

## Self-discipline and Self-so: The Political Perspective on Drinking Poems in the Wei-Jin Period

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**Abstract:** This paper suggests that the literati of the Wei and Jin dynasties broke the rules of drinking in Confucian rites, and affirmed the entertainment function and association attribute of drinking. Affected by the idea of self-so life, drinking became the activity confronting political pressure and expressing life experience. The distorted self-consciousness in drinking impacted upon the basis for Confucian moral psychology, while the recognition of personal desires and the collapse of ethic order turned into the important source of power emancipating suppressed human nature. Drinking poems also indicate that the literati of that time attempted to solve the latent body-mind conflict and pursued the self-so realm featuring the agreement between body and soul.

**Key words:** unrestrained words, Confucian rites, social cognition, self-so

As *Xuanxue* (a form of metaphysics in the name of Laozi and Zhuangzi prevailing in the Wei-Jin period of ancient China) became popular, meditative poetry abounded during the period of Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties. The poets absorbed nutrition from ancient poems before them, expressed their thoughts and feelings at natural scenes, old friends, events in the past, and social reality with fancy or plain words, and voiced the feelings, aesthetic taste, and political attitudes of themselves as individuals. It marked the important turn in the development of literature during that period. This paper will focus on the drinking vogue of the literati during the Wei and Jin dynasties, researching records about alcoholic drink and drinking poems during that period to analyze from a political angle how the literati of that time confronted the society of Confucian rites and fulfilled the arrangement of their self-so life when they woke up to the sense

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of life. In this way it will provide a case study for the argument between *ziran* (literally “self-so” or “naturalness,” the core concept of *Xuanxue*) and *Mingjiao* (a branch of neo-Confucianism during the Wei-Jin period stressing the duty responding to identity).

## 1. Drinking Manners and Drinking Pleasure

“Twenty-second Year of Duke Zhuang” in the *Zuozhuan: Commentary on the “Spring and Autumn Annals”* says, “The noble man said, ‘Using wine to complete a ritual but not continuing to the point of excess is an act of duty. Guiding a ruler to complete a ritual but not leading him into excess is nobility of spirit.’” It accepted drinking into the scope of rites, and took benevolence and righteousness as basic contents to define Drinking manners, pointing out that drinking personality was a sign of self-discipline as a part of gentlemen’s cultivation. Cai Yong of the Han dynasty stated in his poem “Inscription on a Wine Vessel,” “Drinking used to perform rites;/Shall not continue to excess;/Or morality would degrade;/As it might be made.” In this poem, Cai condemned the indulgence in drinking, which had been thought the violence against rites. At the end of the Han dynasty which had fallen into political chaos, the educated people began to break the requirement of traditional Drinking manners and unconventionally drink at the parties of the literati so as to dispel their depression caused by political reasons. Such parties at that time had two important functions, namely social interaction and the literati’s elegant gathering. The parties offered such entertainment programs as singing and dancing performances, *touhu* (pitch-pot), *boxi* (an ancient gambling chess game), *yiqi* (chess games), *chupu* (an ancient game, similar to dice), but more importantly, the chanting and composing of drinking poems were not only the means for the literati to contest each other, but also the important occasions for them to display their noble characters. Apart from the drinking poems improvised at banquets, a literatus would also take drinking as a background to compose poems when he drank alone. Drinking had gradually become an important hobby of the literati during the period of Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties. That created a sharp conflict with traditional drinking rites. Now that drunkenness “was forbidden by former kings and is condemned by gentlemen,” both Cao Cao and Liu Bei imposed prohibition against alcohol, pointing out that drinking spoiled virtues, but Kong Rong wrote an essay titled “A Letter to Rebuke Lord Cao's Memorial to Ban Alcohol” questioning Cao’s ban on alcohol. Kong refuted the negative remark that drinking might lead to the ruin of the country: he argued that alcohol could help emancipate the soul,

