

The Butterfly in the Garden: Utopia and the Feminine in *The Story of the Stone*

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Peach Blossom Spring

Written in the 5th century by the Chinese poet Tao Qian (365–427), *Peach Blossom Spring* is the most celebrated depiction of utopia in Chinese literature. It has so enchanted the Chinese imagination that its name has become virtually synonymous with utopia itself. The work consists of two parts: a prose preface and a poem, both telling the story of the discovery and disappearance of Peach Blossom Spring. But the prose version, perhaps owing to its more tangible dramatic power, is what comes more readily to mind when a Chinese thinks of utopia.

Peach Blossom Spring recounts the experience of a fisherman who while out fishing one day happens upon a grove of peach trees in bloom and follows the spring to its source. There he discovers a community who have lived in seclusion for more than five centuries. Surprised but welcoming, the inhabitants entertain the visitor with food and drink and ask him for news about the outside world. As the visitor prepares to leave, the hosts suggest that there is no need to reveal what he has seen. On his way back, however, the fisherman carefully marks his path. Once home he reports his discovery to the magistrate and leads an expedition to find the Peach Blossom Spring again. Despite all his efforts to map his first route, he cannot find his way back. A coda to the preface notes that attempts by the eminent scholar Liu Ziqi to find the place also ended in failure. Since his death through illness, no one else has made the same attempt.

The account of the Peach Blossom Spring from the perspective of the fisherman is extremely brief. In the original Chinese the prose preface numbers about 321 characters: the poem 160, with 30 lines of 5 characters each.¹ The preface gives almost equal emphasis to the approach to the Peach Blossom Spring and its representation, with 87 characters allotted to the former and 168 to the latter. The poem, on the other hand, focuses largely on the Peach Blossom Spring itself, describing in greater detail the land, the people and their activities. Such a narrative strategy in the preface

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serves, I believe, several functions: (1) it highlights the way the fisherman discovers the Peach Blossom Spring; (2) it presents the place in general terms as a self-sufficient agricultural community; (3) it calls attention to the perceived contentment of the inhabitants; (4) it foregrounds the spontaneous hospitality of the insiders to an outsider; (5) it marks the futility of the fisherman's purposeful attempt to rediscover the place; and (6) it dramatizes the failed attempt to reach utopia.

What made the Peach Blossom Spring accessible to the fisherman was his state of mind. He had set out to catch fish, as was his livelihood, but on that particular day he 'forgot the distance he had traveled'² (忘路之远近) and 'chanced upon' (忽逢) the grove of peach trees in bloom. He was in effect doing what a Daoist aspires to do 'acting without acting' (无为).³ The forgetting of the distance and by implication the time it took him to reach the border of utopia also frees him from his professional preoccupation. Such non-mindful action suggests that the fisherman had become fully attuned to his environment and thus returned to a harmonious relationship with nature.

However, when he tried, by purposefully marking his route, to record his discovery with the intention of revealing it, he failed to find his way back: he was no longer acting without acting and in tune with nature. In telling the outside world the inside story of Peach Blossom Spring he had also ignored the parting words of his hosts and violated another Daoist precept. On parting, the inhabitants ('the insiders' 此中人) had advised him not to tell others about them: 'What you have seen here is not worthy of mentioning to people outside (不足为外人道也).' I have translated 'buzu (不足)' as 'not worthy of' and 'dao (道)' as 'mentioning'. But a secondary reading is also possible. If we read 'buzu' as 'not being content' the expression then contrasts the obvious contentment the fisherman had remarked of the insiders and its very lack in the world outside. As the word 'dao' means both 'to speak (of)', and a path in general or the Daoist way, the parting words of the insiders could also be translated as 'Not knowing contentment is the way of the outsiders'. Thus by broadcasting the story of the Peach Blossom Spring and its inhabitants the fisherman not only proved the truth of what the insiders said about the outside, it also showed how out of tune his ear was to the profounder message the insiders tried to impart to him.

The failed attempts by the anonymous fisherman and the high-minded scholar Liu Ziqi to find the Peach Blossom Spring appeared to have, as the ending of the preface tells us, put utopia forever beyond reach. In two of his other works, however – No. 5 of his 'Drinking Poems'⁴ and 'Biography of Mr Five Willows'⁵ – Tao Qian offers two alternative ways of arriving at the same goal. I begin by citing the first in full.

