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Author(s): Wendy Swartz

Source: *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)*, Vol. 26 (Dec., 2004), pp. 77-97

Published by: [Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews \(CLEAR\)](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4140622>

Accessed: 11/09/2013 13:06

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Rewriting a Recluse: The Early Biographers' Construction of Tao Yuanming

Wendy Swartz
Columbia University

In his historical reception, Tao Yuanming (Tao Qian) has been appreciated as an aloof recluse, moral exemplar and fascinating character. His works aside, the most important sources for these characterizations are his earliest biographies, written during the Southern Dynasties and early Tang. The biographies in the *Song shu*, the *Nan shi* and the *Jin shu* and that by Xiao Tong have been taken for granted as a repository of facts and treated as primary sources. This article shows that they are products of their compilers' choices in the selection and presentation of materials and are thus interpretations of Tao's life.

For close to a millennium, Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (or Tao Qian 陶潛, *zi* Yuanliang 元亮, posthumous name Jingjie 靖節, 365?-427) has been widely considered one of China's greatest poets.¹ But his career as a cultural icon often referred to in literature and later depicted in painting began much earlier. Since his death, Tao Yuanming has been appreciated as an aloof recluse, a moral exemplar, and a fascinating character. Aside from his works, the most important direct or indirect sources for these characterizations and for the anecdotes that illustrate them are his earliest biographies, which place Tao Yuanming in the category of recluse.² In addition to providing accounts of his life and character, for many readers they served as the principal guide to reading his works. His biographies in the chapter on recluses (*yinyi* 隱逸) in official dynastic histories, 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), as well as "Tao Yuanming zhuan" 陶淵明傳 (Biography of Tao Yuanming) by Xiao Tong 蕭統 (501-531), with dates of composition

¹There remains some confusion regarding Tao Yuanming's original name and *zi*. Each of Tao's four early biographers gives a slightly different account of his name and *zi*; Zhu Ziqing 朱自清 (1898-1948) counts ten different accounts in premodern and early modern sources. That Tao's name was not ascertained and properly transmitted, according to Zhu, resulted from the facts that his clan was in decline and that his literary works were not especially valued during his time. See Zhu, *Zhu Ziqing gudian wenxue lunwen ji* 朱自清古典文學論文集 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1981), 2:457-8.

²The earliest surviving secondary account of Tao Yuanming's life is a dirge by his friend Yan Yanzhi 顏延之 (384-456), which will be discussed below. Although this dirge was easily accessible thanks to its inclusion in the *Wen xuan* 文選 (Selections of Refined Literature), compared to the four biographies later readers draw on this account very sparingly.

ranging from the late fifth to the early seventh centuries, frame his reclusion in historiographic terms.³ Given their influence on later readings of Tao and his works, these four documents deserve to be studied in their own right.

The four biographies have generally been used by readers as a repository of facts about Tao and treated as primary sources. Recently, however, a few scholars have begun to problematize this uncritical approach. Qi Yishou 齊益壽 reads the anecdotes in Tao Yuanming's biographies against Tao's own works and other relevant sources to assess their veracity.⁴ Wang Guoying [Wang Kuo-ying] 王國瓔 casts further doubt on much of the lore contained in the biographies, but more importantly she critically analyzes the formation of Tao Yuanming's image within the conventions of biographical writing in official histories.⁵ Many well-loved stories have not stood up to such critical analysis and turn out to have little basis in either Tao's own works or other contemporary sources, often contradicting one or the other, and are most likely the product of hearsay or fanciful imagination.

Regardless of the credibility of specific anecdotes, it is clear that the biographies are the products of their compilers' choices in the selection and presentation of materials and are thus interpretations of Tao's life. To be sure, the four biographies share much of the same content, but a process of addition and deletion of materials yields very different portraits. In the following discussion, each of the four texts is analyzed separately and brought into comparison to probe the nature, means, contexts and motivations of *construction* in the biographers' portrayals, which serves as an important step toward understanding how later conceptions of Tao were shaped. Understanding these biographies as distinct documents requires close attention to differences among them and to the choices involved in their production. Tao's biography in the *Song shu*, compiled by Shen Yue 沈約 (441-513) in 488, served as the basis for the independent account by Xiao Tong 蕭統 (501-531), which the latter included in his edition of *Tao*

³ Tao Yuanming's biography in *Lianshe Gaoxian zhuan* 蓮社高賢傳 (Biographies of the High Worthies of the Lotus Society, which includes an account of Tao's life in an appendix devoted to the biographies of three "worthies" who did not join the society) is excluded here not on the grounds of its uncertain authorship, but on account of the probably late date of its composition. Contrary to the traditional dating of these biographies to the Southern Dynasties, Tang Yongtong 湯用彤 dates them to sometime after the mid-Tang, since the story of Huiyuan and the eighteen worthies forming the White Lotus Society circulated only after the mid-Tang. See Tang, *Han Wei Liang Jin Nanbeichao fojiao shi* 漢魏兩晉南北朝佛教史 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1997), 256-61.

⁴ Qi Yishou, "Lun shizhuan zhong de Tao Yuanming shiji ji xingxiang" 論史傳中的陶淵明事跡及形象, in *Zheng Yinbai Xiansheng bashi shouqing lunwen ji* 鄭因百先生八十壽慶論文集 (Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1985), 109-159.

⁵ Wang Guoying, "Shizhuan zhong de Tao Yuanming" 史傳中的陶淵明, *Taida Zhongwen xuebao* 12 (May 2000): 193-228. Wang shows how Tao was made to fit a typology by reading his *Song shu* biography against the depiction of other recluses in the same chapter and concludes that the historian molded Tao's portrait to conform with the overall idea of the recluse as presented in the chapter. In addition, she explains the formulation of Tao's exemplary moral character in the biographies in terms of historiography's larger purpose as a source of moral lessons.

Yuanming ji 陶淵明集 (Collected Works of Tao Yuanming), and for the versions in the *Nan shi*, compiled by Li Yanshou 李延壽 between 643 and 659, and in the *Jin shu*, completed in 648 under the direction of Fang Xuanling 房玄齡 (578-648).

Reclusion as Ideal and Practice

All of the biographies present Tao Yuanming in the framework of reclusion, which in medieval China involved a complex set of ideas and practices.⁶ Therefore a few remarks on the concept will precede an analysis of the biographies. A good general definition of a recluse is provided by Frederick Mote:

in Chinese society... [terms designating recluses] signified withdrawal from the active public life in the service of society that Confucian ethics prescribed as the most suitable course for all whose abilities, cultivation, and learning qualified them for it. To bar one's gates and earn one's own living without reliance on the emolument of office, to display a lack of regard for the social status which could be attained only by entering officialdom, and to devote one's life to self-cultivation, scholarship or artistic pursuits made one a recluse.⁷

A literatus' withdrawal from or decline of office constituted the dominant mode of reclusion, although, as Mote's definition suggests, motivations differed from case to case. Both classical and modern discussions of reclusion have drawn distinctions among recluses on the basis of motivations and circumstances. Early classifications by Chinese historians include: recluses who lived in obscurity in search of an ideal; those who retired to preserve their integrity; those who retreated in order to distance themselves from harm; those who withdrew out of protest against an unrighteous government; those who withdrew for "not having met with their time" (*bu yu shi* 不遇

⁶For studies that extensively discuss reclusion in medieval China, see Alan Berkowitz, *Patterns of Disengagement: The Practice and Portrayal of Reclusion in Medieval China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); Wolfgang Bauer, "The Hidden Hero: Creation and Disintegration of the Ideal of Eremitism," in *Individualism and Holism: Studies in Confucian and Taoist Values*, ed. Donald Munro (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1985), 157-97; Wang Yao 王瑤, "Lun xiqi yinyi zhi feng," in *Zhonggu wenxue shilun* 中古文學史論 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1998), 188-210; and Wang Wenjin 王文進, *Shiyin yu Zhongguo wenxue: Liuchao pian* 士隱與中國文學—六朝篇 (Taipei: Taiwan shudian, 1999). Other modern studies of reclusion in traditional China include Aat Vervoorn, *Men of the Cliffs and Caves: The Development of the Chinese Eremitic Tradition to the End of the Han Dynasty* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1990); Li Chi, "The Changing Concept of the Recluse in Chinese Literature," *HJAS* 24 (1962-63): 234-47; A.R. Davis, "The Narrow Lane: Some Observations on the Recluse in Traditional Chinese Society." The Twelfth George Ernest Morrison Lecture in Ethnology (Canberra: Australian National University, 1959); and Zhang Zhongmou 張仲謀, *Jianji yu dushan: gudai shidafu chushi xinli pouxi* 兼濟與獨善—古代士大夫處世心理剖析 (Beijing: Dongfang chubanshe, 1998).

