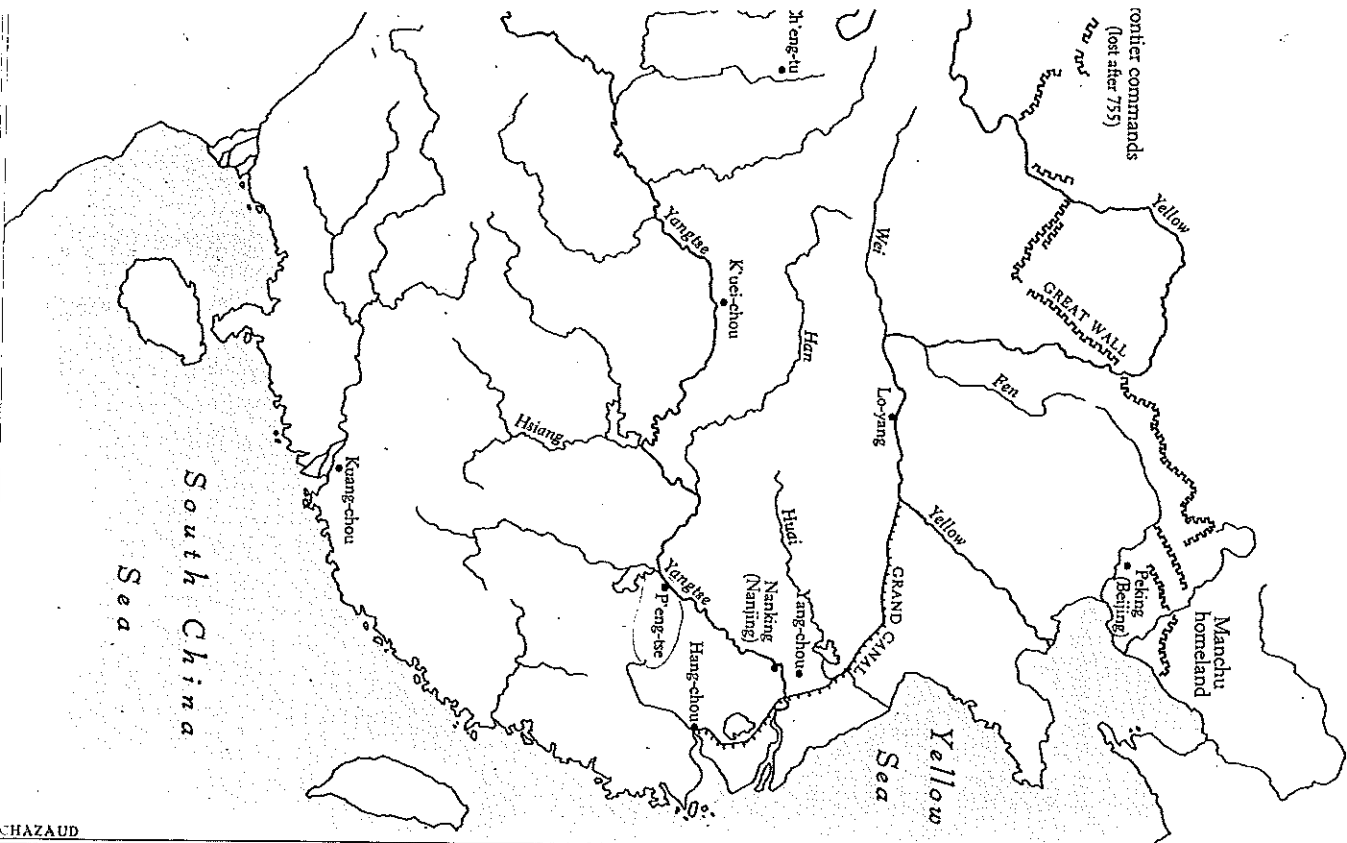
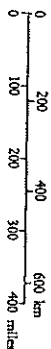


T'ang China

ca. 650 B.C.E.



