

Chapter 2

Tao Yuanming's Natural Philosophy

Since the May Fourth Movement in 1919, scholars, armed with modern science, tend to treat Daoism and Confucianism the same way as they treat the idealism-materialism, subjectivity-objectivity, and consciousness-substance dualities. However, these dualities and the metaphysical mode of thought they epitomize do not apply to studies of classical Chinese philosophy.

Presumably, the Confucian admonishment of “Manage the nation in order and let peace prevail” was planted in the mind of Tao Yuanming during his adolescent years due to his exposure to, and immersion in, Confucian classics, since Confucianism rose to become the mainstream orthodox state ideology in the Han Dynasty and has remained so in imperial China. In the meantime, Tao Yuanming, influenced by the ethos of the Wei and Jin dynasties, absorbed the refined thought of Lao Tzu and Zhuangzi and the metaphysics and, as a result, developed his own cosmology and view of life. Considering his natural dispositions, life experiences, and aesthetic preferences, he might have immersed himself in the profundity of Daoist philosophy, which finds expression in his poetry. These observations, logically sound though, are not free from the Confucianism–Daoism dualism. They appear too superficial when applied to Tao. Interestingly, the views of Tao from earlier scholars, ambiguous though, seem to be more valid. For instance, Liu Chaozhen remarks, “Neither Confucian nor this-worldly, neither egocentric nor defiant, neither gallant nor stubborn, Tao is contented, free from the unnatural, he has got all Nature can offer.”¹ Zhong Xiu states in the same vein that “(when it comes to remarks on Tao) one does not have to be obsessed with whether Tao is identical with Lao Tzu and Zhuangzi, or enlightened immortals or not. He is by far the only one who is completely unrestrained without going astray.”² What Zhong means is that Tao is what he is: philosophical, given to Nature, sympathetic with

¹Tao, Shu. *Tao Shu's Collection of Remarks on Tao Yuanming's Works* (Rare Ancient Edition).

²Zhong, Xiu. *Tao Yuanming's Anecdotes and Poetry* (the Qing Dynasty Edition).

Creations, and following Nature's transformation or the "so-of-itself." Such a man, like *Dao* itself, beggars description.

Strictly, *Dao* is not to be interpreted merely as a *Daoist* concept, but as the core of natural philosophy that originated in times of antiquity. It finds expression in Lao Tzu's and Zhuangzi's cosmology, Confucian Heaven-*Dao* theory, Mohism, the School of Logicians, the Yin-Yang School, and, later on, the (Buddhist) Zen practice. Tao Yuanming does not simply belong to Daoism, or Confucianism or Buddhism; he belongs to Nature. In this sense, he and his poetry are the avatars of classical Chinese natural philosophy.

It is safe to say that natural philosophy can be a good approach to Tao as the avatar of Nature and that Tao may offer new insights into contemporary natural philosophy. However, a thorny issue has to be addressed: What is natural philosophy and what is naturalism?

Since dictionary definitions are plentifully confusing, we may as well pick the simplest one: Natural philosophy or naturalism is a philosophy that the cosmos, society, and life are observed, explained, and experienced with Nature as the yardstick and from the viewpoint of Nature. Understandings of and experiences with Nature vary from historical phase to historical phase, and, therefore, their intention is not monolithic. Pre-modern natural philosophy is best represented by "the oneness of Nature and man" in ancient China; modern natural philosophy by the dichotomy of man as the subject and nature as the object as promoted by Francis Bacon and Sir Isaac Newton. Natural philosophy here in this book is used as opposed to anthropocentrism; it holds that nature is also a subject in juxtaposition with human beings, who are just creations out of Nature, and that the cosmos is an organic community consisting Heaven, the earth, gods, and man. Natural philosophy in this sense is none other than "ecological philosophy," as Edgar Morin (1921–) states:

As regards anthropology, ecological studies restore the high status of "nature," and roots life in nature. Nature is no longer a disorderly, passive, amorphous environment, but rather a complex whole. For this complex whole, man is no longer a closed entity, but an open system residing within it in an autonomous-dependent fashion in organizational morphological terms. (14)

Ecological studies proceeding in the humanist direction is, in essence, post-modern natural philosophy. In this context, our way of thinking and our approaches should be amended accordingly.

In modern times, the most serious harm to nature is inflicted by extreme rationalism. Does this mean that orthodox scholasticism and the way of thinking it represents should be changed? Can studies have an extra touch of intuitional experience and poetic contemplation since nature can be viewed as intuitional experience?

Bernard Stiegler (1952–), a student of Jacques Derrida, says that the most essential is also the most familiar, but, in our culture, it becomes the remotest and invisible. Truly, this has become a common problem: The simplest is the least visible. For instance, for fish in water, water is the least felt because they are in it. In a sense, Nature is to man what water is to fish. Stiegler's declaration is thought-provoking:

Hearing becomes a question, but for natural law to be natural, it is indeed necessary that everyone hear and understand it immediately, originally, without having to use strange and studious reasonings. Natural law must be before reason itself, indeed before reasonings (those of philosophers and metaphysicians as well as those of everyman). It is reasonable to think that everyman, learned or not, can hear it. But the more learned he is, the more difficult it will be for him to hear, for his culture will obfuscate the naturalness of the law (reason, "by its successive developments", will suppress nature.) ... The more natural it is, the deeper it is hidden in the "appallingly ancient": in order to remember, to recover the evidence prior to the fall, reason must be forgotten. Earlier than I think, I am because I feel, I suffer. (109–110)

From cradle to grave, we are exposed to culture and called "men of culture." However, should we not be alert to the risk of the "voice of Nature" being muted by boisterous culture? To avoid this, we may try to follow in Tao's footsteps.

2.1 Tao's Philosophizing

A philosopher poet of ancient China and today's Sinosphere, Tao Yuanming deserves a place in the pantheon of the philosophy of the world, not because his poems, limited in number though, are also philosophy at the same time.

Chen Yinque, among others, made an early attempt to evaluate Tao from the perspective of natural philosophy. He believes that Tao is a great poet and thinker because he inaugurated "neonaturalism" of the medieval times. Based on an examination of the social milieu of the Wei and Jin dynasties, Chen points out that Tao's philosophy, having a trace of "just follow the so-of-itself or the Already-there" as demonstrated by Ruan Ji and Liu Ling, two of the "Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove," is different than Ruan's and Liu's indulgence in sensual pleasures and complete freedom, and that though Tao does not belittle Confucianism, he has no intention of wooing worldly glory because of his inclination toward naturalness and of his resignation to nature's transformation. Therefore, "Tao Yuanming is a Confucian without and Daoist within" (Chen YQ 229). Chen's observation is widely recognized by later scholars. It is safe to say that Tao's philosophy is akin to "fundamentalist" Daoism.

In his 1997 book titled *A Study of Tao Yuanming*, Yuan Xingpei (1936–) scrutinizes Tao's "natural philosophy." Yuan's philosophical approach leads to some pioneering results. It is worth pointing out that philosophers are also involved in the studies of Tao Yuanming. In his 1940s monograph dealing with Nature and life, he shows his preference for classical Chinese natural philosophy in general and the "spiritualized Nature" in particular, though he criticizes the *Daoist* concept of nature from the Hegel's point of view. For He Lin, Tao's poetry proves the poet's internalization of Nature and, therefore, the oneness of Nature and man. He writes:

In modern times, what we mean by "going back to Nature" is return to the spiritualized Nature instead of soliciting self-denial or self-annihilation, or a blind indulgence in the natural world out there. Precisely, it means that humans internalize Nature and let it glow in their souls. The southern Mount in Tao's poetry, the Peach-blossom Springs, and the

landscapes in paintings and poetry, in general, can be considered as that nature which glows in souls. It epitomizes the oneness of Nature and man rather than a blurring of their boundaries, or hostility between them. The oneness as such represents humans' "spiritual conquer" of Nature instead of material conquer, or, in other words, it means a nature that is elevated by the human spirit. (He Lin 122)

Zhang Shiyong (1921–), a contemporary Chinese philosopher, carried further forward the philosophical approach to Tao's thought. In his *The Interaction between Heaven and Man*, which goes beyond the demarcation between philosophy and literature, Zhang, from an East–West comparative/contrastive point of view, juxtaposes Tao Yuanming and the later Martin Heidegger and finds that the two sages meet in terms of the origin of "being." His statement is as follows:

Tao's poetry has a philosophical touch, and therefore, barring *Daoism*, which is Tao's inspiration, Heidegger's philosophy seems to be the only Western philosophy that is akin to Tao's philosophy and can explain Tao's poetry. Heidegger's philosophy has a poetic inclination, and therefore, it seems that Tao's poetry is the only Chinese poetry that can explain Heidegger's philosophy (Zhang SY 375).

Heidegger's philosophy, in this case, refers to existential phenomenology, which, as a point of departure, may lead us closer to Tao's poetic philosophy.

