

Article

Su Shi: A Paragon of Interreligious Harmony in Song Dynasty China

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Abstract: This paper explores the life and works of Su Shi, a prominent intellectual and statesman during China's Song Dynasty, as a champion of interreligious harmony. We examine how Su Shi's vast philosophical and literary output demonstrates his deep engagement with Confucian ethics, Buddhist compassion, and Daoist tranquility. By analyzing his poems, essays, and other writings, we explore how Su Shi navigated these diverse traditions, finding common ground and promoting mutual understanding. This analysis highlights Su Shi's ability to bridge religious and philosophical divides, offering a valuable perspective for contemporary discussions on interfaith dialogue and peaceful coexistence.

Keywords: Su Shi; interreligious harmony; Song Dynasty; Confucianism; Buddhism; Daoism; philosophical integration

1. Introduction

The Song Dynasty (960–1279 CE) witnessed a remarkable flourishing of Chinese culture, marked by advancements in science, technology, and artistic expression. [Chen \(2001\)](#) argued that “the culture of the Huaxia people, after thousands of years of evolution, reached its zenith during the era of the Zhao Song Dynasty”. This golden age also fostered a vibrant intellectual landscape, where scholars and statesmen grappled with the profound questions of existence, governance, and humanity's place within the cosmos. Among these figures, Su Shi 蘇軾¹ (1037–1101 CE) stands out as a towering presence. A renowned poet, calligrapher, essayist, and government official, Su Shi's life and work embodied the richness and dynamism of Song Dynasty intellectual life ([Wang and Zhu 2011](#)).

Su Shi's legacy extends far beyond his mastery of various artistic forms. As a pivotal figure in the development of Confucianism during the Song Dynasty, Su Shi challenged the mainstream Neo-Confucianism and established his unique scholarly faction ([Xia 1987](#)). His academic thoughts not only reinterpreted Confucian classics but also integrated elements of Buddhism and Daoism, demonstrating his deep understanding and acceptance of different religious and philosophical traditions. This open-minded attitude is the cornerstone of Su Shi's contributions, showcasing how seemingly disparate belief systems can coexist harmoniously and enrich each other within a single person's thought. His ideas and works not only challenged the dominant status of “Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism 程朱理學” but also enriched the philosophical and literary resources for future generations, proving that harmony among religions and philosophies is possible.

This paper aims to explore Su Shi's unique position as a champion of interreligious dialogue in Song Dynasty China. We will delve into his intellectual journey, examining how he engaged with the core tenets of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism. By analyzing his poetry, essays, and biographical accounts, we will demonstrate how Su Shi synthesized these diverse traditions into a coherent and personal worldview. Our exploration will reveal how these various influences manifested in his approach to statecraft, his literary works, and his overall perspective on life.



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The structure of this paper will unfold as follows. First, we will provide a brief historical context, outlining the intellectual and religious climate of the Song Dynasty and highlighting the rise of Song Confucianism. Next, we will delve into Su Shi's biography, tracing his formative years, education, and experiences within the political sphere. This biographical sketch will serve as a foundation for understanding the evolution of his thought.

Subsequently, we will embark on a detailed examination of Su Shi's engagement with each of the three major philosophical and religious traditions of his time: Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism. For each tradition, we will analyze specific examples from Su Shi's poetry, essays, or political actions to illustrate how he incorporated its core principles into his worldview. For instance, we might examine how his Confucian beliefs informed his sense of duty and responsibility as a statesman, while exploring how Buddhist tenets like impermanence and compassion influenced his literary works. Additionally, we will investigate how Daoist concepts of living in harmony with nature resonated with Su Shi's personal philosophy.

Through this analysis, we will demonstrate how Su Shi did not simply adhere to one particular doctrine. Rather, he drew eclectically from each tradition, creating a unique tapestry of faith that informed his life and work. As Yutang Lin (1948) put it, "Out of the Buddhist faith to annihilate life, the Confucian faith to live it, and the Daoist faith to simplify it, a new amalgam was formed in the crucible of the poet's mind and perceptions". This exploration not only illuminates Su Shi's intellectual journey but also sheds light on the broader intellectual atmosphere of the Song Dynasty, where religious dialogue and the integration of thoughts were prominent features.

Finally, we will conclude by reflecting on the enduring significance of Su Shi's legacy. We will consider how his model of interreligious harmony offers valuable insights for navigating the complexities of religious and cultural diversity in our own time. By understanding Su Shi's ability to bridge seemingly disparate belief systems, we can gain valuable tools for fostering dialogue and understanding in the contemporary world.

In conclusion, this paper will explore Su Shi's life and work as a compelling case study for interreligious harmony. Through a close examination of his philosophical and artistic expressions, we will demonstrate how he seamlessly blended Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist influences into a cohesive and enriching worldview. This journey will not only explicate Su Shi's intellectual brilliance but also illuminate the rich tapestry of religious and philosophical thought that characterized the Song Dynasty. By studying his approach to interreligious dialogue, we can glean valuable lessons for navigating the complexities of faith and belief systems in our own time.

2. The Life and Times of Su Shi

This part delves into the rich and complex life of Su Shi, a prominent figure in the Song Dynasty, exploring the intertwining of his personal experiences with the vibrant intellectual and cultural backdrop of his time. From his formative years through the peaks and valleys of his political career to his profound engagements with Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism, this part uncovers how Su Shi's life and work were shaped by, and helped shape, the philosophical discourse of his era. Through personal trials and intellectual exchanges, Su Shi's legacy as a scholar, poet, and thinker is illuminated, offering insights into the dynamic cultural fabric of Song China.

2.1. *A Life Woven from Experience: Su Shi's Formative Years*

Su Shi's (1037–1101 CE) life unfolded against the vibrant backdrop of Song Dynasty China, a period of cultural and intellectual flourishing. Born into a distinguished family with a strong scholarly tradition, Su Shi's intellectual journey began early. His father, Su Xun 蘇洵, and his younger brother, Su Zhe 蘇轍, were both renowned scholars, and their influence instilled in Su Shi a lifelong dedication to learning and a deep respect for Confucian classics (Wang and Cui 2000).

Su Shi's formal education exposed him to the core tenets of Confucianism, emphasizing social order, filial piety, and the importance of a well-rounded education for effective governance. However, his intellectual curiosity extended beyond Confucianism. During his youth, he encountered Buddhist teachings, particularly those emphasizing impermanence and the pursuit of enlightenment. These ideas resonated with him, offering a potential explanation for the suffering and injustice he observed in the world. Additionally, Su Shi developed an interest in Daoism, a philosophy that advocated for living in harmony with nature and a rejection of rigid social structures.

A pivotal event in Su Shi's life occurred in 1057 CE when he, along with his brother Su Zhe, passed the rigorous imperial examinations. This prestigious achievement opened the door to a government career, a path traditionally expected of Confucian scholars. However, Su Shi's ascent in the political sphere was not without its challenges. His outspoken nature and unwavering commitment to his beliefs often brought him into conflict with conservative factions at court.

A significant turning point in Su Shi's life came in 1079 CE when he was falsely accused of political dissent and exiled to Huangzhou, a remote region of China, following the "Wutai Poetry Case 烏台詩案" (Y. Wang 2012). This period of exile, though personally challenging, proved to be a time of profound intellectual and spiritual growth. Away from the pressures of court politics, Su Shi immersed himself in his studies, delving deeper into Buddhist and Daoist philosophies. The experience of exile also fostered a deeper appreciation for the natural world, a theme that would become central to his artistic works. This ordeal not only intensified his philosophical inquiries but also strengthened his resolve to transcend the harsh realities of political strife and personal suffering, marking a pivotal phase in both his artistic expression and personal worldview (B. Zhou 2008).

Su Shi's eventual return to the capital in 1086 CE did not signify an end to his political troubles. He continued to face criticism and demotions, further solidifying his reputation as a maverick figure within the political sphere. However, these experiences never dampened his spirit or his commitment to his ideals. Su Shi remained a prolific writer and thinker throughout his life, his works reflecting a tapestry of intellectual influences that had been woven together through his life's experiences.

In conclusion, Su Shi's life was a rich tapestry woven from a series of events and intellectual encounters. His early education immersed him in Confucian doctrine, while his exposure to Buddhism and Daoism provided alternative perspectives on life and the universe. As Mu Qian (2010) once said, "Su Shi was the Su Qin 蘇秦 and Zhang Yi 張儀 of Confucianism, and yet he was the Zhuangzi and Laozi of the political arena. He was neither a strategist 縱橫, a metaphysician 清談, nor a Zen Buddhist 禪學; yet he was all of these. He cannot be confined to one category, but rather forms a category of his own. He is a unique blossom in the garden of Song Dynasty scholarship". Furthermore, the challenges he faced in his political career further shaped his worldview, fostering a deep appreciation for resilience and personal integrity. These experiences, both positive and negative, ultimately contributed to the formation of Su Shi's unique philosophical and religious outlook, which is reflected in his literary and artistic works (S. Yang 1998).

2.2. A Fertile Ground for Flourishing Thoughts: The Song Dynasty's Religious and Philosophical Landscape

To fully understand Su Shi's intellectual journey, we must delve into the rich tapestry of religious and philosophical thought that characterized the Song Dynasty (960–1279 CE). This period witnessed a remarkable flourishing of ideas, marked by a dynamic interplay between established traditions and emerging schools of thought.

Confucianism, as the dominant philosophy, maintained its central role in the social and political structures during the Song Dynasty. However, the era was marked by a revitalized interest in classical Confucian texts and debates around Neo-Confucian interpretations, including between Cheng Yi 程頤 and Su Shi. The divergence between Cheng Yi's strict adherence to Confucian rituals and Su Shi's more flexible, humanistic approach

underscored this period's philosophical discourse. Cheng Yi championed a rigid moral framework, emphasizing the separation of "heavenly principles 天理" and "human desires 人慾", which he believed should guide ethical governance and social responsibilities. In contrast, Su Shi infused his governance vision with a blend of Confucian principles and a more accommodating approach to personal moral cultivation and the inherent goodness of human nature, reflecting a broader, more inclusive interpretation of Confucian ethics (He 2000).

Buddhism, which had been steadily gaining influence since the Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE), continued to thrive during the Song era. Chan (Zen) Buddhism, with its emphasis on meditation and sudden enlightenment, gained popularity among the scholar–official class. Su Shi was particularly drawn to certain aspects of Buddhist thought, especially the concepts of impermanence and detachment from worldly concerns. These ideas resonated deeply with his personal experiences of political turmoil and exile, offering him a path towards inner peace and acceptance. The influence of Chan Buddhism on Su Shi's philosophical views is evident in his writings and poems, where he often reflects on the transient nature of life and the importance of letting go of attachments (Y. Zhou 2017).

Daoism, emphasizing harmony with nature and eschewing rigid social structures (P. Liu 2024), significantly influenced the intellectual milieu of the Song Dynasty. During this period, Daoism's popularity grew alongside Buddhism and Confucianism, creating a rich tapestry of philosophical discourse. The Song Dynasty's cultural renaissance fostered an environment where Daoist thought, with its emphasis on naturalism and spontaneity, resonated with scholars and artists seeking alternatives to Confucian rigidity. Su Shi found Daoist philosophy particularly appealing during his exile in Huangzhou, where he sought solace amid the natural world. This period allowed him to explore Daoist concepts deeply, which then prominently featured in his artistic expressions. Daoism encouraged him to embrace a life of spontaneity and simplicity, seeing nature not just as a retreat but as a vital element of living harmoniously (Z. Yang 2012). These Daoist influences are reflected in his poetry and prose, where themes of natural beauty and tranquility underscore his philosophical shift towards a more introspective and serene outlook. This transition is notably captured in his writings from this period, which underscore the profound impact of Daoist thought on his worldview, urging a return to simplicity and a naturalistic embrace of life's rhythms (Y. Yang 2013).

