



*China Perspectives*

# A MULTIDIMENSIONAL STUDY OF TAO YUANMING

TEXTUAL RESEARCH, PHILOSOPHICAL  
SIGNIFICANCE, RHETORIC AND RECEPTION

Qian Zhixi



# A Multidimensional Study of Tao Yuanming

This book examines the life, philosophy, works and influence of Tao Yuanming, one of the most emblematic poets in ancient China. It sheds light on his lasting poetic and spiritual significance within the Chinese cultural tradition.

The study takes a multi-faceted approach to the poet. The first part addresses the contested scholarly questions surrounding his biography, such as his lifespan and social position. The second part explores his life philosophy of “Spirit-Oriented Nature” as a universal framework for human existentialism. The third part further examines his literary concept of “non-utilitarian aesthetics”, which emphasizes the intrinsic value of art detached from worldly pragmatism. It also analyses his poetic practice, which is governed by the principle of naturalness and synthesizes mimetic realism with expressive lyricism—an innovation that has earned him posthumous recognition as the canonical model for classical Chinese poetry. The final part focuses on his literary influence, tracing the ways in which his poetic artistry shaped poetry during the Tang and Song dynasties. It also examines how his cultural iconicity extends beyond literary achievement to embody the idealized persona of the literati in Chinese intellectual history.

This book will appeal to scholars and students of Chinese literature, poetry and literary and cultural history.

**Qian Zhixi** is a Cheung Kong Scholar Chair Professor, Ministry of Education of China, distinguished liberal art professor at the Department of Chinese Language and Literature, Peking University, and Director of China Research Association of Li Bai. His research focuses on Chinese poetry, Chinese literary history, thought and culture.

## **China Perspectives**

The *China Perspectives* series focuses on translating and publishing works by leading Chinese scholars, writing about both global topics and China-related themes. It covers Humanities & Social Sciences, Education, Media and Psychology, as well as many interdisciplinary themes.

This is the first time any of these books have been published in English for international readers. The series aims to put forward a Chinese perspective, give insights into cutting-edge academic thinking in China, and inspire researchers globally.

To submit proposals, please contact the Taylor & Francis Publisher for China Publishing Programme, Lian Sun ([Lian.Sun@informa.com](mailto:Lian.Sun@informa.com))

Titles in literature currently include:

### **The Classic and Creativity**

Chinese and Western Comparative Poetics in the Age of World Literature

*Jiang Zhuyu*

### **The Sociology of Literature**

Poems and Prose of the Ming and Qing Dynasties

*Luo Shijin*

### **Towards an Ethical Subject**

Human Cloning in Science Fiction

*Guo Wen*

### **Genres of Chinese Intellectual Thought**

*Liu Ning*

### **A Multidimensional Study of Tao Yuanming**

Textual Research, Philosophical Significance, Rhetoric and Reception

*Qian Zhixi*

For more information, please visit <https://www.routledge.com/China-Perspectives/book-series/CPH>

# **A Multidimensional Study of Tao Yuanming**

Textual Research, Philosophical Significance,  
Rhetoric and Reception

**Qian Zhixi**

The book is supported by Chinese Fund for the Humanities and Social Sciences.

First published in English 2027

by Routledge

4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge

605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

© 2027 Qian Zhixi

Translated by Hu Zhijun and Mu Baoqing

The right of Qian Zhixi to be identified as author of this work has been asserted in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

For Product Safety Concerns and Information please contact our EU representative [GPSR@taylorandfrancis.com](mailto:GPSR@taylorandfrancis.com). Taylor & Francis Verlag GmbH, Kaufingerstraße 24, 80331 München, Germany.

*Trademark notice:* Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

English Version by permission of Peking University Press

*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-041-30319-0 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-041-30920-8 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-003-77670-3 (ebk)

DOI: [10.4324/9781003776703](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003776703)

Typeset in Times New Roman  
by KnowledgeWorks Global Ltd.

# Contents

<i>Translators' Note</i>	vii
<i>Preface to the Chinese Edition</i>	ix
Introduction	1
<b>PART ONE</b>	
<b>Textual Research</b>	13
1 A New Critical Assessment of the Evidential Research on Tao's Birth Year	15
2 Family Background: Tao's Humble Status and the Literary Representation	39
3 Textual Research on the Dating of Tao's Literary Works	76
<b>PART TWO</b>	
<b>Philosophical Significance</b>	97
4 The Pursuit of Knowledge and Artistic Creation	99
5 Life Philosophy of "Spirit-Oriented Nature"	113
6 Intra-Textual and Extra-Textual Evidence for the Trilogy "Substance, Shadow, and Spirit"	140
<b>PART THREE</b>	
<b>Rhetoric</b>	161
7 Subtleties of Tao's Literary Theory	163
8 The Art of <i>Ci-Fu</i> and Prose	184
9 A Comprehensive Survey of Tao's Poetry	204

**PART FOUR**

<b>The History of Tao's Reception and Research: From the Southern and Northern Dynasties to the Song Dynasty</b>	319
10 The Influence of Tao's Poetry in the Evolution of the Poetic Style in the Jin, Song and Southern and Northern Dynasties	321
11 Reception History of Tao's Thought and Image in the Tang and the Song Dynasties	333
12 Reception History of Tao's Poetic Art in the Tang Dynasty	370
13 The Interpretation and Reception of Tao's Poetic Art in the Song Dynasty	386
14 The Achievement of Evidential Research in Tao Yuanming Studies in the Song Dynasty	406
Coda	431
<i>Afterword to the Chinese Edition</i>	435
<i>Appendix: The Poetic Writings of Tao Quoted in the Book</i>	437
<i>Translators' Bibliography</i>	440
<i>Index</i>	442

## Translators' Note

*A Multidimensional Study of Tao Yuanming* 陶渊明经纬 adopts a triple research approach in terms of textual research, philosophical significance and the rhetoric of Tao's poetry, and presents the totality of Tao Yuanming's life, literature and thought. In the part of Textual Research, Tao's humble identity and the dating of his works are rediscussed based on the old theory of his death year in the *Book of Song*. In the part of Philosophical Significance, Tao's academic experience and philosophical thoughts are explored, revealing the philosophical significance and historical status of his outlook on life to "make spirit the spokesman for naturalness". In the part of Rhetoric, the art of Tao's *ci-fu*, prose and poetry is dwelled upon, uncovering the two poetic styles of elegance and simplicity and the triple-realm of substance, shadow and spirit in Tao's poetry; his various poetic types are studied in the overall picture of poetic styles of the Han and Wei dynasties; and the "inheritance" and "creation" in his poetry are pointed out. Moreover, in the last part, an attempt is made to provide an overview of Tao's influence and research history, presenting a side view of the history of ancient Chinese poetry and literature through Tao's reception and research. It conducts a survey of the research findings in the previous studies of Tao Yuanming, and opens up a new perspective of related researches. Therefore, this book is of important academic value and research significance.

Tao Yuanming 陶渊明 (also known as Tao Qian 陶潜, 365?–427) has come over time to be considered as a cultural icon and one of China's greatest poets. With his poetic creation and profundity of philosophical musings, he has achieved a high status and significant influence in the history of literature, thought and culture. His literary writings and the unique aesthetic connotation have left an indelible mark in the history of Chinese literature and the spiritual world of Chinese people.

Qian Zhixi 钱志熙 is a Cheung Kong Scholar Chair Professor, Ministry of Education of China, distinguished liberal art professor at the Department of Chinese Language and Literature, Peking University, Director of China Research Association of Li Bai, Executive Deputy Director of the Ancient Stylistics Research Center, Peking University, Vice President and Director of Academic Department of Chinese Poetry Society. He has published more than ten monographs. The representative works are: *The Origin and Development of the Tang Modern Style Poetry*, Peking University Press, 2015; *Biography of Tao Yuanming*, Zhonghua Book Company, 2012; *A Study of Yue-fu Art in the Han and Wei Dynasties*, Xueyuan

Publishing House, 2011. He has published about 200 articles and has received awards many times for his excellent research findings from the Ministry of Education of China and Beijing Municipality.

Tao Yuanming's literature and thought abound in outstanding Chinese socio-cultural values and epitomize the unique qualities of Chinese traditional culture. The philosophical spirit of the Eastern classical naturalism revealed in his poetic writings will surely inspire and enlighten people in the world today. Therefore, the translation of this scholarly book is conducive to the dissemination of traditional Chinese cultural thoughts to audiences in other cultures and the global recognition of the quintessence of Chinese academic studies. And it will have a broad and substantial significance for cross-cultural exchanges. Believably, Tao Yuanming's contemplation on the fundamental questions of human existence and his innate love for rural life will illuminate the way for those who aspire to return to the natural way of life. This translation, in a larger sense, will also have the positive effect on raising our awareness to construct ultimately a harmonious community with a shared future for humanity.

Two sections in the first part of the original book, i.e., "Native Place, Villeggiatura and Seclusion" and "Typical Cases in the Comparison of Different Editions", are omitted in the translation. For one reason, although the two parts are invaluable and important to the following researches, they mainly focus on the textual researches on place names and other proper nouns, Chinese characters, and the forms and meanings of Chinese characters. It is necessary to quote many Chinese characters and words directly into the translation and to explain them in detail. If the translator makes a brief translation, it is difficult for English readers to get an accurate understanding. If the translator strives for complete and accurate translation of the original text, coupled with detailed annotation or explanation, the translation will be too messy and cumbersome. For another reason, the two parts belong to basic research, and their main contents are also covered in the following parts of the book. The translator has made careful explanation in the translation of the relevant sections to facilitate the accurate understanding of English readers.

We take great pleasure in acknowledging all who have supported this translation project. Our deepest gratitude goes to Qian Zhixi, the author of the original book, his doctorate students Sui Xuechun etc., and Rachel McVeigh at Harvard University, for their help in the accurate understanding of the source text and in the revision of the translation manuscript. We are grateful to Professor Li Jianfeng at School of Literature of Shandong University, who is a renowned expert on the study of Tao Yuanming, and his doctorate student Hou Hongzhen, for their constant support. Our colleagues at School of Foreign Languages and Literature of Shandong University have been a source of steady encouragement and assistance. We are indebted especially to Professor Ma Wen, the Dean of the School, whose guidance is invaluable. We thank Professor Liu Chang, Professor Zhao Xiufu, Professor Wang Keyou, Professor Bao Hanyi and Professor Li Yongmei, who gave generously of their time in providing thoughtful comments that have helped make the translation better. We also thank Diao Huilan and Yuan Yuti, two postgraduates of the School, for their careful and patient proofreading.

This translation project was generously supported by the National Office of Philosophy and Social Sciences of China.

## Preface to the Chinese Edition

As one of the greatest Chinese poets, Tao Yuanming (also known as Tao Qian 陶潜, 365–427) has created more than a hundred poems throughout his literary career as well as much-cherished prose, and exerted a profound and pervasive influence on the history of Chinese literature, thus assuming an iconic status in Chinese cultural tradition. No doubt, the value of Tao Yuanming's literary writings provides an entry point for a better understanding of Chinese literature and culture.