China's "Middle Period"

The "middle" in our Western concept of the Middle Ages signifies an "in between," the centuries between the collapse of the Roman empire and the Renaissance. And though many cultural and literary historians have sought to correct the common image of these centuries as a period of intellectual and cultural stagnation, they remain a problematic phase in the story of Western civilization and its literature. In the case of China the situation is quite the reverse. If we use Western period terms, the *middle* of a Chinese "Middle Age" would mean "central." It is a period when Chinese thought and literature reached what many regard as their highest forms. And it is a period that later ages of Chinese history looked back to with awe. In the eleventh century Su Shih expressed a sense of intimidation by the past that was to continue through later centuries.

Those with knowledge first fashion a thing; those with ability carry it through to fullness. It is not accomplished by one person alone. The superior man in his studies and all the various artisans in their skills reached a state of completion in the passage from the Three Dynasties of antiquity through the Han to the T'ang. When poetry reached Tu Fu, when prose reached Han Yu, when calligraphy reached Yen Chen-ch'ing, and when painting reached Wu Tao-tzu, all the variations of past and present and all the possibilities in the world were over.

Tu Fu, Han Yu, Yen Chen-ch'ing, and Wu Tao-tzu all lived during the T'ang Dynasty (618-907). Su Shih's own dynasty, the Sung (960-1279), might equally claim to have brought thought (and despite Su Shih's partiality for Wu Tao-tzu, painting as well) to a height that became a standard of achievement for the centuries that followed. Neither claim is true, of course. Chinese culture and literature continued to evolve after this splendid "Middle Age." They did not merely repeat the past any more than the European Renaissance merely recapitulated classical antiquity. Nevertheless, the great medieval dynasties of T'ang and Sung have loomed large in the national imagination.

In the second century the Han empire was crumbling. Great families dominated the central government, regional warlords were carving out their own domains, and peasant uprisings weakened the central government's authority. In the face of a collapsing social order, writers and intellectuals began to show widespread disenchantment with the Confucian values of public service. By the turn of the third century, China had become divided into three regional states, known as the Three Kingdoms: Shu in the west, Wu in the south, and in the heartland in the state of the warlord Ts'ao Ts'ao, who used the last puppet emperor of the Han empire to give him legitimacy.

After Ts'ao Ts'ao's death in 220 C.E., his successor declared the Han empire ended and established a new dynasty, the Wei. This survived only a few generations before it was overthrown by another dynasty, the Chin, which managed briefly to reunify the old empire. The Chin Dynasty fell in 316 to non-Chinese invaders from the north, and many of the great families of the north fled south of the Yangtze River, where a new Chin government had been set up by a prince of the royal house. Thus began a period of division known as the northern and southern dynasties. The north was divided among various states, each with a non-Chinese ruling and military class. The south was ruled by a succession of short-lived Chinese dynasties.

During this period Confucianism ebbed dramatically; Taoist sects, concentrating on medical, alchemical, and magical arts, flourished and founded great temples in the south. Buddhism, which had been making minor inroads for many centuries, became a major force. Buddhist missionaries from India and central Asia came to China in increasing numbers, and working together with Chinese monks, they began the immense task of translating the important Buddhist scriptures into Chinese. Both Taoism and Buddhism promised, each in its own way, the means for personal salvation, which lay outside the purely social and ethical interests of Confucianism. Hence the private life of the individual apart from social role became an important concern in literature after the Han empire. Writers were fascinated by the figure of the "recluse," whether a true hermit or simply someone who decided, like T'ao Ch'ien, to live at home and not serve in government. This interest was greatly encouraged by political instability and court factionalism, which led to the execution of more than a few writers. But the concern for the individual was deeper than a simple desire to escape the hazards of public life. Those who did serve in the government often cultivated and approved a stylish self-conscious eccentricity that was the very opposite of the self-effacing norms of behavior enjoined by the Confucian tradition. Nature, rather than the polity, held their attention, whether *nature* meant that of the individual or the magnificent and solitary landscapes of south China.

Owing to the loss of north China to non-Chinese overlords, most literature of the period comes from the southern dynasties, where the people saw themselves as the inheritors of traditional Chinese culture. In an important moment for the history of Chinese civilization, cultural legitimacy came to be defined not as occupancy of a place (the north China plain, the ancient heartland) but as a portable tradition. Most of our knowledge of early China reaches us through the filter of the southern dynasties—their libraries, their literary histories, their criticism, and their anthologies. Although the north tried desperately to assert itself as the legitimate heir of the Chinese past, it too felt the power of the southern dynasties' appropriation of "tradition."