Furthermore, the Song Dynasty witnessed a flourishing of intellectual discourse and a growing emphasis on textual scholarship. The invention of "movable type printing 活字印刷術" in the 11th century facilitated the wider dissemination of classical texts and philosophical ideas. This fostered a climate of intellectual exchange, where scholars from different traditions engaged in lively debates and cross-pollination of ideas. Su Shi actively participated in these dialogues, drawing inspiration from various schools of thought while maintaining his own unique perspective.

In conclusion, the Song Dynasty provided a fertile ground for the cultivation of diverse religious and philosophical ideas. The interplay between Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism, and a burgeoning intellectual culture profoundly shaped the intellectual landscape of the time. Su Shi, a product of this vibrant era, embraced this intellectual diversity, weaving together these various strands of thought into his own distinctive philosophical and religious outlook.

2.3. A Tapestry of Intellectual Exchange: Su Shi's Interactions with Contemporaries

Su Shi's intellectual journey was not undertaken in isolation. He thrived in a vibrant network of scholars and religious figures, engaging in lively debates and exchanging ideas that further enriched his own philosophical and religious outlook. Here, we will explore some of Su Shi's key intellectual relationships:

1. Fellow Song Dynasty Confucian Scholars:

Su Shi maintained a complex relationship with Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021–1086 CE), a prominent Confucian reformer of the Song Dynasty. Although both were dedicated to

Confucian ideals, they significantly differed on the best approaches to social and political reforms. Wang Anshi's reforms, which aimed at strengthening state control and increasing efficiency through the New Policies, often clashed with Su Shi's more conservative and pragmatic viewpoints. Despite these political differences, their mutual appreciation for literary pursuits and deep respect for Confucian philosophy helped sustain their friendship (Wang and Cui 2000, pp. 40–52). Su Shi also engaged deeply with Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086 CE), another important Confucian thinker of the Song Dynasty. Their interactions through correspondence and debates were crucial for Su Shi's own understanding and critique of Song Dynasty Confucianism. Sima Guang, known for his conservative views and his monumental historical work "Zizhi Tongjian", shared many intellectual exchanges with Su Shi. These interactions further solidified Su Shi's position within the movement as a unique voice advocating for a more pragmatic approach to governance and social issues (Wang and Cui 2000, pp. 281–83). In addition to Wang Anshi and Sima Guang, Su Shi's thoughts were also influenced by the Cheng brothers, Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032–1085 CE) and Cheng Yi (1033–1107 CE), who were leading figures in the development of Neo-Confucianism. The Cheng brothers emphasized moral self-cultivation and the investigation of things (格物致知), which resonated with Su Shi's own intellectual pursuits. Although Su Shi did not align himself entirely with their school of thought, their emphasis on ethical living and personal virtue deeply impacted his writings and philosophy (Chan 1963). Furthermore, Zhang Zai 張載 (1020–1077 CE), another key Neo-Confucian thinker, contributed to the intellectual milieu that shaped Su Shi's ideas. Zhang Zai's doctrine of the Great Unity (太和) and his focus on the metaphysical aspects of Confucianism offered a broader philosophical context for Su Shi's integration of Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist elements in his thought. Su Shi's engagement with Zhang Zai's writings, especially the "Western Inscription 西銘", reflected his inclination towards synthesizing different philosophical traditions to address the complexities of human existence and governance (J. Liu 2011).

2. Buddhist Monks:

Su Shi's engagement with Buddhism transcended theoretical study as he developed relationships with several monks, among whom was Zen master Foyin 佛印 (1022–1103 CE). Their interactions were characterized by in-depth discussions about Buddhist doctrines and practices, particularly during Su Shi's stays in Runzhou (Idema 1987). These dialogues helped deepen Su Shi's understanding of Buddhist concepts like impermanence and detachment, which prominently influenced his literary works. Su Shi's relationship with Foyin, highlighted by their frequent communications and mutual respect, enriched his spiritual and philosophical perspectives, reflecting a profound connection with Buddhist teachings during his turbulent times (S. Yu 2013).

3. Daoist Hermits:

Throughout his exile in Xuzhou, Su Shi found solace in the companionship of Daoist hermits who inhabited the nearby mountains, notably forming a close bond with the reclusive "Cloud Dragon Mountain Man", Zhang Tianji 張天驥. Their interactions were characterized by poetic exchanges and philosophical dialogues, where Su Shi delved into Daoist concepts of harmonizing with nature and renouncing worldly pursuits. This immersion in Daoist philosophy profoundly shaped Su Shi's literary endeavors during this period. His poetry frequently portrayed the serene beauty of the environment, echoing his deepening embrace of Daoist principles (Wang and Cui 2000, p. 116).

4. Literary Figures:

Within Su Shi's social circle were numerous esteemed literary figures of the Song Dynasty. He collaborated with these writers on poetry and prose, engaging in friendly competition and mutually inspiring each other artistically. This exchange of ideas significantly influenced Su Shi's growth as a writer, refining his literary style and expanding the horizons of artistic expression. Particularly noteworthy was his companionship with the poet

Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅 (1045–1105 CE), which led to a profound exchange of ideas and left a lasting imprint on both their literary styles (Q. Yang 1995).

In conclusion, Su Shi's interactions with a diverse range of scholars and religious figures played a crucial role in shaping his intellectual and artistic development. Through these dialogues and debates, he was exposed to a multitude of perspectives, allowing him to refine his own unique blend of Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist influences. This intellectual exchange not only enriched Su Shi's personal life but also left a lasting legacy on the literary and philosophical landscape of the Song Dynasty.

3. Confucian Ethics in Su Shi's Works (2000 Words)

In this part, we explore the profound influence of Confucian ethics on Su Shi's literary and political life. Su Shi's masterful incorporation of Confucian principles into his works reflects his deep engagement with moral philosophy and governance. We delve into Su Shi's literary techniques, his portrayal of Confucian ideals in poetry and prose, and the implications of his adherence to these principles on his political career. Through a nuanced analysis, we uncover the complexities of Su Shi's relationship with Confucianism, highlighting both its guiding influence and the challenges it posed in his pursuit of ethical leadership.

3.1. Weaving Confucian Threads: Su Shi's Poetry and Prose

Su Shi's literary works stand as a testament to his mastery of language and his profound engagement with Confucian ethics. He skillfully incorporated Confucian principles into his poetry and prose, creating works that not only resonated with aesthetic beauty but also conveyed a powerful moral compass. This section will delve into how Su Shi utilized various literary techniques to express Confucian values in his writings.

1. Confucianism emphasizes the importance of social education and Ren 仁:

Su Shi's poetry often reflects this concern for education and Ren. Upon his arrival in Danzhou, Su Shi was particularly concerned about the local educational situation and was eager to learn more about it. It was said that there was an ancient schoolhouse in Danzhou, and he excitedly went to visit it. To his surprise, he found the schoolhouse empty, which left him extremely disappointed and confused. He had not expected the schoolhouse to be so desolate. So, Su Shi inquired about the situation of the schoolhouse with concern. In his work "The Poem in Response to Tao Yuanming's Message to the Three Young Men Zhou Xuzhi, Zuqi, and Xie Jingyi 和示周續之祖企謝景夷三郎", he (S. Su 1982) wrote:

*"I heard that there is an ancient schoolhouse,
and my heart is filled with joy.
I put on my clothes and went to the two schoolrooms,
but I looked through the door and saw no one.
The teacher's meal is already gone,
and the students have not arrived.
I sit here and talk about learning,
I sigh that I heard it too late.
I will always be ashamed of Yu Zhongxiang,
singing and singing by the blue sea".*

He described the scene of no students in the school and the teacher's starvation. He believed that a ruler who embodies Confucian benevolence would prioritize the well-being of the people and govern with benevolence and justice. Su Shi even mentioned Yu Zhongxiang 虞仲翔 (he was a renowned official and scholar of classics during the late Han Dynasty and the Three Kingdoms period, specifically the Wu Kingdom) in his poem, expressing his hope that he could, like Yu Zhongxiang, contribute to the education cause of Danzhou even under difficult conditions. Su Shi's concern for education in Danzhou reflects his embodiment of Confucian benevolence. He cared for the people with his actions and contributed to the development and progress of society.

2. The Importance of Family Values:

Confucianism places great emphasis on family education. Under the guidance of his mother, the young Su Shi had already set lofty aspirations to become a giant of his time, willing to fight to the death for his ideals. Madame Cheng, inherently kind-hearted and a follower of Buddhism, cherished all sentient beings in the world. In the Su family courtyard, with its dense bamboo and cypress trees and abundant flowers, many birds came to nest and roost. Madame Cheng strictly forbade the family from catching birds or taking their eggs. Over time, more and more birds nested in the Su family courtyard, unafraid of humans, some even building nests on low branches where children could bend down to see them. Su Shi and his brothers, along with their friends, often gathered around the bird nests, feeding and observing the fledglings. He vividly described (S. Su 2010c, p. 3470) these scenes in his poem “Different Magpies 異鷦”:

*“In the days of my ancestors, kindness and filial piety prevailed at home.
With five acres of garden, birds gather amidst the tung blossoms.
At that time, birds and sparrows made nests that could be easily reached.
Remembering myself and the other children, feeding and watching the bird flocks”.*

Madame Cheng, starting from small matters, nurtured her son’s compassion, which had a profound impact on Su Shi’s life. For over nine hundred years, Su Shi has been loved and revered by people not only for leaving behind a vast array of literary works of great artistic achievement but also for the magnanimity, kindness, passion, and gentleness that pervade his works.

3. Advocating Respect for Rituals and Emphasis on Virtue:

The fundamental principle of ancient Chinese social order was based on morality and encompassed the rituals of law and religion. The Zhao Song Dynasty emerged from the chaos of the “decline of rituals and the deterioration of music” during the Five Dynasties period. Its rulers vigorously promoted respect for rituals (Li 禮) and emphasized the importance of virtue (De 德), viewing the reconstruction of the societal “ritual–virtue 禮–德” system as a crucial means to maintain their own rule. In this context, Su Shi, deeply influenced by traditional Confucian thought, regarded “rituals” and “virtue” as crucial weapons for social control. He explicitly stated that the social function of rituals was to determine individuals’ social status and hierarchy, thus stabilizing social order, as he believed, “The essence of rituals lies in the clear distinction of roles under heaven. Strict adherence between ruler and subjects, filial piety between father and son, brotherly love, and respect between siblings, all manifest benevolence and righteousness”. Su Shi advocated for using rituals to educate people, considering it the fundamental strategy for governing a country, as he believed that rituals could ensure that each individual adhered to their respective roles, fostering relationships such as paternal love, filial piety, fraternal love, and mutual respect between siblings, thereby promoting the magnification and spread of benevolence and righteousness.

Su Shi’s incorporation of Confucian ethics went beyond mere thematic references. He believed that literature itself served a moral purpose. By holding a mirror to society and highlighting ethical dilemmas, his writings aimed to inspire readers towards self-cultivation and the pursuit of a virtuous life. In conclusion, Su Shi’s poetry and prose were not merely artistic expressions; they were vessels for conveying Confucian ethical principles. Through his masterful use of language, historical allusions, and a commitment to clear and purposeful writing, Su Shi established himself as a leading voice for Confucian ideals within the Song Dynasty literary landscape.

3.2. A Tapestry of Confucian Ideals: Examining Su Shi’s Works

Su Shi’s literary repertoire serves as a rich tapestry woven with threads of Confucian ethics. By delving into specific works, we can gain a deeper understanding of how he incorporated Confucian ideals of morality, governance, and social responsibility into his writings.