The study of Tao Yuanming, albeit outshone by the study of Lu Xun, *A Dream in Red Mansions*, or even that of Du Fu, has certainly scored plentiful and substantial achievements. According to Mr. Wu Yun, who has devoted himself to the history of the study of Tao for many years, there have been more than 1,300 papers and forty-four monographs on the study of Tao Yuanming from 1978 to the end of the 20th century. Wu Yun observed that this was the most flourishing period in the four stages of the Tao Yuanming studies over the course of the century.<sup>1</sup> In 1990, I published an academic article entitled “Contradiction and Harmony: A Relationship in Tao Yuanming's Poetry” 矛盾与和谐——陶渊明诗歌中的一重关系 in the *Journal of Seeker* 求索, and preliminarily formulated some basic views on Tao Yuanming's thought and art. Subsequently, I continued to discuss Tao Yuanming in a number of monographs on the poetry of the Wei, Jin and Southern and Northern dynasties, and published academic articles. Later, at the request of Zhonghua Book Company, I wrote and published *A Biography of Tao Yuanming* 陶渊明传. But, be that as it may, I do not profess to be an expert in this subject. In my study of Tao Yuanming, as well as in my research on Huang Tingjian, Li Bai and other poets, if there is anything different from other researchers, especially from the research fields of specialists, it may lie in my comprehensive approach. Of course, I make no pretence to be a generalist. It doesn't matter at all whether I am an expert or a generalist, and there is no definitely defined criterion. In effect, I prefer to position myself as an adherent or a learner of Tao Yuanming. I am always a faithful admirer of many ancients, especially Su Shi and Huang Tingjian. Regrettably, I am not blessed with the intelligence, talent and spiritual disposition of Su and Huang, who enjoyed themselves by roaming freely in the literary world. For this reason, I have always felt a close affinity for Master Tao. Mr. Wu Yun once used “uprightness of mind and righteousness of conduct” 骨鲠处世 to characterize Tao Yuanming's life philosophy. This may concern his own life experience, but I think that Yuanming

deserves to be called a man of “unbendable nature”, though this characterization is far from the stereotype of Yuanming as a Wei-Jin elite in people’s mind. If people really realized his “unyielding character”, they might not have appreciated him so much. Whenever I talk about Tao Yuanming, either in lectures or in classes, I often can’t help saying: Tao Yuanming is a very “genuine” person, and he earnestly practises what he advocates; however, this hardly elicits any response from the audience. Perhaps, neither “unbendable character” nor “genuine person” is the most appropriate word to define the individuality of Tao Yuanming. Nevertheless, we cannot deny his character of naturalness, blandness and plainness, nor can we completely exclude his loftiness and free-spiritedness. But even in these aspects, such as the concept of “naturalness”, Yuanming is serious-minded. Indeed, he is a man of profound thought and unconstrained critical thinking, which does not reveal a philosophical logic as Ji Kang 嵇康 (223–262) did. He tends to philosophize about life with his lived experience *per se*. In fact, this is what I mean by saying that Tao is a genuine person, since he takes everything in earnest, including the naturalness of thinking and behaving prevalent at that time. And it turns out that he is out of tune with the mainstream celebrity culture and florid style of that era. In reality, he does not simply reject, but rather accepts it critically, which undoubtedly elevates its spirit. Therefore, we feel eventually that he is the most notable exemplar of the Wei-Jin culture. Here, the negation of negation is really an inexplicable logic. Yuan Haowen 元好问 (1190–1257) once wrote, “Yuanming claims himself as a man from the time of Fu Xi, / but he is born to be a poet of the Jin” 南窗白日羲皇上, 未害渊明是晋人. Tao Yuanming often aspires to transcend his time and to reach for the ancient times before the Xia, Shang and Zhou dynasties. But from the perspective of the somewhat vulgarized dialectic today, is it not his spiritual yearning for the ages of ancient sage-rulers? Every time I think of this, I feel that the so-called academic research is like setting off for a new adventure to dig into the chaotic world. Agonizingly, it is hard to sweep away chaos; no sooner have we had a moment of enlightenment than further chaos ensues.

I am fully aware that I am not an expert in the study of Tao Yuanming; however, this book attempts to adopt “the specialized research-led approach” 专学之学 to the exploration of Tao Yuanming. There are two reasons. The first is that when I began my own academic research in the mid-1980s, my focus was mainly on writers and their works, and I was too unqualified and incompetent to present a holistic, long-duration view of literary history. After my commitment to the poetry of the Wei-Jin, Southern-Northern dynasties, I turned more to the research method of periodization, and the related monographs and essays are primarily concerned with problem-based researches of periodization and those of successive dynasties. Some recent researches laid special weight on the individual writers and their works. The second is that the writing of *A Biography of Tao Yuanming* obliges me to make a more comprehensive elucidation of the poet and his writings, which particularly necessitates evidential research as the basic starting point. In *A Biography of Tao Yuanming*, I have presented my basic understanding of Tao’s life and art, and also put forward some new views in terms of empirical research. Restricted by stylistic rules of biography, especially by my inadequate knowledge in relation to

the study of Tao, the three sections of the philosophical significance, rhetoric and textual research in this book leave much space for further research, and there are unavoidably imperfections and deficiencies. Personally, I think this book, *A Multi-dimensional Study of Tao Yuanming* 陶渊明经纬 is a sequel to *A Biography of Tao Yuanming*, and the two are in some ways complementary.

With regard to the three aspects of philosophical significance 义理, rhetoric 辞章 and textual research 考据, I think textual research is problematic, but a thorough exploration of historical accounts can always bring forth some views and even resolve some long-standing disputes. Philosophical significance sounds intricate and unfathomable, but its essence could be detectable after contemplation. What is the most challenging is the study of rhetoric, which I feel supposedly competent to deal with; however, it is difficult for me to come up with some particularly new ideas. In this respect, I think it is necessary to revive the ancient tradition, and then apply modern methods of aesthetic and artistic analyses. This is the goal to pursue not only in the study of Tao, but also in the comprehensive research on ancient literature. Thus, the section of “The Song Poets’ Exposition and Acceptance of the Art of Tao’s Poetry” in **Part Four** aims to introduce the Song poets’ dialectic analysis of Tao’s poetic art, which still represents the height of the aesthetic study of the naturalness of Tao’s poetry so far. Likewise, the Song empirical research on Tao Yuanming has directly initiated the study of Tao in the modern sense. However, the Tang poets most deserve the credit for their successful representation of Tao’s poetic art in practice.

## Note

- 1 Wu Yun 吴云, “Bainian Taoxue shi (2)” 百年陶学史 (下). In *Gugeng chushi: Wu Yun jiang Tao Yuanming* 骨鲠处世——吴云讲陶渊明. Tianjin Ancient Books Publishing House, 2009, p.159.



**Taylor & Francis**

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

# Introduction

## I

With regard to Tao Yuanming and his poems, I always read and understand them as classics of poetic art and the lofty ideals of human life. And I had formed my initial recognition when I was a doctoral candidate, during which I truly felt the charm of Tao's poems. They struck a chord with me and tugged at my heartstrings. Before then, I had read many poems by my favourite poets of different periods, but I still felt that Tao's had a special loftiness. Later, I came to understand some of Su Shi's 苏轼 (1037–1101) and Huang Tingjian's 黄庭坚 (1045–1105) evaluation of and comments on Tao's poems. Huang emphasized the artistic excellence and naturalness of Tao's poetry, ranked Tao Yuanming above Xie Lingyun 谢灵运 (385–433) and Yu Xin 庾信 (513–581), and affirmed his loyalty. He wrote in his poem "Lodged in the Former Residence in Pengze, Thinking of Magistrate Tao" 宿旧彭泽怀陶令: "Free from expressly crafted diction, / his poetry is a heavenly stroke of genius"<sup>1</sup> 空余诗语工, 落笔九天上. This couplet reflects not only his appreciation of Tao's thoughts but also the poetic art. And Su Shi even placed Tao above Xie Lingyun and Bao Zhao 鲍照 in the Six Dynasties and Li Bai and Du Fu in the Tang dynasty. Moreover, most of Su Shi's comments on Tao's poems are very accurate and pertinent, and some even can be said to be very classic. In his view, Tao's poetry "seems plain but is actually resplendent, lean but really rich"<sup>2</sup> 质而实绮, 癯而实腴; and similarly, "Yuanming's poetry is seemingly insouciant and mild, after perusing, we find wonderful phrasings"<sup>3</sup> 渊明诗初看若散缓, 熟看有奇句. These are some of his constructive comments on Tao's poetic art. The subsequent Song critics followed Su and Huang's line of thought, and continued to make effective exposition of the artistic height of Tao's poetic writings, especially the naturalness and conformity to the way of art. Inspired by them, I began to make attempts to explore and summarize the imaginative world and art of Tao's poetry.

However, I came to realize that Tao Yuanming, like many other historical figures, was simplified and idolized in the historical accounts. And he was also stereotypically labelled. Generally speaking, he was basically a recluse and a lofty-minded man in historical documentary records from the Southern dynasty to the Tang dynasty. In the Song dynasty, some scholars and critics highlighted his loyalty, but also affirmed his artistic attainments, and regarded him as a man of "having the

## 2 *A Multidimensional Study of Tao Yuanming*

Way” 得道。Most likely, Yuanming gave the immediate impression of relaxed detachment, simplicity and plainness. In fact, he lived a passionate life mixed with contradictions. His inner harmony derives from the resolution of contradiction, that is, the transition from conflict to harmony, which is not so much a one-move completion but a continuous process. As a poet, being confronted with an array of contradictions and conflicts is the most essential part of Yuanming’s life experience and literary creation. However, unlike most poets who are caught in contradiction and with continuous passionate experience, Tao Yuanming seeks incessantly for a kind of transcendence or rationality. Ultimately, this rationality has crystallized into a life thought, namely, the life philosophy of “Spirit-Oriented Nature” 神辨自然。In my opinion, this personality trait may have been nurtured since his childhood. Of course, it was in middle age that Yuanming was confronted with real contradiction, the crux of which is the dilemma of engagement or reclusion, thereby arousing his deep meditation on life. It is generally assumed that Tao’s resignation from Pengze marks the solution of this contradiction, which also agrees with my initial understanding. But then I came to realize that I could not understand it that way, since the dilemma of engagement or reclusion, and the philosophizing of the substance, shadow and spirit, or in today’s terms, the question of flesh and spirit, ran actually through his life. Tao’s lifelong held serenity and purity assumed initially a kind of character: “He is a quiet man who does not talk much” 闲静少言 (“Biography of the Gentleman of the Five Willow”), 五柳先生传 and “when he was young he did not delight in amusements” 弱不好弄 (“Funeral Elegy for the Summoned Scholar Tao” by Yan Yanzhi)<sup>4</sup> 陶征士诔。Eventually, this character ascended to a sublime realm of life, a philosophy: “My outward form follows the way of change, / But my heart remains untrammelled still” 形迹凭化往, 灵府长独闲 (“In the Sixth Month of 408, Fire” 戊申岁六月中遇火)。

The ancients were not without their objections to Tao Yuanming and the art of his poetry. It is a fact well known to scholars that his artistic achievements were not fully recognized in the Southern dynasties. Even the Northern Qi litterateur Yang Xiuzhi 阳休之 (509?-582), who was an admirer of Tao Yuanming, also said: “Reading Tao Qian’s poems, I feel that his verbal refinement is not excellent, but I have found wonderful and unusual phrases, they are exceedingly vigorous and unrestrained, with highly lodged intent”.<sup>5</sup> From an artistic perspective, saying that “his verbal decorations are not excellent”, after all, is a derogatory comment. Later, the Song poet Chen Shidao 陈师道 (1053-1102) claimed that Yuanming did not compose poetry, but rather he simply expressed the wonders in his heart. Likewise, the ancients also raised objections to Tao’s thought. Among the major poets of the Tang dynasty, Wang Wei 王维 (701-761), Du Fu 杜甫 (712-770) and Liu Yuxi 刘禹锡 (772-842), all took a sceptical view of Tao’s thought. Thus, we can see that although Tao Yuanming enjoyed a high status in ancient times, the negative comments on Tao Yuanming’s poetic art and thought still existed objectively in history. Later, some neo-Confucianists also argued over whether Tao Yuanming really attained the Way, and the opposition-unity relationship between Tao Yuanming and Confucianism-Daoism. In the modern era, the doubts cast on Yuanming’s thoughts, such as his eremitism, have substantially heightened. There was a prevailing

opinion that his reclusion had a positive significance for his resistance to the dark and troubling reality and refusal to join with the vicious; but fundamentally, it was a passive posture to retreat from the world. In this sense, Tao was unworthy of being paragon of personality, not even for modern people. He was, at the most basic level, no more than an aloof recluse. Now it appears that such understanding is biased and one-sided and suffused with a sense of superiority of the times. And if we uphold this sense of superiority, neither Tao Yuanming nor any of the ancient sages could be on a par with us, and on the whole they are unqualified to be the exemplary models for us to follow.

Personally, I think that Tao Yuanming has not lost his status as a canonical writer and the classic value in our contemporary era or even in the future, whether in thought or poetry itself. So far, there is still no forcefully persuasive criticism of Tao Qian's personality and poetry that convinces us to give up studying him as a paragon, and just treat him objectively and dispassionately as a simple object of study. We are certainly not ignorant of many other literary classics, poems of various styles, besides Tao's personal writings. Even the poems by the Qing and modern poets, such as Huang Jingren 黄景仁, Su Manshu 苏曼殊 and Yu Dafu 郁达夫 have their own unique charm. When reading their works, we consciously or unconsciously feel that the expression of a certain emotion has reached artistic perfection, let alone the works of these ancient poets, such as Li Bai, Du Fu, Su Shi and Huang Tingjian. It also should be mentioned that just as great literary masterpieces are created in every age, so are the poems with admirably artistic value. After all, Tao Yuanming is essentially just an ancient-minded poet. What he can provide to later poets is relatively limited in terms of the expression of specific contents and artistic method. Although Tao's poetry has made some progress in realistic representation, it is characteristic of natural and classical lyricism. He also often reminisces about his official career in his poems, but seldom does he positively narrate his specific official experiences, especially those interpersonal contacts, such as the anecdote about his refusal to bow down to the local inspector for a measly five pecks of rice. Likewise, Tao's poems rarely depict his personal specific real-world encounters, nor do they directly express the political situation and worldly affairs at that time. Consequently, there is relatively little content in Tao's poems. After all, this is a regret for those later poets who flaunt their use of allegorical poems to admonish people. Obviously, Tao's poems are inadequately rich measured by a realistic standard. Huang Tingjian is an ardent admirer of Tao Yuanming, in terms of the reflection of the personal experience or the larger background of reality, Tao's writing approach is very close to Huang's poetic principle of "lodging the intend profoundly, evading the sensitive topics of worldly affairs" 兴托深远, 不犯世故之锋 ("A Colophon to the Poem in Reply to Chao Yuanzhong" 答晁元忠书).<sup>6</sup> As we know, Li Bai also endorsed his remarks and expressed the similar view. To my way of thinking, they are all influenced by Tao's poetic art, and their concepts and views of literary creation are largely derived from their learning experience of Tao's poems.

