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A Reinterpretation of Tao Yuanming's Thirteen Poems from a Zhuangzian Perspective

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Abstract

Although some scholars have successfully challenged the traditional biographical reading, which considers an author's biography an important reference and proposed proper reinterpretations of many of Tao Yuanming's poems, we still find its dominance in the interpretation of words and sentences, even the structure and theme in Tao's poems. In light of this issue, this article reinterprets thirteen of Tao's poems based on our detailed investigation of all the existing notes on them. Most biographical readings, shaped by the ideal image of intellectuals portrayed in the *Analects*, obscure the substantial connections with the *Zhuangzi* in Tao's poetry. Our reinterpretation focuses on the intertextual relationship between Tao's poems and the *Zhuangzi*. We can see that the influence of the *Zhuangzi* on Tao's poetry is more extensive and far-reaching than previously considered. This can help us reveal the connection between Tao's poetry and the metaphysical institution in the Eastern Jin dynasty, which took its view of life from the *Zhuangzi*, instead of taking Confucianism as the only source.

Keywords

intertextual reading – reinterpretation – Tao Yuanming's poems – *Zhuangzi*

A detailed comparison of all the existing notes on the poems of Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 [ca. 365–427] suggests a wide divergence of interpretations. For example, the disagreements in China in recent annotations by Lu Qinli 逯欽立 [1910–1973], Wang Shumin 王叔岷 [1914–2008], Gong Bin 龔斌, and Yuan Xingpei 袁行霈¹ on about thirty poems are not just at the general semantic level but also reflect the tendency, intentional or unintentional, to adopt the canonized image of Tao in the biographies of him. The gap between the image of Tao in these biographies and the image of him from his poetry often acts as a trigger for different interpretations to bridge this gap.² The primary biographic materials on Tao include “Eulogy for Scholar Tao [*Tao zhengshi lei* 陶徵士誄],” by Yan Yanzhi 顏延之 [384–456], a biography by Xiao Tong 蕭統 [501–531], and official biographies in the *History of the Song* [*Songshu* 宋書], the *History of the Jin* [*Jinshu* 晉書], and the *History of the Southern Dynasties* [*Nanshi* 南史]. They all adopt the formulaic writing commonly used in eulogies [*lei* 誄] and biographies, highlighting Tao’s persona as a virtuous Confucian hermit and a loyalist to the Jin dynasty [266–420]. Although this nicely echoes the ideal

- 1 Tao Yuanming 陶淵明, *Tao Yuanming ji* 陶淵明集 [*The Works of Tao Yuanming*], annot. Lu Qinli 逯欽立 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979); Wang Shumin 王叔岷, annot., *Tao Yuanming shi jianzhenggao* 陶淵明詩箋證稿 [*Annotation of Tao Yuanming’s Poetry*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007); Tao Yuanming 陶淵明, *Tao Yuanming ji jiaojian* 陶淵明集校箋 [*The Works of Tao Yuanming: Proofread and Annotated*], annot. Gong Bin 龔斌 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2011); Yuan Xingpei 袁行霈, annot., *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu* 陶淵明集箋注 [*Annotation of Tao Yuanming’s Works*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011). There are nine four-word poems with around 40 reading disagreements and 115 five-word poems with around 207 reading disagreements in the four annotations.
- 2 In addition to the poems reinterpreted in this paper, many other poems that can support this claim. For example, disagreements over the theme of poems often center on whether the poem refers to a specific event in Tao’s real life, particularly concerning the fall of the Jin [266–420]. Regarding “Nigu 擬古 [Imitation of Ancient Poems IX],” Lu Qinli, Wang Shumin, and Gong Bin all take it as an allegory of the Jin overthrow, while Yuan Xingpei disagrees. Regarding “Yong ershu 詠二疏 [Singing of the Two Shu],” Gong, following Wang Yao’s 王瑤 ideas, noted that the poem meant to mourn for Zhang Yi 張禕, who drank the poisoned wine himself, rather than serve it to Sima Dewen 司馬德文 [r. 418–420], the last Jin emperor, but Yuan thinks otherwise. Regarding “Imitation of Ancient Poems II,” Gong thinks it shows Tao’s aspiration to follow Tian Chou’s 田疇 [168–214] example in showing his loyalty to the Jin; Yuan believes that Tao means to attract people to rally around him by his virtue and build a *taohua yuan* 桃花源 [Peach Blossom Paradise]. Regarding “Imitation of Ancient Poems, III,” as Lu and Wang see, by portraying the swallow’s nostalgia for its nest, Tao expressed his attachment to the Jin dynasty. Yuan thinks it shows Tao’s determination to be a recluse. Except for the fall of the Jin, Tao’s relationship with the Bailian she 白蓮社 [White Lotus Society], a Buddhist community, is another kind of concrete events with which annotators like to connect Tao’s poems. Lu and Gong both relate poems such as “Imitation of Ancient Poems, VI,” to an anecdote about Tao and Bailian she, but Wang and Yuan disagree.

image of intellectuals in the *Analects*, it is far from an honest reflection of Tao's real life, let alone his poetry. Thus the traditional biographical readings can easily lead to a misinterpretation and divergence of interpretations of Tao's poetry. What is more, the four Chinese annotations we mentioned above have a similar interpretation of some poems that is dictated by biography, all potentially obscuring a more reasonable reading.

Although it is difficult for us to trace the original meaning of Tao's poetry, we can at least understand the biographical reading and its dominance, that is, to reveal how the current interpretation influenced by a canonized image in the biographies has prevailed over a more reasonable but neglected interpretation. Modern scholars have made great efforts with regard to this issue.³ However, we still find that the interpretation of words and sentences, and even the structure and theme, of some of Tao's poems is largely influenced by the ideal image of Confucian scholars in biographies of Tao, obscuring the substantial connections with the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 in Tao's poetry to different degrees.⁴ Consequently, it affects our comprehension of how the voice of the *Zhuangzi*, such as the thoughts on freedom, benevolence, righteousness, and accomplishments, echoes in Tao's poems.

In light of these issues, this article reinterprets thirteen of Tao's poems based on our detailed investigation of existing notes on them. Our reinterpretation focuses on the revelation of an intertextual relationship between Tao's poems and the *Zhuangzi* and focuses on three aspects: the joy of drinking, the pain of reality, and worldly concerns. These are three main themes in both Tao's poetry

3 In addition to the Chinese annotations mentioned above, scholarly works in English also made considerable contributions in this respect. For example, A. R. Davis pointed out the remarkable difference between Tao's works and biography, see A. R. Davis, *Tao Yuanming, His Works and Their Meaning* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009). Other significant works include James Hightower, trans., *The Poetry of Tao Ch'ien* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970); Xiaofei Tian, *Manuscript Culture: The Records of a Dusty Table* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005); Robert Ashmore, *The Transport of Reading: Text and Understanding in the World of Tao Qian (365–427)* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2010).

4 Most scholars admit that Tao's works are greatly influenced by the *Zhuangzi*. According to Zhu Ziqing's 朱自清 [1898–1948] statistics, Tao's poems appropriate the *Zhuangzi* the most, counting up to 49 times; the *Analects* the second, counting up to 37 times. See Zhu Ziqing 朱自清, "Taoshi de shendu 陶詩的深度 [The Depth of Tao's Poetry]," in *Tao Yuanming yanjiu ziliao huibian* 陶淵明研究資料彙編 [*The Collection of Study Materials about Tao Yuanming*], ed. Beijing daxue zhongwenxi jiaoshi tongxue 北京大學中文系教師同學 and Beijing shifan daxue zhongwenxi jiaoshi tongxue 北京師範大學中文系教師同學 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2012), 1:288. As far as the latest published monographs are concerned, Wendy Swartz explores the intertextual relationship between Tao's poems and *Zhuangzi* taking some of his poems as examples, in "The 'Spontaneous' Poet Tao Yuanming as an Intertext," in *Reading Philosophy, Writing Poetry, Intertextual Modes of Making Meaning in Early Medieval China*, ed. Wendy Swartz (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2018).

and his biographies. Through an analysis of examples of these different tropes, we demonstrate that interpreting Tao's poems through a Zhuangzian lens can bring his poems into clearer focus than a Confucian lens can.⁵

1 The Joy of Drinking

There is no doubt that drinking has great significance for Tao and his poetry,⁶ but the function of drinking is subject to argument. Xiao Tong made a highly influential remark: "As I see, drinking is not the real goal of Tao, but only the vehicle to express Tao's personality ideal."⁷ This commentary shares the same syntactical structure with Su Shi's 蘇軾 [1037–1101] later words, "Poetry is not the real goal of Tao Yuanming, but only the place where he lodges his personality ideal."⁸ Both remarks lead to the same idea: the exploration of Tao's high-minded and reclusive personality in his drinking and poetry is the most important issue. Ever since, this has greatly affected understanding of Tao's poems.

For example, Tao's master work "Drinking Alone in Consecutive Wet Days [*Lianyu duyin* 連雨獨飲]" adopts some Zhuangzian terms, such as *wangtian* 忘天 [remove Heaven from my mind] and *renzhen* 任真 [follow the True] to express the feelings of detachment in drinking. Our discussion focus on *minfu* 僊俛, another word in the *Zhuangzi* at the end of the poem, and elucidate how the canonized image influences the interpretation of even a word. The last four lines of the poem read:

自我抱茲獨	Since I began to embrace my solitude,
僊俛四十年	Forty years flew away so fast, just all at once.
形骸久已化	My form has been transformed as time goes by;

5 Unless otherwise noted, all translations are those of the authors.

6 The earliest biography of Tao in *The Song History* recorded an anecdote: When Tao served as magistrate of Pengze 彭澤 District, he commanded that sorghum be planted in all public fields for winemaking. This anecdote was also included in the biography written by Xiao Tong, who added a statement by Tao: "If I can often get drunk in wine, I'll be well satisfied" [吾常得醉於酒足矣], in Yuan Xingpei, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 420. What is more, in the preface to *Tao Yuanming ji*, Xiao Tong edited, he noted that, "It is said that every piece of Tao's poems mentions drinking" [有疑陶淵明詩篇篇有酒], in Yuan Xingpei *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 422.

7 吾觀其意不在酒，亦寄酒為跡焉。Xiao Tong's preface to *Tao Yuanming ji*; Yuan Xingpei, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 422.

8 陶淵明意不在詩，詩以寄其意耳。As quoted in Chao Buzhi 晁補之, *Jileiji* 雞肋集 [*The Works of Chicken Ribs*], *Sibu congkan* 四部叢刊, vol. 33.

- 16 心在復何言⁹ My heart still enjoys full freedom from being changed,
And what more is there to say?

Almost all existing annotations interpret *minfu* as “striving.”¹⁰ By doing so, readers could see the poet’s outstanding character based on his unchanged persistence in his life’s ideal for forty years,¹¹ which is somehow correlated with the interpretative tradition that treats drinking as “the place where Tao lodges his personal ideal.” In other words, Tao expresses his aspiration through poems about drinking.

儻俛 has two meanings: one is “striving,” and the other is “a brief moment.” The evidence for the first meaning comes from the *Book of Poetry* [*Shijing* 詩經], in which it is written as *minmian* 黽勉, not *minfu* 儻俛.¹² *Minmian* 黽勉 can sometimes be interchanged with *minmian* 儻俛, so *fu* 俛 can also be pronounced as *mian*. But *minfu* 儻俛 has another meaning, “a brief moment,” in which 俛 is the same as its homophone 俯 and is pronounced *fu*. This meaning of *minfu* was often used in Tao’s time. Yan Yanzhi, a friend of Tao’s, also used *minfu* in this sense. His “A Song of Qiu Hu [*Qiu Hu shi* 秋胡詩]” was included in the *Selections of Refined Literature* [*Wenxuan* 文選]:

- 孰知寒暑積 Who said the change from winter to summer can slow
down?
儻俛見榮枯¹³ we just see trees rapidly thrive and wither again

9 Yuan Xingpei, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 87.

10 For example, Hightower translated line 14 as “I have struggled through forty years” in *The Poetry of T’ao Ch’ien*, 71. Yuan Xingpei noted, “It means that since I embraced my solitude and insulated myself against any external thing, I have been struggling for 40 years,” in *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 90.

