

I CHING

The Book of Change



Translated by

Thomas Cleary

ABOUT THE BOOK

The *I Ching (Book of Change)* is considered the oldest of the Chinese classics, and has throughout Chinese history commanded unsurpassed prestige and popularity. Containing several layers of text and given numerous levels of interpretation, the *I Ching* has been venerated for more than three thousand years as an oracle of fortune, a guide to success, and a source of wisdom. The underlying theme of the text is change, and how this fundamental force influences all aspects of life—from business and politics to personal relationships. This translation of the *I Ching* draws on ancient Confucian commentary, which emphasizes applying practical wisdom in everyday affairs.

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A COMPLETE & UNABRIDGED TRANSLATION BY

Thomas Cleary



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INTRODUCTION

The Book of Change is the most ancient and most profound of the Chinese classics, venerated for millennia as an oracle of fortune, a guide to success, and a dispensary of wisdom. The ancestor of all Chinese philosophy, it is the primary source for the pragmatic mysticism of the *Tao Te Ching*, the rational humanism of Confucius, and the analytic strategy of Sun Tzu's *Art of War*.

The Book of Change was originally composed over three thousand years ago by a king and his son in the tutelage of a Taoist sage. Six centuries later, the book was analyzed and annotated by Confucius, the great scholar and educator. The result of this work was the classic in the format known today, a compendium of advice on the causes behind the rise and fall of kingdoms and careers.

The earliest function of the core symbols of *The Book of Change* is traditionally said to have been as a system of notation, a tool for grouping associations and defining relations symbolically. This system evolved into a language of logic for describing the courses of actions and events.

The sources of *The Book of Change* lore are thus to be found in the origins of writing itself, in the attempt to depict phenomena and events in written symbols. The structures of *The Book of Change* represent dynamic patterns of causal relations; the total design of the book constitutes a symbolic language generating descriptions of relationships as they change over time.

The original recorded versions of *The Book of Change* would have been inscribed on strips of bamboo or wood, which when arrayed for the purposes of consultation would not resemble a modern book in form or structure. The internal order was maintained by the relationships among the principal symbols, which by virtue of their complexity allowed several different systems of interrelation to coexist within the internal order of the abstract *Book of Change*.

Consulting *The Book of Change*

A convenient method of consulting the book is given in an ancient appendix attributed to Confucius, according to the following directions:

Change has an absolute limit:
This produces two modes;
The two modes produce four forms,
The four forms produce eight trigrams;
The eight trigrams determine fortune and misfortune.

This formula summarizes the basis of the structure of *The Book of Change*, from which is derived the simplest method of drawing specific advice from the book.

1. The "absolute limit" of change refers to mental quietude. The first step in consulting *The Book of Change* is to calm the mind.

2. The “two modes” are yin and yang. These abstract terms stand for flexibility and firmness, weakness and strength, stillness and movement, passivity and activity, sadness and happiness, depression and elation.

Identification of yin and yang factors and qualities in a person or situation helps the reader to understand and apply the statements on the yin/yang components of each sign of *The Book of Change*.

Note that yin and yang do not symbolize femininity and masculinity in *The Book of Change*. In the symbolism of this system, a female represents yin and a male represents yang, but not the other way around.

A female symbol therefore does not represent female gender, and a male symbol does not represent male gender; yin does not represent women and yang does not represent men. Yin and yang are universal complements that occur in all people and events.

It is also important to note that yin and yang do not symbolize bad and good. Yin and yang can be either good or bad, according to the function of the quality in a given situation.

3. The “four forms” are called major and minor yin and yang. The yin mode is subdivided into major yin and minor yang, or climaxing yin and incipient yang. The yang mode is subdivided into major yang and minor yin, or climaxing yang and incipient yin.

The significance of these subdivisions is in representation of the principle that yin and yang modes are not static, but are always in the process of waxing or waning.

