ONE

Introduction

I have to believe that this old gentleman never really died. Even today he remains awe-inspiring and alive.

— Xin Qiji 辛棄疾 (1140–1207)

This book begins with the death of Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (also known as Tao Qian 陶潛, 365?–427), who has come over time to be considered one of China’s greatest poets.¹ Over the centuries, portrayals of his life—some focusing on his eccentricity, aloofness, and winebibbing, others on his exemplary moral virtue—would elevate him to iconic status. Recent studies on canon formation have indicated that it is common for a writer to achieve his reputation as we know it many generations after his death, and that changes in his reception often have less to do with the works themselves than with changes in the motivations and needs of anthologists and critics of different periods.² The reception of Tao Yuanming is an illuminating

epigraph: Xin Qiji, “Shuilong yin” 水龍吟, in idem, Jiàxuān cì biǎnnián jiànzhù, 4/521 (ZLHB, 102). Unless otherwise noted, all English translations are mine.

1. There remains some confusion regarding Tao Yuanming’s original name and his byname (字 zi), an alternative name a male assumed at the age of twenty. Each of Tao’s four early biographers gave a slightly different account of his name and byname. The early twentieth-century scholar Zhu Ziqing found ten different accounts of Tao’s name and byname in premodern and early modern sources. According to Zhu, Tao’s name was not transmitted because his clan was in decline and his literary works were not especially valued during his time; see Zhu, “Tao Yuanming nián-pu zhòng zhì wèntì,” in idem, Zhu Ziqing gǔdiàn wénxué lùnwén ji, 2: 457–58.

2. For discussions of canon formation in China, see Pauline Yu’s “Charting the Landscape of Chinese Poetry” and “Canon Formation in Late Imperial China.”
Introduction

case in point. Largely dismissed as a poet in the first few centuries following his death, Tao would seem to have been the object of a miraculous recovery unless we identify turning points and crucial figures in the construction of his historical image. This book is an examination of the processes behind the making of a model poet and cultural icon.

Any historical study of reception must take into account changes in reading habits and modes of criticism. Reception ought to be a topic of special centrality in Chinese literary history, in light of the time it spans, the relative stability and continuity of the literary language, and the accessibility of the literary corpus. The steady accumulation and transmission of a certain cultural wealth through the subscription to a set of shared texts and methods as well as goals of study identified the members of the literati elite and ensured their privileges. Yet Chinese literary reception has not been sufficiently conceptualized as a problem for study. This lack becomes ever more exigent since the study of reception has long been acknowledged to be capable of revealing transformations in the hermeneutical practices of a literary tradition. The development of reading practices in traditional China can also be a highly valuable window into shifts in literati culture and values. A study of the construction of the posthumous reputation of a central figure in Chinese literary history, the mechanisms at work in the reception of his works, and the canonization both of Tao Yuanming himself and of particular readings of his works can shed light on the transformation of the literary field and cultural sphere in premodern China.

Critics have long looked beyond the “author” or the linguistic functioning of the text to understand the production of meaning; one focus of this effort has been the active role played by the reader. Hans Robert Jauss has often been credited with bringing a historical dimension to reception study. At a time when literary history had fallen into disrepute, Jauss, who sought to restore history to the center of literary studies and to extend the area of intertextuality, proposed that the “relationship of work to work” be brought into the “interaction between work and mankind.” The “aesthetics of reception” is premised on the view that a “literary work is not an object that stands by itself and that offers the same view to each reader in each period. It is not a monument that monologically reveals its timeless essence. It is much more like an orchestration that strikes ever new resonances among its readers . . . and brings it to a contemporary existence.” At stake in this perspective is the way in which the active engagement of the audience sustains the historical life of a literary work, shifting critical focus from “the traditional aesthetics of production and representation” to an “aesthetics of reception and influence.” This shift in critical attention results from the recognition that “the quality and rank of a literary work” do not result solely from the “biographical or historical conditions of its origin [Entstehung]”; rather, they derive “from the criteria of influence, reception, and posthumous fame, criteria that are more difficult to grasp.” Within Jauss’s model, readers’ reception of a work takes place within a “horizon of expectations,” based both on past works in a given tradition and on the readers’ cultural values. As new works and new historical conditions change readers’ expectations, these horizons of literary expectations are altered, and new judgments and interpretations of old works become possible. The notion

5. Ibid., 21. The larger context for Jauss’s statement is his concern to restore links between past artifacts and present concerns. In the same passage, Jauss writes that a literary work is like an orchestration that “frees the text from the material of the words.” Whether the text can ever be freed from the “material of the words” remains highly questionable, however, especially if we consider poetry.
6. Ibid., 20.
7. Ibid., 5.
that changes in aesthetic and cultural attitudes largely determine perceptions of “the quality and rank of a literary work” as well as its author’s reputation is crucial if we are to reach a historical understanding of the Tao Yuanming modern readers have inherited. However, the neat divide between the “biographical or historical conditions of [a work’s] origin” on one hand and readers’ reception on the other was never clearly drawn in traditional China. Thus, the extent to which the literary was a distinct category needs to be established and not assumed, and a study of literary reception in the Chinese tradition must examine literary questions in relation to nonliterary categories, such as history, biography, and morality.

