




Zoka: Seeking What The Ancients Sought

Janice Doppler

Poetry Pea
2023



The waka of Saigyō, the renga of Sōgi, the paintings of Sesshū, the tea of Rikyū – there is one thread that runs through them all. For it is the essence of art to follow the Way of creation, taking the four seasons as a companion ...

follow the creative, get back to the creative!

Steven D. Carter, translator
Matsuo Basho Travel Writings



“The dynamic spirit that informs
the natural world and the inner
workings of the cosmos.

”

Steven D. Carter, translator

The Creative = Zoka



Zoka is ...

- ▶ Unpredictable creative force of nature
- ▶ Nature's tendency and ability to continuously self-transform
- ▶ The perpetual emerging, transforming, and returning to is source of everything in the cosmos.

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Zoka is not...

- ▶ Nature as in a community of plants and animals
- ▶ Something that directs nature
- ▶ A spiritual deity translated as the Creator



sudden rain

the scent of meadow tea

through the screen door

Joshua St Claire

Poetry Pea 1:23



twilight

a dahlia wilts

into deeper shades

Sangita Kalarickal

Poetry Pea 1:23



► *Zoka* in Japanese

► *Zaohua* in Chinese

► *Prakriti* in Sanskrit

► The Creative in English

造化

造化

造化

“ ... ‘Zoka,’ the creative force of nature, a Japanese concept used in haiku. In Sanskrit, we call this ‘Prakriti.’ ‘Prakriti is described in the *Bhagavad Gita* as the ‘primal motive force.’ ”

Kala Ramesh

beyond the horizon beyond:
haiku and haibun

BEYOND CHINA TO INDIA ... ZOKA = PRAKRITI

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Wisdom Texts

How might contemporary haiku poets utilize *Yijing* and *The Zhuangzi* to enhance their work and follow Bashō's advice to follow *zoka*?

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Zoka in *Yijing* is...

- The flow of change in the cosmos via two energies:
 - **Yang** – impulse to create and drive transformation
 - **Yin** – response to the creative impulse
- Zoka is both energies simultaneously

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Zoka in Yijing

- Ancient sages described what they could see - the seasons, sun, and moon
- Light and dark are main movers of the cosmos:
 - **Sun** – represents light
 - **Moon** – represents dark
- Shifts between light and dark create seasons

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For Shifts Between Light & Dark Investigate:

- Subtleties in shadows and/or reflected light
- How the dark side of a mountain differs from, and is similar to, the light side
- Changes associated with the coming and withdrawing of light, of dark

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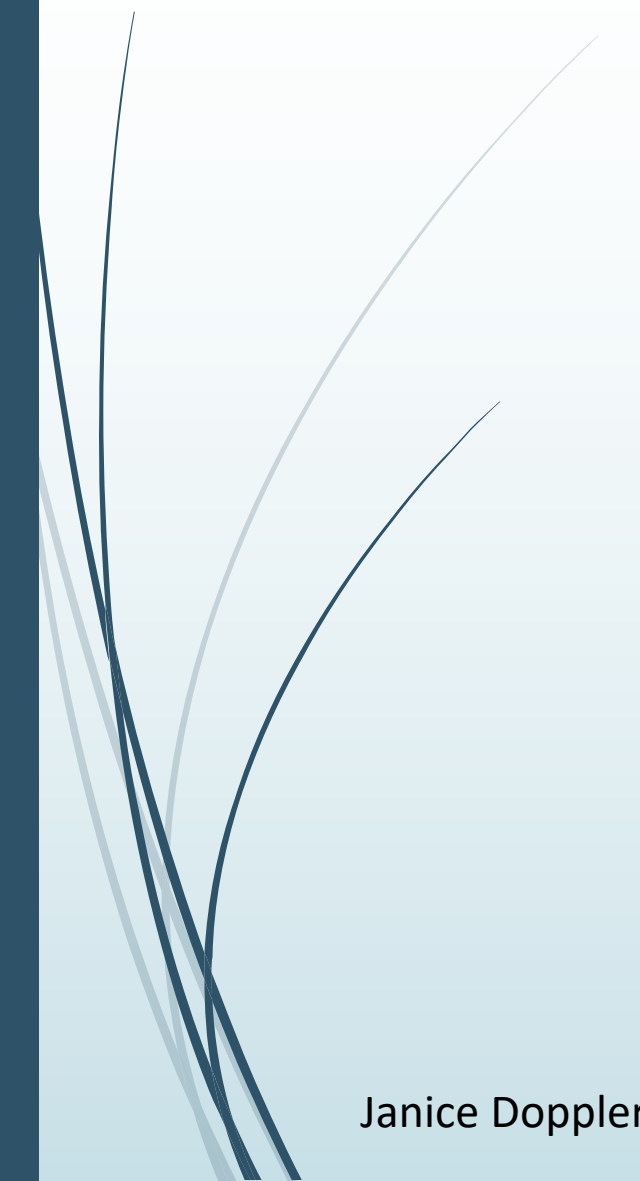

Qualities of the Seasons

- SPRING – creation ... births strength
- SUMMER – development ... expands strength
- AUTUMN – fruition ... fulfills strength
- WINTER – consummation ... consolidates strength

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Characteristics of Spring

- Initiation
 - First arising
- Sprouting
- Origination
 - Beginning of positive energy



making up for
the little space she takes
robin's song

Vandana Parashar
Heron's Nest (2022)



