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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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A Controversial Poet, a Forgotten Dynasty: Jin Dynasty Poets' Reception of Bai Juyi and Its Historical Significance

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Abstract A certain dispute that arose during the early Jin dynasty regarding Bai Juyi that seemed to be a coincidental occurrence was to some extent inevitable. On one hand, it foreshadowed the opposition that would later arise between followers of the Tang and Song stylistic schools; on the other, it represented both the Tang school poets' disdain for the "ornamental avant-garde" poetry that was fashionable at the time as well as their own search for a new creative direction. The re-evaluation of Bai Juyi that occurred during that period, particularly the frequent comparison of Bai to Tao Yuanming, indicates that Bai Juyi's poetry was widely accepted at the time, which itself represented not only a challenge to traditional perspectives, but also a historical landmark in Bai Juyi's history of acceptance. Jin dynasty poets' creative imitation of Bai Juyi's carefree as well as his satirical poems spurred a maturation of Bai's spirit of concern for self and reality, which later incorporated itself into the spirit of Chinese literati in general.

Keywords Jin dynasty poets, Bai Juyi, acceptance, historical significance

Introduction

The Tang dynasty poet Bai Juyi 白居易, appellate Letian 乐天, has always been a controversial figure;[1] the early Jin has long been an overlooked dynasty. Yet

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[1] Shang Yongliang, 2010.

when we discover that it was during this overlooked dynasty that our controversial poet suddenly received more widespread acceptance than ever before, we find ourselves moved by more than a simple realization of fact, but a problem of significant interest.

As a government founded by the minority Jurchen people, the early Jin dynasty (1115–1234) possessed its own unique cultural characteristics. The Jurchens, having come from northern China, were not heavily Sinified, and their level of civilization was lower than that of the Song dynasty. The editor of *Jin wen ya* 金文雅 (Jin literature), Zhuang Zhongfang 庄仲方, states in his preface, "In the beginning, the Jin had no written language. Only when the First Emperor got Han Fang 韩昉 from Liao did there begin talk of it; then the First Emperor moved to Bianzhou (now Kaifeng in Henan Province) and collected books and other such materials. Scholars like Yuwen Xuzhong 宇文虚中, Zhang Hu 张斛, Cai Songnian 蔡松年 and Gao Shitan 高士谈 came over from Song and literature began to proliferate; yet it was still borrowing talent to build a new era."[2] Since the Jin were "borrowing talent," it would have been impossible for them to avoid heavy cultural influence from the Song. Moreover, early Jin rulers administered cultural policies exactly opposite to the authoritarian, highly prohibitive policies enacted by ruling parties in the last half of the Northern Song: "those of the [previously forbidden] Yuanyou 元祐 party were commended, while Cai Jing 蔡京, Tong Guan 童贯, Wang Fu 王黼 and others were imprisoned as traitors, all to fulfill the wishes of the people."[3] At once, the poetry of the Song dynasty, particularly the work of Su Shi 苏轼 and Huang Tingjian 黄庭坚, became fashionable.

After forty to fifty years of development, by the Dading 大定 years of Emperor Shizong 世宗 (1161–1189) and the Mingchang 明昌 and Cheng'an years of Emperor Zhangzong 章宗, most of the borrowed talent had passed away and a new generation entered the literary arena. At that same time, society moved towards "literate government,"[4] and Jin poetry finally began to step out of the influence of the Song poets and look toward the Tang, a movement that was described as "a state as peacefully governed as that of Zhou dynasty, with a revival of Han literature."[5] Of course, the influence of literary tradition was such that past adoration of the Song was not abandoned entirely (in the words of Yuan Haowen 元好问, "For the past hundred years, poets have mostly studied Su Shi

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[2] *Jin wen ya*, volume 1, reprinted by Jiangsu shuju in 1891.
[3] Liu Qi, 1983, volume 12, p. 136.
[4] Yuan Haowen, "Tongxuan dashi Lijun mubei" 通玄大师李君墓碑, in *Yishan xiansheng wenji* 遗山先生文集 (Collected works of Sir Yishan), volume 31, Sibu congkan, first ed.
[5] Wang Pan, "Dading zhi ji xu" 大定治绩序, in *Guochao wenlei* 国朝文类 (Dynastic records), volume 32, Sibu congkan, first ed.

and Huang Tingjian"[6]), merely that in comparison to the overwhelming preference for Song poetry during the earliest years, more poets now were actively returning to the Tang tradition, resulting in the formation of opposing Tang and Song schools of poetry. It was at this point that acceptance of Bai Juyi's poems began to grow, and Bai's colloquial language and plain style gradually emerged from beneath Song criticisms of its "vulgarity" to become a forceful weapon in the Tang school's fight against the ornamental avant-garde movement.

Disputing Appraisals of Bai Juyi

The conflict was incited by the best-known imitator of Su Shi and Huang Tingjian's poetry during the early Jin dynasty, Wang Tingyun 王庭筠 (1156–1202). Wang Tingyun, appellate Ziduan 子端, named the "Lord of Huanghua Mountain," of whom it was said, "His writing followed contemporary fashion, and he was well-known for a while […] the capacity for imitation displayed in his poetry well exceeded all others of his generation."[7] He was an influential figure in his own time. His poetry pursued the avant-garde, imitating Huang Tingjian and dismissing Bai Juyi. He once wrote a poem proclaiming, "I lately have been poor in inspiration, work halted; I force a poem out, and find it resembles Bai Juyi."[8] On the surface, this seems merely to be an excuse for not writing, but the subtext clearly displays the author's disdainful attitude towards Bai Juyi.

This disdain can itself be traced to literary sources. As early as the Northern Song dynasty, as the attitude behind Su Shi's line "Yuan is airy, Bai is vulgar (referring to Tang dynasty poet Yuan Zhen 元稹)" gained popularity, criticism and dismissal of Bai Juyi became widespread. The scholars Chen Shidao 陈师道 and Wei Tai 魏泰 led the attack. In his *Houshan shihua* 后山诗话 (Mountain thoughts on poetry), Chen states, "In studying poetry, one should take Du Fu as instructor; there being rules, one has something to study. Han Yu's 韩愈 poems do not contain much to explicate, and rely solely on the depth of his talent. Tao Yuanming 陶渊明 did not write poems, he simply wrote the beauty found in his heart. Even if you study Du Fu and fail, you will not lose in terms of

[6] Yuan Haowen, "Zhao Xianxian shu ni he Wei Suzhou shi ba" 赵闲闲书拟和韦苏州诗跋, in Zhang Jinwu (ed.) *Jin wen zui* 金文最 (Classics of the Jin dynasty), volume 25, reprinted in 1895.

[7] Yuan Haowen,1959), pp. 145–146.

