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Article

Space and Place in Tao Qian's Tianyuan Poetry

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Abstract

Tao Qian is one of the central figures in Chinese literary history and the founding father of the so-called *tianyuan* (farmstead) poetry. Traditionally, Tao's writings have been read biographically, which has limited our understanding of their deeper structural and experiential dimensions. In this article, I turn my attention to the place-consciousness of his poetry and analyze how he repeatedly creates experiences of belonging in his verses. As a theoretical frame of reference, I utilize the concepts "space" and "place" as they are defined by Yi-Fu Tuan in his study *Space and Place*. In Tao's *tianyuan* poetry, the surrounding, indefinite space turns constantly into a lived and meaningfully organized place which functions as the epicenter of the agrarian lifestyle and worldview. As I seek to demonstrate, a place is not only a physical location but is a complex and multilayered phenomenon that can appear as a means of knowing, a source of truthful living, and even as an event. In Tao's writings, the experience of place is predominantly positive and empowering but can also at times cause feelings of loss and grief.

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Keywords

Tao Qian (Tao Yuanming) – farmstead poetry – space – place

1 Introduction

The fact that in December 405 Tao Qian 陶潛 (365–427),[1] after renouncing his official career for good, returned to his native home at the foothills of Mount Lu 廬山 to continue life as a humble farmer and thereafter wrote prolifically about the everyday joys and struggles of agrarian life in his poetry has turned out to be a double-edged sword for his artistic legacy. It has proven to be nearly impossible for later critics to distinguish between his writings and his persona. For this reason, it has become routine in Chinese literary history to interpret Tao's poetry biographically or even as a some kind of ethico-political statement.[2]

The roots of this reading tradition run deep. Less than a century after Tao's death, an eminent literary critic Zhong Rong 鍾嶸 (ca. 469–518) wrote about Tao that "each time I look at his writings, I think of the virtuousness of his character."[3] This stance survived in modern western interpretations of Tao's writings even to the late 20th century.[4] James Robert Hightower sums up his

1 Tao Qian is also known by his byname Tao Yuanming 陶淵明. The exact years of his birth and death are not known. For Tao's brief biography, see James Robert Hightower, *The Poetry of T'ao Ch'ien* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 2–3 and Wendy Swartz, *Reading Tao Yuanming: Shifting Paradigms of Historical Reception (427–1900)* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2008), 6–8.

2 Of course this is a simplification of the historical reception of Tao's works. In her detailed and in-depth study *Reading Tao Yuanming*, Wendy Swartz demonstrates that the portrayals of Tao Qian have varied significantly in Chinese literary history and that some biographers and interpreters have focused on his eccentricity, aloofness, and winebibbing, and others on his exemplary moral virtuousness. However, as the examples I quote in the introduction prove, the tendency to connect Tao's personality with his writings have been one of the most dominant features of his historical reception. At the same time it should be noted that some scholars have critized the political reading of Tao's oeuvre. For instance, A. R. Davis writes: "So many of the problems in Chinese studies of T'ao Yüan-ming seem to me to have been created and also rendered insoluble by the insistence on treating the whole of his life and works in political terms. He is commonly called 'T'ao the Hermit' and his hermitage – his withdrawal in retirement from public life – has been seen as a deliberate political act, while his writings are thought to be continuing political criticism." A. R. Davis, *T'ao Yüan-ming: His Works and Their Meaning*, vol. 1: Translation and Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), xv.

3 *Shipin duben* 詩品讀本, annot. Cheng Lin 成林 and Cheng Zhangcan 程章燦 (Taipei: Sanmin shuju, 2018), 93.

4 However, the biographical reading, especially to treat Tao's poems as political statements, is no longer predominant. Recent studies such as Tian Xiaofei, *Tao Yuanming*

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view: "T'ao Ch'ien [Tao Qian] reflects the conflicts and contradictions of the period, and his poetry best expresses the dilemma of the man of good will born into the troubled times of medieval China."[5] In a similar vein, Charles Yim-tze Kuang 鄺龔子 claims that Tao's art is "in essential unity with his life and ideals" and that "Tao's life and identity form part of his poetic legacy."[6] Occasionally the urge to mythologize Tao's character has even led to such extravagant gestures as naming him "the avatar of nature."[7]

It is not difficult to discern where these kinds of hagiographic readings originate from or why they have come to dominate Tao scholarship. As Alan J. Berkowitz puts it, "[m]uch of what Tao Qian writes describes Tao Qian in reclusion and that [...] is what has made him so renowned."[8] What Berkowitz is saying here is, essentially, that Tao Qian became probably the best known practitioner of reclusion in China because he wrote himself into being such a person.

While there is certainly truth in the claim that Tao's writings reflect the troubled times of his era and that they often focus on mundane agrarian toilings, reading poetry straightforwardly as an expression of ethical uprightness or even as an apotheosis of the individual tends to overlook the deeper aesthetic and structural dimension of the verses. For this reason we must resist the temptation of identifying Tao's writings with his historical self and bear in mind that what we are dealing with, as Berkowitz has aptly stated, are "literary portrayals of Tao Qian by Tao Qian"[9] and "autofictography."[10] In order to be

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and Manuscript Culture: The Record of a Dusty Table (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005) already focus more on the texts and not the author.

5 Hightower, *The Poetry of T'ao Ch'ien*, 1.

6 Charles Yim-tze Kwong, *Tao Qian and the Chinese Poetic Tradition: The Quest for Cultural Identity* (Michigan: Center of Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1994), 1–2.

7 Shuyuan Lu, *The Ecological Era and Classical Chinese Naturalism: A Case Study of Tao Yuanming*, trans. Meng Xiangchun (Singapore: Springer, 2017), 6.

8 Alan J. Berkowitz, *Patterns of Disengagement: The Practice and Portrayal of Reclusion in Early Medieval China* (Red Wood City: Stanford University Press, 2000), 217. In fact, there is no precedent in Chinese literary history for the scope of Tao's autobiographical project. See Wendy Swartz, "Imagining Self and Other," in *Early Medieval China: A Sourcebook*, ed. Wendy Swartz et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 328. Also, Tao's essay "Wuliu xiansheng zhuan" 五柳先生傳 (Biography of the Master of Five Willows) is the first fictionalized autobiography in China. See Wendy Swartz, "Self-Narration: Tao Yuanming's 'Biography of the Master of Five Willows' and Yuan Can's 'Biography of the Master of Wonderful Virtue,'" in *Early Medieval China: A Sourcebook*, ed. Wendy Swartz et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 382.