Building a house amidst human habitation,
Yet no noise of carts and horses.
You ask me: 'How can this be?'
Heart-and-Mind distant, place of itself falls out of the way.
Plucking chrysanthemums under the eastern hedge
Far away the South Mountain comes into view.
Mountain air at dusk feels good,
Birds flying in harmony return.
In this there is truth,
When I tried to explain it, I have already forgotten the words.

If the way to the Peach Blossom Spring is lost, can one still get there? The poem cited above provides an answer: one can still get there by becoming part of nature. Even dwelling by the road most traveled by, so long as one holds utopia in one's mind's eye, one can realize it in the company of birds returning home at sunset. Plucking chrysanthemums is the poet's way of getting in touch with his natural surroundings, and the dispassionate way the poet sees the South Mountain and the coming of dusk, both registers of the passage of time, attunes his eye and ear to the cyclical movement of permanence and change in the natural world and puts the reality of death in proper perspective.

The key to true enlightenment, however, lies in the recognition that ultimate truth can never be captured in words. This is of course what the opening line of the *Daodejing* asserts: 'The way that can be spoken is not the constant Way (道可道非常道).' Once the idea of utopia is intimated and made concrete through imagery, one must avoid the danger of being imprisoned by the limitation of language. In this light, the forgetting of words parallels the forgetting of distance traveled by the fisherman in *Peach Blossom Spring*. The absence of purposeful intentionality signals the performance of *wuwei* or non-action. Implicit in the approach inscribed in this poem is also the sense of contentment of the insiders perceived by the fisherman – a reference made explicit by the use of '(此中)' in this'. (In the preface the inhabitants of the Peach Blossom Spring are identified as '(此中人) insiders.')

In Chinese the expression 'contentment (知足)' literally means 'knowing where to put one's foot'. In this poem the poet is content to stay within the boundaries of his land and to confine his activities to plucking flowers at dusk and to joining the birds in their return to South Mountain. If the fisherman had been similarly content, he would have found his way back to the Peach Blossom Spring by returning imaginatively to it whenever the thought of utopia came to mind. In the final analysis, so the poem tells us, utopia is always present in us. So long as we are content with what we have and remain attuned to our environment, the performance of our daily activities in a non-willful way will turn the thought into reality.

Judging from the prominence given to the agricultural activities noted by the fisherman in *Peach Blossom Spring*, the satisfaction of daily material needs appears to be a necessary condition for contented living within the community. The leisurely gathering of flowers by the poet in the drinking poem, enacted for no apparent economic purpose, evokes a life relatively free from pressing material concerns. Elsewhere in Tao Qian's writing, however, the poet speaks often and freely of his anxiety over the uncertain rewards of farming, of his struggles to provide for his family and even of 'begging for food'.⁶ The question then becomes: 'Is contentment possible if one cannot even make a living?' Again the answer the poet provides in 'Biography of Mr Five Willows' (Five Willows) is a reassuring 'yes'.

'Five Willows', like *Peach Blossom Spring*, is minimalist in form, consisting as it does of 174 Chinese characters. It sketches the life of a Mr Five Willows by highlighting the following characteristics:

No one knows his name or place of origin.
 He named himself after the five willow trees growing by his house.
 Taciturn but literate, he does not go after fame and profit.

He reads for enjoyment rather than understanding.
But a particular insight would so delight him that he would forget to eat.
He loves to drink but he is often too poor to afford wine.
Knowing how things are, friends and relatives would invite him for a drink.
When that happens he would get drunk, not caring if he stays or leaves.
His dwelling barely shelters him from wind and sun;
His clothing all patches and holes, his cooking utensils often empty,
Yet he is content, forgetful of gain and loss.

By celebrating the life of Mr Five Willows, whose extreme poverty and lack of worldly success should have caused a member of the educated elite like him endless sorrow and pain, Tao Qian has show-cased Daoist contentment as key to an alternative route to utopia. On this view Mr Five Willows exemplifies the human capacity to overcome even the direst kind of material deprivation so long as he is at peace with himself.

