

Secrets to Su Shi's Happiness under Any Circumstances: Transcending and a Positive Perspective

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ABSTRACT

What have endeared Su Shi to countless followers in nearly a thousand years all over the world lie not only in his outstanding achievements in literary and arts, but also in his optimism in adversity. This paper probes into the insight secrets of why he could be happy most of the time to enlighten people nowadays to lead a happy, easy and peaceful life. Firstly, transcending constantly through keeping adjusting his expectations in accordance with the everchanging circumstances: transcending conventions to realize his people-oriented ambition when he was a young official; transcending material limitations when he was exiled for the first time to Huangzhou; transcending fame and power when he was back to court with great power; transcending himself when he was exiled for the second time to Huizhou and finally transcending everything when he was banished to the most remote Danzhou on Hainan Island; and secondly, seeing every circumstance in a positive light: overlooking the negative and magnifying the positive; indulging himself in the beauty of the nature; enjoying the present moment and being optimistic about the future without thinking.

Key words: Su Shi, Happiness Under any Circumstances, Transcending, A Positive Perspective

INTRODUCTION

Su Shi (8 January 1037 – 24 August 1101), also known as Su Dongpo, was a Chinese writer, poet, painter, calligrapher, pharmacologist, gastronome, and a statesman of the Song dynasty. He was a poet in most of the common Chinese folks' eyes, a peerless achiever in terms of art and literature in Chinese cultural history from a researcher's perspective (Lifeng, 2008), "an incorrigible optimist" commented by the Chinese writer, translator, linguist and philosopher, Lin Yutang (1947) and even a man of "happiness under any circumstances" according to Su Shi himself in his prose *Memo-rial to the Transcendental Terrace*. (1521)

The pursuit of happiness is the ultimate goal of life for most people in this world, who try whatever they can to learn how to get happy or happier, some people agree that our happiness depends on external circumstances (Lilienfeld, et al., 2010), the reality is what we can only do is to try our best to create a favorable circumstance which is out of our control in most of the occasions. Happiness is about being able to make the most of the good times, but also to cope effectively with the inevitable bad times in order to experience the best possible life overall. It was his outstanding talents, brilliant knowledge, straightforward personality and people-oriented faith that made Su Shi experience great honor and go through extraordinary hardships (as illustrated in Figure 1), such as being framed by villains, imprisoned and exiled,

homelessness, hunger and even facing the threat of death. Though Su Shi once commented himself as "an exception in ancient and modern times to have so few good fortunes and so many bad fortunes" (1870), he never lost his heart and felt depressed, Su Shi is a perfect example in adjusting his emotion to the inevitable ups and downs of life, he played, sang through life and enjoyed it tremendously, when sorrow came and misfortune fell, he accepted them with a smile (Yutang, 1947). His happiness under trying circumstances is the most brilliant quality that has endeared him to countless followers in nearly a thousand years all over the world.

Su Shi was first sketched mainly as an optimist in 1932 by Cyril Drummond Le Gros Clark in his English book entitled *Selections from the Works of Su Dongpo* (1932). He was known and popular in the English world as an optimistic man whose secret to happiness was that "he gave more to the world than he received from it, and by capturing certain poetic moments and immortalizing them wherever he went" in *The Gay Genius* by Lin Yutang (1947), the book was translated into Chinese and renamed as *The Biography of Su Dongpo* which contains much of the author's own interpretation and understanding, while *The Biography of Su Shi* in Chinese by Wang Shuizhao and Cui Ming (2013) of Fudan University is mainly based on Su Shi's literary works and attributes Su Shi's happiness to the influences of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, and the transcending of material limitations, which is accepted by most of the contemporary