rejuvenate the state, improve the destiny, and enforce the law, eulogizing “the good of drinking.” Both Ran Ji and Liu Ling, who ranked among “Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove,” were known for their fondness of alcohol, and famous poet Tao Yuanming also explicitly expressed the “pleasure of drinking,” regarding alcohol as a major medium to develop morality and find amusement. Accordingly, people after that took drinking as a manner for a renowned literatus, so that they came to misbelieve that “A famous gentleman doesn't necessarily have to possess remarkable talent. Merely let a man be perpetually idle and a heavy drinker, and whoever has read the poem, ‘Encountering Sorrow’ (*Lisao*), can then be called a ‘famous gentleman.’” People of the Wei and Jin dynasties indulged themselves in heavy drinking, and even set the fashion that “the living room is always crowded, while the drinking vessels are full of wine.”

The vogue of heavy drinking during the Wei and Jin dynasties had its unique cultural background. In addition to the social function that drinking possesses itself, one also needs to pay special attention to the particular meaning of alcohol. The chapter “Metaphorical Language” in the *Zhuangzi* mentions “*zhi yan*” (unrestrained words), which is the expression closer to the feelings of life itself in comparison with both metaphorical words and the illustrations from valued writers. Cheng Xuanying interpreted the word “*zhi*” as a vessel for wine, therefore the phrase “*zhi yan*” can be explained as a drunk talk, the natural feelings revealed or vented after getting rid of the restraint of rationality. It is therefore heart-felt words. Guo Xiang remarked that a wine vessel “tips and pours out the wine when full and straightens up when empty,” suggesting that through drunk talks one could avoid the possibility of stereotype and one-sidedness. In a certain sense, drinking poems themselves were just drunk talks relatively, and Friedrich Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* stated that “The ecstasy of the Dionysian state, with its annihilation of the usual limits and borders of existence, contains for its duration a *lethargic* element in which all past personal experience is submerged. And so this chasm of oblivion separates the world of everyday reality from that of Dionysian reality. However, as soon as that everyday reality returns to consciousness, it is experienced for what it is with disgust: an ascetic mood which negates the will is the fruit of those conditions.” Such spiritual experience getting rid of the restraint of the real world accelerated the awakening of the sense of self-so life among the literati of the Wei and Jin dynasties.

Faced with the social disturbance at the end of the Han dynasty and the impermanence of life, the educated people of the Wei and Jin dynasties had a sober understanding of mortality.

Those who were concerned with mortality pursued longevity, and took alcohol as the way and means of seeking for permanent life. There were two schools of them: some under the influence of *Daojiao* (the Chinese religion bearing the name of Taoism) took certain kinds of medicinal powder while drinking, regarding alcohol as a good help for accelerating the effect of such powder. Lu Xun in a speech titled “Wei-Jin Style and the Relationship between Articles and Medicine and Wine” pointed out one needed to eat something cold after taking medicinal powder, but could drink hot alcohol. But other celebrities did not take medicinal powder; they merely drank out of personal interests. For instance, Ji Kang, a member of the “Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove” ranked among the former, while Ruan Ji belonged to the latter. The 13<sup>th</sup> piece of the *Nineteen Old Poems* says, “Some seek long life in fasts and potions; many end by poisoning themselves. Far better to drink fine wine, to clothe ourselves in soft white silk!” It comments on the strength and shortcoming of taking medicine and drinking, thinking drinking superior. Besides that “rooted in a love for hills and mountains,” Tao Yuanming also chanted in the *On Reading the Seas and Mountains Classic* that “In this world all I want, is wine, and length of years.”<sup>2</sup> People who anticipated to escape from mortality regarded drinking as the evidence of life at present. They enjoyed drinking to get rid of the physical restraint of human bodies, for examples, Cao Pi was so much impressed with the withering of plants and the shift of seasons that he believed that a human should satisfy their desires for food and drink, “pouring osmanthus wine, cooking carps and breams, and praying for pleasure and ease with beauties,”<sup>3</sup> so as to fill the void part of natural life. Liu Ling addicted himself to alcohol and lived an unconventional and unrestrained life.<sup>4</sup> According to Biography of Liu Ling in the *Book of Jin*, Liu “often carried a pot of wine when he rode a vehicle pulled by deer, ordering his servants to hold spades and follow him. He told those servants, ‘Simply bury me where I die.’” Lu Ji felt bitter about the transiency of human life, therefore took wine as the drug to relieve worries and enjoy present pleasure.<sup>5</sup>

