Abstract

The image of Tao Yuan Ming has been ambiguous and hotly debated by scholars interested in the poet’s work. The perception of his image has a direct influence on the interpretation of his works and the ambiguity of his image has resulted in severe disputes on the best approach to understanding his works. It is therefore important to identify the different representations of Tao Yuan Ming and how they have influenced the decipherment of Tao Yuan Ming’s works.

The image of Tao Yuan Ming has long been written into historical biographies by historians who lived not long after him. In addition, his image can also be conceived be detailed reading of his works. However, the precise image of Tao Yuan Ming is not conclusive by simply reading the historical biographies and his works for they are often conflicting in nature. The persona as portrayed in historical biographies and as self-portrayed or revealed in Tao Yuan Ming’s works were often created with distinct motives and aims, thus manipulating the reader into believing the poet to be of a personality that is very far off from the poet’s true character.

This thesis aims to analyse the various images of Tao Yuan Ming as portrayed in historical biographies and as self-portrayed in Tao Yuan Ming’s own works, paying special attention to the intentions and motives behind these portrayals and their (lack of) reliability for readers to identify the poet with. By analysing Tao Yuan Ming’s multifaceted images, this thesis sought to find a new way in which readers can better identify Tao Yuan Ming with, giving clearer and more
appropriate meaning to his works. Through the debunking of certain stereotyped myths regarding Tao Yuan Ming’s image, the author of this thesis will put forward the notion that Tao Yuan Ming’s real-self is one who was in constant dilemma, caught in-between social ideologies and personal inclinations. Tao Yuan Ming was a poet who wasn’t afraid to pen down his feelings and thoughts even when they would not be well received by people living in his era, neither did he conceal his ambitions and personal likings in order to create a perfect image of himself. The value of Tao Yuan Ming’s works lies in the honesty and surrealism that Tao made no effort to conceal in his works.