

First section 440 + spoilers,

<https://mylasted.blogspot.com/2022/10/return-of-mount-hua-chapter-433-im-not.html>

Second section 1430+ spoilers

<https://maehwasup.wordpress.com/2024/06/17/chapter-1426/>

Ao3 mirror link:

<https://archiveofourown.org/works/59232376>

Feel free to leave comments/ criticisms!

A lengthy essay on (in my opinion) one of the most well-written Mount Hua characters, God Hand Tang Jopyung (title revealed in chapter 1422, character introduced in ~430). Tang Jopyung only appears for less than a dozen? chapters, but has an absurd amount of meaning and commentary condensed within his character.

Before that though, I want to talk about one of the major themes of Mount Hua, and Chung Myung's (CM) main source of guilt. This is the death of all combative Mount Hua seniors on the peak of Heavenly Mountain, the subsequent downfall and squalid conditions Mount Hua had to endure after, and the twisted version of Kangho a hundred years after.

Pre-reincarnation CM, the Plum Blossom Sword Saint (PBSS), was an utter asshole. He realizes post-reincarnation how deep his inhumanity and anti-societal nature was. Thus, CM is plagued with guilt for not being able to remain alive to save Mount Hua, but also not passing

down any teachings to his fellow Sahyung/Sajil. This is further compounded by his Sahyung's/Sajil's sacrifices being "dogs deaths", as the current Kangho choose to bury the story of the Heavenly Mountain.

A hundred years pass, and those in power of Orthodox Kangho are cold and calculating, composed of self-centered sect leaders who make decisions based off of their pride and ego. Chung Myung hates the current Orthodox sects much for the same reason he hates his past self, as the sect leaders engage in actions that promote glory rather than understanding how valuable their disciples and morals are. They are arrogant and believe they can handle the consequences of war, and don't understand the devastation their ideologies can create.

The Tang family as it is first introduced is no different. Although it's easy to forget, when first introduced the Tang family are a bunch of fucking pricks. Jo Gul talks about how they oppress neighboring merchant groups through controlling their children. Jo Gul's family is threatened death for not giving up Mount Hua disciples. On top of that, the Tang family as a whole is deeply misogynistic, seeing women as political tools that should not be taught martial arts. The Tang family council of elders are self-centered and egotistical, much like the rest of Kangho, and some inwardly believe that the Tang family could rule Kangho if they freely used poison.

Everything below this point is closely related to facts but somewhat interpretive/ opinionated on Biga's intentions.

With this context, Tang Jopyung is later introduced in chapter ~400. Right off the bat, he is introduced as the oldest and most skilled of the Tang craftsmen, as well as being

dementia/old-age addled and unable to behave coherently. What draws him out of this muddled state is his memories of PBSS. His existence is paramount to dealing with cold steel and passing down weapons to the current Mount Hua sect. While he is crafting, he reflects on how meaningless aspects of his life have been as a craftsman. Blacksmithing is paralleled to martial arts, the process of honing and repeatedly refining one's own skills day after day to extreme degrees, and Biga continues playing on this theme throughout ROTMHS.

The only way to get past the Tang family's addled brain is the "revival" of PBSS, and CM pretends to be PBSS to get Jopyung to act. Tang Jopyung later talks about how PBSS's random nagging inspired him to stick as a blacksmith and thus exist to pass down weapons 100 years later to Mount Hua.

PBSS: "Yah, you crazy son of! I don't understand what is so great about wielding a sword. Those who live with blood on their hands are the most corrupt people in this world. And if there is no one to maintain and make their swords, what will be used to fight? Whatever you say, you need to be on the path that is best for you, now stop this." Importantly, CM doesn't even remember this. It is PBSS's random, even jerk-like nagging, propped up by the prestige of his title and accolades that passes down 100 years, even through the brain-addled Tang family craftsman, that inspires Jopyung to go back to blacksmithing. It is this forgotten rambling that delivers weapons to the hands of a generation 100 years later.

Now the stage is set for what I believe to be one of the most well-written Mount Hua chapters, chapter 1426.