Furthermore, it seems that there is really not much we can learn from Yuanming in relation to his life experience. Although he once entered officialdom

and went on official trips, he lived most of his life as a recluse among the southern mountains. Seemingly, Tao's life is much simpler than that of most people, but actually, those admirers and adherents of Yuanming far surpass him in terms of real-life encounters and the richness of experience, such as the well-known literati Su Shi, Xin Qiji 辛弃疾 (1140–1207) and Gong Zizhen 龚自珍 (1792–1841). As for those caught up in the whirling vortex of political and economic strife, or those who fancy themselves “wave riders” of the times, Yuanming and his poems can neither provide them with effective strategies and artifice, nor can arouse their fighting spirit. Accordingly, in the view of people involved in the complicated modern social life, the value of Tao Yuanming's life experience as a guiding role seems to be rather dubious. On the other side, a man with rich and complicated life experiences does not necessarily play a guiding role. A simple life, by contrast, can also serve as a model of life, and even a simple life can be used as a learning object for those who have undergone plenty of trials and tribulations or lived a dramatic life. That's what it means to return to one's original nature. Equally, the art of Tao's poetry is, in a sense, simple, and the same is true of his poetic pattern, style and rhetoric. Can simple art serve as a model for complex art? The answer is definitely yes. The so-called complex art refers to the sophistication of specific artistic techniques and the richness of the representation of life contents; whereas the simple art refers to the kind that is relatively plain, ancient and unsophisticated in terms of poetic form and technique. For example, the flamboyant style prevalent in the Six Dynasties is a type of complex art, and Tao Yuanming rejects this style and replaces it with his simple and natural artistic concept. In this way, Tao's poetry is evidently closer to the essence of poetry than that composed with overelaborate techniques. The appraisal of the value of poetic art must be grounded on the idea of the essence of poetry and an aesthetic judgment that contains this idea. Our way of thinking tends to be essentialist argumentation, judging the relative superiority or inferiority of an idea or art in accordance to whether it approximates the essence and reveals the essence. Simply put, Tao Yuanming is close to attaining the Way in life, and in art, he has realized aesthetic freedom. It is notoriously problematic to distinguish whether Tao's poetry is an art or a philosophy, a beauty or a truth. Characteristically, his poetry integrates with art and philosophy, concurrently representing the truth and goodness. As far as these two aspects are concerned, the canonical value of Tao's poetry in modern times is beyond all doubt. It is time to end the era of treating Tao Yuanming only as an objective research object (the same is true for other classics of thought and art in ancient China), so as to conduct fully sympathetic and resonant research. Only in this way can the study of Tao Yuanming become a constituent part of the contemporary history of ideas and aesthetic history. Therefore, my attitude is that the study of Tao Yuanming is not equivalent to scientific research. Except for some specific empirical problems involved with the methods of induction and synthesis, the so-called “study”, in its original meaning of the modern experimental science, is only a metonymy in any discipline of liberal arts. In some cases, it is better to denote our engagement in literary research with such relatively accurate words as “approach” 走近, “understanding” 了解

or “explanation” 解释. After all, the word “study” is customarily used, and we had better comply with the convention.

## II

In relation to the comparative study of a writer, the academic community has developed a tripartite model, involving the three parts: life, thought and art. This book also adopts this model, and divides the main contents into the three sections, textual research, philosophical significance and rhetoric, to conduct the research on Tao Yuanming. Herein, the concepts concerned and problems under discussion are not all-embracing, but pertinent to some specific topics. Admittedly, my analyses of these problems may not necessarily constitute a logical system, but I strive hard to make my arguments consistent as far as possible and not self-contradictory. Occasionally, overlaps exist in some of the problems. And confusion and perplexity arise now and then in the study of Tao. In terms of the historical account of Yuanming’s life, the exact dates of birth and death and the places of residence are major problems considerably concerned with the chronology of his literary creation. I defend the account in the *History of Liu Song* which claims that Tao lived to the age of 63. And I have obtained substantial and sufficient intra-textual evidence to vindicate my stance. Arriving at a solid understanding of his places of residence is also a crux of the problem in the study of Tao, and this has seldom been seriously examined. That is to say, the problem concerning the spatial dimension of Tao’s activities is much more complicated and equivocal than that of temporal dimension. Thus, a follow-up and clarification of the spatial dimension of Tao’s activities will be surely important for us to understand his literary writings. These two aspects of the problem involve essentially empirical research, and also require a considerable amount of historical knowledge. Some knowledge has not even been definitely defined in historical records; for instance, Tao Yuanming’s reclusion is not just a simple withdrawal from officialdom; it probably results in a change in the mode of residence, that is, moving from the habitation of the gentry to that of the populace. In this sense, “Returning to the Farm to Dwell” 归园田居 signifies as much his eschewal of office and return to home as his retreat into the fields and gardens for a bucolic existence amidst nature. Therein lies the problem of the different living styles of the gentry and populace in the Wei and Jin dynasties. And pedigree, family status and social stratum are of particular relevance, since they are significant influencing factors on Tao’s living situation and affiliation with others in the society at that time. This problem is more complicated than the two mentioned above, because it is intimately related to the social and political hierarchy of the whole Eastern Jin society. To this end, we are required first of all to investigate the pedigree and stratum in the Eastern Jin before exploring Tao’s family background and social status. Nevertheless, that sounds rather unrealistic. It is definitely hard to reach a perfect state or draw a credible and logical conclusion when we approach a problem. Even so, we should not hesitate to proceed; otherwise, we will never accomplish a single success in our lifetime. The above problems discussed in this book are all related to the study of Tao’s life.

Accounts differ and opinions vary widely among scholars about the creation period of Tao Yuanming's literary writings. Taking the "Biography of the Gentleman of the Five Willows" 五柳先生传 and "Lament for Gentlemen Born out of Their Time" 感士不遇赋 as examples, some scholars believe they were written in Tao's early years, while some hold that they were composed in his later years. As opinions vary, no unanimous conclusion can be drawn, thus varied interpretations arise. With these problems unsolved, the biographical information and the development of Tao's literary creation will be a topsy-turvy account. Accordingly, our study of Tao's works is not only aimed at literary appreciation, but also a full survey of the three aspects: philosophical significance, rhetoric and textual evidence. In so doing, not only do we seek our understanding of his thought within the poems *per se*, but also probe into his inner sentiments and lodged intent. For this purpose, I make use of historical facts and adopt a logical approach. The former attempts to integrate information from various historical accounts of Tao's life story, places of residence and the intentional use of rhetorical devices in certain periods so as to determine the creation time of his writings. The latter aims to closely examine the developmental trajectory of Tao's thought and the changes of his literary style from the early period to the later to obtain corroborative evidence. Tao's poetry is characterized by its style of naturalness and simplicity, and most of his writings are accessible. However, two problems arise therefrom. The first is that accessibility does not necessarily mean that we can easily acquire a full and true understanding, since Tao's poetry is imbued with profundity and subtlety. The second is that in some of his poems, such as "Imitations" (a series of nine poems) 拟古九首 and "An Account of Wine" 述酒, Yuanming adopts the rhetorical device of equivocation and also uses enigmatic and cryptic diction, consequently doubling the difficulty in achieving a thorough and precise interpretation.

Tao Yuanming's political orientation, which involves his ethical view, is a matter of historical controversy, opinions are widely divided. Since the ethics of the Jin thinkers are very complicated in comparison to the different times before and after, it is not easy to expound Tao's political attitude more accurately, especially his reaction to the Jin and Liu Song dynasty change. An intensive study of Tao's outlook on life and attitude towards life necessitates an intimate knowledge of broad ideological background. It is improbable that the formulation of one's ideas and thoughts is totally self-sufficient; however, what truly deserves to be called an individual's thought is invariably internalized into his mind through his own understanding and practice within the social milieu. Tao Yuanming is by no means a philosopher in a general sense, but he does have high attainments in philosophizing. His greatest advancement in philosophy lies in that he syncretizes the thinking about life of substance-spirit philosophy 形神哲学 with the doctrine of Names and Daoist naturalism 名教与自然 prominent in the Wei-Jin dynasties, and thus formulates his life philosophy of "Spirit-Oriented Nature" 神辨自然. Noteworthy, this is the most intensive philosophical expression of his thought of life. Some scholars have described Tao's spiritual realm as "a state of crystal-line transparency" 澄明之境. If this realm is truly achieved, I think, it is also the ultimate aesthetic transformation of his philosophy of "Spirit-Oriented Nature",

namely, a perceptual presentation of what he expressed in the line “but my heart remains untrammelled still”. On the whole, Tao Yuanming, as an exemplar of personality from the Southern dynasties to the Tang dynasty, epitomizes to a great extent the reclusive and lofty demeanour, and his overall thoughts had not been valued until the Song dynasty. Although Tao’s thought of “flesh, shadow and spirit” was recurrently transmitted in the imitations of successive dynasties, its philosophical implications have not been fully elucidated, nor is its significance as his lifelong “guiding principle” generally recognized. In a larger sense, Yuanming’s important status in the history of ideas constructed by modern scholars is largely ignored, and his key role in the core vein of ancient Chinese philosophy is utterly obscured.

Fortunately, far-sighted personages in ancient times were well aware of Tao’s lofty position in the history of Chinese thought. Lu Jiuyuan 陆九渊 (1139–1193), founder of the *Xinxue* 心学, once observed, “Li Bai, Du Fu and Tao Yuanming are all intent upon my Way (*Xinxue*)”.<sup>7</sup> Tan Sitong 谭嗣同 (1865–1898), a great modern thinker, remarked in the Preface to his *Of Benevolence* 仁学:

Those who pursue the study of benevolence should have a good knowledge of Buddhist classics, an extensive reading of western canons, such as the *New Testament*, as well as academic monographs of mathematics, physics and sociology. Above all, they should familiarize with the *Four Books* and the *Five Classics*, and such Chinese classical masterpieces as *Records of the Grand Historian*, and the great works of Zhuangzi, Mengzi and Mozi, plus with those of Tao Yuanming, Zhou Maoshu 周茂叔, Zhang Hengqu 张横渠, Lu Zijing 陆子静, Wang Yangming 王阳明, Wang Chuanshan 王船山 and Huang Lizhou 黄梨洲.<sup>8</sup>

Although Lu and Tan have their respective focal points, taken together, it is evident that Tao Yuanming does play a pivotal role in the history of Chinese philosophy, and is one of the sources of various philosophical thought, such as neo-Confucianism, *Xinxue* 心学 and even Zenism that arose later in China. Since Tao’s philosophy of “Spirit-Oriented Nature” directly explores the true essence of life, it might be possible to achieve compatibility and extend it to the history of world philosophy. However, what unique attainments Tao Yuanming makes in philosophy have never been intensely explored. Likewise, the modern neo-Confucian masters have not attached particular attention to Yuanming’s thought in their comparative study of the Chinese and Western philosophy.

This book, with the focus on the philosophical implication of “Spirit-Oriented Nature”, attempts to probe into Tao’s life philosophy and extends the thought of flesh, shadow and spirit to the examination of his life and creation through internal evidence-based approach; and explores through external evidence-based approach his historical position in relation to the thought of flesh and spirit, with special emphasis on his philosophical originality and loftiness. Meanwhile, this book aims to make an analytical study of the triple-realm of substance, shadow and spirit in Tao’s poems from the perspective of realm aesthetic.

Furthermore, this book attempts to study the art of Tao's poetry. As for the height of Tao's poetic art, scholars and critics in the northern and southern dynasties had neither made a complete evaluation nor acquired comprehensive knowledge of his artistic attainments. And the Tang poets were deeply influenced by Tao's poems, even though they had more or less understanding, they could hardly develop a systematic criticism. It was not until the Song dynasty that Su Shi, Huang Tingjian, Zhu Xi and others made a more adequate aesthetic interpretation of Tao's poetic art, mostly in a dialectical way. Accordingly, some of their conclusions provided guidelines for later generations to make their own evaluation of Yuanming's poems. However, the previous studies of Tao were confined to the discussion and interpretation of his poetry *per se*, rarely did they deal with the original relationship between Tao's poetry and that of the Wei-Jin. The exploration of the origin of Tao's poetry in Zhong Rong's 鍾嶸 (ca.468–ca.518) *Grades of Poetry* 詩品 did not arouse much attention until the Ming and Qing dynasties. Yet most of the discussions were merely the extension centred on Zhong Rong's comments and evaluation. Consequently, little attention was given to the overall inheritance and development of Tao's poetry and that of the Han, Wei-Jin dynasties. This book takes into account the examination of the unique and even unmatched classic value of Tao's poetry on the one hand, and on the other highlights the connection between Tao Yuanming and the history of poetry, and further analyzes the general paradigm of the Wei-Jin poetry which is highly individualized by Tao Yuanming. Accordingly, the discussion of Tao's poetic art is not so much a rhetorical approach as an aesthetic one, that is, the exploration of the artistic philosophy embodied in Tao's poems, or how he has completed his aesthetic practice through crystallized and highly conscious spiritual musings, and eventually created his literary works in accord with the law of art to the greatest extent.

