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Cover calligraphy Yan Zhenqing 顏真卿, Tang calligrapher and statesman

Cover picture G. E. Morrison with his two 'adopted' children, sons of his head servant, photographed in 1905 in the front courtyard of his house at 98 Wang-fu-ching Ta-chieh, Peking

## THE NARROW LANE: SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE RECLUSE IN TRADITIONAL CHINESE SOCIETY \*

史 A. R. Davis

During the present year I have been reading some of George Ernest Morrison's diaries and letters, and I have recently agreed to begin very soon a study of Morrison's life from the voluminous material in the Mitchell Library.<sup>1</sup> I thus hope that I may hereafter be able to make some offering on Morrison, the man of action, the man of the 'main thoroughfare', if now I speak of the 'narrow lane' of T'ao Yüan-ming 陶淵明 (365–427), the Chinese poet whose work I have been studying over the past years. Since, in part, I try to demonstrate the proximity of the 'mountain' to the 'market-place' in the Chinese conception of withdrawal, the subject may not in the end be completely inappropriate for a lecture in honour of Morrison.

\* \* \*

The Chinese, who delight for the sake of historiography to classify, quite soon established the *yin-shih* 隱士, 'the withdrawn scholar', 'the recluse', as an historical category. In fourteen of the *Twenty-Five Dynastic Histories* Withdrawn Scholars have their specific section along with such groups as Imperial Favourites and Rapacious Officials. The Withdrawn Scholars first find their separate place in Fan Yeh's 范曄 *Hou-Han shu* 後漢書 compiled during the fifth century AD and I therefore propose to take this as a convenient *terminus ante quem* for this consideration of the growth of the concept.

Where are we to look for the beginnings of the concept of withdrawal? Here it is less easy to mark a definite point in time. In the systematization of legends into a pseudo early Chinese history, the recluse also has his place. Thus we find historicized but not historical recluses in the third millennium BC. Even when we come down to the first millennium BC, from which we have some wealth of contemporary written sources, many of the recluses named are still of a legendary rather than an historical character. However, it is clear that for the thinkers and schools of the sixth to the third centuries BC the

\* The 20th George Ernest Morrison Lecture in Ethnology delivered on 19 November 1958 and first published by the Australian National University, Canberra, in 1959. Albert Richard ('Bertie') Davis (1924–83) was at the time Professor of Oriental Studies at the University of Sydney, to which post he was appointed in 1955.

The assistance of Professor Liu Ts'un-yan in the preparation of this article for reprinting is gratefully acknowledged. [—Ed.]

<sup>1</sup> This work did not materialize, being preempted by Cyril Pearl's *Morrison of Peking* (Sydney: Angus & Robinson, 1957). [—Ed.]

<sup>2</sup> *A history of Chinese philosophy*, trans. by Derk Bodde, 2 vols (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1952–53): 1, p.132.

<sup>3</sup> *The Analects of Confucius*, trans. and ann. by Arthur Waley (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1938), p.25.

for the first time a positive response to the question of withdrawal from society, I shall begin my examination. In attempting to trace ideas and attitudes in this particular period we continually face the difficulty that the texts which have come down to us are in a majority of cases not the work of one hand but rather of a school and may even, through the inadvertence of later compilation, contain material essentially hostile to the views of the alleged author. We have always to attempt a sifting of such material in the study of the period itself, though we shall do well to remind ourselves that our criteria are almost all inevitably subjective. Once we pass from the creative period to that in which the texts are accepted as a whole, the need for such discrimination vanishes and we have to attend to the new problem of the particular interpretation given at any historical stage.

Fung Yu-lan 馮友蘭, in his *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, says: “in the days of Confucius there existed no philosophic groups of any consequence, other than that of Confucius himself and the three or four negative ‘recluses’ whom he encountered.”<sup>2</sup> The evidence for this statement of Fung Yu-lan’s is from the eighteenth book of the *Analects*, a part of the *Analects* which Waley suggests is non-Confucian in origin.<sup>3</sup> The various anecdotes here preserved probably arise from a Taoist milieu and were originally intended to belittle Confucius. They may well, therefore, not be historically valid, and Fung Yu-lan’s statement may require qualification. However, these stories are likely to have been circulating within about two hundred years of Confucius’ death, say by the third century BC, and are therefore valuable for my present purpose. I shall quote two of them. First *Analects* 18.6:

Ch’ang-chü and Chieh-ni were ploughing together as ploughmates. Master K’ung passed by them and sent Tzu-lu to ask where there was a ford. Ch’ang-chü said: “For whom are you driving?” Tzu-lu said: “For K’ung Ch’iu.” He said: “Is not that K’ung Ch’iu of Lu?” Tzu-lu said: “It is.” He said: “He already knows the ford.” Tzu-lu asked Chieh-ni. Chieh-ni said: “Are you not a follower of K’ung Ch’iu?” He said: “That is so.” Chieh-ni said: “Everyone in the empire is swept away. Who can change it? Rather than follow one who withdraws from particular men, would it not be better to follow one who withdraws from the whole generation?” And he continued covering the seed. Tzu-lu went and told the Master who said with a sigh: “One cannot flock together with birds and beasts. If I cannot associate with such men as there are, with whom can I associate? If the empire possessed the Way, I should not be trying to change it.”