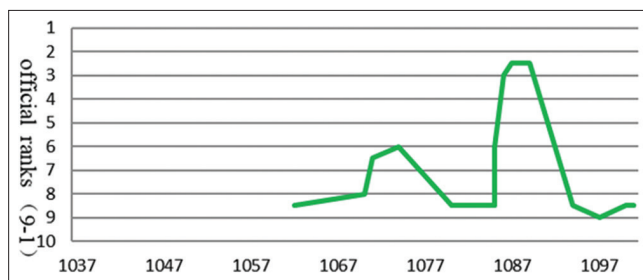


Figure 1. Changing diagram of Su Shi's official positions (also can be regarded as his living conditions)

researchers in their journal papers like Ren Jingsen (1998). Leng Chengjin (2016) of Renmin University of China analyzes from the perspective of Su Shi's aesthetic transcendence of the tragedy consciousness in reality by writing poems and drinking wines, indulging in the beauty of nature and spiritual liberation. On the basis of these viewpoints, this paper tries to enlighten people in this era to be happy especially when reality is not what they expected through comprehensively analyzing and systematically summarizing the secrets to Su Shi's happiness under any circumstances: transcending constantly through adjusting expectations in accordance to the circumstances and seeing every circumstance in a positive light.

TRANSCENDING CONSTANTLY THROUGH KEEPING ADJUSTING EXPECTATIONS IN ACCORDANCE TO THE CIRCUMSTANCES

Individuals differ in their adaptation to events, with some individuals changing their setpoints and others not changing in reaction to some external events. How did Su Shi react to these unexpected and dramatic changes in his life? In addition to discarding some of the doctrines in Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism with his own understanding and experience, Su Shi shifted his focus on different philosophy under different circumstances rather than sticking to one persistently, inheriting and integrating Buddhism and Taoism into Confucianism to constitute his own pragmatic vision of raising or lowering his goal with the rise or fall of life so as to maintain the same level of happiness regardless of external circumstances. Analyzing his typical works in different life stages, we can conclude that he had been always transcending:

Transcending Conventions--"Assisting the Emperors in Administering the Country Well as Emperors Yao and Shun"(276)(8th of Jan. 1037-July 1079)

Su Shi was born in Meishan, near Mount Emei today Sichuan province with outstanding talents and diligence. He passed the highest-level civil service examination to attain the degree of jinshi in 1057, a prerequisite for high government office. Young Su Shi was ambitious and confident that his younger brother Su Zhe and himself would fully display their executive potentials in "assisting the emperors in administering the country well as emperors Yao and Shun" when their academic accomplishments attracted the attention

of Emperor Renzong and also that of celebrities like Ouyang Xiu. Su Shi also gained a high honor for what were deemed impeccable answers and achieved celebrity status in the subsequent 1061 decree examinations. Confucian teachings were central to the civil service examination system and the identity of the scholar-official class in Song dynasty, Su Shi was certainly no exception in taking Confucianism as the backbone of his spirit, especially when he held certain official positions with the power to implement the people-oriented doctrine, stressing on the importance of ensuring the livelihood of the common people. He was delighted to use his administrative power to benefit the common people, including revising the rules of people serving in the local office in Fengxiang where he was appointed as an official for the first time, collecting donations for the poor and dredging the West Lake in Hangzhou, expelling locusts and apprehending thefts in Mizhou, and bringing flood under permanent control in Xuzhou. His straight forward personality and people-oriented faith made him be at odds with conventions all the time, he wrote several poems criticizing Wang Anshi's reforms, especially the government monopoly imposed on the salt industry, the dominance of the reformist faction at court allowed the New Policy Group greater ability to have Su Shi imprisoned for nearly five months and then exiled for political crimes with the claim that Su Shi was criticizing the emperor, when in fact Su Shi's poetry was aimed at criticizing Wang Anshi's policy of enriching the government by impoverishing the common people.

Transcending Material Limitations-- "There Is No Rain or Sunlight Anymore" (1156) in Huangzhou (January 1080-April 1084)

It's natural for human being to be happy under favorable circumstances and unhappy under unfavorable circumstances, the rule of the universe, however, is to be on the move and changeable and the rule of life is to be on the rise and fall. Glory and shame, obscurity and eminence, is just the same as storms and sunlight, belonging to the different, yet dispensable state of life, changeable dramatically and interchangeable.

