

Session 11 Dao, Nature and

The Principle of Following the Nature

The Meaning of Ziran

- **Ziran** 自然 is a key concept in Daoism, to mean "self so; so of itself" and translated as 'naturalness; spontaneity.'
- Generally, Ziran is interpreted as a spontaneous state of 'as-it-is' without any unnatural influence, usually is tied to the practice of non-action or effortless action.
- Ziran can be interpreted by following terms:
**Spontaneity; Originality ; Genuineness ;
Authenticity ; Simplicity**

The Characteristic of the Nature

- 清静无为，无为而无不为:
- Tranquil and effortless action,
- There is nothing cannot be done by effortless action
- 和谐有序，秩序井然:
- Harmony and order; Ordered harmoniously
- 见素抱朴，无往不胜:
- to manifest plainness and embrace simplicity can win any battle
- 生生不息，永不殆尽: continue renewal with never stop of Creation
- 公正无私，生养万物
- Upright and Selflessness to generate and nourish all beings
- 自然而然，尽性显功:
- full potentiality and great achievement can be manifested and gained through effortlessly Spontaneity
- 成就万物而不与万物争功:
- Support things to be completed themselves with no intension to claim recognition of its contribution
- 《通玄真经》：守虚 adhere to empty, 守无 guard none-being, 守平 defend peaceful state, 守易 stick to change/simplicity, 守清 keep purity, 守真 maintain genuine, 守静 hold tranquility, 守法 abide order/law, 守弱 stand on softness

ZiRan as Spontaneity in story of the Dexterous Butcher

- Cook Ting was cutting up an ox for Lord Wen-hui. As every touch of his hand, every heave of his shoulder, every move of his feet, every thrust of his knee — zip! zoop! He slithered the knife along with a zing, and all was in perfect rhythm, as though he were performing the dance of the Mulberry Grove or keeping time to the Ching-shou music.
- “Ah, this is marvellous!” said Lord Wen-hui. “Imagine skill reaching such heights!”
- Cook Ting laid down his knife and replied, “What I care about is the Way(Dao), which goes beyond skill. When I first began cutting up oxen, all I could see was the ox itself. After three years I no longer saw the whole ox. And now — I go at it by spirit and don’t look with my eyes. Perception and understanding have come to a stop and spirit moves where it wants. I go along with the natural makeup, strike in the big hollows, guide the knife through the big openings, and following things as they are. So I never touch the smallest ligament or tendon, much less a main joint.
- “A good cook changes his knife once a year — because he cuts. A mediocre cook changes his knife once a month — because he hacks. I’ve had this knife of mine for nineteen years and I’ve cut up thousands of oxen with it, and yet the blade is as good as though it had just come from the grindstone. There are spaces between the joints, and the blade of the knife has really no thickness. If you insert what has no thickness into such spaces, then there’s plenty of room — more than enough for the blade to play about it. That’s why after nineteen years the blade of my knife is still as good as when it first came from the grindstone.
- “However, whenever I come to a complicated place, I size up the difficulties, tell myself to watch out and be careful, keep my eyes on what I’m doing, work very slowly, and move the knife with the greatest subtlety, until — flop! the whole thing comes apart like a clod of earth crumbling to the ground. I stand there holding the knife and look all around me, completely satisfied and reluctant to move on, and then I wipe off the knife and put it away.”
- “Excellent!” said Lord Wen-hui. “I have heard the words of Cook Ting and learned how to care for life!”
- Translated by Burton Watson (*Chuang Tzu: The Basic Writings*, 1964)

Authenticity, Purity and Simplicity (Chuang Tzu, Chap 12-1)

- When Tzu Kung went south to the Ch'u State on his way back to the Chin State, he passed through Han-yin. There he saw an old man engaged in making a ditch to connect his vegetable garden with a well. He had a pitcher in his hand, with which he was bringing up water and pouring it into the ditch, great labour with very little result.
- "If you had a machine here," cried Tzu Kung, "in a day you could irrigate a hundred times your present area. The labour required is trifling as compared with the work done. Would you like to have one?"
- "What is it?" asked the gardener.
- "It is a contrivance made of wood," replied Tzu Kung, "Heavy behind and light in front. It draws up water as you do with your hands but in a constantly flowing stream. It is called a well sweep."
- Thereupon the gardener flushed up and said, " I have heard from my teacher that those who have cunning implements are cunning in their dealings and that those who are cunning in their dealings have cunning in their hearts, and that those who have cunning in their hearts cannot be pure and incorrupt, and that those who are not pure and incorrupt are restless in spirit and not fit vehicles for TAO(Dao). It is not that I do not know of these things. I should be ashamed to use them."

