

“The Pedestrian” and “Guest”: The Taoist Life Consciousness in Classical Chinese Poetry

“El peatón” y “el huésped”: la conciencia de vida taoísta en la poesía clásica China

“行人”与“客人”：中国古典诗词中的道家生死观

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Abstract: Both *pedestrian* and *guest* are not rare in classical Chinese poetry. It is reasonable to interpret *pedestrian* and *guest* as person on the road or away from home in some classical Chinese poems. However, considering the relevant Taoist classics and Taoist life consciousness, *pedestrian* and *guest* should be interpreted as the living person, not the man walking on the road, in the poems of mourning the dead, worshipping the ancestors, explaining the relationship between the individual and world, or expressing the insights related to Buddhism. It is not an accidental, but an important topic in

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ancient poetry. The adoption meaning of living person can make the work more profound and touching and the logic of the poems is clearer and more coherent.

Key Words: Pedestrian; Guest; Taoist Life Consciousness; Classical Chinese Poetry.

Resumen: El “Pasajero” o el “huésped” son dos palabras que aparecen frecuentemente en los poemas clásicos chinos. Normalmente designan a personas que están fuera o lejos de casa. Sin embargo, en tres tipos de poemas: en los que se conmemoran a los difuntos u honran a los antepasados; en los que discuten sobre la relación entre los seres humanos y el mundo o los poemas relacionados con la penitencia, estas palabras deben interpretarse acorde con el concepto de “vida” y “muerte” del taoísmo. Es decir, designan genéricamente a “gente viva”, en vez de una referir simplemente a los pasajeros o a los alejados de casa. La existencia de dicho fenómeno no es una casualidad, sino una representación de un tema importante en las poesías antiguas chinas. Cuando entendemos la poesía aplicando el concepto de “gente viva”, la obra suele ser más profunda, más conmovedora, y la lógica de ella misma es más clara y coherente. Así puede beneficiar a los lectores para la comprensión del significado más profundo de la poesía.

Palabras clave: Pasajero; Huésped; Conciencia de vida taoísta; Poesía clásica china.

摘要: “行人”与“客人”二词经常出现在古典诗词之中，通常情况下，可将这两个词解为离家远行的人。然而，在三种内容的诗歌，即缅怀死者或祭奠先人、探讨个体人与世界之关系、以及关于修行之人的诗歌之中，行人与客人通常应依据道家生死观，将之解为活着的人，而不是简单的将之理解为走在路上或离家远行的人。这种现象并非偶然，而是古代诗歌中的一个重要话题。以“活人”这一含义来解读整首诗，作品往往更加深刻、感人，诗中逻辑也更为清晰、连贯，对于读者理解诗词的深层内涵，大有裨益。

[关键词] 行人；客人；道家生死观；中国古典诗词

Both “pedestrian” and “guest” are not rare in classical Chinese poetry. Normally, pedestrian means a person who is walking on the road and leaving far away from home. For example, in *Quaint Poetry* written by Wang Rong: “The waterfowls go home consciously in the evening. /Only the pedestrian alone has not returned. (游禽暮知反，行人独未归。)”

Sometimes it refers to a soldier who goes out for fighting in some classical Chinese poetry, in *Song of the Conscripts* written by Du Fu: “Chariots rumbling, /horses neighing, /pedestrians on the march with bows and arrows at the waist. (车辚辚，马萧萧，行人弓箭各在腰。)”

While “guest” usually means a person who is traveling far or away from home, for example in *Nineteen Ancient Poems*: “A guest came from afar and left two carps to me. (客从远方来，遗我双鲤鱼。)”

However, in some classical Chinese poems whose subjects are life and death, the “pedestrian” and “guest” bear a different modality and should be interpreted carefully from Taoist life consciousness.

1. “Pedestrian” and “Guest” from the Taoist Life Consciousness

The “pedestrian” and “guest” should be interpreted as the living person in some classical Chinese poems that dealing with the theme of life and death. The reason has been shown in the article “Tianrui” from the book of *Lieh-Tzu*, a Taoist classic: “In ancient times, the dead were called homecoming. If so, the living person should be regarded as pedestrian. (古者谓死人为归人。夫言死人为归人，则生人为行人矣。)” We can also find clues about the deeper meaning of the guest as living person from the same article from *Lieh-Tzu*. In Taoism, human beings can be divided into spiritual and physical forms.

