On Su Dongpo' s Creativity

Zhang Guowen*

1. Creativity Is Everywhere

Su Dongpo was born in a family in the western region of Sichuan province, China, during the Song Dynasty. Su Dongpo experienced official demotion several times during his life and once lived in the wilderness among the wild animals. He was oppressed by Zhang Dun, a prime minister of the Song Dynasty. Jailers abused him. He was falsely accused in the Wutai Poem Case. He barely survived these challenges. The cultural output of Su Dongpo' s era was magnificent, comparable to the grandeur of the era of Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty. Su Dongpo' s father, Su Xun, and his younger brother, Su Zhe, were both literary masters. Their predecessors were Han Qi, Fan Zhongyan, Fu Bi, Ouyang Xiu and Fan Zhen. Their successors were Qin Guan, Huang Tingjian, Zhang Lei and Chao Buzhi. Their confidants were Zhao Yun and Qin Cao. There were the most famous calligraphers and painters of the Song Dynasty like Mi Fu, Li Gonglin, and Wen Tong, well-known collectors like Zhao Delin and Wang Jinqing, renowned Chan Buddhist monks like Can Liao, Bian Cai and Liao Yuan, eminent Daoists like Bao Guang and Monk Jian. Some resented Su Dongpo, who were Cheng Yi, a Neo-Confucianist, and Wang Anshi, a politician and litterateur. During the Song Dynasty, scholars gathered together like stars twinkling in the sky, and Su Dongpo was one of them. Su Dongpo' s inexhaustible and continuous literary creativity can be attributed to two aspects: His natural talents and his own efforts.[1]

This essay analyzes the social and cultural environment of Su Dongpo, which helps us understand the formation process of an innovative and interdisciplinary master with encyclopedic knowledge.

* Zhang Guowen, expert of Su Dongpo research.

Su Dongpo

Su Dongpo discussed, communicated and argued with the great men I mentioned above. In the spirit of wisdom, they even attacked each other. These great men also did all they could to respond to Su Dongpo. Similarly, Su Dongpo also had to try his best to find the path of creativity. Su Dongpo's talent was extraordinarily refined, and it became more outstanding after "leap up 3 times," and "stir up 100 times" .

This essay argues that Su Dongpo's creativity was the comprehensive result of natural talents and his own efforts.

Su Dongpo's lived during a period when creativity played an enormous role in day-to-day life.

The formative period of Su Dongpo's creativity began with his education from his grandfather and parents. Then he finished his first *Ode to A Craft Mouse*, which showed his creative potential. Later he began his study trip to many places, and read a collection of books. After that, he went to the capital city of the Northern Song Dynasty. He wrote an article entitled *On Punishment and Reward Based on the Principle of Faithfulness to the Limits* which impressed the chief examiner with a creative literary quotation, and earned Su Dongpo a good reputation. This was the formative period of Su Dongpo's creativity.

In Politics, Su Dongpo was down-to-earth, people-oriented, and worked tirelessly to make improvements. He did a lot of good for local people. On the other hand, Su Dongpo created a lot of excellent works with wide imagination, which seemed unimaginable to future generations. He challenged Han Yu, wrote *Eight Views of Fengxiang*. He challenged Li Bai, and wrote another Chinese philosophical poem about Lushan Mountain. He challenged Liu Yong, and wrote the most beautiful poem about the West Lake. He challenged Tao Yuanming, and wrote poems according to Tao's themes and types of poems. Su Dongpo applied his creativity to different subjects and affairs, such as wine, dreams, people, painting, flowers, rain, and the moon. He would tour around at night, and sleep during the day. He chose going to prison, being out of prison, seeing a visitor off, educating children, losing couple, and go hunting as subjects, which were helpful for him to write a number of masterpieces shocked people of his and future generations. This was the climax period of Su Dongpo's creativity. There are a few examples as below:

Example 1: *Record a Dream to Write Palindrome with Two Poems and Prefaces*

On December 15th, the snow began to clear; I dreamed someone was boiling the pellets tea — a kind of tea of the Northern Song Dynasty with snow water. I asked the beauty to sing for me and drink a cup of tea with me. In the dream, I wrote a

palindrome poem. But when I was awake, I could remember only one line: Tea buds floated on the tea leaf, just like a lot of flowers attached on the green clothes. Then I finished the poem. It is:

Oh, the beauty, you saw tea buds in the white jade bowl which were very slender,

Tea buds floated on the tea leaf, just like the flowers attached on the green clothes.

Your song was so beautiful, it made the clouds hold her breath, and brought the quiet courtyard to be condensed into a statue.

The bowl I saw in the dream was the loose snow which fell into the empty rocks.

On a heavy snow night, Su Dongpo dreamed that someone was boiling the tea with snow water. He asked the beauty to sing for him. In the dream, he wrote a palindrome poem. And when he woke up, he described the dream. He was absolutely a master of creativity!

Example 2: *The Preface of Three Flowers*

Xu Shian, an official under the county magistrate who administered lawsuits, of Fangzhou prefecture, wrote to me that there was a talented person in our prefecture who often wore three flowers. No one here knew his name, so people named him Three Flowers. He could write poems, with artistic conception the same as immortals. He also could draw pictures. Xu Shian was going to give me a collection of poems and paintings, so I'd like to compose a poem for it:

The hair turned white, but the study of Taoism had no progress,

Had a hard time to try to cook the sand into rice. How ridiculous it was!

And, had a sleep before dealing with it again,

I didn't have leisure time to visit that talented man called "three flowers".

Wisdom is like a bird, living in the body like a bottle. How could the hands stop their flight?

People for eternal life, to escape into well from transmigration, it was in vain!

Well, I first took a look at the poems and paintings of "three flowers".

If I was going to visit "three flowers", the warm-hearted Xu Shian would be a good guide.

Su Dongpo loved flowers. "The night was already deep. I worried that the flowers in front of me would go to sleep like people in the night, so I lit a tall candle, so as not to miss the opportunity to appreciate the blooming flowers this time." This was a description of a flower lover: "As a woman grew old, if she wore a flower on the head, she wouldn't feel shy, but the flower would be shy to be onto the old woman's head." This was a bosom friend with the above "three flowers". But more importantly, not to jump over other people's personality and taste, which may be a source of tremendous creativity!