The extreme poverty of Mr Five Willows also links the biography to the preface. As the fisherman follows the flow of peach blossoms in the stream and arrives at its source, the narrator marks the border crossing into utopia with the line ‘欲窮其林，林尽水源，便得一山’ (‘He wanted to follow the grove to its limit. Where the grove ends, there is the spring and the mountain’). The word ‘qiong (窮)’, rendered here as ‘follow’ also means ‘exhausted’ or ‘poor’ in the sense of having exhausted one’s means of livelihood. Read this way, the extreme poverty that Mr Five Willows lives in actually enables him to follow the fisherman in his approach to the Peach Blossom Spring. Such an interpretation is the key, I submit, to the delight Mr Five Willows derives from his reading. As soon as he sees the connection between his mode of existence and the fisherman’s unmindful journey, he gains access to the utopia beckoning from the other side of the mountain. His sense of contentment and his ability to forget his daily material concerns, however, are the necessary conditions for the attainment of such an insight. In fact, *Peach Blossom Spring* and ‘Five Willows’ have invested in the word ‘qiong (窮)’ such a wealth of utopian overtones that the Tang poet Wang Wei invokes it again to indicate a moment of enlightenment by concluding a poem with the lines: ‘jun wen qiongtong li, yuge ru pu shen (君問窮通理，漁歌入浦深).’ (‘If you ask for the truth, the fisherman’s song enters deep into the bay’.)⁷ Here the compound ‘qiongtong’ literally means ‘to go all the way to the end [of the road/path] (i.e. ‘to exhaust the journey’ and ‘arrive in the end at an opening’). The truth in question is the breakthrough the fisherman experiences at the threshold of the Peach Blossom Spring. This moment is so pregnant of promise that the Chinese even today re-envision it with the expression ‘shan qiang shui jin yi wu lu, liu an hua ming you yi cun (山窮水尽疑无路，柳暗花明又一村)’ (‘Where the mountain comes to an end and the stream reaches its source, one suspects that there is no more road; but in the shadow of willows and the bloom of flowers, there appears another village’). Images of mountain and water, willow and flowers in bloom signal an allusion to the Peach Blossom Spring, their convergence inevitably recalling in the Chinese mind the imminent emergence of the road to utopia.

*The Story of the Stone*⁸

Enduring and profound as Tao Qian's view of utopia has been in Chinese literature and culture, a book-length study is needed to locate and evaluate its full impact. For my present purposes I propose only to focus on the way the *Peach Blossom Spring* has shaped and informed the construction and operation of the Grandview Garden in *The Story of the Stone* – the 18th-century Chinese novel considered by many to be the greatest work of fiction ever written in China.

There is little doubt that the author of *The Stone* Cao Xueqin had *Peach Blossom Spring* in mind when he constructed the Grandview Garden. In a scene pregnant with romantic promise, the protagonist Bao-yu and his young female cousin Daiyu discover the joy and power of poetry and love by reading the *Romance of the Western Chamber*. Their emotional awakening, set in motion by an exchange of quotes from the play, is made memorable by the celebrated burial of flowers. The scene opens with Bao-yu reading the play. As he reads the line 'luohong chengzhen (落紅成陣)' ['red petals fall in drifts' (Yang, 1.453)], a gust of wind as if responding to the poetic image emerging in his mind blows most of the blossoms off the flowering peach tree. Not wanting to trample on the flowers Bao-yu gathers them up and casts them into a stream, whereby they make their way out of the garden to the outside. But there are too many flowers to remove this way. As Bao-yu searches for a solution, Daiyu happens by and suggests that burying the fallen blossoms would be a far better way of dealing with them:

'Not into the water,' objected Daiyu, 'It may be clean [ganjing (干净)] here, but once it flows out of these grounds people empty all sorts of dirt and filth into it. The flowers would still be spoiled. I've a grave for flowers in that corner over there. I'm sweeping them up and putting them in this silk bag to bury them there. In time they'll turn back into soil. Wouldn't that be cleaner [ganjing (干净)]?' (Yang, 1.454)

As Crimson Pearl Plant incarnate in the Land of Illusion, Daiyu's ecological sensitivity and empathy are of course true to character. But the way she talks about the environment outside the garden, the way the stream connects the outside with the inside, and the explicit reference to the peach blossoms all conjure up a return to the Peach Blossom Spring. Her fear of the flowers getting spoiled outside and the apparent cleanliness inside thus signify a utopian existence in the Grandview Garden.⁹

