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STRINGLESS ZITHERS AND WINELESS CUPS: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE ON TAO YUANMING AND SU DONGPO

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Abstract

In his own era Tao Yuanming was considered only a secondary poet. His literary prestige rose sharply in the Song dynasty, acquiring nearly top status. His rise to enduring prominence owed considerably to Su Dongpo's long, devoted, and indefatigable promotion of his works. To show his admiration for Tao, Su, himself an unparalleled genius in literature, went out of his way to compose poems matching nearly all of Tao's poems. Taking Su's statement identifying himself with Tao at its face value, critics tend to ignore their differences and focus instead on their resemblances. Those who do note their differences, however, maintain that Su's different poems are irrelevant to Tao. This essay demonstrates that Su wrote matching poems to exalt as well as to exhort Tao. Su exalts Tao in hopes of encouraging self-seeking officials to serve with no undue attachment to post and lucre; he counters Tao so as to persuade upright intellectuals of Tao's kind to renounce seclusion and serve instead with no regard for life or death. Cutting both ways, his matching poems are a double-edged sword.

Preamble

The prestige and popularity of Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (365–427) in the Chinese poetic tradition owed considerably to Su Dongpo's long, devoted, and indefatigable promotion of his works. Before Su Dongpo 蘇東坡 (1036–1101) developed an interest in Tao Yuanming, Tao had been generally considered a secondary poet. Shortly after his death, Tao's contemporary Yan Yannian 顏延年 (384–456), who wrote his epitaph, stressed mainly Tao's integrity but paid little tribute¹ to his writing, curtly commenting on his writing as merely “plain.” Similarly, Shen Yue 沈約 (441–513) wrote a biography on Tao and showed no

¹ *Tao Jingjie ji* 陶靖節集, annotated by Tao Shu 陶澍 (Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan 商務, 1967) 1:1; hereafter cited as *Tao*. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations in this essay are mine.

admiration for his writing.² Liu Xie 劉勰 (?–473) in his masterpiece of literary criticism *Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍 wrote nothing at all about Tao. Zhong Rong 鍾嶸 (505?–?) in his influential book *Shi pin* 詩品 (*Evaluating Poetry*) gave him a rating of “middle,” treating him as an average poet.³ Although Xiao Tong 蕭統 (501–531) held his writing in esteem, he included only eight of Tao’s poems – a meager number – in his anthology *Wen xuan* 文選, an act which seemed to undercut, if not contradict, his praise of Tao; especially so, since Xiao included in his anthology forty poems by Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 (385–433) and twenty by Yan Yannian, the two poets, who by common consent are less artistically accomplished than their contemporary Tao.

During the Tang dynasty (618–907), Tao began to receive more praise, yet not without reservation. Notwithstanding their praises of him, nearly all the major Tang poets had one thing or another to say against Tao.⁴ For example, Li Bai 李白 (701–762) called him small-minded: “Small-minded by the eastern fence, / Yuanming is not the one to consort with 醒齷東籬下, 淵明不足群.”⁵ Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770) thought his poetry tasteless: “Tao Qian fled from the world; / He might not have reached the Way. / I read his poetry / And hate rather its haggardness 陶潛避俗翁, 未必能達道. 觀其著詩集, 頗亦恨枯槁.”⁶ Wang Wei 王維 (699?–761) saw his resignation as an act of rashness, “intolerant of one humiliation 一慚之不忍,” which led to “life-long humiliation 終身慚.”⁷ Worse still, Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824) deemed it even unworthy to mention Tao’s name in his account of poetic history: “Proceeding henceforth to the Jin and Song, / Poetry worsened day by day. / At this time stood out Bao and Xie; / Theirs is the clearest and deepest 透迤抵晉宋, 氣象日凋耗, 中間數鮑謝, 比

2 Shen Yue 沈約, “Yinyi 隱逸” in *Song shu* 宋書, 8 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華, 1974), vol. 8, juan 93, pp. 2287–89.

3 Zhong Rong 鍾嶸, *Shi pin jizhu* 詩品集注 (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe 古籍, 1994) 260.

4 For the Tang poets’ reception of Tao see Dai Jianye’s 戴建業 *Chengming zhi jing: Tao Yuanming xinlun* 澄明之境: 陶淵明新論 (Wuhan: Huazhong shifan daxue 華中師範大學, 1999) 305–314. Building up on Qian Zhongshu’s study, Dai concluded: “The majority of Tang poets, though they mentioned Tao, did not see him as an outstanding poet” (314).

5 “Deng Baling zhiji wang Dongting shuijun 登巴陵置酒望洞庭水軍” in *Li Taibai quanji* 李太白全集, ed. Wang Qi 王琦, 3 vols (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977) 2: 994.

6 “Qian xing wushou 遺興五首” in *Dushi jingquan* 杜詩鏡銓, ed. Yang Lun 楊倫 (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1980), juan 5, p. 234.

7 “Yu Wei jushi shu 與魏居士書,” *Wang Youcheng ji zhu* 王右丞集注, ed. Zhao Diancheng 趙殿成, 2 vols (Taipei: Zhonghua shuju, 1966) 2: 10.

近最清奧。”⁸ It was not until some seven centuries later, when Su came on the literary scene, that the name of Tao rose to the top rank of the great poets in Chinese history.⁹

To show his fondness of Tao and the significance of Tao's works, Su not only wrote favorable comments on him, but also undertook the unprecedented task in Chinese literary history of composing poems to match each of the 126 poems composed by Tao. Although Su completed only 109 matching poems, his tremendous endeavor succeeded in bringing the full significance of Tao's poetry to light. Needless to say, had Su himself, a man of many-sided talents, not commanded unparalleled respect and prestige, his effort to promote Tao would have amounted to little. Indeed, Su's own genius gained recognition early in his life. When he passed the civil service examinations with great distinction at the age of twenty-two, Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–1072), the literary leader of the time who happened to take charge of the examinations, was so impressed with his writing that he burst with joy and willingly ceded the literary scepter to him: “Wonderful! Wonderful! I shall stay out of this man's way for him to achieve preeminence 快哉, 快哉! 老夫當避路, 放他出一頭地。”¹⁰ His genius was such that even his political foe Chief Censor Li Ding 李定, who interrogated him during his imprisonment, could not but eulogize him:

Su Shi is truly a genius! [...] He is able to answer questions swiftly, citing classics and histories, about his own works composed within the past twenty or thirty years, without making a single mistake. He is truly a genius in the world!¹¹

蘇軾誠奇才也! [...] 雖二三十年所作文字詩句, 引證經傳, 隨問即答, 無一字差舛, 誠天下之奇才也!

8 “Jian shi 薦士” *Hanyu quanji jiaozhu* 韓愈全集校注, eds. Qu Shouyuan 屈守元 and Chang Sichun 常思春, 5 vols (Chengdu: Sichuan daxue 四川大學, 1996) 1: 355.

9 Cf. *Gudian wenxue yanjiu ziliao huibian: Tao Yuanming juan* 古典文學研究資料彙編: 陶淵明卷, ed. Peking University and Beijing Normal University (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965); “You Tao shi de huixian tan Su Shi de meixue sixiang 由陶詩的晦顯談蘇軾的美學思想” in *Su Dongpo yanjiu luncong* 蘇東坡研究論叢 (Sichuan: Sichuan wenyi 四川文藝, 1986) 174; and Li Yibing's 李一冰 *Su Dongpo xinzhuhan* 蘇東坡新傳, 2 vols. (Taipei: Lianjing Publishing Co. 聯經, 1983) 2: 749.

10 Wang Yinglin 王應麟, *Kunxue jiwen* 困學記聞, 3 vols. (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1959), vol. 3, juan 18, p. 1381.

11 Wang Gong 王鞏, *Jiashen zaji* 甲申雜記 (Taipei: Zhonghua shuju, 1984) 7; Wang Cheng 王稱, *Dongdu shilue* 東都事略, 4 vols (Taipei: Guoli zhongyang tushu guan 國立中央圖書館, 1991), vol. 4, juan 98, p. 1515; and Tuo Tuo et al. 脫脫, “Li Ding” in *Song shi* 宋史, 40 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1991), vol. 30, juan 329, p. 10602.

After Su firmly established himself as the literary leader of his time, he fostered a number of brilliant writers, including the “Six Disciples of Su 蘇門六君子,” Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅 (1045–1105), Qin Guan 秦觀 (1049–1100), Chen Shidao 陳師道 (1053–1102), Chao Buzhi 晁補之 (1053–1110), Zhang Lei 張耒 (1054–1104), and Li Fangshu 李方叔 (1059–1109). Although accomplished in their own different ways, these great writers were one in their admiration for Su, an admiration which knew no bounds. The poems Su wrote to match Tao’s received close attention from them to the effect that sometimes they each wrote a matching poem of their own, turning the study and imitation of Tao into a literary fashion: “Just overnight Tao appeared in the sight of everyone.”¹²

Su’s prestige suffered during the last few years of his life, when he was severely persecuted for his political affiliation. Shortly after his death, however, his name and honor was restored. Su rose to the summit of preeminence in Chinese literature, when Emperor Xiaozong 孝宗 (1127–1194) of the Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279) hailed him as the greatest writer in history:

I found time in my busy life pressed by ten thousand matters to read poetry and history. The writings of all the other writers contain both good and bad things, between which I often have to choose. Only with respect to Shi’s works, I could read them all day long, forgetting what fatigue is. I regularly placed them by my side to show my respect for him and my intention to follow him as a model.¹³

朕萬機餘暇. 紬繹詩書. 他人之文. 或得或失. 多所取舍. 至於軾所著. 讀之終日. 疊疊忘倦. 常置左右. 以為矜式.

Emperor Xiaozong’s remark has henceforth remained as the orthodox view in Chinese literature.¹⁴ Upheld by Su’s supreme prestige, Tao’s literary name accordingly stands high.

Su Zhe 蘇轍 (1039–1112), Su Dongpo’s younger brother and a renowned essayist, once wrote at his request a preface to the collection of his matching poems. Showing no special preference for Tao’s poetic style, Zhe followed the orthodox view of the previous writers and spoke lowly of him:

12 *Xin zhuan* 2: 749.

13 “Preface” to *Su Dongpo quanji* 蘇東坡全集, 2 vols (Beijing: Beijing Zhongguo shudian 北京中國書店, 1986).