1. The Humanitarian Spirit of Confucianism:

The essay “On the Ultimate Loyalty and Generosity in Rewards and Punishments 刑賞忠厚之至論” by (S. Su 2010d, p. 155), written when he was twenty-two years old, emphasizes the Confucian governing philosophy centered around benevolence and righteousness. He highlights how ancient kings like Yao 堯 and Shun 舜 deeply cared for their people, and their governance was reflected in the way they rewarded virtue and punished vice, guided by principles of benevolence and righteousness. Su Shi argues that rewards should not be limited to material wealth, nor should punishments be confined to physical harm, but should rather be rooted in the human heart and focused on benevolence. The essay also stresses the importance of exercising prudence in administering rewards and punishments, avoiding excessive leniency or severity, and advocating for a government that respects the benevolent heart and implements moderate policies. This ideology embodies Confucian compassion and governance principles, advocating for ruling by virtue, respecting human nature, and fostering social harmony and stability. Most notably, Su Shi suggests in the essay that the highest authority should “govern the world with the way of the gentleman elder, leading the world to follow the path of the gentleman elder, hence it is said: the utmost of loyalty and honesty”, reflecting his humanitarian spirit.

2. Governance and the Ideal Ruler:

In his poem “Qin Yuan Chun: The Solitary Lodge with Green Lamps 沁園春: 孤館燈青”, he writes (S. Su 2010b, p. 125):

*“At that time, my brother and I lived together in Chang’an,
like the brothers Lu when they first arrived, both young and ambitious.
Having a thousand words at hand and myriad volumes in mind,
to serve the ruler like Yao and Shun, what difficulty is there?
Adapting to the circumstances,
I remain composed, observing from a leisurely distance with folded hands.
Though healthy and vigorous,
I am content with wandering through the years, even contending with nobles”.*

In this poem, Su Shi describes the scene of himself and his brother Su Zhe living together in Chang’an, implying their shared aspirations and youthful ambition. This reflects the Confucian emphasis on shared aspirations and joint endeavor. He longs to encounter a ruler like Yao or Shun, where he can deploy his talents, reflecting the Confucian ideals of serving the ruler and the country. Furthermore, Su Shi emphasizes the importance of adapting to the times and maintaining composure, reflecting the Confucian principle of adapting to the changing circumstances and integrating knowledge with action.

3. Social Responsibility and the Literati Class:

In Su Shi’s (S. Su 2010d, p. 215) essay “On the Book of Songs 詩論”, Su Shi mentions that the “Book of Songs” was created by the people of the world, whether they were ordinary citizens, restrained subjects, or lowly servants, driven by various emotions such as sorrow and joy. The people expressed their worries about their poverty and hardships or described their grand and splendid joys. The content ranges from the relationships between rulers and ministers, fathers and sons, to the rise and fall, order and chaos of the state, down to matters of daily life, bedroom affairs, insects, and plants—nothing is excluded. Those “inappropriate” works are also reflections of society; thus, through them, one can observe public sentiment and understand the rise and fall of the nation. These works have been passed down because of the sages’ intention, which is rooted in benevolence and righteousness. As the backbone of society, the scholar-official class bears immense social responsibility. They must not only cultivate themselves and manage their families but also concern themselves with the governance and prosperity of the state. The emotions and thoughts conveyed in the “Book of Songs” are crucial for them to understand and fulfill their social responsibilities. By studying and inheriting the “Book of Songs”, scholar-

officials can better grasp public sentiment and discern social changes, thereby achieving benevolence and righteousness in governance and realizing social harmony and stability.

By examining these specific works, we see how Su Shi wove Confucian ethics into the fabric of his literary output. He addressed issues of individual morality, ethical governance, and social responsibility, demonstrating the enduring relevance of Confucian ideals in his time. These themes not only resonated with his contemporaries but continue to offer valuable insights into the role of the intellectual and the importance of ethical leadership in society.

3.3. *A Double-Edged Sword: Confucianism and Su Shi's Political Life*

Confucianism played a significant role in shaping Su Shi's political career, but it also proved to be a double-edged sword. While he adhered to Confucian ideals, which propelled his commitment to moral governance and social responsibility, it also led to conflicts with political institutions and even the highest authorities.

1. Su Shi's Confucian Ideals in Action:

Political Reform: The comprehensive reflection of Su Shi's (S. [Su 2010d](#), pp. 771–902) political thought is systematically presented in the 25 memorial essays he submitted to Emperor Renzong of Song, known as the "Advocating Policy 進策問". The core idea was to alleviate the plight of the people, enabling them to live and work in peace and ensuring the long-term stability of the country. Despite being well aware of the severe poverty and weakness of the state during Emperor Renzong's later years, Su Shi remained steadfast in advocating for decisive change. However, what set Su Shi's reform measures apart from those of Wang Anshi was his acute awareness of the heavy burdens and hardships faced by the people. Therefore, when proposing reform measures, he did not advocate for increasing government revenue. Instead, he emphasized the rectification of governance, streamlining of bureaucracy, and leading by example in frugality, starting from the emperor himself. This approach aimed to alleviate the burden on the people and allow them to breathe easier ([Qiu 2008](#)).

2. Advocating for People-Centric Governance:

Confucian philosophy highlights the importance of rulers considering the welfare of their subjects. Su Shi exemplified this principle by actively seeking and implementing policies that benefited the populace. During his exile in Hainan, he initiated various programs aimed at alleviating poverty and enhancing infrastructure, demonstrating his commitment to "minben" (people-oriented) governance. His efforts not only improved the lives of many but also reinforced the value of familial and communal harmony, as seen in his intervention in the family dispute of Li Ziming (Yu'e [Lin 2022](#)). By reconciling the estranged family members and emphasizing the values of filial piety and mutual understanding, Su Shi left a lasting impact on local society and was highly praised for his focus on family values and community welfare.

3. The Cost of Conviction:

Confucianism encourages officials to speak their minds, even when it is unpopular. Su Shi was a staunch advocate of this practice. He frequently remonstrated with the highest rulers, criticizing policies he deemed harmful, regardless of the potential consequences. This steadfast commitment to candid criticism strained his relationship with emperors and court officials who preferred obedient bureaucrats. Su Shi's unwavering adherence to Confucian principles often led to conflicts with political establishments. His outspoken criticism and advocacy for unpopular reforms alienated powerful figures. He was frequently accused of political dissent, resulting in demotions and exile. Yet, even in exile, Su Shi continued to express his criticism of rulers neglecting the welfare of the people through poetry, which nearly led to his demise in the "Wutai Poetry Case" ([Dai 2019](#)). However, these experiences did not weaken his commitment to his ideals. Throughout his life, he remained an outspoken critic of corruption and a defender of moral governance.

4. The Confucian Legacy in Public Life:

Despite facing challenges, Su Shi's dedication to Confucian ethics has left a lasting impact on public life. His writings are filled with moral principles and social commentary, inspiring scholars and officials for generations. He dared to speak candidly and became a role model for those seeking to uphold moral standards within the government. Su Shi's life exemplifies the complexity of navigating the political realm while adhering to strict moral principles. Particularly commendable is his tireless efforts to improve the lives of local people wherever he was exiled, notably through his active involvement in flood relief efforts and water conservancy projects such as dredging West Lake, repairing six wells, and implementing flood control measures in Xuzhou. These actions reflect his adherence to the Confucian principle of "benefiting the world and serving the people 經世濟民" (Sun and Zhang 2023). His unwavering commitment to his Confucian ideals, though admirable, often led to personal hardships. However, his legacy as a champion of reform, social responsibility, and candid criticism continues to inspire those who believe in the power of moral leadership.

In conclusion, Confucianism served as a guiding force in Su Shi's political career. His dedication to this philosophy fueled his pursuit of ethical governance, social responsibility, and meritocratic practices. However, his unwavering commitment to these ideals also led to conflict with the political establishment. Despite the challenges, Su Shi's legacy lies in his unwavering stance on ethical leadership, an inspiration for those who believe in the transformative power of Confucian principles.

4. Buddhist Compassion in the Literary Output of Su Shi (2000 Words)

Su Shi is an important figure in the history of Chinese literature, whose literary creations not only transcend the ideals of Confucianism but also reflect a deep influence of Buddhist philosophy (Q. Wang 2023). This part delves into the manifestation of Buddhist themes in Su Shi's literary works and analyzes their profound impact on his personal life and philosophical views. Through an exploration of key concepts such as "compassion 慈悲" and "impermanence 無常" in Su Shi's works, we can gain a better understanding of the literary maestro's worldview and creative style.

4.1. Echoes of the Dharma: Buddhist Themes in Su Shi's Works

According to Z. Su (1990, p. 1127), the younger brother of Su Shi, Su Shi "deeply comprehended the true essence while studying Buddhist scriptures, drawing parallels with the teachings of Confucius and Laozi, engaging in extensive debates effortlessly, exhibiting boundless magnanimity". Through careful examination of Su Shi's works, we can discern his profound involvement with Buddhist themes, particularly the concepts resonating with his personal experiences and philosophical viewpoints. Here, we will explore how Su Shi integrates Buddhist ideology into his poetry and prose works.

1. Impermanence and the Fleeting Nature of Life:

Expressions like "my life is like a dream" and "the past and present are like dreams" are common in Su Shi's poetry and prose. On one hand, they reflect his firsthand experience of life's brevity and impermanence. On the other hand, they also signify his attempt to alleviate the pressures of officialdom by embracing the Buddhist concept of "illusory existence" as a means of liberation. In his poem "Ode to the Fish Pillow Crown 魚枕冠頌", Su Shi vividly portrays this state of liberation using striking imagery: a pristine and bright fish-shaped pillow crown, perfectly matched in form and spirit, suddenly transforms into a fish, ensnared once again in a fishing net, only to be dissected and turned back into a pillow. However, by the time it becomes a pillow again, it is no longer a fish; by the time it becomes a crown, the crown is no longer a pillow. In the endless cycle of change, ultimately it is neither a crown nor a pillow. If there were no change, it would be given to one who has no hair to put it on (Z. Zhang 2000). This philosophy enabled Su Shi to find solace for his soul amidst the exile of his life. This profound ideology reflects his deep contempla-

tion on life and reality, enabling him to transcend worldly tribulations and maintain inner peace and strength.

2. Compassion and non-killing:

Su Shi's mother was a devout Buddhist throughout her life, and her belief in "compassion and non-killing" deeply influenced Su Shi. She believed that all life desires to live, just as humans do, and questioned whether animals willingly submit to death. This compassion stems from a profound empathy for all sentient beings and serves as the primary reason for abstaining from killing. During Su Shi's exile to Huangzhou, he had close associations with Chen Jichang. According to Su Shi's (S. Su 2010c, p. 7629) poem "A Poem Dedicated to Chen Jichang, 書贈陳季常詩" on every encounter, Su Shi would compose a poem using the rhyme "zhi 汁" (in classical Chinese poetry, the "zhi" rhyme refers to using the vowel sound "ī" of the character "汁" (juice) as a rhyme foot in poetry composition, ensuring harmonious unity in the phonological aspects of the verses) to admonish Chen Jichang against killing. Su Shi refrained from killing for a long time, fearing that Chen Jichang might kill for his sake, hence the poems as a cautionary measure. Eventually, Chen Jichang also ceased killing. Following his involvement in the "Wutai Poetry Case", Su Shi often reflected on his own suffering and concluded that life should not be easily taken away. Seeing the poultry waiting to be slaughtered in the kitchen reminded him of his own imprisonment, and he resolved not to subject living beings to endless suffering. He visited Chen Jichang and wrote poems with the rhyme "zhi" to dissuade him from killing for Su Shi's sake. From then on, Chen Jichang refrained from eating meat, and many people in Qiting were influenced to abstain from meat as well.

3. The pursuit of consciousness and liberation:

During his northward journey across the sea, Su Shi passed through Qianzhou and composed the poem "Two Poems in Rhyme with Jiang Hui's 次韻江晦叔二首". One line reads,

*"Floating clouds change with the times,
the lonely moon shines with this heart".*

At this moment, Su Shi had experienced the vicissitudes of life, and his soul was like the clear moon revealed after the dispersal of the floating clouds. This moon symbolized Su Shi's awakened nature. Regardless of the worldly changes, he could face them with the same equanimity as the solitary moon hanging high above. Zai Hu (1962) praised this line of poetry, saying, "Its meaning is profound, like that of someone engaged in Zen enlightenment, expressing his thoughts openly and without hindrance". In fact, this "lonely moon" not only represents Su Shi's enlightenment in Zen Buddhism but also signifies the fulfillment of his own life journey (Wang and Zhu 2011, p. 594).