In the 1930s, Heidegger acquainted himself with Daoism and translated in collaboration with Xiao Shiyi (1911–1986) a number of chapters of *Lao Tzu*. Heidegger holds as his antithetical motto a sentence taken from Chapter 15 of Lao Tzu, which reads "Which of you can assume such murkiness to become in the end still and clear? Which of you can make yourself insert to become in the end full of life and stir?" However, in Heidegger's works, Tao Yuanming is not mentioned because Heidegger might not have known such a Chinese poet, nor could Tao predict the existence of Heidegger, who is a millennium Tao's junior, but they meet in *Daoism* conveyed by *Lao Tzu* and thus become "soul mates." Why *Daoism*, then? In the domain of philosophy, their roads lead to the "origin." Tao returned to his country life, symbolizing his poetic return to the origin of the simple and the natural; Heidegger returned to the pre-Plato and pre-Aristotle Greek philosophy when human beings and "being" were one. This era coincides with the golden era of Chinese philosophy when Lao Tzu and Confucius established their philosophies.

However, contemporary times have witnessed a suffering nature and declining poetry, which pose a threat to human beings, physically and spiritually. This seems to be an irresistible trend. Heidegger in his twilight years intended to become a banner of philosophy that could save the world on the edge of collapse. He tries to uncover the origin of nature's decline in modern times on the one hand and to trust the saving of the world to literature in general and poetry in particular in a techno-Benthamite era. Heidegger's later return to the realm of arts shocked the academic community because he not only added zest to philosophy but also turned the course of philosophical studies. Ever since Heidegger's philosophical turn, "the concept of nature" and "poetic dwelling" have resurfaced as major philosophical issues of the times. Some even hope that Heidegger's philosophy can help us find a way out for modern people who seem to be disoriented before they are beyond salvation.

In his endeavor to explore a path of salvation, Heidegger was hugely inspired by F. Hölderlin (1770–1843), a German romanticist poet, which symbolizes the amity between philosophy and poetry in a post-Plato era. Heidegger, who is so un-Western in terms of philosophical tradition, reinterpreted Nature, poetry, and the relationship between poetry and Nature from the viewpoint of existential phenomenology. His philosophical turn has some sort of oriental aura found in philosopher poets or poet philosophers.

In his *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, Heidegger explains that he chose Hölderlin instead of Homer, Vigil, Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, etc. though their works could reveal the nature of poetry as well. Heidegger believes that Hölderlin's poetry is a witness to humans' attachment to the land and nature, and that Hölderlin, as a poet, gracefully shuns the situation that "[d]anger is the threat beings pose to being itself" (55), thus enabling language to lead humans back to the origin of the world and to a spiritual realm where beauty and serenity reign. Such language can only be poetic language. Heidegger emphasizes that "Poetry itself first makes language possible. Poetry is the primal language (Ursprache) of a historical people," (60) and that the being of human beings is essentially poetic. Human "say" in poetry by virtue of language without hurting nature, and this is, in Heidegger's term, "the most dangerous activity" (So vulnerable nature is!). However, for Heidegger, poetry and only poetry can lead people back to the roots of nature, where people can enter into infinite serenity. Therefore, Heidegger declares that poetry is the most innocent undertaking.

Hölderlin writes the following lines:

Whom no master alone, whom she, wonderfully
All-present, educates in a light embrace,
The powerful, divinely beautiful nature. (75)

Heidegger offers a detailed interpretation: "The inner movement of these three lines strives toward the final word 'nature', and there the movement comes to its end. ... Nature comes to presence in human work and in the destiny of peoples, in the stars and in the gods ... in streams and in thunderstorms. 'Wonderful' is the omnipresence of nature" (75). Heidegger then argues that "nature embraces the poets. They are drawn into this embrace. This inclusion transposes the poets into the fundamental characteristic of their being. Such transposition is education. This characterizes the poets' destiny" (77). Judging from his rendition, Heidegger has broken away from quintessentially philosophical discourse and, along with Hölderlin, entered into poeticized, soothing, holy nature.

In order to correct the direction of history development in an era of mounting crisis for human existence, and to save the land and human spirit, Heidegger trusts his hopes to poetry and eventually discovers Hölderlin. Heidegger does so because Hölderlin, the poet of poets, is a true poet in Nature's soft soothing arms. In fact, philosophers' poetry and poets' philosophy or philosophizing, among others, are both profound ways to reveal the secret of human existence.

Do Heidegger's praises for Hölderlin not apply to Tao as the avatar of Nature? Admittedly, Heidegger might have no idea that in the far Orient some 1600 years ago, there lived a poet, or, a soul out of Nature and Muse.

The decline of Nature and human spirit today is even more serious than Heidegger's day. A cold comfort may be that "where there is crisis, there is salvation." In a context of growing ecological movement, the Chinese should consider it their responsibility to present to the world their Tao Yuanming, or, the world's Tao Yuanming, who may be part of the salvation of the world.

2.2 The Significance of Nature in the Sinosphere

The earth is being jeopardized by ever-increasingly frequent ecological disasters. As a result, "Nature" has become a common concern for the public and a key word for eco-critics.

The twentieth century witnessed an unprecedented trauma for Nature both in philosophical and physical senses in the East and the West. In response, there have risen some strong eco-voices such as "reverence for nature," "preservation of nature," and "returning to nature."

Nature, like "culture," is a seemingly accessible everyday expression in Chinese. However, a closer scrutiny of it, which is like a labyrinth, has to invoke different historical stages and diversified cultures. This expression seems to contain all secrets about the universe, the human world, and all forms of literature and arts. It is necessary to reveal the meaning of Nature and its usage in the Sinosphere before moving on to discuss Tao's natural philosophy.

According to most Chinese dictionaries, the interpretation of "nature" (自然, *ziran* in *pinyin*, meaning "self-so") is usually "heaven-so" (天然, *tianran* in *pinyin*, meaning literally "Heaven has made it so.") or "non-artificial." This explanation is far from being satisfactory, because, literally, Nature, as a noun, may have a better definition than an adjective. However, the interpretation of "self-so" as "heaven-so" is worth exploring. The key to this is how "heaven" is understood. In pre-Qin Chinese philosophy, "Heaven" (*tian*) does not mean the "sky" over the earth, but the supreme, infinite, absolute entity that has a will of its own, which generates and dominates all things out there, each after its kind. Heaven is *Dao* (the Way), or otherwise called "the *Dao* of Heaven." Since the *Dao* of heaven runs of itself, it is called "self-so." Lao Tzu's statement that "The ways of men are conditioned by those of earth. The ways of earth, by those of heaven. The ways of heaven by those of Tao, and the ways of Tao by the Self-so" (Chapter 25) does not mean that the self-so is something that Heaven follows. Being autonomous or subject to their individual laws, Heaven, Tao, and the self-so are identical. It is in this sense that "Nature" has some sort of "heaven" at its very source and functions as a substitute for Heaven or *Dao*. It has evolved into an absolute being that has infinite vitality, purposefulness, autonomy, and generating power. The wisest of creations as humans are, they have to revere and follow Nature.

The English word “nature,” which is widely considered as an equivalent for Chinese *ziran*, meaning “the so-of-itself,” is fundamentally different from the latter. Though the English-language “nature” does have a touch of autonomy and self-existence, it mainly refers to the self-existent physical world in time and space as opposed to the human world. Precisely, in this sense, it is only a rough equivalent to “the ten thousand things,” meaning all creations, in classical Chinese. Well versed in both English and Chinese, Jin Yuelin uses “the unification of nature and man” in English to refer to “the oneness of Heaven and man” in Chinese. However, Jin also states that Heaven as in “the unification of Heaven and man” is much more meaningful than “nature” in the sense of the natural world. For Jin, nature’s God in the West is closer in meaning to Nature in the Chinese sense. He believes that the difference between Nature in the Chinese sense and pure nature (the physical world) is that man belongs to the former but is alienated from the latter (Jin 151). Similarly, in his elucidations on Hölderlin’s poetry, Heidegger compares “nature” with φύσις and concludes that man “transposes subsequent elements into the beginning, and replaces that which is proper to the beginning with something alien to it” (79). Therefore, Nature in classical Chinese deserves further exploration in today’s eco-criticism.

It is widely acknowledged that the mainstream thoughts of classical Chinese culture are Confucianism and Daoism, whose fountainhead is generally believed to be *The Book of Change*, which, in turn, descended from the fortune-telling custom of the Shang Dynasty. As the unearthed oracle characters suggest, fortune telling at that time falls into two categories: Nature and human activities. The former includes calendar, meteorology, climate, time sequence, and direction, human activities; the latter includes farming, hunting, and wars. Confronted with the meta-question of “Nature and man,” people would resort to the unity of opposites such as up and down, front and back, in and out, motion and motionlessness, blessing and curse, victory and defeat, auspiciousness and omen, and life and death to explain their confusions about life and the world. What makes fortune-telling possible is the faith in the telepathy and interaction between gods and man as well as that between nature and man.