14 Because of V. I. Lenin’s praise of Wang Anshi, Su’s one-time political foe, Su’s prestige suffered in the early years of the Chinese Communist regime. But after the Cultural Revolution, his name has been restored: “Su Shi, you are the pride of the Chinese people” (Zhu Jinghua 朱靖華, *Su Shi xinping* 蘇軾新評 [Beijing: Zhongguo wenxue chubanshe 中國文學出版社, 1993] 29).

Alas! Yuanming lived the life of a recluse to fulfill his wish and sang songs to forget his old age. He was truly a carefree man, but he had meager talent. As to Zizhan, he served all the way up to the position of Chief Secretary to the Sovereign and headed eight prefectures. His career shines in his age and so does his firm and faithful character. How could the dim-witted Yuanming be compared with him?¹⁵

嗟夫淵明，隱居以求志，詠歌以忘老，誠古之達者，而才實拙。若夫子瞻，仕至從官，出長八州，事業見於當世，其剛信矣。而豈淵明之拙者哉？

The magnanimity of Su Dongpo's spirit coupled with his admiration for Tao could not countenance such an adverse comment even from his beloved brother. Thus he changed his brother's wording to the following:

Alas! Yuanming was unwilling to wear his belt for five decaliters of rice to see a little person in the country, while Zizhan serves more than thirty years, and, after being humiliated by jailers, still refuses to change and eventually encounters a greater disaster. Now he intends to entrust the closing years of his life to Yuanming, who can believe this?¹⁶

嗟乎淵明，不肯為五斗米一束帶見鄉里小兒，而子瞻出仕三十餘年，為獄吏所折困，終不能悛，以陷大難，乃欲以桑榆之末景，自托於淵明，其誰肯信之？

Here lies, as Dongpo ghostwrote for his brother, the immense difference between them. Tao renounced his career because of his unwillingness to submit to his superior; whereas Su, after mortifying humiliation, imprisonment, and threats to his life, persisted in his service. Indeed so great is the difference between Tao and Su that it takes nothing less than a leap of faith to accept Su's identification of himself with Tao. This leap of faith precariously calls for the exaltation of Tao to the highest poetic status:

With respect to poets, I like no one except Yuanming. Yuanming did not write much poetry; however, his poetry is plain yet elegant, lean yet rich. Cao [Zhi], Liu [Zheng], Bao [Zhao], Xie [Lingyun], Li [Bai], and Du [Fu] are all his inferiors.

吾於詩人無所甚好，獨好淵明之詩。淵明作詩不多，然其詩質而實綺，臞而實腴，自曹劉鮑謝李杜諸人，皆莫及也。¹⁷

Few orthodox Chinese critics, if any, would agree with Su's rating of Tao as a better poet than Li Bai and Du Fu. Why on earth did Su then make such an

15 Fei Gun 費袞, *Liangxi manzhi* 梁溪漫志 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian 上海, 1990), juan 4, p. 2.

16 Su Zhe, "Zizhan he Tao Yuanming shiji yin" in *Luancheng ji* 樂城集, 3 vols (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe 1987), vol. 3, juan 21, p. 1402.

17 *Ibid.* 3: 1402.

exaggerated statement? What drove him to write the matching poems? And how did he relate himself to Tao? The following study of mine, probing the literary affinity between Tao and Su, will endeavor to answer these questions.

Before the Exile

Su was slow in acquiring a taste for Tao's poetry. When Su was young, his goal was to put his Confucian ideals into practice, and he had his mind set on serving the Song court and achieving an illustrious career. At this stage Tao, who secured only a few low provincial positions in his life, held little interest for him. Sometimes, in keeping with the orthodox view, Su even belittled Tao and referred to him in a pejorative manner. In a poem he wrote in 1075 (Xining 熙寧 8), when serving as prefect of Xuzhou, Su, by then already an accomplished senior official and widely acclaimed literary leader, held Tao in contempt:

I laughed at Tao Yuanming Who planted forty acres of sorghum. Refusing to listen to his wife's advice, He further heaped blames on his own sons. A zither without strings is no zither; Why did he play it? ¹⁸	我笑陶淵明 種秫二頃半 婦言既不用 還有責子歎 無絃則無琴 何必勞玩撫
--	--

A few notes first on Tao's life are due. While Tao served as the magistrate of Pengze County, he, famed for his habit of inordinate drinking, ordered that all the public fields in the county be planted with sorghum, a plant which could be made into alcohol. Although his wife asked him to plant rice for the subsistence of the family,¹⁹ he refused to listen. The poverty of his family apparently had no effect on his decision to plant sorghum for wine, nor did it deter him from drinking inordinately. Apart from drinking, his children also posed a problem. Partly to advise his sons and partly to vent his frustration, Tao wrote a poem, titled "Rebuking My Sons 責子," taking his five sons to task. By his own account (*Tao* 3: 50), Tao had five sons, but none of them enjoyed the prospect of an illustrious career in the future. His oldest son, then age 16, was lazy; the

18 Su Shi 蘇軾, ed. Wang Wengao 王文誥, *Su Wenzhong gong shi bianzhu jicheng* 蘇文忠公詩編註集成, 6 vols. (Taipei: Xuesheng shuju 學生, 1979) 4: 2110–1; hereafter cited as *Su*.

19 *Song shu* 8: 2287. Because of his wife's strong protest, Tao reserved a small portion of the land for rice.

second son disliked letters; the third and fourth sons, though at age 13, could not even distinguish a six from a seven; and the youngest one, age 9, showed interest only in eating. The mediocrity of his sons understandably frustrated him and drove him even closer to wine. In addition, Tao enjoyed playing in the company of his friends a zither without strings. His indulgence in wine at the expense of his family, his failure to teach and discipline his children, and his queer conduct in public – all this Su mocked. In brief, he declined to credit Tao with virtue: “Who said that they were sages? 孰云二子賢” (*Su* 4: 2111)

Su held the same view two years later, when he rated Ren Shizhong, his contemporary, over Tao: “He [Ren] was not like Tao Yuanming, / Who was so poor that he had to till his own field 豈比陶淵明, 窮苦自把耬” (*Su* 4: 2230). At this stage Tao in Su’s view was primarily an odd, frustrated, and underachieved minor official. As this essay will show, Tao’s limitation never quite disappeared in Su’s sight even after he found in Tao a worthy spirit.

First Exile

Su’s understanding of Tao enlarged in proportion to his frustrations with his political career. The turning point came in 1079 when Su was arrested, thrown into prison, and condemned by his political foes for criticism of the government.²⁰ His foes, including Chief Censor Li Ding and Censor Shu Dan 舒亶, pressed for capital punishment. The shadow of death stalked him at this time. Although his life was eventually spared, Su was, after five months of torment, sent into exile in 1080. Having spent two years in disgrace, humiliation, and hardship in Huangzhou, the place of exile, he began to understand Tao’s withdrawal from the political world and started to write poems echoing Tao’s sentiment. Before Huangzhou, Tao interested Su mostly for his love of wine. Now Tao also came to represent for him a scholar who knew the joy of a pastoral life. In the second month of 1082, Mao Guozhen 毛國鎮, prefect of Yun, who was about to retire, came to ask Su for a word of advice. Su copied

20 Alice Cheang in her “Su Shi as the Man of the Eastern Slope” (*Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* [December 1993] 53) wrote that Su was charged with libel for the poetry he had written “during his provincial appointments as the governor of Hangzhou, Mi-chou, and Hsu-chou” (325). Before the charge was brought against him, Su had not served as governor of Hangzhou, but as Judge (*tongpan* 通判), a federal official sent to the province to spy on the governor as the governor’s subordinate.

Tao's "Return 歸去來辭" and gave it to him as a parting gift. Su's choice of Tao's work for this solemn occasion shows his approval of Tao's integrity.

Shortly after the completion of the Snow Hall, his house in Huangzhou, Su wrote a lyric in 1082 titled "A Man by a River Town 江城子" to echo Tao's poem "Toured Xiechuan 遊斜川." This lyric identifies Su himself with Tao:

Conscious in dreams and sober in drunkenness,
Only Yuanming was my early incarnation.
Rushing through the world, I end up farming still.
Last night, spring rain fell copiously on the east slope.
Crows and magpies gleefully greet the sun.
To the west of the Snow Hall streams gurgle underground.
The hill in the north looks aslant, the creek wild.
I look at the pavilion and hill in the south –
The storied city, alone, looms high and beautiful.²¹
It is the same scenery at Xiechuan.
I am old and can spend the rest of my life here.²²

夢中了了醉中醒
只淵明是前生
走遍人間依舊卻躬耕
昨夜東坡春雨足
烏鵲喜報新晴
雪堂西畔暗泉鳴
北山傾小溪橫
南望亭丘
孤秀聳曾城
都是斜川當日境
吾老矣寄餘齡

The opening line well capitulates the spirit of both Tao and Su. Both use wine as a refuge for the safeguard of their sense of integrity, if not sanity. Needless to say, wine also helped both poets focus on the joy of the present and forget the sorrow of the past or the future. A fundamental difference, however, exists between Tao and Su. Whereas Tao in "Toured Xiechuan" is given to the joy of the present moment – wine, companions, and landscape – Su emphasizes hard labor and the weather benevolent to sentient beings. Tao closes his poem on a note of abandonment as if there were no future:

Knowing not if the future
Will be like this again,
I give myself to wine,
Forgetting the sorrow of ten thousand years.
Enjoy the pleasure of this morning,
For tomorrow is not what I seek. (*Tao* 2: 17)

未知從今去
當復如此不
中觴縱遙情
忘彼千載憂
且及今朝樂
明日非所求

In contrast, the ending of Su's lyric is ambiguous: On the one hand, Su expresses his hope that his future may all be like the present; on the other hand,

21 The storied city refers to the heavenly abode of Daoist immortals at the top of Mt. Kunlun. See *Tao* 2: 17.

22 Su Shi, ed. Long Muxun 龍沐勛, *Dongpo yuefu jian* 東坡樂府箋 (Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1981) 2: 2.

there is a slight and subtle concern that the prime of his life is slipping away, and that the rest of his life may elapse in a lackluster fashion without the achievement of his ultimate political goal.