The spirit is part of heaven and the skeleton is part of earth. The spirit is clear and scattered which belongs to the heaven. And the skeleton is muddy and gathering which belongs to the earth. So, when the spirit has been out of body, it should be back to the heaven and the body should be back to the earth simultaneously. It is the state or process of being ghosts. Ghost always shares the experience of returning, implying a man who has returned to his true home. (精神者，天之分；骨骸者，地之分。属天清而散，属地浊而聚。精神离形，各归其真；故谓之鬼。鬼，归也，归其真宅。) (*Lieh-Tzu*)

In *The Explanatory Note of Lieh-Tzu* written by Lu Chongxuan, a scholar of Tang Dynasty, it says:

body is the artificial home of one’s spirit if heaven (Taiqing) should be considered as the true home. (以太清为真宅，明此形骸为虚假耳。)

Thus, the living person should be the one whose spirit hasn’t returned to the true home but in the artificial body instead since death means that one’s spirit leaves his body and returns to the true home. That is why living person is called “guest” in Taoist classics.

The book of *Zhuangzi*, another Taoist classic, has further explained the reason why “pedestrian” and “guest” are interpreted as living persons and ghosts as returning to the true home. In the article *The Equality of Things*, the famous story about Zhuang’s dream explicates clearly the Taoist life consciousness.

In the past, Zhuang Zhou dreamed that he had become a butterfly. The dream was so vivid that he had forgotten he was Zhuang Zhou and enjoyed himself as a butterfly. When he woke up suddenly, it surprised him to know

that he was still Zhuang Zhou. However, it still puzzled him whether Zhuang Zhou had become a butterfly in his dream or a butterfly had become Zhuang Zhou in the butterfly's dream. There must be a difference between Zhuang Zhou and butterfly, which should be called lines of demarcation between others and oneself. (周之梦为胡蝶与，胡蝶之梦为周与？周与胡蝶，则必有分矣。此之谓物化。)

It is a general consensus to consider one's own judgment as the truth and consider others as the falsity. Naturally, the world to be cognized is considered as the only real world. However, it is the most difficult to everyone to judge which one is true. The posterity cannot totally know what happened in the past and the people on one side have no idea about what happened on the other. So, it makes no sense to assert that the world can be cognized is the only real world and everything in dream is illusory. That is why Zhuang Zhou was not sure which identity was true, Zhuang Zhou or butterfly, and which one was in the dream, Zhuang Zhou or butterfly. In the story of dream in *Zhuangzi*, a major issue is placed which is about the lines of demarcation between life and death.

People consider the physical world as the real world by their perception, but know nothing about life after death. Just as said in *Lieh-Tzu*:

Life and death are like two completely opposite routes so that the dead in this world may live in another world. (死之与生，一往一反。故死于是者，安知不生于彼。)

Thus, both life and death are two different existing forms in Taoist life consciousness. Also, there is no need to be afraid of death, because death should be regarded as a complete rest after a lifetime of busy work. It is said in the article *A Great Master* in the book of *Zhuangzi*:

The fate of life and death is the same like alternation of day and night in nature. (生死，命也，其有夜旦之常，天也。)

The body form is given by nature and exhausted during the life time, except a short break in an old age till death which should be considered as a complete rest. (大块载我以形，劳我以生，佚我以老，息我以死。)

Concerning Taoist life consciousness, Cheng Xuanying, a scholar of Tang Dynasty explains:

One's body is a physical form of life from birth and considered dead as the time of Qi scattered, which is a kind of subject spirit in Taoism. In his opinion, people are exhausted after having gotten his physical form and should get a short break for the incapability of an old age. Because of the limitations of physical form, people can only get complete rest after death. Though there are some different characteristics among birth, the elder and

the dead, on the physical form, has nothing changed in the spiritual form for the reason that all the forms are belonging to oneself. So, there is no need to scare of dying in Cheng Xuanying's opinion. (“大块者，自然也。夫形是构造之物，生是诞育之始，老是耆艾之年，死是气散之日。但运载有形，生必劳苦；老既无能，暂时闲逸；死灭还无，理归停憩；四者虽变而未始非我，而我坦然何所惜耶！”）