Example 3: *Characters of the Immortals*

One day, I happened to come to a remote area of the Wang's house. There was an immortal person who landed at his house, and claimed himself to be Li Quan, also styled as Detong. He was good at the seal character font, with wonderful brushwork, and it was not easy to recognize his calligraphy. He said that these were the characters of the Immortals. He told me that he was good at many projects. He wrote another poem again, still with rhyme in the previous. It is:

After getting drunk, I wanted to drink tea, so I took an optional step to knock at the door,

I never thought that an immortal lived in the deep of the bamboo forest.

I heard him speaking to the god on the curvature of the spinal column,

And I saw his vivid and powerful gods'

handwriting.

His face was gaunt and haggard; I should have felt wronged for him,

With the remaining road, can't we support spirit?

I returned home and cleaned the empty house, and then I had a sleep,

I also worried about his interference in my dream.

A crotchety man pretended to be a supernatural being, which was not surprising in that era; but if the person was creative, with unique skill, he would become the kind of person appreciated by Su Dongpo.

It is said that the famous Apple co-founder Steve Jobs has been recognized as one of the most creative people, and he has won the respect of the world. It is said that his death has caused many of us to think: Why doesn't China have a person like Steve Jobs?

I reply with Su Dongpo: China had a great man who was much greater than Steve Jobs long time ago.

What we have to do now is to restore the growth soil of Su Dongpo.

What we learned should be the teacher of the world; how we behaved should be the standard of the world. Su Dongpo also made a lot effort in cultivating innovative talents.

The creativity of talents education came from the education tradition of Su Xun and Ouyang Xiu. To implement the educational concept, Su Dongpo invested great enthusiasm into the reform of education. Finally, he was teachers of many poets, Ci writers, calligraphers, painters, and politicians.

For many years, I accidentally received Zhang Lei, Huang Tingjian, Qin Guan, Chao Buzhi, Li Zhi, and Chen Shidao, who were usually known as "the six gentlemen of Su Dongpo". I thought this was a luxury from the Heaven, it sent talents to me constantly, and I would have more students like them continuously. In recent years, I have experienced change of the world. I walked everywhere in expectation of more good students like them, but few meet my standard. I knew talents would never go to waste, if they were useless for this generation, they would bring about inspiration for future generations. They would never live a mediocre life, and not rot with vegetation. Su Dai and Su Guo didn't abandon their studies, so I can request them to help me beside the writing desk and the ink stone.[2]

In the ocean of crowds, why is it Su Dongpo instead of others who found "the six gentlemen of Su Dongpo" and made use of their talents for the country? Why did Su Dongpo tirelessly paved the way for them, so that they could display their skills to the fullest extent, instead of getting rotted with vegetation?

Su Dongo is myriad surges; Su Zhe is steep piedmont.

Huang Tingjian is crane in the sun; Chen Shidao is bamboo in the forest.

Qin Guan is pretty peaches and plums; Chao Buzhi is extraordinary jade.

This is the evaluation of Zhang Lei, one of "The four students of Su Dongpo" of his teachers Su Dongpo and Su Zhe, and his bi conditional gate brothers. The author thinks that this is a vivid description of their creativity condition.

Su Dongo — myriad surges;
Su Zhe — steep piedmont.
Huang Tingjian — crane in the sun;
Chen Shidao — bamboo in the frost;
Qin Guan — pretty peaches and plums;
Chao Buzhi — extraordinary jade.

Is it really anything of the characters' nicknames in *Water Margin*, such as "timely rain" Song Jiang, "figured monk" Lu Zhishen, and "good swimmer" Zhang Shun?

Zhang Lei, one of Su Dongpo's students nicknamed his teachers and friends for their outstanding creativity, which was earlier than that of Shi Nai'an.

The contribution to creativity of Su Dongpo, his younger brother and "the six gentlemen of Su Gongpo" is obvious to all people.

Huang Tingjian was good at calligraphy, writing preface and postscript in the manuscript or on the back of the painting; Qin Guan was good at writing argumentation; Zhang Lei and Chao Buzhi were good at writing narration, and Sao Fu, which is a kind of poetry originated from the Han Dynasty. Chen Shidao was good at calligraphy and writing prefaces, and good at other styles at the same time, which reflected his comprehensively creative talents. From the selection of contents of *A Collection of Poems and Essays of the Song Dynasty* edited by Lü Zuqian, it can be concluded that:

90 Fu are included, and 21 out of them are from "gentlemen of Su Dongpo," which accounts for about 23%;

90 narrations are included, 25 out of them are from "gentlemen of Su Dongpo," which accounts for about 28%;

87 prefaces are included, and 17 out of them are from "gentlemen of Su Dongpo," which accounts for about 20%;

70 argumentations are included, and 22 out of them are from "gentlemen of Su Dongpo," which accounts for about 31%;

70 calligraphy works are included, 17 out of them are from "gentlemen of Su Dongpo," which accounts for about 24%;

84 prefaces are included, 27 out of them are from "gentlemen of Su Dongpo," which accounts for about 32%;

46 postscripts are included, 21 out of them are from "gentlemen of Su Dongpo," which accounts for about 46%;

46 elegiac addresses are included, 16 out of them are from "gentlemen of Su Dongpo," which accounts for about 35%.[3]

Judging from the situation of selection of main styles above, it can be concluded that the proportion of selected essay of "gentlemen of Su Dongpo" approaches or reaches one third of the essays created by all the scholars of the Song Dynasty, which has a history of more than three hundred years. This is very persuasive. In addition to SanSu, and "the six gentleman of Su Dongpo," Zhang Shunmin, Li Gefei, Tang Geng, and Su Guo had made certain achievements in essays. Huang Tingjian lives alone with 9 essays at the top, accounting for about 20%.