[8] See reference made in Wang Ruoxu, "Wang Ziduan yun jinlai dou jue wu jia si, zong you shi cheng Bai Letian. Qi xiao Letian shen yi. Yu yi chang he wei sijue" 王子端云近来陡觉无佳思纵有诗成似乐天其小乐天甚矣予亦尝和为四绝, in *Hunan yilao ji* 滹南遗老集 (Collected poems of the old man south of the Hu river), volume 45, Sibu congkan, first ed.

craftsmanship; but if you possess neither Han Yu's talent nor Tao Yuanming's beauty and you imitate their poetry, all you will have in the end is Bai Juyi." In his *Lin Han yinju shihua* 临汉隐居诗话 (Thoughts on poetry in my hermitage by the Han river), Wei Tai 魏泰 writes, "Bai Juyi is only good at writing long narratives. His poetic structure is unsophisticated, his scope is limited and without variation, so that one hundred poems look like one, and very easily aggravate the reader." Knowing this much about Song attitudes, it should be no surprise that Huang Tingyun should compare uninspired poetry to the work of Bai Juyi.

Wang Tingyun's scorn was probably also motivated by practical considerations. Generally speaking, the Song literary school during the early Jin developed in two separate directions: toward grand description of the natural world and the eye-catching avant-garde, while the influence of the latter was particularly strong. This avant-garde linguistic trend in poetic thought was first visible in the work of Huang Tingjian's student Cai Gui 蔡珪, and reached its zenith in the time of Wang Tingyun, Li Chunfu 李纯甫 and Lei Yuan 雷渊. As these later poets were all figures of high visibility and significant influence, they competed constantly to stay at the forefront of their own movement, while the mass of others followed. In volume 8 of Liu Qi's 刘祁 *Gui qian zhi* 归潜志 (Returned home, secluded), the lines "In the Mingchang and Cheng'an years, those who wrote poetry pursued the avant-garde," "… their poems were all written in ornamental language," truly describe the trend of the times.

Here, history presents us with an interesting phenomenon: at first, a few big literary names begin promoting a certain literary style; yet once that style heats up into a trend, it sweeps up even them inside it and limits their freedom. To put it another way, since the poetic community of the period valued the ornamental and avant-garde, it naturally looked down upon simple, colloquial language; yet writing avant-garde poetry requires racking one's brain, while colloquial language is relatively easier. It was just necessary for poets to file away their colloquial compositions, then establish a public perspective regarding their avant-garde selves and current trends—which is why we see Wang Tingyun making use of Bai Juyi to engage in self-ridicule.

The first to openly criticize Wang Tingyun's attitude toward the avant-garde and toward Bai Juyi was the poet and scholar Zhao Bingwen 赵秉文 (1159–1232). Bingwen, appellate Zhou Chen 周臣 and known as Idle-Free, was a figure of importance in the Jin literary arena. On his "Xianxian gong mu ming" 闲闲公墓铭 (Inscription on Sir Idle-Free's tomb), Yuan Haowen enumerates Dang Huaiying 党怀英, Wang Tingyun, Zhou Ang 周昂, Yang Yunyi 杨云翼, Li Chunfu and Lei Yuan as those who "could not but be named as champions" "one hundred years after the Song, three hundred years since the Liao." However, "the only one not drowned in fashion and drunk on ambition, who took morality,

humanity, life, happiness and misfortune as his subjects of study, who swam freely through the Classics and was easy among the masters, who was young, then strong, strong, then old, and who passed away as happily as ice melting into water was my Sir Idle-Free." Certainly no low appraisal.[9]

In his early years, Bingwen moved in the same direction as Wang Tingyun, taking Su Shi's work as his object of imitation. Yet later, his interests shifted from the Song to the Tang poets: "In Zhao Idle-Free's later years, his poems shifted toward Li Bai, Du Fu and the other masters, yet he did not speak of this to others. After his death appeared many like Ma Zhiji 麻知己, Li Changyuan 李长源 and Yuan Yu 元裕. Since Zhao Bingwen and his colleagues modeled their poetry on the Tang masters, it was inevitable they should separate from the Song school and part company with Wang Tingyun and Li Chunfu (appellate Zhichun 之纯, known as the Screen Mountain Hermit). In *Gui qian zhi*, Liu Qi says:

> Of the contemporary masters, Idle-Free praised the prose of Dang Huaiying and Cai Gui, the poetry of Zhao Wenru 赵文孺 and Yin Wuji 尹无忌. He once said, "Wang Tingyun is a man of talent, but too driven by the need for fame. Every time he finishes a piece he has to find someone to praise it, so all he knows is novelty. Those lines of his, 'I lately have been poor in inspiration, work halted; I force a poem out, and find it resembles Bai Juyi' cannot avoid public censure." By contrast, Li Chunfu only praised Wang Tingyun among the masters, saying, "Su Shi evolved to Huang Tingjian, Tingjian into Wang Tingyun, and others are hard-pressed to match them." Some said that Bingwen did not support Tingyun, but constantly competed with him, while Li Chunfu's support of Tingyun was all to antagonize Bingwen.[10]

As we can see from the above excerpt, the literati of the present dynasty receiving Zhao Bingwen's praise were Zhao Wenru and Yin Wuji (who later changed his name to Shi Tuo 师拓 to avoid similarities with the imperial name), while his opinion of Wang Tingyun and Wang's disdain for Bai Juyi was not high. Close reading suggests that there were two reasons why Wang's poem would meet with public censure: first, his over-engagement in the avant-garde, writing poems for the sake of gaining praise and thereby violating the poetic spirit, while simultaneously maintaining a high opinion of himself and scorning the plainspoken work of Bai Juyi. Second, his concern for reputation—"Every time he finishes a piece he has to find someone to praise it." As soon as Wang realized he had written something low-quality, which would not be praised, he would make an excuse like "resembles Letian" to stall criticism. Thus, what appears to

[9] Yuan Haowen, "Xianxian gong muming" 闲闲公墓铭, in *Yishan xiansheng wenji*, volume 17, Sibu congkan, first ed.
[10] Liu Qi, 1983, volume 10, p. 119.

be self-ridicule is really a sort of affectation, a consequence of being "too driven by the need for fame."

Whether Zhao Bingwen ever made this same statement to Wang Tingyun's face or not we will never know. As an opinion made public among colleagues, however, it undoubtedly made its way to Wang's ear, and is probably the reason people said, "Bingwen did not support Tingyun, and constantly competed with him." As to the extent of their competition, the dearth of material makes it hard to guess; what we know for certain is that between Zhao and Wang/Li there existed a considerable break in terms of poetic ideology. *Gui qian zhi* records that, "Zhao Idle-Free once said to me: 'I first met Yin Wuji when I was young. I once asked him, "I've long known you were a poet, but you liked neither Su Shi or Huang Tingjian; why is that?" Wuji replied, "To study Su and Huang is shameful." His poetry took Li Bai and Du Fu for its models.'" According to this statement, Zhao Bingwen was influenced by Yin Wuji's preference for Tang poetics over Song, suggesting that his own later turn toward studying Tang poetry, as well as his dissatisfaction with Wang Tingyun were inspired in part by this previous experience.