In other words, all the changes are physical and the spiritual form is the true one because of its unchangeableness. So, the different stages of life are about one's physical form and one's spiritual form remains constant in Taoism. Death is considered as the only way to get complete rest and peace because living person is exhausted from having gotten his physical form to scattering it and finally set it free in Taoist life consciousness. It is speculated that the dead should be considered as a kind of extrication so that the living person should be considered as the “pedestrian” or “guest” who is tired of walking on the road and away from true home. Therefore, the “pedestrian” and “guest” would be interpreted as living persons, which is an epitome of a kind of Taoist life consciousness, rather than a kind of metaphor, especially in some classical Chinese poems whose subjects are life or death.

2. “Pedestrian” in Classical Chinese Poems of Life Consciousness

Few ancient scholars have pointed out that the “pedestrian” and “guest” should be interpreted as living persons in their explanatory notes of classical Chinese poetry. For one thing, the context where “pedestrian” and “guest” can be regarded as the living persons may be find in the poetry of mourning the dead or exploring the essence of life. The number of such poems is small and the theme is so clear that there is no need to explain in details for ancient readers. For another point, normally, it is also acceptable to interpret “pedestrian” and “guest” as the persons on traveling or away from home in some classical Chinese poems whose subjects are life or death. However, the interpretation of *pedestrian* and *guest* as living persons are not rare in these classic poems. Actually, it is necessary to point out a good example to show the life consciousness of living persons, such as in *Crying for Yin Yao* (哭殷遥), written by Wang Wei .

How long can a man live?
One is doomed to dissipate and die.
You did not escape the fate of death.
All these things made me so sad.

Your mother has not been buried.
Your daughter is only ten years old.
In the misty and cold suburbs,
The bleak sob could be heard.
The floating clouds are boundless,
And the birds cannot sing because of these.
How lonely the pedestrian was!
And how desolate and dreary the day was!
I still remember when you were alive,
You learned to be immortal from me.
I suffered from persuading you so late
That made you fail to gain longevity.

...

人生能几何，
毕竟归无形。
念君等为死，
万事伤人情。
慈母未及葬，
一女才十龄。
泱泱寒郊外，
萧条闻哭声。
浮云为苍茫，
飞鸟不能鸣。
行人何寂寞，
白日自凄清。
忆昔君在时，
问我学无生。
劝君苦不早，
令君无所成。

.....

Wang Wei, a poet and artist in Tang dynasty, wrote this poem to express his sadness over the death of his good friend Yin Yao. It is reasonable to interpret “pedestrian” as a person on travel or away from home in the sentence “how lonely the pedestrian is”. However, considering the descriptions of the environment in the former two sentences, “In the misty and cold suburbs, the bleak sob could be heard. The floating cloud became more boundless and birds could not sing because of these”, it is possible for a person to feel lonely in the context of Wang Wei’s poem. Furthermore, if the pedestrian is interpreted as a living person, the connotative meaning of

each sentence in this poem will become much clearer. Wang Wei expressed his view of life consciousness in the first and second sentences of this poem which demonstrated that life is short and man will always die. And then he wrote about the condition of his friend's mother and daughter, the scenery in the countryside, and the loneliness of living person (the *pedestrian*) due to the death of Yin Yao. Finally, it led to the reminiscent sentences about Yin Yao, who had asked the author something about Wu Sheng (the method of separating one's spirit from the body to achieve immortality). It is shown that interpreting the pedestrian as living person is more appropriate in this poem, because it can make the logic of the poem clearer and more coherent.

Similarly, there are many classical poems dealing with the theme of mourning a dead friend or expressing the poet's sadness over the death of dear friends. Just as in Wang Wei's poem above, the *pedestrian* should be interpreted as a living person, considering the theme and Taoist life consciousness, like *Crying for Registrar Miao of the Ministry of Agriculture and Finance* (哭司农苗主簿), written by Lu Lun (卢纶), a celebrated poet of Tang dynasty.

