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Return to an Inner Utopia: Su Shi's Transformation of Tao Qian in His Exile Poetry

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Abstract

This article examines Su Shi's systematic matching of Tao Qian's poetry during his last periods of exile to the far south. Su understood the aesthetic features of Tao's poetry as having an ethical dimension. Through emulation of Tao Qian, Su Shi reinterpreted his exile to be a result of his natural inclinations, just like Tao's reclusion, and even as a felicitous condition for his "return" to an original state of authenticity and spontaneity. By assuming certain agency for his suffering, Su Shi claimed control over his fate and reasserted his freedom of choice. Meanwhile, his poetry betrays a sense of anxiety and dislocation in his natural and cultural habitats, as well as alienation from the political center. As a result, he reimagined Tao Qian's "Peach Blossom Spring" to be an inner utopia. His return into this inner realm was further informed by Daoist alchemical practices and contained esoteric features.

Résumé

Cet article s'intéresse à la façon systématique dont Su Shi a composé des poèmes à l'imitation de ceux de Tao Qian pendant ses dernières périodes d'exil dans l'extrême-Sud. Pour lui, les propriétés esthétiques de la poésie de Tao Qian avaient une dimension éthique. Imiter Tao était un moyen de réinterpréter son exil comme s'il résultait de ses inclinations naturelles, à l'instar de la réclusion que Tao s'était imposée, voire comme une occasion bienvenue de retrouver un état original d'authenticité et de spontanéité. Se voulant responsable de ses propres souffrances, Su Shi revendiquait le contrôle de son destin et réaffirmait sa liberté de choix. En même temps, sa poésie révèle toute l'anxiété et la perturbation que lui causait l'environnement naturel et culturel où il avait été jeté, autant que sa séparation d'avec les centres de pouvoir. Du coup, il concevait "La source aux fleurs de pêcher" de Tao Qian comme une utopie intérieure. Son retour vers cet univers intime était

par ailleurs informé par les pratiques alchimistes taoïstes et présente certains traits d'ésotérisme.

Keywords

Su Shi, Tao Qian, spontaneity, return, Peach Blossom Spring, inner utopia

In what was to become a celebrated act in Chinese literary history, Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037-1101), a giant of Song-dynasty literary, artistic, and intellectual life, began to systematically compose “matching Tao” (*he Tao* 和陶) poems in the spring of 1095 during his exile to Huizhou 惠州 (in modern Guangdong province). This project of 109 poems was completed when he was further exiled to Danzhou 儋州 (in modern Hainan) and issued in four fascicles soon after his return to the mainland in 1100.¹ Inspired by and following the rhyming patterns of the poetry of Tao Qian 陶潛 (352-427),² the famous Eastern Jin (317-420) recluse poet, these poems contributed to the making (and remaking) of the images of both poets and to a return to simplicity in Chinese lyrical aesthetics.³

Scholarship so far has focused on the significance of Su Shi's agency in Tao Qian's canonization. His image transformed through Su's criticism and emulation, Tao has come to be viewed as a spontaneous man of the Way, and not just an eccentric medieval recluse and hearty drinker.⁴ Taking a different approach, this paper will focus instead on what

¹ This anthology was highly popular in the Song and has been printed repeatedly in various editions. The earliest existing wood-block print, preserved in the National Taiwan Library, was issued at the end of the Northern Song in Huangzhou; see Liu Shangrong 劉尚榮, *Su Shi zhuzuo banben luncong* 蘇軾著作版本論叢 (Chengdu: Ba Shu shushe, 1988), 24-33.

² There have been many debates on Tao Qian's name and the dates of his birth and death. For a summary, see Wendy Swartz, *Reading Tao Yuanming: Shifting Paradigms of Historical Reception (427-1900)* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Asia Center, 2008), 1n1, 5n10. Swartz takes Yuanming 淵明 as Tao's actual name, but as I am concerned with Su Shi's “matching Tao” practice, I follow Su and choose Qian. The different contexts when Su Shi used “Tao Qian” and “Yuanming” suggest that he regarded Qian as the formal name and Yuanming a polite name. The dates of Tao Qian follow Yuan Xingpei 袁行霈, “Tao Yuanming nianpu jianbian” 陶淵明年譜簡編, in his *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu* 陶淵明集箋注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2003; hereafter *TYM*), 845-65.

³ On the rising aesthetic category of *pingdan* 平淡 (“even and plain”), related especially to Tao Qian's poetry, see Swartz, *Reading Tao Yuanming*, 186-200.

⁴ For recent examples, see Tian Xiaofei, *Tao Yuanming and Manuscript Culture: The Record of a Dusty Table* (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 2005), 4-6, 31-44, and passim;

Su Shi's practice meant for Su Shi himself. It will be seen that Su Shi's active transformation of, and identification with, Tao Qian's image were driven by a purpose to overcome the tyranny of despair, deprivation, and mortality. The apparent serenity of the "matching Tao" poems was therefore fundamentally paradoxical, a result of self-persuasion. As Ronald Egan has noted, Su deliberately sought to avoid sorrow and self-pity in exile, even though in his poems "one finds a degree of insistence upon contentment in the new surroundings that is unexampled in Tao's originals."⁵ Such an insistence betrayed the forced nature of their analogy, which was not lost on Su's contemporaries. As Su Che 蘇轍 (1039-1112) remarked in the preface to his elder brother's collected "matching Tao" poems, Tao abruptly resigned from office for a trivial slight, but Su Shi remained an official despite malicious defamation, prosecution, and multiple exiles.⁶ The external "traces" of their life trajectories were thus glaringly different. To justify his identification, Su defined his "return" (*gui* 歸) as returning to an inner state of spontaneity, unconditioned by external contingencies. Tao's resignation was thus understood as a consequence of his natural disposition—just like Su's exile, an inevitable outcome of his unyielding character. In this regard, both not only "returned" to living a spontaneous life in nature, but also chanced their return in seemingly different, but equally natural, fashions. Their difference was thus not a matter of choice (Tao) versus force (Su), but solely in that Tao's return was earlier, more resolute, and more thorough. In this sense, Su should and could emulate this paragon of disengagement to complete his own course of return.

Yet another irony appears to have eluded Su Shi. When he sought to experience his exile through Tao's poetry, the wild southern landscape lost its immediacy and was instead fashioned after the poetic representa-

Swartz, *Reading Tao Yuanming*, 87-90, 200-04, 210-11; Robert Ashmore, *The Transport of Reading: Text and Understanding in the World of Tao Qian (365-427)* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Asia Center, 2010), 245-46.

⁵ Ronald C. Egan, *Word, Image, and Deed in the Life of Su Shi* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Asia Center, 1994), 234.

⁶ See Su Che, "Zizhan he Tao Yuanming shiji yin" 子瞻和陶淵明詩集引, *Su Che ji* 蘇轍集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), *houji* 21.1110-11 (also commonly known as "Dongpo xiansheng he Tao Yuanming shi yin" 東坡先生和陶淵明詩引, as quoted in *Su Shi shiji* 蘇軾詩集, ed. Kong Fanli 孔凡禮 [Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982; hereafter SSSJ], 35.1882-83).

tion of Tao's orderly farmstead below Mt. Lu 廬山 (in modern Jiangxi). In other words, Su Shi metaphorically domesticated the far south to be part of China's heartland. During the Northern Song, Huizhou and especially Danzhou signified the southernmost periphery of Chinese civilization. Su's account of the local Dan 蠻 and Li 黎 peoples betrayed a strong Han-ethnocentric perspective. Solitude, cultural alienation, and material deprivation often haunted the aging poet. Matching Tao's farmstead poetry was therefore a means to distance and aestheticize his immediate surroundings, transforming them into a reflection of another, much different, literary landscape. In this sense, Su's return into nature was simultaneously his retreat from a nature in its raw, undomesticated state and into a cultural landscape furnished with familiar ethical paradigms. Meanwhile, being an exile, he also discovered in Tao's work a pattern of disengagement, which allowed him to voice political dissent. His sense of alienation from the immediate, material nature as well as from the distant political center, together with his deepening interest in Daoist alchemy, contributed to his rediscovery of "Peach Blossom Spring" (*taohuayuan* 桃花源). It was no longer a secret corner isolated from the external world, as Tao Qian's original account had depicted,⁷ but an inner utopia with the features of an alchemist's grotto heaven. At last, as his rewriting of Tao's rhyme-prose "Return!" ("Guiqulai xi ci" 歸去來兮辭) shows, his journey of no-return into the ever farther south was transformed into a journey of returning "home," that is, an inner realm of spontaneity.

Literary Friendship with an Ancient

As Robert Ashmore has noted, Tao Qian's reception is unique (comparable only to that of Qu Yuan 屈原 [ca. 343 – ca. 277 BCE]) in that his collection was "continuously augmented by successive generations of reader-authors who felt incited to commemorate the ancestor poet by composing new poems in the ancestor's voice."⁸ This self-conscious emulation and identification formed a diachronic circle of literary

⁷ See Tao Qian, "Taohuayuan ji bing shi" 桃花源記并詩, *TYM*, 479-80.

⁸ Ashmore, *The Transport of Reading*, 244.

friendship, the members of which not only shared a kindred “ambition” (*zhi* 志),⁹ but literally spoke in one harmonized voice.

Su Shi was a poet with his own unique voice. His disposition toward erudite exposition, eloquent persuasion, hyperbole, and the fantastical—often faulted by friends and foes as being either unrestrained¹⁰ or utterly “crafty” and ornamented¹¹—was quite unlike Tao Qian’s poetry of understatement. Even in his “matching Tao” poems, Su Shi, in the words of the Qing commentator Ji Yun 紀昀 (1727-1805), “gathered his talents tight to approximate Tao, but from time to time revealed his true colors” (斂才就陶、亦時時自露本色).¹² Often, Su Shi’s poems were found to be cleverer, more skillful, and more dramatic than Tao’s originals. As the poet and critic Yuan Haowen 元好問 (1190-1257) remarked: “Though Dongpo (Su Shi) matched the poetry of Tao, the aura and appearance [of his poems] are simply that of Dongpo” (東坡和陶，氣象祇是東坡).¹³ Despite their obvious difference, however, Su Shi’s later poetry did transform under the influence of Tao. It became more understated, at times deliberately so. For Su Shi, though, the aesthetic appearance of “the even and the plain” (*pingdan* 平淡) required the highest level of craftsmanship. As he advised his nephew:

As for writing in general, when you are young, you should make its aura lofty and steep, its color vivid and splendid. When you age and mature, eventually your writing will achieve evenness and plainness. It is in fact not plainness, but ultimate splendor.¹⁴

⁹ As noted in *Mencius* 5A.4, readers of the *Odes* should “deploy their minds to encounter the [ancient poet’s] ambition” 以意逆志.

¹⁰ Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅 (1045-1105), for instance, cautioned his nephew not to learn from Su Shi’s “being fond of abusing” (*baoma* 好罵); see “Da Hong Jufu shu” 答洪駒父書, no. 2, *Huang Tingjian quanji* 黃庭堅全集 (Chengdu: Sichuan daxue chubanshe, 2001), 474.

¹¹ As represented by Zhu Xi’s 朱熹 (1130-1200) repeated criticism; see, eg., *Zhuzi quanshu* 朱子全書 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2002), vol. 18, *yulei* 語類, 139.4300, 4302, 4305-06, 4308, 4314.

¹² Quoted in the commentary to “He Tao ‘Yinjiu ershishou’” 和陶飲酒二十首, no. 20, *SSS*, 35.1892.

¹³ Yuan Haowen, “Ba Dongpo ‘Yinjiushi’ hou” 跋東坡飲酒詩後, quoted in *ibid.*, 35.1891.

¹⁴ Su Shi, “Yu Erlang zhi yishou” 與二郎姪一首, *Su Shi wenji* 蘇軾文集, ed. Kong Fanli 孔凡禮 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986; hereafter *SSWJ*), *yiwen* 佚文, 4.2523.

凡文字，少小時須令氣象崢嶸，采色絢爛，漸老漸熟乃造平淡，其實不是平淡，絢爛之極也。

Through his own example of emulating Tao in the last decade of his life, Su Shi showed that “the even and the plain” never meant the simple absence of artistic design, but was rather the understated appearance beneath which hide ultimate skill and strength. He characterized Tao’s poetry in similar terms, namely, a “withered plainness” (*kudan* 枯澹), defined as “withered outside and saturated inside; seemingly plain but rich in taste” (外枯而中膏，似澹而實美).¹⁵ To emulate Tao was thus to “return to Tao,” namely, a stylistic minimalism by an author capable of extreme sophistication.

Yet Su’s emulation was not only driven by the literary value of Tao’s poetry, but equally, if not more, by his admiration of and identification with Tao’s poetic persona. He empathized with Tao’s “weakness,” which was a “stubborn nature and unwieldy endowment, often in contradiction with worldly things” (性剛才拙與物多忤).¹⁶ He argued that his remaining in office was but a “guise” (*ji* 跡, literally “trace” or “footprint”) and not true evidence to judge a character.¹⁷ Despite their different “guises,” Su intimated that he and Tao shared the same unyielding honesty which dictated their choices in life.

In the case of Su Shi, however, such “choices” were hardly voluntary. They referred to repeated exiles resulting from his failure to navigate the treacherous cycles of factional strife between “reformers” (*xindang* 新黨) and “conservatives” (*jiudang* 舊黨) that defined the Northern Song political landscape. Yet by hinting at his “stubborn nature,” Su Shi implied that his suffering was not just due to the forces of fate, but also—perhaps even more so—due to his character. Assuming a certain responsibility for his suffering endowed him with power and agency. Only by claiming such a power of choice, Su Shi’s magic escape from

¹⁵ Su Shi, “Ping Han Liu shi,” 評韓柳詩, *SSWJ*, 67.2109-10.

¹⁶ Su Che, “Zizhan he Tao Yuanming shiji yin.”

¹⁷ This line, though found in Su Che’s preface, was perhaps written by Su Shi himself. According to a Song author who had a chance to see the manuscript of the preface at the place of Su Che’s third son, Su Xun 蘇遜, Su Che’s original preface claimed Tao Qian was in effect a lesser talent, and that Su Shi’s admiration showed his humility to appreciate every virtue in others. Su Shi revised this passage to its present, more reverent form. See Fei Gun 費袞, *Liangxi manzhi* 梁溪漫志 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1999), 4.1-2.

exile into an inner utopia of freedom became possible. Adversities became opportunities. Material deprivation was understood as the precondition of his Daoist diet, facilitating therefore his pursuit of longevity.¹⁸ Social isolation likewise helped him to select friends from the large repertoire of ancient worthies. Tao Qian and Ge Hong 葛洪 (283-343),¹⁹ a Daoist alchemist and author who allegedly became an immortal on Mt. Luofu 羅浮山 in Huizhou, were summoned to join a new triad of “three gentlemen” (*sanshi* 三士).²⁰ Holding their hands, he shall “Return! Oh return!” (*gui zai fu gui zai* 歸哉復歸哉).²¹ The singular direction of returning home suggests teleology. He was not a victim of capricious fate but its master, able to maintain a stable and steady course of return through ups and downs toward a primordial state of simplicity and spontaneity.