These are just a few examples of how Buddhist themes permeate Su Shi's literary works. By exploring impermanence, compassion, and the search for consciousness, Su Shi offered profound reflections on the human condition and the nature of reality. These themes not only resonated with him on a personal level but also enriched the intellectual landscape of the Song Dynasty, showcasing the multifaceted nature of his philosophical outlook.

4.2. A Tapestry of Buddhist Themes: Analyzing Su Shi's Works

Su Shi's literary output serves as a tapestry woven with threads of Buddhist thought. By delving into specific poems and essays, we can gain a deeper understanding of how he engaged with key Buddhist concepts like compassion, impermanence, and enlightenment.

1. Impermanence and the Flow of Time:

The Water Dragon Chant: Harmonizing Zhang Zhifu's "Willow Catkins Poem" 水龍吟·次韻章質夫楊花詞: This poem describes the drifting of willow catkins, symbolizing the impermanence of all things in the world. S. Su (2010b, p. 302) uses this to lament

the brevity of life, encouraging people to cherish the present moment. This sensitivity to time echoes the Buddhist concept of impermanence (anitya). In the poem, Su Shi writes,

*“They seem like flowers yet are not flowers,
and no one pities their fall”.*

By describing the drifting catkins, he vividly illustrates the change and unpredictability of things, conveying a deep awareness of the brevity of life and the vicissitudes of the world. He not only expresses regret for the fleeting spring,

*“I do not regret that these flowers have fallen,
but I regret that the fallen petals in the western garden cannot be gathered”*

but also uses the imagery of the willow catkins to remind people to treasure the present moment,

*“Spring is divided into three parts:
two parts dust and one part flowing water”.*

The scene of willow catkins drifting in the wind depicted in the poem is like many moments in life, fleeting—

*“Upon closer inspection,
they are not catkins but the tears of parting”.*

Su Shi’s lament not only reflects his personal emotional experience but also resonates with the Buddhist concept of impermanence, further emphasizing the fragility of life and the relentless passage of time.

2. The Pursuit of Enlightenment:

Self-Titled Portrait at Jinshan 自題金山畫像: S. Wang (2000) believes that Su Shi’s mentality during his periods of exile represents the highest level of the traditional Chinese scholar–official’s mindset in the face of demotion and banishment. During his life in exile in Huangzhou, Huizhou, and Danzhou, Su Shi experienced loneliness, hardship, and misery. He sought philosophical transcendence through Buddhist and Daoist thought, maintaining confidence in life and affirming his self-worth. In his poem “Self-Titled Portrait at Jinshan 自題金山畫像”, Su Shi wrote,

*“My heart is like a tree turned to ash,
my body like an unmoored boat.
When asked about my life’s achievements, I answer:
Huangzhou, Huizhou, Danzhou”.*

This poem, composed two months before his death, reflects his awareness of life’s impermanence and his transcendence beyond it. Despite a life full of setbacks, he refused to wallow in sorrow and faced life’s disappointments with an open-minded attitude, achieving spiritual transcendence through self-liberation. He regarded his time in the three places of exile as the most illustrious period of his career, showcasing his detachment from concerns of success and failure. Through the enlightenment and philosophy of Buddhism, Su Shi transcended personal suffering and displacement, exhibiting an incurable romantic spirit and demonstrating a broad-minded and self-mocking attitude towards life. This transcendence and enlightenment made him the “Old Dongpo 東坡老” (this title embodies Su Shi’s spirit of loving life and his optimistic and open-minded mindset) who elicits a knowing smile from others.

3. Transcendence in the Ultimate Meaning of Life:

Reply to Elder Jingshan Lin 答徑山琳長老: In the final stage of his life, S. Su (2010c, p. 5333) was accompanied by the monk Wei Lin, revealing the solace that Zen Buddhism provided to him. In his closing poem “Reply to Elder Jingshan Lin”, he depicted the scene of being with Wei Lin and wrote,

*“Both you and I are born in the year of Bingzi,
each having lived thirty thousand days.
A thousand verses per day,
swiftly flowing like a current”.*

This indicates his profound realization of the passage of time and demonstrates his understanding and respect for the monastic life. While acknowledging life’s brevity, he also expressed his commitment and dedication to spiritual cultivation. Furthermore, Su Shi wrote in the poem,

*“The great affliction arises from having a body;
without a body, there is no ailment”.*

This reflects his profound contemplation on the essence of life, believing that the suffering of birth, aging, sickness, and death arises from the condition of having a physical body. The phrase “without a body, there is no ailment” expresses his desire and belief in transcending the cycle of birth and death. This contemplation on the ultimate meaning of life, within the context of Zen Buddhist thought, highlights Su Shi’s profound insight (Egan 1994).

These are just a few examples of how Su Shi’s literary works illuminate his engagement with Buddhist concepts. By analyzing specific poems and essays, we can see how he explored themes of compassion, impermanence, and the pursuit of enlightenment. These themes not only enriched his personal philosophy but also resonated with a wider audience during the Song Dynasty, leaving a lasting legacy on Chinese literature and thought.

4.3. The Enduring Influence of Buddhism on Su Shi

Buddhism’s profound impact on Su Shi extended far beyond mere literary themes. It permeated his personal life and shaped his philosophical outlook in several ways.

1. A Source of Comfort and Resilience:

In Su Shi’s poetry, Buddhist and Zen imagery naturally flows, deeply intertwined with his profound understanding of Buddhist texts. The idiom “snow traces of a wild goose” originates from Su Shi’s (S. Su 2010c, p. 186) poem “Reply to Ziyong from Mianchi and 子由澗池懷舊”, which states:

*“Life’s journey takes us far and wide;
Like geese on snow, our steps they guide.
Upon the mud, their prints may stay;
Yet where they fly, who knows the way?”*

This verse depicts life as a bird treading on snow, where the footprints left behind are incidental, as the bird’s coming and going have no set direction. This imagery is infused with the concept of “traces of birds in the sky” from the *Huayan Sutra* 華嚴經: a bird flies through the sky, its path immeasurable, and the places it hasn’t flown are also beyond measure. Through the Zen imagery of “traces of birds in the sky”, Su Shi conveys the idea that life is a long journey, where encounters are random, advocating for a natural and serene attitude towards life (Xing 2022). This philosophy not only provided Su Shi with personal consolation and resilience but also represented the common approach of Song Dynasty scholars. Through this philosophy, they could maintain inner peace and resilience in the face of life’s ups and downs, thereby finding inner solace and strength.

2. The Prajnaparamita (wisdom of emptiness) view of life’s impermanence:

Su Shi’s official career was full of ups and downs, and he used the Buddhist concept of Prajnaparamita (wisdom of emptiness) to understand the impermanence of life. In his work “Nian Nu Jiao: The Great River Flows Eastward 念奴嬌: 大江東去”, he expressed the insight that “life is like a dream” (S. Su 2010b, p. 391). This sentiment serves as the best explanation for the alternation of honor and disgrace and as a way of self-consolation. During his tenure as an assistant prefect in Hangzhou, he wrote the poem,

*“Passing glories and witherings are like lightning and wind;
how can anything last as long as a flower’s red?
The master sits in meditation in the empty hall, contemplating form and emptiness;
form is emptiness and emptiness is form”.*

This poem references the saying from the Heart Sutra, “Form is emptiness; emptiness is form”. He realized the void from prosperity and sensed the emptiness from beauty, reminiscent of Zen Master Qingliang Wenyi’s verse on observing peonies: “Their vivid colors follow the morning dew, their fragrance chases the evening wind. Why wait for their fall to understand their emptiness?” In his later years, exiled to Lingnan, Su Shi frequently expressed his reflections on life’s impermanence, such as in

*“Dreams come and go;
who has less, who has more?
A sigh in a snap, like floating clouds,
how many are there?”*

He often mentioned life as illusory things like dreams, bubbles, and floating clouds in his poetry, gaining the wisdom to settle his mind from Buddhism.

3. The Attitude of a Mind Dwelling Nowhere:

In “Baibu Hong 百步洪” (Baibu Hong, also known as Xuzhou Hong 徐州洪, which is one of the three Hongs in Xuzhou, is a rapids located in the Si River), S. Su (2010c, p. 1858) vividly and expressively depicts the turbulent rapids of Baibu Hong, using this imagery to convey his insights on the impermanence of life. The poem uses metaphors such as “rabbits running and hawks swooping” and “swift horses rushing down a thousand-foot slope” to vividly illustrate the perilous journey of a boat through rapids. However, Su Shi’s vision extends beyond merely describing natural scenery. He shifts his focus with lines like “My life is fleeting like the passing day and night, each moment surpassing the last”, expressing profound reflections on the brevity of life and the futility of worldly fame and fortune, which are nothing but fleeting illusions. He advocates for letting go of attachments and adopting an attitude of “a mind dwelling nowhere 心無所住”, suggesting that only then can one achieve true liberation. This poem incorporates Buddhist concepts such as Prajnaparamita (the wisdom of emptiness) and the Huayan worldview, reflecting Su Shi’s profound philosophical outlook (Y. Zhou 2017). As Fang Dongshu remarked, this poem “comes entirely from the Huayan”. Su Shi’s “Baibu Hong” is not only a masterpiece of natural description but also a deeply philosophical poem, reminding us to let go of attachments, transcend material concerns, and attain inner peace and freedom.

Su Shi’s deep understanding of Buddhism not only enriched his literary creations but also profoundly influenced his life attitude and philosophical outlook. Through Buddhist wisdom, he learned to maintain inner peace and resilience in the face of life’s ups and downs and impermanence. His works reflect a detached attitude toward honor and disgrace, emphasizing the importance of following the natural course and remaining unattached to external things. Su Shi’s advocacy for “a mind dwelling nowhere” is not only a reflection of personal cultivation but also his profound insight into the essence of life. This attitude enabled him to remain optimistic and composed even in adversity, finding solace and strength for his soul. Therefore, Su Shi is not only an outstanding literary figure but also a thinker who attained inner peace through Buddhist wisdom. His poems and writings convey deep life philosophies, inspiring us in modern life to also let go of attachments and pursue inner tranquility and freedom.

5. Daoist Tranquility and Its Manifestation in Su Shi’s Philosophy (2000 Words)

In Su Shi’s literary world, Daoist philosophy is a profound force that permeates his poetry and prose, shaping his unique worldview and attitude towards life (Grant 1987). Through an exploration of Daoist elements in Su Shi’s works, we discover his pursuit of harmonious coexistence with nature, longing for a simple life, and relentless effort to achieve

inner tranquility. These Daoist principles not only are reflected in his works but also serve as practical tools for him to navigate life's challenges, helping him overcome adversity and maintain inner peace and resilience. In this part, we will delve into the Daoist philosophy embodied in Su Shi's works, thereby gaining further insight into how he navigates the waves of life, achieving inner harmony and growth (Virág 2014).

5.1. Unveiling the Daoist Threads in Su Shi's Tapestry

Su Shi's literary legacy is a rich tapestry woven with threads of various philosophical traditions. Although Confucianism and Buddhism undoubtedly hold significant positions, Daoism, another ancient Chinese philosophical school, also had a substantial influence on his works. By investigating Daoist elements within Su Shi's works, we gain a deeper understanding of his multifaceted worldview.