Many scholars and critics stress the loftiness of Tao's poetry, in other words, they have observed the essence of a kind of idealized poetry, especially the naturalness in style, embodied in his poems. And similar expressions of this naturalness occurred only in the "Nineteen Old Poems" 古诗十九首 and Cao Cao's 曹操 (155–220) poems created at the early developmental stage of the five-character poetry. That is what we call the natural, lofty and archaic style of the Han-Wei poetry. Tao Yuanming lived in the period of the late Jin and early Liu-song dynasties. As we know, before his creation, the history of poetry had witnessed several apexes, such as Jian'an 建安 (196–220), Zhengshi 正始 (240–249) and the Western Jin, during which classical poets came to the fore and began to display their literary talent, thus a considerable number of classic five-character poems were created. The naturalness of Tao's poetry, in view of the development of the history of poetry, is a return to his original nature. I once took the developmental trajectory from Cao Cao's poetry to that of Tao Yuanming, or from the "Nineteen Old Poems" to Tao Yuanming's as a way of thinking about the history of poetry, and proposed that Tao's poetry was a return after the five-character poems were fully artisticalized and artificialized in the hands of literati. Now I have abandoned this somewhat transcendental thinking, but I still treat it as a way of understanding. Art at all times tends to oscillate between the two poles of nature and artificiality; the tendency

towards nature or the pursuit of artificiality, in many cases, depends on the writer's personality and aesthetic taste. Historically, poets with triumphant achievements in their natural style, including Tao Yuanming, Wang Ji 王绩 (585–644) and Li Bai 李白 (701–762), and even Ruan Ji 阮籍 (210–263), Zuo Si 左思 (ca.250–ca.305) and Cao Cao, were naturalists in thought, and all advocated naturalness in personality, though their vast and multifarious differences in the specific expressions of thought cannot be mentioned in the same breath. Accordingly, the pursuit of naturalness or tendency to artificiality in poetic creation, every so often, is attributable to the way of thinking, mentality and individuality. And we tend to consider them as the major reasons. In some cases, the choice between naturalness and artificiality is seen as a kind of opposing and complementary movement of the history of poetry. These periods are not the most typical. When the poetry of the Southern dynasty, with florid verbal embellishment as the beautiful and rhetoric as the supreme, became gradually artificial, the most representative ensued; as it were, the Early and High Tang archaism took the pursuit of naturalness as an important goal. These phenomena also make me aware that the problematic naturalness and artificiality cannot be perceived purely as a question of the writer's personality and aesthetic palate. Even the individuality of a writer is hardly immune from the influence of tradition and the prevailing trend of his time.

Tao Yuanming is undeniably the exemplar of natural style, which does not necessarily mean that he has no intention to pursue literary refinement and craftsmanship, nor does he ignore the artistic effects of rhetorical devices. Through a survey of some phenomena of his literary creation and writing practice, such as his composition of many poems in series, we can find in terms of the genres or patterns in his poems the traces of the influence of poetic tradition since the *Book of Poetry*. Evidently, he has inherited a rich artistic tradition. Furthermore, after a new understanding of his humble status, we come to realize that he is a promoter of the Han-Wei lyric tradition of the humble group, as his poems reflect the lyrical style of humble poets in the theme, image and other aspects. For example, as to the representational objects in poetry, the Western Jin tended to return to antiquity, and poems began to externalize the spiritual world and real life; of course, the poetic pattern still functioned as a means to express emotion and aspiration. By the Eastern Jin, metaphysical poetry began to prevail, and poems were mostly expressive of abstract contents, or a kind of virtual personality ideal, which had its realistic ideological basis, but without realistic significance and the real sense of life, thus was empty and superficial. Tao Yuanming restored the lyric tradition of the humble group since the "Nineteen Old Poems". There is indeed much philosophy in Tao's poetry; but the reason for his success lies less in his philosophizing than lyricism. In all his life, Yuanming is always a man of true feelings, and he is very affectionate towards his families, friends and neighbours. Such beautiful feelings in the world as love, friendship and family affection are all present in his poems. However, his feelings extend beyond the secular life, as he is always reminiscent of the leisurely rustic life amidst nature. He particularly yearns for a life of simplicity and genuineness, all of which are not merely the

manifestation of his sincere and true feelings, but also a revelation of his spiritual pursuit of transcendence, loftiness and serenity. Truly, a reading of these poems arouses our admiration for Yuanming and spontaneously our yearning for rustic life. In this way, Tao Yuanming promoted the lyric tradition of five-character poetry, and equally made notable advances in the representation of the real life. Among the poems of the two Jin dynasties, Tao's are the most abundant in subject matter and theme. Of course, he writes mainly about his own life experiences and daily activities, such as official service, ploughing in fields, personal contacts, which are the most typical topics in Tao's poems. Some scholars claim that Yuanming seems little inclined to touch on the contents of politics and reality of his time. Actually, he reveals in "An Account of Wine" his political view, but in an implicit way. The realistic contents, such as the concern about the social turmoil of the time, the lives and livelihood of the ordinary, do not have a positive expression in Tao's poetry. This is really a complicated problem to deal with, since it is closely related to his artistic concept and the general poetic style of the time. In light of the canonical statement of poetry in the "Great Preface" to the *Mao Commentary* 毛诗大序, it has the political and allegorical functions, and the intent to express sentiments. Most of Tao's poems belong to the latter.

Nonetheless, we can still see that Tao Yuanming is a pioneering innovator in the subject matter and the representational object in the development of five-character poetry. In other words, from the perspective of the development of realistic poetry (which is a trend in the development of poetic art), Tao Yuanming deserves to be called a major poet. His poetry, aimed at the expression of genuine spiritual experiences and everyday life, breaks the traditional aesthetic stereotype, especially the gradually aristocratic flamboyant style of the Jin Dynasties. Moreover, his poems overflow the limits of the sphere of representation. Traditionally, fields and gardens were treated as the objects of lodging lofty sentiments; Tao Yuanming, however, directly describes his life in fields and gardens, his ploughing in farmstead and the georgic bliss, which has never occurred in the traditional poems. As a result, his poetic composition has made an exceptional progress in terms of subject matter and content, thereby laying the foundation for the use of some similar themes in the later Tang and Song poems. Additionally, Tao Yuanming has reached an extraordinary height in the artistry of realistic writing and creative scene. As a poet of exceptionally natural style, he never portrays scenes and things in a static, rigid way, nor does he load his writing with fancy and overelaborate diction. What he pursues and values most is the true artistic effect. In this regard, Tao can be regarded as the top poet of the Six Dynasties, and his great influence on the Tang poets, especially Li Bai and Du Fu, is a generally acknowledged fact.

The last part of this book is a general survey of the history of reception, history of influence, and history of criticism and research on Tao Yuanming and his literary writings. The main purpose is to make an overall account of the history of Tao's influence, and to gain an insight into his works in the total context of the history of ideas and history of poetry. Yuanming is not a poet in a pure

sense; the ideological and cultural significance that his poems convey is more abundant and meaningful than the poetry itself. Or rather, the perfect poetic art in essence is endowed with rich philosophical and cultural significances. In a sense, Tao Yuanming is one of the representatives of the Chinese tradition (and even the Eastern tradition), and his highly conscious self-fulfilment has a far-ranging significance in the human pursuit of self-worth. A contemporary scholar points out:

“The study of Tao Yuanming must be conducted in the whole context of Chinese culture, otherwise, it is hard to explore his value and influence, since his poetry accords closely with Chinese cultural spirit, it is a perfect embodiment of the quintessence of Chinese tradition. Yuanming gives an infectious expression of his insight into the way to the highest good through his poetic language. Without a profound understanding of Chinese culture, the discussion of Tao’s poetry will miss the point, just like scratching an itch in a leg outside the boot.”<sup>9</sup>

Undeniably, this is a reasonable point of view. The deep-rooted relationship between Tao’s poetry and the spirit of Chinese culture is most typically reflected in its later profound influence on Chinese culture.

This is a brief introduction of the main contents in this book. Tao Yuanming is a timeless poet, at any time in my study of his poetry and his personality, I am always feeling that I attempt to measure the sea with an oyster shell. Much more remains for me to learn, to explore so as to bring the study of Tao Yuanming studies to new depths. The beauty of his poetic language, the profundity of his philosophical musings, and his contemplation on the fundamental questions of human existence, his lofty character and innate love for nature are always open to our understanding, exploration and interpretation.

## Notes

- 1 Huang Tingjian 黄庭坚, *Huang Tingjian shi jizhu* (juan1, vol.1) 黄庭坚诗集注, 卷一, 册一. Annotated by Ren Yuan 任渊, et al. Collated by Liu Shangrong 刘尚荣. Zhonghua Book Company, 2003.
- 2 Su Zhe 苏辙, *Luancheng ji* (juan 21, vol.2) 栾城集, 卷二十一, 册下. Collated by Zeng Zaozhuang 曾枣庄, Ma Defu 马德富. Shanghai Chinese Classics Publishing House, 1987.
- 3 Quoted in: *Lengzhai yehua* 冷斋夜话. In *Xijian ben songren shihua sizhong* 稀见本宋人诗话四种. Edited and Collated by Zhang Bawei 张伯伟, Jiangsu Ancient Books Publishing House, 2002, p.14.
- 4 Yan Kejun 严可均, ed., *Quan shanggu sandai Qin Han sanguo liuchao wen* (juan 38, vol.3) 全上古三代秦汉三国六朝文全宋文 (卷三十八, 册三). Zhonghua Book Company, 1996, p.2646.
- 5 *Beiqi Yang Xiuzhi zhi xulu* 北齐阳休之序录. In *Jianzhu Tao Yuanming ji* 笺注陶渊明集. Annotated by Li Gonghuan 李公焕. Beijing Library Publishing House, 2003, Photolithograph Yuan block-printed edition by China Rare-book Reproduction Project “中华再造善本工程”影印元刻本.

12 *A Multidimensional Study of Tao Yuanming*

- 6 *Song Huang Wenjie quanji: Zhengji* (juan 18) 宋黄文节公全集·正集 (卷十八). In *Huang Tingjian quanji* 黄庭坚全集. Collated by Liu Lin 刘琳 et al. Sichuan University Press, 2001, p.462.
- 7 Lu Jiuyuan 陆九渊, *Lu Jiuyuan ji* 陆九渊集. Collated by Zhong Zhe 钟哲. Zhonghua Book Company, 1980, p.410.
- 8 Tan Sitong 谭嗣同, *Tan Sitong quanji* (zengding ben, vol.2) 谭嗣同全集 (增订本, 册下). Edited by Cai Shangsi 蔡尚思, Fang Xing 方行. Zhonghua Book Company, 1981, p.293.
- 9 Jiang Yinghao 蒋英豪, "Tao shi xinlun xu." 陶诗新论·序. In Zhong Yingmei 钟应梅, *Tao shi xinlun* 陶诗新论. Hong Kong Nengren Shuyuan, 1995, p.1.