Despite this picture implying a pre-designed direction, such a return in both lifestyle and literary expression could hardly be foreseen in Su Shi's previous writing. His first explicit attempt to emulate Tao Qian was in his “Eight Poems of the East Slope” (“Dongpo bashou” 東坡八首), written in 1081 during his exile in Huangzhou 黃州 (in modern Hubei) to commemorate his farming experience.²² Eleven years later, Su Shi, now the Magistrate of Yangzhou 揚州, wrote twenty poems, each matching a piece in Tao Qian's poetic series entitled “Drinking” (“Yinjiu” 飲酒).²³ He declared to have developed a penchant for staying tipsy—or rather, constantly holding an empty wine cup while otherwise drinking sparingly, due to his low tolerance for alcohol. This earliest

¹⁸ See Zhiyi Yang, “Dialectics of Spontaneity: Art, Nature, and Persona in the Life and Works of Su Shi (1037-1101)” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2012), 343, 361-67, 381-83.

¹⁹ It has been generally agreed that Ge Hong was born in 283. Whether he lived to 61 or 81 *sui*, however, is subject of debate. For a comprehensive summary of this issue, see Yang Mingzhao 楊明照, *Baopuzi waipian jiaojian* 抱朴子外篇校箋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1991), appendix VII, 795-806. Yang argues that Ge Hong died in 343. For the contending opinion of the year 363, see Wang Liqi 王利器, *Ge Hong lun* 葛洪論 (Taipei: Wunan tushu chubangongsi, 1997), 35-36. This issue matters since 81 is an auspicious number, implying that Ge might have “chosen” to pretend death at this age while actually becoming an immortal.

²⁰ See Su Shi, “He Tao ‘Du Shanhaijing’ 和陶讀山海經, no.1, *SSSJ*, 39.2130.

²¹ *Ibid.*, no.13, *SSSJ*, 39.2136

²² Su Shi, “Dongpo bashou” 東坡八首, *SSSJ*, 21.1079-84.

²³ See Su Shi, “He Tao ‘Yinjiu ershishou’ bing xu” 和陶飲酒二十首并敘, *SSSJ*, 35.1881-92.

instance of matching Tao's poems seemed to be a singular act, indicating no systematic agenda, and was unlikely to be resumed were it not for Su's later, deliberate emulation of Tao Qian in his last exiles. According to Su Shi, in the third month of 1095, one day after an excursion to a waterfall in the mountains of Huizhou, he was inspired by his son's recital of Tao Qian's "Return to My Garden and Fields" ("Gui yuantianju" 歸園田居) and was determined to undertake a project of matching the entire catalogue of Tao's work.²⁴ Only through this last, systematic enterprise were his earlier, sporadic emulations given a teleological perspective portending a disposition that was yet to be fully developed. His last exiles were therefore also presented as necessary, both as a result of his natural dispositions and as a precondition to complete his "return."

With these poems, Su Shi initiated a subgenre in Chinese poetry called *zhuihe* 追和, or "matching [an ancient poet's poems] in retrospect." As he declared to Su Che, "poets of earlier times had 'Imitating the Old' poems but had never matched the poems of an ancient author. Retrospectively matching the poetry of an ancient author begins with Dongpo!" (古之詩人有擬古之作矣，未有追和古人者也。追和古人，則始於東坡).²⁵

To be precise, poets before Su Shi did occasionally write poems matching those of the ancients.²⁶ Unlike Su Shi's, however, these were isolated, random acts which never reached such a systematic scale or degree of self-identification. Poetic exchange was first initiated in the Six

²⁴ See Su Shi's preface to "He Tao 'Gui yuantianju liushou' bing yin" 和陶歸園田居六首并引, *SSSJ*, 39.2103-04.

²⁵ See Su Che, "Zizhan he Tao Yuanming shiji yin."

²⁶ For instance, Li He 李賀, "Zhuihe Liu Yun" 追和柳惲, *Quan Tang shi* 全唐詩 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960; hereafter *QTS*), 390.4395, "Zhuihe He Xie 'Tongque ji'" 追和何謝銅雀妓, *QTS*, 392.4412; Li Deyu 李德裕, "Zhuihe taishi Yan gong tong Qingyuan daoshi you Huqiusi" 追和太師顏公同清遠道士遊虎丘寺, *QTS*, 475.5392; Pi Rixiu 皮日休, "Zhuihe Huqiusi Qingyuan daoshi shi" 追和虎丘寺清遠道士詩, *QTS*, 609.7029, "Zhuihe Youdujun ciyun ershou" 追和幽獨君次韻二首, *QTS*, 609.7030; Lu Guimeng 陸龜蒙, "Ci zhuihe Qingyuan daoshi shiyun bing xu" 次追和清遠道士詩韻並序, *QTS*, 617.7114, "Ci Youdujun yun" 次幽獨君韻, *QTS*, 619.7128; etc. Such practices, however, were rare, whimsical, and not influential. There are also a few "matching Tao" poems attributed to Tang Yanqian 唐彥謙 (*jinsi* 861), now collected in *QTS* (671.7677). But scholars have pointed out that they were composed by the Yuan poet Dai Biaoyuan 戴表元 (1244-1310). See Wang Zhaopeng 王兆鵬, "Tang Yanqian sishishou yanshi zhengwei" 唐彥謙四十首贗詩證偽, *Zhonghua wenshi luncong* 52 (1993): 226-44.

Dynasties.²⁷ It was a token of friendship, publically displayed, beckoning the whole republic of letters as well as later readers to bear witness. Since Bai Juyi 白居易 (772-846) and Yuan Zhen 元稹 (779-831), whose close friendship and extensive exchange of poetry made them known as Yuan-Bai 元白 (also the name for their style),²⁸ poetic exchange was used by poets to promote their similar styles, such as Ou-Mei 歐梅²⁹ and Su-Huang 蘇黃,³⁰ or even deliberately exploited by otherwise obscure figures to form paired names or perceived literary groups, such as Pi-Lu 皮陸³¹ and the “Nine Monks” in early Song. Su Shi’s extensive matching of the poetry of Tao Qian, therefore, could be put in this tradition as a deliberate effort of creating one’s literary equal. Different from the other cases, which had real-life liaisons prior to literary exchanges, Su Shi essentially reversed the primacy and fashioned a literary friendship with Tao Qian through his one-way poetic exchange.

Moreover, exchange poetry was essentially social in nature and was often composed on occasions of genteel gatherings as a learned pastime. By the Northern Song, it was practiced at every stratum of literary society.³² The percentage of matching poems among one’s compositions during a certain period, if faithfully preserved, served as a record and index of one’s social activeness. Around one-third of Su Shi’s extant poems were composed explicitly as matching poetry, with verbs like *he* 和 (“harmonize with”), *chou* 酬 (“reciprocate”), or *da* 答 (“respond to”) in the title. The percentage of exchange poems with his contemporaries was highest during his times in the capital and lowest during his three exiles. There, the reading and matching of Tao Qian’s poetry made up for the decreased availability of a literary society.

²⁷ For a study on the transformation of forms of poetic exchange from the Six Dynasties through the Tang, see Zhao Yiwu 趙以武, *Changhe shi yanjiu* 唱和詩研究 (Lanzhou: Gansu wenhua chubanshe, 1997).

²⁸ For an important study on their exchange poetry, see Anna M. Shields, “Remembering When: The Uses of Nostalgia in the Poetry of Bai Juyi and Yuan Zhen,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 66 (2006): 321-61.

²⁹ Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007-1072) and Mei Yaochen 梅堯臣 (1002-1060).

³⁰ Su Shi and Huang Tingjian.

³¹ Pi Rixiu 皮日休 (ca. 834/839-after 902) and Lu Guimeng 陸龜蒙 (?-881).

³² By focusing on the exchanges in the group around Ouyang Xiu and Mei Yaochen, Colin S.C. Hawes even proposes that the main justification for writing poems during the Northern Song was “to develop and sustain human relationships through the regular exchange of poems with friends and acquaintances.” See Hawes, *The Social Circulation of Poetry in Mid-Northern Song* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 2005), 3.

By methodically going through the entire corpus of Tao, Su Shi beckoned the camaraderie of an ancient kindred spirit, a gesture that served an ideological purpose. No one could or would match a contemporary poet's oeuvre in its entirety. In comparison, Su's matching of Tao's entire corpus elevated their relationship from the level of friendship to, in Wendy Swartz's words, "virtual identification."³³ While poetic exchanges with a contemporary could often be obligated by decorum within an immediate setting, matching an ancient author was an act of purely voluntary choice, breaking free of the limits of time and space. Such a choice was thus invested with the significance of identifying a role model whose literary merit and moral stature were both objects of emulation.

Su Shi's admiration played a crucial role in Tao Qian's canonization, a process beginning in the Tang and culminating in the Song. In her study on Tao's reception history, Tian Xiaofei has discussed how Su Shi was dissatisfied with the word "gaze" (*wang* 望) in Tao's "Drinking, No. 5." He replaced it with "see" (*jian* 見), so as to dissolve the intentionality implied by "gaze" and render Tao's behavior completely spontaneous.³⁴ Wendy Swartz has similarly observed how Su Shi, deliberately or not, misinterpreted Tao's poems to serve his argument that Tao had a genuine understanding of the Way, an affirmation against some Tang criticism that was followed by most Song critics.³⁵ As a result, when Su Shi identified himself with "Tao Qian," he was identifying with an icon of his own making. This was a figure whose unconventional behavior was not driven by whimsical impulses, but rather sustained by a tenacious adherence to the ideal of spontaneity. In the end of this canonization process, Tao emerged as no longer an eccentric individual hovering on the margins of literary history, but a "moral hero" whose behavior was consistently guided by the Way.³⁶ By matching Tao's poems in total, Su Shi intimated that his was a similar case.

³³ See Swartz, *Reading Tao Yuanming*, 200-01.

³⁴ Tian, *Tao Yuanming and Manuscript Culture*, 31-32.

³⁵ Swartz, *Reading Tao Yuanming*, 120-21.

³⁶ For the "moral hero" and the Confucian ideal of reclusion, see Alan J. Berkowitz, *Patterns of Disengagement: The Practice and Portrayal of Reclusion in Early Medieval China* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2000), 21. On Tao Qian's transformation into such a hero and Su Shi's role in it, see Swartz, *Reading Tao Yuanming*, 55, 73, 89-90.

A Metaphorical Landscape

The half-barbaric far south posed physical and existential challenges to Su Shi. He needed to adapt not only to deprivation, but also to an alien ethnic culture. This was especially the case in Danzhou, on an island divided from the mainland by a broad surging strait, with its agriculture remaining at a rudimentary stage. As Kathleen Tomlonovic observes, “in crossing the natural barrier of water, Su Shi had passed over a cultural barrier as well. Although the island was under the jurisdiction of the Song court, which had designed policies for subduing the inhabitants, the area, particularly the interior, remained the domain of the native peoples.”³⁷ To cope with his deep feeling of dislocation, Su Shi had to assimilate the foreign into his own system of meaning. He did this by poetically transforming the wilds surrounding him to adhere to the map of Tao Qian’s cultivated “garden and fields.” The culturally distinctive natives were sorted into various archetypes familiar in a poetic countryside. Yet his own assumed roles were fluid and varied with the context. At times he represented himself as completely integrated into this wild landscape; at other times, however, he adamantly adhered to his political and cultural identity and played the role of a civilizing force.

Modern academic literature often celebrates Su’s later exile poetry as evidence of his genuine love of nature and of “the folk.” Yet, despite Su’s repeated invocation of “Return! Oh return,”³⁸ it remains dubious how thorough or “natural” his “return” into the southern landscape was. About half of his poetry in Huizhou and Danzhou was written to match Tao’s. This fact poses the uneasy question of how much Su Shi allowed his immediate experience of nature to flow into words, if to him the entire landscape had already become an echo of Tao Qian’s poetry.

It is questionable whether any “field and garden” poetry can faithfully represent the unmediated countryside, given the fact that such poetry must employ literary skills, exist in a cultural system of reference, and acquire its significance through presenting an alternative space to the urban center. Tao Qian’s countryside was already populated by con-

³⁷ Kathleen M. Tomlonovic, “Poetry of Exile and Return: A Study of Su Shi” (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Washington, 1989), 169.

³⁸ See Su Shi, “He Tao ‘Du *Shanhaijing*,’” no. 13, *SSSJ*, 39.2136.

ventions and archetypes that were formed in the eremitic tradition before him. In comparison, Su Shi's countryside is even more metaphorical and idealized, at times so utopic that its rural residents are all moral ideals incarnate. This feature is explicit in Su's first "matching Tao" poem written in Huizhou in response to Tao's "Returning to My Garden and Fields."³⁹ The opening verse in Tao's series celebrates his return after thirty (or thirteen) years of service.⁴⁰ Of the ten couplets, eight use strict parallelism, imposing order onto the actual landscape and creating a sense of regularity associated with farmstead life. In Su Shi's matching poem, strict parallelism is similarly used in the first four couplets:

環州多白水	Surrounding this prefecture, many white waters;
際海皆蒼山	Hemming the coast, all dark hills.
以彼無盡景	By virtue of this infinite landscape,
寓我有限年	Let me lodge here for my finite years!
東家著孔丘	The neighbor to the east houses Kong Qiu;
西家著顏淵	The neighbor to the west houses Yan Yuan!

³⁹) Tao's original consists of five poems, but Su Shi's matching series has six. The collection of Tao in Su's possession must have mistakenly included a sixth poem that was an imitation poem by Jiang Yan 江淹 (444-505), titled "Tao Zhengjun tianju" 陶徵君田居, in a series of thirty "Zatishi" 雜體詩; see *Jiang Wentong ji huizhu* 江文通集彙註, ed. Hu Zhiji 胡之驥 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984), 4.156-57. This imitation poem was not infrequently collected in early editions of Tao's poetry.

⁴⁰) Whether Tao's original fourth line was "Away I had been from home for thirty years" (*yiqu sanshi nian* 一去三十年) or "thirteen years" (*shisan nian* 十三年) is not just a question of textual variants but associated with the broader picture of Tao's chronology, biography, and the traditionally quintessential question on whether he was so loyal to the Jin Dynasty that he refused to serve under the Song (and even purportedly refused to use its reign names). Tao Qian's bureaucratic career has many obscurities. Yuan Xingpei's latest study supports the argument that he did serve under the Song. According to Yuan, Tao Qian held some short bureaucratic posts in his twenties. He lived idly until joining the military government of Huan Xuan 桓玄 (369-404) in 398, aiding the latter's rebellion against the Jin dynasty. He stayed in service until the winter of 401, when his mother died and he returned home for the three-year ritual mourning. Huan Xuan was defeated and killed by Liu Yu 劉裕 (363-422; r. 420-22), the would-be founder of the Liu-Song dynasty (420-479). Tao Qian then joined Liu Yu's military government in 404, became the Magistrate of Pengze county in 405, and resigned after some eighty days. See Yuan Xingpei, "Tao Qian nianpu jianbian" 陶淵明年譜簡編, *TYM*, 849-58. Clearly, if this poem commemorates his returning home after roughly three decades of desultory civil service, it should have been written after his final return in 405. "Thirteen" is likely a variant created to obliterate Tao's service under Liu Yu, which would have enraged many later readers as a betrayal of his former patron.

市為不二價 The merchants always set an honest price;
 農為不爭田 The farmers never fight over their fields.⁴¹

The “infinite landscape” of rapid waters and dark mountains suggests a sublime nature of black and white—the “colors” in a literati’s landscape painting. Using Tao’s closing-in perspective and orderly depiction, Su turns the wilderness into a protective force, benignly “surrounding” and “hemming” the human domain where the poet could reside. In this small utopian society, not only are the residents in Su’s elite Hejiang Belvedere 合江樓 neighborhood Confucian sages, but even merchants and farmers are paragons of decency. In this idealized vision, Huizhou appears no longer a wild place at the periphery of Chinese civilization, but a privileged heartland representing natural order, civil harmony, and moral perfection.