Su wrote verses, not to mirror, but to match Tao's. As Wang Wengao 王文誥, a famed commentator of Su's, remarked, “Su wrote poems to match Tao's primarily to express his own ideas 公之和陶, 但以自托耳” (*Su* 6: 3383). Wang was right about Su's using Tao as a vehicle of self-expression. He was also right about the great difference between the two poets when he wrote:

Radical differences exist between Tao and Su. There are poems which Su wrote to imitate Tao in agreement with him. There are poems which, though Su did not write to agree with Tao, happen to resemble his works. There are poems which just borrow Tao's rhyme words with no regard for Tao's ideas. There are poems in which Su, paying no heed to the form, freely changed the rhyme words. [...] In the latter cases, although Su claimed to write poems to match Tao's, the poems are irrelevant to Tao.

Wang was wrong, however, in stating that some of Su's matching poems are irrelevant to Tao. If Tao's poems had had no bearing on Su, as Wang maintained, Su would have composed his own poems without painstakingly matching Tao's. Seemingly irrelevant, Su's poetic discourse in such cases is actually a corrective reply to, nay, a counter argument against Tao's. Tao was noted in Chinese history for his refusal to compromise his integrity in serving the corrupted court and for his sudden and dramatic departure from office. His integrity, needless to say, commanded Su's respect. As Su explained, this respect was profound:

As to my relation to Yuanming, how could I like his poetry only? I have genuine feelings about his person. Before his death, Yuanming wrote to Yan and other sons: “I was poor in my youth. Because of the poverty of my family, I had to wander from place to place. My outspoken character and meager talent often brought me into conflict with the world. I feel that lasting calamity was to occur because of me. Thus I persisted in parting with the world and thereby subjected you to cold and hunger.” This statement of Yuanming's was a true record. Now this flaw is truly mine, which I failed to detect earlier. Serving most of my life, I have encountered calamities in the world. This is why I deeply admire Yuanming, in hope of learning a bit from the wealth of his knowledge in my late years.²³

23 *Luancheng ji* 3: 1402. Zhu Jinghua in his book *Su Shi lun* 蘇軾論 (Beijing: Jinghua chubanshe, 1997, pp. 184–208), taking this comment at its face value, identified Tao with Su thoroughly and made no mention of the difference in their personalities. Although Wu Pi-yung in his essay “I am not as good as T'ao” noted the difference between Tao and Su,

然吾於淵明，豈獨好其詩也哉？如其為人，實有感焉。淵明臨終疏告儼等：吾少而窮苦，每以家弊東西遊走，性剛才拙，與物多忤，自量為己，必貽俗患，黽勉辭世，使汝等幼而飢寒。淵明此語蓋實錄也。吾今真有此病，而不早知。半生出仕，以犯世患，此所以深服淵明，欲以晚節師範其萬一也。

As Su himself saw it, he shared with Tao an outspoken personality. Both were at enmity with the corrupt world. When Su came under fierce and scurrilous attack from his political foes, many of whom were essentially self-seeking officials with little sense of moral decency, Su readily found in Tao a kindred poet who knew the frustrations and danger in politics and who could offer him some emotional solace and perhaps even help him ward off some of the malicious attacks. As his disciple Chao Buzhi, responding to Su, wrote in his own matching poems, exalting Tao helps divert the foes' attention: "Hide the blade and lie low; / To treat foes carelessly may spell loss of my treasure 藏鋒避世故輕敵喪吾寶."²⁴ In this sense, when Su exalts Tao, he exhorts caution. Su admired Tao also because of his ability to resist the temptation of an office and its accompanying lucre. Neither Li Bai nor Du Fu was able to renounce their careers as decisively as Tao. Hence, in Su's view as expressed here, Tao towered above Li and Du. His admiration for Tao's character easily translated into the judgment of his poetry, leading him to rate his verses above others'. Su himself, of course, served not so much for a high office or wealth as for the fulfillment of his Confucian obligation to his nation and his people. But many of his foes served themselves only. In this regard, Su exalted Tao also because he would like these place hunters to learn from Tao. His celebration of Tao thus expressed his hope, though vainly, that they should follow Tao's example in setting no undue importance on an official position and its accompanying wealth.

On the other hand, however, through his poetic response to Tao Su endeavored to exhort upright intellectuals like Tao, who favor seclusion in times of adversity, to come around to his view of serving the nation faithfully and persistently – as he himself did – with no regard for position or wealth, life or death. While Tao refused to suffer the humiliation of waiting upon his superior by cutting short his service, Su willingly endured the sufferings of incarceration, persecution, and exile and waited until the last moment of his death before he

he, following the traditional view, stated that Su's poems were "unrelated to Tao's" (*National Palace Museum Bulletin* 37: 1 [July 2003] 53–4).

24 "Yinjiu ershi shou tong Su hanlin xiansheng ciyun zhuuhe Tao Yuanming 飲酒二十首同蘇翰林先生次韻追和陶淵明" in Chao Buzhi's *Jile ji* 雞肋集, *Yingyin wenyuange siku quanshu* 景印文淵閣四庫全書 (Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguang, 1983), vol. 1118, p. 438.

requested retirement. His praise of Tao notwithstanding, Su actually saw him as a fallen figure, enthralled by poetry and wine: “Yuanming fell into poetry and wine 淵明墮詩酒” (*Su* 6: 3577). Unlike what he stated above, from the outset of his career Su was conscientiously outspoken against evil – if it was a “flaw” at all. Nor was his talent meager. Although he himself had little, if anything, to learn from Tao, he humbled himself in showing the world that many could benefit from studying Tao. This explains why in nearly all the major matching poems by Su, the theme of faithful service, which runs alongside his eulogy of Tao, often replaces that of seclusion. By eulogizing Tao, he advises the world to detach themselves coolly from a blind, perfervid pursuit of rank and lucre. By dwelling on his own persistent service, he encourages upright officials to persevere in hard times. Like a double-edged sword, his message cuts both ways.

Different Backgrounds

The differences between Tao and Su are reflections not only of their different lives but also of the two different environments of their separate eras. The political environment in which Tao lived was on the whole chaotic, rebellious, and treacherous. Starting with the usurpation of the throne by Cao Pi 曹丕 (167–226), morality went into rapid decline, political power changed hands swiftly, and the political stage was rife with conspiracy, violence, insurrection, and murder. The Eastern Jin dynasty 東晉 (317–420), which Tao served, witnessed ceaseless rebellions²⁵ and usurpations from within and numerous nomads’ invasions from without. Tao entered Huan Xuan’s 桓玄 (369–404) service at the age of thirty-five and, having detected Huan’s ambition to overthrow the throne, soon quit his position. When Huan expectedly usurped the throne two years later, in 402, Tao was at home farming, acting as though nothing unusual had happened: “Far away, I am cut off from the world.”

It was a hard time for many, particularly for upright intellectuals who had to serve in the government. Poverty forced Tao to serve in the government, but his pride, his untrammelled spirit, impatience with bureaucracy, and uncompromising character soon compelled him to renounce his official career. Thus, when an inspector came to his county, as his biography shows, he, unwilling to bow to his superior, resigned: “I cannot bow to a lowly figure from the country-

25 See Lü Simian 呂思勉, *Liangjin nanbei chao shi* 兩晉南北朝史 (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1983) 1–459.

side simply for five decaliters of rice 我不能為五斗米折腰向鄉里小人.”²⁶ In addition, with the decline of court authority came the collapse of Confucianism as a guiding moral force. Daoism surged to replace Confucianism as the dominant school of thought. Aided by Daoism, Buddhism also began to make substantial inroads in the intellectual realm, but in its still rudimentary form of translation it was not developed²⁷ enough to quench the intellectual thirst of the time. To quench his thirst, Tao had to rely chiefly on Daoism and, above all, wine.

In comparison, Su lived in a much more peaceful and prosperous era. The Song empire, though surrounded on the northern and the western frontiers by powerful nomads, enjoyed long-term unity, peace, and prosperity. Emperor Renzong 仁宗 (1010–1063), whose service Su first entered, established an uninterrupted reign for some forty years – a rare accomplishment even in the whole history of China. A number of its rulers before Su, including Renzong, were conscientious, if not outstanding, monarchs. Of course, it needs to be mentioned, the regimes of Su’s time were not wholly without problems. Shenzong’s reform, to mention a most notable example, brought about the rapid promotion of numerous self-serving officials. To secure high posts by hook or by crook, these officials inflicted great havoc upon the nation and the people. A high official Deng Wan 鄧綰 (1028–1086) well described this shameless stance of theirs when he proclaimed: “You may laugh at me or rebuke me; but to have a high office is all that I care about 笑罵從汝, 好官須我為之.”²⁸ As a victim of their conspiracies, Su was imprisoned and exiled. But even Shenzong 神宗 (1048–1085), who passed the ultimate verdict against him, was not without high principles. Despite the adverse consequences of his reform, he meant to create a stronger and more prosperous state. Although strongly handicapped by his ministers, he had every intention to put Su to great use. Furthermore, when Empress Dowager Xuanren 宣仁 (1032–1093) ruled the empire on behalf of her grandson as regent, she gave effect to this intention of Shenzong’s and placed a profound trust in Su, endowing him with such power that Su felt it imperative to devote his life to his nation: “I will stop serving only after my humble life reaches its end 盡微生而後已.”²⁹ Although Su was never given the chance in

26 *Song shu* 8: 2287.

27 See Tang Yongtong 湯用彤, *Han Weijin nanbei chao fojiao shi* 漢魏晉南北朝佛教教史 (Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1968) 132–271; and Yinshun 印順, *Fojiao shidi kaolun* 佛教史地考論 (Taipei: Huizi jiangtang 慧日講堂, 1973) 8–9.

28 “Deng Wan” in *Song shi*, vol. 30, juan 329, p. 10597.

