

"Accomplishments May Be Wasted Due to Greed, While Virtues Are Achieved by Integrity": Analysis on Su Dongpo's Thought of Clean Government

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Abstract General Secretary Xi Jinping has repeatedly quoted the famous sayings and aphorisms of Su Dongpo, a great literary figure of the Song Dynasty, on various occasions to explain the governing philosophy of Communists. Su Dongpo is not only a monument in the literary and cultural history of China and even the world, but also a good official with outstanding political reputation. Throughout the legendary life of Su Dongpo, despite his bumpy career, he remained steadfast, caring for the people when serving as a high-ranking official in the court and the country when exiled to a remote place. He adhered to the principle of prioritizing honesty in personal conduct and prioritizing integrity in governance. In the new era, we can draw wisdom from Su Dongpo's thought of clean government, never forget our original aspirations, remember our missions, and firmly establish and practice the "correct view of political achievements".

Key words Su Dongpo; Thought of clean government; People-oriented; View of political achievement

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In the book *Xi Jinping's Cited Historical Allusions*, the ancient celebrity with the most allusions cited by General Secretary Xi Jinping is Su Dongpo^[1]. Although Su Dongpo has been away from us for over 900 years, people in the places where he lived and worked often hold various activities to commemorate him. People miss Su Dongpo not only because he was one of the few literary and artistic geniuses in Chinese history, but more importantly, perhaps due to his broad mindedness as a politician who concerned about the country. Su Dongpo's thought of clean government also deeply influenced General Secretary Xi Jinping, who repeatedly quoted various allusions from Su Dongpo in his writings and speeches to explain the governing philosophy of Communists. The current theme education on the "correct view of political achievements" is deeply carried out throughout the Party and the country. We believe that remembering history can truly open up the future, and being good at inheriting can truly innovate and develop. It is also one of the driving forces for Party members and cadres to establish a "correct view of political achievements" by actively drawing wisdom and nutrition from Su Dongpo's thought of clean government.

1 Origin of Su Dongpo's thought of clean government

Su Dongpo is not only a monument in the history of Chinese literature and culture, but also a good official with outstanding political reputation. Throughout the legendary life of Su Dongpo, de-

spite his bumpy career, he remained steadfast, caring for the people when serving as a high-ranking official in the court and the country when exiled to a remote place. He adhered to the principle of prioritizing honesty in personal conduct and prioritizing integrity in governance. So how was Su Dongpo's thought of clean government developed? We may understand him, study his historical background, and investigate and explore his life stories.

1.1 Good parenting style is the root of Su Dongpo's thought of clean government The cultivation of Su Dongpo's virtue of honesty and integrity is inseparable from his good family ethics and educational environment during his youth. The legacy of Su Dongpo's grandfather Su Xu's eagerness for justice and kindness, as well as the exemplary role of his father Su Xun's words and deeds, and especially the earnest teachings of his mother Mrs. Cheng during Su Dongpo's childhood on "not excavating or demanding the property buried underground by previous generations", all played an important role in cultivating Su Dongpo's thought of clean government. Mrs. Cheng, the mother of Su Dongpo, can be fully regarded as a great woman and mother. Mrs. Cheng educated Dongpo with the Confucian standards of "cultivating oneself, managing the family, governing the country, and pacifying the world" when he was a child. As he grew up, Su Dongpo naturally possessed the great sentiment of "worrying before the worries of common people, and enjoying after the joys of common people". The famous quotation that "if it's not something that belongs to me, I can't retrieve even a penny" is from Su Dongpo's poem *First Ode on the Red Cliff*. Its philosophy originates from his mother's allusion of "not excavating or demanding the property buried underground by previous generations"^[2]. Later, Su Dongpo served as

an official in Qixia, and there was a large willow tree next to his residence. During snowy days, the surrounding area was covered in snow, but there was no snow under the tree. After the snow cleared, the ground was covered by several inches. Su Dongpo suspected that it was a place where ancient people hid elixirs and was about to dig it up. His wife Wang Fu said, "if my mother-in-law were still alive, she would definitely not let you excavate". Su Dongpo felt ashamed and stopped digging. This passage truly records the teachings of Su Dongpo's mother on him, as well as the advice of his wife. A virtuous wife and a loving mother had a significant impact on Su Dongpo's thought of clean government. If Su Dongpo's thought of clean government is like a towering tree, then his mother's teachings undoubtedly make it grow straight, while his wife's advice is to prune it in time. Su Dongpo also wrote a wonderful passage about the exemplary power of his mother: Mrs. Cheng exclaimed at Fan Pang's uprightness and sacrificial spirit while reading the *Biography of Fan Pang in the Book of Han*. Su Dongpo asked on the side, "if I became someone like Fan Pang, would you agree, mother?" Mrs. Cheng replied firmly, "you can be Fan Pang, can't I be Fan Pang's mother?"^[3] Today, reading it still leaves one feeling amazed and saddened.