11 Such as Gong Bin’s gloss: “The immortal riding cloud-high crane can reach the eight limits in an instant, but I do not admire him because I know the illusion of it. In solitude I cling to my aspiration of authenticity, and have strived for 40 years without change.” See Gong Bin, *Tao Yuanming ji jiaojian*, 119. In this interpretation, we can tell what the poet’s ambition is from “have strived for 40 years without change” which reads *minfu* as “striving.”

12 “Gu feng 谷風 [Wind from the Valley],” “Shiyue zhijiao 十月之交 [The Beginning of the Tenth Month],” “Yunhan 雲漢 [Galaxy],” see Kong Yingda 孔穎達, comm., *Maoshi zhengyi* 毛詩正義 [Corrected Interpretations of Maoshi], in *Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經註疏 [Notes and Commentaries on the Thirteen Classics], ed. Ruan Yuan 阮元 (Beijing: Zhonghuashuju, 1980), 91, 409, 662.

13 Xiao Tong 蕭統, ed., Li Shan 李善, Lü Yanji 呂延濟, Liu Liang 劉良, Zhang Xian 張銑, Lü Xiang 呂向, and Li Zhouhan 李周翰, annot., *Liuchen zhu Wenxuan* 六臣註文選 [The Selections of Refined Literature, Annotated by the Six Ministers], *Sibu congkan* 四部叢刊, vol. 21.

Li Shan 李善 [630–689] noted: “*Minfu* means a short moment between looking up and down.”¹⁴ Lü Xiang 呂向 [d. 742] glossed: “*Minfu* is as an instant.”¹⁵ Tao uses *minfu* three times in his existent works, all meaning “a short moment.” The other two cases are as follows:

結髮念善事	Since childhood I have kept righteousness in my mind.
僂俛六九年 ¹⁶	Fifty-four years flew away so fast, just all at once.
僂俛辭世，使汝等幼而飢寒。 ¹⁷	Soon I resigned the office, and caused you in your childhood to suffer hunger and cold.

Almost all annotators interpret these two instances of *minfu* as “striving,” too,¹⁸ but it seems to be incoherent in the context and introduces a new topic into the work. In the first case, the theme of the poem is bewailing the uncertainty of fate and frustration in one’s lifetime. The two lines look back on the rapid passage of fifty-four years to demonstrate how transient life is, which constitutes a coherent part of the poem. In the second case, Tao told his sons that he resigned from office very quickly. As a result, he did not earn enough money and caused them to suffer hunger and cold in their childhood. So, here *minfu* should refer to the short time in office.

In addition, it is unsurprising that, in the first case, *minfu* is used with a similar meaning and even in a similar semantic structure as it is in “Drinking Alone in Consecutive Wet Days.” This resemblance, as a remnant of oral characteristics, is common in the poetry of early medieval China, when poems usually have some formulaic words from the existing repertoire with very limited change.¹⁹ Moreover, another four lines in Tao’s “Fire in the Sixth Month of

14 僂俛，猶俯仰也。Li Shan and Liu Liang 劉良 also glossed *minfu* in Lu Ji 陸機，“Wenfu 文賦 [Fu on Literature],” in *Liuchen zhu Wenxuan* as *fiuyang* 俯仰 [look up and down], vol. 17.

15 僂俛，猶須臾也。Xiaotong, *Liuchen zhu Wenxuan*, vol. 21.

16 “Yuanshi chudiao shi Pang zhubu Deng Zhizhong 怨詩楚調示龐主簿鄧治中 [A Lament in the Chu Mode for Registrar Pang and Secretary Deng],” in Yuan Xingpei, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 76.

17 “Yu zi Yan deng shu 與子儼等疏 [A Letter to My Sons, Yan and the Others],” in Yuan Xingpei, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 363.

18 For the first case, see Yuan Xingpei, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 79; Hightower, *The Poetry of Tao Ch’ien*, 64. For the second case, see Davis, *Tao Yuanming*, 228; Yuan Xingpei, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 367.

19 Stephen Owen argued that most poems of early medieval China were created from a shared poetic repertoire. See Stephen Owen, *The Making of Early Chinese Classical Poetry* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006).

Wushen Year [*Wushen sui liuyue zhong yuhuo* 戊申歲六月中遇火] are quite similar to the four lines quoted above from “Drinking Alone in Consecutive Wet Days”:

	總發抱孤念	Since youth I have held solitary disposition,
	奄出四十年	Forty years flew away so fast, just all at once.
	形跡憑化往	My body has decayed over time,
16	靈府長獨閑 ²⁰	Yet my soul solely remains peaceful.

The two poems seem to paraphrase each other. They have almost identical meaning with a little change of expression and even use a similar grammatical structure. For example, in the third line in both cases, the meaning is similar, with an equivalent subject and predicate – “my form” equals “my body,” and “transformed as time goes by” is no different from “has decayed over time.” Based on the similarity of the two cases in terms of meaning and structure, we can infer that here *minfu* has the same meaning as *yanchu* 奄出, its counterpart, which means that time flies all at once.

The transience of life implied by *minfu* is the main theme in Zhuangzian thought, although the *Zhuangzi* did not use this word directly. It is sometimes demonstrated together with two other points in the *Zhuangzi* – the relationship between *xing* 形 and *xin* 心 and forgetting words. These two points are seen in the last four lines of Tao’s poem “Drinking Alone in Consecutive Wet Days” and have been noted by previous scholars.²¹ What I add, though, is that the three points, including the transience of life, are demonstrated together and in the same sequence in both the *Zhuangzi* and these last four lines in Tao’s poem:

Man’s life between heaven and earth is like the passing of a white colt glimpsed through a crack in the wall – whoosh! – and that’s the end. Overflowing, starting forth, there is nothing that does not come out; gliding away, slipping into silence, there is nothing that does not go back in.

Having been transformed, things find themselves alive; another transformation and they are dead. Living things grieve over it, mankind mourns. But it is like the untying of the Heaven-lent bow-bag, the unloading of the Heaven-lent satchel – a yielding, a mild mutation, and the soul

20 Yuan Xingpei, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 154.

21 See Gu Zhi 古直, annot., *Tao Jingjie shijian* 陶靖節詩箋 [Annotation of Tao Jingjie’s Poetry] (Taiwan: Guangwen shuju, 1999), 53; Gong Bin, *Tao Yuanming ji jiaojian*, 119; Yuan Xingpei, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 91; Tian, *Manuscript Culture*, 139; Swartz, *Reading Philosophy*, 207.

and spirit are on their way, the body following after, on at last to the Great Return. The formless moves to the realm of form; the formed moves back to the realm of formlessness. This all men alike understand. But it is not something to be reached by striving. The common run of men all alike debate how to reach it. But those who have reached it do not debate, and those who debate have not reached it. Those who peer with bright eyes will never catch sight of it. Eloquence is not as good as silence. The Way cannot be heard; to listen for it is not as good as plugging up your ears. This is called the Great Acquisition.

人生天地之間，若白駒之過郤，忽然而已。注然勃然，莫不出焉；油然漻然，莫不入焉。

已化而生，又化而死。生物哀之，人類悲之。解其天弢，墮其天裘。紛乎宛乎，魂魄將往，乃身從之。乃大歸乎！不形之形，形之不形，是人之所同知也，非將至之所務也。此衆人之所同論也。彼至則不論，論則不至；明見無值，辯不若默；道不可聞，聞不若塞：此之謂大得。²²

The three points of correspondence between the last four lines of the poem and the above-quoted text are presented in the following order: (1) *Minfu* in line 14 of the poem resonates with the transitory process of life emphasized in the first paragraph of the quote; (2) The phrase *yihua* 已化 and the word *xing* 形 are used both in the quote and line 15 of the poem. The concern about transformation of form is just a matter for ordinary people, not for the people who have reached the Way (“those who have reached it”) in the quote, because “transformation happens on the outside but not on the inside” for these people,²³ that is, the outside form changes along with external things, whereas the heart inside remains peaceful and unchanged. This is exactly what the phrase *xinzai* 心在 in the last line of the poem refers to. (3) *Fuheyan* 復何言 in line 16 of the poem embeds the textual element from the end of the quotation about the harm that words do to the Way.

These three points are readily observable throughout the *Zhuangzi*. The faster the transformation of form is, the more difficult it is for the heart to remain peaceful. Therefore, those who manage to transcend this transformation can obtain more and reach a free state called Great Acquisition, as put forward in the passage. Under this state of the Way, both the peaceful heart and the

22 “Zhi beiyou 知北遊 [Knowledge Wandered North],” in Burton Watson, trans., *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 181–82. In this paper, all the English translations of *Zhuangzi* are adapted from Watson’s translation.

23 Watson, *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*, 186.

recondite Way refuse debate. It was based on a thorough comprehension of the *Zhuangzi* that the poet used *minfu* to summarize his forty years of life, together with the other two points in the same sequence in the poem. The transience of life is vividly illustrated in the quotation in detail. The word *minfu* in Tao's poem might naturally remind Tao's intellectual contemporaries who were familiar with *Zhuangzi* texts of these kinds of images of the fleeting of life, such as "the passing of a white colt glimpsed through a crack in the wall" described in the *Zhuangzi*.

In contrast, interpreting *minfu* as "striving" would make this poem inconsistent with the characteristics of the Way, which is described in the *Zhuangzi* as naturally doing nothing and following the way of Heaven, instead of personal striving. This argument is reiterated in "Knowledge Wandered North [*Zhi bei-you* 知北遊]": "[He who follows along with the Way] will be wielding his mind without wearying it, responding to things without prejudice."²⁴ Both "without wearying it" and "without prejudice" are the opposite of striving for a definite ambition. What is more, the opposite of "transformation happens on the outside but not on the inside" is "transformation happens on the inside but not on the outside."²⁵ As Guo Xiang 郭象 [252–312] noted, the reason for this condition is "wearing the body to serve the heart's desire."²⁶ Therefore, if *minfu* is interpreted as striving, in this context, *xin* at the end of the poem becomes the ideal of life. This *xin* produces a desire to wear the body, degrading the theme of the poem and making it contrary to the characteristics of the Way in the *Zhuangzi*. In Tao's poems, *xin* is often a free heart, "the mind moving freely" [*youxin* 遊心] that the *Zhuangzi* reiterates,²⁷ rather than an obsession with life's ideal.

In addition to the kind of interpretation of words such as *minfu*, some annotations go further and regard drinking as an allegory of important political events to match Tao's canonized image as a Jin loyalist. If it is true that the poem "An Account of Wine [*Shujiu* 述酒]" contains some expressions that are incomprehensible to later readers,²⁸ which creates conditions for interpreters to apply allegorical reading, then another poem by Tao, "The Day of the Zha

24 其用心不勞，其應物無方。Watson, *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*, 180.

25 內化而外不化。Watson, *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*, 181, 186.

26 以心使形。Guo Xiang 郭象, annot., Cheng Xuanying 成玄英, comm., *Zhuangzi zhushu* 莊子註疏 [*Annotation and Commentaries of Zhuangzi*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011), 407.

27 "Renjianshi 人間世 [In the World of Men]," in Burton Watson, *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*, 28.