Although Jauss’s interest in understanding the historical reception of a work is ultimately directed toward the goal of better understanding its meaning, a goal that requires him to arbitrate among previous readings and position his own among them, this book is a study not of Tao Yuanming and his works as such but rather, first, of the constructions of Tao and, second, of the mechanisms that underlay them. Nor does it take hermeneutical problems as givens and automatically assess claims against Tao’s own works; instead, it historicizes these problems by inquiring into the social and intellectual conditions that made the claims possible in the first place. It seeks to answer the question of what makes a particular hermeneutical inquiry relevant at a given historical moment and not at an earlier one. This approach thereby differs from one that uses the critical reaction of later periods to probe authorial intention and that ultimately looks for answers about a writer’s later reception in his own works.

My focus is on readers’ interpretive negotiations with Tao’s works. In particular, I pay close attention to factors that exceed the pa-

8. In his introduction to Toward an Aesthetic of Reception, Paul de Man (ix–x) distinguishes between hermeneutics and poetics: hermeneutics is a process aimed at the “determination of meaning,” whereas poetics involves the “formal analysis of linguistic entities.” The example de Man uses is well known: Homer’s reference to Achilles as a lion. To conclude that “Achilles is courageous” is to make a hermeneutic decision; to consider “whether Homer is using a simile or a metaphor” is a concern of poetics. De Man classifies Jauss as a hermeneut.

9. This perspective seems to have informed, for example, Paula Varsano’s recent monograph on the major Tang poet Li Bo 李白 (701–62) and his critical reception, Tracking the Banished Immortal; see pp. 22, 24, and 199.
rameters of his works, such as changes in hermeneutical practices, critical vocabulary, and cultural demands, as well as the intervention of interested and influential readers. I believe that such an approach helps explain to a large extent the very different pictures of Tao Yuanming and the divergent ways of reading his works across time. This was not simply a succession of portrayals but rather a cumulative process, driven by a dialogue spanning fifteen hundred years about three categories that lay at the heart of literati culture: reclusion, personality, and poetry.

Tao Yuanming was more (and perhaps less) than simply a near-fabled figure in his afterlife and a kind of precious mirror reflecting those who read him and about him. We do, in fact, know with reasonable certainty a number of things about the historical Tao Yuanming. He was born during the Eastern Jin 东晋 (317–420), a dynasty whose society was dominated by great aristocratic clans (shizu 士族). He came from a minor elite family, which, although it lacked privileged access to high office, still could boast of an impressive tradition of government service. His paternal great-grandfather was the celebrated general Tao Kan 陶侃 (259–334), who was enfeoffed as duke of a commandery for his role in quelling a rebellion in the late 320s and thereby stabilizing the new government of Eastern Jin. His grandfather, Tao Mao 陶茂, was governor of Wuchang 武昌. His maternal grandfather, Meng Jia 孟嘉 (fl. mid-fourth century), was a senior aide to Huan Wen 桓溫 (312–73), perhaps the most powerful man in southern China in the mid-fourth century. These accomplished ancestors did little more than serve as ideal models for Tao, however, since by the time he was born his family had lost most of its prestige and wealth. The date of his birth is still disputed, but most scholars accept a date of 365. He was a native of Chaisang 柴桑 in Xunyang 寻阳 (modern Jiujiang 九江 in Jiangxi 江西).

10. Most scholars, traditional and modern alike, follow Wang Zhi’s 王質 (1127–89) dating of Tao’s birth to 365, which would mean that he lived to the age of 63 sui (62 by western reckoning). Some scholars have argued for other dates, based on varying sources or differing interpretations of them: for example, Zhang Yin 張縯 (jinshi 1163) and, more recently, Yuan Xingpei 袁行霈, suggest the date of 352 (76
Tao took his first office relatively late in life and retired permanently early in his career. He held and resigned from a succession of low-ranking civil posts until 405. Among those under whom he served were almost certainly Huan Xuan 恒玄 (369–404) and Liu Yu 劉裕 (363–422), both of whom later sought to overthrow the Jin 晉 (265–420), Huan Xuan unsuccessfully in 403–4 and Liu Yu successfully in 420. These coups were typical of the political unrest that characterized the last decades of the Jin, which was finally replaced by Liu Yu's Song 宋 dynasty (420–79).

After retiring from his last post in 405, Tao spent the rest of his life as a farmer-recluse in the environs of Xunyang. He experienced both the joys of material self-sufficiency and the hardships of agricultural life. Tao's life in reclusion, however, was not one of total deprivation or isolation. His love of wine was famous, and although he often drank alone, he was also a convivial drinker who frequently socialized with local officials and other members of the elite, as well as with neighboring farmers. During his lifetime, he acquired local fame as a recluse. (This is, in fact, not ironic since certain types of reclusion practiced during the Six Dynasties 六朝, 222–589, were quite sociable, as we will see.) It is in this period that he composed most of his surviving works.11

