time, to live in the eternity of what he was accustomed to call the divine essence of things."<sup>24</sup> History means nothing to the people in T'ao Ch'ien's poetic world because they have fallen from time, knowing neither the vicissitudes of life nor the dust and noise of the world outside them.

### The Poet in the Pastoral Locus:

The poet opens the story with the fisherman's trip upstream. The journey is one of the archetypes for escape, exile, searching, the longing after an eternal home, and the exploration of unknown worlds. The journeys of Orpheus, Odysseus, Dante, King Mu of Chou, Ch'ü Yüan, and the spiritual excursion of the Taoists exemplify the basic religious impulse in man, the searching and ordering instincts in the human mind, and, the perennial yearning for self-renewal and immortality in us all. When T'ao Ch'ien puts his fisherman in the Peach Blossom land, he blends the idyllic with the mythical. The poet gives an idyllic setting to the story that fits with the pastoral imagery of his poems. However, at the same time, he brings a ritual and dreamlike quality to the fisherman's adventure. As a simplified rite of passage, the whole action of the story has an analogy to the human instinct for self-affirmation. It is a metaphorical equivalent of the poet's own arcadian dream, a journey to enlightenment which he can make in his own mind.

Before a discussion of why T'ao Ch'ien employs the fisherman as a figure in the quest one must see the literary and historical context. The fisherman is a remote, vague, and yet significant figure in both landscape painting and nature poetry because as a traveler and wanderer in nature he is exposed to experiences unknown to others. T'ao Ch'ien models his fisherman on the famous *yü-fu* (漁父) as a mythic character and a high-minded recluse in *Chuangtzu* (莊子), *Ch'u Tz'u* (楚辭), and Ssu-ma Ch'ien's *Shih Chi*.<sup>25</sup> Another feasible biographical reason for the poet to identify with the fisherman is the poet's own family background. One critic, Chang Chih, citing from *Tsin Shu* (晉書) and *Shih-shuo hsin-yü* (世說新語) proves that T'ao's grandfather, T'ao K'an (陶侃), a general of East Tsin, came from a much-despised Hsi (溪) clan near Chiuchiang, Kiangsi, who lived on fishing.<sup>26</sup>

It is highly probable that T'ao Ch'ien considered himself one of the

plain rustics and fishermen, people of purity and simplicity. In his poem, "On Moving House," the poet expresses his desire to move to Southtown because it is inhabited by many simple-hearted people with whom he wishes to pass his days. T'ao identifies himself with these poor people, "recluse[s] like himself—literate, educated, but holding no public position and committed to making a livelihood out of farming."<sup>27</sup>

The fisherman's "passage" to Peach Blossom Spring conforms to the expression elsewhere of his yearning for a return to nature. Earlier in his life he was driven by circumstances to serve in the bureaucratic world. He found he could not stand official life and awaited the time when he could get away from the tumult and strife of the court and marketplace. He wrote in a preface to his famous poem "The Return":

I longed to give it up to go back home. Why you may ask. Because my instinct is all for freedom and will not brook discipline or restraint. Hunger and cold may be sharp but this going against myself really sickens me. Whenever I have been involved in official life I was mortgaging myself to my mouth and belly, and the realization of this greatly upsets me. I was deeply ashamed that I had compromised my principles.<sup>28</sup>

Like the image of the homing birds and hovering clouds, the image of the boat used by the poet expresses his desire to return to nature. In the poem "Written at T'u-k'ou at Night," T'ao Ch'ien describes how, on a night journey on an official mission, he resolved to return to the farm where he could enjoy a life in harmony with nature:

Mindful of my mission, I cannot sleep  
At midnight still the lonely boat goes on  
I am not one to volunteer my services  
I only yearn to lead a farmer's life. . . .

(lines 13-16)

The image of the boat also represents the way to achieve the spontaneous, unchangeable "natural self" which feeds upon the fields and gardens, the visual manifestation of the cosmic order, Tao itself. Apparently, the return means a return not only to the farm, but to his true self in compliance with the Taoist concept of nature. From time to time the poet says that he will cultivate True Nature in his poor hut. The best way to achieve spiritual

illumination is to give up his worldly commitment and go back to his homestead:

And I, what am I doing here,  
Unwilling thrall to present duty?  
My frame would seem to be subject,  
But the simple heart remains unchanged.  
I daily dream of fields and gardens —  
Much longer I cannot stay away.  
All I want is a boat back home,  
In truth the cypress can endure the frost.  
("As I Passed through Ch'ien-hsi," lines 9-16)

The poet presents in the Peach Blossom land a *locus amoenus*: a charming and serene *shih-wai t'ao-yüan* consisting of open plains and rich fields surrounded by criss-cross pathways, delightful lakes, mulberries and bamboos. More typical of the rural setting in the *shih-wai t'ao-yüan* is the cockcrow and dogsbark, and the joyous rustic folks walking or working at ease.