28 Xiaofei Tian reinterpreted "Shujiu 述酒 [On Account of Wine]" and pointed out that this poem is oblique only to readers of later generations, but for readers contemporaneous to Tao, the wording is actually clear. See Xiaofei Tian 田曉菲, *Chenji lu: Tao Yuanming yu shouchaoben wenhua yanjiu* 塵幾錄：陶淵明與手抄本文化研究 [*The Record of*

Sacrifice [*Zhari* 蜡日],” which is often paired with “An Account of Wine” and read as a political allegory, seems very plain and lucid even to today’s readers:

- | | | |
|---|---------------------|--|
| | 風雪送餘運 | Wind and snow push the last turn of the run of a year, |
| | 無妨時已和 | But cannot impede the smooth coming of the mild season. |
| | 梅柳夾門植 | The gate is flanked by plums and willows, |
| 4 | 一條有桂花 | Among which there is a branch with beautiful flowers. |
| | 我唱爾言得 | I sing and you echo in agreement; |
| | 酒中適何多 | So much agreeableness we can get in drinking! |
| | 未能明多少 | How much exactly we don’t know; |
| 8 | 章山有奇歌 ²⁹ | Just like immortal pleasure of magical songs in Mt. Zhang. |

If read with the expectation of finding profound implications of political events in writing about drinking, this poem becomes oblique and complicated in the eyes of commentators. Wu Qian 吳騫 [1733–1813] situated this poem in the turmoil at the end of the Jin dynasty and searched line by line for political references.³⁰ This commentary became quite influential for later scholars. Wang Shumin, for example, supported this line of investigation.³¹ Qing dynasty [1616–1911] scholars Tao Shu 陶澍 [1777–1839] and Qiu Jiasui 邱嘉穗 [fl. ca. 1717] claimed that this poem was so cryptic that they gave up on paraphrasing it as they also tried to reveal its political relevance.³² However, setting aside these comments, we find this poem very plain – just a description of the joy of drinking at the end of the year, and there is no convincing evidence of any allegory in it.³³ Even the last line of the poem, which causes the most confusion, is not hard to explain: “Mt. Zhang” is a celestial mountain recorded in the *Classic of Mountains and Seas* [*Shanhai jing* 山海經],³⁴ thus “the magical song in

a Dusty Table: Tao Yuanming and Manuscript Culture] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), 219–50. This reinterpretation is not included in the earlier English edition.

29 Yuan Xingpei, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 216.

30 See Beijing daxue zhongwenxi, *Tao Yuanming yanjiu ziliao huibian*, 2:217–18.

31 See Wang Shumin, *Tao Yuanming shi jianzhengao*, 371.

32 See Tao Shu 陶澍, annot., *Jingjie xiansheng ji* 靖節先生集 [*The Works of Mr. Jingjie*], annot. Tao Shu 陶澍, 1840 block-print edition, vol. 3; Beijing daxue zhongwenxi, *Tao Yuanming yanjiu ziliao huibian*, 2:218.

33 Davis, Hightower, and Yuan Xingpei mentioned that this poem is just about the pleasure of drinking at the end of the year, and there is no need to look for allegories. See Hightower, *The Poetry of T'ao Ch'ien*, 167–68; Davis, *Tao Yuanming*, 114–15; Yuan Xingpei, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 218.

34 See Wang Yao 王瑤, annot., *Tao Yuanming ji* 陶淵明集 [*The Works of Tao Yuanming*] (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1957), 88.

Mt. Zhang” refers to the song by immortals, and people chant it just to show that drinking makes them feel like immortals.

Along with the tendency to see this poem as a political allegory, the echoes of the *Zhuangzi* are overlooked here. In the opening lines, the poet depicts scenery to illustrate the state of ease when he forgets the seasons. Just as “The Great and Venerable Teacher [*Da zongshi* 大宗師]” in the *Zhuangzi* states, “He who looks for the right time is not a worthy man,”³⁵ “the right time” refers to both natural seasons and social opportunities. It means a worthy man should forget about time and suit himself. In the poem, wind and snow “cannot impede the smooth coming of the mild season” and cannot stop the poet from appreciating the plum blossom and drinking with his friends. It is a joy similar to forgetting about time in the *Zhuangzi*. As for the amount of joy mentioned in lines 6–7, we can also find a textual reference in “The Great and Venerable Teacher”: “He goes along with what is right for things, and no one knows his limit.”³⁶ As nothing fails to be right for him, he has no limit. The *Zhuangzi* often ignores objective measures, such as time and amount. Only by abandoning such measures and limits can one reach the state of real joy and freedom, which is the essence of the Way.

As in these two poems, the joy of drinking often constitutes the substance of Tao’s poems, as it gives him an extreme sense of freedom. This sense enables him to gain insights into life and time, which is difficult to achieve without wine. Correspondingly, the *Zhuangzi* often uses wine to reach the state of the Way. In “Mastering Life [*Dasheng* 達生],” getting drunk is described as a way to reach the state of the “whole spirit” [*shenquan* 神全], when one can forget about “life and death, alarm and terror” and enjoy the freedom of keeping himself whole.³⁷ Tao’s “Twenty Poems after Drinking Wine, XIV [*Yinjiu* 飲酒]” reveals this function of wine directly:

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| 8 | 不覺知有我
安知物爲貴
悠悠迷所留
酒中有深味 ³⁸ | No longer feel about my own existence,
How could I tell the value of other things?
Carefree and leisurely, I am lost in where I stay,
And steeped in the profound taste of wine. |
|---|--|---|

35 天時非賢也。Watson, *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*, 43.

36 與物有宜，而莫知其極。Watson, *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*, 43.

37 死生驚懼。Watson, *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*, 146. Although drunkenness is not what the *Zhuangzi* is after, it was merely a way of explaining the sage’s condition that “there is nothing that can do him harm.” [莫之能傷。]

38 Yuan Xingpei, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 188.

“The profound taste of wine” at the end of the poem refers to the feeling of freedom, the state of the “whole spirit” in the *Zhuangzi*, as opposed to the virtues lodged in drinking as praised by Xiao Tong. A comment by Bai Juyi 白居易 [772–846] on Tao’s poems on drinking is very incisive: “Every poem urges me to drink, other than this nothing else is said.”³⁹ This can be regarded as the perfect rebuttal to the search for virtue in Tao’s poems by Xiao Tong and his followers, and “nothing else is said” is also the state of reaching the Way without words.

In addition, the frequent allusion to the *Zhuangzi* and the reflection on the principles of life in Tao’s poems show the influence of metaphysical poetry at that time. Mountains and waters are frequently used images in metaphysical poetry. The wine in Tao’s poems has the same function as these images, through which the poet can achieve the Way. Therefore, understanding of the function of wine in Tao’s poetry can help us discover the similarity between his poetry and metaphysical poetry [*xuan yan shi* 玄言詩].⁴⁰

2 Pain in Reality

When Tao is in a state of drunkenness, the *Zhuangzi* delights him with the prospect of unlimited freedom. But when Tao is sober, as with his contemporary intellectuals, the ideals in the *Analects* constitute his chief ambition.⁴¹

39 篇篇勸我飲，此外無所云。Bai Juyi 白居易，“Xiao Tao Qian ti shi shiliu shou 效陶潛體詩十六首 [Sixteen Poems in Imitation of Tao Qian’s Style, XII],” in *Tao Yuanming yanjiu ziliao huibian*, 1:20.

40 Sun Chuo 孫綽 [314–371], Xu Xun 許詢 [fl. 371], Yu Liang 庾亮 [289–340] and Huan Wen 桓溫 [312–373] are the representatives of metaphysical poetry, as Zhong Rong 鍾嶸 [ca. 468–518] commented in his “Grades of Poetry” [*Shipin* 詩品]. While its features as highly intellectualized, full of abstract argumentation and thus characterized as “moral argument” by Zhong Rong are highlighted, there are still many poems which are less abstract, describing more real life, such as the works of Tao Yuanming and Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 [385–433], of which the substantial relationship with metaphysical poetry is neglected. But in fact, they share the common trends with metaphysical poetry, featured by frequent allusion to *Zhuangzi*, aiming at reaching the Way by means of experiencing things in daily life, and reflecting the principles of life in the feeling process. The ambiguous boundary of “metaphysical poetry” needs to be rethought, as the term “metaphysical poetry” was given by later scholars. Zhu Ziqing is one of the earliest modern scholars who used this term, based on Zhong Rong’s comments that we mentioned above. See Zhu Ziqing, *Shiyanzhi bian*, 36.

41 Shen Deqian 沈德潛, *Gushi yuan* 古詩源 [*The Source of Ancient Poem*] comments, “Allusions from the *Analects* are Mr. Tao’s favorite. Among scholars from Han dynasty to Song, only Yuanming could be regarded as a real disciple of the sage.” [陶公事專用《論

Nevertheless, ideals often conflict with reality. In this case, it is still the *Zhuangzi* that provides a way for him to rethink the ideals in the *Analects*. Tao's poems have many references to the *Analects* and the *Zhuangzi*. Sometimes, the absorption of the thinking in the *Zhuangzi* in Tao's poems does not take the normal form of explicit allusions; rather, it blends into the inner texture of the work and is easily overlooked. This kind of expression is conducive to a biographical reading that adheres to the ideals in the *Analects*, while ignoring the implications of the *Zhuangzi*. In this way, the ambivalence in the poem is likely to go unnoticed if one sticks to the positive and decisive image of Tao.

2.1 "Firmness in Adversity," "Engaging in Farming," "Fame after Death"

Tao's "Biography of Master Five Willows [*Wuliu xiansheng zhuan* 五柳先生傳]" is considered autobiographical and is mentioned in all the biographies of him.⁴² The difficult circumstances of Yan Hui 顏回 in *Analects* 6.11 are reproduced in this "autobiography," and Master Five Willows shares Yan Hui's content and joyful attitude:

His house is extremely small and crude, even not able to shelter him from wind and sun. His clothes are coarse and shabby with patches; his rice bin and water gourd are usually empty. Nonetheless, he is still content and joyful.

環堵蕭然，不蔽風日，短褐穿結，簞瓢屢空，晏如也。⁴³

According to this, readers tend to interpret the feeling about poverty in Tao's poems as "content and joyful" and thus ignore the pain in it, let alone the implications of the *Zhuangzi*.

In "To My Cousin Jingyuan, Written in the Middle of the Twelfth Month of Year Guimao [*Guimao sui shieryue zhong zuoyu congdi jingyuan* 癸卯歲十二月中作與從弟敬遠]," the poet is also in a state of poverty similar to that of Yan Hui; however, instead of following Yan Hui's moral model, he is apparently unable to endure such hardship, as shown in line 12 of the poem: "Nothing could

語》，漢人以下，宋儒以前，可推聖門弟子者，淵明也。] In *Tao Yuanming yanjiu ziliao huibian*, 1:201.

42 There is a significant inheritance relationship between the "Biography of Master Five Willows" and the biography of Yang Xiong 揚雄 in the *Hanshu* 漢書 [*History of the Han Dynasty*].

43 Yuan Xingpei, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 344.

make me feel even one shred of pleasure.”⁴⁴ Qiu Jiasui and Fang Zongcheng 方宗誠 [1818–1888] read this poem as meaning that Tao never felt any remorse or distress over his lack of wealth, obviously overlooking the lament over the predicament in the poem and regard the equanimity and enjoyment in Tao's biography as main source. Along with this kind of annotation, the wisdom in the *Zhuangzi*, which gives the poet consolation when the ideal of the *Analects* is of no help, is ignored. The last four lines of this poem offer this salvation:

平津苟不由	If the level ford cannot be followed,
棲遲詎爲拙	How could it be inferior to live as a hermit?
寄意一言外	I lodge my thoughts beyond these words,
20 茲契誰能別 ⁴⁵	Who can identify my principle?

Expressing a similar emotion, “The Sign of Virtue Complete [*Dechongfu* 德充符]” in the *Zhuangzi* reads:

If you look at them from the point of view of their differences, then there is liver and gall, Chu and Yue. But if you look at them from the point of view of their sameness, then the ten thousand things all are one. A man like this doesn't know what his ears or eyes should approve – he lets his mind play in the harmony of virtue. As for things, he sees them as one and does not see their loss.

