

RHYMING WITH TZU-YU'S "TREADING THE GREEN"
By Su Shi (Su Dongpo)

Introduction

Su Shi (1036-1101), also known as Su Dongpo, had a long career as a government official in the Northern Song. Twice he was exiled for his sharp criticisms of imperial policy. Su is also one of the most noted poets of the Northern Song period.

Selected Document with Questions

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Rhyming with Tzu-Yu's "Treading the Green"¹
By Su Shi (Su Dongpo)

East wind stirs fine dust on the roads,
fine chance for strollers to enjoy the new spring.
Slack season—just right for roadside drinking,
grain still too short to be crushed by carriage wheels.
City people sick of walls around them
clatter out at dawn and leave the whole town empty.
Songs and drums jar the hills, grass and trees shake;
picnic baskets strew the fields where crows pick them over.
Who draws a crowd there? A priest, he says,
blocking the way, selling charms and scowling:
"Good for silkworms—give you cocoons like water jugs!
Good for livestock—make your sheep big as deer!"
Passers-by aren't sure they believe his words—
buy charms anyway to consecrate the spring.
The priest grabs their money, heads for a wine shop.
Dead drunk, he mutters, "My charms really work!"

¹ "Treading the Green" refers to a day of picnics held in early spring. Su's younger brother Tzu-Yu had written a poem describing the festival, and Su here adopts the same theme and rhymes for his own poem. The "priest" in line 9 may be either a Buddhist or Taoist priest.

**Primary Source Document with Questions (DBQs) on
RHYMING WITH TZU-YU'S "TREADING THE GREEN," BY SU SHI (SU DONGPO)**

Questions:

1. Use your own words to describe the scene, the people, and their feelings on this occasion.
2. What is the author's attitude toward popular religion?