Simplicity (zhuangzi: **Section NINE - HORSES' HOOFS**)

- In this age of Perfect Virtue men live the same as birds and beasts, group themselves side by side with the ten thousand things. Who then knows anything about "gentleman" or "petty man"?
- Dull and unwitting, men have no wisdom; thus their Virtue does not depart from them. Dull and unwitting, they have no desire; this is called uncarved simplicity. In uncarved simplicity the people attain their true nature.
- Then along comes the sage, huffing and puffing after benevolence, reaching on tiptoe for righteousness, and the world for the first time has doubts; mooning and mouthing over his music, snipping and stitching away at his rites, and the world for the first time is divided.

Non Artificial and Originality in Zhuangzi (马蹄)

- Then along comes Po Lo. "I'm good at handling horses!" he announces, and proceeds to singe them, shave them, pare them, brand them, bind them with martingale and crupper, tie them up in stable and stall. By this time two or three out of ten horses have died. He goes on to starve them, make them go thirsty, race them, prance them, pull them into line, force them to run side by side, in front of them the worry of bit and rein, behind them the terror of whip and crop. By this time over half the horses have died.
- The potter says, "I'm good at handling clay! To round it, I apply the compass; to square it, I apply the T square." The carpenter says, "I'm good at handling wood! To arc it, I apply the curve; to make it straight, I apply the plumb line."
- But as far as inborn nature is concerned, the clay and the wood surely have no wish to be subjected to compass and square, curve and plumb line. Yet generation after generation sings out in praise, saying, "Po Lo is good at handling horses! The potter and the carpenter are good at handling clay and wood!" And the same fault is committed by the men who handle the affairs of the world!
- In my opinion someone who was really good at handling the affairs of the world would not go about it like this. The people have their constant inborn nature.

Genuineness in story of Huntun 混沌 (Zhuangzi, chapter 7)

- The emperor of the South Sea was called Shu [Brief], the emperor of the North Sea was called Hu [Sudden], and the emperor of the central region was called Hun-tun [Chaos].
- Shu and Hu from time to time came together for a meeting in the territory of Hun-tun, and Hun-tun treated them very generously. Shu and Hu discussed how they could repay his kindness.
- "All men," they said, "have seven openings so they can see, hear, eat, and breathe. But Hun-tun alone doesn't have any. Let's try boring him some!"
- Every day they bored another hole, and on the seventh day Hun-tun died. (7, tr. Watson 1968:97)

Cosmological description of Hun tun in the Huainanzi

- Heaven and earth were perfectly joined [*tung-t'ung* 洞同], all was chaotically unformed [*hun-tun wei p'u* 渾沌為樸]; and things were complete [*ch'eng* 成] yet not created. This is called [the time or condition] of the Great One. [*t'ai-i* 太一].
- All came from this unity which gave to each thing its differences: the birds, fish, and beasts. This is called the lot [or division, *fen* 分] of things. (14, tr. Girardot 1983:134)

The Skill of Huntun in Zhuangzi Chapter 11

- Two other *Zhuangzi* contexts use *hundun*. Chapter 11 has an allegory about Hong Meng 鴻蒙 "Big Concealment" or "Silly Goose", who "was amusing himself by slapping his thighs and hopping around like a sparrow", which Girardot (1983:110) interprets as shamanic dancing comparable with the *Shanhaijing* below:
- "You have only to rest in inaction and things will transform themselves. Smash your form and body, spit out hearing and eyesight, forget you are a thing among other things, and you may join in great unity with the deep and boundless. Undo the mind, slough off spirit, be blank and soulless, and the ten thousand things one by one will return to the root – return to the root and not know why. Dark and undifferentiated chaos – to the end of life none will depart from it. But if you try to know it, you have already departed from it. Do not ask what its name is, do not try to observe its form. Things will live naturally and of themselves." (tr. Watson 1968:122)
- Note: Hong Meng poetically reduplicates *hunhun-dundun* 渾渾沌沌 "dark and undifferentiated chaos" in describing Daoist "mind-nourishment" meditation.

