Relationship between Personal Experience and Literary Creation in Traditional Literati Characteristics

Guangyu Zeng
College of Literature and Journalism, Sichuan University, Chengdu 610064, Sichuan, China
College of Liberal Arts, Chongqing Normal University, Chongqing 401331, China

Haixia Yang*
College of Liberal Arts, Chongqing Normal University, Chongqing 401331, China
*Corresponding author

Abstract
In order to study the relationship between the personal experiences of traditional literati and poets and their literary works, the paper analyzed the personal experiences and literary works of Li Bai, the poet of the Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD), and Su Shi, the poet of the Song Dynasty (960-1279 AD), and explored the relationships between their personal experiences and their creation of literary works. The traditional Chinese culture has a long history. Through thousands of years of feudal rule, many outstanding literati emerged, especially in the Tang and Song Dynasties, such as Li Bai, Du Fu, Li Shang-yin, Su Shi, Li Qing-zhao, etc. They were brilliant and made remarkable works in their respective fields. Their achievements in literature, as well as their poetry, are also very welcomed by modern people. In the feudal society, entering the official position through the imperial examination was an important way for many literati to realize the value of life. The original intentions including “Study is also the way, the road is in it”, “Being poor and independent, being rich and enthusiastic” were also the purpose of them. Through the analysis of Li Bai and Su Shi’s personality characteristics, life experiences and the characteristics of their literary works, the paper has found that after the entry into the political world, various factors and changes made them unable to concentrate on literary creation anymore; besides, as the imperial bureaucrats, they would be subject to court politics. These factors, their careers, and their personal life experiences have had an important impact on their literary creation, thus forming their later literary works.

Key words: Li Bai, Su Shi, Characteristics and Personal Experiences, Literary Creation

1. Introduction
Throughout the ages, literary works are the labels of literati. Especially for traditional literati, they cherished the ancients, expressed their feelings, and praised the great rivers and mountains of their motherlands through literary works. Each dynasty had their representative figures, from Confucius in the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC) to Li Bai, Du Fu, Li Shang-yin, and Du Mu in the Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD), Ouyang Xiu, Su Shi, and Li Qingzhao in the Song Dynasty (960-1279 AD), and Gong Zi-zhen. Nalan Xing-de, Yuan Mu, Zheng Ban-qiao in the Qing Dynasty (1616-1912 AD), etc., all of them had added meaningful touches to the history of Chinese literature. Their poems not only have a certain impact on Chinese culture but also contribute to the development of society.

In different dynasties, different literati would have different personalities; some of them would be open-minded, some would worry about the country and the people, and some would show sympathy for the people because of their own misfortunes; some of the poets were indifferent in pursuing fame and fortune, while some of the poets would be repeatedly shackled but still enthusiastic. Therefore, different life experiences would make them have different understandings of poetry and society, which would have a certain influence on the creation of their literary works.

Therefore, the paper analyzed the personal characteristics and life experiences of Li Bai, the poet of the Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD), and Su Shi, the poet of the Song Dynasty (960-1279 AD), to find the relationship between life experiences and the literary creations of poets, which would facilitate the deeper study of poets and their works, providing references for research on other inter-era literati and the relationship between their works and their life experiences.

2. Literature Review
Different characteristics and personalities would have a certain impact on the literary creation of poets or literati (Lu, 2018; Xie, 2017) further explored the characteristics of their poems by comparing and analyzing the language styles of the poets of Pan Yue (247-300 AD) and Lu Ji (261-303 AD). Through the research on the living situations of Keng Wei (presumed to be living in 673 according to current studies) and the content and
style of his poems, Zhang (Zhang, 2017) discovered that the sudden changes of his poetry style were related to the society and transformation he experienced. By comparing Li Bai’s and Su Shi’s attitudes towards life and poetry styles, Du (Du, 2017) found that given different time backgrounds and living environments of the different periods, their personalities and life attitudes were different, thereby two different styles of poetry were formed. Li Bai’s poems were intense and strong, while the poems of Su Shi were clear and magnificent. Sun Mulan and Shi Qin (Sun, and Shi, 2017) studied the poems of Wang Wei (701-761 AD) and Meng Hao-ran (689-740 AD); they found that the poets had certain similarities in their creations; however, because of their different life experiences, they had different personalities, which showed in their different poetry styles (Wan, 2018).