**Part One**

# **Textual Research**



**Taylor & Francis**

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

# 1 A New Critical Assessment of the Evidential Research on Tao's Birth Year

## 1.1 A Survey of the Historical Accounts and Previous Views

It was accounted in Tao Yuanming's biography written by Shen Yue 沈约 (441–453) in the “Biographies of Recluses” in the *History of Liu Song* 宋书·隐逸传: “Tao Qian died in the fourth year of the Yuanjia 元嘉 (427), at the age of sixty-three”.<sup>1</sup> This can be treated as solid evidence, for Yan Yanzhi 颜延之 (384–456) wrote in his “Funeral Elegy for the Summoned Scholar Tao” 陶征士诔: “Tao died so many years on a date in the fourth year of the Yuanjia period at a certain village in the district of Xunyang” 春秋若干, 元嘉四年月日, 卒于寻阳县之某里.<sup>2</sup> And Yuanming wrote in the “In Sacrifice for Myself” 自祭文: “The year is dingmao, and the correspondence of the pitch-pipe is Wuyi (in the ninth month of the lunar calendar) 岁惟丁卯, 律中无射. That is precisely in the ninth month in the fourth year of the Yuanjia period. Accordingly, Wu Renjie 吴仁杰 (1137–ca.1200) confirmed in his *A Chronology of Master Tao Jingjie* 陶靖节先生年谱 that Tao passed away in the fourth year of Yuanjia (427). However, it was assumed that Tao died later than that, not necessarily after writing his “In Sacrifice for Myself”. In fact, Yuanming did not write his age into this eulogy for himself, but said:

I rejoiced in my destiny, accepted my lot, And so lived out my “hundred years”. These “hundred years”! All men begrudge them.	乐天委分, 以至百年。 惟此百年, 夫人爱之。
--	----------------------------------

The so-called hundred years is a synonym for the span of one's life. And Yuanming added:

My life has approached its span; My person has striven for retirement. From old age I have come to my end; What more could I desire?	寿涉百龄, 身慕肥遁, 从老得终, 奚所复恋!
---	----------------------------------

Saying that his life “approached its span” suggests that he died a natural death, not a premature death. After textual research, Liang Qichao 梁启超 (1873–1929) concluded that Tao died at fifty-six, while Gu Zhi 古直 (1885–1959) asserted at

fifty-two, neither conforms to Tao's self-narration in this poem. The death in one's fifties cannot be counted as a natural death, but if one died in his sixties, we can say that he lived out the years of his life and died of old age, as the Chinese ancients said that a man seldom lives to be seventy years old.

Yan Yanzhi's "Funeral Elegy for the Summoned Scholar Tao", included in the *Selections of Refined Literature (Wenxuan)* 文选, was attached to some later editions of the *Collected Works of Tao Yuanming*, and the original words "Tao died so many years" 春秋若干 were rewritten as "died at the age of sixty-three" 春秋六十三. Yuan Xingpei 袁行霈 believes: "This is an appendix to Tao's collection, or the collator with his preconception thus added these six characters according to Shen Yue's *Biography of Tao Yuanming*, which is not as reliable as *Wen xuan*".<sup>3</sup> That really makes some sense. Then Yuan, based on the fact that Yan Yanzhi's "Funeral Elegy for the Summoned Scholar Tao" did not mention Yuanming's lifespan, casts doubt on the account of Tao's life in the *History of Liu Song*:

Yan Yanzhi had a friendly relationship or deep affection with Yuanming, and composed the eulogy shortly after Tao's death without knowing his lifespan. Moreover, Shen Yue was younger than Yan, so how did he know? According to the "Preface" to the *History of Liu Song*, the book was compiled under the imperial edict from the spring of the fifth year of Yongming 永明 (487), and completed in the second month of the sixth year of Yongming (488), and it had been sixty-one years since Tao's death (427). Then, the basis of Shen Yue's claim was questionable. Compared with the two, I would rather believe what was written in Yan's "Funeral Elegy for the Summoned Scholar Tao" and doubt what was accounted in Shen's *Biography of Tao Yuanming*.<sup>4</sup>

Although Yan Yanzhi was a friend of Tao Yuanming, he was not necessarily clear about Tao's specific age. Next, we will trace and discuss the source about Yuanming's lifespan accounted in the *History of Liu Song* by Shen Yue.

According to the *History of Liu Song*, Tao Yuanming died in the fourth year of the Yuanjia (427) at the age of sixty-three. Then, it can be calculated that he was born in the third year of Xingning 兴宁 (365) during the reign of Emperor Ai 哀帝 of the Eastern Jin. Before Zhang Yan 张纘 of the Southern Song wrote his *A Textual Criticism of Wu Jingjie's Chronological Biography of Tao Yuanming* 吴谱辨证, scholars had not raised any objection to it. In the Southern Song dynasty, several editions of the chronology of Tao Yuanming were revised in accordance with the account in the *History of Liu Song*. However, Zhang found evidence in Tao's poems, and proposed that Tao died at the age of seventy-six:

Master Tao wrote in "An Excursion to Xiechuan" 游斜川: "I've reached fifty in the opening year" 开岁倏五十. If it is right, Tao was born in the year of Renzi 壬子. By the year of Xinchou 辛丑, he had already been fifty years old. At the end of the year of Dingmao 丁卯 he passed away, thus having a natural lifespan of seventy-six years.<sup>5</sup>

“Xinchou” was the fifth year of Long’an 隆安 during the reign of Emperor An of the Jin. Tao said that he was fifty years old that year. Thus, we are certain that he was born in the year of Renzi, namely, the eighth year of Yonghe 永和 of Emperor Mu of the Jin 晋穆帝, and he was seventy-six years old when he died in the year of Dingmao (427). If the line in “An Excursion to Xiechuan” has no verbal ambiguity, Zhang Yan’s statement will refute the account in the *History of Liu Song*. Li Gonghuan 李公焕 of the Southern Song still held that Tao died at the age of sixty-three in his *An Annotated Collection of Tao Yuanming* 笺注陶渊明集, as he thought that “fifty” 五十 in the line that “开岁脩五十” should be understood as “the fifth day” 五日: that is, “The year begins and at once it is the fifth day”.

It was accounted that Tao Jingjie was thirty-seven years old in the year of Xinchou. And we read in the poem the line that “I’ve reached fifty in the opening year”, which refers to the tenth year of Yixi 义熙 (the year of Jiayin 甲寅, 414). With this line as evidence, the preface is incorrect. If we read the line as “The year begins and at once it is the fifth day”, it is largely consistent with the date in the preface, that is, “on the fifth day of the first month” 五月五日.<sup>6</sup>

In the later versions of Tao’s collected works, “sui” 岁 was noted as “day” 日 in light of Li Gonghuan’s annotated edition, not based on the circulated edition. Actually, in the style of cursive script, “日” looks similar to “十”. Nevertheless, the line that “The year begins and at once it is the fifth day” sounds abrupt in tone, and it is not coherent with the following line that “My life goes onward to its rest” 吾生行归休. For this reason, few scholars take this annotation.

Tao’s poems are the most widely circulated with more variants. In other versions of Tao’s collected works preserved during the Southern Song dynasty, “Xinchou” 辛丑 was annotated as “Xinyou” 辛酉, as in Tang Han’s 汤汉 (1202–1272) *Annotated Poetry of Master Tao Jingjie* 陶靖节诗. It was the second year of Yongchu 永初 in the Liu Song dynasty. If “Xinchou” was identified as the year designated by the Heavenly Stems and Earthly Branches, and based on the line that “I’ve reached fifty in the opening year”, Tao Yuanming was fifty-six years old when he died; thus, it can be calculated that he was born in the second year of Xian’an 咸安 of Emperor Jianwen of Jin 晋简文帝 (372). It is for this reason that Liang Qichao claimed that Tao Yuanming lived for fifty-six years.<sup>7</sup>

We might as well quote the preface to “A Trip to the Slanting River” 游斜川 and the relevant lines:

On the fifth day of the first month in the year of Xinyou, the day was mild and clear with a scenery of tranquil beauty. I took a trip to the Slanting River with

a couple of friends from my neighbourhood. ... Not contented with merely enjoying the scene, we wrote poems on the spot. Regretting the swift passage of time and the brevity of our life-span, each of us put down our time and place of birth and the date of this trip.

(Wang Rongpei's translation, p.149.)

辛酉正月五日, 天气澄和, 风物闲美, 与二三邻曲, 同游斜川。.....欣对不足, 率共赋诗。悲日月之遂往, 悼吾年之不留。各疏年纪乡里, 以记其时日。

I've reached fifty in the opening year;	开岁倏五十,
The end of my dear life is drawing near.	吾生行归休。
This very thought has filled my heart with woe,	念之动中怀,
And so on springtime trip I gladly go.	及辰为兹游。

(Wang Rongpei's translation, p.149.)

Lu Qinli 逯钦立 (1910–1973) maintains that “Xinyou” 辛酉 is used as a way of numbering the days, not the years. Based on *The Conversion Table of the Lunar Calendar Years and Chronology of Dynasties in the Twenty Official Historical Books* 二十史朔闰表 by Chen Yuan 陈垣 (1880–1971), he reckons that the first day of the first month in the tenth year of Yixi (414) is designated as “shuo ri” 朔日 (the first day) of Xinyou. Assuming that Tao Yuanming died at sixty-three in the fourth year of the Yuanjia (427), he was exactly fifty in this year (414). Thus, he wrote in the poem that “I’ve reached fifty in the opening year” 开岁倏五十. Lu Qinli argues that it was a custom in the Jin that people usually offered sacrifices to their ancestors and went for an outing with families or friends on the first day of the first month of the lunar year. And Yuanming followed this custom and went on trip to the Slanting River. For specific statements, please refer to “Appendix Two: The Chronology of Tao Yuanming’s Deeds and Poetic Writings in the Tenth Year of Yixi” 陶渊明事迹诗文系年·义熙十年 in *The Collected Works of Tao Yuanming* 陶渊明集 collated and annotated by Lu Qinli.<sup>8</sup> As far as I know, in many southern areas, the first day of the first lunar month is customarily a special occasion for official scholars and common people to go for an outing. Since Tao Yuanming stated expressly that it was “the fifth day of the first lunar month” in the preface to the poem, Lu Qinlin has to argue that the numbering word “五” in “the fifth day of the first lunar month” is mistaken, which is less persuasive after all.

All in all, Tao Yuanming’s age is a controversial issue. And the crux of the matter lies in the lines of “A Trip to the Slanting River”:

I've reached fifty in the opening year;	开岁倏五十,
The end of my dear life is drawing near.	吾生行归休。
This very thought has filled my heart with woe,	念之动中怀,
And so on springtime trip I gladly go.	及辰为兹游。

(Wang Rongpei's translation: “A Trip to the Slanting River”, p.149.)

Reading these lines, we can just rest assured that “fifty” must be correct. The opening year 开岁 refers to the New Year's Day. What Yuanming intended to express was that when the new year began, he was approaching fifty, and his life went towards its final rest. The thought of this stirred his innermost feelings. On this special occasion, he made this excursion. Lu Qinli annotated: “In the line ‘行归休’, ‘行’ means ‘proceed’, or ‘going onward’; and ‘归休’ means ‘retreat and return’, signifying that from now on, he will retire and withdraw from official life”.<sup>9</sup> Lu proposed that Yuanming composed this poem at the age of fifty. In fact, he resigned from Pengze at forty-two and lived in seclusion for many years. Thus, it does not stand to reason for Yuanming to say that from now on he will no longer assume an official position. Seemingly, it is more appropriate to interpret the line as that his life was drawing to an end, for we read the line that “This very thought has filled my heart with woe” 念之动中怀 in the poem.

As regards Tao Yuanming's lifespan, since Zhang Yan of the Southern Song dynasty cast doubt on the account in *The Book of Liu Song* that Tao Yuanming died at the age of sixty-three, based on the annotation to “Xinchou” 辛丑 and the line that “I've reached fifty in the opening year” in Tao's “A Trip to the Slanting River”, modern scholars and commentators have set out their arguments against it. Their major method is to seek evidence from Tao's own poetic writings. Conventionally, some poets showed a somewhat of disregard for the factors of time and place in their writing practice, and rarely was the time of their life activities, as well as the time and place of creation designated or recorded in their literary works. In this aspect, Ruan Ji's 阮籍 (210–263) “Eight-Two Songs of My Hearts” 咏怀诗八十二首 was a case in point. In effect, the Wei-Jin poetry attached much less attention to such historical factors as time and place, which might be a manifestation of its pure lyricism. It was not until the Liu Song dynasty that poets began to put more emphasis on time and place in their works. Amongst others, Xie Lingyun 谢灵运 (385–433), was an exemplar. When it comes to Tao Yuanming, his poems may be roughly classified into two types. One is the pure lyric, which follows the style of Ruan Ji and others, such as the “Twenty Poems after Drinking Wine” 饮酒二十首, “Imitations” (nine poems) 拟古九首, and “Untitled Poems (twelve poems) 杂诗十二首, all of which are included in volume four of his collected works. The other type involves eight or nine poems in total with the years designated by the Heavenly Stems and Earthly Branches 干支纪年, such as “In the Fifth Month of the Year Gengzi (400), Held up at Guilin by Adverse Winds while Coming back from the Capital” (two poems) 庚子岁五月中从都还阻风于规林二首, and “Written at Tukou at Night during the Seventh Moon of the Year Xinchou (401), while Returning to Jiangling after Leave” 辛丑岁七月赴假还江陵夜行涂口. In addition, Tao Yuanming prefers to write his age into his poems, reflective more or less of the typical feature of his poetic composition. Also, with a strong awareness of historiography and being well-informed about history, he has written some historical biographies and eulogies, which indicates that he values the lived experiences of individuals.