1.2 Excellent traditional culture is the core of Su Dongpo's thought of clean government

Su Dongpo wrote in his famous work *Ode on the Red Cliff*: "all things in heaven and earth have their rightful owners; one must not covet even a single thing that is not rightfully theirs. The clear breeze over the river and the bright moon in the mountains become sounds when heard and scenery when seen. They can be taken without restriction and used endlessly"^[4]. This passage by Su Dongpo is profound and influential in China's classics of clean government. Su Dongpo was deeply influenced by the excellent traditional culture of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. The basic principle followed by Su Dongpo's career throughout his life was the Confucian philosophy of honesty as the foundation, governance based on morality, and clean governance for the people. Traditional Confucianism emphasizes that "the key to governance lies in correcting oneself" and puts the integrity and selflessness of officials in the first place. Confucianism emphasizes that "when the ruler speaks and acts correctly, everyone will follow without giving orders; if one is not upright, no one will obey even the strictest orders". Confucius praised Yan Hui for that "even though he lives in a rundown alley, eats rough food and drinks cold water every day, and others are worried, he still laughs happily, not changing his aspirations and happiness because of poverty", which meant being contented in poverty and devoted to things spiritual. Mencius said that "money and status cannot confuse him, poverty and hardship cannot change him, and power and authority cannot yield to him" is an important criterion for being a "great man". Confucius said, "to me, being rich and noble through unrighteousness is like a floating cloud". "To be a person, one should have a sense of shame. If one can complete tasks in all countries and not disappoint their mission, they can be

called a "scholar" ". These all reflect the correct Confucian view of shame. The Confucian culture of integrity has had a profound impact on Su Dongpo and is the core of his thought of clean government. Su Dongpo explicitly wrote in his *Six Matters with Integrity as the Core*: "there are six responsibilities, but in essence, they all belong to one. Officials prioritize integrity and uphold the overall interests of the country by pursuing noble character"^[4]. The six matters were from the *Rites of Zhou*, "the six criteria of goodness, ability, respect, righteousness, law, and discernment are used to fairly evaluate the governance ability of officials, and the word "integrity" is added in front of each criterion to emphasize that integrity is fundamental". Su Dongpo believed that honesty and integrity are the primary moral qualities and basic professional requirements of officials. If the foundation of integrity is lost, it can't talk about "goodness", "ability", "respect", "righteousness", "law", and "discernment". If the Confucian concept of clean governance is the foundation of Su Dongpo's thought of clean government, then the clean governance ideas of Buddhism and Taoism also had a positive impact on Su Dongpo.

2 Contemporary value of Su Dongpo's thought of clean government

On February 17, 2014, General Secretary Xi Jinping quoted Su Dongpo's phrase "governing a country should neither easily cause trouble nor be timid and afraid to take responsibility"^[4] in his speech at the Special Seminar on Studying and Implementing the Spirit of the Third Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and Deepening Reforms for Major Leading Cadres at the Provincial and Ministerial Levels. Su Dongpo's statement emphasizes the need for officials at all levels to be bold and responsible, to handle political affairs with both seriousness and proactivity, and to seize opportunities. Specifically in our work, being diligent in political affairs means daring to take responsibility and being proactive. In 1089, Su Dongpo once again went to Hangzhou as an official. Faced with the increasingly serious situation of West Lake marshification, he submitted a letter to the court requesting the opening and dredging of West Lake in Hangzhou. Su Dongpo ordered craftsmen to use the silt excavated from West Lake to build a Su Causeway. But the silt in West Lake was too soft, and hard soil had to be mixed in to build the embankment. Therefore, Su Dongpo wanted to excavate the hard soil of Chishan next to Goryeo Temple for later use, but this was strongly opposed by Goryeo Temple monks. The inscription from the Dongpo Pavilion of Huajia Mountain Villa next to West Lake recorded, "the monks of the temple believe that Chishan is the Fengshui barrier on the left side of the temple, and excavation will damage Fengshui and cause disasters, so they strongly advise against it. Su Dongpo made a vow: if this really causes trouble, after my death, I am willing to transform into the Guardian God of the temple to protect it". Faced with the opposition of the monks, Su Dongpo chose to take responsibility for the people, and the

construction of the dam could not be delayed. Su Dongpo was willing to sacrifice himself to protect the Dharma. From then on, the stone statue of Su Dongpo next to West Lake became more prominent. Since then, Su Dongpo's spirit of daring to take responsibility for the well-being of the people has also been preserved in the world. "We must not cause trouble, nor should we be afraid of it". General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized the need for the country to have a stance on fundamental issues such as the development path and political system. Later, when General Secretary Xi Jinping talked about foreign policy, he also put forward the idea of "we don't cause trouble, but we're not afraid of it", which is similar to Su Dongpo's statement.

