

From Gozan to Okamura Shigeru: A Study on the Changing Evaluations of Tao Yuanming

Yiting Wang^{1,a,*}

¹Shanghai Jiao Tong University, 800 Dongchuan RD. Minhang District, Shanghai, China
a. 18721734196@139.com

*corresponding author

Abstract: Tao Yuanming(陶淵明), known as the "foremost recluse poet of all time", has had a considerable influence in Japan. During the Gozan period, literati generally regarded Tao as a symbol of reclusive spirit, expressing admiration for his life and ideals through their poetry. However, Kokan Shiren was an exception, offering the first moral critique of Tao, labeling him as an "arrogant official" and suggesting that his resignation from office and retreat into reclusion was an escape from social responsibility. By the 20th century, the Japanese sinologist Okamura Shigeru completely overturned the traditional Japanese view of Tao, presenting him as a figure full of contradictions and driven by the pursuit of fame and fortune, with his reclusion motivated by a desire for personal gain. A comparison of these two perspectives reveals that the Gozan period's acceptance of Tao Yuanming was influenced by Zen Buddhism, whereas Okamura Shigeru's research reflects the critical analysis of Chinese literature emerging during Japan's modernization process. The differences between the two demonstrate the evolution of cultural and academic positions, as well as research methodologies, across different historical contexts.

Keywords: Tao Yuanming, Okamura Shigeru, Gozan Zen monks, Japanese Sinology.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

Tao Yuanming, the first pastoral poet in Chinese literary history, is revered as the "foremost recluse poet of all time". His spirit is deeply rooted in Chinese cultural heritage and has spread overseas, especially in Japan, where he holds a prestigious reputation within the shared Sino-Japanese cultural sphere. Since the Nara period, Japanese literati have continued to express admiration for Tao, often offering unique interpretations that differ from the mainstream Chinese perspective. Figures such as Chūgen Engetsu and Matsuo Bashō have appreciated and understood the deeper meaning of Tao's works, while scholars like Kokan Shiren and Okamura Shigeru have questioned the conventional views held in China.

In today's world, where international cultural exchanges are becoming increasingly frequent, the transmission and reception of Chinese literature abroad are gaining more attention. Given Tao Yuanming's distinctive position in literary history, research into his influence has deepened. In Japan, the establishment of the Six Dynasties Studies Association and the Tao Yuanming Research Society highlights the high regard that Japanese academia holds for Tao Yuanming. This paper focuses on

the differences between the Gozan Zen monks and Okamura Shigeru in their reception of Tao Yuanming and explores the reasons behind these differences. By analyzing the unique characteristics of Tao Yuanming's reception in Japan, this study aims to provide new perspectives for future research.

1.2. Current Research Status

1.2.1. Domestic Research Status

Zhang Zhong[1] and Cai Danjun[2] both reveal the widespread dissemination, profound influence, and enduring popularity of Collected Works of Tao Yuanming after its introduction to Japan. Zhang's work focuses on the number of Japanese scholars studying Tao, while Cai's research examines the reprinting, selection, and annotation of Tao's works, emphasizing their significant impact in Japan. Zhong Youmin[3] compares Tao's influence on Eastern literature with Western literature, pointing out that countries like Japan received Tao's works earlier, and the impact on their literary creation and daily life was deeper and lasted longer, forming a cultural tradition.

Wei Zhengshen[4] and Liu Jing[5] have each written reviews summarizing 20th-century research on Tao Yuanming. Wei traces a century of Japanese scholarship on Tao, dividing it into three phases: the transitional period in the first half of the century, the expansion phase during the 1950s-70s, and the flourishing phase of the last two decades. Wei emphasizes the scientific and systematic methods used by Japanese scholars. Liu, by contrast, focuses on how different Japanese scholars interpret Tao's inner world, revealing his contradictions, sense of loneliness, and fascination with an illusory world. Liu also critiques the tendency of Japanese scholars to interpret Tao's poetry through the lens of their own culture.

Kodama Mieko[6] and Luo Chunlan & Mu Song[7] both focus on the reception of Tao Yuanming's literature in Japan. Kodama's study emphasizes "reception," "influence," "evaluation," and "understanding," highlighting the integration of Tao's literature with Japanese culture, particularly the evolving connotations of the "Tao Yuanming chrysanthemum" image in Japan, showcasing the mutual influence and fusion of cultures. Luo and Mu expand on this by suggesting that while Japan's poetic theory has inherited China's admiration of Tao's poetry, it has also offered criticism, such as Kokan Shiren's "arrogant official" theory, reflecting Japan's independence and autonomy in interpreting Chinese culture.

Due to differences in personal experiences and perspectives, scholars can have varying interpretations of Tao Yuanming. This has drawn the attention of scholars in mainland China, who have analyzed the reception of Tao Yuanming by different Japanese literati across various historical periods. Their detailed analyses reveal the selectivity, lag, and subjectivity in how Tao Yuanming was received, as well as Japan's autonomy and creativity in adopting foreign cultures.