9 Berkowitz, *Patterns of Disengagement*, 217.

10 Berkowitz, "The Poetry of Reclusion: Tao Qian," in *How to Read Chinese Poetry in Context: Poetic Culture from Antiquity Through the Tang*, ed. Zong-qi Cai (New York: Columbia

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able to recognize the autonomy of his poetry, we must acknowledge the fact that the man behind the poems in not the same as the poems.

In this article, I choose to put the man to one side for a moment and concentrate instead on the poems themselves. The focus of my analysis is Tao's conscious endeavor to create a deep and meaningful sense of being in and belonging to a certain location. The main question of my research is by what kind of poetic and textual means does Tao construct this experience of belongingness in his poems. As the theoretical frame of reference, I utilize concepts of "space" and "place" as they are set forth in the cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan's 段義孚 (1930–2022) study *Space and Place*. In short, space and place are experiential fundamentals through which the "perspective of an experience"[11] is created, constructed, and mediated. My main thesis is that by analyzing the spatial orientations of Tao's poetry, we can better understand the deep-rooted place-awareness it aims to express.

In literary histories, Tao is generally portrayed as the founding father of the so-called *tianyuanshi* 田園詩,[12] literally "fields and gardens poetry," but generally referred to simply as "farmstead poetry."[13] As the name suggests, it means literature whose main concern is "with rural subjects, including all forms and manners of scenes and objects, the work, life and feelings of rustic people."[14] Considering the fact that the agrarian work, ethos, and whole lifestyle are inherently tied to the soil and to a farmstead, it is surprising how little attention previous Tao scholars have paid to the prevailing place-awareness of his poetry. As I seek to demonstrate in this article, this omission has limited

University Press, 2018), 130. Stephen Owen takes a step further and declares: "It should be said, once and for all, that T'ao Ch'ien is not the naive and straightforward poet he claims to be." Stephen Owen, "The Self's Perfect Mirror: Poetry as Autobiography," in *The Vitality of the Lyric Voice: Shih Poetry from the Late Han to the T'ang*, ed. Shuen-fu Lin and Stephen Owen (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 81.

11 The subtitle of Tuan's book is *The Perspective of Experience* and the topic is mostly discussed in the second chapter called "Experiential Perspective."

12 For instance, Ou Lijuan 歐麗娟 has described him as: "Tao Yuanming, the first farmstead poet in the history of Chinese literature." Ou Lijuan 歐麗娟, *Tianguang yunying gong paihuai: Ou Lijun pindu gu shici* 天光雲影共徘徊：歐麗娟品讀古詩詞 (Taipei: Lianjing chuban gongsi, 2021), 50. Tao has also been called "the father of agrarian poetry." Michael A. Fuller, *An Introduction to Chinese Poetry: From the Canon of Poetry to the Lyrics of the Song Dynasty* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2018), 148.

13 The literary texts related to farming were originally called *tianjiayu* 田家語 and only later was the concept changed into *tianyuanshi* 田園詩. See Tsai Yu 蔡瑜, "Tao Yuanming de xin ziran shuo – renjing de ziran" 陶淵明的新自然說—人境的自然, in *Huixiang ziran de shixue* 迴向自然的詩學, ed. Tsai Yu 蔡瑜 (Taipei: Taida chuban zhongxin, 2012), 63.

14 Kwong, *Tao Qian and the Chinese Poetic Tradition*, 57. See also Tsai, "Tao Yuanming," 146.

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our understanding of Tao's writings and the fundamentals of the worldview they present.

My analysis of Tao's poetry consists of three separate sections. First, I discuss how a place can appear as a means of knowing and, second, how a farmstead is portrayed not only as a place for living but also for nourishing an authentic way of life. In the last part, I extend my examination to temporal dimensions and show how a place can turn into a multifaceted and complex event. In the first two cases, the experience of a place is predominantly affirmative, uplifting, and empowering, but as my readings in the last section illustrate, place-consciousness can at times turn out to be saddening, alienating, and terrifying.

Applying modern western theoretical tools to pre-modern Chinese poetry is, of course, a questionable endeavor. But in this particular case, I believe that Tuan's ideas reveal new and previously uncharted facets of Tao's oeuvre. Place-consciousness, in a very broad sense, is a recurring motif in Tao's poetry and analyzing its structural underpinnings and poetic manifestations can help us better comprehend its role and functions in his writings.

2 Space and Place

On a superficial level, experiencing a certain location is based on simple tensions: some objects are closer than others, some are bigger than others, some are higher than others, and so forth. However, below these concrete and easily noticeable distinctions lies a more abstract level which Yi-Fu Tuan has divided into two separate but mutually defining parts, namely *space* and *place*. These terms are intrinsically interconnected and cannot be understood separately. Tuan defines them as a kind of a process moving from space to place and back:

> What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value. Architects talk about the spatial qualities of place; they can equally well speak of the locational (place) qualities of space. The ideas "space" and "place" require each other for definition. From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of space, and vice versa.[15]

15 Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place. The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2018), 6.

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Space is the vast openness around us and place is a specified location within that openness. As Tim Cresswell has noted, space is a more abstract concept than place.[16] In a way, space is the empirical raw material and place is space lived from a specific experiential perspective. In the case of a landscape, space is the complex diversity of potentially limitless details and place is a certain domain of that space perceived from a certain viewpoint. Space enables place(s) to come into existence, but at the same time space can only be approached via place(s).

In more concrete terms, to use Gary Snyder's words, this means that "the world is places."[17] Snyder elucidates his view in more detailed terms: "We experience slums, prairies, and wetlands all equally as 'places.' Like a mirror, a place can hold anything, on any scale."[18] Tuan expresses the same idea with different words: "Place exists at different scales. At one extreme a favorite armchair is a place, at the other extreme the whole earth."[19] In summary, any experience with meaningful boundaries has the potential to form a place.

Still, the organized experience of one's surroundings is just one side of being-in-a-place. As Tuan mentioned above, one of the main elements of creating a place-experience is to endow it with value. In his book *The West Side of Any Mountain*, ecocritic J. Scott Bryson applies Tuan's ideas to modern western ecopoetry. Bryson sees the role of a location-conscious ecopoet as a two-fold endeavor: on the one hand, it is to create place ("making a conscious and concerted effort to know the more-than-human world around us"); and on the other hand, it is to value space ("recognizing the extent to which that very world is ultimately unknowable").[20]

Scott's ideas point to the ethical dimension of ecopoetics which should also be taken into account in this analysis. The creation of place is meaningless if it does not suggest some kind of ethical awareness in relation to its immediate surroundings. However, reading value systems into fictional texts is always dangerous, as already demonstrated in the introduction, and for this reason I practice the utmost care when mapping the possible ethical dimensions of Tao's poetry.