⁷Mote, "Confucian Eremitism in the Yüan Period," in *The Confucian Persuasion*, ed. Arthur Wright (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960), 203.

時); and those who followed their innate nature.⁸ These various types of motivations are not mutually exclusive. Modern studies on reclusion have refined these categories and sorted out classes of Confucian, Daoist and Buddhist orientation.⁹

Another system of classification based on the location of the recluse vis-à-vis society was introduced by medieval writers. Categories under this system include Recluse at Court (*Chao yin* 朝隱), Recluse in the City (*Shi yin* 市隱), and hermit hiding in the mountains or recluse living by the fields and gardens. Reclusion within the court remained a subordinate form of reclusion first made possible by the intellectual climate of the late Han 漢 (206 BCE-220 CE), Wei 魏 (220-265), and Jin 晉 (265-420) dynasties, which prized the “attainment of intent” (*deyi* 得意). As Wang Yao succinctly paraphrases this attitude, “So long as one attains the intent of [reclusion], it is permissible to practice reclusion at court or in the city. One need not hide among the mountains and lakes.”¹⁰ This type of reclusion complicates the concept without undermining its dominant mode, which consists in not holding office. The variety of classifications, based either on motivation or physical location, and the number of categories within each system, render plain the pervasiveness and complexity of the practice in medieval China.

Reclusion was not merely a category used by historians for classifying the dead, but also named a specific type of social interaction in which a literatus engaged while alive. In Six Dynasties culture, reclusion was a positively valued and in some cases highly sociable practice that continued to evolve.¹¹ While Aat Vervoorn has argued that major facets of the Chinese eremitic tradition were established by the end of the Han dynasty,¹² according to Alan Berkowitz, “it was during the Six Dynasties that the building blocks of reclusion in China--the individuals whose lives denote the substance of it--came to form the framework that characterized reclusion throughout premodern China.”¹³ Tao Yuanming was one of these individuals and his practice of reclusion considerably contributed to the fabric of this tradition.

⁸ See the introductions to the “Biographies of Recluses” in the *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 (History of the Latter Han) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965), 83/2755-7, and the *Nan shi* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 75/1855-6; and the historian’s comment appended to the “Biographies of Recluses” in the *Song shu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 93/2297.

⁹ See Berkowitz, *Patterns of Disengagement*, 17-63, 207-9; Mote, “Confucian Eremitism in the Yüan Period,” 203-9; and Zhang Liwei 張立偉, *Gui qu lai xi: yinyi de wenhua toushi* 歸去來兮: 隱逸的文化透視 (Beijing: Sanlian shuju, 1995), 1-75.

¹⁰ Wang Yao, *Zhonggu wenxue shilun*, 201.

¹¹ Certain representatives of what Ishikawa Tadahisa 石川忠久 has termed the “Kuaiji 會稽 clique,” such as Xie An 謝安 (320-385), Xu Xun 許詢 (fl. ca. 358) and Zhi Dun 支遁 (314-366), practiced reclusion during either parts of their lives or throughout. Members of the Kuaiji clique gathered together to engage in Pure Conversation (*Qingtán* 清談), to enjoy artistic pleasures, as well as to go on mountain outings, of which the most famous was the Orchid Pavilion gathering in 353. See Berkowitz, *Patterns of Disengagement*, 143.

¹² See Vervoorn, *Men of the Cliffs and Caves*, 236-7.

¹³ Berkowitz, *Patterns of Disengagement*, 14.

Four Portraits

As they turned information about his life and reclusion into written accounts, Tao Yuanming's biographers worked within certain conventions of Chinese historiography. As Denis Twitchett has argued, biography in China "remained the exploration of a man's actions in some special function, rather than the presentation of a fully articulated picture of the individual in the round."¹⁴ In biographies in official histories, the reader should not expect to find a life documented in any chronological or comprehensive sense. Writers of biographies beginning with Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145-ca. 86 BCE) and Ban Gu 班固 (32-92) tended to choose one or two characteristics, purposefully omitting others, to define the subject's personality. As one historian recently observed, the most common form of portraiture in the *Shi ji* 史記 (Records of the Grand Historian) is one in which Sima Qian "narrates one or two key scenes from the subject's life, thereby depicting a certain significant trait of the subject's personality. This resembles half-body portraiture in which the image is incomplete, but his personality [as we know it] is nonetheless vividly conveyed."¹⁵ The specific traits highlighted are usually tied to the individual's type, if any. Part of the biography section of dynastic histories is organized by categories of people (e.g. scholars, flatterers, abusive officials, recluses) and typology governs to a great extent the shape of the biographies under a given heading.¹⁶ In the "Yinyi zhuan" 隱逸傳 (Biographies of Recluses) in the *Song shu*, Shen Yue follows the established method of character depiction by concentrating first of all on the few characteristics and actions that define the subjects of the chapter as recluses.

Tao Yuanming's biography represents the story of a model recluse insofar as it displays many characteristics and preferences typical of recluses in the chapter.¹⁷ The

¹⁴ D.C. Twitchett, "Chinese Biographical Writing," in *Historians of China and Japan*, ed. W.G. Beasley and E.G. Pulleyblank (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 110.

¹⁵ Chen Lanchun 陳蘭村 et al., ed., *Zhongguo zhuanji wenxue fazhan shi* 中國傳記文學發展史 (Beijing: Yuwen chubanshe, 1999), 77. Li Xiangnian 李祥年 makes a similar argument, though he credits Ban Gu rather than Sima Qian with originating the practice of selecting one or two characteristics to manifest the "defining" aspects of the subject's personality. Li, *Han Wei Liuchao zhuanji wenxue shi gao* 漢魏六朝傳記文學史稿 (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 1995), 84.

¹⁶ Wang Guoying argues in a recent study of the biographers' depiction of Tao Yuanming that Tao is made to fit a typology. Using the "Biographies of Recluses" in the *Song shu* as an example, Wang reads Tao's biography in comparison with other biographies in the same chapter and identifies shared characteristics. She concludes that the historian styled Tao's portrait in accordance with the overall definition of the recluse in the chapter. See Wang, "Shizhuan zhong de Tao Yuanming," 216-20.

¹⁷ Wang Guoying has noted how the characterization of Tao Yuanming in the *Song shu* shares features ascribed to other recluses in the chapter, including repeated decline of office, transcendence of the common, disregard for fame and profit and an independent will. See Wang, "Shizhuan zhong de Tao Yuanming." To this list of shared features one might add a few more common to many of these biographies: love of nature, fondness for an art such as letters, music or calligraphy, and material self-sufficiency.

first part of the biography relates anecdotes of Tao's recluse-like behavior and quotes the works in which Tao Yuanming most clearly represented himself as a recluse, "Wuliu Xiansheng zhuan" 五柳先生傳 (Biography of the Master of Five Willows) and "Guiqu laixi ci" 歸去來兮辭 (The Return). In this section we find also what Wolfgang Bauer has called a recluse's "negative career," that is, the official positions offered to Tao and how many times he rejected or resigned from them.¹⁸ Many stories well-loved in later tradition, translated below, fill the remainder of the first section. Shen Yue's collection of anecdotes which predominantly concern Tao's wine-drinking yields a picture of an aloof, eccentric recluse.