In the long run it was a northern dynasty, the Sui, that reunified China, to be quickly supplanted by another northern dynasty, the T'ang. Drawn by the cultural legacy of the south, the two dynasties slowly forged a new culture that combined northern and southern traditions. The T'ang Dynasty was an age of cultural confidence and, initially at least, of expansion, with T'ang armies pushing at the frontiers on all sides. Particularly important was the expansion to the northwest and control of the trade routes to the west. The upper class was attracted by the exotic goods, music, and ideas that came in along the caravan routes. Taoism and Buddhism continued to be powerful, supported by the common people and the imperial government alike; and Confucianism, the basis of state organization, enjoyed a resurgence. Even today, a reader's first association with the T'ang period is likely to be its poetry.

The composition of poetry came to be used in the examination by which intellectuals entered government service. It became an integral part of social life, a medium of basic social exchange. Perhaps nowhere else in the world has lyric poetry ever occupied such a central position, and from this context emerged a number of major poets whose work made them familiar personalities throughout the rest of Chinese history. A great poem might deal with large philosophical issues but just as easily with meeting an old friend. Poetry was seen as a way to record both individual personality and the historical moment. Through the poem the poet became alive for future readers, and in that person the philosophical idea or the moment became alive.

In the 750s, the confidence of the dynasty was broken by a major rebellion of the northeastern armies. The capital at Ch'ang-an was taken and the emperor was forced to flee. Although the rebellion was soon put down, the dynasty never quite regained its former authority. In 907 the T'ang Dynasty finally fell, and after a half-century interregnum of warring kingdoms, it was replaced in 960 by a new dynasty, the Sung.

The Sung Dynasty saw major social and intellectual changes. The old aristocratic families that dominated the T'ang Dynasty had lost their power, and the government was opened up to social groups that had previously been largely excluded from political participation. The lower Yangtze River region became a major population center, and southeasterners increasingly dominated Chinese intellectual life, as they would in later ages. In 1127 the Chin, a sinicized but non-Chinese state on the northeastern frontier, conquered north China, and the Sung Dynasty was reestablished in the south, with its capital in Hang-chou.

Although printing existed earlier, the eleventh century saw the rapid development of commercial printing, allowing literary works and scholarship a far wider audience than ever before. As in Europe, the dissemination of learning through the printed book had a significant impact on the civilization. A reexamination of the Confucian classics gave rise to a movement known as neo-Confucianism, which came to dominate intellectual life. Meanwhile Sung Dynasty classical literature continued the forms of the T'ang period, but with a difference of tone—a less intense, more reflective manner that for later ages seemed to embody the personality of the dynasty. In the urban centers of the south in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries there also developed a new vernacular literature, recreating in writing the ambience of professional storytelling. Thus began a vernacular literary tradition that would evolve alongside classical literature up to the present.

PRONOUNCING GLOSSARY

The following list uses common English syllables to provide rough equivalents of selected words whose pronunciation may be unfamiliar to the general reader.

Ch'ang-an: <i>ch'ang-ahn</i>	Tao Ch'ien: <i>tau ch'ien</i>
Hang-chou: <i>hang-joe</i>	Wei: <i>way</i>
Sui: <i>sway</i>	Wu Tao-tzu: <i>woo tau-dzu</i>
Su Shih: <i>soo shir</i>	Yen Chen-ch'ing: <i>yen chun-ching</i>

TIME LINE

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
365-427 Tao Ch'ien, poet and farmer	220-280 The Three Kingdoms period, when China is divided into three regional states
400-450 The flourishing of landscape poetry	280 China is briefly reunified under the Chin Dynasty
500-550 Development of literary criticism, literary history, and anthology making in the south	316 North China falls into the hands of non-Chinese invaders and the court moves to the south; the following period is known as the northern and southern dynasties
	350-550 Flourishing of Buddhism and translation of Buddhist scriptures
	589 A northern dynasty, the Sui, reunifies China
	618 The Tang Dynasty supplants the Sui
	629 The journey of the Buddhist monk Tripitaka, the hero of <i>Monkey</i>
ca. 690 Composition of poetry included as part of the <i>chin-shih</i> examination, which young men take to qualify for the best posts in the government	
ca. 699-761 Wang Wei, poet	
701-762 Li Po, poet	
712-770 Tu Fu, poet	713-755 The "High Tang" and the reign of Hsuan-tsung; the capital, Chang-an, is a cosmopolitan center
	755 The rebellion of the northeastern armies under their general An Lu-shan drives the emperor from the capital