It is a consensus of the academia that *Daoist* philosophy mainly deals with the operation of the universe or Nature, and Confucianism society or human activities.

The most influential of Chinese natural philosophical masterpieces are *Lao Tzu* and *Zhuangzi*, especially the former. The following statement best captures the role of Daoism in Chinese culture.

Without *Lao Tzu*, Chinese culture and the Chinese national traits would have become vastly different. In fact, even Confucianism, the mainstream thought of Chinese society would not have been the same, because, historically, it was influenced by Daoism as Chinese Buddhism was. Without a real understanding of the profundity of the little book (*Lao Tzu*), one is not expected to understand Chinese philosophy, religion, politics, medicine, and arts including culinary art (Chan 137).

Chan believes that among all the Chinese classics, *Lao Tzu* is the most influential though the shortest. According to statistics, there have been more than 700

hundred versions of interpretive works, including over 40 English versions. In Lao Tzu, "*ziran*" is mentioned 5 times. They are as follows:

But from the Sage it is so hard at any price to get a single word
That when his task is accomplished, his work done,
Throughout the country everyone says:
"It happened of its own accord." (Chapter 17)

To be always talking is against nature. (Chapter 23)
The ways of men are conditioned by those of earth.
The ways of earth, by those of heaven.
The ways of heaven by those of Dao, and the ways of Dao by the Self-so. (Chapter 51)

No mandate ever went forth that accorded to Dao the right to be worshipped,
Nor to its "power" the right to be worshipped,
Nor to its "power" the right to receive homage.
It was always and of itself so. (Chapter 51)

And so teaches things untaught,
Turning all men back to the things they have left behind,
That the ten thousand creatures may be restored to their Self-so.
This he does; but dare not act. (Chapter 64)

"*Ziran*" listed above unexceptionally means "the self-so," "the naturally so," or "the primordially so." In Lao Tzu's logic, only Dao is the unfathomable, unspeakable self-so which is the root of Heaven and the Earth "whence issued all the secrets." In this sense, Dao is almost interchangeable with "Nature."

Ziran is mentioned many times in *Huai'nantse*. In his *Notes to Lao Tzu*, Wang Bi (226–249) almost identifies *ziran* with *Dao*, saying "As Heaven evolves, Dao is identical with *ziran* ... What we mean by '*ziran*' is but a representation of the unspeakable and the infinite" (*Notes to Lao Tzu*, Chapter 25); "Heaven and the earth simply let it be, and because of their non-artificiality, all things run themselves. Therefore, Lao Tzu said 'Heaven and Earth are ruthless; to them the Ten Thousand things are but as straw dogs'" (*Notes to Lao Tzu*, Chapter 5); "All things follow *ziran*; therefore, they are not to be forced" (*Notes to Lao Tzu*, Chapter 29); and "It is not that the actual representation of *ziran* is unseen, but that its being is not to be seen. Nothing can change what it is" (*Notes to Lao Tzu*, Chapter 17).

Hou Wailu summarizes Wang Bi's natural philosophy this way: "In generative terms, nature is not physical, but absolute; it is but an expression for the infinite; therefore, it is still a master, the master of all things; it is speechless and intangible, and therefore should not be treated as a subject of cognition, but only as something to follow" (III 115). Such natural philosophy as held by Wang Bi holds that Nature is a hidden intangible being independent of any external force. It dictates all physical creations.

Such a conception of Nature as a formless infinite intangible existence independent of external forces but dominant over all other existences negates human's capability of knowing and grasping Nature, and opposes the materialization and objectivation, and then the transformation and conquering of Nature. It maintains that human beings can only follow Nature and be one with it so that they can act

without going astray, do without being too artificial, which can be best described by “With non-doing as the model and speechlessness as the teaching, things, each after its kind, would have their true nature, which is identical with *Tao*” (*Notes to Lao Tzu*, Chapter 23).

In essence, Lao Tzu’s natural philosophy as expounded by Wang Bi is close to Western existential phenomenology. Due to historical and ideological restraints, Hou, close to spelling out Tao’s natural philosophy, fails to expand his vision and modify his logic so that he labels the subtle philosophizing found in classical Chinese philosophy as sheer “idealism” in the negative sense of the word.

Unlike Hou, Wing-Tsit Chan has a more down-to-earth and unprejudiced stance in his treatment of traditional Chinese cultural spirit. In his elaboration of Lao Tzu’s natural philosophy, Chan summarizes the significance of Daoist natural philosophy in three aspects, namely the conception of Nature, that of society, and that of life.

Conception of Nature: *Dao* is the one; it is natural, eternal, spontaneous, nameless, and indescribable; it is the origin of all creations, the process of motion, and the underpinning for the operation of all things.

Conception of society: When individualized by specific things, *Tao* becomes a virtue. The individual’s ideal life, the ideal social order, and the ideal form of government should be based on *Dao* and governed by it.

Conception of life: When it comes to the way of life, *Dao* means the simple, the spontaneous, the tranquil, the feeble, and, most importantly, inactivity. Inactivity does not mean “doing nothing” but “doing nothing that is against Nature.” In other words, “it is a process of nature unveiling itself” (Chan 137–138).

2.3 The Modern Evolution of Daoist Natural Philosophy

The twentieth century witnessed the almost entire collapse of Daoist natural philosophy in China due to the impact of the various kinds of revolutionary campaigns and the modernization drive. Outside China, Daoist natural philosophy is only found in a few Chinese scholars overseas, whose stances and attitudes seem to change as the world’s philosophical ethos change. Lamentably, Daoist philosophy has survived the hard times thanks to those scholars that are labeled as “neo-Confucianists.”

In his *A General Study of Lao Tzu and Zhuangzi*, which contains eighteen essays on Lao Tzu and Zhuangzi spanning over 30 years, Qian Mu (1895–1990), a master of Confucian studies, touches upon the Daoist conception of Nature. As a self-taught, grassroots-to-high caliber scholar, he, at a time when his nation and culture were on the verge of collapse, was decidedly committed to curing the ills of the time. To this end, he resorted to Confucianism, among others, as the cure, advocating “to save the world through China; to save China through Confucianism,” a motto he had espoused from his prime to twilight

years. Obviously, his theory is different than the May Fourth Movement slogan "Down with Confucianism," yet they share the same purpose of re-energizing the nation. Qian Mu's attitude to Daoism is inevitably defined by the ideology of the times. In his essay titled "The Conception of Nature in *Guo Xiang's Notes to Lao Tzu*," Qian compares Wang Bi's and Guo Xiang's notes regarding the conception of Nature and finds that the former believes that "Nature generates all" and that "Nature is but a substitute for the nameless and the infinite, the primordial and the formless"(Qian 368). For Wang Bi, *Dao*, Non-being, and Nature are identical. This idea sounds not sound to Qian, who does not believe in "something out of nothing." Guo Xiang argues that things cannot be generated out of nothingness and that things evolve because they are what they are. For Guo, Nature is virtually "the natural world" and there is no sovereign over Nature. In short, Wang Bi emphasizes "non-being" and, therefore, non-doing and Guo Xiang "being" and therefore human agency; the former leads to the Way of Heaven and the latter points to "the law of things." On this point Guo Xiang and Qian Mu converge, and the latter generously praises the former's conception of Nature, saying, "Guo Xiang's interpretation to the conception of Nature as in Daoism is the most relevant, accurate, and paramount. It is no exaggeration to say that naturalism in Daoism was established by Guo" (Qian 369). For Qian, Guo Xiang's naturalism not only developed Daoist naturalism but also overtook the latter to become the summit of classical Chinese natural philosophy. It must be pointed out that his personal preferences aside, Qian tries to interpret Daoism from the perspective of Confucianism and to let the latter governs the former. Consequently, he partly succeeds in transforming Daoist natural philosophy via Guo Xiang into part of the practical solution to the problems of the times and even led it onto a modernist utilitarian and rationalistic track. In his series of books, Qian exalts Confucius and belittles Lao Tzu because he is committed to the idea that scholarship should practically benefit the state, the citizens, and social progress in general. His pursuit as such coincides with the ethos of Enlightenment and rationalism of modern Chinese society.

Fang Dongmei (1899–1977), four years Qian's junior, also dedicated to promoting Confucianism, treats "Nature" as a proposition in a very different way.

Unlike Qian, who is more like a "pure Confucianist" who tries to transform the "impractical" part of Daoism with orthodox Confucianism in order to facilitate social progress, Fang, well immersed and versed in modern Western philosophy, and with Henri Bergson (1859–1941), Freud, Whitehead, etc. as his spiritual mentors, has a better understanding of the inadequacies of some modern Western conceptions and the accumulated ills of the Western modernization, and, therefore, has more academic though sometimes complicated dimensions. He is committed to unveiling and correcting some of the ills of modern Western society and thus became an early part of the modernity reflections in China. In order to achieve his goal, Fang, as a "neo-Confucianist," assumes a more open profile as can be seen from his proactive absorption of natural philosophy from the Daoist canon. The following quote clearly shows his methodology and goal:

Nature, as the name of it suggests, should refer to the natural world. Ontologically, it is an absolute being and the root for all existences. Primordially, it is identical with *Tai Chi*. “Nature” as an expression appears first in *The Book of Change*, which maintains that *Tai Chi* generated Heaven and the earth, which, in turn, generated all things. In the Song Dynasty, it was developed by the then neo-Confucianists into the infinite Way of Heaven, thus becoming the perfect order that all things follow.