1. Tao once said to relatives and friends, "I just wish to sing and play the zither to support my three-path existence.¹⁹ Is this possible?" Someone in charge heard of this and made him the Magistrate of Pengze. [Once in office,] Tao asked his clerks to plant all of the government-owned fields with *shu* 秫 [glutinous rice from which wine could be made]. His wife and sons pleaded with him to plant *jing* 秠 [non-glutinous rice]. Consequently, he had 2 *qing* 頃 and 50 *mou* 畝 of land planted with *shu* and 50 *mou* planted with *jing*.²⁰
2. The commandery sent a local inspector [to Tao's district]. District clerks informed Tao that he should greet the inspector with a bound girdle [proper decorum]. Tao Qian sighed and said, "I cannot bend at the waist to a petty country bumpkin for five bushels of rice." On the same day, he untied the ribbon on his official seal and resigned.
3. Wang Hong 王弘, Regional Inspector of Jiangzhou 江州, wanted to make Tao's acquaintance but had been unsuccessful. Tao Qian once went to Mount Lu. Wang Hong had requested that Tao Qian's old friend Pang Tongzhi 龐通之 bring some wine to a half-way point [between Tao's home and Mount Lu], Lili 栗里, and invite Tao [for a drink]. Tao Qian, who had a leg ailment, asked an attendant (*mensheng* 門生) and two of his sons to carry him in a sedan chair.²¹ Once he arrived, he was delighted and drank with [Pang Tongzhi]. Shortly after, Wang Hong arrived and Tao cast no blame on either.²²

¹⁸ Bauer, "The Hidden Hero," 168.

¹⁹ The term "three paths," which refers to the life of a withdrawn scholar, comes from the story of Jiang Xu 蔣詡, who retired from office after Wang Mang's 王莽 (r. 9-23) usurpation. Jiang did not leave the vicinity of his hut and associated only with two like-minded friends, Yang Zhong 羊仲 and Qiu Zhong 求仲, who would stroll with Jiang along the three paths leading to his hut. On the source of the story, see A.R. Davis, *T'ao Yüan-ming: His Works and Their Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 2:155, 178.

²⁰ One *qing* equals one hundred *mou*. In the Six Dynasties, one *qing* equalled approximately 12.5 acres.

²¹ I have translated *mensheng* as attendant, following Tang Changru's 唐長孺 explanation of the usage of this term in the Southern Dynasties: it referred to a dependent living in one's household, functioning in the capacity of an attendant. This particular usage should not be confused with the term's later denotation--a disciple who inherits a scholastic heritage. See Tang, *Wei Jin Nanbeichao shi luncong xubian* 魏晉南北朝史論叢編 (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1959), 102.

²² In other words, Tao was not upset at the deception involved in staging the meeting.

4. When Yan Yanzhi 顏延之 (384-456) was made [Governor of] Shi'an 始安 Commandery, he passed through [Xunyang 尋陽]. He visited Tao Qian every day and during each visit they would without fail drink themselves into a stupor. Before he left [for his new post], Yan left Tao Qian with 20,000 cash. Tao Qian, in turn, gave all of the money to a wine shop [as credit], with which he obtained wine over time.
5. One Double Ninth day, Tao had no wine [with which to celebrate], so he went outside and sat for a long time among the chrysanthemums beside his house. Just then, some wine Wang Hong had sent arrived and so he drank it on the spot. After getting drunk, he went back inside.
6. Tao Qian had no musical knowledge, but possessed a plain zither with no strings. Each time he became intoxicated by wine, he would strum the zither so as to lodge his feelings (*ji qi yi* 寄其意).
7. When either noble or common men came to visit, Tao Qian would bring out wine if he happened to have some. If Qian became drunk first, he would say to his guests, "I am drunk and wish to sleep now. You may leave."
8. A military officer from the commandery visited Tao Qian when the latter had just finished warming his wine. Tao untied his head cloth to strain the wine. Once done, he tied the cloth back onto his head.²³

Shen Yue concludes the first part of the biography by saying, "Such were his genuineness and candor" 其真率如此.²⁴ These two qualities, whose initial contexts are wine-related events, would become a permanent part of Tao's image.

While the majority of the anecdotes that Shen Yue includes involve Tao's drinking episodes or fondness for wine and show proper recluse decorum, Tao's image in his *Song shu* biography cannot be said to be one-dimensional. The argument made by a modern scholar of Chinese biographical writings that subjects of dynastic biographies are usually drawn as one-dimensional figures is a point best understood in general terms.²⁵ Shen Yue concludes Tao Yuanming's biography with an argument for Tao's loyalty toward the Jin dynasty and emphasis on his role as a father, counterbalancing the quirky and aloof behavior of the recluse. On Tao's loyalist position,²⁶ Shen Yue writes:

²³ *Song shu*, 93/2286-290. All English translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

²⁴ *Song shu*, 93/2288.

²⁵ See Li Xiangnian, *Han Wei Liuchao zhuanji wenxue shi gao*, 185.

²⁶ Shen Yue's interpretation of Tao's reclusion as a loyalist reaction may have been partly inspired by Yan Yanzhi's "Tao zhengshi lei" 陶徵士誄 (Dirge for the Summoned Scholar Tao), which, though written in the Liu Song dynasty, classifies Tao Yuanming as a Jin, rather than a Liu Song, summoned scholar. It is suggestive that Yan perhaps believed that Tao's retirement and refusal to serve after 405, the year that marks Liu Yu's ascendancy but predates his usurpation by 15 years, indicated a resistance to the new figure of power. See Yan Yanzhi, "Tao zhengshi lei," in *Quan*

Because his great-grandfather was a minister under the Jin, Tao felt that it would be dishonorable to serve the succeeding dynasty. Since the beginning of Gaozu's 高祖 [Liu Yu 劉裕 (r. 420-422), the founding ruler of the Liu Song dynasty] ascendancy toward kingship, he refused to serve again. He dated all of his writings with the month and year. Works written before the Yixi 義熙 reign period (405-418) are designated with Jin reign titles, but those written from the Yongchu 永初 reign period (420-422) on are merely marked by cyclical signs (*jiazi* 甲子).²⁷

According to Shen Yue, refusal to acknowledge the new dynasty by using its reign titles is additional proof of Tao's loyalty to the Jin. Shen Yue's account of Tao Yuanming's position-taking harks back to his introduction to the chapter and the historian's comment appended to the chapter, in which he defines the men he has included as worthies (*xianren* 賢人) who retired in the absence of a sagely ruler and whose stories can "dissuade against greed for success and transform the ordinary spirit" (*jitan lisu* 激貪厲俗).²⁸ Shen Yue describes his recluses as

men who have gone their own way, possessing an unbendable nature. Their intent could not be broken nor their *dao* subdued. They did not avail themselves of a [recluse's] reputation in hopes of advancement. If they had encountered a ruler who showed confidence in them, or had the fortune of meeting their time, then why would they allow their hearts to drift in the rivers and seas, choosing to find repose in the hills and bushes? Undoubtedly, it is so since there was no other choice.²⁹

Shen Yue thus concludes his chapter with the certainty that these recluses would have served the state under good times. Withdrawal was traditionally conceived as a political position-taking, hardly meaningful except as defined against government service. Nonetheless, it was not invariably interpreted as a reaction to a specific course of events or figure in power but often read as a properly Confucian response to the general political atmosphere. Whether Tao's withdrawal belongs to the former or latter type of response is the subject of much later debate in Tao Yuanming studies. It should be noted that one of the key bases for Shen Yue's affirmation of Tao's loyalty, his claim concerning Tao's two methods of dating poems, is inconsistent with Tao's extant collection of poems and prose. Of the fourteen dated poems and prose pieces, only one, "Ji Chengshi mei wen" 祭程氏妹文 (In Sacrifice for My Sister Madame Cheng [407]), is designated with the appropriate Jin reign title. However, this piece was written during, not before, the Yixi reign period. The other thirteen texts, which are marked by cyclical signs, were written before, during and after the Yixi reign period (405-418). In other words, Tao began dating his works with cyclical signs well before the collapse of Jin in 420, and even before Liu Yu's rise to power in 405. Shen Yue's assertion that using

Song wen 全宋文 in *Quan Shanggu Sandai Qin Han Sanguo Liuchao wen* 全上古三代秦漢三國六朝文 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1958), 38/2646b. Cited hereafter as *Quan wen*.

²⁷ *Song shu*, 93/2288-9.