16 Tim Cresswell, *Place: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 15.
17 Gary Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild: Essays* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990), 27.
18 Ibid.
19 Tuan, *Space and Place*, 149.
20 J. Scott Bryson, *The West Side of Any Mountain: Place, Space, and Ecopoetry* (Iowa City: University Of Iowa Press, 2005), 8.

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3 Place as a Form of Knowledge

The fourth poem of Tao's "Yin jiu" 飲酒 (Drinking Wine) poem cycle tells the story of a stray bird:

An anxious bird has lost its flock.	栖栖失群鳥
It is still hovering alone, though the sun is setting,	日暮猶獨飛
back and forth, with no place to rest.	徘徊無定止
Night after night its voice gets more mournful.	夜夜聲轉悲
With stark shrieks it thinks of charming distances,	厲響思清遠
coming and going, what could it lean on?	去來何依依
Then it comes across a lonely-standing pine,	自值孤生松
and folds its wings at the end of a long trip.	斂翮遙來歸
Due to the harsh wind, all trees are bare,	勁風無榮木
and this is the only shade that does not wane.	此蔭獨不衰
So finally it finds a place to live	託身已得所
and for a thousand years it will not leave.	千載不相違[21]

This straightforward and simple fable depicts the existential distress of a bird that has lost its flock and feels forlorn and displaced. All of a sudden, the world around it appears unstructured which makes its surroundings seem chaotic and intimidating. The bird flits back and forth in the air but the directions seem to have lost their meaning. Salvation only arrives when the bird finds a solitary pine tree into which it can (re)settle and feel safe again. The anxieties of directionlessness and being lost dissolve once the bird finds a new locus, the epicentre of its lifeworld, which gives its existence both structure and meaning.

It is not difficult to see that the poem is an allegory of a human individual seeking his natural place in this world.[22] Tao even makes the parallelism between birds and humans explicit in another poem that includes the lines: "The birds enjoy having a roost / and I too love my hut" 眾鳥欣有託，吾亦愛吾廬.[23] In this sense, the first poem in Tao's "Gui yuantian ju" 歸園田居 (Returning to Live among the Fields and Gardens) poem cycle can be read as a humanized version of the story of the distressed bird. The poem begins with the speaker lamenting how he lost thirteen years of his life living away from home due to official duties. Only returning to his native farmstead frees him,

21 *Tao Yuanming ji* 陶淵明集, annot. Wen Honglong 温洪隆 (Taipei: Sanmin shuju, 2017), 157.

22 See e.g. Kwong, *Tao Qian and the Chinese Poetic Tradition*, 94 and Hightower, *The Poetry of T'ao Ch'ien*, 129.

23 *Tao Yuanming ji*, 270.

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both physically and mentally, from the shackles of mundane officialdom. The poem ends with solemn, almost confessional proclamations:

My home is free of the worldly dust,	戶庭無塵雜
empty rooms filled with sweet leisure.	虛室有餘閑
For long I was caught inside a cage,	久在樊籠裏
now I have returned to what exists of itself.[24]	復得返自然[25]

Both poems consist of a simple narrative in which the speaker initially experiences deep existential estrangement from his surroundings and the world seems to be in a state of disarray, then he manages to find a stable locus which allows him to reorient himself, and finally the sense of balance and contentment, "a coherent picture of existence,"[26] returns. As these two examples show, place-awareness is a recurring theme of Tao's poetry, implying its centrality in his thinking and poetic vision.

Tuan Yi-Fu's ideas of space and place provide useful tools for analyzing the spatial dimension of the poems. In the "Yin jiu" poem, space appears as the unfathomable state within which the bird is able to move but where directions have become meaningless, and place is undoubtedly the pine tree that gives it a much-missed shelter. In the "Gui yuantian ju" poem, space is the wide and vicious world filled with stressful demands and place is the farm which is the only thing that can satisfy the speaker's deeper spiritual yearnings. What is interesting in both poems is that the transition from space to place is marked with the verb *gui* 歸, literally "returning home." Space is the unstructured potential spreading in all directions but organizing it into place, a center of meaningful being, which can engender the experience of "returning home" anywhere.

But the spatial distinctions in these poems are still rather obvious and trivial. A much more sophisticated composition of space and place appears in the fifth poem of the "Yin jiu" poem cycle:

24 The Chinese concept *ziran* 自然 (self-thus) is extremely difficult to translate. It is often rendered as "nature" but this is problematic and somewhat misleading, since the western idea of "nature" indicates a place, whereas the original expression refers more to a (natural) state of being. Christoph Harbsmeier has specified eleven syntactically distinct uses of *ziran*. Christoph Harbsmeier, "Towards a Conceptual History of Some Concepts of Nature in Classical Chinese: Zì Rán 自然 and Zì Rán Zhī Lǐ 自然之理," in *Concepts of Nature: A Chinese-European Cross-Cultural Perspectiv*, ed. Hans Ulrich Vogel and Günter Dux (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 220–21.

25 *Tao Yuanming ji*, 54.

26 Kwong, *Tao Qian and the Chinese Poetic Tradition*, 31.

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I build my hut within the world of men,	結廬在人境
yet I hear no voices of horses and carts.	而無車馬喧
You ask me, how is this possible.	問君何能爾
A distant mind makes a place remote.	心遠地自偏
Picking chrysanthemums by the eastern fence,	採菊東籬下
leisurely gazing at the southern mountains.	悠然見南山
Mountain air is charming at dusk,	山氣日夕佳
flying birds follow their companions.	飛鳥相與還
All this contains a true meaning,	此中有真意
but when I try to explain it, I forget the words.	欲辯已忘言[27]

On the most elemental level, this poem is a buoyant and emotionally appealing description of an idyllic farmstead radiating joyous simplicity, natural beauty, and deeply-lived communion with the bucolic surroundings. It is clearly not depicting the habitat of a traditional wilderness hermit but of a rustic dweller surrounded by an inhabited countryside – Susan E. Nelson even talks about "garden reclusion" when discussing this poem.[28] This fact is already expressed in the opening couplet of the poem: the speaker has built his abode inside a village and even if the esteemed guests do not pay a visit ("horses and carts" in the second line are a euphemism for aristocrats and officials[29]), the mere possibility of such visits implies that the speaker is not living in a remote and isolated location.

Although on the surface the poem appears to be a simple depiction of a calm countryside evening, a deeper look at the structural elements of the lines uncovers a more complex network of meanings, tensions, and polarities. For instance, the feelings of spaciousness are created by mentioning "southern mountains" and "flying birds" which are both perceived from an unspecified distance. With the images of a looming mountain range and hovering birds, the poem establishes the realm of space which spreads both horizontally (the mountains) and vertically (the birds).