Wang Peng[8] examines the Chinese poetry of representative Zen monks during the Gozan period. He found that while most of them appreciated the Zen insights and philosophical wisdom in Tao's poetry and praised his reclusive lifestyle, their reception was marked by noticeable selectivity, lag, and subjectivity. They were more inclined to accept the aspects of Tao's image and philosophy that aligned with Buddhist ideals, meaning their understanding and imitation of Tao Yuanming were mostly superficial and lacked deep comprehension and internalization. Qi Xiaoming[9] focuses on Kokan Shiren's Jibei Shihua, pointing out that Kokan's critical views emerged partly because he was not influenced by the Song dynasty's literary trend of advocating for "plainness" in poetry. Additionally, Japan's hierarchical societal structure influenced Kokan's belief that Tao Yuanming's withdrawal from public office was a shirking of the responsibilities expected of a member of a stratified society.

In modern times, Okamura Shigeru has become a prominent and controversial Japanese scholar due to his radically different interpretation of Tao Yuanming. Lu Xiaoguang [10] summarizes

Okamura's view that Tao was a person deeply obsessed with fame and fortune, carefully calculating his personal gains and losses. Lu believes this reflects Japanese society's emphasis on collective values and the dichotomy between public and private appearances, leading Okamura to dig beneath Tao's "transcendent" exterior to expose his "secular" motivations. In contrast, Sun Jianhui[11] attributes Okamura's unique perspective to his personal biases, arguing that his research suffers from three main issues: a preconceived evaluative framework, an overemphasis on subjective interpretation, and excessive focus on details at the expense of the broader picture.

1.2.2. Current Research Status Abroad

Japanese scholars have also made significant achievements in the field of Tao Yuanming research. In Ōyane Bunjiro's *Research on Tao Yuanming*, the chapter "Japanese Literature and Tao Yuanming" analyzes from the perspectives of macro spatiotemporal periods and the relationship between Chinese and purely Japanese literature. In the concluding section, Ōyane notes that the admiration for Tao Yuanming's serene and noble personality, as well as the profound love for his poetry and prose, has been continuous among poets, literati, and painters throughout various periods in Japan. They have absorbed his work into the very fabric of their own creations. Although the book takes a broad perspective and covers a wide range of topics, its analysis of specific works is somewhat brief.

1.3. Review

A review of domestic and international research on Tao Yuanming and Japanese literature shows that a relatively complete system of study has been established. The research can be broadly divided into two categories: general studies and specialized studies. General studies explore the macro trajectory of the reception history of Tao Yuanming in Japan, while specialized studies delve into specific periods, particular literati, or specific themes. These two types of research complement each other. However, there are still certain limitations in the current research, such as the relatively narrow focus of research subjects and insufficient comprehensive analysis. Future research could expand the scope and deepen the analysis to contribute more new insights to the study of Tao Yuanming's reception history.

2. The Reception of Tao Yuanming During the Gozan Period

During the Gozan period, the literati, primarily Zen monks, held great admiration and respect for Tao Yuanming. Their reception of his works mainly focused on *Return to the Fields*, *Peach Blossom Spring*, and *Drinking Wine (Poem V)*, though there was also some attention to *Reading the Classic of Mountains and Seas* and *Letters to My Sons*. The primary form of their reception was through creative responses, especially poetic exchanges. Their appreciation centered on Tao Yuanming's pursuit of the "Way," his reclusive spirit, and the beauty of nature, all of which resonated strongly with their Zen Buddhist beliefs, jointly constructing an ideal world that transcended the mundane.

Although their evaluations of Tao Yuanming were largely praiseworthy, there were still subtle differences in interpretation. For example, in the early phase, Chūgan Engetsu revered Tao Yuanming as a "seeker of the Way" and, in his *Collected Works of the Eastern Sea Bubble*, refuted Du Fu's assertion that "Yuanming was a recluse but did not fully comprehend the Way" [12] Chūgan argued: "Yuanming is indeed a seeker of the Way; how could his true meaning merely lie in poetry?" [13] Chūgan believed that Tao Yuanming's withdrawal from society was precisely the manifestation of his understanding of the "true meaning." He regarded Tao as having become a "seeker of the Way," a term used in Zen Buddhism to refer to someone who has reached the highest spiritual level. This illustrates Chūgan Engetsu's deep admiration and reverence for Tao Yuanming's transcendent spirit. In contrast, Keijū Shūrin, from the later phase, also admired Tao Yuanming but focused solely on the

concept of *shuin* ("reclusive writing"). This reflects the common attitude among literati at the time, expressed as "though we cannot attain it, our hearts long for it"[14]. While they admired Tao Yuanming's reclusive lifestyle and praised his transcendent integrity, they lacked the courage to emulate or follow him and remained bound by worldly constraints, unable to achieve true detachment from the secular world.

