



# Key Concepts of Fate and Prediction in the Yijing (Classic of Changes)

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## Abstract

As the chapters in Christopher Lupke’s edited volume, *The Magnitude of Ming* (2005), abundantly illustrate, there have been a great many different constructions and understandings of the Chinese term *ming* (命) over the past 3,500 years

## Key Concepts of Fate and Prediction in the Yijing

or so. One of these is most certainly “fate” or “destiny.” But, as the Lupke volume also indicates, there have also been a great many different constructions and understandings of this particular notion. This paper explores some of the ways that the *Yijing* (Classic of Changes; 易經) addresses issues of “destiny,” giving particular attention to the specialized terms in the *Changes* that deal with the related problems of “knowing fate” (*zhiming*; 知命) and “establishing fate (*liming*; 立命). It will also give attention to the highly refined vocabulary employed by the *Yijing* and related works to evaluate cosmically ordained situations, and especially the way that understandings of this specialized vocabulary have evolved over time and have been expressed in various commentaries, from sophisticated exegetical studies to relatively simple primers such as the late Ming work by Huang Yun (黃蘊) known as *Understanding the Yijing at a Glance* (*Yijing yijian nengjie*; 易經一見能解). Some of the evaluative terms to be discussed (listed alphabetically in Pinyin transliteration) are: *li* 利, *li* 厲, *lin* 吝, *hui* 悔, *jiu* 咎 and *wujiu* 无咎, *ji* 吉, *wang* 亡, *xiang* 享 (*heng* 亨), *xiong* 凶, *yong* 用, *yuan* 元 and *zhen* 貞. Any study of specialized terminology—especially when it appears in the earliest strata of an ancient Chinese text like the *Changes*—encounters the vexing philological problems of multiple loan words, obscure meanings, and, of course, different understandings of terms over time.

## Introduction

From the Han dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE) through the Qing (1644-1912) the *Yijing* remained a work of enormous and unchallenged scriptural authority; everyone in Chinese society esteemed it and employed it in some way, from emperors and officials to artisans and peasants. Commoners used pages from the book as a charm to ward off evil, and scholars gave it pride of place as “first among the [Confucian] classics.” Although the document contains few explicit references to supernatural beings or supernatural forces, it has always had a profoundly spiritual dimension. Indeed, the *Changes* describes itself as “the most spiritual thing in the world.” By virtue of its spiritual power, we are told, the *Yijing* “lets one know what is going to come, and by virtue of its wisdom, it becomes a repository of what has happened.” But whereas most religious traditions, both East and West, have emphasized the activities of a god or gods as an explanation for cosmic processes, devotees of the *Changes* have long held the view that such explanations reside in the cosmic powers embodied in its lines, trigrams and hexagrams.

### What is the *Yijing* and What Does it Do: A Brief Overview?

The *Changes* first took shape about three thousand years ago as a divination manual, comprised of sixty-four six-line symbols known as hexagrams (*gua* 卦). Each hexagram was uniquely constructed, distinguished from all the others

## Key Concepts of Fate and Prediction in the Yijing

by its combination of solid (————) and/or “broken” (— — —) lines. The first two hexagrams in the conventional order are Qian and Kun; the remaining sixty-two hexagrams represent permutations of these two paradigmatic symbols.



Figure 0.1: 1. Qian



Figure 0.2: 2. Kun

At some point in the Zhou dynasty (c. 1045-256 BCE), no later than the ninth or eighth century, each hexagram acquired a “hexagram name” (*guaming* 卦名) a brief description known as a “judgment” (*tuan* 彖; a.k.a. “tag” ) and a short explanatory text for each of its six lines called a “line statement” (*yaoci* 爻辭). This highly compact document, less than 4,200 characters in length and probably first inscribed on strips of bamboo, became known as the “basic text” (*benwen* 本文) of the Changes. The operating assumption of the *Yijing*, as it developed over time, was that these hexagrams represented the basic circumstances of change in the universe, and that by selecting a particular hexagram or hexagrams and correctly interpreting the various symbolic elements of each, a person could gain insight into the patterns of cosmic change and devise a strategy for dealing with problems or uncertainties concerning the present and the future.

## Key Concepts of Fate and Prediction in the Yijing

During the third century BCE, a set of diverse and poetic commentaries known as the “Ten Wings” became attached to the *Changes*, and the work received imperial sanction in 136 BCE as one of the five major “Confucian” classics. These Ten Wings—particularly the so-called “Great Commentary”—articulated the *Yijing*’s implicit cosmology and invested the classic with an alluring philosophical flavor and an attractive literary style. The worldview of this amplified version of the *Changes* emphasized correlative thinking, a humane cosmological outlook, and a fundamental unity between Heaven, Earth and Man. For the next two thousand years or so, the *Yijing* held pride of place in China as the “first of the [Confucian] classics.”

How does the document work? The first point to be made is that *Changes* allows, and even encourages, an enormous amount of interpretive flexibility; by nature it is an extraordinarily open-ended, versatile and virtually inexhaustible intellectual resource. It reflects what Keats once referred to as “negative capability,” the capacity to encounter uncertainties, mysteries and doubts “without an irritable reaching after fact & reason,” and it relies on many different ways of knowing. Thus, there are any number of ways to approach the classic, whether as a book of divination or as a source of philosophical, spiritual, or psychological inspiration. The editors of China’s most important premodern literary compilation, the *Complete Collection of the Four Treasuries* (*Siku quanshu* 四庫全書), remarked in the eighteenth century that interpreting the *Changes* was like playing chess: No two

## Key Concepts of Fate and Prediction in the Yijing

games are alike, and there are infinite possibilities. Chinese scholars have identified literally hundreds of interpretive traditions focused on the *Yijing* in imperial times alone. At the same time, however, officially endorsed commentaries on the *Changes* guided readers, especially those who hoped to pass the state examinations from the early fourteenth century to 1905.

As indicated above, the judgment of a hexagram (sometimes described as a “hexagram statement,” a “decision” or “tag”) suggests the overall meaning of the hexagram—in particular its powers and possibilities. The six lines of each hexagram represent a situation in time and space, a “field of action with multiple actors or factors,” all of which are in constant, dynamic play. The lines, reading from the bottom to the top, represent the evolution of this situation and/or the major players involved. The first, second and third lines constitute a “lower” trigram and the fourth, fifth and sixth lines comprise an “upper” trigram, each having its own set of primary and secondary symbolic attributes. Interpretation involves an understanding of the relationship between the lines, line statements, and trigrams of the chosen hexagram, and often an appreciation of the way that the selected hexagram is related to other hexagrams. Commentaries of every conceivable sort have historically provided guidance in negotiating a path to understanding, including shared understanding.

Most hexagram names in the *Changes* [see handout] seem to have been derived from a term or concept that appears in their respective judgments and/or individual line statements.

## Key Concepts of Fate and Prediction in the Yijing

Let us take the Gen (艮) hexagram — number 52 in the received version and variously translated as Mountain, Restraint, Keeping Still, Bound, Stabilizing, Limited, Immobile, Steadiness, etc. — as an example. I have chosen to emphasize this hexagram not only because a number of Chinese scholars, both past and present, have seen it as capturing the “essence” of the *Yijing* but also because it has long had wide appeal in China and elsewhere in East Asia as an object of contemplation for Confucians, Buddhists and Daoists alike.

In this hexagram, the character *gen* 艮 appears not only in the judgment but also in all six of the line statements. Here is what one early Zhou dynasty (c. 1050-256 BCE) understanding of the judgment and the individual line statements of the Gen hexagram might have been:



Figure 0.3: Gen

Judgment: If one cleaves the back he will not get hold of the body; if one goes into the courtyard he will not see the person. There will be no misfortune (*wujiu*). (艮其背不獲其身行其庭不見人无咎)

First (bottom) line: Cleave the feet. There will be no misfor-

## Key Concepts of Fate and Prediction in the Yijing

tune (*wujju*). Favorable in a long-range determination (*li yong zhen*). (艮其趾无咎利永贞)

Second line: Cleave the lower legs, but don't remove the bone marrow. His heart is not pleased. (艮其腓不拯其隨其心不快)

Third line: Cleave the waist, rend the spinal meat. It is threatening (*li*). Smoke the heart. (艮其限列其夤厲薰心)

Fourth line: Cleave the torso [lit. body]. There will be no misfortune (*wujju*). (艮其身无咎)

Fifth line: Cleave the jaw. Talk will be orderly. Troubles (*hui*) will go away. (艮其輔言有序悔亡)

Sixth line: Cleave thickly. Auspicious (*ji*). (敦艮吉)

Another entirely possible verbal meaning of *gen* in this particular hexagram is “to glare at,” which would, of course, fundamentally change the meaning of each line.

As is apparent from the above example, many hexagram judgments are extremely cryptic and subject to any number of interpretations. A large number of judgments (probably seventy percent) refer to ancient and now obscure divinatory formulas involving sacrifices and/or offerings to spirits. Here are a few examples of such formulas. Qian (number 1 in the received order): “Primary receipt [or a grand offering or perhaps great enjoyment], favorable for a [divinatory] de-



## Key Concepts of Fate and Prediction in the Yijing

termination (*yuanheng lizhen* 元亨利貞);” Shi (number 7): “The determination is favorable (*lizhen* 利貞) for a great man; no misfortune (*wujiu* 无咎);” Lü, number 10: “Step on the tiger’s tail; it won’t bite the person; a sacrificial offering (*heng* 亨);” Tongren (number 13): “Gather the people in the open country; a sacrificial offering (*heng* 亨); favorable (*li* 利) for crossing a big river; a favorable determination for a noble person (*li junzi zhen* 利君子貞);” Dayou (number 14): “A great harvest; primary receipt [or a grand offering] (*yuanheng* 元亨);” Qian (number 15): “Receipt of an offering (*heng* 亨); for an exemplary person there will be a conclusion;” Shike (number 21): “Receipt of an offering (*heng* 亨); favorable (*li* 利) for resolving a legal dispute;” Bo (number 23): “Not favorable (*buli* 不利) when there is somewhere to go.”

Longer judgments generally provide variations on the same or similar themes. For instance, Kun (number 2 in the received order), reads: “Primary receipt. A determination favorable for a mare. A noble person (*junzi* 君子) who is going somewhere will first lose his way, and later find a host. Favorable to the west and south, one will find a friend; to the east and north, one will lose a friend. Auspicious in a determination about security (*an zhen ji* 安貞吉).” Fu (number 24) reads: “An offering; in going out and coming in there will be no illness. A friend will arrive without misfortune (*wujiu* 无咎); he will turn around and head back on his way, and return in seven days. Favorable for having somewhere to go.” One can easily see how such statements might lend themselves to a variety of interpretations, even if originally they referred to very specific circumstances.

