

“NATURE” IN CHINA & JAPAN

- I. *Nature as process.*
- II. *Nature as interrelationships*
- III. *Natural as action based on true inner nature*
- IV. *The communal character of life*

I. NATURE AS PROCESS

1. *The turning of the seasons.*
2. *The inevitable passing away of things.*
3. *Creative, chaotic, beautiful change.*
4. *The process of things coming into being*

1. The turning of the seasons

- ❖ *We are always within a particular season, which is always temporary and in process of becoming another season.*
- ❖ *Each season has its own distinctive characteristics.*
- ❖ *Animals, plants, people, and human cultural activities co-exist as parts of the turning seasons.*

2. The passing away of things

- ❖ Mujō: *impermanence.*
- ❖ Aware: *a bittersweet sorrow at the transience of beauty.*
- ❖ *Various forms*
 - ❖ *Passing away of seasons*
 - ❖ *Steady aging of beauty*
 - ❖ *The rise and fall of glory*
 - ❖ *The imminence of sudden death and destruction*

3. The unpredictable, creative, and beautiful changes of nature

- ❖ *The unpredictable (“chaotic”) changes from moment to moment that are beautiful and spontaneously skillful like a cosmic artist.*
- ❖ *The “Creative” (zōka)*

4. The process of things coming into being

- ❖ *“Nonbeing”:* *a creative, formless dimension of reality beyond space and time, beyond our senses and intellect.*
- ❖ *Things arise into form and then disappear again like waves rising from the ocean and then falling away.*

II. NATURE AS WEB OF RELATIONSHIPS

1. *A metaphysics of interrelatedness.*
2. *Dynamic interrelationships.*
3. *Ideal: fulfill one’s niche; fit harmoniously into the system.*

1. A metaphysics of interrelatedness

- ❖ *The Western ecological view as metaphysics: the universe is fundamentally a net of relationships and a dynamic system of mutual conditioning.*

- ❖ *Interrelatedness is primary, distinctness secondary: our distinctness is our unique set of interrelationships.*
- ❖ *“Interbeing”:* each of us “interexists” with others.

2. Dynamic interrelatedness

- ❖ *The system is dynamic and ever-changing.*
- ❖ *Individuals: everyone’s set of relationships changes from moment to moment.*
- ❖ *Whole: each moment is a new web of interdependence.*

3. Ideal: deeply fitting in

- ❖ *One’s social and spiritual goal is to fulfill one’s particular niche in the system. This is one’s fulfillment.*
- ❖ *Such a fitting-in grounds one in the universe; you find your place rather than impose your desires.*
- ❖ *The overriding goal is the harmony of the system (not self-benefit or justice)*

III. THE NATURAL: THAT WHICH ACTS ACCORDING TO ITS NATURE

- ❖ *An “adverbial” concept of nature.*
- ❖ *All things have an inner nature. To act according to your inner nature is to be natural.*
- ❖ *Humans tend to act on their desires or intentional will rather than their inner nature.*
- ❖ *This causes inner disharmony, anxiety, and clumsiness.*
- ❖ *It also causes outer disharmony: social disorder.*
- ❖ *The ideal is to act spontaneously out our true nature.*
- ❖ *However, this requires great discipline of spiritual practice over long periods of time.*
- ❖ *The same is true of other living things. To see the true nature of a pine tree, we need to see an old tree buffeted by cliff winds. Or we need to train it in order to reveal its true nature.*

IV. THE COMMUNAL CHARACTER OF LIFE

- ❖ *All things share these aspects of change: people, plants & animals, mountains & rivers.*
- ❖ *We are all part of one system.*