Based on the traditional aesthetics of the ancient Chinese poetry, Yuan Xiu-juan (Yuan, 2017) explored the personalities the ancient literati. Through the combinations of the development of paintings and seclusion thoughts of literati in the Song (960-1279 AD) and Yuan (1271-1368 AD) Dynasties, Guo (Guo, 2017) deepened public comprehensions of the situations of literati in that period, as well as the comprehensions of the laws governing the development of painting. Li Yongxiang and Guo Yanhua (Li and Guo, 2018) researched the relationships between the war between the Song Dynasty and the Western Xia regime (1038-1227 AD) and the remonstrance literature in the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127 AD) through studying the literary characteristics of literature generated during the war.

3. Methods

3.1. Characteristics and Personal Experiences of Li Bai

Li Bai (701-762 AD), also known as Li Tai-bai and Qinglian Buddhist, was the greatest poet in the Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD) of China. It was said that the ancestral home of Li was Chengji, Longxi (presently Qin’an County, Tianshui City, Gansu Province). When he was young, Li and his father moved to Mianzhou, Jiannan Dao. The great romantic poet of the generation was praised as “God of Poetry” by the posterity and was referred as “Li Du”, or “The Senior Li Du”, with another poet Du Fu (712-770 AD) in Tang Dynasty.

Figure 1. Portrait of Li Bai

Figure 2. Li Bai and Du Fu meet in Donglu for the third time

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Li Bai’s character was deeply influenced by Confucianism and Taoism, which subsequently formed two characteristics of his poems, i.e. sorrowful and unrestrained and optimistic and open-minded, which also impressed the late literati and the modern people. During his youth, Li Bai was a scholar of poetry and Taoism. Therefore, he was deeply influenced by his predecessors, especially Confucianism and Taoism. When he was ready to enter the city to become an official, the Confucian thought of “helping the world” made him want to make a contribution in the political world; however, when he was unwilling to be in the officialdom and was suppressed everywhere, he would choose to make a sightseeing tour and pursuing the traces of Gods from time to time. With the feelings of “I am a madman, I sing and laugh at saints” and “there is nothing wrong with the sorrow, the shackles can be delight”, even the sacred Confucius and mythological Chinese Emperors were ridiculous and despised to Li. At the time, the cynical thoughts of Taoism occupied the primacy of his thoughts, thereby was utilized by Li as a way against the feudal era and the prevalence in Confucianism.

Li Bai’s life could be divided into five periods in accordance with his life experiences, i.e. the period before the age of 25, the period of 26 to 42 years old, the period of 42 to 45 years old, the period of 45 to 55 years old, and the period 55 to 61 years old. Li Bai accepted the enlightenment education earlier and began to read the history books of all ages; at the age of 14, he liked to write the articles, practice with swords, read books, and pursue the mortality. After that, he began to travel around the country and followed Zhao Rei (659-742 AD) to study, who had a far-reaching influence on Li Bai’s literature. When he was 25, Li left Sichuan Province and started his roaming life. In his middle ages, since Emperor Xuanzong (685-762 AD) of the Tang Dynasty admired Li Bai’s works very much, and when the Emperor was talking about some current political affairs, Li answered the Emperor’s questions very smartly, Li was enshrined in the Imperial Academy. Besides, his intelligent thinking also won the favor of Emperor Xuanzong. Later, because of his unruly personality and the favor of the Emperor, Li offended many people, such as Gao Li-shi (684-762 AD); finally, he stayed in Chang’an, the capital of the Tang Dynasty, for only two years before he was banished. When he was 43 years old, he began to live a happy life in villages and fields. During the period, he became a good friend with Du Fu and Gao Shi (704-765 AD); they drank wine and proposed poems together. Besides, it was the time that Li bailed the famous general Guo Zi-yi (697-781 AD). In general, the political world was farther away from him. When he turned 52, after traveling a lot of places, he had the idea of standing on the frontiers. Later, due to the outbreak of the Anshi Rebellion (755-763 AD), Li Bai was convicted and imprisoned because of his involvement with the Emperor’s brother, His Royal Highness Yong. Fortunately, Guo Zi-yi was able to save him from death. Finally, he was pardoned at the age of 59. After that, he drifted in the south of the Yangtze River. Although he was away from the court for several years, Li Bai’s patriotic feelings were still there. When he heard that the Grand Commandant Li Guang-bi (708-764 AD) had led the army to attack the Anshi rebels, he immediately went to join the army; however, he was too old to fight the enemies. He was sick and had to turn back in the halfway. In the next year, he died of illness at the age of 61 when he was on the way to his uncle’s.
Li Bai’s life was frustrated to him. Although he was indulgent when he was young, he finally became depressed and filled with dissatisfaction with the world. He could only leave poems to express his unwillingness. Li Bai’s attitude of not afraid of power and the contempt for nobles has enabled him to ridicule the hierarchical order centered on political rights and to criticize the political phenomenon of corruption at that time. The bold rebellious attitude also promoted the prosperous the spirit of heroism in the Tang Dynasty.

