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## Editor's Introduction: New Interpretations of Medieval Chinese Literature

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The development of academic research largely depends on new materials and innovative research methodologies. In this special issue, scholars from mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau, and the US apply new approaches to the study of medieval Chinese literature. The articles in this issue focus on influential poets, such as Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 [ca. 365–427], Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 [385–433], Su Shi 蘇軾 [1037–1101], and Li Qingzhao 李清照 [1084–1155], as well as vernacular poetry and fiction, such as “bamboo branch lyrics” [*zhuzhici* 竹枝詞] and the *Water Margin* [*Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳]. The significance of these articles is that they not only investigate the literary merits of medieval Chinese literature but also situate them in their larger cultural context. These articles approach medieval Chinese literature from a variety of multidisciplinary perspectives, such as ethnography, history, law, philosophy, and psychology. Using these different lenses, these articles collectively develop an innovative and rich understanding of Chinese literature.

In “Reinterpretation of Tao Yuanming’s Thirteen Poems: A Zhuangzian Perspective,” Xu Yan 徐豔 and Zhang Qinming 張秦銘 question the biographical reading of Tao Yuanming’s poems by explaining the significance of the poems in the context of Daoism, in particular, the philosophy of Zhuangzi 莊子 [ca. 369–ca. 286 BCE]. Xu and Zhang use thirteen of Tao’s poems to focus on existing commentaries on Tao’s poetry. Based on their analysis of the intertextual connections between Tao’s poems and the *Zhuangzi*, they find that many of Tao’s poems are filled with allusions to the received *Zhuangzi* text that have not been properly addressed, interpreted, or understood from a Daoist perspective. Therefore, their article aims to fill this gap by linking the philosophy of Zhuangzi to Tao’s poems and, in so doing, to shed new light on the impact of Daoism on this important poet and to reveal the profound

meaning conveyed through Tao's poetry, which is often concealed by his seemingly plain literary style.<sup>1</sup>

In a change of direction, Stephen Roddy looks at vernacular poetry in his article, "A Love of Labor: The Ethnographic Turn of *Zhuzhici*." He examines *zhuzhici* and its development from an ethnographic perspective, with an emphasis on "water labor."<sup>2</sup> Roddy explores representative *zhuzhici* writers from the Tang [618–907] to the Qing [1616–1911] dynasties: Liu Yuxi 劉禹錫 [772–842], Bai Juyi 白居易 [772–846], Yang Weizhen 楊維禎 [772–842], and Zhu Yizun 朱彝尊 [1629–1709] – focusing on the historical development and conscious and unconscious transformation of the genre. During the Tang and Song [960–1279] dynasties, *zhuzhici* mainly reflected the daily life and somber mood of laborers working along the Yangzi River, its tributaries, and nearby lakes. From the Yuan [1206–1368] to the Qing era, *zhuzhici* began to favor a more refined style, depicting various lakeshore scenes. Many of the protagonists of that era of *zhuzhici* are women, rather than men, and the poems emphasize the concerns of women about the security of men, not the circumstances of water labor. The complaints of women and female bitterness are the two most frequent topics of these poems. Poets after Zhu Yizun continued to use *zhuzhici* for both lyrical entertainment and ethnographic purposes.

Whereas Xu and Zhang reinterpret Tao's poems from a Daoist perspective, in "Contemplating 'Return': Xie Lingyun's 'Hillside Garden,'" Wang Ping 王平 investigates another well-known poet in the Eastern Jin [317–420] dynasty, Xie Lingyun, and places his works in the context of such important classics as the *Classic of Poetry* [*Shijing* 詩經] and the *Classic of Changes* [*Yijing* 易經].<sup>3</sup>

- 1 For representative Chinese scholarship on Tao Yuanming, see Zhong Shulin 鍾書林, *Tao Yuanming yanjiu xueshu dang'an* 陶淵明研究學術檔案 [*Academic Archive of Tao Yuanming Studies*] (Wuhan: Wuhan daxue chubanshe, 2014). For a survey of Anglophone scholarship on Tao, see Wu Fusheng 吳伏生, *Yingyu shijie de Tao Yuanming yanjiu* 英語世界的陶淵明研究 [*Tao Yuanming Studies in the Anglophone World*] (Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 2013); Zhang Yue 張月, "Ou Mei jinqi Tao Yuanming yanjiu zongshu, fenxi yu zhanwang 歐美近期陶淵明研究綜述、分析與展望 [Summary and Analysis of Recent Studies on Tao Yuanming in Europe and America]," *Gudian wenxian yanjiu* 古典文獻研究, no. 2 (2017).
- 2 Roddy has published articles on *Zhuzhici*, such as "Bamboo Branches out West: *Zhuzhici* in Xinjiang," *Journal of Modern Literature in Chinese* 現代中文文學學報 15, no. 2 (2018); and "Cong minzu zhi shijiao kan *zhuzhici* 從民族志視角看竹枝詞 [Examining Bamboo Lyrics from an Ethnographic Perspective]," *Minzu wenxue yanjiu* 民族文學研究, no. 6 (2018).
- 3 Wang has another recent article on Xie Lingyun: Wang Ping 王平, "Fengliu yiwu Xie Kangle: Shanshui, shanju, dili shuxie yihuoshi zhengzhi biaoshu 風流遺物謝康樂: 山水、山居、地理書寫抑或是政治表述 [Xie Lingyun: A Relic of the Past]," in *Zhonggu wenxue zhong de shi yu shi* 中古文學中的詩與史 [*The Interrelation between Poetry and History in Medieval Chinese Literature*], ed. Zhang Yue 張月 and Chen Yinchi 陳引馳 (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2020), 189–207.