Su Shi’s matching poems often downplay the elements of fear and anxiety in Tao Qian’s originals, further creating a sense of smooth reconciliation with nature. Tao’s following couplet betrays a tangible fear of whiling away a life in insignificance, symbolized by natural forces preying on his harvest:

常恐霜霰至 The arrival of frost and sleet is my constant fear,
 零落同草莽 Lest my crops fall prey, like grasses grown in the wilderness.⁴²

In Su Shi’s matching couplet, nature itself imposes the principle of order and is the real author of regulated and cultivated poetic lines:

春江有佳句 The spring river contains marvelous lines of poetry;
 我醉墮渺莽 In my drunkenness they fall into the vast nebulosity.⁴³

The poet declares nature to be a fellow author; all he needs is to record the wonderful lines that the river has imparted to him. Ironically, he apologizes for being too drunk to be that faithful scribe, although he is still able to commemorate his oblivion. Rhetorically, drunkenness loosens the grip of consciousness and brings the poet closer to a state of

⁴¹ Su Shi, “He Tao ‘Gui yuantianju’ liushou” 和陶歸園田居六首, no.1, *SSSJ*, 39.2104.

⁴² Tao Qian, “Gui yuantianju,” no. 2, *TYM*, 2.83.

⁴³ Su Shi, “He Tao ‘Gui yuantianju,’” no. 2, *SSSJ*, 39.2104-05.

spontaneity. It appears that the poet, in the soft dissolution of consciousness, feels one with the flowing river, itself a symbol of spontaneous creation.⁴⁴ But if nature does not write poetry after all, it is then the silent poetry of spontaneity that finally eludes the sober poet. Whatever comes to his brush is already a cultivated language, mediated moreover by cultural memory and paradigms of the past. Even here, *miaomang* 渺莽, “vast nebulosity,” might not have naturally occurred to Su Shi; he may have said so only to match Tao Qian’s rhyme *mang* 莽. The *mang* in Tao’s line represents vegetation to be consumed by the merciless seasonal forces, while for Su, it is the oceanic unconsciousness that he willingly falls into. Nature is no longer ruthless and insentient but benign and protective to the human cause. Su Shi’s frequent rhetorical technique of personification implies a pervasive homocentric perspective, a reassertion of the self as the center of the observation.

A Poetic Ethnography

At the same time of Su’s reconstruction of the landscape, he also develops a way of re-envisioning the local native’s ethnicity. To begin with, the Chinese writing system itself encoded a certain Han ethnocentrism. Huizhou aboriginals were addressed as “Dan” (蠻). As a variant of *yan* (蜒), “slug,” this etymologically derogative term referred to an ethnic group which lived in boats upon the water. The natives of Hainan were called Li 黎, namesake of a local mountain “Mother of Li” 黎母山. It literally means “black,” referring to their dark skin due to the equatorial climate. Since for the Han, dark skin suggested daily toil in the fields, its association implies social, economic, and political subjugation. This association had been established and strengthened by such ancient terms for the underclass: *limin* 黎民, “dark skinned folks,” or *qianshou* 黔首, “heads wrapped in black handkerchiefs”—the old Qin Dynasty term for the common people. Such ethnic designations evoked the exotic and the alien, as well as the Han’s ethnic superiority.

⁴⁴ On a comparative discussion of drunkenness in relation to the river image as a symbol of oblivion, see Yang, “Dialectics of Spontaneity,” 113-15.

Su Shi's colorful report on local customs might have selectively magnified the exotica. According to these reports, in Huizhou he sometimes trod upon snakes and dined on insects.⁴⁵ In Danzhou, the Li people planted little rice and dined instead on tarot roots and sometimes on smoked mice and bats;⁴⁶ they wore coconut hats⁴⁷ and clothes made of cotton tree fiber;⁴⁸ they killed oxen in shamanic sacrifices to cure diseases instead of employing them to plow the fields.⁴⁹ In his letters to friends across the strait, Su once sorely wrote: "I and my son are doing fine; but mixing with the Li and the Dan, we barely feel our humanity" (某與兒子粗無病，但黎、蜒雜居，無復人理).⁵⁰ Here, the definition of "human" is constructed ethnically. As Robert Campany points out, eating grain and cooking are presented in the *Book of Rites* as "among the traits possessed by human beings par excellence. Anything less—even if it is the result of natural, local variations—counts as less than fully human and needs to be modified."⁵¹ Su Shi, among the southern natives, appears to feel the eventual dissolution of his own ethnic identity, or even his humanity (*renli* 人理).

Traces of such despair articulated in private epistles, however, are rarely found in his poetry, where more often than not he celebrates the rustic society. Here he again models himself after Tao Qian, who in his poetry cordially drinks with his farmer neighbors⁵² or casually chats when encountering them on a village road.⁵³ To emulate this spirit Su Shi writes couplets such as the following:

⁴⁵ Su Shi, "He Tao 'Du Shanhaijing'," no.13, *SSSJ*, 39.2136.

⁴⁶ Su Shi, "He Tao 'Quannong' liushou" 和陶勸農六首, *SSSJ*, 41.2254-57; "Wen Ziyou shou" 聞子由瘦, *SSSJ*, 41.2257-58.

⁴⁷ Su Shi, "He Tao 'Quannong' liushou;" "Yeziguan" 椰子冠, *SSSJ*, 41.2268-69.

⁴⁸ Su Shi, "He Tao 'Nigu jiushou'" 和陶擬古九首, no. 9, *SSSJ*, 4.:2266.

⁴⁹ Su Shi, "Shu Liu Zihou 'Niufu' hou" 書柳子厚牛賦後, *SSWJ*, 66.2058.

⁵⁰ Su Shi, "Yu Cheng Quanfu shiershou" 與程全父十二首, no. 9, *SSWJ*, 55.1626.

⁵¹ Robert Ford Campany, "The Meaning of Cuisine of Transcendence in Late Classical and Early Medieval China." *T'oung Pao* 91 (2005): 8-9.

⁵² See, e.g., Tao Qian, "Yinjiu" no. 9 and no. 14, *TYM*, 3256, 268; "Lianyu duyin" 連兩獨飲, *TYM*, 2.125 (where the neighbor sent over some wine); "Guimaosui shichun huaigu tianshe ershou" 癸卯歲始春懷古田舍二首, no. 2, *TYM*, 3.203 (where he sent over some wine to a new neighbor).

⁵³ See Tao Qian, "Gui yuantianju," no. 2, *TYM*, 2.83.

I.

江鷗漸馴集 River gulls get familiar and gather around me;
 蟹叟已還往 An old man of Dan has become my company.⁵⁴

II.

一與蟹叟醉 Getting drunk with an old man of Dan—
 蒼顏兩摧頹 Two greying faces glow in utter waste.⁵⁵

III.

鳩舌倘可學 Were it possible to acquire their butcherbird tongue,
 化為黎母民 I shall transform to a native below Mt. Mother of Li.⁵⁶

In couplet I, Su Shi refers to a story in *Liezi* 列子 where river gulls would gather around a guileless fisherman, until one day he was persuaded by his father to catch the gulls; but the gulls discerned his treacherous intentions and refused to fly down any more.⁵⁷ Su Shi wants to reassure his reader that he has forgotten all chicanery, so that river gulls, and even an “old man of Dan,” come to his company. This parallelism suggests a perspective from which the local Dan natives are viewed on a par with natural creatures. The viewer places himself in a position of active agency, observing and commentating on the passive local subjects. The old man of Dan does not utter his own voice: like the river gulls, he is a stage prop to witness the author’s claimed dissolution of his cultural and social superiority.

Couplet II celebrates his unassuming drinking spree with an “old man of Dan.” We do not know whether this is the same old man mentioned in couplet I, or another, or a fictive one. Like in couplet I, this good friend of Su’s is identified only by his gender, age, and ethnicity. These generic features make him less individualistic than stereotypical. In contrast, in Tao Qian’s scenes of drinking parties, though his neighbors are also unidentified, they are often endowed with agency, capable of initiating events or giving speeches. Such realistic details make Tao’s rustic company more convincingly individualistic, if not necessarily more true.

In couplet III, the author jovially announces his alacrity to become a native of Li—if only he is able to acquire their “butcherbird tongue”!

⁵⁴ Su Shi, “He Tao ‘Gui yuantianju,’” no. 2.

⁵⁵ Su Shi, “He Tao ‘Xiasun tianshe huo’” 和陶下澗田舍獲, *SSSJ*, 42.2316.

⁵⁶ Su Shi, “He Tao ‘Tianshe shichun huaigu ershou’” 和陶田舍始春懷古二首, no. 2, *SSSJ*, 41.2281.

⁵⁷ See *Liezi jishi* 列子集釋, ed. Yang Bojun 楊伯峻 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), 2, 67-68.

Su Shi in Hainan apparently suffered from linguistic alienation. He did not understand the native Hainan dialect but was able to tutor some local students who perhaps could speak in a modified and standardized version of the dialect. Su Shi, after decades of his itinerant bureaucratic career across eastern, central, and northern China, must have understood, if not spoken, more than one dialect. Yet nowhere else during his provincial tenures did he comment in writing upon the local accent.⁵⁸ Only in Hainan, the native people appeared not just as innocent, natural creatures, but their language resembled also bird chirps, deprived of meaning to the “cultured” ear. The political, economic, and cultural dominance of the Han Chinese was simultaneously understood as an anthropological advantage. Su Shi’s incapacity to learn the local dialect was regarded as physiological—since his tongue, literally, was that of a human, not of a butcherbird.

These zoogeographical metaphors—assigning images of animals to represent ethnic groups of different regions—were certainly applied only to local natives alien to Han culture who would not be able to read such verses. Nevertheless, these poems would have been read by local elites, including officials, students, and others of the gentry, as well as by members of Buddhist or Daoist clerical orders. Su Shi clearly did not mean to insult his local friends and hosts. He used such metaphors because they were an embedded part of the established cultural hierarchy. Presumably his local hosts were sympathetic, or at least accustomed, to the perspective of Han cultural dominance.

Another notable feature is the difference in genre conventions: when Su Shi’s prose laments his dislocation, his poetry in contrast romanticizes his relocation. This discrepancy betrays an element of deliberate persuasion in Su Shi’s vow of assimilation. Furthermore, to blend his own outlandish figure into a cast of local characters, Su Shi’s other approach is to dress them in outfits of cultural archetypes. As a result, if the alien peoples of the south first strike Su Shi as being virtually part of nature, on second thought he suspects their hidden intelligence or

⁵⁸) Su Shi seemed to be well-versed in dialects. There is an anecdote that he judged a figure in Li Gonglin’s 李公麟 (1049-1106) painting to be from Fujian, based on the unique shape of its mouth in pronouncing “six.” See Kong Fanli 孔凡禮, *Su Shi nianpu* 蘇軾年譜 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1991), 30.977.

humanity, with their apparent innocence resembling the disguises of recluses or earthly immortals.

This second approach partly derives from Tao Qian's poetry as well. For instance, in Tao Qian's ninth poem in "Imitation of the Old," he depicts a "scholar of the east" who lives in deprivation (eating only nine times through thirty days and changing his hat once in ten years) but exhibits divine physical and spiritual well-being. Evidently, this is a Daoist figure nourished not by normal food but by cosmic energy (*qi* 氣). Tao Qian expresses a desire to follow him "from now on to the time of cold."⁵⁹ The "time of cold" (*suihan* 歲寒) refers to a cosmic winter when man must rely on his own inner source of warmth to fight against forces like age, disease, and death. This poem could be read either as a Daoist or as a moral allegory.

Su Shi matched this poem twice. In the first instance, he transforms this "scholar of the east" to a woodcutter of the Li ethnicity:

黎山有幽子 形槁神獨完 負薪入城市 笑我儒衣冠 生不聞詩書 豈知有孔顏 翛然獨往來 榮辱未易關 日暮鳥獸散 家在孤雲端 問答了不通 歎息指屢彈 似言君貴人 草莽棲龍鸞 遺我古貝布 海風今歲寒	There is a secluded mister in the Mountain of Li, His form wizened, his spirit alone remains intact. Bearing a load of firewood to the market in town, He laughs at my scholar's robe and hat. In his life he has never heard of the <i>Odes</i> or the <i>Documents</i> , Not to mention knowing Confucius or Master Yan. In utter freedom, he comes and goes all alone. Glory or disgrace hardly cross his mind. At sunset, birds and beasts retreat to their hidings; He heads to a home atop the lonely clouds. I barely understand his questions or replies; I sigh and flick my fingers in despair. He appears to say: "You, sir, are of noble standing; Like a dragon or a simurgh, you come to nestle among the weeds." He presents me a bolt of cotton tree cloth— The sea wind of this season is cold. ⁶⁰
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Except for his ethnicity, this "secluded mister" resembles many proverbial woodcutters in recluse literature. Like Tao Qian's scholar who is

⁵⁹ See Tao Qian, "Nigu jiushou" 擬古九首, no. 5, *TYM*, 4.327. In the edition used by Su Shi, it is the ninth poem.

⁶⁰ Su Shi, "He Tao 'Nigu jiushou,'" no. 9, *SSSJ*, 41.2266.

nourished by immaterial energy, his intact spirit defies the decline of his form. He is a son of nature never blighted by education. He laughs at Su Shi's scholarly attire, just like in the *Analects*, the world-traveler Confucius was jeered by recluses who preferred to keep their virtue private.⁶¹ The woodcutter's ignorance of Confucian sages proves that his virtue is developed naturally, instead of cultivated by moral commands. Like a Daoist figure, he roams in freedom and cares little about worldly affairs. Su could barely understand him, a speaker of the "butcherbird tongue." Yet the woodcutter nevertheless knows Su Shi as a man of standing, now in misfortune. He may not be aware of Su's spectacular talents or the dramatic political events that unfolded in the distant world across the strait, yet he appears to have grasped Su Shi's condition intuitively. He presents a token of empathy—a bolt of plain, warm, home-spun cloth. The portrayal of this woodcutter combines elements from various poetic stereotypes: a recluse who reveals his identity on encountering a traveler, an earthly immortal, and an enigmatic *zhiyin* 知音—a kindred spirit who understands one's wordless music.

Su Shi's self-image in this poem is constructed through the eyes of a common man. His moral stature, demeaned in the capital, is recognized by someone whose genuine nature is not distorted by established cultural or political hierarchy. By depicting the periphery as morally superior to the center,⁶² Su Shi sends to his readers, especially those at the central court, a political complaint.

The woodcutter of Mt. Li provides an image whose desirability derives from what he is not—that is, not being exposed to learning, not caring about worldly power or glory, and not being enmeshed in the network of meaning. Su Shi cannot become a native of Mt. Li because his "natural state" was irrevocably lost in the past. Even in his "return," Tao Qian style, the acquired traces of culture are so deeply inscribed onto him that they become the very essence of his identity. Thus his

⁶¹ As told in a few anecdotes in *Analects*, 18.5-8; see *Lunyu zhengyi* 論語正義, ed. Liu Baonan 劉寶楠 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), 21.718-30.