自其異者視之，肝膽楚越也；自其同者視之，萬物皆一也。夫若然者，且不知耳目之所宜，而遊心乎德之和；物視其所一而不見其所喪。⁴⁶

This notion of leveling all things and eliminating the gain and loss, the main notion in the *Zhuangzi*, provides a kind of extreme freedom, in which people no longer need to offer their approval or worry about their losses. If we take “the point of view of their sameness,” as the *Zhuangzi* suggests, the difference between “the level ford” and “living as a hermit” in Tao's poem disappears – they converge into one thing. In this case, the poet does not need to know which to confirm and which he has failed. He will obtain freedom of mind despite his difficulties in reality. Unlike the otherworldly freedom

44 了無一可悅。Yuan Xingpei, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 146.

45 Yuan Xingpei, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 146.

46 Watson, *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*, 34.

demonstrated in Tao's poems about drinking, it is worldly freedom that can lead him to the state of freedom even when he is stuck in real life; as *Zhuangzi* says, "You may go and play freely in the imprisoned bird cage."⁴⁷ "The imprisoned bird cage" refers to troubles in reality. This attitude is reiterated in Tao's poem "Idly Stay at Home on the Double Ninth Festival [*Jiuri xianju* 九日閑居]": "Living in seclusion is truly delightful, / it doesn't mean resting in retirement equates with no achievement."⁴⁸ As shown in these lines, the poet gains self-satisfaction by ignoring the difference between "resting in retirement" and striving for achievement, and this kind of difference is the main element in weaving "the imprisoned bird cage" that prevents people from playing freely. This is also what *yijanwai* 一言外 and *ziqu* 茲契 in the last two lines of "To My Cousin Jingyuan" refer to.⁴⁹

In poverty, Tao not only felt depressed but also turned to farming [*gonggeng* 躬耕]. This is also against the *Analects* precept that "exemplary people make their plans around the Way and not around their sustenance."⁵⁰ "Meditating on Ancients in the Early Spring of Year Guimao at My Farm, II [*Guimao suishi chun huaigu tianshe* 癸卯歲始春懷古田舍]" expresses Tao's thoughts on this issue:

	先師有遺訓	The ancient Master has left a precept:
	憂道不憂貧	Be concerned for the Way, not poverty.
	瞻望邈難逮	I look up to it but it's far away and out of my reach;
4	轉欲志長勤	So I turn to take constant toil as my present goal.
	秉耒歡時務	Holding my plow, I rejoice in seasonal farming;
	解顏勸農人	With smile I encourage fellow farmers.
	平疇交遠風	The plain field encounters wind blowing from far away;
8	良苗亦懷新	Even good seedlings embrace freshness.

47 "In the World of Men," in Watson, *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*, 25.

48 Yuan Xingpei, *Tao Yuanming jijianzhu*, 50.

49 In previous annotations, *ziqu* has often been interpreted as understanding between Tao and his cousin Jingyuan. But this makes the line mean that they need others to understand their accordance, which is unintelligible in the context of the entire poem. In our opinion, here *qi* 契 should be construed as "principle." Our evidence is as follows: in the Jin dynasty, Yuan Hong 袁宏 [ca. 328–76], "Sanguo mingchen xu zan 三國名臣序贊 [Preface and Hymn to the Famous Officials of Three Kingdoms]," writes, "So high-level intellectual has a command of the principle." [故達識攝其契。] Zhang Xian 張銑 noted that "*Qi* means principle." [契，義也。] See Xiao Tong, *Liuchen zhu Wenxuan*, vol. 47.

50 君子謀道不謀食。Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation* (New York: Ballantine, 1998), 190. In this paper, all the English translations of the *Analects* are adapted from Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont's translation.

- 雖未量歲功 Although the annual harvest has not been estimated,
 即事多所欣 Approaching of most things makes me happy.
 耕種有時息 In plowing and planting, I take a rest from time to time;
 12 行者無問津 No passerby to ask about the ford.
 At sunset I return home with fellows,
 日入相與歸 And offer wine to refresh neighbors after work.
 壺漿勞近鄰 Closing my rustic gate and chanting poetry,
 長吟掩柴門 I may just as well settle to be a farmer.
 16 聊爲隴畝民⁵¹

Although scholars such as Huang Wenhuan 黃文煥 [1598–1667] commented on this poem, claiming that farming never hindered Tao from following Confucius and Yan Hui's examples, the phrase *miaonandai* 邈難逮 in line 3 clearly indicates the poet's divergence from the sage's teaching. What is more, as in "To My Cousin Jingyuan," Tao addressed this contradiction with the idea from *Zhuangzi* to level all things. But unlike "To My Cousin Jingyuan" in which Zhuangzian thought only relieves the pain of the poet, in this poem the gist of the *Zhuangzi* brings much happiness to the poet under adverse conditions because according to the *Zhuangzi*, when one forgets the difference between gain and loss, one can possess everything even after losing everything. As the chapter "Constrained in Will [*Keyi* 刻意]" in the *Zhuangzi* reads: "At ease in the illimitable, where all good things come to attend."⁵² Lines 5–14 in this poem depict so many "good things" [*zhongmei* 眾美] on the farm, everybody and everything are happy, embodying the state of being "at ease in the illimitable." Now, the poet is free of the need to conform with a certain code of conduct proposed in the *Analects* and thus can go along with things jubilantly and let his mind move freely.

"Meditating on Ancients at My Farm, II," is a masterpiece of pastoral poetry. It is worth noting that the pastoral scenery and lifestyle here are not simply realistic writing; they are "good things" that signify the life state of being "at ease in the illimitable," which is the state of achieving the Way. From this perspective, the pastoral scene and lifestyle depicted in Tao's poetry, together with drinking discussed above, play a role similar to that of mountains and waters, the main images in his contemporary metaphysical poems, which are metaphors for the Way. This can broaden our view about the influence of metaphysical poems at that time.

People who maintain "strength in adversity" [*guqiong* 固窮] usually earn an honored name. When it comes to desiring a posthumous name, the view

51 Yuan Xingpei, *Tao Yuanming jijianzhu*, 144.

52 澹然無極而眾美從之。Watson, *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*, 121.

in the *Analects* is the opposite of that of the *Zhuangzi*. The *Analects* 15.20 says, “Exemplary persons despise the thought of ending their days without having established a name,”⁵³ while the *Zhuangzi* advises, “Do not be an embodier for fame,”⁵⁴ and lists several conditions of “penned-in things,” including “men of haggard-hermit looks reach out for fame,”⁵⁵ to blame those who remain impoverished for their entire life just for the sake of their reputation. When Tao reflected on the value of “fame after death” [*shenhou ming* 身後名] in “Twenty Poems after Drinking Wine, XI,” and “A Lament in the Chu Mode for Registrar Pang and Secretary Deng [Yuanshi chudiao shi Pang zhubu Deng Zhizhong 怨詩楚調示龐主簿鄧治中]” from the perspective of the *Zhuangzi*, most commentators instead paid attention to the influence of the *Analects*. For example, Tang Han 湯漢 [1202–1272] and Wen Runeng 溫汝能 [1748–1811] praised Tao’s indifference to fame in “Twenty Poems after Drinking Wine, XI,” according to the belief that Tao attaches importance to the same aspiration held by Yan Hui and Rong Qiqi 榮啟期 [595–500 BCE], two paragons admired by Confucius for their firmness in adversity.⁵⁶ Wen Runeng reviewed “A Lament in the Chu Mode” as a temporary feeling, instead of real indifference to posthumous fame, because Confucians resent the thought of ending their days without having made a name for themselves.⁵⁷ Zhang Zilie 張自烈 [1597–1673] pointed out that Tao cannot ignore posthumous fame in this poem.⁵⁸ Whether or not they admit that Tao foresaking posthumous fame, most of them deny Tao’s real bitterness toward being *kugao* 枯槁 [bleak and withered] because of their belief in Tao’s constant aspiration to “be at ease in poverty and delighting in the Way” [*anpin ledao* 安貧樂道], an important principle in the *Analects*.

Tao’s reflection on the *Analects* and approval for the *Zhuangzi* is especially notable in the following lines from “Twenty Poems after Drinking Wine, XI”:

	顏生稱為仁	Gentleman Yan is praised for being righteous,
	榮公言有道	Master Rong is said to conform with the Way.
	屢空不獲年	The former with food bin often empty died young;
4	長飢至於老	The latter suffers hunger through his long life.
	雖留身後名	Although they leave behind honored names,

53 君子疾沒世而名不稱焉。Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*, 188.

54 無為名尸。“Ying diwang 應帝王 [Fit for Emperors and Kings],” in Watson, *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*, 59.

55 枯槁之士宿名。“Xu Wugui 徐無鬼,” in Watson, *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*, 203.

56 In “Tianrui 天瑞篇 [The Chapter of Good Omen from Heaven]” of *Liezi* 列子, Confucius praises Rong Qiqi for his ease in poverty.

57 Beijing daxue zhongwenxi, *Tao Yuanming yanjiu ziliao huibian*, 2:75.

58 Beijing daxue zhongwenxi, *Tao Yuanming yanjiu ziliao huibian*, 2:74.

- 一生亦枯槁 Their lifetime is indeed bleak and withered.
 死去何所知 After death nothing can they know;
 8 稱心固爲好⁵⁹ Gratifying one's heart's desire is always the best.

Lines 3–6 illustrate the image of Yan and Rong, ideal images of humility in Confucian terms. But this kind of intellectual image is similar to those “men of haggard-hermit looks reaching out for fame” in the *Zhuangzi*. What is more, by choosing the expression *chenxin* 稱心 in line 8, which resembles the word *youxin* reiterated in the *Zhuangzi*, the poet defines his Zhuangzian position in opposition to that of intellectuals who chase posthumous fame.⁶⁰ This attitude is also seen in “A Lament in the Chu Mode for Registrar Pang and Secretary Deng,” in which Tao bemoans that fame after death does not help with his present bitterness:

- 12 夏日長抱飢, In summer daytime I always suffer hunger;
 寒夜無被眠. In winter night I sleep without a quilt to warm me.
 造夕思雞鳴, By dusk I long for cocks' crow;
 及晨願鳥遷. At dawn I yearn for ravens' departure.

As a result,

- 吁嗟身後名, the fame after death,
 於我若浮煙.⁶¹ to me means nothing but floating mist.

Unlike the biographical readings that purify and elevate the themes of Tao's poems to match the ideal of intellectuals in the *Analects*, some readers acknowledge Tao's anxiety about poverty in his poetry. Unfortunately, these comments are usually questioned and ultimately rejected by the mainstream. The reading of Tao's poetry by Du Fu 杜甫 [712–770] is a prominent example. Two statements by Du Fu in his poem “Getting out What Stirred Me [Five Poems] III [Qian xing 遣興]” were widely refuted: Tao “wasn't necessarily able to achieve the ideal state of the Way,”⁶² and “He hated his life being bleak and withered.”⁶³ Unwilling to accept the fall of an icon such as Tao, many later readers gradually

59 Yuan Xingpei, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 183.

60 In “Twenty Poems After Drinking Wine II”, contrary to XI, Tao praised Rong's posthumous fame from the standpoint of the *Analects*.

61 Yuan Xingpei, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 76.

62 未必能達道。

63 頗亦恨枯槁。Qiu Zhao'ao 仇兆鰲, annot., *Dushi xiangzhu* 杜詩詳註 [Detailed Gloss on Du's Poetry] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1992), 226.

came to interpret *kugao* in Du Fu's poem as a poetry style.⁶⁴ Because the style of *kugao* is the main thing that makes Tao "the leader of the real poets,"⁶⁵ they thought Du Fu's commentary was apparently wrong.

These traditional biographical readings, though persistent and widespread, have been reflected upon by many later scholars. Following Du Fu's observation, they further noted in Tao's poems the concern for poverty and the ambivalent attitude toward the ideal of intellectuals in the *Analects*.⁶⁶ But from another perspective, Tao's poems express more than ambivalence – the poet often resolves the conflict between reality and ideals in the *Analects* through the spirit of the *Zhuangzi*. The thoughts in the *Zhuangzi* about how to enjoy freedom even when one is stuck in real life helped Tao to change with the times. This can help us discover the connection between Tao's poetry and the metaphysical institution in the Eastern Jin dynasty, which sought a view of life from the *Zhuangzi*, instead of taking Confucianism as the only source.