Su Shi was naturally at loss and overwhelmed by such a blow out of nothing guilty when he was exiled to Huangzhou in Hubei province in February of 1080, homeless, powerless and lonely. An optimist would never allow his sadness and disappointment take over, so Su Shi settled down his mind gradually through reproaching on his own faults of reckless speech and poems, and then retreated into the practice and study of Buddhism and Taoism. Buddhist teaching helps people overcome sufferings through withdrawing from the real world and the infightings among people, letting everything go and accepting the reality with contentment because everything is the natural result of one's own pre-destiny which can't be otherwise, what one should do is just enjoy the present moment. He remarked in his *Memorial to Anguo Temple in Huangzhou* (1558) that any corrections would be temporary if he didn't correct from the origin of his belief, through sitting in meditation, he forgot the distinctions between himself and the non-self, it was then that his external and internal selves became one, he began to experience the great happi-

ness. Taoism emphasizes naturalness, spontaneity, simplicity, detachment from desires, and most important of all, behaving without deliberated intention and living an easy life under any circumstances. Su Shi once said the Taoist masterpiece *Zhuangzi* “spoke my mind” (3326) and described his moonlight voyage to the Red Cliff in Huangzhou in much the similar way as an excursion of immortals to enjoy the breeze over the river and the moon in the mountains with the Taoist theme of “the integration of universe and human being”: men needn’t envy the eternity of the universe, instead men should enjoy the eternity of the universe by enjoying the present moment. These doctrines certainly can relieve those who suffer acute or sharp strikes from the outside. Still practicing the basic principles of benevolence, righteousness, proper rite, knowledge and integrity of Confucianism, Su Shi tried his best to set up an infant rearing association to save lives of the infants of the poor, but under most of the occasions in Huangzhou, he was much contented and happy by believing in and practicing Buddhist transcendence and void, and Taoist frankness and naturalness.

Su Shi enjoyed his life at Dongpo (Eastern Slope), a farm of terrace to the east of his home, from which he took his literary pseudonym and proclaimed that he had outgrown the external adversity in his lyrical poem to the tune of *Ding-fengbo* (*Calming the Waves*) in the spring of 1082: “Listen not to the rain beating against the trees, why don’t you slowly walk and chant at ease? Better than saddled horse I like sandals and cane. Who would be afraid? I’d spend a straw-cloaked life in mist and rain. Drunken, I’m sobered by vernal wind shrill, and rather chill. It turned out to be sunny at the top of the hill, looking back at where it was raining, there isn’t rain or sunlight anymore!” (Yuanchong, 2015) Being worried or afraid of unavoidable tribulation is stupid and useless, why don’t you just accept it with a smile? What if the situation isn’t as serious as you thought? Chances are that it might turn out to be a good opportunity! In such a belief and state of mind, his life philosophy matured and began to see through obscurity and eminence, glory and shame, transcending material limitations such as fame, profits and status, living in serenity without rain or sunlight. Many researchers today agree that “there isn’t rain or sunlight anymore” was Su Shi’s declaration to liberate himself from the external confinements, because most of literary works composed afterwards were optimistic and open-minded, such as two notable proses and one lyrical poem on *The Red Cliff*.

His exile to Huangzhou was a big step backward for him, but he managed not to be bitter, and used this exile opportunity as a way to explore new modes about writing about himself, new modes about thinking about himself and he really became a different person. He became a happy Dongpo, which he had not been before.