TIME LINE

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
768-824 Han Yu, poet and prose writer, advocate of "old-style" prose	
772-846 Po Chü-y, poet	
779-831 Yuan Chen, poet and author of <i>The Story of Yang-ying</i>	
791-817 Li Ho, poet	
803-852 Tu Mu, poet	
813-858 Li Shang-yin, poet	
981 Completion of the <i>T'ai-yüing kuang-chi</i> , a vast compendium in which is preserved almost all the prose fiction from the T'ang and earlier	
1000-1100 Rise in popularity of song lyrics or <i>tz'u</i> , sung at parties and by courtesans from the Entertainment Quarters • Rapid expansion of commercial and state-supported printing	
1084-ca. 1151 Li Ch'ing-chao, lyricist and author of "Afterword" to <i>Records on Metal and Stone</i>	
1127-1279 Rise of drama and professional storytelling in vernacular Chinese, especially in Hang-chow, the capital of the Southern Sung	
	1127 North China falls to non-Chinese invaders from the northeast; the dynasty is reestablished south of the Yangtze River. This period, lasting until the Mongol conquest, is known as the Southern Sung
	1279 Mongols conquer south China
	1299 Marco Polo's account of his visit to China
	907 Final collapse of the Tang into numerous regional kingdoms
	960 Founding of the Sung Dynasty and the reunification of China
	800 Revival of Confucianism under Han Yu
	1000-1100 Development of Neo-Confucianism, which used the Confucian classics as a ground for philosophical reflection on human nature

T'AO CH'EN

365-427

In the second decade of the fourth century, non-Chinese invaders from the north conquered north China and took the reigning Chin emperor captive. In the ensuing turmoil many of the great families and their retainers emigrated to the region south of the Yangtse River, where one of the Chin imperial princes had established his own branch of the dynasty. This was an unprecedented situation, in which "China" became a purely cultural tradition, no longer tied to the traditional heartland.

The great families from the north considered themselves an aristocracy, as compared with the local population. Buddhism established itself as a major force and received lavish patronage from the court and aristocracy. Monasteries supported schools and housed non-Chinese monks, who joined their Chinese counterparts in translating the Buddhist scriptures into Chinese. The Taoist "church" (an organized religion to be distinguished from the philosophical Taoism of early China) grew in importance and attracted distinguished followers. While society since the Han empire had always offered many alternatives to a Confucian dedication to political life, in the southern dynasties such alternatives became more and more prominent.

Individualism and eccentricity were much admired in this period, both within the aristocracy and by those who scorned social life altogether and went to live as recluses among the beautiful mountain regions south of the Yangtse. T'ao Ch'ien, who finally came to be seen as the outstanding writer of the age, was very much an individualist, and his courage of conviction was undoubtedly strengthened by the intellectual currents of the time. Despite a claim to at least one illustrious ancestor, T'ao's immediate family consisted of poor provincial gentry. He prided himself on bumbling naïveté rather than aristocratic sophistication, and instead of opulent leisure, he saw pleasure in the simple life of a rural community, offering contentment in the rhythms of farm labor.

An old strain in the Chinese tradition idealized and even sentimentalized the peasant farmer. T'ao Ch'ien stands out from earlier writers by choosing such a life as his own and finding contentment in it. Celebration of this decision and his subsequent life can be found throughout his poetry. T'ao Ch'ien's family background made him a good candidate for minor provincial posts or a place in the entourage of one of the powerful aristocrats who had usurped the political power of the eastern Chin ruler, and he did indeed serve in both capacities. Each time, however, something happened that led him to resign his post: sometimes a death in the family, sometimes sheer dissatisfaction with a career whose formalities and burdens he loathed. His final post was as magistrate of Peng-tse, a county seat not far from his hometown. After only a little more than two months in office, he quit his post and went home, where he quietly spent the last twenty-two years of his life. It was on this occasion that he wrote his long poem "The Return," in which he states the problem eloquently: "Whenever I have been involved in official life I was mortgaging myself to my mouth and belly."