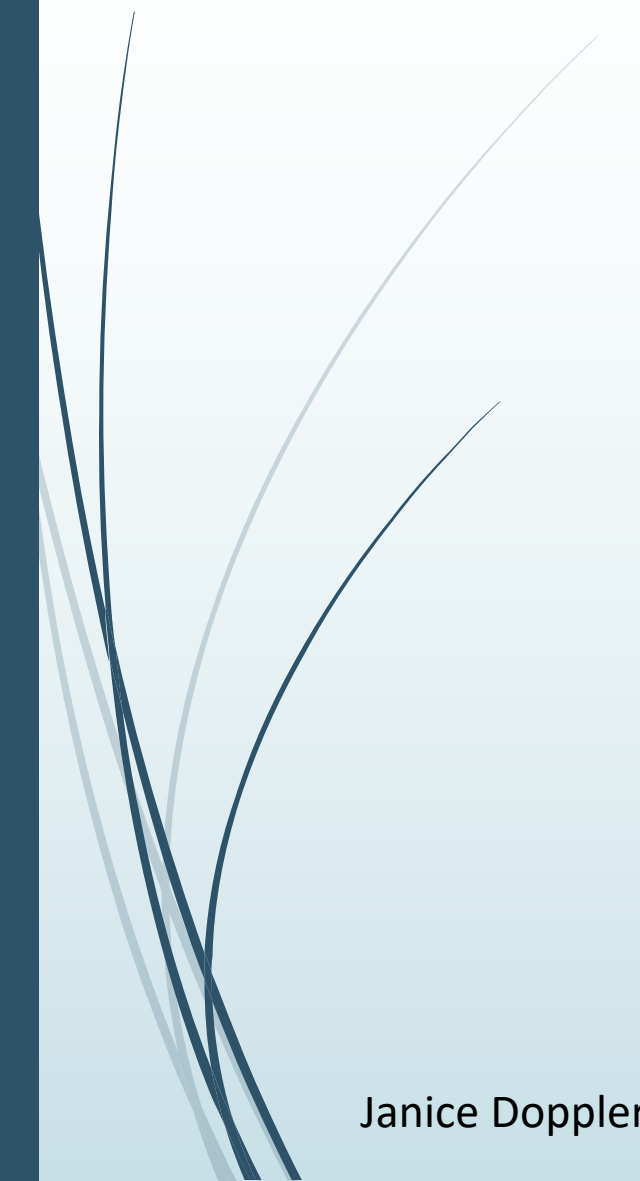

an egg mass
in sunlit shallows
the tadpole wriggles free

Janice Doppler
Presence (2022)

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Characteristics of Summer


- Prosperity
- Growing
- Developing
- All things develop and flourish
- Expansion of positive energy



forest walk --
a spider's shadow
climbs a tree

Kala Ramesh

*beyond the horizon beyond
(2017)*



wild strawberries ...
the skim and dart
of white butterflies

Jo Balistreri

Heron's Nest (2023)

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Characteristics of Autumn

- Harmony
- Blooming
- Maturing
- Goodness
- Benefits of positive energy



who am I

a falling leaf

gives the answer

Kala Ramesh

Acorn (2022)



indian summer

a maple leaf drawn back

into the eddy

Carolyn Hall

Heron's Nest (2001)

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Characteristics of Winter

- Quiescence
- Storing
- Declining
- Returning to the root
- Resting of positive energy



train journey

moonlight settles

on my lap

Hemapriya Chellappan

Acorn (2000)



frost crystals

sparkle on fur ...

dead opossum

Janice Doppler

Frogpond (2020)

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Insights from The Zhuangzi

How might contemporary
haiku poets cultivate
awareness of *zoka*?

Zhuangzi = Daoist Philosopher

The Zhuangzi = Book


- A compilation of stories written in prose
- Illustrates how to cultivate the ability to follow the flow of the cosmos





Cultivating Awareness of Zoka


- Gaze outward at the macrocosm described in *Yijing*
- Gaze inward at the microcosm that is you



“ When I first began to cut oxen, what I saw was nothing but the whole oxen. After three years, I no longer saw whole oxen. Today, I meet the ox with my spirit rather than looking at it with my eyes ... I never encounter the slightest obstacle. ”

Victor H. Mair, translator

*Wandering on the Way: Early
Taoist Tales and Parables of Chuang Tzu*




A man skilled at catching cicadas with a pole spent months learning to balance two balls atop one another on a pole. He added a third ball, eventually a fourth. When he was able to balance a stack of five balls on the pole, he could easily capture cicadas.



Energies of Zoka

	COSMOS	INDIVIDUAL POET
YANG	impulse to create and transform	impulse to write
YIN	response to the creative impulse	response to impulse to write



“ A fish trap is for catching fish; once you’ve caught the fish, you can forget about the trap. A rabbit-snare is for catching rabbits; once you’ve caught the rabbit, you can forget about the snare.

Words are for catching ideas; once you’ve caught the idea, you can forget about the words.”

Victor H. Mair, translator



Guidance for *Zoka Prompt*

- ▶ You don't have to work at following *zoka* because you already live within *zoka* and it flows within you. What you can do is become increasingly open to noticing the flow.
- ▶ Use your intuition.
- ▶ Go into natural places with the intent to be open to inspiration rather than the intent to write haiku.

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A Bit More Guidance

- Go frequently to a place you want to know. Spend time. Don't just show up, look around, and leave. Loiter. Let the place seep into you.
- Experience what is there. Allow whatever comes, to come
- Pay attention and jot down what you notice and what moves you.