29 *Quanji* 1: 326.

the political arena to employ his surpassing talent to the full, Su, an able official, had every reason to believe that it behooved him to lead his people and nation to wealth and prosperity. Above all, when Su was young, he made an agreement with his mother, who was tutoring him, to serve like the Confucian martyr Fan Pang 范滂 (137–169) of the Eastern Han dynasty (25–220), who willingly surrendered his life to death for the sake of righteousness at the age of thirty-three.³⁰ Su could not go back on his own agreement. Thus, unlike Tao, Su was determined to serve his government even at the cost of his life. Moreover, after six centuries of vigorous religious labor, Buddhism in the Song flowered in the Chinese tradition,³¹ having been thoroughly assimilated to the Chinese thought. Su freely drew on Confucianism,³² Daoism, and Buddhism, with Confucianism as the central guiding force. Consequently, despite political persecution Su was able to persevere in his service and meet hardship with patience, courage, and fortitude.

The study of the backgrounds of Tao and Su would be incomplete without a remark on their similarities. In spite of their differences, however, an affinity in their backgrounds stands forth and contributes to Su's appreciation of Tao. The literary age in which Tao lived witnessed either the fervid pursuit of an ornate style void of significant thought or the use of poetry as a subservient tool of philosophy and religion at the cost of aesthetic beauty.³³ As one of the few writers rising above these dominant trends, Tao eschewed the defects of both extremes by opting for a simple yet refined style for the exploration of his life. The absence of an ornate style, which ran counter to the prevalent poetic taste, thus brought his poetry little praise from his own era, and to a certain extent, accounts for the low rating of his poetry by his contemporaries.

Like Tao's era, the early years of the Song reign saw the prevalence of a similarly florid and often decadent style. In opposition to this prevalent trend,³⁴ Ouyang Xiu, Su's mentor, espoused the use of a simple yet elegant style in writing. This literary movement found unreserved support in Su, who was to

30 "Wangxiong Zizhan Duanming muzhiming" in *Luancheng ji* 3: 1410; and Fan Ye 范曄, *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書, 12 vols (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965), v. 8, juan 67, pp. 2203–2208.

31 *Fojiao shidi kaolun* 77–83.

32 Su felt averse to Buddhism at the early stage of his life. Although he exhibited an interest in it later in his life, he never committed himself to this religion.

33 Liu Dajie 劉大杰, *Zhongguo wenxue fada shi* 中國文學發達史 (Taipei: Zhonghua shuju, 1967) 196–214, 230–242.

34 *Ibid.* 534–557.

give it the consummate expression: “I, Shi, would like to follow you as the least of your disciples and contribute the very little that I have.”³⁵ The establishment in Su’s time of a simple and elegant style in writing contributed to the creation of a literary milieu conducive to a better appreciation of such a writer as Tao. As Su’s frustrations with politics mounted and his intellectual interest in religion increased accordingly, Su began to explore various philosophical and religious ideas in his writing, and thereby found in Tao, whose poetry displays like concerns, a kindred spirit across the age.

A few remarks are due on the difference between Confucianism (儒家 *rujia*) and Daoism (道家 *daojia*), which is pertinent to my argument in this essay. Throughout Chinese history, both Confucianism and Daoism have taken on various forms which are too complex for this essay to discuss. Suffice it here to say that, taking their various forms into account, Confucianism differs from Daoism in that the former emphasizes a personal commitment to the community, be it nation, family, or organization, often at the expense of the self while the latter stresses the indulgence of personal propensities, however peculiar, with little, if any, regard for social conventions. Although Confucius teaches that a person could withdraw from politics when the situation is beyond redemption, he never allows a person to withdraw from his community. After his resignation from political office, Confucius devoted himself to the editing of classics and the teaching of his disciples. Further, he himself waited until the last moment of his life before he gave up hope to serve again. It was with a deep sense of nonfulfillment that Confucius left the world. As the *Shiji* 史記 shows, Confucius explained seven days before his death how very much he wished that his political talent had been put to great use: “Tears coursing down his cheeks, he said to Zigong, ‘The world has long been without order, for they would not follow my way.’”³⁶ Although withdrawn from the political world physically, Confucius remained in close contact with politics through his disciples, whom he counseled frequently. In the eyes of his contemporaries he was “the person who still tries even though he knows it cannot be done 知其不可而為之者.”³⁷ What sets Confucianism apart from Daoism is this spirit of commitment to close

35 Su Shi, *Jingjin Dongpo wenji shilue* 經進東坡文集事略, 2 vols. (Taipei: Shijijie shuju 世界, 1975) 2: 715–16.

36 “Kongzi shijia” in Sima Qian’s 司馬遷 *Shiji* 史記, ed. Zhou Dake 周大可, 4 vols (China: Sanqin chubanshe 三秦, 1990), vol. 2, juan 47, p. 1187. A similar passage also appears in *Li ji zhushu* 禮記注疏, 4 vols. (Taipei: Zhonghua shuju, 1965), vol. 1, juan 7, p. 7.

37 “Xianwen” in *Lunyu jizhu* 論語集註, ed. Zhu Xi 朱熹 (Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1961), juan 7, p. 103.

involvement with the sociopolitical world. Of this distinction my essay avails itself.

Matching Poems

Su's interest in Tao took on new significance in 1092 (Yuanyou 元祐 7), when he decided to compose poems to match each of the poems composed by Tao. Serving then as general-governor of Yangzhou, Su began this extraordinary project by first writing a cycle of twenty poems to match Tao's "Drinking Wine." This poetic endeavor was due to, among other things, his repeated frustrations with court intrigues, from which he had extricated himself by asking to serve at a provincial position. Barely several months earlier, in the eighth month of 1091, while serving in court as Edict Writer (Hanlin chengzhi 翰林承旨) and Instructor of the Emperor, Su was viciously slandered and fiercely attacked by his political foes in their scramble for power. Worse still, even his friend Zhao Junxi 趙君錫, then Chief Censor, ruthlessly betrayed him. Repulsed by the sinister political schemes and treacherous conspiracies in court, Su thus repeatedly asked the Empress Dowager for a provincial position and was accordingly granted one in Yingzhou first, then in Yangzhou. Hence, after leaving the court, he understandably turned to Tao for company.

The two cycles by Tao and Su on drinking warrant fruitful comparison. The limited space here, however, does not allow detailed comparison of all the poems. Accordingly, only poems most pertinent to the central themes of this essay will be discussed. To begin with, Tao devoted a preface to his drinking philosophy, explaining that he drank to seek excitement in a dull life: "I lead an uneventful life with little joy. And the night has recently waxed long. When good wine comes my way, I would drink every night. 余閒居寡歡, 兼比夜已長, 偶有名酒, 無夕不飲" (*Tao* 3: 40). In addition, wine may also serve as a catalyst for Tao's literary creativity: "Drunk, I would compose a few lines to entertain myself." Like Tao, Su also wrote a preface to explain his approach to wine:

I drank very little, often taking delight just in the holding of a cup. Then, I was accustomed to doze off on a seat. People saw me drunk, but inside I was sober, a state which defies the description of drunkenness or soberness. While in Yangzhou, I ceased drinking right after noon. After the guests had left, I would take off my robe and relax for the day. The joy was

incomplete but the feeling was good. Thus I wrote twenty poems to match Tao's "Drinking Wine," in hopes of describing the verisimilitude of the ineffable. (*Su* 5: 3197).

Unlike Tao, who drank excessively, Su, making a point of not touching any wine after noon, drank with restraint. In drinking, Su enjoyed the atmosphere as much as, if not more than, the wine itself. A commentator of the Qing dynasty, Zha Shenxing 查慎行, duly noted a similarity between Tao's playing a zither with no strings and Su's holding a cup with no wine.³⁸ Failing to see the change in Su's attitude from a chronological perspective, however, Zha viewed this discrepancy as a contradiction. In fact, by now Su had come a long way from mocking to appreciating the seemingly absurd conduct of Tao's.

This approach leads to the discussion of the ruling themes of their verses. Tao's cycle opens with the idea that poverty and prosperity alternate in an individual's life, forming together a ceaseless cycle. When there is wine, the poem suggests, just drink and be merry. Su opens his cycle with his admiration not for drinking but for Tao's life of leisure: "I am worse than Tao, / For worldly things enmesh me 我不如陶生, 世事纏綿之." Su wishes that he could lead a leisurely life, but he does not willfully seek it at the expense of the goal and ideal of his life. In fact, what he sought was a life of right conduct; whether or not the life is eventful should not matter: "I let go of my heart / And doubt no more what I'll meet. / When I know the joy of wine, / I would hold even an empty cup 縱心與事往, 所遇無復疑, 偶得酒中趣, 空杯亦常持." The letting go of one's heart is an ideal spiritual state attained by Confucius when he reached the age of seventy: "At seventy, I was able to follow my heart's desire without transgression 七十而從心所欲不踰矩."³⁹ In applying this state to himself, Su clearly views himself as a Confucian scholar striving for the ideal spiritual condition.

The fifth poems in Tao's and Su's cycles are both highly accomplished verses, which present a vision of themselves respectively:

I built my hut in the world of men,
Yet it's free of the noises of horses and carts.
One asked me why I was able to do this;
I said: "my heart was aloof, so the place was far."
Picking the chrysanthemums by the east fence,
I saw in tranquillity the south hill.

結廬在人境
而無車馬喧
問君何能爾
心遠地自偏
采菊東籬下
悠然見南山

38 *Su* 5: 3205.

39 *Lunyu jizhu* 2: 7.

The mountain air was fine at dusk;
 The birds returned to their nests in flocks.
 In this there is truth;
 I want to say, but I forget the word. (*Tao* 3: 41–42)

山氣日夕佳
 飛鳥相與還
 此中有真意
 欲辨已忘言

The small skiff is truly like a leaf;
 The currents rush under it.
 Rowing the skiff in drunkenness at night,
 I did not see the pillows and stools lie askew.
 At dawn I asked about the trip ahead;
 We had already passed a thousand hills.
 Alas! What am I doing?
 I often traveled this path back and forth.
 Pray, plan early for the future;
 And say no more about the past. (*Su* 5: 3198)

小舟真一葉
 下有暗浪喧
 夜棹醉中發
 不知枕几偏
 天明問前路
 已度千重山
 噎我亦何為
 此道常往還
 未來寧早計
 既往復何言

These poems show that Tao and Su are poles apart on their separate stances toward the world. Seemingly irrelevant, Su's verse here actually counters Tao's. Whereas Tao uses the image of land, an emblem of solidity and stability, to represent his life in relation to the external world, Su uses the image of water, an emblem of flux and dynamism, to represent his. Tao's house stands on a tract of land free of noises from horses and carriages and visitors; Su's home takes the form of a boat riding the resounding waves of currents. Tao flees from the bustling world to seek asylum in the world of seclusion; Su engages the bustling world and finds moments of peace amidst his activities in his heart. Tao seeks security in seclusion; in persecution Su braves danger.

