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Negotiating Values: The Reception of Su Shi's Works and Image

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Master of Arts  
in East Asian Studies

by

Rucheng Wang

2024

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## ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Negotiating Values:

The Reception of Su Shi's Works and Image

by

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Master of Arts in East Asian Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2024

Professor Huijun Mai, Chair

This paper explores the reception history of Su Shi (1037-1101), examining how his image evolved over time and across different interpretations. It discusses how Su Shi, a composite model of a loyal official and a carefree literatus, was portrayed in historical, literary, and dramatic sources. By analyzing the interplay between Su Shi's works and works of reception, this paper delves into the complex dynamics of values surrounding his image construction. This paper argues the reception of Su Shi's works and his image was not a linear progression, but rather a constant process of negotiations and contentions of different discourses. It opposes a simplistic portrayal of Su Shi, highlighting the multifaceted nature of his persona and the diversity of perspectives that emerged over the centuries. Through critical analysis, this paper reveals the interplay of values and discourses that shaped Su Shi's reception, resisting attempts to

canonize or monopolize the interpretation of his image.

The thesis of Rucheng Wang is approved.

Andrea Goldman

Yinghui Wu

Huijun Mai, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2024

## **Dedication**

*To my grandfather, a man who continues to write in his eighties.*

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## Acknowledgments

The exploration of Su Shi's life and legacy, a cultural giant in Chinese history, is an ongoing journey. As such a prolific writer who left a profound legacy in Chinese history, his stories have been adapted into numerous biographies, novels, drama scripts, and anecdotes. His resilient spirit, epitomized by his ability to find joy in adversity, continues to resonate with generations to come, including myself. I was encouraged by his lyrics during my high school years. From then on, he became a resolution, a source of power and liberation when I faced adversities and distress. He was a traveler and traveled to a lot of places throughout his life, and thus he provided answers for us on how to deal with parting and displacement. I always know that he is more than a role model and want to delve deeper into his life and his reception, but I know that my research is just "a speck of grain in the boundless sea", to use Su Shi's words.

I must thank three excellent professors in my thesis committee who graciously offered tremendous support to this thesis. This thesis could never have been done without their support, advice, and encouragement. Professor Huijun Mai introduced me to the research of Su Shi and the literature of the Song Dynasty, and she provided incredible support in designing and developing my thesis. I always appreciate the discussion and close reading of Su Shi's works in her seminar. Professor Andrea Goldman provided me with impressive knowledge of drama studies given her expertise in the field. I am always grateful for her advice in instructing and improving my thesis. Professor Yinghui Wu introduced me to the method of reception history, and I always appreciate her insights in structuring my introduction and conclusion. I am also thankful to the UCLA East Asian Library for providing access to a wealth of resources essential

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Lastly, I must express my heartfelt gratitude to my parents for their unwavering support throughout my academic journey. Their early introduction to Chinese culture and history paved the way for my studies at UCLA, and their encouragement fuels my continued pursuit of knowledge and scholarship.

## Introduction

As an exemplary scholar-official, Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037-1101) embodies a perfect combination of a bureaucrat and a literatus. He fulfilled his official duties with unwavering loyalty, demonstrating a profound sense of responsibility towards the state and the people. Simultaneously, Su Shi embraced the carefree lifestyle of a literatus, finding contentment in the pursuits of reclusion and Buddhist contemplation. His exile experiences added to his popularity: later scholars perceived him as a model who could discover joy in adversity and sought to resolve their own conundrums by reading into Su Shi's experiences.

This paper discusses the historical reception and construction of Su Shi's image during his exile in Huangzhou 黃州 (today's Hubei 湖北). It examines the evolving perceptions of Su Shi and the divergent interpretations of his works across generations to shed light on the complexity of his portrayal. I argue that the reception of Su Shi's works was not a successive portrayal, but rather a constant process of negotiations and contentions of different values and discourses.

Through the critical analysis of historical, literary, and dramatic sources, the paper aims to explore the dynamics among different narratives and reveal divergent values behind these narratives. By closely reading the cross-generic texts, this paper also seeks to reveal the interplay between Su Shi's own works as well as later sources that attempted to define Su Shi's image.

This paper diverges from the conventional reception history of Su Shi which sought to delineate changes in his perceived image over time. Instead, this paper seeks to elucidate the complex dynamics between Su Shi's works and works of receptions by revealing how later sources sought to define Su Shi's image and how Su Shi's works rejected an authoritative

understanding of his image. Chapter 1 introduces four public images constructed in Su Shi's writings in Huangzhou. Through the discussions of these images, the chapter aims to reveal Su Shi's life experiences and the transformation of his identities during the exile. Chapter 2 discusses *Song shi's* 宋史 portrayal of Su Shi's experience in Huangzhou and the value that the accounts reflected. Chapter 3 explores three Yuan dramas: "Su Zishan's Banishment to Huangzhou in Snowstorm" 蘇子瞻風雪貶黃州, "The Dream of Dongpo and Four Friends Amidst Flowers" 花間四友東坡夢, and "Su Zishan's Drunken Inscription of the Red Cliff Rhapsody" 蘇子瞻醉寫赤壁賦. The chapter shows how Yuan dramatists reconstructed the image of Su Shi and how they challenged Su Shi's image in history by rewriting his experience in Huangzhou. By looking into the dramatic arrangements, the chapter uncovers the values of the playwrights as they shaped the character of Su Shi. In the end, the interpretation of Su Shi's works and his image is an ongoing process that resists authoritarian definition.

## Chapter 1. Literary writings: Su Shi in Huangzhou

The Huangzhou period (1080-1085) was an especially prolific period for Su Shi. Su Shi created a large number of literary works that provided materials for historical writings, anecdotes, and dramas. This chapter discusses four images created by Su Shi in his works: Su Shi as a banished official, Su Shi as a farmer, Su Shi as a recluse, and Su Shi as a traveler.<sup>1</sup> In contrast to the flat character portrayed in *Song shi's* biography, Su Shi's own work presented the multiplicity and complexity of a character that was, whether intentionally or unintentionally, ignored by *Song shi's* narrative. This complexity of a character, as reflected in the tensions among Su Shi's different identities, was dramatized by Yuan playwrights. We will see in Chapter 3 that not only Su Shi's inner conflicts were exaggerated in drama scripts, but his conflicts with the rival party members were also put under the spotlight.

### Chapter 1.1 Su Shi as a Banished Official

Su Shi provided a brief overview of his situation in his poem, "On First Arriving at Huangzhou"

初到黃州:

自笑平生為口忙，	I laugh at myself for bustled all my life because of my mouth,
老來事業轉荒唐。	When I am getting old, I find that my work is becoming ridiculous.
長江繞郭知魚美，	Where the long river surrounds the city wall, I know the fish will be delicious,

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<sup>1</sup> Among the four images of Su Shi, the banished official and the recluse are at the two ends of the spectrum, and the traveler and the farmer are in between the official and the recluse. Su Shi's experiences in Huangzhou are diverse and cannot be defined by any one of the images. However, one can see his efforts to mitigate his image as an official and highlight his character as a recluse. He is by no means a real recluse, nonetheless. As Kathleen Tomlonovic sharply points out, "[Su Shi] could be identified as a pseudo-recluse who obfuscated the distinction between those who talked about reclusion and those who actually rejected fame and honor in the political domain. However, his adoption of the traditional actions associated with reclusion and his use of the language descriptive of retirement were the result of an ambivalence that contributed to a poetic tension in his literature." She concludes that "the interplay among the themes of service, retirement and exile in Su Shi's poetry is an intricate weaving of ideals held and realities encountered." See Kathleen Tomlonovic, "Poetry of Exile and Return: A Study of Su Shi (1037-1101)," 354.

好竹連山覺筍香。	The fine bamboos connect the mountains, I apprehend the fragrance of bamboo shoots.
逐客不妨員外置，	There is no harm for the expelled ones to serve as supernumeraries,
詩人例作水曹郎。	The poets always serve as Water Bureau clerks.
只慚無補絲毫事，	Only I am ashamed not making a single shred of contribution,
尚費官家壓酒囊。 <sup>2</sup>	While still costing the government to press out wine bags for me.

Su Shi provided many crucial messages in this poem. He sets the tone of the whole poem by announcing his self-ridicule. He explained that he laughed at himself because he “bustled all [his] life because of [his] mouth.” Su Shi played a pun here as there are two possible interpretations for bustle for one’s mouth: the first interpretation is that he busied all his life to make a living, which is certainly true because he had already served in office for twenty years; the second interpretation is that his turbulent life is due to his speech. We will discuss in Chapter 3 that Su Shi was accused of defaming the emperor in the “Crow Terrace Poetry Case” (*Wutai shian* 烏台詩案), which directly caused his displacement to Huangzhou. Su Shi’s younger brother, Su Zhe 蘇轍 (1039-1112) explained the reason for accusations against Su Shi in “Epitaph for My Late Brother, Duanming scholar, Zizhan” 亡兄子瞻端明墓誌銘:

Earlier, after he was assigned to the provincial post when he saw there were things inconvenient for the people, he dared not to speak out, but he also dared not to stay silent. Therefore, he followed the moral responsibility of a poet, lodging criticism of things, and hoping it would contribute to the state. The censors thus libeled him.

初，公既補外，見事有不便於民者，不敢言，亦不敢默視也。緣詩人之義，托事以諷，庶幾有

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<sup>2</sup> Zhang Zhilie 張志烈, Ma Defu 馬德富, and Zhou Yukai 周裕鍇, *Su Shi shiji jiaozhu* 蘇軾詩集校注 (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 2010), 20:2150. Su Shi added one line of self-commentary (*zizhu* 自註) at the end of the poem: “As a rule, a portion of a supernumerary official’s salary is usually paid in the form of used wine bags” 檢校官例折支，多得退酒袋。Supplementary payment (*zhezhi* 折支) is a form of official salary that is paid in resources rather than cash payment. In Su Shi’s case, he received wine bags for his salary. The translation is based on Alice W. Cheang, “Poetry, Politics, Philosophy: Su Shih as the Man of the Eastern Slope,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 53, no. 2 (December 1993): 327. For the rest of translations, unless otherwise noted, are translated by the author.

補於國，言者從而媒孽之。<sup>3</sup>

The term “to libel” (*meinie* 媒孽) originally meant distiller’s yeast.<sup>4</sup> The term later developed the meaning “libeling” as rumors fermented just like yeast. Ironically, Su Shi’s poems that were originally used to lodge his criticisms of the state became evidence for his crime. His sense of responsibility as a poet and a righteous official propelled him to speak out his criticisms of the state, but he realized that these poems that he wrote for the state were used as weapons for his enemies. Therefore, Su Shi wrote in the second line that when he was getting old, his career became “ridiculous” (*huangtang* 荒唐). *Huangtang* could also mean something is in vain.<sup>5</sup> He felt that his career was becoming ridiculous because he could no longer declare his criticisms, even lodging meanings in his poems would be impossible. Feeling responsible for advising the court, Su Shi felt that his career as a poet and a minister was in vain.

In the next two lines, Su Shi shifted his focus to daily life. He seemed to love the surroundings in Huangzhou, a remarkably rustic area. He anticipated the food in Huangzhou would be delicious after he discovered the long river surrounding the city wall and the nice bamboo covering the mountains. The discussion of food once again referred to the first line which discussed Su Shi’s bustle for his mouth. A possible explanation is that his mouth can no longer used to announce his criticism, but he can still taste delicious food, marking his transition of focus from his political career to life details.

The next two lines introduced Su Shi’s new identity: a banished official. He mentioned

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<sup>3</sup> Zeng Zaozhuang 曾棗莊, and Ma Defu 馬德富, eds., *Luancheng ji* 樂城集 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1987), 1414.

<sup>4</sup> *Hanyu da cidian* 漢語大詞典, s.v. “Meinie 媒孽.”

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, s.v. “Huangtang 荒唐.”

that he became a “supernumerary” (*yuanwai* 員外).<sup>6</sup> A supernumerary refers to someone related to the bureaucratic system and yet is not included in the system. Acknowledging his new status, he assured himself, by recalling historical precedence, that poets usually become Water Bureau clerks.

The last two lines ended the poem in self-ridicule: Su Shi mentioned that he was ashamed that he could not make any contribution to the state, while he still needed a salary from the government to sustain his life. Note that Su Shi’s claim that he “could not make any contribution” (*wubu* 無補) is directly contrary to what Su Zhe wrote in the epitaph that Su Shi “hoped to contribute (*youbu* 有補) to the state.”<sup>7</sup> The absurdity is that Su Shi hoped to make some contribution to the state by fulfilling his responsibility as a poet and a state minister, but he was no longer able to do so because of the restriction of his speech. What was more preposterous was that while he made no contribution to the state in Huangzhou, he still needed the government’s salary to make a living. From the poem itself and Su Shi’s self-annotation, we know that his salary was paid in the form of wine bags, and these salaries were hardly enough for him to sustain his life. This poem sets a tone for his life in Huangzhou, where he was free from official duties but faced adverse financial conditions. Thus, finding a new meaning of life in Huangzhou and a new source of income became the major pursuits of Su Shi during this period.

Su Shi’s identity as an exile was also reflected in several works he created in the Dinghui

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<sup>6</sup> *Hanyu da cidian* 漢語大詞典, s.v. “*yuanwai* 員外.”

<sup>7</sup> The conflict resulted in Su Shi’s realization that literary writing was no longer a secure means of political criticism. In his “Response Letter to Li Duanshu” 答李端叔書, for instance, Su Shi wrote: “I dared not to compose any literature after I got the crime” 自得罪後, 不敢作文字. See Zhang et al, *Su Shi wenji jiaozhu*, 49:5345.



monastery 定惠院. After Su Shi arrived at Huangzhou in 1080, he spent the first three months in the Dinghui monastery and created many great works there. One of the most famous ones was his lyric, “The Song of Divination, composed while lodging in the Dinghui Monastery in Huangzhou” 卜算子·黃州定慧院寓居作:

缺月掛疏桐，	The crescent moon hanging on a sparse Wutong tree,
漏斷人初靜。	The water clock stops, and a person settles in silence.
誰見幽人獨往來，	Who sees a secluded person coming and going alone,
縹緲孤鴻影。	An elusive shadow of a lonely goose.
驚起却回頭，	Startled, it turns its head,
有恨無人省。	With regrets unshared by anyone.
揀盡寒枝不肯棲，	Picking through the cold branches, unwilling to roost,
寂寞沙洲冷。 <sup>8</sup>	Lonely on a sandbar cold.