²⁸ *Song shu*, 93/2275-6.

²⁹ *Song shu*, 93/2297.

cyclical signs was a sign of protest against the new dynasty is thus untenable. But more importantly, this claim of loyalty surreptitiously displayed through dating methods became so well-accepted that editors and critics from the Song dynasty onwards found themselves obliged to correct the discrepancy in Shen Yue's argument with much argumentation and proof.³⁰

In addition to Tao's position within the ruler-subject relationship, Shen Yue addresses another of Tao's Confucian roles by quoting in full two texts in which Tao discusses his role as a father, "Yu zi Yan deng shu" 與子儼等疏 (To My Sons, Yan and the Others) and "Ming zi" 命子 (On Naming My Son). The former was written as a type of "instruction" (*xunjie* 訓戒), in which Tao contemplates his imminent death, reflects on his own "unyielding personality" and lack of *savoir-faire* (which explain why he was not fit for office and thus withdrew),³¹ expresses sadness over allowing his sons to experience hunger and cold, and through several historical lessons instructs his sons to love one another. While this text dates to the last years of Tao's life and is set against the background of his own death, "On Naming My Son" is an early set of poems celebrating the birth of his first son, and it thus reveals a different perspective on his role and expectations as a father. In the poems, Tao traces his ancestry from the Xia and Shang dynasties through his great-grandfather, Tao Kan 陶侃 (259-334), to his father. With these illustrious predecessors as models, Tao laments his own unworthiness while hoping that his son will become an able man. Whether from the viewpoint of an aging father or a new parent, these texts show the same heart-felt concern for his sons. Their function in Tao Yuanming's biography is to show the more human side of the recluse. Wang Guoying rightly points out that on the sole basis of the four texts cited by Shen Yue we can see that Tao Yuanming is presented as both recluse and father, with two texts illustrating each role.³² One might add that Shen Yue's decision to include "On Naming My Son" reflects also the high regard for clan and genealogy during the Southern Dynasties.

The formulation of Tao's exemplary moral character through an emphasis on his roles as a loyal recluse and benevolent father in the *Song shu* is consistent with the conceptual underpinnings of Chinese historiography. Wang Guoying argues for the need to read Tao's biography in light of the historian's larger purpose of using history as a source of moral lessons.³³ Like history in general, biography tended to serve a didactic function and lives often became morality lessons. The moral point of the *Song*

³⁰ For discussions of this question of *jiazi* dating, see Zhu Ziqing, "Tao Yuanming nianpu zhong de wenti" 陶淵明年譜中的問題, in *Zhu Ziqing gudian wenxue lunwen ji*, 2:460-5; and Wendy Swartz, "Reclusion, Personality and Poetry: Tao Yuanming's Reception in the Chinese Literary Tradition" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2003), 79-82.

³¹ Tao Yuanming clearly posits his innate nature as a reason for his withdrawal: "My nature is unyielding, my talent feeble; to many things I am opposed. When I weighed up my position, I knew that I should inevitably incur wordly misfortune. So I made an effort to withdraw from the world..." I have used A.R. Davis' translation from his *Tao Yuan-ming: His Works and Their Meaning*, 1:228.

³² Wang Guoying, "Shizhuan zhong de Tao Yuanming," 204.

³³ Wang Guoying, "Shizhuan zhong de Tao Yuanming," 221-26.

shu biography, however, is at times overshadowed by the number of impressionistic stories about Tao's winebibbing. While in some contexts drinking could be interpreted as a form of escape with political significance, this collection of anecdotes simply yields an idiosyncratic and eccentric character to be savored.

As the earliest official biography of Tao Yuanming, Shen Yue's version would serve as the basis for the three later versions and it thus functions as a type of original from which the others borrow and mutate. Xiao Tong's biography, though technically not an official biography, was traditionally used in a way no different from the three official ones, perhaps because its author was the Crown Prince of the Liang 梁 dynasty (502-557). That Xiao Tong wrote a version of Tao's biography not long after Shen Yue, who had been Xiao's Junior Tutor (*shaofu* 少傅), suggests that he may have been dissatisfied with Shen Yue's version. Moreover, Xiao is not known to have written a biography of anyone else, indicating a concern for the proper transmission of Tao's life. The emphasis of the new version of Tao Yuanming lies in his principled adherence to reclusion rather than his eccentricity and candor. In this regard, Xiao Tong would appear to follow the lead of Yan Yanzhi, who portrayed his friend Tao Yuanming as a resolute recluse in "Tao zhengshi lei" 陶徵士諫 (Dirge for Summoned Scholar Tao). In the opening passage of this dirge, Yan had praised the "resolute conduct" and "exalted principles" of past recluses and lamented that few could continue the great lineage of Chao Fu 巢夫 and Bo Yi 伯夷 since recluses in his own time had become irresolute: "though the paths are in the same dust, there are many who stop along the way and change their tracks."³⁴ Implicitly Tao Yuanming is the model recluse who did not change his course. Xiao Tong, who knew the dirge and included it in the *Wen xuan* 文選 (Selections of Refined Literature), makes a similar reading of Tao's reclusion, and the new anecdotes that he includes in Tao's biography are, not coincidentally, unrelated to Tao Yuanming's wine-drinking.

1. The Regional Inspector of Jiangzhou, Tan Daoji 檀道濟 (served 426-?), went to visit Tao, who was lying in bed, appearing emaciated from several days of hunger. Daoji said to him, "The rule of thumb for worthy men taking office is that when the Way (*Dao* 道) is absent from the times, one should go into reclusion; but when the Way prevails, one should serve. You are living in an enlightened era, so why impose such hardships upon yourself?" Tao replied, "How could I, Qian, dare to be compared to the worthies? It is simply that my ambition is inadequate." Daoji offered some grain and meat, but [Tao] refused the gift with a wave of his hand.

2. Not wishing to tire his family, Tao moved alone [to Pengze to assume his new post]. He sent a servant boy to his sons. In a letter to them he wrote: "In light of your daily expenditures, it is difficult to be self-sufficient. Today I am sending home this servant to help you with farm chores. He too is the son of someone, so you should treat him well."

³⁴ Yan, "Tao zhengshi lei," in *Quan Song wen* in *Quan Wen*, 38/2646b.

3. The Regional Inspector [of Jiangzhou from 416 to 417] Tan Shao 檀韶 with great effort convinced [Zhou] Xuzhi 周續之 to come out of reclusion to lecture on the Rites and collate texts with the scholars Zu Qi 祖企 and Xie Jingyi 謝景夷 just north of the city [of Xunyang].³⁵ The Regional Inspector's residence they stayed in was near the cavalry stables. This is why Yuanming wrote in a poem to the three:

Master Zhou transmits Confucius' teachings
Xie and Zu follow like an echo.
A stable is no proper study room,
But your texts you carefully collate there.³⁶

周生述孔業，
祖謝響然臻。
馬隊非講肆，
校書亦已勤。³⁷

Let us analyze the significance of these stories. Building on Shen Yue's presentation of Tao Yuanming's role as a father, the second story strengthens the image of Tao as a benevolent father figure who wants care extended even to someone else's son living in his house. The first and third show Tao's resolution to live in reclusion as well as his principled nature. The message of the third story is not as straightforward as the first and requires the knowledge of the last lines of Tao's poem:

These are those this old man loves,
He hopes that you might be his neighbors.
This lesson he would like to teach you:
Come here with me beside the River Ying.

老夫有所愛，
思與爾為鄰。
願言謝諸子，
從我潁水濱。³⁸

The Ying River is where the legendary Xu You 許由 washed his ears after hearing Emperor Yao's offer to make him the Chief of the Nine Provinces,³⁹ and is

³⁵ Zhou Xuzhi (377-423) was known, along with Tao Yuanming and Liu Yimin 劉遺民, as one of the "three recluses of Xunyang." See his biography in *Song shu*, 93/2280-1. There is no biographical information on Zu Qi or Xie Jingyi.

³⁶ I have used James R. Hightower's translation from his *The Poetry of T'ao Ch'ien* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 59. I have emended all romanization in borrowed translations, here and elsewhere, from Wade-Giles to *Hanyu pinyin*. Xiao Tong has cited the fourth and sixth couplets of the poem.