In his own distinctive way, T'ao Ch'ien shared with other Chin intellectuals a fascination with freedom and the idea of leading a natural life. It was thought that what individuals felt was "natural" and was distinct from their will and bodily desires. Thus T'ao could will himself to serve, even wish to serve, and could satisfy his "mouth and belly," yet still be going against his nature. A joke of the same period clarifies the issue. A poor scholar once visited the house of a wealthy aristocrat. He had to use the toilet and came to a room so lavishly decorated that he thought he had stumbled into the women's quarters by mistake. He made a hasty retreat and apologized to the aristocrat, who told him that it had, indeed, been the toilet. So informed, he returned, but on trying to use the room as it was intended, he found that he could not relieve himself. He returned, said good-bye, and as the anecdote ends, "went to

somebody else's toilet." Beneath the joke lies a recognition that we each have a nature in which we feel at ease; that nature can be compelled neither by will (the intention to use the opulent toilet) nor by the body's demands (which sent the scholar to the toilet in the first place). Happiness is possible only in circumstances in which one's nature is not violated.

Throughout his work T'ao returns again and again to defining what is natural to him as an individual, discovering how to live so that his nature will be content, and observing how few needs he actually has. When a fire burns down his house, he looks around and concludes that he still has enough, though the danger of hunger and want is always there, threatening to drive him forth into the world, as it does on several occasions.

The good society, then, is the small world of the farming community, supplying human needs adequately but without excess. The unpleasant alternative is the empire and its government, with its false hierarchies and continual threat of violence. His most famous image of the happy life is based on a legend then current about Peach Blossom Spring, a farming community hidden deep in the mountains, whose inhabitants were the descendants of people who had fled the Chinese heartland during wars some five centuries earlier. A fisherman, following a trail of peach blossoms in the water, stumbles on this village and gives the curious villagers a summary of the war-torn preceding half millennium of Chinese history. On leaving to go home, he pays careful attention to the route, but no one is ever able to find the place again.

In many ways the fisherman is the emblem of T'ao Ch'ien's poetry and prose. He moves from the public world to an enclosed private world, safely cut off from the outside. For the sake of the story he must go back to the public world to tell about Peach Blossom Spring, even though no one will ever be able to get there. In the same way T'ao Ch'ien's poetry and prose writings are sent out from his village to the larger world, to be read by the literate officials who serve in the imperial government. These poems tell them of a possibility of contentment that eludes them and will be hard to find even if they go looking for it.

PRONOUNCING GLOSSARY

The following list uses common English syllables to provide rough equivalents of selected words whose pronunciation may be unfamiliar to the general reader.

Ch'ien-lou: <i>ch'ien-loh</i>	Liu Tzu-chi: <i>lyoh dzuh-jie</i>
Han Hsin: <i>hahn shin</i>	Peng-tse: <i>puhng-dzuhn</i>
Huan Tui: <i>huahn tuay</i>	T'ai-yüan: <i>tay-yooan</i>
Ko-tien: <i>guh-tyen</i>	Tao Ch'ien: <i>tau ch'ien</i>
Liu Pang: <i>lyoh bahng</i>	

The Peach Blossom Spring¹

During the T'ai-yüan period² of the Chin dynasty a fisherman of Wu-ling once rowed upstream unmindful of the distance he had gone, when he suddenly came to a grove of peach trees in bloom. For several hundred paces on both banks of the stream there was no other kind of tree. The wild flowers growing under them were fresh and lovely, and fallen petals covered the

1. All selections translated by James Robert Hightower except "Biography of Master Five Willows," translated by Stephen Owen. 2. From 376 to 396 C.E.

ground—it made a great impression on the fisherman. He went on for a way with the idea of finding out how far the grove extended. It came to an end at the foot of a mountain whence issued the spring that supplied the stream. There was a small opening in the mountain and it seemed as though light was coming through it. The fisherman left his boat and entered the cave, which at first was extremely narrow, barely admitting his body; after a few dozen steps it suddenly opened out onto a broad and level plain where well-built houses were surrounded by rich fields and pretty ponds. Mulberry, bamboo and other trees and plants grew there, and criss-cross paths skirted the fields. The sounds of cocks crowing and dogs barking could be heard from one courtyard to the next. Men and women were coming and going about their work in the fields. The clothes they wore were like those of ordinary people. Old men and boys were carefree and happy.