⁶² Similar reversions of value are certainly not uncommon in earlier literature, as found in the Zhuangzian recluses' decline to reign the empire, in Luo Fu's 羅敷 witty retort to the lusty magistrate ("Moshang sang" 陌上桑), and in the conventional eulogies of a farmer's life. The "periphery" presented in Su Shi's poetry here, however, has simultaneously ethical, cultural, economic, and geo-political dimensions and is thus unprecedented.

poetry betrays a perpetual struggle between deliberate abandonment and adherence to his political and cultural self. Another poet whom Su Shi frequently read in Huizhou and Danzhou was Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773-819). According to Lu You 陸遊 (1125-1210), Su once called Tao and Liu his “two friends in my banishment to the south.”⁶³ When Liu Zongyuan was banished to Yongzhou 永州 (in Hunan), he turned himself into a cultural force committed to the noble cause of “transforming the barbarians.”⁶⁴ Su Shi explicitly opposed this approach, as he once declared: “I should not be like Mr. Liu (Zongyuan), Vice Director of the Ministry of Rites, preaching the *Odes* and the *Documents* to the savage commoners” (莫學柳儀曹，詩書教氓獠).⁶⁵ Yet despite all his claims of losing a sense of rank and cultural identity, some revealing cases show that Su Shi defended his identity all the more in the threat of an alien surrounding.

Su Shi was not officially obligated to “transform the barbarians.” Under the Tang and the Song, exiled officials often assumed various local administrative and educational duties. Han Yu 韓愈 (768-824) and Liu Zongyuan were magistrates in charge of prefectural affairs; Su Che was a tax clerk in Yunzhou 筠州 (now Gao'an 高安, Jiangxi). Su Shi, however, was typically discharged of all duties in his exiles.⁶⁶ Even so, Su could not help feeling an obligation to public affairs.⁶⁷ In Huizhou he dispensed medicine, oversaw the building of a bridge, and advised on the construction of the aqueduct system in Guangzhou. Half a year after coming to Danzhou, he composed a series of poems matching Tao's “Exhorting Farmers” (“Quan nong” 勸農) in the classical tetrasyllabic meter, for the explicit purpose of promoting agriculture and sericulture among the (likely illiterate) natives.⁶⁸ In Tao Qian's time, “exhorting farmers” was a county official's duty.⁶⁹ Tao possibly composed these

⁶³ See Lu You 陸遊, *Laoxue'an biji* 老學庵筆記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), 9.120.

⁶⁴ See, e.g., Liu Zongyuan, “Tong Liu Ershiba yuanzhang shujit yanhuai ganshi shushi” 同劉二十八院長述舊言懷感時書事, *Liu Hedong ji* 柳河東集 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1974), 42.674-79.

⁶⁵ See Su Shi, “Jiangguo Guangzhou yong Guo yun ji Mai Dai erzi” 將過廣州用過韻寄邁迨二子, *SSSJ*, 44.2390.

⁶⁶ As noted in Tomlonovic, “Poetry of Exile and Return,” 192-93.

⁶⁷ On Su Shi's engagement with social problems in a private capacity, see Egan, *Word, Image, and Deed in the Life of Su Shi*, 127-33.

⁶⁸ Su Shi, “He Tao ‘Quannong’ liushou.”

⁶⁹ See “Zhiguanzhi” 職官志 in *Jinshu* 晉書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 24.746.

poems in his capacity of libationer (*jijiu* 祭酒), a minor educational office in the prefecture.⁷⁰ As a man out of office, however, Su's "Exhorting Farmers" poems projected him as an overseer of the farmers, therefore falsifying his repeated claim of becoming one of them.

This constant change of positions between the dissolution and the reaffirmation of his identity is a staple of Su Shi's late poetry, and such a paradoxical image might have been deliberate. Unlike Tao Qian, Su Shi enjoyed a huge and zealous contemporary audience. Tao, obscure in his time, explicitly recommended his words to the "later-born."⁷¹ This gesture of writing for the future recalls similar remarks from Confucius, Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145 – ca. 85 BCE), and Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 BCE – 18 CE), cultural heroes who suffered from their contemporaries' misunderstandings and thus entrusted their immortality to future generations. In contrast, though Su Shi must have like-mindedly written for the later-born, he was keenly aware of his popularity. According to Zhu Bian 朱弁 (1085-1144), even in Su Shi's youth, things he wrote were immediately copied and broadly recited.⁷² Scholars have argued that since the Crow Terrace prosecution (Wutai shi'an 烏臺詩案, 1079),⁷³ Su Shi became wary of the dissemination of his works, and this awareness had left its impact on his literary compositions.⁷⁴ Rumor had it that he was banished further to Hainan after the chancellor Zhang Dun 章惇 (1035-1105) read a poem celebrating his life of simplicity and ease in Huizhou.⁷⁵ His Hainan poetry appeared to have already spread to the mainland through certain channels even before his return.

⁷⁰ See Yuan Xingpei's note to this poem, *TYM*, 1.35-36.

⁷¹ Tao Qian, "You hui er zuo yishou bing xu" 有會而作一首并序, *TYM*, 3.306.

⁷² See *Song shihua quanbian* 宋詩話全編, ed. Wu Wenzhi 吳文治 et al. (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1998), vol. 3, 2950.

⁷³ For more about this case, see Charles Hartman, "Poetry and Politics in 1079: The Crow Terrace Poetry Case of Su Shih," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 12 (1990): 15-44.

⁷⁴ See Uchiyama Seiya 內山精也, "Tōba Utai Shi'an ryūten kō" 「東坡烏台詩案」流伝考, *Yokohama shiritsu daigaku ronshō* 3 (1996): 272-92.

⁷⁵ This anecdote was first recorded by Zeng Jili 曾季狸 (12th cent.); see *Tingzhai shihua* 艇齋詩話 (Hong Kong: Guangwen shuju, 1971), 66-67. The concrete plot was not necessarily true, but Zhang Dun's desire to see the death of Su Shi perhaps was. As a poem by Huang Tingjian states: "When Zizhan was banished to south of the Dayu Ridge, / the Chancellor of the time wanted to see him dead" 子瞻謫嶺南，時宰欲殺之; see "Ba Zizhan 'He Tao shi'" 跋子瞻和陶詩, in *Huang Tingjian quanji* 黃庭堅全集 (Chengdu: Sichuan daxue chubanshe, 2001), 17.604.

Directly after his death, even when the government ban of his writing was instated, his “overseas poetry” enjoyed such popularity that it was said whoever could not recite these poems suffered from a disadvantage in conversation.⁷⁶ With this large contemporary audience in mind, Su Shi must have cautiously controlled his poetic persona. Thus, although on one hand, he gaily reported every step of his “return into nature,” on the other, he reassured his reader that he never forgot the proper responsibility of a good Confucian to domesticate the semi-barbaric natives. These two sides are combined into a powerful, albeit paradoxical, political persona who loftily transcended worldly affairs while dutifully observing moral commands—the very moral paradox that ennobled ancient paragons of reclusion.⁷⁷

By any account, Su Shi remained a cultural force. Soon after he arrived in Hainan, a friend sent him across the sea more than a thousand fascicles of books.⁷⁸ Su might have used these books generously to tutor local students. These students kept him constant company,⁷⁹ and in turn he sometimes advised them in writing and calligraphy.⁸⁰ A certain Jiang Tangzuo 姜唐佐 (*jins* 1103) was especially gifted.⁸¹ Since no candidate from Hainan had ever succeeded in the metropolitan exam, Su Shi encouraged Jiang to “break heaven’s desertion” (*po tianhuang* 破天荒). Two years after Su Shi’s death, Jiang finally succeeded.⁸² Even though Su Shi avoided Liu Zongyuan’s earlier explicit commitment to “transforming the barbarians,” his contemporaries nevertheless were keen to point out his foresight and beneficial cultural influence⁸³—an influence

⁷⁶ See *Song shihua quanbian*, vol. 3, 2950.

⁷⁷ See Aat Vervoorn, *Men of the Cliffs and Caves: The Development of the Chinese Eremitic Tradition to the End of the Han Dynasty* (Hong Kong: Chinese Univ. Press, 1990), 28-40, 229; Berkowitz, *Patterns of Disengagement*, 20-35.

⁷⁸ See Su Shi, “He Tao ‘Zeng Yang zhangshi’” 和陶贈羊長史, *SSSJ*, 41.2281-82.

⁷⁹ See e.g., Su Shi, “Beijiu duxing, bianzhi Ziyun, Wei, Hui, Xianjue sili zhi she, sanshou” 被酒獨行遍至子雲威徽先覺四黎之舍三首, *SSSJ*, 42.2322-23; “Yong Guo yun, Dongzhi yu zhusheng yinjiu” 用過韻冬至與諸生飲酒, *SSSJ*, 42.2324-25; “Zeng Li Si Yanwei xiucai” 贈李兕彥威秀才, *SSSJ*, 43.2352-53; etc.

⁸⁰ See Fei Gun, *Liangxi manzhi*, 4.2.

⁸¹ For Su Shi’s correspondences with Jiang, see Su Shi, “Yu Jiang Tangzuo xiucai liushou” 與姜唐佐秀才六首, *SSWJ*, 57.1739-40.

⁸² This story is authenticated by Su Che; see Su Che, “Bu Zizhan ‘Zeng Jiang Tangzuo xiucai’ bing yin” 補子瞻贈姜唐佐秀才並引, *Su Che ji, houji* 3.909.

⁸³ This story is also related in Shao Bo 邵博, *Shaoshi wenjian houlu* 邵氏聞見後錄 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 17.133-34.

that, ironically, belied his claim to having assimilated into the native folk.

The Poetry of Dissent

In a number of poems written during this last period of exile, Su Shi meditated upon the value of the individual, and that it should not be sacrificed for a vague “public good” or absolute loyalty to the sovereign ruler. For Chinese literati, the dilemma between public service and disengagement was perpetual. As Tao Qian declared of all literati:

或擊壤以自歡 Some delight themselves in the game of “hitting the wood-stick”;
或大濟於蒼生 Some bring great benefit to the whole humble populace.⁸⁴

Rang 壤 is a shoe-shaped stick made of wood. In the game, one plants first a wood-stick distantly and then throws another to hit it. A story relates that an octogenarian, living under the rulership of Emperor Yao, was playing this game by the roadside. When an onlooker praised the virtue of the emperor that ensured his happiness, the old man retorted: “I rise when the sun rises; I rest when the sun sets. I dig a well to drink and plow the fields to eat. What does the power of the emperor have to do with me?” (日出而作，日入而息。凿井而饮，耕田而食。帝力于我何有哉?)⁸⁵ The original moral lesson is the Daoist ideal of governance without interference. Tao Qian, however, used this reference to illustrate an example of private virtue which delights only its possessor, yet his poetry sometimes betrays an anxiety over leading a life wasted and unfulfilled.⁸⁶ So what accounted for Tao’s resignation, despite his awareness that to “bring great benefit to the whole populace” was noble and laudable? Was it simply because of those quotidian scribbles and squabbles in a lowly bureaucrat’s humdrum life? Did he just prefer the quietude of the farming life? Since the Late Tang, the interregnum com-

⁸⁴ Tao Qian, “Gan shibuyu fu” 感士不遇賦, *TYM*, 5431-33.

⁸⁵ See Huangfu Mi 皇甫謐, *Gaoshi zhuan* 高士傳 (*SBBY*, 1.6).

⁸⁶ On Tao Qian’s sense of social mission, see Charles Yim-tze Kwong, “Naturalness and Authenticity: The Poetry of Tao Qian,” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 11 (1989): 37-40.

bat of Tao's age had also spurred speculation that his resignation was of a grander nature, such as a protest against the moral and ritual disorder of his time. According to this version, Tao's choice was totally consistent with the Confucian attitude of seeking employment with dedication until all measures are tried and failed in an age of darkness.⁸⁷ As Aat Vervoorn describes it, "the gentleman serves in office as long as by doing so, he can further the Way; once that becomes impossible he must resign to avoid moral compromise."⁸⁸

This orthodox reading was inconvenient for Su Shi's identification with Tao. Unlike Tao Qian, Su was a prominent political figure and had to carefully avoid criticizing the current regime. A hint of frustration would be noted as *lèse majesté*, inappropriate at the least and deadly at most. Unsurprisingly, Su Shi contended that Tao Qian (and he himself) was simply endowed with a "partial nature," ill-fitted to the world. Both Tao's and his return were but a natural result of their disposition:

嗟我與先生	Alas, you and me, sir—
所賦良奇偏	Both are endowed with an extremely partial nature.
人間少宜適	Nothing, if any, befits or pleases us in the realm of man.
惟有歸耘田	Returning and plowing the fields is all we can muster. ⁸⁹

To support this image of Tao, Su Shi highlights a fact which seldom catches attention in Tao Qian's resume: his initial acceptance of official appointment. He argues that Tao's taking office and his resignation were both motivated by his authentic self, dictated by concrete circumstances and not by any grand moral agenda.

淵明初亦仕	Yuanming initially also entered officialdom;
弦歌本誠言	It was sincere of him to say that ritual music was his livelihood.
不樂乃徑歸	Taking no delight in it, he simply returned.
視世羞獨賢	Looking at the world, he was ashamed to be virtuous alone. ⁹⁰

Xiange 弦歌, or "string music and singing," refers to a story in the *Analects*. Confucius' disciple, Ziyou 子游, was once the magistrate of

⁸⁷ See Swartz, *Reading Tao Yuanming*, 55-73, passim.

⁸⁸ Vervoorn, *Men of the Cliffs and Caves*, 30.

⁸⁹ Su Shi, "He Tao 'Yuanshi' shi Pang Deng" 和陶怨詩示龐鄧, *SSSJ*, 41.2271.

⁹⁰ Su Shi, "He Tao 'Pinshi' qishou" 和陶貧士七首, no. 2, *SSSJ*, 39.2138.

Wucheng 武城 (in Shandong). Despite the insignificance of this county, he taught students to play courtly music and chant the *Odes*, much to the Master's amused approval.⁹¹ Tao Qian, however, reportedly claimed that he would consider *xiange*, or the appointment of county magistrate, only to provide for his family.⁹² Su Shi came to understand Tao Qian's official career in this light under the influence of Ouyang Fei 歐陽斐 (1047-1113), the third son of Ouyang Xiu, and Su Shi's in-law.⁹³ Tao's unpretentious motivation showed his true aversion to power. Understood as such, what drove Tao into officialdom was not moral or political idealism but plain and honest human needs. Yet even more unbearable than hunger was his finding no delight in a bureaucratic life; thus, he "simply returned."

In this interpretation, Tao Qian's behavior was motivated solely by hunger and delight, two of the most visceral, instinctive drives of life. Its spontaneity reveals the authenticity of his state of mind, which was not affected by external moral teachings. This view of spontaneous morality adheres to Su Shi's definition of a "sage" as the one who takes delight in the Way, not the one who knows the most about it.⁹⁴ The "pleasure principle" serves as an instinctive guide for one's moral behavior. When facing tough choices in life, one should not let analytic reason interfere, but should reach a decision according to one's innate inclinations. If one finds no pleasure in trying to rectify the depraved world, one should rather stop trying and keep one's virtue private. As Su Shi indicates, this is the egoistical model of "for oneself" that Tao Qian establishes.

⁹¹ *Analects*, 17.3; *Lunyu zhengyi*, 20.679-80.

⁹² See Tao Qian's biography in "Yinyizhuan" 隱逸傳, *Jinshu*, 64.2461.