Both types of poets placed their reclusive aspirations on Tao Yuanming, directly using him as a symbol of reclusion in their writings. They concentrated on his withdrawal from public life, gradually idealizing his image as a recluse. In the literature from this period, names and places associated with Tao Yuanming, such as "Mister Five Willows," "Pengze," and "Jingjie," frequently appeared. For instance, in Chūgan Engetsu's *Collected Works of the Eastern Sea Bubble*, he writes: "Mister Five Willows wanted to plant millet but didn't plant rice." In *One Leaf of the Wild Clouds*, he writes, "My thoughts on Yuanming are boundless, inspired by the poetry from the southern mountain." All of these references symbolize reclusion, expressing admiration for Tao Yuanming's free and leisurely lifestyle by stating "loves Tao Pengze the most" and "thoughts on Yuanming."

In their poetic exchanges, they often borrowed imagery, phrases, and historical allusions from Tao Yuanming's works. A prime example is *Drinking Wine* (Poem V), in which the line "Within this, there is a true meaning, but when I try to explain it, I forget the words" vividly portrays Tao Yuanming's realization of self and harmony with nature, as well as his transcendent and ineffable qualities, which were greatly appreciated by Zen monks. The most frequently borrowed line is, "Plucking chrysanthemums by the eastern hedge, I see the southern mountain with ease." Chūgan Engetsu incorporated this line into *Chongyang*, writing, "Climbing high has become a tradition, gazing far draws out deep emotions. Casually I pluck yellow chrysanthemums, and see the red city with ease"[13]. Hesei Reigen also incorporated it in *Plucking Chrysanthemums by the Eastern Hedge*[15]. In addition, Weizhong Tongshu's *Inscription on Zhao Ziang's Painting of Xijialou* reads: "The mountain tower has early autumn sentiments, sunset is the best time; who borrowed Wuxing's brush to write Pengze's poems?"[16]. This echoes the line, "The mountain air is good at dusk, the birds return together." All of these adaptations express the poets' yearning for a pastoral lifestyle.

For "Return to the Fields," there were both direct quotations, such as Chūgan Engetsu's "Alas, the fields are overgrown, why not return?" as well as reflections after reading the work. For example, Wisho Tokuyan wrote *Reading Tao Yuanming's "Return to the Fields"*: "the children and grandchildren are left without strategy, returning to the eastern hedge to embrace the chrysanthemums"[17]. These reflective poems express admiration and envy for Tao Yuanming's decision to withdraw from public life. The imitation of *Peach Blossom Spring* showed even more innovation. For example, Daishū Shōnen wrote, "Peach blossoms along both banks reflect each other's red, fallen petals float with the water overnight." These lines not only carry forward the original imagery of *Peach Blossom Spring* but also elaborate and imagine the scenes and stories within it.

Additionally, Tao Yuanming's *Letter to Ziyang* et al. gained popularity for its depiction of the joy and leisure Tao found lying beneath his northern window in the summer breeze. The line "Often in May or June, I lie beneath the northern window, enjoying a cool breeze, imagining myself as one from the time of Emperor Xi" became especially beloved among the Gozan literati. Yukison Tomomei in his *Min'e Collection* wrote: "Though I am not Tao Jingjie, I still love the pleasure of the northern window. The carefree breeze of Emperor Xi gently stirs up fresh verses"[18]. These lines reflect the poets' longing for the peaceful and leisurely life that Tao Yuanming enjoyed during his reclusion.

Many poets, in addition to studying Tao Yuanming's content, also sought to deeply understand the emotions in his poetry. They began to imitate Tao's poetic style and mood, striving to express their love for nature and pastoral life through a simple, unadorned, and fresh style. For example, Chūgan

Engetsu's Responding to Tōhaku: "From now on, I go nowhere else; I hoe my fields and garden. Spring is more than half gone, and the dishes I serve come from the vegetables I once planted." [13] Similarly, Yukison Tomomei also imitated this mood in Cloud Reclusion [18] These poets learned from Tao Yuanming's plain style of describing rural life, such as hoeing the fields, planting vegetables, and appreciating natural scenery, using simple language to express their longing for a reclusive life.