Unlike the magical land of Cockaigne where wine runs in rivers, and pancakes grow on trees, the Chinese happyland is a combined pastoral *otium* and a place of agricultural activity.<sup>29</sup> Reminiscent of some arcadian landscape in *Shih Ching* (詩經), *Lao Tzu* (老子), *Shang-chün Shu* (商君書), or *Shih Chi*, the prefatory poem "Peach Blossom Spring" gives a more detailed georgic motif:

By agreement they set about farming the land  
When the sun went down each rested from his toil.  
Bamboo and mulberry provided shade enough,  
They planted beans and millet, each in season.  
From spring silkworms came the longsilks thread  
On the fall harvest no king's tax was paid.  
No sign of traffic on overgrown roads,  
Cockcrow and dogsbark within each other's earshot.  
("Prefatory poem," lines 7-14)

## The Fisherman's Passage:

It is important to note a mythic pattern in the intrusion of the fisherman into a source of power. The fisherman as a worldly intruder must first separate himself from the "dusty net" of the world from which he comes. The mention of dynastic period of T'ai-yüan and the locale Wu-ling gives a sense of historicity, but the historical world begins to change, as the fisherman is moving toward a mysterious arcadia. The familiar surrounding appears unearthly as he goes upstream with his boat. The poet aptly uses two words *wang* (忘 forget) and *hu* (忽 suddenly) to suggest that a momentary transformation is at work. An unusual mixture of sight and scent is present: the peach grove — the ground covered with fallen petals — is suffused with fragrance. Just as scenes of great beauty, peace, and plenty suggest an abode of gods and nymphs,<sup>30</sup> the peach grove suggests that something mysterious is at hand. One may recall that the opening of Chang Tsu's (張騫) *Yu-hsien-k'u* (遊仙窟, *Dwelling of Playful Goddesses*) has the same unearthly setting for the romance between a wandering scholar and a divine woman:

The day was waning, the horse and its rider exhausted. I came to a gorge with ten thousand cubits of soaring cliffs above and a thousand fathoms of blue lake beneath . . . I then constrained my heart and purified my mind ritually for three days. Going by the tender ivy on the bank, my boat suddenly came to a pine-covered crag and then a gorge full of peach blossoms. A fragrant breeze and a brilliant light were everywhere. In the presence of such an enchanting landscape, I stopped at a pavillion and suddenly I came upon a divine woman . . .<sup>31</sup>

Like the enchanting world full of fragrance and luminosity in Chang's story, the peach grove has the ritualistic significance of purification prior to the entry to the sacred place. The fisherman's forgetfulness and bewilderment are intended to be a dramatic interlude. It is interesting to note that Dante has a similar experience at the entrance of the Inferno. Before Virgil appears to guide him, Dante has lost his way and is greatly perturbed by the dense grove around him. Dante ends the Purgatorio with the imagery of the pastoral freshness characteristic of the Earthly Paradise:

From those most holy waters, born anew  
I came, like trees by a change of calendars  
Renewed with new-sprung foliage through and through  
Pure and prepared to leap up the stars.<sup>32</sup>

The symbolic sacramental landscape offers the poet a beatific vision of the terrestrial paradise. Like the forest in the beginning of the *Inferno* and the Earthly Paradise of the *Purgatorio*, the peach grove in T'ao's story is a symbolic buffer zone between the mundane and the mysterious world. The fisherman's passing through the peach grove embodies a process of ritualistic cleansing by both water and lavish fragrance.

