

Jared Ronda

Professor Stubbs

ENG 201

3/23/23

Reflection on Anthology of Chinese Literature

*Heaven and Earth are a Crucible, the Creator is the smith,*

*Yin and yang are the charcoal, living creatures are the bronze:*

*Combining, scattering, waning, waxing= where is any pattern?*

*A thousand changes, a myriad transformations with never any end.*

*If by chance one becomes a man, it is not a state to cling to;*

*If one be instead another creature, what cause is that for regret?*

*A merely clever man is partial to self, despising others, vaunting ego;*

*The man of understanding takes the larger view: nothing exists to take exception to.*

*[...]*

*Find no cause for complacency in life, but cultivate emptiness and drift.*

*The Man of Virtue is unattached; recognizing fate, he does not worry.*

*Be not dismayed by petty pricks and checks!*

-J. R. Hightower, "Anthology of Chinese Literature", pgs. 138-140

The Anthology of Chinese Literature is a collection of writings from Medieval China, which houses multiple different writings from a myriad of Chinese authors. This one excerpt, taken from a single writing in the collection, is a reflection of the author's general disposition and beliefs, which would reflect the general belief systems of the era.

The excerpt is taken from Chia Yi, which itself seems to espouse the wisdom imparted from taoism, a belief system that has helped shape traditions in China. From the writing, it notes the taoist belief of impermanence, in how nothing is ever permanent in the world, and how people change, and how there is nothing permanent in the world other than fate itself, so holding onto petty grudges and beliefs is just immature, and how better men surrender themselves to fate will make one wise and virtuous. It's an interesting interpretation on how petty and grudge-holding men are seen as foolish while those who let go of such beliefs are wiser for it.

Another aspect of note is how it uses a forge as a metaphor for life on Earth. From the metaphor, yin and yang, the two aspects of balance in taoism, are the coals in which life is forged from, while Heaven and Earth are the crucible, and the creator itself is the smith. It's an interesting metaphor, as it suggests that life itself, though being a creation of a higher power, also suggests that one's life itself and the whims of the creator and our own environment will shape who we are. Such a metaphor can also be seen as how we, as life itself, are shaped from everything around us, and how there is no distinct pattern to be made; we are all unique in our own ways.

There were a diverse set of belief systems in China, especially during the medieval era. This single writing takes note of one particular belief system prevalent in the era, Taoism, and makes it much easier to interpret for the average layperson, which makes it all the more understandable as to how it permeated the landscape of its era.