

I Ching

JeeLoo Liu

from *An Introduction to Chinese Philosophy*

I Ching

- *Book Of Change* is its common translation
- The *I Ching* is the cosmological foundation of Chinese philosophy
 - Difficult to date the book
 - Confucius refers to the *I Ching* and is thought to have written some early commentaries on the hexagrams
 - *Book of Change* depicts the world as full of possibilities and yet determined
 - A world of *yin* and *yang*, but capable of being changed by human action

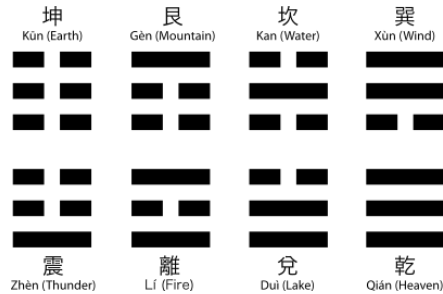
Core Text

- Core text was a cooperative effort spanning from approximately 2000-500 bce
- Three Stages of Textual Development
 - Creation of Trigrams
 - Combination of Trigrams into Hexagrams
 - Confucian commentary, *Commentary on the Judgment*

Trigrams

- Trigrams created that represent the eight basic natural elements
 - Heaven, earth, water, fire, wind, thunder, mountain, and lake
 - Each trigram consists of three lines that are either solid or broken
 - They represent "changing transitional stages" and do not so much represent things as things' "tendencies in movement" (Wilhelm)

Trigrams

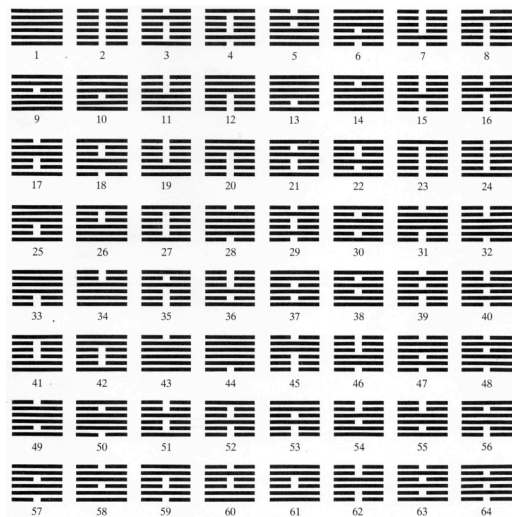


- "If the eight basic units of Yijing represent not static states but dynamic potential for change, then their connotations cannot be fixed onto any particular natural phenomenon either. This cosmology is about constant flux; it is a philosophy of change." (Liu, 28)

Hexagrams

- King Wen of Zhou Dynasty (1150 bce) combined the trigrams into hexagrams (six lines)
- Each hexagram had a brief commentary (or Judgment)
- Each hexagram signifies a moral situation in life, with the ideal moral person ("the superior man") as a common theme

Hexagrams



Commentary of the Judgment

- Confucian commentary extending upon the Judgments of King Wen of Zhou
- The commentaries develop the idea that nature possesses moral attributes
- The hexagrams can be understood as representations of moral attributes symbolized in Nature

I Ching (Yijing): Book of Change

- *Yi* means "change" or "easy"; *jing* means "classic"
- Chinese scholars say the text's title refers to the transition between *yin* and *yang*
- This philosophy of change builds upon the cosmology
 - The basic element of the universe is *qi*
 - *Qi* contrasts with matter (another candidate for the basic stuff of the universe) in that matter has spatio-temporal stability
 - *Qi* is dynamic and the constant movement of things in the universe illustrates that change is the natural state of affairs

Change and Hexagrams

- In the *I Ching*, the cosmology of *qi* is applied to the human condition
- Hexagrams are symbols of this change
 - Six lines are called "changing lines"
 - Each hexagram describes a movement from bottom line to top
 - The movement from the bottom line to the top describes a certain kind of causal relationship, with each line's meaning momentarily "frozen" and determined by preceding lines

I Ching Cosmology

- Change is the nature of the universe
- Universe possesses moral attributes

Change Is the Nature of the Universe

- Nature of the universe is change
 - Law of cyclical development (law of polar reversal): things at one extreme move toward their opposite
 - Harmony changes to disharmony and back to harmony
 - Law of periodicity: things in one stage will eventually transition to another stage
 - Human organization stages: initiation, growth, expansion, and destruction
 - Nothing stays in one stage forever