1. The Emergence and Formation of Daoist Thought:

The emergence of Daoist thought in Su Shi is inextricably linked to his life experiences. Before the age of thirty, Su Shi led a smooth and successful life, nurtured by a rich cultural family environment. At twenty, his essay "On the Ultimate Loyalty and Generosity in Rewards and Punishments" earned him praise from Ouyang Xiu. In 1061, he passed the imperial examination and subsequently held positions such as Assistant Magistrate of Fengxiang and Editor in the Historiography Institute, embodying an active and patriotic spirit. After turning thirty-three, Su Shi's life took a dramatic turn, marked by repeated demotions and political strife. It was in these painful and disappointing times that his Daoist thoughts began to germinate. In 1069, Wang Anshi implemented new reforms, which Su Shi opposed, favoring gradual changes instead. This disagreement led to his departure from the court. During his subsequent appointments, he delved into the works of Zhuangzi, finding resonance with the sentiment "I have found my heart". In 1079, Su Shi faced severe punishment due to the "Wutai Poetry Case" and was exiled to Huangzhou. This period marked a significant transformation in his thinking as he learned to accept reality, adopt an optimistic attitude toward adversity, and embrace the Daoist principle of "Ziran 自然". His writings began to reflect a "broad-minded 曠達" style. Although the new reforms eventually failed and Wang Anshi fell from power, Su Shi continued to be marginalized by Sima Guang and other conservatives. Through these repeated exiles, Daoist thought became a crucial spiritual solace for him.

2. Harmony with Nature:

Su Shi loved nature and was adept at discovering genuine interest and spiritual joy in ordinary things. His harmony with nature became an essential part of his life philosophy. Mengde Ye (1939) recorded an anecdote about Su Shi in Huangzhou in "Bishu Luhua". One evening, Su Shi was drinking and enjoying the river scenery with some friends. The night was deep, the river vast, and a gentle breeze blew. Su Shi felt relaxed and inspired, immediately composing a verse: "At night the wind is calm and the ripples are smooth, the small boat drifts away, and my life is entrusted to the rivers and seas". He and his friends sang it several times, thoroughly enjoying the beautiful night. The next day, it was rumored that Su Shi had composed a verse at night, hung his official robe by the river, and sailed away. When the county magistrate Xu Jun heard this, he was shocked and hurried to pay a visit. However, he found Su Shi snoring loudly, sound asleep. This anecdote vividly showcases Su Shi's carefree and unrestrained character. He regarded fame and fortune as fleeting clouds, not adhering to worldly conventions, and integrated with nature, from which he gained spiritual solace and the true meaning of life.

3. The Daoist concept of "governing by Wu-wei"

After Su Shi was exiled to Mizhou, he built a gathering place and named it "Gai Gong Hall". Gai Gong was a native of Mizhou and an early Han Dynasty thinker who advocated for the concept of governance through non-intervention. In "Gai Gong Hall Record 蓋公堂記", S. Su (2010d, p. 1079) used allegory to criticize the frequent changes and loss

of principles in the court, which was manipulated by power-seeking politicians. He employed the story of a person suffering from a cold and cough, misdiagnosed with gu poison, leading to numerous ailments. Upon re-diagnosis as heat, treated with cold medicine, the condition worsened. After changing doctors thrice, the illness became more severe. An old man advised the patient to stop taking medicine and focus on health restoration, resulting in recovery. Su Shi used this analogy to compare to governance, warning that if the court continues to appoint officials recklessly, it would lead to the country's downfall, similar to administering random medicines leading to harmful consequences. He profoundly understood Laozi's statement, "Governing a large state is like cooking a small fish 治大國若烹小鮮", (Dao De Jing, chap. 60) expressing the idea that human governance is less effective than ruling through non-intervention, emphasizing that "when the governing principle is pure, the people will naturally be at peace".

In conclusion, Su Shi's Daoist thought played a crucial role in his life transitions and profoundly influenced his literary creations and governance philosophy. Through his close connection with nature, he sought inner peace and expressed his unique insights on state governance through the principle of "governing by doing nothing that goes against nature". Su Shi, with his open-minded and optimistic character and unique philosophical perspective, left a valuable ideological legacy for future generations, becoming a shining star in the history of Chinese literature.

5.2. *Su Shi's Daoist Spirit: Transcendence, Nature, and Artistic Expression*

Su Shi's engagement with Daoism wasn't merely intellectual; it permeated his approach to life. By examining his views on nature, simplicity, and tranquility, we can see how Daoist beliefs shaped his worldview.

1. The Realm of a Carefree and Transcendent Life

Traveling Between Qiong and Dan 行瓊儋間: In his later years, S. Su (2010c, p. 4841) was exiled to Danzhou, where he wrote the poem "Traveling Between Qiong and Dan", expressing his transcendent and carefree spirit. The poem depicts the wonder of four regions encircling an island, with numerous caves scattered throughout: "Four regions surround an island, with a hundred caves within". As the poet travels northwest, it feels as though he is stepping onto a crescent moon: "I travel to the northwest corner, like crossing a crescent moon". Standing on a high point and gazing toward the Central Plains, he sees only a vast expanse of water: "Climbing high to look toward the Central Plains, all I see is endless water". Gazing out at the sea, he laments that the nine regions within the seas are as insignificant as a grain of rice in a granary: "In the vast granary, a single grain is indistinguishable". This imagery evokes the majestic scene of the giant fish and bird from Zhuangzi's "Free and Easy Wandering". In the poem, Su Shi expresses his understanding of the vastness of nature and the impermanence of life, demonstrating his broad-mindedness and carefree spirit despite his exile: "People might blame the old Dongpo, for his face has aged and his words are empty. It has been a long time since I heard this wonderful sound, not since the Palace of Penglai", echoing Zhuangzi's words: "The perfect man has no self; the divine man does not strive for achievement; the sage does not seek fame 至人無己，神人無功，聖人無名" (Zhuangzi Chapter 1). This state of mind is reminiscent of the grand scene of the giant bird soaring with the sky on its back, looking down upon the world, showcasing Su Shi's pursuit of spiritual freedom and transcendence from worldly concerns even in adversity (A. Gao 2015).

2. Yearning for the Daoist Celestial Realm

Shui Long Yin: The Vast Clouds of Antiquity 水龍吟·古來雲海茫茫: In "Shui Long Yin: The Vast Clouds of Antiquity", S. Su (2010b, p. 504) deeply yearns for the ethereal and transcendent life of Daoist immortals. Through his admiration for figures such as Sima Ziwei and Li Bai, Su Shi expresses his desire for the Daoist celestial realm. Since ancient times, people have been filled with imagination about that elusive immortal realm. Su Shi, however, places this longing within Daoist thought. He believes that through the

cultivation of Daoist practices, one can transform into an immortal, transcend the mundane world, and roam freely in the celestial realm (A. Gao 2015). In his poem, Su Shi depicts the Daoist immortal realm:

*“The vast clouds of antiquity,
where are the jade palaces of the Daoist mountains?
In this world, there exists the Hermit of Red City,
who rises like a dragon and phoenix”.*

He seems to see immortals riding clouds and fog, carefree and at ease, filled with longing. Su Shi also laments that after traveling the world and seeing all the sights, he silently admires the exiled immortals when he encounters them, his admiration overflowing.

*“Having traversed the nine provinces and four seas,
I laugh as the scattered petals fall like flying snow.
Upon seeing the exiled immortal by the river,
I silently admire him without words”.*

He further expresses his wish to become an immortal and leave the mundane world with them. “Traveling the expanse, facing each other with vastness, drunk and at ease. When the opportunity arises, I will ride the whale on a steady path, promising to go together”. The place they “promise to go together” is the mountain of Miao Gu She, where Zhuangzi in “The Happy Excursion” describes the goddess residing, a place where one can transform into an immortal. Su Shi’s longing for the Daoist celestial realm reflects his desire to transcend the mundane world and pursue the eternal.

3. The Artistic Concept of Following Nature’s Way:

Shi Cangshu’s Pavilion of Drunken Ink 石蒼舒醉墨堂: Influenced by the philosophical thought of Laozi and Zhuangzi, Su Shi, with his transcendent and detached spirit, integrated the concept of “following nature’s way” into his artistic creation, forming a unique artistic style. His works are profound in conception, unrestrained in brushwork, and embody the realm of unity between heaven and man, and the unity of all things. In “Shi Cangshu’s Pavilion of Drunken Ink”, S. Su (2010c, p. 481) wrote: “My brush 意 (intent) is born from no law, I push and seek for brushstrokes with ease”. This line expresses Su Shi’s pursuit of “intent”. He believed that artistic creation should focus on the expression of conception, rather than being confined to form and technique. Su Shi’s “intent” is a transcendent conception, a free expression. It is not bound by any rules or regulations, but comes from the sincere outpouring of the author’s heart. Su Shi’s “intent” also reflects a kind of confidence and uninhibitedness. He believed in his own talent and inspiration and that he could create unique works. Su Shi’s artistic concept of “following nature’s way” inspires people to appreciate nature, love life, and pursue a higher realm of life.

Su Shi’s integration of Daoist principles into his life and art serves as an enduring testament to the timeless appeal of Daoism. His works encourage readers and admirers to transcend their own limitations, embrace the beauty of the natural world, and seek a deeper connection with the universe. In this way, Su Shi’s legacy extends beyond his literary achievements, offering a philosophical guide for living a more meaningful and fulfilled life. His life and art continue to inspire those who seek to understand and embody the Daoist ideals of transcendence, nature, and artistic expression.

5.3. Navigating Life’s Currents: Case Studies of Daoist Application in Su Shi’s Works

Su Shi’s Daoist beliefs weren’t merely abstract concepts; they served as practical tools for navigating life’s challenges. By examining specific poems, we can see how he applied Daoist principles to overcome adversity and cultivate inner peace.

1. The Influence of Daoism on Young Su Shi:

Su Shi grew up in Meishan, Sichuan, a region that is one of the birthplaces of Daoism. The Daoist atmosphere has long permeated the countryside and villages, influencing many

Sichuan scholars. While Li Bai was a typical representative of the Tang Dynasty who was deeply influenced by the Daoist spirit of Shu, Su Shi was a representative figure in the mid-Northern Song Dynasty, well-versed in Laozi and Zhuangzi's philosophies. The young and ambitious S. Su (2010c, p. 297) showed an initial understanding of Daoist philosophy in his early poetic creations, as seen in "The Stone Drum Song 石鼓歌":

*"Through the rise and fall of a hundred changes,
things remain at ease;
wealth and fame may last a moment,
but names endure.
Reflecting on the principles of things,
I sit and sigh, how can one's life last as long as yours?"*

In his early official career, Su Shi frequently performed Daoist rituals by imperial decree, leaving behind numerous Daoist poems, such as "The Temple of Lingering Clouds", "Following the Rhyme of Jiang Yingshu", and "The Pond of Condensed Auspiciousness". Although these commissioned works are somewhat shallow in content and artistic quality, they reflect Su Shi's attention to and participation in Daoism, which not only was limited to times of career setbacks but also stemmed from a deep social foundation and personal development process (A. Gao 2015). This deep understanding of Daoist thought enabled Su Shi to maintain a magnanimous and detached attitude in the face of life's ups and downs.

2. Su Shi's Magnanimous Attitude Beyond Personal Gain and Loss:

The "Wutai Poetry Case" was a significant turning point in Su Shi's life. In 1079, at the prime of his career, Su Shi was exiled to Huangzhou. Faced with this sudden demotion, Su Shi immersed himself in Daoist classics, exhibiting a magnanimous attitude beyond personal gain and loss, and an unperturbed spirit undisturbed by worldly affairs. After one rainy outing, S. Su (2010b, p. 351) wrote the timeless piece "Ding Feng Bo: Don't Listen to the Sound of Rain Beating on the Leaves 定風波·莫聽穿林打葉聲":

*"Looking back at the desolate place I came from, I return,
with no concern for rain or shine".*

Confronting past hardships, Su Shi used his magnanimous attitude to turn the past's trials into fleeting clouds, with neither rain nor shine able to shake his inner tranquility. This approach, deeply inspired by the Daoist principles of "governing by doing nothing that goes against nature" and "following the natural way", reflects Su Shi's profound understanding of the truths of the universe and life and his complete transcendence over worldly gains and losses. Su Shi faced life's challenges with a magnanimous attitude and viewed worldly troubles with a detached mindset, embodying the Daoist teaching that "contentment prevents disgrace, and knowing when to stop prevents danger".