Kokan Shiren's attitude toward Tao Yuanming during the early Gozan period was more complex. In his poem Occasional Verse on the Ninth Day, he wrote: "Yuanming plucks chrysanthemums and gazes at the southern mountain; since then, all the ridges blur from sight. How could one know the banquet at Cui's house in Lantian, as the two peaks stand tall and tranquil?" [19] He contrasts the reclusive lifestyle with the grand feasts of the noble Cui family of Lantian, portraying inner peace amid the complexities of the secular world. This shows his appreciation for the spirit of reclusion. However, despite participating in poetic exchanges in admiration of Tao Yuanming, Kokan Shiren expressed subtle dissatisfaction with Tao Yuanming in the sixth entry of his Jibei Shihua (Poetic Remarks of Jibei), a special section devoted to Tao. In it, Kokan criticized Tao bluntly as an arrogant official, [20] reflecting his failure to fulfill the duties expected of an official. By choosing to "return to nature" during times of national crisis, Kokan argued, Tao was demonstrating disloyalty to the Jin dynasty, a behavior unbefitting a great sage. Kokan also critiqued Tao's literary style, commenting: "In terms of poetic style, Tao's strength lies only in simplicity and plainness. Is this truly perfect poetry?" [21] This marked the first instance of a Japanese literatus evaluating Tao Yuanming from a moral standpoint beyond his literary works, thereby diversifying Japanese perspectives on Tao Yuanming's character and legacy.

This critique is closely related to Kokan Shiren's unique life experiences. Kokan Shiren was a disciple of Issan Ichinei, who came from China, and he was deeply influenced by Han culture and believed that the core of poetry and prose lay not in simplicity or extraordinary craftsmanship but in being "aligned with reason" (适理). While many ambitious individuals of the time found their aspirations frustrated, Kokan's strong political ambitions were realized thanks to the favor he received from the emperor. This led Kokan to feel profound gratitude toward the emperor, shaping his belief that reclusion was a form of escapism, and that governance was the true embodiment of being "aligned with reason." As a result, Kokan argued that Tao was an arrogant official.

In conclusion, the attitudes of the Gozan period literati toward Tao Yuanming were diverse and complex. They regarded Tao as a spiritual guide and close companion, praising and imitating him in their writings. At the same time, they idealized Tao's reclusive lifestyle and image as a loyal minister, integrating these ideals into their own literary and artistic creations.

3. Okamura Shigeru's Reception of Tao Yuanming

In *A New Perspective on Tao Yuanming*, Okamura Shigeru analyzes Tao's personality across six dimensions and offers a subversive interpretation of Tao Yuanming, portraying him as a contradictory, self-centered figure with strong utilitarian tendencies. Okamura even uses phrases like "shameless" and "without shame" multiple times, painting a stark contrast to the traditional image of Tao as a noble recluse.

Regarding the secular and the transcendent, Okamura delves into seven areas of Tao Yuanming's poetry that reflect internal contradictions rooted in his personality and spiritual essence. Okamura concludes that these contradictions reveal Tao Yuanming to be a hypocritical man clinging to life. To illustrate his point, Okamura contrasts Tao's satisfaction and joy in *Returning to the Fields* (Poem I) with the anxiety expressed in *Drinking Wine* (Poem IV), suggesting that Tao's emotions after returning home were overly contradictory. However, it is evident from Okamura's argument that he made an assumption that the poem reflected Tao's feelings after his return to his hometown. Most

scholars, however, believe that Drinking Wine (Poem IV) expresses Tao's longing for the previous dynasty and his loyalty, and Okamura fails to provide evidence to support the timeline he proposes. This kind of subjective evaluation also appears in the second section. Okamura Shigeru first cites examples from Returning to the Fields (Poem I): "Clearing land on the southern edge of the field, returning to the countryside to keep to clumsy ways." Okamura argues that the term "clumsy" (拙) signifies Tao Yuanming's upright and uncompromising attitude towards life. However, Okamura further claims that Tao's frequent mention of "clumsy" reveals a sense of pride in this characteristic, lacking any objective causal reasoning. In reality, "clumsy" as Tao Yuanming's life philosophy was used to constantly remind and encourage himself, reflecting a sense of humility rather than a boastful pride in his simplicity. Furthermore, Okamura interprets the line "Knocking on doors with clumsy words" from Begging for Food as self-mockery by Tao Yuanming", which clearly refers to Tao's hesitation and careful choice of words when begging from neighbors. Thus, it is evident that Okamura's argument relies heavily on subjective speculation.

In the next two sections, the author traces Tao Yuanming's career, which Okamura Shigeru sees as the main reason for portraying Tao as self-serving. In Okamura's view, Tao's official career started as a Wine Officer in Jiangzhou, then moved to serving as a staff member under Liu Lao-zhi, later working for Xuan Heng (who was Liu's rival), and finally returning to serve under Liu Jingxuan. This back-and-forth between two major political factions led Okamura to conclude that Tao's official appointments were driven by his personal ambition (猛志), and that his repeated changes in employment were a continuous effort to seek the best path to achieve his ambitions, rather than demonstrating any loyalty to his superiors. Okamura further argues that Tao's eventual retirement to a reclusive life was driven by his inability to harmonize with society, his longing for the freedom of rural life and the fields he owned, as well as his desire to avoid political dangers. However, this interpretation starkly contrasts with the views of the renowned Chinese scholar Gong Bin, who has a different understanding of the second and third phases of Tao's career. Gong points out that Tao joined Xuan Heng's staff because Xuan's father had once supported Tao's maternal grandfather, Meng Jia, and at that time, Xuan Heng had not yet shown any rebellious inclinations. When Tao later realized Xuan's treacherous ambitions, he left Xuan's faction and moved to Liu Yu's camp. Seen from this perspective, Tao is no longer a self-serving individual but rather a person who was grateful, patriotic, and clear-sighted. The order of Tao Yuanming's official appointments has long been a topic of debate among scholars. The most widely accepted views are those of Tao Peng and Zhu Ziqing. Gong Bin adopted Zhu Ziqing's version, whereas Okamura merged the two interpretations and used it as a conclusion without providing substantial argumentation, making his analysis highly subjective.