2.2 "Benevolence and Righteousness"

In the *Analects*, benevolence and righteousness are the highest ideals for intellectuals. They take first priority and thus are regarded as being even more important than individual life. Under this principle, giving up one's life for the sake of benevolence and righteousness is always the ideal choice for a resolute intellectual, although it is against human nature. Tao expresses his reflection on this issue in some poems, such as "Singing of the Three Good Men [*Yong sanliang* 詠三良]" and "Singing of Jing Ke [*Yong Jingke* 詠荊軻]," which are often read as political allegory to show Tao's own loyalty to the Jin dynasty.⁶⁷ Tao Shu related "Singing of the Three Good Men" to the specific historical event

64 Su Shi once called Tao's works "dry and bland" [枯澹], saying "the exterior is dry, but the interior is saturated; it seems to be bland but actually flavorful." [外枯而中膏，似澹而實美。] See Su Shi 蘇軾, "Ping Han Liu shi 評韓柳詩 [Commentary on Poetry of Han Yu and Liu Zongyuan]," in *Tao Yuanming yanjiu ziliao huibian*, 1:30. Accordingly, the Southern Song dynasty [1127–1279] scholar Zeng Hong 曾紘 [fl. 1119] described Tao's poetry as follows: "the surface is seemingly bleak and withered, yet the inside is full of joy." [外若枯槁，中實敷艷。] Zeng Hong's remark is cited in Li Gonghuan 李公煥, annot., "Jianzhu Tao Yuanming ji 箋注陶淵明集 [Notes on Tao Yuanming's Works]," in *Tao Yuanming yanjiu ziliao huibian*, 1:50.

65 真詩人之冠冕。 Zeng Hong's remark.

66 Many achievements of the study on Tao have noted this point to different degrees. For example, Robert Ashmore in *The Transport of Reading* argues that Tao's writing is related to the *Analects* by having a conversation with it and inviting readers to join this conversation, instead of simply using allusions from the *Analects*.

67 In the official biographies, Tao appears to be loyal to the Jin. But this image has been widely challenged by later generations. For example, see Yuan Xingpei, "Tao Yuanming yu Jin Song zhiji de zhengzhi fengyun 陶淵明與晉宋之際的政治風雲 [Tao Yuanming and

at the end of Jin when Liu Yu 劉裕 [363–422] plan to kill the Jin emperor with poisoned wine and believed the poem was meant to mourn for Zhang Yi 張禕 [d. 421], who chose to drink the poisoned wine himself, rather than serve it to the emperor.⁶⁸ Modern exegetes, Wang Yao, Wang Shumin, and Gong Bin, all agree with Tao Shu's idea.⁶⁹ Liu Lü 劉履 [1317–1379], Jiang Xun 蔣熏 [ca. 1610–1693], and Qiu Jiasui suggested that “Singing of Jing Ke” expressed Tao's hope for revenge after the Jin dynasty was usurped by Liu Yu.⁷⁰ There are also some different voices. Yuan Xingpei pointed out these inferences are untenable because of a lack of evidence, and he saw “Singing of the Three Good Men” as just “an imitation of old style” and “Singing of Jing Ke” as illustrating Tao's bold and unrestrained character.⁷¹ However, whether they approved or disapproved the political reading, they all overlooked Tao's sober and sharp reflection on the fate of three good men [*sanliang* 三良] and Jing Ke 荊軻 [d. 227 BCE] in the poems from the standpoint of the *Zhuangzi*.

By choosing as the poetic subject “three good men,” who were buried alive after the death of Duke Mu of Qin 秦穆公 [d. 621 BC], Tao carries on a writing tradition that goes back from Jian'an 建安 all the way to the *Classic of Poetry*. However, in our contention, Tao's dealing with this conventional subject takes a new direction that particularly showcases his connection with the *Zhuangzi*. All four previous poems highlight the fear and anguish of people who were “approaching the coffin pit”:

臨其穴 惴惴其慄 ⁷² 攬涕登君墓 臨穴仰天歎 ⁷³	Approaching the coffin pit, I shiver with fear. Wiping tears, I mount your tomb, Approaching the coffin pit I look up to Heaven and draw a sigh.
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Political Conditions between the Jin and Song Dynasties,” *Zhongguo shehui kexue* 中國社會科學, no. 2 (1990).

68 See Beijing daxue zhongwenxi, *Tao Yuanming yanjiu ziliao huibian*, 2:281–82.

69 In addition to citing Tao Shu in the “Collection of Commentaries,” in *Tao Yuanming ji jiaojian*, Gong Bin also dated this poem to 421, when the poisonous wine incident happened, in the “chronology” he edited. See Wang Yao, *Tao Yuanming ji*, 93; Wang Shumin, *Tao Yuanming shi jianzhenggao*, 467; Gong Bin, *Tao Yuanming ji jiaojian*, 350, 552.

70 See Beijing daxue zhongwenxi, *Tao Yuanming yanjiu ziliao huibian*, 2:283–85.

71 Yuan Xingpei, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 264, 267.

72 “Huangniao 黃鳥 [The Yellow Bird],” in *Shijing*, see Kong Yingda, *Maoshi zhengyi*, 502.

73 Cao Zhi 曹植, “Sanliang shi 三良詩 [A Poem on the Three Good Men],” in *Xianqin hanweijin nanbeichao shi* 先秦漢魏晉南北朝詩 [Poems of the Pre-Qin Period, and Han, Wei, Jin, the Northern and Southern Dynasties], ed. Lu Qinli 逯欽立 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1998), 455.

臨穴呼蒼天 涕下如綆縻 ⁷⁴ 低頭闕壙戶 仰視日月光 ⁷⁵	Approaching the coffin pit I cry out for the heaven, tears run down incessantly. I look down at the entrance of the coffin pit, look up and see the glow of sun and moon.
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Moreover, it is hard to figure out whether the action of “approaching the coffin pit” is that of the “three good men” or other people who pitied them, perhaps including the poets.⁷⁶ This uncertainty comes in part from the absence of a subject in the lines portraying the act of “approaching the coffin pit,” which is common in the grammar of ancient Chinese poetry. In this circumstance, the poets seem to share the fear and distress with “the three good men.” Or, in other words, they are on the same side. However, Tao’s poem is in contrast to all the earlier ones, as shown in lines 15–16:

16 臨穴罔惟疑 投義志攸希 ⁷⁷	They approached the tomb without hesitation, As sacrificing for righteousness should be their aspiration.
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First, it highlights the resolution of the “three good men” to sacrifice without fear or anguish; second, the identity of the people who “approach the coffin pit” is clearly “the three good men.” Those who approached the grave unhesitatingly and claimed that the sacrifice was in keeping with their aspirations can only be martyrs, not bystanders or poets. That is, Tao is describing the feelings of the three good men in face of sacrifice from the perspective of a third party, which makes it possible for him to express disapproval of this feeling and choice. Tao’s description of the tragic fate of “the three good men” can easily remind us of the rational inspection and criticism toward benevolence and righteousness in the *Zhuangzi*: “not being part of man’s true form” [*fei renqing* 非人情], “destroys men’s constant naturalness” [*shi qi chang* 失其常] and “confuses the world” [*shi tianxia huo* 使天下惑].⁷⁸

74 Wang Can 王粲, “Yongshi shi 詠史詩 [A Poem on History],” in *Xianqin hanweijin nan-beichao shi*, 364.

75 Ruan Yu 阮瑀, “Yongshi shi 詠史詩 [A Poem on History],” in *Xianqin hanweijin nan-beichao shi*, 379.

76 Commentators hold different opinions about it. For example, in the annotations to “The Yellow Bird,” Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 [127–200] suggested that it is other people in the Qin [770–207 BCE] who approach the coffin pit (see Kong Yingda, *Maoshi zhengyi*, 501–2), while Zhu Xi 朱熹 [1130–1200] suggested it should be “the three good men” (see Zhu Xi 朱熹, ed., *Shi ji zhuan* 詩集傳 [The Collection of Glosses of Shi] [Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011], 98–99). Similar debates take place over the other three poems.

77 Yuan Xingpei, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 264.

78 “Pianmu 駢拇 [Webbed Toes],” in Watson, *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*, 61–62.

Zhuangzi uses “a sixth finger” to symbolize that benevolence and righteousness is, in many cases, an excessive requirement that surpasses human nature but demands that the whole world live up to this standard. This requirement is unattainable, creating a lot of unnecessary worries for people, thus it is “not part of man’s true form.” The “three good men” had to sacrifice their own lives by being buried alive with the dead lord. This is too much to ask of any individual and is far beyond men’s innate nature, so it caused great pain for the “three good men” and those around them. Therefore, “not part of man’s true form,” the characteristic of benevolence and righteousness, is best embodied in this tragic story.

Moreover, from the perspective of the *Zhuangzi*, using benevolence and righteousness to regulate men’s behavior is no different from using tools such as a compass and square to make something right or cords and glue to make something firm – all “destroy men’s constant naturalness.” Now we can understand why Tao’s poem highlights the resolution by the “three good men” to sacrifice without fear or anguish, unlike other poems that highlight their fear and anguish. It is to show that benevolence and righteousness altered their naturalness – the basic human instinct to value one’s own life totally disappeared at this point.

In addition, the belief of benevolence and righteousness confuses and drives people to dash headlong into pursuing accomplishment to the point of death. This point in *Zhuangzian* thought is also embodied in Tao’s “Singing of the Three Good Men,” as lines 1–10 read:

	彈冠乘通津	We dusted our caps and took the thoroughfare of official career,
	但懼時我遺	Only feared being left out by the right opportunities.
	服勤盡歲月	We served diligently and devotedly throughout the years,
4	常恐功愈微	Often dreading that it was not remarkable enough.
	忠情謬獲露	Our loyalty seized chances to be revealed;
	遂爲君所私	We gained special favor from the lord eventually.
	出則陪文輿	Accompanying his ornate carriage when he went out,
8	入必侍丹帷	Waiting upon him beneath red curtain inside the palace.
	箴規嚮已從	Our counsel and advice were always accepted,
	計議初無虧 ⁷⁹	Our plans and admonitions were totally adopted.

79 Yuan Xingpei, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 264. For the latest research achievement about Tao’s poems on history, see Yue Zhang, *Lore and Verse: Poems on History in Early Medieval China* (Albany: State University of New York, 2022), 73–96.

Tao highlighted their diligence, loyalty, and the consequent great success – that is, the special favor from the lord. They were always busy seeking opportunities to assert themselves, as “only feared” in line 2 and “often dreading” in line 4 vividly portray. Therefore, they are under the same pressure as the men described in the *Zhuangzi* who are “not happy” [*bule* 不樂] without the chance to demonstrate their abilities.⁸⁰ This aspiration for accomplishments and the realization of their ambition, including special favor from the lords, foreshadow the misfortune to come. In this respect, the miserable fate of the three good men is similar to that of loyal ministers Bi Gan 比干 [d. ca. 1047 BCE], whose heart was cut out, and Wu Zixu 伍子胥 [559–484 BCE], whose eyes were plucked from their sockets, which the *Zhuangzi* bemoans.⁸¹ Regardless of whether they were willing or forced to die, their misfortune was due to loyalty. We can tell that they were so deeply confused by benevolence and righteousness that they “sacrificed their lives” for it without fear,⁸² because “external things,” such as benevolence and righteousness, as well as the pursuit of accomplishments driven by it, can cruelly devour “internal things,” the true nature of men, to which the *Zhuangzi* always sticks. In some degree, the “three good men” are the epitome of people who strive for “external things,” so Tao’s lament in the poem points not only to the “three good men” but also to the group that shares the same fate.