The text of *The Stone* as a whole supports Daiyu's view of the two worlds: the world inside the garden and the world without.¹⁰ The world inside represents Cao Xueqin's vision of the Peach Blossom Spring reconstructed in *The Stone* to be inhabited by Bao-yu and his young female cousins. The world outside contains people who conduct themselves very much like the fisherman and the magistrate who control their society and want to extend that control into the utopia that was the Peach Blossom Spring. This outside world can in turn be divided into two parts: the world outside the walls of the Jia mansions and the world within. For the convenience of discussion and analysis I will refer to the outermost world as the first world, the mansions at large as the second world, and the world inside the garden the third world.

The first world is populated largely by members of four social classes, namely the educated elite, the peasants, craftsmen, and merchants (*shi nong gong shang* (士农工商)). This entire population is subject to a monarch who wields absolute authority and power over them in the name of heaven. Such a monarch governs with the aid of scholar officials selected primarily on the basis of their ability to write 'eight-legged essays',¹¹ and a coterie of eunuchs. In the 18th century where the novel is set, this first world was filled with self-serving bureaucrats and greedy eunuchs.

The second world, the world of the mansions, is peopled by relatives of the insiders who live in the third world. The second world owes its prosperity and well-being to the official positions conferred by the monarch on its members, the productivity of its land, its alliance with other powerful families, and the elevation of Bao-yu's elder sister to be an imperial concubine. As the novel opens, this world already shows signs of imminent decline. It is a decline brought on by the erosion of its agricultural base, its internal conflicts, its moral decay, and the premature death of the imperial concubine. In light of the remark by Daiyu cited above, the first and second worlds have both contributed to the pollution of the stream that links it to the third world of the garden.

So long as this third world, the world of the garden, is economically sustained and protected by powerful matriarchs, it thrives and shelters its inhabitants from the harsh reality outside, especially after Bao-yu's near fatal beating by his father Jia Zheng. It provides a space of their own for Bao-yu and his young cousins to do what they please, and the freedom to write poetry, form poetic societies, play drinking games to guess at riddles, celebrate festivals and birthdays, and indulge in their romantic tendencies.

It is all in all a *Peach Blossom Spring* translated into reality for a small group of young people who for a narrow span of their lives are allowed to live the way they see fit. But the severe beating of Bao-yu by his father reminds them and the reader alike that their edenic existence in the garden is always contingent on what happens in the first and second worlds. When the stream flowing through the garden gets equally polluted inside and out, the Grandview Garden, like its prototype the Peach Blossom Spring, will be accessible only through an act of sympathetic imagining.

Grounded as it is in the Peach Blossom Spring, the Grandview Garden departs from its model in one significant aspect. It owes its conception and inception to four seminal matriarchal figures: the Goddess Nuwa, the peasant woman Granny Liu, Grandmother Jia and the Imperial Concubine Jia Yingchun. I have argued elsewhere¹² that in her role as repairer of heaven, Nuwa serves the dual function of preserver of patriarchy and progenitor of mankind. In fashioning 36501 pieces of rocks to mend the icon of monarchical power,¹³ she invests needlework at once with creativity and domesticity. Granny Liu is the lowly peasant woman who alone among hundreds of characters in the novel, answers the need of the narrator to set the narrative in motion. Grandmother Jia, the matriarch par excellence presiding over the Jia mansions, is the only woman with enough authority and power to shield Bao-yu from the disciplinarian excesses of his father. She not only stops the near fatal beating but also sees to it that the garden becomes a sanctuary where Bao-yu can remain free from similar physical abuse. Bao-yu's elder sister Yuanchun, who considers herself his mother surrogate, is directly responsible for the birth of the

Grandview Garden. It is originally constructed to honor her first home-coming after her ascension to the position of imperial concubine. In order to keep the garden occupied for the sake of Bao-yu, she orders the young cousins to take up residence there.