Transcending Fame and Status--“Court Power Again Is Absolute Nothingness to Me” (697) (April 1084-April 1094)

When Su Shi and all other banished statesmen were recalled to the capital due to the ascension of a new government in 1086, he was no longer as ambitious and competitive as before due to his experience in the past 25 years, especially

with the meditation and enlightenment in Huangzhou. He was promoted sharply within one-year time from the lowest official rank of the ninth grade to more than the third grade thanks to recognition of his talents by the emperor’s grandmother. Su Shi enjoyed these years of fully displaying his potentials to write beautiful documents for the emperor, realizing his dream of “assisting the emperors in administering the country well as emperors Yao and Shun” again by teaching the young emperor Zhezong, and selecting outstanding talents and most of important of all to fulfilled his “people-oriented” political ambition, for which he was once again pushed aside by the Chancellor Sima Guang and members of his opposing party. He was happy to serve in different cities later on as a governor to strive for the benefits of common people, most notably in Hangzhou, where he was responsible for constructing a pedestrian causeway across the West Lake that still bears his name today: Sudi (Su causeway), he also dredged the West Lake in Yingzhou and suspended Flower Exhibition in Yangzhou. Most of his poems in this period were about nature, drinking and gatherings which expressed his intention of going back to nature and the life of seclusion, a typical one is “court power again is absolute nothingness to me, what I enjoy is the scenery of clear River Luo undulated with the east wind”.

Transcending Himself-- “Why Can’t I Have a Rest Right Here” (3280) in Huizhou (April 1094-April 1097)

On his way to Huizhou, where he was banished for the second time, Su Shi said: “I know that being in the society is contradict to being out of the society. Being out has been my will for a long time, the reason why I can’t realize it is that I haven’t been defeated in the society, today, I am really defeated.” (3417) The insight of his political prospect regained his self-existence and his optimism, on a bright mid-autumn night when family members get together, Su Shi remembered a lyrical poem composed on another mid-autumn night 18 years ago spent with his younger brother, he chanted the poem alone, and wrote it down: “though circumstances were different, I don’t feel sad today, I look forward to the happiness tomorrow.” (3171) Realizing that the living and his own physical conditions in Huizhou were much worse than before, Su Shi adjusted his expectations accordingly: he used to climb to the Pinetree Wind Pavilion and enjoy the scenery on the top of a hill, but one day, he felt tired in the mid-way to the pavilion, looking at the pavilion which is located somewhere above the trees far away, he was frustrated and anxious, “when and how could I climb to the pavilion?” a second thought came to his mind suddenly: “why must I go to the top? why can’t I just have a rest right here?” a sense of relief and happiness overwhelmed him like a unhooked fish. “Why can’t I just have a rest right here” is a breakthrough of the external setpoint, letting go of the things that out of your reach is also a happiness of liberating yourself. Su Shi was a follower of Tao Yuanming, who once remarked: “Surfing on the everchanging waves of life, I am neither happy nor afraid”, so when he learnt that it’s impossible for him to be allowed to return to the mainland, he said: “Just image that I were a local entry-level licentiate of Huizhou who had

failed many times in the exams, why can't I?" (2887) In a letter to his brother Su Zhe, he expressed his transcendence in face of cruel reality: "both of us are getting old and the only thing we should do is to enjoy ourselves, there is nothing else worth considering. We shall not entertain ourselves in the conventional way, instead, we shall care about nothing but to seek pleasure from mountains, rivers, grasses, woods, insects and fishes." (2804)

Transcending Everything-- "It's the Most Spectacular and Marvelous Trip in My Life" (1087) in Danzhou (April 1097-24th Aug. 1101)

When Su Shi was exiled further from Huizhou to Danzhou where most of the exiled officials died of contagions, harsh climate and living conditions as terrible as "no meat for food, no medicine for diseases, no shelter for accommodation, no friends for a voyage, no charcoals for the winter and no cool springs for the summer" (2647) at the age of 60, the genius of happiness promptly lowered his expectations to being alive: "drunken and full, a sound sleep are my real cause, leisure and spare time are interests and meaning of my life"; (975) "it's a day for me as long as I am full, a sound sleep makes me forget all the necessities." (1026)