Now that accounts differ and opinions vary in the textual research on the time and place of Tao's life activities, it seems that Yuanming is to blame for

the lack of account of his own life. Quite the reverse, we read no less information about the time and place in relation to his life and poetic creation in his works. It is observed that there reveals a clear tendency for true account in poems by Tao Yuanming and Xie Lingyun (probably influenced by Tao in this respect), thus leaving much information about specific time and place. For this reason, such confidence seems to be shared by all of those who believe that the problem of Tao's lifespan can be solved after all through an analytical reading of his writings. Accordingly, the conventional textual researches of Tao's age, pro or con, all take his works as intra-textual evidence, which may even be treated as a research method. Among modern scholars and researchers, Liang Qichao is the first practitioner, and his research has exerted significant influence. After gathering all the lines concerning Tao's self-narration of his age in all his poetic writings, Liang exclaimed, "I have found in Tao's twelve poems the account of his own age in his own words". Then, he listed the relevant lines in these poems:

## 1 "Returning to the Farm to Dwell" 归园田居:

By mischance I fell into the dusty net,	误落尘网中,
And was thirteen years away from home.	一去三十年。

## 2 "A Trip to the Slanting River" 游斜川:

I've reached fifty in the opening year,	开岁倏五十,
The end of my dear life is drawing near.	吾生行归休。

(Wang Rongpei's translation: "A Trip to the Slanting River", p.140.)

## 3 "A Lament in the Chu Mode" 怨诗楚调:

The best I could, these fifty-four years.	僂俛六九年
---	-------

## 4 "A Lament in the Chu Mode":

At twenty I met with troubled times,	弱冠逢世阻,
When thirty I lost my first wife.	始室丧其偏。

## 5 "Drinking Alone in the Rainy Season" 连雨独饮:

I have struggled through forty years.	僂俛四十年。
---------------------------------------	--------

## 6 "Written at Tukou at Night during the Seventh Moon of the Year Xinchou (401), while Returning to Jiangling after Leave" 辛丑岁七月赴假还江陵夜行涂中:

For thirty years I stayed quietly at home,	闲居三十载,
And kept my distance from the dusty world.	遂与尘事冥。

7 "In the Sixth Month of Wushen (408), Fire" 戊申岁六月中遇火:

Since youth I've held my solitary course	总发抱孤念,
Until all at once thirty-six years have passed.	奄出四九年。

8 "Twenty Poems After Drinking Wine" 饮酒二十首:

So it went and now I am nearly forty,	行行向不惑,
With nothing done to show for all those years.	淹留遂无成。

9 "Twenty Poems After Drinking Wine":

I had reached the age one should have made his start,	是时向立年,
For lost ideals I was much ashamed.	志意多所耻。

10 "Untitled Poems" 杂诗:

But now with fifty years of my own,	奈何五十年,
I'm all at once doing it myself.	忽已亲此事。

11 "To My Sons, Yan and the Others" 与子俨等疏:

My years have passed fifty.	吾年过五十。
-----------------------------	--------

12 "In Sacrifice for My Sister Madame Cheng" 祭程氏妹文:

My years were twice six,	我年二六,
You were just nine years old.	尔才九龄。 <sup>10</sup>

Reading the above lines, we can find that Tao Yuanming is a numeral-conscious poet and even likes to use the expression of multiplication in his poems, such as “六九” (six times nine), “四九” (four times nine), “二六” (two times six) and others. Perhaps, this might have been the usual practice at that time, or say, a distinguishing feature of Tao's poetic writing close to everyday language. Then, how did Liang Qichao make his textual research? To put it briefly, he invoked the line that “I've reached fifty in the opening year” 开岁倏五十 in “An Excursion to Xiechuan” to conclude that Tao Yuanming died at the age of fifty-six. As it is known that “Xinchou” 辛丑 was annotated as “Xinyou” 辛酉 in other versions of Tao's collected works, so this line would not be taken as corroboration. Then Liang had to resort to the other lines in the above-listed poems as circumstantial evidence, but neither of them is convincing. However, through his analysis of all these lines, Liang listed eight items of evidence and attempted to overturn the confirmation that Tao's lifespan was sixty-three years. Furthermore, Liang argued: “The deeds of Master Tao from the age of twelve to fifty-four recur many times in his poetic writings. If he lived on into his sixties, how come none of the poems talk about it?”<sup>11</sup> For Liang, it does not make sense to say that Tao writes few poems as his

old age is drawing near, for he has composed “In Sacrifice for Myself” 自祭文 and “Bearers’ Songs” (three poems) 拟挽歌辞三首. This is, probably, the crucial perceptual knowledge that supports Liang Qichao’s assertion that Yuanming did not live past the age of sixty. We know that a firm evidential basis needed to be established before any conclusion of textual research is drawn. Without sufficient evidential information, the conclusions of textual research mostly fall into perceptual understanding. Therefore, You Guoen 游国恩 (1899–1978) wrote an essay entitled “The Query and Textual Criticism of Tao Qian’s Lifespan” 陶潜年纪辨疑 as a complete refutation of Liang’s statement. He said, “It seems like, at first blush, a firm reversal; but on closer examination, it is absolutely preposterous”.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, his refutation of Liang’s claim was still based on the annotation to the year of “Xinchou” 辛丑 and the line that “The year begins and at once it is the fifth day” 开岁脩五日. It is known that “the fifth day” 五日 originally appeared in Li Gonghuan’s 李公焕 edition entitled *An Annotated Collection of Tao Yuanming* 笺注陶渊明集. All of You Guoen’s other arguments against Liang’s claim are not solid evidence and similarly unfounded. In brief, although Liang and You proposed the relatively systematic confirmation respectively in their textual research on Tao’s lifespan, neither of them can be deemed as final conclusion. It might be thus said, there is indeed a right answer hidden behind the recurrent self-narration of his age and deeds in Tao’s collected works. But how can we find the answer? No one seems to have found the key to unlock it.

As we know, Zhang Yan believed that Tao died at the age of seventy-six;<sup>13</sup> and Liang Qichao claimed that Yuanming’s lifespan was fifty-six.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, Gu Zhi held that it was fifty-two.<sup>15</sup> Based on the lines: “Heaven and Earth allot our life, where there is life, there must be an end” 天地赋命, 生必有死, and “My Years have passed fifty” 吾年过五十 in “To My Sons, Yan and the Others”; and the line that “This early end is not fate’s malice” 早终非命促 in the first of the “Bearers’ Songs” 拟挽歌辞; as well as the line that “When your years were of middle age” 年在中身 in the “Funeral Elegy for the Summoned Scholar Tao” 陶征士诔 by Yan Yanzhi, Gu Zhi contended that Tao died after fifty. These lines, however, are all inconclusive evidence, of which the line that “When your years were of middle age” in the “Funeral Elegy” is not Yuanming’s dying words. And we read in the first of his “Bearers’ Songs”:

All that live must die:	有生必有死,
This early end is not fate’s malice.	早终非命促。
Last night a man like any other,	昨暮同为人,
Today inscribed among the ghosts.	今旦在鬼录。

These lines are actually more of the typical sigh over the transience of human life. It is quite natural for a man of sixty-three to give vent to such feelings. As for the lines in Yan’s “Funeral Elegy”:

When your years were of middle age,	年在中身,
You became ill with a malarial fever.	疾维疟疾。

You regarded death as returning home;	视死如归，
You looked on misfortune as fortune.	临凶若吉，
Medicines you would not taste;	药剂弗尝，
In prayers you sought no aid.	祷祀非恤。 <sup>16</sup>

These lines suggest that Yuanming was ill after the age of fifty, not that he died precisely in middle age. Sun Deqian 孙德谦 (1873–1935) believed that “middle age” 中身 in the line that “When your years were of middle age” invoked the allusion that “King Wen was appointed king in his middle age” 文王受命惟中身 in the *Book of Documents* 尚书. He explained:

In the “Funeral Elegy for the Summoned Scholar Tao” by Yan Yanzhi, the line that “When your years were of middle age” employs the allusion that “King Wen was appointed king in his middle age” in the *Book of History*, suggesting that Yuanming lived to a great age as King Wen did. It is known that King Wen passed away at the age of ninety-seven, then Yuanming must have been dead at the same age. In accordance with the account in the *Book of Documents*, King Wen had reigned for fifty years, and he was only forty-seven when he was put on the throne. How could we assume that Yuanming died at the age of forty-seven? Only in the knowledge that “middle age” alludes to King Wen” can we confirm the exact dates of the birth and death of Yuanming.<sup>17</sup>

It is completely ridiculous and absurd to assume that Yuanming died at the age of ninety-seven. If Yan borrowed the meaning of “middle age” in the *Book of Documents*, his intent was most likely to point out that Yuanming suffered from serious illness at the age of about fifty. Actually, by Yuanming’s own account in “To My Sons, Yan and the Others” 与子伊等疏, he was in fragile health and often fell ill:

My years have passed fifty. ... Since I became ill, I have gradually declined. My relatives and friends have not neglected me, but always come to relieve me with medicines and acupuncture. Yet I myself fear that the great allotment will have its limit.

吾年过五十。…… 疾患以来，渐就衰损，亲旧不遗，每以药石见救。自恐大分将有限也。

So, in this case, he wrote to his sons, but these words do not imply that he died at that time. Living a life of hardship and toil, Yuanming was plagued with illnesses in his later years. According to the above analysis, Gu Zhi’s refutation of the argument that Tao died at the age of sixty-three is also unconvincing. Even so, Gu Zhi felt quite sure that he had found other solid evidence. After a perusal of the lines that “My years were twice six; / You were just nine years old” 我年二六，尔才九龄

(“In Sacrifice for My Sister Madame Cheng”); and those in the “In Sacrifice for My Cousin Jingyuan” 祭从弟敬远文:

<p>You and I Not only were dear friends, But our fathers were brothers, Our mothers were sisters. And both in childhood Encountered unjust calamity.</p>	<p>惟我与尔， 匪但亲友， 父则同生， 母则从母。 相及齟齿， 并罹偏咎。</p>
--	--

Gu Zhi deduced that Tao Yuanming was five years older than Jingyuan, who died in the year of Xinhai 辛亥 (411). (In the line “相及齟齿”，“齟” *tiao* refers metaphorically to the age of twelve, Yuanming; and “齿” *chi*, the age of eight, Jingyuan.) Furthermore, based on the lines that “Your years had just passed ‘standing firm’, / When suddenly you took leave of the world” 年甫过立，奄与世辞，Gu Zhi assumed that Jingyuan was thirty-one, and Yuanming thirty-six in that year. And he concluded by counting from that year down to the fourth year of the Yuanjia 元嘉 (427) that Yuanming’s lifespan was fifty-two years. Nevertheless, his assumption is problematic, as we read the lines:

With the year under the sign Xinhai (411), the month, mid-autumn (the eighth month), on the nineteenth day, the day chosen by divination, my cousin Jingyuan is buried, ever to be at rest with the Lord Earth.

岁在辛亥，月惟仲秋。旬有九日，从弟敬远，卜辰云窆，永宁后土。

Here, Tao reported the date of the interment, but he did not explicitly state that Jingyuan died in this year. Traditionally, the dead was not always buried immediately after. Often for economic reasons, the coffin was placed in a temporary shelter, and it was uncertain how long it would take before the formal burial. As we know, Du Fu’s 杜甫 coffin was placed for more than fifty years before his grandson was able to move it back to his hometown for the interment ceremony and asked earnestly Yuan Zhen 元稹 (779–831) to write the well-known the “Epitaph for Du Fu, The Deceased Ministry Councilor of the Tang Dynasty” 唐故工部员外郎杜君墓系铭. Reading this sacrificial piece, we feel that it was not written for the funeral immediately held after Jingyuan was dead, but written long after Jingyuan’s death, when the mourning rite was complete for a second time. And this again struck a sympathetic chord in Yuanming’s inner heart, he emotionally recalled the sweet memories of their past days, and mourned for the deceased Jingyuan. We read the lines that Yuanming lamented the loss of his dearly beloved cousin:

<p>Twiddling our wine-cups, we talked; Things last, but men are fragile. How should my young cousin Leave the world before me?</p>	<p>抚杯而言， 物久人脆。 奈何吾弟， 先我离世！</p>
--	--

My memories are inexhaustible;	事不可寻，
To my thoughts what limit!	思亦何极，
Days pass; months flow away;	日徂月流，
Cold and heat alternate.	寒暑代息。
Death and life are different realms;	死生异方，
The living and the dead have their bounds.	存亡有域。
At the chosen time you go to your eternal home;	候晨永归，
Straight along the road you ascend.	指途载陟。
Wailing are your left-behind children,	呱呱遗稚，
Who cannot yet make proper sounds.	未能正言，
Grieving is your widow,	哀哀嫠人，
Whose observances are very correct.	礼仪孔闲。
The courtyard tree is as it was,	庭树如故，
But your house is deserted.	斋宇廓然。
Who says: Jingyuan,	孰云敬远，
When will you come back again?	何时复还？

Apparently, these lines describe the situation several years after Jingyuan's death, of which "Days pass; months flow away; / Cold and heat alternate" indicate a time span. And the lines that "The courtyard tree is as it was, / But your house is deserted" recount that Yuanming passed Jingyuan's former residence again when he attended the burial ceremony. However, none of these lines involves the situation just after Jingyuan's death. And Yuanming wrote that Jingyuan's son was just born when he died, unable to utter his words clearly. It seems that Jingyuan was buried after he had been dead for three to five years. Supposing that Tao died at the age of sixty-three, we can confirm that he must have composed this elegy when he was forty-one. As he was five or six years older than Jingyuan, by this calculation, Jingyuan must have been dead at the age of thirty-one or thirty-two, which tallies with the lines that "Your years just passed 'standing firm' (his thirtieth year), / When suddenly you took leave of the world" 年甫过立，奄与世辞。Gu Zhi's textual research, seemingly credible, ignored the general knowledge that the year of burial is not necessarily that of death. Understandably, this is the result of his eagerness to seek quick confirmation. This is utterly wrong, for it is Zhang Yan who first raised doubt in the credibility of the account. As for Liang's claim and Gu's argument, neither is tenable, as I mentioned above, Yuanming said plainly in his "In Sacrifice for Myself" 自祭文: "From old age I have come for my end" 从老得终。Undoubtedly, if one dies at the age of fifty-six or fifty-two, it cannot be counted as a natural death at the old age.