From Tao’s perspective, Jing Ke is in the same group as the “three good men.” Lines 19–20 give the key statement in Tao’s poem “Singing of Jing Ke”:

心知去不歸	He was well aware that this journey had no return,
20 且有後世名 ⁸³	But his name would be remembered by later generations.

Tao believes that Jing Ke sacrificed himself just for posthumous fame, which invites a pointed question here: is it worth it? From the perspective of the *Zhuangzi*, “intellectuals risk[ing] death for the sake of fame”⁸⁴ is little different from “petty men risk[ing] death for the sake of profit,”⁸⁵ as both intellectuals and petty men chase “external things,” whether fame or profit, which go against

80 “Xu Wugui,” in Watson, *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*, 203.

81 “Bi Gan’s heart was cut out; Wu Zixu’s eyes were plucked from their sockets – loyalty brought them this misfortune.” [比干剖心，子胥抉眼，忠之禍也。] See “Daozhi 盜跖 [Robber Zhi],” in Watson, *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*, 261.

82 以身爲殉。 “Webbed Toes,” in Watson, *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*, 62.

83 Yuan Xingpei, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 267.

84 士則以身殉名。

85 小人則以身殉利。 “Webbed Toes,” in Watson, *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*, 62.

their true nature or “internal things.” Thus, Jing Ke in this poem, which echoes the “three good men” in the preceding poem, is among the sort of people who “sacrific[e] their lives for external things” criticized by the *Zhuangzi* and Tao.

It is worth noting that Tao highlighted the strong and wide influence of benevolence and righteousness in this poem to demonstrate his deep reflection on this issue. This influence is criticized in the *Zhuangzi* as “confusing the world.” Jing Ke’s sacrifice was entirely his own choice, and he headed to his death bravely and fearlessly, as shown in lines 21–24:

登車何時顧 飛蓋入秦庭	Getting on the carriage, he never once looked back; With flying canopy, he ran in full speed to the court of Qin.
24 凌厲越萬里 逶迤過千城 ⁸⁶	Being brave and fierce, he dashed ten thousand <i>li</i> ; Along winding paths, he passed through a thousand towns.

The implicit judgment here is that the more bravery Jing Ke displayed, the more enslaved he appeared to be by the rules of benevolence and righteousness. Tao reveals the moral basis for Jing Ke’s bravery in line 5: “Exemplary persons should die for their understanding friend”;⁸⁷ then he concludes that this was a failure in lines 27–28: “But what a pity, his swordsmanship was imperfect, / Then the astonishing feat was not accomplished.”⁸⁸ This description echoes the kind of criticism of benevolence and righteousness in the *Zhuangzi*. According to the *Zhuangzi*, the behavioral principles of Jing Ke, among the important criteria of benevolence and righteousness, is nothing but “tales handed down from ages past, retold by the ages that follow. They show us that the gentleman who is determined to be upright in word and consistent in conduct will, as a result, bow before disaster, will encounter affliction.”⁸⁹ Jing Ke’s sacrifice set a good example for other intellectuals, but, at the same time, he went to the end of his days tragically and never returned. On the basis of this judgment, the stress on Jing Ke’s resolution in these four lines show how deeply he is enslaved by “external things.” Correspondingly, Tao begins the poem with “Dan of Yan is famous for gracious hospitality for warriors,”⁹⁰ which points out that Jing Ke’s sacrifice is not for himself but for others who support him. The *Zhuangzi* called

86 Yuan Xingpei, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 267.

87 君子死知己。

88 惜哉劒術疎，奇功遂不成。Yuan Xingpei, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 267.

89 此上世之所傳，下世之所語，以爲士者正其言，必其行，故服其殃，離其患也。“Robber Zhi,” in Watson, *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*, 262.

90 燕丹善養士。

people like Jing Ke “servants to circumstance and things.”⁹¹ All these elements, including posthumous fame, a code of conduct, the Dan of Yan, that cause Jing Ke to sacrifice himself are “circumstance and things”; and Jing Ke acts like a servant in this situation, which means that, when the moment comes that he can put his talents to use, he cannot keep from acting, so he is spurred on desperately to demonstrate his incomparable courage in the event of peril.

In addition, the bigger tragedy is that benevolence and righteousness can exert their influence far beyond Jing Ke. When Jing Ke started off on his journey to sacrifice, “those who attended were all heroes,” as line 12 claims.⁹² “All heroes” implies that they embrace the same ambition and courage to realize their ambitions as Jing Ke. “Jianli struck the lute with a melancholy tone, / Songyi sang in a high-pitched voice.”⁹³ Their musical performance is a metaphor showing that they share the same values, so they can understand each other’s music tunes, that is, they are Jing Ke’s bosom friends, or, in other words, *zhiyin* 知音 [a friend keenly appreciative of one’s talents].⁹⁴ Not only did the people of the time aspire to the same goal, but, a thousand years later, Jing Ke’s deeds are still admired [suggested in lines 29–30]. We can detect the deep sadness of Tao in these sentences, as, although benevolence and righteousness are against human nature, they have such powerful and everlasting power as to lure people to blindly sacrifice themselves for it.

2.3 Accomplishment

Tao’s reflection in his poems concerns not only benevolence and righteousness, which is the primary principle advocated by Confucius, but also the accomplishments pursued in real life by Confucius and his followers, sometimes including Tao. “Twenty Poems after Drinking Wine, XX” is a typical example:

91 勢物之徒。“Xu Wugui,” in Watson, *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*, 204.

92 四座列群英。

93 漸離擊悲筑，宋意唱高聲。Yuan Xingpei, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 267.

94 Gao Jianli 高漸離 and Song Yi 宋意 are both hangers-on of Prince Dan 太子丹. Gao Jianli’s heroic action is similar to Jing Ke’s. It is recorded in the *Shiji* that Emperor Qin [259–10 BCE] heard he was good at playing the lute and called him to his court. He tried to assassinate Emperor Qin but failed and was killed. As for Song Yi, Zhang Shoujie’s 張守節 commentary cited “Yan taizi pian 燕太子篇 [The Chapter on the Prince of Yan]”: “As I observed, among the hangers-on of Prince Dan.... Song Yi’s bravery shows in his veins, so his face turns blue in rage.... Jing Ke’s bravery shows in his spirit, so his face stays unchanged in rage.” [竊觀太子客，... 宋意，脉勇之人，怒而面青... 荆軻，神勇之人，怒而色不變。] See Sima Qian 司馬遷, “Cike liezhuan 刺客列傳 [The Section Devoted to Assassins],” in *Shiji* 史記 [Records of the Grand Historian], comm. Pei Yin 裴駟, Sima Zhen 司馬貞, and Zhang Shoujie 張守節 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1963), 2530.

of this interpretation is the need to maintain the perspective of the poet as a follower of Confucius (caring about where the ford is like Confucius did), even when, by contrast, the poet is seen as Chang Ju and Jie Ni, who never agree with Confucius.

According to the source text, *Analects* 18.6, it is Confucius and his disciples who rush about in a carriage all day long to seek a way to save the world. Correspondingly, the subject of lines 15–16 in the poem should also be considered Confucius and his disciples, possibly including the poet himself,⁹⁸ rather than the ignorant common people, as argued by the previous interpretation. It manifests Tao's doubt in the ambition to save society following in the footsteps of Confucius, as they failed to find the path for their pursuit. Under this circumstance, indulging in drink may be a better choice for him. But the above-mentioned reading views the poet's denial of the effect of Confucius and his successors' cause as a lamentation that no one has taken up Confucius' cause.

Unlike the Confucian ambition, the *Zhuangzi* often expresses disappointment about the world. It argues that Confucius' enthusiasm for saving the troubled world is not only meaningless for the world but also harmful to himself, so it is fiercely criticized by Zhi 跖, a thief:

This “Way” you tell me about is frantic, endless seeking, crafty, vain, hypocritical affair, not the sort of thing that is capable of preserving the truth within. How can it be worth discussing?

子之道，狂狂汲汲，詐巧虛偽事也，非可以全真也。奚足論哉。⁹⁹

What calls for special attention here is that in line 3, robber Zhi uses the word *jiji* 汲汲 [endless seeking] to criticize the Confucian Way; we can then realize the implication of a similar criticism in line 3 of Tao's poem when he uses the same word *jiji* to describe Confucius. Following this clue, the content in lines 2 and 4 of the poem about how Confucius tried to restore the world to the truth, can also be read in reference to the criticism by Zhi that Confucius's Way is “not the sort of thing that is capable of preserving the truth within.” Then we can distinguish Tao's suspicion about Confucius in this poem. The

98 “Yong pinshi 詠貧士 [In Praise of Impoverished Gentlemen, II]”: “My retirement is not like Confucius' crisis in Chen, / but I cannot help complaining about poverty like his student Zilu.” [閑居非陳厄，竊有慍見言。] See Yuan Xingpei, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 254. Here Tao also compared himself to Confucius' disciple.

99 “Robber Zhi,” in Watson, *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*, 258.

Zhuangzi has other negative description of Confucius and his followers that are similar to “endless seeking,” such as “sweating and laboring to the end of their days and never seeing their accomplishment, utterly exhausting themselves and never knowing where to look for rest” – which is a great pity, for it was totally against the nature of truth.¹⁰⁰ Lines 3, 11–12, and 15–16 of the poem, which highlight the hardship of Confucius and his followers, including the “elderly men” who were devoted to education in the Confucian classics in the Han dynasty [206 BCE–220], express pity rather than praise, echoing the negative description in the *Zhuangzi*.

In addition, the *Zhuangzi* suggests that when the times are not agreeable and bring the greatest adversity to the world, the only thing that people should do is to “rest and wait.”¹⁰¹ Other parts of the poem, including lines 1–2, 7–10, 13–14, also echo the complaint in the *Zhuangzi* to reveal that the turbulent days were against the pursuit of Confucius and his followers and thus made all their efforts futile. From this perspective, we can understand why drinking, suggested in the last four lines of the poem, is a better choice under the circumstances – the poet meant to heed the advice in the *Zhuangzi* to “rest and wait,” which is the only way to “preserve the truth within” in adverse conditions.

Nevertheless, the *Zhuangzi* and drinking do not always alleviate the poet's stress and anxiety concerning accomplishment in reality. Tao's “The Tree in Bloom [*Rongmu* 榮木]” structures another peculiar combination of the ideal in the *Analects* and drinking, which leads to disputes about their interpretation. The disagreement mainly occurs in stanza 4:

	先師遺訓	The ancient Master left a precept,
	余豈云墜	How could I possibly betray it?
	四十無聞	If one at forty is still obscure,
4	斯不足畏	Then there is no need to stand in awe of him.
	脂我名車	Grease my luxury carriage,
	策我名驥	Whip my rare horse.
	千里雖遙	Albeit that a thousand <i>li</i> is far indeed,
8	孰敢不至 ¹⁰²	How can I dare not to drive there!

100 終身役役而不見其成功，爾然疲役而不知其所歸。“Qiwu lun 齊物論 [Discussion on Making All Things Equal],” in Watson, *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*, 9.

101 See “Shanxing 繕性 [Mending the Inborn Nature],” in Watson, *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*, 124.

102 Yuan Xingpei, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 9.

Lines 3–4 are based on *Analects* 9.23. This standard of achievement proposed by Confucius is ingrained in the poet's mind, so when he reaches old age he feels ashamed to be without fame, as the preface to this poem claims: "I learned about the Way since my hair was tied up as a child, but nothing have I achieved even though my hair turned white now."¹⁰³ The same feeling is expressed in stanza 3:

	嗟予小子	Alas, my humble self,
	稟茲固陋	Is endowed with such ineptness.
	徂年既流	The passing years flowed away,
4	業不增舊	But nothing has added to my accomplishment.
	志彼不捨	Though I never give up my original ambition,
	安此日富	Meanwhile indulging myself with drink, and its illusions of being rich and even proud of my treasures.
	我之懷矣	Oh, my heart,
8	怛焉內疚 ¹⁰⁴	painfully feels guilty.