Tao's extant works include just over 120 poems, three rhapsodies, and ten prose works in various genres. Among the subgenres represented in his corpus, we can find poems written on official duty, social or exchange poems, poems on historical figures, and poems based on various meditations or events during his retirement. The
last category constitutes the majority of his œuvre. In most of his poems and prose works, the theme or reference point is his reclusion. Even the poems written while he was in office express a longing to retire. Tao wrote of the joys of rustic life: drinking wine, playing the zither, enjoying his leisure, and reading and writing poetry for his own pleasure. And he wrote about the toils of farming and trials of poverty, such as cold and hunger, which in one instance are conveyed memorably by these lines hoping for the swift passage of time: “At dusk we would think of the cock crow, / At dawn we hoped the crow would cross quickly” 造夕思雞鳴，及晨願鳥遷. Occasionally he also alluded to the frustration of his youthful ambitions and his lack of accomplishment. Nonetheless, two gestures that punctuate many of works are a reaffirmation of his resolve and a declaration of his integrity.

Tao Yuanming, above all, wrote about himself. There is no extant precedent in Chinese literature for the candor with which Tao Yuanming spoke about his principles, fears, personal fancies, and wants, or for the scrupulous dating and prefatory notes he attached to his works. The strong autobiographical presence in Tao’s writings raises two immediate questions: how much agency has he been granted in determining his own critical reception, and to what extent did his detailed self-characterizations define and constrain later interpretations of him and his works? Tao Yuanming’s autobiographical project is the subject of an interlude in this book, since it deals with issues peripheral but important to the main story. My discussion encourages a confrontation between notions of production and representation, foregrounded by Tao’s autobiography, and of readers’ reception, asserted by responses to Tao Yuanming that do not always conform to the guidelines he had carefully set. Several interesting aspects of Tao’s autobiographical works also warrant our attention: the coexistence of his self-conscious construction of the literary self with the affirmation by later readers of the naturalness or artlessness of his work; and his numerous wonderful contradictions. On one hand, he tells us that he writes so that “Tao Yuanming” will

---

12. TYMJJJ, 98. All citations of Tao Yuanming’s poetry are from TYMJJJ unless otherwise noted.
be known to posterity; on the other, he goes to great length to state that he is unconcerned about his posthumous reputation, which means how he gets read. The core of Tao’s autobiographical project lies somewhere between earnestness and playfulness, the latter implying a recognition of both the boundaries of autobiographical writing and the intention to push them.

The prominent autobiographical dimension in Tao’s works surely inspired a special emphasis on his personality in discussions of his works, even in traditional China where the “personality” and life history of a writer were generally integrated into readings of his or her works. The role biography played in the interpretation of a writer’s works differed greatly between the Western and Chinese traditions. The Russian Formalist Boris Tomaševskij has pointed out that in the West prior to the eighteenth century there were eras in which the personality of the writer was of no interest to readers. It was not until the “individualization of creativity—an epoch which cultivated subjectivism in the artistic process—[that] the name and personality of the author came to the forefront.”13 For Chinese readers, in contrast, a poet’s biography traditionally functioned as a crucial hermeneutic element. The time-honored dictum from the Shang shu 尚書, or the Classic of Documents, “The poem speaks what is intently on the mind” (shì yán zhì 詩言志),14 and Mencius’ famous words, “When singing their [the ancients’] poems and reading their books, is it right not to know what kind of persons they were?” underlay traditional reading practices.15 These generated an important pair of assumptions: (1) a poem as a privileged form of self-expression directly evidences the author’s true state or condition of mind and therefore allows the reader to know the author; (2) a good reader pays attention to the author behind the text. The poetry of Qu Yuan 屈原 (ca. 343–ca. 277 BCE), widely considered the first great Chinese poet, was read in the light of his frustrated ambitions and die-hard loyalty.

14. I have adopted Stephen Owen’s translation of zhì; see his Readings in Chinese Literary Thought, 40.
15. Mencius 5B.8. The original reads: “頌其詩，讀其書，不知其人，可乎?”
The historical image of Du Fu 杜甫 (712–70), established in the Song 宋 dynasty (960–1279), as a loyal subject who epitomized moral responsibility and social compassion placed his works beyond “the reach of usual methods of literary criticism.” In similar fashion, Tao Yuanming’s personality and biography weighed heavily in the assessment and ranking of his poetry by later readers. One of the earliest critics of his poetry, Zhong Rong 鍾嶸 (ca. 469–518), wrote that “each time I look at his writings, I think of the virtuousness of his character” 每觀其文，想其人德. Six hundred years later, perhaps the most ardent and astute student of Tao’s poetry, Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101), exclaimed: “How could it be his poetry alone that I love? His person, too, has moved me.” These are but two prominent critics among many who shifted easily between Tao’s person and his writings. The process is considered in Chapter 3, in which I review the conceptual underpinnings of the hermeneutical practice of reading a poem to know the poet and examine varying assessments of Tao’s personality. Far from a stable construct, his “personality” embodied different virtues and ideals in different periods; Tao early on represented primarily an interesting personality and only later turned into a moral ideal and Confucian sage. If we want to understand this extraordinary transformation, we need to examine crucial readings and appropriations in their historical contexts.