No matter for what special reason they drank, the literati of the Wei and Jin dynasties had displayed strong awareness of life in the process of drinking. They cherished transient life

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<sup>2</sup> Tao Yuanming, *Annotated Collection of Works by Tao Yuanming*, proofread and annotated by Gong Bin. Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, 2011, p. 420.

<sup>3</sup> Cao Pi, “Weeds on a Large Wall: Ballad,” in the *Collection of Yuefu Lyric Poems*, Volume 39.

<sup>4</sup> In “The Free and Unrestrained,” a chapter of *A New Account of the Tales of the World*, we can find the stories of Liu Ling about “asking his wife for wine” and “taking off clothes and staying naked.”

<sup>5</sup> See Lu Ji, “Short Song” and “The Song of Perambulating the East and West Gates,” in *Collection of Yuefu Lyric Poems*, Volume 30 and Volume 37.

sensitively, and both the people who sought for immortality and those who aimed at escaping from secular disputes regarded their life experience acquired in drinking as a part of natural life, taking the chance of special physical experience gained through drinking to constantly increase the contents and profundity of life in reality. Therefore, drinking had become not only an important part of their natural life, but a representative characteristic of their life style, a softhearted comfort on the way of seeking for the freed oneself from life and death. In the state of heavy drinking, one may easily have disordered, irrational perception, including the dramatic awareness of himself, external things and present contexts under the condition of non-spatio-temporal orientation. That leads to the double dissolution of his identification and social recognition, as well as the real feeling of unreal world in the state of real life. Such special confusion not only weirdly impacts upon the values in the real world, but more importantly obscures the conceptual discrimination between nature and artificiality. Men gain the experience of absolutely natural life from disordered, indefinite, freely organized world of Dionysus. In this state of life, not only the boundary between nature and artificiality is broken, but also individuals are placed in the extreme state of complete comfort or acute discomfort, provoking their re-consideration of relative “naturalness.”

## **2. Moral Psychology and Mortality**

Drinking had been covered by Confucian rites very early. In order to prevent heavy drinking and guarantee the proper role of drinking, the Rites of the District Symposium in the *Book of Etiquette and Ceremonial* stipulated detailed rituals and ceremony for drinking at regular gatherings in the countryside. Such rituals had been intended to maintain the fundamental principle of “respects for the senior” in the relationship of the host and the guest or the senior and the junior, and display the order to be observed between elders and juniors in social edification. For the consideration of respecting the senior, much importance began to be attached to these rites since the Han dynasty, pertinent detailed rituals were explained by the scholars annotating Confucian classics, drinking gatherings in the countryside gradually became important occasions where government officials and landed gentry and esteemed elders joined together to carry out social edification and recommend the worthy and talented. Such rites not only turned into an

important part of Confucian conventions, but became complementary to social rule.<sup>6</sup> In the period of Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties, the political function and Confucian significance of drinking were downplayed while its social function was kept, and drinking had recovered itself as an individual and group hobby to a larger degree.