+1430 Spoilers

Fast forward many years. JLS is now heading towards the Tang family to decimate it. As Tang Wei and other members plan to defend the Tang family, Jopyung hammers away in the workshop and reminisces on the warm hand of Tang Bo (TB) on his head. He remembers the teachings TB tried to pass on:

“those bastards who don’t know what comes first and what comes later. Those who value what I created more than their own lives can’t walk the right path.”

Jopyung reflects on whether he fulfilled his promise to TB as a descendent, and further reflects on his life as a craftsman and the process of blacksmithing. Blacksmithing is an endless process of “melting, tempering, cooling, striking”, excluding the “trivial things” and leaving only the “purest and fairest”. That is “the craftsmanship of the Tang family”. After his thoughts end, “Tang Jopyung slowly raise[s] his head. The Tang family workshop. Everything he had touched was there. Everything he had.”

With this revelation, Jopyung continues hammering with his sounds fading softer and softer into the background. What seems to be about blacksmithing is Tang Jopyung’s realizations about the Tang family sect as a whole. The process of developing disciples and descendents is the same “melting” and “tempering” that Tang Jopyung has dedicated his life to, and is a mirror of the craftsmanship of the Tang family to raise new generations. In other words, the process of tempering and honing steel is the same as how the Tang family processes and hone’s generations of people.

Now, faced with a choice to defend the Tang family's treasures, or save as many feeble lives as possible, Tang Jopyung realizes that his lifelong pursuit of craftsmanship is meaningless in comparison to those Tang family lives crafted through the ages. It is important to note the prestige of craftsmanship and treasures are the very things corrupted elders like Tang Wei value, but also even the common craftsman can't help but defend. Reaching these conclusions and reflecting on the warm hand of Tang Bo on his head, Tang Jopyung decides to burn down what is likely Kanghos greatest workshop to push the Tang family away to safety.

Using prior chapters, Biga artfully develops a connection between blacksmithing, the pursuit of martial prowess/ the martial path, and the raising of generations. Biga has constantly questioned whether the search for glory, better results/possessions (such as creating treasured swords) and the overall bloody nature of pursuing martial arts is at all meaningful compared to the inherent value of humans. The warped culmination of these ideals is JLS.

JLS walks in through the grand entrance of the Tang family, mildly confused as they acted against his predictions, and is led to the lone Jopyung, hammering away at an anvil. He threatens Jopyung, asking him where the Tang family members have gone. He is ignored as Jopyung continues hammering away. JLS knows he should just kill Jopyung and go on his way, but JLS can't help but ask what Jopyung is doing, to which Jopyung responds, "I am making a flying dagger."

JLS quickly realizes how poetic this situation is. He mocks Jopyung, saying

"everything you have dedicated your life to has crumbled... still, there is nothing else you can do. So, even at the end of your life you repeat the same actions. If that's the life of an artisan, it's just pitiful".

JLS is not just mocking artisans though; he thematically is trashing the idea there is any meaning in the honing of one's skills. This is the same pursuit of righteousness and martial prowess that forms the Orthodox sect's prestige. To JLS, martial arts, justifications, and human souls are nothing more than tools or hindrances, and he believes there is no inherent value/meaning besides pure human desire. So he mocks what he sees as Jopyung trying to create a "remarkable weapon", as "it's just pounding on poorly forged iron, creating nothing but useless trash." After all, JLS somewhat rightfully believes the constant indoctrination of strength and personal egos pounded generation after generation in all martial artists is nothing but useless trash trying to become masterful weapons. JLS hates those who "ascribe false meaning to the meaningless", preferring those who cry and plead at the end of their lives, as he sees them as honest to the true human form. To JLS that dagger is nothing more and nothing less than a weapon to be wielded and a sad relic of human nature.

In response to JLS's arguments, Jopyung does not react. He continues forging the dagger and talking as if JLS isn't present. Tang Jopyung describes the simple and repetitive process of blacksmithing, along with the time he's spent doing those things. Even JLS stands still to listen to the decades of time and effort put into Jopyung's voice. Jopyung talks about his life, how he has created "stronger, sharper, more remarkable weapons, breaking and remelting them if they didn't meet the standards." Notably, Tang Jopyung says, "Only after being split and split again, tearing off its flesh until the very end, only then ... will it become a master weapon." This is both the martial path and Kangho itself, the nature of individuals training to become masters and martial artists engaging in warfare.