4. The “eight trigrams” produced by the four forms of yin and yang complete the foundation of the book, and finally yield the symbols used to manipulate the book for spot consultation:

Major yang trigrams: SKY and LAKE

Minor yin trigrams: THUNDER and FIRE

Major yin trigrams: EARTH and MOUNTAIN

Minor yang trigrams: WATER and WIND

The permutations of these eight symbols form the cores of the sixty-four chapters of *The Book of Change*. Accordingly, the consultation is carried out through the juxtaposition of their symbolic values:

SKY represents *strength* or *creativity*.

LAKE represents *joy* or *attraction*.

THUNDER represents *initiative* or *action*.

FIRE represents *attention* or *awareness*.

EARTH represents *receptivity* or *docility*.

MOUNTAIN represents *stopping* or *stillness*.

WATER represents *passion* or *danger*.

WIND represents *penetrating* or *following*.

The consultation is done by selecting a pair of symbols representing qualities relevant to the situation under consideration. These may stand for facets of personality

and character in individual people or groups, or for dominant forces in the fabric of an event, activity, or undertaking.

Each pair of symbols produces two hexagrams (or one, where the same symbol is taken twice). These become the text for consultation, reading in the manner described below. Please refer to the charts at the end of this introduction for the combinations of trigrams, the hexagrams they produce, and examples of typical relationships and situations they may be used to represent.

Once the hexagrams have been selected, their specific application to the subject of interest is a personal matter, it being the nature of *The Book of Change* to vary in meaning according to many individual factors, including the mood and personality of the reader. For enhanced perspective on a given reading, moreover, each hexagram may also be paired with two others, a primal correlate and a structural complement. (In a few cases the primal correlate and structural complement are the same.) See the back of the book for a list of the hexagrams with their correlates and complements.

In actual practice, furthermore, interpreters of the book have traditionally *always* read it *as a whole system* and made their explanations in light of awareness of the total philosophy. It is the overall integrity and coherence of the book that underlie its efficacy; thus it is traditionally considered advisable to read the book in its entirety in order to maximize its benefits.

The Book of Change Readings

The first element of an individual reading is the title of the hexagram, which suggests a certain theme, consisting of an archetypal element or aspect of human life. This is followed by a summary statement of pragmatic philosophy relative to that theme.

The next element of the reading is the “overall judgment,” Confucius’s analysis of the theme and statement, elaborating the relationships of the elements represented by the trigrams. This is followed by an aphorism, also attributed to Confucius, based on the imagery of the hexagram as a pair of specific trigrams.

The theme, statement, overall judgment, and imagery aphorism form the abstract core of each chapter and are the parts that are read when the classic is consulted for general knowledge or perused at leisure in the ordinary course of events.

The following statements on the components, which deal with specific ways of handling oneself in situations of relative strength and weakness, are also read when the consultation deals with unexpected or unpredictable changes. As a consequence of their frame of reference, the relevance of the components may be to past, future, or other factors outside the immediate present.

Reference to the primal correlate and the structural complement of the hexagram in question enlarges the perspective and adds depth and dimension to the reflection fostered by the reading.

TRIGRAMS	CONSULTATION CHART							
UPPER 								
LOWER 	Sky	Lake	Thunder	Fire	Earth	Mountain	Water	Wind
 Sky	1	43	34	14	11	26	5	9
 Lake	10	58	54	38	19	41	60	61
 Thunder	25	17	51	21	24	27	3	42
 Fire	13	49	55	30	36	22	63	37
 Earth	12	45	16	35	2	23	8	20
 Mountain	33	31	62	56	15	52	39	53
 Water	6	47	40	64	7	4	29	59
 Wind	44	28	32	50	46	18	48	57

Key

SKY: *strength/creativity*

LAKE: *joy/attraction*

THUNDER: *initiative/action*

FIRE: *attention/awareness*

EARTH: *receptivity/docility*

MOUNTAIN: *stopping/stillness*

WATER: *passion/danger*

WIND: *penetrating/following*

Examples

1. A relationship between someone who is very intelligent and someone who is very adaptable might be represented by a combination of fire and wind. Fire over wind yields hexagram number 50, THE CAULDRON. Wind over fire yields number 37, PEOPLE IN THE HOME.
2. A situation in which one faction is eager to move ahead in an undertaking while another faction is hesitant and inhibited might be represented by a combination of thunder and mountain. Thunder over mountain yields number 62, PREDOMINANCE OF THE SMALL. Mountain over thunder yields number 27, NOURISHMENT.
3. If you tend to be lighthearted but are in perilous circumstances, this might be represented by a combination of lake and water. Lake over water yields number 47, EXHAUSTION. Water over lake yields number 60, REGULATION.