In regard to Tao Yuanming's reclusive life, Okamura Shigeru argues that Tao's reclusion was driven by a desire to enhance his reputation as a hermit. Okamura bases his argument on Tao's poem Relocating (Poem I), particularly the line: "In the past, I desired to live in the southern village, not to choose a house, but because I heard that there were many sincere people there, with whom I could enjoy morning and evening together." Okamura interprets the phrase "sincere people" as learned individuals with whom Tao could discuss ancient matters and appreciate poetry. From this, he deduces that Tao moved to the southern village to ingratiate himself with officials and gain fame. However, there is no clear causal link between these two assumptions: First, Tao Yuanming longed for a pastoral life, seeking nature rather than complete isolation from society. The southern village was home to many hermits, and it is perfectly natural for Tao to seek like-minded individuals with whom he could share his experiences. Okamura's interpretation seems deliberately twisted to support his argument. Second, by the time Tao moved to the southern village, he was already a well-known recluse and had no need to seek fame or curry favor.

In the discussion of "truth" and the "integrity of enduring poverty", Okamura Shigeru argues that the "truth" Tao Yuanming pursued—defined as "a state of complete preservation of the pure and

simple natural essence of the ancient era"—could only be attained by withdrawing from the realities of society. According to Okamura, Tao's impractical pursuit of this "truth" also contributed to his stubborn individualism. Additionally, Okamura cites *Written in Mid-December of the Year of Gui Mao, Addressed to My Cousin Jingyuan and Drinking Wine (Poem XVI)* to suggest that Tao's claim to uphold the "integrity of enduring poverty" was merely a negative reflection of his failure to achieve greater heights and was even self-mockery. Okamura argues that shortly after writing these pieces, Tao accepted an appointment as a military aide under Liu Jingxuan, indicating that the "integrity of enduring poverty" was merely an excuse or consolation for Tao during times of frustration. However, the true meaning of "integrity of enduring poverty" is not, as Okamura interprets, about stubbornly clinging to poverty, but rather about maintaining one's moral character and integrity despite living in poverty. Tao Yuanming's decision to serve as Liu Jingxuan's military aide was not an act of ingratiating himself with corrupt individuals, so the notion that he violated his own "integrity of enduring poverty" is unfounded. Finally, in the section on Man and Literature, Okamura argues that Tao Yuanming's image as a noble recluse was a fabricated ideal over time, suggesting that we should separate the man from his poetry to more objectively assess Tao Yuanming's literary achievements.

In conclusion, his study of Tao Yuanming is characterized by its innovative perspective and profound psychological analysis of Tao's character. He tends to interpret Tao from a modern standpoint, incorporating modern values that emphasize societal integration into his literary analysis, allowing for a nuanced dissection of Tao's individual psychology. However, it also contains some unreasonable aspects. Some of his views may be overly absolute, failing to fully and objectively consider the complexity and contradictions of human nature, as well as the dynamic changes individuals face when making life choices. Okamura overlooks the fact that contradictions are a constant in life, and a person's value should be determined by their final choices rather than the contradictions themselves. Additionally, there may be a degree of bias in Okamura's selection of evidence. At times, he may misinterpret Tao Yuanming's original meaning or encounter issues with the versions of historical materials he references.

4. Comparison of Tao Yuanming's Reception by the Gozan Zen Monks and Okamura Shigeru

During the Gozan period, the literati, primarily Zen monks, focused on classic works such as *Return to the Fields*, *Peach Blossom Spring*, and *Drinking Wine (Poem V)* in their reception of Tao Yuanming. Their writings largely reflected admiration for Tao's "seeking of the Way," his reclusive spirit, and his appreciation of nature, expressing a longing for a pastoral, reclusive lifestyle. In contrast, Okamura Shigeru, in his *A New Perspective on Tao Yuanming and Li Bai*, took a scholarly approach by analyzing works from various periods of Tao's life, offering a subversive interpretation of the traditional image of Tao Yuanming. Okamura viewed Tao as a contradictory, self-centered figure with strong utilitarian motives. He argued that Tao's decision to retire to a life of seclusion was, in fact, driven by a desire for fame and reputation, a way to achieve his ambitious "bold aspirations".