Daoist understanding of the ziran

- *Zhuangzi*: the Ox Carver and the Bell-Stand Carpenter can execute their skills perfectly by means of spiritual practice entailing becoming one with the Dao, allowing their actions to emerge perfectly and spontaneously.
- This theme is developed further, with the suggestion that being at one with the Dao betokens a way of living based on primordial simplicity and authenticity (naturalistic primitivism) (Lai 2003), a message with great appeal in our age where technology is blamed for a complex and 'unnatural' lifestyle with all its ensuring problems.

Principle of Following the Way of Nature

- Dao De Jing (chapter 25) : Humans follow the principle of Earth, Earth the Heaven, Heaven the Dao, Dao the nature. 人法地，地法天，天法道，道法自然。
- Zhuangzi (working everything out evenly):
- Through the Tao they are all seen as one, regardless of their completeness or difference, by those who are capable of such extended vision. 《庄子·齐物论》：天地与我并生，而万物与我为一。

清静无为 (庄子)

- 圣人者,原天地之美而达万物之理. 是故至人无为, 大圣不作,观于天地之谓也.
- 圣人之生也天行, 其死也物化; 静而与阴同德, 动而与阳同波;不为福先, 不为祸始; 感而后应, 迫而后动, 不得已而后起. 去知与故, 循天之理.

清静无为，无为而无不为（老子）

- 道之尊，德之贵，夫莫之命而常自然。
- The Honor of Dao, the treasure of De, is to be constantly natured without undertaking and order
- 生之蓄之，生而不有，为而不恃，长而不宰，是为玄德。
- Generating and nourishing, generating and not possessing, being effective and not retaining, increasing and not dominating: this is the Virtue of Dao.
- 功成事遂，百姓皆谓我自然。
- If a wholly Great One rules, the people hardly know that he is exists,...the work done, business takes its course, all people think: we are free
- 圣人处无为之事，行不言之教。生而不有，为而不恃
- The sage dwells in effectiveness without action, he practice teaching without talking. He generates and yet possesses nothing,; he is effective and keeps nothing.
- 是以圣人无为故无败，无执故无失。
- Because of none-action, the sage never fails his mission; because of no grasp he never lost.

和顺自然 Harmoniously follow with the nature

- 《周易》：是故天生神物，圣人则之；天地变化，圣人效之。 Thus, the sage chose the principle of the Divine which was produced by the Heaven; and followed principle of the Change which is essential nature of the Heaven and Earth (Universe, Nature)
- 夫大人者，与天地合其德，与日月和其明，与四时合其序。 As a great man, one will Identify one's virtue with that of the Heave and Earth; identify one's brightness with that of the Sun and Moon; follow the order of the Four Seasons.

Daoist principles of *wuwei* and *ziran*

- Lai sees them as complementary processes.
- *Ziran* accounts for the spontaneity of action by individuals as determined by their particular nature and desires (inherit nature of being);
- while *wuwei* limits these natural impulses within the bounds of 'non-intrusive action' or 'non-interfering action', as Lai translates it (type of action).
- Dao and *de* work together as a unified system where the interests and flourishing of inherently interconnected component parts, is self-regulated by the checks and balances of *ziran* and *wuwei*.

Relationship between Daoist religion and Daoism

- Jordan Paper (2001: 17) is deeply critical of what she sees as the inappropriate use Daoist religious texts by Western thinkers who on the one hand dismiss the Daoist religion as superstitious nonsense, while on the other hand romanticising these texts as expressing a relationship with nature which the West has lost.
- She argues skeptically that if any environmental message is to be found in Daoism, it comes from a lifestyle linked to specific ritual practices indigenous to parts of China and Taiwan that venerate the earth as the dispenser of food and bounty and keep at bay the destructive forces of nature where the earth becomes the grim reaper that causes death through starvation.

The common denominator

- A common denominator that is generally favoured by all those concerned about diminishing biodiversity, global warming, and other examples of a deteriorating natural environment is the idea that
- Nature constitutes a biocentric universe that is essentially *holistic*, allowing all entities within its scope intrinsic value.