Perhaps the most discussed aspect of Tao’s life is his reclusion. In the most general terms, reclusion, which was traditionally defined against officeholding, represented one of the two major paths a member of the educated elite might choose. It could be motivated by a variety of goals: political protest, pursuit of private ideals, religious self-cultivation, or freedom from the worries of official life. This was no facile decision for a literatus schooled in Confucian ethics, since his withdrawal meant the renunciation of aspirations to serve state and society, social respect, and a stable income. But even for those who did not choose this path, reclusion stood as an attractive

---

17. Zhong Rong, Shipin zhu, 260 (ZLHB, 9).
18. Su Shi made this remark in a letter to his brother, Su Che 蘇軌 (1039–1112), who quoted it in “Zizhan he Tao Yuanming shiji yin” 子瞻和陶淵明詩集引, in idem, Luancheng ji (houji), 21.5a (ZLHB, 35).
Introduction

alternative to the obligations and compromises that government service imposed. They could still partake of this other way of life through a variety of cultural practices: building country retreats, socializing with recluses, writing poetry in the persona of a recluse, or artistically expressing a longing to withdraw. Both for those who made the break with officialdom and especially for those who did not, Tao became the model of the literatus recluse. In Chapter 2, I discuss various readings of Tao’s reclusion, and place them in the context of changing attitudes toward this important political and cultural practice. His withdrawal brought to the foreground issues central to traditional literati culture: service versus reclusion, public duty versus self-cultivation, and loyalty to the state versus a transcendence of politics.

Readers have long relied at least as much on Tao’s early biographies as his own works for information on his reclusion. The biographies in the Song shu 宋書 (History of the [Liu] Song), the Nan shi 南史 (History of the Southern Dynasties) and the Jin shu 晉書 (History of the Jin), and that by Xiao Tong 蕭統 (501–31), the first known editor of Tao’s works, have generally been taken for granted as repositories of facts and treated as primary sources. I read them instead as part of Tao’s early reception and as authoritative texts that shaped his later reception. I argue that they are products of their compilers’ choices in the selection and presentation of materials and are thus interpretations of Tao’s life. These influential texts were often drawn upon in later literary uses of Tao’s life and in debates about the nature and purpose of his reclusion.

Tang 唐 (618–907) dynasty poets were generally attracted to Tao’s representation of the literati ideal of retirement and were fond of drawing poetic material from the Tao Yuanming lore, but because of a pervasive sense of public duty and private responsibility few were willing to countenance his choice of lifestyle. The case of Tao Yuanming inspired lively dialogues between Tang writers on values proper to the literati class. Song dynasty writers began to probe both Tao’s works and his biographies to find his motivations for retirement and the philosophy underlying it, two issues that seldom troubled Tang readers but were consonant with the growing intellectual concern with the principle of things in the Song. It is also in this
period, when personal cultivation constituted a major intellectual concern and when many Song literati sought to establish values and self-identity independent of official life, that Tao’s life was to a great extent rewritten and his choice of reclusion re-evaluated.

The modern critic Gao Dapeng has argued that Tao Yuanming stands as the historical figure who most fully realized the ideal of reclusion for the Chinese elite. This begins to answer what makes Tao a unique figure capable of revealing various aspects of literati culture.

Whether in terms of nature, society, culture, or religion, the term yin 隱 [reclusion] carries its own historical tradition; so we can say that it had become the “collective unconscious” of the Chinese literati. It had become “internalized” as part of the intellectual’s personality . . . it was the most fundamental, most pervasive, and even highest value. . . . Yin was a moral ideal for the Chinese literati, as well as an aesthetic and an overarching ideal. In the long-term progress of history, it had become the common dream of the literati. Tao Qian bravely did what they wanted but did not dare to do. His appearance lent reality to their dream, which he expressed in the most beautiful and powerful way. Thus he provided a substitutional satisfaction in the “unconscious” of the literati and elicited a sympathetic response from their character, thoughts, or morality. Their dream was entrusted to Tao’s poetry, and thus Tao Qian became a heroic idol. The creation of this hero was tied largely to yin.19

By itself, the fact that Tao Yuanming was a recluse did not suffice to garner such admiration and sympathy from the literati; rather, it was the way in which he practiced and represented his life in reclusion that inspired their responses. Perhaps more than any other literary figure, Tao Yuanming reflected literati cultural values, aspirations, and fears; by engaging with the dead poet, a literatus could learn something about himself and his class. The idyllic side of Tao’s retirement and its many pleasures—wine, music, books, poetry writing, a sense of freedom, and leisure—drew many into dialogue with him. Tao’s other experiences in reclusion and the poems that came out of them contained lessons on dealing with material deprivation and frustrated ambition and maintaining personal integrity in the face of a tainted state and society; these concerns made it easy for many literati to identify with him. As the Southern Song 南宋 (1127–1279)

19. Gao Dapeng, Tao shi xinlun, 43–44.
literatus Xin Qiji powerfully put it, “I have to believe that this old gentleman never really died. Even today he remains awe-inspiring and alive. The concerns of our class have been the same since ancient times, as permanent as mountains and rivers.” In the process of identifying with Tao, readers often infused their concerns into him. He therefore could be made to represent a number of, sometimes conflicting, positions: he could symbolize transcendence of politics, as the Song critic Ye Mengde 葉夢得 (1077–1148) believed, or he could stand for loyalty to ruler, as the Song moralist philosopher Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) claimed. As Tao Yuanming became established as an icon, he also became part of the literati cultural capital that could be appropriated.