The popularity of drinking reflected from one aspect how the literati in the period of Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties affirmed natural desires and feelings; for them, drinking was not only an index of individual morality, but more of the behavior expressing personal characters. The drinkers abandoned such restraint as the rites of drinking, regarding drinking as an attachment of personal internal emotions. In this way, alcohol not only became an excuse for their escape from politics, but were an important weapon to protest the neo-Confucianism of that time. In the face of the ruthless fact that “few renowned literati have been able to survive,” the celebrities followed the principle of enjoying themselves in time with the help of alcohol, sought for the life of amusement at will, and thus kept away from the dark politics of that time and expressed their lofty ideal of staying away from dirty society. Among those people the most representative was Ruan Ji, one of the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove. He resigned the post of the governor of Dongping but assumed the office of a commandant of infantry just because in the commissary of latter “were stored several hundred *hu* (a kind of wine vessel in ancient China) of wine.” He was often drunken to avoid disasters when he was incumbent, and also often gave vent to grievance through wine. He used to chant, “Looking down into my cup, much misery;/Thinking of friends in former times./Facing the wine I cannot speak,/Depressed, I feel a sour pain.”<sup>7</sup> The unease and loneliness in the turbulent world could be temporarily relieved through the tranquilizing role of alcohol only. Tao Yuanming euphemistically expressed in *An Account of Wine* his antipathy for politics of the Jin and Liu-Song dynasties.<sup>8</sup> Later, Xiao Tong commented in the Preface to the *Collected Works of Tao Yuanming*, “There are those who have doubts about Tao Yuanming's poetry, since wine is present in each poem. I however think that

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<sup>6</sup> Wang Meihua also pointed out as local official groups of the Tang and Song dynasties strengthened their awareness of social edification, the rites of drinking in the countryside gradually became popular through imperial orders. See Wang Meihua, *Downward Movement of Rituals and Social Changes in the Tang and Song Periods* (Chapter V). Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Ruan Ji, *Poems on Singing My Feelings*, XXXIV.

<sup>8</sup> Cai Yu quoted the latest achievements in the study of Tao Yuanming, and classified *An Account of Wine* as a political allegorical poem. In Cai's view, this poem is “full of allusions” expressing his accusation of the political corruption at that time. See Cai Yu, *A Study of Tao Yuanming's Humanism Poems*. Taipei: Linking Publishing, 2012, p. 193.

his true intentions do not lie in wine; rather he made his mark through wine.” Bi Zhuo of the Western Jin dynasty once said, “With a boat full of hundreds of *hu* of wine and seasonal delicious food and fruits, you hold a *hu* of wine with your right hand, and a crab with your left hand, drinking heavily as you wish. That is the satisfactory way you spend your life.”<sup>9</sup> The grief at mortality and the hopelessness in face of society made the literati exhibit their helpless resistance in the illusion and degradation. Wang Xiulin commented on the life with drugs and alcohol as its keynote. He thought it “illusionary” and “abnormal,” stating that it was “an echo to the illusionary keynote of mentality at that time that showed indifference to transiency and changes.”<sup>10</sup>

Such life style with drinking as its content was merely the individual behaviors of a certain part of the literati at first, but later it gradually evolved into an example to be collectively imitated, bringing direct impact on the Confucian tradition at that time. The Free and Unrestrained in *A New Account of Tales of the World* says,

“Ruan Ji had a fat pig steamed and drank two *dou* (a measurement in ancient China, largely a decalitre) of wine when he was about to bury his mother. Then, at the last ritual, he did nothing but cry, ‘It’s all over!’ He uttered one single cry and then spit up blood, wasting away for a long time.”<sup>11</sup>

Ruan Ji violated the funeral rule of “eating coarse rice and drinking water” by having wine and meat during the mourning of his mother, but did not lose the true meaning of ethics: he was so grieved that he spit up blood. That inspired people to think about the true meaning of rites and ethics while opposing external ritual norms. Likewise, another story in *The Free and Unrestrained* says,

“The Ruan family were all great drinkers. Once upon a time, Ruan Ji’s nephew Ruan Xian went to a gathering of his clan. At his arrival, people put aside cups and began to drink directly from the vats. They sat in a circle and drank heavily face to face. At this moment, a flock of pigs came for drinking. They simply ladled the surface off, and proceeded to drink together.”

As this passage shows, all the Ruans preferred wine, and Ruan Ji’s nephew Ruan Xian drank face to face together with his clan fellows sitting in a circle, directly from large vats as

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<sup>9</sup> Biography of Bi Zhuo, in the *Book of Jin*.