The reasons for these two starkly different perspectives can first be traced to the distinct ways in which Chinese culture was received in these two eras. During the Gozan period, the spread of Chinese culture was primarily mediated by Chinese Zen monks who traveled to Japan, such as Issan Ichinei, as well as Japanese monks who returned after studying in China, like Setsuon Yūbai and Chūgan Engetsu. These figures brought Chinese poetry, poetics, and other cultural thoughts back to Japan, but the overall volume of Chinese cultural studies remained limited, as the reception of Chinese culture was still in its early stages. The Gozan literati primarily focused their reception on figures like Su Shi and Huang Tingjian, and their study of Tao Yuanming was not fully developed. As a result, their views largely reflected an inheritance and imitation of Chinese literati's opinions. Both Huang Tingjian and Su Shi, who were greatly admired by the Gozan literati, were ardent devotees of Tao

Yuanming. Huang Tingjian praised Tao as a "worldly hero." Su Shi amplified Tao Yuanming's spirit of noble reclusion, praising his poetry as "plain but elegant, emaciated yet rich." Su Shi even wrote over a hundred poems in response to Tao's works in his later years, elevating Tao Yuanming's stature significantly. Consequently, the Gozan Zen monks overall adopted an attitude of praise and admiration toward Tao Yuanming.

Of course, the Zen monks' inheritance of Chinese literati's perspectives also exhibited diversity. Take Kokan Shiren and Chūgan Engetsu as examples—each held different attitudes toward Tao Yuanming. In *Jibei Shihua*, Kokan Shiren commented that Tao Yuanming could be called a "pure and unpretentious man, but not a great sage"[20], a sentiment that closely mirrors the line by Tang poet Du Fu: "Tao Yuanming, the recluse who avoided the world, may not have truly attained the Way." Both held subtle criticisms of Tao's reclusion from society. Additionally, Kokan remarked that Tao's poetry "is only good at being simple and plain," which echoes Du Fu's lament in *Qianxing* (Five Poems) that Tao's works were "rather regretfully dry and withered." In *Jibei Shihua*, Kokan even mentioned that "Li Bai and Du Fu are supreme talents"[22], reflecting his admiration for Du Fu. Thus, Kokan's attitude toward Tao Yuanming can be seen as an extension and development of Du Fu's critique. Du Fu's comment, "Tao Yuanming, the recluse who avoided the world, may not have truly attained the Way," also sparked considerable discussion within the Chinese literary world. Guo Xiang argued, "Tao Qian truly attained the Way, why call him a recluse who avoided the world? Living simply with a meager existence, with a tattered robe and an empty gourd..." directly rebutting Du Fu's view and asserting that Tao Yuanming did indeed attain the Way. Chūgan Engetsu also inherited this perspective, engaging in this cross-temporal literary debate by proposing that "Tao Yuanming is a true sage, and his essence cannot be confined to his poetry... Criticizing his poems insults Tao Yuanming, yet Tao would not even furrow his brows at such remarks." This shows that the Sinological research of the Gozan period was characterized by imitation and inheritance of Chinese literati's opinions, and due to their focus on poets like Su Shi and Huang Tingjian, their attitudes toward Tao Yuanming were predominantly admiring.

In contrast, Okamura Shigeru's *A New Perspective on Tao Yuanming and Li Bai* was written during the expansion period of Japanese Sinology. During this time, scholars gradually abandoned the "Kokukan" mindset, which viewed Chinese classics as equivalent to Japan's native culture, and instead began to approach Chinese classical literature as foreign literature, interpreting it from a modern perspective[4]. In other words, researchers of this period had begun to demystify Chinese scholars' conclusions and gradually analyzed Chinese literature from an international perspective. As a result, Okamura naturally approached Tao Yuanming's works from the viewpoint of Japanese culture.

First, Japanese culture emphasizes the distinction between "omote" (表, outer appearance) and "ura" (里, inner reality), meaning that one's external behavior should fundamentally align with societal norms, often at the expense of expressing one's true inner feelings. When these two conflict, the inner feelings should be concealed. As a result, Okamura Shigeru placed significant focus on distinguishing between Tao Yuanming's outward behavior in social interactions and his inner reality. Okamura chose to interpret Tao's choices and friendships from a utilitarian and fame-seeking perspective. Kenjiro Doi, in *The Psychological Structure of the Japanese People*, also pointed out that the dependence psychology of the Japanese leads them to prioritize group interests above all else, sometimes developing a sense of "guilt"—a deep sense of guilt that arises from betraying one's group. Hence, Tao's refusal to "bow for five pecks of rice" was seen by Okamura as an act of disrupting group order and failing to cooperate with other members. And Tao's political career represented repeated betrayals of his original group, which in turn cast Tao as an extremely self-serving figure.