The idea of visiting a wonderful world is, of course, very common in myth, legend, and folklore. In addition, the existence of a number of writings about similar adventure suggests that there existed a common source from which T'ao Ch'ien and his contemporaries drew. Liu Ching-shu (劉敬叔) in *I-yuan* (異苑, Marvellous Garden), for example, has a strikingly similar passage:

In Yuan-chia period (424-453), a hunter from Wu-ling chased a deer and entered a stone cave with a narrow passage. He soon discovered a ladder. No sooner had he finished climbing it, he saw a place full of flourishing mulberry and fruit. Strollers walked by and took no surprise at the intrusion of a stranger. The hunter chopped a twig from a tree with which he marked the way. But he was soon bewildered and forgot how to return to the place.<sup>33</sup>

Here, as in T'ao Ch'ien's story, we have a narrow passage leading to another world, an easy, carefree, and outlandish people, and the intruder's confused inability to rediscover the strange world. T'ao's account is more dramatic and suggestive than Liu Ching-shu's because the latter's work is too elliptical in its narrative method.

There were still other sources for Liu I-ch'ing (劉義慶, 403-444) to relate the story of "Liu Ch'en and Juan Chao" (劉晨與阮肇), a story about the strange experience of two men in the T'ien-t'ai mountain area.<sup>34</sup> Having got lost while picking nettle, Liu Ch'en and Juan Chao traced a stream to the other side of the mountain and were greeted by two hospitable, beautiful girls. They were treated with peaches and other delicious food and,

finally the girls offered themselves in marriage. After a period of six months, Liu and Juan became homesick and asked to return home. Reluctantly, the girls gave them a farewell party with music and dance, and then showed them the way home. Upon arriving at their hometown, the two men were shocked to find they had lived in the mountain for more than three hundred and fifty years. The *Sou-shen hou-chi* (搜神後記), a collection of marvellous stories attributed to T'ao Ch'ien, has several accounts of how various people chance upon the strange world as Liu Ch'en and Juan Chao did.<sup>35</sup> These texts present essentially the same theme, which reaffirms the identification of T'ao Ch'ien's story with some ur-myth.

### The Cave:

The cave is a universal symbol of a dividing line between the mundane and the supramundane world, the underworld and upper world. It is through the cave that many heroes in folklore begins a subterranean journey. The famous episode of the cave of Montesinos in *Don Quixote* immediately presents the hero's passage from reality to the world of dream.<sup>36</sup> In the cave Don Quixote sees a palace with crystal walls, the enchanted Dulcinea, and many other strange things. Others, like the hero in Voltaire's *Candide* float down an unknown river, pass through a tunnel, and arrive in a sort of earthly paradise.<sup>37</sup> In China, the visit to an enchanted world through an opening is not infrequent in such *ch'uan-ch'i* (傳奇) stories as "A Lifetime in a Dream" (南柯記) by Li Kung-tso (李公佐) and "In the Pillow" (枕中記) by Li Pi (李泌).<sup>38</sup> In Li's story Ch'un Yü-fen (淳于棼) follows two envoys through the hollow in a tree, and he soon discovers a subterranean world in which landscape and life resemble the upper world. During his stay Ch'un undergoes the ups and downs of life there. He wakes up to find that the place he has visited is actually a kingdom of ants under a sandalwood tree. The same image of the opening is used in Li Pi's famous account of how a frustrated scholar goes into another world through a hollow of the pillow on which he is sleeping. Like Ch'un Yü-fen, he leads a life of both imperial favor and misfortune in his dream. The story ends with the awakening of the sadder and wiser scholar in the same room where the Taoist monk has been preparing millet meal for him.

But the cave here stands — for the Taoists as well as some mystics,

Plato included – for a throughway to understanding or illumination. In one of the earliest Taoist *Yün-chi ch'i-ch'ien* (雲笈七籤 *Seven Bamboo Tables of the Cloudy Satchel*) by Chang Chün-fang (張君房, ca. 1019) the cave is specifically a synonym of *t'ung* (通, through), a passaway to *hsüan* (玄, mystery) and *miao* (妙, wonder) on the transcendental level.<sup>39</sup> The Taoists have talked about the religious nature of human perception, for it implies a process of enlightenment. T'ao Ch'ien must have conceived the movement of the fisherman as an archetypal movement of the human soul itself, from the state of lethargy to spiritual illumination. The outside world is the first of those significant landscapes – the locality and time are a manifestation of a reality in which the soul is blunt and uncouth, disturbed by dust and noise. Lost and confused, he must undergo a “peach-change” and come to the gate of perception. And yet, prior to his attainment of illumination he has a narrow and difficult passage, the dark night of the soul. The tidy farmsteads and rich fields at the other side of the cave become a symbol of the final illumination after the process of *via purgatorio* and spiritual struggle or agony is completed.