<sup>10</sup> Wang Xiulin, *The Body Concept of Intelligentsia of the Wei-Jin Dynasty*. Taipei: Huamulan Culture Press, 2009, p. 66.

<sup>11</sup> “The Free and Unrestrained,” in *A New Account of the Tales of the World*.

pigs did. That made the drinking that had been elegant degrade into a vulgar animal behavior, and such challenge against ethical order was a huge shock at that time. Apart from criticism against the external ritual system, the various breakthroughs in terms of the purpose, occasion and manner of drinking even went further in undermining the internal moral basis of *Mingjiao*. In the mental state of drinking, men's moral psychology decreases, their sense of shame becomes weak, the sense of guilt is strengthened, the sympathy dissolves, and the self-respect swells. With the effect of alcohol, one gradually loses his self-control, becoming more sensitive and braver. With the decrease of tolerance, an individual may easily have the sense of estrangement and detachment from present situation and life from the angle of the third person. Such physical response to drinking can bring about strong self-awareness in the early stage of drinking, and this self-awareness is built on the self-awareness of the body at first, but has lost the self-evaluating part of rational self-consciousness, easily degrading to the position of egocentrism. This state directly causes the incompleteness of moral self; men are in lack of sufficient capability of restraining their behaviors with moral consciousness, and more badly fall into the state of slowness and indifference at the level of moral awareness, the swollen ego does not reflect on itself in its relation to others; instead, it respects individual natural feeling as the absolute approach to cognition. In this way, not only the establishment of moral self falls into predicament, but the irrational elements in the consciousness itself also have their role gradually increasing. People will forget or selectively forget the moral education that they have usually received, or even simply shelve the possibility that moral consciousness may be externalized. These elements were fatal to the role that the breakdown of *Mingjiao* played to individuals.

But the choice of drinking to directly oppose *Mingjiao* was slightly different from the afore-mentioned cases. In this state, they not only refused to affirm the authority of morality itself, but denied the authenticity of moral behaviors. What drinking directly caused was the loss of self-management capability, while self-management was the very core for the establishment of moral principle. The "loss of self" destroyed the psychological process of "extension" formed on the basis of the self's sympathy and empathy, and caused the disorder from the psychology of "self" to behavior. It was through drinking that people could directly express what they felt in their hearts, employing the external state of the "loss of self" as a pretext against moral authority; fundamentally the actor placed the value judgement of an ego above the moral principle, emphasized naturalness within the body which was the combination of *yin* and *yang*, sought for

purity and tranquility as the highest morality while meeting physical desires. In this way, they completed the transcendence over limited life. Such a life style was natural and unrestrained, and sought likewise exquisiteness and perfection. In that process, the suppression of naturalness and the singularity of standard were opposed, and the internal contents of life were constantly enriched through challenging and breaking the norms of *Mingjiao* on the basis of natural talents and characters. Therefore, the natural attitude towards drinking became the revealment of men's desires, and the important sources of power emancipating the suppressed human nature.

### **3. The Transcendence over Reality and the Unity of Mind and Body**

Drinking was not only a life style, but also a way in which the literati experienced the mind-body. The comfortable and complacent feeling gained through drinking was a start point for people to seek for the mysterious realm of *Dajia* (the philosophical school of Taoism), and on the basis of this they employed the deep wise thinking to express their longing for the oneness of self and others, and of man and nature. The Free and Unrestrained in *A New Account of Tales of the World* records Wang Fo's exclamation, which says, "I would feel my body and spirit disconnected once I stopped drinking for three days." In the theory of evolutional *qi* of the Han dynasty, the body and mind of a human being is of oneness, thinkers of the Han dynasty merely used the terms of *yin* and *yang* to discuss the nature of human beings, not separating them. People of the Wei and Jin dynasties distinguished between body and mind, but still maintained the simultaneous cultivation of spirit and body, i.e., emphasizing the preservation of the body while attaching importance to the perfection and satisfaction of spirit. In the real life, however, the mind should have been able to go wherever it wants to, but the body is restrained in limited space and time, and the mind is confined by benefits and customs in reality, unable to freely wander. That is the issue that "the mind is burdened with the body", which Ruan Ji mentioned in his *Poem at the Drinking Gathering*.