If we assume that this story originates from a source hostile to Confucius, Confucius emerges from it very favourably. We are here presented with fundamentally opposed attitudes to a ‘disorderly age’, the attitude of the reformer and of the recluse who believes no reform is possible.

The second story in *Analects* 18.7 reads:

When Tzu-lu was following the Master, he fell behind and met an old man, carrying a basket on his staff. Tzu-lu asked him: “Have you seen my master?” The old man said: “You who do not toil with your four limbs, who do not

distinguish the five grains—who is your master?” And he planted his staff and started to weed. Tzu-fu stood with folded hands. The old man kept Tzu-lu for the night, killed a fowl and prepared millet to make him a meal, and introduced his two sons to him. The next day Tzu-lu went on and told of what had taken place. The Master said: “He is a recluse,” and he told Tzu-lu to go back and see him again. When he reached the place, the old man had gone.

<sup>4</sup> Ch.2, 13th story.

<sup>5</sup> Ch.2, 12b (*SPTK* ed.)

<sup>6</sup> *Han-shih wai-chuan* reads Ho-nan.

The present text continues with the following sentences, which have probably been displaced from the above conversation:

Tzu-lu said: “Not to take service is not right. If the rules that apply to old and young cannot be disregarded, how should the duties of prince and minister be disregarded? By wishing to keep his person pure, he puts the great relationship in confusion. The gentleman in his service carries out his duty. That the Way is not practised, he knows beforehand.”

In this case the clash is presented with greater asperity, a clash between social duty and individual cultivation. It will be noted that in both these passages the alternative to public service is personal agricultural labour. I may illustrate this further with a story of the so-named ‘madman of Ch’u’, Chieh-yü 接輿, whom also Confucius is made to encounter in *Analects* 18. The story I quote is found in the Han collections *Lieh-nü chuan* 列女傳<sup>4</sup> and *Han-shih wai-chuan* 韓詩外傳.<sup>5</sup>

I translate the *Lieh-nü chuan* version:

... Chieh-yü ploughed with his own hand for his food. The King of Ch’u sent a messenger with a hundred measures of gold and two four-horse carriages to go and invite his services, saying: “His Majesty desires to request you to administer Huai-nan.”<sup>6</sup> Chieh-yü laughed and did not reply. The messenger then, being unable to talk with him, went away. When his wife came from the market, she said: “When you were young, you carried out your principles; surely, when you are becoming old, you are not abandoning them? Why are the carriage tracks outside the gate deep?” Chieh-yü said: “The King does not know my unworthiness. He desires to make me administer Huai-nan.”<sup>6</sup> He has sent a messenger with gold and horses to invite me.” His wife said: “Were you able to refuse?” Chieh-yü said: “Riches and honour are what men desire. Why do you hate them? Of course I accepted.” His wife said: “The righteous man takes no action except according to propriety; he does not, because of poverty, change his principles; he does not, because of humble position, alter his conduct. In serving you, I have ploughed with my own hand for your food, I have myself spun thread for your clothes. Your food has been ample, your clothes have been warm. Your actions have been based on righteousness. Your happiness in it has indeed been self-sufficient. If you accept the heavy emoluments of others, if you ride in others’ strong carriages, behind others’ fine horses, if you eat others’ rich and fresh foods, how then will you behave?” Chieh-yü said: “I did not accept.” His wife said: “When your prince would employ you, not to comply is disloyalty. To comply and still be opposed is unrighteousness. It is better to go away.” The husband carried the cooking pots on his back, the wife her loom upon her head. They changed their names and moved far away; no one knew where they went.

<sup>7</sup> Wolfram Eberhard, *A history of China* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1950), p.7.

<sup>8</sup> A recent example is Joseph Needham, et al., *Science and civilisation in China*, vol.2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), p.16.