Nonliterary standards of judgment such as reclusion and personality were often discussed in parallel with or in relation to Tao Yuanming’s poetry. Each of these discursive categories has its own trajectory, which needs to be traced through time; a general period by period chronological survey of Tao’s reception would fail to treat these issues properly. In the chapters that follow, the categories of reclusion, personality, and poetry are organized into three distinct but related topical strands. The overall arrangement of each chapter is nonetheless linear so that developments in each of the three discursive fields are made clear, although the organization of each section within a chapter is determined by issues rather than straight chronology. We thereby gain not only insight into the structure and components of Tao’s historical reception but also a unique vantage point for understanding changing attitudes toward these three categories, which remained key intellectual or social concerns for the Chinese literati.

The second half of the volume deals with more specifically literary issues of Tao’s reception. I pay particular attention to the correspondence between judgments of his literary worth on one hand and cultural and aesthetic values on the other. In Chapter 4, which covers the first part of the narrative from the Six Dynasties to the Song, I track the process by which Tao, generally neglected as a poet during the first few centuries after his death, achieved canonical status.

Tao Yuanming became a major poetic model during the High Tang (712–56), whose poets saw Tao and his works as a refreshing alternative to the constraints of court poetics and culture. They avidly drew on his farmstead poetry for style, lines, themes, and structuring strategies. They were equally, if not more, fond of appropriating poetic material from an articulated repertoire of vivid and impressionistic stories provided by Tao’s early biographies. Even as Tang poets were ambivalent about his retirement, as Chapter 2 details, their fascination with it provided a context in which they could esteem his poetry.

Although Tao served as a poetic model for a number of Tang writers, it was in the Song that he achieved unparalleled prominence as a poet. Changes in reading practices and the redefinition of critical terminology led to new evaluations of his poetry, which now came to epitomize “evenness and blandness” (pingdan 平淡) and “naturalness” (ziran 自然), dominant aesthetic ideals of the Song. This late attribution of naturalness to Tao’s writings raises particularly interesting questions. Although the simplicity, directness, and lyrical nature of Tao’s farmstead poetry seem to render this quality self-evident, it was articulated as a defining attribute of his works only about six hundred years into his reception history. Naturalness was hardly unknown as an aesthetic term during Tao’s own time, since, for example, it was applied by a number of Six Dynasties writers to Xie Lingyun’s 謝靈運 (385–433) poetry, which has since come to exemplify the high craft and artifice for which the period is known. Modern scholars have noted the characterization of both Xie Lingyun and Tao Yuanming as “natural” by critics of different periods, but they explain it as a progression from error to truth: the Six Dynasties critics’ perception of Xie Lingyun’s poetry was simply inaccurate or, at best, must be understood as a relative assessment (in comparison to the works of other writers of the period, such as Yan Yanzhi’s).21 According to this line of thought, it is the Song critics who finally got it right: Tao Yuanming rightfully becomes the epitome of poetic naturalness, and Xie Lingyun turns into his antithesis. Even if these modern critics are right and Six Dynasties critics indeed misperceived Xie Lingyun’s poetry, it is still worth

21. See, e.g., Yuan Xingpei, Tao Yuanming yanjiu, 165.
asking why they did so. A more basic question is whether the term *ziran* carried the same meaning for Six Dynasties and Song critics. Historicizing the separate attributions of *ziran* to Tao and Xie not only reveals the changing conceptions of the term but also explains the watershed in Tao’s reception: his elevation in the Song to the embodiment of poetic naturalness made him at once worthy of imitation and inimitable. And despite, or even because of, this paradox, he was raised to the status of an absolute poetic model. The valorization of his poetry would parallel his rise as an exemplary character. The processes behind the many transformations of Tao Yuanming are the major concern of this book. Who were the main players? How did they transform Tao’s image? What were their motivations?

The Song dynasty reception of Tao warrants special attention not only because he was canonized during this period, but also because his collected works were first printed in the Song. Xiaofei Tian’s recent book, *Tao Yuanming and Manuscript Culture: The Record of a Dusty Table*, focuses on this special topic in Tao Yuanming’s reception history: the edition and transmission of his works. She argues that Tao’s writings, like all pre-Song literature, have come down to us through the filter of the literary values and ideological motivations of Song editors, on whose work later editions are based. Furthermore, the reduction in the number of variants coincides with an increasing stabilization of the composite image of Tao Yuanming, whose aspects are defined in broad strokes: for example, a lofty recluse who transcended the vulgar world; a Jin dynasty loyalist who withdrew in defiant protest; and a poet who loved a life of leisure, writing natural poetry that harmonized with his rustic lifestyle. Her work presents the intriguing possibility of a more nuanced and complex Tao Yuanming, whose poetry has been “simplified” by Northern Song editors, who often chose variants they believed to make more sense.\(^2\)

\(^2\) Tian counters that some of the rejected variants make better...