3. Su Shi's Serene and Content Late Life:

In 1094, during Emperor Zhezong's reign, Su Shi was once again marginalized by the New Party, experiencing demotions from Yingzhou and Huizhou, and eventually being exiled to Danzhou in Hainan. Despite the harsh living conditions, "lacking adequate food and medicine", Su Shi managed to "enjoy writing, eating taro, and drinking water", forming deep friendships with the local people and the Li ethnic group. This period in Lingnan led to a shift in his literary style towards simplicity and naturalness. In his later years, Su Shi embraced poverty with joy. In "Using the Previous Rhyme to Congratulate Ziyong on the Birth of His Fourth Grandson 借前韻賀子由生第四孫", S. Su (2010c, p. 4964) wrote:

*"Without an official post,
I am light and free;
with children,
I have everything I need.
Inner joy lies in simple meals,
not in official rank".*

Su Shi believed that as long as his descendants were healthy, worked diligently, and embraced a simple rural life, they would find endless joy. In his later years, Su Shi often recited Tao Yuanming's poems, reflecting his admiration for simplicity, disdain for fame and fortune, and his yearning for the elegant poetry of the Wei and Jin dynasties.

In conclusion, Su Shi's application of Daoist principles is evident throughout his works. By accepting impermanence, finding refuge in nature, embracing simplicity, and maintaining equanimity, Su Shi transformed his challenges into opportunities for growth and inner peace. These case studies demonstrate how Daoism wasn't just a philosophical influence for Su Shi, but a practical guide for navigating the complexities of life.

6. The Integration of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism in Su Shi's Thought

In Su Shi's thought, the integration of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism is not only a crucial part of his personal philosophical system but also a significant source of inspiration for his literary and artistic creations. This integration reflects Su Shi's deep understanding and critical thinking regarding the core principles of the three teachings, as well as his balanced pursuit of personal cultivation and social responsibility within a complex political environment. By deeply exploring Confucian moral ethics, Buddhist views on impermanence, and Daoist harmony with nature, Su Shi developed a unique worldview that is both practical and contemplative. This philosophical synthesis enriched his literary works and provides valuable insights for modern society in terms of cross-cultural and interfaith dialogue.

6.1. Su Shi's Perception of the Relationship Among Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism

Su Shi is renowned for his exceptional ability to integrate the three dominant philosophical traditions of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism into a cohesive worldview. This section explores the historical context of this triad's integration, Su Shi's unique understanding of each tradition, and the influence of his personal experiences on his philosophical synthesis.

1. The Historical Background of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism Integration

Before the Song Dynasty (960–1279), Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism each developed their own systems, basing themselves on their respective teachings while incorporating elements from other religions to enrich and expand their doctrines and increase their influence in the ideological realm. However, this integration was more about coexistence rather than true fusion. Entering the Song Dynasty, in the new social environment, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism began to interpenetrate and supplement each other due to the common need for survival and development, gradually forming a "three teachings in one" pattern with Confucianism as the main body and Buddhism and Daoism as supporting wings. During this period, Song Dynasty scholars, in the cultural context of "three teachings in one", integrated the core principles of the three teachings, especially the philosophy of life, exhibiting a mindset different from previous generations (Y. Zhang 2018).

Confucianism, with its emphasis on social harmony, moral integrity, and governance, had long been the cornerstone of Chinese society. However, the rise of Neo-Confucianism during the Song Dynasty introduced new interpretations and debates that enriched Confucian thought (Bol 2003). Concurrently, Buddhism, which had been steadily growing since its introduction to China in the first century CE, continued to influence the intellectual elite with its teachings on impermanence and enlightenment. Daoism, deeply rooted in Chinese culture, emphasized natural harmony and spontaneous action, providing a counterbalance to the more structured doctrines of Confucianism and Buddhism.

Su Shi grew up in an environment saturated with these diverse intellectual traditions. His family, particularly his father Su Xun and his brother Su Zhe, were accomplished scholars who immersed him in Confucian classics from a young age (Zhu et al. 2017). This early exposure laid the foundation for his lifelong engagement with Confucian ideals. As Su Shi matured, his intellectual curiosity led him to explore Buddhist and Daoist texts, further broadening his philosophical horizons.

2. Su Shi's Unique Understanding of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism

Su Shi's approach to Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism was not one of simple acceptance but of critical integration, where he sought to harmonize the core principles of each tradition into a unified worldview.

Confucianism: Su Shi adhered to Confucianism's emphasis on moral integrity, social responsibility, and governance. He believed in the Confucian ideal of self-cultivation as a means to achieve personal virtue and societal harmony. This belief is evident in his numerous official posts, where he sought to implement policies that reflected Confucian ethics. Su Shi's writings frequently highlight the importance of righteousness, filial piety, and loyalty, core tenets of Confucian thought (R. Wang 2024).

Buddhism: Su Shi's engagement with Buddhism was profound, particularly its teachings on impermanence and the quest for spiritual liberation. His poetry and prose often reflect Buddhist themes, such as the transient nature of life and the pursuit of inner peace. For instance, Su Shi's poem "Ding Feng Bo: Don't Listen to the Sound of Rain Beating on the Leaves 定風波·莫聽穿林打葉聲" embodies the Buddhist concept of accepting life's fluctuations with equanimity (Egan 1994). Su Shi's understanding of Buddhism provided him with a philosophical refuge during times of political turmoil and personal adversity.

Daoism: Daoism's influence on Su Shi is evident in his appreciation for nature and the principle of *wu wei* 無為 (non-action). He often sought solace in nature, finding inspiration and tranquility in its simplicity and beauty. Daoist thought encouraged Su Shi to embrace spontaneity and to align his actions with the natural order, a perspective that permeates his literary and artistic expressions. His famous poem "Shui Diao Ge Tou- When Will the Bright Moon Appear 水調歌頭·明月幾時有" illustrates this Daoist inclination towards natural harmony and self-reflection (Z. Zhang 2000).

3. The Influence of Su Shi's Personal Experiences on His Philosophical Synthesis

Su Shi's personal experiences, particularly his tumultuous political career and frequent exiles, significantly shaped his philosophical outlook. These experiences forced him to confront the impermanence and unpredictability of life, deepening his engagement with Buddhist and Daoist principles.

Political Setbacks: Su Shi's career was marked by numerous political setbacks, including multiple exiles due to his outspoken criticism of governmental policies. These experiences of loss and displacement prompted Su Shi to reflect deeply on the nature of power, ambition, and personal integrity. His writings during these periods often reveal a synthesis of Confucian duty and Buddhist detachment, advocating for a balanced approach to life's challenges.

Exile and Reflection: The most significant period of philosophical reflection for Su Shi occurred during his exile in Huangzhou (1080–1084). Isolated from the political center, Su Shi immersed himself in nature, Buddhist meditation, and Daoist philosophy. This period of contemplation is vividly captured in his prose work "Letter to Bi Zhongju" (答畢仲舉書), where he articulates his understanding of life's transient nature and the importance of inner tranquility (Huang 2021). The hardships of exile strengthened Su Shi's conviction in the interrelatedness of Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist teachings as guiding principles for a fulfilling life.

Philosophical Reflections in Later Works: In his later works, Su Shi's integration of the three traditions became more pronounced. His poem "Recalling the Past at Red Cliff" (念奴嬌·赤壁懷古) serves as an excellent example of this synthesis. The poem reflects on the historical site of the Battle of Red Cliffs, contemplating the ephemeral nature of human achievements (Buddhist influence), the enduring beauty of nature (Daoist influence), and the importance of learning from history to cultivate virtue (Confucian influence) (W. Gao 2009).

Su Shi's intellectual journey exemplifies the harmonious integration of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism. His ability to weave together the moral principles of Confucianism, the spiritual insights of Buddhism, and the natural harmony of Daoism into a unified

philosophical framework is a testament to his intellectual versatility and depth. Su Shi's synthesis of these traditions not only provided him with a resilient personal philosophy but also offers valuable lessons for contemporary society on the importance of embracing diverse perspectives and finding common ground among different belief systems.

Through his life and works, Su Shi demonstrated that the integration of multiple philosophical traditions can lead to a richer and more nuanced understanding of the human experience. His legacy continues to inspire those who seek to navigate the complexities of modern life with wisdom, compassion, and an appreciation for the interconnectedness of all things.

6.2. *The Interweaving of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism in Su Shi's Works*

Su Shi masterfully integrated Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist philosophies into his poetry, prose, calligraphy, and paintings. This section delves into how these three philosophies intertwine in Su Shi's works, examining key poems, essays, and artistic creations to illustrate this philosophical synthesis.

1. Philosophical Integration in Poetry

"Record of the Supernal Terrace 超然臺記" is an exemplary work where Su Shi reflects on his inner thoughts and the external world through a harmonious blend of Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist philosophies. The essay, written during his exile in Huangzhou, showcases his introspective journey and philosophical reflections. Su Shi's use of the term "supernal" indicates a transcendence beyond the mundane, resonating with the Buddhist idea of enlightenment. The Daoist influence is evident in his depiction of nature and the serene landscape that surrounds the terrace, emphasizing a harmonious relationship with the natural world (Qing and Niu 2015). Confucian values emerge through his reflections on his duties and the moral obligations that define his character, portraying a balanced life guided by ethical principles.

In "Jiangchengzi: Recalling the Night of the Hunting Trip to Mizhou 江城子·密州出獵", Su Shi intricately weaves together the three philosophies. The poem begins with a vivid depiction of a hunting scene, symbolizing his physical and metaphorical journey. The Confucian aspect is reflected in the discipline and valor associated with hunting, paralleling the virtues of a gentleman and his commitment to societal duties (Bai 2021). The Buddhist theme is evident in Su Shi's contemplation of the transient nature of life, as he reflects on the fleeting moments of joy and the impermanence of success. The Daoist influence appears in his appreciation of the natural environment, finding solace and wisdom in the simplicity and spontaneity of the landscape.

Other works by Su Shi also exhibit a seamless blend of philosophical thoughts. For example, his poem "Ding Feng Bo: A Gift to Wang Dingguo's Maidservant Yu Niang upon Returning from the South Sea 定風波·南海歸贈王定國侍人寓娘" captures the essence of Buddhist detachment and Daoist natural harmony. The line "Where my heart finds peace, there is my homeland" reflects his resolute attitude in the face of life's adversities, combining Buddhist serenity with Daoist non-action. Similarly, his poem "Spring Night 春宵" reveals a deep appreciation for the fleeting beauty of life, a concept rooted in both Buddhist and Daoist thought, while still upholding the Confucian appreciation for the ordered progression of time and seasons.

2. Multiple Philosophical Perspectives in Prose

In "The Stele for Master Han Wen at Chaozhou 潮州韓文公廟碑", Su Shi honors Han Yu, a great Confucian scholar, while incorporating Buddhist and Daoist elements. The inscription is a testament to Han Yu's virtuous life and contributions to Confucian scholarship. Su Shi praises Han Yu's moral integrity and educational efforts, reflecting Confucian values (Yu'e Lin 2022). At the same time, Su Shi acknowledges the transitory nature of life and the pursuit of spiritual enlightenment, echoing Buddhist sentiments. The Daoist influence is apparent in his description of Han Yu's peaceful demeanor and his harmonious

relationship with nature, suggesting that true wisdom lies in the integration of all three philosophies (L. Yu 2022).

“Record of the Pavilion of Releasing the Crane 放鶴亭記” exemplifies Su Shi’s ability to merge philosophical ideas in his prose. This piece, written to commemorate the release of a crane into the wild, is imbued with Daoist themes of freedom and natural harmony. Su Shi’s reflections on the crane’s liberation symbolize the Daoist ideal of returning to one’s true nature and the pursuit of a carefree existence. The Confucian influence is visible in his acknowledgment of the ceremonial aspect and the moral implications of the act, while the Buddhist element is present in his contemplation of the transient nature of life and the interconnectedness of all beings (H. Gao 2015).

