

CHINESE VIEWS OF NATURE AND ART

I. NATURE

Nonbeing

- ❖ There is more to reality than we can see or comprehend. In other words, it does not have the limitations that Being does.
- ❖ Nonbeing is creative. Being emerges out of it, and returns into it.
- ❖ There is a continuity between Nonbeing and Being.
- ❖ Analogies:
 - ❖ Waves emerging out of an undifferentiated ocean.
 - ❖ Black hole

Tao (Dao)

- ❖ Several different meanings, including the ideal Way of the Sage. But in terms of nature it means basic patterns and principles of the “natural world” we see.
- ❖ The world of the Tao is characterized by orderly change and harmonious interrelationships.
- ❖ Example: yin and yang. These are complementary opposites that outline the basic structure and pattern of the universe. There are the processes of night and day and winter and summer. There the opposites wet and dry, valley and mountain, dark and bright ... and female and male.

Heaven

- ❖ Not the Heaven of Christianity.
- ❖ There is one, organic universe, made of heaven, earth, and humans.
- ❖ Two basic meanings:
 - ❖ 1. “The heavens,” as opposed to the earth
 - ❖ 2. “The sublime principles of the universe.”

Spontaneous Transformations

- ❖ Nature is primarily a series of ongoing transformations. Nature is always in movement, always changing.
- ❖ It changes spontaneously out of its own nature, rather than according to “laws of nature.”
- ❖ These changes are creative, beautiful, and awe-inspiring.

The Creative

- ❖ The universe exhibits ongoing spontaneous transformations.
- ❖ These are skillful, beautiful, and creative.
- ❖ It is an ongoing process that works by itself. There is no separate Creator, only the spontaneous creativity of the universe creating itself.

The Life, Spirit, and Feelings of Things In Nature

- ❖ The Chinese saw all of life as animated by a vitality (*ch'i*), a spirit (*shen*), and lifelessness (*sheng*).
- ❖ *Ch'i* literally means “breath,” and can be thought of as the “breath of life.” A rock has that as well as a person. And a landscape painting needs to capture the *ch'i* of the scene.

Oneness and Interrelatedness

- ❖ Taoist writers like Chuang Tzu and the painters and poets influenced by Taoism often spoke of the oneness of the natural world.
- ❖ However, they did not mean that distinctions were unreal. Each phenomenon is distinct, but each is also deeply interrelated with everything else in a unbroken web of relationships.

II. THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE ARTIST

Tranquil observation of nature

- ❖ Great art arises out of a highly sensitive awareness and appreciation of nature.
- ❖ The only way we are able to cultivate that sensitivity is by cultivating an inner calm, a tranquility that allows us to see clearly and deeply.

Oneness with nature

- ❖ The great artist and religious person goes beyond mere awareness of nature.
- ❖ True consciousness of nature involves the loss of a sense of a self separate from nature.
- ❖ There is no longer a sense of a subjective consciousness and an objective reality. There is just: nature.

Bringing nature within, or entering into nature

- ❖ Sometimes artists and sages talked about this oneness in terms of nature (e.g., a mountain) entering into oneself.
- ❖ Sometimes they would talk about it as entering into an object of nature (e.g., a bamboo).

III. THE CREATIVE PROCESS

Spontaneity

- ❖ A sage and a great artist does not act out of desires or will or reason. He acts spontaneously on his true nature.
- ❖ Poems and paintings come naturally of themselves.

The artist and the Creative

- ❖ Artistic activity arises in a state of calm, openness, and spontaneity.
- ❖ The creativity of the artist is the same kind of thing as the creativity of nature.
- ❖ Since we are essentially a part of nature, and since the artist acts on his true nature, art is one manifestation of the Creative.

The process

- ❖ One of the principle disciplines of the artist is to remove the obstructions that prevent one from acting on one's true nature.
- ❖ In general, the process of becoming a great artist and the process of becoming enlightened is one of subtraction.
- ❖ Sometimes this is talked about in terms of "forgetting" – forgetting the self, its desires, concerns about success or acclaim.