Another famous poet and critic who formally expressed objections to Wang Tingyun was Wang Ruoxu 王若虚 (1174–1243), appellate Congzhi 从之, known as the Lazy One. He was once described as "a man of broad education, deep, refined talent and significant experience."[11] He had a talent for debate and a sharp pen. On one hand, he frequently criticized Wang Tingyun's idol Huang Tingjian, saying, "Tingjian's poetry is unique without being magical, has full stops but no long shots; he flaunts his knowledge and calls it richness, decorates the old and calls it new, while that element that is utterly natural and flows out as the breath from the lungs is lacking." On the other hand, he had no tolerance for Wang Tingyun's contempt of Bai Juyi, and exhausted his capacity for criticism on that point. His extended poem, titled "Wang Tingyun Wrote: 'I lately have been poor in inspiration, work halted; I force a poem out and find it resembles Bai Juyi.' That He Should Disdain Juyi! Let Me Try My Own Hand With Quatrains" runs thus:

> You exhausted years on years with practice, while the sickness crept into the bone.
> The man called the Snow-Stream Hermit still peers at heaven through a straw.
>
> Dress the product all in tasteful colors, make it fit this pitiful era's fashions,
> A generation bare as a rat's tail; is it for you to dispute your predecessors?

[11] Li Zhi, "*Hunan yilao ji* yin" 滹南遗老集引, in *Hunan yilao ji*, volume 1, Sibu congkan, first ed.

Subtle truths to fill the lungs with air, quicken like a rough rope on an itch.
On wasted paper this generation built; that old man held heaven in his breast.

Buckets and buckets of snowy pearls, each a perfect, unmarked face;
Mediocrities flinging stones can't hide the stars, radiant in their eternal place.[12]

Right from the title ("That He Should Disdain Juyi!") we begin to smell gunpowder, and the four quatrains that follow completely get the lead out. The opponent is clearly defined, the arguments focused and forceful, and the author's scornful sentiment finds full expression in the text. Yet the poet also confirms as he destroys, establishing Bai Juyi as a representative of Tang poetry while undermining the contemporary poetic fashions symbolized by Wang Tingyun. Bai Juyi he praises with language like "subtle truths," quicken[ing] like a rough rope over an itch," "Buckets and buckets of snowy pearls" and "the stars, radiant in their eternal place." Conversely, he describes Wang Tingyun and his style as "sickness crept into the bone," "peer[ing] at heaven through a straw," "dress[ing] the product all in tasteful colors" and "bare as a rat's tail."

On the surface, this is no more than a squabble over Bai Juyi's poetic aesthetics, yet speaking in terms of purpose, it is clearly an attempt to borrow Bai's colloquial style to contend against the ornamental avant-garde movement of the period and establish a correct creative direction. In this sense, the dispute ignited by one poem by Wang Tingyun contains a particular, rectifying meaning in the context of early Jin literary history.

Originally, this dispute ended with Wang Ruoxu. Yet, extending our line of sight further, we discover another figure, Yuan Haowen, who appeared to be outside the dialogue, yet exerted his own influence within it. Yuan Haowen (1190–1257), appellate Yuzhi 裕之, known as the Lost Mountain, "One of the age's master craftsmen, who looked down at the literary world as the Father of Prose for over thirty years. His poetry studied both the Tang and Song, but his poetic aesthetics tended toward Zhao Bingwen and Wang Ruoxu. Although Yuan never directly participated in Wang and Zhao's quarrel with Wang Tingyun, he did display an obvious affiliation, as well as employ an interesting method to increase the influence and broadcast range of the conflict. Evidence for this is as follows: First, Yuan was an avid appreciator of Bai Juyi and praised his poetry highly (see later reference). Second, Yuan and Wang Ruoxu were close friends and associates. In the poem "Bie Wang Shijun zhang Congzhi" 别王使君丈从之 (Leaving His Lordship Wang Ruoxu) in volume 8 of *Yishanji* 遗山集 (Lost mountain collection), Yuan laments,

Every meeting with Lord Xie rewards me with revelation, and

[12] *Hunan yilao ji*, volume 45.

Facing Master Bai, all I feel is lasting friendship.
I have tonight to raise my glass and toast the flashing poet,
Whose peaceful rise is worthy to be recorded by men of letters.
In a thousand years, the North Star and Mount Tai will be here;
Your magnanimity overwhelms your audience.
Who will we seek, after we have separated? I fear
You will miss your aging former student.

The poet's reference to Wang Ruoxu as "Lord Xie" and "Master Bai," along with his comparison of Wang to "the North Star and Mount Tai," make evident the esteem in which Yuan Haowen held him.

Third, Yuan took care to include Wang Ruoxu's poetic work "Wang Tingyun Wrote, 'I lately have been poor in inspiration, work halted; I force a poem out and find it resembles Bai Juyi." That He Should Disdain Juyi! Three Poems to Defend Master Bai From Criticism"[13] in his comprehensive anthology of early Jin poetry *Zhongzhou ji* 中州集 (Poems from the Central Plains). This very action indicates an aesthetic objection to Wang Tingyun and support of Wang Ruoxu, since the piece's inclusion in such a large-scale anthology would have allowed it to reach far beyond the boundaries of one author's individual collection. Can we not consider this a unique sort of participation, especially considering that the result was comparatively more influential than Zhao Bingwen or Wang Ruoxu's own actions? We may safely say that it was Yuan Haowen who added the final period to the end of this interchange.

The Bai Juyi Craze, and Bai Juyi-Tao Yuanming Comparisons

As the conscious course of poetics in the Jin dynasty turned from the Song standard to the Tang, not a few poets directed their attention to Bai Juyi. For instance, the near-worshipped scholar Liu Jiji 刘汲即, known the Old Man of West Cliff, studied Bai's poetry, writing poems that were "solid but not barbarous, clear but not cold, simple but with structure, plain but with flavor, while constantly studying Bai Juyi and working hard to imitate him."[14] The scholar known as the South-of-the-Brook Poet Xin Yuan 辛愿 also liked Bai Juyi: "At twenty I finally learned how to read. I procured a copy of Bai's "*Baishi fengjian ji* 白氏讽谏集" (Bai's collected admonishments) to try out, and by the end of the

[13] *Zhongzhou ji*, volume 6. These are the same three poems contained in *Hunan yilao ji*, volume 45, entitled "Wang ziduan yun jinlai tu jue wu jia si, zong you shi cheng Bai Letian. Qi xiao Letian shen yi. Yu yi chang he wei sijue." The title is slightly different.
[14] Yuan Haowen, 1959, first half, volume 2, p. 78.

day, I could recite the poems from memory."[15] The magistrate for the Security Bureau in Donglu, Shandong Province, Jia Zhao 贾照 "loved ancient learning, and called himself the "Hermit of Four Friends," considering himself a friend of the old poets Yan Ziling 严子陵, Tao Yuanming, Bai Juyi and Shao Yaofu 邵尧夫. Thus his poetry contains the line, "Look to the Four Friends to learn my style/hold to the three enigmas in my ancient studies."[16] The young poet Gao Sicheng 高思诚 "passionately admired Bai Juyi's character and loved his poetry," and purposefully "remodeled the main room of his house into a study, then pasted the walls with couplets selected from Bai Juyi, arranged to be recited, that they might be a joy to his eye and tongue every day."[17]

As for the literary giant Wang Ruoxu, not only did he appreciate Bai's poetry highly, saying "his work fully expresses both sentiment and music, enters the body as breath, sculpts language to represent subject, is filled by the present and approaches a unity with the essential force of life,"[18] but he also "adhered in his prose to the standards set by Ouyang Xiu 欧阳修 and Su Shi, while his poetry studied Bai Juyi, and while he was not prolific, he was able to imitate Bai with incredible accuracy." The influential figure advocated the study of Bai Juyi both on a theoretical level as well as in his own creative work.[19] A general survey of the evidence, therefore, suggests that there existed a significant group of Jin dynasty literary figures who appreciated Bai Juyi, some to the point of infatuation.

