Taoist Influence In The Good Earth Essay, Research Paper

Taoist Influences in The Good Earth

The Good Earth by Pearl S. Buck is a story that takes place in the early

twentieth

century in China. It is a novel about a man, Wang Lung, and some of the

events he

endures in his lifetime. This story has many references to Eastern religions

and

philosophies. One of the most prominent influences in this story is the

Chinese philosophy

of Taoism. The Good Earth relates to Taoism in a number of ways. Three ways

that The

Good Earth shows the influence of Taoist philosophy are the appreciation of

nature, the

Taoist practice of turning to nature during times of social activism , and

the Taoist belief

in simplicity and that money and hierarchical government are not important.

The Taoist appreciation of nature plays a huge role in The Good Earth. The

Taoists believe that "the order and harmony of nature is far more stable

and enduring than

either the power of the state or the civilized institutions constructed by

human learning"

(Waley 56). An early Taoist belief is the practice of Wu-wei, which is best

described as

"action modeled by nature" (Waley 56). Wang Lung owes everything he

has to the earth

and has no trouble admitting it. Wang Lung and his family even go so far as

to create

shrines to the earth, as shown in this passage from the story, "Together

this man and this

woman stood before the gods of their fields" (Buck 16). Wang Lung may

not be an

admitted Taoist, but he certainly follows some aspects of the Taoist way of

life.

Another way that Wang Lung displays elements of Taoism in his behavior is

when

he decides to work only in the night during the revolution. Removing oneself

from social-

political conflict is a typical Taoist behavior. This passage from The Way

and it’s Power

by Arthur Waley explains this behavior, "Throughout Chinese history,

people weary of

social activism and aware of the fragility of human achievements would retire

from the

world and turn to nature. They might retreat to a countryside or mountain

setting to

commune with natural beauty ." Wang Lung may not have retreated to a

countryside or

mountain setting, but he would have if he had the chance since his greatest

desire was to

return home to his land. This quote from the point in the story when Wang

Lung was

afraid he may have to fight in the war, proves that. "Now I am truly

tempted to sell the

little slave and go north to the land" (Buck 92).

The Taoist belief in simplicity also plays a huge role in this story. This

quote from

The Tao of Pooh explains the significance of the Uncarved Block. "The

essence of the

principle of the Uncarved Block is that things in their original simplicity

contain their own

natural power, power the is easily spoiled and lost when that simplicity is

changed" (Hoff

10). Although Wang Lung becomes quite prosperous, he is still a simple man at

heart.

After overhearing a conversation between two men about what they would do if

they had

lots of gold and silver, Wang Lung replied, "If I had the gold, and

silver and the jewels, I

would buy land with it, good land, and I would bring forth harvests from the

land!" (Buck

87).

The Taoist way of life plays a part in the life of Wang Lung, the main

character of

The Good Earth. He shows this Taoist influence by his appreciation of the

earth and what

it brings to him, his pacifist nature, and his simple way of thinking and

living. Wang Lung

may not have realized it the Taoist way of life has influenced the way he

lives greatly.