The Relationship between the poetry of T'ao Ch'ien and Chuang-Tzu

T'ao Ch'ien lived during the period of the Chin-Sung Dynasties (365 A.D. - 427 A.D.) and Chuang-Tzu was born during the middle of the Warring States Period. (368 B.C. - 268 B.C.). Although they were about seven hundred years apart, their characters and attitudes were quite similar.

Chuang-Tzu was one of the most admirable philosophers of T'ao Ch'ien. It is therefore understandable that the thoughts of T'ao Ch'ien were greatly influenced by the teachings of Chuang-Tzu. Perhaps T'ao Ch'ien might have had his own ideas which just coincided with Chuang-Tzu. However, as we are not able to distinguish as to what should be T'ao Ch'ien's own ideas and what had been derived from Chuang-Tzu's teachings, I would just gather them in one discussion.

This thesis is divided into seven parts.

Parts One & Two discuss T'ao Ch'ien's intelligence, hobbies, family and living environment
in order to understand his character and philosophy.

Part Three explains the social background of the Wei-Chin Dynasties. During that period, the doctrines of Lao-Tzu and Chuang-Tzu were very prevalent. As a result, the content of most of the poetry of the age consisted of their philosophy. This poetry was called "Suan Y^uan Shih" (玄 言 詩) in the history of Chinese Literature. Part of the poetry of T'ao Ch'ien reflected the same trend. Another part of his poetry was slightly different especially his so-called "Farmer Poems" which were more simple, spontaneous and plain.

Part Four discusses the philosophy of T'ao Ch'ien. His family background and the study of the writings of ancient sages had formed his ways of thinking. He was very enthusiastic and vigorous during his early age. After nearly ten years in government service, he found that he could not adapt to work in a government office and decided to give up his post of district magistrate of P'eng-tse. From then on, he lived the life of
a farmer. It has also been a strong argument that the thought of T'ao Ch'ien was in some aspects affected by Buddhism. To conclude, we would say that the thoughts of T'ao Ch'ien were very complicated.

Part Five emphasizes how the teachings of Chuang-Tzu affected T'ao Ch'ien. To deal with this matter, it is divided into three portions for discussion that is "Ignorance of Self" "Gain & Loss are the same" and "Life and Death are identical". We try to compare the philosophy of T'ao Ch'ien and Chuang-Tzu by quoting evidence from Chuang-Tzu's works and T'ao Ch'ien's poetry.

Part Six discusses how T'ao Ch'ien adopted the teachings of Chuang-Tzu in his poems by referring to the "Wen Hsüan Chu (文選注)" (Written by Li-Sun of the Tang Dynasty) and the commentaries, textual criticism and studies on T'ao Ch'ien's poems.

Part Seven is the conclusion of the thesis.