One phenomenon within the Bai Juyi craze worthy of note is the tendency to relate poetically Bai Juyi with Tao Yuanming. One example is Jia Zhao's inclusion of Bai and Tao among his "Four Friends;" another is Zhao Bingwen's poem "Ti Hao Yunshi Ronggui tang" 题郝运使荣归堂 (On Shipping Officer Hao's triumphant teturn), which links Tao and Bai together through couplet structure: "Tao Yuanming, who asked directions in Chai Sang/Bai Juyi, who left his post for Luoshe." In Zhao Bingwen's "Da Li Tianying shu" 答李天英书 (Reply to Li Tianying's letter), he begins by praising the "plainness" of Bai's poetry, then goes on to say, "With Li Bai, Du Fu, Su Shi and the *Ci*-genre poets, I study their diction but not their meaning; with Tao Yuanming, Li Bai and the other greats, I study their meaning but not their diction."[20] The implication is

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[15] Yuan Haowen, 1959, second half, volume 10, p. 484.

[16] Yuan Haowen, "Dong ping Jia shi qianqiu lu houji" 东平贾氏千秋录后记, in *Yishan xiansheng wenji*, volume 34, Sibu congkan, first ed.

[17] Wang Ruoxu, "Gao Sicheng yong bai tang ji" 高思诚咏白堂记, in *Hunan yilao ji*, volume 43, Sibu congkan, first ed.

[18] "Shi hua" 诗话, in *Hunan yilao ji*, volume 38.

[19] Shang Yongliang, 2009a.

[20] This text is from Zhao Bingwen 赵秉文, *Fu shui ji* 滏水集 (Poems of the Fu river), volumes 7 and 19, Wenyuan ge siku quanshu edition.

that Zhao Bingwen valued not only Tao and Bai's unaffected poetic styles, but also the integrity and scope of their poetic visions. Likewise, in the final poem of Zhao Yuan's "Shu Huaijiyuan di Yuzhi yun sishou" 书怀继元弟裕之韵四首 (Missing the poetic air of brother Yuan Haowen: four poems), the narrator proclaims, "Lili is in debt to Yuanming, Xiang Mountain to Juyi; masters now vanished in the past, high as the heaven to which we lowly look." The establishment of Bai and Tao as models brings out the implied distance in the narrator's view of past and present artists, further obviating the narrator's appreciation of Bai and Tao's poetry.

In contrast to the abovementioned comparisons of Bai Juyi and Tao Yuanming, Yuan Haowen's remarks on the connections between the two is more worthy of examination. In the fourth entry of his "Lun shi sanshi shou" 论诗三十首 (Thirty poems on poetry), he says of Tao Yuanming's poetry: "One ordinary line and the ancient world renewed/when glamour falls away, a pure interior is revealed. A white sun sets outside my southward window; believe Yuanming was only a man of a single era." An author's note below the poem adds: "Liu Zongyuan, the Xie Lingyun of the Jin; Tao Yuanming, the Bai Juyi of the Tang."[21]

Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 and Tao Yuanming as poets were both highly esteemed by Yuan Haowen. By linking them thus to Xie Lingyun and Bai Juyi respectively, Yuan Haowen posits a transmission of poetic voices from Xie to Liu and from Tao to Bai (for an extension of this hypothesis see Poem 20 from Yuan's *Thirty Poems on Poetry*, cited below), thereby also suggesting that descriptors of Tao like "ordinary" and "pure (as of essence)" also suit Bai Juyi. Not only does such an appraisal automatically elevate the positions of Liu Zongyuan and Bai Juyi, it also clearly outlines two courses of stylistic transmission through literary history, which itself is a contribution of no small value.

On closer inspection, we see that Yuan's argument also represents a challenge to a dominant thesis within the literary criticism of the period. Examination of poetry's history of acceptance reveals that the first person to engage in comparative analysis of Tao Yuanming 陶渊明 and various Tang dynasty poets, which would deeply influence generations of scholars thereafter, was the Song dynasty giant Su Shi. In his "Ping Han-Liu shi" 评韩柳诗 (Criticism of Han Yu's and Liu Zongyuan's poetry) in the second volume of *Dongpo tiba* 东坡题跋 (Excerpts from Su Shi), he states: "Liu Zongyuan's poetry should be ranked below that of Tao Yuanming and above Wei Yingwu 韦应物. Han Yu achieves greater heights of majesty in his work than Liu, but in terms of poetic feeling and

[21] From *Yi shan ji* 遗山集, volume 11, in the Wenyuan ge siku quanshu. Si bu cong kan, first ed. See also *Yu ding jin shi zeng bu zhongzhou ji* 御订全金诗增补中州集, volume 66; *Yu xuan jin shi* 御选金诗, volume 23; also note in *Yuan shi xuan* 元诗选, first collection, volume 33, beneath Lun shi sanshi shou 论诗三十首, no. 4, which reads "Liu Zongyuan, the Xie Lingyun of the Tang; Tao Yuanming, the Bai Juyi of the Jin."

stylistic beauty Han cannot match him. Those who pursue the style we call "bland-and-dry" are trying for a dry exterior with a rich marrow, an apparent blandness that is in fact beautiful; this is the current of Yuanming and Zongyuan." Here Su Shi engages in direct comparisons of Liu Zongyuan, Wei Yingwu and Tao Yuanming, and through explication of "bland-and-dry" as "a dry exterior with a rich marrow, an apparent blandness that is in fact beautiful" posits a literary tradition represented by "the current of Yuanming and Zongyuan." This judgment, due in part to Su Shi's penetrating literary insight and in part to his lofty cultural standing, earned the unified support of many scholars after him. This footnote by Han Zicang 韩子苍 is a good example: "Only Wei Yingwu could match the carefree tone of Tao Yuanming, yet he never successfully imitated his bland-and-dry; that was achieved by Liu Zongyuan, yet only with frustrating rarity. Liu wrote few poems, which realized the influence of past masters; yet his only pleasure was to study Tao Yuanming, the only goal he did not achieve."[22] These words, heavily inspired by Su Shi's discourse, can be said to have added an earlier representative to Su Shi's proposed Tao-Liu literary tradition, as well as deeply influenced later critics of poetry.