## Key Concepts of Fate and Prediction in the Yijing

Like judgments, the individual line statements of the hexagrams—which vary in length from as few as two characters to as many as thirty—often include records from previous divinations that were either transmitted orally or recorded in early divination manuals of one kind or another. Many of these statements seem to be based directly or indirectly on “omen verses” of the sort that can also be found on Shang dynasty oracle bones. Here are a few examples of line statements that happen to deal explicitly with the theme of military affairs. Line five of Shi (number 7 in the received order): “In the hunt there is a catch: advantageous (*li* 利) to shackle captives; no misfortune (*wujiu* 无咎). The elder son leads the troops; the younger son carts the corpses; the determination is ominous (*xiong* 凶).” Line three of Lü (number 10): “The feeble-sighted will be able to see; the lame will be able to walk. Step on a tiger’s tail; it will bite the person. Ominous (*xiong* 凶). A warrior performs for the great ruler.” Line six of Fu (number 24): “Lost return; ominous; there will be a calamity (*zai* 災). If troops are set in motion, there will be a great defeat. For the ruler of the state it will be ominous; for up to ten years it will not be possible to launch a military campaign.”

As with the judgments, most line statements that contain explicitly divinatory material indicate positive prognostications or the non-judgmental expression “no harm/misfortune.” Overall, in the basic text of the *Changes* (i.e. both the judgments and line statements), the most common negative terms—for “trouble” (or “regret”/“remorse”), “distress,” “threat-

ening,” and “ominous”—appear a total of only about 130 times, as compared to about 430 instances of “auspicious,” “favorable,” “advantageous,” or “successful.” Other fairly frequent divinatory terms, such as “to put something to use” (55 occurrences) also have positive connotations.

As should already be apparent, commentaries have long been necessary to make sense of the cryptic utterances reflected in so many hexagram judgments and line statements. Indeed, over the last two millennia or so, virtually every one of the four thousand or so words in the basic text has been subjected to intense and relentless scrutiny. Moreover, many passages from the *Changes* have been interpreted in widely disparate ways. The reasons for this diversity of opinion are not difficult to find. In the first place, the divinations recorded in the *Changes* usually lack sufficient context, inviting sometimes wild speculations. Ancient terms and allusions are often unclear; loan words, local variants and scribal errors abound.

Archaeological excavations at several Chinese sites over the past 30 years or so—notably Mawangdui (馬王堆; 1973), Fuyang (阜陽; a.k.a. Shuanggudui 雙古堆; 1977), Tianxingguan (天星觀; 1978), Baoshan (包山; 1987), Wangjiatai (王家台; 1993), Guodian (郭店; 1993), and Ji’nan cheng (濟南城; 1993)—have revealed several different versions of the *Changes*, some of which show affinities with earlier descriptions of the hexagram-based works known as the *Lianshan* 連山 (“Linked Mountains”) and the *Guicang* 歸藏 (“Return to the Hidden”) and/or with textual fragments

## Key Concepts of Fate and Prediction in the Yijing

attributed to these works. The so-called Shanghai Museum version of the *Changes*, dating from ca. 300 BCE, is the earliest extant copy of the classic. Illegally excavated by tomb robbers in the early 1990s from a site in Jingmen 荊門, Hubei province, this work consists of nearly fifty-eight bamboo strips or fragments, revealing a total of thirty four hexagrams and 1,806 characters (a little over one-third of the received text, sans commentaries). One of the several features unique to this version is that the hexagram pictures appear to be comprised of trigrams that are somewhat separated from one another. Another unique feature is the six different kinds of square-shaped black or red symbols that appear immediately after the hexagram names. Finally, there are a great many variant characters of the sort often found in Chinese manuscripts from the state of Chu that were written about the time of the Shanghai Museum version of the *Changes*.

To take one brief example, the Shanghai Museum variant for the name of the hexagram Meng (number 4 in the received version, which is generally understood as “juvenile ignorance,” or “youthful folly”), is Mang 彤 (Long-haired dog). Perhaps Mang is simply a loan word for Meng here, but it may be the other way around. After all, several verbs in the line statements of the Meng hexagram fit “a long-haired dog” as well (or better) than they do an ignorant youngster—for example, “bind [*kun* 困] the hairy dog” and “hit [*ji* 擊] the hairy dog.”

After the rise of Confucianism and other moralistic philoso-

## Key Concepts of Fate and Prediction in the Yijing

phies from about the sixth century BCE onward, simple value-neutral descriptions of events that appeared in the judgments and line statements of the “original” *Changes* increasingly became prescriptions for proper behavior: “dids” became “shoulds,” so to speak. As part of this process, a number of obscure or unsettling terms and phrases came to be understood in new ways. Thus, a term like *fu* (俘), which originally seems to have denoted a “capture” or a “captive” (cf. 俘) in war came increasingly to be understood as a moral quality: “sincerity” or “trustworthiness.” Similarly, the term *heng* (亨), which originally had to do with the specific ritual sacrifices and prayers surrounding a divination, came to be glossed as “prevalence,” “success,” or “penetrating.” *Zhen* (貞), originally denoting a divinatory “determination” (i.e. the announcement of the “charge” to the turtle or milfoil), came to be interpreted as “constancy,” “perseverance,” or “correctness and firmness,” and a word that previously denoted “thickness” (*hou* 厚) came to be more generally understood as “simple honesty.” By the same token, a noble person (*junzi* 君子) became an “exemplary person” (also translated as “superior man,” “gentleman,” etc.), and words that previously denoted “trouble” (like *hui* 悔 and *lin* 吝) increasingly carried moral connotations of “blame,” “remorse” and “regret” and even “humiliation.”

## The Rise and Development of Systematic Correlative Cosmology

Meanwhile, during the period from about the fourth to the second centuries BCE, Chinese philosophers developed a highly sophisticated cosmology based on what has been called correlative thinking. In contrast to Western-style “subordinative thinking,” which relates classes of things through substance and emphasizes the idea of external causation, in Chinese-style correlative thinking concepts are not subsumed under one another but placed side by side in a pattern; things behave in certain ways not necessarily because of prior actions or the impulses of other things, but rather because they resonate with other entities and forces in a complex network of associations and correspondences. Applied to cosmology, this sort of correlative thinking encouraged the idea of mutually implicated “force fields” identified by highly specialized terms and linked with specific numerical values.

Central to this approach was the idea of *qi* (氣), literally “breath” or “air.” *Qi* is often translated as life breath, energy, pneuma, vital essence, material force, primordial substance, psychophysical stuff and so forth. Unfortunately, no single rendering serves all philosophical and practical purposes. For now, suffice it to say that in various states of coarseness or refinement, it composed all objects in the world and filled all the spaces between them. From late Zhou times onward, everything was assumed to be *qi* in some form, from eminently tangible objects like rocks and logs to more rarefied phenomena like light and heat. *Qi* was then “simultaneously

## Key Concepts of Fate and Prediction in the Yijing

‘what makes things happen in stuff’ and (depending on context) ‘stuff that makes things happen’ or ‘stuff in which things happen.’”<sup>1</sup>

With respect to human beings, *qi* in its coarser aspects becomes flesh, blood, and bones, but in its most highly refined manifestation, known as “vital essence,” it not only suffuses and animates our bodies, but it also becomes our “spirit” (*shen* 神). “Spirit” in late Zhou and early Han usage, had a wide range of meanings, as it does in contemporary English. But whereas in English the term almost invariably implies a sharp contrast with the material body, in classical Chinese discourse the distinction was never so clear. Spirit was viewed as an entity within the body that was responsible for consciousness, combining what Westerners would generally distinguish as “heart” and “mind.” In other words, “The numinous essence [of human beings] might be thought of as the interface between the sentient and insentient, or the psychological and physical. It is a blend of both aspects and thus appropriate for a world view that did not strongly value such boundaries.

The important point for our purposes is that for well over two thousand years, Chinese of various philosophical persuasions believed that by cultivating their *qi* to the fullest extent, and thus harnessing the highly refined spiritual capabilities

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<sup>1</sup> The quotation is from Nathan Sivin, as cited on page 301 of Christopher Cullen’s article “The Science/Technology Interface in Seventeenth-Century China: Song Yingxing on ‘qi’ and the ‘wuxing’” in the *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 53.2 (1990): 295-318.

## Key Concepts of Fate and Prediction in the Yijing

of their hearts and minds, they could achieve extraordinary things. Daoist-oriented individuals, for instance, could attain immortality; Confucians, for their part, could literally “transform people” and ultimately change the world by means of ritual rectitude and moral force. According to the *Zhongyong* (中庸 conventionally translated as the Doctrine of the Mean), an extremely influential work initially composed in the late Warring States period, the key to Confucian self-cultivation was sincerity—the moral integrity that enables a person to become fully developed as an agent of the cosmos: “Sincerity is Heaven’s Way; achieving sincerity is the Way of human beings. One who is sincere attains centrality without striving, apprehends without thinking.” The work goes on to assert that the person who possesses the most complete sincerity “is able to give full development to his nature, . . . and to the natures of other living things. Being able to give full development to the natures of other living things, he can assist in the transforming and nourishing powers of Heaven and Earth . . . [and thus] form a triad with them.” In this view, a person with fully developed sincerity can literally know the future, and be “like a spirit.”

What, then, should such a cultivated individual do? The Confucian answer was to direct one’s spirit toward achieving cosmic resonance—that is, a sympathetic vibration of *qi* across space. This could, of course, occur between objects, the way a plucked note on one instrument resonates with the same note on another instrument, but it could also occur in the minds of human beings. In other words, resonance, as a theory of “simultaneous, non-linear causality,” was predicated



## Key Concepts of Fate and Prediction in the Yijing

on the idea that like-things could influence like-things on a cosmic as well as a microcosmic scale. Human consciousness was thus “implicit in and susceptible to the same processes of cosmic resonance that [might] affect trees, iron, magnets, and lute strings.” In short, harmony prevailed when like-things resonated and unlike-things were in balance.

The concepts of *yin* (陰) and *yang* (陽) were central to late Zhou and early Han systems of correlative thinking. They were conceived in three different but related ways. First, they were viewed as modes of cosmic creativity (female and male, respectively), which not only produced but also animated all natural phenomena. Second, they were used to identify recurrent, cyclical patterns of rise (*yang*) and decline (*yin*), waxing (*yang*) and waning (*yin*). Third, they were employed as comparative categories, describing dualistic relationships that were viewed as inherently unequal but almost invariably complementary. *Yang*, for example, came to be associated with light, activity, Heaven, the sun, fire, heat, the color red, and roundness, while *yin* was correlated with the Earth, the moon, water, coldness, the color black and squareness, as well as darkness and passivity.

Another important feature of Han-style correlative thinking, though somewhat more problematical in the minds of certain scholars, was an emphasis on the so-called “five agents” (*wuxing* 五行; also translated elements, phases, activities, etc.), identified with the basic qualities or tendencies of earth (stability), metal (sharpness), fire (heat), water (coolness), and wood (growth). Like *yin* and *yang*, each of the five

## Key Concepts of Fate and Prediction in the Yijing

agents, in various combinations and operating under different temporal and spatial circumstances, had tangible cosmic power embodied in, or exerting influence on, objects of all sorts by virtue of the sympathetic vibration of *qi*. Whether considered as external forces or intrinsic qualities, *yin* and *yang* and the five agents constantly fluctuated and interacted as part of the eternal, cyclical rhythms of nature. Everything depended on timing and the relative strength of the variables involved. By taking into account these variables, one could predict whether movement would be progressive or retrogressive, fast or slow, auspicious or inauspicious.