In the aspect of poetry, Su Dongpo and his disciples achieved the highest level. Not only the poetry of the Song Dynasty headed by Su Dongpo and Huang Tingjian, but also the most prosperous period of the poetry of Song Dynasty, and the period of the highest achievement, were both the period of Su Dongpo and Su Zhe.

In the aspect of Ci, the achievements and influence of Su Dongpo were better than that of poems and Fu. "Su Dongpo was not addicted to rhythm. He wrote Ci occasionally. Su Dongpo made some innovations: He established a "new world", namely the fresh unconstrained Ci school. And then other scholars began to cheer up."[4] If there was no Su Dongpo's reform of the style of Ci, and his numerous excellent works, it would be almost impossible for Song Ci to be tied with Tang poetry of literary genre. Su Dongpo was dissatisfied with Liu Yong's Ci for its delicate style and narrow content. He lifted the flag of reform, and unified the gentlemen of Su Dongpo and the lyricists. In their joint efforts, they changed the traditional concept

of "poem is solemn, while Ci is delicate," changed the narrow theme of the moon and flowers, and be immersed in love, which greatly improved the style and grade of Ci. Ci, a humble literary genre before, like a young wrong-doer, began to work hard and finally entered the solemn performance field of the poetry.

According to the statistics of Tang Guizhang's *The Complete Collection of Poems of the Song Dynasty*, among all the 873 writers, 227 were living in the northern Song Dynasty, accounting for 26%; 646 were living in the southern Song Dynasty, accounting for 74%. Therefore, someone concluded that in the field of Ci, the southern Song Dynasty surpassed the northern Song Dynasty, the era of Su Dongpo, completely. I do not agree with this conclusion, because after Su Dongpo raised the flag of reform, and set his fashion in the field of Ci, it was natural that there were numerous followers.

On one occasion, a disciple consulted Su Dongpo how to make creativity "spring up like a fountain, and don't pick out places"?

Su Dongpo replied to him, "When worn-out writing brushes pile up like mountains, you either can't write good articles; the more books you read, the better works you complete."

Inevitably, the problem goes back to the origin of "accumulated strength", which is a stupid way, but it's also the only proper course to "own remarkable ability". Fang Zhouzi's question for a talented teenage that illuminated his future with bad grades in seven courses has got the approval of Su Dongpo. A person, who doesn't read, essentially became an example to the readers. That's preposterous!

To further explain it clearly, Su Dongpo got a pen and wrote a word on the table. The disciple took a close look at the word; the word was "money", he was baffled and asked why.

Su Dongpo said, "Let's take writing articles for example. There are a lot of things in the city; if I want to get our advantage, what should we do? There is one thing called "money". If we had money, all things could be used to our advantage. The imagination in writing articles and creativity are the same. If we have a theme ("meaning"), then the Confucian classics, historical books, and other classics all can be used to our advantage."[5]

Su Dongpo told his disciples: Attention and support each other among scholars is necessary, but a person's reputation and status, fundamentally depends on one's own efforts, instead of going shortcuts.

> In the world, only one's true talents cannot cheat others. His articles are like gold and jade, with its own relatively fixed value for each one. With the mutual promotion and recommendation of the elder and younger generation, they may convince people all around the world of his talents by others' kind words. This is indeed possible. But once the person's conduct and insight are handed over to the public to be reviewed, his height cannot be controlled by a single introducer. Of these people, I was the first person to find the talents of them like Huang Tingjian and Zhang Wenqian. At first when I read their articles to you, probably only half of you believed what I said. Over time you believed what I said, and praised them full of joy. How could I increase or decrease its inherent quality of their talents for them? Not only I can't, but also even my elder generation wouldn't do it for me.[6]

Su Dongpo pointed out explicitly, "If a man wants to keep his own reputation and status, he needs to rely on his own skills, give the rein to his own creativity over a long time of hard work."

Li Zhi was impatient and eager for quick success and instant benefits in his early years. When he had his first contact with Su Dongpo, he urgently

wanted Su Dongpo to "introduce" himself with Su Dongpo's influence and status. After he was refused by Su Dongpo, he was angry and "wrote to blame Su Dongpo for many times". Su Dongpo was against his motivation of chasing fame. Su Dongpo criticized Li Zhi that it was not enough to just have a literary taste, you must also have the same moral foundation; only in this way, can the literary career have a better development. Later, Li Zhi corrected his attitude towards fame, and finally became one of "the six gentlemen of Su Dongpo".

If we have a glimpse at Su Dongpo's "magic pocket", a magician of creativity in the 11th century, we can just get a prescription: A man can reap the benefits on the basis of rich knowledge and experience. Merely, the magician himself was skilled enough to play myriad changes, making others "fail to see the truth".

Su Dongpo said, "My life is not happy, in addition to writing articles. I can write whatever I want to. There's an end to the words, but not to their message. There is no time without all my heart and soul, and I think the joy of the world is no more than writing articles." So, it's no wonder that Su Dongpo's creativity reached the degree of following his inclinations, and exported to the Western Xia regime, Qidan, an ancient nationality in China, and even the Korean peninsula.

2. From "collide with various wisdom and withstand difficult challenges and tests of various aspects" to "rise abruptly based on his accumulated strength"

Su Dongpo served as a Hanlin Academician and reader of the academy later in his life. He became a teacher of the emperor, with a very high status. Su Dongpo's methods of scholarly research are well worth following and learning.

In his later years, Su Dongpo took his study of *Han Shu* for example, to sum up his methods of scholarly research as "collide with various wisdoms and withstand difficult challenges and tests of various aspects" method in his *Another Reply to Wang Xiang*.

