



Analysis of Su Dongpo's Transformation in Separation

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Abstract. In 2000, the French newspaper Le Monde held a "Millennium Heroes" global celebrity selection event from 1001 to 2000. A total of 12 people were selected from around the world, and Su Shi was the only Chinese selected. In China, almost everyone can memorize a few of his poems and tell some anecdotes about him. The name Su Shi (Su Dongpo) has become an eternal cultural memory of the Chinese nation. This article, through literature review and on-site visits, takes the emotion of separation as a clue to narrate Su Shi's life experiences of separation from family, friends, and the court. This article finds that separation was a lifelong emotion that Su Shi couldn't forget, and it was precisely because of this emotional clue that Su Shi transformed and reborn into a detached and free-spirited Su Dongpo. The psychological journey of Su Shi's transformation during separation has great reference significance for us modern people when facing the life and death separation of our loved ones, the melancholy of leaving our hometown, and the disappointment of pursuing our dreams.

Keywords: Su Shi, separation, emotional clues, psychological journey

1 Introduction

Su Shi (1037–1101), also known as Su Dongpo, must be multifaceted because, unlike Chinese figures who are known primarily for their poetry, he was recognized as a scholar-official whose literary works referenced earlier philosophical, literary, and historical writings. Furthermore, He is also a politician and a calligrapher and painter ^[1]. In 1947, Lin Yutang wrote the book "The Gay Genius", which recounted the life of a writer, politician, calligrapher, and painter, building Su Dongpo renown overseas. Tang Kailin (Kathleen Tomlonovic), an American scholar, said that after being exposed to Su Dongpo's articles, he was attracted by his free and imaginative thinking ^[2]. She completed her doctoral thesis under the title of 'Poetry of Exile and Return: A Study of Su Shi' (1037-1101) and also published her personal monograph 'Research on Su Shi in the Western Sinology'. Irvine East Asian Languages & Literature Professor at the University of California, Michael A. Fuller, "The Road to East Slope: The Development of Su Shi's Poetry Voice" is the first research monograph by Su Shi, which analyzes Su Shi's poetry from a philosophical perspective and conducts a very systematic study of the content, form, style, and techniques of Dongpo's poetry ^[3]. Beata Grant, a professor

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at the Department of East Asian Cultural Studies at Washington University in St. Louis, wrote *Mount Lu Revisited: Buddhism in the Life and Writings of Su Shih (1037-1107)* , It can be said that it provides a comprehensive introduction to Dongpo from a special perspective ^[4].

After literature review, it was found that the current research on Su Shi's works can be roughly divided into: research on Su Shi's poetry, lyrics, literature, calligraphy and painting, research on Su Shi's life experience, and research on Su Shi's thoughts, cultural realm, and spiritual qualities. Besides, the innovation of this paper lies in going beyond literature review with on-site visits and location specific research methods. The author visited Su Shi's hometown - Meishan, Su Shi's exile location in Hangzhou to search for Su Dongpo's footprints. From a research perspective, this article is different from previous scholars who have studied Su Shi's works, experiences, and thoughts as the starting point. Instead, the author analyzes emotional clues from Su Shi's works and life experiences, in particular the concept of separation. From the first time he left his hometown of Meishan, he embarked on a life marked by separation. This article will use the emotion of separation as a clue to narrate Su Shi's lifelong separation from his family, friends, and the court, as well as his psychological changes and transformation during the separation, and his rebirth into a detached and free-spirited Su Dongpo. Separation is a lifelong emotion that Su Shi could not forget.

Among the over 3000 poems and works left by Su Shi to future generations, there are many poems and works with the theme of separation; Some other poems, even if not on the theme of separation, still reflect his transcendent and reborn state after a certain separation. This article focuses on the theme of "separation" to study Su Shi's life and works, opening up a new perspective for researchers and showcasing Su Dongpo, who is emotionally rich, pursuing freedom and equality, and rebirth from nirvana. The psychological journey of Su Shi's rebirth in separation has great reference significance for us modern people when facing the life and death separation of our loved ones, the melancholy of leaving our hometown, and the disappointment in pursuing our dreams.