By the early Han period the five-agents had come to be correlated with various seasons, directions, planets, colors, flavors, musical notes, senses, emotions, organs, grains, sacrifices, punishments and so forth. They were also correlated with different states or phases of *yin* and *yang*. As one concrete but relatively simple illustration, we may look at one construction of calendrical time. In terms of *yin* and *yang*, the year is divided into four parts: two solstices and two equinoxes. The winter solstice marks the point of fullest *yin*, when *yang* begins to emerge out of the cold. From this point onward, *yin* starts to decline and *yang* increases. At the spring equinox, *yin* and *yang* are in perfect balance. The process continues until the summer solstice, when *yang* is at its apex and *yin* is at its nadir. Thereafter *yang* declines and *yin* increases until the winter solstice, when the cycle begins again.

From the standpoint of five-agents correlations, during the

## Key Concepts of Fate and Prediction in the Yijing

first month of the lunar calendar, the power of wood prevails. This continues until the fourth month, when fire dominates. The sixth month is ruled by earth. The seventh, eighth, and ninth months are controlled by metal, and the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth months fall under the predominant influence of water. Armed with this sort of correlative knowledge, one could determine at any given time of year which directions were most auspicious, which planetary configurations were most favorable, which rituals should be performed, which foods, offerings and medicines were most appropriate, and so on.

Like *yin* and *yang*, the five-agents worked in sequences, but the order of displacement indicated above is somewhat unusual, for in the standard “mutual conquest” sequence of the five agents, water conquered fire, fire conquered metal, metal conquered wood, wood conquered earth, and earth conquered water. By contrast, in the “mutual production” sequence, wood produced fire, fire produced earth, earth produced metal, metal produced water, and water produced wood. There have been many explanations of how these two related processes occur in nature, some of which are fairly commonsensical and others of which involve a stretch of the imagination—for instance wood is sometimes said to overcome earth by “digging it” (as with a wooden shovel).

The eight trigrams (*bagua* 八卦) had similar qualities and capacities. Thus, for instance, the Zhen (Thunder) trigram caused things to move, Sun (Wind) dispersed things, Kan (Water) moistened things, Li (Fire) dried things, Gen (Moun-

tain) caused things to stop, Dui (Lake) pleased things, Qian (Heaven) provided governance, and Kun (Earth) sheltered things.

### The Hermeneutical Role of the “Ten Wings”

The most important development in the history of the *Changes* was the addition of a set of poetic commentaries known collectively as the Ten Wings. As indicated briefly above, these commentaries are quite heterogeneous in content. The first and second wings, together known as the “Commentary on the Judgments” (*Tuanzhuàn* 象傳) and the third and fourth, collectively titled the “Commentary on the Images” (*Xiangzhuàn* 象傳) probably date from the sixth or fifth century BCE. They are almost certainly the oldest systematic treatises on the basic text of the *Changes*. The Commentary on the Judgments explains each judgment by referring to its phrases, its hexagram symbolism and/or the location of its *yin* and *yang* lines. The Commentary on the Images consists of two subsections: a “Big Image Commentary,” which discusses the images associated with the two primary trigrams of each hexagram (lines 1-3 and lines 4-6 respectively), and a “Small Image Commentary,” which refers to the symbolism of the individual lines. The two parts of the “Great Commentary” (*Dazhuàn* 大傳) also known as the “Commentary on the Appended Statements” (*Xici zhuàn* 繫辭傳) are generally described as the fifth and sixth wings. Using somewhat different rhetorical devices in each of its two sections, this commentary offers a sophisticated,

## Key Concepts of Fate and Prediction in the Yijing

although sometimes rather disjointed, discussion of both the metaphysics and the morality of the *Changes*, often citing Confucius for authority.

The rest of the Ten Wings lack the divided structure of the first six. The “Commentary on the Words of the Text” (*Wenyan zhuan* 文言傳) addresses only the first two hexagrams of the basic text, and some scholars believe that it represents fragments of a much longer but no longer extant work. The “Explaining the Trigrams” (*Shuogua zhuan* 說卦傳) commentary attaches meanings to each of the eight trigrams that go well beyond the basic significations that they possessed in the early and middle Zhou period. The wing titled “Providing the Sequence of the Hexagrams” (*Xugua zhuan* 序卦傳) aims at justifying the received order of the hexagrams, and the last, the “Hexagrams in Irregular Order” (*Zagua zhuan* 雜卦傳) offers definitions of hexagrams that it often casts in terms of contrasting pairs. Different editions of the *Changes* organize this material in different ways. And some scholars ignored some wings completely. Wang Fuzhi (1619-1692), for example, refused to accept the legitimacy of the “Providing the Sequence of the Hexagrams” wing.

The Great Commentary is the most philosophically interesting of the Ten Wings. It probably assumed something close to its final form around 300 BCE, and from the Han period to the present this document has received far more scholarly attention than any other single wing. The primary goal of the Great Commentary was to explain how the hexagrams, trigrams and lines of the document duplicated the fundamental processes

## Key Concepts of Fate and Prediction in the Yijing

and relationships occurring in nature, enabling those who consult the *Yijing* with sincerity and reverence to partake of a potent, illuminating, activating and transforming spirituality. By participating fully in this spiritual experience, the reader could discern the patterns of change in the universe and act appropriately. As the Great Commentary states: “Looking up, we use it [the *Changes*] to observe the configurations of Heaven, and, looking down, we use it to examine the patterns of Earth. Thus we understand the reasons underlying what is hidden and what is clear. We trace things back to their origins then turn back to their ends. Thus we understand the axiom of life and death... The *Changes* is without consciousness and is without deliberate action. Being utterly still it does not initiate, but when stimulated it is commensurate with all the causes for everything that happens in the world. As such, it has to be the most spiritual thing in the world, for what else could possibly be up to this?”

In other words, the *Yijing* showed how human beings could “fill in and pull together the Dao of Heaven and Earth,” thus helping to create and maintain cosmic harmony through their spiritual attunement to the patterns and processes of nature. By using the *Changes* responsibly, humans could not only “know fate” (*zhiming* 知命) but also do something about it (i.e. establish fate; *liming* 立命).

The process of consulting the *Yijing* involved careful contemplation of the “images” (*xiang* 象) associated with, and reflected in, the lines, trigrams and hexagrams of the basic text. According to the Great Commentary, sages like Fuxi

(伏犧), “had the means to perceive the mysteries of the world and, drawing comparisons to them with analogous things, made images out of those things that seemed appropriate.” Thus, we are told that “the *Changes* is [nothing but] images” (易者象也) and that the term “image means the making of semblances [or representations]” (象也者像也). Somewhat ironically, the word “image” appears nowhere in the basic text of the *Yijing* and only three times in the Commentary on the Judgments (hexagrams 23, 50 and 62).

Initially, there were only “hexagram images” (*guaxiang* 卦象) “trigram images” (*guaxiang* 卦象) and “line images” (*yaoxiang* 爻象)—pure signs unmediated by language. But later on, hexagram names, judgments and line statements appeared in written form to help explain these abstract significations. Thus, words came to be used by subsequent “sages” to identify “images of things” (natural phenomena, such as Heaven and Earth, mountains, rivers, thunder, wind, fire, etc.), “images of affairs” (social and political phenomena, including institutions, war, famine, marriage, divorce, etc.), and “images of ideas” (thoughts, mental pictures, states of mind, emotions, and any other sensory or extra-sensory experiences). Some commentators likened images to “flowers in the mirror” or “the moon in the water”—that is, reflections of things that “cannot be described as either fully present or fully absent.”

Images were also closely connected with numbers (*shu* 數) as a means by which to understand patterns of cosmic change. Indeed, the Great Commentary tells us that in

## Key Concepts of Fate and Prediction in the Yijing

conjunction with hexagrams, numbers “indicate how change and transformation are brought about and how gods and spirits are activated.” Vague but provocative passages such as these would later inspire an enormous amount of scholarship designed to identify and explain the complex relationship between “numbers and images” (*xiangshu* 象數) but the primary focus of the Ten Wings is on images. In fact, at certain points in the text this emphasis seems to diminish the value of the written word itself. For example, the Great Commentary avers that “Writing does not exhaust words, and words do not exhaust ideas... The sages [therefore] established images in order to express their ideas exhaustively... [and they] established the hexagrams in order to treat exhaustively the true innate tendencies of things.”

Ideally, then, if one is able to grasp the meaning of the image, words become unnecessary. In fact, however, the ancient sages did their fair share of expositing. For instance, the Great Commentary states that “They [the sages] appended phrases to the lines [of the hexagrams] in order to clarify whether they signified good fortune or misfortune and [they] let the hard [*yang*] and the soft [*yin*] lines displace each other so that change and transformation could appear.”

According to this text, good fortune and misfortune involve images of failure or success, respectively. Regret and remorse involve images of sorrow and worry. Change and transformation involve images of advance and withdrawal. It goes on to say: “The judgments address the images [i.e. the concept of the entire hexagram], and the line texts



## Key Concepts of Fate and Prediction in the Yijing

address the states of change. The terms ‘auspicious’ [*ji* 吉] and ‘inauspicious’ [*xiong* 凶] address the failure [*shi* 失] or success [*de* 得] involved. The terms ‘regret’ [*hui* 悔] and ‘remorse’ [*lin* 吝] address the small faults involved. The expression ‘there is no blame’ [*wujiu* 無咎] indicates success at repairing transgressions... The distinction between a tendency either to the petty or to the great is an inherent feature of the hexagrams. The differentiation of good fortune and misfortune depends on the phrases [i.e. the line statements].”

The Great Commentary also tells us that the hexagrams “reproduce every action that occurs in the world,” and as a result, “once an exemplary person finds himself in a situation, he observes its image and ponders the phrases involved, and, once he takes action, he observes the change [of the lines] and ponders the prognostications involved. The goal of the exemplary person, as Wang Fuzhi once observed, was not to determine good fortune and misfortune per se, but rather to know “what to be concerned about, what to hold in awe, and what course of action to choose.”

How does the exemplary person go about making such choices? The Great Commentary provides a number of guidelines. It indicates for example that “The first lines [of a hexagram] are difficult to understand, but the top lines are easy, because they are the roots and branches, respectively [i.e. the origins and endings]... The second lines [of a hexagram] usually concern honor, while the fourth lines usually concern fear... The third lines usually concern misfortune, while the fifth lines usually concern

## Key Concepts of Fate and Prediction in the Yijing

achievement.” It also indicates that the three odd-numbered (*yang*) trigrams—Zhen, Kan and Gen—each of which has one “sovereign” and two “subjects” (i.e. one solid line and two unbroken lines), show the way of the exemplary person, while the three even-numbered (*yin*) trigrams—Sun, Li and Dui—each of which has two “sovereigns” and one “subject” (i.e. two solid lines and one unbroken line), illustrate the way of the inferior person.