In many instances, T'ao Ch'ien writes of and enjoys the inward landscape. His own self-cultivation results from a Taoist paradox: within a physically empty dwelling place, the poet can have his peace of mind. This is one of the most profound statements of T'ao Ch'ien's total apprehension of nature and his own active mind. The poet remarks that with the gate closed he can ban all “dusty thoughts from the ‘bare room,’ ” a favorite image of his poetry,<sup>40</sup> and in the poor hut he can cultivate his true nature. The poet is content with “little space,” reminiscent of Chuangtzu's “radiance in an empty room,”<sup>41</sup> and enjoys the inner landscape image as a type of seclusion of the mind. Fang K'un (方壘) of Ch'ing dynasty sees the fisherman's approach to the cave as a *permutatio*, allegorical or ironical allusion to this inward cultivation. Fang's comment is brief but revealing: “In the story the Peach Blossom on the two shores implies *t'ao* (peach), homonymous with the poet's last name; tracing the source of the stream means *yüan* (source or spring), which is a homonym of the poet's first name; coming out of the cave implies *ming* (radiance, brightness), a homonym of the last word of the poet's own name.”<sup>42</sup> In the same vein, Lin Yün-ming (林雲銘), another Ch'ing scholar who regards the story as a dreamland, offers an insight of psychic interest into the nature of the journey to self-knowledge and perception:

The story is about how one perceives Tao: "the blossom on the two banks" is in fact that all the thirty-six palaces are full of vitality. "The light in the mountain cave" bespeaks the goodness in the original human nature, like the radiant moonlight. When the poet talks about the happy old folk and children, he refers to the beauty and felicity in the primal beginning. That the people do not realize the dynastic change from Ch'in to Wei and Chin period states the unchangeable Tao without the beginning and end, without ancient and present.<sup>43</sup>

### The Test Failed:

The failure of the fisherman to keep the oathlike promise is related to the motif of taboo violation or test failure in folklore.<sup>44</sup> Sir Gawain and Orpheus in western literature best illustrate this.<sup>45</sup> On his chivalric mission Sir Gawain, graciously received by Bercilak and his lady in a castle, has an agreement with his host; the exchange of whatever tokens of pleasure they receive each day. When Gawain receives the game killed by the host in the day's hunt, he responds with the kisses the lady has given him but fails to produce the magic baldric. For this Gawain is subsequently punished at the Green Chapel; he receives a scratch from the Green Knight's return blow with an axe. In the underworld, Orpheus, who has charmed Pluto and Persephone by the powers of his song, receives permission to bring back his wife Eurydice from Hades. Nevertheless, at the mouth of Hades, Orpheus breaks the promise by turning back to look at her. He returns to the upper world disconsolate and alone.

A strikingly similar account in which failure to keep promise causes grievous consequences can be found in Cheng Huang-ku's (鄭還古) "Tu Tzu-ch'un chuan" (杜子春傳 Biography of Tu Tzu-ch'un).<sup>46</sup> This Buddhist didactic story is concerned with how a prodigal son Tu Tzu-ch'un meets an old man, his several-time benefactor, and goes with him to the Cloud-terrace Peak for the divine process. The old man offers him a portion of immortality and tells him to sit throughout the night quietly in the main hall. In a vision Tu is assailed from all sides by evil spirits and fierce beasts. He remains silent even when *Yakhar* mutilates his wife in his presence. For his obstinate silence Tu is put to death, suffers in Hell, and is then reincarnated as the wife of a scholar. For the same persistent silence Tu's husband furiously throws their child against a stone. No sooner does Tu

Tzu-ch'un utter a faint cry of compassion than he wakes up to find himself sitting in the same place. The Taoist removes his coat and chops it into pieces and then breaks the crucible. He tells the young man that his blunder of crying out has destroyed the efficacy of the portion and that Tu must remain mortal. Later, when Tu Tzu-ch'un makes a second visit to the Cloud-terrace Peak, he finds no sign of the old man at the desolate site.

In T'ao Ch'ien's story, the relationship between the earthling and the inhabitants of the mystical kingdom is built upon a solemn covenant. The fisherman is cordially entertained and entrusted to keep the secret. But like Tarquin — Roman legend's archetypal violator of a comrade's trust — the fisherman not only marks the return route with bamboo twigs, but also reports to the county magistrate his experience in the cave.<sup>47</sup> Thus the fisherman commits a double crime: he intrudes into a forbidden land where he witnesses some kind of mysterious activity, and he betrays the hospitality and trust of his hosts by violating the oathlike promise. The consequence of his failing the test is that the Peach Blossom land remains an enigma for ever, as elusive as the magic mountains in the remote region of the Pechili Sea.