⁹³ Su Shi's second son Su Dai 蘇迨 (1070-1126) married Ouyang Fei's daughter in the third month of 1091; see Kong Fanli, *Su Shi nianpu*, 30.970. Later that year, Su Shi was appointed the magistrate of Yingzhou, where Ouyang Fei was living in retreat at the time. Toward the end of that year, during a visit, he suggested to Su Shi that Tao's "superior insight" lie in entering officialdom only due to the lack of provisions at home; see Su Shi, "Ouyang Shubi jianfang, song Tao Yuanming shi, tan qi jueshi [...]" 歐陽叔弼見訪誦陶淵明事嘆其絕識 [...], *SSSJ*, 34.1815. In another poem, Su Shi used the same term to describe Ouyang Fei: "Your learning of the Way has recently gained new insight;/for poverty, however, you reenter for now the officialdom" (學道新有得，為貧聊復仕); see "Yi ping shan zeng Ouyang Shubi" 以屏山贈歐陽叔弼, *SSSJ*, 34.1823.

⁹⁴ See Su Shi, "Zhongyong lun" 中庸論, *SSWJ*, 2.60. In contrast, a "worthy" (*xianren* 賢人) knows about the Way more than takes delight in practicing the Way.

In the late spring of 1097, Su Shi was obliged to leave his newly-built house in Huizhou and was further banished across the strait to Hainan. Su Che was also banished farther to Leizhou 雷州 (in Guangdong). The two brothers traveled together to the port and bid farewell—their last farewell, as their instincts foreboded. Beginning in their youth they always slept in the same room when traveling; this time they spent one last sleepless night together—sleepless for Su Shi at least partly due to his affliction with hemorrhoids, a chronic disease he caught in Huangzhou. Su Che thus recited Tao Qian's "Abjure Drinking" ("Zhijiu" 止酒) poem, since alcohol would only exacerbate the ailment. Su Shi later matched Tao's poem to show his resolution.⁹⁵ In the beginning lines he recounted how they both fell into their predicament:

時來與物逝	When the time comes, we depart along with things.
路窮非我止	When the road comes to an end, we stop despite our will.
與子各意行	You and I each took a journey at our own whim,
同落百蠻裏	And have similarly fallen amidst a hundred barbarian tribes.

With a few broad strokes of time and fate, the poem presents two brothers of extraordinary talent being swept up by powerful scourges across the central plains, briefly coming to company at the margin of a landmass, only to be separated again by a surging ocean. Then Su Shi paraphrased his brother's suggestion:

勸我師淵明	You advise me to follow the example of Yuanming,
力薄且為己	Since my capacity is low, I should consider for my own.
微疴坐杯酌	This ailment is caused by many cups of wine;
止酒則瘳矣	Stop drinking, and it will be cured.
望道雖未濟	Gazing at the Way, I have not yet reached its coast;
隱約見津涘	But afar, I can vaguely discern the ford and shore.

Su Shi's apology for his "low capacity" could be read both as low tolerance to alcohol and as his limited capacity in practicing the Way. Similarly, the "way" that the poet gazes at might be read either as the actual way of banishment or, metaphorically, as the Way writ large—the ultimate truth, as encoded in the word "ford," referring to Confucius' seek-

⁹⁵ Su Shi, "He Tao 'Zhijiu'" 和陶止酒, *SSSJ*, 41.2245-46.

ing of a chance to practice his philosophy in actual governance.⁹⁶ In the case of Su Shi, however, his “ford” may not be the grand truth of salvaging the world, but the individual truth of ascertaining self-knowledge. This, however, awaits him only across the ocean, reachable after he abandons the central realm and all its political and cultural identities, when he will be left with himself alone.

Su Che recommended the teaching of “for oneself” (*weiji* 為己) as a cure to Su Shi’s ailments. This term also comes from the *Analects*, where Confucius states: “People of olden times studied for themselves; people today study for others” (古之學者為己，今之學者為人).⁹⁷ To study “for oneself” is the noble choice since only by enriching oneself independently of whimsical expectations of the time can one adhere to permanent principles. While Su Shi regarded Tao Qian as a paradigm of virtue kept “for oneself,” this quotation of Confucius’ exhortation might also have masked a deep change in Su Shi’s political thinking—that is, his loss of faith in loyalty as total dedication to the service of the throne. Instead, a literatus, even in the role of a bureaucrat, was entitled to cultivate his private sphere outside of the public realm.

This message is encoded in Su Shi’s reflection on the “three worthies” (*sanliang* 三良) who died at the funeral of Duke Mu of Qin 秦穆公 (r. 659-621 BCE). According to *Zuozhuan* 左傳, they were “used as sacrifice” (*weixun* 為殉), their deaths were mourned by the metropolitan public (*guoren* 國人), and opinion held it as evidence of Duke Mu’s innate cruelty.⁹⁸ *Zuozhuan*’s choice of words suggests that their deaths were not voluntary, but were forced and violent. Yet the commentator Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127-200) hypothesized that they must have volunteered to sacrifice themselves out of loyalty.⁹⁹ In 1061, during Su Shi’s first official

⁹⁶ In *Analects* 18.6, Changju 長沮 and Jieni 桀溺 were plowing the fields when Confucius passed by with his disciples. Zilu 子路 was sent to ask for directions to the ford, but was mocked by the recluses for not knowing even that, while still trying to save the world. See *Lunyu zhengyi*, 21.720-23.

⁹⁷ *Analects*, 14.24; *Lunyu zhengyi*, 17.586.

⁹⁸ *Zuozhuan* Wen 6; see *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi* 春秋左傳正義, 19A:142, in Ruan Yuan 阮元, *Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經注疏 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), 1844.

⁹⁹ The Mao commentary to the ode “Huangniao” 黃鳥 (Mao 131) seems to suggest that they were forced to die: “The people of the capital criticized King Mu for using humans to follow him in death” (*yiren congsi* 以人從死). The Zheng commentary, however, glosses *congsi* as “suicide” (*zisha* 自殺). See *Maoshi zhengyi*, 6.105, in *Shisanjing zhushu*, 373.

post in Fengxiang county, he seconded Zheng Xuan's opinion in a verse on Duke Mu's tomb, a local tourist attraction. He maintained that the people of old had superior morality and were willing to die for being appreciated by a powerful patron. Such heroic deeds were no longer seen in his day, leading to the suspicion that their death was coerced.¹⁰⁰ It should be mentioned that Su Che, in his matching poem, rejected Su Shi's surmise forthright, arguing that the three men could better have repaid the ruler's appreciation by serving his son, the next king; thus, these wise gentlemen could not have chosen a fortuitous death.¹⁰¹

Su Che's argument hinged upon the fact that the royal lineage of Qin was not severed. The moral value of loyal dedication itself was not questioned, and his poem did not represent a break with the traditional ideology of loyalty to the throne.

Su Shi's revised commentary upon the "Three Worthies" came almost four decades after his initial poem. This time it was in response to Tao Qian. Tao's poem also accepted the alternative tradition that the three committed suicide, and it related the story based on the account of Ying Shao 應劭 (fl. 153-196). In this version, Duke Mu once sighed and said at a happy banquet that he would very much like someone to share his pleasure in life and his grave in death, so the three volunteered. Their death was merely to fulfill their oath.¹⁰² The authenticity of Ying's narrative may be questionable. Nevertheless, it must have found a large audience, including Tao Qian, who was willing to think of the worthies' choice of death as noble.

Tao's poem reveals conflicting emotions. He sympathizes first with their entrance into officialdom, an action he interprets as driven by the fear of an idle life. He subtly disapproves, however, of its consequence as "being used for the ruler's personal interest" (遂為君所私), since once the ruler showed his diabolic wish at an intimate moment, they had no other choice than to volunteer. The poet respects their loyalty, yet the tears shed onto his robe question the very value of absolute dedication to a capricious ruler.¹⁰³ In this regard, Tao's resignation is a trade-off: he

¹⁰⁰ Su Shi, "Qin Mugong mu" 秦穆公墓, in "Fengxiang baguan" 鳳翔八觀, *SSSJ*, 3.118-19.

¹⁰¹ Su Che, "Qin Mugong mu" 秦穆公墓, in "He Zizhan 'Fengxiang baguan' bashou" 和子瞻鳳翔八觀八首, *Su Che ji*, 2.27.

¹⁰² As quoted in the *zhengyi* 正義 commentary to *Shiji*; see *Shiji*, 5.195, n. 4.

¹⁰³ Tao Qian, "Yong Sanliang," *TYM*, 4.383.

may risk living an idle life, but at least he preserves his most precious self.

To Tao's thoughtful poem, Su Shi's response is extraordinary. He dismisses all scholastic sophistication and ambiguities and completely overturns his youthful admiration for their loyalty. Instead, he argues that there should be a limit to one's service to the ruler. He elaborates on the distinction between the public and the private, declaring that public service shall not be equated with the ruler's private wishes, and insisting that individual life has an intrinsic value that should not be sacrificed in vain. As he reasons:

此生太山重	The weight of this life is as heavy as Paramount Tai;
忽作鴻毛遺	How in a sudden is it discarded as a goose feather, so light?
三子死一言	The three gentlemen died for a single word—
所死良已微	What they died for was truly, alas, a triviality!
賢哉晏平仲	Sagacious was Yan Pingzhong, the Qi minister,
事君不以私	Whose service to the ruler was not for private interest. ¹⁰⁴
我豈犬馬哉	Am I a dog, am I a horse,
從君求蓋帷	That follows the king for an exquisite canopy?
殺身固有道	There is a proper way to let oneself die,
大節要不虧	That is, one's great integrity shall remain intact.
君為社稷死	If the king died for the sake of the state,
我則同其歸	I shall then follow his fate.
顧命有治亂	A royal command may bring order—or chaos;
臣子得從違	So the subject can opt to follow—or disobey.
魏顆真孝愛	Wei Ke[']s rejection of his father's wish] showed true filial affection; ¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ *Zuozhuan*, Xiang 25, relates that the powerful Qi minister Cui Zhu 崔杼 (?-546 BCE, aka Cui Wuzi 崔武子) married a beautiful widow who later had an affair with Duke Zhuang 齊莊公 (r. 553-48 BCE). When Duke Zhuang came to his house, Cui trapped him and committed regicide. Many ministers of Qi died in the ensuing bloodbath. The renowned minister and philosopher Yan Ying 晏嬰 (?-500 BCE, aka Yan Pingzhong 平仲) came to mourn at Cui Zhu's gate. He rejected the options to die, flee, or resign, arguing that only when a ruler died for the sake of the state should one die for the king. In this case, the ruler died dishonorably in adultery, so one should mourn for his death as dictated by ritual but nothing more. Then he mourned for the dead duke, whose body was still in Cui Zhu's hostage, and left. Cui Zhu hesitated to kill him, in awe of his reputation. See *Chun-qiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*, 36.281, in *Shisanjing zhushu*, 1983.

¹⁰⁵ *Zuozhuan*, Xuan 15, narrates that Wei Ke's father Wei Wuzi 魏武子 had a favorite concubine. When Wuzi first got sick, he asked Ke to remarry her properly after his death. But when he was about to die, he ordered Ke to sacrifice her at his grave. After Wuzi died, Wei Ke remarried the woman. Asked why, he replied that his father's first request was

三良安足希	The death of the “Three Worthies” deserves no admiration!
仕宦豈不榮	Doesn't an official career bring glory?
有時纏憂悲	It sometimes entails a sorrowful story.
所以靖節翁	For this very reason, the old man Jingjie [i.e., Tao Qian]
服此黔婁衣	Chose instead to wear Qianlou's shabby clothing. ¹⁰⁶

Of the five historical instances Su Shi cited, the “Three Worthies” are set in contrast against two virtuous ministers (Yan Ying and Wei Ke 魏顥 [6th cent. BCE]) and two recluses (Qianlou 黔婁 and Tao Qian). The comparison reveals their action to be unwise. Though Su Shi followed an alternative tradition and believed that they died for an oath, their commitment to a despotic request alone reduced them to their ruler's pets. Unlike Yan Ying, they served not the state, but the ruler's private interests. They should perhaps follow the example of Wei Ke: although he was obligated to carry out his father's last wish, he ultimately chose to follow his reason. The freedom of choice exercised in his decision made it noble. Similarly, the “Three Worthies” should have dared to break the oath, since it was going to tarnish the Duke's posthumous reputation. Their blind loyalty thus had nothing in it to admire. The last allusions to Tao Qian and Qianlou further imply that perhaps their very choice of entering officialdom was folly. Power and glory were bought at a dear price: one's precious self.

Su Shi found in the *Book of Changes* the theoretical support for his new understanding on relations between ruler and subject. According to his own commentary, Hexagram 28, “Great Excess” (“Da guo” 大過), represents an age when the ruler is arrogant and the power of the ministers is shattered. This is because in the *yin-yang* binary system, the ruler is in the *yang* position, and his ministers are in the *yin* position. The *yang* controls the *yin*, but it could neither exist without the *yin* nor

issued in his sanity, while the second was probably not. Wei Ke thus chose the command which showed an inner state of being in good order (*zhi* 治) instead of in chaos (*luan* 亂), lest he tarnish his father's reputation. See *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, 24.186, in *Shisanjing zhushu*, 1888.

¹⁰⁶ Su Shi, “He Tao ‘Yong sanliang’” 和陶詠三良, *SSSJ*, 40.2184-85. Qianlou 黔婁 was a lofty character of such extreme poverty that when he died, he was covered with a cotton blanket too short to overlay simultaneously his head and his feet. When some suggested to use the blanket diagonally so as to cover the whole body, his wife replied that it was better to be upright than to have adequate covering. See *Lienü zhuan huibian* 列女傳彙編 (Beijing: Beijing tushuguan, 2007), 2.192-94.

should it deprive the *yin* of its dignity. Neither force should overpower the other.¹⁰⁷ In his commentary on Hexagram 18, “Decay” (“Gu” 蠱), he suggests that a virtuous person should endeavor to rescue the world when he sees the early signs and symptoms of disaster. But if the situation is beyond rescue, he should stay away from the kings and lords to save his own skin.¹⁰⁸ In other words, he observes the “timeliness” (*shi* 時) of retreat. As Vervoorn has argued, this idea of timely service is found across the early Confucian and Daoist classics. It “provides a way of finding room for both periods of dutiful service and periods of lofty withdrawal in the individual’s relationship with ruler and society. ... In this way eremitism ceased to be a type of conduct which *prima facie* required moral justification and became something natural and inevitable, a part of the eternal order of things.”¹⁰⁹

Su Shi’s change of attitude toward the “Three Worthies” suggests a shift of emphasis from absolute loyalty to the individual value of life. For a traditional literatus, cultivated to think of morality as having an ultimately altruistic and public purpose, the egoistic option provided an escape into the private sphere. This sphere may find a physical abode in a garden, the fields, or in a refined studio. In the vision of Su Shi, this sphere was essentially an inner utopia that only a meditative mind could reach.

Peach Blossom Spring as an Inner Utopia

In his famous prose account with a poem, “Peach Blossom Spring,” Tao Qian depicted an autonomous rural society where residents shunned the external world and were free from governmental interference. Su Shi, alienated from his external environment and not free to complain, discovered in Tao’s vision instead an inner utopia, which shared the essential features of a Daoist grotto heaven and could only be visited by a meditative mind, regardless of location or external situation. It is an

¹⁰⁷⁾ *Su Shi Yizhuan* 蘇氏易傳, in *San Su quanshu* 三蘇全書, ed. Zeng Zaozhuang 曾棗莊 et al. (Beijing: Yuwen chubanshe, 2001), vol. 1, 232-33.

¹⁰⁸⁾ *Ibid.*, 205.

¹⁰⁹⁾ Vervoorn, *Men of the Cliffs and Caves*, 68.

“inner citadel”¹¹⁰ where, by disclaiming one’s desires for goals in the external world, one becomes the king of an infinite space, contained in a nutshell. One is free from the tyranny of environment, of fate, or of an absolute monarchy—not by removing these obstacles from one’s path, but by renouncing even the vaguest desire to go down that path.