At the end of all this, Jopyung creates ... a "coarse textured and uneven" weapon. The dagger is ugly, "so pitiful that it defies belief." Because ... of course it is.

The pinnacle of Tang family craftsmanship, the final breath of the Tang workshop, the dagger is twisted and ugly because that's what the Tang family is. The Tang family is misogynistic, power hungry, egotistical, and corrupted to the core. It gets better after CM overturns the elder council, but Tang elders and the family as a whole simply don't understand Jopyung burning down the workshop. The Tang family never grew to understand "what comes first and what comes later," the Tang "values what they created more than their own lives." Furthermore, the lives that shape that dagger, PBSS, TB, and Jopyung, are filled with regrets for what they did not do and realizations they only obtained at the end. Thus, the final creation of the Tang workshop and God Hand Jopyung is an ugly and unrefined dagger. However,

"Tang Jopyeong, meticulously examining the inferior dagger, seemed to imply that it could become a one-of-a-kind master weapon."

This is the main difference between Tang Jopyung and JLS. Both see the corruption of the Tang family, but one believes there is potential to be found in the struggles of imperfect humans, and one can see nothing but the flaws. Tang Jopyung himself has led a unsightly life much in the same way the dagger is flawed, but he still passes on righteousness and purpose at the end of his life before the Tang family leave. Ironically, if anyone understands the meaninglessness of creation, it is JLS, but JLS cannot comprehend what value Jopyung would find in unsightly weapons and sects.

And so Jopyung finishes smithing, examines and lays down the dagger, and finally asks:

"Is this dagger a failure then?"

This is the sum of JLS's words, the acknowledgement that perhaps everything was truly a failure. What Jopyung is asking is if his very existence as a blacksmith, the Tang family as a whole, and perhaps even all of Kangho is a failure. So the question lingers, is this warped and

corrupted weapon born from endlessly honed training a failure? Is Kangho, the martial path, PBSS, and TB nothing but failures?

In an unpredictable action, Jopyung offers the dagger to JLS. JLS is flabbergasted. JLS, a character who so rarely mispredicts events or is shocked by anything that occurs, is in complete disbelief in front of a near dead dementia ridden old man. JLS asks, “what are you doing?”, to which Jopyung replies:

““There's no predetermined owner for iron. The one who holds it is the owner. You're just here right now.”

The still-warm heat was transmitted, Tang Jopyungs blood, dried on the surface of the dagger, stained Jang Ilso's hands a deep red...”

Joypung has given JLS everything. He has spoken his entire life's values into words, he has handed JLS the last creation of the Tang family, he has burnt down his life's work and efforts, and been weathered by time until even his mind had left him.

The workshop is empty, devoid of people. Anyone who came into this workshop and learned about poisons and craftsmanship could stand here in the Tangs place. Anyone could eventually learn the martial arts, the craftsmanship, the poison. Treasures can be collected and power can be grabbed, but only so long as the people stay alive. The daggers and martial arts are nothing more than daggers and empty books.

JLS does not see the dagger as anything more than a tool. He does not understand the depths of people's desires to hone martial arts and blacksmithing, the familial and warm kindness of sects that goes beyond their nature as weapons. JLS only sees the Orthodox's hypocrisy and flaws, only sees the path to glory he can build by crushing people under these flaws. Despite his hatred for Kangho's nature, JLS is ultimately obsessed and thus trapped by it. Jang Ilso is so

caught up in his intellectual and idealistic superiority that he can't help himself but to impulsively keep grabbing at power. His goal is the lives of the Tang family, but he is left puzzling over an incomprehensible old man and an incomprehensible old dagger while his actual objective gets further and further away. And so, Tang Jopyung dies on the spot standing before JLS can even sever his throat.

Tang Jopyung is a simple character. He doesn't understand or think about anything besides the process of blacksmithing and his youthful memories. So fittingly, in the chapters leading to his death, he does nothing but smith. He burns down the unrefined Tang family, identifies and discards the unusable legacy to be handed to JLS, and pushes the pure lives away in the hopes that they can become something better. Everything he does is everything that is pathetic to JLS, and everything he does has infinite meaning in the lives he saves.