Furthermore, the Great Commentary suggests ways to interpret hexagrams that are not necessarily evident in their judgments, lines, or trigram relationships. Thus, for example, we read that

Sun [“Compliance,” number 57] demonstrates how one can weigh things while yet remaining in obscurity. Lü [“Treading,” number 10] provides the means to make one’s actions harmonious. Qian [“Modesty,” number 15] provides the means by which decorum exercises its control. Fu [“Return,” number 24] provides the means to know oneself. Heng [“Perseverance,” number 32] provides the means to keep one’s virtue whole and intact. Sun [“Diminution,” number 41] provides the means to keep harm at a distance. Yi [“Increase,” number 42] provides the means to promote benefits. Kun [“Impasse,” number 47] provides the means to keep resentments few. Jing [“The Well,” number 48] provides the means to distinguish what righteousness really is. Sun [“Compliance,” number 57] provides the means to

## Key Concepts of Fate and Prediction in the *Yijing*

practice improvisations.

Sometimes the Great Commentary organizes hexagrams according to themes, such as the following cluster pertaining to virtue (*de* 德): Lü, (“Treading,” number 10) “is the foundation of virtue.” Qian (“Modesty,” number 15) “is how virtue provides a handle on things.” Fu (“Return,” number 24) “is the root of virtue.” Heng (“Perseverance,” number 32) “provides virtue with steadfastness.” Sun (“Diminution,” number 41) “is how virtue is cultivated.” Yi (“Increase,” number 42) “is how virtue proliferates.” Kun (“Impasse,” number 47) “is the criterion for distinguishing virtue.” Jing (“The Well,” number 48) “is the ground from which virtue springs.” Sun (“Compliance,” number 57) is the controller of virtue.

Essential to the process of consulting the *Yijing* was an acute attunement to the seminal first stirrings of change, which afford the opportunity for acting appropriately at the most propitious and efficacious time. The technical term in the *Yijing* for this moment is “incipience” (*ji* 機; often described metaphorically as a door hinge, trigger, or pivot)—that “infinitesimally small beginning of action, the point at which the precognition of good fortune can occur.” Once again in the words of the Great Commentary, “It is by means of the *Changes* that the sages plumb the utmost profundity and dig into the very incipience of things. It is profundity alone that thus allows one to penetrate the aspirations of all the people in the world; it is a grasp of incipience alone that thus allows one to accomplish the great affairs of the world.”

## Key Concepts of Fate and Prediction in the Yijing

In short, by virtue of their spiritual capabilities and comprehensive symbolism, the sixty-four hexagrams of the *Yijing* provided the means by which to understand all phenomena, including the forces of nature, the interaction of things, and the circumstances of change. Like *yin* and *yang*, the five agents, the eight trigrams and other cosmic variables, they were always in the process of transformation, but at any given time they also revealed qualities and capacities.

Let us now look again at the Gen hexagram to see an example of one way in which the Ten Wings influenced *Changes* exegesis and divination. By the beginning of the Han dynasty, if not well before, the early Zhou dynasty idea that Gen might mean “to cleave” or “to glare at” had given way to a very different conception. Now, the dominant meanings attached to the Gen hexagram had to do with “stillness,” “restraint” and “stability.” Below is a rendering of the basic text based on a Han dynasty understanding, together with various commentaries drawn from the Ten Wings.



Figure 0.4: Gen

Judgment: Restraint [or Stilling] takes place with the back, so the person in question does not obtain the other person. He goes into that one’s courtyard but does not see him there.

## Key Concepts of Fate and Prediction in the Yijing

There is no blame.

Commentary on the Judgment: Gen means “stop.” When it is time to stop, one should stop; when it is time to act, one should act. If in one’s activity and repose he is not out of step with the times, his Dao should be bright and glorious. Let Restraint operate where restraint should take place, that is, let the restraining be done in its proper place. Those above and those below stand in reciprocal opposition to each other and so do not get along. This is the reason why, although “one does not obtain the other person,” and “one goes into one’s courtyard but does not see him there, yet “there is no blame.”

Commentary on the Images: United mountains [i.e. doubled Gen trigrams]: this constitutes the image of Restraint. In the same way, the exemplary person is mindful of how he should not go out of his position.

Line 1: Restraint takes place with the toes, so there is no blame, and it is fitting that the person in question practices perpetual perseverance.

Commentary on the Images: If “Restraint takes place with the toes,” one shall never violate the bounds of rectitude [or “stray off the correct path”].

Line 2: Restraint takes place with the calves, which means that the person in question does not raise up [i.e. rescue] his followers. His heart feels discontent.

## Key Concepts of Fate and Prediction in the Yijing

Commentary on the Images: “The person in question does not raise up his followers, nor does he withdraw and obey the call.”

Line 3: Restraint takes place with the midsection, which may split the flesh at the backbone<sup>2</sup>, a danger enough to smoke and suffocate the heart.

Commentary on the Images: If “Restraint takes place with the midsection,” the danger would “smoke and suffocate the heart.”

Line 4: Restraint takes place with the torso. There is no blame.

Commentary on the Images: “Restraint takes place with the torso,” which means that the person in question applies restraint to his own body.

Line 5: Restraint takes place with the jowls, so the words of the person in question are ordered, and regret vanishes.

Commentary on the Images: “Restraint takes place with the jowls,” so the person in question is central and correct.

Line 6: The person in question exercises Restraint with simple honesty, which results in good fortune.

Commentary on the Images: The good fortune that springs from “exercising Restraint with simple honesty,” means that one will reach his proper end because of that simple honesty.

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<sup>2</sup> Variant characters in the Mawangdui version of this line suggest the idea of “scratching the spine” rather than “splitting the back flesh”.

## Key Concepts of Fate and Prediction in the *Yijing*

Although these glosses from the Ten Wings certainly did not resolve all ambiguities or eliminate all future controversies regarding the possible meanings of Gen's judgment and line statements, they did underscore a radical interpretive shift that transformed the Gen hexagram from an apparent description of a ritualized sacrifice to a set of prescriptions for self control and ethical behavior.

In short, the Ten Wings of the *Yijing*, even without the alternative readings provided by the Mawangdui manuscript and other versions of the *Changes*, vastly enhanced its symbolic repertoire. Although the content of the classic became "fixed" in 136 BCE, for the next two thousand years scholars and diviners enjoyed an enormous amount of latitude in interpreting the work. In the meantime, the Great Commentary became the locus classicus for virtually all Chinese discussions of time, space and metaphysics, investing the *Yijing* with extraordinary philosophical authority. In addition, this amplified and state-sanctioned version of the *Changes* became a repository of concrete symbols and general explanations that proved serviceable in such diverse realms of knowledge as art, literature, music, mathematics, science and medicine.

## Other Han-Based Hermeneutics

Approaches to the *Yijing*—whether scholarly or divinatory—have naturally hinged on factors such as philosophical or religious affiliations, intellectual fashions, politics, social

status, gender, personal taste, family ties, and other variables of time, place and circumstance. As Chinese society evolved, new ways of thinking about the classic arose, inexorably expanding the scope of interpretive possibilities to include virtually every emerging realm of knowledge. Thus, over the course of more than two millennia, thousands of commentaries were written on the *Changes*, each amplifying the text and each reflecting a distinctive technical, philological, religious, philosophical, literary, social or political point of view. Not surprisingly, then, the document came to be identified by a number of Chinese scholars as a “mirror of history” as well as the “mirror of men’s minds.”

The so-called New Text (*jinwen* 今文) scholars of the early Han period sought in particular to identify correspondences between the various features of the natural world (both physical and metaphysical) and the hexagrams, trigrams and individual lines of the *Changes*. These correspondences often involved numerical correlations, since—as with the Pythagoreans in ancient Greece—numbers provided cosmologically inclined individuals with a systematic explanation of the universe and its movements. They provided a way of “domesticating” nature, of submitting it to the premodern equivalent of equations. From a practical standpoint, an understanding of numbers enabled human beings to determine how best to situate themselves in a harmonious relationship with their environment.



## Key Concepts of Fate and Prediction in the Yijing

According to the Great Commentary, when numbers are combined in various ways, they “exhaust all aspects of change;” thus, a mastery of numbers enables one “to know the future.” For this reason, a significant amount of this commentary is devoted to various numerological discussions. For instance, we are told that the numbers of Heaven are one, three, five, seven and nine (all *yang* numbers) and the numbers of Earth are two, four, six, eight and ten (all *yin* numbers). The sum of the five Heavenly numbers is twenty-five and the sum of the five Earthly numbers is thirty; together they come to fifty-five. The Great Commentary also describes in detail a method for divining with fifty milfoil stalks that involves dividing the stalks into numerical groups that symbolize *yin* and *yang* (two), Heaven, Earth and Man (three) and the seasons (four). It is easy enough to imagine how these numbers, both alone and in combination, came to be correlated with all kinds of phenomena, from musical notes and heavenly bodies to divisions of time and space. Such correlations revealed cosmic connections—spiritual resonances that existed between like things. As such, they explained how the universe operated and, more importantly, how it could be manipulated.

New Text scholarship marked the beginning of what would become known as the School of Images and Numbers (*xiangshu* 象數), in contrast to what became known as the School of Meanings and Principles (*yili* 義理). The former school emphasized mathematical calculations and correlations of the sort described above; the latter was more closely associated with so-called Old Text (*guwen* 古文) sources,

## Key Concepts of Fate and Prediction in the Yijing

and its exponents paid primary attention to what they saw as the “moral” content of the judgments, line statements and commentaries to the Changes.

One of the most influential early interpreters of the *Yijing* was Jing Fang (京房; 77-37 BCE). Known primarily as a divination specialist, but also identified as an exponent of New Text scholarship and an advocate of the Images and Numbers approach to the *Changes*, he has been credited with inventing and/or popularizing several calendrically based schemes for linking phases of change with markers of time. These systems involved correlations between *yin* and *yang*, the five agents, the eight trigrams and the sixty-four hexagrams on the one hand and units of space and/or time associated with the ten heavenly stems and twelve earthly branches (operating either individually or in combination), the twenty-four segments of the solar year and the twenty-eight lunar lodges on the other.

Jing Fang is also famous for developing several interpretive devices that have remained influential in the analysis of the *Yijing* up to the present day. One of these is the idea of “matching positions” (*dangwei* 當位); another is the notion of “nuclear trigrams” (*hugua* 互卦; also known as “interlocking” or “overlapping” trigrams). Matching positions refers to *yang* (solid, odd-numbered) lines that occupy odd-numbered places in a hexagram and *yin* (broken, even-numbered) lines that rest in even-numbered places. Only one hexagram, Jijji (“Ferrying Complete,” number 63), has “matching” lines in all six positions, and only one, Weiji (“Ferrying Incomplete,”

## Key Concepts of Fate and Prediction in the Yijing

number 64), has no matching lines at all. (see below). Because all of its lines are in their “correct” positions, the Jiji hexagram is generally viewed as highly favorable, indicative of stability, cultural development and personal refinement. Nonetheless, the Commentary on the Judgment warns that although the *yang* and *yin* lines of the hexagram “behave correctly,” if one ceases to practice constancy and no longer follows a “middle path,” chaos will ensue.