THE BOOK OF CHANGE



1. The Creative

Great success benefits the upright and true.

OVERALL JUDGMENT

Vast indeed is the scope of the greatness of the creative basis. All things and all beings originate from it, so it sums up the totality of Nature.

Like clouds raining as they go, things and beings flow in forms. When you have an overall understanding of their processes, how they begin and end, when the six stages have been accomplished in a timely manner, then you ride the six dragons to harness Nature.

The evolutionary developments of the Way of the Creative each straighten out essential life and preserve overall harmony intact. This is what benefits the upright and true. When it emerges to lead the people, all countries are peaceful.

IMAGE

The action of Nature is powerful; cultured people use it to strengthen themselves ceaselessly.

COMPONENTS

1 *yang*. Do not use the hidden dragon. *Image*. Do not use the hidden dragon when positive energy is low.

2 *yang*. When you see the dragon in the field, it is worthwhile to see great people. *Image*. When you see the dragon in the field, it means that the use of your inner character, qualities, and powers affects everything you do.

3 *yang*. If cultivated people work diligently all day and are serious at night, then they will not err in dangerous situations. *Image*. Working diligently means going over and over the Way.

4 *yang*. One may leap at times in the deep, with no fault. *Image*. One may leap at times in the depths insofar as there have been no mistakes in the process of development.

5 *yang*. When the flying dragons are in the sky, it is worthwhile seeing great people. *Image*. When flying dragons are in the sky is when great people are working creatively.

6 *yang*. Dragons that fly too high have regrets. *Image*. Dragons that fly too high have regrets; this means that fullness cannot last forever.

Using Yang. When you see a group of dragons with no head, it is lucky. *Image*. In using yang, celestial qualities cannot be deliberately made to be in the forefront.



2. The Receptive

Great success beneficial to a chaste mare. Cultured people have places to go; if they get lost first, it is to their advantage to find a leader later on. With yin companions and no yang companions, there is peace; it bodes well to be steadfast and true.

OVERALL JUDGMENT

Perfect indeed is the greatness of the receptive earth, which sustains the birth of all beings and accords with what it receives from heaven.

The richness of earth supports beings, its virtue is one with the unbounded, it contains within it vast glory and magnificence, through which all things and beings successfully exist.

The mare is akin to the earth, traveling the earth without bound, gentle and docile, helpful and faithful. Cultured people are going somewhere: earlier they got lost and strayed from the Way, later they followed and attained the eternal.

Having yin companions is going with peers; having no yang companions means joy is in the end. The good omen of stability and steadfastness corresponds to the boundlessness of earth.

IMAGE

The attitude of earth is receptive. Cultured people support others by enriching character.

COMPONENTS

1 *yin*. Walking on frost, you come to solid ice. *Image*. Walking on frost and solid ice stand for the initial congealing of yin. Follow that path all the way, and you come to solid ice.

2 *yin*. Being honest, straight, and magnanimous will help everything, even without practice. *Image*. The action of balanced yin is honest and straight. It helps everything, even without practice, because the Way of earth is enlightening.

3 *yin*. Hide your adornments; it is well to be chaste. If you work in government, you do not do anything, but you get things done. *Image*. Hiding your adornments and being chaste mean going into action only at the right time. If you work in service of the affairs of leadership, your knowledge is illuminated and expanded.

4 *yin*. Shut the bag, and there is neither blame nor praise. *Image*. Shutting the bag so there is no blame is being careful to avoid harm.

5 *yin*. A yellow garment is very auspicious. *Image*. To say that a yellow garment is very auspicious means that culture is centered.