But at the same time the idle gazer is picking chrysanthemums by the eastern fence (of his garden) which is an explicitly defined place within the lived world of the speaker. The immediacy of the flowers is intensified against the backdrop of the distant mountains; the mountains loom faraway but the

27 *Tao Yuanming ji*, 158.

28 Susan E. Nelson, "Revisiting the Eastern Fence: Tao Qian's Chrysanthemums," *The Art Bulletin*, 83.3 (2001): 441.

29 Tian Xiaofei, *Tao Yuanming and Manuscript Culture*, 247.

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flowers can be touched. Also, chrysanthemums were not picked for decoration but for use as medicine, probably in a wine infusion, in order to prolong life.[30] So in this "place," the natural world (a plant) and human culture (using it as a medicine) merge.

In this sense, the fence *li* 籬 is the experiential culmination point of the poem. The elements of wild nature (the mountains) and of urban life (horses with carts and officials using them) reside outside the fence and the elements of domestic nature (chrysanthemums and implicitly the speaker's farmstead) inside it. Interestingly, the character 籬 appears in the middle of the poem (the fifth line) as if dividing the poem itself into two halves. It functions as a spatial demarcation: everything outside the fence is perceived from inside it. The only living beings seemingly capable of crossing this border are the birds which are returning to their nests at dusk in the eighth line. Homing birds are one of Tao's favourite and frequently repeated symbols.[31] Often they symbolize the tired farmer heading back home after a whole day's labor,[32] but here they exemplify the fact that the borderline between space and place is never impermeable or hermetic.

Moreover, the dynamics of spatial tensions function in multiple ways and even a distant space can occasionally form a place. Initially, the looming mountains (probably Mount Lu[33]) mentioned in the sixth line create the sense of a distant horizon which is contrasted with the adjacent chrysanthemums. This drastic divergence in distances enhances the feeling of being-in-place that is centered in the garden flowers. But the dialectics of distance is never that simple because, as Tuan states, "place is whatever stable object catches our attention."[34] He continues:

> We may be deliberately searching for a landmark, or a feature on the horizon may be so prominent that it compels attention. As we gaze and admire a famous mountain peak on the horizon, it looms so large in our consciousness that the picture we take of it with a camera is likely to disappoint us, revealing a midget where we would expect to find a giant.[35]

In Tao's days there were, of course, no cameras, and the only way to represent a mountain was either to paint it or to write about it. In this particular poem,

30 Hightower, *The Poetry of T'ao Ch'ien*, 131.
31 Ibid., 15.
32 Ibid., 40.
33 See e.g. *Tao Yuanming ji*, 158, fn 7.
34 Tuan, *Space and Place*, 161.
35 Ibid.

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the "mountains" are actually mentioned twice: first the speaker is gazing at the "southern mountains" and in the next line he declares that the "mountain air is charming at dusk." So in these lines the mountain-as-place is perceived in two phases, initially as an indefinite visual object and then adding a sensually pleasing dimension to it (here the "mountain air" [*shanqi* 山氣] should be understood as referring to the clouds and mists shrouding the peaks[36]). Adding aesthetic value to the mountains connects them more intimately with the human perceiver and emphasizes the significance of his experience. So, following Tuan's ideas, one could argue that in these two lines, mountains cease to be an unorganized space, exposing the other side of their perceptional existence as a place.

Naturally, the mountains can also be read symbolically. For instance, Hightower sees the looming mountains in Tao's poem, along with the chrysanthemums, as a symbol for long life.[37] But there is more to the mountains that just their imposing and seemingly eternal presence. The fact that the mountains are located in the south is, of course, not without significance. As Tuan mentions, in traditional China the ruler stood facing the south and received the full rays of the noon sun.[38] In fact, because the emperor's throne invariably faced south, the phrase "facing south" came to be used as a proper noun designating an emperor.[39] Also, in a traditional Chinese city, front and back were clearly distinguished and there could be no mistaking the front and south with its broad ceremonial avenue.[40] This is to say that the south was a sacred direction with immense cultural and symbolic meaning and the fact that the speaker in Tao's poem is gazing south juxtaposes him, at least metaphorically, with the emperor in his palace. This brings a certain solemnity to the poem: the speaker is observing the space in front of him like a sovereign overseeing his empire.[41]

But at the same time this majestic solemnity is contrasted with a metaphysical detachment expressed in the fourth line: "A distant mind makes a

36 See *Tao Yuanming ji*, 158, fn 8.

37 Hightower, *The Poetry of T'ao Ch'ien*, 131.

38 Tuan, *Space and Place*, 40.

39 Rene Qun Chen, "Cardinal Directions in Chinese Language: Their Cultural, Social and Symbolic Meanings," *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, 66.2 (2009): 235.

40 Tuan, *Space and Place*, 41.

41 This may seem far fetched, but for instance a Song critic Zhang Jiucheng 張九成 (1092–1159) asserts that this poem implies that although "Tao Yuaming is among the fields, he still does not forger the ruler." See Li Gonghuan 李公煥, *Jianzhu Tao Yuanming ji* 箋注陶淵明集, vol. 3, accessed August 11, 2022, https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=220513.

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place remote."[42] Hightower even believes that this poem is so famous because it "conveys admirably the detachment and repose of the Great Recluse" who "remains uncontaminated by the world."[43] But is he really so uncontaminated? For instance, in the seventh line the speaker expresses feelings of pleasure while observing the charming mountain view, and adding aesthetic valuation to a scenery implies at least some sort of attachment to it. Herein lies one of the core paradoxes of Tao's poem: as already mentioned, space becomes place by endowing it with value,[44] but at the same time the speaker of the poem proclaims that his mind remains separated from the mundane world. It appears that he is simultaneously creating a place and withdrawing from it.

The visual enjoyment of a natural object can vary both in kind and in intensity, but according to Tuan, "[t]he most intense experiences of nature are likely to catch one by surprise."[45] As a paradigmatic example of this, he mentions the bright star that the poet William Wordsworth (1770–1850) suddenly observed one evening above him and whose appearance penetrated his "capacity of apprehension with a pathos and a sense of Infinite."[46] The tranquil and restrained notion of the charm of a distant mountain vista expressed in Tao's poem could not be much further from Wordsworth's moment of ecstatic epiphany. Instead of a great surprise, the atmosphere of Tao's poem exudes familiarity, and it seems unlikely that the speaker is seeing the mountains for the first time. This ambience of stability enhances the feeling of being-in-place, since "place is permanent and hence reassuring to man, who sees frailty in himself and change and flux everywhere."[47] In this sense, the endurance of the mountains provides an unfaltering context for volatile human existence and deepens his sense of belonging to a place.