³⁷ Xiao Tong, "Tao Yuanming zhuan" 陶淵明傳, in *Quan Liang wen in Quan wen*, 20/3068b-3069a.

³⁸ Gong Bin 龔斌, ed., *Tao Yuanming ji jiaojian* 陶淵明集校箋 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1999), 90. Trans. Hightower, *The Poetry of T'ao Ch'ien*, 59.

³⁹ See Huangfu Mi 皇甫謐, *Gaoshi zhuan* 高士傳, SBBY ed., 1.3a.

representative of an uncompromising attitude toward reclusion. With this reference, Tao Yuanming attempts to convince his younger friends to leave office and return to their original ideals.

These three new stories differ from Shen Yue's collection of anecdotes in that they demonstrate the possibility of portraying the recluse apart from his wine-drinking and aloofness. To be sure, the basis of Xiao Tong's version is Shen Yue's biography of Tao, which means that the majority of the anecdotes involve wine. But as if uncomfortable with the intimate association of Tao Yuanming with wine, Xiao Tong writes in the *Preface to Tao Yuanming ji*, in all likelihood intended to be read alongside the biography, that "there are those who have doubts about Tao Yuanming's poetry, since wine is present in each poem. I however think that his true intentions do not lie in wine; rather he made his mark through wine."⁴⁰ Although regular wine-drinking was rarely viewed pejoratively as a form of alcoholism by Chinese literati, and had become a defining part of the elite culture of the Wei and Jin dynasties, Xiao Tong's defense elevates Tao's drinking to the level of an outlet for suppressed emotions, much like the use of wine associated with Ruan Ji 阮籍 (210-263).⁴¹

Xiao's *Preface* moreover argues that Tao Yuanming's writings are useful for teaching how "to disavow rank and salary." After reading his writings, Xiao tells us, "there is no need to bother with climbing Mounts Tai and Hua and studying Laozi" to learn the art of disavowing office.⁴² It is in the context of an image of a resolute, not dissolute, recluse that we must interpret the new information found in Xiao Tong's version of the biography regarding Tao Yuanming's wife: "His wife, née Zhai, sharing the same purpose and bent, was likewise able to deal with hardship" 其妻翟氏, 亦能安勤苦, 與其同志.⁴³ Although this contradicts Tao Yuanming's own description of his wife, with which Xiao Tong must have been familiar ("In my house there is no wife of [Lao] Lai" 室無萊婦),⁴⁴ the existence of a supportive wife sharing the same ideals would set

⁴⁰ Xiao Tong, "Tao Yuanming ji xu" 陶淵明集序, in *Quan Liang wen* in *Quan wen*, 20/3067a.

⁴¹ According to Wang Yao, by the Wei Dynasty drinking had become a means for the gentry to escape from cruel political reality. The transition from the Wei to the Jin was marked by great instability, during which expressions of opinion or position-taking were terribly unsafe. Drinking and drunkenness were used most notably by the Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove as a defensive guise as well as anesthesia for their sorrow over the contemporary state of affairs. See Wang, *Zhonggu wenxue shilun*, 172-180.

Yuan Xingpei 袁行霈 compares Ruan Ji's wine consumption to Tao's and argues that the former carries many traces of unspeakable sorrow while the latter contains a certain joy. According to Yuan, both the stimulating and numbing effects of wine gave access to a transcendent, philosophical state which obscures the distinction between the world of things and the subject. See Yuan, *Tao Yuanming yanjiu* 陶淵明研究 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1997), 113-4.

⁴² Xiao Tong, "Tao Yuanming ji xu," in *Quan Liang wen* in *Quan wen*, 20/3067a.

⁴³ Xiao Tong, "Tao Yuanming zhuan," in *Quan Liang wen* in *Quan wen*, 20/3069a.

⁴⁴ The line is from "To My Sons, Yan and the Others." Gong Bin, ed., *Tao Yuanming ji jiaojian*, 441. The translation is by A.R. Davis. Davis, *T'ao Yüan-ming*, 1:228. The wife of Lao Laizi persuaded her husband to decline an offer to serve under the King of Chu and to remain in reclusion. See Liu Xiang 劉向, *Lienü zhuan* 烈女傳, SBBY ed., 2.9b-10a.

into relief the picture of a recluse with great resolve, along the lines of portraits of such famous recluses as Lao Lai 老萊 and Qian Lou 黔婁, both of whom happen to figure in Tao's writings via their extraordinary wives.⁴⁵

Xiao Tong's version of Tao Yuanming is more one-dimensional than Shen Yue's; it leaves us with a more clearly defined and unified picture of a recluse. His selection of Tao's poems in the *Wen xuan* offers further enlightenment. The nine works Xiao Tong chose to include in the *Wen xuan* generally concern either Tao's intention to retire or aspects of his actual retirement.⁴⁶ The works Xiao Tong excluded from the anthology are equally revealing. Poems and prose pieces that evince an appreciation of loyalty to ruler and ambition for grand deeds, such as "Yong san liang" 詠三良 (In Praise of the Three Good Men) and "Yong Jing Ke" 詠荊軻 (In Praise of Jing Ke), were not selected.⁴⁷ There is no reason to think that this omission resulted from generic or topical restrictions of the *Wen xuan* since there is a specific category of "Poems in Praise of History" (*Yongshi Shi* 詠史詩), which includes a notable poem by Zuo Si 左思 (ca. 250-ca. 305) about Jing Ke and one about the Three Good Men by Cao Zhi 曹植 (192-232). Xiao Tong's dismissal of Tao Yuanming's more ambitious side in his selection for the *Wen xuan* is consistent with his representation of Tao in his *Preface* and *Biography* as a model recluse free of worldly ambition.

The most significant omission in Xiao Tong's version of Tao Yuanming's biography is what Shen Yue offers as proof of Tao Yuanming's loyalty to the Jin. Xiao accepts Shen Yue's opinion that Tao Yuanming refused to serve after Liu Yu's ascendancy owing to a sense of propriety and loyal obligation, but does not mention any correlation with the two methods of dating in Tao's works. As one may assume that Xiao Tong had access to

⁴⁵ In "The Biography of the Master of Five Willows," Tao Yuanming reworks part of the description of Qian Lou by his wife as recorded in *Lienü zhuan* and applies it to the Master of Five Willows: "He was not distressed by poverty or low station, nor was he anxious for wealth and rank." In the fourth of Tao's "In Praise of Impoverished Gentlemen, Seven poems" 詠貧士七首, the description of Qian Lou is also based on his wife's biography in *Lienü zhuan*. See Liu Xiang, *Lienü zhuan*, SBBY ed., 2.7b-8a. The wives of both Qian Lou and Lao Lai are depicted in Tao's works as sympathetic partners to their recluse husbands.

⁴⁶ Xiao Tong included the following works by Tao Yuanming in the *Wen xuan*: "Shi zuo zhenjun canjun jing Qu'e zuo" 始作鎮軍參軍經曲阿作 (Lines Written as I Passed Through Qu'e, On First Being Made Adjutant to the General), "Xinchou sui qiye fujia huan Jiangling yexing Tukou" 辛丑歲七月赴假還江陵夜行塗口 (Written at Tukou at Night during the Seventh Moon of the Year 401, While Returning to Jiangling After Leave), "Wan'ge shi san shou" 挽歌詩三首 (Bearers' Songs, Three poems) No. 3, "Yinjiu ershi shou" 飲酒二十首 (Twenty Poems After Drinking Wine) Nos. 5 and 7, "Yong pinshi qi shou" 詠貧士七首 (In Praise of Impoverished Gentlemen, Seven poems) No. 1, "Du Shanhai jing shisan shou" 讀山海經十三首 (On Reading the *Mountains and Seas Classic*, Thirteen poems) No. 1, "Nigu jiu shou" 擬古九首 (Imitations, Nine poems) No. 7, and "Guiqu laixi ci" 歸去來兮辭 (The Return).