With the living conditions and his health worsened dramatically in the following year, Su Shi even overcame the worry and fear of death: "There is nothing for me to long for in my life, which will come to an end in no time. I will be happy as long as alive, my life shall be disposed by the Creator, whatever it will be, living or come to an end, either is ok!" (2647) He even made a joke of being alive: "I am contented with life in every aspect always except that I am still alive!" (1069) He lowered his expectations to such an extent that he couldn't be unhappy as long as he could get enough food and have a sound sleep, thinking nothing, waiting for nothing and asking for nothing from this world, a state of mind he called "being myself and enjoying myself" in *Dongpo's Commentaries on I Ching*, a book written during these exile years, persuading people to change their viewpoints on things if they couldn't change the external circumstances to liberate themselves from annoyance and troubles so as to be contented with an imperfect life. *Napping (this Chinese character was used as a pun which can also be interpreted as enlightened) Alone* (1055) is one poem from which we can see how his mind transcended the practical obstacles to achieve "being himself and enjoying himself": "Three-year peaceful life makes me indifferent to the miasma in the fog, only be afraid of scabies caused by the wind from the north. Necking down like a jackdaw in the morning, I am delighted just as the flames rise out of the firewood. Red waves surge in the room and the spring wind rises, Mr. Su is being seated quietly in the spring wind. Rosy clouds are floating and dispersing in my drunken eyes, while countless peach and plum flowers are blooming in my mind. Napping alone in leisure in the noon beside bright windows, I soon fall asleep and snore. Looking back at where it was raining, there isn't rain or sunlight anymore!" "The miasma in the fog" and the cold room are all external circumstances that couldn't be changed by Su Shi, but what he could do is seeing "rosy

clouds" and "peach and plum flowers" in his heart. If "there isn't rain or sunlight anymore" on the road of Huangzhou can be viewed as his declaration of transcending practical material limitations, then "there isn't rain or sunlight anymore" inside a room of Danzhou is definitely his declaration of transcending everything in the world, including the outside world and himself, in such a state, the genius managed to live in his own Utopia, happy and contented, reaching the highest level of literati -- universe realm, completely breaking the confinement of external factors to take only "being myself and enjoying myself" into account. There were also happy excursions in this period as if he had been living in the paradise: "I lie down, letting go of the boat. I don't plan to go anywhere; I float up and down with the gulls. Midway I run into a counter current, so I left the boat and walked uphill. I wondered if Tao Pengze also had this joy." (Vincent, 2008)

On the night of June 20th 1101, Su Shi boarded a boat back to the mainland, with the bright moon in the clear sky, the sea seemed extremely clear and quiet, the tranquil and transparent scenery reminded Su Shi of his own upright life, he chanted a poem to celebrate his returning to the north, safe and sound: "Who made the clouds dispersed and the moon so bright? the original nature of the sky and sea is clear and clean. Even if I had died many times in the southern deserted Islands, I would never have hated at all, it's the most spectacular and marvelous trip in my life." Without his wisdom of lowering his expectations, how could it be possible that a malicious exile was described as the most marvelous and spectacular trip in his life?

SEEING EVERY CIRCUMSTANCE IN A POSITIVE LIGHT

The Taoist doctrine "Misery is what happiness rests upon. Happiness is what misery lurks beneath" reassures those who have been overtaken by misfortune and encourage them to be optimistic about the future. There are always two sides in everything, an optimist sees the positive while a pessimist sees the negative side. That's another important secret to Su Shi's happiness in crushing adversity, what's more, he could not only overlook the negative, but also magnify the positive as he expressed in his *Memorial to the Transcendental Terrace*: "Everything is worth observing, if it is worth observing, it must be enjoyable, it isn't necessarily wonderful, unusual, great or beautiful By that analogy, I will be happy under any circumstances." When his friend was sad about the brief and evanescence of life, and envied the everlasting flow of the great river, Su Shi comforted him: "Look at this water and this moon! The water passes continually by, and yet it is always here. The moon waxes and wanes but it always remains the same moon, if you look at the changes that take place in the universe, there is nothing in it that lasts more than a fraction of a second. But if you look at the unchanging aspects of things, then you realize that both the things and ourselves are immortal." (1190) Su Shi reassured his friend monk Tsanliao who worried about Su Shi's health in Danzhou where no doctor or medicine was available: "As to malaria and other diseases, aren't there also diseases in the north? It's true, there are no doctors around this place,

but think how many people are annually killed by doctors at the capital, I must congratulate myself!" Blessed are those who are deprived of the good things of this earth! It was this type of humor that enabled Su Shi to be happy and contented wherever he was. (Yutang, 1947)