### 3.2. Characteristics and Personal Experiences of Su Shi

Su Shi (1037-1101 AD), also known as Zizhan and Dongpo Buddhist, was regarded as the “Taoist” by himself and the “Genius of Poetry” by the world. He was born in the Meishan, Meizhou (presently Meishan County, Sichuan Province) in the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127 AD). Together with his father Su Xun (1009-1066 AD) and his brother Su Che (1039-1112 AD), they were regarded as the “Three Su” and were included in the “Eight Great Scholars of Tang and Song Dynasties”. His poems were fresh, healthy, and broad in subjects; he preferred to make use of exaggerated metaphors, which were unique in style. Su Shi and Huang Ting-jian (1045-1105 AD), another great poet in the Song Dynasty, were regarded as “Su Huang”. He initiated the unrestrained school of the Song poetry and referred as “Su Xin” with another representative of the unconstrained school Xin Qi-jí (1140-1207 AD).

Su Shi’s character was more versatile, detached, optimistic, humorous, tolerant, true, daring, and self-deprecating. These qualities were combined and had a positive impact on his later life.
paper for subsequent analysis. Su Shi’s first half of life was happy and fortunate. His parents’ teachings were rich and varied, so his thoughts were free and eclectic, and his outlook on life was free and cheerful. He left Meizhou at the age of 19 and went to Beijing to take the imperial test with his father and his brother. Their journey to Beijing was more like a study tour since they traveled the beautiful scenery of the Ba and Shu region (presently the Sichuan province and the Chongqing Municipality). Fortunately, the father and sons were all recommended by famous scholars. During the imperial selection part, Su Shi won second place and showed a good literary talent, which made Ouyang Xiu (1007-1072 AD), a famous politician of that time, also amazed. Many scholars praised him and he also obtained appreciations from the Emperor.

However, after Su Shi became an official, his true and playful character made him repeatedly hit the wall in the officialdom. So he asked to transfer to another place. However, in 1079, Su Shi was interrogated for 130 days for the “Wutai Poetry Case”. At that time, Wang Anshi’s reforms led to the generation of two parties in the political world, i.e. the new party and the old party; however, Su Shi opposed the reform and stood on the old party which was on the opposite site of Emperor Shenzong (1048-1085 AD) of the Song Dynasty. At that time, Su Shi was often suppressed by his political opponents; However, Emperor Shenzong of the Song Dynasty loved his talents and had to banish Su Shi from the court to Huangzhou to protect him. In April 1085, the new Emperor succeeded to the throne, abolished Wang Anshi’s reforms, recalled Su Shi, pardoned Su Shi from the sin, and promptly promoted Su to the third-level official. Later, since Su Shi did not agree with the total negation of Wang Anshi’s reforms proposed by the empress dowager and Sima Guang (1019-1086 AD), he felt uncomfortable and took the initiative to resign. It was March 1091 that Su Shi went back to the court again. He successively served as the Minister of Personnel, the prefecture chief of Yingzhou and Yangzhou, Military Minister, and the Minister of Personnel again. However, the happy time did not last long. After the Emperor Zhezong (1077-1100 AD) of the Song Dynasty took over the reins of government upon coming of age, he began to ruthlessly suppress the members of the old party; Su Shi was once again stunned, and finally arrived in Chanzhou, which is presently the end of the sea in Hainan Province.

Figure 6. Su Shi was shackled

Su Shi’s life had gone through three ups and downs. For ordinary people, it was undoubtedly very dramatic. It may be easy to be depressed in adversity, but Su Shi was open-minded, which made him optimistic in adversity and reflected his self-adapted state of mind. Compared with the three ups and downs of Su Shi’s officialdom, the hard life after his being detained was more worthy of our consideration. When Su Shi was 44 years old, he was desecrated in Huangzhou. At that time, he was very strong and could live on himself and meet his own needs. However, when he was shackled to Huizhou, Su Shi was 58 years old, and Huizhou was a barren land at that time. The huge pressure of life and the discomforting surrounding environment coupled with the weak body of Su Shi at this time, making his body and mind face a huge test. However, the extremely difficult condition had not hit Su Shi; on the contrary, it had stimulated his self-sufficient attitude of life; although life was hard, it was still very happy.