Cosmologically, Nature is the hotbed for Heaven and the earth and all things. From the perspective of value theory, Nature is the process of all creations and evolutions and it generates different hierarchies of value such as forms of beauty and virtues and perfection achievable with the guidance of truth.

The Chinese prefer *ziran* (Nature) to *yuzhou* (宇宙, or universe or cosmos) whatever the difficulty. The reasons are as follows:

The first reason is that “The nature (of man) having been completed, and being continually preserved, it is the gate of all good courses and righteousness.” (*The Book of Change. Xi Ci*) In Chinese philosophy, Nature in the sense of the natural world and human nature are identical, so this expression mirrors the oneness of Nature and Man.

The second reason is that poetically inclined, the Chinese tend to “humanize” nature. A quote from Lao Tzu is a good case in point. Lao Tzu says, “That which was the beginning of all things under Heaven we may speak of as the ‘mother’ of all things. He who apprehends the mother thereby knows the sons. And he who has known the sons will hold all the tighter to the mother, and to the end of his days suffer no harm.” Nature is to man what the mother is to the son. The Nature-man relationship never disappears simply because man may be detached from Nature as the son may be detached from his mother.

The third reason is that in terms of hierarchy, Nature unifies Heaven and the earth and man, and combines all existences into a harmonious movement as a tribute to the wonderful universe. (Fang 128–129)

Fang Dongmei highly praises the classical Chinese conception of Nature as a generative, vital, free, harmonious, perfect whole unifying Heaven and man to make it an antithesis to the material, mechanical, and simplistic conception of nature as well as to the political, economic, and personality structures on the basis of such a conception. Unlike Qian Mu’s rationalism, Fang keeps “reason” at arm’s length and even blames the neo-Confucianists of the Song Dynasty for their “stubborn clinging to reason,” and “violation against Nature both in the sense of humanity and the natural world.” He points out on many occasions that “The Song neo-Confucianists cling to ill-grounded theories and annihilated virtuous human desires, tastes, feelings and emotions. Their philosophy cannot be juxtaposed with literature and arts and open cultural spirit; otherwise, a distorted philosophy system may take roots” (Fang 507–508). In order to correct the one-sidedness and absoluteness of “reason,” which impairs human nature, Fang argues, “People should draw on the spirit of Daoism,” since “the spirit of Daoism can be unified with Confucianism as they once were in the pre-Qin times” (508). Fang finds that the Confucianism coincides with Daoism on the idea that Heaven and the earth and man were all generated, and the ten thousand things (all creations) and the self are one. Gu Xiang’s substitution of “the law of things” for “the Way of Heaven” is considered by Qian Mu as “a major gift to Chinese thought.” On the contrary, it is viewed by Fang as “the gravest of mistakes,” because Qian is committed to

China's modernization, but Fang is committed to offering oriental resources for more profound reflections on modernity.

As one of the spearheads of modern neo-Confucianism, Fang believes that the valuation of "non-being" in Daoism is the path whereby the mainstream Western philosophy may be surpassed. He argues:

The Daoist approach to philosophy is to proceed from non-being rather than being; in other words, it starts on a meontological level instead of a merely ontological level. The superficial being should be traced all the way to its essential non-being. In Greek ontology, the absolute being is to be understood via the relative being, and this, in the eyes of Daoists, still a clinging to being. However, the ultimate truth can only be revealed through negation. (257)

Those who favor "being" tend to emphasize utilitarianism and the endeavor to empower the nation; those we value "non-being," emptiness and transcendence, may better safeguard their personal purity, freedom, and dignity. In essence, being and non-being, as opposites of the unity, capture the two mutually complementary aspects of social activities and personal life. Eventually, the pro-being ones believe that man can conquer Nature, which is an object for them; the pro-non-being ones aspire to the oneness of Nature and man and to the salvation of personal existence. The former views earthly possessions as the greatest of blessings; the latter makes poetic dwelling their worthiest of pursuits. In fact, Qian Mu does not deny this. In his criticism of Daoism as "impractical," he points out that "When applied to arts, Daoist conceptions are truly transcendental." It is safe to say that Qian Mu, a critic of Daoism, still values Daoism, though he is committed to creating a better life instead of higher arts through Daoism.

The connection between art and life is interwoven with the perception of Nature. Fang Dongmei, again, among other modern Chinese scholars, expounds the spirit of Chinese philosophy and art in a thought-provoking way. He points out that classical Chinese philosophy and cosmology contain universal value of arts; for instance, Zhuangzi's idea that "being a saint means trying to understand the law of things through the beauty of Heaven and the earth" embodies the Chinese spiritualism; the Chinese must become artists before they become thinkers, because their perception of the nature of beauty usually precedes that of other things. For this reason, the Chinese are better at artistic creation, especially poetry. Even Chinese philosophical wisdom develops through an immersion in arts. Chinese philosophy and poetry are of the same roots historically, and both of them point to the unity of Nature and life. Fang says, "In Chinese arts in general, there is vitality in the form of freedom and eternal aura. It symbolizes a eulogy for and appreciation of the eternal magic touch of the universe which generates and nurtures all things" (373). However, Fang also states that "Without a decent understanding of Daoism, one would have difficulty appreciating the significance and subtlety of Chinese arts such as poetry and paintings" (368).

More often than not, Fang, rooted in Confucianism though, tries to trace the origin of Chinese philosophy to *The Book of Change*. He infuses the personality of Nature to Confucian "virtue," thus creating "the virtue of Nature's soul" (413). In such connectedness of Nature and man, Chinese poets are always able to "feel and

contemplate Nature's transformation and their own oneness with Nature" (381), thus making possible poetic dwelling. Fang's statement offers some trustworthy insight into Tao's poetic philosophizing and life.

It seems that in the modern evolutions of Confucianism, Daoist spirit has penetrated the whole of Confucianism and reformed the latter's teachings and even stance though Confucianism is still predominant in studies of traditional Chinese thought. In terms of attitudes to Nature, if Qian Mu and Fung Yu-lan perhaps try to save Confucianism by virtue of Western Rationalism and pragmatism after the Enlightenment Movement, and therefore are cautious about Daoism, Fang Dongmei, informed by Bergson's life philosophy, Freud's psychoanalysis, and Whitehead's process philosophy, is open to Daoism, especially the Daoist idea that "Dao follows the so-of-itself," and to critical of instrumental rationality, thus becoming part of the Chinese reflections on modernity.

When Tu Weiming (1940–) emerged as "the third generation heir to modern neo-Confucianism," Confucianism faced another major reform in a context of world-sweeping ecological crisis that jeopardizes each and every nation's and individual's subsistence. Unlike Qian Mu, known for his rationality, and Fang Dongmei, known for his life philosophy, Tu has adopted an eco-philosophical approach to the reform of neo-Confucianism. Naturally, Daoist natural philosophy, which contains ecological and even spiritual-ecological significance, has risen to become a drive for Tu's endeavor to reform Confucianism and to make Confucianism part of the resources for reshaping the post-modern society. Therefore, Tu's ecologically inclined neo-Confucianism has a post-modernist touch.

Above all, Tu emphasizes that social development must be "reoriented" to better handle the global ecological crisis, saying, "There has to be a fundamental and urgent change to the relationship between Nature and man both in theory and in practice for the sake of human subsistence" (Tu "DI" 182). As is known, "ecology," which emerged originally as "natural science," began its "humanist turn" partly because of the voice of Rachel Carson (1907–1964) in the 1950s and now it has found its way into many fields of humanities and social sciences such as sociology, politics, economics, ethical philosophy, the science of law, philosophy, aesthetics, and literary criticism, where the relationship between Nature and man is inevitably re-examined. In such a context, Tu proposes "the ecological turn of Confucianism" in explicit terms, arguing that this is a brand-new world outlook featuring "the organic and interactive unity of cosmos and human society," and that "in terms of Confucianism re-evaluation, such a world view marks the cultural turn of Confucianism in that it emphasizes the interaction between the earth and man" ("DI" 183). He argues that "Confucianism must go beyond anthropocentrism" and the "human-centeredness" ("DI" 2), a basic teaching of Confucianism, must be changed. To enhance his argument, Tu cites the observations of Xiong Shili (1885–1968) and Liang Shuming (1893–1988) on the Nature-man relationship, especially the former's "Nature vitality theory" based on *The Book of Change*, which preceded the ecological turn of neo-Confucianism.

