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Su Dong-Po's Bamboo and Paul Cézanne's Mountain

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Su Dong-Po (1037-1101) of the Song Dynasty is arguably the most well-known poet and writer in China. He is also a distinguished painter; he liked to paint bamboos and rocks. Unlike his contemporaries and painters before him, the leaves in Su's bamboo painting are not necessarily attached to the stem. Paul Cézanne (1839-1906), a French post-impressionist, is recognized by Picasso, Matisse and many others as the father of modern art. He went beyond impressionism and painted many things including apples. Both these two artists tried to go beyond the appearance and show the *essence* of the objects they painted, in their own new ways. It was not by accident that these two painters—one from the East and the other from the West, separated from each other by about 800 years—had the same idea about painting. There must be something basic behind this. As shown in this chapter, the mechanism behind their techniques is based on how we see things, the cognitive science of vision in the human brain. The fact that Su's style was not adopted as mainstream, unlike that of Cézanne, is discussed; it is related to the unique nature of China's ultra-stable feudal system in the past, in which science and technology are implicitly or explicitly discouraged. Finally, the possible origin of Dong-Po Pork, for which Su is also famous for, is presented in an appendix.

17.1 Introduction

Su Dong-Po (1037-1101) from China and Paul Cézanne (1839-1906) from France (Fig. 17.1) lived about 800 years apart from each other, in two different continents. Both are pioneering painters. While Su is

primarily a poet and writer, Cézanne is shy in writing [Cézanne, 1995, p. 9].



Fig. 17.1. Su Dong-Po (left) and Paul Cézanne (right, c. 1861). Su designed the hat he was wearing.

The preferred painting subjects of these two artists are quite different. Su painted mainly bamboo and rock, while Cézanne did still life, landscape, portrait, and nude (which he did without live models, for unavailability or his shyness, or both).

Both of them were nature lovers. Yet, this is not the only thing the two had in common, in spite of their very different personal character and career (see Sections 17.2.1 and 17.3.1 below). In their paintings, they were not satisfied to reproduce the likeness of the objects they painted, but instead strived to capture the very essence of those painting objects. And they invented new ways to do that.

Technically, Su used ink brushes and his black-and-white paintings were always done with simple strokes. In his bamboo paintings, some of the leaves are detached from the stem, creating a style quite different from those of his contemporaries. For Cézanne, he used oil brushes. His paintings were done with swift strokes with “planes” of color, reducing the objects to their basic geometric forms as he visualized them. And in so doing, he ushered in the era of modern arts.

In the following, the life and career, art view and their innovative painting style are presented, respectively, in Sections 17.2 and 17.3. The neurological basis of their art is discussed in Section 17.4. In Section 17.5, the fate of these two artists' painting styles, with the social background, is contrasted and explained. Finally, since many Chinese learn about Su's name through Dong-Po Pork, if not his arts, our findings about the origin of this delicious Chinese dish—including the cooking recipe—is given in an appendix.

17.2 Su Dong-Po and His Bamboo

Su Dong-Po's career, art view and painting innovations are presented.

17.2.1 Su's Life and Career

Su Dong-Po,¹ a poet, writer, painter and calligrapher, lived in the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127). His life and career are summarized in Table 17.1.

Table 17.1. Chronology of Su Dong-Po's life and career.²

Year	Age (yr)	Event
1037	0*	Born Jan. 8 in Meishan, Sichuan Province
1054	17	Married first wife, Wang Fu, 14 years old
1056	19	Ranked no. 2 in <i>juren</i> national exam. in capital, Changan
1057	20	Ranked no. 2 in <i>jinshi</i> national exam. in Changan; mother died; returned home
1061	24	Got his first job as assistant magistrate in Fengxiang
1064	27	Met Wen Tong, a bamboo painter

¹ Su is the family name of Su Shi; his literary name is Su Dong-Po, which is spelled differently in old literature as Su Tungpo [Lin, 1947], Su Tung-p'o [Sirén, 1935; Watson, 1994] or Soo Doong-Bô (*The Columbia Encyclopedia*, 2004, Columbia University Press). A short account of his life is given in [Watson, 1994, pp. 3-12]; a long account, [Lin, 1947]. (Note that in Lin's book, he records lunar calendar dates in solar calendar terms.) A thin Chinese book on his life and arts, with many of his calligraphy reproduced and a very useful chronology included, is [Yang, 2006]; a thick Chinese book is [Li, 1996].