Figure 0.5: Jiji



Figure 0.6: Wei Ji

Generally speaking, hexagrams with lines in “correct” positions are considered auspicious, although not invariably. Opposite lines that occupy analogous *yinyang* positions in the lower or “inner” and upper or “outer” primary trigrams (lines 1, 2 and 3 and lines 4, 5 and 6, respectively) are generally viewed as having a particularly close and favorable relationship or “correspondence”—esp. the lines in the second and fifth place, which from the standpoint of position

## Key Concepts of Fate and Prediction in the Yijing

represent respectively the “correct” relationship of official to ruler, son to father and wife to husband.

The nuclear trigram approach to the *Changes* proved to be an especially useful device for opening up interpretive possibilities. It was based on the idea that every hexagram has, in addition to its two primary trigrams (lines 1, 2 and 3 and lines 4, 5 and 6, respectively), two overlapping trigrams, comprised of lines 2, 3 and 4 and lines 3, 4 and 5, respectively. These nuclear trigrams, in combination, yield another related hexagram. In Figure 0.6 above, for example, the primary trigrams of Jiji are Li (“Fire”) below and Kan (“Water”) above. This trigram symbolism indicates, at the most rudimentary level, the idea of a congenial balance of elements (for instance, water in a kettle being heated by a flame)—which is also the generally positive connotation of the Jiji hexagram as a whole. By contrast, although the nuclear trigrams of Jiji are the same as the primary trigrams (Li and Kan), their positions are reversed (with Kan at the bottom and Li on top), suggesting the notion of imbalance (as for example, when water in a kettle boils over and extinguishes the flame). The hexagram produced by these two nuclear trigrams is “Ferrying Incomplete” (number 64), for which the Commentary on the Images explicitly counsels the need for the exemplary person to put things in proper order.

Later Han scholars such as Zheng Xuan (鄭玄; 127-200 CE), Xun Shuang (荀爽; 128-190 CE) and Yu Fan (虞翻; 164-233 CE) embraced most of the New Text ideas discussed above. But they also made their own distinctive contributions to the

already substantial interpretive repertoire of the *Changes*. Zheng, for example, developed a way of analyzing the individual lines of a hexagram in such a fashion that they could refer to trigrams that were not actually present in the hexagram(s) under consideration. Zheng's name has also been closely associated with a number of *Yijing*-related "apocryphal" texts that employ calendrical and numerological methods for predictive purposes. One of these, *Opening Up the Regularities of Qian* (*Qian zao du* 乾鑿度; a.k.a. *Qian zuo du*) reads like a sophisticated tract on the Great Commentary itself.

Xun Shuang is best known for his theory of ascending and descending lines and trigrams, which came to be closely linked to the idea that the six lines of a hexagram can represent different levels of social or bureaucratic status as well as the developmental stages of a situation. [See Figure 0.7] Viewed hierarchically rather than developmentally, and by family analogy (as discussed briefly above), line 5 might represent the husband and line 2 the wife. The line statements would then pertain to these relationships, and once again the interpretive possibilities were virtually endless.

## Key Concepts of Fate and Prediction in the Yijing

Line 6: The Sage [aka “The Ancestral Temple”]  
Line 5: The Ruler [aka “The Great Sovereign”]  
Line 4: The Minister [aka “All The Marquises”]  
Line 3: Middle-Ranking Official [aka “The Three Dukes”]  
Line 2: Lower Official [aka “The Great Officer”]  
Line 1: Commoner [aka “The Primary Scholar”]

Figure 0.7: Hexagram Lines and Status Positions

Yu Fan’s interpretive claim to fame was his emphasis on “lost images” (*yixiang* 逸象) “laterally linked hexagrams” (*pangtong gua* 旁通卦) and “changing positions” (*yiwei* 易位). Lost images refers to “trigram qualities” (卦德) that go well beyond the already ample symbolism provided by the Explaining the Trigrams wing. Over time, these “lost images” came to number in the hundreds. For instance, a list appended to a nineteenth century book by Cao Weilin (曹為霖) titled *Historical Mirror of Changes Studies* (易學史鏡) identifies sixty-six different qualities associated with the Qian trigram alone—including types of people (the king, the sage, the exemplary person, the military man, the traveler, etc.), values (reverence, faithfulness, knowledge, virtue, love, etc.) and general attributes or activities (goodness, greatness, blessings, abundance, benefits, purity, order, height, maturity, awesomeness, severity, anger, beginning, etc.).

The notion of laterally linked hexagrams has to do with the way a new hexagram can be produced from an original one

by changing each line of the first from *yin* to *yang* or *yang* to *yin*. Changing positions refers to a similar practice, but one in which not all the lines of a hexagram are transformed into their opposites. A well known modern commentator on the *Yijing*, Wei Da (韋達), maintains that “In nine cases out of ten, the meaning of one line is confirmed and elucidated by the significance of its transformation.”

Taken together, this vast arsenal of interpretive techniques made it possible for Han and later scholars to invest a given hexagram or combination of hexagrams with virtually any meaning. Let us take as an admittedly extreme example, Yu Fan’s gloss on the top line statement of Lü (“The Wanderer;” number 56), which reads in the received text: “This bird gets its nest burnt. The Wanderer first laughs and later howls and wails. He loses his ox in a time of ease, which means misfortune.” This is how Yu explains the relationship between this line statement, the structure of the hexagram, and the line statement of a derivative hexagram:

The trigram, Li, is a bird and is fire; the trigram, Sun, is wood and is high. The fourth line loses its position, changing into the trigram Zhen, which is a basket, the image of a nest. Now, the image of a nest is not apparent; therefore the bird burns its nest. The trigram Zhen refers to laughing, and . . . [it also signifies the idea of] a beginning, and thus we have laughing at the outset. The response is in the trigram Sun. Sun signifies howling and wailing, and the image of Sun [signifies the idea of] afterward; thus, howling and wailing take place

later. When the third line moves [changes to a yin line], the trigram Kun is an ox, and when the fifth line moves [changes to a yang line], it forms the trigram Qian, and Qian is ease. The top line loses the third line. The fifth line moves in response to the second line, thus the ox is lost in time of ease. Losing its position and being without a response, it is therefore inauspicious. If the fifth line changes, it forms the hexagram Dun (Withdrawal, number 33), the second line [of which refers to the idea of] “holding with yellow ox hide”—the lost ox of the traveler’s family.

Although this complex trigram symbolism can be traced to various previous commentaries, the precise reasons that the lines change and “lose their position” in this particular instance are never made clear. Small wonder, then, that a great many Chinese scholars, both past and present, have criticized the “excesses” of this radically complex approach to Images and Numbers in the *Changes*.

One of the most vociferous early critics of Images and Numbers scholarship was Wang Bi (王弼; 226-249), the progenitor of what became known as Abstruse Learning (*Xuanxue* 玄學), a creative amalgamation of both Confucian and Daoist thought. Wang rejected the exegesis of Han thinkers like Zheng Xuan, Xun Shuang and Yu Fan almost entirely in favor of a Meanings and Principles approach to the *Yijing* that stripped away virtually all of the complex and often confusing numerical, astrological and calendrical calculations that had been attached to the work by Jing Fang and his



successors.

The term “image” meant something very different to Wang Bi than it did to his late Han predecessors. Rather than viewing a hexagram, trigram or line image as something that could be quantified or calibrated with seemingly infinite specificity and complexity, Wang considered hexagrams and trigrams to be a more general means of understanding processes of change. Whereas Later Han commentators like Zheng, Xun and Yu measured the meaning and value of a hexagram in terms of its relationship to other hexagrams, all of which were enmeshed in an elaborate web of numerological and other symbolic correspondences, Wang Bi focused on individual hexagrams, and the way they illuminated changing situations. As Wang put the matter in his famous essay, “General Remarks on the *Zhou Changes*” (*Zhouyi lueli* 周易略例), “When we cite the name of a hexagram, in its meaning we find the controlling principle, and when we read the words of the judgment, then we have got more than half the ideas involved. . . . The hexagrams deal with moments of time and the lines are concerned with the states of change that are appropriate to those times.”

Thus, in virtually all of his commentaries on individual hexagrams, Wang takes pains to spell out the nature of every line and its relationship with other lines and/or trigrams. For him, each hexagram, whether auspicious or inauspicious, simple or complicated, symbolizes the possibility of change. “First, a hexagram denotes a specific situation (or time, *shi* 時), such as war, peace, harmony, discord, conflict and

## Key Concepts of Fate and Prediction in the Yijing

reconciliation. Second, the six lines of a hexagram represent the room to maneuver (application, or *yong* 用) within that particular situation, showing both the hidden dangers and the available options.” At this precise juncture, between what is “fated” and what can be done, Wang Bi emphasizes “the fluidity of human affairs and the importance of making the right decision.”

The only major interpretive principles that Wang shared with commentators from the Late Han period were: (A) the view that certain hexagram lines can resonate productively with one another and (B) the notion that the lines can represent—either directly or by analogy—different kinds of people in different positions and social situations. Under most circumstances, however, Wang chose to emphasize the temporal and developmental significance of the individual lines within the framework of a single hexagram. In his words: “Moments of time entail either obstruction or facility, thus the application [of a given hexagram] is either a matter of action or of withdrawal.” Once the critical (“incipient”) moment of time has been determined, “one should either act or remain passive, responding to the type of application involved.” One contemplates the name of the hexagram in order to see whether the general situation portends good fortune or bad, and one cites what is said about the incipient moment in order to see whether one should act or remain passive. From these things, “it is apparent how change operates within the body of one hexagram.” So, for instance, in glossing the Gen hexagram (“Restraint,” number 52; below) Wang points out that the third *yang* line portends danger, indicating the need

## Key Concepts of Fate and Prediction in the Yijing

for great caution and care, because of its position at the “backbone” of the hexagram (i.e. its location between a pair of *yin* lines on either side).



Figure 0.8: Gen

By the end of the Six Dynasties period (220-589 CE), Wang Bi's commentary on the *Changes*, amplified by the remarks of Han Kangbo (韓康伯; c. 332-385?), had gained ascendancy among scholars of the *Yijing*. This ascendancy continued into the Sui (589-618) and Tang (618-907) dynasties, especially after Wang's edition of the text became the centerpiece of Kong Yingda's (孔穎達; 574-648) *Correct Meaning of the Zhou Changes* (Zhouyi zhengyi 周易正義), which remained the official version of the *Yijing* throughout the Tang and into the Song (907-1279) and Yuan (1279-1368) dynasties.

Han-style New Text scholarship and Images and Numbers interpretations did not disappear entirely, however. In fact, in some circles there was a resurgence of Han-style correlative thinking. During the Tang period, for example, the five agents were first matched systematically with the eight trigrams. In the most common configuration, the Qian and Dui trigrams

shared the agent metal; Sun and Zhen shared wood, and Gen and Kun shared earth. Kan was linked solely with water and Li was associated only with fire. In another, less common, model, Qian and Kun shared both wood and water, Gen and Dui shared fire, Kan and Li shared earth, and Zhen and Sun shared metal. In either case, the basic goal was to assure that in any given situation the conjunction of symbolic elements—whether trigrams, agents, or numbers—would be harmonious and therefore auspicious. But to critics of this sort of cosmological thinking, like the Tang scholar Lü Cai (600-664) and his successors, efforts to correlate incommensurate numbers represented nothing more than a “forced fit” (*qiangpei* 強配).