Overlooking the Negative and Magnifying the Positive

Being exiled in Song dynasty meant not only the demotion of political and administrative power, but also the decline of living conditions for the whole family: shabby quilts on the bed, raw firewood under the broken pot, without any salary, neither with timely communications with old acquaintances, nor with adequate clothes in a remoted area, Su Shi faced these difficulties with just a smile: "what is impossible in adversity? I'd rather not mention them, just a smile and then forget about them", (2645) there are many of Su Shi's works reflecting his perspective of looking down upon adversity: "I have come out of fame, needless to say my body, how come the single thunder and lights to be worshiped? Looking at from the top of mountain like a baby, those countless people in the world who lost their chopsticks." (223) "looking down at all of the creatures, which are as insignificant as the breaths of mosquitos and blackflies." (1015)

An ordinary yellow mud road in Huangzhou between his home Lingao Pavilion and the Snow House at Dongpo which was muddy after rain and dusty in the rest of the year was magnified to be like a picturesque road in paradise: "The great river is surging to the left, with clouds indistinctly billowing above; grass and trees are clustered to the right, with leaves and branches lively verdant." "I enjoy the white clouds over the Yellow Mud in the morning, and stay with the blue smoke of the Snow House in the evening." (Shuizhao, Ming, 2013) The rocky and uneven country road was extraordinarily lovely in the optimist's eyes: "Never do I dislike these sloppy and rocky roads, just enjoy the loud and clear sounds they hit my cane instead"; (565) There are more works magnifying the positive effects of the exile life, such as plenty free time and leisure, liberty and independence to indulge in the nature, to drink and to write: "Early to bed and late to rise, I don't know where is the so-called bad fortune?" (2681) "Indulging myself in the mountains and on the river with a small boat and a pair of straw sandals, I decline most of the visitors and seldom reply others' letters, which makes me feel terrific, I have never felt so good before!" (2788) He even felt lucky to be so carefree and serene in his *Sketch of the Night Excursion to Chengtian Temple*: "There is the moon every night, and there are bamboos and pine trees everywhere, but there aren't so many people who can be so free like the two of us!" (3273) so he proudly announced "I'm not unhappy each day during this six-year exile" (2866) and "I have already taken the hell as the paradise"! (535) He once again found benefits in the remote Danzhou of no longer having to get up early in the morning to meet the emperor like a harnessed horse, but combing his hair in the morning, having a nap at noon and bathing his feet at night with plenty of free time. Indeed, being exiled provided Su Shi not only opportunities to experience the hardships of the common people, but also sufficient time for him to compose literary

works, which delighted him the most and brought Su Shi unprecedented literary and artistic achievements. He composed most of his prestigious literary works of poems, lyric poems, prose and comments on Chinese classics in his exile up to twelve years, "looking at my writings on *I Ching*, *Book of Documents* and *Analects*, I feel that I have not spent my life in vain, what else matters?" (2734) "There is nothing more enjoyable than writing in my life, I am most happy when I express myself in words!" (Yuan, Minghua, 1983)