Then, how to solve the latent conflict between mind and body in reality? We find out different approaches in the drinking poems composed during the period of Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties. Liu Ling's poem known as The Genius of Wine depicts the two types of characters, namely Mr. Great Man and Mr. Noble Heir or Mr. Official. The latter established themselves on social norms and commented on right and wrong, imposing sharp criticism against

the Mr. Great Man for whom “wine, and wine alone, was all his lot.” However, Mr. Great Man “sitting down, quietly stroke his beard and sipped his wine by turns, until at length he lapsed into a semi-inebriate state of placid enjoyment, varied by intervals of absolute unconsciousness or of partial return of mental lucidity. His ears were beyond the reach of thunder; he could not have seen a mountain. Heat and cold existed for him no more; He knew not even the workings of his own mind. To him, the affairs of this world appeared but as so much duckweed on a river; while the two philanthropists at his side looked like two wasps trying to convert a caterpillar (into a wasp, as the Chinese believe is done).” Here, the image of Mr. Great Man is basically a copy of the ideal personality of *Daojia* believers, but Liu Ling added the role of drinking to it: Mr. Great Man, who is half drunken and half sober, is not disturbed by the turning of seasons, or by desires; his spirit roams around in the universe, joyous and carefree. Mr. Great Man here has transcended the particular states (drunk or sober) of the body in drinking, able to “take the duration of heaven and earth as an early morning, numberless early mornings as a moment, the sun and the moon as door and window, and eight farthestmost points as yards and roads. When he travels, he leaves no traces; and when he resides, he is not confined to any house: he takes the heaven as a curtain and the earth as a mat, doing whatever he wishes, and pleasing himself whatever he does.” In such a way, he extends his spiritual power to the limitless space and time, gaining spiritual freedom between heaven and earth.

Yang Xi of the Eastern Jin dynasty composed poems titled “Eleven Poems Improvised at the Company of Taoists in the Cloudy Woods,” depicting in details his feeling of the ideal world of freedom. In particular, the six piece says,

“Wine and company abound,/With sudden tranquility around./Unaware why it is so,/I know it is not conditional./Accompany brings pleasure,/Staying alone I even feel better./Travelling in the mystic sky,/I meet it when I fly.”

Yang Xi’s thought about easiness was mainly around “conditionality” and “unconditionality.” Although he proposed that “unconditionality surpasses conditionality,”<sup>12</sup> he also admitted that “I am here for the conditional,”<sup>13</sup> starting from the conditional existence of individuals in reality to think about how to be in ease. In the sixth poem in question, he solved the conflict between conditionality and unconditionality with the casual “encounter,” interpreted

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<sup>12</sup> See *Eleven Poems Improvised at the Company of Taoists in the Cloudy Woods*, V.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, I.

the encounter of drinking with the mentality of naturalness; more importantly, he thus understood from the perspective of spirit the contingency of physical encounter, and then the necessity of mind-body integration from the angle of mysticism. In his view, this process was just the natural evolution “whose reason is unknown,” that is, the transition from conditionality into unconditionality is not the act of any external force, but more dependent on the intellectual inspiration.