6 *yin*. When dragons battle in the fields, their blood is dusky yellow. *Image*. Dragons battling in the fields means the Way has come to an end.

Using Yin. It is beneficial to always be steadfast and true. *Image*. When using yin, always be steadfast and true in order to arrive at a great conclusion.



3. Difficulty

Great success is beneficial for the honest. Do not deliberately hold to a specific goal. It is useful to establish local leaders.

OVERALL JUDGMENT

In difficulty, firmness and flexibility begin to interact, and problems arise. Acting right in the middle of dangerous straits, great success comes through for the honest and true. As thunder and rain fill the body, Nature creates confusion and darkness. It is useful to establish local leaders, but it is not peaceful.

IMAGE

Clouds and thunder make difficulty; thus cultured people consider reasons.

COMPONENTS

1 *yang*. When you are hesitant and not getting anywhere, it is advantageous to remain upright. It is useful to set up local leaders. *Image*. Even though you are not getting anywhere, your intentions and actions are to be correct. By respecting the lowly, many people are won.

2 *yin*. Stopped, not getting anywhere, mounted on a horse but at a standstill, do not be hostile, but form a partnership. A girl is chaste; she does not get engaged. After ten years she becomes engaged. *Image*. What is difficult for the weak and pliable to do here is to ride upon the strong and adamant. Becoming engaged after ten years means returning to normalcy.

3 *yin*. Chase deer without a guide, and you will only go into the forest. Cultured people sense that it is better to give up and that it would be regrettable to go. *Image*. Chasing deer without a guide means following the wild animals. Cultured people give up on this, since to go on would bring regret, because it would be fruitless.

4 *yin*. Mounted on a horse, yet at a standstill, if you seek partnership it bodes well to go ahead; there is no disadvantage. *Image*. It is intelligent to go seeking.

5 *yang*. When stalling the benefits, a little steadfastness is auspicious, a lot of steadfastness is unlucky. *Image*. Stalling the benefits means that the giving forth is not yet carried out on a large scale.

6 *yin*. Mounted on a horse but at a standstill, you weep tears of blood. *Image*. You weep tears of blood, for what can last?



4. Innocence

Innocence gets through successfully. Though you do not seek the innocent yourself, the innocent seek you. The first augury informs, the second and third muddle. Muddling is not informative. It is advantageous to be correct.

OVERALL JUDGMENT

In innocence, there is danger below a mountain. Stopping at danger is innocence. Innocence gets through by successful action at the right time. Though you do not seek the innocent yourself, the innocent seek you, because your aspirations correspond. The first augury informs, because of being firmly on target. The second and third muddle, and muddling is not informative, because it muddles innocence. To take advantage of innocence to nurture honesty is the work of sages.

IMAGE

A spring emerging under a mountain stands for innocence. Cultured people nurture character by fruitful action.

COMPONENTS

1 *yin*. It is advantageous to use punishments to awaken the ignorant; it is regrettable to go on without restrictions. *Image*. It is advantageous to use punishments, if it is done through just laws.

2 *yang*. It is auspicious to embrace the innocent. It is auspicious to take a wife. The offspring takes over as head of the family. *Image*. The offspring taking over as head of the family represents the conjoining of firmness and flexibility.

3 *yin*. Do not take a girl to see a rich man, for if she is not self-possessed there is no benefit. *Image*. Do not take a partner who is incompatible.

4 *yin*. It is regrettable to be thwarted by ignorance. *Image*. The shame of being thwarted by ignorance is having strayed from reality by yourself.

5 *yin*. Innocence is auspicious. *Image*. What is auspicious about innocence is harmonizing smoothly.

6 *yang*. Attacking ignorance, it is not beneficial to be a brigand, it is beneficial to ward off brigands. *Image*. It is advantageous to deliberately ward off brigands; those on top and those below agree.



5. Waiting

When waiting is truthful, it is gloriously successful; be truthfully steadfast, and you will be lucky. It is profitable to cross great rivers.