Similarities between Liu Zongyuan and Tao Yuanming, however, end with their poetics; comparison of their individual personalities, their attitudes and other aspects reveals significant difference; moreover, "bland-and-dry" only touches one characteristic of Liu's poetry, while ignoring both the harshness and sympathy that appear in his style.[23] If we switch our focus to the poets' respective life experiences, the various intents and external contexts of their poems, we notice that Liu Zongyuan bears a stronger resemblance to Xie Lingyun 谢灵运 instead. This resemblance is best described by Yuan in his Thirty Poems on Poetry: "Lingyun's lines reflected old and new at once; and whose thought rose from a spring so deep as Liu's? The string is touched, the echo wavers on; no doubt the solitary heart of that old year." Also of interest is Yuan's own footnote to the fourth poem in the series, "Liu Zongyuan, the Xie Lingyun of the Jin." These statements bring to light a different set of similarities and differences between the four literary figures in question, and depart significantly from Su Shi's accepted view. From this perspective, therefore, when Su Shi established a connection between Liu Zongyuan and Tao Yuanming, he was also obscuring the differences that exist between the two, as well as the similarities between Liu Zongyuan and Xie Lingyun, between Tao Yuanming and other poets such as Bai Juyi. Yuan Haowen's contrasting re-identification of similarities between Liu and Xie, Tao and Bai, can be seen as a refutation of Su Shi, as well as a return to truth in literary history.

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[22] Quote of "Liu Zongyuan", in He Wen, 1984, volume 8, p. 158.
[23] Shang Yongliang, 1990.

Yuan Haowen was of course not the first to find similarities between Bai Juyi and Tao Yuanming. We see the argument advanced as early as the Northern Song by Su Shi's disciple Zhang Lai. In his "Ti Wu Rende shijuan" 题吴德仁诗卷 (On Wu Rende's poetry), he writes:

> While Tao Yuanming loved to drink, his house was poor and so could not partake often, let alone enjoy good wine. Those with whom he drank were mostly farmers, fishermen, woodchoppers and the like, seated in the open air, while those who could afford the time to please their stomachs were few and far between. Bai Juyi also loved to drink, but his family brewed its own unfiltered rice wine, which is of excellent quality. Nor did he ever drink without music, as well as the service of boys and young women, all amid the natural beauty of Luoyang, which is second to nowhere under heaven. Those who traveled with him, like Pei Du and Liu Yuxi, were all great names of their age. Therefore, to be like Yuanming, one must live in poverty and without security; to live like Juyi, one must live in luxury but without success. In our lives, Deren and I imitate faithfully Yuanming's straightforward honesty, while, in terms of our official positions, we take after Juyi; as for both poets' unconventionality, we meet that standard too. How could this not be virtue![24]

This passage picks out similarities and differences between the lives of Tao Yuanming and Bai Juyi through examination of their common passion for enjoying alcohol, concluding with a reference to their similarly "unconventional" dispositions. In this case, though Zhang Lai's subject is not poetry, he still associates Tao Yuanming with Bai Juyi in terms of their respective outlooks on life, thereby providing, from an ontological perspective, an origin for the Tao-Bai associative argument Yuan Haowen would later make.

Yuan Haowen's Bai-Tao association also takes into consideration similarities in the poets' respective temperaments and attitudes toward life. The seventh volume of the Yuan dynasty scholar Chen Li's 陈栎 *Dingyu ji* 定宇集 (Poems for a pacified world) records a conversation between Chen and his nephew Wu Zhongwen 吴仲文 regarding this very question:

> The question: Yuan Haowen said: "Liu Zongyuan, the Xie Lingyun of the Tang; Tao Yuanming, the Bai Juyi of the Jin." What does he mean? Answer: "Xie Lingyun, the son of Xie Xuan, inherited his father's official title, yet met with disaster through wastefulness and lack of restraint; Liu Zongyuan was caught by Shuwen's party and died under their oppression. Observed together,

[24] Zhang Lei, *Zhang Youshi wenji* 张右史文集 (The collected historical writings of Zhang Youshi), volume 47. Sibu congkan, first ed.

> they are quite similar. Tao Yuanming followed his will against convention, loved travel and merry-making, very much like Bai Juyi. Of course, though they both loved travel and merry-making, as for where each ended up, Juyi cannot compare to Yuanming."

Examination of the text makes clear that Chen believed "Juyi cannot compare to Yuanming" on the level of "where each ended up," yet in terms of each poet's tendency to follow "his will against convention" and pursue "travel and merry-making," he confirms their similarity and, by association, the validity of Yuan Haowen's argument.

A more important point to Yuan Haowen's hypothesis lies in his identification of a consonant mood in Tao Yuanming and Bai Juyi's poetic works that is built on similarities in cultural character. In the Qing dynasty text *Shizhou shihua* 石洲诗话 (Thoughts on poetry from the riverbank), author Weng Fanggang 翁方纲 offers the following analysis of the connections between Tao Yuanming and Bai Juyi, Xie Lingyun and Liu Zongyuan: "The poetic structures created by Tao Yuanming and Xie Lingyun stand above all others of the Six dynasties; those coming after who expressed a natural, carefree voice follow Yuanming, while those who spoke with clear, distilled spirit follow Lingyun; this is what we call 'the hibiscus opening at morning,' which other masters never attained."[25] "These are fixed poetic moods, from antiquity to today. We do not link Liu Zongyuan with Tao Yuanming, but say rather that he transmit's Xie Lingyun's style; we do not link Tao Yuanming with Wei Yingwu, but say rather that he resembles Bai Juyi. Tao and Bai exemplify the uninhibited, easy mood, while Xie and Liu exemplify the meditative, distilled mood."[26] Weng's conclusions agree with Yuan Haowen's poetic thesis, asserting that "these are fixed poetic moods, from antiquity to today," and contributing insightful analysis as to why Tao Yuanming is not compared with Xie Lingyun and Wei Yingwu but with Bai Juyi instead.

Explicitly put, there exist between Bai Juyi and Tao Yuanming not merely congruencies of individual personality and outlook, but also inheritances of cultural and poetic character. Compared to Su Shi's thesis of Tao-Liu association, Yuan Haowen's "Tao Yuanming, the Bai Juyi of the Jin" places more emphasis on their similarly "uninhibited, easy mood," and locates Bai Juyi as a direct transmitter of Tao Yuanming's voice within a broader cultural context. Examined in connection with Yuan's statement in *Taoran ji* shi xu 陶然集诗序 (Preface to

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[25] Weng Fanggang, 1983, volume 7: *Yuan Yishan lun shi san shi shou* 元遗山论诗三十首 (Yuan Lost Mountain's thirty poems on poetry), *Qing shihua xu pian* 清诗话续编 (Qing dynasty treatises on poetry), p. 1496.