⁴⁷ The Three Good Men refer to the sons of Ziju 子車 of the state of Qin 秦, Yanxi 奄息, Zhongxing 仲行 and Zhenhu 鍼虎, who chose to be buried alive with the deceased Duke Mu 穆 of Qin in 621 B.C.E. They were revered as honorable men and memorialized in Ode 131, "Huangniao" 黃鳥 (The Oriole), according to the *Zuo zhuan* (Duke Wen sixth year).

the editions Shen Yue used, his implicit rejection of Shen Yue's observation concerning the two methods of dating makes the validity of the observation suspect.

The biography of Tao Yuanming in the *Nan shi* introduces very few additions to Tao Yuanming's life when compared to Shen Yue's and Xiao Tong's versions. It combines anecdotes and the biographer's comments from the two earlier versions, repeating almost verbatim their words and narrative sequence. Its omissions are more telling. Unlike the *Song shu* version, which cites four of Tao's texts, or Xiao Tong's version, which does not need to cite Tao's works since his *Collected Works* is appended to the biography,⁴⁸ the *Nan shi* version cites three: "The Biography of the Master of Five Willows," "The Return," and "To My Sons, Yan and the Others."⁴⁹ That Li Yanshou decided to omit "On Naming My Son" suggests more emphasis on Tao Yuanming as an isolated figure compatible with the image of a recluse. It is possible that these omissions resulted from the biographer's concern for length, but this reading, as I have proposed, is substantiated by Tao's biography in the *Jin shu*, compiled around the same time. The *Nan shi* version concludes with two new lines, not seen in either the *Song shu* or Xiao Tong's version, to emphasize the virtue of Tao's wife. To Xiao Tong's description, "His wife, née Zhai, sharing the same purpose and bent, was likewise able to deal with hardship," Li Yanshou adds, "While the husband [i.e. Tao Yuanming] ploughed the

⁴⁸ According to Li Gonghuan's 李公煥 late-thirteenth century edition of *Tao Yuanming ji* (Collected Works of Tao Yuanming), Xiao Tong cites "The Biography of the Master of Five Willows" in the "Biography of Tao Yuanming," as Shen Yue did. His reasons for citing only this text and omitting the other three texts which Shen Yue cites are unclear. An argument can be made, as I have, that he felt no need to cite all four texts since they are included in the appended *Tao Yuanming ji*, and only cites the "Biography of the Master of Five Willows," since Xiao Tong, like Shen Yue, considered this autobiographical text as telling "truthfully" Tao Yuanming's own life. This argument is appealing for its likelihood and convenience. However, a counter-argument can be made that there were reasons other than avoidance of repetition within the same volume. Rather, "To My Sons, Yan and the Others" could have been excluded since it contains the line, "In my house there is no wife of [Lao] Lai [who dissuaded her husband from taking office]," which contradicts Xiao Tong's vision of Tao Yuanming's wife: "His wife, née Zhai, sharing the same purpose and bent, was able to deal with hardship." While this counter-argument is credible, reasons for the omission of the other two texts are more difficult to fathom. One could assert that "On Naming My Son" was omitted since it indicates Tao Yuanming's lineage and points to his posterity, thus inappropriate for his image as a pure recluse, isolated, detached, and somewhat mysterious (which is much in line with Tao's self-portrayal in "The Biography of the Master of Five Willows"). But to suppose that Xiao Tong intended to mold Tao's image as a pure recluse is very problematic, because a satisfactory reconciliation cannot be made between this image and the image of Tao as a caring and benevolent father, which Xiao Tong certainly emphasizes with the addition of Tao's short letter to his sons. As for the exclusion of "The Return," I do not know of a reasonable counter-argument. I am grateful to Chen Qiren 陳啟仁 of National Taiwan University for suggesting other interpretations.

⁴⁹ The opening lines from "To My Sons, Yan and the Others" about the inevitability of death and determinacy of fate have been omitted.

fields, the wife, one step behind, hoed the land” 夫耕於前，妻鋤於後。⁵⁰ This is one of its two innovations. The more significant contribution made by Li Yanshou was to use Tao Yuanming's name synonymously with the concept of reclusion in his introduction to the “Biographies of Recluses.” Tao is the only recluse, not counting the legendary ones, named in the introduction: “Of the likes of Tao Qian, some take office but do not seek fame, withdraw without ridiculing the common. Some distance their persons from harm and conceal their tracks while serving the Confucian Way. Some hide their traces on the rivers and lakes. Others remain unknown beneath the crags and rocks. All of these men were recluses of their times.”⁵¹ Within a span of 170 years, Tao Yuanming had been upgraded from being one recluse among many in the *Song shu* to the epitome of contemporary recluses in the *Nan shi*.

Of the three later biographies, the greatest departure from Tao Yuanming's biography in the *Song shu* is that in the *Jin shu*, completed in 648.⁵² A.R. Davis' term “caricature,” with which he describes all four biographies, is most apt for this version.⁵³ The new material in the *Jin shu* version may be classified into two types. First, the editors elaborate on stories that already appeared in Shen Yue's account. For instance, in the *Song shu* account, Wang Hong wanted to meet Tao Yuanming and hence asked a mutual acquaintance, Pang Tongzhi, to arrange a meeting. In the *Jin shu* account, Wang Hong went to Tao's house in person, but Tao pleaded illness and refused to see him. Tao later said to someone else: “My personality does not get on well with the rest of the world, and due to illness I have remained in retirement. It is hardly that I am purifying my intentions to gain a reputation. How could I dare use the fact that Master Wang's carriage came all the way here to glorify myself?” Unsuccessful in his first attempt to see Tao Yuanming, Wang Hong asked Pang Tongzhi to arrange the gathering at Lili. After the happy meeting between Tao Yuanming and Wang Hong, the *Jin shu* version goes on to tell how Tao and Wang rode side by side but separately back into town. Tao Yuanming “laughed and talked [with Wang Hong], while enjoying his intoxication. He did not covet in the slightest [Wang Hong's] luxurious carriage.”⁵⁴ The novelty in the *Jin shu* that is perhaps most often cited is a “quotation” that gives voice to the recluse's eccentricity. As in the *Song shu*, Tao Yuanming has a stringless zither which he strums to convey his feelings, but now he quips, “As long as I get the flavor of the zither, why

⁵⁰ *Nan shi*, 75/1859. Li Yanshou slightly rewords Xiao Tong's description of the character of Tao's wife, but does not change the meaning substantially.

⁵¹ *Nan shi*, 75/1856.

⁵² The compilation of the now standard *Jin shu* is a subject of great interest to historians, who have generally focused on the political motivations involved, the justifications given for this imperially-commissioned project, and Emperor Taizong's 太宗 (r. 627-649) personal interest in it. For studies on this subject, see Li Peidong 李培棟, *Wei Jin Nanbeichao shiyuan* 魏晉南北朝史緣 (Shanghai: Xuelin chubanshe, 1996), 108-39, and Yue Chunzhi 岳純之, “Tangchao chunian chongxiu *Jin shu* shimo kao” 唐朝初年重修晉書始末考, *Shixueshi yanjiu* 2 (2000): 38-42.

⁵³ A comparative analysis of the four biographies shows that Davis' observation that in Tao's early biographies, “his own ironic poses have become caricatured and distorted” is not equally accurate for all four. Davis, *T'ao Yüan-ming*, 1:4.