The pivotal role the four matriarchs play in the conception of *The Stone* and the Grandview Garden has the powerful effect of imparting to its genesis a feminist orientation and dimension. As heir-apparent to the Jia fortune, Bao-yu is engendered also to embody this feminist ethos. There is in fact something of the proto-feminist about Bao-yu. The jade pendant he supposedly was born with and wears as his namesake was actually the odd stone that the Goddess Nuwa discarded in her task of mending heaven. To the extent its 'very lack of talent' for the task parallels the same lack attributed to virtuous women, the jade pendant mirrors Bao-yu's own empathy with women and his distaste for the eight-legged essays, a mastery of which is a prerequisite for success in officialdom. His affinity with the opposite sex is well known – he is reputed to have said: 'Girls are made of water, men of mud. I feel clean and refreshed when I'm with girls but find men dirty and stinking' (Yang, 1.35). The image of girls constituted of clean and refreshing water immediately brings to mind the unpolluted stream Daiyu calls to Bao-yu's attention when she gets ready to bury the flowers. Such an association further cements, in my view, the link between the garden and the Peach Blossom Spring.

The feminist spin with which Cao Xueqin weaves the Peach Blossom Spring into the fabric of the Grandview Garden measures how radical was this move he had undertaken – to re-envision utopia in the context of 18th-century China. He was writing at a time when literary inquisitions were the emperor's ways of silencing intellectual dissent. And by making poetry-writing the cornerstone of his utopia instead of 'eight-legged essays', he directly undermined the very foundation of the patriarchal system of government. Unfortunately, such feminist resistance proved insufficient to withstand the encroachment of patriarchal influence and ideology. In the end the Grandview, like the Peach Blossom Spring, disappears. But its image has been inscribed on the stone. A reader can return to its story the same way as to the Peach Blossom Spring.¹⁴ For such a return to take place, however, the reader must learn to attune his/her ear by first glancing at a few more texts from Daoist and Confucian classics.

The Butterfly Dream

In chapter 27 of *The Stone* where the chapter-head couplet juxtaposes Baochai chasing a couple of jade-colored butterflies and Daiyu weeping by the tomb of flowers, the image of the butterflies provides, I believe, a key to finding a way back to the Peach Blossom Spring. In the context of what happens in the chapter, the chase carries multiple implications. To begin with, it sheds light on Baochai's jealousy for Daiyu. Seeing Bao-yu together with Daiyu triggers her desire to give chase to the butterflies. The allusion of the paired butterflies to the well-known legend of the butterfly lovers,¹⁵ and their color to the jade [*yu* (玉)] component in Bao-yu and Daiyu's names, reinforces such an association and underscores her transgressive role in the triangular relationship. Her persistent pursuit of the harmless insects also

registers her lack of affinity with and alienation from nature. Her unprovoked attack on the butterflies, no matter how playful she intended it to be, contrasts sharply with Daiyu's empathy with the fallen flowers. Finally, more importantly for our present purposes, the chase leads us to Zhuangzi's *Butterfly Dream*. The philosopher Zhuang Zhou once dreamed that he was a butterfly, but when he awoke he wondered whether it was not the butterfly who dreamed him. Meditation on this paradox led Zhuang Zhou to conclude that there must be a distinction between himself and the butterfly, between the dreamer and the dreamed, and that this distinction is what makes the transformation of things possible. The Butterfly Dream represents, I believe, border crossing of the highest order. In a move that anticipates Charles Darwin, Zhuang Zhou projects himself into the heart and mind, as it were, of a butterfly and seriously entertains the possibility of a complete reversal of the subject/object position. It is a move that requires the momentary suspension of one's selfhood or identity and the ability to hear with the ear of a radical other. We should also note that the parable was narrated in the past tense and in the third person, and that Zhuang Zhou insisted on there being a distinction.

To begin with the obvious, a distinction between philosopher and butterfly is always already generically determined. We might marvel with Darwin at the discovery that humans had once upon a time shared the same ancestry with butterflies, but homo sapiens do occupy different positions on the evolutionary scale and end up being members of a different species. Moreover, such a distinction carries linguistic and rhetorical implications. No matter how attuned Zhuangzi's language is, he was bound as the rest of humanity to his mother tongue. And no matter how adept the philosopher is in hearing with the ear of the other, he had no technology at his disposal to translate his parable into the tongue of a butterfly. But the very imagining in classical Chinese of a butterfly dreaming a philosopher hints at the possibility of non-verbal or trans-lingual communications that resonate with Confucius' remark, 'Does heaven speak?' (*Analects*, 17–19) and the opening line of the *Daodejing*, 'The *dao* [way, road, path, course] that can be spoken is not the constant *dao*.'