## Conclusion:

T'ao Ch'ien's work implies a symbolic memory and a symbolic hope of a better human condition. It inevitably suggests that the weary soul desires to escape from the uncertain world. The entrance into the timeless Arcadia reveals how the poet looks at himself and at reality. As he identifies himself with the fisherman, the discovery of the Peach Blossom land is probably T'ao Ch'ien's own dream fulfilled. But, "Peach Blossom Spring" represents the general and comprehensive myth of lost innocence; it also symbolizes the limits of human knowledge and of human nature. The escape from these limits, it becomes clear, is only temporary and is just a prelude to return. The Peach Blossom Spring is merely a spiritual landscape where the poet can find a relief from his inner urgency. And yet, he finds that it is impossible for him to escape into an ideal world of permanence, because he is changing with nature:

During the flowing illusion of our lives  
Hot and cold daily alternate.

My constant fear is that the Great Change come  
Before the decline of my vital energy.

(“Returning to My Former Residence,” lines 11-14)

At its best, he could only stoically accept what fate has assigned to him:

Just surrender to the cycle of things,  
Give yourself to the waves of the Great Change  
Neither happy nor yet afraid.  
And when it is time to go, then simply go  
Without any unnecessary fuss.

(“Substance, Shadow, and Spirit,” III, lines 20-24)

Behind the myth of Peach Blossom Spring lies a basic human belief. This belief is described by Harry Levin in his study of the Golden Age in the Renaissance as “a nostalgic statement of man’s orientation in time, an attempt at transcending the limits of history.”<sup>48</sup> The idea of change and mutability — a theme which dominates T’ao Ch’ien’s thoughts — evokes a melancholic landscape for the poet in a world characterized by its mortality:

The Three August Ones were great saints  
But where are they living today?  
Though P’eng-tsu lasted a long time  
He still had to go before he was ready.  
Die old or die young, the death is the same,  
Wise or stupid, there is no difference.

(“Substance, Shadow, and Spirit,” III, lines 9-14)

The quest for the permanent values represented by the sages and recluses in the past proves to be futile. The poet is aware that human life is like a visit (“Tree in Bloom”) or like a conjurer’s illusion (“Substance, Shadow, and Spirit”). The transitoriness of life is evidenced by the fact that the story “Peach Blossom Spring” starts with the fisherman’s bewilderment and shifts into an enigmatic Peach Blossom world and concludes with frustration. The tragic tone is latent in the seemingly peaceful and pleasing idyllic setting, because in the mind of the poet none can ever reach the paradise, or even make himself transcend the world:

In a thousand years there will be no new dawn.  
 There will be no new dawn  
 And all man's wisdom helps not at all.  
 The people who have brought me here  
 Will now go back, each to his home. . . .  
 What shall we say, we who are dead?  
 Your bodies too will lodge on the hill.

("Bearers' Songs," III, lines 10-18)

