REMARKS ON RETURN FROM UTOPIA 武陵人

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When *Return from Utopia* was put on the stage by the members of the Christian Arts Fellowship 基督教藝術團契 in the theater of National Arts Gallery in Taipei for two

1. According to Robert C. Elliott, author of *The Shape of Utopia: Studies in a Literary Genre* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), the usage of the term utopia has been sticking to Thomas More's punning coinage: the play on the Greek *ou topos*: no place, and *eu topos*: good place. Inextricably bound up in our usage of the term today are the two meanings: one associated with escape from the reality into the timeless fantasies of the imagination, one with the effort to construct models of the ideal society, whether in poetry, drama, fiction, or otherwise. However, “if More coined the word, he was by no means the first to give form to man's longing for a good society. Behind utopia lies the myth of the Golden Age.” “The archetypal test, at least for the Western World, is that of Hesiod:

In the beginning, the immortals
Who have their homes on Olympos
created the golden generation of mortal people.
These lived in Kronos' time, when he
was the king in heaven.
They lived as if they were gods,
their hearts free from all sorrow,
by themselves, and without hard work or pain;
no miserable
old age came their way; their hands, their feet,
did not alter.
They took their pleasure in festivals,
and lived without troubles.
When they died, it was as if they fell asleep:
All goods
were their. The fruitful grainland
yielded its harvest to them
of its own accord; this was great and abundant,
while they at their pleasure
quietly looked after their works,
in the midst of good things
prosperous in flocks, on friendly terms
with the blessed immortals.”
weeks—December 25, 1972-January 7, 1973, I was amidst a vast attentive audience. The

Multifarious forms of Hesiod's story possibly appeared long before his time in folktale of a magical
land of abundance where wine runs in rivers and pancakes grow on trees. Anyhow the Greek comic
writers used these themes as a handy way of satirizing the literature of the Golden Age which even
then (as ever since) was repeatedly applied without any change. "An early example of the satire is this
from Teleclides:

First there was peace among all things like water covering one's hands. And
the earth bore neither fear nor disease, but all needed things appeared of
their own accord. For every stream flowed with wine, and barley cakes
fought with wheat cakes to enter the mouths of men . . . . And fishes,
coming to men's houses and baking themselves, would serve themselves
upon the tables . . . . and roasted thrushes with milk cakes flew down one's
gullet."

The above parody has a double effect—longing and laughter. "Tales of Cockaigne turn up in the
folklore of many lands . . . . An English version from the early fourteenth century makes Cockaigne
out to be fairer than Paradise:

In Cockaigne we drink and eat
Freely without care and sweat . . . .
Under heaven no land like this
Of such joy and endless bliss.

There is many a sweet sight,
All is day, there is no night,
There is no quarreling nor strife,
There is no death but endless life, . . .

Every man takes what he will,
As of right, to eat his fill.
All is common to young and old,
To stout and strong, to meek and bold."

Though these lines stress the longing, much of the poem is quite satirical for there is no land without
strife, without pain, without death. "The Golden Age and Cockaigne provide the elements out of
which the intellectual concept of utopia develops . . . . The Golden Age and utopia, the one a myth,
the other a concept, are both projections of man's wishful fantasies, answering to the longings for the
good life which have moved him since before history began . . . . Utopia comes ultimately from the
same dream."

2. Chang Hsiao-feng, Wuling-jen (Return from Utopia) (Taipei, Taiwan: Cosmic Ligh: Publishing Co.,
1974), pp. 3-4.
play, as a whole, was well-received by the general public and a few discerning literary critics, though the treatment of the theme as well as of the protagonist, rather than the performance, of the play has given rise to a lot of heated controversy. In fact, the theme of the play is a very old one—the perfect state of happiness—reflected in both Occidental works like Hesiod's *The Works and Days*, Plato's *The Republic*, Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*, William Morris' *News from Nowhere*, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, and Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* and Oriental works like the writings of Confucius孔子, Lao Tzu老子, and T'ao Yuan-ming陶渊明 (also T'ao Ch'ien陶潜).

In penning *Return from Utopia*, Hsiao Feng張曉風 borrows the basic story and theme from T'ao Yuan-ming's "A Record of the Peach Blossom Spring 桃花源記:"

During the T'ai-yuan period of the Chin dynasty a fisherman of Wuling 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 ground--

3. Hsiao Feng (also Chang Hsiao-feng張曉風 or Esther Chang), a native of T'ungshan City of Kiangsu Province江蘇省銅山市 (formerly Hsuchow徐州), was born in Chihua金華 in 1941 but brought up in Taiwan Province台灣省. In Taiwan she has had a good education—elementary education at Chungshan Primary School; secondary education at Taipei Municipal First Girls' Senior High School; college education at Soochow University. She graduated with the degree of Bachelor of Arts from the Department of Chinese Literature of Soochow University in Taipei. Currently she is an associate professor of Chinese literature in both Soochow University and National Yangming Medical College. Like her husband Lin Chih-p'ing林治平, chief editor and president of the *Cosmic Light* magazine 宇宙光雜誌, and professor of Chungyuan University, she is a devout Christian, enthusiastic in preaching Christianity to almost all walks of life through speeches and writings. Now she has a son and a daughter.