In Tao Qian’s iconic record, a stray fisherman encountered a clear stream, on the banks of which stood groves of blossoming peach trees. Rowing against the stream, he found a narrow entrance to a cave and, on the other side, an open space occupied by a small hermetic agrarian community. It had been established centuries earlier by people escaping the warfare at the end of the Qin dynasty. The hospitable residents had a pleasurable life in autonomy and self-sufficiency, knew no change of kings, and paid no taxes. When the fisherman went home, he broke his oath of secrecy and guided the magistrate of Wuling 武陵 (modern Changde, Hunan) to seek the cave. But Peach Blossom Spring was never found again.¹¹¹

Three prominent features contributed to Peach Blossom Spring’s lasting appeal: its exclusivity; its utopic symbolism; and its half mythical, half realistic characteristics. Its residents were humans, but their living space was similar to a Daoist heaven. As Susan Nelson has argued, Tao Qian “borrowed elements from fables about Immortals current in his day; however he modified them, notions of the supernatural were at their origin and core.”¹¹² These supernatural associations include the peach blossoms at the entrance which intimate immortality, the tunnel entrance which suggests a grotto heaven, the stream nourishing perhaps a “spiritual fount,” and the magical disappearance of the entrance upon one’s seeking.¹¹³ These are all common mythemes in Daoist lore. Yet, as Yim-tze Kwong has observed, though this story might be inspired by contemporaneous ones about immortals, its narrative is decidedly realistic, making Peach Blossom Spring “at once utopian and this-worldly.”¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Here I borrow Isaiah Berlin’s term, who characterized one kind of passive freedom as achieved not by removing obstacles but by removing desires. See “Two Concepts of Liberty,” in Berlin, *The Proper Study of Mankind* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2000), 206-12.

¹¹¹ Tao Qian, “Taohuayuan ji bing shi,” *TYM*, 6.479-80.

¹¹² Susan Nelson, “On Through to the Beyond: The Peach Blossom Spring as Paradise,” *Archives of Asian Art* 39 (1986): 26.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

¹¹⁴ Kwong, “Naturalness and Authenticity,” 49.

Su Shi's re-envisioning of the "Peach Blossom Spring" was not just based on Tao's account and poem, but also on their extensive subsequent literary reception. From the Six Dynasties on, but particularly in the Tang dynasty, Peach Blossom Spring became a popular poetic motif. It was used as a facile synonym either of a princely estate or of a grotto heaven. The former use is exemplified in the following poem from Yu Xin 庾信 (513-581):

梁王修竹園	The prince of Liang's garden of slender bamboos—
冠蓋風塵喧	Their crowns overtop the clamor of wind and dust below.
行人忽枉道	A passenger may suddenly go astray,
直進桃花源	And intrude straight into a Peach Blossom Spring. ¹¹⁵

Similar to Tao Qian's vision, this Peach Blossom Spring is also an exclusive space. Ironically, however, its residents are no longer farmers escaping despotic rulership, but the rulers themselves. Tall bamboos looming over the dust and clamor symbolize their power. The hapless passenger is a parody of the stray fisherman—hospitality surely does not await him. At best he will be expelled as a joke by the laughing prince and his guests. Peach Blossom Spring is no longer a classless society, but a privatized, privileged space, the ruthlessness of which is revealed only upon intrusion. In other poems mentioning Peach Blossom Spring before the Tang, the motif refers to an aestheticized, artificial garden.¹¹⁶

This usage of "Peach Blossom Spring" extended well into the Tang dynasty. During the Tang, "Peach Blossom Spring" as a literary motif gained popular currency, verging on becoming a cliché. As an allusion and a motif, it appears in more than two hundred poems in *Quan Tang shi* 全唐詩, called alternatively *taohuayuan* 桃花源, *taoyuan* 桃源, *huayuan* 花源, *Wuling yuan* 武陵源, or *Wuling xi* 武陵溪. A number of these poems described the princely estates of "weekend recluses." As

¹¹⁵ Yu Xin 庾信, "Fengbao Zhaowang huijiu shi" 奉報趙王惠酒詩, in *Xianqin Han Wei Jin Nanbeichao shi* 先秦漢魏晉南北朝詩, ed. Lu Qinli 遼欽立 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983; hereafter *XQHW*), 2377.

¹¹⁶ Aside from the poem above, in Lu Qinli's book, the "Peach Blossom Spring" is mentioned in another three poems prior to the Tang. The second poem, also from Yu Xin ("Yong huapingfeng shi ershiwushou" 詠畫屏風詩二十五首, no. 5, *XQHW*, 2395), refers similarly to a princely estate; the third, to a mountain villa (Xu Ling 徐陵, "Shanzhai shi" 山齋詩, *XQHW*, 2530); and the fourth, to a Buddhist temple (Kong Deshao 孔德紹, "Deng Baimashan Humingsi shi" 登白馬山護明寺詩, *XQHW*, 2721-22).

Stephen Owen has argued, Tang estate poetry features “an encounter of antithetical extremes, in which the center of political power ... and the place defined by its rupture from centered political space ... came together.” The example that he raises is Shen Quanqi’s 沈佺期 (656?-714?) formulation “Peach Blossom Spring meets the Ninefold Palace” (桃花源接九重).¹¹⁷ Such a suburban estate marked an exclusive space in nature, distinct from the urban. Its residents enjoyed relative freedom afforded by their temporal distance from the center of power—yet also, paradoxically, by their privileged access to wealth and power.

Another common use of Peach Blossom Spring in Tang poetry was as an escapist, pristine realm of transcendence. As the Southern Song author Hong Mai 洪邁 (1123-1203) observed, residents in Tao Qian’s original “Peach Blossom Spring” were mortals, but Tang poets generally depicted the space as a supernatural realm accommodating earthly immortals.¹¹⁸ Those mythemes latent in Tao’s depiction proliferated into various combinations and elaborations. Wang Wei’s “Song of Peach Blossom Spring” (“Taoyuan xing” 桃源行), for instance, clearly declares that those farmers running away from war and tyranny somehow became immortals:

初因避地去人間 At first they escaped warfare and left the realm of man;
及至成仙遂不還 Till they became immortals and would never return.¹¹⁹

Tao Qian’s description of life in Peach Blossom Spring was transplanted onto other conventional themes of immortals’ lives such as dining on turtle shells, drinking stone marrow, wearing deer fur, and planting jade or fantastic, efficacious plants.¹²⁰ Indeed, Tao’s rural utopia had become

¹¹⁷ Owen, “The Formation of the Tang Estate Poem,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 55 (1995): 44, 46. Shen Quanqi’s line is from “Fenghe xing Wei Sili shanzhuang shiyan yingzhi” 奉和幸韋嗣立山莊侍宴應制, *QTS*, 97.1054.

¹¹⁸ Hong Mai 洪邁, *Rongzhai suibi* 容齋隨筆 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2005), *sanbi* 10.548-49. This is also the case with Tao Qian’s poem about Peach Blossom Spring; there are interesting differences between the famous prose account and the less famous poem.

¹¹⁹ Wang Wei, “Taoyuan xing” 桃源行, in *Wang Wei ji jiaozhu* 王維集校注, ed. Chen Tiemin 陳鐵民 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997), 1.16-17.

¹²⁰ See, e.g., Lu Zhaolin, “Guo Dongshan gukou” 過東山谷口, *QTS*, 42.529; Quan Deyu 權德輿, “Taoyuan pian” 桃源篇, *QTS*, 329.3679; Liu Yuxi 劉禹錫, “Taoyuan xing” 桃源行, *QTS*, 356.3995; etc.

so closely associated with a Daoist heaven that it was even listed as such in Daoist scriptures.¹²¹ Han Yu, who chided all stories about immortals as nonsensical, nevertheless proceeded to elaborate in great detail upon a painting of “Peach Blossom Spring” as a domain of immortality.¹²²

Immortals are beings of absolute freedom—free from illness and death, and also free to transform and to act. As a grotto heaven, Peach Blossom Spring was no longer a tax-free shelter for refugee peasants, refusing those less lucky, nor a high society garden, refusing those born lowly, but a pleasure house for immortals, denying entrance to mortals altogether. This last vision is at once the most fantastical and the most exclusive.

In Su Shi’s matching poem (with preface),¹²³ however, he protests against the earlier tradition of depicting Peach Blossom Spring as a Daoist heaven. As he argues in the preface:

Popular legends about Peach Blossom Spring are usually overblown. If we examine Yuanming’s record carefully, he only said that their ancestors came to that place to escape the warfare at the end of the Qin. So those whom the fisherman met seemed to be their descendants, not some immortal people from the Qin. He also said that they killed chickens for meals. How could an immortal kill [chickens]?

世傳桃源事，多過其實。考淵明所記，止言先世避秦亂來此，則漁人所見，似是其子孫，非秦人不死者也。又云殺雞作食，豈有仙而殺者乎？

Su Shi notices the residents’ non-vegetarian diet and holds it central to his argument. As will be seen later, food is deeply meaningful to define a space. Susan Nelson remarks that Su Shi was the first person who argued convincingly against describing Peach Blossom Spring as a paradise, initiating an “immortality controversy” on the nature of this place.¹²⁴ Yet, while claiming to redeem the “authorial intention” of Tao Qian, Su Shi gave this theme his own twist. For him, many Peach Blossom Springs

¹²¹ Listed as *Taoyuan shandong* 桃源山洞 in a “Tiandi gongfu tu” 天地宮府圖; see Zhang Junfang 張君房, *Yunji qiqian* 雲笈七籤 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2003), 618.

¹²² Han Yu, “Taoyuan tu” 桃源圖, *QTS*, 338.3787. Discussed also in Nelson, “On Through to the Beyond,” 27.

¹²³ Su Shi, “He Tao ‘Taohuayuan’ bing yin” 和陶桃花源并引, *SSS*, 40.2196-98.

¹²⁴ Nelson, “On Through to the Beyond,” 27-28, *passim*.

hide in secret nooks of the world beyond the reach of centralized political or cultural forces; yet they are readily accessible in dreams.

An old legend has it that there was a Chrysanthemum Creek in Nanyang. The water was sweet and fragrant. There were some thirty households and they drank from its water. They all lived long, some up to a hundred and twenty or thirty years.¹²⁵ Amidst Mt. Qingcheng of Sichuan, there was an “old-man village,” where some had lived to see their descendants of the fifth generation. The road to this village was extremely treacherous and long-winding, so all their lives, they had never tasted salt or vinegar. There grew many wolfberry trees in the stream, the roots of which were as thick as snakes and dragons. Whoever drank its water lived long. In recent years, the condition of the road has improved, so eventually the residents are able to acquire various kinds of foods and seasonings. Their life expectancy, however, has decreased. Could Peach Blossom Spring also be of that kind? Had the Magistrate of Wuling managed to find it, it would have long become a battlefield of fighting and snatching! In my opinion, there are many places like this between heaven and earth, not just Peach Blossom Spring. When I was in Yingzhou, I once dreamt of arriving at an official building. The people there did not differ from the mundane, but the mountains and rivers formed a vista clear and vast, which was truly delightful. I looked back into the hall and found a tablet with the inscription “Qiuchi.” Then I woke up. It occurred to me that Qiuchi used to be the homeland of the Di natives from Wudu, under the protection of Yang the Irresistible.¹²⁶ How did I get there? The next day I asked my guests. A guest called Zhao Lingshi, whose polite name was Delin, said: “Why should you ask, sir? This is a land of bliss adjunct to the Grotto Heaven. Du Fu once said: ‘The Qiuchi Cave has existed since age immemorial; a secret path leads to it, a minor heaven.’”¹²⁷ Another day, Wang Qingchen, whose polite name was Zhongzhi, Vice Director in the Ministry of Works, told me: “Once on my return from an envoy trip, I passed by Mt. Qiuchi. It was nourished by ninety-nine springs and surrounded by myriad mountains. It was truly a place to hide from the world, just like Peach Blossom Spring.”

¹²⁵ A story found in the “Xianyao” 仙藥 chapter of *Baopuzi* 抱朴子; see Wang Ming 王明, *Baopuzi neipian jiaoshi* 抱朴子內篇校釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 11.207-08.

¹²⁶ Di is the ethnic tribe occupying this region. Wudu 武都 (in modern Gansu) is the name Han Wudi gave to this prefecture in 111 BCE. The Yang clan of Di came to live on Qiuchi since the end of the Eastern Han. See *Shuijingzhu jiaozheng* 水經注校證, ed. Chen Qiaoyi 陳橋驛 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), 20.481. Yang Nandang 楊難當 (literally: Yang the Irresistible) was the chief of his clan in 429-42, until being crushed by the Liu-Song dynasty. His history is recorded in *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1956), 121.3978-124.3929.

¹²⁷ Quote from Du Fu, “Qinzhou zayong” 秦州雜詠, no. 14, in *Du shi xiangzhu* 杜詩詳注, ed. Qiu Zhao'ao 仇兆鰲 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), 7:584.

舊說南陽有菊水，水甘而芳，民居三十餘家，飲其水，皆壽，或至百二三十歲。蜀青城山老人村，有見五世孫者，道極險遠，生不識鹽醢，而溪中多枸杞，根如龍蛇，飲其水，故壽。近歲道稍通，漸能致五味，而壽益衰。桃源蓋此比也歟。使武陵太守得而至焉，則已化為爭奪之場久矣。嘗意天壤之間，若此者甚眾，不獨桃源。予在穎州，夢至一官府，人物與俗間無異，而山川清遠，有足樂者。顧視堂上，榜曰仇池。覺而念之，仇池武都氏故地，楊難當所保，余何為居之。明日，以問客。客有趙令時德麟者，曰：“公何為問此，此乃福地，小有洞天附庸也。杜子美蓋云：‘萬古仇池穴，潛通小有天。’”他日工部侍郎王欽臣仲至謂余曰：“吾嘗奉使過仇池，有九十九泉，萬山環之，可以避世，如桃源也。”

According to the *Shuijingzhu* 水經注, Qiuchi is a rocky mountain cut steep at all sides with only one winding narrow path leading to the peak; its peak, however, is flat, with 300 acres of arable land nourished by a rich mountain spring.¹²⁸ Su Shi's dream visit to Qiuchi must have happened in late 1091 or early 1092, during his tenure in Yingzhou. Since then, Qiuchi became Su Shi's private obsession. Shortly after his transfer to Yangzhou in the spring of 1092, Su Shi acquired a pair of rocks. One was green, resembling a mountain range with a tiny hole; the other was white and smooth as a mirror.¹²⁹ Recalling his dream, as well as Du Fu's poem, he named this pair of rocks Qiuchi. Notably, he began the matching Tao exercise also in Yangzhou, around the same time he acquired the rocks. His admiration of Tao's poetry and the naming of the rocks both hint at the escapist thoughts increasingly haunting Su's mind. The Qiuchi rocks accompanied him back to the capital, through his long journey of banishment to Huizhou and Danzhou, and eventually on his return to the mainland. They were the daily companions by Su Shi's side, symbolizing to him a world beyond.

As the story of the Chrysanthemum Creek shows, the eudaimonic character of such secret domains was protected by their exclusivity, and the intrusion of the outside world would breach its blessed isolation. As Su elaborates in his matching poem, the “Peach Blossom Spring” is a metaphor for an inner realm of bliss, and access to it is possible only in absolute mental tranquility:

¹²⁸⁾ See *Shuijingzhu jiaozheng*, 20.481. Qiuchi is today's Mt. Changyang 常羊 in Gansu.