2 The Separation between Su Shi and His Relatives

Su Dongpo's first parting was at the age of 22. In 1057, he and his mother bid farewell and left the old house where he grew up in Shahuhang, Meishan to travel thousands of miles to Kaifeng, the capital of the Northern Song Dynasty. At this moment, he was full of energy and talent, like a caged bird ready to spread its wings and fly high into the broader sky. This departure was full of hope and excitement. He, his father Su Xun, and his brother Su Zhe enjoyed the scenery of nature along the way, and arrived in the ideal capital city of Kaifeng two months later. This departure marked the beginning of Su Dongpo's brilliant political career. He made a big splash with his article "The Ultimate Theory of Punishment, Reward, and Loyalty", which was appreciated by Ouyang Xiu, an official in charge of Northern Song Dynasty imperial examiner. This separation was also Su Dongpo's last farewell to his mother. Kaifeng is thousands of miles away from Meishan, and his mother did not wait for her son to return home in glory passing

away due to illness. Su Shi went home to mourn and observe filial piety for his mother for three years.

In 1065, Sushi initially served as supervisor of the Public Petitioners Drum Office and later was summoned to an interview by emperor himself for an assignment at the Imperial Archives, for which he was rated the highest and given the positions of Auxiliary in the Historiography Office and Provisional judge of the superior prefecture of Kaifeng. This official position usually has a term of one to two years, and upon completion, it is usually entrusted with a high position ^[5]. However, the changes came again. Eight years after his mother's death, in May 1065, Su Dongpo's beloved wife Wang Fu passed away. One year later, his father Su Xun also passed away, and Su Shi again returned to his hometown to observe filial piety for his father for three years. Career achievements unfortunately cannot prevent the separation of life and death from loved ones. Deeply loved parents along with lover who accompany each other day and night, Dongpo really wanted to share his frustrations and the inspiration and joy of creating poetry with them again. But life and death separated them, and Dongpo could never see them again. Ten years later, Dongpo wrote Jiang Cheng Zi to express his longing for his deceased wife. The poems are as follows:

Ten years parted, one living, one dead;
 Not thinking
 Yet never forgetting.
 A thousand li from her lonely grave
 I have nowhere to tell my grief.
 Yet should we meet again she would hardly know
 This ravaged face,
 These temples tinged with gray.
 At night in a dream, I am suddenly home again;
 By my small study window
 She sits at her dressing-table.
 We look at each other and find no words.
 But the tears course down our cheeks.
 Year after year heart-broken I fancy her
 On moonlit nights
 By the hill covered with young pines ^[6].

Today, the author arrived at the Su family cemetery--- the Short Pine Hill mentioned in Su Shi's Poems--- and offered three columns of fragrant incense in front of Wang Fu's tomb, tears streaming down the eyes. Perhaps Su Dongpo, who was deeply in love with his wife at that time, stood here, facing the parting of life and death with lover, as well as the youth that cannot be returned, with tears in his eyes. Nowadays, Su Shi's Clothes and Crown Tomb and Wang Fu's tomb are adjacent to each other. Even after thousands of years, their deep affection cannot be diluted. A gentle breeze passes by the ears, seemingly echoing with the phrase 'not thinking, yet never forgetting'.

The life and death separation from his parents and wife Wang Fu made Dongpo only able to meet them in a dream. The separation from his younger brother Su Zhe, who was in different positions and in different directions, was also a lingering emotion that Su Dongpo had been having through his life.

Su Zhe was three years younger than Su Shi. The two brothers had been studying and practicing calligraphy together since childhood, going on outings in the fields, riding cows in the fields, and planting pines on the mountain. Their emotions are sincere. Su Shi loved his younger brother so much, and there were over a hundred poems titled after his brother's name in his lifetime. Su Shi served as a general judge in Hangzhou, while his brother Su Zhe served as an official in Jinan. In order to be closer to his brother, he transferred himself to Mizhou, but ultimately he couldn't see his younger brother due to urgent business matters. The two brothers have been separated for seven years. During the Mid-Autumn Festival that year, the moonlight was like water, and Su Shi remembered his younger brother with mixed emotions. He wrote this tune "prelude to water melody" to express his longing. The words are as follows:

How long will the full moon appear?
 Wine cup in hand, I ask the sky.
 I do not know what time of the year
 It would be tonight in the palace on high.
 Riding the wind, there I would fly,
 Yet I'm afraid the crystalline palace would be
 Too high and cold for me.
 I rise and dance, with my shadow I play.
 On high as on earth, would it be as gay?
 The moon goes round the mansions red
 Through gauze-draped window soft to shed
 Her light upon the sleepless bed.
 Against man she should have no spite.
 Why then when people part, is the oft full and bright?
 Men have sorrow and joy, they part or meet again;
 The moon is bright or dim and she may wax or wane.
 There has been nothing perfect since the olden days,
 So let us wish that man
 May live long as he can!
 Though miles apart, we'll share the beauty she displays ^[7].

