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Picture Books

Su Dongpo: Chinese Genius
Demi
Lee and Low Books
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If children need a new superhero, they should skip Hollywood's fictitious offerings and learn about China's real Su Dongpo. "He was the best," concludes the author.

Demi builds her case by sharing the quality of the man, not just his achievements. Her respect for her hero 1036—1101) is portrayed in her descriptions of his leadership style: "Just as [his] writing followed the laws of nature, so did his rulings, which were just and as brilliant as the sun." She seasons the text with quotes from his lyrical poems and from the Chinese Book of Wisdom.

During his remarkable life, Su Dongpo was a statesman, philosopher, poet, painter, engineer, architect, and humanitarian, scholar, judge, and advisor to rulers. He started China's first public hospital, developed the first sanitation system, and enacted reforms. A noted poet from an early age, he wrote some works about nature, but got in trouble for his poetry about social conditions and corruption, leading to his persecution and exile. Despite his deportation, he remained a popular hero.

Demi's illustrations offer a lush gallery of Chinese-style art—brightly adorned with lacquer red, royal blues, and gold foil—depicting mist-cloaked mountains, swirling seas, and regally dressed emperors. Su Dongpo's poetry and Demi's images meld when she paints his words as illustrations: "Then suddenly the cliffs opened as if by the power of heaven. / The swirling waters began to leave their wide expanse."

Demi studied art in China, and has been extensively recognized with awards for her more than 100 books, including the *New York Times* Best Illustrated Books, and the Middle East Book awards. She masterfully tells Su Dongpo's story with illustrations, language, and concepts understandable to elementary school readers; this volume will likely make them thirst to learn more about China and this "best" hero.

Linda Salisbury