⁵⁴ *Jin shu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 94/2462.

bother with sounds made by the strings?"⁵⁵ These two examples and the few others not cited here present a further imaginative step from the original account. New conclusions to old anecdotes offer more satisfaction to the reader with fuller narrative and more colorful details. Second, the *Jin shu* version offers stories and character descriptions not seen in any of the other three biographies. For example, Tao Yuanming sometimes would be invited by his fellow villager, Zhang Ye 張野, and companions, Yang Songling 羊松齡 and Chong Zun 寵遵, to drink with them or to go along to someone else's party. Even if Tao did not know the host, he felt delight and made no objection. He would drink until intoxicated, then return home. Another anecdote describes Wang Hong noticing Tao Yuanming's lack of shoes during their first meeting. Wang ordered his servants to measure Tao's feet and make a pair of shoes for them. Surrounded by guests, Tao stretched out his feet for measurements to be taken. Such stories magnify the aloofness, lack of inhibitions, and disregard for polite behavior already ascribed to Tao by the earlier biographers. New descriptions of Tao's character in the *Jin shu* work along the same lines as the new anecdotes. Tao Yuanming is now said to have eschewed involvement in managing his family's livelihood, delegating all of the farmwork and household chores to his sons and servants. This utterly aloof and carefree recluse is further described as "never having expressed anger or joy."⁵⁶

The omissions in the *Jin shu* version of Tao's biography are as meaningful as the additions. The editors do not cite "On Naming My Sons" and "To My Sons, Yan and the Others." Nor do they repeat Xiao Tong's citation of Tao's letter to his sons, in which Tao asks them to treat the new servant boy well. These two important omissions and the new information about how Tao passed the farm responsibilities to his sons, taken together, deemphasize the image of Tao, built by the previous biographies, as a benevolent father figure. The *Jin shu* biography also leaves out the argument concerning Tao's refusal to serve two dynasties, and Tao's role as a loyal subject of the Jin is thus no longer visible. The last omission is any mention of Tao Yuanming's wife. The excision of all relationships in the Confucian sense (ruler-subject, husband-wife, father-son) leaves an image of a recluse all the more carefree, individual, and unbound to common roles.

The Making of a Perfect Recluse

The image of Tao Yuanming standing above normal social relations, developed to varying degrees in the four biographies, informs the biographers' retelling of Tao's life and selection of materials. For example, there are two versions of an encounter between Tao and Wang Hong. Recall that, according to Shen Yue, Wang Hong tried to make Tao's acquaintance but was unsuccessful. He then arranged for Tao's friend Pang Tongzhi to set up wine and food for Tao Yuanming at a pavilion in Lili. When Tao arrived, he "grew delighted and drank with [Pang Tongzhi]. Shortly after, Wang Hong

⁵⁵ *Jin shu*, 94/2463.

⁵⁶ *Jin shu*, 94/2462.

appeared and Tao cast no blame on either." A version which appears in earlier histories, to which Shen Yue must have had access, gives a very different account: "Sometime after Tao Qian resigned, suffering from a leg ailment, he asked one attendant and two sons to carry him in a sedan chair to pay Wang Hong a visit. After he arrived, he grew delighted and drank with [Wang Hong]."⁵⁷ Shen Yue's retelling, adopted by Xiao Tong and Li Yanshou, depicts Tao Yuanming as a recluse whose transcendence and eccentricity absolved him of any need for proper decorum. In this version, Tao receives a visit from a high official and is able to express pleasure or displeasure at the encounter. In the earlier version, Tao calls on Wang Hong and he therefore appears as more conventional, sociable and human in his interactions. The air of loftiness that characterizes Tao's personality in the four biographies is absent in this version. The source for the *Song shu* version was likely Tan Daoluan's 檀道鸞 (fl. 459) *Xu Jin yangqiu* 續晉陽秋 (Continuation of the annals of Jin), in which Tan relates how Wang Hong visited Tao Yuanming and, upon noticing that Tao Yuanming wore no shoes, ordered his servants to measure Tao's feet for shoes.⁵⁸ Tan Daoluan's account of Wang Hong's visit to Tao circulated at the same time as an account of Tao's visit to Wang Hong in either Sun Yan's 孫嚴 or Xu Yuan's 徐爰 respective *Song shu*, and Zang Rongxu's 藏榮緒 (415-488) *Jin shu*, probable sources for the variant version of the anecdote. That Shen Yue, Xiao Tong and Li Yanshou chose the former and omitted the latter demonstrates the active (and not always innocent) role played by the historians in the early construction of Tao's image. The Tang editors of the *Jin shu* elaborated on Shen Yue's version of the anecdote and prefaced it with another story in which Wang Hong goes to

⁵⁷ The *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽 cites this passage from a *Song shu*; see *Taiping yulan* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960), 774/3432b. Since it does not appear in Shen Yue's *Song shu*, it must have been taken from one of the two earlier works of the same title, probably that of Sun Yan 孫嚴 or, less likely, that of Xu Yuan 徐爰, on which Shen Yue's history is based. Both histories predate Shen Yue's and survived into the early Song. See "Yiwen zhi" in *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 (New history of the Tang) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 58/1456.

An identical passage is cited in the *Beitang shuchao* 北堂書鈔 (compiled in 630). But there it is attributed to a *Jin shu*. As the compilation of the now standard *Jin shu* was begun in 646 and completed in 648, and earlier works of the same title either predate Tao Yuanming or were lost by the early Tang, the quotation must be taken from Zang Rongxu's 藏榮緒 (415-488) *Jin shu*, which was compiled before Shen Yue's *Song shu* (488). Although *Beitang shuchao* is earlier than *Taiping yulan*, the said passage appears in Chen Yumo's 陳禹謨 (1548-1618) Ming edition of *Beitang shuchao* and not in the more reliable Qing edition of Kong Guangtao 孔廣陶 (1832-1890). Yu Shinan 虞世南 (558-638), comp., *Beitang shuchao*, ed. Chen Yumo, SKQS ed., 140.5a; cf. Yu Shinan, comp., *Beitang shuchao*, ed. Kong Guangtao, 1888 ed., 140.4a. It is possible that Chen Yumo's and Kong Guangtao's manuscripts differed, or that Chen, who often replaced passages from lost sources with others from known sources, culled this passage from *Taiping yulan*. Tang Qiu's 湯球 (1804-1881) reconstruction of Zang Rongxu's *Jin shu* includes this passage, but he may have taken the passage directly from Chen Yumo's edition without having compared it to other editions. Tang Qiu, comp., *Jiu jia jiu Jin shu jiben* 九家舊晉書輯本 (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1991), 151.

⁵⁸ Tan Daoluan, *Xu Jin yangqiu*, in *Huang shi yishu kao* 黃氏逸書考 (Yangzhou: Yangzhou guji shudian, 1984), 32a.

Tao Yuanming's house to pay a visit only to be rejected at the gate. This further emphasizes Tao's loftiness and rejection of social conventions.

Additions to and omissions from earlier versions of Tao's biography, as well as the selection of material from other sources, demonstrate the aspect of construction in the biographers' presentation of Tao's life. That the composite images in the biographies differ is moreover significant because a reader's image of Tao Yuanming could depend on which of the texts he relied on. One important example is the particular influence of the *Jin shu* biography in the Tang 唐 (618-907).⁵⁹ Although High and Mid-Tang writers used anecdotes common to all four biographies, their portrayal of Tao Yuanming in their own poetry in general most resembles the depiction of Tao in the *Jin shu*. Tang writers were fond of representing Tao's reclusion in idyllic terms, often focusing on the dual pleasures of wine drinking and zither playing (the latter substitutable by reading or composing poetry in leisure) and depicting an overall detached existence surrounded by hardly more than willow trees and chrysanthemum flowers.⁶⁰ A few explanations can be made for the preference for the *Jin shu* biography. First of all, Tang writers may well have found that the *Jin shu*, which developed to an extreme Tao's eremitic behavior, offered more interesting and colorful poetic material. Second, it is the most "literary" of the four, with more attention to narrative flow, satisfactory conclusions and imagistic language. Third, the new compilation of the *History of Jin* was ordered by the second Tang emperor, Taizong 太宗 (r. 627-649), who was dissatisfied with the eighteen existing versions written by private historians either in chronicle or composite form. In an edict, Taizong faulted the private historians of the past: "Although these authors have left accounts, they are not good historians. Their works

⁵⁹ See Swartz, "Reclusion, Personality and Poetry," 40-3.