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 times 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 gentlewoman 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 place. 4

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254-55.
晉太元中，武陵人捕魚為業，緣溪行，忘路之遠近；忽逢桃花林，
夾岸數百步，中無雜樹，芳草鮮美，落英繽紛。漁人甚異之，
復前行，欲窮其林，林盡水源，便得一山；山有小口，窾窾若有
光。便捨船從口入。初極狹，狹通人，復行數十步，豁然開朗，
土地平曠，屋舍儼然；有良田美池，桑竹之屬，阡陌交通，雞犬
相聞。其中往來，種作男女，衣著悉如外人；黃髮垂髫，並怡然
自樂。見漁人，乃大驚，問所從來？具答之，便要還家，設酒殺
雞作食。村中聞有此人，咸來問訊，自云：「先世避秦時亂，率
妻子邑人，來此絕境，不復出焉。」遂與外人間隔，問今是何世
？乃不知有漢，無論魏晉。此人一一具言所聞，皆歎惋！餘人
各復延至其家，皆出酒食，停數日辭去。此中人語云：「不足為
外人道也。」遂出，得其船。便扶向路，處處誌之。及郡下，話
太守說如此；太守即遣人隨其往，尋向所諳，還迷不復得路。南
陽劉子騁，高尚士也，聞之欣然規往，未果，尋病終，後遂無問
津者。5

But important modifications have been made by Hsiao Feng, who has not only successfully
transformed the original sketchy prose account of the fisherman's encountering of the
peach blossom spring into a lengthy dramatic play of poetic prose by creating a dozen or
so characters of various ages and social groups, but also vividly depicted the happy and
contented lives of the villagers in the utopian peach blossom spring. Moreover, she empha-
sizes the psychological conflicts of her protagonist, Fisherman Huang Tao-chên 黃道真,
eventually left the utopian spring with determination. Broadly speaking, the play is quite a
creation.

To keep the historical background in focus, Hsiao Feng, in the prelude of the play,
intentionally mentions: "In the reign of T'aiyuan of the Chin Dynasty, there was a man of
Wuling, fisherman by profession. 晉太元中，武陵人，捕魚為業."6 Besides, she retains
parts of T'ao Yuán-ming's original prose to describe the beauty of nature: “Rows of peach
trees along both banks for several hundred paces, unmixed with other trees. Fragrant
grass, fresh and beautiful, fallen peach blossoms scattering on the ground. 夾岸數百步，

6. Hsiao Feng, Hsiao-fêng hs'i-chü chi (The Plays of Hsiao Feng) (Taipei, Taiwan: Taosheng Publishing
House, 1982), p. 95.
Obviously, it is the very beauty of nature that attracted Fisherman Huang Tao-chêng to find the utopian peach blossom spring, where he was persuaded to stay—no, settle down, to be more exact—by the villagers who fled the wars and taxes in the Ch’in Dynasty 秦 (221-207 B.C.). He was offered the hand of a beautiful maiden, the promise of a life of abundance, and the permanent separation from wars and taxes. The villagers said: “Here the fish are exceptionally plentiful and exceptionally easy to catch. 這裏的魚特別多，並且特別容易抓./ The soil is exceptionally fertile and the water exceptionally clear. 這裏的土特別肥，這裏的水特別清 ./ The sun is exceptionally warm and the moon exceptionally round. 這裏的太陽特別溫暖，這裏的月亮特別圓./ The blossoms are exceptionally red and the fruits exceptionally sweet. 這裏的花特別紅，這裏的水果特別甜./ The silkworms are exceptionally big and their silk exceptionally long. 這裏的蠶特別大，吐的絲也特別長./ The foods are exceptionally fragrant and the maidens exceptionally beautiful. 這裏的糧食特別香，這裏的姑娘特別漂亮.” Huang Tao-chêng said: “Yet I’d rather choose Wuling.可是我寧可選擇武陵.” The villagers asked: “Is there anything good in Wuling? 武陵地方有什麼好?” Huang Tao-chêng thought for a while and then said: “There’s nothing good in Wuling. 武陵地方沒有什麼好.” The villagers asked: “Is there anything good in the Chin Dynasty? 晉朝有什麼好?” Huang Tao-chêng answered: “Nothing good, either. 晉朝也沒有什麼好.” The villagers again asked: “Are there anything good with the folks in your hometown? 你故鄉的人又有什麼好?” Huang Tao-chêng, shaking his head, said: “You’re right. Nothing good with them either. 是的，我的故鄉的人也沒有什麼好.” Surprised, the villagers said: “What the hell are you going back then? 那麼，你究竟為著什麼回去?” Huang Tao-chêng explained to them patiently: “I return to Wuling because I am tired of the peach blossom spring. 我返回武陵，是因為我厭倦了桃源 ./ In Wuling, at least I have the right of longing for heaven. 在武陵，我至少有嚮往天國的權利./ But here you have only comfort, only peace, only happiness that drives me mad. 而在這裏，你們只有舒服，只有安靜，只有一切令人癲狂的幸福.” Upon hearing this, the villagers said: “If our land here isn’t heaven, is there any other heaven? Do you really mean to say that Wuling is what you called heaven? 如果我們這裏不是天國，請問還有什麼天國，難道武陵就是天國?” Huang Tao-chêng said: “No, Wuling isn’t what I called heaven. Yet in the distresses of Wuling, I’ll think of heaven from time to time. But in here, I’ll only forget—forget my own self, forget my property and home, forget heaven. The happiness here will efface my right of thinking.