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42 This line has proven to be particularly challenging for western translators and its rendering varies significantly. Hightower translates it: "With the mind detached, one's place becomes remote." Hightower, *The Poetry of T'ao Ch'ien*, 130. A. R. Davis translates it: "When the heart is remote, the place becomes like it." Davis, *T'ao Yüan-ming*, 96. David Hinton translates it: "Wherever the mind dwells apart is itself a distant place." David Hinton, trans, *The Selected Poems of T'ao Ch'ien* (Port Townsend: Copper Canyon Press, 2000), 52. And Bill Porter translates it: "when the mid travels so does the place." Bill Porter, *Finding Them Gone: Visiting China's Poets of the Past* (Port Townsend: Copper Canyon Press, 2016), 259. My own and rather unlyrical version is based on the idea that when a mind is distant (i.e. detached) (*xinyuan* 心遠), it makes every place (*di* 地) itself (*zi* 自) seem remote (*pian* 偏).

43 Hightower, *The Poetry of T'ao Ch'ien*, 130.

44 Tuan, *Space and Place*, 6.

45 Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Value* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 94.

46 Cit. ibid.

47 Tuan, *Space and Place*, 154.

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It is also important to notice that the second couplet of the poem is written in the form of a short dialogue, which means that the fourth line is actually the reply to a question. This reflects the fact that the speaker of the poem (the "Great Recluse") does not shy away from human contacts but is practising his "garden reclusion" among his fellow humans. Moreover, the statement-like fourth line substantiates that the speaker is able to formulate verbally his inner experiences, and this becomes significant when discussing the last couplet of the poet.

From the point of view of spatial orientation, the compound *xinyuan* 心遠, literally "mind distant," adds a psychological layer to the structural scheme of Tao's poem – here, the adjective "distant" (*yuan* 遠) does not signify distance from a certain perceived object but from the perception itself. So when gazing at the distant southern mountains and the charming mountain view, the speaker is simultaneously maintaining a similar (mental) distance to these perceptions and evaluations. In this sense, the expression 心遠 is connected with the expression *youran* 悠然 (leisurely) in the sixth line. If the "distant mind" is the internal side of the detachment, carefree leisureness is its external manifestation. In this sense, the poem is saying that the true beauty of external things can be reached only via mental detachment that enables perceiving in the state of spiritual idleness that permeates the whole poem and gives it its deep aura of tranquility.

What is left is the poem's last couplet in which the concrete natural imagery gives room for a statement rising from an inner experience. Everything described in the poem conveys a deep truth that in the end, according to the speaker, remains inexpressible with limited human words. Again, this seems paradoxical since in the fourth line the speaker explains verbally his internal condition to an anonymous (and perhaps imagined) interlocutor who otherwise does not appear in the poem. The ontological silence of Tao's verses has long roots in Chinese literary history. As Tian has noted, the expression *wangyan* 忘言 (to forget the words) in the last line echoes the famous passage in the 26th chapter of *Zhuangzi* 莊子:[48]

> The fish traps are for catching fish; once you have caught the fish, you can forget the trap. Snares are for catching rabbits; once you have caught the rabbit, you can forget the snare. Words are only to catch the meaning; once you have caught the meaning, you can forget the words. Where can I find a man that has forgotten the words, so that I could talk with him?[49]

48 Tian, *Tao Yuanming and Manuscript Culture*, 24.

49 *Zhuangzi benyi* 莊子本義, annot. Shui Weisong 水渭松 (Taipei: Sanmin shuju, 2012), 434.

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Interestingly, in the last line of his poem Tao declares himself to be the man who has forgotten words and who is therefore keenly sought after at the end of the quote. In the Zhuangzian realm of whimsical Daoist paradoxes, speaking – and presumably more real and meaningful speaking – is possible only after one has forgotten words. But in the context of Tao's poem, this insight seem to lead nowhere, since the poem ends with forgetting the words and the profound discussion that should follow the lexical forgetfulness never materializes.

However, this overwhelming experience that cannot be reached with verbal expressions may also be approached from a different angle. Tuan writes: "Spatial ability is essential to livelihood, but spatial knowledge at the level of symbolic articulation in words and images is not."[50] For him, spatial ability (freedom of movement and observation) precedes spatial knowledge (meaningful organization of a location) expressed in language. Tuan appears to be saying that the ability to exist in a state of freedom can manifest itself in some kind of prelingual awareness. In the case of Tao's poem this nonverbal experience hovers behind the images of distant mountains, mountain air and flying birds, all of which imply spatial ability even though they are expressed in words but with deliberately vague and equivocal language.

In short, the inexplicability of an experience exemplifies the limits of language and consequently the wider human conceptual-linguistic sphere. In the finale of his poem, Tao engages with a stance which David W. Gilcrest has called "sceptical environmental poetics" that "recognizes the border between language and the living world as a frontier beyond which abides the truly wild."[51] Indeed, the limits of language are not the limits of the wild world and the experiences it engenders and sustains. By the same token, Tuan is sceptical of the possibilities of language and warns against the "blindness" it may cause:

> Blindness to experience is in fact a common human condition. We rarely attend to what we know. We attend to what we know about; we are aware of a certain kind of reality because it is the kind we can easily show and tell. We know far more than we can tell, yet we almost come to believe that what we can tell is all we know.[52]

Tuan's words resonate profoundly with Tao's poem and expose its epistemological dimension: although the poem describes a charming natural scene and

50 Tuan, *Space and Place*, 74.

51 David W. Gilcrest, *Greening the Lyre: Environmental Poetics and Ethics* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2003), 148.

52 Tuan, *Space and Place*, 201.

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the calm presence of an attentive yet detached mind observing its beauty, the truest essence of the experience still remains in the realm of ineffable intimacy that transcends all verbal descriptions. But at the same time it is essential to realize that this kind of supramundane experience, paradoxically, is possible only when one is deeply rooted in a place.

Seen this way, a place implies a special type of knowledge or, perhaps, a special type of *knowing*. As Wolfgang Kubin has stated, the Chinese concept of nature is synonymous with *Dao* and thus "helps one to overcome his struggles."[53] In the case of Tao's "Yin jiu," this would mean that being deeply rooted to a specific place but at the same time maintaining a certain mental distance from it makes it possible to find a harmonious connection and balance with the natural world. At the core of it is an internal "knowledge" which cannot be fully explained by language but can be referred to in a poem.