Indulging Himself in the Beauty of the Nature

Feng Youlan, a renowned Chinese philosopher pointed out that only those who understand the universe and life thoroughly can see the "vitality" of the nature, feel the "complacency" of the creature to attain great contentment and happiness. "Open the door to be an official, pace gracefully on the street and at court, close the door to be a recluse, walk in the mountain and under the trees", (498) Su Shi created natural and ecological surroundings full of flowers, grass, vegetables and fruits to feel the spaciousness of the nature, to experience the broadness of the universe: he built "Snow Hall" with mulberry, willow, peach, orange and tea plants around in Huangzhou, "Crane Peak" new house with orange flower blooming outside the gate and colorful lychee over the wall in Huizhou, and "Sugar Palm Hut" with a small garden full of various kinds of vegetables and plants in Danzhou. He enjoyed himself greatly in nature in his lifetime, proudly proclaiming that he had traveled five-thousand kilometers around half of the country and "appreciated most of the fabulous scenic sites, Lushan, Southern Ridges and the West Lake". (1013) The beauty lies half in the scenery itself, the other half in the heart of the viewer, there had been always marvelous scenery in such an incurable optimist even if in the deserted mountains and wild rivers, the flying birds, the swimming fish, the growing grasses were all spectacular and beautiful in his eyes: "Wild peach smiles over the short bamboo fences, willow waves over the crystal stream"; (213) "The water is so clear that cliffs and fishes can be seen, nobody in the deep woods so birds greet one another"; (153) "Grass and trees thrive up to the sky in the transition from spring to summer, snow and moon are the same color in a thousand miles in autumn and winter time, scenery changes dramatically"; (493) "The lake is deeper and more serene with the rise of the summer floodwaters, leaves are falling by the west wind in the autumn with the lotus blooming, flying snow darkens the sky and clouds touch the ground, new cattail emerge out of the water and willow reflects on the oasis. The scenery of the four seasons on the lake is endless, but life is floating and unstable." (165)

Enjoying the Present Moment and Optimistic about the Future without Thinking

Thomas Jefferson once said: "How much pain they have caused us, the evils which have never happened." Great minds think alike, Su Shi believed that the pleasure of no thinking was beyond description: one could be drunken without drinking any wine, one could fall asleep without

closing his eyes, because thinking in advance of the occurrence of event was a waste of time and thinking after the occurrence of the event was useless: "There is nothing for me to think about in this world at present. I speak my mind straight forward upon seeing an event and never think about nonsense in my spare time. . . . For it's all my destiny to be obscure or eminent, to gain or to lose, to die or to live, to be fortunate or unfortunate, why bother to think?" (1531) so he never worried nor was afraid of the future, he just enjoyed his present moment: "Lay Buddhist Dongpo, drunken and full, is leaning on a small table, white clouds are floating on the left, a crystal river is eddying on the right, with all the doors wide open, forests and mountains gather in. At such a time, he looks as if he were thinking something, but he isn't thinking at all to enjoy himself purely with all of the presents of the nature, what a shame! what a shame!" (3285) It was this kind of philosophy that enabled Su Shi to be happy wherever he was. Su Shi imagined "collecting the good harvest and submitting it to the wise emperor" (300) right after he succeeded in praying for the rain in the drought in Mizhou, another imagined harvest of "autumn grains full of the fields like clouds" (376) in Xuzhou after the flood was finally controlled. When his family first arrived in Huangzhou with difficulties for daily expenses, Su Shi came out with a solution of spending no more than 150 cents a day so as to sustain a year time, "there will certainly be a way out by then, a canal is formed when water comes, I have nothing to worry about from now on." (2573) He predicted a vivid and detailed rice growth scenery just out of his single intention to diversify the spring water: "Seedlings emerge out of the water to hear farmers' delighted chats. Distributing the seedlings in the early summer, timely wind blows to raise the rice leaves up. Bright moon will witness the dew dropping, one after another like a thread. Frost and rice ears turn heavy in autumn, the rice plants standing firm with heads down." (518) What a lovely and optimistic man he was! How came that he was unhappy?