[26] Weng Fanggang, 1983, volume 8: "Wang Wenjian fang Yuan Yishan lun shi san shi shou jueju san shi wu shou" 王文简戏仿元遗山论诗绝句三十五首, p. 1504.

the collected poems by Taoran), "After Du Fu went to Kuizhou, after Bai Juyi went to Xiang Mountain, after Su Shi went to Hainan, all [their poems were produced] with no need for editing; is this something those who haven't approached the Way could do?" we can see that Yuan is comparing Bai Juyi's later works with those of Du Fu and Su Shi, praising them as "[produced] with no need for editing" and having "approached the Way"—truly a high appraisal. It is not hard to understand, therefore, Yuan's aesthetic reasons for connecting Bai Juyi with Tao Yuanming.[27]

Creative Imitation of Bai Juyi

Early Jin poets' acceptance of Bai Juyi is also evident in their creative imitation of Bai in their own poetry. I will separately explain two aspects of this imitation.

First is the imitation of Bai Juyi's carefree, contented worldview and his colloquial poetic diction, indicating a deep understanding and acceptance of Bai's outlook on life.

The first poet to merit our attention is Wang Ji 王寂 (1128–1194), appellate Yuanlao 元老, native of Yutian, Hebei Province. In his official career, he rose as high as Assistant Minister of Revenue and Minister of Rites. The officials of the Imperial Library said of him, "His poetry was clear as morning and incisive, and written in a surprisingly original style. He himself was thoroughly well-versed in ancient literature, and in the Dading and Mingchang years certainly deserved the title of author. The Jin dynasty authors compiled in *Zhongzhou ji* numbered over a hundred, yet of them, the only collections that remain are of Zhao Bingwen and Wang Ruoxu, while the rest have disappeared. Luckily, however, one edition by Wang Ji has surfaced out of the sea of rotten parchment, and the articles are well-written enough to be on a level with Wang Ruoxu and Zhao Bingwen's collections."[28] As a general appraisal of Wang Ji's work, this statement is accurate; its description of Wang's poetic style, however, is noticeably incomplete. Skimming through *Zhuoxuan ji* 拙轩集 (The heavy carriage collection), we notice that Wang's style is anything but consistent; some of the poems are clear and incisive, yet there are also grandly expressive poems, avant-garde poems and a greater number of plainly-written colloquial poems. On the whole, Wang Ji's early style tended toward the majestic and expressive, yet as he aged (and particularly after he was banished from the imperial court), became more withdrawn and plainspoken. His acceptance of Bai Juyi was also an influential factor in the evolution of his style.

It appears that one of the keys to learning Bai Juyi's style was absorption of

[27] Shang Yongliang, 2009b.
[28] Yong Rong 永瑢, et al., 1965, p. 1420.

his philosophy of contentment in accordance with his principle of "middle seclusion." In his poem Yi zu zhai 易足斋 (The satisfied study), Wang Ji writes of his own outlook on life in this fashion:

> I love this cottage, its constant quiet; this life, at ease as it follows fate.
> Conversations in destitute winter nights, my reed hassock is warm;
> Sleeping late on summer mornings, my bamboo mat can cool me.
> A pile of molded books lie on the couch for idle reading;
> Two bowls of porridge make a meal, and a nap once I'm full.
> Red banners and golden decrees have nothing to do with me;
> Nor do I envy the powerful, in their hundred-story towers.[29]

A lonely hut, following fate, destitute winter conversations and sleeping late on summer mornings—the text resonates with the very philosophy of contentment Bai Juyi practiced. Looking back at Bai's poetry, we see the reason; the first poem of "Chun ri xian ju san shou" 春日闲居三首 (Three poems on living idly in Spring) runs thus: "Yuanming said, 'I love my cottage,' and I love my own room. Here are books and a zither to play, tools for comforting loneliness." Or again, in "Liu Shijiu tongsu" 刘十九同宿 (Rooming with Liu Shijiu): "The red banners that break bandits are not my affair; the yellow reports passed above are free of my name. I only sit here in Gaoyang with Officer Liu, playing *go* and wagering wine until the morning come." Lines like these make clear Wang's intentional transmission of Bai's style, while pieces like "Ti Zhongyin xuan" 提中隐轩 (On the nobility of middle seclusion) express even more clearly Wang Ji's admiration of Bai Juyi's lifestyle:

> You do not see Yan Junping or Mei Zizhen, the Chengdu fortune-teller and the saint. Each one man secluded in a sea of millions, listening to carts and horses race and bang outside his door. Nor do you see Jie Zhitui or Qu Yuan, alone and powerless on the marsh or in the mountain, separated ever from the world. They tossed their bodies to fire or water; while the first were drowned in city noise, these were trapped in forest quiet. What mistakes they made, abusing themselves in the urban sea or selling their lives to buy undying names. I would rather study Bai Juyi, and drift from one minor position to the other all my life. If one gets one's grain in the summer and winter, worries are few, and if the wife and kids can keep warm, one's heart stays at peace. Should there be compatriots at hand, one can empty one's enjoyment from a winecup. Speeches, coalitions, these are not my projects; banning books and chasing bandits not my responsibility. To tighten the belt and bow for five

[29] Wang Ji, *Yizu zhai*, *Zhuo xuan ji*, in *Wenyuan ge Siku quanshu*.

> cupfuls of rice is not shameful, and always preferable to Yuan Zai's eight hundred bushels of black pepper. The government that fails is stained by its own blood, and what would one give then to be a runaway calf? Dusty boots and an old ledger do not complain of time's passing, and ceaseless travel is safer than being Li Si, holding his massive seal atop the Qin empire. Misfortune erupts in court and drives many to the sword, at which point a day of hunting is a pleasure beyond reach. I know moreover that power and wealth should not be pursued, coming at their price of a lifetime of worry. Better to be daily drunk in the nobility of middle seclusion, then pass out and let rest the ten thousand problems of this world.

In the author's opinion, the lives of Yan Junping, Mei Zizhen, Jie Zhitui and Qu Yuan were either "drowned in city noise" or "trapped in forest quiet," neither comparable in freedom or ease of life to Bai Juyi; and so he clearly states, "I would rather study Bai Juyi." Comparison of this poem to Bai's "Zhong yin" 中隐 (Middle seclusion), reveals similarities of mood, sentiment and perspective on human life and worry that are so strong the two seem to come from one source. In reality, this theme of avoiding human trouble and finding contentment in "middle seclusion" that we see invoked in many of Bai Juyi's pieces, such as "Yong Huai" 咏怀 (Singing the Heart) and "Chi shang pian" 池上篇 (Over the pond) is a conscious retreat from politics after a lifetime of grueling experience in the political arena; it is also the concrete realization of the Chinese intellectual's belief in "pacifying the world when the way is smooth, improving oneself when it is blocked." Wang Ji's poem is merely a restatement of these experiences and values, with his subject of study clearly fixed as Bai Juyi.

