

**I CHING:
STRUCTURE, ORIGIN,
AND INTERPRETATIONS**



19. Authority Approaches

Introduction. The *I Ching* (*I* means “change,” *Ching* means “Classic,”) is translated as “Classic of Change,” “Book of Changes,” “Book of Change,” or “Classic Book of Changes.”

The *I Ching* is one of the **Five Classics** of Chinese Literature and perhaps the most influential of all Chinese books.² It dates back to at least 800 B.C. and could be several centuries older. Schulz writes:

The bulk of commentary material on the *Classic of Change* produced over the course of Chinese history is impressive. The table of contents to the *Ching ik'ao*..., a comprehensive survey of material from the Han Dynasty through the seventeenth century, lists some two thousand and fifty titles on the *Change*, fully a fourth of all works included.³

Undoubtedly one of the earliest functions of the *I Ching* was divination. Kunst states:

The text of the *Yijing* grew organically over a period of many centuries, perhaps a millennia, as it was transmitted orally among the professional diviners who used the yarrow plant to obtain oracles. It served as a manual of ready reference of the consequences of relevant past divinatory determinations.⁴

Under the influence of the Confucianists, the *I Ching* became a handbook of moral wisdom. And in the Han dynasty the *I Ching*, combined with the **Five Agents** system and numerology, also became a cosmology.

The Structure of the I Ching. The original *I Ching* is an ancient Chinese book containing approximately 4,100 Chinese characters.⁵ The book is divided into 64 chapters (units); each chapter comments on a hexagram, a symbol composed of six horizontal lines arranged one over the other. Each line may be either yang (a solid line, e.g., —) or yin (a broken line; broken lines have a gap in the middle, e.g., --). Since there are six lines and either may be yang or yin the total number of combinations is: $2^6 = 64$.

Each hexagram has a name given in one or two Chinese characters. The name of the hexagram always precedes the hexagram text, which is called the **Decision** or **Judgment**, and which describes a situation of which the hexagram is a symbol. The Judgment is more than a descriptive passage; it is also interpreted as giving moral advice, that is, a recommendation—given the specific

¹ It should be noted that most nouns in Chinese have neither a singular nor plural form; hence, I could translate as either “Change” or “Changes.”

² The *I Ching* became a Confucian Classic in 136 B.C. [A] Smith, p. 22.

³ [A] Schulz, p. 3.

⁴ [A] Kunst, p. 4.

⁵ [A] Kunst, pp. 3 and 449.

context-for action or non-action.⁶

For example, the Judgment for Hexagram 10, *Treading*, is “Stepping on the Tiger’s Tail. It does not bite. No error.” The Judgment for Hexagram 21, *Biting Through*, is “Favorable for bringing legal action.” The Judgment for Hexagram 23, *Falling*, is “Not favorable to go in any direction.” Sometimes the Judgment is longer. For example, the Judgment for Hexagram 24, *Return*, is “In going and coming there is no error. Friends come without blame. They go back the way they came. Coming and going in seven days. Favorable to have somewhere to go.”⁷

Following the hexagram text is the line text, which is composed of short descriptions associated with each line of the hexagram. There are six such descriptions, one for each line. (Hexagrams 1 and 2 each have an additional description that pertains to a special case.) The line texts are regarded as describing various stages (e.g., early, middle, or later stages) of the situation described by the hexagram text. The line text, like the hexagram text, is interpreted as giving moral advice.

The line text for Hexagram 24, *Return*, is:

Line 1. Returning from not far. No need to repent. Very favorable.

Line 2. Good return. Favorable.

Line 3. Repeated returns. Danger, but no misfortune.

Line 4. Returning alone on the road, although in the midst of others.

Line 5. A noble return. No misfortune.

Line 6. Going astray. Not returning. Danger. If armies are set marching there will be a great defeat to ruler of state and for ten years there will be trouble.”

The Ten Wings. The *Ten Wings* is a collection of the earliest commentaries or appendices to the original *I Ching*.

The First and Second Wings are called “Commentary on the Judgment” (*T’uan Chuan*). The Third and Fourth Wings are called “Commentary on the Images” (*Hsiang Chuan*). The Fifth and Sixth Wings are called “The Great Treatise” (*Hsi Tz’u Chuan* or *Ta Chuan*). The Seventh Wing is called “Commentary on Words of the Text” (*Wen Yen*). The Eighth Wing is called “Discussion of the Trigrams” (*Shuo Kua*). The Ninth Wing is called “Sequence of the Hexagrams” (*Hsu Kua*). And the Tenth Wing is called “Miscellaneous Notes on the Hexagrams” (*Tsa Kua*).⁹

⁶ For a discussion of the meaning of the Judgment, see [A] Lee, *Understanding the I Ching*, pp. 154-59.

⁷ Translations are based on those of [A] Kunst, [A] Legge, and [A] Wilhelm/Baynes.

⁸ Translations based on those of [A] Kunst, [A] Legge, and [A] Wilhelm/Baynes.