Narrating the parable in past tense and third-person, on the other hand, allows Zhuangzi to objectify an autobiographical experience while situating himself as the third-term on the border. By occupying such a liminal position he was able to embrace at once both the perspectives of the dreamer and the dreamed, be it/he a butterfly or philosopher. We must keep in mind, however, that the distinction between self and other is critical. Without it, as Zhuangzi so emphatically warns us, no transformation or translation is possible. Selflessness provides no basis for transformation in either direction. It is one thing to imagine Gregor Samsa transformed into a man-sized bug, quite another to find oneself waking up one day morphed into one. Or in the era of preemptive wars, the logic of unilateralism could easily erase all borders.

Confucian attunement: language and ear

On the other hand, attunement is what opens the pathway to the Peach Blossom Spring for Daiyu, Baoyu, and the fisherman. And its lack is what prompts Baochai to turn butterflies into playthings. Attunement is also a central concern of Confucius – he cites it in an autobiographical sketch as an accomplishment that takes him nearly a lifetime to attain:

At fifteen [I set] my heart-and-mind upon learning; at thirty I took my [stand]; at forty I was no longer of two minds; at fifty I [knew] the [Mandate of Heaven (天命)]; at sixty my ear was attuned [*ershun* (耳順)] and at seventy I could give my heart-and-mind free rein without overstepping the bound. (*The Analects*, 2.4)

It is surprising that in taking inventory as it were of his life-long accomplishments, Confucius should place aural attunement on a higher plane than knowledge of the mandate of heaven. On the other hand, it should come as no surprise if we recall the importance Confucius has attached to reciprocity and communication in interpersonal relationships. After all, as the graph *ren* (人) (to be humane/humaneness) so vividly illustrates, to be fully human is for an individual person to interact with another person in a truly reciprocal manner. Still we should note the emphasis he has put on the ear and by extension on hearing. The use of the word *shun* (順) also reminds us of the phrase *yan shun* (言順) (language attuned) he uses in his discourse on government in terms of rectification of names.¹⁶ Thus, in self-cultivation as well as in government, to be attuned aurally and linguistically is for Confucius of paramount importance. To know the mandate of heaven alone will not be enough, we must also learn to communicate what we have learned to others. And to do so our ear must be attuned; we must hear with the ear of the other. The consequence of failing to do so, as Confucius warns in his discussion of rectification of names, will inevitably be that we will not know where to put our hand and foot.

Putting hand and foot in the right place

When Confucius says, ‘at thirty I took my stan[d]’ [*wu sanshi er li* (吾三十而立)] the word he uses, *li* (立), graphically depicts ‘a person standing on the ground (presumably) on his/her two feet’. It is a posture that marks humanity as distinct from beasts. Taking a stand thus implies taking a position in society that carries with it a generally recognized degree of humanity and autonomy. It is an act of claiming one’s place in society, of delimiting boundaries to set the self apart from the other. To do so in as fully human a way as possible, however, one must know exactly where to put or set one’s foot – to know in other words where and when to stop ‘*zhi zu*’ (知止), to know that one has enough, or to be content. This I think is what Confucius has in mind when he tells us, ‘at seventy I could give my heart-and-mind free rein without over-stepping the bound’. Knowing when one has enough or where to set one’s foot represents therefore for Confucius the highest stage of self-cultivation, a stage one reaches only after one’s ear has been attuned. And this is why he specifies the

condition that 'people will not know where to put hand and foot' as the ultimate consequence of names not being rectified and why the *Great Preface* [shi daxu (詩大序)] invokes the image of hand and foot to extend the power of poetry:

The poem is that to which what is intently on the mind (chih) goes. In the mind (hsin) it is 'being intent' (chih); coming out in language (yen [yan] (言)), it is a poem. The affections (ch'ing) are stirred within and take on form (hsing) in words [yen (言)]. If words alone are inadequate [bu zu (不逮)], we speak them out in sighs. If sighing is inadequate, we sing them. If singing them is inadequate, unconsciously our hands dance them and our feet tap them [shou zhi wu zhi zu zhi dao zhi (手之舞之足之蹈之)]. (Owen, 40–1)