Even in such a difficult environment, Su Shi could be optimistic and composed. It was inseparable from the ideological education he received in his early years. It was because of the optimistic and composed attitude that Su Shi had proposed more widespread and classic poems.
4. Discussion

4.1. The Relationship between Personal Experiences of Li Bai and His Poetry

According to records, Li Bai created 1,010 poems in his whole life, all of which were collected in the Complete Works of Li Bai. The poems were divided into 25 episodes, including 59 ancient poems, 149 songs in folk-song-styled verses, and 805 ancient poems. His words have been widely circulated by future generations and enjoyed a very high status. His masterpieces include The Waterfall of Lushan Mountain, Difficult Roads, Difficult Shu Roads, Please Enjoy the Wine, Liang Fu Chant, and Departing Early from the Baidi City.

In the early days of Li Bai, his poetry was themed of hundreds of millions of poems in the mountains and rivers. He used exaggerated techniques to describe the magnificent majesty of the mountains and rivers of the motherland and created many popular works, such as Departing Early from the Baidi City, which not only expressed the distance and the poet’s heart of great ambition through the lines but also revealed that the poet was courageous, heroic, and not afraid of the various dangers. At that time, Li Bai was young and prosperous. The poem Farewell at Jingmen expressed the poet’s deep attachment to his hometown. The famous line “I was still in favor of my hometown” also reflected the poet’s strong feelings for his hometown and relatives. It was both the expectation of his own future and the description of beautiful things, as well as the deep sate for the water and soil that raised him. The descriptions of the beautiful mountains and rivers in his motherland added fantasy to the poet’s future life. As the age increased, the arrogance of the literati also caused him to sprout anti-powerful thoughts, which was reflected in his Dream Journey to the Tianmu Mountain; such kind of thoughts was also accumulated with the increase of his life experiences; the famous line “How could I bend myself to noble but filthy men, and make myself unhappy?” expressed his inner voice; while at that time, Li Bai still gave deep hope to his future and there were not many worries about it. The content of his poetry also expressed gratitude for good things and enthusiasms for life. Li Bai’s early poems were full of passionate love for life. His poems were often filled with innocent love, and they were inspired by the beautiful life that was overwhelmed by vulgar life. It also showed his positive and enthusiastic mind.

In the medium term, Li Bai’s poetry continued the former heroic and was joined with more of his own emotions. Difficult Roads was created when he left Beijing. In the poem, the famous line included “the roads are difficult, the roads are difficult. There were many roads., but where are they now? When the wind and the waves break, my dreams would be fulfilled.” The poet was full of grief and anger, which deeply revealed the hardships of the road to the political world and also expressed the pain and sorrow that the poet had accumulated in his heart for a long time. Although the contents of Please Enjoy the Wine showed the poet’s unconstrained character of not caring about fame and fortune, such as the lines “The ancient sages are lonely, only the drinker left his name to comfort himself” and “The thousands of gold are still coming back”, he still couldn’t hide his disappointments and anger. At the end of the poem, the line “I will drink the permanent sorrow with you” seemed to tell the world that he was unrestrained and open-minded; however, it couldn’t hide the poet’s thoughts and escapism. Of course, there were also some landscape poems with beautiful artistic conceptions, such as For the Return of Wei Wan, a local of Wangwushan Mountain, it described the beautiful scenery of lake and moon as in “People go to the moon, left the empty boat in the lake.”; in Farewell My Brother Changju at Xunyang, he wrote “People sit on the moon, sails fall down to the lagoon”; in The Letter to Landlord Cui Zongzhi through the Journey along the River at Night, he wrote “Moon spins with the green mountains, the river flows with the green mountains. I am like sitting on the stars, feeling that the forests are calm.”; and in the Moon Chant at Xilou, Jinling, he wrote “Night in Jinling is cool and windy, I go to the Xilou to see the mountains. The white clouds reflect the empty city, and the white dew drops the autumn moon.”; all of these lines were the idealized descriptions of the natural features of the poet based on his own personality and characteristics, which paid more attention to the overall artistic conception, making the poems very natural and true.

In the late period, Li Bai indulged in pursuing mortality. His works were not as many as before, but there were still good works that could express his mind and thoughts. For example, in the Farewell and Cry, Jiangxia, the line “there are no tears in the life, this is infinitely crying” expressed that the poet was crying because of the undeserved sin he got due to the involvement with His Loyal Highness Yong. Fortunately, Guo Zi-yi saved his life on his way to exile. Later, he wrote the Departing Early from the Baidi City and took advantage of the beautiful scenery of the river to express his own pleasure after being pardoned. Love, exaggeration and some strange ideas blended in with the mountains and rivers, which was more natural. And the poet also wrote a poem at the age of 61 when he heard that the Grand Commandant Li Guang-bi led the soldiers to pursue the rebels; he was determined to attack the enemy but turned back because of illness.