The lyric has two parts: in the first part, Su Shi introduces a “secluded person” (*youren* 幽人) who is unseen by anyone but a lonely goose; in the second part, the lonely goose is not noticed by anyone but the secluded person. They look into each other as mirrors: both the secluded person and the lonely goose become reflections of each other. The image of a lonely goose was used repeatedly by poets to signify a banished official<sup>9</sup>: ambitious and yet unsettled. However, Su Shi’s arrangement of this lyric marked its difference from conventional poetry of things (*yongwu shi* 詠物詩) by juxtaposing the human and the goose as the subjects of the lyric<sup>10</sup>. In contrast to the earlier poems, in which poets served as observers of the goose’s behavior, Su Shi places the human and the goose as double subjects of the lyric, and they serve as the sole

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<sup>8</sup> Zhang et al, *Su Shi ciji jiaozhu*, 1:249-250.

<sup>9</sup> See, for instance, Du Fu’s 杜甫 (712-770) “Lonely goose” 孤雁 and Zhang Jiuling’s 張九齡 (678-740) “Sentiment #4” 感遇其四.

<sup>10</sup> This lyric is more comparable to poetry (*shi* 詩) rather than lyric (*ci* 詞). See Cheang, “Poetry, Politics, Philosophy: Su Shih as the Man of the Eastern Slope, 341-342.

observer and companion for each other.

From the first line of the lyric until the end, Su Shi left several puzzles that were unsettled. On a silent night, the water clock stopped, and a secluded person did not rest. The person went out for a walk, discovered by no one but a lonely goose. In the next line, the perspective shifts from the goose to the person: the person saw the goose being startled and it turned its head. He speculated that it must have some resentment. Then he saw the goose flying around, finding a place to rest. It refused to rest on a tree branch after a round of search, and it finally decided to rest on a sandbar. After reading this lyric, readers might face several puzzles: Why was the goose startled? Why did it turn its head? What was its resentment? Why did it refuse to rest on a tree branch?

Su Shi did not attempt to address these puzzles while leaving space for the readers' speculations. Many commentators, thus, read this lyric as rich in political allegories.<sup>11</sup> Alice Cheang explains that “the allegorical interpretation of *yongwu* grows out of a convention of reading poetry that is almost as old as the poetic tradition itself: as the instrument of moral judgment (literally, *meici* 美刺, the apportionment of praise and blame, for good and bad government respectively)<sup>12</sup>. She adds that “What can be symbolized by the description of the

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<sup>11</sup> For instance, The Layman of Tongyang (Tongyang jushi 銅陽居士) commented: “The crescent moon” satirizes the dim light. “The stopping water clock” signifies the dark time. “The secluded person” is the one who is unable to fulfill aspirations. “Coming and going alone” signifies his helplessness. “The startled goose” reflects a virtuous person not at ease. “Turning back” shows he cannot forget his affection for the monarch. “Unnoticed by anyone” means the monarch was not aware. “Picking through the cold branches, unwilling to roost” shows that he does not seek comfort in high positions. “Lonely on a sandbar cold” means he is ill at ease. This lyric is extremely like the poem Kaopan. 缺月，刺明微也。漏斷，暗時也。幽人，不得志也。獨往來，無助也。驚鴻，賢人不安也。回頭，愛君不忘也。無人省，君不察也。揀盡寒枝不肯棲，不偷安於高位也。寂寞沙洲冷，非所安也。此詞與考槃詩極相似。 See Zhang et al, *Su Shi ciji jiaozhu*, 1:253.

<sup>12</sup> Alice Cheang, “Poetry, Politics, Philosophy”, 343. In this quotation and the quotations that follow, I will change the Wade-Giles romanization to pinyin romanization for consistency throughout the thesis.

literal object is narrowly defined by a set of common themes, one of them being ‘the gentleman at odds with the world’.”<sup>13</sup> She points out that these themes could be traced back to as early as the time of the Book of Songs (*Shi jing* 詩經) and the Songs of Chu (*Chu ci* 楚辭). This explains why commentators like Tongyang jushi strove to align Su Shi’s lyrics to the *Book of Songs*.

However, it is very difficult to allegorize this lyric by Su Shi as Cheang indicates that “The *ci* avoids conventionally established correlations; rather, it suggests tentative analogies between the poet’s situation and that of the object he describes while resisting the reader’s attempts to discover in them definite acts of signifying.”<sup>14</sup> The relationship between the human and the goose is tentative as Su Shi did not seek to clarify this relationship. Indeed, several elements in the lyric invited readers’ speculations: The introduction of the secluded person is certainly Su Shi’s self-identification as evidenced in his poem, “The secluded person does not go out without a cause” 幽人無事不出門. The image of the goose was highly anthropomorphized. It has *hen* 恨 (often translated as regrets or resentment) that is unnoticed by anyone, and it can “pick” (*jian* 揀) through the branches and is “unwilling” (*bukēn* 不肯) to roost. These behaviors reflect human agency and could easily be read as a projection of human consciousness. However, it is very difficult for the readers to provide a definite answer to what the goose is signifying. As a result, there were many possible interpretations that the readers could make for this lyric, and yet no one could monopolize the interpretation.

Su Shi presented a puzzling stance in this lyric. On one hand, his arrangement in the

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<sup>13</sup> Cheang, “Poetry, Politics, Philosophy”, 343.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 342.

lyrics invites political allegorization. On the other hand, the ambiguity of the lyric rejects a definite interpretation. What accounts for this conflict? The answer might lie in Su Zhe's account mentioned earlier: "Therefore, he followed the moral responsibility of a poet, lodging criticism in things" 緣詩人之義，托事以諷. The idea of "to satirize" (*feng* 諷) means indirect criticism. Poetry is a good vehicle to lodge criticisms. After the Poetry Case, however, poetry became the proof of his crime. The conventional way to lodge criticisms in poetries became dangerous. The period of exile in Huangzhou, thus, became a period of proliferation of Su Shi's lyrics<sup>15</sup>. Poetry is a prestigious literary genre that is strongly associated with the poet, and Su Shi was accused of defaming the emperor because of his poetry writing. Therefore, it is quite possible that Su Shi used a less prestigious genre, lyrics, to lodge his criticisms. For one thing, lyrics were less associated with their authors and prevented autobiographical interpretation. For the other thing, due to the lack of prestige, readers were less likely to read them as serious political allegories. Thus, by poetizing lyrics, Su Shi imbued allegories in the lyric which invited political speculations and prevented serious interpretation of political criticism that might incur accusations.

## 1.2 Su Shi as a Farmer

After the first several months of lodging in the Dinghui monastery, Su Shi and his family moved

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<sup>15</sup> Benjamin Ridgway summarized the explanation for this proliferation by referring to Ye Jiaying and Ronald Egan. Ye Jiaying believes that Su Shi began to write lyrics during this time because he encountered political failures which made him associate his marginalized status with the marginalized genre. Ronald Egan argues that Su Shi wrote lyrics at this time due to his initial rejection of the genre due to its ill reputation. Ridgway seconded Ye's hypothesis by pointing out that almost one-third of Su Shi's lyrics were written in his exile in Huangzhou. While it is hard to identify the exact reason why Su Shi started to create lyrics at this time, the correlation between his political marginalization and his creation of lyrics seems clear. See Ridgway, "Imagined Travel: Displacement, Landscape, and Literati Identity in the Song Lyrics of Su Shi (1037-1101)," 77.

to the Lingao pavilion 臨皋亭. In his second year in Huangzhou, Su Shi and his family almost ran out of economic resources. At this time, Su Shi's friend, Ma Zhengqing 馬正卿 (1037—?) asked the local authorities to grant the abandoned campground to Su Shi, after which it became the well-known site, “East Slope”東坡.<sup>16</sup> Dongpo has profound meaning to Su Shi, as it was not only the place where Su Shi could settle down and make a living for himself and his family during his exile, but also his new self-identification. As Cheang comments, “The search for *an* 安, a place of rest, a feeling of rootedness—the theme that comes to dominate the rest of the Huangzhou period—defines the poet’s search for a new identity.”<sup>17</sup> Su Shi’s adoption of his new style name “Dongpo jushi” reflected a self-fulfilling prophecy that “the ‘Eight Poems on the Eastern Slope’ are not only about Su Shi’s new life as a farmer, then, but about how, through this new life, he works out a sense of his own self—how he comes by his true and proper name.”<sup>18</sup>

One noteworthy aspect of Su Shi’s self-identification at this stage is his alignment to Tao Qian 陶潛, that is, Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (365-437) as reflected in his lyric “River City Song” 江城子<sup>19</sup>:

夢中了了醉中醒。	Alert in a dream and sober in drunkenness,
只淵明。	Only Yuanming,
是前生。	Was my prelife.

<sup>16</sup> Su Shi introduced his situation in the preface to “Eight Poems on the Eastern Slope”東坡八首: “It was the second year of my stay in Huangzhou, and I was in daily worsening straits. My friend Ma Zhengqing took pity on my hunger and asked the district authorities if I could have several acres of an old army campground to cultivate. The land, which had long lain waste, was no more than a pile of rubble overgrown with weeds; there had also been a severe drought that year. The mere task of breaking up the soil was nearly enough to exhaust my strength, and so, letting go of the plow with a sigh, I wrote these poems to console myself in my effort, in the hope that next year’s harvest would make me forget my labors.” 餘在黃州二年，日以困匱，故人馬正卿哀餘乏食，為於郡中請故營地數十畝，使得躬耕其中。地既久荒，為茨棘瓦礫之場，而歲又大旱，墾辟之勞，筋力殆盡。釋耒而歎，乃作是詩，自潛其勤，庶幾來歲之入，以忘其勞焉。 See Zhang et al, *Su Shi shiji jiaozhu*, 21:2242. The translation is based on Cheang, 354.

<sup>17</sup> Cheang, 352.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 354.

<sup>19</sup> Zhang et al, *Su Shi ciji jiaozhu*, 1:344. Translation based on Ridgway, 158-159.

走遍人間，	Having wandered throughout the world,
依舊卻躬耕。	Just as before I cultivate the land
昨夜東坡春雨足，	Last night abundant spring rains fell on East Slope,
烏鵲喜，	Magpies in their happiness,
報新晴。	Announce the clear new weather.
雪堂西畔暗泉鳴。	On the western bank of Snow Hall, a hidden spring sings out.
北山傾。	The Northern Mountain slants,
小溪橫。	A small stream horizontally flows down from it.
南望亭丘，	Gazing south from the pavilion toward the hill,
孤秀聳曾城。	The solitary peak rises like the Tiered Wall Mountain.
都是斜川當日境，	All this is the scene of Xie Brook on that day,
吾老矣，	And having grown old,
寄餘齡。	Here I will lodge my remaining years.

In the preface, Su Shi introduced his imitation of Tao Yuanming's outing to Xie Brook 斜川 by altering his surroundings: he built the Snow Hall, crafted a small hill, and channeled a small spring.<sup>20</sup> All these acts aimed to mimic Tao Yuanming's surroundings that Tao described in his poems.

In the lyric "River City Song," Su Shi demonstrated his intriguing relationship with Tao Yuanming, as shown in the opening lines: "Alert in a dream and sober in drunkenness,/ Only Yuanming,/ Was my prior life." Su Shi started the lyric by introducing two sets of contradictory statuses: Alertness and dream as well as soberness and drunkenness. The counterintuitive way of writing invites readers' memory of a famous story in *Zhuangzi* 莊子.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Su Shi wrote in the preface: "Tao Yuanming made his outing to Xie Brook on the fifth day of the first lunar month. Standing beside the stream he gazed at the Southern Hill and delighted in the single rising peak of Tiered Wall. There he composed his poem on Xie Brook, enabling readers of the present day to imagine the beauty of that place. In the spring of 1082, I farmed on the East Slope and built Snow Hall there to live into the south. I built up a hill behind the Four Vistas Pavilion and to the west, I channeled a small spring on the Northern Mountain. I sigh in exhilaration at how much this place is just like Tao's description of his outing to Xie Brook. Thus, I wrote this lyric and used the tune of 'River City Song.'" 陶淵明以正月五日遊斜川，臨流班坐，顧瞻南阜，愛曾城之獨秀，乃作斜川詩，至今使人想見其處。元豐壬戌之春，餘躬耕於東坡，築雪堂居之。南挹四望亭之後丘，西控北山之微泉，慨然而歎，此亦斜川之遊也。乃作長短句，以江城子歌之。 See Zhang et al, *Su Shi ciji jiaozhu*, 1:344. Translation based on Ridgway, 158-159.

<sup>21</sup> "In the past, Zhuang Zhou dreamt of transforming into a butterfly. So caught up in the dream, he forgot he was Zhuang Zhou. Upon abruptly waking, he realized he was still Zhuang Zhou. Unable to determine whether the dream Zhuang Zhou became a butterfly, or the butterfly transformed into Zhuang Zhou, there must be a distinction between the two. This is what is meant by the

The relationship Su Shi identified with Tao Yuanming was just like the relationship between Zhuang Zhou and the butterfly. In Su Shi's dream, he is a reincarnation of Tao Yuanming. Su Shi's relationship with Tao Yuanming seems slightly more intricate than that of Zhuang Zhou and the butterfly. Su Shi applied a Buddhist term "prelife" (*qiansheng* 前生) to indicate his relationship with Tao. By adopting the phrase "just as before" (*yijiu* 依舊), he invoked a sense of déjà vu that he already experienced the life of a farmer in his prelife. The phrase "cultivate by oneself" (*gonggeng* 躬耕) not only identified the work of Tao after he resigned from office and Su Shi's current work but also referred to a special group of people: these people were not real farmers and yet they farmed as a way of life. This is evidenced in a passage in the *Analects*.<sup>22</sup>

Chang Ju and Jie Ni were two figures recorded in the *Analects*. They appeared to be farmers, but they were, in fact, recluses as demonstrated in the passage. Confucius and his disciple Zilu 子路, that is, Zhong You 仲由 (542-480 BCE) were looking for a ford to pass the river. When Confucius let Zilu ask for the direction for the ford, the first recluse, Chang Ju

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transformation of things." 昔者莊周夢為蝴蝶，栩栩然蝴蝶也，自喻適志與！不知周也。俄然覺，則蘧蘧然周也。不知周之夢為蝴蝶與，蝴蝶之夢為周與？周與蝴蝶，則必有分矣。此之謂物化。See Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩, ed., *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2013), 106.