If dancing with one's hands and feet goes beyond what poetry can do in giving expression to one's feelings, it is easy to understand why it is so egregious for people not to know where to put their hand and foot. But we must also bear in mind the example of Confucius who at 70 finally learned to follow his heart and mind's desire without overstepping the bound. In dancing and in life one must know how to stop. For letting well enough alone, to be content [literally, to know where to put one's foot (知足)] is the ground on which the first utopia in China was constructed in the Daoist classic the *Daodejing*.¹⁷

Chapter 80, *Daodejing*

Let there be
A small state with few people;
Let it be armed
But not for going to war.
Let the people take death seriously
But keep travel at a distance.
Let there be ships and chariots
But find no excuse to harness them;
Let there be armor and weapons
But no thought to display them.
Let the people return to the practice of tying knots,
Let them savor their food,
Wear beautiful clothes,
Enjoy their customs,
And live in peace.

Even though neighbouring states are
Within sight of each other
And the sound of dogs and chickens
Are within earshot,
Let their peoples grow old and die
Without getting involved with each other. (Author's translation)

As Roger Ames and David Hall¹⁸ noted in their commentary on this chapter it can be read in at least three different ways:

– As commentators tend to do, ‘as a primitivist document rejecting the distractions of living within a larger world, and recommending a return to the simplicity of a village life untainted by the trappings of “civilization”’. In his conception and construction of *Peach Blossom Spring* as utopia, Tao Qian had certainly been inspired by a reading of this chapter along these lines. In *The Story of the Stone* so long as the Grandview Garden was guarded by the matriarchs and its young inhabitants retain their innocence it would insulate them from the pollutions of the world at large. The feminist sensibility of *The Stone* further aligns it with the feminine that is part and parcel of *Daodejing*.

– ‘as a celebration of local living . . . A life is lived most fully in the immediacy and concreteness of ordinary experience. We can only thrive by further articulating and extending ourselves within those constitutive relationships that locate us in a specific time and place. We must grow from here to there.’ Each in its own way and in varying degrees, Tao Qian’s work and Cao Xueqin’s novel resonate with such a reading. But none of the texts offer a way for insiders to grow from here to there.

– as a military response to the socio-political reality of the Warring States Period:¹⁹ ‘the ruler must make a choice between raising and deploying an army in conquest of foreign lands, or leaving the people to tend their crops at home. In order to go to war, a culture must be created that glorifies combat and the spoils of victory above the risks entailed on the battlefield, thereby making light of death and injury.’ Such a reading has little relevance for the speaker of the drinking poem, Mr Five Willows, and the inhabitants of Grandview Garden. And though the insiders of Peach Blossom Spring moved there explicitly to escape from the chaos of the Warring States, there is no evidence that once there they are concerned with any military invasion or defense. But such a reading should give us pause living in the post-9/11 world. If nations of the world see the wisdom of modeling themselves on such a state, the hope of realizing its utopian promise would be more thinkable. On the other hand, if another state with overwhelming military power were to read this chapter simply as too primitive, such a utopian state, no matter how attuned to the contingencies of the real world, would be utterly defenseless. What then can we do?

‘Saving Shangri-La’

My paper was inspired by this headline which calls attention to the debate under way in China on the future of the Tiger Leaping Gorge, supposedly the original site of Shangri-La. I believe reading the texts presented in this paper could intimate a way to think about utopia that would contribute to its preservation. We could begin by reading Chapter 80 of the *Daodejing* simultaneously as a primitivist document, as a celebration of local living, and as a thoughtful response to reality. A good way to continue is to attune our ear to the call of the madman of Lu Xun’s ‘A Madman’s Diary’.²⁰ Considered by many to be the pre-eminent writer of the 20th century, Lu Xun wrote this story at the end of the First World War. From having read, among others, Gogol, Zhuangzi, Darwin and Nietzsche, Lu Xun found China to be a man-eating society and called out a challenge through the madman: ‘There are perhaps still children who have not eaten man. Save the children!’ In my view, Cao Xueqin