Wang Ji also wrote other poems that he marked as imitations of Bai Juyi, such as "Zhongqiu yuexia yougan xixiao Bai Letian" 中秋月下有感戏校白乐天 (Under the moon at the Mid-Autumn Festival, I feel like parodying Bai Juyi):

> The moon is full in all its parts; a thousand old emotions hang at Mid-Autumn.
> Chang'e will never get old; these white temples cry for fading life. I strain
> To remember times when I'd cried for joy, yet all that emerge are sighs.
> Sadness and joy are man's inventions; the moon is bright as it always has been.

The diction is simple, the meaning penetrating, very much like Bai Juyi's "Zhongqiu yue" 中秋月 (The Mid-Autumn moon) and other sentimental pieces. Another example is "Ti Xiangshan si" 题香山寺 (On Xiang mountain temple):

> The hermit, while he lived, loved the mountain, and the spirit after chose to wander there;

When the eye can search the yellowed sutras for their mysteries,
There are no tear-stains for black sleeves to wipe away.
Fan Su smiles with her cherry lips up at the sun;
Xiao Man turns her willow waist within a dance.
If one wish to ride old age all the way into that darkest night,
Then wrap in a scarf, go listen to the river murmur.

All of Bai Juyi's well-known habits, from reading Buddhist sutras and searching for enlightenment to embracing beautiful courtesans and wandering through mountains, are encapsulated within these few images. Any careful reader can sense the narrator's envy of Bai Juyi's life and admiration of his character, even without the poem's first line.

Returning to Zhao Bingwen, we notice that, during his shift from the Song to the Tang school of poetics, while he "took Li Bai and Du Fu as his models," he also widely imitated the poetry of other seminal Tang figures, such as Wang Wei 王维, Lang Shiyuan 郎士元, Wei Yingwu, Liu Changqin 刘长卿, Li He 李贺 and Lu Tong 卢仝. In addition, his attitude toward Bai Juyi is particularly interesting. In the eighth volume of *Gui qian zhi*, we find a quote by Li Chunfu from his preface to Zhao Bingwen's collected poems that reads: "My Lord's poetry often contained language from Li Bai and Bai Juyi, which I have always been able to detect." While this comment is certainly a criticism, it also reflects indirectly a connection between Zhao's and Bai's poems. Close reading of Zhao Bingwen's poetry collection "*Fu shui ji*" 滏水集 (Poems of the Fu river) uncovers numerous poetic references to Bai Juyi's works, along with declamations made in admiration of Bai's character: "The river runs through the mountains as of old, but Master Bai is nowhere to be found (from "Longmen" 龙门 [Dragon gate]). We also find praises of Tao Yuanming and Bai Juyi's poems as "masterworks" by whose meaning the author "wishes to be taught (see "Reply to Li Tianying's Letter")."[30] Bingwen's poem "Fang Letian xinzhai" 仿乐天新宅 (Imitation of Bai Juyi's "New manor")[31] reads:

Luck and disaster appear as the two sides of one coin; old wealth is driven out, new moves in;
Yesterday, machetes and arrows surrounded the old house;
Today, the new leader is hailed with horse and carriage.
If the rabbit runs, you may still look for a rabbit in your net;
If the fish flies, you can still expect a fish within the weir.
Power and poverty only run as fate directs them;

[30] Zhao Bingwen, *Fu shui ji*, volumes 3 and 19. *Wenyuange Siku quanshu*.
[31] Ibid., volume 4.

Yet the warning of their wheel-ruts is easy enough to see.

The poem, done as an intentional study of Bai Juyi, borrows the image of moving into a new house to describe the continual reversal of fortune motivated by perennial struggles for political power. Similar themes can be found everywhere in Bai Juyi's own work, for instance:

Catastrophe and happiness, good luck and bad, a cause for each;
they must be studied, but never worried about.
One only sees the fire that lights the rooftops,
never the wave that turns the lonely boat.
If the official does not draw much from the well,
he will need less when disaster strikes.
Though man is not a drinking gourd, he must consume;
so take as little as suits you, then retire.

(From "Gan xing ershou, qiyi" 感兴二首其一 [Two spontaneous poems, no. 1])

The two poets' similar attitudes toward unpredictable fortune as well as their common desire to avoid disaster are both quite clear.

The second aspect of Bai Juyi's poetry commonly imitated by early Jin dynasty poets was his satire, as exemplified by the satirical New Music Bureau poetry Bai himself invented, which reflected the suffering of common people and revealed the dark side of society. In this respect, the work of the blind poet Zhao Yuan (who lived around 1215), the one who once proclaimed, "Xiang Mountain is in debt to Juyi,"[32] is particularly worthy of attention. Zhao Yuan's biography in *Poems from the Central Plains* said of him, "Being handicapped and unable to hold any position, he concentrated his energies and anxieties on poetry, and gained significant mastery. The simple language he crafted in some of his five-character poems was inimitable by others."[33] Careful reading of the 34 poems by Zhao Yuan contained in the *Poems of the Central Plains* confirms that their most noticeable characteristic is plainspoken fluidity, which bespeaks a fundamental understanding of Bai Juyi's poetic spirit. Another example:

The wild duck's legs too short, the millipede's too many.
All things are born unequal; a sword sharpens itself in space.
Old Zhi the robber lived long and well, his sins never meeting retribution,

[32] Zhao Yuan, "Shu huai Ji yuan di yu zhi yun si shou" 书怀继元弟裕之韵四首, no. 4, in Yuan Haowen, 1959, volume 5, p. 266.
[33] Ibid., p. 265.

> While Bo Yi, the model of compassion, starved on the slopes of West Mountain.
> Heaven's will is beyond comprehension, our conjecture only stupid guessing.
> Better to partake of wine, let one's life go amid the flowing years,
> And when the spirit rises, climb aloft and sing one's helplessness aloud.[34]

Though not entirely similar to Bai's "Wuke naihe ge" 无可奈何歌 (Song of helplessness), the primary narrative techniques and basic tones of both poems closely coincide, as the narrators register their dismay with the inequity of the universe and the need to find diversion.

Zhao Yuan's study of Bai Juyi was not limited to poetic style alone, but extended to the use of Bai Juyi's New Music Bureau poetic structure to create poems that reflected the myriad sufferings of common people, thereby expressing a deep sympathy with Bai's concern for society. The piece below, "Lin fu ku" 邻妇哭 (The neighbor widow weeps) is a perfect example:

> The neighbor widow weeps, weeps a bitter strain; of the ten that filled the house, only five remain. I once had asked her who had gone: her sons were dead, the husband taken captive. The neighbor widow weeps, weeps with mournful sound; her boys still lie above the earth, her husband not returned. Holes in the roof go unrepaired, the paddy lies unplowed. The neighbor widow weeps, weeps without a pause; not a single man to spare from any fitting house. She searches until night; comets race across the sky; while the rice coming from Bingzhou ends up in Yuzhong.[35]

The poem narrates the misfortunes of its main character, whose "sons were dead, [and] husband taken captive" and whose "holes in the roof go unrepaired." The poem's structure, though clearly influenced by the *Shijing* 诗经 (Book of songs) and Han dynasty Music Bureau odes, yet it resembles nothing more closely than the circular, three-three-seven meter of Bai Juyi's "New Music Bureau" poetry. Held up against those poems of Bai Juyi's that "cry for the wronged," such as "Qin jiliao" 秦吉了 (The myna), the similarity becomes even clearer.