² Adapted from [Yang, 2006, pp. 110-121]. For the same year, the number listed in our Age column differs from that in Yang's book, since he follows the Chinese custom in age counting (for example, he lists Su as one year old in 1036). Similarly, in our Event column, we reduce the age number by two from that in Yang's book.

1065	28	Became Secretary of Dept. of History in capital; wife Wang Fu died at age 25
1066	29	Father died; returned home
1068	31	Married second wife, Wang Run-Zhi, 19 years old; moved family to Changan; resumed Secretary of Dept. of History
1071	34	Opposed emperor's reform movement; sent to Hangzhou as deputy magistrate and stayed there for 3 years
1074	37	Took in Wang Chaoyun, age 10, as servant; moved to Mizhou as magistrate
1077	40	Became Xuzhou magistrate
1079	42	Became Huzhou magistrate; in prison (about 6 months) for writing poems and essays deemed politically incorrect
1080	43	Banished to Huangzhou, with a job but no pay; ¹ took in Wang Chao-Yun as concubine
1084	47	Assigned to Ruzhou; visited Lu Mountain in transit
1085	48	Assigned to Changzhou, then Dengzhou, finally back to Changan as Secretary to Premier's office
1086	49	Became Secretary to Emperor (<i>hanlin</i>) for 3 years
1089	52	Asked and got transferred to Hangzhou (due to political conflicts in office)
1091	54	Back to Changan as Minister of civil service (for 3 months); asked and got transferred to Yingzhou
1092	55	Transferred to Yangzhou; returned to Changan as Minister of war and Minister of education; Empress, his political support, died
1093	56	Second wife Wang Run-Zhi died at age 44; transferred to Dingzhou as Commander
1094	57	Exiled to Huizhou, Guangdong Province (his old writings in his <i>hanlin</i> days were judged politically incorrect), bringing concubine Wang Chao-Yun (became third wife later) and third son along; ² started building an elaborate mansion the next year
1096	59	Third wife Wang Chao-Yun died at age 32
1097	60	Mansion completed; banished to Qiongzhou, Hainan Island (the most southern part of China) when the emperor thought Su was too happy in Huizhou after reading Su's verse ³
1100	63	Returned to mainland, with permission to live anywhere
1101	64	Died of illness in Changzhou, Aug. 24, with entire family by his side

¹[Yang, 2006, p. 59]. ²[Yang, 2006, p. 83]. ³[Lin, 1947, p. 368].

Su was a very smart person. He was not a dogmatist in philosophies, unlike many of his fellow countrymen. He exercised judgment in selecting and applying whatever he found suitable from Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. Confucianism helped him in handling interpersonal relationships. Taoism kept him calm, in lieu of psycho-

therapists, when he was banished from the capital (to nice places like Hangzhou and not so nice places like Huizhou); and directed him to embrace nature. Buddhism smoothed out his agonies when his three wives died and when unpleasant things were encountered.

And Su was a very good scholar, innovative and flexible when needed. The excellence of his poems and essays had been well recognized since his early age. After he was released from jail at age 42, he stopped writing poems that got him into trouble.³ Instead, he turned to writing Song prose. Breaking with tradition, he expanded the scope of prose to cover anything and everything that he felt for—nature, daily life, festivals, expired wives and other women, philosophical thoughts, and so on. All were very touchingly and skillfully done. Su became a pioneer and the foremost person as Song prose is concerned.

Furthermore, throughout his life, Su was surrounded by very gifted friends. Su, together with the younger Mi Fei, established the impressionistic style of Chinese painting, called *Scholar Painting* (initiated by Wang Wei in Tang Dynasty) [Jiang, 1993, pp. 162-163]. And bamboo is one of the major themes in their paintings.

17.2.2 *Su's Art View*

Here, we examine his thoughts and attitude on art and literature around the time of his exile. As he opposed the political reform by Wang An-Shi, he was impeached for writing many verses which were regarded as lese-majesty. He was exiled to Huangzhou in 1080. Though he did not write many poems at this time, he devoted himself to painting. Through this experience he began to realize that both painting and composing poems were originated from the same source of creation. Su's art view can be sum up by four major points.

