

# “Ticino” by Hermann Hesse and Chinese Idyllic Poet School: The Common Desire for Utopia

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Hermann Hesse (1877-1962), the Nobel Prize winner for literature, is one of the most popular writers of the German language. The canton of Ticino, located in southern Switzerland, is the place that Hesse traveled to in 1919 in bad circumstances after the First World War. As Hesse's second home, Ticino played an important role in his life, where Hesse was involved with novels, prose, poetry, and watercolors. In the Eastern Jin Dynasty, Chinese poet Tao bears a vision for an ideal world of beauty and peace in the “Peach Blossom Spring”. He is a master of idyllic poems, which shows his pursuit of the ideal world and a simple pastoral life. There are many similarities between Ticino by Hermann Hesse and Chinese idyllic poetry school. Therefore, the aim of the work is to reveal the similarities and differences between Hesse's and Tao Yuanming's work. Last but not least, the authors also hope that this work could give new impetus to Hesse research and, to a certain extent, contribute to further debate.

*Keywords:* Hermann Hesse, Tao Yuanming, idyll, utopia

## Introduction

Works on the comparison between Chinese literature and German literature began very early. The subject studied in this work is the prose of the book Ticino: reflections, poems, and watercolors of the author, which is collected and published by the German Hesse expert Volker Michel. Compared to other previously published Ticino impressions, Volker Michel describes in his epilogue on the basis of many unknown testimonies from Hesse's letters, in which he explained how the poet discovered this landscape, what he experienced there and why it became his adopted home.

The main purpose of this work is to analyze Hesse's prose in detail and the similarities and differences between their works. This work assumes that the hidden desire for the happy life of Hermann Hesse's prose can be uncovered and taken into account. All in all, this work focuses on three topics. Firstly, the work is in the context of Hesse research with a focus on Hesse's prose. Secondly, there is a summary of China's natural poetry. For this purpose, a famous poet of natural poetry will be explored, namely Tao Yuanming. Finally, the contents of Ticino and Tao Yuanming are compared as an example, in which it comes to the conclusion that every nation in this world strives for utopia.

## Hesse and Ticino

After experiencing the First World War and the failure of his first marriage, Hesse arrived in Montagnola

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on the peninsula in Luganere Lake to find his inner peace and tried to recover from the pain and disappointment he greatly suffered. In 1919, he described Ticino as “a pre-determined homeland and as a desired asylum”. In Ticino, Hesse has rediscovered his inspiration and motivation to write and recovered well both physically and mentally. Ticino was for Hesse a landscape that had hosted and comforted him three times for a short time during the war and made him happy and grateful again. Immediately after arriving in Ticino, Hesse created two great stories in eight weeks, namely *Klein and Wagner* and *Klingsor’s last summer* as well as some poems.

The natural beauty of Ticino, the bright colors, and the Baroque way of life of the natives there sparked Hesse to paint and write more colorful pictures and articles. He has visited many corners and places in Ticino and made many works out of it. In many of his novels, narratives, poems, and also proses you can find the traces of Ticino. It is determined that Ticino and its landscape provided the material for many pieces of Ticino prose.

### Analysis of the Prose of Hesse’s “Ticino”

Structurally, the prose pieces in the book can be seen as a diary, but at the same time as a critical chronicle over 42 years from the year 1918 to the year 1960. This rhythm of life between the winters in the big city and the warm months that Hesse spent in Switzerland also corresponds to the sequence of descriptions of this volume, the seasons in Ticino, the flowering of the chestnut forests, the different thermal radiations of the terrain in the nights between Midsummer and late autumn, until the grape harvest and the pressing of the red country wine Nostrano hold.

Table 1

*Articles Listed According to Their Producing Time*

Time	Title
1918	Mountain path
1919	Village, Homestead, midday rest, Red House, summer day in the south, winter letter from the south
1920	Churches and chapels in Ticino
1921	The little path, Ticinoer summer evening, beach
1923	Madonna d Ongero
1924	Madonna Festival in Ticino, What the poet saw in the evening
1925	In Locarno
1926	Evening clouds, watercolor, summer’s end, autumn
1927	Reunion with Nina, return to the country, May in the chestnut forest, watercolor painting, suit around an old tree
1928	Opposites, Zinnias, neighbor Mario, walk in the room, when it is autumn
1929	Between summer and autumn
1931	New beginning in the Ticino, Ticino autumn days
1938	Remembering Klingsor’s summer
1945	The peach tree
1953	Kaminfegerchen
1954	Thanks to the Ticino
1955	Diary sheets 1955
1960	Forty years in Montagnola

There are also variety of poems produced and three articles were also produced: “The Foreign City in the South” (1925), “Vogel” (1932), “A Ticino Curriculum Vitae” (about 1932).