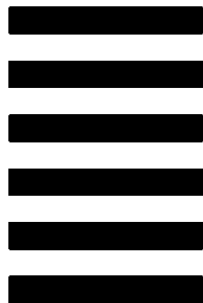
A Universe With Moral Attributes

- *I Ching* sees the universe with goodness inherent in it
- Heaven embodies the attributes of creativity, constancy, and steadfastness; the earth/sun embodies the attributes of warmth, kindness, and impartiality
- The other elements of the trigrams do not have moral attributes as much as they are models for human behavior
- The universe is a moral universe

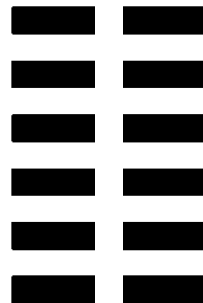
Qian and Kun

- *I Ching* opens with the hexagrams *Qian* and *Kun*
- *Qian* is composed of six unbroken lines; *Kun* is composed of six broken lines
- *Qian* is pure yang; *Kun* is pure yin
- *Qian* and *Kun* represent abstract principles which all things exhibit
- *Qian* stands for the Creative Principle, represented by Heaven; *Kun* stands for the Receptive Principle, represented by Earth

Qian and *Kun*

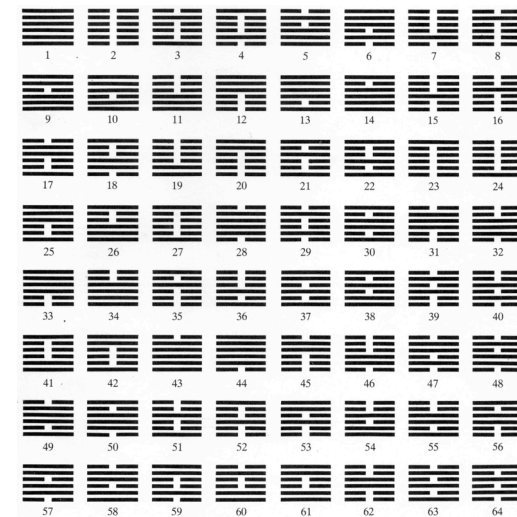


Qian



Kun

Hexagrams



Human Sandwich

- Humans are situated between Heaven and Earth and have a moral obligation to continue and be equal to the work of Heaven and Earth
 - Trinity: Heaven, Earth, and Humans
- "The thinkers behind *Yijing* project moral attributes onto Heaven and Earth. In their view, a moral universe is the source of our moral attributes and the inspiration for our moral conduct. The morally correct thing for humans to do is to 'emulate' the moral attributes of Heaven and Earth." (35)

Four Primary Virtues

- Four primary virtues are attributed to the hexagrams, but not all hexagrams have all four
- Virtues: *yuan* (create), *heng* (nourish), *li* (benefit), *zhen* (rectify)
- The four virtues are manifest in nature and are the roots of human morality
- Humans should strive to emulate the virtues of Heaven and Earth

The Good (Shan)

- "One cycle of *yin*; one cycle of *yang*, this is called '*dao*.' What continues it, is 'Good.' What completes it, is 'nature.'" from the *Great Treatise*
 - *Dao*: a *yin*, *yang* cycle
 - the Good: the continuation of *dao*
 - What continues *dao*? assisting in the functions of Heaven and Earth (create, nourish, benefit, and rectify)
- "To aid others in their fulfillment of life's potentials is not relative to individual or cultural perspectives; it is simply good in and of itself." Liu (37)

Equilibrium and Harmony

- *I Ching* depicts nature as harmonious (*he*) as nature being in equilibrium (*zhong*) existing between two extremes
 - This is the natural state of the universe and humans may disrupt it but never permanently change the universe's harmonious equilibrium
 - Envisioned as a pendulum in motion
 - Transitioning from one extreme to the other, the constant ebb and flow is harmony itself
 - *Zhong* can represent the middle or mean. Equilibrium captures this meaning as the center between two extremes to which all things gravitate toward

Human Nature

- *Qi* is regulated in accordance with *dao* and contains within itself the states of equilibrium and harmony
- Human nature comes from Heaven
 - It is naturally good
 - Humans have the purest, most harmonious combination of *yin* and *yang*
 - Human moral goodness means following our natures
 - When the emotions are aroused, we should control them to return to a state of harmony and equilibrium

Moral Foundations

- There is no is/ought gap, the way the world is is the way the world ought to be
- "...the moral attributes of the universe are what we humans *ought* to emulate....Under this moral philosophy, what is 'good' is not what God commands, not what social conventions decide, not even what human reason prescribes. Good is what is seen in Nature; it is what natural phenomena manifest. This philosophical system derives moral standards from observation of the external world, and the world is conceived differently from a mechanic [sic], physicalistic worldview." Liu (39)