1. Both Tao and art are integral for painting

All paintings are unconscious reflection of a philosophy. Su was heavily influenced by his mother's love for Tao. One of Zhuang Zi's well-known

³ After all, poems reached its zenith in the Tang Dynasty (618-907) or even before. And the very form of poems allowed his enemies to read his mind too easily.

quotations, “Heaven and Earth coexist with me and everything is combined with me,” can be considered as the basis of his view on painting bamboos. Su was totally aware that Tao itself cannot bring art to perfection. He realized there are men who can possess both Tao and art; others who possess Tao but not art—although the subject takes shape in their heart, it does not take shape in their hands that hold the brushes [Sirén, 1935, p. 440]. In fact, it is never easy to make the hand to cooperate with the heart. The spirit of the subject can only be fully expressed when the necessary technical skills have been mastered thoroughly by the painter.

2. Painting is to bring out the “inherent reason” behind the subject

Su objected to painting bamboo with too many leaves, because that would be just a copy of the object. At that time and even now, lots of people judged a painting only by its resemblance to the real object. Su did not agree with this criterion. Su believed the purpose of a painting is to bring out the “*inherent reason*” (*li*) behind the subject [Sirén, 1935, pp. 439-441]. Su is regarded as the first one who extracted the noumenon from the conventional conception theory [Leng, 2004, p. 500].

3. Rapid rhythmic strokes done with a unifying conception

The style of “scholar painting” emphasizes rapid rhythmic strokes done with a unifying conception of the subject [Lin, 1947, p. 274]. To Su and other scholar-painters, painting served mainly as a symbolic means of expressing visual ideas or reflexes of the mind [Sirén, 1935, p. 434].

Lin Yu-Tang believes art are all about rhythm, whether in painting, sculpture, or music. As long as beauty is movement, every art form has an implied rhythm [1947, p. 279]. In this sense, the brush movement follows Su’s mind and the nature’s rhythms can easily be seen from the brush movement. The lines and contours are results of a process of growth and serve a definite purpose [1947, p. 280]. The pictures that contain the nature’s rhythms may be considered the impressionistic school of Chinese art, in which the artist is much more concerned about expressing in a controlling rhythm than making copy of the objects. Su described the painting process as “Then grasp the brush, fix your attention, so that you see clearly what you wish to paint; start quickly,

move the brush, follow straight what you see before you, as the buzzard swoops when the hare jumps out. If you hesitate one moment, it is gone” [Su, 1986, p. 365].

Su sometimes painted after drinking a lot of wine. To him, wine kindles inspiration and improvement of brush speed; he is then no longer bound by any imposed rules. Wine is just the method that leads Su to the purified world, from which he can get spiritual energy. However, it cannot guarantee him to reach the perfect state for painting. Only a small number of bamboo paintings created by Su while he was a little drunk were preserved.

4. Absence of irrelevant matter

Su’s painting of a few sprays of bamboo leaves with a barely visible moon shining from behind creates two effects. First, the absence of irrelevant matter stimulates the imagination of the spectator; second, it implies that these few bamboo leaves are worth looking at forever and ever in the delight of the simple rhythms they express [Lin, 1947, p. 281].

17.2.3 Su’s Bamboo Painting

Su’s bamboo painting is done with three guiding principles.

1. Bamboo is the emblem of hermits

Bamboo, considered as one of the noble plants by the Chinese, expresses a peculiar combination of “suppleness and strength” [Sirén, 1935, p. 437]. The thin bamboos are like hermits [1935, p. 441]. Their power to remain green even in the cold season and their habit of yielding and bending before the storm, without breaking and always coming back, appeal to Su and Chinese intellectuals like him. Yielding and bending can suggest life, and life can easily be seen from Su’s unique bamboos.

2. Bamboo has no constant form but inner spirit

Some of Su’s bamboos were painted in one stroke from the ground up to the top without any bamboo joints. For Su, a painting’s ultimate value is justified by how well it satisfies the painter’s mind, not by the painting skills or the highly-finished painting itself, although he once had a great admiration for this type of work. He fully expressed this view in two

lines: “To judge a painting by its verisimilitude is to judge it at the mental level of a child” [Su, 1986, p. 367]. Fewer details make it easier to express nature’s rhythm. Correct proportions and vividness are not as important as the “*constant principle*” [1986, p. 367], which was interpreted as the “inner spirit” by Lin Yu-Tang [1947, p. 282]. The constant principle, or in other words, inner spirit, is the rule of nature.