When they caught sight of the fisherman, they asked in surprise how he had got there. The fisherman told the whole story, and was invited to go to their house, where he was served wine while they killed a chicken for a feast. When the other villagers heard about the fisherman's arrival they all came to pay him a visit. They told him that their ancestors had fled the disorders of Ch'in times³ and, having taken refuge here with wives and children and neighbors, had never ventured out again; consequently they had lost all contact with the outside world. They asked what the present ruling dynasty was, for they had never heard of the Han, let alone the Wei and the Chin. They sighed unhappily as the fisherman enumerated the dynasties one by one and recounted the vicissitudes of each. The visitors all asked him to come to their houses in turn, and at every house he had wine and food. He stayed several days. As he was about to go away, the people said, "There's no need to mention our existence to outsiders."

After the fisherman had gone out and recovered his boat, he carefully marked the route. On reaching the city, he reported what he had found to the magistrate, who at once sent a man to follow him back to the place. They proceeded according to the marks he had made, but went astray and were unable to find the cave again.

A high-minded gentleman of Nan-yang named Liu Tzu-chi heard the story and happily made preparations to go there, but before he could leave he fell sick and died. Since then there has been no one interested in trying to find such a place.

The Return

I was poor, and what I got from farming was not enough to support my family. The house was full of children, the rice-jar was empty, and I could not see any way to supply the necessities of life. Friends and relatives kept urging me to become a magistrate, and I had at last come to think I should do it, but there was no way for me to get such a position. At the time I happened to have business abroad and made a good impression on the grantees as a conciliatory and humane sort of person. Because of my poverty an uncle

offered me a job in a small town, but the region was still unquiet and I trembled at the thought of going away from home. However, P'eng-tse was only thirty miles from my native place, and the yield of the fields assigned the magistrate was sufficient to keep me in wine, so I applied for the office. Before many days had passed, I longed to give it up and go back home. Why, you may ask. Because my instinct is all for freedom, and will not brook discipline or restraint. Hunger and cold may be sharp, but this going against myself really sickens me. Whenever I have been involved in official life I was mortgaging myself to my mouth and belly, and the realization of this greatly upset me. I was deeply ashamed that I had so compromised my principles, but I was still going to wait out the year, after which I might pack up my clothes and slip away at night. Then my sister who had married into the Ch'eng family died in Wu-chang, and my only desire was to go there as quickly as possible. I gave up my office and left of my own accord. From mid-autumn to winter I was altogether some eighty days in office, when events made it possible for me to do what I wished. I have entitled my piece 'The Return'; my preface is dated the eleventh moon of the year i-ssu.¹

To get out of this and go back home!

My fields and garden will be overgrown with weeds—I must go back.

It was my own doing that made my mind my body's slave

Why should I go on in melancholy and lonely grief?

I realize that there's no remedying the past

But I know that there's hope in the future.

After all I have not gone far on the wrong road

And I am aware that what I do today is right, yesterday wrong.

My boat rocks in the gentle breeze

Flap, flap, the wind blows my gown;

I ask a passerby about the road ahead,

Grudging the dimness of the light at dawn.

Then I catch sight of my cottage—

Filled with joy I run.

The servant boy comes to welcome me

My little son waits at the door.

The three paths are almost obliterated

But pines and chrysanthemums² are still here.

Leading the children by the hand I enter my house

Where there is a bottle filled with wine.

I draw the bottle to me and pour myself a cup;

Seeing the trees in the courtyard brings joy to my face.

I lean on the south window and let my pride expand,

I consider how easy it is to be content with a little space.

Every day I stroll in the garden for pleasure,

There is a gate there, but it is always shut.

Came in hand I walk and rest

Occasionally raising my head to gaze into the distance.

The clouds aimlessly rise from the peaks,

The birds, weary of flying, know it is time to come home.