Scholars from these two periods approached their analyses from different angles and referenced different materials as evidence, leading to varying interpretations of Tao Yuanming. So, why did the

Gozan Zen monks and Okamura Shigeru analyze Tao from these respective perspectives? This is related to the concept of "horizons of expectations" (Erwartungshorizont) that guided their analyses. Chinese scholar Tong Qingbing further interpreted this idea, stating that "prior to and during the process of literary reading, as a receptive subject, based on complex personal and social reasons, there exists a pre-established mental schema, which serves as the psychological framework guiding the reading process. This psychological schema is called the horizon of expectations formed by reading experience." In other words, before interpreting Tao Yuanming, both the Gozan Zen monks and Okamura Shigeru already had anticipated conclusions and conducted their analyses accordingly.

During the Gozan period, constant political upheavals, wars, and natural disasters led to a chaotic and unstable society. This, in turn, fostered a wave of world-weariness, with "disdain for the impure land and desire for the Pure Land" becoming a common aspiration of the time, planting the seeds of reclusion in people's hearts. Along with the introduction of Song dynasty culture, Zen Buddhism—with its simple and direct practices—aligned with the needs of the warrior class, gradually becoming the spiritual guide for the shogunate and gaining wide acceptance among the Japanese people. Zen monks, in turn, became the dominant figures in the literary field. Additionally, the bureaucratization of temple systems forced Zen monks to become entangled in secular affairs, making it difficult for them to truly transcend the world and attain the Way. In this context, the life of freedom and harmony with nature that Tao Yuanming symbolized became a source of spiritual solace for the Zen monks. As a result, they selectively interpreted Tao's works from a Zen Buddhist standpoint, using their own value systems and aesthetic preferences to construct an idealized image of Tao as a recluse in their minds.

First, Zen Buddhism advocates self-power (自力) and is relatively indifferent to the concept of protecting the nation, while emphasizing intense personal introspection[21], and focusing more on the cultivation of one's spiritual world. As a result, the Gozan Zen monks praised Tao Yuanming for his genuine expression of personal thoughts and admired the courage shown in *Returning to Live in the Countryside* (Guìqùláixīcí) when Tao resigned from office and returned to reclusion. Additionally, Zen Buddhism's advocacy for "the Way in daily life" and "not relying on words" aligns with Tao's plain writing style, his life philosophy of "wanting to explain but already forgetting words" (欲辨已忘言), and his unadorned and natural aesthetic, which mirrors the calm and tranquil mindset brought by Zen. Thus, Chūgan Engetsu emulated this in his poem *Answering to Tōhaku* (Hédá Dōngbái). However, as Mr. Zhu Guangqian noted, "Tao Yuanming was a person of extraordinary heights but was not a rigid systematist or a religious adherent..."[22] Tao's poetry often contains views that are entirely contrary to Zen teachings. The most typical example is in *Elegy* (Nǐ Wǎngēcí) (Part 1): "When the soul and breath disperse, what is there to know? A dried body lies abandoned in a hollow tree," which points to the belief that once a person dies, there is no soul, directly opposing the Zen concept of "the body may perish, but the spirit does not." Faced with poems expressing such sentiments, the Gozan Zen monks would avoid emulation or adaptation. Thus, when the Gozan Zen monks accepted Tao Yuanming, they did so with the precondition of constructing an idealized image of the recluse. This resulted in their selective adaptation and emulation of Tao's poetry.

Upon reviewing Okamura Shigeru's interpretations of other Chinese literati, it becomes evident that he approached Chinese literature with a preconception—that traditional views were inherently biased. In his *Historical Study of Zhou and Han Literature*, Okamura stated: "The Book of Songs belongs to the literature of the aristocratic court," suggesting that the text was a manual used by the state of Lu to train bureaucrats for political education. In *Thought and Literature of the Han, Wei, and Six Dynasties*, Okamura characterized the spiritual world of the aristocratic literati from the Six Dynasties as cowardly and vain and even interpreted Laozi and Zhuangzi's notion of "transcendence" as a cover for laziness and pretentiousness, deeming hard work and dutiful service as "vulgar" and idle indulgence as "elegant." This interpretation carried a deeply critical tone. When it came to

interpreting Tao Yuanming, Okamura exhibited the same horizon of expectations. In the introduction to *A New Perspective on Tao Yuanming*, Okamura remarked that "since ancient times, whether in China or Japan, Tao Yuanming has been held in high esteem." Then, in the second chapter, he stated, "we must not approach this with preconceived biases of favor but must trace the facts with calm and analytical attitudes." It is clear that Okamura's purpose in writing *A New Perspective on Tao Yuanming* was to critically analyze Tao's works and experiences in order to overturn this widely accepted high evaluation.