<sup>22</sup> In *Analects* 18.6, Confucius passed Chang Ju and Jie Ni, who were yoked together pulling a plow through a field. He sent Zilu to ask them where the ford was to be found. Chang Ju inquired, "That fellow holding the reins there—who is one driving the cart?" Zilu answered, "That is Confucius." "Do you mean Confucius of Lu?" "The same." Then he should know where the ford is." Zilu then asked Jie Ni. Jie Ni also replied with a question: "Who are you?" "I am Zilu." "The disciple of Confucius of Lu?" "Yes." "The whole world is as if engulfed in a great flood, and who can change it? Given this, instead of following a scholar who merely avoids the bad people [of this age], wouldn't it be better for you to follow scholars like us, who avoid the age itself?" He then proceeded to cover up his seeds with dirt and did not pause again. Zilu returned and reported this conversation to Confucius. The Master was lost in thought for a moment, and then remarked, "A person cannot flock together with the birds and the beasts. If I do not associate with the followers of men, then with whom would I associate? If the Way were realized in the world, then I would not need to change anything." 長沮、桀溺耦而耕。孔子過之，使子路問津焉。長沮曰：「夫執輿者為誰？」子路曰：「為孔丘。」曰：「是魯孔丘與？」曰：「是也。」曰：「是知津矣。」問於桀溺。桀溺曰：「子為誰？」曰：「為仲由。」曰：「是魯孔丘之徒與？」對曰：「然。」曰：「滔滔者天下皆是也，而誰以易之？且而與其從辟人之士也，豈若從辟世之士哉？」耷而不輟。子路行以告。夫子憮然曰：「鳥獸不可與同群，吾非斯人之徒與而誰與？天下有道，丘不與易也。」 See Li Xueqin 李學勤, eds., *Lunyu zhushu* 論語註疏, in *Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經註疏 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1999), 249-250. The translation is based on Edward Slingerland, *Analects: With Selections from Traditional Commentaries* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2003), 216-217.

asserted that Confucius knew where the ford was. This is an allegory as the word *jin* 津 could also mean a way to solve the conundrum of life. Chang Ju was implying that Confucius already found a way to solve the conundrum of life, so he did not need to ask them. Then Zilu asked another recluse, Jie Ni, who provided a more elaborate response to Zilu's question. He answered the question by asking another question: since the world is submersed by a great flood, who can change it? Therefore, Jie Ni believed that instead of being the scholars who avoid people (*bi ren zhi shi* 辟人之士), it would be better to be the scholar who avoids the world (*bi shi zhi shi* 辟世之士). This passage demonstrated the difference between Confucian scholars and actual recluses as the former group would temporarily become recluses while waiting for the next official appointment. Confucian scholars were not recluses because they did not reject the whole world and they were devoted to changing the world.

Back to the lyric, the phrase “cultivate by oneself” suggested a status in between being an official and being a recluse. In this lyric, Su Shi seemed contented with his new life in the East Slope and adapted to his new role as a farmer. He wrote about the heavy spring rain that may contribute to the growth of crops. The magpies announced clear weather, which was great for an outing. He animated his surroundings through his writing: the hidden springs sang, and the mountain and the stream displayed different poses. He gazed through the pavilion he built toward the hill and enjoyed the marvelous scenery in his surroundings. He exclaimed that “all this is the scene of the Xie Brook on that day,” aligning his outing to Tao Yuanming's outing to the Xie Brook. As Benjamin Ridgway comments, “Su Shi's home improvements further domesticated a foreign landscape and inscribed a sense of the past, a tradition of farmer-poets to which Su Shi



could assimilate himself.”<sup>23</sup> Ridgway points out a principal factor that by reconstructing a foreign environment and associating his experience with ancient scholars, Su Shi became adaptable to the new environment and his new social role.

Zhiyi Yang points out the idealized aspect of Su Shi’s landscape writings. She mentions that “Tao Qian’s countryside was already populated by conventions and archetypes that were formed in the eremitic tradition before him. In comparison, Su Shi’s countryside is even more metaphorical and idealized, at times so utopic that its rural residents are all moral ideals incarnate.”<sup>24</sup> She argues that “Through emulation of Tao Qian, Su Shi reinterpreted his exile to be a result of his natural inclinations, just like Tao’s reclusion, and even as a felicitous condition for his ‘return’ to an original state of authenticity and spontaneity”<sup>25</sup> She adds that “by assuming certain agency for his suffering, Su Shi claimed control over his fate and reasserted his freedom of choice.”<sup>26</sup> Yang’s comments are crucial to understanding the meaning of Su Shi’s emulation of Tao Yuanming as Su Shi not only regarded Tao as a spiritual idol but the model of voluntary disengagement from politics. Thus, by identifying with Tao. Su Shi translated his exile experience into a voluntary choice. And yet the situation of Su and Tao was vastly distinct as Tao resigned from office while Su “remained an official despite malicious defamation, prosecution, and multiple exiles.”<sup>27</sup> Su Shi’s political disengagement was thus less thorough and less resolute than that of Tao Yuanming. He remained somewhere in between an official and a recluse. The

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<sup>23</sup> Ridgway, 158.

<sup>24</sup> Zhiyi Yang, “Return to an Inner Utopia: Su Shi’s Transformation of Tao Qian in His Exile Poetry,” *T’oung Pao* 99, no. 4 (January 2013): 339-340.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 329.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Yang, 331.

understanding of his exile experience was, therefore, a complex process.

### 1.3 Su Shi as a Recluse

On the third month of 1082, Su Shi made a trip to Sandy Lake 沙湖 and composed a lyric,

“Calming the Wind and Waves”定風波 on his way<sup>28</sup>:

莫聽穿林打葉聲，	Don't listen to the drumming of rain on leaves falling through the forest,
何妨吟嘯且徐行。	Why not sing and whistle while walking along at ease?
竹杖芒鞋輕勝馬，	The bamboo cane and straw sandals are lighter than a horse.
誰怕。	What's to fear?
一蓑烟雨任平生。	In a fisherman's coat, I live out my life amid the rain and mist.
料峭春風吹酒醒，	A cool spring wind awakens me from my drunkenness,
微冷。	Bringing a slight chill.
山頭斜照却相迎。	From the hilltops, slanting rays seem to greet me.
回首向來蕭瑟處。	Turning back to where I'd come from, the sougning winds blow.
歸去，	Return home,
也無風雨也無晴。	With neither wind and rain nor clearing skies.

He started the lyric by an argument: he suggested the readers not to listen to the sound of wind and rain, but to “sing and whistle while walking along at ease.” The negative imperative “don't listen” (*mo ting* 莫聽) and the suggestive phrase “why not” (*he fang* 何妨) enhance the persuasive elements of the lyric. As Ridgeway comments: “Verbs expressing desires, negative imperatives, and rhetorical questions all give a strong sense of the speaking voice of the poet

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<sup>28</sup> Su Shi introduced the context of the trip in the preface: “On the seventh day of the third month on the road to Sandy Lake, I ran into rain. The rain gear had been sent ahead, and my companions walking with me were all miserable, only I did not notice. In a little while the sky cleared, and thereupon I wrote this lyric.” 三月七日，沙湖道中遇雨，雨具先去，同行皆狼狽，餘獨不覺。已而遂晴，故作此詞。 See Zhang et al, *Su Shi ciji jiaozhu*, 1:351-352. Translation based on Ridgeway, “Imagined Travel”, 150-151.

within these lines.”<sup>29</sup> He argued that “these decisions reflect a philosophy of finding enjoyment in nature even under the most difficult circumstances and maintaining an inner equanimity in the face of a changing environment.”<sup>30</sup>

The act of singing and whistling (*yinxiao* 吟嘯) was a common practice for the scholars in the Wei-Jin 魏晉 (220-420) period. For instance, a famous scholar-official, Xie An 謝安 (320-385), was fond of this practice. *The History of Jin* (*Jin shu* 晉書) recorded an occasion when Xie An practice singing and whistling:

Once, he sailed across the sea with Sun Chao and others. As the wind rose and waves surged, everyone felt fearful, but An remained calm, singing and whistling as if undisturbed. The boatmen thought An was delighted, and continued to sail without stopping. When the wind intensified, An calmly said, “How shall we return in such conditions?” Upon hearing his words, the boatmen promptly turned back. Everyone admired his poise.

嘗與孫綽等泛海，風起浪湧，諸人並懼，安吟嘯自若。舟人以安為悅，猶去不止。風轉急，安徐曰：「如此將何歸邪？」舟人承言即回。眾咸服其雅量。<sup>31</sup>

The phrase “elegant quality” (*yaliang* 雅量) was greatly valued during the Wei-jin period.<sup>32</sup> It refers to a quality that one is undisturbed by the change in external conditions. In Xie An’s story, his elegant quality was reflected in comparison to others. When the group of people faced tremendous waves, Xie’s companions were all shocked while Xie seemed very calm as

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<sup>29</sup> Ridgway explains the “speaking voice” of the lyrics by referring to Shunfu Lin’s argument: “The mode of the interplay between (the preface and the song lyric)...is exactly like the mutual generative process of the spoken and sung parts in Chinese drama. The spoken part usually reflects on the background that produces the emotions involved in the sung part. The sung part, in turn, presents a ‘morphology of feeling’ that has evolved from the situation.” In other words, Ridgway compared the song lyrics to dramas, indicating that just like dramas have spoken and sung parts, song lyrics also share the same function. The performative element of lyrics was very similar to that of dramas since they were both addressed directly to the audience. See Ridgway, “Imagined Travel”, 148, 152.

<sup>30</sup> Ridgway, “Imagined Travel,” 152.

<sup>31</sup> Fang Xuanling 房玄齡 et al, *Jin shu* 晉書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2000), 1379.

<sup>32</sup> *A New Account of the Tales of the World* spent a whole chapter recording the stories of elegant quality.

demonstrated by his acts of singing and singing. Su Shi's elegant quality, similarly, was demonstrated by the contrast between him and his companions. He showed his elegant quality by emulating ancient celebrities like Xie An who kept singing and whistling in a disastrous weather condition. Su Shi was persuading his audiences to ignore the unfavorable external conditions and enjoy the moment of ease.

Su Shi's stance of "walking along at ease" during a turbulent time was discovered frequently in his works created in Huangzhou. In the last two lines of the poem "East Slope," he wrote: "Don't disdain the rugged road on the slope's top, /Cherishing the dragging sound of the staff. In another lyric he composed around the same time as the "Calming wind and waves", he wrote: "I am a carefree sojourner in the world taking this carefree stroll" 我是世間閑客，此閑行。<sup>33</sup> The idea of carefreeness (*xian* 閑) was the result of his identity as an exile, which freed him from official duties. Egan explains that as Su Shi no longer had to deal with the official duties as a provincial bureaucrat, he was able to liberate himself from the conventional public image as a loyal advisor and remonstrating minister of the state. He adds that, thus, "[Su Shi] was ready now to explore new roles and modes of expression."<sup>34</sup> He concluded that "banishment not only provided Su Shi with more leisure time, it also freed him from having a single dominant orientation in life, that towards the service of his ruler."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Zhang et al, *Su Shi ciji jiaozhu*, 1:354. For the translation, see Ridgway, "Imagined Travel", 141.

<sup>34</sup> Egan lists a range of new roles Su Shi experienced: "He became a Confucian scholar, that is, commentator on the classics. He took up an interest in medicine and alchemy, trying both internal and external techniques for improving health and prolonging life. He began to keep a diary or notebook (*Dongpo zhilin*) and filled it mostly with records of strange events, dreams, outings, and longevity techniques. He became a gentleman farmer and imitated, at first sporadically and then methodically, the poetry of the Tao Qian." See Ronald C. Egan, *Word, Image, and Deed in the Life of Su Shi* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 220.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

Egan rightly points out that banishment fundamentally shifted Su Shi's orientation from political affairs to life details and natural landscapes. In the lyric, "Calming the Wind and Waves," Su Shi presented himself as a recluse who was not carefree of political turmoil. He wrote: "The bamboo cane and straw sandals are lighter than a horse./ What is to fear?/ In a fisherman's coat, I live out my life amid the rain and mist." The bamboo cane, the straw sandals, and the fisherman's coat are all emblems of the recluse. The Tang recluse Zhang Zhihe wrote: "With a green bamboo hat,/And a mossy fisherman's coat./Though a fine rain blows across in the wind, it's no cause to return home" 青箬笠, 綠蓑衣, 斜風細雨不須歸.<sup>36</sup> Ridgway commented that "In both song lyrics the fisherman's coat serves to protect the poet from the winds and rain of a storm and, by metaphorical extension, during times of political turmoil."<sup>37</sup> He expands, noting that "If the fisherman's coat is an emblem of Su Shi's residence in the local landscape of Huangzhou, one that he borrows from a poetic predecessor Zhang Zhihe 張志和 (732-774), in these song lyrics Su Shi puts the locality in opposition to the "storm," the larger political struggles between factions who supported the emperor's New Policies and those that opposed them."<sup>38</sup>

Ridgway's point that Su Shi used the hermetic tradition as a shield against political prosecution is insightful. By acting like a recluse who identified with the place of exile, he was declaring to retreat from the rainstorm caused by factionalism. In the ending lines of the lyric, Su Shi wrote: "Return home, /With neither wind and rain nor clearing skies." As Zhiyi Yang

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<sup>36</sup> Peng Dingqiu 彭定求. *Quan tangshi* 全唐詩 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), 29:418.

<sup>37</sup> Ridgway, "Imagined Travel," 164.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

points out, “Su defined his ‘return’ (*gui* 歸) as returning to an inner state of spontaneity, unconditioned by external contingencies.”<sup>39</sup> Looking back, Su Shi developed a new perspective that he did not see the clear sky or rainstorms. When he looked back on his life, he discovered all the external phenomena disappeared and turned into his experience of growth. Su Shi, at this point, was announcing that he was ready to start over again and began to accept his new identity by eliminating the turbulent memory of his past.