The tenth poems in their cycles, making use of the metaphor of a journey, turn to their official careers. Tao explained the reason why years ago he had to flee from the bureaucratic world:

In the past I journeyed far
 All the way to the east sea.
 The road was rough and long;
 The winds and waves aborted my trip.
 Who made me take this trip?
 Hunger seemed to be the cause.
 I gave myself in for a full stomach,
 While a little food was more than I need.
 I fear, this was not the right thing to do;
 So I stopped and returned to my life of leisure. (*Tao* 3: 43)

在昔曾遠遊
 直至東海隅
 道路迥且長
 風波阻中途
 此行誰使然
 似為飢所驅
 傾身營一飽
 少許便有餘
 恐此非名計
 息駕歸閒居

The poet was apparently not cut out for a political career, which appeared to him “rough and long.” But hunger drove him into it. “The winds and waves,” which put an abrupt end to his journey, are metaphors for the frustrations Tao personally encountered in his career. Tao started on a Confucianist quest for a political career, but gave up halfway. Henceforth, Confucianism faded into the background of his thought and played no pronounced role in his life. Since what he needed was daily bread, he saw no merit in enduring for it all the unwanted difficulties. He could just easily return home and earn his living by farming.

A different mood reigns in Su’s poem. Instead of hardship, it sings of joy:

A sedan carried the drunken prefect
Around the corner of the old city.
The hangover was like passing rain,
Which was gone midway in a gentle breeze.
You can count the hills up ahead;
Horsemen in the back, don’t rush me!
My connections are with the southeast,
Where the white-haired man can find rest.
I know from afar the Hill of Ten-Thousand Pines;⁴⁰
At its foot lies a three-acre home. (*Su* 5: 3200)

籃輿兀醉守
路轉古城隅
酒力如風雨
清風消半途
前山正可數
後騎且勿驅
我緣在東南
往寄白髮餘
遙知萬松嶺
下有三畝居

The way Su discharged his official duties is likened in the poem to a prefect’s journey in a sedan – a journey of ease with no insurmountable difficulties. The speaker, with magnificent aplomb, even takes time on his trip to enjoy the soothing landscape. This verse is a faithful description of Su’s surpassing administrative talent; as the Song scholar Fei Gun 費袞 tells us: “Wandering between the Lingyin and Tianzhu temples and followed by officials carrying files, Su came to the Lengquan Pavilion, where he sat down at a desk and began to judge various cases. His writing brush landed on paper as swiftly as wind and rain. While chatting and laughing, he disposed of all disputes, quarrels, and lawsuits.”⁴¹ Although Tao was no comparison to Su in administrative ability, Su refrained from boasting and meekly implied their difference by a mere contrast.

More than any other poems in their cycles, the eleventh poems show that Tao anchored his faith chiefly in Daoism as much as Su pinned his to Confucianism. Here, Tao’s concern is with the tranquillity of the self, whereas Su’s is with the sufferings of the humanity. Tao discredits the benevolent

40 The Hill of Ten-Thousand Pines is situated outside the Fengshan Gate of Hangzhou. See Yan Jicheng’s 嚴既澄 *Su Shi shi* 蘇軾詩 (Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1970) 212.

41 *Liangxi manzhi*, juan 4, p. 2.

conduct of Yan Hui 顏回, a favorite disciple of Confucius', with the argument that fame is no good to a dead person. No matter how much one cares for his own body, Tao continues, one has to die in the end. Thus his poem concludes that the best thing to do is to live a life after one's heart. But in Su's poem humanity, or altruism, prevails. Purposefully, Su turned away from Tao to dwell on administrative service as an alternative way of life. In the fifth and sixth months of 1092 (Yuanyou 7), respectively, shortly before writing his matching poem, Su had sent a memorial to court asking that the impoverished peasants in the southeast of China, part of which was under his jurisdiction, be given a year's extension for payment of their debts. In fact, during the past two and a half years, Su had written some eleven memorials requesting relief for the poor and needy in the southeast: "These several prefectures were not only plagued by excessive rain but also by powerful wind. All the dams and dikes were broken or damaged. The water entered the city of Huzhou and rose up to a foot inside people's houses."⁴² Repeatedly, his memorials remind the court of the gravity of the situation:

The number of people who may die of starvation is to exceed that of the Xining reign. I, your minister, heard that during the Xining reign, more than five hundred thousand died in Hangzhou and more than three hundred thousand died in Suzhou, not to mention the other prefectures.⁴³

Despite his urgent pleas, no proper action was taken. Worse still, for this rightful concern of his, he was slandered by his political foes, Censors Jia Yi 賈易 and Yang Wei 楊畏, who claimed that Su concocted the story about the disaster. All the oppositions, however, failed to daunt Su. Instead, Su cried out all the more fiercely.

I, your minister (Prefect of Yangzhou), heard that Mencius said, "With a benevolent heart, enforce a benevolent policy." Should Your Majesty have no such heart, I would not dare to expect such policy from you. I kept speaking, but my words kept falling on deaf ears. I might as well have stopped. But I still tirelessly cry out aloud without stopping because I know that Your Majesty has such heart, which was only frustrated by your ministers.⁴⁴

42 "Zou Zhexi zaishang diyizhuang 奏浙西災傷第一狀" in *Quanji* 2: 492.

43 "Qi jiang shanggong fengzhuang hudou ying fu Zhexi zhujun jiexu tiao mi zhazi 乞將上供封樁斛豆應副浙西諸郡接續糴米劄子" in *Quanji* 2: 513-14.

44 "Zai lun jiqian liushi shishi zhazi 再論積欠六事四事劄子," *Quanji* 2: 545.

臣聞之孟子曰. 以不忍人之心. 行不忍人之政. 若陛下初無此心. 則臣亦不敢必望此. 屢言而屢不聽. 亦可以止矣. 然臣猶孜孜強聒不已者. 蓋由陛下實有此心. 而為臣子所格沮也.

Thus after years of frustrated effort, when his request was finally granted, the poet was understandably tipsy with joy. Moreover, favoring weather also set in that year in the region and brought a good crop to the needy peasants. Such joy naturally found expression in Su's poem. Reflecting on the hard life of the commoners, the eleventh poem thus opens with a political profession, which opposes oppressive officials yet shows care for the oppressed: "People toiled, for officials had no virtue 民勞吏無德." Treating the peasants' well-being as his own, the speaker then expresses his gratitude for the fine weather and bountiful crops: "The year was good, for heaven maintained justice 歲美天有道." One good crop, however, was nevertheless insufficient to restore the debt-ridden peasants to wealth. It would have to take a number of successive good crops for the populace to save enough and pay back their debts to the government: "Watering once can't make all dried plants wet 一溉未濡槁." After years of disaster, the sorely-pressed peasants need all the relief they could obtain. Thus when the edict extending the deadline for the payment came, the populace exulted: "The edict pardoned the debts / And the elders looked good 詔書寬積欠, 父老顏色好." The poet was candid, if not blunt, when he noted that this act of relief was made possible by the absence of greed in the emperor: "Bowing again, I praised my lord / For his virtue without greed 再拜賀吾君, 獲此不貪寶." Here Su addressed his emperor in a didactic tone as though the latter were still his docile student. In light of the prevailing tone of joy, the drunkenness at the close of the poem may thus come not so much from drinking as from exultation: "Drunk, I wrote my memorial of thanks at the desk 醉几書謝表."

Indulging the desire of the self, the thirteenth poem by Tao encourages the readers to seek the pleasure of wine even from day to night. It harps on the difference between the sober and the drunken, paradoxically favoring the drunken over the sober. The poem then closes with a remark for the drunken people: "My message for the drunkard is: / At sunset, light and hold your candle 寄言酣中客, 日沒燭當秉." In urging his readers to continue his enjoyment of wine even after darkness falls, Tao primarily reiterates the theme of a verse in the well-known⁴⁵ "Nineteen Ancient Poems." Su's poem appears to pick up where Tao left off, taking exception to his conclusion. It points out the limitation of

45 Lu Qinli 遼欽立, ed, *Xianqin hanwei jin nanbei chao shi* 先秦漢魏晉南北朝詩, 3 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983) 1: 333.

drinking, as Su writes: “Although drunkenness can be fun, / it is still in the cycle of life and death; / How could I keep my body / Free from both drunkenness and soberness? 醉中雖可樂，猶是生滅境，云何得此身，不醉亦不醒” Su’s aspiration is after a life of transcendental peace, not one of limited sensual comfort.

Tension, as the Tang poet Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824) noted,⁴⁶ marks the fifteenth poem of Tao’s cycle. The poet ponders over his poverty and the passage of time with a subtle sense of regret that sprang from the nonfulfillment of the goal of his life, a moral qualm which prompts him to think over the possibility of reentering the bureaucratic world. In this poem, unlike the previous ones, Tao paints a sad, bleak, and forlorn life which he is compelled to live against his wish. His house is now falling apart, but none would help him mend it: “I live in poverty, short of hands; / Briers and thorns make my house a wasteland 貧居乏人工, 灌木荒余宅.” Wild creatures such as birds fly in large numbers with no fear in the neighborhood of his house, which is hardly frequented by people – a powerful image signifying the desolation of a wasteland: “Flocks and flocks of birds flew around; / Yet there’s no trace of people walking 班班有翔鳥, 寂寂無行跡.” Time also adds to his woes. It has robbed the poet of his youth: “The hair on my temples is already white 鬚邊早已白.” Hence, a last ditch effort to re-enter service seems to the poet worthwhile: “If I refuse to seek a career, / The goal I have embraced would go to waste 若不委窮達, 素抱深可惜.”⁴⁷

Turning to Su, we see a spirit of modesty and contentment in a life of honor and prosperity. While Tao describes a ramshackle house he lives in, Su, living in a fine house, depicts in his imagination his home in Sichuan as lying in ruins, not from the absence of maintenance, but from disuse: “I left my hometown for thirty years; / Winds and rains laid my old house to waste 去鄉三十年, 風雨荒舊宅.” Su, comparing himself with Tao, was aware of the amenities he had enjoyed, which were denied to Tao. This awareness called forth a sense of humility in Su: “Each time I ate, I felt ashamed before Yuanming 每用愧淵明.” Moreover, the verse continues, he had three fine boys and Zhe also had three. These

46 Cited in *Tao Yuanming shi wen hui ping* 陶淵明詩文彙評, ed. Yang Jialo 楊家駱 (Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1964) 190.