4 A Farmstead as a Place for Nourishing Truth

In the fifth "Yin jiu" poem discussed above, the concrete habitat of the speaker, a farmstead, appears only implicitly, apart from the "hut" mentioned in the first line. The "fence" (that surrounds and encloses the farm) serves as a metonym for the whole farmstead. Since place is an "enclosed and humanized space" and a "calm center of established values,"[54] an inhabited farmstead becomes almost naturally a place. Tuan writes about the dialectics of a farm and wild nature:

> From one viewpoint, the forest is a cluttered environment, the antithesis of open space. Distant views are nonexistent. A farmer has to cut down trees to create space for his farmstead and fields. Yet once the farm is established it becomes an ordered world of meaning – a place – and beyond it is the forest and space.[55]

Technically, a farm is created by wiping out the obstructing natural elements of a location and replacing the lush disorderliness of the wilderness with coherent man-made structures. But as Tuan points out, there is more to a farmstead

53 Wolfgang Kubin, "The Myriad Things: Random Thoughts on Nature in China and in the West," in *Concepts of Nature: A Chinese-European Cross-Cultural Perspective*, ed. Hans Ulrich Vogel and Günter Dux (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 517.

54 Tuan, *Space and Place*, 54.

55 Ibid., 56.

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than just barns and fields; it is also a "world of meaning" which defines and organizes the lives of its inhabitants.

In the middle part of the aforementioned poem "Gui yuantian ju", the speaker gives a more detailed tour around his homestead:

My farm occupies more than ten *mu*	方宅十餘畝
and my hut eight or nine *jian*.	草屋八九間
Elms and willows cast shade on the backyard,	榆柳蔭後園
peach and plum trees stand in front of the hall.	桃李羅堂前
Other villages appear hazy in the horizon	曖曖遠人村
and their rising smoke is blurred.	依依墟里煙
A dog barks deep in the alleys	狗吠深巷中
and a cock crows at the top of a mulberry tree.	雞鳴桑樹巔[56]

The sequence describes a simple rustic dwelling with its surroundings and in doing so is clearly creating a place in the sense of an "organized world of meaning." Every element mentioned in the lines – for example the two species of trees behind the hut and two in front of it – appears to be in its right location and in natural harmony with one another. Gaston Bachelard (1884–1962) has stated that our house is "our corner of the world" and "our first universe"[57] which means that it constitutes the epistemological center of one's fathoming of the world. These ideas resonate deeply with Tao's verses in which all mentioned details exist in direct relation to the farmstead, and the uncharted space-world extends outwards from it. Moreover, through the emotionally charged description of the homestead it becomes "the topography of our [or in this case, the speaker's] intimate being"[58] which is not just a "confusion of images"[59] to a new resident but also a scene that exudes familiarity and genuine connectedness. From the point of view of the speaker, the farm depicted in the poem is not an abstract and anonymous farm but *his* farm.

The last two lines of the quote allude to the 80th chapter of *Daodejing* 道德經 which describes a kind of miniature agrarian utopia that consist of a small country with a sparse population living an overtly simple life. The ending of the chapter describes the exceptionally deep-rooted place-boundness of the people: "They see the neighboring country in the distance and hear the

56 *Tao Yuanming ji*, 53–54.

57 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (London: Penguin Classics, 2014), 26.

58 Ibid., 20.

59 Tuan, *Space and Place*, 17.

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voices of their cocks and dogs but never in their lives travel there and back."[60] The dog barks and the cock crows in Tao's verses echo the words of *Daodejing*, emphasizing the atmosphere of idyllic remoteness of his dwelling depicted in the poem.

However, a farmstead is not just a place of living and toiling but it encompasses a deeper ontological level which becomes visible in Tao's poem "Xinchou sui qiyue fujia huan jiangling yexing tukou" 辛丑歲[61]七月赴假還江陵夜行塗口 (Written in the Night of Seventh Month of Xinchou Year While Passing through Tukou and Returning to Jiangling from Leave):

For thirty years I have lived in idleness	閑居三十載
and neglected the affairs of the dusty world.	遂與塵事冥
The *Songs* and the *Documents* brought me joy,	詩書敦宿好
in forests and gardens I had no base feelings.	林園無俗情
So how could I let go of all this	如何捨此去
to travel to faraway Nanjing?	遙遙至南荊
Under the early autumn moon I beat the oars	叩枻新秋月
and by the river bank bid farewell to my friends.	臨流別友生
A chilly breeze rises near dusk,	涼風起將夕
the moon shines in the clear emptiness of night.	夜景湛虛明
The vast sky is covered with brightness,	昭昭天宇闊
the placid stream reflects its gleam.	皛皛川上平
Thinking of my mission, I am unable to sleep	懷役不遑寐
but keep moving alone in the middle of the night.	中宵尚孤征
Shang songs are not my way of doing things	商歌非吾事
and I am loath to abandon plowing the fields.	依依在耦耕
Discarding the official's hat I return to my old place	投冠旋舊墟
and free myself from worldly ambitions.	不為好爵縈
Nourishing the true under my thatched roof	養真衡茅下
is the best way to protect my reputation.	庶以善自名[62]

Again, the poem expresses the speaker's discontent with the lifestyle of officialdom and his yearning to move (back) to a more natural environment. Apart from the obvious tension between the urban and agrarian environments, the texture of the poem is replete with other spatial distinctions: some elements are in the distance (the moon, the illuminated firmament) and others in the

60 *Laozi jieyi* 老子解義, annot. Wu Yi 吳怡 (Taipei: Sanmin shuju, 2017), 462–63.

61 This refers to the year 401.

62 *Tao Yuanming ji*, 124.

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proximity (moonlight on the surface of the river), some are above (the moon, the sky) and others are below (the river, the fields, the boat), and some places appear to be innate to the speaker (forests, gardens) and for others he needs to purposely travel to (Nanjing). The eighth couplet elevates this two-fold setting to a more conceptual level, because it contrasts a high-spirited cultural activity (singing the songs of the Shang dynasty, here a euphemism for trying to impress the ruler by using indirect methods[63]) with a mundane farming toil (plowing the land). While abstract songs have no palpable shape or defined location, plowing can only occur is a specific place.

Nevertheless, the main thematic dichotomy that resonates through the whole poem is between the dusty, duty-filled outside world and the idle harmony inside the speaker's hut. As already seen, this kind of dualistically presented scheme of possible life-choices is archetypal for Tao's writings, but in this poem he takes a step further. As the penultimate line divulges, for Tao a farmstead is not just a place of living and working – but a state of truthful existence.