#### 1.4 Su Shi as a Traveler

On the seventh month of 1082, Su Shi went out boating with his guests.<sup>40</sup> The weather seemed very nice: “A cool breeze blew gently, and the river had no waves”<sup>41</sup> Su Shi, who appeared to be the Master Su in the rhapsody, raised a toast to his guests and recited the poems from the *Book of Songs*. Su outlined a scenario of a literati gathering: a group of educated individuals gathered together, enjoying the nice weather and scenery at night with the full moon. The moon and the wine cup added up to be great triggers of poetical writing,<sup>42</sup> and they became essential elements for literati gatherings as well. Su Shi recorded that their little reed “drifted out onto the vast expanse of water.”<sup>43</sup> They “flew along as if [they] were borne by the wind up into the sky, not

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<sup>39</sup> Yang, 331.

<sup>40</sup> It is controversial who was the guest Su Shi mentioned in the “First Rhapsody on Red Cliff”. Some commentators believed it was the musician Li Wei 李委, while others believed that it was the Daoist priest Yang Shichang 楊世昌. The Yuan dramatists arranged for Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅 and the Buddhist monk 佛印 to be the companions of Su Shi. After all, who the guest was did not matter that much in this piece.

<sup>41</sup> Zhang et al, *Su Shi wenji jiaozhu*, 1:27. For the translation, see Egan, 222.

<sup>42</sup> Li Bai wrote a lot of poetries while drinking alcohol and enjoying the moonlight. This setting often triggers philosophical inquiries. In his poem “Toast to the Moon”把酒問月, for instance, Li Bai addressed several critical questions to the moon. See Peng Dingqiu, *Quan Tangshi*, 1827.

<sup>43</sup> Zhang et al, *Su Shi wenji jiaozhu*, 1:27. For the translation, see Egan, 222.

knowing where [they] would stop; [they] soared freely as if [they] had left the world behind, sprouting wings and rising aloft like immortals.”<sup>44</sup> These descriptions reflected the unworldly nature of the gathering.

When Su Shi and his guests finished a round of toasts, they began to sing songs. At this moment, one guest who played the flute joined the music. Yet, his flute sounded so different from the delighted atmosphere, “as if there was something he resented or yearned for, as if someone were weeping or complaining.”<sup>45</sup> Su Shi, surprised by the music, asked the guest why he performed that way.

The guest offered a sophisticated answer with several layers. He first invoked people’s memory of a historical figure, Cao Cao 曹操 (155-220). At the place they were boating, Cao Cao wrote his poem. When they gazed to the east, they could see Xiakou 夏口, and when they looked to the west, they could see Wuchang 武昌. Both places, as the guest identified, were battlegrounds where Cao Cao fought with Zhou Yu 周瑜 (175-210).<sup>46</sup> The guest continued that when Cao Cao “conquered Jingzhou 荊州 and took Jiangling 江陵, he proceeded eastward down the Yangzi.”<sup>47</sup> The guest described the astounding scale of Cao Cao’s navy: “Bow to stern, his warships stretched a thousand miles, and his banners blocked out the sky.”<sup>48</sup> The guest narrated Cao Cao’s heroic gesture: “He poured wine as he gazed across the river and composed poetry with his halberd lying across his lap,” and he commented on Cao Cao being “without a

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid. The idea of “borne by the wind” (*yufeng* 禦風) as well as “sprouting wings”(yuhua 羽化) are all Daoist languages. *Zhuangzi* recorded that the Daoist immortal, Liezi 列子, could be borne by the wind.

<sup>45</sup>Zhang et al, *Su Shi wenji jiaozhu*, 1:28. For the translation, see Egan, 223.

<sup>46</sup> Xiakou is in today’s Wuhan 武漢, and Wuchang is in today’s Ezhou 鄂州. Both places are in today’s Hubei 湖北.

<sup>47</sup> Zhang et al, *Su Shi wenji jiaozhu*, 1:28. For the translation, see Egan, 223.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

doubt, ...the greatest warrior of his age”<sup>49</sup> “And yet,” the guest continued with a question, “where is he today?”<sup>50</sup> The complete question was, even the heroic figures like Cao Cao disappeared, would people remember them— “the fishermen and woodcutters of the river islets?”<sup>51</sup>

The guest believed that they were “Mayflies caught between Heaven and Earth, a speck of grain in the boundless sea.”<sup>52</sup> He mourned for the brevity of their lives and admired the boundlessness of the Yangzi River. He wished to “grasp a soaring immortal to wander far and wide or embrace the bright moon and live on for all time.”<sup>53</sup> He then denied this wish by stating: “Knowing how difficult such feats are, I consign my fading notes to the sorrowful wind.”<sup>54</sup>

Master Su, hearing the complaints of the guest, provided a very philosophical response:

Do you not know about the river and the moon? The former flows on and on but never departs. The latter waxes and wanes but never grows or shrinks. If you look at things from the viewpoint of the changes they undergo, nothing in Heaven or Earth lasts longer than the blink of an eye. But if you look at them from the viewpoint of their changeless traits, neither the objects of the world nor we ever come to an end. What is there to envy? Furthermore, all objects between Heaven and Earth have their master. As for something we do not own, we do not presume to take the smallest amount of it for ourselves. But as for the Yangzi’s cool breeze and the bright moon that shines between the mountains—when our ears are exposed to them, they hear sounds; and when our eyes meet them, they see images. We are not prohibited from taking these for our own, and we can use them without ever exhausting them. They are, in fact, the Creator’s inexhaustible treasures, given freely for us jointly to consume.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. Recall the earlier mentioning of the Daoist languages such as “borne by the wind” (*yufeng* 禦風) as well as “sprouting wings” (*yuhua* 羽化) in the Rhapsody. Here, the guest also sought to practice the Daoist approach to becoming immortals. The phrase “embrace the bright moon and live on” possibly refers to the Chinese goddess Chang’e 嫦娥, who lived on the moon forever.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. The guest presented a common sentiment in the “contemplating the past” (*huaigu* 懷古) literature. Contemplating the past usually invokes the feeling of the transience of life, as the traces of human lives will be removed by history. However, contemplating the past would also invoke a different kind of feeling—the continuity of history—as evidenced by the response of the Master Su in the following passage.



蘇子曰：「客亦知夫水與月乎？逝者如斯，而未嘗往也；盈虛者如彼，而卒莫消長也。蓋將自其變者而觀之，則天地曾不能以一瞬；自其不變者而觀之，則物與我皆無盡也，而又何羨乎！且夫天地之間，物各有主，苟非吾之所有，雖一毫而莫取。惟江上之清風，與山間之明月，耳得之而為聲，目遇之而成色，取之無禁，用之不竭。是造物者之無盡藏也，而吾與子之所共食。」<sup>55</sup>

Su Shi, by adopting the symbolisms of water and the moon, not only evoked a sense of continuity between him and earlier literati, but also invited the participation of later scholars in the construction of collective memories. As water and the moon can last through time, they became the recurrent themes shared by poets generation after generation.<sup>56</sup> We can similarly find the embodiment of continuity in Li Bai's 李白(701-762) works. For example, Li Bai wrote in the poem "Toast to the Moon" 把酒問月<sup>57</sup>:

今人不見古時月，	Today's people do not see the moon of ancient times,
今月曾經照古人。	but today's moon used to shine on the ancients.
古人今人若流水，	Ancient people and present people are like flowing water,
共看明月皆如此。	and they all look at the bright moon together.

This poem reflects Li Bai's understanding of continuity: although people today cannot see the moon of ancient times, today's moon used to shine on people of ancient times. Generations are like flowing water, but when people look at the moon, they must share the same feeling. This sense of continuity could also be found in the poem "Moonlit Night on the Spring River" 春江花月夜<sup>58</sup> written by Zhang Ruoxu 張若虛 (670-730):

<sup>55</sup> Zhang et al, *Su Shi wenji jiaozhu*, 1:28. The translation is based on Egan, 223.

<sup>56</sup> Egan notes that "the sanguine reassurance that Su finds in the underlying thought of an ongoing human consciousness and community, greater by far than any single life, yet linking separate lives together, as Su is linked to the Red Cliff warriors and later readers are, in turn, linked to Su is a special and memorable resolution of the problem raised so often by encounters with ancient sites in Chinese poetry." He continues: "It is this evocation of human continuity, in the face of which individual possessiveness is meaningless, that makes the ending of the rhapsody so immensely satisfying." See Egan, 224.

<sup>57</sup> Peng Dingqiu, *Quan tangshi*, 179:1827

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 117:1184.

江畔何人初見月? By the riverside, who was the first to see the moon?  
江月何年初照人? Which year did the moon first shine on people?  
人生代代無窮已, Generations in human life are endless,  
江月年年望相似. Year after year, the river and moon look very similar.

At the end of the Rhapsody, therefore, Su Shi was constructing a collective memory shared among Song and later literati.<sup>59</sup> Su Shi's visits to the Red Cliff were no longer mere sightseeing or literati gatherings, but an attempt to initiate a spatiotemporal discourse with the ancients while also inviting scholars of later generations to participate in this colossal discourse. We will see in Chapter 3 how the Yuan dramatists employed the elements of spatiotemporal discourse in the dramas related to Su Shi.

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<sup>59</sup> As Cong Zhang points out, "Song literati travelers were keen to make contact with, and physical changes to, famous sites. For them, the places they visited all had a layered past, whose stories were constantly being rewritten and reread by generations of visitors. She explained that "this meant that the visitor had to be well-versed in the lore of places to participate in their cultural memory. She continued that "in this sense, touring an illustrious site was not simply about viewing the traces of celebrated figures from the past. More important to the sightseers was their own interaction with the place and their reading of the literary history embedded there." See Cong Zhang, 181.

## Chapter 2. Historical accounts: Su Shi in Huangzhou

The description of Su Shi's displacement in *Song shi* includes three parts: first, the reason for the exile; second, the experience of the exile; and third, the end of the exile.<sup>60</sup> In this chapter, I will mainly discuss how *Song shi* accounted for Su Shi's exile experience in Huangzhou and why the authors decided to use a concise narrative style, and leave the discussion for the other two parts for Chapter 3, which discusses dramas concerning Su Shi's exile experience. *Song shi* provided a concise description of Su Shi's experience in Huangzhou:

Emperor Shenzong, showing special pity for [Su Shi], displaced him to serve as the Vice Commander of the Regional Militia in Huangzhou. Shi and the farmers and rustic old men, following each other through the hills and streams, built a residence in the East Slope and adopted the style name the "Layman of the East Slope".

神宗獨憐之，以黃州團練副使安置。軾與田父野老，相從溪山間，築室於東坡，自號東坡居士。<sup>61</sup>

Several points could be made about Su Shi's identity in Huangzhou after reading this passage.

First, the opening line informs the readers of Su Shi's identity as a displaced official. It is worth noting that the word "to displace" (*anzhi* 安置) has a special meaning in the Song's judicial system.<sup>62</sup> It refers to the practice of assigning a designated residence to officials who have been demoted and banished, with certain restrictions on their movements. The displacement typically comes with additional penalties. For instance, a displaced official might also be a demoted official or an official could be displaced and removed from office. In Su Shi's case, he was

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<sup>60</sup> While Su Shi's punishment was not exile in exact translation, I use the word "exile" to signify an involuntary removal from one's position.

<sup>61</sup> Tuo Tuo 脫脫, *Song shi* 宋史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2000), 8644.

<sup>62</sup> *Zhongguo gudai dianzhang zhidu da cidian* 中國古代典章制度大辭典, s.v. "Anzhi 安置."

displaced and appointed as the Vice Commander of the Regional Militia in Huangzhou. This official post was a nominal post that did not grant him any official duties or salaries.

Second, Su Shi's status as a nominal official freed him from official duties and provided him with a lot of leisure time to travel through hills and streams. In the Song Dynasty, sightseeing became a common practice among scholar-officials as they were constantly moving from one post to another.<sup>63</sup> This was especially the case for displaced officials as they did not have to worry about official work. Thus, we can find a large amount of Su Shi's work in Huangzhou concerning sightseeing.

Third, *Song shi*'s record that Su Shi traveled with farmers and rustic old men provided us with a clue as to Su Shi's self-recognition. The phrase "farmers and rustic old men" (*tianfu yelao* 田父野老) also includes people without official ranks. Su Shi's association with these people sheds light on how Su Shi understands his self-identity in Huangzhou. This understanding was also reflected in Su Shi's poem titled "East Slope" 東坡:

雨洗東坡月色清，  
市人行盡野人行。  
莫嫌犖確坡頭路  
自愛鏗然曳杖聲。<sup>64</sup>

The rain washes the East Slope, clearing the moonlight  
The urban folks passed through, and rustic folks took to the paths.  
Don't disdain the rugged road on the slope's top,  
Cherishing the dragging sound of the staff.

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<sup>63</sup> Scholars have noticed the significance of travel to the identity formation of Song literati. For instance, Cong Zhang sharply points out that "Song elites took advantage of the opportunities presented by examination learning and office-holding and used them to consolidate their dominance in the broader culture and society. Frequent travel, a direct result of their professional and scholarly pursuits, became a powerful tool in the realization of this goal." James Hargett also notes that "Su Shi greatly enjoyed his leisure time, even during his Huangzhou exile years, and one of his favorite recreational activities was sightseeing. That he was one of the first Chinese authors to write at length about sightseeing as a leisure activity is in itself quite significant, especially in the history of travel writing in China." See Cong Zhang, *Transformative Journeys: Travel and Culture in Song China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2011), 4 and James M. Hargett, "What Need Is There to Go Home? Travel as a Leisure Activity in the Travel Records (*Youji* 游記) of Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101)," 123.

<sup>64</sup> Zhang et al, *Su Shi shiji jiaozhu*, 22:2490.

