Chinese Literature- Final Exam

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Chinese Literature

**Question 1: Compare the poems of Wang Wei, Li Po, and Tu Fu. What philosophies are these poets usually associated with? How do their poems exemplify the philosophies (Only use one poem for each poet)?**

**Answer:** Wang Wei had been one of the greatest poems in Chinese history. He had served in the civil services, back in 721. His love for the literature can be observed with his writings about the many different aspects of life. There are many of the works that can be associated t him as his best compilations. But the philosophy we could associate Wang Wei with is the Life. How he takes the perspective of life in many different ways and makes his readers travel with him to many aspects. In his poem ‘Climbing Pien- chueh Temple' that is translated by Stephen Owen, he has presented the aspects of life that are deeply connected with the soul and the physical world(Mair, 2001, p. 90). In this poem, Wang Wei has exemplified the life with the movement of the soul that passes through many hard phases to get itself calm and soothing.

Li Po, in his personal life, has experienced many distractions. His life had never remained much rewarding to him. This aspect is therefore apparent in his poetic work. He has written in his poem about the boldness and grace. The boldness and grace for him are two opposite sides of life. What his poems exemplify are, combining the opposite aspects of life. This shows that life had been the philosophy of Li Po. In his poem ‘To Meng Hao- jan', Li has explored what the life of a drunken man is all about(Mair, 2001, p. 92). He explores the ways how the drunken man takes his life to some time on the very high nodes and in some times, he comes at the very bottom of the times in his life. He exemplifies through his poems such aspects of life by amalgamating them with the grace and the boldness, being drunken is how ungraceful one is.

Tu Fu compared to both Wang Wei and Li Po, had not been that much success in life. His civil service experience reveals that he left the side of the life which he found cumbersome. Therefore he decided to move on with the new phases ‘the- poetry' which he has conquered them. In his poem ‘At the sky's end', he had explored what is life when anyone has nothing(Mair, 2001, p. 98). Although he wrote this poem by referring to his friend's life, the sky's end is what he thinks is the end of life when one is left with no other choices in hand. His philosophy is just about an unsuccessful life and how it can be related to the one end of the sky. Sky's end is how he had exemplified the end of life.

Author of Climbing Pien- chueh Temple: Written by Wang Wei, translated by Stephen Owen

Date of Writing: 756

Author of To Meng Hao- jan: Written by Li Po, translated by Stephen Owen

Date of Writing: 756

Author of At the sky’s end: Written by Tu Fu, translated by David Lattimore

Date of Writing: 749

**Question 3: In “Red Cliff Rhapsody,” why did Su Shih’s play the flute plaintively? Explain Su Shih’s answer to him. How would you characterize his worldview which made his guests happy again?**

**Answer:** In the ‘Red Cliff Rhapsody', Su Shih has been telling about his experience of traveling towards the red cliff. Red Cliff is accompanied by some of the guests towards their destination. About the environment, they had been traveling in is the best one can imagine. Su Shih remembers that he and his friends were drunk and were enjoying the sight of the sea. The moon as observed by Su Shih was moving with them and his light was glittering the surface of the sea. Su Shih thought at that time he could not remember where exactly their destination was. Since Su Shih was completely indulged in the sight of that view, he started singing. He played the flute plaintively as the moon sight according to him, made sad one of the widow on her lonely boat(Mair, 2001, p. 239).

Su Shi explained to his guests that he is mesmerized by this view. For him, the moon, the glittering light of it on the surface of the sea and this endless journey are one of the things, he wants to achieve. But at the same time, he also confesses in front of his guests that he knew he can never be the part of that world. His view that made his friends happy was the comparison of the earth and the heavens with that of the moon and the water. He mentioned that these all can never meet, therefore he thought that one should think of himself as eternal(Mair, 2001, p. 240). This made his friends happy again. His world view suggests that everything in the world is eternal and moves with us- human beings just as part of our lives. As like Su cannot be the part of the world, he wished for, similar is true for the rest of the people who live on the face of this earth. Just we can enjoy this sight and cannot indulge into that for the sake of attaining the everlasting pleasures.

Author of At the Red cliff: Su Shi

Date of Writing: 1082

**Question 5: What literary techniques and arguments did Han Yu use in “Memorial on the Bone of Buddha” to dissuade the emperor from welcoming a relic of the Buddha to the imperial palace?**

**Answer:** The literary techniques and arguments used by Han in the memorial of the bone of Buddha are all about how the Confucianism is related to the peaceful teachings of Buddhism. He mentions that since we had been the followers of this very peaceful religion and the teachings of it remain peaceful for the entire world, therefore we must promulgate them in a more active manner. Han has been very submissive to his Majesty, therefore he dissuades the emperor from welcoming a relic of Buddha to the Imperial Palace.

He based his reasoning on the notion that since the Majesty is supreme to all over them, therefore he must not personally sit inside the pavilion and witness the monks taking part in the whole exercise. Han argues that since the people are very stupid and they will start believing in whatever wrong will come in their minds, therefore you must abide doing so. The reason he proposes is that if the Supreme leader of their will does this act, the people will think that he has started worshipping someone else. This according to him is what not desirable(Zhang, 1984, p. 252). He further mentions that this can also make the people depress and they will be forced by their emotions to leave everything that they have gathered in your love. He also bases his opinion on the reasons that if the Supreme leader would be a witness in this way by his followers, they will start teasing themselves also. He then draws a picture of the conflict and destruction that would be happening, if such a scene is witnessed by the people. So Han argues that for the sake of the unity of our people and for the sake of our religion, the emperor must abide doing so. This is what, according to Han is desirable.

Author of Memorial on the bone of Buddha: Han Yu

Date of writing: 819

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Mair, V. H. (2001). *The shorter Columbia anthology of traditional Chinese literature*. Columbia University Press.

Zhang, X. (1984). *Poetry and Prose of the Tang and Song*. Beijing: Chinese Literature Press.