3. Philosophical Imagery in Calligraphy and Painting

Su Shi’s calligraphy is not merely a display of artistic skill but a profound expression of his philosophical beliefs. His brushwork embodies the spontaneity and fluidity of Daoist thought, emphasizing naturalness and unrestrained creativity. In the calligraphy piece “Letter to Ruoxu 與若虛帖”, Su Shi’s fluid brushstrokes capture the essence of Daoist *wu wei*, or effortless action. The characters seem to dance on the paper, reflecting a harmonious balance between control and freedom, which is a core principle of Daoist thought (S. Su 2002, pp. 2–6).

Su Shi’s paintings also reveal his philosophical inclinations. His depiction of landscapes often includes serene natural settings that evoke a sense of peace and contemplation. In “Pine and Rock 松石圖”, Su Shi illustrates the resilience of pine trees and the steadfastness of rocks, symbols of endurance and stability in both Daoist and Confucian thought. The painting’s simplicity and elegance highlight the Daoist appreciation for nature’s inherent beauty and the Confucian respect for perseverance and strength (Chu 2020). Additionally, the tranquility conveyed in his landscapes reflects the Buddhist pursuit of inner peace and enlightenment.

Su Shi’s works demonstrate a profound integration of Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist philosophies, each contributing to a rich tapestry of thought and expression. His ability to harmonize these diverse traditions in his poetry, prose, calligraphy, and painting reflects his intellectual depth and his quest for a balanced and meaningful life. Through his literary and artistic endeavors, Su Shi offers a timeless lesson on the value of philosophical integration and the pursuit of wisdom across different traditions.

6.3. *The Philosophical Significance of Su Shi’s Integration of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism*

Su Shi is renowned for his profound ability to synthesize the three major Chinese philosophical traditions: Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism. This section examines the philosophical framework of this integration, its theoretical foundations, and the implications for contemporary society and individual lives.

1. Achieving Integration in Su Shi’s Thought

Su Shi’s integration of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism was not a mere amalgamation of ideas but a deeply reflective synthesis that sought harmony and balance among these diverse philosophies. He believed that the core principles of each tradition could complement and enhance one another, leading to a more holistic understanding of life and the universe.

Confucianism, with its emphasis on moral integrity, social responsibility, and governance, provided the ethical foundation for Su Shi’s thought. Buddhism contributed the spiritual dimension, focusing on impermanence, suffering, and the path to enlightenment. Daoism offered a perspective on natural harmony, simplicity, and spontaneity. Su Shi’s writings and actions reflected a seamless blend of these principles, creating a unique philosophical outlook that was both practical and contemplative.

2. Theoretical Basis for Integration

The theoretical basis for Su Shi's integration of these philosophies lies in the shared goal of achieving personal and societal harmony. Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism all emphasize self-cultivation and the development of inner virtues. Su Shi saw these paths as complementary rather than contradictory. For instance, the Confucian practice of self-cultivation can be enriched by the Buddhist practice of meditation and the Daoist practice of aligning oneself with the natural order.

This integrative approach is evident in Su Shi's poetry and prose, where he often reflects on the transient nature of life, a theme rooted in Buddhism, while also advocating for righteous actions and moral integrity, central to Confucianism. His appreciation for nature and the concept of *wu wei* (non-action) reflect his Daoist inclinations, showing how these philosophies interweave in his thought process (Mair 2010).

3. Insights for Modern Interfaith Dialogue

Su Shi's approach to integrating Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism offers valuable insights for modern interfaith dialogue. In an increasingly pluralistic world, his philosophy underscores the importance of finding common ground among different belief systems. Su Shi's thought suggests that mutual respect and understanding can lead to a harmonious coexistence, where diverse religious and philosophical traditions enrich rather than conflict with one another.

For example, the Confucian emphasis on ethical behavior can find commonality with the Buddhist and Daoist focus on inner peace and harmony. This integrative perspective can foster a more inclusive and tolerant society, where different traditions are seen as various paths leading to the same goal of human flourishing.

4. Achieving Multicultural Coexistence in Contemporary Society

In contemporary society, Su Shi's philosophical integration highlights the potential for achieving multicultural coexistence. His thought encourages individuals and communities to embrace diversity and learn from different cultural and philosophical traditions. This approach can help mitigate conflicts arising from cultural misunderstandings and promote a more harmonious and integrated global community.

Su Shi's emphasis on balance and harmony can be applied to contemporary issues such as environmental sustainability, social justice, and mental health. By drawing on the strengths of Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist teachings, modern society can develop more holistic and effective solutions to these challenges (Yao 2000).

5. Contemporary Value of Su Shi's Philosophical Integration

Su Shi's integration of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism holds significant contemporary value. His thought offers a model for integrating diverse perspectives to create a more balanced and enriched worldview. This integration can inspire individuals to cultivate inner virtues, foster harmonious relationships, and engage in ethical actions that benefit society.

In the context of globalization, Su Shi's philosophy provides a framework for navigating the complexities of modern life. His emphasis on self-cultivation, inner peace, and harmony with nature can guide individuals in their personal development and interactions with the world. By embracing the wisdom of Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist traditions, people can find deeper meaning and purpose in their lives (Ching 1993).

6. Drawing Wisdom from Su Shi's Philosophical Integration

Modern individuals can draw valuable wisdom from Su Shi's philosophical integration to address contemporary challenges. His thought encourages a balanced approach to life, where ethical behavior, spiritual cultivation, and harmony with nature are all essential components of well-being.

For instance, the Confucian principle of self-cultivation can guide individuals in their personal and professional development, emphasizing the importance of moral integrity

and social responsibility. The Buddhist practice of mindfulness and meditation can help individuals manage stress and achieve inner peace. The Daoist appreciation for nature and simplicity can inspire a more sustainable and mindful way of living (Kohn 2019).

By integrating these principles into their daily lives, individuals can develop a more holistic and resilient approach to modern challenges. Su Shi's thought provides a timeless source of wisdom that can help people navigate the complexities of contemporary life with grace and balance.

7. Interreligious Harmony and Its Contemporary Relevance

Su Shi is renowned for his integration of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism. In his poem "Zi You's Birthday 子由生日", he wrote, "Since childhood, we have studied Confucian classics, in addition to delving into the teachings of Daoism and Buddhism 君少與我師皇墳，旁資老聃釋迦文" (S. Su 2010c, p. 4291). He seamlessly blended these seemingly disparate philosophical traditions to form his unique and rich philosophical system, which he applied to both his life and works. In this part, we will explore Su Shi's inclusive attitude towards different religious and philosophical traditions, and its implications for contemporary society, especially in terms of interfaith dialogue and peaceful coexistence. We will focus on several aspects: How did Su Shi integrate Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism? What lessons can Su Shi's attitude of cultural inclusiveness offer to contemporary society? How does Su Shi's intellectual legacy inspire interfaith dialogue and peaceful coexistence? Through a deep analysis of Su Shi's thoughts and practices, we hope to demonstrate how he transcended narrow doctrinalism, embraced multiculturalism with an open mind, and contributed his wisdom to building a more harmonious world.

7.1. A Tapestry of Traditions: Su Shi's Harmonious Embrace of Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist Teachings

In 1082, four years after Su Shi was exiled to Huangzhou due to the "Wutai Poetry Case", he composed the timeless masterpiece "First Ode on the Red Cliff 前赤壁賦". During this period, Su Shi experienced a significant turning point in his life. His Confucian ideal of "bringing the emperor to the level of Yao and Shun" faced a severe setback, and the Buddhist and Daoist classics he had read in his early years began to merge into his life and thoughts. "First Ode on the Red Cliff" thus became a literary embodiment of Su Shi's integration of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism.

1. The Manifestation of Confucian Thought in "First Ode on the Red Cliff":

In "First Ode on the Red Cliff", S. Su (2010d, p. 27) depicts a scene where he and his guest sail beneath the Red Cliff under the moonlight, showcasing his concern for personal morality and resilience. Even in adversity, Su Shi can still recite the moonlit poems and the verses about the graceful lady from the Book of Songs, demonstrating the Confucian emphasis on self-cultivation and the pursuit of virtue. Despite being in exile, Su Shi's mind remains on the state and he does not forget his political responsibilities, reflecting the Confucian ideal of active engagement in worldly affairs. For example, in the text, Su Shi writes, "Boundless is my longing; I look towards the beauty far away in the heavens", expressing his unfulfilled ambition to realize the Confucian ideal of "governing the country and bringing peace to the world". Additionally, Su Shi's reflections on historical figures such as Cao Cao and Zhou Yu, as well as his contemplation of his own situation, also highlight his respect for Confucian ethics and morality. By invoking Cao Cao's ambitions and achievements, Su Shi expresses his own feelings of enduring concern for the world despite his setbacks, embodying the Confucian ideals of dedication to the state, society, and self-cultivation.

2. The Manifestation of Buddhist Thought in "First Ode on the Red Cliff":

Buddhist thought is a crucial component of Su Shi's philosophical outlook, especially after his exile to Huangzhou, where Buddhism became a significant pillar of his spiritual support. In facing life's adversities, Su Shi drew upon the Buddhist concept of "Prajna

Emptiness” in “First Ode on the Red Cliff” to seek spiritual solace. Su Shi writes, “From the perspective of the unchanging, things and I are endless”. By viewing the ever-changing “things and I” from the standpoint of unchanging “emptiness”, he perceives both people and objects as material forms, with life and death being natural transformations of matter. Based on this understanding, Su Shi asserts that all phenomena, including the ups and downs of officialdom, are transient and fleeting; only inner calm can alleviate the suffering of life. This aligns with the Buddhist idea of “Prajna Emptiness”, which helps Su Shi find peace amidst his exile, allowing him to achieve inner tranquility.

3. The Manifestation of Daoist Thought in “First Ode on the Red Cliff”:

Daoist thought also holds significant importance in Su Shi’s works. In “First Ode on the Red Cliff”, Su Shi presents a dreamlike natural scene where he and his friends sail and drink under the moonlight, immersed in the serene environment of gentle breezes and calm waters, experiencing a harmonious unity with nature. This Daoist philosophy of “wu wei” (non-action) and “harmony between man and nature” provided Su Shi with spiritual solace and a sense of freedom during his exile. For example, in the text, he writes, “Vast and boundless, like riding the wind, not knowing where it stops; drifting and detached, as if living apart from the world, transcending and becoming immortal”, and “Embracing the moon and roaming with the immortals”. Through these passages, Su Shi depicts a state of detachment and carefree enjoyment, reflecting his longing for a life free from worldly concerns. These descriptions not only showcase the beauty of nature but also combine natural landscapes with life philosophy, expressing his desire for an unrestrained life. In this state, Su Shi could relieve his mental stress and attain inner peace and satisfaction, maintaining a broad-minded and optimistic attitude even in adversity. This further illustrates the profound influence of Daoist thought on his spiritual world.

Su Shi’s “First Ode on the Red Cliff” is a remarkable testament to his ability to harmoniously integrate Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist philosophies into his worldview. This synthesis of ideas not only provided him with the resilience and wisdom to navigate the hardships of his exile but also enriched his literary expression. The Confucian emphasis on moral integrity and social responsibility is evident in Su Shi’s unwavering concern for the state and his reflection on historical exemplars. At the same time, Daoist principles of harmony with nature and “wu wei” (non-action) offered him spiritual solace, allowing him to find peace and satisfaction in the beauty of the natural world. Additionally, Buddhist notions of impermanence and detachment from material desires helped Su Shi attain a deeper understanding of life’s transience and fostered an inner tranquility that transcended his external circumstances. By weaving these diverse philosophical strands together, Su Shi created a tapestry of thought that not only defined his personal beliefs but also left an enduring legacy in Chinese literature. His works demonstrate how the integration of multiple religious traditions can lead to a more profound and holistic understanding of the human experience, offering valuable insights that continue to resonate through the ages.