It was during the Tang dynasty that Buddhist and Daoist ideas, which had already begun to influence *Yijing* scholarship in the Six Dynasties period, gained ever greater visibility. Proponents of Daoist “alchemy,” for instance, in their quest for longevity and eventual immortality, increasingly saw the *Changes* as a convenient device by which to align the body and mind with the cosmos. Likewise, Tang Buddhists, building on Six Dynasty precedents, engaged the *Yijing* to an unprecedented extent. This was particularly true for the variety of Buddhism known as Flowery Splendor (Huayan 華嚴). From this point onward, as we shall see, Buddhist terminology, imagery and symbolism increasingly found its way into *Changes* exegesis.

### **A Brief Account of Interpretations of the Changes in Late Imperial and Post-Imperial Times (960 CE-Present)**

The intellectual and institutional challenge posed by Buddhism in the Tang dynasty resulted in the rise of “Neo-Confucianism” during the Song dynasty. This new brand of metaphysically oriented Confucianism drew heavily on the *Yijing* as a domestic source of inspiration, a counterweight to the “alien” ideas of Buddhism. Neo-Confucianism took two major forms in the Song period and thereafter. One was the so-called School of Principle, which focused on the idea that in order to cultivate the “principle” of one’s innate goodness, it was necessary to study the Confucian Classics assiduously, thus refining one’s *qi* from without, so to speak. The other was the so-called School of the Mind, which emphasized the value of seeking the principle of the innately good self within, primarily through meditation. Both schools placed a heavy emphasis on the power of the mind, however. Thus, for all his insistence on the importance of book-learning, one of the leading exponents of the School of Principle, Cheng Yi (程頤; 1033-1107), could write that “With the most highly developed sincerity, [the mind] can penetrate metal and stone, and overcome water and fire, so what dangers and difficulties can possibly keep it from prevailing?”

One of the many noteworthy features of early Song scholarship on the *Yijing* is the profusion of charts and diagrams that suddenly appeared at that time, many of which came to be attributed to a Daoist master named Chen Tuan (陳搏; 871-989). These illustrations, although usually associated with the School of Images and Numbers, came to be attached to the writings of many Song and later scholars identified

## Key Concepts of Fate and Prediction in the Yijing

solidly with the School of Meanings and Principle—one of many indications of the limits of these and other such evaluative categories in the history of *Changes* scholarship.

The most influential of these early diagrams were: (1) The “Yellow River Chart” (*Hetu* 河圖), (2) The “Luo River Writing” (*Luoshu* 洛書), (3) the “Former Heaven Chart” (*xiantian tu* 先天圖) and (4) the “Later Heaven Chart” (*Houtian tu* 後天圖). All four came to be seen as “maps” of the cosmos, symbolic guides to its inner workings and outward manifestations. The Yellow River Chart arranges the numbers from one to ten in such a way as to pair odd (*yang*) numbers with even (*yin*) ones. These numbers are then correlated with the five directions (and hence, the five agents): two and seven to the south (fire), one and six to the north (water), three and eight to the east (wood), four and nine in the west (metal), and five and ten at the center (earth). In the “mutual production” sequence of the five agents, wood produces fire, fire produces earth, earth produces metal, metal produces water, and water produces wood. In the “mutual conquest” sequence, water conquers fire, fire conquers metal, metal conquers wood, wood conquers earth, and earth conquers water. In the Yellow River Chart, which reflects the mutual production sequence of the five agents, all of the odd numbers add up to 25, and all of the even numbers add up to 30.

In the Luo River Writing we find a “magic square,” in which all the numbers in any row of three, whether perpendicular, horizontal, or diagonal, add up to fifteen. Even (*yin*) numbers occupy all four corners, and the five-agents sequence is one

## Key Concepts of Fate and Prediction in the Yijing

of mutual conquest. Thus, for example, wood (three and eight) overcomes earth (five and ten), earth overcomes water (one and six), water overcomes fire (two and seven), fire overcomes metal (four and nine) and metal overcomes wood.

The Former Heaven Chart, attributed to Fuxi, displays the eight trigrams in four sets, each corresponding to one of the four seasons (usually depicted in clockwise order, with summer located in the south, at the top of the diagram). The juxtapositions in this configuration are: Qian (South) and Kun (North); Sun (Southwest) and Zhen (Northeast); Kan (West) and Li (East); and Gen (Northwest) and Dui (Southeast). According to the Explaining the Trigrams commentary, the clockwise movement of the trigrams from Zhen, through Li and Dui to Qian, takes into account what is already existing while the counter-clockwise movement of the trigrams from Sun, through Kan and Gen to Kun, takes into account what has not yet come into existence. In terms of their direct “effects in nature,” as discussed briefly above, Zhen (Thunder) causes things to move, Sun (Wind) disperses things, Kan (Water) moistens things, Li (Fire) dries things, Gen (Mountain) causes things to stop, Dui (Lake) pleases things, Qian (Heaven) provides governance, and Kun (Earth) shelters things.

The Later Heaven Chart, attributed to King Wen, presents the trigrams in a spatial order that depicts yet another kind of developmental change. In the most common version of this scheme, Zhen (East) marks the beginning of the Later Heaven cycle, followed by Sun (Southeast), Li (South), Kun

## Key Concepts of Fate and Prediction in the Yijing

(Southwest), Dui (West), Qian (Northwest), Kan (North), and Gen (Northeast). In this sequence, all things come forth in Zhen (Thunder), they are set in order in Sun (wind), they are made visible to one another in Li (Fire), they are nourished by Kun (Earth), they are pleased by Dui (Lake), they contend in Qian (Heaven), they toil in Kan (Water), and they reach maturity in Gen (Mountain). Not surprisingly, the four illustrations discussed above became mutually implicated. Thus, for instance, the Luo River Writing came to be paired with the Former Heaven Chart, and the Yellow River Chart came to be paired with the Later Heaven Chart.

Over time, the interrelationships between these charts became ever more complex. In each case, the purpose was to create a comprehensive vision of reality, one in which number and image, as well as past, present and future, were seamlessly integrated. Naturally, the wide variety of formulations invited a great deal of criticism from different angles, but the effort to build comprehensive models of reality continued unceasingly.

One of the great Images and Numbers systems builders of the Song period was Shao Yong (邵雍; 1011-1077), whose book, *Supreme Principles that Rule the World* (*Huangji jingshi shu* 皇極經世書) received praise for its comprehensiveness as well as criticism for its effort to “force” some of its correlations and for taking liberties with the conventional symbolism of the *Changes*. We shall hear more of him in subsequent chapters. According to Shao, everything began with the “Supreme Ultimate,” a concept drawn from the Great Commentary,



## Key Concepts of Fate and Prediction in the Yijing

which came to be identified as the generative force that produced all things, equivalent to both Heaven and the Dao. In Shao's view, the Supreme Ultimate produced numbers, numbers yielded images, and images became concrete objects, all comprised of *qi*.

Shao believed that the eight trigrams were the basic “elements” of which all things were ultimately constituted. They were engendered by the interaction of *yin* and *yang*, which produced four two-line images (sometimes known as digrams), representing (1) greater *yin* (two broken lines, correlated with the Dui trigram), (2) lesser *yin* (a broken line resting above a solid line, correlated with the Zhen trigram), (3) greater *yang* (two solid lines, correlated with the Qian trigram) and (4) lesser *yang* (a solid line resting above a broken line, correlated with the Li trigram). These four images, in turn, were related to four images designated “greater weakness” (correlated with the Kun trigram), “lesser weakness” (correlated with the Kan trigram), “greater strength” (correlated with the Gen trigram) and “lesser strength” (correlated with the Sun trigram).

From these two sets of images others followed: four celestial images (the sun, moon, stars, and zodiacal space), four terrestrial images (water, fire, soil, and stone), and a host of other “natural” groupings of four—including seasons, directions, limbs, virtues, stages of life, sense organs, etc. Some of these groupings may not seem so natural. For example, the Gen trigram, representing “greater strength,” came to be correlated with a four-part category consisting of (1) odors

## Key Concepts of Fate and Prediction in the *Yijing*

and fire, (2) daytime and wind, (3) the *Classic of Poetry* and flying things, and (4) the stomach and bone marrow. Shao also developed a vast system of numerical correspondences, based in part on the numbers associated with Yellow River Chart, to “more precisely define the relationship of things, predict the future, and comprehend vast quantities of space and time.” In Shao’s complex system of reckoning, numbers in one sequence described aspects of the present or the past, and in a different sequence they revealed the future.

Scholars of the School of Principle such as Cheng Yi resisted this sort of numerological system building. For them, the *Yijing* was above all a moral document, to be used solely for cultivating sageliness within and then manifesting it in service to society. In his highly influential commentaries, Cheng steadfastly refused to see the *Changes* as anything more than a text encouraging right behavior, although in his private conversations he was somewhat ambivalent about the numerology of scholars such as Shao Yong.

Zhu Xi (朱熹; 1130-1200), a towering figure in traditional Chinese thought, tried to negotiate a path to understanding the *Yijing* that would avoid the moralistic extremes of Cheng Yi as well as the numerological excesses of Shao Yong, feeling that “Confucians who talk about images and numbers give strained interpretations and draw far-fetched analogies, while those who preach [only] meanings and principles stray far from the subject.” Fundamentally Zhu considered the *Changes* to be a book of divination; “what is described in it,” he wrote, “is simply images and numbers by which to

foretell one's good or evil fortune." But he also believed that the ultimate purpose of the *Yijing* was self-cultivation, and that without sincerity and the rectification of character the work would be of no use as a divinatory device. Zhu's understanding of the classic was thus fundamentally within the framework of the School of Principle. Indeed, this branch of learning would later be identified as the Cheng [Yi]-Zhu [Xi] School (程朱學派).

Because of his interest in divination, Zhu Xi was more open than some of his colleagues to certain ideas of Han thinkers such as Jing Fang and Yu Fan. For example, he used Jing's so-called Eight Palaces (*bagong* 八宮) system to explain how the eight trigrams changed systematically into the sixty-four hexagrams. And in an even more radical move, Zhu incorporated the Yellow River Chart and Luo River Writing into both his *Introduction to Changes Studies* (*Yixue qimeng* 易學啓蒙) and his *Fundamental Meaning of the Zhou Changes* (*Zhouyi benyi* 周易本義) arguing that the culture hero Fuxi had drawn upon the numerology of these two diagrams in laying the foundations of the *Yijing*.