Hearses surrounded the new cemetery on the edge of the plain,
 The pedestrian faced with the direction of the crying in the plain.
 Thinking of the scene that continuous ancient trees are in the autumn
 mountains,
 The only way to see you is a name engraved on a tombstone.

原头殡御绕新茔，
 原下行人望哭声。
 更想秋山连古木，
 唯应石上见君名。

It is obvious that Lu Lun's work is similar with Wang Wei's *Crying for Yin Yao* in the same theme of mourning over his dead friend and bleak descriptions of the funeral and the environment of the graveyard. So, it is more suitable to interpret the *pedestrian* in the line "The pedestrian faced with the direction of the crying in the plain" as a living person and taking the conclusion of Wang Wei's poem into consideration, the meanings of a person on travel or away from home in this poem also make sense. But from the last two sentences which relate to the real, living world, it is inclined to treat the pedestrian as a living person for what the dead left to the living world is "just a name engraved on a tombstone". So, the *pedestrian* of this

poem should be interpreted as the living man rather than the man passing by the cemetery.

In fact, apart from the theme of mourning and remembering one's dead relatives or friends, in other poems about life and death consciousness the *pedestrian* can also be regarded as a living person, such as the pedestrians occurring in some special situations or festivals, as in the poem of *Qingming Festival* (清明).

Rain falls thick and fast on Qingming Festival.
Pedestrians were in deep sorrow on road.
Where was a drinking place?
A buffalo boy pointed to Apricot Flower Village.

清明时节雨纷纷，
路上行人欲断魂。
借问酒家何处有，
牧童遥指杏花村。

Qingming Festival is a traditional Chinese festival to visit grave and mourn the dead. The Apricot Flower Village was named for its apricot blossoms, which generally referred to the place where wine was sold. Literally, the *pedestrians* in the second line of this poem can be understood as passersby or persons on the road. However, when interpreting *pedestrians* as living persons, the atmosphere and description of the second line more agrees with the title, *Qingming Festival*. The first line of this poem is an environmental description about the weather of the Qingming Festival. And the second line is a description that the living men were so sad that their spiritual form nearly detached from their physical form on this special festival to visit grave and mourn the dead. The effect of such interpretation not only makes the poetry more logical, but also accords with the Taoist life consciousness in the period of the Wei and Jin Dynasties.

Also, it is not uncommon to interpret *pedestrian* as a living person in another literary form of classical Chinese verse, Ci. It is originated in the Tang Dynasty and fully developed in Song Dynasty. In such classical Ci whose themes are about the essence of life, the *pedestrian* should be interpreted as a living person as well. It is more obvious in Su Shi's (苏轼) work, *Linjiangxian: Seeing Qian Mufu off* (临江仙·送钱穆父).

It had been three years since we left the capital.
Both of us had travelled all over the world because of relegation.

Your smile was still as warm as spring.
 You were peaceful like an ancient well without waves.
 And you stuck to yourself like a bamboo in autumn.
 The ship was about to set out disconsolately overnight
 With the moon and cloud.
 There was no need to frown when drinking.
 The life is like an inn.
 I am also a pedestrian.

一别都门三改火，
 天涯踏尽红尘。
 依然一笑作春温。
 无波真古井，
 有节是秋筠。
 惆怅孤帆连夜发，
 送行淡月微云。
 尊前不用翠眉颦。
 人生如逆旅，
 我亦是行人。

Linjiangxian is a name of the tunes to which Ci are composed and Qian Mufu was a friend of the author. In the last two lines of this work, the author compared life to an inn and himself to a *pedestrian*. Certainly, it is reasonable to interpret the *pedestrian* as a person on travel or away from home in this work, too. However, it will be more meaningful to interpret *pedestrian* as a living person from the Taoist life consciousness in *Lieh-Tzu* and *Zhuangzi* cited previously. Interpreting like this, the work expresses that every living person is actually a person who walks in a foreign land, and does not have to cling to the sadness of parting. It makes the work more profound and touching.