## Notes

1. T'ao Yüan-ming *Shih-wen hui-p'ing* (陶淵明詩文彙評, Collected Essays on Poetry and Prose of T'ao Yüan-ming) Taipei: Ming-lun, pp. 338-339. For the English translation of T'ao Ch'ien's "Peach Blossom Spring" see James Robert Hightower, *The Poetry of T'ao Ch'ien* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), pp. 254-258. All references to T'ao Ch'ien's works are quoted from this edition.
2. Michael Sullivan, *The Birth of Landscape Painting in China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1962), p. 83.
3. David Hawkes, "Chinese Poetry and the English Reader," in *Legacy of China*, ed. Raymond Dawson (Oxford: The clarendon Press, 1964), p. 114.
4. Hightower, p. 256.
5. Ch'en Yin-ko (陳寅恪), "T'ao-hua-yüan-chi p'ang-cheng" (桃花源記旁證, Notes on Peach Blossom Spring), *Ch'ing-hua hsüeh-pao* (清華學報), 11 (1936), pp. 79-88; T'an Chia-chien (譚家健), "T'ao-hua-yüan-chi cha-chi" (桃花源記札記, Notes on Peach Blossom Spring) in *T'ao Yüan-ming T'ao-lun-chi* (陶淵明討論集, Collected Essays on T'ao Yüan-ming) (Peking: Chung-hua, 1961), pp. 151-159.
6. The best records of the T'ao-yüan county, the present-day Ch'ang-te, Hunan are *T'ao-yüan hsien-chih* (桃源縣志, Gazetteer of T'ao Yüan), 1892, and *T'ao-hua-yüan chih* (桃花源志, Gazetteer of T'ao-hua yüan), T'ui-pu-chai edition, 1877; The *I-t'ung-chih* (—統志) of Ming and Ch'ing dynasty has a special geographical and biographical section of T'ao-yüan. Such *pi-chi* (筆記) notes as Cheng Ching-wang's (鄭景望) *Meng-chai pi-t'an* (蒙齋筆談, Pen Talks in the Meng Studio), Hung Mai's (洪邁) *Jung-chai sui-pi* (容齋隨筆, Random Notes in the Jung Studio), Hu Tzu's (胡仔) *T'ao-hsi yü-yin ts'ung-hua* (荅溪漁隱叢話) and others give fragmentary comments on T'ao Ch'ien's works. Also see *T'ao Yüan-ming Shih-wen hui-p'ing*, pp. 339-362.
7. Wang Wei (王維), *Wang You-ch'eng ch'üan-chi* (王右丞全集, Complete Works of Wang Wei) (Hong Kong: Chung-hua, 1972), pp. 98-99. Liu Yü-hsi (劉禹錫), *Liu Pin-k'e wen-chi* (劉賓客文集, Collected Works of Liu Yü-hsi) (Shanghai: Shang-wu, 1937), pp. 213-214 (*Ts'ung-shu chi-ch'eng* 叢書集成).
8. Ko Hung (葛洪), *Pao-p'u-tzu nei-wei-p'ien* (抱朴子內外篇, Inner and Outer Chapters of Pao-p'u-tzu) (Shanghai: Shang-wu, 1936) (*Ts'ung-shu chi-ch'eng*).

For the English translation of the inner chapters see J.R. Ware: *Alchemy, Medicine, Religion in the China of A.D. 320* (Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1966), pp. 33-52, 66-96, 177-99, 261-78. See also Massimo Scaligero, "Tao and Grail: the Search of Earthly Immortality", *East and West*, VIII, 1 (April 1957), pp. 67-72.

9. Huang T'ing-hao (黃廷鶴), *Shih Ye* (詩冶), XI, in *T'ao Yüan-ming Shih-wen hui-p'ing*, p. 347.
10. Chiang Ying-k'e (江盈科), "Ch'in-jen-tung shuo" (秦人洞說, On the Cave of the Ch'ins), *T'ao-hua-yüan chih*, chüan XI.
11. Ch'iu Chia-sui (邱嘉穗), *Tung-shan-ts'ao-t'ang T'ao-shih-chien*, (東山草堂陶詩箋, Annotation of T'ao Ch'ien's Poetry by the East Hill Studio), *T'ao Yüan-ming Shih-wen hui-p'ing*, p. 353.
12. Hightower, p. 256.
13. Chang Wei-ch'i (張爲騏), "T'ao-hua-yüan-chi shih-i" (桃花源記釋疑, Resolving Some Doubts on Peach Blossom Spring), *Kuo-hsüeh yüeh-pao hui-k'an* (國學月報彙刊), 1 (1924), pp. 201-220.
14. *The White Pony*, ed. Robert Payne (New York: The New American Library, 1947), p. 64.
15. Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* (New York: Princeton University Press, 1949), p. 35. This is an elaboration of the three stages in Arnold Van Gennep's *Rites of passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).
16. *The Complete Writings of William Blake*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 571.
17. This is exactly what Harry Slochower argues that man's creative impulse can be quickened by looking back toward the tradition of creativity around some persistent themes and motifs. See his *Mythopoesis: Mythic Patterns in the Literary Classics* (Detroit, 1970).
18. Three Augusti are half-man and half-divine Sui-jen (燧人), Fu-hsi (伏羲), and Shen-nung (神農) corresponding to the traditional Chinese reverence of the Three Portents: Heaven, Man, and Earth. Fu-hsi, brother and husband of Goddess Nü kua (女媧), introduced hexagrams, farming, fishing and cattle herding. Whereas Sui-jen invented fire, Shen-nung, also Yen-ti (炎帝), a sun god was originator of agriculture and medicine. The Five Emperors recorded in the first chapter of *Ssu-ma Ch'ien's* (司馬遷) *Shih Chi* (史記, Historical Records), are Yellow Emperor (黃帝), Chuan Hsü' (顓頊), Ti K'u (帝嚳), Yao (堯), and Shu (舜). In legends and historical accounts, the Five Emperors were endowed with miraculous power and extraordinary intelligence. For the Three Augusti and Five Divini see Fu Sheng (伏勝), *Shang-shu ta-chuan* (尚書大傳, Ta chuan pien of the Book of History), annotation and commentary by Cheng Hsüan (鄭玄, 127-200), Shanghai, 1929 (Ssu-pu ts'ung-k'an ch'u p'ien). Huang Fu-mi (皇甫謐), *Ti-wang shih-chi* (帝王史記, Chronicles of Emperors and Kings), Shanghai, 1936, pp. 1-14 (Ts'ung-shu chi-ch'eng). Yuan K'o (袁柯), *Chung-kuo Ku-tai shen-hua* (中國古代神話, Ancient Myths of China) (Peking:

- Chung-hua, 1960), pp. 40-90, 98-172.
19. Ssu-ma Ch'ien (司馬遷) *Shih Chi* (史記, Historical Records) (Peking: Chung-hua, 1972), p. 1242. For the golden reign of the sage-kings see also *Shang-chün-shu* (商君書, The Book of Shang Yang), annotated by Kao Heng (Peking: Chung-hua, 1974), p. 136.
  20. Evan Morgan, *Tao the Great Luminant* (Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh, 1933), p. 85.
  21. Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching* (道德經), ch. 80. For English translation see D.C. Lau, *Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching* (Baltimore: Penguin Classics, 1974), p. 142, and Chang Chung-yüan, *Tao: A New Way of Thinking* (New York, 1975), pp. 207-09.
  22. Hightower, p. 4. For Ko-t'ien and Wu-huai see Lo Pi (羅泌), *Lu Shih* (路史, History of the Royal Road) (Shanghai: 1936), pp. 39, 52.
  23. Hightower, pp. 4-5.
  24. Sir Herbert Read, *The Green Child* (New York: New Directions, 1948), p. 12.
  25. For the fisherman as a recluse and a mythical character see David Hawkes, *Ch'u Tz'u: The Songs of the South* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1959), pp. 90-91; *Chuangtzu*, trans. Herbert Giles (Shanghai, 1926), pp. 413-22; Ssu-ma Ch'ien, *Shih Chi*, chüan 84, (Peking, 1972), p. 2486.
  26. Chang Chih (張芝), *T'ao Yüan-ming chuan-lun* (陶淵明傳論, Biography and Critique of T'ao Yüan-ming), Shanghai, 1953, pp. 2-6; Ch'en Yin-ko, "Wei-shu Ssu-ma Jui chuan Chiang-tung min-tsu-t'iao-shih-cheng chi t'ui-lun" (魏書司馬叡傳江東民族條釋證及推論, Some Speculations on the Nationality of Eastern Yangtzu Region According to the Biography of Ssu-ma Jui in the Book of Wei), *Li-shih yü-yen yen-chiu suo chi-k'an* (歷史語言研究所集刊), 11 (1943), pp. 1-25.
  27. Hightower, p. 75.
  28. Hightower, p. 268.
  29. Arthur O. Lovejoy and George Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity* (Baltimore, 1935), pp. 40-41; A.L. Morton, *The English Utopia* (London, 1952), pp. 217-22.
  30. Olympus in *Odyssey* VI. 43-6, the home of nymphs in *Illiad* XX. 8-9. Elysium in *Odyssey* IV. 566-8.
  31. Chang Tsu (張鱗), *Yu-hsien-k'u* (遊仙窟, The Dwelling of Playful Goddess), in *Tan-jen hsiao-shuo* (唐人小說, Stories by T'ang People), ed. Wang P'i-chiang (汪辟疆) (Hong Kong: Chung-hua, 1973), p. 19. Howard S. Levy, *The Dwelling of Playful Goddess* (Tokyo, 1965), p. 10-11.
  32. Dante, *Divine Comedy*, trans. Dorothy Sayers (Penguin edition, 1955), Canto XXXIII, 142-145.
  33. Liu Ching-shu (劉敬淑), "I Yüan" (異苑), see *Shuo Fu* (說郛) (Shanghai, 1930), chüan 117.
  34. Liu I-ch'ing (劉義慶), "Liu Ch'en and Juan Chao" (劉晨與阮肇), one of the strange tales in *Yu-ming-ju* (幽明錄, Records of Obscure Light), fragments of which have been compiled by Lu Hsün (魯迅) in *Ku-hsiao-shuo kou-ch'en* (古小說鈎沈, Redeeming the Stories of Antiquity) (Hong Kong, 1970), pp. 237-322, 247-48.