3. Constant form and constant principle are against each other

The bamboos that Su painted have no *constant form* but inner spirit. “The lack of constant form does not spoil the whole thing, but the whole thing would lose spiritual significance without the inner spirit.” [Su, 1986, p. 367]. Without the constant form, one can break away from the material form and rule, so that he can truly grasp the reason for the nature. For Su, the lack of constant form is “the constant form,” which embodies the rule of nature. Su kind of regarded the constant form and the constant principle as opposing each other, with the result that some of his bamboos (Fig. 17.2) are thinner than usual, the bamboo leaves are not always linked to the stem, and the bamboo joints’ bulging parts are less tangible, unlike the bamboos painted by his contemporaries such as Wen Tong (Fig. 17.3).

17.3 Paul Cézanne and His Apple

Paul Cézanne’s career, art view and painting innovations are presented here.

17.3.1 *Cézanne’s Life and Career*

Paul Cézanne⁴ was born on January 19, 1839 in Aix-en-Provence in southern France. His father is a well-to-do banker who supported Cézanne financially all his life; unlike other impressionist painters of his time, Cézanne had no need to worry about selling his paintings.

⁴ A short and very readable account of Paul Cézanne’s life and art is presented in [Jennings, 1986, pp. 41-52], with color pictures; a long account is [Lindsay, 1969]. A useful reference is: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_C%C3%A9zanne. The one-hour long video *Cézanne in Provence* (pbs.org) is enjoyable.

Upon the insistence of his father, Cézanne studied law for three years while taking classes at the drawing academy. At age 22, he went to Paris to study painting, with his father's permission, but was unhappy there. He returned home shortly and worked in his father's bank; could not stand it and went back to Paris in 1862. He went home again, for good, in 1870; the motivation was to evade the military draft [Jennings, 1986, p. 44]. Cézanne kept his marriage and a son secret to his father for ten years, but not to his mother, for fear of offending the father.



Fig. 17.2. Su Dong-Po, *Bamboos and Stones*, 106 x 28 cm (partially shown).



Fig. 17.3. Wen Tong, *Ink Bamboo*, 131.6 x 105.4 cm.

While in Paris, Cézanne was in the company of the other impressionists but insisted to paint differently. It was Camille Pissarro (1830-1903), a father figure to Cézanne, who introduced him to out door painting; and Cézanne loved it for the rest of his life.

His joined the first Impressionist exhibition in 1874, skipped the second, and rejoined the third. He kept sending his paintings to the Salon, *the* annual government-sponsored juried exhibition in Paris [Romano, 1996, p. 27], and was rejected each time, until the year 1882, at age 43.

It was in his forties that Cézanne found his own style of painting; he flourished and received wide recognition in his fifties. He loved his art so much that he wrote, “I have sworn to myself to die painting...” [Cézanne, 1995, p. 330]. And he got it. On Monday, October 15, 1906, Cézanne, age 67, was out painting as usual. But he got soaked in the rain for several hours, and was brought home in a laundry cart by others. The *next* day, he went to the garden to work on a portrait, and then went home collapsed. Six days later, Cézanne died at home [Lindsay, 1969, pp. 341-342].

Cézanne, together with Seurat, Gauguin, van Gogh and others, pioneered post-impressionism [Strickland, 2007, p. 112], but it was Cézanne who opened the door to modern painting; in fact, modern art (see Section 1.3.2). Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) praised him as “my one and only master.” Both Picasso and Henri Matisse (1869-1954) called him “the father of us all.”⁵

17.3.2 Cézanne’s Art View

Cézanne hardly wrote anything on his art view. But in the letters (1889-1906) to his young friends, especially the painter Emile Bernard (1868-1941), he did express some of his thoughts on this subject [Cézanne, 1995]. Here are some quotes from these letters and elsewhere.⁶

On the nature of painting

- Painting from nature is not copying the object; it is realizing one’s sensations.
- Pure drawing is an abstraction. Drawing and color are not distinct; everything in nature is colored.
- The man of letters expresses himself in abstractions whereas a painter, by means of drawing and color, gives concrete form to his sensations and perceptions. (p. 303)

On painting nature

⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_C%C3%A9zanne (May 12, 2010).