This Chieh-yü story is a type of which there are many examples. From the point of view of economic history these stories would seem to confirm the existence of private land-holding as distinct from land received as salary for official position. There is, however, stress laid, in all the withdrawal stories of the late Chou period, on the poverty and hardship involved in the decision to reject official life, and I see no reason to regard this as particularly exaggerated. Eberhard in his *History of China* writes of the Taoists living in retirement on their estates and devoting themselves to literature.<sup>7</sup> This statement does not seem to me to be supported by the actual literature which has survived and which, in my opinion, contains nothing treating personal themes such as we might reasonably expect to emerge from the leisured retirement which Eberhard would seem to suggest. Such personal writing does emerge, as we shall see, under the Han, when large private land-holdings made it possible to withdraw from 'the world' to a fairly easygoing existence on a family estate.

But before going on to the Han, I want to go back to examine another passage from the *Analects* which we might hope established the Confucian attitude to withdrawal more certainly.

*Analects* 8.13 reads:

The Master said: "Be firm in good faith, love learning, hold fast unto death to the good Way. Do not enter into a state which is in danger; do not stay in a state which is in disorder. When the empire possesses the Way, be seen; when the empire does not possess the Way, hide. When your country possesses the Way, poverty and humble position are shameful; when your country does not possess the Way, riches and honour are shameful."

Now if this passage, which belongs to what has been considered the oldest stratum of the *Analects*, does represent the ideas of Confucius himself, it seems to me that he was thus guilty in Tzu-lu's words of "confusing the great relationship." For by this statement service to the state ceases to be an absolute duty, but one conditional upon the individual's determination of whether or not 'the time is out of joint'. Since we may assume that in any time some individuals will be at odds with the age, it is a very short step to the recluse who "lives in retirement to pursue his ideals" (*Analects* 16.11). For it is indeed the great strength of Confucianism that with all its insistence upon the duties of social relationships, the ethical decision remained an individual one: the word for *duty* (義) at once meant something very like our *conscience*.

There is a fairly general assumption that the 'recluses' whom Confucius was made to encounter represent Taoists or proto-Taoists.<sup>8</sup> There is in fact a general equation of 'hermitism' and 'Taoism' in this formative period of Chinese thought between the sixth and third centuries BC. This equation of hermit and Taoist is of course lightly made for the whole of Chinese history, but in fact the rigid differentiation of Taoism and Confucianism at the philosophical level will not hold for the Han period, i.e. from the second century BC onwards. It may be that there is some blurring of outline already in the third century BC. Certainly, I think that the Confucian definition of



withdrawal, in the last passage of the *Analects* I quoted, affords a point of proximity with the Taoist attitude. Both Confucian and Taoist could subscribe to the sentiment we find in the *Book of Changes* under Hexagram 18:

He does not serve king or lord, but makes higher his service.  
He does not serve king or lord; his ideals can be a model.

We should do well to be wary in the use of the word 'hermit', when it has become a synonym for Taoist. To make the point, let me quote the account of a Confucian 'hermit', Confucius' disciple Yüan Hsien 原憲. The earliest extant version, which I translate, does, it is true, come from a Taoist book, *Chuang-tzu* 莊子<sup>9</sup> but virtually identical versions appear in two 'Confucian' collections:<sup>10</sup>

Yüan Hsien lived in Lu in a house with surrounding walls which were only a few paces long, whose thatch was growing grass, whose brushwood door was unfinished and had a mulberry tree for a post. Its two rooms had earthenware pots for windows which were blocked up with coarse cloth. The roof leaked and the floor was damp, but seating himself correctly, he would play on his lute and sing. Tzu-kung, driving large horses, in an inner robe of deep purple and an outer plain one and with a canopied carriage which could not get into the lane, came to see Yüan Hsien. Yüan Hsien in a straw hat and slippers without heels and with a staff of thorn, answered the door. Tzu-kung said: "Oh! What sickness have you, sir?" Yüan Hsien replied: "I have heard that to be without property is called poverty and that not to be able to put into practice what one has studied is called sickness. Now I am poor but I am not sick." Tzu-kung drew back, shamefaced. Yüan Hsien laughed and said: "To act with an eye to the world's opinion, to follow the herd in making friends, to study in order to please others and to teach for the sake of oneself, to conceal goodness and righteousness and make a display of carriages and horses, I cannot bear to do this."

When Master Yüan<sup>11</sup> was living in Wei, he wore a robe, quilted with hemp, without an outer garment. His countenance was swollen and his hands and feet calloused. For three days he did not light a fire, in ten years he did not make new clothes. When he straightened his cap, the strings broke; when he drew tight the lapel of his robe, his elbows could be seen; when he put on his shoes, the heels burst. Yet dragging his shoes along, he sang the Hymns of Shang. His voice filled heaven and earth, as though coming from an instrument of metal or stone.