3. From 221 to 207 B.C.E.

1. A cyclical date name. China used a lunar calendar in which the first month began in late January or early February. The eleventh moon or month was probably December.

As the sun's rays grow dim and disappear from view
I walk around a lonely pine tree, stroking it.

Back home again!

May my friendships be broken off and my wanderings come to an end.
The world and I shall have nothing more to do with one another.

If I were again to go abroad, what should I seek?

Here I enjoy honest conversation with my family.

And take pleasure in books and zither to dispel my worries.

The farmers tell me that now spring is here

There will be work to do in the west fields.

Sometimes I call for a covered cart

Sometimes I row a lonely boat

Following a deep gully through the still water

Or crossing the hill on a rugged path.

The trees put forth luxuriant foliage,

The spring begins to flow in a trickle.

I admire the seasonableness of nature

And am moved to think that my life will come to its close.

It is all over—

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

Let us then follow the inclinations of the heart:

Where would we go that we are so agitated?

I have no desire for riches

And no expectation of Heaven.

Rather on some fine morning to walk alone

Now planting my staff to take up a hoe,

Or climbing the east hill and whistling long

Or composing verses beside the clear stream:

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

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

Biography of Master Five Willows¹

We don't know what age the master lived in, and we aren't certain about his real name. Beside his cottage were five willow trees, so he took his name from them. He lived in perfect peace, a man of few words, with no desire for glory or gain. He liked to read but didn't try too hard to understand. Yet whenever there was something that caught his fancy, he would be so happy he would forget to eat. He had a wine-loving nature, but his household was so poor he couldn't always obtain wine. His friends, knowing how he was, would invite him to drink. And whenever he drank, he finished what he had right away, hoping to get very drunk. When drunk, he would withdraw, not really caring whether he went or stayed. His dwelling was a shambles, providing no protection against wind and sun. His coarse clothes were full of holes and patches; his plate and pitcher always empty; he was at peace. He forgot all about gain and loss and in this way lived out his life.

1. Master Five Willows is T'ao Ch'ien's image of himself.

Ch'ien-lou's² wife once said, "Feel no anxiety about loss or low station; don't be too eager for wealth and honor." When we reflect on her words, we suspect that Five Willows may have been such a man—swinging wine and writing poems to satisfy his inclinations. Was he a person of the age of Lord No-Cares? Was he a person of the age of Ko-t'ien?³

Returning to the Farm to Dwell

From early days I have been at odds with the world;
My instinctive love is hills and mountains.
By mischance I fell into the dusty net
And was thirteen years away from home.
The migrant bird longs for its native grove.
The fish in the pond recalls the former depths.
Now I have cleared some land to the south of town,
Simplicity intact, I have returned to farm.
The land I own amounts to a couple of acres
The thatched-roof house has four or five rooms.
Elms and willows shade the eaves in back,
Peach and plum stretch out before the hall.
Distant villages are lost in haze,
Above the houses smoke hangs in the air.
A dog is barking somewhere in a hidden lane,
A cock crows from the top of a mulberry tree.
My home remains unsoiled by worldly dust.
Within bare rooms I have my peace of mind.
For long I was a prisoner in a cage
And now I have my freedom back again.

Here in the country human contacts are few
On this narrow lane carriages seldom come.
In broad daylight I keep my rustic gate closed,
From the bare rooms all dusty thoughts are banned.
From time to time through the tall grass
Like me, village farmers come and go;
When we meet we talk of nothing else
Than how the hemp and mulberry are growing.
Hemp and mulberry grow longer every day
Every day the fields I have plowed are wider;
My constant worry is that frost may come
And my crops will wither with the weeds.

2. A figure of antiquity who preferred a life of poverty to serving in office.
3. Both are mythical emperors of earliest antiquity, before there were troubles in the world.