⁶ <http://mypaulcezannepainting.com/Blog/category/quotations-from-paul-cezanne> (May 12, 2010).

- The truth is in nature, and I shall prove it.
- In order to make progress, there is only nature, and the eye is trained through contact with her. (p. 306)

On painting method

- There are two things in the painter, the eye and the mind; each of them should aid the other.
- A work of art which did not begin in emotion is not art.
- Let us go forth to study beautiful nature, let us try to free our minds from them, let us strive to express ourselves according to our personal temperament. (p. 315)
- I believe in the logical development of everything we see and feel through the study of nature and turn my attention to technical questions later. (p.330)
- Treat nature by means of the cylinder, the sphere, the cone. (p. 301)

On painting assessment

- Taste is the best judge. It is rare. Art addresses itself only to an excessively limited number of individuals. (p. 302)
- When I judge art, I take my painting and put it next to a God object like a tree or flower. If it clashes, it is not art.
- Michelangelo is a constructor, and Raphael an artist who, great as he may be, is always tied to the model.—When he tries to become a thinker he sinks below his great rival. (p. 309)

On being a painter

- Talking about art is almost useless. (p. 303)
- The Louvre is a good book to consult but it must be only an intermediary. The real and immense study to be undertaken is the manifold picture of nature. (pp. 302-303)
- Genius is the ability to renew one's emotions in daily experience.

From these quotes, one can see that Cézanne considered that

- Nature is the most worthy as painting subjects are concerned.

- The painter should start with his emotion and depict what he feels (not the impression) about the subject, copying the subject is out of the question.
- Those who can appreciate good art are rare.
- Some great artists may not be so great in his eye.⁷

17.3.3 Cézanne's *Apple Painting*

Cézanne once said, “With an apple I will astonish Paris.”⁸ Well, he did not really paint an apple significantly different from others before him. But he did find a new way to paint a set of apples, by arranging them (usually with other fruits and other objects on a table) in such a way that different subsets of the arrangement are shown in different perspective. In other words, *multiple perspectives* coexist in the same painting, breaking the single-perspective tradition.⁹



⁷ Belitt profess creative

great physicist; the reason is pretty complicated (see [Tsui & Lam, 2010]).

⁸ <http://mypaulcezannepainting.com/Blog/category/quotations-from-paul-cezanne> (May 12, 2010).

⁹ *Mona Lisa* by Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) is a famous example of the single-perspective design, in which all lines converge to a point behind Mona Lisa's head [Strickland, 2007, p. 34].

Fig. 17.4. Paul Cézanne, *The Kitchen Table* (1888-1890).

Figure 17.4 is an example of this multi-perspective design. For instance, the basket handle is shown from the perspective of looking from the right side of the picture, while the jar and the pear on the right front is seen from the front [Loran, 1943]. This fusing of different viewpoints on a single canvas was used by Picasso [Miller, 1996, p. 414].

The second innovation by Cézanne is equally important. To render what he saw as the *essence* behind the subject matter, neither the subject's shape nor the painter's impression, he structurally ordered whatever he perceived into simple forms and color planes.¹⁰ This is what he meant when he wrote, "Treat nature by means of the cylinder, the sphere, the cone." This technique was adopted and pushed to the limit by Picasso in his Cubism paintings [Miller, 1996].

In fact, near the end of his life, Cézanne's paintings got simpler and simpler and became more abstract, like the one shown in Fig. 17.5, which is at the brink of abstract painting.



Fig. 17.5. Paul Cézanne, *Mount Sainte-Victoire Seen from Lauves* (1904-1905).

17.4 Neurological Basis of Their Artworks

That Su Dong-Po's detached bamboo leaves and Paul Cézanne's color-plane brushes, as well as his multi-perspective composition, work is due to the complex mechanism of seeing in the viewer's brain. The old understanding of vision is that our brain simply tells us how the pixels of light received by the eye are spatially arranged. The new understanding based on neurological studies tells a different story [Kolak et al, 2006, pp. 82-86; Livingstone, 2002].

Essentially, light enters the cornea, focused by the lens and projected to the retina, where photoreceptors convert light signals into electric signals. The signals are processed first in the occipital lobe (at the back of the brain) and then the parietal lobe and the temporal lobe (see Fig. 17.6). In so doing, the brain analyses the signals, recalls information from memory for comparison, presents a final interpretation of the image that the eye receives, and excites other neurons as a response.