If we compare this story of Yüan Hsien with that of Chieh-yü, it will be clear that there is little point in stressing the Confucian character of the one and the Taoist character of the other. If we want to understand the situation through Chinese eyes, we shall, I think, do well to adopt the label which the Chinese later began to apply to the withdrawn scholar and the recluse, that of *kao-shih* 高士, 'lofty', 'elevated scholar'. This designation, as is entirely clear from its application, implies a value judgment, that he who follows his own ideals at the expense of contemporary position and honour is exalted. In this idea of the *kao-shih*, the 'lofty scholar', the Confucian feeling for the spiritual power and moral force of the superior man could find a measure of

<sup>9</sup> Ch.28 (SPTK ed. 9.24b).

<sup>10</sup> *Han-shih wai-chuan* 1.5a and *Hsin-bsü* 7.8b (SPTK ed.).

<sup>11</sup> The current text reads 'Master Tsêng'; the present reading is emended from the *Han-shih wai-chuan* and *Hsin-bsü* parallels and a quotation of *Chuang-tzu* in *T'ai-p'ing yü-lan* 686.

<sup>12</sup> 6.1a (SPTK)

<sup>13</sup> 7.13a. (Shen-t'u Ti); 7.14b (Pao Chiao).

<sup>14</sup> 1.12b. (Shen-t'u Ti); 1.13a (Pao Chiao).

<sup>15</sup> *Wên-hsüan* 15.2b (SPTK).

accord with the Taoist feeling that the desire for fame and position obscured the individual's realization of the simplicity of natural truth. A final incompatibility must remain in that the Confucian concept of withdrawal would still embrace the notion of the social value of moral example which the Taoist would reject as detracting from the purity of the motive of withdrawal. Yet short of this, there is an agreement among writings classified as Taoist or Confucian which has been often ignored. For example the withdrawn scholar must not behave extravagantly:

To be deeply rooted in one's opinions, to esteem one's own conduct, to withdraw from the world to follow strange customs, to argue loftily and criticise resentfully, merely to oppose, this is what the scholars of hills and valleys, the men who condemn the age, those who wither away or who jump into the depths, delight in.

This is *Chuang-tzu* 15<sup>12</sup> which may be compared with *Chung-yung* 中庸 10 where Confucius is made to disapprove of living in retirement and practising the marvellous, to be reported in later generations; in the same way Pao Chiao 鮑焦 who 'withered away' by starving himself to death and Shen-t'u Ti 申徒狄 who committed suicide by 'jumping into the depths' of the Yellow River, do not find praise in the Confucian *Hsin-hsü* 新序<sup>13</sup> and *Hanshib wai-chuan*.<sup>14</sup>

I must stress that in all this I am of course proceeding from the standpoint of similarity and not of difference. If one proceeded from the opposite point of view, one might be tempted to argue the unConfucian character of some of the Confucian texts which I quote and the unTaoist character of the Taoist ones, but one would not, I think, reach the *kao-shih*, the 'lofty scholar' who may be Confucian, Taoist, or both. We have also to remember that by the third century BC a considerable literature was beginning to grow up and was obviously circulating, though to what extent it is hard to estimate. The writings of the contending philosophical schools were becoming incorporated into a common literary heritage. This process was naturally accelerated with the coming of the unified empire of the Han.

In all I have said up till now I have stressed the social and political attitude surrounding the concept of withdrawal; I have made it appear that withdrawal required a moral justification. I believe that I am correct in this, for I consider that the surviving Chou literature is, where not religious, essentially ethical and political in emphasis. The suggestion that the Taoist writers of the period are escapist I regard as anachronistic. I do not think it is possible to find in Chou literature anything praising the pleasures of a rural existence in the manner of my next quotations which come from the Later Han period (first to second centuries AD). The scholar-official or gentry society with its large-scale private ownership of land, together with a general increase of production and wealth, I suspect, made it possible to look on the 'simple existence' with a new eye.

Here then is *Return to the Country* 歸田賦 by Chang Hêng 張衡,<sup>15</sup> the astronomer and mathematician (AD 78–139) who had also written long descriptive pieces on the life of the Han capital cities:

I have spent in the city an eternity of time,  
 Without clear plan to aid the age.  
 Vainly looking on the stream to admire the fish,  
 And waiting for the River to run clear,<sup>16</sup> with no time fixed.  
 I am moved by the great-heartedness of Master Ts'ai,  
 Who followed after Master T'ang to obtain removal of his doubts.<sup>17</sup>  
 Truly the way of Heaven is subtle and obscure,  
 So I shall follow the Fisherman<sup>18</sup> and share his joy,  
 Striding over the dust and going far away.  
 From the world I shall take a long farewell

So then in Mid-Spring's fair month,  
 When the season is mild, the air clear,  
 When plains and marshes are luxuriant,  
 With every flower in blossom,  
 When the fish-hawk beats his wings,  
 And the oriole plaintively sings,  
 Side by side, they fly up and down,  
*Kuan-kuan*, they cry to one another,  
 Among them I shall wander  
 And so delight my feelings.