If one looks at the headings in the book thematically, he can divide them into the following groups:

## (a) Plants and animals

## Headlines:

*May in the chestnut forest, suit around an old tree, contrasts, zinnias, The peach tree*

There are many texts in Hesse's work in which he equates the individual with a tree and thus takes up anthropomorphic interpretations from different cultural circles. It is said in the famous poem *In the fog*, “No tree sees the other, everyone is alone.” Through the trees in the garden of Casa Camuzzi, through the walks in the chestnut forests and later through the care of the plantings in Montagnola was Hesse highly inspired by the garden of Casa Rossa, with trees becoming living beings and his friends. During the whole year Hesse has observed a lot of natural spectacles. As he wrote in diary pages in 1955, he has made visits to blackbirds, hedgehogs, or snakes, and once a thick, heavy turtle.

## (b) Weather, seasons, morning and evening hours

## Headlines:

*Lunchtime rest, winter letter from the south, What the poet saw in the evening, Summer day in the south, Ticino summer evening, evening clouds, summer end, autumn, When it gets autumn, Ticino autumn days, Between summer and autumn, memories of Klingsors summer, diary sheets 1955*

In the summer day in the south he preferred to sit in Nordland or felt the freeze air in an alpine hotel. And every morning the sun rises and the birds in the endless chestnut forests begin to sing. Towards the evening Hesse went to the lake, a piece of sandy beach with woods behind full of reeds and grass. When Hesse sat in the evening on the balcony, he has lost himself in the clouds, looking into the middle of the clouds with his long neck. In rainy weather, in the wild storms of this season, the clouds then come into his room (p. 100, evening clouds).

## (c) Building and village

## Headlines:

*Homestead, Small path, Mountain pass, Red house, In Locarno, Beach, Walk in the room, Back in the country*

Everything is wonderful for Hesse in the farm. The sun shines more intimately there, and the mountains are more gorgeous. Chestnut and wine, almond and fig are growing there, and people are refined, well-mannered and friendly, though they are poor. The houses, walls, vineyard steps, paths, plantations, and terraces, everything is neither new nor old, everything is as if it were not worked out, blasted by human, but emerged like rock, tree, and moss.

## (d) Church

## Headlines:

*Madonna d. Ongero, churches and chapels in Ticino, Madonna festival in Ticino*

Hesse has visited many chapels and churches in Ticino, where Catholicism is prevalent and most of the beautiful old church buildings could not be exist today. That is why the churches in Ticino, in comparison with the North, are most valued in their magnificence and beauty. The churches and chapels in Ticino have given Hesse many good memorable hours.

Due to his long painting experiences, his words are also very picturesque, beautiful, and colorful. In addition, the words are coordinated with nature. That's why they are nature-friendly and nature-loving. In many of his proeses Hesse has expressed his heartfelt thanks to nature. In short, his words are very picturesque, pure, nature-spirited, and thoughtful.

Table 2

*About the Words (Some Examples)*

Title	Plants	Color	Food
Gehöft (1919)	Moss, tree, grass, primrose, poplar, alpine roses, leaves	redder, dark golden, brown	Wine, almond, chestnut, corn, fig, vegetables
Sommertag im Süden (1919)	Forest, gardens, flowers, chestnut forests, grasses	Green, brown, black	Fruits, bread, blueberries, country wine, grapes, lemons
Strand (1921)	Acacia branches, grass, leaves, flowers, lotus flowers, forest, white willows	Purple, golden yellow, colored, deep green, violet, red, blue, light blue, orange, white, crystals	dinner
Abendwolken (1926)	Palm trees, Judas tree, wisteria, fan crowns, tree garden, chestnut forest, yew trees	White gray, purple, golden, green, colored, rosy, ocher yellow, light red, golden yellow	

### Chinese Idyllic Poetry School

In none of the other cultures of our world does literature enjoy such outstanding status as in China. Alone from the Tang Dynasty (618-907), nearly 50,000 poems have survived, and some poets have made more than 2,000 poems on paper. Nature and the landscape are a significant topic for Chinese poets. However, the poems in question are not landscape descriptions, but rather landscape impressions that reflect the inner feelings of the viewers and poets. What is important for the Chinese is that nature is not represented on its own, but there is always a human being who, as a small being, opposes the overpowering nature, as we know from landscape painting in China. First nature lyricists were Zuo Si, Xi Kang, Yu Chan, and Sun Chuo.

### Tao Yuanming

Tao Yuanming is the greatest poet between Han and Tang times in China. “To buck his head for five bushels of rice a day,” as he said, he felt bad and sorry to have quit the civil service. He moved in the countryside, ordered a field and a garden, and sang about what he loved: children and the elderly, inhabitants, drinking wine with friends, chrysanthemums and pines, the silence, and the seclusion. Its “peach blossom spring” has been gaining great success in China for centuries.