Su Dongpo said, "In my opinion, when young people read books, they should complete reading every book a few times. There are too many books, much like the crowded people; the contents of the books are numerous and jumbled, much like the department store. A person's energy is limited, and cannot master all the contents, you just need to get that part of knowledge which you want. So, I want you to open the book every time with just one goal or task to read, also understand and digest one idea. For example, you want to know the ideas of the ancients for the conducts of sages and wise men during the success or failure and gain or loss, you should read books only with this target or task excluding others. If you have a new idea, you should set other targets or tasks to look for deeds, historical facts, classical descriptions, and cultural relics, and you can do the same for other studies. Although this method is pedantic and doltish, one day after they finish the study, they can digest all the knowledge and their minds will often be rich with various intellectual factors. Compared with readers who don't study further or deeper, they cannot be mentioned in the same way. This method of reading is definitely not a crash. How ridiculous! Ridiculous!"[7]

After Su Dongpo introduced his own reading method of "collide with various wisdoms and withstand difficult challenges and tests of various aspects", he said even two "ridiculous", because a young student Wang Xiang wrote to him to consult the shortcut of composition in the Imperial Examinations. Su Dongpo not only told him clearly that "there is no shortcut", but also taught him a way to focus on reading, and accumulate knowledge step

by step. The central meaning is when we acquire sufficient knowledge, no matter what articles we deal with, we can deal with them well, and everything is possible to be "handled". Here Su Dongpo focused on method of reading, but he intended to summarize and introduce his writing experience, which is one of the secrets of his brilliant achievements in his creation.

Reading a book many times;

Understanding and digesting one idea each time;

And later, on the basis of the first two steps, we need to make a comprehensive understanding, and finally to be thoroughly acquainted with it, "do not neglect anything".

In this way, when a man is professional and knowledgeable, he can withstand difficult challenges and tests in various aspects, and copy with any situation easily.

Su Dongpo's method of "collide with various wisdom and withstand difficult challenges and tests of various aspects" was recommended by Huang Tingjian. Huang Tingjian thought if the writer wanted his works to spread, he must increase his reading as many as possible, which he explained to be "Given facilities, success is assured."

Copy and recite the calligraphy works, method of "collide with various wisdom and withstand difficult challenges and tests of various aspects" all are the methods of Su Dongpo to "broadly learn knowledge and accumulate experience, and rise abruptly based on its accumulated strength".

Su Dongpo thought that there must be the accumulation of knowledge, when it was accumulated to a certain degree, it will "extend over a long period of bowing down, play a role after prepared fully; it like water will flow after filled up, and arrow will shoot after the bow is stretched to its full extent." This is the accurate annotation of "broadly learn knowledge and accumulate experience, and rise abruptly based on its accumulated strength."

It's a long and difficult process for the degree of "accumulation" to be "difficult to extend for a long time", "fully prepared", "filled up", and "stretched to its full extent". Su Dongpo thought that the ancients were higher than the contemporaries in the field of long-term accumulation; the ancients will not use their capacities lightly, but use them after fully developed.

Su Dongpo just expressed his ideas by the ancients. Only after raising sufficient knowledge, will the "abrupt rise" be strong, and abundant. Creativity is the same. If there is no profound accumulation for a long time, the works or articles will be weak and superficial, and it is difficult for them to become masterpieces.

Also, corresponding to "accumulated strength" is "abrupt rise", one is "thick", and the other is "thin". Su Dongpo laid special stress on the proportional relation of accumulation of learning and creative output: One should not be tired of the "thick" of accumulation of learning, and "thin" of creative output. Su Dongpo warned people of seeking quantity over quality in one's creation, because when the quantity is too large, it must be at the expense of the quality. Only when one person is impulsive to write, can he write with sincere feelings and concrete content in his heart, finally completed good articles. Writing articles hastily, playing with words, or writing just for the purpose of writing, articles completed in such cases will leave regret for writers.

In Huizhou, Su Dongpo mentioned "broadly learn knowledge and accumulate experience, and rise abruptly based on its accumulated strength" again. In *A Reply to Zhang Jiafu*, Su Dongpo said, "Most of the people, who write articles, will regret when they are old. I regretted the articles completed when I was young. However, when one complete works with unique insight, it is impossible to have any regret. Knowledge learning and experience accumulation is critical for writing articles, which

is like a rich man who builds a mansion. Only when material is enough, can he complete his building. Otherwise it becomes impossible." Su Dongpo is a model of "accumulated strength". *The Stories of Troops which are Going for a Battle* recorded that one day Emperor Shenzong of the Song Dynasty talked about talents with his officials in feudal times. They thought that Su Dongpo was diligent in study, and prominent among all scholars in previous dynasties. No matter what official position or what kind of life condition he was on or lived, he would read books every evening, and read late into the night. He always adhered to this habit, which only can be kept by a man with extraordinary perseverance.

The method of "broadly learn knowledge and accumulate experience, and rise abruptly based on its accumulated strength" can be a method of reading, creation, thinking, and innovation. These are two steps in the complete process: A broad preparation, and an abrupt rise. This is the true expression of Su Dongpo on creativity.

3. The Fight between the Dragon and the Tiger

Wang Anshi thought the education method and examination system of that time should lay special emphasis on memorizing and reciting, not for thinking and practicing, leaving students unaware of the significance of learning. So, when exams came, they mainly pondered the ideas of assigning topics. If a man entered into the official career for his skill in knowledge of the classics, he could just be an education official. But Jinshi, the successful candidate in the highest Imperial Examinations, would be close to the people and govern the populace. So when they were young, they should be in the pursuit of state affairs instead of steeping themselves in studying and having tests in poetry. Otherwise, when they became officials, they could not distinguish beans with wheat on farming, and principal criminal with accessary criminal on criminal law. What use is learning?

In a word, we should "learn to meet practical needs".

In 1069, Wang Anshi took office. He abolished "fill-in-the-blank" and "questions and answers," "poems and Fu" instantly, and laid emphasis on "opinion", "essay" and general works on the classics.

Instead of discourse on politics, in these articles candidates' talent, interest in current affairs, and evaluation of ancient and modern rise and fall of a nation is fully displayed.

As for righteous cause, the candidates could pay less attention to recitation, and attach great importance to flexible application.

Wang Anshi claimed to initiate education and cultivate scholars, and develop talents who had a good knowledge of Confucian classics and take advantage of them.

Su Dongpo didn't agree with Wang Anshi on the reform of examination system. In 1069-1071, he wrote to the Emperor Shenzong of the Song Dynasty three times, put forward his own views, and further spearheaded his attack at the Emperor Shenzong of the Song Dynasty and Wang Anshi as both advocated political reform.