CONCLUSION

The originality of the paper mainly consists in extracting Su Shi's constant transcending and positive perspective in different stages of life from his literary works, also in the study of enjoying the present moment without too much thinking expressed in his *Memorial to the Hall of Thinking* (1531) and reflected in his *Writing on Lingao Pavilion* (3285), in the study of his looking forward to future happy time without being sad about the present adversity reflected in *Writing on Appreciating the Moon at Pengcheng* (3171), in the comparison of the same "Looking back at where it was raining, there isn't rain or sunlight anymore!" in Danzhou with that in Huangzhou to indicate his different life vision. These wisdoms not only helped Su Shi react indifferently to malicious defamation and prosecution, overcome despair and deprivation in multiple exiles, but also help people nowadays live a happy, easy and peaceful life.

Most of his literary works (over 2700 poems, 400 lyrical poems and 4200 prose) express optimistic view on life or describe beautiful natural scenery, a small percentage imply

sadness or pessimism, a plenty of percentage describe the adverse circumstances first, followed by a solution and a happy ending, because the aim of his life-long learning of knowledge was just to cope with the unexpected changes of external circumstances, the learnt doctrines relieved his distress in adversity, a typical example is one of lyrical poem to the tune of *Mantingfang* (*Full Courtyard Fragrant*): "Nearly half of our life is filled with storms, sadness and worries, so why bother to compete with one another on earth? But we are fortunate to have fresh breeze and the bright moon, in such a beautiful place of south to Yangtze River, with a thousand cups of wine, chanting to the tune of Mantingfang." (1149)

It was his perception, interpretation, adaption that helps to adjust his setpoint in accordance to the external circumstances to maintain an optimal state of being. Young Su Shi was ambitious and keeping forging ahead to realize his dream of serving the common people from which he derived great joy. Being exiled for the first time to Huangzhou, he decided to abandon the former Su Shi and start a new life of the present Su Shi through shifting his belief from Confucianism to Buddhism and Taoism, and much relieved in preserving his own existence till he transcended fame, status and other material limitations, that's also why he was indifferent to his regained great political power years later. Su Shi interpreted his second exile to Huizhou as a real defeat and transcended himself in accepting reality and whatever difficulties impending. He transcended everything while living in deadly Danzhou to achieve "being himself and enjoying himself" in doing everything at his own will in the real or his own virtual world. The other secret we can peer into from his works is he always saw things in a positive light, a philosophy transcending the Taoist doctrine of "the interdependence of good and bad fortunes", including overlooking the negative and magnifying the positive, enjoying the present moment and being optimistic about the future rather than thinking too much so as to return to an inner state of spontaneity, unconditioned by external contingencies. (Zhiyi, 2013)

On his way back to the north from Danzhou, Su Shi saw his own portrait on the wall of Jinshan Temple in Zhenjiang and chanted a poem to summarize his whole life: "My heart is just like the burned wood ash, my body is like an unanchored boat. If you ask me my life achievement, it's Huangzhou, Huizhou and Danzhou." (427) Su Shi might have composed this poem to make fun of himself out of great pride or great disappointment, but what he might not have realized is that it's just these exile years that made him not only the most prestigious integrated achiever in literary and arts in Chinese literary history, but also an influential optimist with his own systematic thoughts: trying his best for what he could change, be optimistic about uncertainty and just a smile to what he couldn't change.

Su Shi went through his life like the fresh breeze and has been enlightening countless followers like the bright moon for nearly a thousand years. His secrets to happiness under any circumstances are just like the fresh breeze and the bright moon, which can be owned by anyone who appreciates and cherishes them, because "no one is the permanent owner of the rivers, mountains, breeze and the moon, anyone who has leisure and cares to appreciate is their owner." (229) Why

can't we transcend constantly through adjusting our expectations in accordance with the everchanging circumstances and always see everything in a positive light? Why can't we let go of the things that don't matter to our life to indulge ourselves in the fragrance of the wild flowers under the floating clouds? Only in this way, can we rediscover the true happiness, tranquility and beauty of life with elegance, confidence and humanity as Su Shi described in his lyrical poem to the tune of *Dianjiangchun (Rouging Crimson Lips)*: "With whom shall I sit? The fresh breeze and the bright moon; When my assistant comes, I'll share the breeze and moon with him!" (1178)

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