In summary, Li Bai’s works have the following characteristics: first, his poems have strong self-awareness and self-expression; Li Bai wanted to pursue the fame and fortune, meanwhile, he was unwilling to be trapped; such contradictory and unifying characteristic of Li is reflected in his poetry; second, Li Bai’s poems have a kind of vigorous and invigorating strength, using poetry to vent their emotions; third, as a romantic poet, he incorporated his artistic imagination into his poems and cast a layer of fantasy on them.
4.2. The Relationship between Personal Experiences of Su Shi and His Poetry

According to relevant information, there were about 4,000 poems of Su Shi. The poems were broad in content and diverse in style. They were dominated by boldness, with the unified proportions of variations and extremely romantic characteristics, making the new direction of development for Song Poetry. The famous poems of Su Shi include Water Melody, Butterfly Love Flowers, Moon of the Xijiang River, and Mediation of the Past at Red Cliff, as well as the collection of poems Dongpo Yizhuan and Dongpo Yueju.

When Su Shi was still an official in his early years, the heroes in his works were mainly the ancients or himself. His main works of that period include Returning to the Resignation, Former Song of the Red Cliff, Song of the Spring of Dongting Lake, and Zuiweng Pavilion. The Former Song of the Red Cliff was the proud work of Su Shi, which is quiet and imaginary and deep and elegant.

After Su Shi was detained in Huangzhou because of the “Wutai Poetry Case”, Su began to shout in the face of such a difficult and harsh environment, and the period was also the peak period of his literary creation. At the stage, Su Shi wrote the famous Song of the Red Cliff, Mediation of the Past at Red Cliff, and Cold Food Poetry. The style of the works in the period was unrestrained. When Su Shì’s feelings were strong, he expressed his anger with strong writings, and it could see from his calligraphy that with the changes of emotions, the momentum was in ups and downs. Changes to the dignified style of the past were made, which was similar to the situation of Li Bai in the Tang Dynasty.

Many of his poems showed that Su Shì had ideas and ambitions, such as “Struggle and dare” in The Gravestone Epitaph of Mr. Dongpo and “The Court is clear and the world is ruled.” in Ce Bie. There were also some poems of Su Shi which used a fable and metaphorical approach to outline a picture, such as “Three or two branches of bamboo blossom in the evening, the warmth of rivers in Spring is firstly known by ducks.” in Night Scene of Huichong River in Spring, or “The West Lake is like the beauty, who is always beautiful despite her makeup.” in Sunny then Rainy, on the Lake.

In the study, it is found that Su Shì’s poems had a wide range of themes, such as poems that paid attention to people’s livelihood, poems that expressed patriotic passion, poems that recorded scenery of mountains, rivers, and villages, and poems that expressed the wit, excitement, and richness of Su Shì’s heart.

Although Su Shì was disappointed, complaining, and sorrowful, he always pursued the value of life and individuality of literature, which reflected Su Shì’s love for life. Even if he was taken to Lingnan the barren land, he could still find the joy of life and live a life on his own. What is most representative of such kind of life is the very romantic poem Water Melody. “When is the moon coming? Ask the sky with wine in hand.”, the whole poem was written with enthusiasm. In the end, he wrote: “I hope that people will live for a long time, thus we could reunion again.”, which expressed not only the sincere wish of Su Shì in the distressed life but also the common aspiration of people who yearn for happiness for thousands of years.

In summary, Su Shì’s poems were natural and unrestrained with a wide range of subjects. He was good at making use of exaggerated metaphors, making his poems be of unique styles. Besides, his poems also pursued magnificent styles and broad artistic conceptions, as well as rational thinking about the fate of life. Moreover, Su Shì’s articles and poems also had the uniqueness of art; they were not only a tool for carrying the Taoism but also a high-level form of human spiritual life.

5. Conclusions

Different cultural backgrounds and societies create different personalities. Different personalities could lead to different life experiences. Different life experiences would have a certain impact on the poet’s literary creation. Throughout the ages, many literati and literary writers would carry out literary creations according to their mood at the time. When they were very impressed with something, their thinking would be opened, and they would continue to create literary works, and these works would also have different styles that could reflect the mood of the poet and the social situations of that time. Therefore, the study of the relationships between the traditional literati’s personal experiences and their literary creations is conducive to further comprehension of the poet, the further analysis of the literary writing background, as well as the emotions involved; therefore, the situations of a certain dynasty could be obtained, providing ideas for scholars in related fields in the study of the dynasty.

References