OVERALL JUDGMENT

Waiting is necessary; when danger lies ahead, that is. When strength is robust and not trapped, its justice is not thwarted and its duty is not frustrated. When waiting is truthful, it is gloriously successful; be truthfully steadfast, and you will be lucky; this means you will take your place in the order of Nature by way of correct balance. That it is profitable to cross great rivers means that progressive action will accomplish something.

IMAGE

Clouds ascend to the heavens, waiting; thus do cultured people relax and enjoy food and drink.

COMPONENTS

1 *yang*. Waiting on the outskirts, it is worthwhile to try to be constant, so that you may be faultless. *Image*. Waiting on the outskirts means not having gotten into difficult and problematic activities. It is worthwhile to try to be constant, so that you may be faultless; this is assuming that you have not already become abnormal.

2 *yang*. Waiting on sand is criticized a little, but there is a good ending. *Image*. Waiting on sand means there is an abundance in the center. Although there is a little criticism, it can be used to make the end felicitous.

3 *yang*. Waiting in mud brings on enemies. *Image*. Waiting in mud means there is trouble outside. Once you have brought enemies on yourself, be serious and careful not to get beaten.

4 *yin*. Waiting in blood, come out from your own cave. *Image*. Waiting in blood means listening obediently.

5 *yang*. Waiting with wine and food, it bodes well to be steadfast and true. *Image*. With wine and food, it is good to be chaste; that means being balanced and proper.

6 *yin*. Going into a cave, there are three unhurried guests coming. Respect them, and you will eventually have good luck. *Image*. When three unhurried guests come, be respectful to them, and you will be lucky in the end. Even if you do not attain status or position, you will not have lost much.



6. Contention

Contention means there is obstruction of truth; be wary. Balance bodes well, finality bodes ill. It is worthwhile to see great people, but not worthwhile to cross great rivers.

OVERALL JUDGMENT

Contention is adamant above and dangerous below, representing powerful contention in danger. Contention means there is obstruction of truth; be careful to remain centered and balanced, and you will have good luck. This refers to strength emerging in balance. Finality bodes ill, because contention cannot be made to conclude. It is worthwhile to see great people, in the sense of valuing balance and rectitude. It is not worthwhile to cross great rivers, because you would plunge into an abyss.

IMAGE

Sky and water going in different directions symbolize contention. Thus do cultured people calculate and plan how to begin whenever they do things.

COMPONENTS

1 *yin*. If you do not persist forever in an affair, there may be some talk, but all will be well in the end. *Image*. Not persisting forever in an affair means that contention is not to be prolonged. Although there may be some talk, there will be clarification.

2 *yang*. If you do not win your suit, go home and hide. With three hundred families in your hometown, there will be no trouble. *Image*. If you do not win your suit, go home and hide to get out of harm's way. When suits are brought against those above by those below, problems come up that must be taken on.

3 *yin*. Though living on past merits, if you are steadfast and diligent you will eventually be lucky. If you pursue government work, you do not make anything happen. *Image*. Living on past merits is the luck of following the ascendant order.

4 *yang*. If you do not win your suit, go back and take to your fate, change over to peace. It bodes well to be steadfast. *Image*. Going back to take to your fate, changing to become peaceful, it bodes well to be steadfast; this means not slipping.

5 *yang*. Contention may be very lucky. *Image*. Contention is very lucky when it is balanced and correct.

6 *yang*. You may be presented with a belt of honor, but it will be taken away from you three times before the day is out. *Image*. Even if one receives acknowledgment of victory through contention, that does not mean one is worthy of respect.



7. An Army

If an army is to be upright, it is auspicious to have mature people; then there is no blame.

OVERALL JUDGMENT

An army is a group; to be upright is to be correct. Those who are able to employ groups correctly can thereby become leaders. When strength is centered it is responsive; action in dangerous straits is obedient. Even if this poisons the world, the people will follow it. If there is good luck, what blame will there be?

IMAGE

Within the earth there is water, an army; thus do leaders take people in and care for the masses.

COMPONENTS

1 *yin*. An army is to go forth in an orderly manner; if not, there will be misfortune even if there is a good cause. *Image*. An army is to go forth in an orderly manner because it will have bad luck if it loses order.