Then when the dragon cries in the great marsh,  
 And the tiger roars among the hills,  
 Above I shall let fly the slender string,<sup>19</sup>  
 Below I shall angle in the long-flowing waters.  
 Striking against the arrow, the bird will die;  
 Covetous of the bait, the fish will swallow the hook.  
 So I shall pull down the bird that soared free among the clouds,  
 And have hanging on my line the sand-fish that hid in the depths.

Then when the bright Spirit<sup>20</sup> suddenly declines,  
 And Wang-shu<sup>21</sup> takes his place,  
 Enjoying to the full the perfect pleasure of wandering about,  
 Although it is evening, I shall forget my weariness.  
 Moved by the warning left for us by Master Lao,<sup>22</sup>  
 I shall turn back my carriage to my rustic hut.

I shall pluck beautiful tunes from the five-string lute,  
 And recite the works of the Duke of Chou and of Confucius.  
 Plying my brush and ink, I shall start to compose,  
 And set forth the model ways of the Three Emperors.  
 Since I give my heart rein beyond worldly limits,  
 What shall I know of glory and disgrace?

In this piece there is a very great difference of attitude. Chang Hêng's opening lines suggest to me that he looks on official life rather as a career and is finally deciding that it is one for which he is not particularly suited. He seems to feel no need to offer any justification for pursuing an individual and personal enjoyment. In such writing we have something very different from the writing of courts and court-supported philosophical schools. We have here, I believe, the writing of a highly literate class with some measure of eco-

<sup>16</sup> I.e. for a very long time. The expression goes back to a lost Chou song quoted in *Ts'ochuan*, Duke Hsiang 8th year, "To wait for the River to run clear, how long is a man's life?"

<sup>17</sup> Ts'ai Tsè 蔡澤 (third cent. BC) who had unsuccessfully sought office from various rulers, consulted the physiognomist T'ang Chü 唐舉 who told him that he would live for a further forty-three years. He subsequently found favour in Ch'in and became chief minister (see his biography in *Shih-chi* 79).

<sup>18</sup> The fisherman is a typical recluse: he appears with the poet Ch'ü Yüan 屈原 in a piece entitled "The fisherman" 漁父 in the anthology *Ch'u-tz'u*, ch.7.

<sup>19</sup> I.e. an arrow to which a string was attached for bringing down birds.

<sup>20</sup> I.e. the sun.

<sup>21</sup> Wang-shu is the charioteer of the moon.

<sup>22</sup> *Lao-tzu* (*Tao-tê-ching*), ch.12: "Gallop and hunting make a man's mind go mad."

<sup>23</sup> I should make acknowledgment here to J. R. Hightower, whose article "The *fu* of T'ao Ch'ien," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 17: 164–230, first brought this piece to my notice. I have preferred to give a version in prose rather than in lines as Hightower does, since, though the original has a strong parallelism, it has no rhymes.

<sup>24</sup> "Chant below the rain-dance altar etc."—the choice of Tsêng Hsi 曾皙 which Confucius applauded. See *Analects* 11.25.

<sup>25</sup> I have not been able to trace any precise reference to *Lao-tzu* (*Tao-tê-ching*); probably only a general reference is intended.

<sup>26</sup> *Li-chi* 19. (*Yüeh-chi*; *SPTK* ed. 11.10b.) contains the statement that "anciently Shun made the lute with five strings and to it sang the *South Wind*." Chêng Hsüan 鄭玄 (AD 127–200) comments that he had never heard the words. However a version of them appears in the dubious *K'ung-tzu chia-yü* (third cent. AD).