Contemporary scholars also carry out the textual research on Tao's lifespan. Deng Ansheng 邓安生 contends in *The Chronology of Tao Yuanming* 陶渊明年谱 that Tao lived to the age of fifty-nine, which is quoted by Gong Bin 龚斌 in *The Collated and Annotated Edition of Tao Yuanming's Collection* 陶渊明诗集校笺。Inspired by Lu Qinli, Deng still starts from "An Excursion to Xiechuan" to seek evidence, and he agrees to Lu's view that "Xinchou" 辛丑 is used as a way

of numbering the days. Thus, he argues that “the fifth day of the first month of Xinchou” 辛丑正月五日 in the preface to the poem is designated by the Heavenly Stems and Earthly Branches. Then he consults *The Conversion Table of the Lunar Calendar Years and Chronology of Dynasties in the Twenty Official Historical Books* 二十史朔闰表 by Chen Yuan 陈垣, and finds that the fifth day of the first month in the fourteenth year of Yixi (418) precisely falls on the day of the year of Xinchou. Accordingly, in the light of the line that “I’ve reached fifty in the opening year”, and counting up to the fourth year of Yongjia (427), he concludes that Yuanming lived to the age of fifty-nine.<sup>18</sup> Even so, this is not really nailed down very firmly by solid evidence.

As opinions and arguments vary, no unanimous conclusion can be drawn. However, neither the doubts about the account of “sixty-three years old” in the *History of Liu Song*, nor the evidence to confirm the year of Yuanming’s year of birth and lifespan, are incontrovertible. Scholars, who uphold the account in the *History of Liu Song*, such as You Guoen and Lu Qinli, have presented their refutations of the variously-supposed doubts. Unfortunately, their focuses fall more on rebuttal than the provision of compelling evidence.<sup>19</sup> Specific arguments of different schools will not be discussed here one by one. I think, the most important is to find adequate historical materials and hard evidence to support the account that Tao died at his sixty-three years old in the *History of Liu Song*. With sufficient historical documents and records to confirm that Yuanming’s lifespan is sixty-three, the varied claims and absurd remarks will eventually collapse of themselves. In this sense, textual research is in essence a voyage of discovery.

## 1.2 The Accuracy of the Account about Tao’s Lifespan in the *History of Liu Song*

Personally, I think Zhang Yan’s argument is after all a single evidence, the very crux of the matter is that there are some textual variants, on which he seems unable to make accurate judgement or come up with a sound solution. So he said, “If the poem proves to be right” 若以诗为正.<sup>20</sup> The use of the word “if” stands careful consideration. Although later scholars have found some supplementary evidence, they are more of conjecture than direct evidence. In this case, I think it is reasonable to accept the record in the *History of Liu Song*. It is proposed that when Shen Yue completed the *History of Liu Song*, sixty-one years have passed since the death of Yuanming, and the whole writing time is only one year, which cannot guarantee the accuracy of the information and accounts. Worse still, mistakes often ensue in the course of hand-copying and block-printing. Consequently, the record of “sixty-three years old” in the *History of Liu Song* is unreliable. In this respect, the scepticism of Liang Qichao and others about it makes some sense.<sup>21</sup> Although Shen Yue’s *History of Liu Song* was compiled within just over a year, scholars and historiographer of his time actually attached great importance to the history of this dynasty. Historically, they began to compile the official history in the Yuanjia period (439) under the regime of Emperor Wen of Southern Song 宋文帝. The eminent scholar He Chengtian 何承天 (370–447) drew up narrative biographies. At the end of the

Jin dynasty, Tao was summoned by the imperial court to be an official in charge of historiography 著作郎, but he refused to enter officialdom. Yuanming, Zhou Xuzhi 周续之 (377–423) and Liu Yimin 刘遗民 (352–410), were known as “Three Recluses of Xunyang 寻阳三隐”. At that time, literati and scholar-officials aspired to pursue eremitism, and the imperial court highly commended and valued recluses, and Yuanming was regarded as one of the prominent personages in a way. Moreover, he once served as Aide to Liu Yu 刘裕, Emperor Wu of Song dynasty 宋武帝, thus it was highly likely that he had been included in the biographies in the *History of Liu Song* when it was amended then, for this occurred only twelve years after his death. In other words, Yuanming's entitlement to his biography in the *History of Liu Song* was officially decided when the historical book was amended in the *Liu Song* dynasty. Besides, in the sixth year of Daming 大明 (462) in the reign of Emperor Xiaowu 孝武帝, Xu Yuan 徐爰 (394–475) and others continued to compile the official history with reference to the manuscripts by He Chengtian and others. It was predecessors' efforts that paved the way for the quick completion of the *History of Liu Song* by Shen Yue. For this reason, Zhao Yi 赵翼 (1727–1814) in the *Notes on the Twenty-Two Official Histories* 廿二史札记 pointed out, “The *History of Liu Song* is mainly compiled based on the old version of Xu Yuan 宋书多徐爰旧本 (Volume nine)”.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, the biography of Tao Yuanming in the *History of Liu Song* was compiled conjointly by He Chengtian, Xu Yuan and others during the Liu Song dynasty, not by Shen Yue. Therefore, the lifespan of Tao Yuanming accounted in the biography is the factual record of contemporary historians, not out of the conjectures of the historians in other dynasties. To say the least, even if it was written by Shen Yue, the information about his year of death was obviously derived from the account in the previous historical documents.

On the other hand, the imperial court of Liu Song not only valued but also often summoned recluses, thus, there would be no paucity of biographical materials about those renowned recluses in the archives and documents. Since Tao Yuanming was called to the post of Assistant Archivist, his name must have been recorded in an official list by convention. And when he died, the prefecture would normally report it to the imperial court. In fact, other renowned recluses would also receive such treatment. Most likely, the accounts of the year of his death and lifespan in the *History of Liu Song* drew from this sort of sources. Among the seventeen recluses listed in the “Biographies of Recluses” in the *History of Liu Song*, the years of death and lifespan of the sixteen of them were clearly recorded:

Dai Yong 戴颙: died in the eighteenth year of Yuanjia (441), at the age of sixty-four.

Zong Bing 宗炳: died in the twentieth year of Yuanjia (443), at the age of sixty-nine.

Zhou Xuzhi 周续之: died in the first year of Jingping 景平 (423), at the age of forty-seven.

Wang Hongzhi 王弘之: died in the fourth year of Yuanjia (427), at the age of sixty-three.

Ruan Wanling 阮万龄: died in the twenty-fifth year of Yuanjia (448), at the age of seventy-two.

Kong Chunzhi 孔淳之: died in the seventh year of Yuanjia (430), at the age of fifty-nine.

Liu Ningzhi 刘凝之: died in the twenty-fifth year of Yuanjia (448), at the age of fifty-nine.

Gong Qi 龚祈: died in the seventeenth year of Yuanjia (440), at the age of forty-two.

Tao Qian 陶潜: died in the fourth year of the Yuanjia (427), at the age of sixty-three.

Zong Yuzhi 宗彧之: died in the eighth year of Yuanjia (431), at the age of fifty.

Shen Daoqian 沈道虔: died in the twenty-sixth year of Yuanjia (449), at the age of eighty-two.

Guo Xilin 郭希林: died in the tenth year (of Yuanjia) (433), at the age of forty-seven.

Lei Cizong 雷次宗: died in the twenty-fifth year (of Yuanjia) (448), at the age of sixty-three in Zhongshan 钟山.

Zhu Bainian 朱百年: died in the first year of Xiaojian 孝建 (454), at the age of eighty-seven in the mountain.

Wang Su 王素: died in the seventh year of Taishi 泰始 (471), at the age of fifty-four.

Guan Kangzhi 关康之: died in the first year of Shengming 昇明 (477), at the age of sixty-three.<sup>23</sup>

Exceptionally, since Zhai Faci 翟法赐 “dwelled in a rock cave, he was rarely seen”, and later “died among the rocks, the year of his death remained unknown”. As we see, the year of death and lifespan of these famed recluses once summoned by the imperial court were definitely recorded in the historical books. As for Zhai Faci, who was an exception, the historians added a specific explanation. This further attested to the stylistic rules and format available for the compilation of the *History of Liu Song* to fulfil the requirement to record the year of death and age in the biographies of recluses. And this probably was concerned with the institution of eremitism at that time. In this sense, it is unreasonable to cast doubt solely on the accounts of Tao Yuanming’s lifespan.

### 1.3 The Intra-Textual Evidence Present in the “Twenty Poems after Drinking Wine” Series

In terms of the intra-textual evidence, no direct evidence that confirms the precise lifespan of Tao Yuanming can be found in his poetic writings. However, through persistent comprehensive survey of his collected works, I have realized that the account about Yuanming’s lifespan of sixty-three is more confirmable; whereas

the other arguments are mutually incompatible and hardly convincing. Here I will only take the nineteenth of his “Twenty Poems after Drinking Wine” as a specific example for a detailed textual analysis:

Some time ago, tired of constant hunger, I left my plow behind and went to serve. I failed in my duty to support my family, Cold and hunger held us in their grip. I had reached the age one should have made his start, For lost ideals I was much ashamed. At last to carry out my lonely lot I shook my robe and came back to the farm. The stars have flowed unceasing in their course, Until a twelve-year cycle has gone by. The highways through the world are broad and long. This is what made Yang Zhu stop and weep. Although I have no royal gift to squander. Cheap wine will serve my purpose just as well.	畴昔苦长饥, 投未去学仕。 将养不得节, 冻馁固缠己。 是时向立年, 志意多所耻。 遂尽介然分, 拂衣归田里。 冉冉星气流, 亭亭复一纪。 世路廓悠悠, 杨朱所以止。 虽无挥金事, 浊酒聊可恃。
--	--

It was accounted in the biography of Tao Yuanming in the *History of Liu Song*: “As his parent was old and his family poor, he began his official career as Libationer 祭酒 of the Jiangzhou 江州 prefecture. But he could not bear the bureaucratic work, and thus resigned from office not long after”.<sup>24</sup> It was when Yuanming recalled this event in his later years that he composed the nineteenth of the “Twenty Poems after Drinking Wine”. As to when Yuanming took the post of Libationer, Wang Zhi 王质 (1127–1180) confirmed that it was before the age of thirty in the *Chronological Biography of Tao Yuanming of Lili* 栗里谱. Thus, Wang wrote in the item of “the Nineteenth Year of Taiyuan 太元 (394)”:

In this year Master Tao was thirty years old, as we read the couplet in his “Returning to the Farm to Dwell” 归田园: “By mischance I fell into the dusty net. / And was thirteen years away from home” 误落尘网中, 一去三十年. This indicates that the start of his official service as Libationer occurred before he composed this poem. Feeling an unendurable sense of being stuck in the post, he resigned from office soon. Therefore, he said: “For long I was a prisoner in a cage. And now I have my freedom back again” 久在樊笼里, 复得返自然. Later, when he was called to be Secretary 主簿, he flatly refused.<sup>25</sup>

Leaving aside Wang Zhi's assumption that the series of “Returning to Farm to Dwell” (five poems) was composed after Tao's resignation from the post of Libationer, his view that Yuanming's service started before the age of thirty has been widely accepted by later generations. Later, Wu Renjie 吴仁杰 in *The Chronicle of*

*Master Tao Jingjie's Life* 陶靖节先生年谱 asserted that the series was composed when Yuanming was twenty-nine years old. And in the item of “In the Eighteenth Year of Guisi 癸巳, he stated:

At the time Yuanming assumed the post of Libationer of the Jiangzhou prefecture. He resigned and returned home before long. When he summoned to be Secretary, he did not accept. He said in the poem: “Some time ago, tired of constant hunger, I left my plow behind and went to serve” 畴昔苦长饥, 投耒去学仕. And he added, “I had reached the age one should have made his start” 是时向立年, it is thus clear that Master Tao started his official career at the age of twenty-nine, and it was in the year of Guisi (393). Also, we read in the biography of Tao Yuanming in the *History of Liu Song*: “As his parent was old and his family poor, he began his official career as Libationer of the Jiangzhou prefecture. But he could not bear the bureaucratic work, and resigned from office not long after.” Thus, he wrote in the line that “I shook my robe and came back to the farm” 拂衣归田里.<sup>26</sup>

Later, those who agreed to the confirmation that Yuanming lived to the age of sixty-three all endorsed this statement, which attests to its credibility.