---

2. Xiaofei Tian, *Tao Yuanming and Manuscript Culture*, 11–12. It is worthwhile to emphasize that these editorial practices, although they influence the material aspect of the texts, are nonetheless hermeneutical decisions, constituting one kind of act in the construction of Tao Yuanming; interpretations of Tao and his texts even after their “fixing” represent another kind of construction that is also active and more widely participatory. Certain readings of Tao and his texts themselves become
Introduction

sense within the context of Six Dynasties literary conventions and references. Although “‘sense’ is historically contingent,” as Tian points out, the act of making sense is also historically conditioned.23 This is relevant to an understanding of the processes underlying Tao Yuanming’s reception: the meanings of Tao’s texts and Tao as text shift over the ages and reflect the values, interests, and vocabulary of different readers and periods.

After re-examining some textual variants, reorganizing a number of Tao’s poems into new categories, and re-reading some of Tao’s well-loved and often neglected poems, Tian concludes that Tao was “both much more embedded in the literary and philosophical interests of his age and much more innovative, playful, quirky, and wistful than his accepted image.”24 Tian’s project acknowledges the constructed nature of what we know about Tao Yuanming but at the same time reveals a faith in the ultimate knowability of a Tao Yuanming separate from his always historically contingent image. Thus, we are reminded that “the real Tao Yuanming, however, has long been lost.”25 The real trouble is even if by some miracle we had the original manuscript penned by the author, the “genuine” or “true” Tao Yuanming might be no more accessible. The concern of this book is not restoration but tracing a historical process of construction, and its intellectual trajectory therefore moves in a different direction. We have Tao’s texts as redacted and restored by later readers. What we do know are readers’ interpretations of Tao and his works; what we can infer are the motivations behind these readings; what we can learn are the changes in literati values and reading practices; and what we can understand are the mechanisms behind Tao’s reception and construction.

Since Tao Yuanming was canonized in the Song dynasty, post-Song developments in his reception have not received proper attention in the literature.26 The only previous book-length study that canonized and fixed, as we will see, and alternative readings (that we know of) are relegated to the sidelines.

23. Ibid., 12.
24. Ibid., 14.
25. Ibid., 109.
26. A noteworthy exception is Zhong Youmin’s Taoxue shihua, which surveys material from the Jin, Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties (pp. 75–177).
conceptualizes Tao’s historical reception makes this most curious statement: “After Su Shi, Tao Yuanming’s historical position was already basically established, hence without expending ink [on post-Song developments], the prominence of Tao Yuanming’s reputation is naturally lodged in the history of [Tao’s] literary influences and that of the interpretation and evaluation [of his works].” This statement suggests that there is no need to account for Tao’s prominent reputation after Su Shi, only to know it. Indeed, the history of Tao’s reception ends with the Song dynasty in this recent book. My discussion distinguishes between canonization and reception, a process that continues after a writer has achieved iconic stature and his works normative status as an embodiment of a culture’s values. In Chapter 5, I examine several significant hermeneutical approaches that emerged during Tao’s post-canonization period in late Imperial China, for developments in the history of Tao studies did not cease either with Tao’s canonization or with the increasing stabilization of Tao’s texts: whereas a macroscopic approach positioned Tao in a literary-historical process and a microscopic one involved close readings of his texts, a third applied evidential research methods to ascertain facts about Tao’s life and his works.

These approaches and their conclusions, to varying extents, constituted important reactions to the work of Song scholars. I argue that Ming and Qing readers challenged their Song predecessors more on methodological than on ideological grounds. In their readings of Tao Yuanming, two salient points remained constant: the same desire to know the true visage of Tao Yuanming and a faith in its knowability. Indeed, traditional readers operated with different reading assumptions and perceived different issues at stake than do today’s readers. Moreover, they engaged with the past for different reasons. In particular, they had an extraordinary vested interest in Tao Yuanming. I choose not to conclude simply that their efforts or claims to understand the “real” Tao Yuanming are problematic according to current literary notions and instead focus on the ways in which each of these new approaches to Tao’s poetry correlated

27. Li Jianfeng, Yuan qian Tao Yuanming jieshoushi, 12.
28. I am grateful for Xiaofei Tian’s comments on this point at the Third Annual Medieval Studies Workshop at Columbia University, December 10, 2005.
with larger intellectual trends of the time and on how identifying these correlations may enrich our understanding of both subjects.

Premodern readers produced interpretations of Tao and his poetry that have remained influential through the modern era. Three of the most authoritative late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century critics, Wang Guowei 王國維 (1877–1927), Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929), and Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881–1936), made major claims about Tao Yuanming, claims that still resonate with today’s readers. However ingenious or insightful they may appear, these modern readings are rooted in a fifteen-hundred-year-old discussion on Tao Yuanming. Recall Wang Guowei’s famous interpretation of Tao’s best-known couplet: “Plucking chrysanthemums by the eastern hedge, At a distance I catch sight of the southern mountain” 採菊東籬下, 悠然見南山; for Wang, this exemplifies “a state/world without the self” (wu wo zhi jing 無我之境), in which one “no longer knows which is the self and which is the object” and in which “objects are seen through the perspective of objects” (yi wu guan wu 以物觀物). This state, more difficult to create in poetry than one in which the self is present (you wo zhi jing 有我之境) and in which “objects are seen through the perspective of the self” (yi wo guan wu 以我觀物), is evidence of superior spirit, as Wang suggests: “When the ancients composed poetry, most described the state/world in which the self is present. This, however, does not mean that they were unable to write about the state/world without the self. Only the outstanding and brave poets could distinguish themselves in the regard.”