The poet was in a state of depression in Stanza 3 as in Line 3–4 of stanza 4, but surprisingly, in the last four lines of stanza 4, the tone turned sharply confident. In addition, it is quite confusing that, given his old age, as suggested in the preceding stanzas, he is still able to drive a luxury carriage with a rare horse, which normally symbolizes great talent and strength, in order to go on a long journey so as to heed Confucius' advice. To address this inconsistency, Lu Qinli contended that, here, the poet cited the precept in the *Analects* in a sense that is the opposite of its original meaning: "It questions whether, even if at forty, one has not become renowned, it really means that he deserves no awe. These two lines [lines 3–4 in stanza 4] are saying that, despite the poet's current age, he still has time to become famous."¹⁰⁵ But this explanation does not make much sense, because the preceding lines already made it clear that the poet means to follow Confucius' teaching, rather than questioning it or even reversing its meaning. The Song dynasty [960–1279] scholar Zhao Quanshan 趙泉山 speculated that the last four lines indicated Tao's decision to withdraw from the world.¹⁰⁶ Zhao's speculation is also untenable because the narrative about heading somewhere farther than a thousand *li* with *mingche* 名車 [a luxury carriage] and *mingji* 名驥 [a rare horse], in the context of that time,

103 總角聞道，白首無成。

104 Yuan Xingpei, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 9.

105 Tao Yuanming, *Tao Yuanming ji*, 17.

106 Cited in Li Gonghuan, *Jianzhu Tao Yuanming ji*, 2:2.

is a common formula for glory and achievement.¹⁰⁷ In contrast, retiring is often symbolized by stopping the carriage and putting away the whip, instead of driving afar.¹⁰⁸ Therefore, neither Lu Qinli's approach to interpreting stanza IV as the determination to get ahead in life nor Zhao Quanshan's viewing it as a declaration of retirement is reasonable in the context of the poem. Both readings are related more to the ethics and personality of the canonized image of Tao.

As we see, *rifu* 日富 in line 6 of stanza 3 is the key word in this poem. *Rifu* refers to the allusion in "Xiao Yuan 小宛" in the *Classic of Poetry*, in which drunken people are criticized as "those benighted and foolish ones, / are easy to get drunk and thus feel themselves growing richer and complacent."¹⁰⁹ They are exactly the opposite of "the wise men alike sage / who can restrain in drinking."¹¹⁰ With this allusion the last four lines of stanza 4 finally make sense: the poet is just flaunting wealth while drunk, as ignorant and benighted people do. In other words, only in a drunken illusion can the poet follow the sage, but this illusion has no hope of being realized. This is a response demonstrating circumlocution in the first two lines in stanza 4, from which we can see the deep desperation in the poem.

In Wei [220–265] and Jin [265–420] dynasties, it is common for metaphysical institutions to turn to the *Zhuangzi* as a method of reflection on the restraints on the principles of life on intellectuals in the *Analects*. Tao's poems expressing pain in reality are greatly influenced by this trend. However, when later readers downplayed the implications of the *Zhuangzi* and rehighlighted the gist of the *Analects*, understanding of the poems naturally led to the opposite meaning. This is the main reason that the above-mentioned poems are the most likely to be interpreted with the opposite connotation.

3 Worldly Concerns

The above-mentioned poems by Tao focus on his internal world, including the joy of drinking and the pain in reality; another kind of important content in his poetry concerns his relationship with others and the external world. In

107 Such as Lu Ji, "Menghu xing 猛虎行 [Ferocious Tiger Ballad]": "Getting the carriage ready, I strictly obey the ruler's command; / with a whip in hand I am about to travel far in quest of my goal." [整駕肅時命，杖策將遠尋。] Xiao Tong, *Liuchen zhu Wenxuan*, vol. 28.

108 There are quite a few related examples in Tao's poems, such as "Twenty Poems after Drinking Wine X": "I was afraid it was not a wise plan, / so I stopped my carriage and retire to rest at home." [恐此非名計，息駕歸閑居。] Yuan Xingpei, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 181.

109 彼昏不知，壹醉日富。

110 人之齊聖，飲酒濫克。Kong Yingda, *Maoshi zhengyi*, 870.

“Biography of Master Five Willows,” Tao’s self-image appears to be unworldly.¹¹¹ After he was included in *The Section Devoted to Hermits in the Official History* [*Yinyi zhuan* 隱逸傳], his unworldly characteristics are further highlighted. Based on this, later commentators often simplify his complicated attitude toward the earthly world and his Zhuangzian reflection on this issue in poetry.

The purpose of this simplified interpretation is especially significant in the annotation of the last four lines in “Twenty Poems after Drinking Wine, VIII”:

8	提壺掛寒柯 遠望時復爲 吾生夢幻間 何事緹塵羈 ¹¹²	Hanging my wine jug on the winter branch, I look far into the earthly world from time to time. Living amid illusory dreams, Why should I stay trammled by dusty bonds?
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Line 8 has a variant of *shifuwei* 時復爲, which is *fuhewei* 復何爲 [why do it any longer?]. Obviously, the two phrases lead the line to opposite meanings: the former means looking afar sometimes, whereas the latter means looking afar no more. But what is intriguing is that, regardless of whether one chooses *shifuwei* or *fuhewei*, the annotations all construe the line in the same way, that is, to express Tao’s unworldly feelings in seclusion. Why is that so? The key lies in how the poet regards distant places. Those who adopt *fuhewei* regard distant places as part of the earthly world. Those who adopt *shifuwei*, on the contrary, regard distant places as somewhere secluded, far from the earthly world.¹¹³ By changing the type of places that *yuanwang* 遠望 [look far] refers to, commentators attempt to read the line as an embodiment of Tao’s unworldly feelings. It is astonishing what a decisive role his image as a peaceful hermit plays in annotations.

We choose *shifuwei*, as most editions do, to fill in the text, but contend that a “distant place” refers to an official career and the earthly world, as in most of Tao’s poems, instead of somewhere secluded. Similar metaphors can be found in his poems such as “Miscellaneous Poems V [*Zashi* 雜詩]”: “My

111 The image of Tao as a peaceful hermit has encountered some challenge. For example, the Japanese scholar Okamura Shigeru 岡村繁 argued that Tao was a very worldly and ambitious figure, citing Tao’s frequent communication with officialdom after his retirement. See Okamura Shigeru 岡村繁, *Tao Yuanming Li Bai xinlun* 陶淵明李白新論 [*Innovated Opinion about Tao Yuanming and Li Bai*], trans. Lu Xiaoguang 陸曉光 and Li Zheng 笠徵 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2002), 90–101.

112 Yuan Xingpei, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 178.

113 Only Gong Bin asserts the former, see Gong Bin, *Tao Yuanming ji jiaojian*, 242; scholars who support the latter include Huang Wenhuan and Wu Zhantai 吳瞻泰 [Qing dynasty], see Beijing daxue zhongwenxi, *Tao Yuanming yanjiu ziliao huibian*, 2:178.

ferocious ambition is beyond the four seas, / fluttering the wings I attempted to soar afar";¹¹⁴ and "Passing Qu'a on My Way to Assume the Office of Adviser to General Zhenjun [*Shizuo zhenjun canjun jing Qu'e* 始作鎮軍參軍經曲阿]": "Didn't I travel somewhere remote? / I have trudged up and down for more than a thousand *li*."¹¹⁵ Therefore, line 8 should be read as saying "I look far into the earthly world from time to time," showing the poet's concern about worldly affairs. Because of this, at the end of the poem, the poet blames himself for being trammelled by dusty bonds, from which we see the ambivalent attitudes of the poet toward the earthly world.

Alongside the poet's ambivalence toward the earthly world, he sometimes expresses expectations of powerful friends. But this level of worldly concern has been overlooked in previous interpretations. One prominent example is "In Praise of the Impoverished Gentlemen I [*Yong pinshi* 詠貧士]":

	萬族各有托	All species have their own reliance,
	孤雲獨無依	Only the lonely cloud is without support.
	曖曖空中滅	Dimming, it fades away in the sky,
4	何時見餘暉	When can it behold afterglow of the grace of the sun?
	朝霞開宿霧	When morning glow breaks through the overnight mist,
	眾鳥相與飛	Flocks of birds fly out together;
	遲遲出林翻	Only one bird leaves the forest quite late,
8	未夕復來歸	And returns early before dusk.
	量力守故轍	Coming back hometown owing to limited ability,
	豈不寒與飢	Unavoidably he suffers from cold and hunger.
	知音苟不存	But if an understanding friend does not exist,
	已矣何所悲 ¹¹⁶	Then let it be – no need to grieve.

This poem laments the sad fate of impoverished gentlemen who are dying. As indicated in the last two lines, their tragedy is mainly due to the absence of an understanding friend. As we see here, the lonely cloud that has no chance to behold the sun's afterglow is a metaphor for the impoverished gentleman's failure to meet a powerful friend who can appreciate him. However, in previous annotations, *yuhui* is normally interpreted as the glow emitted by a lonely cloud and indicates an "impoverished gentlemen with no hope of glory and

¹¹⁴ 猛志逸四海，騫翮思遠翥。

¹¹⁵ 我行豈不遙，登降千里餘。Yuan Xingpei, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 241, 128.

¹¹⁶ Yuan Xingpei, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 252.

wealth,” as Liu Liang’s 劉良 [fl. ca. 718] glossed about this poem in *Wenxuan*.¹¹⁷ This interpretation portrays the sad fate of Tao and other impoverished gentlemen, which is the result of their high-minded personality and their constant aloofness, especially with influential officials. In this way, the interpretation matches Tao’s canonized image in biographies as a great recluse. But it is problematic, because commonsense indicates that a cloud has no “glow” [*hui* 暉], let alone an “afterglow” [*yuhui*]; and the glimmer of a cloud is the result of reflecting light from the sun, which is often a metaphor for the utmost political power. In fact, the use of *yuhui* here is similar to that in “The Epitaph of Chu Yuan [*Chu Yuan beiwen* 褚淵碑文],” written by Wang Jian 王儉 [452–489] in the Southern Qi dynasty [479–502]: “So warm as the afterglow that he could never forget.”¹¹⁸ Interestingly, Liu Liang, the same annotator mentioned above, correctly noted *yuhui* here as “the emperor’s grace upon him.”¹¹⁹ In addition, in lines 5–6 of Tao’s poem, following the line with *yuhui*, flocks of birds chase the morning glow, which normally symbolizes political power,¹²⁰ forming a sharp contrast with the lonely cloud, which has no access to *yuhui*. From this correspondence we can also infer that *yuhui*, like the morning glow, is a metaphor for political power.

Expecting powerful friends but being disappointed is a recurrent motif in Tao’s poetry, and we can tell that he suffered deeply from this problem. In “Imitation of Ancient Poems, VIII [*Nigu* 擬古],” the poet expressed melancholy, which is analogous to that in the preceding poem, but this point has also been overlooked:

	少時壯且厲	In youth I was strong and firm,
	撫劍獨行游	Holding a sword, I traveled alone.
	誰言行游近	Who said I traveled near home?
4	張掖至幽州	The route was from Zhangye to Youzhou.
	飢食首陽薇	When hungry I ate Shouyang fern;
	渴飲易水流	When thirsty I drank water from the Yi River.
	不見相知人	I hadn’t seen any understanding friend,
8	惟見古時丘	But only the remains of ancient grave mounds.
	路邊兩高墳	Among which two high tombs stood by road,

117 貧士無榮貴之望。Xiao Tong, *Liuchen zhu Wenxuan*, vol. 30.

118 暖有餘暉，遙然留想。

119 天子恩光及之。Xiao Tong, *Liuchen zhu Wenxuan*, vol. 58.