He was opposed to abolishing the practice of selecting officials based on his poetry and Fu, and replacing it with selection based on one's discourse on politics and Confucian classics. He said that identify talents is the first step to acquire talents; the method was assessing the actual capability of talents. Speaking of poetry, from the Tang Dynasty up to now, there were countless ministers who played a big role in the creation of poetry or Fu. These people didn't live up to all the people's trust, so we must abandon the examination form of poetry and Fu.

"In terms of articles, discourse on politics can be regarded useless; poetry can be regarded

the same as well. From the political point of view, both poetry and discourse on politics were useless. Despite of being regarded useless, they have never been abandoned by the ancients. And from the Tang Dynasty up to now, there were numerous famous ministers who took office through examinations of poetry and Fu. So is it really necessary to abolish it?"

Su Dongpo stated clearly that Wang Anshi's school reform scheme was just a one-sided view, which failed to fully consider the present situation of education, and would cause incalculable confusion and loss.

He earnestly reminded the emperor: He requested the emperor to issue a command clearly to the department in charge of education, stating that the rule of fairness should be adopted in examinations and secure that talented scholars had the opportunity to be promoted to positions of leadership. Scholars who knew the *Five Classics* well, even plain and modest, should be admitted; and scholars who were opportunistic, even if his articles were written neatly and exquisitely, as long as there was artificial veneer, shall be rejected. In this way, the general mood of society would be cleaned up little by little, and the style of study would return to the right way of Confucianism. His Majesty was eager to have loyal ministers, and the nation would avoid going to a complete collapse, so that both could be expected soon.

However, sometimes, what one learns cannot be applied in practice.

Cultural construction is in bad need of many talents. How can you calculate their "learning" by an assembly line method?

To cultivate officials, we taught them Confucian classics, which was not only narrow-minded, but also a typical pragmatism of "no overall plan for a fundamental transformation". The effective prescription which Su Dongpo made for the education at that time also had curative effects for our education today.

> The decline of culture has never been as serious as it is today. To be honest, the root cause is Wang Anshi, whose articles are not bad, but with a defect he favored the ones who completely followed him. Even Confucius was unable to require others to act exactly in his way, such as Yan Yuan's benevolence, and Zi Lu's braveness. But Wang Anshi expected to unify the whole world by his knowledge! In the fertile soil, even the same creature maintains the diversity of growth. Only in desolate, poor, and saline soil, we get an eyeful of worthless crops, such as thatch and reed. This is the ruling thought of Wang Anshi.[7]

With his power, Wang Anshi united those people with the same views but alienated those with different views on education, which was the root cause of the decline of culture and education. Su Dongpo firstly affirmed the advantage of Wang Anshi, but this was not only the advantage, but also a disadvantage as well. Due to the educational and cultural chauvinism, there was only a point of view, and one kind of voice in the cultivation of talents. This killed the situation of all flowers blossoming and hundreds of schools contending, which would lead to an inevitable ending, namely "in desolate, poor, and saline soil, we would get an eyeful of thatch and reed." All of these were harmful to the stability of the Song Dynasty.

Later, in view of the arbitrary conducts of Wang Anshi, when Su Dongpo acted as the examiner of the Imperial College he assigned a topic as follows: The emperor Wu in the Jin Dynasty destroyed the state of Wu by arbitrary conducts, while Fu Jian attacked the state of Jin but destroyed himself for his arbitrary conducts; Duke Huan of Qi only trusted

Guan Zhong, and finally became a powerful chief of the princes of the Spring and Autumn Period, while Yan Kuai only believed in Zi Zhi, and brought about his own death. The things were the same, but the results were different. Why? Why did the different people do the same thing, and the results were often the opposite? Su Dongpo asked students to think in a critical way, raise their vigilance, and not to work with people who loved fame and fortune, to go on a campaign and slaughter to own power, but to participate in the construction of the nation with students' conscience.

During this period, Su Dongpo wrote *Shi Cangshu´s Zuimo Hall* in collaboration with Wen Tong, and Shi Cangshu, a calligrapher. He thought the calligraphy works would be precious because of their nature. He said, "I like listening to the creation out of imagination when I'm writing. There is no fixed method. I like writing freely without too much hesitation, and I hate writing deliberately." This view of advocating innovation and opposing sculpture was also the embodiment of Su Dongpo's opposition against Wang Anshi's arbitrary comments regarding artistic value.

Paying attention to personality, and protecting everyone's creativity, was the education thought implemented by Su Dongpo all his life, and as well as the education behavior which he maintained persistently. He said, "Following others' steps is always lagging behind others. Only if you have your own goal, can you gain the real knowledge." He also said, "The greatest taboo of writing articles is to follow others' footsteps."

Su Dongpo never shaped his disciples with invariable models, instead, for the unique personality and style shown in his disciples, Su Dongpo always gave much encouragement. Huang Tingjian's poems, Zhang Lei and Qin Guan's articles, Chao Buzhi's Fu, Qin Quan's Ci, were all apparently different from Su Dongpo's. Su Dongpo often didn't skimp the gorgeous words to praise them. Huang Tingjian came from Sumen but later founded his own school, and became the father of the Jiangxi Poetry School, but in the Jiangxi Poetry School, there was no seat for Su Dongpo.

Su Dongpo just put forward his views on the issue of direction. For example, he once persuaded Qin Guan of his flashy words of Ci, to prevent his creation from the negative aspects. For young people who learned from him or turned to him for advice, he was always delighted to receive and encourage them.

Even several of Wang Anshi's sons and nephews all studied under Su Dongpo and Wang Anshi's younger brother, Zhang Dun, who exerted all his strength to persecute Su Dongpo, sent his two sons Zhang Chi and Zhang Yuan to study under Su Dongpo. Shu Dan, an official of supervision institution in Song Dynasty, involved in the persecution of Su Dongpo during the Wutai Poem Case, also sent his son Shu Huan to study under Su Dongpo. During that period of intense political struggle, Wang Anshi sent his sons and nephews to study under his political opponent, which showed that Wang Anshi was at ease about his political opponent's morality and scholarship.