⁶⁰ See, for example, Li Bo's 李白 (701-762) portrayal of Tao Yuanming in "Xi zeng Zheng Liyang" 戲贈鄭溧陽 (Playfully Presented to Zheng, Magistrate of Liyang), in which all of the key images associated with Tao's life in retirement are listed in orderly fashion: line one speaks of Tao's drunkenness, line two his five willow trees, line three his stringless zither, line four summons the image of Tao Yuanming straining his wine with his cap, line five the image of napping by the northern window and line six alludes to Tao's self-characterization as a man living during the epoch of the legendary good ruler Fu Xi. The images in lines five and six refer to Tao's leisure and utter contentment with his situation. See *Quan Tang shi* 全唐詩 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960), 169/1746. The stringless zither and the image of straining wine in lines three and four appear only in Tao's biographies and not his works. This fact leads the reader, then, to suspect that lines five and six, too, were drawn from Tao's biography, even though they also appear in Tao's oeuvre. And the only version of the four biographies to mention the cool breeze by the northern window and the man of Fu Xi's time is the *Jin shu*. That Li Bo was familiar with the *Jin shu* account of Tao's life, or to push this point further, that the colorful scenes from the *Jin shu* narration appealed especially to a Tang poet should not be surprising. The impressionistic and, to a certain extent, exaggerated pictures provided workable poetic material from the point of view of Tang poetics, to which the sequencing of images and imagery as narration are central. See also the fourth of Wang Wei's "Ouran zuo" 偶然作 (Offhand Compositions) in *Quan Tang shi*, 125/1254. For further discussion of the Tang reading and representation of Tao's reclusion, see Swartz, "Reclusion, Personality and Poetry," 40-68.

are short on authentic records” 雖存記注，而才非良史，書虧實錄。⁶¹ Taizong wrote the appraisals (*lun* 論) appended to the basic annals of the reigns of Sima Yi 司馬懿 (d. 251; made emperor posthumously) and Sima Yan 司馬炎 (r. 266-290), and the biographies of Lu Ji 陸機 (261-303) and Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (321-379), thereby granting the new *Jin shu* the legitimization of “imperial authorship” (*yuzhuan* 御撰). The authority derived from the emperor’s personal involvement in its compilation would likely have drawn a certain amount of readership, study and interest. Hence, although some of the eighteen versions of the history of Jin survived into the Song dynasty, “ever since [the completion of the 648 *Jin shu*] all those who referred to the histories of Jin have dispensed with the old versions, and instead followed the newly-compiled one,” according to the historian-critic Liu Zhiji 劉知幾 (661-721).⁶² The version of the *History of Jin* most read by later Tang writers would have been the 648 edition.

The dynastic histories in which Tao Yuanming’s biography appeared, namely the *Song shu* and the *Jin shu*, were criticized by later Chinese historians, such as Liu Zhiji and Liu Xu 劉昫 (887-946), for distortion and exaggeration.⁶³ An equally systematic phenomenon in the four biographies is the willful selection of materials based on authorial interpretation and internal consistency. For instance, none of the biographers cite Yan Yanzhi’s dirge, the most reliable second-hand account of Tao’s life and personality. And if they had, discrepancies would become obvious. The dirge records such valuable information as a conversation between Tao Yuanming and Yan Yanzhi that reveals a friendship based on intimacy and understanding, not drinking sessions, and that Tao Yuanming played the zither (which presumably had strings) and therefore had musical knowledge, as Tao himself claimed in many of his works. Yan praises Tao for virtues (honesty, simplicity, chastity and purity) that make him seem serious-minded, even stolid: “When he was young, he did not delight in amusements; when he

⁶¹ *Quan Tang wen* 全唐文 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 8.3a.

⁶² Liu Zhiji, *Shitong tongshi* 史通通釋, SBBY ed., 12.15a.

⁶³ Liu Zhiji in *Shitong* makes the following criticism of the *Song shu*: “There have been those who established strange doctrines and loved to create fabulous stories 立異端，喜造奇說。In the Han, there was Liu Xiang, in the Jin, Ge Hong, and in recent times, Shen Yue, who far surpassed his two predecessors.” Liu Zhiji, *Shitong tongshi*, 18.15b-16a. Criticism of the *Jin shu* was plentiful. Liu Zhiji writes that “the sources it drew from were predominantly little books of stories (*duanbu xiaoshu* 短部小書). It demands little effort and is easy to read, like the *Yu lin*, *Shishuo xinyu*, *Soushen ji*, *Youming lu* and such. Works such as Cao [Jia]’s or Gan [Bao]’s *Jin ji* and Sun [Sheng]’s *Jin yangqiu* or Tan [Daoluan]’s *Xu Jin yangqiu* were not used. Thus in the *Jin shu* there is a great number of omissions in the praiseworthy events recorded.” Liu Zhiji, *Shitong tongshi*, 16.6a. Liu Xu 劉昫, author of the *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 (Old History of the Tang), lists more shortcomings in the biography of Fang Xuanling: “Most of the historians [who participated in the compilation of the *Jin shu*] were literary men who liked to use fantastic and erroneous trifles to produce unusual tales 好採詭譎碎事，以廣異聞。In their critical assessments, they vied for resplendence and not truth” 競為綺豔，不求篤實。 *Jiu Tang shu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 66/2463. These passages are discussed by Qi Yishou in “Lun shizhuan zhong de Tao Yuanming shiji ji xingxiang,” 152.

was a grown man, he truly possessed a simple heart" 弱不好弄，長實素心。⁶⁴ Such a text could find no place in the four biographers' creation of a perfect recluse who, while principled and resolute, was far more memorable for his idiosyncracies and transcendence of worldly cares and norms.

Conclusion

This discussion has argued that there is much to be gained from a critical examination of Tao Yuanming's biographies. While they have turned out to be products of an interested selection of materials in the service of each compiler's purposes, the information provided by these biographies must still be used, for they are the only complete, early secondary accounts of his life (Yan Yanzhi's dirge aside). But the construction of these biographies can no longer be ignored. Since these texts have generally been treated as reliable historical documents, little attention has been paid to variations among them and development over time.

These four texts have generally been taken for granted by scholars up to the present who treat them as sources of information rather than as texts that influenced later readings of Tao Yuanming. As the first group of texts in the history of Tao's reception, they not only set the terms for later discussions, give the contexts and authorial intentions with which to read certain poems, but also mold the imaginations of later readers. Later readers would unquestioningly use stories from these biographies as referents for Tao's poems, taking it for granted that these are "accounts." The problem with this hermeneutical process, which relies unreservedly on the stability of these biographies, is a circularity between historical account and textual interpretation. As Stephen Owen has argued,

We construct our historical accounts out of other historical accounts; and in the case of interpretation, we construct such accounts to answer the demands of the particular literary text; then we interpret the literary text in the light of the historical account that we have made to serve as its context.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Yan, "Tao zhengshi lei," in *Quan Song wen* in *Quan Wen*, 38/2646b. I have used A. R. Davis' translation from his *T'ao Yüan-ming: His Works and Their Meaning*, 1:244. In the elegy (*ci* 辭) proper, Yan describes Tao's character as follows: "In the conduct of close relationships/He made himself of least importance. The faithfulness of his promises/Was weightier than the word of Bu. His honesty was deep, his simplicity pure;/His truth was tranquil, his purity gentle. Genial but capable of dignity,/He was learned but not tedious" 陸親之行，至自非敦。然諾之信，重於布言。廉深簡潔，貞夷粹溫。和而能峻，博而不繁。 Yan, "Tao zhengshi lei," 38/2646b. Trans. Davis, *T'ao Yüan-ming*, 1:246.

⁶⁵ Stephen Owen, "Poetry and Its Historical Ground," *CLEAR* 12 (Dec. 1990): 108.

And,

[W]e never see the grounding of a literary text in its history; we see only the formal imitation of such grounding, the framing of the literary text within another text that pretends to be its historical ground, an "account" of history.⁶⁶

Thus the role of these four texts need to be problematized in two ways: first, as documents that represent interpretations of Tao from the first centuries after his death; second, as sources used by later readers in constructing their interpretations of Tao Yuanming and his works. By selecting and editing particular anecdotes and texts, each of the biographers created a collage representing a distinct image of Tao. Although later readers would cut pieces out of both the biographies and his works to assemble collages of their own, they relied on the biographies not only for data on Tao but for their language, categories and assessments as well. No later text would have such a defining role in Tao's reception. While the biographies as a group were one of the pillars on which later reception rested, their differences demonstrate that even over this period of less than two centuries Tao Yuanming's historical image was far from constant. This seemingly solid pillar was not made from a single block but built up over time of several pieces whose shapes reveal the traces of their original production.

⁶⁶Stephen Owen, "Poetry and Its Historical Ground," 107-8.