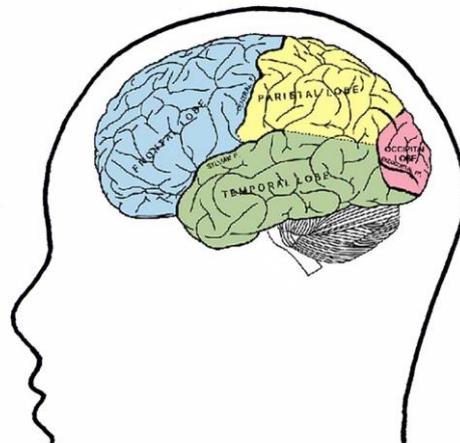


Fig. 17.6. The brain lobes: Frontal (left), parietal (middle up), temporal (middle down) and occipital (right).

Since we do know from observing nature that all tree leaves are connected to the stems, our brain was able to interpret Su's detached leaves correctly as part of the bamboo and not something that flow in air. The same goes for Cézanne's paintings. That is, our brain connects the dots for us. And since the brain of each person is different, it follows that no two persons see the same thing identically; minuscule difference in their interpretation and appreciation of the same artwork is always present.

17.5 Discussion and Conclusion

It is interesting to compare and contrast the life and career paths as well as the subsequent influence of these two giants in the humanities, Su Dong-Po from the East and Paul Cézanne from the West.

1. Su made his living as a public servant¹¹ while Cézanne was supported mainly by his father. This shows that it is important to have financial security as an artist. Moreover, Su's stormy and dramatic career allowed him to move around the country with plenty of spare time, which benefited greatly his arts.

2. That two painters living almost a thousand years apart from each other with very different cultural backgrounds came to the same

¹¹ Su was not a rebel and definitely not a maverick in politics. He went through the national examinations and worked in the government for two reasons: First, being an officer was the only way for an intellectual to get a decent living in a feudal society. Second, according to Confucius teaching, the foremost duty of an intellectual is to serve his country. To that end, the most efficient way was getting oneself near the emperor and let him listen to all your smart advices; less than that, became the governor of someplace oneself and served the people directly. Unfortunately, the ever changing political climate of the Song Dynasty was beyond what Su's limited political skills could handle. The good news for Su is that no other political figures survived the roller-coaster Song court much better than he did. The reason is that Northern Song emperors came and gone frequently (9 emperors in 168 years), like the rapid shuffling of CEOs in a big, modern company—and the stock price plunges, with one important difference; i.e., arts flourished in the former as a result but not in the latter.

conclusion that the aim of painting is to depict the essence behind the object and not the appearance or impression of it illustrates the same human nature that the two shared, in consistent with the slow variation of human nature according to Darwin's evolution theory and the out-of-Africa understanding that all human beings shared the same ancestors who came out of Africa about 60,000 years ago (see [Lam, 2010]).

3. As for the bamboo painting style that Su initiated, unfortunately, with few exceptions, it was not adopted by other Chinese painters. This is in sharp contrast to the fate of Cézanne painting style, which opened up the era of modern arts in the West. The reason behind this difference in fate is due to the driving force of science and technology that existed in Cézanne's Europe but not in Su's China. In Europe, color photography appeared in 1873, thirty six years after photography was invented by Daguerre [Strickland, 2007]. These science/technology advances made the birth of Impressionism almost inevitable. (In fact, the first official Impressionism exhibition was held in 1874.) On the other hand, China was an ultra-stable society [Jin & Liu, 1992; 1993], in which innovation was discouraged by Confucianism. Furthermore, mathematics was not included in the national examination in old China in spite of the few ingenious mathematical achievements. This resulted in the lack of interest and advance in science in the society. Arts in China suffered, unfortunately for Su's bamboo.