4. The Fight against Neo-Confucianism (idealist philosophy)

One day, Cheng Yi met Qin Guan, one of Su Dongpo's proud disciples. He asked Qin Guan, "Is 'if heaven had emotions, it would also worry about people.' your masterpiece or not?"

Qin Guan thought Cheng Yi would praise this Ci, so he, in a hurry, joined his hands together in salute and thank him humbly.

But Cheng Yi's facial expression changed quickly, and said to Qin Guan seriously, "The vast sky is a great dignity, how can you casually

blaspheme it?" After finishing the sentence, he stalked out.

Cheng Yi frowned upon Su Dongpo's words and deeds for a long time, the latter's words and deeds in Cheng Yi's view mostly belonged to the category of immorality. For example, Su Dongpo once wrote a Ci for young people:

Thinking back to the capital city, it's a beauty gathering place. Thirty years ago, I was a leader in the pursuit of erotic. At the time I went to the brothel to search for traces of the past, only found my name in blanks of flowers which was written when singing the moon and the wind at that time.

Su Dongpo once called himself "a romantic and charming handsome man," and Qin Guan once replied, "I once worked for a mansion where there were a number of romantic and charming handsome men." Su Dongpo had a jolly laugh. This frank and confident expression was inacceptable by anyone, let alone Cheng Yi.

When the creativity of literature met with the mechanical and moralistic Neo-Confucianism, it was rather embarrassing. It is obvious that they kept different doctrine, and were totally incompatible as fire and water.

At the beginning of the reign of Emperor Zhezong of the Song Dynasty, Su Dongpo's official career went well. He paid attention to exploring the feelings, began with affection, and accorded with the principle. He was sincere, honest, loyal, and selfless. He paid equal attention to Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, and frowned upon the style of stale and pedantic scholars, who maintained ethic discipline. There were more students to learn from him.

For that reason, he openly challenged his rival on assigning topics.

Su Dongpo said in the examination paper: now the government expects to emulate the honest attitude of Emperor Renzong of Song Dynasty, but it is worrying that officials and departments won't implement earnestly, resulting in superficial attack behaviors, besides, the government wants to emulate the energetic and promising attitude of Emperor Shenzong of Song Dynasty, but I am afraid that supervisory departments, satraps, and other officials don't understand the profound meaning, resulting in rigid behaviors.

Disciples of Cheng Yi began to construct literary inquisitions, even drew farfetched analogies, and seized Su Dongpo's mistakes or shortcomings. They asked, "How can two emperors link together with 'steal', and 'carve'?" It was so intense that even shocked at the highest level. Finally, the grandma-empress endorsed Su Dongpo, and soothed the lawsuit.

Su Dongpo put forward detailed suggestions for reform aimed at the method of talents admission according to the test scores of different subjects. It was bound to appear uneven circumstance in the examinations because every subject enrolled the number of people before examinations. Sometimes there were few people who conformed to the standard in a subject, so that we need to lower the standard to admit enough people; Sometimes there were too many people who conformed to the standard in a division, so that some people should be excluded, because it exceeded the prescribed amount. This was a drawback of admission for the imperial examination. Su Dongpo suggested using poetry as measure standard, then gradually admitting talents regardless of the subjects in the future, making the imperial examination more comprehensive and scientific.

Cheng Yi's methods did not make sense in some respects. He was also a teacher of the emperor. One day, the little emperor folded a willow during the lectures. Cheng Yi said to him that spring was a time that everything went for glory, it was not reasonable to fold branches, making the little emperor be afraid of him.

According to the historical records, "During the Xining and Yuanfeng periods in the Song Dynasty, Cheng Hao from Henan province and his younger brother Cheng Yi taught the knowledge of Confucius and Mencius. Students from Luoyang and Henan area all worshiped them as their teachers."

This seemed exaggerated, because the development of neo-Confucianism at that time was not fine. In the early period of Emperor Zhezong of Song Dynasty, when Fan Zuyu talked with Chen Guan, an examiner of Imperial Examinations in the Song Dynasty, about Cheng Bochun (Cheng Hao), Chen Guan asked expectedly, "Who is Cheng Bochun?" This surprised Fan Zuyu greatly. Chen immediately found excuses for himself, and said, "I grew up in Southeast China, so I really don't know him". In the early period of the Chunxi reign of the Southern Song Dynasty, when Liu Qingzhi acted as the professor of government-established institutions in Ganzhou, he built an ancestral temple to sacrifice Zhou Dunyi, who was the founder of neo-Confucianism, and took the position as a relative higher rank of Qian Zhou. The students even asked, "Who is Zhou Dunyi?" This showed that the influence of neo-Confucianism at that time was limited.

In 1081, Yang Shi, passed the imperial examination and became a Scholar in 1076. He later was transferred to be an official but didn't go, he worshiped Cheng Hao as his teacher in Yingchang in students' manners. Both the teacher and student got along well with each other. In 1093, Yang Shi and You Zuo went to Luoyang to visit Cheng Yi. Unfortunately, when they arrived there, Cheng Yi was sleeping with the door locked. Yang Shi and You Zuo stood outside the door, until Cheng Yi woke up. At this time, the ground was covered with thick snow. Then, the story of "standing in the snow to wait upon Master Cheng respectfully" spread quickly. For scholars of Yang Shi's generation, this "performance art" naturally stemmed from the sincere heart and the reverence for culture. And for Cheng Yi, letting his students stand outside until the snow was thick was too arrogant, which also confirmed he was unreasonable.

Cheng Yi liked eating vegetables, while Su Dongpo liked eating meat. As a result, when they had dinner at the official house, people who followed Cheng Yi would eat vegetable, while people who followed Su Dongpo would eat meat. And as stated above, Su Dongpo's teaching view was advocating frankness and nature, pursuing spiritual freedom, and absorbed anything and everything of Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism and Political Strategists. This view completely conflicted with Cheng Yi's view, namely, "Keep the celestial law existence, and kill off human desire." They thought the study of Su Dongpo were heretical ideas.