The tune "Prelude to Water Melody" he wrote to his younger brother opened the door to the Unconstrained Ci School of poetry, and from then on, the Song Dynasty poetry changed from the gentle school represented by Liu Yong to a style of both bold and unrestrained poetry. A year later, the two brothers really reunited in Xuzhou. Su Zhe also wrote a tune called "Prelude to Water Melody--- How long has it been since we parted ways" in response to his brother. Su Zhe said, after tonight, we will have to be apart again... Perhaps, being apart is the norm in our lives.

A thousand years later, the author stepped into the old house where Su Shi and Su Zhe grew up and looked up at the millennium old Huangjing tree, as if the author saw the childhood brothers playing around the big tree and welcoming her arrival. Come to the courtyard where the two brothers were studying together, the author feel the sound of the wind blowing through the green bamboo rustling in front of the courtyard. Su Shi once said in a poem: 'You can eat without meat, but you cannot live without bamboo.' He likes bamboo and loves drawing bamboo the most, which was related to the

environment he lived in since childhood. Su Shi's mother, Mrs. Cheng, loved growing bamboo and taught the two brothers to withstand wind and rain like bamboo. Regardless of wind, frost, snow, or rain, they should remain their true heart and be upright and honest. A thousand years later, Su Xun, Su Shi, and Su Zhe were collectively referred to as "Sansu", and their old house was called "Sansuci", becoming an eternal cultural memory symbol of the Chinese nation.

3 The Separation between Su Shi and His Friends

Su Shi's footprints throughout his life spread throughout almost the entire country, making a lot of friends. His vast network of contacts in Northern Song (960–1127) society, including political, religious, literary, and artistic figures, brought variety and erudition to his writings^[8]. All Su Shi's farewell poems were written when he bid farewell to his friends.

In 1071, at the age of thirty-six, Su Shi was appointed General judgment of Hangzhou and became good friends with the local magistrate at that time, Chen Xiang. When Chen Xiang was going to leave Hangzhou, Su Shi wrote three sincere farewell poems without a break. After writing "Jiang Cheng Zi · Solitary Mountain Bamboo Pavilion Farewell to the Ancient", he asked the banquet singers to sing. Hearing this affectionate farewell poem, and the singers all wept.

In 1089, Su Shi, at the age of fifty-four, took office as Prefect of Hangzhou in his capacity of Grand Academician in the Dragon Diagram Hall. At this time, he had already experienced the ups and downs of his life. His friend Qian Mu is about to be transferred from Shaoxing to Hebei. Su Shi's farewell poem "Riverside Daffodils: Farewell to a Friend" to Qian Mu conveys his understanding of life--- life is like a journey, and I too am on my way. The content of the poem is as follows:

"Three years have passed since we left the capital;
 We've trodden all the way from rise to fall.
 Still I smile as on warm spring day.
 In ancient well no waves are raised;
 Upright, the autumn bamboo's praised.
 Melancholy, your lonely sail departs at night;
 Only a pale cloud sees you off in pale moonlight.
 You need no songstress to drink your sorrow away.
 Life is like a journey; I too am on my way."^[9]

In the first part, it describes how they haven't seen each other for three years and have been constantly drifting around. Now that they meet again, there is still a warm feeling between old friends. In the second part, the first two lines conveys the sense of loneliness in parting, with the sail sailing alone and the moonlight dim. But next, Su shi suggests not dwelling too much on the sadness but rather enjoying a drink together. Our life is a continuous journey, we are like travelers walking on the road in the world. Joy, anger, pain, and separation are all normal states of life.

At this time, Su Shi already felt relieved when parting. In contrast to the previous sadness farewell poems that moved the singers to tears, now, the present Su Shi

cherishes the warmth of the final reunion even more. He regarded parting, emotions, sorrows, and all experiences as the normal state of life. Su Shi had already been reborn into a psychologically powerful Su Dongpo in separation. This transformation of mental process has great reference significance for us modern people when facing separation.