120 Wang Yao thought the content in lines 5–6 “is a metaphor for the courtiers fawning upon rulers after the change of dynasty.” See Wang Yao, *Tao Yuanming ji*, 68. We do not think it is a specific reference to the Jin dynasty being overthrown by Song but agree to interpret “the morning glow” as “powerful people.”

	伯牙與莊周	They belong to Boya and Zhuangzhou.
	此士難再得	Understanding friends are hard to find again,
12	吾行欲何求 ¹²¹	What shall I expect to seek if I keep going on?

This poem makes allusions to several ancients: Bo Yi 伯夷, Shu Qi 叔齊, Jing Ke, Yu Boya 俞伯牙, Zhong Ziqi 鐘子期, Zhuang Zhou 莊周, and Hui Shi 惠施. Dispute over its interpretation mainly focuses on to whom *cishi* 此士 [these gentlemen] in line 11 refers. Previous commentators hold different opinions. Some commentators, such as Tang Han, believe that *cishi* refers to Boya and Zhuang Zhou. According to the *zhiyin* story that, after the death of their *zhiyin* Zhong Ziqi and Hui Shi, Boya and Zhuangzi both stopped showing their excellent talent, the annotator Tang Han argued that, by comparing himself to Zhong Ziqi and Hui Shi, Tao Yuanming claimed to be able to appreciate Boya and Zhuangzi, but worthies like them no longer existed.¹²² In this notion, the purpose of the poet's long journey is to find worthies and make himself a good judge of their talent. But this is obviously at odds with what the poem means, because the opening of the poem makes it clear that the poet travels to seek glory and fame for himself,¹²³ not just to appreciate someone else's talent. Another interpretation holds that *cishi* refers to Bo Yi, Shu Qi, and Jing Ke or includes Bo Yi, Shu Qi, Jing Ke, Boya, and Zhuangzi. It is even more far-fetched than the earlier one.

As we see, here *cishi* refers to understanding friends, that is, *xiangzhiren* 相知人 mentioned in line 7. In other words, line 11 means the same as line 7. Boya and Zhuangzi both stopped showing their talent after losing their understanding friends and ultimately died with unfulfilled ambition. Now, they are buried by the side of the road. This is the sad ending for people with unrecognized talent. In this case, even if "I" am as steadfast and fearless as Bo Yi, Shu Qi, and Jing Ke, there is no future worth expecting. And, inferring from the opening lines that depict the poet's travel in pursuit of fame and glory, there is no reason to reject the reading that the understanding friend for which he yearns should be a powerful figure. Thus, we draw the conclusion that this poem is a lament for the absence of a powerful friend, too.

Based on this clarification, we can now understand Tao's Zhuangzian reflection on the significance of powerful friends, because this issue tortured him too much in his life. Unlike the miserable, impoverished gentlemen without

121 Yuan Xingpei, *Tao Yuanming jijianzhu*, 232.

122 See Beijing daxue zhongwenxi, *Tao Yuanming yanjiu ziliao huibian*, 2:241.

123 As Lu Qinli noted, here, the long journey is a metaphor for the poet's eagerness to go into service for glory and fame. See Tao Yuanming, *Tao Yuanming ji*, 114.

support, as mentioned above, “Twenty Poems after Drinking Wine, XVII” is about the lucky one who receives favor from the powerful:

	幽蘭生前庭	The valley orchid grows in the courtyard,
	含薰待清風	Containing perfume, it awaits refreshing breeze.
	清風脫然至	Till refreshing breeze comes and liberate its fragrance,
4	見別蕭艾中	It is distinguished from inferior plants.
	行行失故路	Going on and on, I lost my old track,
	任道或能通	Just following the way, I might go through.
	覺悟當念還	Awake from the dream, I have to consider returning;
8	鳥盡廢良弓 ¹²⁴	The good bow is cast aside once the birds are gone.

In the first four lines, an outstanding talent who used to live in the mountains finally obtained support from a powerful friend and an opportunity to display his ability, thus distinguishing himself from shallow and vulgar people. This meaning becomes clear in connection with an allusion to Confucius that might be involved here and has not been noticed by previous commentators: Confucius returned to Lu from Wei, and on the way he saw a valley orchid and sighed, “orchids give off their perfume for the sake of the king. Now this orchid flourishes here alone, accompanied by weeds. It is just like worthies at the wrong time who are surrounded by petty men.”¹²⁵ In this context, *qingfeng* 清風 refers to a powerful king – it is the favor of the king that enables the talent of a worthy to come into play.

However, *qingfeng* here was usually interpreted as a friend who supported Tao’s seclusion. For example, Tang Han thought it symbolized a friend who could understand why Tao stayed away from the world.¹²⁶ Similarly, Wang Shumin believed that *qingfeng* could make the perfume of the orchid grow stronger, highlighting the poet’s transcendent spirit.¹²⁷ Most existing annota-

¹²⁴ Yuan Xingpei, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 191.

¹²⁵ 蘭當爲王者香，今乃獨茂，與眾草爲伍，譬猶賢者不逢時，與鄙夫爲倫也。It is from “Cao on Marvelous Orchid [*Yilan cao* 猗蘭操]” in *Qincao* 琴操 ostensibly written by Cai Yong 蔡邕 [133–192] and is partly cited in the Chen dynasty [557–589], in Zhijiang 智匠, *Gujin yuelu* 古今樂錄 [*Records of Music Poetry from Ancient to Modern Times*]. See Guo Maoqian 郭茂倩, ed., *Yuefu shiji* 樂府詩集 [*Anthology of Music Bureau Poetry*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2017), 839. It is also partly cited in Lu Ji 陸璣, *Maoshi caomu niaoshou chongyu shu* 毛詩草木鳥獸蟲魚疏 [*Explanation for Plants, Trees, Birds, Beasts, Insects and Fish in Maoshi*], suppl. Mao Jin 毛晉 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 1 in the Wu dynasty [229–280].

¹²⁶ Beijing daxue zhongwenxi, *Tao Yuanming yanjiu ziliao huibian*, 2:191.

¹²⁷ Wang Shumin, *Tao Yuanming shi jianzhenggao*, 327.

tions of *qingfeng* are based on Tao's canonized image as an eminent hermit and overlook his reflection on the role of a powerful friend in the poem.

Moreover, another Confucius anecdote in the *Zhuangzi*, perhaps echoing the allusion mentioned above in which Confucius sighed over a valley orchid, looms in this poem. Reading the poem along with this anecdote might provide a more reasonable interpretation. In "The Great and Venerable Teacher," Confucius said to his disciples that "we are dreaming and haven't awakened yet,"¹²⁸ for they are still bound by the rules of common decency and thus unable to see the truth of life and death. It is also the case for the "valley orchid" in Tao's poem: the opportunity to display its talents or to "give off their perfume for the sake of the king" as in the allusion above, is attained only through "dreaming and not awakening yet," that is, being lost in a dream. Then lines 5–6 in the poem can be seen as describing the state of being lost and unable to control oneself in a dream.

Lines 1–6 in this poem also remind us of another dream in the *Zhuangzi* about "awakening" that involves a butterfly:

Once Zhuang Zhou dreamed, he was a butterfly, a butterfly flitting and fluttering around, happy with himself and doing as he pleased. He didn't know he was Zhuang Zhou. Suddenly he woke up, and there he was, solid and unmistakable Zhuang Zhou.

昔者莊周夢爲胡蝶，栩栩然，胡蝶也，自喻適志與。不知周也。俄然覺，則蘧蘧然周也。¹²⁹

In Tao's poem, a worthy obtaining the opportunity to display his talents is analogous to the butterfly in the dream "being happy with himself and doing as he pleased." The depiction in line 5 of the poem, "lost my old track" as the "valley orchard" originally lives in the mountains and woods but now moved to the courtyard,¹³⁰ is similar to "he didn't know he was Zhuang Zhou," which means losing oneself. As for line 7, it could be seen as the process of finding oneself again, as written in the *Zhuangzi*, "Suddenly he woke up, and there he was, solid and unmistakable Zhuang Zhou." So, Tao's poem is only another version

128 其夢未始覺者邪。Watson, *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*, 51.

129 Watson, *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*, 18.

130 According to Xie Xuan's 謝玄 [343–388] biography in *The History of the Jin*, the orchid that grows in the courtyard refers to an outstanding talent who is a member of a prominent family.

of the butterfly dream in the *Zhuangzi*. Maybe we can call it the dream of the valley orchid.

With implication of “awakening” in the *Zhuangzi* [in line 7 of the poem], here the poet expresses his reflection on his success in having powerful friends to appreciate his talents. In “dreams,” a powerful friend is a “refreshing breeze.” It is what the “valley orchid” with perfume was waiting for and also the key to success in life. From this perspective, the “valley orchid” is no different from the “lonely cloud” in the preceding poem that expects an afterglow, both manifesting the poet’s wish to see a powerful friend who understands him. But after you wake up, the powerful friend, who used to be a “refreshing breeze,” might turn out to be cruel and discard you as soon as your help is no longer required; as the saying goes, “the good bow is cast aside once the birds are gone.” Therefore, unlike the above-mentioned poems that show the expectation of powerful friends, this poem represents the poet’s rational insight into powerful friends. It is essentially the same as Tao’s reflection on accomplishments in reality as we mentioned before, which also allude to the spirit of the *Zhuangzi*.

4 Conclusion

This paper reinterprets the following thirteen poems: “Drinking Alone in Consecutive Wet Days,” “The Day of the Zha Sacrifice,” “To My Cousin Jingyuan, Written in the Middle of the Twelfth Month of the Year Guimao,” “Meditating on Ancients in the Early Spring of the Year Guimao at My Farm, II,” “Twenty Poems after Drinking Wine, XI,” “Singing of the Three Good Men,” “Singing of Jing Ke,” “Twenty Poems after Drinking Wine, XX,” “The Tree in Bloom,” “Twenty Poems after Drinking Wine, VIII,” “In Praise of Impoverished Gentlemen, I,” “Imitation of Ancient Poems, VIII,” and “Twenty Poems after Drinking Wine, XVII.”

Through reinterpretation, we see that the influence of the *Zhuangzi* on Tao’s poetry is more extensive and far-reaching than has been disclosed in extant annotations. As the gist of the *Zhuangzi* is often the opposite of the gist of the *Analects*, our reinterpretation, focusing on implications of the *Zhuangzi* that have been neglected, differs from the existing biographical narrative centering on the *Analects* and sometimes reveals a meaning contrary to that claimed in existing readings.

Our reinterpretation can further the rethinking of the position of Tao’s poetry in literary history. Tao’s supreme status in literary history is largely based on people’s esteem of his personality and virtue and his breaking of the style of metaphysical poetry that prevailed in the Eastern Jin dynasty. However,

our reinterpretation focuses on revealing the difference between Tao's poetry and his canonized image, based on biographies of him, and on clarifying the depth of the resonance with the *Zhuangzi* in Tao's poetry. On this basis, we can see more clearly the connection between Tao's poetry with metaphysical institution and the related poetry style in the Eastern Jin dynasty, which took its view of life from the *Zhuangzi*, rather than taking Confucianism as its only source. What's more, the pastoral lifestyle and drinking depicted in Tao's poetry display as a similar role as mountains and waters, the main images in his contemporary metaphysical poems, which are metaphors for the Way. In this sense, our reinterpretation can encourage a reflection on the canonization of Tao's poems in the mainstream narrative of literary history.

Acknowledgements

This paper is the result of Xu's one-to-one class for Qinming on Tao Yuanming's works over two semesters. Thanks to the Luce Fellowship [2018.9–2019.5] of the National Humanities Center. Xu drafted the main part of this paper during her stay in NHC. Thanks to Professor Wang Ping of University of Washington, Professor Zhang Yue of University of Macau, Dr. Zhu Mengwen of Southern University of Science and Technology, and two anonymous reviewers for their enlightened comments on this paper. This study is supported by Chinese National Fund ("Canonization of Cao Zhi's works and New interpretation of his anthology" 21BZW085).

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