The expression "nourish the true"[64] (*yangzhen* 養真) is not unambiguous but it has philosophical roots in the Daoist tradition. *Zhuangzi* explains: "True (*zhen*) is what man has received from Heaven, acts spontaneously and is unchangeable."[65] In *Zhuangzi* the term *zhen* 真 "refers to the natural state of a thing and what it is natural to do, or, simply, what is natural."[66] In the context of Tao's "back to the original nature" ethos, it is noteworthy that *Zhuangzi* also talks explicitly about "returning to *zhen*"[67] (*fanqi zhen* 反其真) which indicates that *zhen* is something that can be approached and attained.

63 The expression "singing the Shang songs" alludes to a story of Ning Qi 甯戚 (a native of the Wei state who lived during the Spring and Autumn period) found in *Huainanzi* 淮南子. According to the story, Ning Qi sang a song in the Shang mode under a cart and when Duke Huan of Qi 齊桓公 heard it, he sighed and appointed Ning Qi a high official. Chinese Text Project (online database), "Zhu Shu Xun" 主術訓, 5, accessed August 11, 2022, https://ctext.org/huainanzi/zhu-shu-xun?searchu=%E7%94%AF%E6%88%9A&searchmode=showall#result.

64 The correct translation of *zhen* is of course debatable. For instance, Tian translates it as "genuineness, naturalness." Tian, *Tao Yuanming and Manuscript Culture*, 137. And Kwong translates it as "truthfulness." Kwong, *Tao Qian and the Chinese Poetic Tradition*, 41.

65 *Zhuangzi benyi*, 502.

66 Kim-chong Chong, "The Concept of *Zhen* 真 in the Zhuangzi," *Philosophy East and West*, 61.2 (2011): 324.

67 *Zhuangzi benyi*, 104.

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According to Mark Edward Lewis, *zhen* entered Chinese poetics in the writings of Tao Qian who held it up as his ideal.[68] This seems to denote the significance of the concept to him, and some scholars have even suggested, unsurprisingly, that *zhen* is the "essence of Tao's spirit."[69] The compound *yangzhen* 養真 (nourishing the true) is affiliated with the expression *zhenyi* 真意 (true meaning) mentioned in the fifth "Yin jiu" poem discussed earlier. The quest for a genuine and truthful existence is one of the core motifs of Tao's poetry and, even more importantly, in its world-conception this state is fundamentally connected to place-awareness. The "true meaning" can be reached within the framework of tranquil natural setting and this "true" can be further nourished and cultivated under a thatched roof which obviously serves as a metonym for a modest farmstead and for the simple, rustic lifestyle.

Whatever the prevailing "true" of Tao's verses might be, the path to it goes through an in-depth sense of belonging to a place which means, in essence, that a place is not "just a thing in the world but a way of understanding the world."[70] In this sense, the last couplet of the poem "Xinchou sui qiyue fujia huan jiangling yexing tukou," in its emphasis on wisdom found from within, evokes the 47th chapter of *Daodejing*: "Without stepping out of the door, he knows everything under Heaven. Without peeking through the window, he sees the Ways of Heaven."[71] Discarding the career of an official, the speaker decides to return to the farmstead which is presented as the only place that is able to provide him with sufficient means for satisfying his spiritual yearnings and a natural context for attaining an elevated, sagacious lifestyle. For him, the farm is not only his "first universe" but the ultimate universe.

5 Place as an Event

In the "Xinchou sui qiyue fujia huan jiangling yexing tukou" poem discussed above, the anonymous speaker lives initially for thirty years in idleness, then travels to the city of Nanjing to take up a post as an official, but in the end he returns to his native place. This narrative structure reveals another important aspect of place-consciousness, namely time.

68 Mark Edward Lewis, *China between Empires: The Northern and Southern Dynasties* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 243.

69 Kwong, *Tao Qian and the Chinese Poetic Tradition*, 41.

70 Cresswell, *Place: An Introduction*, 18.

71 *Laozi jieyi*, 313.

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The experience of a place does not occur only in the spatial but also in the temporal continuum and in the act of human experience these two converge. As Tuan points out, language plays also an important role in this process: "Language itself reveals the intimate connectivity among people, space, and time. I am (or we are) here; here is now. You (or they) are there; there is then, and then refers to a time which may be either the past or the future. – Here implies there, now implies then."[72]

Movement in space also necessarily means movement in time and these two categories of an experience intertwine in verbal expressions. All this is visible in Tao's poem "Huan jiuju" 還舊居 (Returning to a Former Homestead):

In the past I used to live in Shangjing	疇昔家上京
and six years have passed before returning.	六載去還歸
Today I am finally coming back,	今日始復來
but many sad things make me sorrowful.	惻愴多所悲
The field paths are where they used to be	阡陌不移舊
but the village houses have changed.	邑屋或時非
I walk around the place where I once lived,	履歷周故居
and only a few of the old neighbors remain.	鄰老罕復遺
Step by step looking for signs of the past,	步步尋往迹
some places are difficult to move away from.	有處特依依
During the hundred years of fleeting illusions,	流幻百年中
winters and summers constantly alternate.	寒暑日相推
My constant fear is that the Great Change occurs	常恐大化盡
before my *qi* has been exhausted.	氣力不及衰
So let me put these thoughts aside	撥置且莫念
and instead raise a cup of wine.	一觴聊可揮[73]

The main theme of this poem is the inevitable passage of time and its ramifications to the animate and inanimate. As Tian has aptly described, the poem ruminates on "the power of change and the illusory nature of human life" and also voices "the same worries and fears about mortality."[74] Still, lamenting on the passing of time is just half the picture. What really makes this poem so poignant is that in its composition the changes in time are juxtaposed with changes in location.

72 Tuan, *Space and Place*, 126–27.

73 *Tao Yuanming ji*, 137.

74 Tian, *Tao Yuanming and Manuscript Culture*, 109.

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The narrative core of the poem is the description of the speaker's returning to his former dwelling and his affective reflections on the signs of alterations. The important thing to remark here is that these reflections have both spatial and temporal dimensions. The speaker used to live in Shangjing[75] and, as already seen, the immediate surroundings constitute an individual's primary and most intimate experiences of a place. The second line tells us that six years ago he left the city.[76] But starting from the third line on, the speaker comes back to the same place only to find out that the buildings have changed and that most of his old neighbors have disappeared. With these sorrowful observations, the once familiar location appears to regress, at least to some extent, to unfamiliarity and has ceased to be a living and meaningful place for him in its entirety.