Now we are to look into the issue of Tao Yuanming's age reflected in this poem. The couplet that “Some time ago, tired of constant hunger, / I left my plow behind and went to serve” refers to the fact that the poet started to serve as Libationer of the Jiangzhou prefecture at the age of twenty-nine. Since he could not bear the official life, he resigned and returned home before long. And this is reflected in the lines: “I had reached the age one should have made his start, / For lost ideals I was much ashamed”. Accordingly, Wu Renjie in *The Chronicle of Master Tao Jingjie's Life* confirmed that it was at the age of twenty-nine that “He began his official career as Libationer of the Jiangzhou prefecture. But he could not bear the bureaucratic work, and resigned from office not long after”, which was accounted in the biography of Tao Yuanming in the *History of Liu Song*. Indeed, this is the virtually unanimous conclusion. The crucial point lies in the two lines: “At last to carry out my lonely lot, / I shook my robe and came back to the farm”. Do they describe Tao's mood after resigning from the post of Libationer, at the age of twenty-nine, or from the magistrate of Pengze? I thought these two lines were supposed to say that Yuanming was in the mood for retreat into fields and gardens. Here, he made clear that it was at that time that he had the intention to live a contented life in rustic retirement. If this refers to his mood after his resignation from the magistrate of Pengze, the lines that “The stars have flowed unceasing in their course, / Until a twelve-year cycle has gone by” indicate that it has been twelve years since he withdrew from office and lived in seclusion. Based on the lines that “I shook my robe and came back to the farm” and “Until a twelve-year cycle has gone by”, Tang Han 汤汉 (1202–1272) of the Song dynasty argued that the series of “Twenty Poems

after Drinking Wine” must have been composed in the twelfth or thirteenth year of Yixi:

It was in the first year of Yixi (405) that Tao Yuanming resigned from Magistrate of Pengze, as he said that “Until a twelve-year cycle has gone by”. Accordingly, it can be inferred that the series of “Twenty Poems after Drinking Wine” was created in the twelfth or thirteenth year of Yixi.<sup>27</sup>

However, the lines that “I had reached the age one should have made his start, / For lost ideals I was much ashamed” 是时向立年, 志意多所耻 speak explicitly of the occurrence when Yuanming resigned from the Libationer at the age of twenty-nine. And after he gave up his official post at Pengze, he had twelve to thirteen years' experience of living in idleness or being an official. Skipping from his resignation from the Libationer at the age of twenty-nine to his eschewal from office at Pengze and retreat into fields and gardens is abrupt and chronologically confusing. Also, this is virtually a reiteration of the lines that “The highways through the world are broad and long, / This is what made Yang Zhu stop and weep” 世路廓悠悠, 杨朱所以止. Consequently, the linear narrative of the whole poem seems to be very messy. So, I think, the lines that “At last to carry out my lonely lot, / I shook my robe and came back to the farm” 遂尽介然分, 终死归田里 describe Tao's posture when recalling his resignation from the prefecture Libationer, which suggests that he intended to return to fields and gardens right away, not that he retreated into the bucolic existence amidst nature after that. Wu Renjie also believed that the line “I shook my robe and came back to the farm” pointed to Tao's resignation from the Libationer, instead of the event that he was made magistrate of Pengze and soon resigned and returned home to live in seclusion. In fact, the various versions of the biography of Tao in the historical books of successive dynasties all account his resignation from the post of the Libationer and practice plowing. It was recorded in the “Biographies of Recluses” 隐逸传 in the *History of Liu Song*:

As his parent was old and his family poor, he began his official career as Libationer of the Jiangzhou prefecture. But he could not bear the bureaucratic work, and resigned from office not long after. When the Prefecture asked him to be Secretary, he did not accept. Supporting his family by plowing in the fields, he became frail and sickly. He also became Advisor to the Zhenjun 镇军 (the stabilization Army) General and then to the Jianwei 建威 (Establishing Majesty) General.<sup>28</sup>

亲老家贫, 起为州祭酒, 不堪吏职, 少日, 自解归。州召主簿, 不就, 躬耕自资, 遂抱羸疾。复为镇军、建威参军。

The similar account was found respectively in the *Biography of Tao Yuanming* by Xiao Tong 萧统 (501–531), as well as in the biography of Tao in the *History of the Jin* and that in the *Histories of Southern Dynasties*, and so did in the item of “the Eighteenth Year of Taiyuan” 太元十八年 in Lu Qinli's *Chronology of Tao*

*Yuanming's Deeds and Poems* 陶渊明事迹诗文系年. Lu stated: "After renunciation of office, Yuanming began to plow in person to support his family. At this time, he lived a leisurely life in retirement at Shangjing village 上京里 of Xunyang 寻阳 (Chaisang 柴桑)".<sup>29</sup> It is known that Yuanming held lofty ideals in his early years and composed "Biography of the Gentleman of the Five Willows" 五柳先生传 to lodge his sentiments. Later, "as his parent was old and his family poor", he began to assume an official post, but resigned not long after. When the Prefecture asked him to be Secretary, he did not accept. Then he returned home to plow in the fields to support his family, as he said in the poem "I shook my robe and came back to the farm". But later Yuanming entered officialdom again, became Advisor to the General of the stabilization Army and then to the General of the Establishing Majesty, yet he accomplished neither success nor acquired fame. Finally, he resigned at Pengze, returned to a natural way of life and lived in seclusion. Without a specific account of his experience of being an official within a span of time, Tao only generalized his official career during a period of twelve or thirteen years with the line that "The stars have flowed unceasing in their course, / Until a twelve-year cycle has gone by". Tao Shu 陶澍 (1778–1839) in "*A Study of Master Jingjie's Chronology* 靖节先生年谱考异" noted:

If we assume that Master Tao was born in the year of Renzi 壬子, and take into account the sequence of events, the line that "I had reached the age one should have made his start" and the others are all untenable. Recently, I read several works by Huang Zhang 黄璋 from Yuyao 余姚, in which he strongly supported Zhang Yan's 张纘 (also known as Jichang 季长) argument that Tao was born in the year of Renzi. Even though, based on the lines that "I left my plow behind and went to serve" and that "I had reached the age one should have made his start" in the "Twenty Poems after Drinking Wine", Zhang concluded that Tao was made Libationer at the age of twenty-nine, he ignored these lines: "The stars have flowed unceasing in their course, / Until a twelve-year cycle has gone by", and "The highways through the world are broad and long, / This is what made Yang Chu stop and weep", which imply his resignation and the start of his reclusive life at the age of forty. If Tao was born in the year of Renzi, he started his official career as Libationer of the prefecture, then this occurred in the year of Gengchen 庚辰. He resigned from office not long after. When the Prefecture called him to be Secretary, he refused and did not take any other official post since then. Why should he wait for more than ten years until he was forty to write the *ci*-poem "The Return" 归去来兮辞 to account his resignation. And since he had withdrawn from office, why should he wait for another ten years until he was fifty to reenter officialdom, serving as Advisor to the Zhenjun General and then to the Jianwei General? Thus, it can only be confirmed that Tao was born in the year of Yichou 乙丑, and he was exactly forty-one years old when he untied his seal ribbon and left the post of magistrate of Pengze.<sup>30</sup>

The word “复” (cycle) in the line that “Until a twelve-year cycle has gone by” 亭亭复一纪 conveys properly his passive sentiments facing the vicissitudes in his official career. Yuanming wrote in the “In Sacrifice to My Cousin Jingyuan”:

I once entered into public service, And became involved in men's affairs. I drifted along without achievement, And feared I had deserted my old ideals. When I laid aside my whip and came home, You understood what was in my mind.	余尝学仕, 缠绵人事, 流浪无成, 惧负素志。 敛策归来, 尔知我意。
---	--

These lines refer to the event accounted in the couplet that “The stars have flowed unceasing in their course, / Until a twelve-year cycle has gone by”. Subsequently, the lines that “The highways through the world are broad and long. / This is what made Yang Zhu stop and weep” are concerned with the event that Tao resigned his post at Pengze and retreated into the fields and gardens, which is reflected in the line that “When I laid aside my whip and came home” in the above-mentioned poem. As for “the highways through the world” 世路 in the line that “The highways through the world are broad and long”, it signifies his official experience of going into public life in the service of society expressed in the line that “Until a twelve-year cycle has gone by”.

Even the specific date when the series of “Twenty Poems after Drinking Wine” was composed remains unknown, it can be confirmed that it must have been completed after Yuanming withdrew from society and lived in seclusion in his later years. We read the lines in the sixteenth piece of the series: “A dismal wind blows round my wretched shack, / And a waste of weeds engulfs the courtyard” 弊庐交悲风, 荒草没前庭, in which “wretched shack” 弊庐 refers to the South Village 南村. Since Tao moved there in the seventh year of Yixi (411) when he was forty-eight, the series must have been written at that time. He wrote in the nineteenth poem:

The highways through the world are broad and long. This is what made Yang Zhu stop and weep. Although I have no royal gift to squander, Cheap wine will serve my purpose just as well.	世路廓悠悠, 杨朱所以止。 虽无挥金事, 浊酒聊可恃。
---	--------------------------------------

These lines describe the event that he resigned from office and returned home to live in seclusion. Historically, Shu Guang 疏广 (?–45 BC), a renowned minister of the Western Han, did not leave the wealth he accumulated when he was an official to his descendants, but splurged on extravagant eating, drinking and merry-making after his eschewal of office and returning home. Yuanming did not lead a dissipated life as Shu Guang did after his retirement, he was after all affordable for cups of home-brew thanks to the generous offer of his relatives and old friends. Besides, Tao also expressed his sentiments after his final decision to

retreat into fields and garden and practice seclusion in several other poems, such as the fourth poem:

The bird has refuge here and resting place, And in a thousand years will never leave.	托身已得所, 千载不相违。
--	------------------

And the sixth:

Contemptuous of the vulgar clods, They chose to follow Huang and Qi.	咄咄俗中愚, 且当从黄绮。
---	------------------

Also, the ninth:

Though one can learn of course to pull the reins, To go against oneself is a real mistake. So let's just have a drink of this together, There's no turning back my carriage now.	纾轡诚可学, 违己诘非迷! 且共欢此饮, 吾驾不可回。
---	--------------------------------------

Furthermore, the twelfth:

Master Zhang Zhi once served a term in office, And still was young when the times went out of joint. He closed his gate and never more went forth, Renounced the world for his remaining days.	长公曾一仕, 壮节忽失时。 杜门不复出, 终身与世辞。
---	--------------------------------------

We can now summarize our discussion: in the first eight lines in the nineteenth of the “Twenty Poems after Drinking Wine” series, the poet recalls the event that at the age of twenty-nine, “he began his official career as Libationer of the (Jiangzhou) prefecture. But he could not bear the bureaucratic work, and resigned from office not long after”. Subsequently, the couplet “The stars have flowed unceasing in their course, / Until a twelve-year cycle has gone by” narrates the occurrence after the age of twenty-nine. “A cycle” 一纪 is equal to twelve years, and a cycle plus twenty-nine years is exactly forty-one years. It is thus clear that Tao resigned from the magistrate of Pengze when he was forty-one years old. And he stated explicitly in “The Return” 归去来兮辞 that it was the first year of Yisi 乙巳岁, namely, the first year of Yixi (405). Obviously, this poem was written after his resignation from Pengze and retreat in fields and gardens. Thus, it can be deduced that Tao Yuanming was born in the year of 365 and died at the age of sixty-three in the fourth year of the Yuanjia (427). This proves that the account in *the History of Liu Song* is accurate.

The two lines that “At twenty I met with troubled times, / When thirty I lost my first wife” 弱冠逢世阻, 始室丧其偏 in “A Lament in the Chu Mode: To Show to Secretary Pang and Scribe Deng” 怨诗楚调示庞主簿邓治中 are also frequently quoted by more scholars in their textual research on Yuanming’s age. They provide two interpretations. One is that the two lines form a coherent account, focusing on