The poem's title identifies its association with Su Shi since East Slope was known as the place where Su Shi made a living for himself and his family members. The opening line of the poem signifies a change in Su Shi's self-recognition by portraying a weather change. The East Slope serves as a pun as it refers to both the place where Su Shi lives and Su Shi himself. Just as the sky is cleansed by the rain, the poet's inner self is also cleaned. In the line that follows, the urban folks and the rustic folks could be interpreted as two distinct groups of people, but one could also interpret them as the same individuals who transitioned from the first group to the second group. In Su Shi's case, the urban Su Shi has gone, and the rustic Su Shi comes. The third line also contains a pun: the rugged road refers to both the physical road and Su Shi's life journey. Su Shi convinced himself that he would not complain about the ruggedness of life, because he already passed through the ruggedness and was prepared to accept his new identity as a rustic person.

Last, Su Shi's style name (*hao* 號) "Layman of the East Slope" (*Dongpo jushi* 東坡居士) provided the most significant clue to Su Shi's new identity. Laymen originally meant the talented and merited recluses who do not serve the court. It later became the word that Buddhist monks and Daoist priests call those who practice Buddhism and Daoism at home. Literati also identify themselves as laymen when they are not serving the court. For instance, Su Shi's mentor Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修(1007-1072) adopted the style name the Layman of the Six-Ones (*Liuyi jushi* 六一居士) in his later years of life. His "Biography of the Layman of the Six-Ones"六一居士傳 announces his decision to break away from officialdom and start his life of retirement. By the same token, Su Shi's self-identification as the Layman of the East Slope also reflects his decision to keep some distance from officialdom. However, Su Shi's situation was more complicated.

Unlike Ouyang Xiu who adopted the style name when he retired from office, Su Shi was not a retired official or a recluse as the style name implied. This in-between status between an official and a recluse was a major topic that appeared repeatedly in Su Shi's works as well as later dramas concerning his affairs.

For historiographers in ancient China, historical writing is a systematic process of selecting, editing primary sources, and crafting a coherent narrative. From *Song shi*'s writing, it is not difficult to tell that the authors used selective documentation. In this sense, history authors were no different from storytellers as they recorded what they thought was important in detail while ignoring the episodes that seemed trivial. Therefore, the way of writing history inevitably reflects the authors' values, perspectives, and motivations. The question then, is to figure out what are the values, perspectives, and motivations reflected in *Song shi*. A discussion in the Zuo Commentary (Zuo zhuan 左傳) might provide some hints for the question. When Shusun Bao 叔孫豹 (?-548 BCE) came to Jin 晉 (today's Shanxi 山西), Fan Xuanzi 范宣子 (?-537 BCE) asked him a question: "What is 'immortality' (*buxiu* 不朽)?" Shusun Bao did not respond. Shi Gai continued questioning whether his clan could be immortal. Shusun Bao responded that:

According to what Bao heard, this is called heritage, not immortality. In Lu, there was a former minister of the state named Zang Wenzhong. Though he has passed away, his words still endure. What is meant by this? According to what Bao heard, first and foremost, there is the establishment of virtue, next is the establishment of achievement, and then the establishment of words. Though time passes, they are not abandoned. This is what is meant by immortality.

以豹所聞，此之謂世祿，非不朽也。魯有先大夫曰臧文仲，既沒，其言立。其是之謂乎？豹聞之，大上有立德，其次有立功，其次有立言，雖久不廢，此之謂不朽。<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Yang, Bojun 楊伯峻. *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), 1088.

Shusun Bao refers to a historical figure named Zang Wenzhong 臧文仲 (?—617 BCE) who passed away at the time and yet his words still survive in historical accounts, and Shusun Bao used him as an example of immortality. Then he provided a critical standard of immortality: first and foremost, to establish virtue (*lide* 立德), the next level is to make achievements (*ligong* 立功), and then the next level is to establish words (*liyan* 立言). He stressed that these things will not be abandoned once someone dies, and this is what he meant by immortality.

The three standards of immortality (*san buxiu* 三不朽) introduced by Shusun Bao became crucial standards for history writing. To establish virtue usually refers to contributing to the people and cultivating moral standards. Making contributions was usually reflected in contributing to the state. To establish words usually means advising on policymaking. All in all, these standards are mostly political-oriented. Therefore, *Song shi*'s authors spent a lot of space discussing how Su Shi contributed to the state and local societies by building infrastructure and alleviating natural disasters, how he spoke against the New Policies (*xinfa* 新法), and how he gave advice to the emperor while leaving little space discussing what Su Shi experienced in places in Huangzhou because these personal experiences are relatively trivial to historical recording.

The concise narrative of Su Shi's time in Huangzhou can also be explained by the Confucian idea that the life of a recluse complements that of an official. In other words, Su Shi's life in Huangzhou is valuable to record only because it was considered a period for a banished official to reform himself and wait for new official appointments. This idea was evidenced in two

passages in the Analects (*Lunyu* 論語).<sup>66</sup> In these two passages, Confucius highlighted the significance of following the Way (*dao* 道), arguing that a gentleman should serve the office (*shi* 仕) when the state possesses the Way (*youdao* 有道) and leave the office (*yin* 隱) when the state loses its Way (*wudao* 無道). In the second passage, through the discussion of Shi Yu 史魚 and Qu Boyu 蘧伯玉, Confucius showed his attitude toward serving the office. Although praising Shi Yu's uprightness, Confucius favored Qu Boyu's adherence to the Way when he commented: "What a gentleman was Qu Boyu! When the state possessed the Way, he served it; when the state lacked the Way, he was able to roll up his talents and hide them away." According to the commentary, the way to determine whether a state possesses the way is whether there was a sage ruler.<sup>67</sup> Therefore, Confucius's comment suggested that a gentleman should wait upon the time of sage rulers to serve the office. This notion was corroborated in his commentaries in the *Book of Change* (*Yijing* 易經): "A gentleman hides one's talents within, waiting for the right time to act. What is the disadvantage?" 君子藏器于身,待時而動,何不利之有。<sup>68</sup>

In passage 9.13, Confucius' disciple Zigong 子貢 (520-446 BCE) came up with an intriguing allegory, and Confucius' response reflected his belief in the relationship between

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<sup>66</sup> In passage 8.13, Confucius commented on when a gentleman should serve the office: The Master said, "Be sincerely trustworthy and love learning and hold fast to the good Way until death. Do not enter a state that is endangered, and do not reside in a disordered state. If the Way is being realized in the world, then show yourself; if it is not, then go into reclusion. In a state that has the Way, to be poor and of low status is a cause for shame; in a state that is without the Way, to be wealthy and honored is equally a cause for shame." 子曰:「篤信好學,守死善道,危邦不入,亂邦不居。天下有道則見,無道則隱。邦有道,貧且賤焉,恥也;邦無道,富且貴焉,恥也。」 In passage 15.7, Confucius commented on two historical figures, showing his attitude towards the timing of serving the office and retreating from office: The Master said, "How upright was Historian Yu! When the state possessed the Way, he was straight as an arrow, and when the state lacked the Way, he was also straight as an arrow. What a gentleman was Qu Boyu! When the state possessed the Way, he served it; when the state lacked the Way, he was able to roll up his talents and hide them away." 子曰:「直哉史魚!邦有道,如矢;邦無道,如矢。君子哉蘧伯玉!邦有道,則仕;邦無道,則可卷而懷之。」 See Li Xueqin 李學勤, eds., *Lunyu zhushu* 論語註疏, in *Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經註疏 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1999), 104, 209. The translation is based on Edward Slingerland, *Analects: With Selections from Traditional Commentaries* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2003), 82, 177.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>68</sup> Li Xueqin 李學勤, ed. *Zhouyi zhengyi* 周易正義. In *Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經註疏. Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1999.



scholar-officials and rulers: Zigong said, “If you possessed a piece of beautiful jade, would you hide it away in a locked box, or would you try to sell it at a good price?” The Master responded, “Oh, I would sell it! I would sell it! I am just waiting for the right offer.” 子貢曰：「有美玉於斯，韞匱而藏諸？求善賈而沽諸？」子曰：「沽之哉，沽之哉！我待賈者也。」<sup>69</sup> In this passage, Zigong was alluding to a gentleman’s virtue to a beautiful jade. In the specific context, it refers to Confucius’ talents and virtue. Zigong was asking Confucius, through the metaphor of a beautiful jade, whether Confucius was looking to serve the office. Confucius’ response made it clear that he was the beautiful jade that was waiting to be sold.

Confucius’ response not only reflected his mentality of waiting to be discovered by a sage ruler but also revealed a very similar mentality for later scholars. For instance, Su Shi expressed this mentality in his “River City Song, Hunting in Mizhou” 江城子·密州出獵: Carrying a tally to Yunzhong, /Oh when will they send the likes of Feng Tang? /Then I would draw my engraved bow like the full moon, /And gazing to the northwest, /Strike down the heavenly wolf. 持節雲中，何日遣馮唐？會挽雕弓如滿月，西北望，射天狼。<sup>70</sup> In this song lyric, Su Shi identified himself as Wei Shang 魏尚(?—157 BCE) and sought a sage king like Emperor Wen of Han 漢文帝 (203-157 BCE) to send a messenger like Feng Tang 馮唐 (3 century- 2 century BCE) to promote him. When Su Shi wrote the lyric, Song was fighting with Western Xia 西夏. Su Shi hoped that he could be dispatched to lead an army to fight against Western Xia’s invasion. Su Shi’s aspiration to be discovered by a sage ruler and given a good offer was no different from

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<sup>69</sup> Li Xueqin, *Lunyu zhushu*, 118. The translation is based on Slingerland, *Analects*, 191.

<sup>70</sup> Zhang et al, *Su Shi ciji jiaozhu*, 1:136-137.

that of Confucius. From the time of Confucius to the time of Su Shi, this aspiration was shared by Confucian scholars.

This perhaps explains why historians did not spend much space discussing Su Shi's experience in Huangzhou. It was because they only took the time of exile as a short episode between Su Shi's official appointments. This official narrative of Su Shi's life was not without criticism, however. A Ming scholar Yuan Zhongdao 袁中道 (1570-1626) commented on Su Shi's biography in *Song shi*:

What the biography of Su Shi recorded were mostly the significant events of his political career. However, when observing individuals, their demeanor is often captured in moments of unintended expressions such as frowning and laughing. Like the portrait of Pei Shu, the facial features and physique are already well-defined, but the absence of three hairs on his cheek makes it less like the person: The reason why Ban Gu and Sima Qian's book can reflect one's spirit is because of this idea. Starting from the Tang and Song periods, there was a somewhat acerbic tone. Since there were not many things to do in the capital, I gathered scattered observations into a single volume, allowing readers to grasp the overall picture of their life journeys at a glance. It is just like a part of an armor and a single piece of feather, some stories that appeared in other books may not be included in this account. However, the spirit of his unrestrained nature is likely discernible.

子瞻本傳所載者,皆其立朝大節.然觀人者,其神情正在顰笑無心之際,如畫裴叔,<sup>71</sup> 則面部體格已定,而非頰上三毛,則不似: 班馬傳神.猶得此意.唐宋而下,頗有酸氣,都中無事,乃取其散見者,都為一本,使其老少行蹤,一覽便盡之耳.片甲一毛,或猶見於他書者,今未必盡收.然其瀟灑之趣,大約亦可見矣.<sup>72</sup>

Yuan criticized Su Shi's biography for only recording "the significant events of his political career" (*lichao dajie* 立朝大節). He argued that an individual's character is reflected in "moments of unintended expressions such as frowning and laughing" (*pinxiao wuxin zhi ji* 顰笑無心之際). He believed that rather than the significant political events, some trivial episodes of

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<sup>71</sup> Pei Shu refers to Pei Kai 裴楷, whose style name is Shuze 叔則. Yuan abbreviated his name as Pei Shu here.

<sup>72</sup> Yan Zhongqi 顏中其. *Su Dongpo yishi huibian* 蘇東坡軼事彙編 (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1984), 336.

life might be more significant to characterize a person. He cited the story of Gu Kaizhi 顧愷之 (348-409) painted a portrait for Pei Kai 裴楷(237-291) in *A New Account of the Tales of the World* (*Shishuo Xinyu* 世說新語).<sup>73</sup> The commentary noted that “Kaizhi has painted portraits of ancient worthies, all of which have been praised for their excellence” 愷之歷畫古賢,皆爲之贊也. This commentary pointed out a crucial fact that Gu Kaizhi did not paint the portrait of Pei Kai when Pei was alive. Instead, he was painting for an ancient worthy. Since Gu Kaizhi was born more than half a century after Pei Kai’s death, he could not observe what Pei Kai looked like when he was alive. Therefore, adding three more hairs to Pei Kai’s cheek was Gu’s artistic expression. Intriguingly, all observers believed that this artistic creation reflects a “divine brilliance” (*shenming* 神明) which made the painting much better than it was before. Yuan Zhongdao alluded to history writing to portrait painting, stating that “The reason why Ban Gu 班固 (32-92) and Sima Qian’s 司馬遷 (circa 135 BCE—?) book can reflect one’s spirit (*chuanshen* 傳神) is because of this idea.” Yuan suggested that history writing is like portrait painting since historians may not know the figures they were writing. Most biographies were written after the figures died. Thus, great historians such as Ban Gu and Sima Qian all had some artistic expression in their biographies to increase the vividness of the characters just like what Gu Kaizhi did for Pei Kai’s portrait.

The idea of reflecting one’s spirit was discussed in another passage in *A New Account of*

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<sup>73</sup> In the painting of Pei Shuze by Gu Changkang, three more hairs are added to his cheeks. When people asked why, Gu said, “Pei Kai is handsome, clear-sighted, and discerning. This is precisely his discernment.” Those who observed the painting searched for it, and indeed, the addition of three hairs seemed to possess a divine brilliance, surpassing the initial portrayal. 顧長康畫裴叔則,頰上益三毛.人問其故,顧曰:「裴楷儁朗有識具,正此是其識具。」看畫者尋之,定覺益三毛如有神明,殊勝未安時. See Yu Jiayi 余嘉錫, *Shishuo Xinyu jianshu* 世說新語箋疏 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), 847.

*the Tales of the World*.<sup>74</sup> This passage demonstrated once again that Gu Kaizhi did not paint the portrait on the scene. He would rather finish his portraits after years. History writing follows the same rule. Historical biographies were usually finished many years after the person died. As no one could claim that they could witness every detail of a person's life when they were writing biographies, biographers need to add in some artistic expressions that reflect their understanding of the figures. The idea of the finishing touch, or literally, eye-pointing brush (*dianjing zhi bi* 點睛之筆) is similar to the idea of adding three hairs to a portrait that they are details which seems trivial but the portraits would become less vivid without.