Another point that the readers should pay more attention to is that the pedestrian should be interpreted as secular person relative to the Buddhist monk, in the poetry which was written by Buddhist monks or about the Buddhist faith, Buddhist thoughts, and images and so on. This view is based on the following two points.

Firstly, human beings can be divided into spiritual and physical forms and the living person means the one whose spirit is not in the true home but in the artificial physical form instead. So, the one whose spirit has returned to his true home, the ghost, should be regarded as homecoming and the one whose spirit is still in the artificial body, the living person, is

called the pedestrian. It is much more difficult for the pedestrians to judge which form is true, the spiritual one or the physical one, because they know nothing except the physical world they can perceive of. On the contrary, to believe in religion and practice Buddhism or Taoism is to explore the origin of the world and the true essence of life and death in ancient China. So, the pedestrian should be interpreted as secular person relative to the Buddhist monk in these poems about religion.

Secondly, though it is based on the Taoist classics not the Buddhist classics that the *pedestrian* should be interpreted as the living person in the poems about life or death. The boundary between Buddhist and Taoist ideology is usually not so clear and definite. In the early period when Buddhism was introduced into China, many monks were familiar with ancient Chinese indigenous thoughts, and they applied Confucianism and Taoism to carry forward Buddhism more conveniently among the literati. For example, Zhidun, a famous monk in the Eastern Jin Dynasty, made a great contribution to the interpretation of *The Untrammelled Traveler*, the first article of *Zhuangzi* which is a representative work of Taoism. And many scholars in ancient China are also proficient in Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, such as Su Shi, the author of *Linjiangxian: Seeing Qian Mufu off*. Therefore, although it is based on Taoist classics and thoughts that the *pedestrian* should be interpreted as a living person, it has extended the meaning as secular person in poems about Buddhist thought, too, for example, *The Begging monk* (乞食僧), written by Guanxiu (贯休), an eminent monk in the late Tang Dynasty.

An emaciated and frail monk with an alms bowl,
Went out late for the cold weather was cold.
On the road magnificent red gates faced
For a long time, he had stood in the snow.
His heart was as clean as the moon
Without any tangled trifles.
Pedestrians, don't scorn and ridicule him.
This is what the ancient Buddha looks like.

擎钵貌清羸，
天寒出寺迟。
朱门当大路，
风雪立多时。
似月心常净，
如麻事不知。

行人莫轻诮，
古佛尽如斯。

Although the *pedestrians* in this poem can also be treated as people walking on the road, that is, people passing by the monk who was begging on the way out of the temple. However, when the *pedestrian* here is understood as a living person, then the specific meaning of *pedestrian* should be opposite of the begging monk. It refers to the person whose heart is not as clear as the moon and whose mind is full of tangled trifles, implying the secular person. In this way, the logic of the poem becomes more coherent and readers are easily to be enlightened by the theme of this poem.

Not only in the poems written by monks, but also in the poems about Buddhism or monks written by literati, the *pedestrian* should be interpreted as secular person. For example, in *A Meditators in the Temple by the River* (题江寺禅和) written by Du Xunhe (杜荀鹤), a poet in Tang dynasty): “Pedestrians do not have to ask the master about religious doctrines. / Do not look at the flashy world with your eyes, and do not listen to the noise with your ears. (行人莫问师宗旨，眼不浮华耳不喧。)” Obviously, the master which the pedestrians asked to refers to the meditators in the temple by the river from the title of the poem. And the *pedestrian* here should not be interpreted as the person walking on the road, that is, the person the monk met on the road. It’s the common people like us, who live in the secular world and cannot see through the truth of the soul, conform to the secular meaning of pedestrians.

Therefore, considering the relevant Taoist classics and Taoist life consciousness, it is not difficult to draw such a conclusion that *pedestrian* should be interpreted as the living person, not the man walking on the road, in the poems of mourning the dead, worshiping the ancestors, explaining the relationship between the individual and world, or expressing the insights related to Buddhism.

3. The “Guest” in Classical Chinese Poems of Life Consciousness

It is easier to interpret guest as living person in some classical Chinese poems whose subjects are life or death, like *Nineteen Ancient Poems* (古诗十九首).