Begging for Food

Hunger came and drove me out
To go I had no notion where.
I walked until I reached this town,
Knocked at a door and fumbled for words
The owner guessed what I was after
And gave it, but not just the gift alone.
We talked together all day long,
And drained our cups as the bottle passed.
Happy in our new acquaintance
We sang old songs and wrote new poems.
You are as kind as the washerwoman,
But to my shame I lack Han's talent.
I have no way to show my thanks!
And must repay you from the grave.²

10

On Moving House

For long I yearned to live in Southtown—
Not that a diviner told me to—
Where many simple-hearted people live
With whom I would rejoice to pass my days.
This I have had in mind for several years
And now at last have carried out my plan.
A modest cottage does not need be large
To give us shelter where we sit and sleep.
From time to time my neighbors come
And we discuss affairs of long ago.
A good poem excites our admiration
Together we expound the doubtful points.

10

II

In spring and fall are many perfect days
For climbing high to write new poetry.
As we pass the doors, we hail each other,
And anyone with wine will pour us some.
When the farm work is done, we all go home
And then have time to think of one another—
So thinking, we at once throw on a coat
And visit, never tired of talk and jokes.
There is no better way of life than this,
No need to be in a hurry to go away.

10

1. When Han Hsin was a young man, he found himself in hard straits; a washerwoman pitied him and fed him. Later he became a general of Liu Pang, the founder of the Han Dynasty, and was made a nobleman, able to repay the kindness he had received long before. 2. This echoes a story of a ghost who, out of gratitude, tripped the enemy of Lord Huan of Wei at a crucial moment.

Since food and clothing have to be provided,
If I do the plowing, it will not cheat me.

In the Sixth Month of 408, Fire

I built my thatched hut in a narrow lane,
Glad to renounce the carriages of the great.
In midsummer, while the wind blew long and sharp,
Of a sudden grove and house caught fire and burned.
In all the place not a roof was left to us
And we took shelter in the boat by the gate.

5

Space is vast this early autumn evening,
The moon, nearly full, rides high above.
The vegetables begin to grow again
But the frightened birds still have not returned.
Tonight I stand a long time lost in thought;
A glance encompasses the Nine Heavens.¹
Since youth I've held my solitary course
Until all at once forty years have passed.
My outward form follows the way of change
But my heart remains untrammelled still.
Firm and true, it keeps its constant nature,
No jade stone is as strong, adamantine.
I think back to the time when East-Gate² ruled
When there was grain left out in the fields
And people, free of care, drummed full bellies,
Rising mornings and coming home to sleep.
Since I was not born in such a time,
Let me just go on watering my garden.

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From Twenty Poems after Drinking Wine

Preface

Living in retirement here I have few pleasures, and now the nights are growing longer; so, as I happen to have some excellent wine, not an evening passes without a drink. All alone with my shadow I empty a bottle until suddenly I find myself drunk. And once I am drunk I write a few verses for my own amusement. In the course of time the pages have multiplied, but there is no particular sequence in what I have written. I have had a friend make a copy, with no more in mind than to provide a diversion.

1. Heaven was described as having nine levels; here, simply the whole sky. 2. One of the mythical rulers of high antiquity when there was such plenty that no one bothered to steal.

v

I built my hut beside a traveled road
 Yet here no noise of passing carts and horses.
 You would like to know how it is done?
 With the mind detached, one's place becomes remote.
 Picking chrysanthemums by the eastern hedge
 I catch sight of the distant southern hills:
 The mountain air is lovely as the sun sets
 And flocks of flying birds return together.
 In these things is a fundamental truth.
 I would like to tell, but lack the words.

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lx

I heard a knock this morning at my door
 In haste I pulled my gown on wrongside out
 And went to ask the caller, Who is there?
 It was a well-intentioned farmer, come
 With a jug of wine to pay a distant call.
 Suspecting me to be at odds with the times:
 'Dressed in rags beneath a roof of thatch
 Is not the way a gentleman should live.
 All the world agrees on what to do—
 I hope that you will join the muddy game.'
 'My sincere thanks for your advice, old man.
 It's my nature keeps me out of tune.
 Though one can learn of course to pull the reins,
 To go against oneself is a real mistake.
 So let's just have a drink of this together—
 There's no turning back my carriage now.'
 I

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x

Once I made a distant trip
 Right to the shore of the Eastern Sea
 The road I went was long and far,
 The way beset by wind and waves.
 Who was it made me take this trip?
 It seems that I was forced by hunger.
 I gave my all to eat my fill
 When just a bit was more than enough.
 Since this was not a famous plan
 I stopped my cart and came back home.

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