This is why observers like Yuan Zhongdao were critical of *Song shi*'s narration of Su Shi. He commented on the historical writing tradition starting from Tang and Song as “acerbic” which suggests its plainness in artistic expression. Not satisfied by reading Su Shi's biography, Yuan decided to write a biography for Su Shi by collecting anecdotes from Song scholar's notebooks (*biji* 筆記). Yuan's creation of a new biography for Su Shi reflected the notion that first, conventionally less convincing sources like anecdotes could be used in biography writing as they could add to the vividness of the characters, and second, literary sources could complement, complicate, and challenge the narration in history books like *Song shi*.

In the next chapter, I will introduce dramatic sources that might provide different versions of Su Shi's images from what was depicted in Su Shi's biography in *Song shi*. The next chapter

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<sup>74</sup> In Gu Changkang's portraits, some characters are depicted with their eyes left unpainted for several years. When people asked for the reason, Gu Kaizhi explained, “The beauty or ugliness of the body is irrelevant to the best part of it; the crucial factor in reflecting the spirit lies precisely in the eyes.”顧長康畫人,或數年不點目精。人問其故,顧曰:「四體妍蚩,本無關於妙處;傳神寫照,正在阿堵中。」 See Yu Jiayi, *Shishuo Xinyu jianshu*, 849.

will discuss how playwrights in the Yuan Dynasty created a new version of Su Shi's life in Huangzhou by adapting the historical account of Su Shi and adding some artistic expressions based on their understanding of Su Shi.

### Chapter 3. Yuan Dramas: Su Shi in Huangzhou

There are three extant Yuan dramas concerning Su Shi's story: "Su Zishan's Banishment to Huangzhou in Snowstorm" 蘇子瞻風雪貶黃州, "The Dream of Dongpo and Four Friends Amidst Flowers" 花間四友東坡夢, and "Su Zishan's Drunken Inscription of the Red Cliff Rhapsody" 蘇子瞻醉寫赤壁賦.<sup>75</sup> The three dramas follow the general structure of Yuan dramas: they usually consist of four acts (*zhe* 折) and one interlude (*xiezi* 楔子).

"Su Zishan's Banishment to Huangzhou in Snowstorm" depicts the story of Su Shi being banished to Huangzhou because of the "Crow Terrace Poetry Case" and finally deciding to become a recluse.<sup>76</sup> The drama has four acts and one interlude. Act 1 opens with Wang Anshi's 王安石 scheme in which he asks the censor, Li Ding 李定, to accuse Su Shi of defaming the emperor by writing poetry. Li Ding wants Su Shi to be sentenced to death, while the prime minister Zhang Fangping 張方平 defends him. The emperor decides to displace Su Shi to Huangzhou. Act 2 unfolds with a conversation between Ma Zhengqing 馬正卿 and Su Shi. Ma sympathizes with Su Shi's situation and accuses the court of displacing him. Act 3 begins with Ma Zhengqing introducing Su Shi's poor living conditions in Huangzhou. Su Shi, unable to support himself and his family, asks the magistrate Yang for help. Yang receives Wang Anshi's instruction and refuses to provide economic support for Su Shi. The interlude opens with

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<sup>75</sup> Although the three plays are so-called Yuan dramas, they are based on the edition of Zang Maoxun's *Yuanqu xuan* 元曲選, a Ming redaction of Yuan dramas. Stephen West rightly points out that Zang made significant adaptations to the original Yuan dramas by contrasting Zang Maoxun's version and *Yuankan sanshi zhong* 元刊三十種. See Stephen H. West, "A Study in Appropriation: Zang Maoxun's Injustice to Dou e," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 111, no. 2 (April 1991): 283–302, <https://doi.org/10.2307/604020>. However, since the three plays are not in *Yuankan sanshi zhong*, one cannot tell how much changes Zang has made to the three plays. For the convenience of expression, I will categorize them as "Yuan" dramas while acknowledging the potential Ming adaptations to the original scripts.

<sup>76</sup> Abbreviated as "Banishment to Huangzhou" hereafter.

Emperor Shenzong summoning Su Shi back to the capital. Magistrate Yang hears the news and apologizes to Su Shi for his actions. Act 4 concludes with Emperor Shenzong clearing Su Shi's grievances by appointing him as a Hanlin 翰林 scholar, while Su Shi, tired of serving office, refused the appointment. The drama ends with Su Shi's declaration that he no longer wants to be an official and would rather become a carefree recluse.

“The Dream of Dongpo and Four Friends Amidst Flowers” opens with Su Shi introducing his conflict with Wang Anshi.<sup>77</sup> One day, Su Shi writes a lyric, “Garden Filled with Fragrance” 滿庭芳, and Wang Anshi accused Su of flirting with his wife. The emperor displaces Su to Huangzhou, passing by the Pipa Pavilion 琵琶亭. Su Shi meets his friend He Zhu 賀鑄. He Zhu arranges a farewell party, in which Su meets the prostitute White Peony 白牡丹. Su comes up with the idea of bringing White Peony with him to Huangzhou, alluring his friend, monk Fo Yin 佛印. Fo Yin is an esteemed monk who practiced Buddhism for fifteen years. Su Shi wants him to abandon monkhood and assist him to defeat Wang Anshi. Act 2 recounts that the White Peony fails to allure Fo Yin, and in return, Fo Yin dispatches the “Four Friends amidst Flowers” (peach, willow, bamboo, and plum) to join Su Shi's dream. Act 3 opens with the god of pine dispelling the Four Friends amidst Flowers, and Su Shi suddenly discovers that his interactions with Four Friends were a dream. Act 4 concludes with Fo Yin inviting guests to inquire about Chan 禪. Fo Yin presents his deep insights into Buddhist teachings. Su Shi and the White Peony, who failed to entice Fo Yin, decided to become Buddhists.

“Su Zishan's Drunken Inscription of the Red Cliff Rhapsody” began with Wang Anshi

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<sup>77</sup> Abbreviated as “The Dream of Dongpo” hereafter.

inviting Su Shi to his banquet.<sup>78</sup> During the banquet, Wang Anshi's wife disguises herself among the dancing girls, hoping to catch a glimpse of Su Shi. Su Shi, who discovers the disguise of Wang Anshi's wife, writes a flirting lyric to tease her. Wang Anshi, angered by Su's impropriety, reports his licentious lyric to the emperor. Act 2 introduces that Su Shi has been dispatched to Huangzhou. On his way, Su Shi meets Shao Yong 邵雍, who can predict the future. Shao Yong tells Su Shi his genealogy and asks him to memorize it. The interlude opens with Su Shi visiting the magistrate of Huangzhou, and the magistrate refuses to meet him. Act 3 recounts that Su Shi's friends, Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅 and Fo Yin, invite Su Shi for boating. While boating and drinking near the Red Cliff, Su Shi writes the Red Cliff Rhapsody. Acts 4 concludes with the emperor restoring Su Shi's official title, and Su Shi reflecting on his wrongdoings.

The three dramas present different interpretations of Su Shi's experience in Huangzhou in ways of their organization of openings, developments, and endings. "Su Zishan's Banishment to Huangzhou in Snowstorm" offered an opening based on historical accounts, while the other two plays are adapted from Su Shi's anecdotes.

"Banishment to Huangzhou" begins with Wang Anshi introducing his ambition to boost the nation's economy and enhance military power through the implementation of the New Policies. His New Policies, however, are rejected by Su Shi. In revenge for Su Shi's opposition, Wang asks censor Li Ding to impeach Su for defaming the court. This opening accords with the account in *Song shi*.<sup>79</sup> *Song shi* explains the reason that Su Shi was accused. First, the censors

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<sup>78</sup> Abbreviated as "Drunken Inscription of the Red Cliff Rhapsody" hereafter.

<sup>79</sup> *Song shi* recorded that "Transferred to administer Huzhou, [Su Shi] expressed gratitude in an official memorial. Additionally, he dared not to speak to matters inconvenient for the people but used poetry to lodge criticisms, hoping to contribute to the state. Censors Li Ding, Shu Dan, and He Zhengchen extracted phrases from his memorials and distorted his poems, accusing him of



accused Su Shi of using slanderous language in his Memorial.<sup>80</sup> Second, they collected the evidence of crimes from Su Shi's poem collections, accusing him of defaming the court. The censors wanted to push him to death. However, while interrogation took a long time, the censors were unable to give him the final sentence. Two factors prevented Su Shi from death. Firstly, many people tried to save him.<sup>81</sup> Secondly, Emperor Shenzong did not wish for Su Shi to die.

Shenzong's attitude toward Su Shi was ambiguous in *Song shi*. On the one hand, when censors wanted to sentence him to death, "only Emperor Shenzong took pity on him." On the other hand, however, when censors put Su Shi in jail, the emperor did not oppose them. Therefore, the "Crow Terrace Poetry Case" was acquiesced to by the emperor. In "Banishment to Huangzhou," the playwright presents Shenzong's attitude lucidly: the emperor agrees with Wang Anshi's New Policies, so he is irritated by Su Shi's sarcasm. After he receives the accusation from the censors, he orders Su Shi to be interrogated.<sup>82</sup> Here the dramatic arrangement is

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slander. They [Su Shi] to the imperial prison, and wanted to sentence him to death, but after prolonged deliberation, only Emperor Shenzong took pity on him and appointed him as the Vice Commander of Regional Militia of Huangzhou. 徙知湖州，上表以謝。又以事不便民者不敢言，以詩托諷，庶有補於國。禦史李定、舒亶、何正臣摭其表語，並媒藥所為詩以為訕謗，逮赴台獄，欲置之死，鍛煉久之不決。神宗獨憐之，以黃州團練副使安置。See Tuo Tuo et al, *Song shi*, 8644.

<sup>80</sup> The censors accused Su Shi's "Memorial to the Throne at Huzhou" 湖州謝上表 of defaming the court because of two lines: "[The emperor] Knowing my foolishness did not accord to the current time, therefore I could not accompany the newly advanced; Discovering I am old and not troublesome, so I could take care of the petty men" 知其愚不適時，難以追陪新進；察其老不生事，或能牧養小民。These two lines triggered fierce attacks from the New Party as they perceived these lines as sarcastic. See Peng Jiuwan, *Dongpo Wutai shian*, 1.

<sup>81</sup> Many officials sympathized with Su Shi and tried to save him. The prime minister, Zhang Fangping, whose style name is Andao, was one of them. Ma Yongqing's 馬永卿 (?—1136) *The Quotes of Sir Yuancheng* 元成先生語錄 recorded that "in the second year of the Yuanfeng era, during the transition from autumn to winter, Su Dongpo was arrested in the imperial prison. The scholars under the heaven were saddened by this, and though they looked around, no one dared to save him. At that time, Zhang Andao, who retired in Nanjing, indignantly submitted a memorial to the throne. 元豐二年，秋冬之交，東坡下禦史獄，天下之士痛之，環視而不敢救。時張安道致政在南京，乃憤然上疏。Zhang Andao was the prime minister Zhang 張丞相 appeared in the play "Su Zishan's Banishment to Huangzhou in Snowstorm". Besides Zhang Andao, the Empress Dowager Cao 太皇太后 曹氏, Wu Chong 吳充, and Wang Anli 王安禮 all tried to save Su Shi. In the script of "Su Zishan's Banishment to Huangzhou in Snowstorm", Prime Minister Zhang represented the group of people who disagreed with Su Shi's sentence. See Yan Zhongqi, *Su Dongpo yishi huibian*, 61-64.

<sup>82</sup> I selected two passages from the script: "Yesterday, Prime Minister Wang Anshi expressed his ambition to enrich the country and strengthen the military, which accords with my goal. He proposed the Spring Sprouts policy, which is truly insightful. However, many officials are inclined to stick to old ways, deeming it inappropriate. Su Shi, a scholar in the Imperial Academy, particularly criticizes and undermines these efforts. Although I am inclined to impose punishment, I took pity on his talent.

slightly different from *Song shi*. While in *Song shi* Su Shi was interrogated privately by the censors at the Censorate, in the script the emperor interrogates Su Shi at the imperial palace. It is because the emperor in the script serves as the symbol of justice. At the end of the play, it is also the emperor who announces the restoration of Su Shi's official title at the imperial palace. In contrast to the other two plays in which the emperor does not appear on the stage, "Banishment to Huangzhou" arranges the plot such that the emperor is made responsible for Su Shi's exile and return.

Wang Anshi's role in Su Shi's exile is also equivocal in *Song shi* in contrast to his role in the three plays. In *Song shi*, Wang Anshi does not directly participate in the prosecution of Su Shi, although they disagree with each other.<sup>83</sup> In Yuan dramas, however, Wang Anshi is depicted as the arch-villain and the direct cause of Su Shi's exile. In "Banishment to Huangzhou," Wang Anshi asks Li Ding to accuse Su Shi. In "Dongpo's Dream" and "Drunken Inscription of the Red Cliff Rhapsody," Wang Anshi accuses Su Shi of flirting with his wife and decided to displace him to Huangzhou.<sup>84</sup> It is intriguing that the emperor Shenzong, the symbol

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Recently, I heard more complaints and false accusations, groundless blaming of the court, and I am uncertain of their authenticity. 昨日宰相王安石，志欲富國強兵，意與朕合。立青苗助役之法，十分有見。但百官多喜因循，以為不便。翰林學士蘇軾，尤深詆毀。朕欲加罪，憐惜其才。近聞又生怨謗，妄斥朝廷，未知真偽。"Su Shi, as a court official, why do you resort to using poetry to express grievances? Originally, you should be seriously punished. Prime Minister Zhang has interceded on your behalf repeatedly. Considering your talent, I pardon you from the death penalty but demote you to the position of Vice Commander in Hangzhou's local militia, where you will be stationed." 蘇軾，你職居近侍，何故托詩諷怨？本當處以重罪，張丞相再三申救，朕亦惜爾之才，赦爾死罪，謫黃州團練副使，本州安置。See Xu Zheng 徐征 et al, eds., *Quan yuanqu* 全元曲 (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 1998), 3272-3273.