47 A. R. Davis translated the last two lines as follows: “If I do not accept failure and success, / My early ideals are truly pitiable!” (*Tao Yuanming: His Works and Their Meaning* [Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1983] 1: 100). Although I take the word ‘wei 委’ similarly to mean ‘to follow,’ my reading differs from his in that Tao, finding it hard to embrace the failure of his career, toys with the idea of following again Confucius’ teaching on securing a distinguished service.

obedient sons were sources of enduring joy to both the Su brothers: “A joy our six boys are, / To them I could pass down honesty 欣然六男子, 粗可傳清白.” Hence, his poem closes on a note of contentment.

Tao’s grievance continues into the sixteenth poem. He tells the reader that when he was young, he was unacquainted with the political world and given to the study of six Confucian classics: “When I was young, I knew little of men’s affairs; / My interest lay in the Six Classics 少年罕人事, 游好在六經.” He pursued an official career, but accomplished nothing: “My age advanced toward forty; / Yet I have lingered and achieved nothing 行行向不惑, 淹留遂無成.” Now hunger and cold oppressed him; his life grew hard and dreary: “Why, I found myself stuck in honest poverty, / Having fully experienced hunger and cold. / My broken hut meets sad winds 竟抱固窮節, 飢寒飽所更, 敝廬交悲風.” Some critics maintain that the image of “sad winds”⁴⁸ refers to the chaotic political world. Although this reading is possible, the landscape makes better sense if it is seen as an externalization of the poet’s mental landscape. The dreary, bleak, and chilling landscape betrays the poet’s dark vision of both himself and the world. Ill-housed, ill-dressed, and ill-fed, he looks for light, but instead night reigns: “In coarse garb I keep watch for the long night; / The morning cock refuses to crow 披褐守長夜, 晨雞不肯鳴.”

Darkness plays no notable part in Su’s optimistic, poetic vision. Instead of sadness, joy again permeates the sixteenth poem in Su’s cycle. The virtues of his family, both children and grandchildren, continue to command his praise: “Loudly, these six boys / Each chants one classic. / They in turn fathered five masters / Who are soon to become adults 曉曉六男子, 絃誦各一經, 復生五丈夫, 戢戢丁欲成.” Some of the children stayed home with the family; some served the nation. Years later, his youngest son, Guo 過, in particular was to prove of the highest worth when he left his wife and children and accompanied his father on his second exile all the way from the north to the south of China. This long journey commenced in 1094 (Shaosheng 紹聖 1), when his hair was dark. It ended in 1100 (Yuanfu 元符 2), when his hair turned gray: “I went in the prime of my life and did not return until my hair turned gray 丁年而往, 二毛而歸.”⁴⁹ Conscious of Tao’s sadness, however, Su avoids boasting of this domestic joy in his matching poem and offers instead his apologies for feeling the way he does about his sons: “I drink in shame to this mundane joy 一飲愧凡

48 *Tao Yuanming shi wen huiping* 190.

49 Su Guo 蘇過, “Zhi yin 志隱” in *Xiechuan ji* 斜川集 (Taipei: Zhonghua shuju, 1966), juan 6, p. 7.

情。” He humbles himself in maintaining that the joy of the family is only a joy of mediocrity.

As the cycle draws to a close, Su moves farther apart from Tao. The concluding four poems reflect mostly their ever-widening difference. In the seventeenth poem, a strong sense of guilt compels Tao to defend himself. After presenting his wretched state, he feels the necessity to explain why he chooses to terminate his service and the need to extricate himself from the accusation that he has wasted his life. He compares himself in the poem to an orchid, which waits for a fresh breeze to help it spread its fragrance. When the breeze arrives, the poem stresses, it will surely set the orchid apart from grass and weeds. But the breeze the poet awaits never comes. The life-threatening environment in this case deters him from continuing his service: “When the birds died, the fine bow was also destroyed 鳥盡廢良弓。” Death for a political cause is not what he, unlike Su, could accept. The poet further justifies in the eighteenth poem his refusal to counsel his official friends, when they came to consult him, for they all, in his view, set their minds on destroying others: “Won’t they be used for destruction? 豈不在伐國” The next-to-last poem reiterates the reasons for his initial entrance into public service and final resolve to quit his political career: “In the past I suffered from hunger; / So I left the plow to learn an official’s trade. / I failed to comport myself; / Thus cold and hunger haunted me 曙昔苦長飢, 投耒去學仕, 將養不得節, 凍餒固纏己。” Although the poet may never become prosperous, the poem concludes, he may at least enjoy the comfort of wine after returning to his farm. The last poem then opens with a reflection on legendary rulers in ancient China and Confucius’ sense of mission: “Xi and Nong are far from me in time; / In the whole world few return to the true; / Hurrying, the old man of Lu / Mended it to make it pure 羲農去我久, 舉世少復真, 汲汲魯中叟, 彌縫使其淳。” The poet-critic Zhu Ziqing 朱自清 (1898–1948) was right when he pointed out that Tao, in representing Confucius and his historical mission, had imposed Daoist doctrines on him: “‘True (zhen 真)’ and ‘pure (chun 淳)’ are both Daoist concepts. Yuanming imposed upon Confucius the mission of rendering the world true and pure.”⁵⁰ The term ‘true’ is indeed a key word in *Zhuang Zi*: “Only a true man has true knowledge.”⁵¹ So is the word ‘pure’ essential to *Lao Zi*: “Govern loosely and people will turn pure.”⁵² The

50 “Tao shi de shendu 陶詩的深度,” *Tao Yuanming juan* 1: 289.

51 “Da zongshi” in *Zhuang Zi* 莊子, annotated by Guo Xiang 郭象 [Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan 藝文, 1983] 3: 131.

52 Zhang Mosheng 張默生, *Lao Zi zhangju xinjie* 老子章句新解 (Taipei: Letian chubanshe 樂天, 1971) 58: 76.

imposition of these concepts on Confucius bespeaks but Tao's Daoist belief. Then the poem proceeds to state that true Confucian scholars who gave themselves to the cause of righteousness are nowhere to be found: "I drove the cart all day long / Without seeing a person asking for instruction 終日馳車走, 不見所問津." Under such hopeless circumstances, Tao pleads in conclusion that the reader should forgive him for his disinclination to join such ancient sages as Confucius in their endeavor to redeem the sinful world: "I hate to make many mistakes; / You must forgive this drunkard 但恨多謬誤, 君當恕醉人."

In sharp contrast to Tao, Su devoted the last four poems to the philosophy of government. Whereas Tao mourns over the absence of order and high principle in society, Su counters his idea with the stress on the presence of the Way: "Who says that the great Way is far? 誰言大道遠." Wine, in his view, can help one access the Way: "Three cups can get you there 正賴三杯通." The motif of three cups of wine leading to the Way echoes in effect the second poem in a cycle composed by Li Bai, titled "Drinking Alone under the Moon 月下獨酌." Li's lines read as follows: "Three cups lead to the Way; / One decaliter joins nature 三杯通大道一斗合自然."⁵³ Whereas Li Bai relates wine to nature, Su links it to politics. Because Su makes it his policy to grant timely rest and proper leisure to all the people, his subordinates and constituents alike, who are not compelled to work late into the night, can take advantage of his benevolent administration and find time to refresh themselves: "The prefect does not sit and work at night 使君不夕坐." Moreover, his office discourages unwanted aggression but promotes peace: "The office throws away knives and bows 衙門散刀弓." In consequence, peace, joy, and order prevail in his jurisdiction; hence, his confidence in the accessibility of the Way. The theme of leisure and celebration continues into the last two poems: "Enjoy yourself while there's time 行樂當及時." Following Tao's format, Su's cycle also concludes with the significance of wine. While Tao flees from the political world to wine, Su uses wine to moderate the extreme of politics. According to Su, who favors the idea of fewer rules and no exploitation, wine can properly relax an overtly venturesome and meddlesome official: "Three cups should wash away the Warring States 三杯洗戰國." As the cycle closes, wine has assumed a new significance, ending as a symbol of moderation in politics.

53 *Li Bai shi* 李白詩, ed. Fu Donghua 傅東華, 7th ed. (Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1983) 140.

Second Exile

Su's second exile in 1094 drove him from the prosperous capital first to the underdeveloped Huizhou then to the desolate, uncivilized Hainan Island, the southern extremity of the Song empire, from the zenith to the nadir of his career. Before this exile, Su had enjoyed for nearly eight years the trust of the Empress Dowager, who ruled the empire on behalf of her adolescent grandson, serving at various distinguished positions both in court and province. During these years of honor and prosperity, especially while he was serving in the court as the Dowager's trusted secretary, Su was so occupied with the whirl of events that he had little time for Tao. Nor did he show much interest in Tao. In keeping with his Confucian zeal, Su even dismissed Tao's vision of a utopia at Wuling, a world of its own, as untenable and escapist: "Peach blossoms and the flowing stream are in this human world; / Must all at Wuling necessarily be immortals? 桃花流水在人世, 武陵豈必皆神儂" ⁵⁴ (Su 5: 2968–2969) His close involvement with and heartfelt devotion to the very many affairs of the nation made him see more trenchantly that Confucianism, out of the different schools of thought in China, was the only right way for a government to follow and that Daoism and Buddhism as a ruling ideology may bring disaster upon a nation: "From the Han dynasty on, the governments' policies did not come from Confucius, hence the world was led by many to disorder. The Jin dynasty was destroyed because of Lao (Zi) and Zhuang (Zi), and the Liang dynasty was destroyed because of Buddhism. 自漢以來, 道術不出於孔氏, 而亂天下者多矣. 晉以老, 莊亡. 梁以佛亡." ⁵⁵ During his tenure as Prefect of Hangzhou and Commander in Chief of the western region of Zhejiang, he frequently compared himself in his verse to Bai Juyi (Letian) 白居易 (772–846), whose long, leisurely, and wealthy life of retirement greatly appealed to him: "I am very much like Letian 我甚似樂天" (Su 5: 3045). Only toward the end when Su was inextricably enmeshed in political intrigues ⁵⁶ and power struggles in court did he seek Tao's company in verse again.