Drawing on the experience of modern neo-Confucianism over the past century or so, Tu's series of lectures in the early twentieth century are a constant reminder

of the necessity of self-reflections. Tu found that since the May Fourth Movement, Confucianism, downsized by pro-Western scholars, has begun to incline toward Western thought. He claims that ridiculously, the evaluation of Confucianism should have become whether Confucianism conforms to modernization in the Western sense of the definition, and this is considered by Tu as “the modernist turn of Confucianism,” which, consequently, has rendered Confucianism scientified, instrumental, secularized, and simplistic because “the original Confucian language has been reconstructed fundamentally, and therefore, it is no longer a language about faith, but a language about instrumental rationalism, economic benefits, political expediency and social governance” (217). Such Confucianism is adverse to ecology instead of getting any closer to it. At present, Tu is committed to leading modernist Confucianism back to the naturalistic and ecological track and to re-energizing the conception of the oneness of Heaven and man. This, for him, will mark a rude awakening of neo-Confucianism from the trance of modernism, which will contribute to the reconstruction of a brand-new outlook of the world and life as well. For Tu, the reconstruction of a post-modern ecological world and life view necessitates the absorption of vitality from traditional Chinese thought, especially the conception of the earth as a “vital organic community of life.” Such a conception can be Daoist or Confucian or a mixture of both and others. Tu’s vital organic community of life as such is akin to Nature’s transformation in classical Chinese philosophical term, whose essence is “*qi*,” the vital life-force pervading all, both as substance and energy, life and vitality, being and non-being, and both physical and spiritual. It generated all things as per classical Chinese philosophy, and the generation of Nature is Nature per se. Tu points out that human beings themselves are part of the Heavenly Way just as rivers and mountains are the legitimate beings of Nature’s transformation or the ultimate results of the flow of *Qi* as such (Tu “CB” 88–93).

One of Tu’s major contributions to Confucianism lies in his reinterpretation of classical Chinese natural philosophy from a modern ecological point of view, and, more importantly, in his deconstruction of the dualistic modern thought pattern such as matter vs spirit, subject vs object, and in his breaking down of the barrier between Confucian being and Daoist Non-being, thus presenting a Chinese version of cosmology, which will eventually benefit the reconciliation or harmony between Nature and man in a post-modern era.

2.4 “Knowing the Bright but Cleaving to the Dark” and “Tao’s Names”

“Knowing the bright but cleaving to the dark” appears in *Lao Tzu* (Chapter 28). Arthur Waley’s translation of the chapter is as follows:

He who knows the males, yet cleaves to what is female
Because like a ravine, receiving all things under heaven,
And being such a ravine
He knows all the time a power that he never calls upon in vain.

This is returning to the state of infancy.
 He who knows the white, (yet cleaves to the black
 Becomes the standard by which all things are tested;
 And being such a standard
 He has all the time a power that never errs,
 He returns to the Limitless.
 He who knows glory,) yet cleaves to ignominy
 Become like a valley that receives into it all things under heaven,
 And being such a valley
 He has all the time a power that suffices;
 He returns to the state of the Uncarved Block.
 Now when a block is sawed up it is made into implements;
 But when the Sage uses it, it becomes Chief of all Ministers.
 Truly, “The greatest carver does the least cutting.”

Gao Ming (1926–) states that this chapter boils down to three layers of meanings, namely “knowing the male but cleaving to what is female,” “knowing glory but cleaving to ignominy,” and “knowing the bright but cleaving to the dark,” which correspond to three dualities, respectively, which, in turn, are the strong and the weak, the noble and the humble, and the visible and the invisible. The real nexus of the statement herein is “knowing the bright but cleaving to the dark,” which, ultimately, is a symbol of the limitless or *Dao*. Informed by Daoist spirit, Gao compares the infant’s innocence to the original state of human beings, the uncared block to the original state of trees, and the limitless to the creation, or cosmology in the ontological sense. Zhang Zhiyang (1940–) believes that Chapter 28 is the cornerstone for the whole of *Lao Tzu*, and that “knowing the bright but cleaving to the dark” is the culmination of the great Daoist Way as well as an epitome of Daoist spirit in general. By the way, the famous *Tai Chi* diagram is represented as a mutually becoming and mutually chasing white (the bright) and black (the dark).

It is no surprise that Niels Bohr (1885–1962), the Nobel-winning Copenhagen quantum physicist had the diagram inscribed on his medal. In fact, the Daoist mutually complementing and mutually becoming dualities such as white and black, the bright and the dark, the visible and the invisible, and the strong and the weak, the hard and the tender, and the heavy and the light have long been an attraction for scholars. A new theory of cosmology believes that the cosmos after the big bang was just like a butterfly having two wings which spread in opposite directions, and what we know as the universe today is merely one of the two wings because the other wing is still hidden in the dark. In one of his lectures in Shanghai, Tsung-Dao Lee (1926–), a Nobel laureate for physics, says, “Surprisingly, the mass of the matter that is known to us only accounts for 5 % of the total mass of the universe, and the dark matter which is ‘invisible’ now accounts for 95 % of the universe’s mass. In the depth of the universe, there may exist heavy particles as well as light ones. The ‘dark energy’ of the universe may be 14 times more than the energy that is known.”³

³For more details, see Wenhui Bao, 2009–06–16.

As regards the domain of spirituality or in the individual's inner cosmos, "knowing the bright but cleaving to the dark" reminds people of the iceberg theory of Freudian psychoanalysis: sub-consciousness, like the most of the iceberg, remains under the water; and collective unconsciousness is even deeper under the water. Jung tries to explain the significance of "knowing the bright but cleaving to the dark" to the Western world in his own terms, saying that what is really significant in psychology is usually hidden in the dark and that in the spiritual life of a nation, the dark can evoke the bright for people. This may help to explain the increasing popularity of Jung in Western scholarship and among the general public.

"Knowing the bright but cleaving to the dark" and "knowing the visible but cleaving to the hidden," therefore, seem to be a path leading to the ultimate significance of Nature as well as to the innermost depth of human soul. Unsurprisingly, a study of Tao Yuanming's name would reveal the significance of "knowing the bright but cleaving to the dark" that it contains.

Admittedly, Tao's name has remained a riddle. According to Zhu Ziqing (1898–1948), there are up to ten allegations about Tao's given name and style name. Zhu himself believes that Yuanming (淵明) is Tao's given name, and "yuanliang" (元亮) his style name, which Tao himself changed into "qian" (潛) when the Jin Dynasty was replaced by the Song because of his "strong Daoist inclinations" (Zhu 458).

Like Zhu Ziqing, Yuan Xingpei (1936-) intends to decipher the significance of Tao's name from the dimensions of classical Chinese philosophy by citing *The Book of Change*:

As regards the connectedness between "Yuanming" (meaning literally "abyss bright"), "Yuanliang" (meaning "bright") and "Qian" (meaning "hidden" or "seclusion"), *The Book of Change* states that "As the dragon is hidden in deep water, it is not the time for action. The dragon may also be in the abyss." According to *Guangya*, *qian* means 'hidden', and according to *The Origin of Chinese Characters*, 'hidden' means 'cover'. Both 'hidden' and 'cover' point to 'darkness' as opposed to brightness. According to *The Origin of Chinese Characters* again, *liang* as in *Yuanliang* means brightness, an antithesis of *qian* ('hidden'), and, at the same time, a synonym for *ming* (brightness). (Zhu ZQ 237)

Semantically and epistemologically, Yuan's interpretation conforms to the most common structure of the names of literati of antiquity. It may be an accurate deciphering of the significance of Tao's names. Gao Heng (1900–1986) explains that "The dragon is hidden in deep water, which is the right place for it. When a man finds his comfort zone, he has little to complain about" (161). This explanation completely agrees with Tao's "refusal to change for the sake of earthly achievements and fame," his "return to the rustic life," and his "going back to Nature"; therefore, it should be valid.

I want to add that if Tao Yuanming changed his name at all, it must have happened after he decided to resign from his official post because he viewed the political career as a "cage" or a "net." "Yuan" as in "yuanming" may be derived from *The Book of Poetry*, which contains such a line: "Fish may hide in the dark abyss or bright shallow waters near islets." In fact, "abyss" appears many times in Lao Tzu, and the Way is often compared to the abyss. Without doubt of any, the dark

abyss, a haven for fish, is much safer than the bright shoals. Such an explanation may help better understand the connection between Tao’s names and his life philosophy. Ultimately, Tao’s names, though multiple, boil down to two antithetical aspects, namely brightness and darkness. What Tao Qian or Tao Yuanming means “a ray of brightness hidden in the depth of the dark,” which is reminiscent of the Daoist teaching of “knowing the bright but cleaving to the dark.”

