

## THE I CHING

From T'AI CHI CH'UAN and I CHING 太極掌與易經 (pp. 5-7) by DA LIU

(Texts edited and revised by Lê Văn Đăng, Nov 21, 2012)

The *I Ching* is one of the first efforts of the human mind to place itself in the universe.

A collection and interpretation of a series of sixty-four 6-line figures called hexagrams, it has exerted a living influence in China for three thousand years. The individual hexagrams predate the *Book of Changes*. They were preserved on wood tablets long before they were recorded by King Wen in 1150 B.C.

The *I Ching* eventually became the most important of the Five Confucian Classics (*History, Odes, Ritual, Spring and Autumn, and Change*) and was the only one of these spared when Emperor Ch'in Shih Huang Ti ordered all the ancient books burned in 213 B.C. Its antiquity and worth is substantiated by its use as a common source for both Confucian and Taoist philosophies for many centuries.

The Chinese character for *I* in *I Ching* signifies both change and changelessness. It is constructed from the characters that make up those of the sun and moon, which, although appearing and disappearing each day and night, remain a changeless feature of the heavens. *I* also denotes easiness and clarity. These meanings suggest the clarity with which nature, society, and the individual are revealed through the agency of the sixty-four hexagrams. *Ching* means a book or classic written by a sage.

Each of the hexagrams consists of two 3-lined figures called trigrams. There are eight basic trigrams constructed from a combination of unbroken and broken lines.



The trigrams, like the mathematical symbols  $x$  and  $y$ , can stand for many things.

For instance, the trigram *Ch'ien* can mean heaven (the natural world), leader or king (the social realm), father (family relationship), head (part of body), strength (quality), and other things as well. Combined in a hexagram, the symbols acquire a distinct composite meaning. Each line shows a different aspect of the situation pictured by the hexagram.

The creation of the eight trigrams is attributed to Fu Shi, the legendary Chinese sage who reputedly lived during the age of hunting and fishing around 5,000 years ago. By studying and observing heaven, earth, animal tracks, and his own body, he devised the broken and unbroken line as symbols of the fundamental nature of the universe. From these, he constructed eight trigrams, each of which stood for an aspect of nature, society, and the individual.

The origin of the sixty-four hexagrams is unclear. Supposedly, they were created after the time of Fu Shi. King Wen composed his book during his captivity, following his arrest by Emperor Shing Chu. He spent seven years in prison, studying the hexagrams by night and day. He structured his findings in the form of predictions which implied other meanings besides divination. King Wen's codification led to a commentary consisting of the Judgment, the Image, and the text attached to individual lines of the hexagrams. His son, the Duke of

Chou, completed the work by adding to the text a commentary known as the Decision, which clarifies the Judgment of the hexagram and discusses the philosophy out of which the prediction develops.

The last contribution to the I *Ching* was made by the great Chinese philosopher Confucius, who, with his students, wrote a complete and detailed treatise on the philosophy of the book as it then existed. This section is called the Ten Wings. The Ten Wings, which are like a book review, explain and analyze the history, philosophy, and spiritual meaning of the book. They include a detailed discussion of the trigrams (Eighth Wing, or chapter), a commentary on the Images (Third and Fourth Wings), and miscellaneous notes on the hexagrams (Tenth Wing).

Thus, the I *Ching* through the centuries evolved from simple unbroken and broken lines into a complete philosophical book.

The first English translation of the I *Ching* was made in the nineteenth century by James Legge, a Scottish missionary and scholar. Since that time, more than twenty English-language editions have been published. The best-known English version of the I *Ching* was first translated into German earlier in this century by Richard Wilhelm. Rendered into English by Cary F. Baynes, with an introduction by the distinguished psychiatrist Carl G. Jung, this version, from which we shall often cite text, is arranged in three books: Book I consists of the sixty-four hexagrams and the Judgment, Images, and text for each line written by King Wen. Book II contains the Ten Wings written by Confucius, his students, and his disciples. Book III, the most useful in prediction, is made up of the hexagrams with the commentaries of both Confucius and the Duke of Chou. The commentaries discuss the meaning and symbolism of each hexagram.

The I *Ching* also gives practical advice on matters not directly connected with divination or philosophy. It includes information on government, numerology, astrology, cosmology, meditation, and military strategy. John Blofield, in his version of the I *Ching*, says that it was used regularly by generals of the Japanese army during the Russo-Japanese War in 1904-1905. Although its wisdom took root in China, the I *Ching* is an integral part of the cultural heritage of Japan, Korea, Vietnam, and other Far Eastern countries. Its impact on the West is just beginning. At this moment the hexagrams are being developed for computer use, and in this form their wisdom will be available to the uninitiated on an entirely different level.

The Changes is a book  
From which one may not hold aloof.  
Its tao is forever changing-  
Alteration, movement without rest,  
Flowing through the six empty places;  
Rising and sinking without fixed law,  
Firm and yielding transform each other.  
They cannot be confined within a rule;  
It is only change that is at work here....

They also show care and sorrow and their causes.  
Though you have no teacher,  
Approach them as you would your parents.