¹²⁹⁾ Su Shi, “Shuangshi” 雙石, *SSSJ*, 35.1880.

凡聖無異居 Commoners and sages do not differ in their residence;
 清濁共此世 The pure and the foul share this same world.
 心閑偶自見 When my mind is idle, I catch an occasional glimpse;
 念起忽已逝 But when a single thought stirs, it vanishes like a flash.
 欲知真一處 To find out where hides the one single truth,
 要使六用廢 You must abandon your six senses.¹³⁰
 桃源信不遠 Peach Blossom Spring is truly not far,
 杖藜可小憩 Reachable by walking with a goosefoot stick while taking small rests.
 躬耕任地力 There people farm in accordance with the capacity of the land;
 絕學抱天藝 They abandon learning and embrace the heavenly craft.
 臂雞有時鳴 The arm-roosters occasionally crow;
 尻駕無可稅 And the thigh-carriages cannot be unfastened.¹³¹
 苓龜亦晨吸 The tuckahoe-turtles also suck the morning air;¹³²
 杞狗或夜吠 And wolfberry-dogs occasionally bark at night.¹³³
 耘樵得甘芳 Farmers and woodcutters find sweet and fragrant things;
 齧齧謝炮製 They eat them raw without cooking or pickling.
 子驥雖形隔 Though Ziji failed to tramp its soil,¹³⁴
 淵明已心詣 Yuanming already visited it in his mind.

¹³⁰ The *Śūramgama Sūtra* states: “Reverse the flow to preserve the One; let the six senses stay in abandonment” (反流全一六用不行). See *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經, ed. Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 et al. (Tokyo: Daizō shuppansha, 1924-32), vol. 19, 945.141.

¹³¹ In the “Dazongshi” 大宗師 chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, Ziyu 子輿 becomes sick and is asked whether he feels disgusted by his deformed body. He exclaims that he shall accept all kinds of transformations that destiny dictates. If his arm is transformed into a rooster, he would let it crow to announce the time; if his thigh is transformed to a wheel and his spirit to a horse, he will ride this carriage; and so forth. See *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋, ed. Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961), 6.261.

¹³² The most efficacious tuckahoe is said to resemble the form of a turtle. In a story related in *Baopuzi*, the turtle gingerly sucks the morning air and thus gains longevity; see *Baopuzi neipian jiaoshi*, 3.48.

¹³³ A story in the early Song compendium *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 tells that Zhu Ruzi 朱孺子, an acolyte to the Daoist Wang Xuanzhen 王玄真, once saw two spotted puppies disappearing into a cave. He told Wang and they dug into the cave together, only to find two spotted wolfberry roots. Wang told Zhu to cook them in an alchemist's tripod. After guarding the fire for three days, Zhu was enticed by the smell and drank the soup. Afterwards he shared the root with Wang. Zhu thus became an immortal, while Wang only enjoyed extreme longevity. See *Taiping guangji* (SKQS), 24.7-8. The same comparison of wolfberry to a dog is used by Su Shi also in “Ciyun Zhengfu tongyou Baishuishan” 次韻正輔同游白水山, SSSJ, 39.2150; “Gouqi” 枸杞, in “Xiaopu wu yong” 小圃五詠, SSSJ, 39.2159.

¹³⁴ In Tao Qian's story, Liu Ziji 劉子驥 was a recluse who also wanted to find Peach Blossom Spring, but unfortunately died before departure. See Tao Qian, “Taohuayuan ji bing shi,” *TYM*, 6.479-80.

高山不難越	High mountains are not hard to cross;
淺水何足厲	Shallow waters are trivial to wade.
不如我仇池	It cannot be compared to my Qiuchi,
高舉復幾歲	Raised high above for how many years!
從來一生死	Where life and death are always treated equal;
近又等癡慧	And lately, the foolish and the clever have also become the same.
蒲澗安期境	The Calamus Gully is the domain of Scholar Anqi; ¹³⁵
羅浮稚川界	Mount Luofu is the territory of Zhichuan. ¹³⁶
夢往從之遊	In dreams I follow their roaming;
神交發吾蔽	The encounter of our spirits shall clear my delusions!
桃花滿庭下	Peach blossoms fill an entire court;
流水在戶外	A flowing stream outside of the door.
卻笑逃秦人	Now I laugh at those who escaped the Qin despot—
有畏非真契	They still had fears—my true kindred spirits they were not!

In Su Shi's vision, this world of ours is both shared and divided. It is a common space from which no one can escape. But one can have a divided realm to one's own: a secluded corner accessible when the mind is completely void—if a single thought is stirred, the entrance is closed. The journey to this realm, in other words, is an exercise in mental tranquility and spontaneity. Paradoxically, the ultimate mobility of spiritual roaming is achieved only in the absence of intentionality.

Living in such a realm, moreover, demands one to dispossess learning and craft. This eudaimonic life is nourished by raw food of high nutritious concentration. As Su Shi argues in the preface, the people of Nanyang and Qingcheng enjoyed longevity because of their medicinal water and plain, wholesome diet, unrefined by salt or spices. Despite their description as farmers and woodcutters, those residents were gatherers dining on raw food. As Campany argues, in the meaning system of Chinese cuisine, eating grains and cooking are essential characteristics of an agricultural life.¹³⁷ In contrast, the "cuisine of transcendence" is based on something other than grains, ingested raw (or prepared accord-

¹³⁵ Calamus Gully is in Mt. Baiyun 白雲山 (in modern Guangzhou, Guangdong), where the calamus grows plenty. In the local legend, Scholar Anqi 安期生 found a nine-gnarled calamus root which sprouted purple blossoms, ate it, and became an immortal. See Ji Han 嵇含, *Nanfang caomu zhuang* 南方草木狀, in *Han Wei liuchao biji xiaoshuo daguan* 漢魏六朝筆記小說大觀 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1999), 1:256.

¹³⁶ I.e., Ge Hong.

¹³⁷ Campany, "The Meaning of Cuisine," 8-9.

ing to secret methods different from the standard cooking techniques), and prepared and consumed ritualistically. An alternative diet is an essential component in the endeavor to transcend the sedentary, agrarian society and its political and ideological hierarchies.¹³⁸ Even though Tao Qian employed Daoist mythemes to construct his Peach Blossom Spring, the chicken-killing and millet-cooking residents are physiologically human. Su Shi has noticed this point in his preface to support his argument that Peach Blossom Spring is not a grotto heaven. In his matching poem, however, it is precisely their cuisine that is then modified to be raw and seemingly vegetarian. Their distinctive dietary habits have now become consistent with the socioeconomic and political “otherness” of this community.

The Daoist feature of Su Shi's Peach Blossom Spring is further underlined by its wondrous population including arm-roosters, thigh-carriages, tuckahoe-turtles, and wolfberry-dogs. Human body parts, manufactured objects, plants, and animals seem to be in constant metamorphosis, characteristic of the Daoist worldview. According to Isabelle Robinet, the Chinese philosophy of metamorphosis does not perceive the appearance of the world as a creation, and there is no ontological separation or discontinuity in nature: “When arriving at a terminal point of development, each thing reverses itself into its opposite or otherwise changes its form.”¹³⁹ Those hybrid beings under Su Shi's brush appear to be caught at the most revealing moment of their transitional stage, when their forms are still in fluidity. This seems to imply that the vital density of this magical land facilitates the metamorphosis of things, which are thus constantly found in transformation. Understanding the grand transformation of things represents a “hallmark of intellectual knowledge.”¹⁴⁰ Coming to this land, one's eyes are opened as one sees the world in its true form of transformation.

Those defining features of life at Peach Blossom Spring mirror the life of a Daoist adept, whose meditative spirit is in free roaming, who observes a raw food diet (or ideally dines upon air alone), and who partakes of the metamorphosis of things through chemical or physiological al-

¹³⁸) Ibid., 50-52.

¹³⁹) Isabelle Robinet, *Taoist Meditation: The Mao-shan Tradition of Great Purity*, trans. Julian F. Pas and Norman J. Girardot (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1993), 154.

¹⁴⁰) Ibid., 155.

chemy. This explains Su Shi's proposal to follow Scholar Anqi and Ge Hong, both local celebrities, in dream and in fantasy. He laughs at the residents of Peach Blossom Spring, whose discovery was motivated by fear, an undesirable mental activity hampering true spontaneity. Aat Vervoorn writes that "essential to all eremitism is the element of free choice"; a hermit is properly called a hermit "only if his actions follow from a moral decision rather than merely the pressures of circumstance."¹⁴¹ Therefore, even though these farmers lived at Peach Blossom Spring, they were not practicing eremitism since they were not there out of their own free will, nor did they make sacrifices in choosing their life. Yet Su Shi goes beyond extolling the freedom of choice and focuses instead on the spontaneous mental state that follows this exercise of freedom. He implies that one does not need to relinquish one's worldly abode to go into reclusion. To physically seek a separate realm is already a highly deliberate act, which can be motivated by the unease or fear in one's external environment. It is therefore an inferior form of access. Access to an inner utopia, on the other hand, is gained when one sinks into a state of non-intentionality, as in dream or in meditation. One no longer needs to find a Peach Blossom Spring in the real world so long as one can recreate a eudaimonic life through Daoist practice and receive all the mental and physiological bliss that comes along with it.

Compared to earlier visions of Peach Blossom Spring, all depicting an exclusive physical space, Su's is more egalitarian and more meritocratic: virtually anyone can enter, so long as they reach the level of Su's "kindred spirits." And since it exists only in one's inner space, no stray fisherman or passenger can intrude. It is the ultimate "private sphere."

Return

In the topography of mental reality, a true land of bliss is accessible only in absolute spiritual spontaneity. Going to this land is seen as "returning"—a return toward the original state of authenticity and spontaneity. This redefinition of "return" might have a therapeutic effect on Su Shi, since, as an exile, he could not physically return home. Home-sickness was for him an unaffordable disease:

¹⁴¹ Vervoorn, *Men of the Cliffs and Caves*, 4.

癡人常念起	Even a paralyzed person often thinks of rising—
夫我豈忘歸	How could I forget to think of return.
不敢夢故山	But I dare not dream of my homeland's mountains,
恐興墳墓悲	Lest to arouse the grief over my forefathers' graves. ¹⁴²

This poem was written shortly after he arrived in Hainan. He dreamt one night of his house at White Crane Peak in Huizhou, which he was forced to abandon soon after it was built. This, he interpreted, was because a dream of his Sichuan hometown would be too sad to bear. The comparison of himself to a paralyzed person suggests a spell he could not break. A paralyzed patient is imprisoned in his physical handicap. A political exile is imprisoned in the vast landscape.

As noticed by Yoshikawa Kojirō, one of Su Shi's favorite metaphors was "my life is like a sojourn only."¹⁴³ Yet instead of indulging himself in nostalgia and melancholy, Su decided to resign to the fluctuation of life and settle in the present moment, so as to ensure that his true inner life "lie[s] in a continued resistance."¹⁴⁴ Therefore, on one hand, since life is a constant sojourn, "home" is but an illusion; on the other hand, with "return" redefined as return to one's authentic state, he is already "home" wherever. As a result, as early as his time in Yangzhou, he attempted to regard the lack of career success as felicitous for such a return.¹⁴⁵ In his final exile, he further argued that misfortune facilitated his recognition of his "original face."

瓶居本近危	The [broken] vase had always stayed close to peril.
甌墜知不完	A falling pot knows that it will not remain intact.
夢求亡楚弓	In dream I seek the bow lost in Chu;
笑解適越冠	Laughingly I take off the ritual hat after going to Yue.
忽然返自照	All of a sudden, I come to see myself in the mirror,
識我本來顏	And recognize in it my original face.
歸路在腳底	The road of return has always been under my feet;
殺潼失重關	The layered passes of Yao and Tong disappear. ¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² Su Shi, "He Tao 'Huan jiuju'" 和陶還舊居, *SSSJ*, 41.2250-51.

¹⁴³ Yoshikawa Kojirō, *An Introduction to Sung Poetry*, trans. Burton Watson (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard-Yenching Institute, 1967), 111.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 114.

¹⁴⁵ See Su Shi, "He Tao 'Yinjiu' ershishou," no. 9, *SSSJ*, 35.1886.

¹⁴⁶ Su Shi, "He Tao 'Dongfang you yi shi'," *SSSJ*, 41.2266. The Yao and Tong passes (both in modern Shaanxi) are used here as synecdoche for mountains that are difficult to cross.

In the “Jifu” 跡府 chapter of *Gongsun Longzi* 公孫龍子, it is said that the King of Chu once lost his precious bow while hunting. When his attendants volunteered to find it, the king stopped them and said: “When a Chu man has lost it, a Chu man will find it. What is the loss?”¹⁴⁷ This reference suggests that Su’s loss of rank is not a loss at all. Likewise, in a Zhuangzian parable, a merchant of Song brought many embroidered ritual hats to Yue, a hard sale among the half-naked natives.¹⁴⁸ Taking off his official hat in laughter, Su Shi shows his willingness to discard the accoutrements of culture, so that he can finally see his own true form. The “road of return” is not through the imposing mountain passes. Instead, his home is nowhere but in his innermost mind; thus, his feet have always been treading upon this “road of return.” The geographical distance between Hainan and his Sichuan hometown is translated into psychological space, easily covered in a single thought.

In this vision, the body becomes the lodge of mental activities such as dreams, meditation, and spiritual roaming. It should be well maintained to facilitate these activities. Yet anxiety over mortality lurks behind Su Shi’s every thought of return, since death is its ultimate form. The following rhymeprose “He Tao ‘Guiqulai xi ci’” 和陶歸去來兮辭¹⁴⁹ matches Tao Qian’s earlier piece¹⁵⁰ rhyme for rhyme and rewrites Tao’s celebrated moment of home-coming scene by scene. To a certain extent, it becomes an esoteric hymn on Daoist meditative practice.

Zizhan is banished to live in Changhua (Danzhou). He matches Yuanming’s “Return!” and takes the Land of Nothingness as home. Even though he is beyond the seas, he is ever returning.

子瞻謫居昌化，追和淵明《歸去來辭》，蓋以無何有之鄉為家，雖在海外，未嘗不歸云爾。

This preface intimates that the true purpose of this composition is self-persuasion. Su shows resolution to settle in “the Land of Nothingness.” This land appears in a Zhuangzian parable, where a gigantic ailanthus

¹⁴⁷ Wang Guan 王琯, *Gongsun Longzi xuanjie* 公孫龍子懸解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992), 1.34.

¹⁴⁸ See the “Xiaoyaoyou” 逍遙遊 chapter in *Zhuangzi jishi*, 1.31.

¹⁴⁹ *SSSJ*, 47.2560-61.

¹⁵⁰ Tao Qian, “Guiqulai xi ci” 歸去來兮辭, *TYM*, 5.460-77.

tree could be valued exactly for being useless.¹⁵¹ The “Land of Nothingness” accommodates the one who does not belong. When the poet is attached to no place, everywhere can be for him “the Land of Nothingness,” which Su transforms into a pun regarding the material deprivation of Hainan. Yet, as Su argues, if his own settled mind is his true home, he is constantly returning.

Return, return! I am freshly banished to the south, so how can I return? I lie amongst the expansion of the rivers and oceans, lamenting over the dolorous drums and horns announcing the hours. I left traces crouching in the mud, ever more deeply; gone is the time like flashes of lightning beyond my chase! I think of the southwest road to my home; dreaming is truly correct, but waking is not. I realize the inconstancy of this life, just like changing clothes at the shifts of seasons. But I shall not miss the ramie clothing of the summer when wearing wintry fur, since I have rather gained big and have lost small.