Though the exact expression “knowing the bright but cleaving to the dark” is not found in Tao’s poetry and prose, yet this, for Tao, is not only a generative pattern of things, but also a way of beautiful existence. Tao Yuanming’s observation of this way is expressed in his self-naming, and, more importantly, in the easy graceful balance he keeps between glory and humbleness, wealth and poverty, drunkenness and sobriety, the past and the present, and words and significance. This is only possible because he lives by “knowing the bright but cleaving to the dark.”

2.5 “Knowing the Bright but Cleaving to the Dark” and Tao’s Wisdom of Life

A glimpse of the world history would reveal that, almost unexceptionally, great writers and poets tend to identify themselves with the core cultural and spiritual legacy of the nations they belong to, thus epitomizing their nations’ wisdom of life and becoming poetic avatars of the nations’ souls. Tao Yuanming is no exception. He keeps to the principle of “knowing the bright but cleaving to the dark” in life and crystalizes it in his writings, the evidence of which abounds.

(1) Returning: Official Career and Hermitage

Returning to the country life was an important event, if not the most important one, in Tao’s life. Tao confesses, “A man who stays away from worldly quest, I never seek for office east and west” (187).

From the age of 30–40 years old, Tao came into a political career several times, first as Consultant for a general and then as Head of Pengze Prefecture, without achieving any political feat. It is said that Tao, at the age of forty, unwilling to ingratiate himself with the superior inspectors, abandoned his post and went back to his ancestral home and lived a *tianyuan* life ever after.

Social factors must have contributed to Tao’s tenacious determination to retreat. For him, in a context where the political career was a cage, the networking, and treachery of the upper class was rampant, political corruption was depressing, and even life itself was threatened, abandoning the official post meant “returning” before going astray, or “becoming fish hidden in the depth of the abyss.”

However, ultimately, Tao retreated because he followed his inner voice, a voice growing louder as each day passed by, as he confesses in his “Homeward ho!”: A few days into my official post, I began to think about leaving, because I am Nature-bound instead of being affectionate. He describes his *tianyuan* life this way:

It is a pleasure for me to pace the yard,
 With the state closely shut all day long.
 With a staff in hand, I walk to and fro,
 Raising my head to look afar off and on.
 The careless clouds float from behind the hills;
 The weary birds know that they should return.
 When the dim sun is about to set in the west,
 I fondle a solitary pine and linger around it. ...
 I may ascend the eastern heights to sing a song,
 Or sit by a clear stream to write a poem.
 I shall follow the natural cause and end my life in time;
 With Heaven's decree in mind, what else am I to doubt? (Tao 245–247)

In Tao's writings, returning to the *tianyuan* means returning to Nature, to the origin of life, to the soul's dwelling, and to the poetic. Glen Love (1932–) once elaborates upon the significance of the *tianyuan* to literature and humanity from an eco-critical point of view, saying, "The lasting appeal of pastoral is a testament to our instinctive or mythic sense of ourselves as creatures of natural origins, those who must return periodically to the earth for the footholds of sanity somehow denied us by civilization" (225). Unfortunately, the root reason for Tao's retreat, which is his Nature-rootedness, is often ignored.

For Tao, to shun the hustle and bustle of earthly affairs is to "know the bright," and to return to the *tianyuan* and hermitage is to "cleave to the dark" or to safeguard the purity of the soul. Lao Tzu says, "(And being such a ravine) He knows all the time a power that he never calls upon in vain. This is returning to the state of infancy" (Chapter 28). On another occasion, Lao Tzu says, "He who knows glory yet cleaves to ignominy becomes like a valley that receives into it all things under heaven; and being such a valley, he has all the time a power that suffices; He returns to the state of the Uncarved Block" (Chapter 28). Here in this case, the uncarved block means the simple, original, unwrought state of being, which is the highest achievement of the enlightened Daoists. Tao's returning to the *tianyuan* is a lived experience of "returning to the state of the uncarved block."

In the same light, Heidegger highly values Hölderlin's *Homecoming*. For Heidegger, the homeland is the origin and the root of the soul, which, in turn, has to dwell in a haven as the tree must take roots in the earth. Even the tree follows the principle of "knowing the bright but cleaving to the dark": Its twigs and foliage are exposed to light, but its roots remain in the dark earth. Lao Tzu says, "See, all things howsoever they flourish return to the root from which they grew. This return to the root is called Quietness; quietness is called submission to Fate; what has submitted to Fate has become part of the always so" (Chapter 16). It is in this sense that Tao's returning to the *tianyuan* is "returning to the root," almost identical with Heidegger's aspiration to returning to the origin, where the true poetic dwelling is possible. In fact, the ultimate significance of Tao Yuanming's returning to the *tianyuan* lies herein.

(2) The Peach-blossom Springs: Reality and Vision

Tao's *The Peach-blossom Springs*, one of the best of Chinese writings, ever since its appearance, has remained a resource of inspiration, and an Arcadia, or

a Shangri-La, or a land of promise for later men of letters and general readers alike in China.

Unlike the real society, Tao’s Peach-blossom Springs is a tranquil magic other-worldly world which he himself terms “a world of immortals,” which, in essence, is an idealized world of freedom and simplicity. “The Peach-blossom Springs” has become a synonym for romanticist spirit and Utopian imagination. Liang Qichao points out that Tao, in his writings, envisions an ideal social organization, and therefore names it “the oriental Utopia” (25). Zhu Guangqian has similar remarks, saying that at a time of social chaos, and witnessing people’s sufferings caused by what were called institutional rules and regulations, “Tao realized that the nation’s lifeline was ultimately farming and only farming-related engagements and entertainments can provide true pleasure of life, so he rested his longings on a simple Utopia like the Peach-blossom Springs he envisaged” (Zhu GQ 217–218). It is worth noting that the fact both Liang and Zhu use descriptors such as “oriental” and “simple” imply that they do not think the orthodox “Western Utopia,” designed by Sir Thomas More (1478–1535), is as simple as it is because it has to be based on reason and knowledge, governed by rules, supported by affluence, and realized by the development and transformation of nature. A comparison of Tao’s Peach-blossom Springs and the Western Utopia would indicate that they have little in common except for the rough likenesses shared by all literary imaginations. Unlike the bright, progressive, and promising Western Utopia, Tao’s Peach-blossom Springs is of a retreat and hermitage type.

Only after the many mirages and visions such as Plato’s “Republic,” Bacon’s “New Atlantis,” More’s “Utopia,” Tommaso Campanella’s “City of the Sun,” James Harrington’s “Oceana,” Robert Owen’s “New Harmony,” and Etienne Cabet’s “Ecarian Community” have been “realized” in the real world as steam engines, inner combustion engines, auto assembly line, nuclear submarines, space shuttles, robots, cloned dogs, genetically modified food, skyscrapers, express ways, supermarkets, transnational banks, and various kinds of charters, forums, committees, and boards of trustees, did people realize that happiness they have been trying to seek has never come as promised, and that, even worse, the realized “Utopia” is just like a shining edifice which in essence is a cage. As a result, new thinkers begin to emerge on the land of so-called Utopia and throw their spears at the orthodox “Utopia.” As anti-Utopianists, they satirize and criticize “Utopia” of the Enlightenment style and express their deep concerns about the deteriorating ecology, society, and even civilization, consciously or otherwise, thus ushering the world’s Utopian movement into a post-modernist era. In this context, Tao’s Peach-blossom Springs, in retrospect, now is shimmering as a ray of light of salvation. Tao’s simple oriental “Utopia” coincides with the “anti-Utopia” envisaged by Yevgeny Zamyatin (1884–1937), Aldous Huxley (1894–1963), and George Orwell (1903–1950) in that what they have presented is exactly the antithesis of the orthodox “Utopia.”

(3) Drinking: Sobriety and drunkenness

Half of Tao’s writings relate to drinking. Considering his confession in his lines like “Keeping my shadow company, I drink every evening. I know not that I am

already drunk” and “After hundreds of years, who would know about my glory or ignominy. The only regret would be that I have not drunk much in this life,” readers are under the impression that Tao does not spend a single day without drinking until the last grain of sand of his life runs out. In public opinion, drinking, especially binge drinking, is not infamous, but when it is associated with men of letters and poets in particular, drinking can mean a very different thing. Tao may be the best epitome of the poets of whose life drinking is an inseparable part.

Regarding why poets tend to be positively indulgent in drinking, opinions are divided, especially on Tao's case.