He continues: “The state/world without the self is achieved only in stillness; the state/world in which the self is present, in the passage from action to stillness. Thus the one is beautiful (youmei 優美), the other sublime (hongzhuang 宏壯).” It is not difficult to trace the influence of Western philosophy, in particular Kant’s paired notions of the beautiful and the sublime and Schopenhauer’s invocation of the Kantian sublime in new terms, on Wang’s

30. Ibid., 11.
The presence of Su Shi’s reading of the couplet, which Wang surely knew, is more subtle. (Tao Yuanming and Su Shi were, for Wang, two of the four greatest poets in Chinese history.) Su Shi’s interpretation involved an effort to settle a debate over variants of one character in the couplet. In certain Song editions of Tao’s works, 王望 (to gaze from afar) appears as a variant for 見 见 (to catch sight of). Su Shi was the first to argue passionately against 王 in favor of 见, positing the latter as key to the piece’s “inspired air” (shenqi 神气). For Su, the marvelous subtlety of the couplet lay in the happy coincidence of “scene” (jing 境) and “idea” (yi 意). Indeed 王 connotes a certain intentionality that runs counter to this coincidence, as critics following Su Shi’s reading

31. Citing from Wang Guowei’s Renjian cihua and Houloumeng pinglun, Huang Lin and Zhou Xingli have extrapolated the following correlation between Schopenhauer’s and Wang’s concepts: the state/world without the self (wu wo zhi jing 无我之境) is characterized by the beautiful (youmei 美) in which there is no hostile relationship between the object and one’s will and in which the distinction between object and self has disappeared. The state/world with the self present (you wo zhi jing 有我之境) is linked to the sublime (zhuangmei 壮美) in which, through the contemplation of the objects harmful to the will, one comprehends their Ideas and rises above one’s will and its interests to find pleasure in what is hostile to the will and, ultimately rest in an abandonment of willing itself (see Huang Lin et al., Renjian cihua, 26–30). Here is where Wang’s concepts of the sublime and the beautiful coincide. Wang wrote in his commentary on Houloumeng: “The pleasure [of the sublime (zhuangmei)] lies in making one forget the distinction between object and self; thus, there is in fact no means by which to distinguish it from the beautiful (youmei)” (Yu Xiaohong, Wang Guowei Houloumeng pinglun jian shuo 17–18, 31–37). An important note of caution is warranted here in accepting wholesale Huang and Zhou’s neat match between these pairs of concepts. Huang and Zhou have disregarded the change of terms in Wang’s writings. In Renjian cihua, Wang explicitly linked the concept of 无我之境 with youmei but substituted the term hongzhuang (translated above as the “sublime” but also meaning “grand and powerful”) for zhuangmei, which he used earlier in Houluomeng pinglun. An investigation of the full significations of this switch is beyond the scope of this study; suffice it to say that the neat correspondence becomes unbalanced if one agrees that in Wang’s discourse there seems to be a higher appreciation for the state/world without the self, more difficult to achieve, and the sublime (and its associations with the tragic), which poignantly sets into relief the process of the intellect transcending concerns for profit and harm and forgetting the distinction between self and object, which is the effect of beauty in art itself (see Yu Xiaohong, Wang Guowei Houloumeng pinglun jian shuo, 17–18, 31–37).

readily noted.\textsuperscript{33} Wang Guowei took Su Shi’s reading a step further, reducing even more the subjective presence of the poet, so that \textit{jian} (to catch sight of) functions like its homograph \textit{xian} (to appear). The new twist in Wang’s reading lies here: whereas for Su Shi, the self remains present in this transcendent state (the poet still “sees” the mountain) in which a mystical union between nature and poet has taken place, in Wang’s formulation the self is altogether taken out of the equation: “a state/world without the self” (\textit{wu wo zhi jing} 無我之境) and “objects are seen through the perspective of objects” (\textit{yi wu guan wu} 以物觀物).

Liang Qichao’s reading of Tao Yuanming is also fruitfully read in light of traditional accounts of the poet. The boldness of Liang’s depiction of Tao Yuanming as a transcendent for whom hunger and cold were but “very small problems” is quickly tempered by an understanding of the history behind the development of this image. For example, Ye Mengde went beyond the characterization of Tao as a lofty recluse in his biographies to claim that Tao altogether transcended politics. Ye’s argument represents a major contribution to the making of Tao the Transcendent: “Yuanming’s intent was to detach himself from worldly affairs and transcend the material world. How could men who cling to power have been sufficient to burden his mind?”\textsuperscript{34} Liang Qichao further mystified the poet by shifting the object of his transcendence from political affairs to material aspects of daily life and by asserting that Tao could find solace in Nature “no matter how much suffering his body endured.”\textsuperscript{35}