7. Ibid.
不，武陵不是天國，但在武陵的痛苦中，我會想起天國，但在這裏，我只會忘記。忘記了我自己，忘記了身家，忘記了天國，這裏的幸福取消了我思索的權利。” The villagers then said: “You're foolish. You're foolish. There's no heaven in the world. You'd better lie down here and enjoy happiness without worries and cares. 你是愚蠢的，你是愚蠢的，世上那裡有天國，你不如躺在這裏享清福。” Huang Tao-chênn argued: “Your souls have been paralysed by a kind of second-rate happiness. 你們被一種次等的幸福麻痹了靈魂。/ Your will have been destroyed by an imitation of heaven. 你們被一種仿製的天國消滅了決心。/ As to me, I don't belong to this inferior joy and festivity. 至於我，我已不屬於這種低劣的歡樂。/ I would rather choose the trouble-ridden Wuling. 我寧願選擇多難的武陵。” The villagers said impatiently: “You're foolish. You're foolish. 你是愚蠢的，你是愚蠢的。”

Turning a deaf ear to the villagers’ mockery, Fisherman Huang Tao-chênn made up his mind to go back to Wuling to the company of his petty fellow fishermen, to be drafted into the army to fight for his emperor, and hopefully to marry a plain woman whom he had never seen and been able to marry because of financial problems. His giving up the easy life of the utopian peach blossom spring and his final acceptance of the trouble-ridden Wuling imply both his longing for the first-rate happiness instead of the second-rate one and his complete commitment not only to his fellow men but also to future men.

Man has dreamt of a perfect state of happiness ever since his beginning. Though man has created for himself many kinds of utopias—The Golden Age, Cockaigne, Arcadia, Xanadu, the Earthly Paradise, the Fortunate Isles, the Islands of the Blest, the Happy Other-world, and so on, none of them is perfect, not even the one found by Fisherman Huang Tao-chên, the hero of Return from Utopia. The play implies that a real perfect life is not simply one of material or family bliss, nor merely of abundance or absence of warfare and taxation, nor of dull contentment. When a man learns contentment and stops to strive for a higher ideal, he ceases to be a real man: as Karl Mannheim (1893-1947) says, he becomes a thing.10 Fisherman Huang Tao-chên’s giving up of the easy life of the utopian peach blossom spring and his final acceptance of the trouble-ridden Wuling are a triumph of human spirit. Although life may be a burden sometimes, it is the only one a man possesses. Accordingly, to be a man is to live as fully as possible as well as to allow his heart and soul to live alive not in utopia, but in the present world. Living in the present world gives a man the right to long for the first-rate happiness, which, as the play

8. Ibid., pp. 169-70.
10. Ibid., p. x.
tries hard to carry over to the reader, comes from the world above.

For Christians, the world above is heaven, the kingdom of God, where there is perfect harmony, perfect happiness, perfect existence; no strife, no pain, no death. Here, however, someone would raise a query that Fisherman Huang Tao-chên is not a Christian, why should he long for the perfect state of heavenly happiness? The reason for the question is that Fisherman Huang Tao-chên is not the same fisherman who discovered the utopian peach blossom spring in T'ao Yüan-ming's "A Record of the Peach Blossom Spring," but a Christian-colored fisherman, or rather, I venture to say, the very shadow—if not the psyche—of Hsiao Fêng. Hsiao Fêng puts Christian-colored words into the mouth of Fisherman Huang Tao-chên, whose predecessor—the archetypal fisherman—was heavily shaded with Taoism for T'ao Yüan-ming was a Taoist, or, at least, a Taoistic literary man, and makes him speak like a devout Christian. Perhaps, Hsiao Fêng thinks that this is a better way for her to put forward an important biblical message: perfect bliss and eternal life do not come from any man-made or imaginary utopias, but from "the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God..." (Revelation 21:2) Hence, it is reasonable to say that it is the very biblical quality that makes Return from Utopia differ strikingly from any other writings of the same genre, be they Oriental or Occidental. But few people would be willing to listen to or accept any Christianity preached by a Taoistic fisherman in a Christian robe. This is probably the reason why Hsiao Fêng's treatment of Fisherman Huang Tao-chên has invited much vehement controversy ever since the publication of the play. Beyond doubt, Hsiao Fêng is a devout Christian: her extraordinary zeal in bringing and telling Christianity to the world is praise-worthy, but the vehicle she employs to carry out the job is hardly justifiable.
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