This preconceived perspective can be attributed, on one hand, to Japan's modernization process, during which Confucianism was highly emphasized. As a result, Okamura Shigeru attempted to analyze Tao Yuanming's behavior from a worldly perspective, proposing that a deep-rooted desire for fame and recognition is pervasive among Chinese literati. However, Confucianism also advocates the principle of "cultivating personal virtue when in humble circumstances, and benefiting others when in a position of power." Okamura, however, disregarded this perspective and interpreted the concept of "personal cultivation" (独善其身) as mere selfishness.

On the other hand, Okamura Shigeru's academic identity is closely tied to his analytical approach. As a successor of the Kyoto School, his research methodology was heavily influenced by the school's principles. The Kyoto School, initially founded to provide a theoretical foundation for Japan's imperialist wars, is characterized by its focus on inductive reasoning over deductive approaches and a preference for addressing specific issues rather than forming a comprehensive, overarching understanding[23]. This approach is evident in *A New Perspective on Tao Yuanming*. In his research, Okamura placed significant emphasis on meticulously gathering data and scrutinizing literary texts. Although he could deduce Tao Yuanming's utilitarian tendencies from the surface-level examination of these texts, he failed to fully explore the richness and complexity of Tao's personal philosophy. Furthermore, the Kyoto School's tendency toward skepticism can explain why, in the preface to *A New Perspective on Tao Yuanming*, Okamura called for challenging traditional views and sought to uncover Tao Yuanming's hidden secular motivations.

Lastly, when Japan introduces foreign culture, it often does so with a sense of national utilitarianism, selectively absorbing only what is beneficial or suitable for Japan's own circumstances. After Japan's defeat in World War II, there was a renewed emphasis on the study of Chinese literature, with Japanese scholars using more progressive perspectives to reassess Chinese history[24], drawing lessons from their own failures. As a representative scholar of this period, Okamura Shigeru consciously sought to extract elements from Chinese classical literature that Japan could learn from. In his research, he subjectively portrayed Chinese literati as historically driven by utilitarianism, explaining Japan's defeat and offering potential lessons for the future.

5. Conclusion

During the Gozan period, Tao Yuanming was widely admired among Japanese literati, who often composed poems in response to his works, expressing their yearning for the reclusive spirit and natural beauty that Tao's poetry evoked. However, a critical voice emerged from Kokan Shiren, who evaluated Tao Yuanming from a moral perspective. Kokan argued that Tao's resignation from office and retreat into reclusion was an act of "arrogance," a means of shirking social responsibility. He also critiqued Tao's poetic style, claiming that it "excelled only in simplicity" and could not be considered the work of a fully talented poet, marking a rare dissenting view during the Gozan period. In the 20th century, Japanese scholar Okamura Shigeru launched a more radical challenge to the traditional image of Tao Yuanming. In *A New Perspective on Tao Yuanming*, through a detailed analysis of Tao's life and works, Okamura put forth a view vastly different from the traditional one. He argued that Tao Yuanming was not a purely transcendent recluse seeking spiritual freedom, but rather a figure full of contradictions, self-centeredness, and strong utilitarian motives. Okamura uncovered

hints of Tao's "fierce ambition" in both his career and his poetry, suggesting that Tao's reclusive lifestyle and official career demonstrated a desire for fame and fortune, completely overturning the idealized image of Tao Yuanming as a recluse that had been constructed during the Gozan period.

The formation of these two contrasting viewpoints can be analyzed through the different habits of Chinese literature research and the respective "horizon of expectations" of the scholars involved. During the Gozan period, Japan's reception of Chinese literature was still in a phase of imitating and inheriting Chinese viewpoints. Due to the high regard for literati such as Su Shi and Huang Tingjian and their own yearning for a reclusive lifestyle, the Gozan monks selectively echoed and accepted Tao Yuanming's poems that aligned with Zen Buddhism, praising his simple poetic style and lofty reclusive spirit, thereby constructing their ideal image of a recluse. By the 20th century, with the advancement of Japan's modernization, scholars began analyzing Chinese classical culture from a more open and critical perspective. This led Okamura Shigeru to incorporate Japanese values into his analysis of Chinese literature. Moreover, due to the Kyoto School's tradition of skepticism and a tendency toward negation, which Okamura inherited, he approached Tao Yuanming's poetry with the intent of overturning previous generations' praise of Tao. Consequently, he portrayed Tao Yuanming as selfish and utilitarian.

In conclusion, the differences in evaluations of Tao Yuanming between the Gozan period and Okamura Shigeru reflect the cultural differences, academic positions, and evolving research methodologies shaped by different historical contexts. This divergence not only enriches our understanding of Tao Yuanming's character but also fosters academic exchange and cultural mutual learning between China and Japan. Through comparing and analyzing these differing perspectives, we can more comprehensively appreciate the complexity and multidimensionality of Tao Yuanming as a historical figure, as well as the unique charm he exhibits in different cultural and temporal contexts.

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