After the death of Sima Guang, Cheng Yi thought according to the ancient rites, the true filial son should be so grieved he could not return a salute to guests. Su Dongpo led the colleagues of Hanlin Imperial Academy and Central Secretariat worship. Cheng Yi was also against Su Dongpo's behavior. He said now that you had gone to court, and listened to music on the same day, you shouldn't be on the same day weeping mourners, according to the rules of *The Analects of Confucius*, namely "Confucius cried for funerals in the day, and no longer sang on the same day."

Su Dongpo said there were no records in *The Analects of Confucius* that now that you had gone to court, and listened to music on the same day, you shouldn't on the same day weeping mourners. He insisted on going to worship. Besides, Su Dongpo was also offended by Cheng Yi's resistance to require the filial son come out to welcome them. Su Dongpo said to Cheng Yi, "You are a vulgar man without good sense, just like Shusun Tong," which made him feel ashamed in front of a lot of people.

From the perspective of the logic of Su Dongpo and Cheng Yi's debate, Su Dongpo was right. From ideological point of view, the author thought if the human did not have desires, they wouldn't have creativity either, because creativity was always driven by desire. The idea of "killing off the human desire" was equal to extinguish the creative impulse of humans. Later, China's neo-Confucianism was prosperous and creativity was declining, perhaps it was the result of its muzzle!

Su Dongpo once said, "I hate Cheng Yi's craftiness at ordinary times. So I never give him a good look." And Cheng Yi also hated Su Dongpo very much. Su Dongpo was unrestrained and frank, and once had a trip to mountain with prostitutes. "There were many horses and beauty on the mountain." Su Dongpo recited and responded poems, praised himself, "Thirty years ago, I'm a romantic handsome man." It reached Cheng Yi's ears, he and his disciples jumped out to launch unbridled attacks. The controversy unconsciously became a dispute caused by personal feelings, resulting in great loss on both sides. At first Cheng Yi was exiled, and then Su Dongpo was banished too. Both of them on the official career, had no chance to return.

5.Cultivation of Creativity—the Core of Su Dongpo's Education

Not all Chinese parents are able to afford sending their children to be educated abroad; not all children receive sufficient education abroad; not all Chinese parents and educators are willing to send their children abroad to be educated; not all children under the cultivation of Chinese traditional culture lack competitiveness. Not all...

I summarize here China's top ten creative events in the past few decades: (1) Qian Xuesen's question—aiming at the cultivation of creative talents; (2) Yuan Longping's dream —aiming at the creativity of agriculture; (3) Li Kaifu's "dream works of creativity"—aiming at the creativity of science and technology; (4) Fang Zhouzi exposed academic frauds—aiming at the protection of academic creativity; (5) Shanghai students ranked first in the international scientific competition—aiming at the material base of creativity; (6) Wang Yaping gave lessons in the Shenzhou spacecraft—aiming at the universal education of creativity; (7) The intellectual property dispute between Wong Lo Kat and Jiaduobao drink—aiming at the protection of creativity; (8) Ministry of Industry and Information Technology of the People's Republic of China's attitude towards Telecommunications and WeChat—aiming at the protection of creativity; (9) China's supercomputer won again in the world competition—aiming at the creativity of science and technology; (10) "Creativity" was written into the report of the 18th national congress of the communist party of China, and the narration of "The Chinese Dream"—aiming at the political and cultural protection of creativity.

Though the summing up was not entire, and with distinct individual mark. However, we can clearly see that on the cultivation and protection of the creativity, the Chinese still have a long way to go. For example, the system construction and education, culture and other aspects lack corresponding incentive mechanisms.

So, I wrote this book.

There were a lot of books which studied Su Dongpo from the aspects of literature, politics, and art and so on. I want to study Su Dongpo and his family from the perspective of creativity, and to study how he made preparation for the imperial examination, and how he dealt with his life test… This kind of books were very few, and this book can be used as one of them.

In modern China, there are many "intellectuels"

which are produced by the modern assembly line, while there are only a few learned people who master the classics, and manoeuvre between various political groupings.

Many people yearn for Su Dongpo from different angles, and miss the era which produced learned men who mastered the classics.

Some people suspect that our culture no longer has problems.

I don't think so. According to my observation, it's only a problem of accessories of the culture.

We are one of the accessories too. There is something wrong with us. We can't push our own problems easily to other aspects.

Our protagonist is Su Dongpo, and we should give him a new understanding.

After Confucius, Su Dongpo is the greatest educator in China.

Su Dongpo formed rich, unique, and great education thoughts of creativity in education activities.

Confucius toured around many countries, but when compared the scope of walking with Su Dongpo, it was dwarfed.

Confucius had no food to eat when he was touring around. Su Dongpo was also often caught in the situation of "having no food in the warehouse."

Confucius revised *The Book of Songs*, explained *The Book of Changes*, spread *The Analects*, and finally became an extraordinary master. Su Dongpo set his fashion or continued with the past and opened up the future in the field of poems, Ci, Fu, calligraphy and painting. He left numerous works—over two million words in total — which was not second to Confucius.

The core of Su Dongpo's education idea is creativity.

This is also the most valuable wealth he left for us today.

Therefore, he was opposed to Wang Anshi's chauvinism on teaching concept, and was opposed to Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi's teaching concept of keeping the celestial law existence, and killing off the human creativity.

For the sake of creativity, he said, "Following others' steps to do things is always lagging behind the others. Only if you have your own goal, can you get the real knowledge." For the sake of creativity, he said, "Innocent and romantic, not worried and indignant in the heart should be learnt and followed by the poets."[9]

For the sake of the creativity, he said, "Broadly learn knowledge and accumulate experience, and rise abruptly based on its accumulated strength."[10]

For the sake of the creativity, he said, "Handle with any situation."[11]

For the sake of the creativity, he wrote whatever he wanted to, changed the old to the new, made use of discarded things, and took advantage of, "What can't be reached by the ancients."