Other prominent examples from Zhao Yuan are "Xiu cheng qu" 修城去 (Going to mend the city wall) and "Tianjian qiuri sanshou" 田间秋日三首 (The Autumn sun among the fields: three poems), which also reflect reality, express sympathy for common people and criticize the bureaucratic class. Beneath the first, the

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[34] Zhao Yuan, "Du Letian wuke naihe ge" 读乐天无可奈何歌, in Yuan Haowen, 1959, volume 5, p. 272.
[35] Zhao Yuan, "Lin fu ku" 邻妇哭, in Yuan Haowen, 1959, volume 5, p. 265.

author has added a note: "In the year Jia-Rong, the city wall at Xincheng was destroyed, and we were ordered to repair it. On the road one day, I heard a moaning cry on the wind, and was moved to write this poem." The piece begins, "Off to mend the wall, labor without end; on the road, I hear a human cry come flying down the wind," then goes on to describe the bitter conditions of the job: "a shovel swing, a stroke of the pestle, drawing the blood of the people drop by drop;" "clay is scraped from the foot of the wall and put on the top; what is the use of filling the holes at all?"[36] Four lines from "Autumn Sun": "A good rain knows when to give the sky over, and with help from heaven the slow season brings the fields fruit. Yet the harvest only guarantees the army gets fed, and we send the grain as many miles as they are distant."[37] While on the surface, these lines seem to express a pledge to send grain as far as is necessary, in reality they are in indirect censure of the heavy taxies levied on the peasantry. Echoes of Yuan Zhen's 元稹 "Tian jia ci" 田家词 (Peasant homes)—"Dead farmers have sons, cows have calves; the tithes for the army never come light"—ring strongly.

Compared to Zhao Yuan's "Tianjian qiuri" imitation of Bai Juyi is even more evident in Xiao Gong's 萧贡 (1158–1223) poem "Huang tian ni Bai Letian" 荒田拟白乐天 (Empty fields: following Bai Juyi): "These empty fields have lacked plowhands for years. Now we try to fill them with millet and buckwheat. Anxiously, we hack away at thorns and brambles, and for every tithe paid, ten tithes new." From the narration, we can infer that armed conflict has been frequent and the people deprived of their means of survival, while the reference to thorns and brambles indicates the bitterness of the peasants' labor. Yet even at this stage, the local government still levies taxes, and so frequently that "for every tithe paid, ten tithes new." Not hard to imagine the weight on the peasants' shoulders. The poem, of course, is a study of Bai Juyi, with clean, simple diction and a natural, free-flowing structure, yet also with a strong critical spirit permeating the whole.

Yuan Haowen also wrote several poems of social protest. His "Hu hai" 虎害 (The tiger's damage) expresses the hopelessness of "the pitiful woman of Taishan, whose moans cut through the clouds" through description of a mountain tiger's attacks on a village and the apathy of local officials; "Qu zhu xing" 驱猪行 (Driving out pestilence) depicts the damage done to the Zhang family fields by porcupines and locusts, "The morning sun reveals a mess covering acres; my wife and son look at each other, and empty tears come down." "Su ju tan" 宿菊潭 (Staying the night at chrysanthemum pond) follows a conversation between the narrator and a farmer that reveals the relationship between the people and the government; there is scorn as well as pity, but the final moral is, "Teach your

[36] Zhao Yuan, "Xiu cheng qu," in Yuan Haowen, 1959, volume 5, p. 267.
[37] Zhao Yuan, "Tian jian qiu ri san shou," no. 1, in Yuan Haowen, 1959, volume 5, p. 267.

sons and grandsons to work hard to escape the winter famine." Similarly, "Yanmen dao zhong shu suo jian" 雁门道中书所见 (Observations on the road to Goose gate) illuminates through comparison of the "drunken dancing" going on inside the city with the "bodily concern" that reigns without the cruel reality of social disparity and the emptiness it creates in the poet's heart, the poet observing that the root of the peasants' suffering is, "the rice heads are full of worms, while more than one tiger comes for the meat." While Yuan Haowen never marked these poems as studies of Bai Juyi, the depth of their realism is no lesser than Bai's New Music Bureau poems, and the caustic diction obviously written in imitation of Bai Juyi's style.

Conclusion

We have already employed three different perspectives to reframe our understanding of Bai Juyi's acceptance during the early Jin dynasty. Bringing the effort to conclusion, we are presented with the following essential points:

First, a poem by Wang Tingyun about Bai Juyi and the literary argument that followed opened the curtain on a new era of critical discussion regarding Bai's poetry. This seemingly random yet to some extent inevitable dispute obviates the polarization between the followers of the Tang and Song stylistic schools in the early Jin period, as well as represented the Tang school members' distaste for the "ornamental avant-garde" poetry that had been fashionable and their search for a correct course of poetic development. This endowed the aforementioned dispute with special, restructural significance in the context of Jin literary history.

Second, in the later stages of the early Jin dynasty, Bai Juyi's poetry was praised, held up as a model and even construed by Yuan Haowen to be the true transmission of Tao Yuanming's poetic spirit. Bai Juyi's individual personality, cultural character and poetic values received new attention and valuation. From an acceptance studies perspective, this represents a the discovery of a new meaning, along with a refutation of a dominating literary viewpoint that began with Su Shi, or a revelation of a deeper truth hidden by that viewpoint. This is one of the questions of an overlooked dynasty that is in greatest need of attention.

Third, early Jin dynasty poets' acceptance of Bai Juyi is visible not only in their recorded verbal disputes or written criticisms, but also in their concentrated imitation within their own work of Bai Juyi's poetic voices, both contented and critical. In addition to its significance to the study of poetry, this fact also indicates that the dual concern for self and society beginning with Bai Juyi and his literary expressions of self-contentment and social criticism gained further development during the Jin dynasty, becoming to some extent an inherent part of

the traditional Chinese scholastic spirit.

Of course, it is more accurate to conclude that the early Jin dynasty literati's adoration of Bai Juyi sprang from artistic sensitivity, a sort of spiritual equivalency, than to claim it was the result of clear and conscious reasoning. Judgments on poetry like those offered by Wang Ruoxu, "honest and everyday, straightforward description of the delights of nature, congruent with her laws and inconsiderate of human intent,"[38] or Yuan Haowen, "One Bai Juyi in five hundred years is enough to say that talent still comes out of Bingzhou,"[39] "Twenty years I've studied poetry, and still no spirit speaks through my clumsy brush. I run for help to young Master Bai, in case his verses can be made anew,"[40] all support this thesis. Close similarities in lifestyle, analogous aesthetic pursuits, regional and professional sympathies are all present in this situation. It is not hard to understand, therefore, why the acceptance of a controversial poet like Bai Juyi might increase so greatly in such a commonly overlooked era.

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