Appendix 17.1: Dong-Po Pork

There is no absolute proof that Dong-Po Pork (Fig. 17.7) was indeed invented by Su.¹² However, the following poem, embodied in *Complete*

¹² The folklore has two versions: (1) One day, Su was cooking stewed pork himself (cooking is not an unusual habit for some Chinese male artists, not to mention the Italians), a good friend came in for a visit. The two played Chinese chess for several hours, and Su forgot his cooking. When he remembered it, the pork had been over cooked, but it actually tasted better, and Dong-Po Pork was born. [Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Su_Shi (March 3, 2010).] (2) Su directed the building of Su Causeway in 1090, Hangzhou, which favored the citizens. Su received so many pork in return that he cooked Dong-Po Pork and distributed it to the workers; see below for more details. (Source: Display in Su Dong-Po Memorial Hall, Hangzhou.) These two tales could both be right but are never verified.

Works of Su Shi [Su, 2000, p. 1047], could be considered as a sort of “proof.”



Fig. 17.7. A piece of Dong-Po Pork. [Photograph taken by Lui Lam, at Grandma's Kitchen, Beijing, May 24, 2009.]

Ode to Pork

Ensure continued low burning with a little water after washing the pot
clean.

The flavor of the pork is amazing if the lid is lifted at the right time.

The price of pork in Huangzhou is dirt cheap.

The rich disdain eating it, and the poor don't really know how amazing it
could be with the right cooking methods.

I eat two bowls of pork after getting up every morning.

Leave me alone; I am stuffed.

It is obvious that *Ode to Pork* was written in Huangzhou, not Hangzhou. Su stayed in Huangzhou for four years from 1080 and went again to his post in Hangzhou in 1089. The recipe could be brought to

Hangzhou by Su and ended up becoming one of the best-known Hangzhou dishes.

Both *Records of the West Lake* [Shi, 1995] and *The Integration of West Lake Documents* [Wang, 2004] embody the specialty products of Hangzhou. However, Dong-Po Pork is recorded in neither of these two books. He Yin-Jie, the guide in Su Dong-Po Memorial Hall, stated positively that no existing official history book on Hangzhou records Dong-Po Pork.¹³ As a matter of fact, Dong-Po Pork can be found at many places where Su ever stayed, such as the provinces of Sichuan, Jiangxi, Jiangsu, and Hubei. These dishes share the same name, but the recipes are different. The foregoing poem named *Ode to Pork* is the only one of all Su's works that explain definitely how to cook pork. This clue leads to the days that Su was in Huangzhou, Hubei Province. Rao Xue-Gang, who studied Su's life in Huangzhou for over 23 years and published his research results as *Su Dong-Po in Huangzhou* in 1999, confirmed¹⁴ that *Ode to Pork* was written in Huangzhou in April, 1082.¹⁵

Although *Ode to Pork* was written in Huangzhou, the pork was not named Dong-Po Pork yet. Su loved "stewed pork with brown sauce,"¹⁶

¹³ Interview of He Yin-Jie by Li-Meng Qiu, Su Dong-Po Memorial Hall, May 18, 2010.

¹⁴ Telephone interview of Rao Xue-Gang by Li-Meng Qiu, May 26, 2010.

¹⁵ The name of the poem listed in the two chronologies of Su in Rao's book is *Ode to Boiling Pig's Head* [Rao, 1999, p. 17 & p. 157]. Whereas the name of the same poem embodied in one of the articles of the book is *Ode to Pork* [Rao, 1999, p. 331]. Rao confirmed *Ode to Pork* was called *Ode to Boiling Pig's Head* as well. If it is true, the main ingredient of cooking Huangzhou Dong-Po Pork was quite different from that of Hangzhou Dong-Po Pork while the poem was written, because the latter uses streaky pork. *Su Shi Corpus* [Su, 1986] and *Poetry of Su Shi* [Su, 1982] embody this poem as *Ode to Pork*. According to the footnote to *Ode to Pork* in *Su Shi Corpus*, this poem has another name, *Ode to Boiling Pork Thick Soup* [Su, 1986, p. 597]. The same poem is embodied as *Eating Pork* in *Bamboo Slope Random Notes on Classical Poets and Poetry*, written by Zhou Zi-Zhi [He, 1981, p. 351]. Zhou was born in 1082 and also lived in Song Dynasty. *Eating Pork* is a little bit different in order and characters, but the meaning is the same. The only thing notable besides the name is, "I eat one bowl of pork after getting up every morning", not "two bowls of pork." Although this version might be more reliable, it is not the version widely adopted, probably because the approximate number used in Chinese language is usually expressed by "two".