Skeptical attitude towards holistic theories

- Holistic theories assigns to 'soft' ecology, rather than the sharp edge of science. The problem lies with identifying what exactly constitutes the 'whole' to which holism refers.
- 'Purely **scientific versions of holism** are problematic because there are communities of different species, as well as interactions and interdependencies among the biotic and biotic elements of the environment. As a result there is no precise empirically confirmed ecological whole.' (Shadrer-Frechette ,2003: 308).
- **The problem for science** is there is no evident 'whole' large enough to encompass the kind of metaphysical concept that environmental ethics posits with regard to holism. what appeared to be the overarching totality that encompasses many component parts becomes itself a specific particular part of an ever more elusive concept.
- Shrader-Frechette, 'Ecologists cannot optimize the well-being of all these different wholes (having different spatial and temporal scales) at the same time.' (2003: 309)

Daoist Viewpoints on Holism

- The redefining holism in terms of the totality/particularity dynamic in Dr Karyn Lai's 'Conceptual Foundations for Environmental Ethics: a Daoist Perspective'. (Lai 2003)
- In *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought*, Roger T. Ames presents a detailed philosophical account of relationship between *field* and *focus* in the context of the Dao and *de*, arguing for the ultimately self-creating nature of the Daoist universe, and illustrating how this aesthetic interpretation has much to offer environmental ethics (2004).

A Daoist solution on the problem of the environmental holism

- The environmental holism provides a necessary antidote to the anthropocentrically biased mainstream thinking that has been responsible for the environmental crisis. However, it is vulnerable to attack by the argument that the **cohesiveness of the whole may be undermined by its reduction to individual parts**, and conversely, that the autonomy of the individual will necessarily be sacrificed to the needs of the whole.
- Lai claims the Dao/*de* paradigm derived from the *Daode jing* provides a model of holism that avoids this kind of reductionism.
- Thus the important point for Lai, is that the individual is not an intrinsically isolated and separable part of the whole, but one which by its very nature fosters mutual support of others, and so ensures the collective cohesion of the whole.

A Daoist solution on Problems of Holism provided by Lai

- According to Lai, the Dao is the **totality element** of the model, within which *de*, or **the particular individuals** that constitute the totality, can become fully realised in their own right.
- She characterises the Dao firstly as the ontological ground of being for a vast number of specialised entities whose existence arises and is sustained by the Dao;
- and secondly as a *metaphysical* principle, which forms an ideally inclusive, essentially *beneficial* substratum where all individuals of different kinds can flourish.
- Her analysis of different translations of *de* seem to lead the concept away from ideas of moral rectitude to the more convincing interpretation of *de* as the essential power that enables the individual to be itself.

Contrast between Western and Chinese Conceptualizations of Nature

- Ames (1989: 119) who argues that the dearth of Chinese creation mythology indicates a fundamentally different approach to the idea of nature in Chinese thinking.
- The Chinese see nature as being in a constant state of transformation driven by the engine of the Dao, with its rhythmical cycling from creation to destruction, there is none of the dualism which Western thinking imposes upon nature.
- In the Western mode of thinking, by contrast, the world is already separate from the cosmic forces that created it: God created the world from nothing; or to give an example from a more scientific context, the physical laws of nature provide a theoretical principle which accounts for the actual world of nature as we experience it.

Contrast between Western and Chinese conceptualizations of Nature (2)

- Girardot describes the alternative offered by Daoist thinking, asserting that: ‘The universe is a single, vital organism, not created according to some fixed principle, but spontaneously generating itself from the primal, empty-potency lodged within all organic forms of life’ (2001: *xlvi*).
- In the Western context, then, there exists a dualism which separates nature from its source of origin; whereas in Chinese thinking, there is a seamless continuity between an ever self-creating world of nature, populated by ‘ten thousand things’ and their death and return to the Dao

Dualism in the relationship between human and nature

- In the Western, largely Judeo-Christian tradition, the human relationship with nature is problematic, as the human race sees itself as being outside of nature, banished from the Garden of Eden, but granted Divine authority to act as overlords of a natural world whose diverse species are theirs to name and command.
- By contrast, Daoism sees human beings as only one of the many manifestations of the Dao, with no naturally inherited rights of authority over the world.
- Many environmentalists of different persuasions turn to Daoist texts to support the proposition that humans are inherently part of the natural world (Birdwhistell 2001: 24).