⁹ A discussion of the Ten Wings is given in [A] Wilhelm/Baynes, pp. 225-61; also in

Commentary on the Judgment (*T'uan Chum*). This commentary is in two parts, comprising the First and Second Wings of the *Ten Wings*. The first part covers hexagrams 1 to 30; the second, hexagrams 31 to 64. This corresponds to the division of the hexagrams in the *I Ching* itself.¹⁰ By tradition authorship of the *T'uan Chuan* is attributed to Confucius.

The commentary sometimes talks about the lines in the hexagram, how they relate to one another and whether they are in the correct position” or not, and it discusses other considerations concerning the formal structure of the hexagram. Sometimes the commentary relates the hexagram situation to cosmic and natural phenomena and sometimes the commentary gives moral advice. For example, the **Commentary on the Judgment** says the following about Hexagram 10, **Treading**:

In Hexagram 10, **Treading**, we have the symbol of weakness treading on strength. The lower trigram indicates pleasure and satisfaction and responds to the upper indicating strength. Hence it is said, “He treads on the tail of a tiger, which does not bite him; there will be progress and success.” The fifth line is strong, in the center, and in its correct place. Its subject occupies the God position, and falls into no distress or failure; His action will be brilliant.”

This commentary is looked upon as foreshadowing the two main schools of interpreting the *I Ching*: the **Hsiang Shu** and **I Li** schools. The Hsiang Shu school emphasizes the formal aspects of the hexagram-how the lines relate to one another and how one hexagram can be transformed into another, and so forth. The I Li school emphasizes the hexagram text and its moral message. More will be said about these two schools later in this chapter.

Commentary on the Images (*Hsiang Chuan*). This commentary is in two parts and like the **First Wing**, the first part covers hexagrams 1 to 30 and the second part covers hexagrams 31 to 64. The first part of this commentary is the **Third Wing**; the second part, the **Fourth Wing**. Swanson states that, “The commentary parts, taken as a whole, form a long three hundred and eighty-four line poem.”¹³

This commentary has a section for each hexagram called the Great Images and a section called the Small Images. The Great Images gives an image for each of the **primary trigrams** in each hexagram and for a majority of the

[A] Goodman, pp. 158-68 and in [A] Smith, pp. 7-17.

¹⁰ The text of the *Z Ching* is divided into two parts: hexagrams 1 to 30 and hexagrams 31 to 64. I have not been able to find a justification for this unequal division of the hexagrams.

¹¹ See Glossary, Correctness of a Line.

¹² Based on Legge's translation ([A] Legge, pp. 222-23).

¹³ [A] Swanson, p. 6.

hexagrams tells what the superior man or ancient kings would do in such a situation. For example, the Great Images says, concerning Hexagram 10, **Treading**,  110-111:

The upper **trigram** represents the sky and the lower **trigram** represents the waters of a marsh. The superior man, in accordance with this, discriminates between high and low, and gives settlement to the aims of the people.¹⁴

The Small Images section does not deal with images at all. It repeats the line text and gives a brief commentary on it. Richard Wilhelm says:

It must have been owing to some misapprehension, or perhaps to chance, that this commentary on the text of the individual lines found its way into the Commentary on the Images. . . It may be that the Small Images are mnemonic phrases taken from a more detailed commentary. It is certain that they are very old and originated with the Confucian school, but I should not like to say definitely how close the connection with Confucius himself may be.¹⁵

The Small Images¹⁶ for Hexagram 24, **Return**, are:

- Line 1. Return from not far is the start of self-cultivation.
- Line 2. The good fortune that comes from a good return is due to being dependent on virtue.
- Line 3. Even though there is danger from repeated returns, there is no error.
- Line 4. Returning alone on the road although in the midst of others. His object is to pursue the proper path.
- Line 5. A noble return. No misfortune. In this central position one perfects oneself.
- Line 6. The evil of going astray and not returning results from not pursuing the proper course for a ruler.¹⁷

Great Treatise (*HsiT'zu Chuan* or *Ta Chuan*). This commentary is also known as the **Commentary on the Appended Judgments**.¹⁸ It is the largest

¹⁴ Based on Legge's translation, [A] Legge, p. 280.

¹⁵ [A] Wilhelm/Baynes, pp. 257-58.

¹⁶ I shall continue to use the title "Small Images," although this title is obviously incorrect. See [A] Wilhelm/Baynes, pp. 258-59.

¹⁷ Based on Legge's translation, see [A] Legge, p. 297-98.

¹⁸ Richard Wilhelm points out that the Great Treatise does not discuss the appended Judgments. [A] Wilhelm/Baynes, pp. 258-59. Swanson notes that the name *Commentary on the Appended Judgments* "is found only in texts of the latter Han" ([A] Swanson, p. 6).

and, according to some scholars, the most significant commentary of the **Ten Wings**. It contains approximately 4,400 Chinese characters, making it longer than the *I Ching* itself.¹⁹ The **Great Treatise**, which is in two parts, comprises the 5th and 6th Wings of the **Ten Wings**. The two part division of this commentary **does not** correspond to the two part division of the *I Ching*. Tradition attributes the authorship of the **Great Treatise** to Confucius (551-479 B.C.). Although some scholars dispute this tradition, it is generally agreed that the **Great Treatise** was written not later than 90 B.C.²⁰