## Key Concepts of Fate and Prediction in the *Yijing*

Zhu Xi's instructions for examining the result of a divination, like the rituals he devised for the process, proved to be extremely influential over time. According to Zhu: "Any hexagram may have all unchanging lines. In that case we prognosticate on the basis of the original hexagram's judgment, taking the inner trigram as the question, or present situation, and the outer trigram as the prognostication." When only one line changes, "we take the statement of the original hexagram's changing line as the prognostication." When two lines change, "we take the statements of the two changing lines of the original hexagram as the prognostication, but we take the uppermost line as ruler." When three lines change, "the prognostication involves the judgment of the original hexagram and that of the resulting hexagram, using the original hexagram as the question or general situation and the resulting hexagram as the prognostication." When four lines change, "we use the two unchanging lines in the resulting hexagram as the prognostication, but we take the lower line as the ruler." When five lines change, "we use the unchanging line of the resulting hexagram as the prognostication." When all six lines change, if the hexagrams are Qian (number 1) and Kun (number 2), the prognostications of both are used. For other hexagrams, "the prognostication is the judgment of the resulting hexagram."

Despite Zhu Xi's extraordinary influence in so many realms of Chinese thought and behavior, it is clear that there was never (nor could there ever be) any general agreement on how to interpret the results of an *Yijing* divination. For instance, a number of commentators maintain that if a hexagram has no

changing lines, the diviner need take into account not only the judgment but also the Commentary on the Judgment and the overall Commentary on the Images. If any lines are changing, special attention should be given to the line statements and the Commentary on the Images pertaining to those lines, as well as to the judgment, the Commentary on the Judgment and the overall Commentary on the Images of the derivative hexagram. Some *Yijing* specialists argue that regardless of how many lines of a hexagram have changed, the derivative hexagram should be taken into account, but others maintain that a hexagram cannot be considered “transformed” unless three or more of its lines are either “old *yang*” (nine) or “old *yin*” (six).

Furthermore, we know that some diviners emphasized judgments exclusively, while others placed primary emphasis on trigrams and trigram relationships, including nuclear trigrams. Still others focused primarily on lines and line statements, sometimes in highly idiosyncratic ways (for example, the late Qing diviner Chen Maohou 陳懋侯 always emphasized the fifth line in any given hexagram). A number of diviners paid special attention to laterally linked lines in both trigrams and hexagrams; and some naturally used a combination of techniques.

Zhu Xi’s understanding of the *Changes* became state orthodoxy for much of the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368) and for virtually all of the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1912) dynasties; thus, his opinions on the classic were powerfully reinforced by the civil service examination system. Nonethe-

less, as had been the case with the state's sponsorship of Wang Bi's interpretations during the Tang and Song periods, Zhu's views did not go unchallenged. Although many scholars naturally followed the School of Principle, some did not. Once such individual, Yang Jian (楊簡; 1141-1226), who approached the *Changes* from the standpoint of the School of the Mind, was so hostile to the ideas of Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi that he reportedly avoided entirely the term "principle" in his writings.

Another Yuan dynasty scholar, Xu Heng (許衡; 1209–81), was one of the most famous Chinese supporters of the Mongols and a particularly prominent advocate of Zhu Xi's thought. His *Du Yi siyan* 讀易私言 (Private Words on Reading the *Changes*) is not, however, an overtly political tract. Rather, it focuses narrowly on the interpretive qualities or capacities (*de* 德) of the six hexagram lines. In general, Xu's approach is to elaborate on certain ideas suggested by the "Great Commentary," such as the way lines that occupy different positions can have a similar function (*tonggong yiwei* 同功異位) and the conditions under which *yin* lines will fail and *yang* lines will succeed (*rouwei gangsheng* 柔危剛勝). Xu examines in particular all of the lines occupying the sixth position of each hexagram, categorizing them in terms of qualities such as health (*jian* 健), compliance (*shun* 順), movement (*dong* 動), stopping (*zhi* 止), entering (*ru* 入), speaking (*shuo* 說), pitfalls (*xian* 陷), and beauty (*li* 麗). He also shows, through an analysis of the judgments, the "Big Image Commentary," and the "Small Image Commentary," how variables such as fortune and misfortune (*jixiong* 吉凶)

and remorse and regret (*huilin* 悔吝) depend on the timing (*shi* 時) of a situation as described by the lines.

Overall, as I have tried to argue in *Fathoming the Cosmos and Ordering the World* (2008), despite avowed allegiances to one or another philosophical school, or loyalty to a particular teacher, or later attributions, most Chinese scholars of the *Changes* tended to be eclectic, especially in late imperial times. Thus, the boundaries between the School of Principle and the School of the Mind, like those between the School of Meanings and Principles and the School of Images and Numbers, proved to be quite permeable in practice. Wei Liaoweng (魏了翁; 1178–1237), for example, adopted the strategy of “using images and numbers to seek meanings and principles” (*yi xiangshu qiu yili* 以象數求義理). Xiang Anshi (項安世 d. 1208) tried to supplement Cheng Yi’s single-minded emphasis on meanings and principles with an analysis of images and numbers, placing special emphasis on the images of advance and retreat (*jintui* 進退). Li Xinchuan (李心傳; 1167–1244), following in the footsteps of his father, attempting a particularly broad synthesis of the work of Wang Bi, Zhang Zai, Cheng Yi, Guo Yong (郭雍; 1091–1187), and Zhu Xi. Long Renfu (龍仁夫; fl. ca. 1320), for his part, based his *Zhouyi jizhuan* (Collected Commentaries on the *Zhou Changes* 周易集傳) primarily on the opinions of Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi, but he broke new ground by giving radically different meanings to certain hexagrams—reducing the complex symbolism of Kun (hexagram 2) to “settled” or “at peace” (*an* 安); of Zhun (3), to “solid” (*gu* 固); of Bi (8), to “join in” or “enter” (*ru* 入); and of Zhen (51), to “kill” (*sha* 殺)—meanings

## Key Concepts of Fate and Prediction in the Yijing

that all differ significantly from the ones normally attached to these hexagrams by virtue of their names and judgments.

Great *Yijing* systems builders, notably Lai Zhide (來知德; 1525-1604), drew from many different sources of intellectual inspiration, including not only Jing Fang in the Han and Shao Yong and Zhu Xi in the Song, but also certain Buddhist thinkers. Scholars such as Lin Zhao'en (林兆恩; 1517-1598) and Jiao Hong (焦竑; c. 1540-1620) displayed a similar eclecticism. Scientifically-minded individuals such as Fang Yizhi (方以智; 1611-1671) and Jiang Yong (江永; 1681-1762), for their part, incorporated Western mathematical and astronomical ideas, as well as a profound understanding of the *Changes*, into their creative and multifaceted scholarship.

Even devoutly Buddhist scholars like Ouyi Zhixu (藕益智旭; 1599-1655) drew freely from Confucian and other writings to make their case. The preface to Zhixu's *A Chan [Zen] Interpretation of the Zhou Changes* (*Zhouyi chanzhen* 周易闡真) indicates that his purpose in explicating the *Yijing* is "to introduce Chan Buddhism into Confucianism in order to entice Confucians to know Chan." Not surprisingly, his work contained a good deal of paradox; thus he described it as being about change (*yi* 易), nonchange (*feiyi* 非易), and neither change nor non-change (lit. "not non-change;" *feifei yi* 非非易). The Daoist cleric Liu Yiming (劉一明; 1724-1831), for his part, sought to reconcile Confucianism and Daoism by arguing that Daoist ideas of mental and alchemical refinement were perfectly compatible with Confucian notions of moral self-cultivation. Indeed, according to Liu's book, *Elucidating*



*the Truth of the Zhou Changes (Zhouyi chanzhen 周易闡真)*, the Way of the Confucian sages was the same as the Way of the Daoist immortals.

The Qing dynasty (1644-1912) witnessed the rise to prominence of a new kind of scholarship known as Evidential Studies (*kaozheng xue* 考證學), which sought to rid the Confucian classics, including the *Yijing*, of course, of Buddhist and Daoist accretions, which scholars of this intellectual persuasion blamed on the rise of Song Neo-Confucianism. Using sophisticated philological techniques to expose interpolations and other distortions in both “original” texts and later commentaries, pioneers in Evidential Studies such as Gu Yanwu (顧炎武; 1613-1682), Huang Zongxi (黃宗羲; 1610-1695) and Wang Fuzhi (王夫之; 1619-1692), as well as later exponents of these interpretive techniques, including Mao Qiling (毛奇齡; 1623-1716), Hu Wei (胡渭; 1633-1714) and Hui Dong (惠棟; 1697-1758), generally looked to Han dynasty materials for inspiration rather than to Song dynasty sources, on the grounds that they were closer to the time of Confucius and essentially free from corrosive Buddhist and Religious Daoist influences. Predictably, most of these scholars castigated Zhu Xi for attaching the Yellow River Chart and the Luo River Writing to his “orthodox” writings on the *Changes*, thus legitimating highly dubious documents.

Huang Zongxi, for example, fiercely assailed Shao Yong’s *Supreme Principles that Rule the World* and most other works by individuals identified as exponents of “images and numbers,” including Jing Fang, Jiao Yanshou, and Chen

Tuan. In his highly influential book, *Yixue xiangshu lun* 易學象數論 (Discussion of Images and Numbers in *Changes* Scholarship) Huang disparages the received versions of the Yellow River Chart and the Luo River Writing, which, he claims, lack “historical authenticity,” and is at particular pains to distinguish between “correct” and “incorrect” images. In Huang’s view, the only authentic images were: (1) those of the eight trigrams 八卦之象, (2) those of the six lines 六爻之象, (3) those resembling things (象形之象), (4) those showing the positions of the lines (爻位之象), (5) those indicating hexagram opposition (反對之象), (6) those indicating directions (方位之象), and (7) those indicating overlapping trigrams (互體之象). These seven “exhaust all of the images,” he maintained. Later scholars, however, created what Huang called false images, including those connected with the *najia* (納甲) system, “moving lines” (*dongyao* 動爻), “hexagram changes” (*guabian* 卦變), and the so-called Former Heaven configurations (*xiantian* 先天). These four, he claimed, “obscured the original seven.”

Let us now look at an example of how a Evidential Studies-oriented Qing scholar might gloss a passage related to an early *Changes* divination, consider Mao Qiling’s interpretation of an anecdote from the *Zuo Commentary*—Duke Mu of Qin’s punitive expedition against Duke Hui of Jin in 645 BCE. Here is the original story:

Before the attack, Duke Mu asked his diviner, Tufu, to consult the *Changes* regarding the outcome. Tufu selected the hexagram Gu (number 18 in the received order; see

illustration below). The judgment of this hexagram reads in part: “Favorable for crossing a big river.” The diviner thus predicted victory (in apparently extemporaneous rhymed verse), remarking thereafter that Duke Mu’s troops would cross the Yellow River separating Qin from Jin, defeat the forces of Duke Hui, and arrest the duke. He explained that since the inner (lower) trigram of Gu was Sun (Wind), and the outer (upper) one was Gen (Mountain), the winds of Qin would blow down the “fruits” of Jin on the mountain and their assets would be seized. That is, Qin would prevail in the struggle.