<sup>83</sup> *Song shi* recorded that "during Wang Anshi's administration, he detested [Su Shi] for having different opinions" 王安石執政，素惡其議論異己。See Tuo Tuo et al, *Song shi*, 8640.

<sup>84</sup> In "Drunken Inscription of the Red Cliff Rhapsody", Wang Anshi said: "Su Shi has departed. Unfortunately, this person is impolite. I invited you to my feast, and you flirted with my concubines. How can I forgive you? I will report to the emperor when the next time I meet him. For one thing, Su Shi did not know Huangzhou's chrysanthemum would wither. For another thing, let's use this time to displace him to Huangzhou, so I can fulfill my wish." 蘇軾去了。叵耐此人無禮。某請你家宴，小官侍妾，淫詞戲卻，更待幹罷。我到來日見了聖人說過。一者此人不知黃州菊花謝，二者趁此機會，將他貶上黃州，趁了小官之願。This episode originated in an anecdote in *Jianhu ji* 堅瓠集: A tale said that Wang Jiefu composed a poem about chrysanthemums with the lines "In the evening, wind and rain pass through the garden, golden chrysanthemum petals scatter everywhere." Su

of imperial power, is behind the stage. Although it is the decision of Shenzong that determined Su Shi's appointment, in "Dongpo's Dream" and "Drunken Inscription of the Red Cliff Rhapsody", Wang Anshi becomes fully responsible for Su Shi's exile. The two plays alleviate the element of party struggle by transforming the political conflicts between the New Party and the Old Party into a verbal dispute between Su Shi and Wang Anshi. The persecution of Su Shi by the New Party is reframed as Wang Anshi's revenge on Su Shi as well as the consequence of Su Shi indulging in verbal disputes.<sup>85</sup> These dramatic arrangements not only enhance Wang Anshi's role as an antagonist, but also eliminate the court's responsibility for participating in the persecution of Su Shi. Intriguingly, as Xu Wei notes, although the state's power is behind the stage in these two plays, the scripts reveal that the state discourse has absolute jurisdiction over private struggles as well, reflecting an extension of the state's authority from public affairs to personal conflicts.<sup>86</sup>

After explaining the reasons for Su Shi's displacement, the three dramas offer distinct interpretations of his exile. In "Banishment to Huangzhou", the playwright augments Su Shi's image as a "loyal minister and righteous scholar" (*zhongchen yishi* 忠臣義士) when Su Shi exclaims his grievances to the emperor: "When Wang Anshi single-mindedly reformed the

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Zizhan continued, "Autumn flowers are not parallel to spring flowers in their fall, to pay the poet's careful chant." Thereby offending Jie fu, so Zizhan was exiled to Huangzhou. Only in Huangzhou, do the chrysanthemum petals fall. Seeing this, Zizhan finally felt ashamed. 世傳王介甫詠菊，有「黃昏風雨過園林，殘菊飄零滿地金」之句。蘇子瞻續云：「秋花不比春花落，為報詩人仔細吟。」因得罪介甫，謫子瞻黃州。菊唯黃落瓣。子瞻見之，始愧服。See Sui Shusen 隋樹森, *Yuanqu xuan waibian* 元曲選外編 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 771 and Yan Zhongqi, *Dongpo yishi huibian*, 93.

<sup>85</sup> Although these are certainly dramatic arrangements, the adaptations are reasonable because of Su Shi's historical image of being verbally abusive. Huang Tingjian commented: "Dongpo's literary works are celebrated worldwide, yet his shortcoming was that he loves to criticize." 東坡文章妙天下，其短處在好罵。See Shen Songqin 沈松勤, *Bei Song wenren yu dangzheng* 北宋文人與黨爭 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1998), 265.

<sup>86</sup> Xu Wei 徐蔚. "Huayu chonggou de lishi—Yandai Dongpo zaju jiedu" 話語重構的歷史—元代東坡雜劇解讀. *Jiaying daxue xuebao* 9, no.6 (2003): 84.

convention, I submitted a ten-thousand words memorial in protest. Today I am displaced [because of my loyal advice]. These false accusations push a loyal minister and righteous scholar to die.” 王安石一心變亂成法，臣上萬言書諫諍。今日反受謫貶，兀的不屈死忠臣義士呵。<sup>87</sup> Su Shi then expressed his sentiment in the song lyric, “Magpies Tread on Branches” 鵲踏枝：

萬言策上君王，	Ten thousand words memorial was submitted to the emperor,
一騎馬度衡陽。	A lone rider crosses Hengyang on horseback.
索離了三島蓬萊，	Seeking detachment from the Three Islands of Penglai,
直走遍九曲滄浪。	Riding straight through the Nine Curves of Canglang.
學不的李太白逍遙在醉鄉，	Unable to emulate Li Taibai’s carefree wandering in the drunken town,
參破了韓昌黎夕貶潮陽。 <sup>88</sup>	Understanding Han Changli who was banished to Chaoyang at night.

In drama scripts, lyrics serve as the primary channel for expressing emotions. Chinese poetry often employs lengthy, poetic verses which reflect the character’s inner worlds. These lyrical scenes are usually the highlights of the whole play.<sup>89</sup> The song lyrics (*qu* 曲) in Yuan dramas inherited the poetic convention of “poetry expressing intentions” (*shi yan zhi* 詩言志), in which the character’s authentic sentiments are conveyed. Su Shi complains in this lyric that he is banished because of fulfilling his official duty. In the lyric, he refers to two historical figures, Li Bai 李白(710-762) and Han Yu 韓愈(768-824). Both figures were talented in literary writing, and their writings were the cause for their banishment. Su Shi states that he could not imitate Li Bai’s carefreeness, but he realizes the reason why Han Yu, a loyal minister, was banished. On his way to Huangzhou, Su Shi refers to fourteen literati in history. He aligns himself with these scholars in history who faced adversity because of their writing, establishing a continuation

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<sup>87</sup> Xu et al, *Quan Yuanqu*, 3275.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Xu Jinbang 許金榜, *Yuan zaju gailun* 元雜劇概論 (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 1986), 143.

between himself and the ancients. Su Shi's attempt to converse with the ancients reflects his consciousness of establishing a collective identity among literati groups and evoking echoes from the audiences.<sup>90</sup> As Xu Wei indicates, in the cumulative historical and literary convention, historical figures were translated into cultural symbols, and the reference to banished literati in the past revealed an effort to establish a self-identity as a banished official and a talented scholar.<sup>91</sup>

Xu Wei insightfully points out that “if poetry is merely one aspect of political actions and can be arbitrarily interpreted, as reflected in the experiences of many ancient sages, then, selecting to retreat from court politics and power struggles suggests a negation of poetry and a return of self-awareness.”<sup>92</sup> In “Banishment to Huangzhou,” Su Shi is conscious of the potential danger of poetry writing. In Act 2, when Ma Zhengqing, who supports his living in Huangzhou, asks him to compose a poem, Su Shi rejects the request: “Why am I banished to ten thousand *li* away? I am afraid of composing a hundred poems because of this” 我為甚遠流身萬裡，因此上怕吟詩百篇。<sup>93</sup> When Su Shi suggests his fatigue from being an official, Ma's response reveals an attempt to canonize and exemplify Su Shi's exile from the perspective of later generations: “Master is now in a distant land in the South, where is the justice of the court! Later historians will surely record this” 大人今遠處炎方，朝廷公道何在！後世史官，必有紀錄。<sup>94</sup> Su Shi, enlightened by Ma's statement, sings: “Making ministers to exile; leaving a renowned name

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<sup>90</sup> Xu Wei, “Huayu chonggou de lishi—Yuandai Dongpo zaju jiedu”, 84.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Xu et al, *Quan Yuanqu*, 3282.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 3283

enduring through millennia” 從教臣子一身貶，留得高名萬古傳。<sup>95</sup> This statement reflects an understanding that Su Shi’s exile contributes to a renowned scholar whose name endured all the time. This is a delicate arrangement by the playwright to provoke audiences’ resonance since the audiences look at Su Shi’s story from the perspective of later generations.

While “Banishment to Huangzhou” defined Su Shi’s exile to Huangzhou as a process of establishing an exemplar of an upright official, the other two plays provide very different explanations. “Drunken Inscription of Red Cliff Rhapsody” interprets Su Shi’s exile as a destined experience of Su Shi due to his frivolous character, and “Dongpo’s Dream” formulates his experience as a journey to abandon the attachment of worldly desires.

In “Drunken Inscription of Red Cliff Rhapsody,” Shao Yong predicts the outcome of Su Shi’s exile. Shao was portrayed as a prophet in the play: “The interplay of fortune and adversity follows the heaven’s secrets, foretelling the secrets of life and death; formulating the laws of the heaven and the earth through the eight trigrams, and exploring the doubts of ghosts and gods through the six hexagrams” 窮通造化合天機，死生壽夭預先知。八卦能推天地理，六爻搜盡鬼神疑。<sup>96</sup> Su Shi asks Shao Yong when he will be able to return to the court, but Shao, rather than telling Su Shi his prediction, requests Su to memorize his genealogy. Shao predicts that he is about to die. According to his prediction, by the time of his death, the court would have summoned Su Shi to write an epitaph for him because Su Shi would be the only one who knew his genealogy. At the end of the play, the court official reveals that “because you indulged in

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Sui, *Yuanqu xuan waibian*, 772.

revelry during the banquet at night, showing off your poetic talents by writing lyrics, exquisite dishes were placed and luxurious curtains were rolled up; private musicians and beautiful singing girls gave great performances. Displacing you to Huangzhou; letting you experience a year of desolation” 則為你夜筵間酒性疏狂，逞詩豪戲作詞章。設瓊肴珠簾高卷，出家樂擺列紅妝。將你貶上黃州歇馬，經一載受徹淒涼。<sup>97</sup> The court official continues: “because Shao Yaofu returned to the netherworld, the emperor sent me to bestow on you official edicts. You can enjoy the glory and return to your former position. You are in charge of the three departments of justice and hold a position in the Censorate. Today you will be promoted and receive rewards, please follow me to express gratitude to our emperor” 則為邵堯夫身歸泉世，因此上遣天臣親賜朝章。享榮華依還舊職，掌三台位列都堂。今日個加官賜賞，一齊的拜謝吾皇。<sup>98</sup> At this point, Su Shi’s exile is portrayed as heaven sent. The arrangement of letting Shao, the incarnation of the heavenly mandate, announce the fate of Su Shi shows the playwright’s intention to transform the historical narrative of political persecution against Su Shi into a fated experience of self-reformation.

“Dongpo’s Dream” interprets Su Shi’s displacement as a voyage to abandon his attachment, revealing the discourse between secular and Buddhist ideologies. Su Shi’s goal is to invite Fo Yin to serve in office, while Fo Yin, in contrast, advises Su Shi to relinquish worldly desires. The play is filled with dialogues between Su Shi and Fo Yin, arguing which kind of life—being an official or being a monk—was superior. Fo Yin ridicules Su Shi and suggests he

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<sup>97</sup> Sui, *Yuanqu xuan waibian*, 780.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

become a recluse instead in the song, “Flowers in the Rear Garden”後庭花:

你那「滿庭芳」雖稱席上珍，	While your “Garden Filled with Fragrance” would be precious in a banquet,
送的個老東坡翻成轆下窘。	It turns the old Dongpo into a predicament under the carriage.
則為這樂府招讒譖，	It invites slander in this poetic world,
抵多少文章可立身。	countering how much literary work can establish one’s reputation.
只落的笑欣欣，	Only ending up with a joyous laughter,
倒不如咱家安分，	It’s better to stay modest like me,
向深山將名姓隱。 <sup>99</sup>	hiding my given name and surname in the deep mountains.

Su Shi, who represents a secular figure in the play, persuades Fo Yin to serve the office:

Today is an auspicious day for you to marry White Peony and ascend the official path with me. The beauty will hold the inkstone, and the warrior will grasp the whip for you. Isn’t it better than staying in ancient temples in the deep mountains, hiding your tracks, and burying your name? Eating leftover noodles, and vegetable buns, what are the benefits? You and I should cherish the fragrant spring and dispense with religious scriptures.

今日是個好日辰，娶了牡丹，與小官同登仕路。佳人捧硯，壯士擎鞭，不強在深山古剎，遁跡埋名？吃的是瓢漏粉，菜饅頭，有何好處？你與我惜芳春，罷經文。<sup>100</sup>

This passage portrays a secularized version of Su Shi who attempted to allure Fo Yin by introducing three categories of worldly desires: lust, power, and wealth. White Peony is the symbol of lust, serving in office represents the desire for power, and the disdain for poor living conditions reflects the desire for wealth. Fo Yin remains a devoted Buddhist and is unwavering in the face of Su Shi’s allurements. As Su Shi and White Peony failed to persuade Fo Yin in the end, they surrendered to Buddhist teachings:

從今後識破了人相我相眾生相，	From now on, I see through the illusions of self, others, and all sentient beings,
生況死況別離況，	Moments of life, death, and the pain of parting,

<sup>99</sup> Xu et al, *Quan yuanqu*, 1901.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 1904.



永謝繁華，	Permanently staying away from prosperity,
甘守淒涼。	willingly embracing desolation
唱道是即色即空，	Singing that form is emptiness,
無遮無障。	free from obstructions and hindrances.
笑殺東坡也懺悔春心蕩，	Laughing at how Dongpo regretted erotic desires,
枉自有蓋世文章，	The extraordinary literary works were in vain,
還向我佛印禪師聽一會講。 <sup>101</sup>	I turn to listen to the teachings of the venerable Chan master Fo Yin

Nevertheless, Su Shi's declaration that he "sees through" (*shipo* 識破) the illusions of self, others, and all sentient beings seems like a reluctant compromise to reality. The fact that he is unable to make changes to his situation propels him to turn toward Buddhism and abandon his worldly attachment. His proclamation to permanently stay away from prosperity and embrace desolation is more like a way of self-consolation in a situation in which he feels helpless.