54 The beautiful landscape of the utopia at Wuling is highlighted by peach blossoms. Cf. my book *Nature and Self* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989) 153–157.

55 "Liuyi jushi wenji xu" in *Quanji* 1: 314.

56 Failing to take into account Su's response to Tao at the zenith of his power, Ronald Egan makes a misleading generalization about Su's response to Tao at this stage, when he writes in *Word, Images and Deed in the Life of Su Shi*: "The significance Tao Qian (Yuanming) held for Su seems also to have deepened by the time of his Lingnan exile" (Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies, 1994) 233.

The death of the Dowager saw the downfall of the Old party 舊黨, of which Su was a most prominent member. Zhezong 哲宗 (1077–1100), the young emperor who came into power, vented his long-nursed rancor against his grandmother on her ministers including, and especially, Su. He demoted him time and again and exiled him from place to place, eventually to the remotest corner of the empire. This exile, which lasted for some seven years, almost drove Su to his dire end. But Su met his adversity with courage and fortitude. It was at this time that he decided to write poems matching all Tao's works, starting with "Returned to My Farm to Stay."

Tao wrote his cycle of six poems "Returned to My Farm to Stay 歸園田居" in 406 (Yixi 義熙 2), after thirteen years of an unfruitful quest for an appropriate position, disappointed, frustrated, and disillusioned with the bureaucratic world. He described the bureaucratic world as a net and a cage, a bondage upon the self. His return from Pengze to his home in the countryside meant freedom, especially freedom from human conventions: "Long in a cage, / I am now able to return to Nature 久在樊籠里, 復得返自然" (*Tao* 2: 16). His exaltation of nature over humanity is based on Daoist teaching; as Lao Zi says, "The king follows the earth; the earth follows the heaven; the heaven follows the Way; and the Way follows Nature 王法地, 地法天, 天法道, 道法自然."⁵⁷ Almost wholly cut off from the external world, Tao went into seclusion after returning home: "Closing the door during the day; / I renounce worldly thoughts in my bare room 白日掩荊扉, 虛室絕塵想." The words 'xu (bare, void)' and 'chen (dust or worldly)' suggest the Taoist ideal of renouncing willful human exertion in return to the state of non-activity: "Attain the ultimate void and hold to extreme stillness 致虛極守靜篤."⁵⁸ Totally disillusioned with the political world, Tao, when encountering his neighbors, would speak nothing but the growth of his crops: "We greeted each other with no extra words; / We spoke only of the growth of mulberry and hemp trees 相見無雜言, 但道桑麻長." His vision of the world blends the Daoist notion of nothingness and the Buddhist idea of emptiness: "Life is like an illusion; / Ending in emptiness and nothingness 人生似幻化, 終當歸空無."⁵⁹ With this pessimistic vision, his life of seclusion basically appeared drab and dull, marked by drinking: "Our pleasures

57 *Lao Zi* 5: 31.

58 *Ibid.* 16: 19.

59 Following Liang Qichao, Song Qiulong 宋丘龍 in his comparison of Tao and Su identified Tao as a Confucianist (*Su Dongpo he Tao Yuanming shi zhi bijiao yanjiu* 蘇東坡和陶淵明詩之比較研究, Shangwu, 1982, 70).

bitterly found the night short; / It's dawn again 歡來苦夕短, 已復至天旭.” Pleasure was what he sought, and work what he would like to avoid.

Su wrote a similar cycle matching Tao's. Written in Huizhou in 1094 (Shaosheng 紹聖 1), these matching poems display a spirit of integrity undaunted and undefeated by adversity, radically different from Tao's escapism. Although demoted, disgraced, and banished from court, Su could nevertheless enjoy the environment of Huizhou, the place to which he was exiled, as though it were a home of his choice: “The pressed ape found the woods; / The tired horse was just released from the rein. / Mind empty, I am content with the new gain; / This place looks familiar, and I have many dreams 窮猿既投林, 疲馬初解鞅, 心空飽新得, 境熟夢餘想” (*Su* 6: 3381). More important, Su felt at home with his new neighbors who, like himself, observed Confucian teaching and were, in his view, honest, unsophisticated, and hospitable people reminiscent even of Confucius and his disciple Yan Hui: “The house on the east is famed for Confucius; / The house on the west famed for Yan Yuan 東家著孔邱, 西家著顏淵.” Unlike Tao, who declined to swallow his humiliation and went into seclusion, Su sublimated his humiliation, reached out to his neighbors, and even went out of his way to befriend the aborigines, outcasts in the south: “An old Dan man and I start to visit each other 蠶叟已還往.”⁶⁰ Moreover, in 1095 Su, unaffected by his own exile, exhorted his second son, Dai 迨, to take the civil service examinations and prepare to enter into public service. Su's adherence to Confucian principles grew firmer in spite of, or perhaps as a result of, persecution. His determination to serve his nation remained as firm and strong as ever: “I am still determined to give my life to my nation 許國心猶在” (*Su* 6: 3335). He felt sure that history would restore honor and glory to him if he survived his ordeal. Thus he persisted: “I am content with a meal / Made up of herbs in the field 我飽一飯足, 薇蕨補食前.” His stamina and perseverance in the main sprang from his Confucian belief: “A gentleman must be strong and persevering, for the burden is heavy and the journey long. He takes up humanity as his burden – isn't it heavy? He won't stop until death – isn't it long? 士不可以不弘毅, 任重而道遠, 仁以為己任, 不亦重乎? 死而後已, 不亦遠乎”⁶¹ The example of Fan Pang, whose martyrdom had served as Su's model, must have given him further strength. His fortitude and courage could also have found support in Mahayana Buddhism, which teaches: “There is no difference at all, /

60 The Dan people were the aborigines in the south, outcasts who were allowed by the Song government to reside only on boats.

61 *Lun yu* 4: 51.

Between nirvana and samsara. / There is no difference at all / Between samsara and nirvana.”⁶² To a Mahayana Buddhist, nirvana, the ultimate state of bliss, is the same as samsara, the cycle of birth and death. He does not need to flee from the cycle of birth and death in order to attain nirvana, for the cycle of birth and death to him is nirvana itself. Although Su was never a committed Buddhist believer, his untrammelled spirit could have readily availed itself of Buddhist ideas to his advantage.

Their differences notwithstanding, both of their poems share the spirit of content with a simple life in the countryside. As Tao treasured his pastoral life in retirement, so Su cherished his life in exile. Like Tao, Su also found support in *Zhuang Zi*. Su’s use of Zhuang Zi’s idea, which equates a candle with the moon, shows the poet’s humble spirit to the country folks, with whom he intimately associated and from whom he drew support and strength: “The moon is inferior to a candle 月固不勝燭.”⁶³ Unlike Tao, who allowed Daoism to dictate the principle of his undisciplined conduct, Su utilized *Zhuang Zi* to strengthen, enrich, and refresh his mind so as to become a better Confucian statesman. More important, in spite of his use of Zhuang Zi’s ideas, he did not lose sight of the limitation of this Daoist thinker. In fact, Su never stopped criticizing him even at the late stage of his life: “He forced himself to sing, so he was untrue. / Why should I learn from Zhuang Zhou? 強歌非真達, 何必師莊周” (*Su* 6: 3420). Zhuang Zi’s singing a joyful song after his wife’s death appeared disconcerting to Su. Her death, as Zhuang Zi explained, first grieved him and brought down his tears: “When she first died, how could I alone have remained unaffected? 是其始死也, 我獨何能無概”⁶⁴ But his reasoning afterward compelled him to stop his spontaneous mourning: “Now the person is dead, lying in a big chamber, while I weep and mourn accordingly. This conduct, I think, shows no knowledge of fate. So I stopped.” Exalting reason at the expense of feeling sat ill with Su; hence he dismissed this famed Daoist teacher as untrue and maintained that in this regard he had nothing significant to learn from him.

The discussion of their beliefs leads us duly to the comparison of their philosophical poems on spirit. Tao wrote a cycle on body, shadow, and spirit, in which his approach is basically hedonistic and naturalistic. The poem on body espouses the idea of drinking as the best approach to an ephemeral life: “I hope

62 Sarvepalli Padhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore, eds., *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy*, 5th printing (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1973) 344.

63 Su himself noted that he took this idea from *Zhuang Zi* (*Su* 6: 3382).

64 “The Supreme Joy,” *Zhuang Zi* 18 : 344–345.

you'll listen to my words: / When you get wine, don't turn it down 願君取吾言, 得酒莫苟辭" (*Tao* 2: 13). The poem on shadow adds the Confucian view of doing good as the proper way to lead a worthy life. However, as the name of the poem's speaker, 'Ying 影 (shadow),' indicates, the Confucian teaching to Tao is as hollow and unrealistic as a shadow. In conclusion, the poem on the spirit dismisses the previous views and espouses the Daoist teaching of submitting oneself wholly to the natural process of life and death. It refutes both drinking and doing good. Wine is intoxicating, making one forget sorrow, but it may also shorten a person's life. Doing good on the other hand may not engender praise from people: "To do good is what I often like, / Yet who would praise you? 立善常所欣, 誰當為汝譽." Thus ends Tao's poem:

Too much worry hurts my life;
I should submit to the flux,
Roam freely in the waves of great changes
With neither joy nor fear!
When it's time to die, I die;
No more big worries for me. (*Tao* 2: 14)

甚念傷吾生
正宜委運去
縱浪大化中
不喜亦不懼
應盡便須盡
無復獨多慮

His conclusion above reflects the teaching of *Zhuang Zi*: "When it's time to come, the master was born; when it's time to go, he died accordingly. Conform to time and change, then sorrow and joy will not be able to enter you. 適來, 夫子時也; 適去, 夫子順也. 安時而處順, 哀樂不能入."⁶⁵ Like *Zhuang Zi*, Tao submits to the flux of nature and endeavors to rid himself of human emotions, both joy and fear.