¹⁶ "Fu Yin cooks pork to treat Dong-Po" appears in *Answering Fu Yin Playfully*, written by Su in Huangzhou [1982, p. 2654]; it clearly shows that how much Su loved stewed pork.

but Dong-Po Pork was not named by Su himself. In *Ode to Dong-Po Thick Soup*, Su brought forth “Dong-Po” definitely in the title and the poem: “Dong-Po thick soup, is the vegetable thick soup cooked by Dong-Po Hermit” [Su, 2000, p. 1046].

In the folklore of Dong-Po Pork’s Hangzhou version, Su received a lot of rice wine and pork from graceful local people after he directed the building of Su Causeway. He told his family to cook “stewed pork with brown sauce” and distribute pork to the workers who took part in the building. His family heard “cook pork with rice wine” by mistake. The local people were deeply touched by his generous action and named the pork after Dong-Po [Lin & Shen, 1993, p. 49]. This folklore can be considered as a circumstantial evidence that Su himself did not name “Dong-Po Pork.” And it is quite notable that this recipe is different from the Huangzhou recipe, because “rice wine” takes the place of “water.”

The cooking time is not explicit in the folklore. *Ode to Pork* mentioned “the flavor of the pork is amazing if the lid is lifted at the right time.” “The right time” is present in *Scattered Records of the Fairy in Cloud*, edited by Feng Zhi. A man named Huangsheng cooked 1 kg venison from morning everyday. He would say it is the right time by nightfall [Feng, 2008, p. 75]. The original story was recorded in *Records of Cheng’an*, which is no longer extant. Feng lived in Later Tang Dynasty (923-936); Su might have read Feng’s book.

The two best restaurants in Hangzhou (Lou Wai Lou and Zhi Wei Guan) are unwilling to reveal the recipe of Dong-Po Pork. The following is the recipe of Dong-Po Pork displayed at the Su Dong-Po Memorial Hall (May 18, 2010).

Ingredients

Streaky pork¹⁷ 1500 g
 Green onion 50 g
 Knotted green onion 50 g
 Refined white sugar 100 g

¹⁷ The best ingredient for cooking Dong-Po Pork is the Jinhua pig (alias Liangtouwu pig), which has white trunk and black head and black rump. The pigskin is thin, so are the bones. Jinhua pig has been farmed since the West Jin Dynasty (266-316).

Shaoxing rice wine 250 g
 Ginger 50 g
 Soy sauce 150 g

The cooking

Dice the pork after washing.¹⁸ Boil pork in boiling water for five minutes. Put the pork skin downwards into a big earthen pot with green onion and ginger on bamboo grid. Get the lid on the pot after adding refined white sugar, soy sauce, Shaoxing rice wine and knotted green onion in turn. Tuck “peach blossom paper”¹⁹ into the aperture between the lid and the earthen pot. Put the earthen pot over “high” heat. Adjust stove heat to “low” after the cooking liquid starts boiling. Turn off stove when pork is tender.²⁰ Skim fat and put the small clay pot with pork skin upwards in a bamboo steamer. Adjust stove heat to “high” and steam for 30 minutes.

As set forth, the recipe of Dong-Po Pork is different at different places. The way of cooking Hangzhou Dong-Po Pork is a typical localism method. Yuan Mei (1716 – 1797), a well-known poet, scholar and artist in Qing Dynasty, was born in Hangzhou. He is an epicure and an expert on Hangzhou Style of cooking. What is interesting is that unlike Su, Yuan himself did not cook. However, his book *Sui Yuan Cooking Methods* does describe the way to cook pork. According to Yuan, the cook should be patient and cook pork with the skin downwards first. Oil and fat will soak through the skin. It is the way to keep the flavor and make the skin tastes crisp. Otherwise the skin will get hard and the flavor will disappear [Yuan, 2000, p. 26]. Yet, Yuan did not mention Dong-Po Pork in his book. All he recorded are the “universal” methods of cooking.

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¹⁸ According to the recipe in *West Lake Cyclopedia* [Shen & Zhang, 2005, p. 177], the diced pork should be 75 g each.

¹⁹ Peach Blossom Paper, thin and tough, is a type of semitransparent paper used for making window paper and kites.

²⁰ According to the recipe in *West Lake Cyclopedia* [Shen & Zhang, 2005, p. 177], it takes 2 hours to get the pork tender on simmer.

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