There are evergreen cypresses on the mound
And heaped stones in the stream.

People live on the earth and under the sky,
Like a guest going on a long journey.

...

青青陵上柏，
磊磊涧中石。
人生天地间，
忽如远行客。

.....

The relationship between people and the world in the second line of the poem is consistent with that in *Lieh-Tzu*. It is said that “One is the beginning of deformation. The light and the clear rise and become the sky, the turbid and the heavy fall and become the earth, and the central is human. Everything has become alive because the sky and earth contain essence. (一者，形变之始也。清轻者上为天，浊重者下为地，冲和其者为人，故天地含精，万物化生。)” So, it is not a metaphor for comparing life to a journey. This should be regarded as an interpretation of Taoist life consciousness in *Lieh-Tzu*.

In Tang Dynasty, the peak of the development of Chinese classical poetry, it is very common to apply the *guest* as living person in poetry. For instance, *Returning to the Distant Guo from Hometown* (自乡还远虢), a poem written by Wang Bo (王勃), a celebrated poet of Tang Dynasty.

Life is like being a guest.
How long can it last to be relatives?
I hope in a hundred years,
we can be together like flowers and calyx.
Don't make the poem, Tang Di, lose its function,
Which is used to describe the conduct not noble.

人生忽如客，
骨肉知何常。
愿及百年内，
花萼常相将。
无使《棠棣》废，
取譬人无良。

Tang Di cited above is a poem about brotherhood in *The Book of Songs*, the first collection of poems in ancient China. Although it is feasible to interpret the *guest* as a person who is away from home, it seems more appropriate to interpret the *guest* as living person from the perspective

of the Taoist life consciousness for the meaning of the first line presents the relationship between man and the world and the following lines cares about the transience of human life, for example “How long can it last to be relatives”. Interpreting the *guest* as a living person can make the first line more closely related to the later ones about relatives and life, and the theme of the poem is more profound, and the content conveyed more universal.

Similarly, in the works written by Li Bai (李白), one of the greatest poets in ancient China and a believer in Taoism, the *guest* is also considered as a living person, such as in *The Ninth of Twenty Imitating Ancient Poetry* (拟古十二首·其九).

The living person is a transient guest
 And the dead are men coming back.
 Sky and earth are only temporary inns,
 All creations feel sad through the ages.
 The rabbit in moon is still doing fruitless job.
 The large mulberry tree has turned into firewood.
 The skeletons keep silence without a word.
 While evergreen pines know spring had come.
 It makes me sigh deeply about past and future,
 Vanity and Wealth are not to be cherished.

生者为过客，
 死者为归人。
 天地一逆旅，
 同悲万古尘。
 月兔空捣药，
 扶桑已成薪。
 白骨寂无言，
 青松岂知春。
 前后更叹息，
 浮荣安足珍。

The relationships between people and the world, living person and the death, time and life are still under consideration in this poem, and the main point of this poem is generally conformed to the Taoist life consciousness in *Lieh-Tzu* and *Zhuangzi*. So, it is not proper to simplify such expression as a metaphor for life, particularly in the lines of “The living person is a transient guest/ and the dead are men coming back. / Sky and earth are

only temporary inns. / All creations feel sad through the ages.” And the word *guest* in the first line of the poem should be interpreted as living person considering the theme of the poem which is about relationships between time and life.

In fact, in Li Bai’s articles, there are similar explanations about this life consciousness in his poems, and they are more straightforward. For instance, in *A preface of Banquet for Cousins in the Peach and Plum Garden in the Spring Night* (春夜宴从弟桃花园序):

Sky and earth are an inn for all creations and time is a transient guest of the long years. The void life is like a dream. How long can the joy last? (夫天地者万物之逆旅也；光阴者百代之过客也。而浮生若梦，为欢几何？)

It can be seen that the understanding of Li Bai’s poems mentioned above is an interpretation with theoretical basis. It is not only a consensus reached by many poets and scholars in that era, but also a popular topic of classical Chinese poems during a long period that life is regarded as an inn and the living men are the guest of the world.