Returning to a place that is filled with fond memories creates an interesting twist in Tuan's scheme: "here" can also imply "then." Or to be more precise, the timelines of "now" and "then" can cross in a specific location which is pregnant with emotive thoughts and remembrances. Cresswell describes this process: "Place in this sense becomes an event rather than a secure ontological thing rooted in notions of the authentic. Place as an event is marked by openness and change rather than boundedness and permanence."[77] The main points of this quote are "openness and change": when one returns to a certain place, one does not only perceive its objects as such but, instead, the change that is visible in them, and this exposes the underlying openness of the place.

In this sense, a place is always an "event" for a returnee. The fact that one is able to identify a certain location despite its noticeable changes marks the "individuality" of the place in question. Edward Relph has stated:

> For instance, in a village which has existed for centuries it is quite possible that every building will have been reconstructed at least once, and they all will have been repeatedly changed in the course of maintenance and repair. There may also have been drastic changes to the fabric of the

75 It is unclear, whether Shangjing 上京 (upper capital) is an actual place name or refers to the capital.

76 The second line is ambiguous and can be interpreted in several different ways. Some translators understand the line to mean that for six years the speaker has been going in and out of the city, but this makes little sense because the third line says that he is coming back for the first time (*shi* 始) after the hiatus. In my own rendering, I follow Wen Honglong's 温洪隆 notation in *Tao Yuanming ji* and understand the line to mean that the speaker has left Shangjing six years ago (*liuzai qu* 六載去) and is now returning there (*guihuan* 還歸).

77 Cresswell, *Place: An Introduction*, 71.

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> village – new churches, roads and housing estates being added to the existing ones. However, there can be little question that this is the same essential place that it has always been – grown and changed perhaps, yet as much itself as an old man is the same person as the boy of seventy years ago.[78]

For the speaker of Tao's poem, there can be little question that the place he is revisiting is the same essential place that it has always been. He recognizes some old features (the field paths), notices manifold changes (the local houses and the neighbors), but his strong emotional responses to the perceived details make it clear that the place still contains a unique "identity" that makes him feel connected to it even after several years' of absence. Relph continues: "The individual distinctiveness of a place therefore lies not so much in the exact physical forms and arrangements as in the meanings accorded to it by the community of concerned people [...]."[79] Tao's mournful returnee certainly counts as a "concerned person" when coming back to the vicinity of his former residence. He has clearly developed a rich web of meanings related to it, and his attachment to the place has not waned even when its physical features have transformed.

It is worth noticing that the anonymous speaker of Tao's poem does not explicitly clarify his motivation for going back to his former dwelling. This raises the obvious question: why does he turn back to the past and what is it that he is trying to find there? According to Tuan, "[p]eople look back for various reasons, but shared by all is the need to acquire a sense of self and of identity."[80] Here Relph's and Tuan's ideas converge in a fascinating way. The identity built upon a certain location may help a person to acquire and sustain a sense of his own identity. This means, in essence, that the meanings bestowed on a specific location and the meanings bestowed on an individual come together in a place that is special to that particular individual.

This realization opens a way to apprehend the deeper experiential dimension of Tao's poem. By this I mean that the cross-identification of a location and an individual is not, from the perspective of an experiencing human being, a purely rational phenomenon. Tuan expounds his idea of place-consciousness that transcends everyday human reasoning: "The state of rootedness is

78 Edward Relph, *Rational Landscapes and Humanistic Geography* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 172.

79 Ibid.

80 Tuan, *Topophilia*, 186.

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essentially subconscious: it means that people have come to identify themselves with a particular locality, to feel that it is their home and home of their ancestors."[81]

The key concept here is of course "rootedness," since it is the prerequisite of an identification with the place and the feelings of "homeness." And at the most profound level, this process occurs subconsciously. This appears to accord well with Tao's poem in which the speaker returns to his former home-site and soon seems to be tormented by contradictory feelings. Seeing the unchanged field path engenders delight in recognizing old scenery, but simultaneously the changes in the housing and the people cause grief related to impermanence. This emotional tension culminates in the ninth and tenth lines in which the speaker is so overwhelmed by the feeling of nostalgia (from Greek *nóstos*, "homecoming," and *álgos*, "painful") that he even finds it difficult to physically move.

But all this painful self-identification with a former dwelling and its surroundings takes place instinctively and without logic or reasoning. Because of his pre-existing connections with the details of the environment, he is able to *feel* the place. Hence, the boundary between him and the place blurs and the changes outside reflect the changes inside. This experience is not easy for the speaker to process, and in the eleventh line he goes on to claim, rather anxiously, that the whole human life is but a dream-like series of "fleeting illusions." In the finale of the poem, his dread of mortality becomes so unbearable that he feels no choice but to escape it by inebriating himself.

In other words, this prosaic and emotionally multifaceted poem depicts how a place can also turn into an extremely unpleasant and haunting "event." In Tuan's parlance the troublingly anti-cathartic gesture of the last couplet means reorienting the experiential horizon and moving away from more clearly defined place-awareness back towards hazier and more amorphous space-consciousness. The unfamiliar details of the speaker's former residence exposes the unfamiliar sides of his own identity, and hence the experience of transience appears frightening. Apart from seeing old spots, for him returning from Shangjing also means facing his own limitedness and mortality, and realizing this makes him want to avoid the whole situation by seizing his wine cup. In doing so, the place of recognition turns into an event of anguish and denial.

81 Ibid., 194.

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6 Conclusions

As I have shown in this article, the dialectics of space and place is a central structural motif that permeates Tao Yuanming's *tianyuan* poetry. In the poems discussed above, space becomes a lived place in several ways and via different poetic strategies. The archetypal locus of Tao's *tianyuan* poetry is the countryside with the farmstead at its heart. Typically, the simple yet idyllic rustic dwelling is presented as the polar opposite of the noisy city life and its burdens.

But there is more to it than just the concrete conditions and withdrawal from the urban bustle. In Tao's poetry, the farmstead is not merely a physical location but also, and even more so, a realm of wordless knowledge and a truthful way of existence. In some of his verses, the ontological bond between the speaker and the place becomes so intimate that occasionally the boundary between the two appears to dissolve. The speaker has built the farm for himself as a place for living but at the same time the farm enables him to reach deeper and more profound dimensions of human life.

However, the other side of this intimacy is the anxiety it may engender. Visiting a familiar place can recall fond memories but at the same time witnessing the changes in it can also fill one with unpleasant or even terrifying notions of one's own mortality. In summary, the creation of a place is a complex and multilayered human function that on the one hand makes life organized and purposeful but on the other exposes its fragility and finiteness.

All these aspects of creating a place and the various emotions related to it are visible in Tao Yuanming's poetry. For this reason it is justifiable to claim that he is one of the preeminent place-makers in the history of Chinese poetry.

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