<sup>27</sup> Lit. 'clear second': *shang* being the name of the second note of the pentatonic scale.

conomic independence. Further along the same road is the attitude of Chung-ch'ang T'ung 仲長統 (AD 179–219). T'ung, according to his biography in *Hou-Han shu*, chapter 79, "in keeping silent and speaking (i.e. living in retirement or taking office) had no fixed principles; some of his contemporaries called him 'Madman'. Whenever the province or commandery called him to office, he always pleaded illness and did not accept." In his biography we find this essay of his:<sup>23</sup>

Let my dwelling have good fields and a spacious homestead, with its back to mountains and looking on a stream, with channels and pools surrounding it, bamboos and trees set on every side, a threshing-floor and vegetable garden made before, an orchard planted behind. Let there be boats and carriages sufficient to relieve me of the hardship of walking and wading, servants sufficient to put an end to the labour of my four limbs, that my parents may have all manner of delicate foods, my wife and children have no toil to distress their bodies. When my friends gather, then may there be set out wine and meat for their enjoyment. At auspicious seasons and on lucky days, may kids and sucking pigs be boiled as offerings. May I wander among the garden-plots, roam in the level woods, wash in the clear water, pursue the cool breeze, angle for the swimming carp, shoot at the high-flying geese, chant below the rain-dance altar, and return singing to the high hall.<sup>24</sup> May I make quiet my spirit in the inner apartment and ponder on Master Lao's mysterious emptiness,<sup>25</sup> by exhalation and inhalation and harmony of vital spirits seek to become like a Perfect Man. With men of understanding may I go through the philosophers, discuss the Way, discourse on books, survey the Two Principles (i.e. Heaven and Earth), inquire into men's characters. May I pluck the elegant measure of the song South Wind,<sup>26</sup> loose the beautiful tune of the *ch'ing-shang* 清商<sup>27</sup> mode. Wandering beyond the bounds of a single age, looking indifferently upon whatever lies between Heaven and Earth, I should not accept the censure of my contemporaries and should preserve my allotted span of life. Since thus I might ascend the Milky Way and go out beyond the universe, why should I covet entry within the emperor's gate?

While this description is potential rather than actual, the picture T'ung gives is one of an existence for which it is easy to feel "the world is well lost." If it seems pure escapism, we must be fair to him and point out that his life fell within the years of the final break-up of the Han dynasty. In this period of peasant revolt, of military commanders striving for power by force of arms, of great families striving to maintain themselves by their economic strength, of well-known scholars striving to maintain their influence by the formation of cliques, mutual admiration societies, there were all the characteristics of a disorderly age. This particular disorderly age in China in fact persisted for four hundred years. This Period of Disunity, as it has been called, which lasted from the third to the sixth century AD is perhaps less interesting than the Han which preceded it or the T'ang which followed it for the study of intellectual attitudes and literary development, it holds the highest. It is a period to which foreign invasion and political instability seem to have given to the individual a keen sense of the impermanence of human life. One thinks of the cry of the third-century poet Juan Chi 阮籍 :

In the morning one is a beautiful youth,  
 In the evening one becomes an ugly old man.  
 ... ..  
 Who can remain beautiful and fair?<sup>28</sup>

as a cry from the heart of this age. One scholar has characterized the early part of this period in the phrase “Entre révolte nihiliste et évacion mystique”<sup>29</sup> and it is true that we find all the expected features of pessimism and hedonism, the pursuit of other-worldly religion, the search for immortality by alchemical means, and an apparent worship of clever, brittle talk by intellectuals. All this is demonstrable and one may erect a satisfying structure of stimulus and response, though I am afraid that when one looks closely at the writing of individuals, one finds unfortunate conflicts and contradictions. We are, too, only rather slowly becoming aware of the considerable place of propaganda in history and of the importance of attempting to determine the attitude of the writers of historical sources. I am verging on generalities which I cannot here sustain and I must come back to the withdrawn scholar. As we should expect from a period which it was possible to claim as continuously disorderly, the withdrawn scholar is a common and recurrent figure. But what I am far more concerned with is that there is again a lively interest in the morality of the position of withdrawal. This does not perhaps fit well with the characterization of this period as decadent or hedonistic, and one might wonder why a Taoist like Hsi K’ang 嵇康, who echoed the “make an end of Wisdom, reject Learning” of *Lao-tzu* 老子<sup>30</sup> should compile a collection of accounts of “Sages, Worthies and Lofty Scholars,” including Yüan Hsien whom we saw before. This work of Hsi K’ang’s has survived only in part, through quotations.<sup>31</sup> Of his account of Yüan Hsien there is only a fragment, but it is interesting that it contains the sentence “he was content with a humble position, he was firm in adversity.” “Firm in adversity” is itself a quotation and we should look at its original context. It belongs to *Analects* 15.1:

When they were in Ch’ên, their provisions ran out and his (Confucius’) followers became ill, and none of them was able to stand up. Tsu-lu indignantly came to see the Master, and said: “Is the gentleman also to suffer adversity?” The Master said: “The gentleman is firm in adversity, but the small man, when he is in adversity, is overwhelmed.”