歸去來兮，吾方南遷安得歸。卧江海之瀕洞，弔鼓角之悽悲。迹泥蟠而愈深，時電往而莫追。懷西南之歸路，夢良是而覺非。悟此生之何常，猶寒暑之異衣。豈襲裘而念葛，蓋得物而喪微。

The poem evokes Tao’s famous invocation “Return, return!” only to declare it beyond the capacity of an exile. To Tao Qian’s “I realize today I am correct and in the past I was not” (覺今是而昨非),¹⁵² Su responds that for him only dreaming is correct, since he can return home only in dreams, while his waking state is false, as reality forces him to face the inconstancy of life. He persuades himself to stop the vain nostalgia and to settle in the present moment, arguing that his predicament is in fact a bargain.

My return is truly facile, without galloping or rushing. In every simple action I am returning home. I get off my carriage and lock the gate. Though fences and walls have crumbled, the hall and chambers are still intact. I fetch my Ale of Heaven and pour it into a concaved cup. I drink moonlit dew to cleanse my heart and dine upon the morning’s rosy clouds to brighten my cheeks. The “guest” and the “host” become one and the same, so that the “mother-” and “daughter-in-law” can live in peace. I realize there is no thief nor robber, so I dismantle the gate and break the lock. I expand my round mirror to reflect the external world, which contains the myriad phenomena to be observed from the middle. As I dredge the

¹⁵¹) See *Zhuangzi jishi*, 1.39-40.

¹⁵²) See Tao Qian, “Guiqulai xi ci,” *TYM*, 5.460.

deserted well to fetch fresh water in the morning, a hundred springs surge and brim overnight. I guard the extreme tranquility¹⁵³ and let the energy rise by itself. At times it is like a leaping sparrow¹⁵⁴ or a twirling salamander.¹⁵⁵

我歸甚易，匪馳匪奔。俯仰還家，下車闔門。藩垣雖闕，堂室故存。挹吾天醴，注之窪尊。飲月露以洗心，淪朝霞而眩顏。混客主以為一，俾婦姑之相安。知盜竊之何有，乃培門而折關。廓圓鏡以外照，納萬象而中觀。治廢井以晨汲，滄百泉之夜還。守靜極以自作，時爵躍而鯢桓。

Tao Qian describes himself as riding a rushing carriage to return home, showing his ecstasy and urgency. By contrast, Su Shi declares to have no such urge. Using a rhetorical device often found in Daoist literature, he transforms the physical space of a house to the metaphor of one's body. The borrowing is facile, since "return" is also an essential term in Daoist alchemical literature; for instance, "returning to infancy"¹⁵⁶ suggests that human vitality is fully charged upon parturition and constantly discharges with every natural cycle of breath.¹⁵⁷ Cosmic sustenance provides pristine energy that recovers his physical and mental well-being. When he no longer makes distinctions between the external and the internal (the "guest" and the "host"), the conflicting forces within (the "mother- and daughter-in-law") are harmonized. He is then capable of opening himself to the myriad forms, reflecting them inside as they truly are. His body is now a miniature of the cosmos. The mirror sym-

¹⁵³ Reference to *Laozi* 16, "Attaining the vacuity in its extremity,/guarding tranquility firmly" 致虛極守靜篤; see Zhu Qianzhi 朱謙之, *Laozi jiaoshi* 老子校釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984), 64.

¹⁵⁴ *Jueyue* 爵躍 is a variant to *queyue* 雀躍. In the "Zaiyou" 在宥 chapter of *Zhuangzi*, Yun 雲 (literally, the cloud) met Hongmeng 鴻蒙 (literally, the vast nebulousity) in his roaming. The latter was patting his thigh and leaping around like a sparrow, about to roam too. Hongmeng's true wisdom, it turns out, is in hiding his wisdom. See *Zhuangzi jishi*, 11.358.

¹⁵⁵ In the "Ying Diwang" 應地王 chapter of *Zhuangzi*, Huzi 壺子 bewildered a shaman by showing varying appearances manipulating the latter's physiognomy. He could do this because, as he explained, he was like the depths, accommodating "twirling salamander," "flowing water," and "still water," among others. See *Zhuangzi jishi*, 7.302.

¹⁵⁶ As found in *Laozi* 55: "One who keeps the fullness of the life force,/is comparable to a newborn child" (含德之厚比於赤子); see Zhu Qianzhi, *Laozi jiaoshi*, 218; cf. Edmund Ryden, *Daodejing* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008), 115.

¹⁵⁷ For more discussions on the Daoist notion of "return" or "reverse" (*fan* 反), see Joseph Needham and Lu Gwei-Djen, *Science and Civilisation in China* vol. 5, part 5: *Spagyric Discovery and Invention: Physiological Alchemy* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1983), 25, also 130-35, passim; Kristofer Schipper, *The Taoist Body*, trans. Karen C. Duval (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1993), 119; Robinet, *Taoist Meditation*, 140-41.

bolizes the tranquil, spontaneous mind which has omniscient cognitive capacity. The dredging of the deserted well symbolizes the rediscovery of the inexhaustible fountain of energy which flows from within. In Daoist inner alchemy, maintaining a constant circulation of body fluid is crucial,¹⁵⁸ since water is an essence that maintains life and is symbolic of the Way.¹⁵⁹ Water is also a symbol of simultaneous dynamism and tranquility. By guarding his ultimate tranquility, the poet finally transforms himself into a Zhuangzian figure who is an incarnation of primordial nebulosity (symbolized by Hongmeng 鴻蒙 who jumps joyously like a sparrow) or of the deepest depths (symbolized by Huzi 壺子 who hides like a twirling salamander). The body becomes the physical embodiment of spontaneity.

Return, return! Allow me to live through my days in this roaming voyage. My forefathers have left me this shabby hut—why should I abandon it and look elsewhere? Hainan and the central plains are truly equal; I bring myself along in comings and goings without worry. A Man of Odds¹⁶⁰ gives me one wise word: there is no use for the Eight Diagrams or the Nine Laws! When a man is hungry, he needs food. When the river is crossed, discard the boat! Suddenly, the oxherd and the buffalo both disappear.¹⁶¹ What remain are but tall trees and high hills.

¹⁵⁸) See, e.g., Robinet, *Taoist Meditation*, 90.

¹⁵⁹) As suggested in *Laozi* 8, see Zhu Qianzhi, *Laozi jiaoshi*, 31-33.

¹⁶⁰) I.e., a recluse, constantly at odds with the world. Elsewhere, Su Shi had also called himself “a man of odds”; see Su Shi, “He Tao ‘Du Shanhaijing,’” no.13, *SSS*, 39.2136.

¹⁶¹) Referring to a phase in the Oxherding Pictures, a series of paintings with colophons which depicts the process of an oxherd seeking a lost buffalo. These images, metaphoric for a Buddhist practitioner seeking his self-nature, have multiple versions from the tenth to the twelfth century and differ in their number of phases. The earliest known version is by a certain Master Qingju 清居 with five phases (some tradition has it as “eight phases”); other versions are those by Zide 自得 (1097-1183) with six phases and by Puming 普明 (before 1021) and Kuo’an 廓庵 (11-12 cent.), each with ten phases. Su Shi’s friend Foyin 佛印 (1032-1098) also seemed to have made a version of four phases. See Shi Tianhong 釋天宏, “Kuo’an ‘Shiniutu song’ kao: cong muniutu song tanqi” 廓庵《十牛圖頌》考——從牧牛圖頌談起, *Shijie zongjiao xuekan* 17 (2011): 123-54. Given the multiple versions circulating at Su Shi’s time, it is not clear which version he might have born in mind. In both the Kuo’an and the Puming versions, “mutually forgotten” (*xiangwang* 相忘) refers to the eighth phase. But the Kuo’an version represents it with a full circle—symbol of *yuanyang* 圓相—with both the oxherd and the buffalo disappearing from the picture. Given that Su Shi described this phase as “what remain are but tall trees and high hills,” this was not the corresponding picture that he had in mind. Nor does it correspond to the Puming version, in which the eighth phase is depicted as the oxherd and the buffalo standing unattached to each other (while the tenth phase is represented by a circle). An English discussion, transla-

With alertness, the six senses stay in abandonment; from one single root, I reverse the flow.¹⁶² Gazing afar at my old home, I long to rest. Yet how could I have rested already thrice midway?

歸去來兮，請終老於斯游。我先人之敝廬，復舍此而焉求？均海南與漢北，挈往來而無憂。崎人告予以一言，非八卦與九疇。方飢須糧，已濟無舟。忽人牛之皆喪，但喬木與高丘。警六用之無成，自一根之返流。望故家而求息，曷中道之三休。

This paragraph continues his self-persuasion. The “shabby hut” refers to his own body that he cannot abandon. He has learned to discard divination and human norms. And after he has passed the river, even “the boat,” or his “skillful means,” that he relied upon to achieve enlightenment, should be abandoned. This state of truth is illustrated in Buddhist terms as the mutual oblivion of the subject and the object of seeking (the “oxherd” and the “buffalo”). This is the moment when one abandons the six sensory faculties and returns to the common origin of myriad things. Su fears however that he may fail to truly return, since his capacity is weak. Even though he knows that he shall not rest, he nevertheless has stopped to catch his breath, already thrice midway. His home remains fully in view but beyond reach.

Alas, let it be! My life is destined; my return timed. I in my original state neither go nor stay. Let me say: I will go wherever you go. How can I, in following the teachings of Zhuangzi, neglect to follow Anqi's suit! How can I, because crops planted in the drought will ultimately wither, refuse to water or to cultivate the sprouts!¹⁶³ I have taken Yuanming's elegant abandonment as my example and have written hundreds of new poems in matching rhymes. I also write the pure prelude of “Return!”—I must be his reincarnation, no doubt!

已矣乎，吾生有命歸有時，我初無行亦無留。駕言隨子聽所之，豈以師南華而廢從安期。謂湯稼之終枯，遂不溉而不耜。師淵明之雅放，和百篇之新詩。賦歸來之清引，我其後身蓋無疑。

In this last paragraph, Su Shi decides to reconcile with his limited capacity. If Zhuangzi represents the understanding of the ultimate philo-

tion, and reproduction of the Puming pictures can be found in D.T. Suzuki, *Manual of Zen Buddhism* (London: Rider and Company, 1950), 127-44.

¹⁶² For the “six senses” (六用), see n. 130.

¹⁶³ An analogy from Ji Kang 嵇康, “Yangsheng lun” 養生論; see *Ji Kang ji jiaozhu* 嵇康集校注, ed. Dai Mingyang 戴明揚 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1962), 3.143-44.

sophical truth—the equation of life and death, Scholar Anqi represents another esoteric truth—a mortal can succeed in defeating death. As a principle of Daoist alchemy, death is a curable disease. Su Shi declares that he will follow both examples. He understands the ultimate destiny of decay, but nevertheless, as the analogy borrowed from Ji Kang's 嵇康 (223-263) "Treatise on Nourishing Life" ("Yangsheng lun" 養生論) suggests, just like a farmer shall not give up watering his crops even in a time of drought, he should not give up nourishing his own life just because every effort ends in vain. In the end, he claims to be Tao Qian's reincarnation, even though in effect, when announcing their identity, Su has already modified the meaning of Tao's precedence. To "return" in Su Shi's fashion, one must exercise oblivion and let oneself sink into a meditative, spontaneous mental state; one should also practice the Daoist art of longevity and immortality to maintain the "shabby hut" in which one is accidentally housed—ironically, to deter death, the ultimate "return."

Coda

Su Shi's emulation of Tao Qian was of long-lasting significance. In the reception history of Tao Qian's poetry, it was a crucial step leading to the gradual canonization of Tao through the Song Dynasty. Indeed, many of Su Shi's admirers undertook writing similar poems "matching Tao," a practice so widespread that it earned Chao Shuizhi's 晁說之 (1059-1129) mockery: "In just a single day, Tao Yuanmings suddenly swarmed in front of my eyes" (陶淵明紛然一日滿人目前矣).¹⁶⁴ Chao insisted that it was preposterous for lesser talents to write "matching Tao," since Su Shi alone deserved to be Tao's match. As this reverent judgment shows, Su Shi's emulation had not only elevated the status of Tao Qian, but, at least for sympathetic readers, had also made himself the unique equal of Tao Qian. Emulating Tao helped the formation of Su's "mature style" (*laojing* 老境), characteristic for its deliberate limpidity, suppressed tension, and understated aesthetics, all of which make its apparent simplicity belie rich subtlety. By stylistically "returning" to

¹⁶⁴ See Hong Mai, *Rongzhai suibi*, 3.32.

Tao's purported simplicity, Su Shi declared himself to have fulfilled a trajectory of life "returning" to its original spontaneity. His stylistic choice was hence simultaneously a moral choice.

Yet Su's wistful declaration of himself to be Tao's reincarnation (*hou-shen* 後身) was also highly problematic. Taken at face value, it hinges upon multiple dubious assumptions: first, poetry is a mirror of the poet's true self; second, a later reader can fully grasp the precursor's truth through reading, despite the changed circumstances under which he lives; third, by writing in the precursor's style, he creates a similar literary persona, transforming himself into the faithful reproduction of the poetic persona that he emulates and recreates. Needless to say, the total identity of literary persona with the poet's person is a hazardous theoretical model, but it had its logical legitimacy in Su Shi's conceptual world where poetry had primarily the expressionist value of conveying its author's moral truth.

Yet Su Shi's declaration also contains a tension that resists this straightforward reading: it asks to be taken with a grain of salt since his model of stylistic "return" is designed for failure. As Stephen Owen has observed, since the mid-Tang, authenticity and singularity had come to be seen as inseparable.¹⁶⁵ While Su Shi as Tao's reincarnation may "inherit" Tao's style, an exact reproduction would belie the singularity of both poets. And since Tao Qian's poetry was held as the paradigm of authenticity and spontaneity, emulating this paradigm necessarily required the emulator to be truly himself. As no two individuals are completely alike, Su Shi could declare himself to have become another "Tao Qian" only by remaining stylistically different, which, as the aforementioned comments by Yuan Haowen and Ji Yun show, he also did. A thorough imitation would lay bare the artificiality of the whole project.

All these paradoxes point to the element of self-persuasion underlying Su's effort. To be sure, the poetic persona of the "simple" and "natural" Tao Qian was already highly constructed and an idealized version of the historical person.¹⁶⁶ When Su Shi further transformed this rhetorically

¹⁶⁵ Stephen Owen, *The End of the Chinese "Middle Ages": Essays in Mid-Tang Literary Culture* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1996), 20.

¹⁶⁶ On the constructed nature of Tao's image, see Stephen Owen, "The Self's Perfect Mirror: Poetry as Autobiography," in *The Vitality of the Lyric Voice: Shih Poetry from the Late*

constructed image to be even more simplified and symbolic, his ostentatious optimism purged those instances of anxiety or doubt that Tao Qian's poems occasionally betrayed. Tao Qian, in Su's narrow vision, lived a life predestined to become a metaphor, one that reflected Su's longing for an autonomous self, able to choose his path in life and to move beyond immediate or existential anxieties. Summarily put, Su elevated Tao's image to a cult and a myth. By wearing this mask he constructed, he exercised an imagined power over his own fate and sought freedom from persecution, deprivation, and despair. In doing so, his alleged return into nature became paradoxically a retreat from nature, into a cultivated inner utopia of spontaneity.