Chen Yinque 陳寅恪 (1890–1969) was right when he stated that among all the poems by Tao the cycle "On Body, Shadow, and Spirit" best represents Tao's philosophy.⁶⁶ Right he was also in refuting Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929), when the latter wrote: "What he [Tao] benefited from and toiled on was but Confucianism."⁶⁷ In Chen's view, Liang's perception of Tao essentially as a Confucianist was simply an anachronistic imposition.⁶⁸ Instead of a Confucianist, Tao was, according to Chen, essentially a Daoist: "Yuanming's thought inherited the fruit of the Pure Talk of the Wei and Jin dynasties and developed the

65 *Ibid.* 3: 77–8.

66 "Tao Yuanming zhi sixiang yu qingtan zhi guanxi 陶淵明之思想與清談之關係" in *Tao Yuanming juan* 2: 348–358.

67 Liang Qichao 梁啟超, *Tao Yuanming* 陶淵明 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1924) 19.

68 *Tao Yuanming juan* 2: 354.

Daoist theory on nature to which his family had adhered.”⁶⁹ In correcting Liang’s view, however, instead of giving full effect to the Daoist theme he espoused and succinctly defining Tao as a Daoist, Chen ambiguously argued that Tao was “a Confucianist extrinsically and a Daoist intrinsically.”⁷⁰ By the terms ‘extrinsically’ and ‘intrinsically,’ one wonders whether Chen meant that Tao was a Daoist in heart and mind, yet a Confucianist in conduct. If so, his reading would force turn Tao into a figure of split personality. Whatever these terms mean, they add unnecessary confusion to his interpretation. The ambiguity of Chen’s statement comes from his ill-founded presupposition that there is no conflict at all between Confucianism and Daoism or Buddhism: “Between them there is no conflict.”⁷¹ Surely, tension exists. In history, this tension has often grown into full-scale persecutions. To see the futility of Chen’s argument,⁷² one needs only to consider the example of the Confucian poet Han Yu, who against all odds fiercely opposed Buddhism in behalf of Confucianism and nearly lost his life for doing so.⁷³ If indeed no conflict exists between Confucianism and Daoism/Buddhism, Tao would not have written in the way he did the cycle “On Body, Shadow, and Spirit,” a poem which exalts Daoism at the expense of Confucianism.

Turning to the matching poems by Su, one finds once more a different view. While Tao endeavors to rid himself of emotions in the aforementioned cycle, “On Body, Shadow, and Spirit,” Su treasures human emotions as precisely the elements that render a human life unique, rich, and precious. In this poem, Su openly sets himself apart from Tao. In Su’s view, Tao flees from the world to wine. It is apparent that Su disregards the persona in Tao’s poem who comments on the limitation of wine, and instead, sees him in his actual life as someone who relied considerably on wine for attaining mental peace. In this case, it is not what Tao said but what he did that counts with Su. Su wishes he could follow Tao in seeking refuge in wine, but drinking, despite the temporary comfort it brings, is not the abiding solution to frustration or adversity in life: “I wish very much to follow the old Tao / In changing my house and living in wine 甚欲隨陶翁, 移家酒中住” (*Su* 6: 3540) There will always be a time when one may become

69 *Ibid.* 1: 358.

70 *Ibid.* 1: 358.

71 *Ibid.* 2: 349.

72 Zhu Guangqian 朱光潛 saw no sense in making a distinction as Chen did between the so-called extrinsic and intrinsic aspects of Tao (*Tao Yuanming juan* 2: 363).

73 For the Emperor’s intent to kill Han see Liu Gou 劉恂 et al., *Jiu Tangshu* 舊唐書, 16 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1991), juan 160, p. 4200.

sober and hence has to face the world squarely: “Drunkenness and soberness both have an end; / It’s hard to flee from fate 醉醒要有盡, 未易逃諸數.” The expression ‘I wish very much’ leaves one with the impression that he may be gently coaxing a close friend, who fails to see what he has perceived – a man who for his political belief was once incarcerated and persecuted nearly to the point of death and now is walking through the valley of the shadow of death again. So Su moves beyond Tao and offers a different solution.

As expected, the solution Su proposes here derives in essence again from Confucianism. Whereas Tao upholds Daoism as the ruling principle of his life, Su flatly rejects it: “Don’t listen to Lao Zi’s words! 莫從老君言.” Su’s solution displays little interest in the world beyond, either in the kingdom of immortality offered by the Daoist religion or in the Paradise of the West created by Buddha Amitabha: “The hills of immortals and Buddha’s paradise, / I fear, do not really exist 仙山與佛國, 終恐無是處.” Rather, it hinges on the speaker himself. This assertion of the self in seeking spiritual fulfillment is reminiscent especially of Mencius: “All things in the universe are complete in me. When I return to myself and practice sincerity, joy abounds 萬物皆備於我, 反身而誠, 樂莫大焉.”⁷⁴ The self in its absolute state in Su’s view should be unaffected by the external world, good or evil: “Now I’ll kindle a fire / And put both good and evil to flame 如今一弄火, 好惡都焚去.” This freedom is to rid himself, not of joy or fear, as in Tao’s case, but of any undue concern or worry about other people’s criticism, be it acclaim or blame. The poem then closes with a reference to Confucius, citing him as the source of his thinking: “Confucius was enlightened late in his life: / Why worry while in the world? 仲尼晚乃覺, 天下何思慮.”

The Long Journey Home

Su gave up his poetic project of the matching poems, after he was recalled in 1100 (Yuanfu 元符 3) from Hainan Island to the continent. Seven years of hardship and suffering did not alter Su’s determination to serve. Politics again ruled his mind; he simply had no time or mood for Tao. Once again, his disapproval of Tao surfaced in the last poem he composed to match Tao’s verse, entitled “Composed as I Began to Serve as Aide to the Zhenjun General, Traveling through Qu A 始作鎮軍參軍經曲阿.”

74 “Jinxin” in *Mencius* 孟子, *Sishu jizhu* 189.

In this poem, composed in 404 (Yuanxing 3 元興), Tao complained about his return to the political arena as aide to General Liu Yu 劉裕 (363–422), although no one appeared to press him into this service. Thus his poem laments: “My eyes tire of seeing strange streams and roads; / My heart misses the life by the hill and river. / As I look up at a wisp of cloud, flying birds put me to shame; / As I look down at the water, swimming fish made me ashamed 目倦川途異, 心念山澤居, 望雲慚高鳥, 臨水愧游魚” (*Tao* 3: 34). Like Tao, when Su received the order to return north, he was not wholly without misgivings: “I want to go, yet I fear this letter 欲往畏簡書” (*Su* 6: 3577). Unlike Tao, however, who wants to resign even before taking office, Su is determined to embrace what is in store for him: “Yuanming fell into verse and wine, / Hence parted from feats and fame; / But I was born at a good time, / It’s right to wear red garb and to have gold. / Heaven so ordained / That the deserted be brought back 淵明墮詩酒, 遂與功名疏, 我生值良時, 朱金義當紓, 天命適如此幸收廢棄餘.” Su’s view of Tao has now almost run the full course of a circle. No longer an exalted figure, Tao appears in his sight to have fallen, enthralled by poetry and wine. But Su retains his sense of humility. He attributes his better life, not to his own merit, but to his time, which, according to him, was more conducive than Tao’s to the fulfillment of Confucian ideals.

Word spread that the new emperor, Huizong 徽宗 (1082–1135), was considering appointing Su as Prime Minister. Slightly more than a year after his recall to the continent, however, cholera fell upon him. Aided by aging, brutal summer heat, and fatigue from the long journey home, it swiftly claimed his life. Su waited until the final moment of his death before he asked the Song court to grant him retirement. Belatedly, sixty-nine years after his death, Emperor Xiaozong bestowed on Su first the title of duke then that of Supreme Master (taishi 太師).⁷⁵

Conclusion

The above study demonstrates that Tao Yuanming held an attraction for Su Dongpo primarily during his frustrations, hardships, and sufferings. In Su’s hardship Tao satisfied his imagination of getting away from the oppressive

75 See “Xiaozong” in *Song shi*, vol. 3, juan 34, pp. 649, 655. The biography of Su Shi in the *Song shi* erroneously attributed this imperial favor to Emperor Gaozong (*Song shi*, vol. 31, juan 338, p. 10817).

world, offered him companionship in a life of doldrums and poverty, helped remind him of exercising caution in hard times, and, above all, articulated in his behalf his uncompromising stance toward the corrupt world. When Su was pressed by his administrative work and busy with the discharge of his onerous duties, he had little time for Tao, showing little interest in him. As a zealous subject ever ready to give his life to his nation and people, Su could see Tao as one fallen, enthralled by wine. Through his matching poems Su promoted, on the one hand, the pursuit of a career not for position or lucre, but for humanity, and exhorted, on the other hand, intellectuals of Tao's kind to persist in public service. Su's promotion of Tao benefited Tao as well as himself. Wielding his mighty brush pen and weighty literary scepter, Su brought home the significance of Tao's work and thereby helped exalt him to a high status.

Placed in a larger context of Chinese culture, Tao and Su, for all their similarities, stand for two different types of ideals. Tao began his official career as a Confucianist. But after encountering frustrations with politics, he renounced the world, returned home, and turned to Daoism as the ruling principle of his life. After the renouncement of his official career, he experienced moments of anxiety, if not doubt. Yet he was determined to pursue a quiet life with no politics. In his refusal to commit himself to the redemption of a corrupt world, Tao stands for the Daoist ideal, emphasizing the wholesomeness of the self over the public good. By contrast, despite his liking for a pastoral life, Su deemed service to his nation and people the prescribed mission of his life. He kept the promise he had made in his youth to his mother, holding the Confucian martyr Fan Pang as his model in his fight against evil. For fulfilling his promise and mission, he was imprisoned once, exiled twice, and scandalized many times; but his sufferings only enlarged his sympathy for the poor and oppressed and strengthened his determination to devote his life to his emperor, his nation, and his people. He made ample use of Daoist and Buddhist ideas, but he never allowed them to dictate his life. Thus Su, in his unswerving commitment to doing good and aiding others, stands for the Confucian ideal, stressing the significance of a self-sacrificing spirit. The disparity between Tao and Su occurred not only as a reflection of two different personalities but also of two different philosophies.