This expression “firm in adversity” is one which appears time and again in the writing of T’ao Yüan-ming (AD 365–427), T’ao Yin-shih 陶隱士, T’ao the Withdrawn Scholar, the greatest of all China’s recluses, the greatest model for the life of retirement.<sup>32</sup> With illustrations from the work of T’ao Yüan-ming I shall try to draw together the threads of my remarks.

In AD 405 T’ao made his last appearance in official life, an appearance of some eighty days, giving up his post, according to the humorous but untrue anecdote in his official biography, because he was unwilling “for the sake of five pecks of rice (his official salary) to bow before a country bumpkin (a visiting inspector)!” After his return he composed a *fu* 賦-poem “Return Home” 歸去來辭<sup>33</sup> which has some resemblance to that of Chang Hêng’s, and this I should like to quote:

<sup>28</sup> *Yung-huai shih*, no.4 (Huang Chieh, *Juan Pu-ping yung-huai shih chu* [Annotated Yung-huai poems of Juan Pu-ping] (Peking, 1957).

<sup>29</sup> Etienne Balazs; see *Asiatische Studien/ Etudes Asiatiques* 2 (1948): 27–55.

<sup>30</sup> Ch.19.

<sup>31</sup> For the collection of these see Yen K’o-chün, *Ch’üan San-kuo wên* [The complete prose of the Three Kingdoms], ch.52.

<sup>32</sup> I deliberately stress here, since this is my topic, T’ao as *recluse*. In another lecture, recently published (*Arts, The proceedings of the Sydney University Arts Association* 1.1 (1958), I gave more attention to Tao’s official service and his attitude to it.

<sup>33</sup> *Works*, ch.5: a translation of the prose introduction of this piece was given in the lecture mentioned in the previous note.

<sup>34</sup> Quotation of the words of the song which Chieh-yü addresses to Confucius in *Analecks* 18.5.—

Phoenix, phoenix,  
How has your power declined!  
The past may not be censured,  
But the future still may be striven after.  
Desist, desist!  
Those who how carry on government  
are in danger!

<sup>35</sup> Here T'ao has a deliberate reminiscence of the *Li-sao* 離騷, st.27, the work of the poet Ch'ü Yüan with whom all scholars who withdrew from official life, because they did not 'accord with the times', felt an affinity.

<sup>36</sup> 'Three paths' became a part of the terminology of withdrawal from the story of Chiang Hsü 蔣翊, a Han official who retired rather than serve 'the usurper' Wang Mang 王莽. He made three paths to his hut and sought only the society of two others who also did not accept office (see *San-fu chüeh-lu* fragment ap. Li Shan Comm. to this piece, *Wên-bsüan*, ch.45).

Return home!  
My fields and garden will be covered with weeds, why not return?  
When oneself has made the mind the body's slave,  
Why sorrow and solitary grieve?  
I realise that "the past may not be censured,"  
Yet I know "the future may be striven after."<sup>34</sup>  
Truly I am not far astray from the road,<sup>35</sup>  
I feel today is right, if yesterday was wrong. My boat rocks,  
lightly tossing,  
The wind, whirling, blows my coat.  
I ask a traveller of the way ahead,  
I resent the faintness of the dawn light.

Then I espy my humble dwelling,  
So I am glad, so I run.  
The servants welcome me,  
The children wait at the door.  
The three paths<sup>36</sup> are overgrown,  
But the pine and chrysanthemums remain.

Taking the children by the hand, I enter the house:  
There is wine filling the jar.  
I tilt jar and cup, pouring for myself.  
Looking sideways at the branches in the courtyard, my face is joyful;  
Leaning by the southern window, I express my pride;  
I ponder on the ease of a narrow sufficiency;  
In my garden daily I wander, fulfilling my tastes.  
Although there is a gate, it is always closed.  
With an old man's staff, I roam and rest,  
Sometimes I raise my head and gaze into the distance;  
Clouds aimlessly come out from the mountain peaks,  
Birds, weary of flying, know they should go home.  
The sun's light grows dim and is about to sink;  
Stroking a solitary pine, I circle it.

Return home!  
Let there be an end to intercourse, a breaking off of wandering,  
The world and I shall be estranged from one another;  
If I harnessed my carriage again, what should I seek?  
I delight in the pure conversation of my family,  
I have pleasure in lute and books and so drive away care.  
The farmers tell me that spring has come,  
There will be matters to attend to in the western fields.