This article provides scholarly translations to examine the literary and philosophical implications of the trope of “returning” in Xie’s poems. When Liu Yu 劉裕 [363–422] rose to become the de facto ruler of the Eastern Jin dynasty, Xie delicately expressed his complicated emotions, appearing to obey and praise Liu but, in fact, denouncing Liu’s behavior. To achieve this effect, Xie adopts images and allusions from previous important works and carefully selects his poetic persona and gestures.<sup>4</sup>

Yang Xiaoshan 楊曉山, in “Dream, Memory, and Reflection: Transfigurations of Su Shi’s Qiuchi Rock in Song Poetry,” switches the focus from Six Dynasties to Song dynasty poetry, examining the changing meaning of Su Shi’s Qiuchi 仇池 rock from the perspectives of aesthetics and traumatic memory. Yang’s article continues his academic interest in literati culture in the Song dynasty demonstrated in his book, *Metamorphosis of the Private Sphere: Gardens and Objects in Tang-Song Poetry*.<sup>5</sup> This article analyzes the various meanings of rocks in Su Shi’s three long poems written in response to requests from friends. Su initially manifested an unusual possessiveness about and affinity for external items. He then became a commentator, exploring the meaning of rocks with Buddhist allusions and the technique of negation. This rhetorical strategy was a manifestation of his effort to break away from his possessive craving for external objects. Moreover, the Qiuchi rock represents Su Shi’s isolation and his equanimity during his experience of withdrawing from the government and subsequent exile. This article concludes with a discussion of the afterlife of Su Shi’s rock in Song poetry and the fact that Song poets, especially after the Northern Song [960–1127] dynasty, tended to assign grave outcomes to the desire for material objects in Su Shi’s poems.

The next article, “Beef Outlaws: Beef Consumption in *Water Margin* and Its Song-Yuan Antecedents,” by Isaac Yue 余文章, also focuses on vernacular literature. Yue, who specializes in late imperial literature, examines one of the most famous vernacular novels in Chinese literature from the perspective of food culture. Beef consumption is an important motif in the *Water Margin*. Scholars have long placed this motif within the context of strict laws regarding cattle slaughter and the sale of beef during the Northern and Southern Song dynasties and have usually concluded that this motif represents the outlaws’ deliberate disobedience to edicts, legislation, and rules. However, this article

4 In “Cultural Memory and Xie Zhan’s Poem on Zhang Liang,” I discuss responses to Liu Yu’s rising power by members of the Xie family, focusing on Xie Zhan and his contemporaries’ poems on historical sites. For details, see Yue Zhang, *Lore and Verse: Poems on History in Early Medieval China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2022), 97–120.

5 Yang Xiaoshan, *Metamorphosis of the Private Sphere: Gardens and Objects in Tang-Song Poetry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003).

questions that premise, exploring the legal issues around beef consumption, the economics of beef, and the precedents for this motif. Moreover, the article provides historical background on the problem of illegal beef. This article concludes that, considering the many distortions and falsifications in the *Water Margin* around the consumption of beef during the Song dynasty, its author likely intended the beef consumption in the novel to reflect and reveal culinary taste and economic options, rather than an act of rebellion against authority.

Finally, Zhang Yue 張月, in his interview with Ronald Egan, “Recent Developments in Medieval Chinese Literary Research and Pedagogy,” investigates the problems of researching and teaching medieval Chinese literature in broad terms. This interview adopts a comparative perspective in examining four main topics: reception studies and its application to medieval Chinese literary studies, writing premodern Chinese literary history in the West and China, the translation of Chinese primary sources into English and Anglophone scholarship on Chinese literature into Chinese, and teaching premodern Chinese literature in the US.<sup>6</sup> In our discussion, Egan weighs in on a wide range of issues connected with the methodology in Chinese literary studies, strategies in writing literary history, and the pedagogy of Sinology. Egan draws examples from his long experience in researching and teaching Chinese literature. This interview describes the many current trends in Chinese literary studies in the West.

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6 On the use of reception studies to teach Chinese literature, see Yue Zhang, “Teaching Classical Chinese Poetry through Reception Studies,” *ASIANetwork Exchange: A Journal for Asian Studies in the Liberal Arts* 26, no. 1 (2019).

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