35. *Sou-shen hou-chi* (搜神後記) (Shanghai, 1935) (Ts'ung-shu chi-ch'eng).
36. Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, Ozell's revision of the translation of Peter Motteux (New York: Modern Library, 1930), XXII-XXIV; T. Earle Hamilton, "What Happened in the Cave of Montesinos" in *Proceedings of the Comparative Literature Symposium*, I, No. 8, (April, 1968), pp. 3-17.
37. Francois M. Voltaire, *Candide, Zadig and Selected Stories*, trans. Donald M. Frame (Bloomington, 1961), pp. 46-49. Also see A.H. Krappe, "The Subterranean Voyage," *Philological Quarterly*, XX (1941), pp. 119-30.
38. Li Kung-tso (李公佐), "Nan-k'e-chi" (南柯記, A Lifetime in a Dream), E. D. Edwards, *Chinese Prose Literature of Tang Period* (London, 1938), II, pp. 206-212. Also, *The Golden Casket*, trans. Wolfgang Bauer. (Baltimore: Penguin, 1967), pp. 102-117; Li Pi (李泌), "Chen-chung-chi" (枕中記, In the Pillow), in E. D. Edwards, Vol. II., pp. 212-215.
39. Chang Chün-fang (張君房), *Yün-chi ch'i-ch'ien* (雲笈七籤 Seven Bamboo Tables of the Cloudy Satchel), *chüan* 6; Ch'en Kuo-fu (陳國符), *Tao Ts'ang yuan-liu k'ao* (道藏源流考, Study on the History of Taoist Canons) (Peking: Chung-hua, 1963), p. 1.
40. In the empty room, bare room, and little space T'ao Yüan-ming can have detached repose and attain to spiritual radiance and fulfillment. See his "Return to Farm to Dwell," I, II, "Twenty Poems After Drinking Wine," V, "Written at T'u K'ou," "In Praise of Ancient Farmers" II, "For My Cousin Ching-yuan" and "The Return."
41. *Chuangtzu*, trans. Herbert Giles (Shanghai, 1926), p. 44.
42. Fang K'un (方壘), "T'ao-yüan pi-ch'in-k'ao" (桃源避秦考, Inquiries into the Refugees in T'ao-yüan), *T'ao-vüan hsien-chih*, *chüan* XIII.
43. Lin Yun-ming (林雲銘), *Ku-wen hsi-yi* (古文析義, Meaning of Classical Prose), *Ta-wen-ts'ang-pan*, 1716, Vol. 5; Ch'en K'ang (陳沆), *Shih pi-hsing chan* (詩比興箋, Notes on the Figurative Language of Book of Songs) (Peking, 1959).
44. Stanley Edgar Hyman, "Myth, Ritual, and Nonsense," *Kenyon Review*, (Summer 1949), 455-475; Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1958), Vol. VI, pp. 266, 612-613, 777, and *Passim*; Wolfram Eberhard, *Folktales of China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), pp. 72-73.
45. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. J.R.R. Tolkien and E.V. Gordon (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1936); G. L. Kittridge, *A Study of Gawain and the Green Knight* (Cambridge, Mass., 1916); Elizabeth Sewell, *The Orphic Voice: Poetry and Natural History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960); Walter A. Strauss, *Descent and Return: the Orphic Theme in Modern Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971).
46. Cheng Huan-ku (鄭還古), "Tu Tzu-ch'un chuan" (杜子春傳, Biography of Tu Tzu-ch'un), E. D. Edwards, II, pp. 54-62.
47. Ch'en Hsing-hsüeh (陳性學), "T'ao-ch'uan Pa-fang-t'ing Pei-chi" (桃川八方亭碑記, The Octagonal Pavillion by the Peach Stream) in *T'ao-hua hsien-chih*, *chüan* 10.

48. Harry Levin, *The Myth of the Golden Age in the Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. xv.