Tension between Anthropocentric and Biocentric Viewpoints(O'Neil 2001:164)

- The anthropocentric view sees that **human beings stand apart from nature** and claim to have natural rights and authority over it. Nature is seen as subject to human concerns. Other species, natural habitats and resources are seen as having only **instrumental value** in relation to human beings. They acquire meaning only as a means to specifically human ends.
- The anthropocentric point of view rarely accords moral standing or **intrinsic value to other entities**, as they are not seen as **agents in their own right**, and can therefore only be accorded instrumental value.
- Proponents of environmental ethics have sought to undermine this position by claiming that Daoist texts speak of a world where human beings are not at the centre, and human concerns have no special standing in the overall Cosmos.

the perceived loss of a spiritual framework in the West that in previous less secular times helped to unite the human and natural worlds (Tucker and Grim 2001).

- With Christian belief in decline and the disappearance of land based models of living, nature has become desacralized, and is increasingly regarded as having no intrinsic value. **Human society** therefore **lacks the spiritual tools** with which to connect to the natural world.
- Daoist texts can be readily reaped for content in order to **fill this Western spiritual void**. Girardot (2001) points out that in so far as Daoism's ecological/theoretical framework supports self-cultivation practices that lead to personal transformation and transcendence it does so at a cosmic level, where **the individual becomes one with the Dao and therefore with nature itself**.



Can Daoism act as a significant theoretical resource for the Green movement and environmental ethics?

- The publication in 2001 of *Daoism and Ecology: Ways Within a Cosmic Landscape*,
- the landmark compilation of articles and discussions that contributed to the conference of the same name held two years previously,
- confirms the importance of Asian philosophies, and in particular of Daoism, as a significant theoretical resource for the Green movement and environmental ethics (Girardot 2001).

Why Eco-Daoism Appeals to the Green Movement?

- A further reason why 'Eco-Daoism' appeals to some in the Green movement is that at first sight it appears to speak the soft language of living at one with nature, of seeing human beings as only one among the 'myriad things' that inhabit the planet, whispering of a potentially holistic Cosmos whose harmonious rhythms are disturbed only by the wrongful actions of humankind.
- It is this idea of the environment as an interrelated entity – of a world that maintains its homeostatic balance of diverse species of flora and fauna, each adapted to its specific habitat and co-existing harmoniously, (an idea that is taken to its ultimate conclusion in Gaia theory, where the Earth is considered to be a living organism), that appears so attractive, especially when contrasted with the stark evidence for an increasingly damaged natural environment.

Why Eco-Daoism Appeals to the Green Movement? (2)

- Both proponents of deep ecology and eco-feminists, as well as more general environmental thinkers are at least united on one principle, however diverse the specific interpretations of it: **the model of a holistic world provides the platform** for a theoretical, ethical and practical approach for defining the human relationship with the environment.
- Moreover, it provides fuel for the criticism of what they see as the wrong-headed exploitation of nature by a technologically imprinted society which fails to see the impact of piecemeal actions on the whole.
- Perhaps it is because **environmental degradation** is seen to be a *Western* problem, and certainly one whose roots lie in the rise of Western industrialisation and the capitalist economic system,
- that the whole system of thinking and values underpinning Western culture has become suspect in the eyes of ecologists, environmental thinkers and activists, leading them to explore alternative outlooks and philosophies contained in these ancient Chinese texts.

What is ziran

- 太上下知有之，其次亲之/誉之，其次畏之，其次侮之。有不足焉，有不信焉，犹兮其贵言。功成事遂，百姓皆谓我自然。
- 道常无名（32章）
- 大道泛兮，其可左右。万物恃之而生而不辞，功成不名有，爱养万物而不为主，常无欲可名于小，万物归焉而不为主。（34章）
- 道常无为，。。。万物将自化；。。。不欲以静，天下将自定（37章）
- 我无为而民自化，我好静而民自正，我无事而民自富，我无欲而民自朴（57章）
- 天之道利而不害，圣人之道为而不争