

# **Tao Yuanming & Manuscript Culture**

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# Tao Yuanming: The Man?

- Also known as Tao Qian (365?-427)
- Great-Grandfather Tao Kan (259-334) was one of the most influential political and military leaders in early Eastern Jin.
- Tao Yuanming served several official posts but never rose to any high-ranking position. He was reportedly unhappy in his official capacity.
- After the death of his sister in 405, he resigned from his post of magistrate at Pengze and went home.
- Kept up his friendships with local and court officials; drinking and sharing poetry with them.
- "Appreciated largely as a drinker and a recluse who held fast to his principles." (Tian, 10)
- His poetry was already being rewritten amongst his friends even during his lifetime.

# Tao Yuanming: The Myth

- One of the greatest and most misunderstood of the classical Chinese poets.
- Misunderstanding comes from making Tao Yuanming into an "eternal presence" rather than an image in texts.
- Presence is shaped by the force of culture and subsequent editors.

# The Manuscript Culture

- Subsequent writers felt compelled to "correct mistakes" or to "improve" a manuscript.
- Example of controversy with regard to Jian (to see) as opposed to wang (to gaze at) initiated by Su Shi.
- Pertains to the number of ways a person is able to relate to a mountain and one's interpretation of how the *poet himself* may have related to that mountain.

***I built my cottage in the human world,  
yet there is no noise of horse and carriage.  
How then did you manage to achieve this?  
When the heart is far away, the locale naturally  
becomes remote.***

***Picking chrysanthemum flowers by the eastern hedge,  
I gaze at South Mountain in the distance.  
The mountain air is lovely at dusk,  
and birds fly back with one another.  
In this return there is a fundamental truth,  
I am going to explain it, but already forgot the words.***

Disputed Biography: A quick example of Manuscript Culture in action.

**Song History:** Tao Qian's courtesy name was Yuanming; some say his name was Yuanming and his courtesy name was Yuanliang. He was a native of Chaisang of Xunyang. His great-grandfather was Tao Kan, the Jin commander. From his youth Tao Qian had had lofty inclinations. He once wrote "The Biography of Master Five Willows" as a self-portrayal....This is the way he described himself, and his contemporaries considered it a factual record. (Tian, 68)

**Xiao Tong**: Tao Yuanming's courtesy name was Yuanliang; some say his name was Qian and his courtesy name Yuanming. He was a native of Chaisang of Xunyang; his great-grandfather was Tao Kan, the Jin Commander.

From his youth Tao Qian had had lofty inclinations. He was learned and good at literary compositions. An extraordinary person rising above the crowd, he followed his natural impulses and was content with his choices. He once wrote "The Biography of Master Five Willows" as a self-portrayal....and his contemporaries considered it a factual record. (68)

**Jin History:** Tao Qian's courtesy name was Yuanliang. He was the great-grandson of Tao Kan, the Jin Commander. His grandfather Tao Mao was magistrate of Wuchang. From his youth Tao Qian had cherished lofty feelings. He was learned and good at literary compositions. An extraordinary, unrestrained person, he followed his natural impulses and was content with his choices. He was highly regarded by his townsmen. He once wrote "The Biography of Master Five Willows" as a self-portrayal....He described himself in this way, and his contemporaries considered it a factual record. (69)

**Histories of the Southern Dynasties:** Tao Qian's courtesy name was Yuanming; some say his name was Shenming and his courtesy name Yuanliang. A native of Chaisang of Xunyang, he was the great-grandson of Tao Kan, the Jin Commander. From his youth Tao Qian had lofty inclinations. By his residence were five willow trees, so he wrote "The Biography of Master Five Willows".....He described himself in this way, as he intended it to be a self-portrayal. His contemporaries considered it a factual record. (69)

**All four histories were based upon Tao Qian's tone in his own writings about his life. Some used fictionalized accounts as fact. (Southern Dynasties) Additions to a former account are central to the image building and subsequent adoption of Tao Qian's eternal presence. (Xiao Tong's addition to Song history, for example.)**

# Works Cited:

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