Sometimes I order a covered cart,  
Sometimes I steer a solitary boat.  
Along hidden ways I penetrate the gullies,  
By steep paths I cross the hills.  
The trees, putting forth their leaves, grow luxuriant,  
The springs, bubbling up, begin to flow.  
Rejoicing that everything finds its season,  
I am moved by my life's passing to its rest.

It is finished!  
 Dwelling in the body within the universe,  
 How much longer can there be?  
 Why not trust to my heart the charge of going or staying: Why be  
 worried over where I should go?  
 Riches and honour are not my desire,  
 The Heavenly Village I may not hope for.<sup>37</sup>  
 Cherishing the fair morning, I go out alone.  
 Sometimes I plant my staff and weed or hoe.  
 Or climb the eastern hill and let out long whistles,  
 Or looking on the clear stream, compose a poem.  
 Thus following change, I shall come to the end  
 Happy in my destiny, why should I doubt any more?

Here T'ao is in one of his most happy moods, though perhaps to English ears, he will sound "half in love with easeful Death"! The undertones are of course different. He is proclaiming his withdrawal, he is identifying himself with "the old man who planted his staff," the old man who rebuked Tzu-lu. He is also, I believe, in the final lines, thinking of another of his recluse heroes, Jung Ch'i-ch'i 榮啓期, who in conversation with Confucius is supposed to have said: "Poverty is the constant lot of the scholar, death is the end of man."<sup>38</sup> And he takes to himself both halves of the proposition. Why do I say this is so? Because he had rejected "riches and honour," he had therefore accepted "poverty and humble position." This contrast is forcibly made in another of his *fu*-poems—

Better be firm in adversity and preserve one's ideals,  
 Than compromise and trouble oneself.  
 When carriage and cap are no glory,  
 How should a hemp-quilted gown be a shame?  
 Truly being false to my opportunity, I have chosen  
 simplicity,  
 And gladly I return to rest.  
 Cherishing my solitary feelings, I shall finish my years,  
 And decline a good price from court and market-place.<sup>39</sup>

Since he has declined honour, he must embrace poverty as a symbol, and this presents some difficulty in his poems, since it seems clear that on occasion he suffered actual want as well as symbolic hardship. Sometimes reference may be made to both at once, as in the seven-poem series where he salutes "Poor Scholars" 詠貧士. This is No.2:

Chill and harsh the year comes to its close,  
 Pulling tight a coarse robe, I sun myself in the front room;  
 In the southern garden there is no remaining greenness,  
 Withered branches fill the northern orchard.

<sup>37</sup> I.e. he does not hope to become a Taoist immortal.

<sup>38</sup> *Lieb-tzu* 1.4b. (*SPTK* ed.).

<sup>39</sup> "Moved by scholars' not meeting with good fortune" 感士不遇賦. *Works*, ch.5.

**Figure 1**

*T'ao Yüan-ming* (source: Li-tai ku-jen-tsan, edition 1476, in butterfly binding—courtesy Prof. Liu Ts'un-yan)



<sup>40</sup> See *Analects* 15.1 quoted above. The person who “comes and speaks indignantly” is probably T’ao’s wife.

<sup>41</sup> *Works*, ch.4.

<sup>42</sup> “Drinking wine” 飲酒, no.5, *Works*, ch.3.

I tilt the jar, I have finished the last drops,  
 I inspect the stove, I do not see any smoke.  
 The songs and documents are piled about my seat,  
 At sunset I still have no leisure to study them.  
 Living in retirement is not the Distress in Ch’ên,  
 Yet to me also they “come and speak indignantly.”<sup>40</sup>  
 How am I to soothe my feelings?  
 I rely on the fact that in old times many worthy men  
 were in such straits.<sup>41</sup>

This poem is, I think, very revealing. T’ao might reject fame and position as mere vanity, but he had also to feel that his course was right. For T’ao and men of his kind and class were so much the final keepers of their consciences. Yet they also needed some support, which they found in the tradition which I have tried to show had been built up, of the withdrawn scholar as the lofty scholar who in a troubled age follows the better course. It was a tradition of symbols but those symbols commanded general recognition. By the time of T’ao Yüan-ming one did not have to hide in the depths of the mountains to be a recluse. This is of course what T’ao meant, when he wrote—

I have built my hut within men’s borders,  
 But there is no noise of carriage or horses.<sup>42</sup>

To establish one’s position one must use the appropriate terms.

It may be felt that I have in this lecture set too great an emphasis on literature as opposed to life. If a defence is required, I should urge two things: one, that traditional Chinese society was above all else a literary society, and the other, that it continued for a remarkably long time. In such a society what I should call the habit of quotation became deeply ingrained and was an important factor in the conditioning of mental attitudes, and one must suppose in the actions resulting from those mental attitudes.