On April 30, 2014, General Secretary Xi Jinping quoted Su Dongpo's *An Essay on Chao Cuo* in his *Speech at the End of Inspection Work in Xinjiang*, which said, "the most difficult thing to deal with a disaster in the world is that it appears to be peaceful on the surface, but in reality, it hides unforeseeable hidden dangers"^[4]. This is also a sentence that General Secretary Xi Jinping likes very much. Su Dongpo used this passage to analyze the reason for the failure of Chao Cuo's reform, which was to "sit and watch its changes". General Secretary Xi Jinping used this sentence to warn leaders at all levels to be good at grasping the situation and be diligent in political affairs according to changes in the situation. In addition, General Secretary Xi Jinping once used Su Dongpo's "don't panic in the face of major events, and don't change the norm in critical moments of conflicting interests"^[4] to guide the healthy growth of young cadres in his early work *Getting Rid of Poverty: Miscellaneous Talks on Politics*. General Secretary Xi Jinping quoted these words to remind party members and cadres to be politically firm, so that they can grasp the overall situation and enhance their political determination at critical moments. Therefore, to be a qualified party member, one must be diligent and responsible like Su Dongpo. The aspects that are already clear should be thoroughly analyzed, planned early, and handled calmly; for aspects that are temporarily difficult to see clearly, it is necessary to closely track, prepare for the future, and respond flexibly. It should learn Su Dongpo's thoughts on upholding discipline, and achieve qualified execution of discipline. In his speech at the Second Plenary Session of the Fourth Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, General Secretary Xi Jinping quoted Su Dongpo's phrase "once the law is relaxed, all kinds of bad things will emerge"^[4], emphasizing the importance of law and discipline. This is a sentence from Su Dongpo's memorial to Emperor Shenzong at that time, which was aimed at the phenomenon of officials in the court often trampling on laws and regulations, acting recklessly, and causing public resentment. Later, he put forward the political proposition of "to govern a country, it needs to unite the hearts of the people, cultivate a strong social atmosphere, and uphold the principles of law and discipline"^[4] in the *Letter to Emperor Shenzong*. This shows that in Su Dongpo's mind, court officials must pay attention to act-

ing in accordance with the law in order to win the hearts of the people. During Su Dongpo's period of serving as the governor of Mizhou, faced with the situation of "thieves gradually becoming rampant", he wrote a letter titled *On the Thieves in Hebei and Jingdong*, pointing out that the control of thieves must be combined with the control of officials. According to records, Pacification Commission once sent dozens of fierce yamen soldiers to Mizhou to be ordered to capture thieves. Unexpectedly, these foreign "fierce soldiers" were even more violent and vicious than the thieves, and they even took the opportunity to plunder the people. The people were unable to bear its disturbance and turned to Su Dongpo to report it one after another. Su Dongpo refused to accept the case on the surface, but secretly sought someone to investigate the truth. When the evidence was conclusive, he dispatched his troops to quickly launch an attack, capturing all the evil officials who had harmed the people in one fell swoop, and then publicly tried and severely punished them in the government office. Su Dongpo serving as the governor of Mizhou was his first time governing a region, and punishing corrupt officials was also a concrete practice of his "upholding discipline and order" ideology. General Secretary Xi Jinping used the phrase "once the law is relaxed, all kinds of bad things will emerge" to emphasize that the string of political discipline and rules cannot be loosened, thus warning leading cadres to enhance their sense of discipline, hold the bottom line of discipline, and strengthen their discipline determination. Therefore, to be a qualified party member, one must learn from Su Dongpo's concept of upholding discipline, abide by laws and regulations, and be qualified in implementing discipline in practical work.

It should learn Su Dongpo's thought on clean governance and become a good Party member with strong moral character. In the first collective learning speech of the 18th Central Political Bureau, General Secretary Xi Jinping quoted Su Dongpo's *On Fan Zeng* saying that "the item must first rot before maggots can grow", warning leading cadres to strengthen their official ethics and cultivation from themselves. As the saying goes, "leaders have good behavior themselves and do not need to give orders. Others will also follow suit". Only when everyone is clean and honest can the whole party do a good job in anti-corruption and integrity construction. Su Dongpo himself adhered to the principle of honesty as the top priority in his life and integrity as the top priority in his governance. This can also be seen from his poem *Ode on the Red Cliff* where he says, "if it's not something that belongs to me, I can't retrieve even a penny". Su Dongpo mentioned in his article *Hou Qiju Fu* that he had lived a difficult life since childhood. After becoming an official in Mizhou, "he searched for goji berries and chrysanthemums to satisfy hunger in the abandoned gardens of the ancient city together with Tongshou Liu Tingshi". As the highest military and political officer in Mizhou, he ate goji berries and wild chrysanthemums, but could laugh while touching his belly. His integrity, dedication to the public, and extraordinary political

