Su Dongpo: Chinese Genius
AnnMarie Hamar

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Reviewer: AnnMarie Hamar
Reading Level: Primary
Rating: Outstanding
Genre: Biographies; Picture books;
Subject: Authors, Chinese--Biography--Juvenile literature; Su, Shi, 1037-1101--Juvenile literature; Books--Reviews

The eleventh-century Chinese scholar Su Shih is regarded by many people as a genius. Author Demi describes him as one who embodied the "enlightenment of Buddhism, the simplicity of Taoism, and the wise teachings of Confucianism." A Renaissance man, he was a poet, painter, architect, calligrapher, engineer and statesman. As a magistrate, he was liked and respected for his fairness and his ability to see people, not class structure. Su Shih, who later adopted the name of Su Dongpo, was the first official to grant college loans, work for the relief of famine victims and establish China's first public hospital. He consistently fought against government corruption and as a result was often forced to live in exile. Demi's attitude toward her subject is one of great admiration. The text is reverential in tone and includes some of Su Shih's poetry. The paint and ink illustrations contain vibrant hues and are framed by gold leaf reminiscent of illuminated manuscripts. Overall, this is a beautiful book.