“Pathetic.

“Even the hammer he had put down for the last time, the frail and twisted body, and the worn-out furnace - all were simply pathetic.

However, even Jang Ilso couldn't laugh at the young, confident, and pathetic smile of Tang Jopyungs lips.”

Jang Ilso, unifier of all evil sects, tyrant of the Evil Alliance, is stopped by nothing more than curiosity and the simple words of an old man. There is no glory or power in that old man's words and actions, no desire to create a legend or rise to the top of the world. Jang Ilso, the one who laughs at everyone in the world for their foolishness, can't laugh at the smile on Jopyungs lips. Tang Jopyung dies with a smile, because he understands the meaningless joke that is JLS's quest. Ultimately, what saves the weak lives of the Tang family is not the power they built, the weapons they crafted, nor the martial arts they honed. What saves the Tang family is the very

thing Chung Myung carries as his guilt, the same idle words and regrets of the assholes Tang Bo and Chung Myung from 100 years prior.

If Chung Myung had not yelled at Jopyung to become a blacksmith, or if Tang Bo had not passed down his words, the Tang family would cease to exist. But to CM, his life was a failure, trapped in the downfall of Hua despite his sacrifices, he is unable to remember all the tiny, but massive, good deeds he did.

Thus Biga answers the question: “is the dagger a failure?” If you are JLS, and see the dagger as nothing more than a dagger, then yes, it is unequivocally a failure. The dagger holds no consequence, nor does the lofty glory, martial arts, and treasure that come with engraving oneself as a legend in Kangho. However, if you are Tang Jopyung, the dagger is an unparalleled masterpiece because of the will passed down a hundred years. That is the will to become stronger, to save even one more life, to find joy in creating one more weapon, to fix their past regrets and change the future however they can. That is the same essence of Mount Hua, the Tang sect, and the regrets of PBSS and TBs stories. That dagger is born from the kindness of ancestors that transcends lifetimes, forged by a master blacksmith as the Tang Families last masterpiece, and reflects countless lives, experiences, and emotions. But that same dagger is nothing more and nothing less than a dagger unless you value the will of the people behind it. Now it is JLS’s turn to grasp Kanghos glory, so Tang Jopyung hands him that meaningless dagger, alongside the embers of the Tang’s useless splendor.

The twisted and unsightly grandeur of Kangho is passed down to JLS by a master artisan, alongside the simple set of blacksmith’s knowledge that crafted the God Hand, Tang Jopyung. Amidst the burning down remains of Kangho’s greatest workshop, Tang Jopyung thinks of the warm hands of Tang Bo on his head, and blossoms a youthful smile, because he has given JLS

nothing at all, and he has kept everything that matters alive.

Afterword:

There's a crap ton of detailed stuff I want to talk about that I can't fit into this essay formatting without extending it further, namely:

- The still-warm heat was transmitted, Tang Jopyungs blood, dried on the surface of the dagger, stained Jang Ilso's hands a deep red..."
 - I think this mirrors the event when CM first received his Dark Fragrance Sword. In CM's case, his blood was spilled onto the sword and soaked in, thus symbolizing the connection between him, his weapon, and the Tang family. Tang Jopyungs blood does not sink into the dagger, as his realizations from TB have not truly been passed down/ he has not lived his entire life following them, and thus his blood dries on the surface of the dagger.
- In the final line before leaving, JLS says, "Debts are detestable, you know."
 - JLS has consistently shown a respect for his enemies that go against his ideology/ prove him wrong without wavering. I think despite not really understanding the weight of the dagger handed to him, JLS still understands Jopyung taught him a lesson about Murim, but I'm still not certain about why JLS says this.

The dagger stains JLS' hand red, which I think also symbolizes how he can accept the Tang family's weapons and buildings but the true essence of the Tang can never permeate beyond his hands. Perhaps JLS even without understanding the meaning behind the dagger still feels that

lingering warmth, and this finds the debt detestable if someone who truly had nothing at the end but the will to leave some warmth behind.