ethics should become a model for officials throughout history. When he left Hangzhou, a friend gave him 5 taels of gold and 150 taels of silver as gifts. Despite the overwhelming emotions, he accepted the money and then donated it to Anle Fang for the treatment of impoverished people. And Anlefang was the first public hospital in Chinese history founded by Su Dongpo during his tenure as an official in Hangzhou. General Secretary Xi Jinping once said in his early work *Getting Rid of Poverty; Clean Governance*: "the purpose of being a cadre is dedication, service, and should be based on ideals, not just seeking personal benefits. 'If it's not something that belongs to me, I can't retrieve even a penny'". This is also the minimum requirement for party and government cadres"^[5]. "The item must first rot before maggots can grow". This requires leading cadres to pay attention to their own cultivation. Only by not rotting themselves can they resist the temptation of various insects and achieve "if it's not something that belongs to me, I can't retrieve even a penny". Therefore, Party members and leading cadres attach great importance to their own moral cultivation, strive to be morally qualified, and follow the example of Su Dongpo, who prioritizes integrity in their conduct and governance. They should adhere to the requirements of General Secretary Xi Jinping for clean governance, being an official brings benefits to the community.

It should learn from Su Dongpo's people-oriented ideology and become a good party member with a pioneering role. During his inspection in Hainan, General Secretary Xi Jinping quoted Su Dongpo's statement, which stated that "those who enjoy the benefits of the world shall bear the troubles of the world; those who enjoy the pleasures of the world shall share the worries of the world"^[4], to illustrate the importance of leading cadres serving the people with a broad vision for reform and opening up. In addition, Su Dongpo's article *Memorial on Refraining from Purchasing Zhejiang Lanterns* called on the current emperor to "think deeply and consider the future, and sacrifice love for the people", which fully reflects his people-oriented ideology. During his tenure as an official in Mizhou, Su Dongpo's most talked about story among the local people was his journey through the city to save infants. At that time, the disaster in Michigan left many people without clothes or food, forcing them to abandon their hungry infants. Once, Su Dongpo and his colleagues were digging wild vegetables along the roots of the city wall when they found an abandoned baby among the wolfberry bushes. They took it to the mansion for adoption and led the officials to search for the abandoned baby in the wild. In just a few days, more than 40 abandoned infants were adopted in the state capital. He mentioned this matter in his book *Letter to Zhu, Prefect of Ezhou*^[4]. Ten years later, Su Dongpo went to Dengzhou and passed through Mizhou. Those abandoned

children and their adoptive parents went to pay their respects. The people-oriented ideology is the core idea of Confucian philosophy, and Su Dongpo has put it into practice through practical actions. His people-oriented ideology is highly compatible with the people-centered governance philosophy advocated by General Secretary Xi Jinping. The people are the foundation of the nation, and the nation is peaceful with a solid foundation. Therefore, party members and cadres, especially leading cadres, should keep the warmth and coldness of the people in their hearts, comprehensively grasp the new requirements of development and the new expectations of the people, and play a leading and exemplary role in the process of building a moderately prosperous society in all respects, in order to continuously enhance the sense of gain and happiness of the people.

Su Dongpo is not only a monument in the literary and cultural history of China and even the world, but also a good official with outstanding political reputation. Throughout Su Dongpo's legendary life, although his career was bumpy, he remained consistent, caring for the people when serving as a high-ranking official in the court and the country when exiled to a remote place. Su Dongpo always remembered the principle of honesty as the top priority in being a good person and integrity as the top priority in governing. In the context of anti-corruption and promoting integrity, it can draw wisdom from Su Dongpo's thought of clean government, never forget our original intention, and keep our mission in mind. General Secretary Xi Jinping has repeatedly quoted Su Dongpo's classic quotes in recent years, and these famous sayings and admonitions still resonate with readers today. Now that entire party is carrying out education on the "correct view of political achievements", it should continue to follow General Secretary Xi Jinping's requirements and deeply study Su Dongpo's ideas of being diligent in serving the people, daring to take responsibility, upholding discipline, putting the people first, and prioritizing clean governance. This will undoubtedly be of great benefit to us in practicing the correct view of achievements, meeting the demands of the times, and contributing to society.

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