In the corrupt age of the Wei and Jin, scholars had a difficult time, and therefore, they tended to drown their sorrows in wine, and in so doing, they would forget the earthly world, their sentimentality, their sufferings, and even themselves, and thus became united with Nature. Hu Bugui (1906–1957) remarks that “Drinking is the gateway for Tao to return to the fundamental and the true” (127). This is a valid observation. In other words, drinking is the means by which Tao enters into non-being from being, into the dark from the bright, and into otherworldliness from this worldliness. In fact, Tao vividly expresses a similar opinion in his *Drinking XIII* through a contrast of the drunken man and the sober man. Tao writes:

To stay together as one's closest guest,
 With counter aims the other shows his zest.
 The one is oft in a drunken state
 While the other is sober and awake.
 The two of them would laugh with cheers,
 But never give each other listening ears.
 The sober man is foolish in disguise;
 The drunken man is proud but much more wise.
 Please bring my message to the drinking man:
 By candlelight keep drinking while you can. (119)

In his poem, the intoxicated man has much more wisdom than the sober one, and this, according to Ye Jiaying (1924–), what underpins the poem is Daoist thought. In Daoism, there are teachings on “depend-on” (external underpinning for gratification) and “non-dependent-on” (internal or self-underpinning for self-nourishment or gratification). The sober man is calculative, indecisive, and penny-wise, but the drunken man is pound-wise by listening to his inner voice and living a seemingly vegetative life. Such poetic philosophy echoes in spirit with Lao Tzu's “knowing the bright but cleaving to the dark” and his statement that “The way out into the light often looks dark; the way that goes ahead often looks as if it went back” (Chapter 41). Obviously, the valuation of drunkenness over sobriety and that of non-being over being is another form of “knowing the bright but cleaving to the dark” on the spiritual level.

Heidegger points out in his elucidations on Hölderlin's “Remembrance” that poetic intoxication (*Trunkenheit*) is different from ordinary drunkenness: In the former case, poets, in their intoxication, go beyond the everyday logical cognition

and elevate their souls closer to the origin of being, so for them, intoxication is a true state of being as poetry is the best means of contemplation. Unlike anesthesia, intoxication, for Heidegger, is a sublime form of attunement, and it brings poets to lucidity. He says, “... wherein the depths of concealment are opened up and darkness appears as the sister of clarity ...” (143). This may be what Tao means by “the significance in drinking.” It is safe to say that poetic intoxication in Heidegger’s term is exactly what is known as “Tao’s intoxication.”

(4) Elegy: Life and Death

Regarding life and death, Tao does not believe in Daoist immortalization or Buddhist Samsara (cycle of life). His philosophicality about death can be attributed to his idea that life is but a lodge for the journey, saying that life is about transformation; it eventually vanishes into non-being. For Tao, death means the final oneness with the earth and Nature’s transformation, and with the Way or non-being. Life and death for Tao also fall under the categories of “the bright” and “the dark,” respectively: Life means “the bright,” which is finite and ephemeral; death means “the dark,” which is infinite and eternal. Tao’s view of death as “returning” is based on his practice of “knowing the bright but cleaving to the dark,” thus rising from transiency to eternity.

The Daoist conception of life and death is based on natural philosophy. For Zhuangzi, life and death are just like the shift of day and night or the rotation of seasons, whose essence is the amassing and dispersal of *qi*, or life-force, which, in turn, is part of Nature’s transformation. For Zhuangzi, life is followed by death, and death is the beginning of life, who knows the law; life is generated by the amassing of *qi*, as death caused by the dispersal of it. Tao also has this idea: Since life comes from Nature and to Nature it returns, which is a law independent of man’s will, why should one trouble oneself with the way to go against the Way? He says, “The human life is like a magic show; to nothingness it will eventually go” (57). In fact, Tao’s being comfortable with and philosophical about life and death infused into his life, extra pleasure and ease, which he would otherwise have missed.

Prior to his long departure, Tao composed himself an elegy, saying that death is no big deal; it just means the oneness of the body with the mountain. In his “A Funeral Oration for myself,” he writes:

I am about to stop my earthly sojourn and return to my eternal underground residence... The expansive earth and the boundless sky have given birth to everything, including me as a human being. ... As I never overworked myself, I was filled with ease and comfort. To obey the laws of the heaven and follow the natural course of events – that is the way I spent my life. ... Now I am to leave this world without any regret, for I have attained my ideal of living in the countryside. Now that I am to die a natural death at my old age, what is there for me to linger on? (275–277)

Untroubled by life and death and comfortable with Nature’s transformation, Tao moves toward spiritual freedom and thus has discovered a rare gateway to the highest state of poetic dwelling.

2.6 Tao's "Knowing the Bright but Cleaving to the Dark" and Heidegger's Philosophy

Coincidentally, among the Chinese philosophical works that Heidegger mentions is Chapter 28 of *Lao Tzu*, which, as one can judge, has influenced Heidegger's philosophy profoundly.

During World War II, Heidegger translated eight chapters of *Lao Tzu* in collaboration with Xiao Shiyi (1911–1986). They translated what is known as "knowing the white but cleaving to the dark" into "He who knows his brightness veils himself in his darkness" (Poggeler 63). Heidegger believes that "Mortal thinking must let itself down into the dark depths of the well to see the star by day" (Poggeler 62). Poggeler says that Heidegger "did not mention the 'star' on a momentary impulse: while since Plato the sun has been an image for divine reason, which bathes everything in its light without darkness. The star rises alone for us out of darkness and its mysterious depths. But Heidegger seeks in Lao Tzu the trace of the most ancient thoughts only in the service of leading that which determines our history back to its hidden origin" (Poggeler 62). "Knowing the bright but cleaving to the dark" must have been inscribed in the mind of Heidegger of old age because according to his will, inscribed on his headstone was not a typical crucifix, but rather a shining star which implies that "the star rises alone for us out of the darkness and its mysterious depths."

Interestingly, Heidegger, as a lone star immersed in the dark after he ceased to be, seems to be a footnote to Tao Yuanming's name. He and Tao are somehow connected by a spiritual bond, which is "knowing the bright but cleaving to the dark," as Zhang Zhiyang (1940–) argues, "As a matter of fact, Heidegger's thought can be described as knowing 'sein' but cleaving to 'Dasein' and 'existence',⁴ modeling on Lao Tzu's paradigm of 'knowing the bright but cleaving to the dark'. We should have realized earlier that Heidegger, on its way back to the Pre-Socrates philosophy of Greece, echoed Tao Yuanming across time and space" (Zhang ZY 7–14).

Poggeler describes the connection between Heidegger's thought in his later years and Daoist philosophy this way:

When Lao-Tzu saw that his country was declining irrevocably, he left the archive at the court of Chou in order to wander across the border. As Heidegger engaged the Lao-tzu, he on his side left the archive in which the Western tradition was articulated. The return to the ground of metaphysics was also a way to one's own origin, and yet this origin, which was supposed to have left substance-thinking behind, was, in turn, understood again as a pre-given, quasi-substantial beginning. (66)

Poggeler believes that Heidegger's philosophical return is to liberate modern people from the dominant power of Plato over the past two millennia. Ultimately, Heidegger's path of "return," like that of Tao, also leads to Nature and freedom.

⁴The German word Dasein is sometimes translated as "being-there" or "being-here"; the nature of Dasein's being is described by Heidegger as "existence." Tr.

Heidegger meticulously elucidates Hölderlin's description of the "dark light" in "Remembrance." According to Poggeler, this is another example of Heidegger's drawing on "knowing the bright but cleaving to the dark," saying, "Heidegger supplements this phrase of Hölderlin's with Lao Tzu's line about the wise: he who knows his brightness veils himself in his darkness" (66).

To put the reader better in the context, Hölderlin's stanza in question is cited herein:

But someone hand me
 the fragrant cup,
 full of dark light,
 that I may rest.
 It would be sweet
 to slumber in the shadows.
 It isn't good
 to stay mindless
 with human thoughts.
 On the other hand, conversation
 is also good: to speak
 the thoughts of the heart,
 and to hear much of days of love,
 and of deeds that occur.

Centered around "dark light," Heidegger's elucidation is as follows:

The wine is named the dark light. Thus at the same time the poet asks for the light and for the brightness which contributes to clarity. But the dark light, in turn, cancels out the clarity, for the light and the dark are in conflict. Or so it seems to be for that kind of thinking which is exhausted in calculating with objects. The poet, of course, sees an illumination which comes to appearance through its darkness. The dark light does not deny clarity; rather, it is the excess of brightness which, the greater it is, denies sight all the more decisively. The all-too-flaming fire does not just blind the eyes; rather, its excessive brightness also engulfs everything that shows itself and is darker than darkness itself. (141)

To some degree, Heidegger is more like presenting his own poetics, especially the relationship between brightness and darkness than elucidating Hölderlin's poetry. Lao Tzu's "knowing the bright but cleaving to the dark" and his statement that "the way out into the light often looks dark," and that "great white often looks black" can be considered as a footnote to "dark light" as in Hölderlin's "Remembrance," where darkness and brightness are united harmoniously. If "brightness" represents "being," or things out there, then "darkness" corresponds to "*Dasein*," or the root of all things. Only in poetry can the origin of all things be revealed via "dark light." What Hölderlin drank was wine, and Hölderlin might have never had a sip of Chinese liquor, in which water and fire are perfectly blended as "brightness" and "darkness" are. Like the mutually generative water and fire or brightness and darkness, the future and the past, sobriety and drunkenness are also integrated as one in Hölderlin's poetry, as can be seen from Heidegger statement as follows:

The darkness preserves in the light the fullness of what it has to bestow in its shining appearance. The dark light of the wine does not take away awareness; rather, it lets one's meditation pass beyond that mere illusion of clarity which is possessed by everything calculable and shallow, climbing higher and higher toward the loftiness and nearness of the highest one. (142)

In his later years, Heidegger often compares human beings to “plants.” He quotes Johann Peter Hebel in his “Memorial Address to Konrad Keetzner,” saying, “We are like plants, which—whether we like to admit it or not—must rise out of the earth in order to bloom in the ether and bear fruit” (Sun 1241). Taking roots in the earth and reaching out into the sky—this is an example of Heideggerian “knowing the bright but cleaving to the dark.”