In a critique of the incomplete, even lopsided, perspective inherent in anthologies of selected works, Lu Xun took issue with a long tradition of mystifying Tao Yuanming. Lu argued that the focus on a few texts, namely “The Return” \textit{guī qu lái xié}, “Peach Blossom Spring” \textit{táo huā yuán jì}, and the well-known couplet on southern mountains and chrysanthemums by the eastern hedge, has left the poet “detached and transcendent (\textit{piaoyi} 飄逸) for too long.”\textsuperscript{36} He

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{33} See, e.g., the comments by Chao Buzhi, Cai Qi, and Zhong Xing in \textit{SWHP}, 167–69.
\textsuperscript{34} Ye Mengde, \textit{Shilin shihua}, 1: 434 (\textit{ZLHB}, 52).
\textsuperscript{35} Liang Qichao, \textit{Tao Yuanming}, 27–28.
\textsuperscript{36} Lu Xun, \textit{Lu Xun quan ji}, 6: 421–22.
\end{flushleft}
reminded readers that Tao also wrote lines that display the “fierce visage of the vajra guardian” (*jin’gang nu mu* 金刚怒目):

\[37\]

The twigs that Jingwei carries in her mouth
Are meant to fill the Azure Sea.
The battle-axe and shield of Xingtian’s dance
Show his valiant will is still alive.

To prove that Tao had fervor in him and that “he was not constantly detached,” Lu quoted the allusions to Jingwei, a mystical bird who continually carried twigs from the Western Mountain to fill up the Eastern Sea, where, as the daughter of the Fiery Emperor (Yandi 炎帝), she drowned; and to Xingtian, “who debated divinity with God (*di* 帝), who then cut off his head and buried it on Changyang Mountain. [Xingtian] then used his nipples as eyes and his navel as mouth and danced [for battle] with shield and battle-axe in hand.”\[39\] Lu Xun’s argument is distinctly reminiscent of Zhu Xi’s influential depiction of Tao Yuanming as an impassioned Moral Hero, the nature of whose character must not be confused with his “even and bland” writing style.\[40\] Following Zhu Xi, Zhen Dexiu 真德秀 (1178–1235) foregrounded Tao’s loyalty by referring to his use of the Jingwei story, signifying fervid determination, which Lu Xun cited to demonstrate the fiery side of Tao.\[41\] These modern readings, far from being isolated inventions, continue a dialogue that spanned over a millennium and a half.

This book hopes to offer those interested in Tao Yuanming and his works a historical perspective that may enrich the experience of his poetry. To examine the construction of Tao Yuanming is also to chart the development of hermeneutical practices and literati culture in traditional China. In reconstructing the history of Tao Yuanming’s reception, it is essential to identify the most crucial of

---

37. For the source of this phrase, see *Taiping guangji*, 174/1285.
38. TYMJJJ, 347. I have used James R. Hightower’s translation in *PTC*, 241.
41. See Zhen Dexiu, *Xishan xiansheng Zhen Wenzhong gong wenji*, 2a–b.
Introduction

these interpretive acts and to understand them in their historical context without attempting to assess their validity or mediating among them. Following a single individual and the works circulating under his name through many generations of readers is, I believe, an illuminating way to track changes in the interests and methods of readers. As we shall see, many meanings were assigned to Tao Yuanming and his works, and they were revised more than once over time. This book traces the many contingencies in his passage from early obscurity to sagehood and canonicity, a path that was neither inevitable nor miraculous.

My study of reception permits a re-reading of Tao Yuanming that transcends, without rejecting, the Song discourse that has been generally accepted as canonical by considering discourses that preceded and succeeded those of the Song. By examining how Tao Yuanming's readers constructed him transhistorically and intertextually across genres, which include history and biography, I avoid essentializing key terms introduced into Tao studies during the Song, such as ziran and pingdan, which constituted a hegemonic discourse in a way that appears to legitimate Song literary norms, ostensibly unchanged for nine hundred years. Considering works as evidence for reception, including some previously considered primary sources such as the early Tao Yuanming biographies, makes possible a reconsideration of a range of discourses, especially those of the Six Dynasties, Tang, Ming (1368–1644), and Qing (1644–1911), as contributors to both influential readings of and methods of reading Tao Yuanming. Moreover, these become key elements in raising critical consciousness that our current versions of Tao Yuanming are indeed versions, not the truth bequeathed to us by the Song or any other audience.

My selection of premodern sources for each thematic strand—reclusion, personality, and poetry—is guided by their illustration of major developments in each discursive category. This study neither attempts coverage of every single interesting articulation nor is interested in offering a descriptive catalogue of voices that comprise each period. Rather, it follows the shifts and turns in Tao's historical reception, critically examining influential and/or representative views. By examining various voices through the ages in a dialogue on Tao Yuanming, this volume delineates a cumulative process that
illuminates central issues animating premodern Chinese culture as a whole. Modern critical sources are used with a similar eye to the historical pedigree of certain scholarly views. My method is to trace and cite either the earliest or most influential formulations that have had a formative effect on current positions in Tao Yuanming studies, rather than to create an exhaustive list of interpretations. Finally, this book hopes to shed light on the construction and maintenance of the scholarly discourse that continues to reconstruct Tao even as it ostensibly preserves his work.