2 *yang*. In the middle of the army, if there is good luck there is no blame. The leader gives out directives three times. *Image*. Being lucky in the middle of the army means

receiving the favor of Nature. The leader giving out directives three times symbolizes concern for all nations.

3 *yin*. An army may sustain casualties, which is inauspicious. *Image*. If an army sustains casualties, that is a great failure.

4 *yin*. When an army camps at a distance, there is no trouble. *Image*. When an army camps at a distance there is no trouble, since things are still normal.

5 *yin*. When there are vermin in the fields, it is profitable to catch and denounce them; then there is no error. Mature people should lead the expedition; the immature would sustain casualties even if they were upright and steadfast. *Image*. Mature people lead an army with balanced action; immature people sustain casualties because they are not up to their mission.

6 *yin*. A great leader has directives to found states and perpetuate families. Petty people are not to be elected. *Image*. Great leaders have directives by virtue of just success. Petty people are not to be elected, because they are sure to disturb the state.



8. Accord

Accord is auspicious. If the basis of the augury is always right, there is no error. The unsettled will then come; stragglers will be unlucky.

OVERALL JUDGMENT

Accord is auspicious, for accord means helping, humbly following along in harmony. If the basis of the augury is always right, there is no error; this refers to firm strength in centered balance. The uneasy will then come, for there is response between those above and those below. Stragglers will be unlucky, for they will come to an impasse.

IMAGE

Upon the earth is water, symbolizing accord; thus did ancient kings set up a multitude of states and associate with their leaders.

COMPONENTS

1 *yin*. Accord with the truthful is blameless. When truthfulness fills a plain vessel, eventually it brings other good fortune. *Image*. Flexibility in the helping of accord will have other good fortune.

2 *yin*. Accord that comes from inner rectitude bodes well. *Image*. That accord comes from within means that you do not lose yourself.

3 *yin*. There is accord with the wrong people. *Image*. If there is accord with the wrong people, is that not harmful?

4 *yin*. Correctness in accord with those outside bodes well. *Image*. Accord with the wise outside, so as to follow their progress.

5 *yang*. Make accord evident. A king uses three chasers, overlooking the game in front. When the local people are not wary, that bodes well. *Image*. Making accord

evident means taking one's place right in the center. Giving up on the obstreperous and taking in the harmonious is symbolized by overlooking the game in front. When the local people are not wary, that means the rulership has brought about balance.

6 *yin*. Accord without direction is unlucky. *Image*. Accord without direction never finishes anything.



9. Nurture of the Small

Nurture of the small is successful. Dense clouds not raining come from your own western region.

OVERALL JUDGMENT

Nurture of the small means that flexibility gains status, and above and below respond to it. Powerful yet docile, with strength in balance, your aim is carried out, and thus you succeed. Dense clouds not raining means still being on the move; coming from your own western region means practical measures have yet to be executed.

IMAGE

Wind traveling up in the sky symbolizes nurture of the small; thus do leaders beautify the qualities of their culture.

COMPONENTS

1 *yang*. If you return by the Way, what is the problem? This is auspicious. *Image*. When you return by the Way, it is auspicious that you act rightly.

2 *yang*. Leading back is auspicious. *Image*. Leading back to central balance, you do not lose yourself.

3 *yang*. A cart has its wheels removed, husband and wife look away from each other. *Image*. Husband and wife looking away from each other cannot make a home properly.

4 *yin*. When there is sincerity, bloodiness goes and fear departs, so there is no trouble. *Image*. When there is sincerity, fear departs, because there is agreement higher up.

5 *yang*. When there is sincerity, it forms links, enriching the neighborhood. *Image*. When there is sincerity it forms links, not enjoying riches alone.

6 *yang*. It has rained and settled, and lofty attainment has built up; the wife is chaste and diligent. The moon almost full, it is inauspicious for a leader to go on an expedition. *Image*. Having rained and settled represents fullness of attainment. It is inauspicious for a leader to go on an expedition when there is something in doubt.



10. Treading

To tread on a tiger's tail without getting bitten by the tiger, to get through successfully it is advantageous to be steady.