Informed by Oriental philosophy, Heidegger bases his contemplation of “being” on the distinction between “being” and “Dasein.” For Heidegger, modern philosophy can only deal with “being,” whereas it should address “non-being” as complete transcendence over “being.”

As to what “non-being” is actually is, Heidegger’s answer is as follows:

The no-thing is not an object or anything that is. The no-thing does not show up either for itself or alongside things as if it were an add-on. Rather, the no-thing makes possible the appearance of meaningful things, as such, for human being. The no-thing is not just the opposite of things; it is essential to their very emergence. The repelling action of the no-thing takes place in the very meaningfulness of things. (Sun 146)

The above-cited elaboration, vague and esoteric, is similar to Lao Tzu’s discourse. Like Lao Tzu’s “non-being,” Heidegger’s *Nichts* (no-thing, non-being) transcends the being of all things. What sets *Nichts* apart from Lao Tzu’s “non-being” is that in Heidegger, “*Nichts*” is the background and destination of all things, and therefore “being” is built into “no-thing”; for Lao Tzu, “being” is generated out of “non-being,” which, in turn, is the origin of all things. Ultimately, *Nichts* and Lao Tzu’s “non-being” serve the same purpose: to transcend over reality and return to or guard the pure unwrought state of “being.” In this sense, it is safe to say that Heidegger’s distinction between “being” and “no-thing” is a Western version of Lao Tzu’s “knowing the bright but cleaving to the dark,” the bright representing being or the visible, motion, progress, unveiled reality, and things out there, and the dark signifying no-thing, or the invisible, motionlessness, regression, hidden reality, and the origin of things. In addition, what binds Heidegger and Lao Tzu across time and space is that for them, their “*Nichts*” and “non-being” are like unfathomable abysses and that poets’ and philosophers’ contemplation is a ray of hope in the depth of the abysses.

How can one feel the “being” of “non-being” or “*Nichts*” and somehow enter into the state of the latter since “non-being,” as the original unwrought state of “being” which beggars everyday expression, is not a subject of scientific cognition or logical analysis?

Originally, Heidegger discovers this path: “*angst*” (fear) informs “*Nichts*,” and “death” makes people face the disappearance of all things out there; therefore, “*Nichts*” is revealed. *Angst* is unspeakable overwhelming “fear” or terror under which all cleavings and underpinnings in the real world give way, and, therefore, one enters into a vague aloofness and permeating vastness. It is now that one can feel the impending “*Nichts*” and therefore feel self-existence more keenly, as Heidegger says, “Without the original revelation of the no-thing, there

is no selfhood and no freedom" (Sun 146). Zhang Shiyong offers an interpretation to Heidegger's statement, saying, "Man, in everyday life, is led by the nose by institutions and norms. However, in the face of the impending death, all earthly concerns vanish since death points to Nichts. As a result, the original true state of man appears. Only at this point in time can one feel and discover one's 'ontological self', thus reaching a state of absolute freedom. So, Heidegger's philosophy about Dasein and Nichts is essentially about the return to 'origin' and freedom" (Zhang SY 373–374).

However, Heidegger's path of achieving Nichts through angst aroused by impending death seems to be too "logical" in his argumentation and therefore hardly applicable.

In contrast, the Daoist return to the "origin" and "non-being" is not to be achieved through the "from-death-to-life" path taken by Heidegger. Instead, it is realized through the purgation of all concerns, the purification of the heart, the utter oblivion of the self and things out there, stillness, the forsaking of words and wisdom, the resting of one's mind in tranquility and solitude, the transcendence over time and space, and the breaking away from the yoke of "things." In doing so, transcendence or absolute freedom ensues.

Zhuangzi describes "heavenly music," the highest form of music, as "permeating and encompassing though soundless and formless," whereby one reaches "non-being." It is said that Tao Yuanming had a Chinese zither or harp without strings, implying the Daoist idea of "the great sound being soundless." Tao must have understood that music dwells in the heart rather than in things.

Heidegger believes that those who can realize "Nichts" through angst are always the great and the courageous. In contrast, those Chinese who can reach "non-being" through stillness are usually those of the easy abandoned hermits, most of whom are poets. This is an example of the differences between the China and the West in terms of deep national traits. In ancient China, the absolute freedom that comes along with realized "non-being" is, at the same time, always a state of the arts since the achievers were predominantly poets.

Zhang Shiyong also compares Heidegger's and Tao's poetic philosophizing centered about "death" and "non-being."

Heidegger believes that death makes possible man's realization of "Nichts"; Tao writes in his poem that "As part of the great transformation, Life will be reduced to non-being." Zhang says, "In Tao Yuanming, there is no lament over impending death, but only realized "non-being" as transcendence over wealth, fame, things out there, and life and death. Tao's philosophizing can be viewed as a chanting of Heidegger's transcendence philosophy" (Zhang SY 376). However, since "poetry can convey the true significance of 'being' better than philosophy does" (Zhang SY 376), Tao may have felt transcendence and "non-being" more keenly than Heidegger once did. As regards "non-being" and the way of realization, Zhang cites Tao's poetic line "a remote heart creates a remote dwelling," arguing that philosophically, poetic remoteness as such is "transcendence" in

Heidegger's term. Both "remoteness" and "transcendence" point to the detached attitude toward the world. Heidegger in his late years argues that poets should be evoked to realize philosophical transcendence. He might have no idea that one millennium ago, Tao Yuanming already demonstrated how it is possible. It seems that Heidegger has failed to connect into a whole his "contemplation on death" in his earlier life and later on his thought on poetry, but Tao's contemplation on death is governed by his poetic "remoteness of the heart." Tao writes:

I pluck hedge-side chrysanthemums with pleasure
 And see the tranquil Southern Mount in leisure.
 The evening haze enshrouds it in fine weather
 While flocks of birds are flying home together.
 The view provides some veritable truth,
 But my defining words seem to me uncouth. (113)

"By 'truth', what is meant in Tao is the self-so of life, akin to 'true state of being' in Heidegger's term" (Zhang SY 376–367). This observation is accurate.

In his late years, Heidegger gave up on the "from angst to Nichts" path; instead, he rested his hope of returning to the true state of being on poetry and poets. In Heidegger, art in general and poetry in particular become the original way of the generation of "the truth of being." Thus, he gets closer to Taoist philosophy. Heidegger sates:

Yet the poet, if he is a poet, does not describe the mere appearance of sky and earth. The poet calls, in the sights of the sky, that which in its very self-disclosure causes the appearance of that which conceals itself, and indeed as that which conceals itself. In the familiar appearances, the poet calls the alien as that to which the invisible imparts itself in order to remain what it is – unknown. The poet makes poetry only when he takes the measure, by saying the sights of heaven in such a way that he submits to its appearances as to the alien element to which the unknown god has 'yielded'. (Sun 476)

In this case, what is meant by Heidegger is that only the poet can be a liaison in between Heaven, the earth, God and man, a soul that goes into and comes out of being and non-being, and one that internalizes Nature and lets it radiate in the soul. This is reminiscent of a poetic line by Chang Jian (708–765) reading "The zither music brightens and deepens the river." Metaphorically, poets are the zither music that elevates and transforms things out there.

Lao Tzu says, "I alone seem to have lost everything. Mine is indeed the mind of a very idiot. So dull am I. The world is full of people that shine; I alone am dark" (Chapter 20). It means that the enlightened ones are those guarding the dark lonely. Similarly, Heidegger believes that the enlightened ones are those plunged into darkness by great light. They could be philosophers like Heidegger himself, or poets such as Hölderlin and Tao Yuanming.

Though Tao and Heidegger lived in different times and states and faced different issues, yet their philosophizing, especially poetic philosophizing, has much in common. That being said, what confronted Heidegger was the deep-rooted tradition of rationalism, the trauma inflicted by scientific development on ecology, and the aloofness or rootlessness of human spirit caused by the

subversion of traditional values. In Tao's day, these problems had not surfaced. The issues that did confront Tao seem to be of a "lower" level, or, merely problems about how one deals with things and the world and how one can live with more freedom and originality and less confusion. Paradoxically, the seemingly "lower-level" issue has more universality and spontaneity, and therefore, it precedes other concerns.



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