Poetry, Art, and Chinese Philosophy

Throughout this unit you’ve been introduced the Shih Ching, the I Ching, Confucianism, Taoism, and even a little Chinese brush painting. Now is your opportunity to put some of this together. Read the following poems.

“Snow on the River” by Liu Tsung-yuan (773-819).

Snow on the River
Over thousands of mountains, no bird flies
Over thousands of paths there is no trail of footprints.
On a lonely boat sits an old man with bamboo hat and cape,
Fishing silently in the snowy river.

“Autumn Meditations” by Du Fu (712 – 770)

Jade dew withers and wounds the groves of maple trees,
On Wu mountain, in Wu gorge, the air is dull and drear.
On the river surging waves rise to meet the sky,
Above the pass wind and cloud join the earth with darkness.
Chrysanthemum bushes open twice, weeping for their days,
A lonely boat, a single line, my heart is full of home.
Winter clothes everywhere are urgently cut and measured,
Baidicheng* above, the evening's driven by beating on stones.

*an ancient Chinese temple

Selected ONE poem carefully paying attention to language, repetition, images, metaphor, tense, etc. Essentially, you must interpret this poem using your knowledge of poetry. Next you need to interpret this poem through the eyes of a Taoist or Confucian. If you are inclined, you may also use elements of the I Ching if they work with your interpretation.

The product of this thought will be:

1. A piece of art that reflects your poetic interpretation. This artwork must not be dashed off at the last minute but must be carefully constructed using elements of Taoism or Confucianism and the little you might have learned from our artistic visitor. Think carefully about the medium, the representation, and the message. What are you saying about your poem through your artistic endeavor? You may not take the path of least resistance and say a Taoist would do nothing. No, you must create. (20 points)

2. A short paper of at least 2 pages (12 point, standard margins, double-space, times) that details the following (20 points):
   • How you interpreted the poem as a student of English,
   • How you interpreted the poem through the eyes of a Taoist, Confucian, I Chingian (not a word),
• Why you selected the medium you did and how you’ve represented the poem visually through your artistic interpretation. It should also mention SPECIFIC language, prolifically, that pertains to either of these philosophies.

Super important to think about is that you are not just presenting the poem; you are presenting your response to the poem mixed with the philosophy you have chosen. For example, if I presented a Confucian response to “The Star Spangled Banner,” I would present the following:

1. A poetic analysis of the piece (meter, rhyme, allusions, metaphors, etc.)
2. My Confucian response which would center on the importance of country (Hsin: reliable in word and good faith), soldiers following their leaders and leaders following their ruler (filial piety and sheng jen—sage king), proper order of the army and the population to aid the army (rectification of names—know your place and follow it), a collective call to all (“Oh say can you see?”) as yi (righteous or dutiful action), the integration of T’ien or Heaven’s decree (“by the dawn’s early light”), yung (courage). You get the point. There is a lot there, and it is important for me to not just list these terms, but to place them in the song and explain how they are linked.
3. My computer-generated image would be filled with lots of lines, a hierarchical presentation of the song, patriotic images, angles, plains, points of intersection, and colors that are bright and explosive. I might also include a corpse being marched upon with face crying next to it.
4. I would explain all of these elements using my Confucian language and his reliance on structure. I would explain that I chose a computer-generated image based on the reliance of numbers via the I Ching (Confucius was a big fan of the I Ching and the first half of it was written in a time of war—much like this song). I would also note that the corpse and crying face represent my personal interpretation of Confucius. Here I might note that this presents the people dedicating their lives to a higher power (the government) and the boots on the body as the people losing their individuality. The crying face is my nod to Confucius and his idea of the benevolent leader and educated person who sees the pain of war (chun-tzu).

You have lots of time for this project, so I’m expecting thoughtful, creative work. As you can see from my explanation, planning is essential. The goal of this assignment is to demonstrate a thorough understanding of multiple philosophical concepts from The Analects, The Tao Te Ching, or the I Ching. It is essential that you use the terminology, use lots of it, and use it correctly. You must present your knowledge of the terms as you use them.

This project is due Monday, March 14, our party day. You will be sharing your work with the class. We will also be displaying it in school, so make thoughtful choices.