7.2. Lessons for a Fragmented World: Learning from Su Shi’s Embrace of Diversity

In a world increasingly divided by religious and ideological differences, Su Shi’s approach to philosophical diversity offers valuable lessons for contemporary society. Here’s how Su Shi’s model can inform our approach to navigating a world of competing belief systems:

1. Su Shi’s Open-mindedness and Intellectual Curiosity:

Su Shi’s open-mindedness was manifested in his inclusiveness and acceptance of different schools of thought. He was well-versed in Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist classics and was able to integrate them to form his own unique ideological system. His literary works reflect both the Confucian spirit of engagement with the world and the Buddhist detachment and ease, as well as the natural interest of Daoism. This open-mindedness allowed him to constantly break through tradition and achieve innovative breakthroughs in

literature and art. Su Shi's intellectual curiosity was reflected in his exploration and pursuit of the unknown world. He traveled extensively throughout his life, leaving his footprints all over the south of the Yangtze River, and had a deep understanding of both natural landscapes and humanistic customs. He was full of curiosity about natural phenomena and often depicted strange mountains and rivers in his poems and prose, expressing his love for nature. He was also very concerned about social life, and in his poems and prose, one can see his concern for the suffering of the people and his thinking about social change. Su Shi's open-mindedness and intellectual curiosity were important reasons for his great achievements in literature, philosophy, and art. In today's society, with the development of globalization, exchanges between different cultures are becoming increasingly frequent. Cultivating an open mind similar to Su Shi's has important practical significance for promoting understanding and respect between different civilizations.

2. Focusing on Shared Values:

Despite the unique philosophical systems and doctrines of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism, Su Shi had the insight to discover the underlying commonalities among them. He deeply understood that whether it was the benevolence, righteousness, and etiquette advocated by Confucianism, the compassion preached by Buddhism, or the harmony between nature and humanity emphasized by Daoism, all three traditions jointly stressed the importance of moral behavior, compassion for others, and the concept of harmonious coexistence with the surrounding environment. This ideology is vividly reflected in S. Su's (2010c, p. 848) poems and essays. For instance, in "Drinking on the West Lake in Rainy and Sunny Weather 飲湖上初晴後雨二首", he wrote,

*"I want to compare the West Lake to Xishi.
She looks equally charming whether she is lightly or heavily made up".*

This not only praises the natural beauty of the West Lake but also reflects Su Shi's unique understanding of harmonious beauty, which suggests that regardless of the situation, one should coexist harmoniously with nature, embodying a philosophical ideology of adapting to circumstances and integrating with nature. In "Shui Diao Ge Tou- When Will the Bright Moon Appear 水調歌頭·明月幾時有", Su Shi expresses his cherished aspiration for deep human connections through the lines

*"I only wish that all people could live a long life,
so that we could all admire the beautiful moon together,
even though we are a thousand miles apart".*

In our pluralistic era, by recognizing and bridging religious and philosophical divides, we can better understand and respect different cultural traditions. By focusing on core principles such as kindness, justice, and environmental responsibility, we can build a bridge of understanding and cooperation to jointly construct a more harmonious and beautiful world.

3. Emphasis on Personal Experience:

Su Shi's acceptance and integration of various philosophies indeed went beyond the academic level, deeply rooted in his personal experiences and life practices. He wholeheartedly devoted himself to these profound traditions, drawing wisdom and strength from them. Su Shi's (S. Su 2010b, p. 361) "Huan Xi Sha: Visiting the Qingquan Temple in Qishui 浣溪沙·遊蕪水清泉寺" deeply reflects his unique understanding of the integration of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism. In the poem, "Who says there's no second youth in life? The stream in front of the door can still flow westward!" demonstrates the calmness in the face of changes advocated by Buddhism. By comparing the westward flow of water to the possibility of rejuvenation in life, it showcases Buddhism's attitude of following the natural flow of life. Meanwhile, the poem delicately depicts the beauty of nature with lines like "The short buds of orchids soak in the stream below the mountain, the sandy path among the pines is clean without mud", reflecting the Daoist pursuit of

harmonious coexistence with nature. And, throughout his life, Su Shi paid attention to people's livelihoods. Even during his exile, he was committed to improving the lives of the common people. His poems often express concern for the fate of the country, reflecting the responsibility and commitment of a Confucian scholar. This poem not only showcases Su Shi's love for nature and his understanding of life but also highlights his unique style of integrating Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism into personal experiences. It provides important insights into understanding the value of different belief systems and how to establish deep connections with them.

By embracing Su Shi's model of open-mindedness, shared values, personal experience, contemporary society can navigate the complexities of religious and philosophical diversity. His approach offers a valuable roadmap towards promoting peace, understanding, and a more harmonious world.

7.3. Cultivating Common Ground: Su Shi's Legacy for Interfaith Dialogue and Peaceful Coexistence

Su Shi's life and works offer a powerful model for promoting interfaith dialogue and peaceful coexistence in today's world. By drawing on his approach to reconciling seemingly disparate philosophies, we can cultivate a more fruitful and productive approach to interfaith relations.

1. Finding Strength in Diversity: A Multifaceted Approach to Peacebuilding:

Su Shi's ability to integrate different doctrines provides valuable lessons for contemporary peacebuilding efforts. Just as he borrowed from various philosophical strengths to create a comprehensive worldview, interfaith dialogue can benefit from incorporating diverse peacebuilding approaches. For instance, Su Shi combined Confucian concepts of benevolence, Daoist ideas of natural harmony, and Buddhist theories of prajna emptiness in his works. Through this approach, he not only promoted an understanding of cultural diversity but also provided a philosophical foundation for resolving social conflicts. In modern times, this method can be expanded to include religious doctrines, conflict resolution techniques, social development initiatives, and educational programs that promote tolerance and understanding, together building a peaceful societal environment. By studying how Su Shi integrated multiple cultures in his art and life, we can better understand how diversity becomes a driving force for peace and development in a globalized context.

2. Personal Connections Foster Empathy and Respect:

Throughout his life, Su Shi faced many hardships, including multiple exiles to various places. These turbulent experiences allowed him to deeply engage with the diverse local customs and cultural traditions of each area, fostering a profound understanding and respect for multiculturalism. This attitude is not only reflected in his life philosophy but also in his poetry, as exemplified by the poem "Inscription on the Wall of the West Forest 題西林壁". In this poem, S. Su (2010c, p. 2578) writes:

*"Viewed from the side, it becomes a peak;
from the front, a range.
From afar or near, high or low,
each view is different",*

which is not only a vivid depiction of Mount Lu but also a metaphor for Su Shi's unique perspective on the three teachings of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism. He realized that viewing these philosophical traditions from different angles reveals their unique values and significances. He did not favor one ideology over another but approached them with an open mind to experience and integrate. He understood the Confucian focus on the ethics of daily human relations, grasped the Buddhist perspective on transcending the cycle of life and death, and appreciated the Daoist wisdom of following nature. Su Shi's inclusive attitude stemmed from his empathy for these diverse philosophical traditions, respecting the unique value of each, thereby flexibly applying them in his life to achieve

inner balance and social harmony. His approach not only enriched his own spiritual world but also served as a model for later generations on how to handle the relationships between different philosophical ideas.

3. The Power of Artistic Expression in Bridging Divides:

Su Shi was not only a prolific writer and poet but also an outstanding calligrapher and painter who expressed his philosophical insights through various forms of art. His poetry, calligraphy, and paintings achieved great artistic heights and conveyed profound life philosophies and unique perspectives on the natural world. For instance, his calligraphic works include “Huangzhou Cold Food Poem Scroll 黃州寒食詩帖” (S. Su 2002, p. 17), reflecting Confucian thought; “Dongting Spring Colors Assignment 洞庭春色賦” (S. Su 2002, p. 34), embodying Daoist ideas; and “Qizhou Changqing True Aspect Monastery Relic Pagoda Inscription 齊州長清真相院舍利塔銘” (S. Su 2002, p. 133), expressing Buddhist thought. His calligraphy, not confined by traditional rules and characterized by freedom and openness, integrates the thoughts of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism, demonstrating his cultural cultivation and artistic talent. Similarly, employing artistic expression as a bridge between cultures can effectively facilitate interfaith dialogue, as art, music, and literature possess the ability to transcend language and cultural barriers, evoke resonance, and awaken shared emotions. This emotional resonance helps foster connections and mutual understanding between different cultures.

By following Su Shi’s patterns of mutual understanding, shared values, multifaceted approaches, and artistic expression, interfaith dialogue can become a powerful tool for promoting peaceful coexistence in a world where religious and ideological differences are intensifying. Su Shi’s legacy reminds us that true peace is not built on uniformity, but on appreciating the richness of human experience and finding common ground amidst diversity.

8. Conclusions: A Tapestry of Harmony Woven through Time

Reflecting on the life and works of Su Shi, it is evident that his intellectual and artistic endeavors were not merely products of his time but also enduring contributions to the concept of interreligious harmony and philosophical integration. This paper has demonstrated that Su Shi’s approach to synthesizing Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist principles offers profound insights for contemporary discussions on religious tolerance, cultural diversity, and peacebuilding.

Su Shi’s relevance today is underscored by his model of embracing diversity through his scholarly pursuits and personal practices. By examining his interactions with the philosophical traditions of his era, we find a man deeply committed to understanding and learning from different perspectives. His legacy provides a valuable framework for addressing the challenges of a globalized world, where cultural and religious conflicts persist.

Su Shi’s approach teaches us the importance of open-mindedness in a world often divided by ideological and religious boundaries. His ability to find common philosophical threads among Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism exemplifies the potential for a harmonious coexistence through shared human values. These include the pursuit of ethical integrity, compassion, and an appreciation for the natural world. Such values transcend specific cultural or religious contexts and can serve as the foundation for building a more inclusive global community.

Moreover, Su Shi’s life itself serves as a testament to the strength derived from philosophical diversity. His resilience in the face of personal and political adversity, fueled by his broad philosophical understanding, offers a blueprint for how individuals today might navigate life’s challenges. Through his poetry and prose, Su Shi articulated a worldview that celebrated the richness of life’s experiences and advocated for a balanced approach to existence, integrating action with contemplation and engagement with detachment.

His artistic legacy also provides a powerful medium for bridging divides. Su Shi’s poetry, calligraphy, and painting did not just reflect his mastery of arts but were also expressions of his philosophical ideals. Art, transcending language and cultural barriers, has

the unique capacity to evoke empathy, stir emotions, and foster understanding among diverse peoples. In this way, Su Shi's work continues to inspire not only through its aesthetic and scholarly merits but also as a catalyst for intercultural dialogue and understanding.

This exploration of Su Shi's contributions reveals that his wisdom is not confined to the historical and cultural context of the Song Dynasty but resonates with the universal quest for peace and understanding in the human condition. His life and works encourage us to seek a deeper engagement with the world's rich tapestry of beliefs and to find beauty and wisdom in its diversity. Su Shi's legacy is a reminder that in the multitude of worldviews and the vast expanse of human experience, there lies a potent opportunity for harmony and mutual enrichment.

In conclusion, Su Shi's synthesis of philosophical and religious insights continues to offer valuable lessons for fostering a more peaceful, understanding, and vibrant world. His embrace of diverse intellectual traditions and his profound engagement with the natural and cultural landscapes around him underscore the enduring relevance of his approach to life and learning. As we navigate the complexities of modern interfaith relations and seek pathways toward peaceful coexistence, Su Shi's example shines as a beacon of intellectual integration and cultural inclusivity. His legacy not only enriches our understanding of the past but also illuminates potential pathways for a more harmonious future.

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- ¹ All translations are my own and rely on S. Su (2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2010d). All translations from recent scholarly works in Chinese herein are also my own.

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