The **Great Treatise** is a collection of essays on the *I Ching* which, according to Swanson, were written to solve three problems: (1) To develop a cultural history based on semi-divine mythical kings; (2) To synthesize the information on the trigram and hexagram into one coherent whole; and (3) To integrate the *I Ching* with Yin-Yang and **Five Agents** schools.²¹

Commentary on the Words of the Text (Wen Yen). This commentary makes up the **Seventh Wing** of the **Ten Wings**. Probably it is the remains of a much longer commentary.²² It comments only on Hexagram 1, **Heaven**, and Hexagram 2, **Earth** with most of the comments being on Hexagram 1. Authorship is attributed to Confucius or his school.²³

Discussion of the Trigrams (Shuo Kua). This commentary is the **Eighth Wing** of the **Ten Wings**. It contains information on the trigrams. Richard Wilhelm believes that this commentary contains “many fragments antedating Confucius.”²⁴ It is in this commentary that the associations of the trigrams are given, the **King Wen** and **Fu Hsi Arrangements** of trigrams, and the order in which Trigram 1, **Father**, and Trigram 2, **Mother**, produce the rest of the family of trigrams.

Sequence of the Hexagrams (Hsu Kua). This commentary is the **Ninth Wing** of the **Ten Wings**. According to Richard Wilhelm it was not authored by Confucius.²⁵ It attempts to explain the **textual sequence** of the hexagrams. A paragraph of this commentary, translated by Legge, reads:

Hexagram 3, Sprouting, is descriptive of things on their first

¹⁹ [A] Swanson, p. 8.

²⁰ The **Great Treatise** is mentioned in the *Shih Chi (Historical Record)*, written about 90 B.C., so it cannot have been written later than this. [A] Swanson, p. 9. Swanson believes that the **Great Treatise** was written in late Chou. [A] Swanson, p. 10.

²¹ [A] Swanson, pp. 11-12.

²² [A] Wilhelm/Baynes, p. 259.

²³ [A] Wilhelm/Baynes, p. 259. Swanson states that “Parts of it are quoted in the *Tsochuan* (the enlargement of the Spring and Autumn Annals compiled between 430-250 B.C.) and so is probably older than the *Great Treatise*” ([A] Swanson, p. 6).

²⁴ [A] Wilhelm/Baynes, p. 260.

²⁵ [A] Wilhelm/Baynes, p. 260.

production. When so produced they are sure to be in an undeveloped condition. Hence, Hexagram 3 is followed by Hexagram 4, The Young Shoot. The Young Shoot is descriptive of what is undeveloped—the young of creatures and things. These in that state require to be nourished. Hence The Young Shoot is followed by Hexagram 5, **Waiting**.²⁶ Hexagram 5, **Waiting** is descriptive of the way in which meat and drink (come to be supplied). Over meat and drink there are sure to be contentions. Hence Hexagram 5, **Waiting**, is followed by Hexagram 6, **Grievance**.²⁷

Wilhelm/Baynes state that it “offers a rather unconvincing explanation of the present sequence of the hexagrams.”²⁸

Miscellaneous Notes on the Hexagrams (*Tsa Kua*). This commentary is the **Tenth Wing** of the **Ten Wings**. This commentary, which rhymes, is a series of comments on the names of the hexagrams. Legge’s translation of the first few lines of this commentary is:

Strength in **Heaven**, weakness in **Earth**. We find **Alliance** shows us joy, and **An Army** the anxious mind. The **Authority Approaches** gives, **Observing** seeks;—such are the several themes. Their different figures were to teach designed. **Sprouting** manifests itself, yet keeps its place; ‘Mid darkness still, to light **The Young Shoot** sets its face.’²⁹

The Traditional Account of the Origin of the I Ching. Four names are associated with the traditional account of the creation of the *I Ching*: Fu Hsi, King Wen, the Duke of Chou, and Confucius.

Fu Hsi is one of the Five Emperors (all legendary, semi-divine beings) who ruled China before the Hsia dynasty (which was also considered legendary until archaeological finds in 1978).³⁰ Fu Hsi (3322 B.C.)³¹ is given the credit for

²⁶ In this text we translate the name of Hexagram 5 to mean “Getting Wet.” Legge translated it as “Waiting.”

²⁷ This is a quotation from Legge, [A] Legge (Dover), p. 433, in which I have replaced Legge’s untranslated names for the hexagrams with their hexagram number and an English translation. Legge has a footnote to this passage where he states that it is difficult to see how Hexagram, 5, **Waiting**, represents nourishment. Note that in this work the name of Hexagram 5 is *Getting Wet*.

²⁸ [A] Wilhelm/Baynes, p. 260.

²⁹ This is a quotation from Legge in which I have replaced Legge’s untranslated names for the hexagrams with an English translation (Legge (Dover), p. 441).

³⁰ Archaeological sites dating from this period were discovered in 1978. The source is “Chronology of Chinese History” published by The Center for Teaching about China. Chicago, Ill: 1979.

³¹ Date given by Legge, attributing it to Chinese scholars. No source given. ([A] Legge