had in the mid-18th century anticipated this call. By creating the Grandview Garden for Bao-yu and his young cousins, Cao briefly entertained the possibility of saving the children. For our part, to answer Lu Xun's call, we need to read the figure of Baochai chasing the jade-colored butterflies in the context not only of Daiyu's burial of peach blossoms, but also in light of the Butterfly Dream. And if we want to 'act locally, but think globally,' we need to enlarge that context to include among others the birds of Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman, the wild goose in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, and Herman Hesse's *Steppenwolf*. We should be content with the hospitality the fisherman enjoyed in the Peach Blossom Spring but learn not to turn his non-action into coercive action. And no matter how polluted our environment or how hard our lives might become, we should hold in our mind's eye, with contentment, the image of birds returning to South Mountain, and Mr Five Willows drinking with friends and relatives. When all is said and done, we should still heed Candide's advice: 'We must cultivate the garden'.²¹

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Notes

1. For convenience I have used the Chinese text as reprinted in Davis (1983, II: 139–40). For an English translation of the Preface see Owen (1996: 309–10). For English translations of the poem along with the Preface see Hightower (1970: 254–6) and Davis (1983, I: 195–7).
2. All translations from Chinese into English in this paper are mine unless otherwise noted.
3. For a thoughtful discussion of what they refer to as 'wu-forms' see Ames and Hall (2003: 36–53). They rendered *wuwei* as 'noncoercive actions in deference to the *de* ("particular focus") of things' (p. 32).
4. For English translation see Owen (1996: 316), Davis (1983: I, 96), and Hightower (1970: 130). For the Chinese text see Davis (1983, II: 86).
5. Cf. Owen (1996: 314), Davis (1983, I: 208 and II: 61), and Hightower (1970: 4).
6. Tao Qian actually used this as the title of one of his poems. Cf. Owen (1996: 318), Davis (1983, I: 55 and II: 46), and Hightower (1970: 62).
7. For an English translation of the poem see Owen (1996: 390–1).
8. Better known as *Dream of the Red Chamber* or *A Dream of Red Mansions*, *The Story of the Stone* was written by Cao Xueqin, an aristocrat living out his last days apparently in vastly reduced circumstances in Peking. The book is at once a mystical allegory, a novel of customs and lifestyles, an encyclopedia of Chinese culture, and a tragic romance that has enchanted entire generations since its appearance. For English translations see Cao Xueqin (1973–1986, 1978).
9. For an allegorical reading of the Grandview Garden see Plak (1976). Xiao Chi (2001), on the other hand, looks at it as 'lyric enclave'.
10. Yu Ying-shih likewise divides the novel morally into two parts: the ideal world of the garden and the actual world outside. Xiao Chi (2001), on the other hand, introduces a 'third world' where the flourishing of '*choushi* (ugly events)' makes it inhospitable to the writing of poetry.
11. The 'eight legged essay' refers to a particular form of writing that had become an essential part of the civil service examinations from the late 14th century until they were abolished in 1905. Largely devoid of meaningful content, this kind of essay soon developed into a mechanical linguistic exercise. It is so called because structurally the principal part of the essay must contain eight sections. In modern Chinese the term generally refers to writing that is stereotypical or dogmatic in form and function.

12. Wong (1985), 'Point of View and Feminism'.
13. Traditionally Chinese emperors claimed to be sons of heaven and ruled by virtue of its mandate.
14. The title of Antony Yu's book, *Rereading the Stone* (Yu, 1997) foregrounds such a move.
15. I am referring to the celebrated legend of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai, in which the ill-fated lovers realized their dream only in death by transforming themselves into a pair of butterflies.
16. 'If names are not rectified, language will not be attuned. If language is not attuned, nothing gets done. If nothing gets done, rites and music will not flourish. If rites and music do not flourish, punishment will not hit its target. If punishment does not hit its target, people will not know where to put their hand and foot' (*The Analects*, 13.3).
17. I have elsewhere applied the preceding arguments to the study of, among others, Maxine Hong Kingston, Joy Kogawa, and *The Travels of Laoan* (Wong, 2004).
18. Ames and Hall (2003).
19. From 475 to 221 BCE, seven states (Qin, Chu, Qi, Han, Zhao, Wei, Yan) contended for dominance in China. Hence the name Warring States for the period.
20. Inclusion of this story in *The Norton Anthology: World Masterpieces* (Mack, 1995, Expanded Edition: II) has made it widely available to English readers.
21. *The Norton Anthology* (Mack, 1995, II: 585).

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