Similarly, in "Banishment to Huangzhou," Su Shi chooses to become a recluse instead of returning to serve in office. In the final act of the drama, the emperor calls Su Shi back to the court. Although the emperor asked Su to compose a poem, he refuses the request by satirizing: "Originally a poetic depiction of the moon and a playful commentary on the wind has been translated into deceiving the emperor" 本是個詠月嘲風，翻作了罔上欺君。<sup>102</sup> The play ends with Su Shi refusing the appointment to be a Hanlin scholar:

則願做白髮老參軍，	I would rather become a white-haired military officer,
怎消得天子重儒臣。	How can the emperor value Confucian ministers?
那裡顯騷客騷人俊，	How could the talented be displayed,
到不如農夫婦蠢。	But not as good as the simplicity of a farmer and his wife.
繞流水孤村，	Around the flowing water in a solitary village,
聽罷漁樵論，	Listening to the discussions of fishermen and woodcutters,

<sup>101</sup> Xu et al, *Quan yuanqu*, 1924-25.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 3295.

閉草戶柴門， Closing the grassy door and thatched gate,  
做一個清閒自在人。<sup>103</sup> Becoming a leisurely and carefree person.

Xu Wei argues that if poetry cannot function effectively as the literati discourse and can be arbitrarily interpreted by the mechanisms of power, it might be better for literati to retreat from the court to protect themselves rather than relying on the court.<sup>104</sup> However, Su Shi's refusal to serve in the office seems more like a public performance, a revenge for the prior injustice, and a fundamental betrayal of his character as a loyal minister as depicted in the play. In Act 1, the emperor publicly sentenced Su Shi at the court, at the end of the play, therefore, Su Shi decides to refuse the imperial order publicly. This is a public accusation of the injustice against him, a behavior art designed to criticize the arbitrary power of the imperial court and the darkness of bureaucracy. Su Shi cries out in the court: "Good and evil are undistinguished; benevolence and righteousness are absent. [The courtiers] are only concerned with their self-promotion; no one cares about the poor scholars" 清濁不分，仁義不存。只理會得自推尊，饑寒壯士無人問。<sup>105</sup> Since Su Shi is disillusioned with the court, he decides to become a recluse in the end.

Nevertheless, being a recluse is not a victory over imperial power. It is escaping his official duty and an absolute betrayal of his character as a loyal minister portrayed in the script. In addition, both in history and in the script of "Banishment to Huangzhou", Su Shi relies on the state to support his living, becoming a recluse means he will lose his economic sustenance, leading the ending in an unrealistic direction.

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 3297.

<sup>104</sup> Xu Wei, "Huayu chonggou de lishi—Yuandai Dongpo zaju jiedu", 84.

<sup>105</sup> Xu et al, *Quan yuanqu*, 3296.

A sarcastically more realistic ending is depicted in “Drunken Inscription of the Red Cliff Rhapsody.” After the court official announced the emperor’s decision Su Shi’s official rank, Su Shi expressed his gratitude in “Water Nymph”水仙子:

則爲這友人開宴出紅衣，	This friend hosts a banquet in a red robe,
翠袖殷勤捧那個玉杯。	The green sleeve holds the jade cup.
勸君莫惜花前醉，	I advise you not to begrudge getting drunk before the flowers,
我不合開懷飲醪醅，	I should not drink without reservation,
霎時間不記東西。	for a moment forgetting everything.
惹起詞中意，	It stirs the sentiments in the verses,
也是我酒後非，	I acknowledge my misconduct after drinking.
這的是負罪合宜。 <sup>106</sup>	This is indeed appropriate for me to bear the guilt.

In this lyric, Su Shi undertakes the full responsibility for his exile. He does not dare to complain about the arbitrary decision made by the emperor, which is the underlying and ultimate cause of his exile. It is sarcastic in the sense that Su Shi, the victim of the exile, must acknowledge his guilt in front of the court official to show his resolution to reform himself. It is an unpleasing yet realistic ending because as long as Su Shi relies on the state to sustain his living, he cannot openly accuse the state of displacing him. In contrast, he has to demonstrate that he is aware of his crime and is sincere in correcting it.<sup>107</sup>

In sum, all three plays narrate the story of Su Shi’s exile to Huangzhou, and yet they offer very distinct interpretations of the same event. “Banishment to Huangzhou” portrays a loyal

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<sup>106</sup> Sui, *Yuanqu xuan waibian*, 780.

<sup>107</sup> In fact, it was the stance of Su Shi in history. In his letter to Zhang Dun 章惇, he wrote that “Shi committed offenses that are not easily counted. Only Zihou and Ziyong repeatedly admonished me, but I insisted on my ways, not heeding this advice. While in prison, I had no way to repent, thinking that death was inevitable. Unexpectedly, the benevolent emperor showed mercy, giving me a chance to reform. If I do not change after this, Shi cannot be a man. 軾所以得罪，其過惡未易以一二數也。平時惟子厚與子由極口見戒，反覆甚苦，而軾強狠自用，不以爲然。及在囹圄中，追悔無路，謂必死矣。不意聖主寬大，復遣視息人間，若不改者，軾真非人也。 See Su Shi, “Yu Zhang Zihou canzheng shu” 與章子厚參政書 in Zhang et al, *Su Shi wenji jiaozhu*, 49:5269.

minister and righteous scholar who was banished because of villains' persecution, and he finally rejects the emperor's appointment after he figures out the dark side of the bureaucratic system, revealing his resistance to the imperial power. "Drunken Inscription of the Red Cliff Rhapsody" depicts a talented scholar who was banished because of his flirtations and misconduct during the banquet, and his return reveals the mandate of heaven. His acknowledgment of his crime at the end shows the reformatory power of imperial agency toward an individual in the bureaucratic system. "Dongpo's Dream" recounts the story of a man full of secular desires to turn toward Buddhism. Despite his final declaration to devote himself to Buddhism, his declaration seemed to be a reluctant compromise to reality.

All three plays reflect some portions of the reality of Su Shi's experience in history: he was a banished official because of his poetry writing and his opposition to the New Policies. He devoted himself to Buddhism and a hermitic life as a response to the exile. Nonetheless, as a responsible scholar-official, Su Shi could not become an authentic monk or recluse, since both are the ways to escape his official duty. His reliance on the court to support his life also prevented him from breaking away from the state. He found a delicate balance between officialdom and reclusion during his stay in Huangzhou: On the one hand, he kept his connections with other officials through letters, and he also associated with local magistrates. On the other hand, he socialized with a wide range of people: farmers, fishermen, scholars, Daoist and Buddhist monks, etc. He presented himself as a recluse as a way of self-protection. The public persona of a recluse was also a passive resistance to his identity as an exile. By presenting himself as a recluse, he was able to transform his exile experience into a carefree journey in

mountains and streams. This image of Su Dongpo was also the most popular image of him in later generations.

## **Conclusion**

The reading and re-reading of Su Shi is an everlasting process that will never be put to an end. In the millennium following Su Shi's death, he has become the prototype of Chinese collective identity. People seek to investigate his life and find solutions to their puzzles. Su Shi becomes a mirror in which readers can discover their reflections of themselves. Given the significance of Su Shi in the formation of Chinese cultural identity, historiographers, literary writers, novelists, and playwrights provided a wide range of interpretations of his image which reflect their divergent values. Su Shi's works seem to invite various kinds of interpretations, and yet his works also reject any attempt to monopolize the interpretive authority.

In *Song shi*, the authors define Su Shi as an exemplary Confucian scholar who served as a loyal official when the time was appropriate and lived a life of a recluse during political turmoil. Yet, Su Shi's life is not only a life of politics. His life in Huangzhou is appealing because it is situated within the broader context of the human dilemma. It is not just about the retreat from political life, but also how he figures out a new way of living during his time in Huangzhou. However, the fundamental questions such as how he supported himself and his family, how he discovered the new meaning of life, and how he confronted the adversities of the exile were unaddressed in *Song shi*. For the authors of *Song shi*, Su Shi's exile in Huangzhou is just a trivial episode to his political life. Indeed, Su Shi also attempts to mitigate the factors of exile and strengthen his persona as a recluse. In his letter to Li Duanshu, he introduces his mentality that

he began to enjoy a life unrecognized by people.<sup>108</sup> This is, for one thing, because he wants to protect himself from further persecution, and for another thing, just like his identification with Tao Yuanming, a way to “overcome the tyranny of despair, deprivation, and mortality” and was a “result of self-persuasion.”<sup>109</sup>

In Yuan dramas, Su Shi was reconstructed into three different characters: a banished official who decided to become a recluse at the end, a talented scholar who was banished due to his flirtatious acts, and a secular man who converted to Buddhism.

“Banishment to Huangzhou” stresses Su Shi’s mentality as a banished official in the play. Although its plot accords with the historical record overall, Su Shi’s final retreat from the court becomes a major breakaway from history. The banished officials and poor scholars were a major type of Yuan drama. The two groups have a common feature that they lamented that their talents were unrecognized (*huai cai bu yu* 懷才不遇). While the banished officials are not banished because their talents are unrecognized, they share feelings with poor scholars because they have no way to employ their talents during their exile. As the poor scholars seek to be discovered by the court, the banished official also hopes to be called back to the court. This type of drama aims to reflect the injustice and the darkness of society. As both poor scholars and banished officials rely on the court for economic resources, these dramas often depict the dire conditions of these

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<sup>108</sup> In “Response Letter to Li Duanshu” 答李端叔書, Su Shi wrote: “Since I got the crime, I have secluded myself, drifting in a small boat and wearing straw sandals, wandering among mountains and rivers, mingling with woodcutters and fishermen, often being scolded by drunkards. Gradually, I take pleasure in going unrecognized, with not a single word exchanged with lifelong friends or family. Even if letters are sent to me, I do not respond, finding solace in being somewhat forgotten. 得罪以來，深自閉塞，扁舟草履，放浪山水間，與樵漁雜處，往往為醉人所推罵。輒自喜漸不為人識，平生親友無一字見及，有書與之亦不答，自幸庶幾免矣。 See Zhang et al, *Su Shi wenji jiaozhu*, 49:5344-5345.

<sup>109</sup> Zhiyi Yang, “Return to an Inner Utopia: Su Shi’s Transformation of Tao Qian in His Exile Poetry”, 331.

individuals, seeking to criticize the unjust treatment of the talented scholars by the court. These plays usually have a corrupt official who indirectly caused the starvation of the poor scholars and banished officials. In “Banishment to Huangzhou”, for instance, After Su Shi visits Magistrate Yang several times and requests food, the magistrate orders his servants to strike Su Shi with sticks. Su Shi exclaims: “My chest is filled with talents and yet my belly is not filled with foods. Alas! An ill tiger is bullied by a dog in front of the mountain” 胸中有物，肚里无食，堪悲，虎病山前被犬欺。<sup>110</sup> This reflects the overall conditions of the poor scholar and banished officials in Yuan dramas.

Magistrate Yang’s treatment also triggers Su Shi’s decision to retreat from the court in the final act. Su Shi, as a representative of the poor scholars and banished officials, makes a public announcement to retreat from official service. This can be viewed as an attempt for the playwrights to declare a victory over imperial power and to revenge for social injustice on the representation of the literati group. However, this ending of the play is a betrayal of both its earlier portrayal of Su Shi as a loyal official and Su Shi’s conditions in history. Despite Su Shi frequently demonstrating his intentions to become a recluse in his works, he never retreated from office. While Su Shi faced economic difficulties in Huangzhou, his extensive social network and his effort to farm the lands in Dongpo provided him with steady sources of income. During the transition from a state-sponsored civil servant to a self-sustained farmer, from a dutiful official to a carefree traveler, from a renowned scholar to an unrecognized “recluse”, Su Shi experienced a tremendous transformation in his identities. These details presented in his works resisted broad

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<sup>110</sup> Xu et al, *Quan yuanqu*, 3290.

categorizations of Su Shi as a representative of poor scholars and banished officials.

In “Drunken Inscription of the Red Cliff Rhapsody”, as Guo Qian notes, the playwright incorporates the popularized interpretations and folk perspectives into the play, adopting a jocular tone to describe Su Shi’s exile to Huangzhou, thereby attenuating its political connotations and reconstructing a mundane image of Su Shi on the theatrical stage.<sup>111</sup> His exile to Huangzhou has been reinterpreted as the consequence of his indulgence in wine and women, leading him to moral corruption. However, after he was sentenced to Huangzhou, the emperor restored his rank to his former position after only one year, reducing his exile to a minor episode in his career. As a result, the incorporation of folk narratives transformed significant political struggles into individual disputes. While the conflicts in the play are portrayed as personal struggles, the court still plays a significant role in determining the fate of Su Shi. Although the state’s power is not manifested on the stage, it is the underlying force that manipulated Su Shi’s life. The play denies the responsibility of the state in the persecution of Su Shi. Instead, Su Shi needs to undertake the responsibility of self-indulgence. The play reflects Su Shi’s introspection and his gratitude to the court after he was saved from the death penalty. However, the longing for fame and fortune was intensified in the characterization of Su Shi, creating a distance from Su Shi in history.

“Dongpo’s Dream” portrays a vulgarized version of Su Shi, a man full of worldly desires. As Su Shi failed to allure Fo Yin by the desires of lust, wealth, and power, he declares that he

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<sup>111</sup> Guo Qian 郭茜, “Xiju chonggou zhong de Dongpo bian Huangzhou” 戲劇重構中的東坡貶黃州, 223.



would convert to Buddhism and forget worldly desires. However, the decision to embrace Buddhism is only a reluctant compromise to reality despite its attempt to resist it. Converting to Buddhism is not an ideal way to resist reality but rather a form of escapism. Being a recluse or a monk became the last resort for literati when they could not change their dire conditions. While Su Shi was devoted to Buddhism in Huangzhou, he never became a Buddhist monk or attempted to escape reality by converting to Buddhism. After all, these three plays reflect the ideal types that the playwrights projected on the image of Su Shi. While these plays might reflect certain aspects of Su Shi's character, they could never define Su Shi's image.

In conclusion, the reception history of Su Shi reflects a continuous process of negotiation and debate surrounding his typification and de-typification. The multifaceted and complex presentation of Su Shi in his works has encouraged diverse interpretations. However, Su Shi's legacy resists any simplification, canonization, or monopolization of the interpretive authority over his works and his image. Instead, it embraces the diversity of perspectives and challenges the notion of a singular, definitive understanding. All in all, the discourse over Su Shi's image will continue to evolve.

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