It should also be pointed out that sometimes the word *guest* is not occurred directly in the poems, but replaced by the word *boarder*, as in the common sentence of “life is like a boarder” in classical Chinese poetry. In fact, this sentence also expresses the view that the world is not the real home of living person, but an inn where living person is only a guest or a boarder. This can be reflected in one poem from the *Nineteen Ancient Poems*.

I drove up the East Gate,
And looked far at the tomb in the north of the outer wall.
With the rustling of poplar leaves,
The wide road was sandwiched between the pines and cypresses.
There were dead people buried under it.
And it was as dark as a night that never changed.
Sleeping in the netherworld,
The dead would never wake up again, even after a thousand years.
Compared with the vast alternation of yin and yang,
People’s life span is like dew in the morning.
Life is like a boarder
And can’t exist forever like gold and stone.
The alternation has kept tens of thousands of years.
Even sages cannot live such a long time.

...

驱车上东门，

遥望郭北墓。
 白杨何萧萧，
 松柏夹广路。
 下有陈死人，
 杳杳即长暮。
 潜寐黄泉下，
 千载永不寤。
 浩浩阴阳移，
 年命如朝露。
 人生忽如寄，
 寿无金石固。
 万岁更相送，
 贤圣莫能度。

.....

According to Chinese culture, Yin and Yang are two opposing principles in nature. So, “the vast alternation of yin and yang” in the poem refers to the alternation of day and night, or all the changes that have taken place over a long period of time. It can be seen that the theme of this poem is still on the time and human life span, the relationship between individual and the world, from these sentences “Life is like a boarder/ and can’t exist forever like gold and stone. / The alternation has kept tens of thousands of years. / Even sages cannot live such a long time.” Obviously, the word boarder here should be interpreted as a living person, like the *guest* in another poem of *Nineteen Ancient Poems* which has been mentioned above. And usually, compared with the expression “People live on the earth and under the sky, / Like a guest going on a long journey”, the meaning of the sentence “Life is like a boarder” is much clearer and easier to obtain and interpret.

From the above, it can be concluded that the meaning of *guest* as living person, compared with that of *pedestrian*, is more obvious in the poems about life or death, which is easy to be noticed by readers. Sometimes *guest* is written as boarder, like “Life is like a boarder”, and it appeared so many times in poetry and prose that had attracted the attention of scholars in Song Dynasty. For example, Zhou Bida (周必大), a scholar of the Song Dynasty, pointed out in *Poetry Talks of Er Lao Tang* (二老堂诗话) that there were few repetitive sentences in Su Shi’s poetry and essays, except that “life is like a boarder” appeared more than ten times. Therefore, it is not an accidental, but an important topic in ancient poetry.

4. Conclusions

In summary, apart from the literal meanings, such as person on travel or away from home, the pedestrian and guest in some classical Chinese poems dealing with the life or death can be interpreted as living persons from the perspective of the Taoist life consciousness. The reason has been shown in the Taoist classics, like *Lieh-Tzu* and *Zhuangzi*. According to these classics, the different stages of life are about one's physical form and one's spiritual form remains constant in Taoism. Death is considered as the only way to get complete rest and peace because living person is exhausted from having gotten his physical form to scattering it and finally set it free in Taoist life consciousness. Therefore, the “pedestrian” and “guest” would be interpreted as living persons, which is an epitome of a kind of Taoist life consciousness, rather than a kind of metaphor, especially in some classical Chinese poems whose subjects are life or death. Few ancient scholars have pointed out that the “pedestrian” and “guest” should be interpreted as living persons in their explanatory notes of classical Chinese poetry. For one thing, the context where “pedestrian” and “guest” can be regarded as the living persons may be find in the poetry of mourning the dead or exploring the essence of life. The number of such poems is small and the theme is so clear that there is no need to explain in details for ancient readers. For another point, normally, it is also acceptable to interpret “pedestrian” and “guest” as the persons on traveling or away from home in some classical Chinese poems whose subjects are life or death. However, interpretation of pedestrian and guest as living persons is more appropriate in the poems about life and death, because it can make the work more profound and touching and the logic of the poems is clearer and more coherent.

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