4 The Separation between Su Shi and the Imperial Court

Su Shi was exceptionally talented, and his ideal was to serve the Imperial court and benefit the people through his precepts.

Lin Yutang said that he is an ancient people with a modern spirit ^[10].

He dared to say, “Even if I hold a position in the Imperial Court, I will not change my free and unrestrained nature.”

He dares to say, “Everyone is equal, whether it is good or bad, everyone is just seeking a livelihood.”

He dared to write to the emperor: There is nothing more perilous in the world than the position of the ruler. When the people gather, they become loyal subjects, but if they disperse, they become enemies. In the delicate balance between unity and division, there is no room for the slightest error. Thus, when the entire realm rallies behind you, they call you a king, but if the people lack a unified will, a ruler is merely a figurehead.

In the court, he dared to oppose the reform policies of the New Party led by Wang Anshi, and he also dared to challenge the complete denial of the reforms by the Old Party represented by Sima Guang.

Looking back to Su Shi's political career throughout his life, his exceptional talent earned him the recognition of Emperor Renzong and Yingzong of the Song Dynasty. However, with the beginning of Wang Anshi's reform, he was also impeached during the reign of Emperor Shenzong of Song for daring to express different opinions. In 1071, Su Shi left the court with melancholy and came to Hangzhou to serve as a local official. Although separated from the court, Su Shi did not abandon his ideals. While in the local office, He consistently worked for the well-being of the people in every place he went, engaging in activities such as water conservancy projects, establishing hospitals, resettling disaster victims, and reducing taxes... However, in 1079, the “Wutai Poetry Case” had erupted, Su Shi, who was 45 years old then, was exiled to Huangzhou, which became his lowest point in politics, with no status, dignity, or honor left. It was during this time that Su Shi began searching for ways to maintain inner peace and how to live his left life when his ideals couldn't be realized. He found his first answer in whole-heartedly engaging in farming, leading to the birth of the title Recluse of Dongpo. He also immersed himself in Zen meditation and the study of ancient texts, and he needs to express himself in poetry. His literary creation achieved a breakthrough in transcendence, with the famous Nostalgia of the Red Cliff and Ode to the Red Cliff written at this time, leaving an insurmountable artistic peak for Chinese literature. Su Shi was reborn as the great Su Dongpo during his separation. Afterwards, in 1086, Su Dongpo was recalled to the capital and took office as a Prefect of Dengzhou, before

holding a succession of positions including Imperial Diarist, Drafter in the Secretariat, Hanlin Academician Drafter, and Minister of War.

In 1089, he took office as Prefect of Hangzhou, Yingzhou, Yangzhou. He handled affairs for Hangzhou's people and ordered the construction of a long pedestrian causeway across the West Lake, the famous Su Di. In 1093, He Returned to the imperial court Minister of Rites. However, In 1094, he was once again exiled and wandered from place to place.

Su Shi lived in about twenty different places throughout his life, which is unimaginable even in the modern era of developed transportation and economy. Despite the separation from the imperial court and the challenges and uncertainties of his official career, led to Su Dongpo's life of serving the people, being strong in his heart, and being bold and free-spirited.

5 Research conclusion

Through literature review, it was found that most of the research on Su Shi focused on his life experience, historical background, poetry, works, thoughts, and character. This article provides a new research perspective, extracting the emotional clue of separation from Su Shi's life and poetry, and elaborates on Su Shi's life from a new perspective. This article presents an image of Su Dongpo, who is emotionally rich, pursuing freedom and equality, and reborn from disappointment, from three aspects: the separation between Su Shi and his family, the separation between friends, and the separation between the court. The perspective proposed in this article of " Su Dongpo's Transformation in Separation " is more in line with our modern life, and has great reference significance for us modern people when facing the relationship with their loved ones, the passing of loved ones, the departure of friends, and the disillusionment of ideals.

This article does not mention the relationship between Su Shi and his second wife Wang Runzhi, Su Shi's concubine Wang Zhaoyun, and Su Shi's several sons. In the future, it can be expanded in the separation between Su Shi and his family. In the separation between Su Shi and the court, there is also an unwavering commitment to ideals and the pursuit of self-independence. In the future, further in-depth research and writing on this aspect can be conducted.

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