Tao Yuanming described in details his own spiritual experience of drinking in his “Poems After Drinking Wine.” For example, in the 14<sup>th</sup> piece, he said, “Aware no more that our own ‘I’ exists/How are we to value other things/So rapt we are not sure of where we are—/In wine there is a taste of profundity.” And in the 7<sup>th</sup> he exclaimed, “I drink my solitary cup alone/And when it is empty, pour myself another./The sun goes down, and all of nature rests/Homing birds fly chirping toward the grove./I sit complacent on the east veranda/Having somehow found my life again.” These poems are all the description of Tao Yuanming’s conformity with self-so, and he advocated all his life “pursuing the instinct for freedom, and not brooking discipline or restraint.”<sup>14</sup>

Therefore, he maintained that men should spiritually get rid of the bondage in reality,<sup>15</sup> abandon the angles of practical use and rationality, and appreciate all the gifts from nature. And also, he personated the three figures Body, Shadow and Spirit in a conversation in the three poems known as “Body, Shadow, and Spirit,” discussing the question of life and death, and fame and interests. He said, “Noble or base, wise or stupid, none but cling tenaciously to life. This is a great delusion. I have put in the strongest terms the complaints of Body and Shadow and then, to resolve the matter, have made Spirit the spokesman for naturalness. Those who share my tastes will all get what I am driving at.”<sup>16</sup> Faced with the issue of mortality and immortality, Body tries to dispel melancholy by drinks, but Shadow protests that the value of a human life should be based on doing good and rendering to love outlive oneself rather than drinking. In the end, Spirit proposes that in the general evolution one should conform to nature and adopt the attitude of unconcernedness to submit to the destiny of self-so. Here, Shadow in Tao Yuanming’s metaphor is a more illusory existence than Body, and a limited life dependent upon Body. In comparison,

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<sup>14</sup> The Return, in Tao Yuanming, *Annotated Collection of Works by Tao Yuanming*, proofread and annotated by Gong Bin. Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, 2011, p. 391.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., Returning to the Farm to Dwell I, says “For long I was a prisoner in a cage/And now I have my freedom back again.” P. 73.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., “Body, Shadow, and Spirit with Preface,” p. 59.

Spirit reaches a new height of drinking poems with his reflection on the effect of drinking, that is, the possibility of constructing the *ziran* life with transcendent meaning on the basis of the real life achieved by drinking. Therefore, he wrote in the Drinking Alone in the Rainy Season,

I try a cup, and all my cares are gone,/More, and all at once I forget Heaven./But is Heaven so far from this after all?/Nothing tops the one who trusts the True./The cloud-high crane with wonderful wings/Can reach the ends of the earth in a moment of time./Since I first embraced my solitary state/I have struggled through forty years./I have long since surrendered my body to change/My heart is untouched—what more is there to say?

Under the framework of the *Zhuangzi*, Tao Yuanming meditated on the changes of all things from the angle of limitless space and time, not regarding the preservation of life as an important pursuit. Facing the evolution of life at ease, he sensed through constant drinking the self-so of the mind after the reversal of life was cancelled.

Drinking evolved from the graceful taste of some of the literati in the period of Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties into a life style of the populace, and that displayed the natural feelings of people during that period. Drinking provided people with a way to transcend the politics in reality, stylized and externalized the idea of self-so life that they had invoked, and made them open the path leading to the ideal natural realm through alcohol. The literati indulged themselves with alcohol, and drunkenness helped them relieve the pains in reality and the helplessness in life,<sup>17</sup> while the enchantment in the state of drunkenness endowed people with vitality, inspired them to break away with the restraints of Confucian norms, constantly enrich the essential contents of life, and thus obtain the multiple contents of life in reality. The multiple angles of experience that alcohol brings about in the respect of mind and body provides experimental environment and model for people to gain spiritual freedom by exploring mind-body unity and breaking with physical restraints. Through drinking and literary activities during drinking in the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties, the *Daojia* idea of self-so stepped out the speculation of *Xuanxue*, became recognized important values. With this background, people appreciated the taste of self-so, recognized the diversity of things with greater tolerance, and employed metaphysical thought to seek for the lofty realm of self-so while they affirmed men's natural desires and accepted the reality of men's limited existence.

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<sup>17</sup> Wang Yao, "The Literati and Wine," in *On the History of Literature from Han to Liang and Chen Dynasties: The Literati and Wine*. Beijing: Peking University Press, 1998.