

42

道生一	Dao creates one
一生二	One creates two
二生三	Two creates three
三生萬物	Three creates all things
萬物負陰而抱陽	All things turn from yin to face yang
沖氣以為和	They balance each other to attain harmony

Pinyin Transliteration

dào shēng yī
yī shēng èr
èr shēng sān
sān shēng wàn wù
wàn wù fù yīn ér bào yang
chòng qì yǐ wéi hé

Rhyming Pattern in Ancient (pre221BCE) Phonetic Rhyme Groups

uk 幽 - əŋ 耕 - it 質
it 質 - əŋ 耕 - it 質
it 質 - əŋ 耕 - em 侵
em 侵 - əŋ 耕 - at 月 - at 物
at 月 - at 物 - ə 之 - em 侵 - ə 之 - uk 幽 - əŋ 陽
uŋ 冬 - at 物 - ə 之 - oi 歌 - oi 歌

Prosody

The sound *sreŋ* 生 “to create” repeats in the middle of the first four lines to provide an internal rhyme and rhythm through the first stanza. It is followed by *?it* “one” 一 and *nij-s* “two” 二 in the first two lines, which happen to be in the same rhyme group. The ending character of one line begins the next – *?it ?it* 一, *nij-s nij-s* 二二, *srum srum* 三三, *mâns C.mut mâns C.mut* 萬物萬物, sounding like reduplications. The concluding stanza has no parallel structure, but the antepenultimate character *nə* 而 of the first line rhymes with *ləʔ* 以 of the last line, which is also the latter part of a compound-rhyme *khəp s ləʔ* 氣以.

Annotation

The first line tells us that the one and only nameless constant in the universe Dao that gives rise to “One,” the unitary nothingness, or the Infinite 無極 (wuji), which morphs into the Supreme Ultimate 太極 (taiji), which fits well with the current theory of the Big Bang in which nonexistence gives rise to existence as “One.” Like the growth of cells, one splits into two and polarities emerge as yin and yang. They interact to produce “three” as the harmonious pneuma between them. In time these three permute to bring the multitude of the universe into being. Another interpretation of “three” is the realms occupy by the heave, earth, and people.

Dao is the timeless, formless, ineffable, immutable, indeterminable undifferentiated, origin of the universe. “Dao produces one” is similar to the first stanza in Verse 25: “Before the birth of the cosmos matter coalesced to form.” The metaphysical language in the first stanza is also similar to those in the “Appended Judgments” *Xi Ci* 繫辭 of the *Classic of Changes* 易經, whose eleventh chapter says: “Therefore, the studies of changes produce the “Supreme Ultimate”, from which emerge the two poles.” 是故易有太極 是生兩儀 The “Supreme Ultimate”, being the body of singular origin, is the “one” in this text. The second chapter of the *Classic of Changes*’s “Appended Commentaries” also states: “The dynamic of the six lines (of a hexagon, the top two representing heaven, the middle two human, and the bottom two earth) is the way of the “Three Realms (heaven, earth, and human)” 六爻之動 三極之道也.

The concluding stanza could be describing the process of photosynthesis and the behavior of charged particles, but it is talking about the essential role “one” plays in harmonizing the extremes of any binary system. One represents equilibrium in all realms. Within, we must strive to balance both spirit and body, as well as keeping all systems within bounds. Externally, it should also be the guiding principle for our interactions with others and nature.