If we turn to Mao Qiling’s analysis, however, which reflects the obvious legacy of Han-style exegesis, we see an account that differs substantially from the original explanation offered by Duke Mu’s diviner. Mao begins by noting that the idea of “crossing a big river” in the judgment is derived from the lower four lines of Gu, which resemble the Kan trigram (the symbol of water) inasmuch as they consist of a pair of *yang* lines contained between two *yin* lines. In other words, Mao interprets the four lowest lines visually as if they were three. Secondly, he points out that the upper nuclear trigram of Gu—that is, lines 3, 4 and 5—is Zhen, which is not only the symbol of a feudal lord, but also that of an upturned bowl, which resembles the body of a chariot. Since the upper primary trigram (Gen) is Zhen turned upside down, this indicates the overthrow of Duke Hui. And because Gen symbolizes both the hands and the idea of stoppage (according to the Explaining the Trigrams commentary), the meaning conveyed is the arrest of Duke Hui. This notion is

## Key Concepts of Fate and Prediction in the Yijing

reinforced by consideration of the hexagram Sui (number 17), the opposite of Gu, in which the line readings refer repeatedly to tying someone up, presumably Duke Hui.



Figure 0.9: Gu



Figure 0.10: Sui

We can now fast-forward to 1905. In that year, as part of a reform movement designed to “modernize” China in the aftermath of the disastrous Sino-Japanese War of 1894-5, the Qing government abolished the civil service examination system, which had reinforced Cheng-Zhu orthodoxy and the authority of the *Yijing* and other Confucian classics for nearly seven hundred years. Less than a decade later, the Qing dynasty itself fell to republican revolution, ending any semblance of official patronage of classical scholarship.

In this new post-imperial environment, as in earlier periods, studies of the *Changes* followed the general contours of Chinese political, social and intellectual life. For awhile, some classically trained Chinese scholars continued to use exegesis of the *Yijing* to display their erudition, and a few “tradition-minded” individuals still viewed the document as a sacred scripture. At least one scholar, Wang Xiangxuan (王向玄; fl. 1915), even wrote a syncretic book in Chinese titled *Unity of the Changes* (*Yitong* 易統), in which he

## Key Concepts of Fate and Prediction in the Yijing

attempted to reconcile Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism and Christianity. But increasingly, Chinese intellectuals came to view the *Yijing* as simply an historical artifact—one that had no practical or spiritual value for contemporary Chinese society. Contributing mightily to this self-consciously “secular” approach to the *Changes* was a burst of Chinese scholarship based on new archaeological discoveries and a new-found fascination with the “scientific method.”

Guo Moruo’s (郭沫若; 1892-1978) studies of the *Yijing*, beginning with his celebrated 1927 article, “Life and Society in the Era of the *Zhou Changes*,” marked the beginning of a long period in China during which Marxist categories and concerns played a major role in the analysis of the *Yijing*. Soon thereafter, humanistic opponents of Marxist materialism, including Xiong Shili (熊十力; 1885-1968) and Fang Dongmei (方東美; 1899-1977), began to champion the *Changes* as a means of revitalizing traditional Chinese thought, Confucianism in particular.

Following the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949 and until 1978, this intellectual struggle persisted as part of the larger political rivalry between the Chinese Mainland and Taiwan. But intellectual liberalization in the PRC after 1978 vastly expanded the interpretive parameters of *Yijing* scholarship, as well as the scope of more popular writing. Confucianism (and to a lesser degree, Buddhism and Daoism) was no longer a dirty word on the Mainland, and the past increasingly seemed at least possibly relevant to the

## Key Concepts of Fate and Prediction in the *Yijing*

Chinese present and future. As a result, from the 1980s to today there has been a surge of interest in the *Changes* on both sides of the Taiwan Strait unprecedented since the Qing dynasty.

One of the most interesting features of contemporary writing on the *Yijing*—in addition to a huge outpouring of traditional-style exegetical work—has been an effort by a number of Chinese scholars (and a few Western ones) to explore possible connections between the *Changes* and modern scientific ideas, from linear algebra and quantum mechanics to the fields of molecular biology and computer coding. Thus, we have individuals such as Yang Li (楊力) arguing in the same basic vein as Fang Yizhi and Jiang Yong in the Qing period that the numbers of the Yellow River Chart and the Luo River Writing are “the deriving coefficient” of everything in the cosmos. Similarly, Feng Youlan (馮友蘭) contends that the *Yijing* contains an incipient “algebra of the universe;” Xie Qiucheng (謝求成) maintains that the hexagrams of the classic were originally designed as a high efficiency information transfer system analogous to contemporary computer coding based on optimal units of two (the number of basic trigrams in each hexagram) and three (the number of lines in each trigram); and Tang Mingbang (唐明邦), drawing on the writings of Xie and other contemporary Chinese scholars, asserts that the forms of atomic structure in nuclear physics, as well as the genetic code in molecular biology, and the eight-tier matrix in linear algebra, all seem to be related to the logic of the *Changes*. Although this sort of thinking remains essentially correlative, it has been nonetheless satisfying for

Chinese scholars who have long been accustomed to the view that “modern” science had somehow passed China by.

### Concluding Remarks

As I have tried to show, the *Yijing* hermeneutical and divinatory tradition allowed, and even encouraged, an extraordinarily wide, almost unimaginable, range of interpretive techniques and the expression of a great many different philosophical viewpoints. At the same time, however, throughout the imperial era commentaries shaped the contours of interpretations—especially if they were endorsed by the Chinese state. As we have seen, Wang Bi’s interpretations were considered “orthodox” for much of the Tang and Song dynasties, and the interpretations of Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi became official orthodoxy during much of the Yuan, Ming and Qing periods. Thus, although a work like Li Guangdi’s (李光地; 1642-1718) imperially sponsored *Balanced Compendium on the Zhou Changes* (Zhouyi zhezong 周易折中; 1715) included a broad range of scholarly commentaries on the *Yijing*—eighteen from the Han dynasty, five from the Six Dynasties period, one from the Sui, eleven from the Tang, ninety-eight from the Song, two from the Jin, twenty-two from the Yuan, and sixty-one from the Ming—it still emphasized the state’s Cheng-Zhu orthodoxy.

Another device for encouraging a certain degree of interpretive uniformity in *Changes* studies was the “primer”—that is, a work designed explicitly for “beginning” students. It is difficult

to know how prevalent such works were in late imperial China. Generally speaking, they do not appear in most library and archival collections of *Yijing* materials, which tend to emphasize works that focus on sophisticated scholarly debates and fine-tuned historical and philological analyses. Some works on the *Changes* do have a *xuzhi* 須知 (“must know”) section on various terms, concepts and illustrations, but relatively few have an expressly didactic tone.

The most interesting “primers” from the imperial era that I have examined in the course of my research on the *Changes* are located in the Chinese Collection of the Vatican Archives, some of which have extensive annotations in French and/or Latin. A particularly fascinating example of one of these “primers” is an undated six *juan* work by the famous late-Ming loyalist Huang Chunyao 黃淳耀 (1605–1645), a.k.a. Huang Yunsheng 黃蘊生. The title of the book is *Yijing yijian nengjie*; 易經一見能解), or *Understanding the Yijing at a Glance*—hereafter, *Understanding the Changes*). Over time, this highly influential work was published in a variety of editions, boasting many different titles, including 增補易經講 意一見能解, 石渠閣新鑄周易幼學能解, 新鑄增補周易備旨一見能解, 周易備旨能解, 易經備旨能解, 周易備旨一見能解, 易經補注考備旨, 易經備旨, etc.

For the most part, *Understanding the Changes* eschews scholarly debates and the fine points of philology in favor of straightforward moral and practical advice, based solidly on Cheng-Zhu neo-Confucianism (Huang seems particularly taken by Cheng Yi’s emphasis on self-cultivation). The



## Key Concepts of Fate and Prediction in the Yijing

book begins with a preliminary discussion of why the basic text is divided into two unequal parts. There are several explanations, but Huang's book offers only one, based on the metaphysical and symbolic links between the hexagrams representing Heaven and Earth (乾坤), *yin* and *yang* (坎離), husbands and wives (咸恆), and completion (既濟) and incompleteness (未濟).

Huang goes on to provide systematic expositions on *yinyang* cosmology, various charts and other explanatory devices (the *Hetu*, *Luoshu*, *Taiji tu*, depictions of trigram sequences, etc.) as well as information on the rituals of milfoil divination and rules for interpreting the result (Zhu Xi's in both cases). The rest of the book is devoted to an analysis of the sixty-four hexagrams and the Ten Wings. Periodically, in addition to conventional commentaries, the author provides specially marked inserts titled "meanings" (*zhi* 旨) and "explanations" (*jiang* 講), designed to offer further guidance in interpreting the various components of each hexagram. Often the advice is extraordinarily simple and straightforward—which must have been a great relief to the Jesuits.

For example, *Understanding the Changes* explains the first hexagram, Qian, in the following way:

Qian is the name of Heaven (乾者天之名)  
[As to the four characters of the judgment]:  
Yuan means great (大); Heng means penetrating (通); Li means appropriate/fitting (宜); Zhen means correct and solid/firm (正而固也)

Similarly, the gloss for the first four characters of the Commentary on the [Big] Image for hexagram number 14, Dayou (which state that “Fire on the top of Heaven constitutes the image of Dayou,” reads:

“Fire” refers to the sun (太陽);

“On the top of Heaven” means that “there is no thing that is not illuminated” (无物不照);

Thus, the image of Dayou (故為大有之象)

In the case of the judgment for the Qian hexagram (number 15), Huang explains that the common term *junzi* (君子) simply means “a person of virtue” (有德的人).

Of particular value to novices were the explanations of technical terms of the sort I have looked at briefly in the previous sections of this paper. For instance, in the judgment of the Fu hexagram (number 24), the expression *wujiu* (无咎), usually understood as “no blame” or “no regret” is glossed “no injury” (无殃害也), but in Fu’s third line statement, the same term (*wujiu*) is explained as a phrase of “encouragement” (勸之之辭). When we encounter *wujiu* in the line statements of other hexagrams, *Understanding the Changes* offers us additional interpretative guidelines. For example, in the first line statement of the Gen hexagram (number 52), which begins, “Restraint takes place with the toes; no blame/regret (艮其趾无咎), the gloss for *wujiu* reads: “this [counsels against the blame/regret that comes from] reckless action” (无動); and in the fourth line statement, which reads “Restraint takes place with the torso; no blame/regret (艮其身无咎), the gloss tells us that “This [counsels against the blame/regret that comes from being] bound by material things” (物累).

Naturally, the Ten Wings come in for especially close scrutiny in *Understanding the Changes*—the Great Commentary in particular. Every few words elicit an explanation. But the explanations are, on the whole, very simple. For instance, when we first encounter a discussion of images (*xiang* 象), we are told only that “the word ‘image’ refers to the sixty-four hexagrams established by Fuxi.” And when the text discusses “spirit” (*shen* 神), we learn that this refers simply to “the way Qian and Kun bring things to completion without intention (*wuxin* 无心).” And so on.

In short, *Understanding the Changes* presents the reader with a comprehensive, comforting and completely orthodox appreciation of the *Yijing*—a solid foundation for future study. Little did the neophyte reader know what was in store for him or her down the road.