The wonderful story that tells about a fisherman who accidentally gets lost in a dreamland cut off from the outside world, the “peach blossom land”, in which the people lead a harmonious and carefree life in picturesque surroundings. In this story, Tao writes his hunt for an ideal society and an idyllic life. Tao’s withdrawal from political and social ties to the country and his uncompromising rejection of civil service career and city life are not simply Taoist reasons, but a sketch of China’s political events. For Tao Yuanming, life as a farmer was ideal. Indeed, Tao Yuanming’s various themes often revolve around his key idea of returning back from office to the countryside, back from the chaos of the world to the beauty of nature. He always adheres to the demand that the poetic inner life should correspond to an outside world. Rather, he expressed his utopian desire for life in simple pictures and gestures. As one of his poems from the “Drinking Wine” cycle states:

In people’s haunt I built my cot; Of wheel’s and hoof’s noise I hear not.

How can it leave on me no trace? Secluded heart makes secluded place.

I pick fenceside asters at will; Carefree I see the southern hill.

The mountain air’s fresh day and night; Together birds go home in flight.

What revelation at this view? Words fail me if I try to tell you.

Life in the countryside seems a utopia in his mind. For Tao Yuanming, fieldwork and gardening were an crucial activity for he realized his self-preservation through these manual activities. He plowed and ordered his own garden. So it says in a poem: Little does the cold dew bother me, As long as I have my will.

(a) Nature

Many poems are relevant to nature. These are not landscape descriptions, rather landscape impressions showing the inner feelings of the author. Representations like a lonely fisherman in his boat or on the shore, or the individual observer in front of the overwhelming natural scenery, preferably from the mountain.

(b) The hermit

The creator revealed himself in paintings or poems. The ideal world of such an individual in the oversized nature is the hermit in the mountains. Anyone who withdrew from resistance to prevailing politics or out of frustration over society from civil service life was not ostracized or forgotten, but was considered particularly wise and noble in Chinese society.

(c) The West Lake

In the description of nature, Chinese poets have not only described a localized ideal landscape, but often very concrete places that they think are utopian. The West Lake in Hangzhou, has become an ideal landscape in China due to its beauty and location. This place has inspired poets of all eras since the Tang Dynasty to write countless poems. The moon plays a special role in landscape impressions.

(d) The wine

An important topic of Chinese poets is drinking wine. There are countless drinking songs, especially the poet Li Bai, who is so popular in the West and has dedicated a large part of his work to this genre.

## **The Common Desire**

### **Similar Experience**

Hermann Hesse was born in Calw Baden-Württemberg in 1877 and spent his life in Germany and Switzerland. The four-year war brought disaster to the whole world. After experiencing the First World War and the failure of his first honor, Hesse arrived in Montagnola on the peninsula in Luganere Lake to recover.

Tao's experience was similar: Tao Yuanming's great-grandfather, Tao Kan, was one of the founders of the Eastern Jin Dynasty, but after the death of Tao Kan, the family's financial situation deteriorated steadily. Tao Yuanming had great political ambitions in his youth, which he failed to realize due to the political unrest in the period of the Eastern Jin Dynasty. Tao Yuanming was getting poorer and he could no longer afford his family by fieldwork alone. At the age of 41, Tao Yuanming resumed his job and resigned after just 80 days. From then on, Tao Yuanming led a life as a hermit until his death.

Despite material poverty, Hesse and Tao were always happy and satisfied. They wrote numerous poems and this period is considered the heyday of his literary work. In their works, rural life and the rural landscape became an important aesthetic object of lyric poetry for the first time. Life in the countryside is realized through his works and becomes a refuge from the real and painful life.

### **Common Desire for Utopia**

Tao Yuanming has written the well-known “Peach-blossom Spring”, which describes a utopian society that recounts how a fisherman happens to end up in paradise, where he knows some of the inhabitants who experienced the war and then fled to this paradise. They have no contact with the outside world and live a

diligent and carefree life in peace and harmony. “The peach blossom spring” as a beautiful utopia represents people’s yearning for peaceful society in the time of political turmoil.

Hermann Hesse lived a frugal life in Ticino and had little material comfort. Nevertheless, he has had a beautiful wide landscape in front of his windows and has written numerous works. For him the life there consists of the oldest and most enduring human species, the simplest and the most pious lifestyle, a life full of diligence and effort, but without haste and actual care, for his reason was piety and trust in the deities of the earth, of the water, the air, the seasons, the forces of plants and animals.

The two have found their inner freedom and happiness in nature, such a beautiful world they call Utopia.

### Conclusions

Ticino was Hesse’s second home and he expressed his thanks and love to Ticino in his book. For Chinese readers, it’s easy to notice that *Ticino* from Hesse and Tao Yuanming’s *Peach Blossom Spring* are similar. They both have found their mental sanctuary after the war, chaos, and failure they endured in their lives. They have described a similarly beautiful and harmonious world. Everyone has a beautiful wish for a happy and beautiful life. China’s poet Tao has also expressed his ideal for a harmonious society in the “Peach Blossom Spring”. He has great success in writing idyllic poems that show the pursuit of the ideal world and simple pastoral life.

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