For the sake of the creativity, his "ideas of writing were like the source of ten thousand fountains, the water didn't choose the terrain and come out of the fountain freely, and flows at great speed on the ground. It's not a problem even if the water runs a thousand miles. When water came across rocks and turns, it changed shape according to different land forms, finally it became unpredictable."[12]

For the sake of creativity, he said, "When he wrote as if the wind and the rain were heavy, and it was with a tremendous momentum before he finished writing."[13]

When Su Dongpo criticized Wu Daozi's paintings, he said more than once that creativity should "draw a new train of thought in the old routine, and entrusted his swell lingering charm outside the bold and unconstrained style."[14] Essentially, this is the real image of his teaching concept, which was very appropriate to use this

sentence to describe him. He emphasized that: Bold and unconstrained style should be the basis of thought. Do not be like a deliriously intoxicated and yelling madman. A bold and unconstrained style means that you can draw a new train of thought through the old routine. "Do what you think, but not in violation of the rules" – yet I praise Su Dongpo for doing precisely this. Literary creation should fully carry out free activities, under the allowance and guidance of creation rules, making creation like "floating clouds and flowing water" and allowing it to "spring up like a fountain, —and don't pick out places." But sometimes we must follow the rules of creation. "Initially literary creation has no definite shape, just rush into the place which it can, and stop when it must stop, its image texture presents a natural appearance, so its attitude displays lively."[15]

Yin Zhu, a man of the Song Dynasty, thought that cultivating career was, "A champion, who had passed the government examination, led thousands of troops to restore the land occupied by the enemy you state and Ji state, and put the powerful opponent to drive to the distant desert land. Even as he sang the song of victory, came back to accept reward, and celebrated their victory in the ancestral temple. That kind of glory was no match for cultivating talents."[16] Yin Zhu was very appreciative of Su Dongpo's bold creation, and praised him for being "good at reading, and made a good use of books", and in the future Su Dongpo would be a winner in literature. Ouyang Xiu had seen Su Dongpo's good qualities of challenging the established convention, and making innovations very early.

That's what we need now, and what we hope to have for each child, also what we desire to have for each of our teachers and parents.

From the perspective of teaching achievements, Su Dongpo was successful: The great educator Confucius, who lived two thousand and five hundred years ago—had more than 3,000 disciples, while only 72 of them were wise men. The probability of becoming a wise man was less than 3% whose quality could not meet the level of general high school, let alone the national demonstration school; while the disciples of the Sushi Clan all were cultivated successfully which began from Su Xun. Su Dongpo had more than 50 disciples; most of them were wise men except a few. Needless to say, Su Dongpo had another advantage over Confucius: Su Dongpo once was the teacher of the emperor, prostitutes, monks and Taoist priests, the people, and ethnic groups. Su Dongpo was a teacher who recruited disciples no matter what place he was, or no matter his disciples were rich or poor.

If we get rid of the Sushi Clan and its disciples ("the four disciples of Su-Shi"①, and "the later four disciples of Su-Shi"②), throughout the history of Song Dynasty literature, and even the whole history of the Song Dynasty, we can say that creativity is lacking.

For nearly one thousand years, Su Dongpo himself and his works have become our treasured friends, and Su Dongpo's creative spirit also has become our nation's blood, this is the success of Su Dongpo's education, which will continue. The influence of his creativity includes; science of success, paranormal capacities, science of innovation, enterprise culture, the Gardener School, journalism and communication, public relations, the Cynic School, quality education, yoga, martial arts, science of law, making wine, publication, and hotel management…

It is said that Lin Yutang had summed up the

① They are Huang Tingjian, Qin Guan, Zhang Lei, and Yao Buzhi.

② They are Li Gefei, Liao Zhengyi, Li Xi, and Dong Rong.

field which Su Dongpo had dealt with carefully and made fruitful achievements. It was nearly twenty!

The success of a person's creativity mode will naturally bring some enlightenment to other people. When this kind of education mode brings more people to success, it will have a wider range of the value of thinking.

The pedagogical implications brought by the wisdom of large groups before Su Dongpo and behind are so typical, and so broad. It seems to be standing on a beach of beautiful scenery, as long as you bend over, you will be able to pick up the beautiful treasure.

Pick up the huge rich ore has its obvious background:

The Chinese nation is one of the nations which attach the greatest importance to the education of people. Among them, there are individual people whose desire for success has come to a degree of true obsession.

At the same time, the model of achieving success through educational examination which was also used in Su Dongpo's era one thousand years ago continues today. The inspiration of Su Dongpo's success for today's readers is natural and strong.

Especially in the current society, people have a kind of blind worship of foreign winners based on a Chinese proverb, namely, "Foreign monks give better sermons." People who have lost their discrimination begin to enter the period of painful introspection.

For China, to study ancestors' methods of education, and to find their convenient way to success, may be the only way.

REFERENCES

[1] The Chinese original is quoted from *The Foreword of Selected Works of Su Dongpo* by Chen Jiru.

[2] The Chinese original is quoted from *A Letter to Uncle Lifang.*

[3] This data is from the *People's Daily*.

[4] The Chinese original is quoted from *The Comment of Ci and Qu Written at Biji Lane* by Wang Zhuo.

[5] The Chinese original is quoted from *The Collections of Anecdotes in Song Dynasty*.

[6] The Chinese original is quoted from *A Reply to Mao Pang.*

[7] The Chinese original is quoted from *A Reply to Wang Xiang*.

[8] The Chinese original is quoted from *A Reply to Zhang Wenqian.*

[9] The Chinese original is quoted from *Essays written at Huachan House* by Dong Qichang.

[10] The Chinese original is quoted from *A Saying of Planting Crops: To Zhang Hu.*

[11] The Chinese original is quoted from *A Reply to Wang Xiang*.

[12] The Chinese original is quoted from *The Opinion and Experience of Writing Articles and Literature*.

[13] The Chinese original is quoted from *The Impression and Comment of Paintings of Wang Wei and Wu Daozi*.

[14] The Chinese original is quoted from *The Postscript written at the end of A Painting of Wu Daozi*.

[15] The Chinese original is quoted from *A Reply to Xie Minshi about Writing Poems and Articles*.

[16] The Chinese original is quoted from *The Dynastic Administration and Literati and Officialdom's Behaviors from Taizu to Renzong of the Song Dynasty.*