Book of Changes

The original core of the

I Ching

Lars Bo Christensen
-Preview-

Book of Changes - The Original Core of the I Ching

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The Book of Changes is famous in both China and the West as a classic of Chinese wisdom and as a divination manual. The Chinese title 易經 is transcribed in several different ways, although it is usually written either “Yi Jing” or “I Ching.” There have been many attempts at translating the Book of Changes. However, the translations are all very different. Furthermore, the existing translations include different content. This is of course confusing to readers who wish to come to understand this famous and truly wonderful book.

The present work is concerned solely with the core text of the Book of Changes.

In order to avoid confusion between the core text and the complete classic with commentaries from later periods I refer to the original core text as 周易 which is transcribed “Zhou Yi” or “Chou I” and is pronounced “djow-ee”.

周易 周易 means “The Book of Changes from the Zhou Dynasty”.1

The Zhou Yi consists of 64 verses with seven lines in each verse, except the two first which have eight lines. The total number of lines is 450. Although 易 occurs twice in the book itself there is nothing in the text directly indicating what exactly 易 in the title refers to. However, there can be no doubt that the Zhou Yi was originally a divination manual and I find it obvious that 易 refers to the system of changing numbers which decides the combination of lines of text in the written divination answers.

The Book of Changes has not only been a famous and respected book for more than 2500 years, it has also been a challenging enigma ever since the first accounts of it. Since ancient times, the Book of Changes has inspired people to contemplate life and cosmology and it has given rise to a multitude of philosophical ideas, not only in ancient China but throughout Chinese history including our time. It has also become increasingly popular in the West.

Commentaries and translations of the Zhou Yi are plentiful. Yet, it is a fact that hardly anyone could ever understand the Zhou Yi, even in ancient times. The proof of this statement is in the fact that all translations and interpretations of the Zhou Yi diverge enormously from each other—there are barely two lines that are agreed upon. Therefore, it is absolutely fair to say that there has, at least since the

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1 The name Zhou Yi 周易 was mentioned 10 times in the Zuo Zhuan which is the oldest historical source we have for the name. The record in which it was mentioned was for the year 672 BCE. The Zuo Zhuan itself is from before 340 BCE.
beginning of the Han dynasty, never been any agreement in the interpretations or translations of the Zhou Yi.

Yet, the Zhou Yi has always been held in as much high respect as the texts of Lao Zi, Zhuang Zi, Kong Zi or Meng Zi—all of which are much easier to read. It is as if the Zhou Yi’s popularity was never affected by the fact that hardly anybody could ever read the core part. Nevertheless, the Zhou Yi has been used for divination and citation of wise words by millions of people for more than two millennia.

The language of the Western Zhou period was, in fact, sufficiently evolved to be able to express almost anything. However, it still had many limitations and without the framework of a context it can be especially difficult to translate short lines of early Classical Chinese and this is often the case in the Zhou Yi. To reveal the context is, therefore, the key to a successful translation.

I regard the apparent lack of a context and structure to be the main reason the Zhou Yi has been translated in so many different ways. But there is, in fact, an internal logic in every hexagram and also in the development of the 64 hexagrams. Furthermore, there are obvious relationships between the 32 pairs of hexagrams. This is sufficient to constitute the outline of the context which is needed to determine the further direction of the translation.

- The present work makes it clear that the Zhou Yi was written by a single author.
- It also determines that the so-called “received version” is the most original.
- It clarifies the internal structure of the hexagrams.
- It explains the relations of all the 32 hexagram pairs.
- It investigates the yarrow sticks method.
- It proposes an explanation of how the divination answers were interpreted.
- It gives detailed definitions of nearly 800 words based on text examples from before the Han dynasty.
- But primarily, it provides a meaningful and coherent translation.

The purpose of this book is to make a well-founded description and translation of the Zhou Yi. This demands Chinese text, footnotes and a large glossary—all of which may be of little interest to most non-sinologists. Therefore, I have provided a “stripped down” version of the translation placed at the very end of the book, which is, in fact, the beginning of a traditional Chinese book. My own interpretation of the meaning of each of the 450 lines is written in cursive script below the lines of this translation.

Some chapters are rather technical. Before reading them I would recommend per-
forming the practical techniques with coins or sticks which are described at the end of the book.

I would like to extend many thanks for help and advice to Donald B. Wagner and especially to Stella Sørensen for many hours of work correcting my English.

Conventions

The word “hexagram” refers to the famous 64 images of six lines ䷾ but it also refers to the 64 verses of seven or eight lines of text that are associated with the lines.

Hexagram numbers are often referred to as H+number.
The first line of each hexagram is describing the overall theme of the verse and is referred to as “the title line” or “line 0”.
The first of the hexagram lines 初 is referred to as “line 1”.
Then follow line 2, 3, and 5.
The top line of the hexagrams 上 is referred to as “line 6”.

Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.
Versions of the Zhou Yi

The famous sinologist Bernhard Karlgren called the Zhou Yi “a muddle”, “gibberish” and “obscure”. Considering his talent for reading Classical Chinese this could be a strong indication that the text was corrupt and he and other scholars had much better success translating other ancient texts.

There exists a very large number of Zhou Yi translations and commentaries and many translators and commentators have indeed assumed that the text was corrupt and proposed that certain characters should be changed because some point in the text did not make sense to them. Naturally, many authors, editors and copyists of ancient Chinese texts committed errors, used loan characters or replaced characters because of naming taboos. In many texts it is not a big problem to determine mistakes and loan characters, but with more difficult texts there is an obvious danger of wrongly replacing characters. It is not unreasonable to suspect that the Zhou Yi could have been corrupted over time, and that the true meaning was to be found by searching for the correct loan characters and correcting the mistakes. This approach to the translation of the Zhou Yi is quite common, but has, in my opinion, never helped produce a useful translation. If there is any hope left of finding a meaningful translation after all the futile attempts it can only be based on a single version which is possible to translate in a meaningful way without any replacement of characters. Otherwise, this hope wouldn’t live long out in the dense jungle of previous translations, commentaries and different versions. However, having said that, I actually do see justification for the replacement of a single character in hexagram 9 line 4.

There exist a number of analyses and comparisons of the different versions of the Zhou Yi, most notably Unearthing the Changes by Edward L. Shaughnessy. Some of these have produced interesting theories and conclusions which have been useful to clarify a general overview of the problems regarding the Zhou Yi. I have not, however, found any variations in the excavated texts that seemed to be improvements in the readability, and none of these versions have changed my own conclusion that the received version is the one closest to the original. This argument is supported by my translation in general, but I consider the lines from the Zhou Yi which are cited in the divination records in the Zuo Zhuan to also be weighty arguments. They are briefly explained in the chapter ‘Divinations recorded in the Zuo Zhuan and Guo Yu’ and are identical with the received version and very likely real accounts. There is, in my opinion, no reason to believe these records should

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1 Bernhard Karlgren: Loan Characters in pre-Han texts: no. 1738, 1166 and 1439.
have been invented for the occasion of writing the Zuo Zhuan or that they were rewritten later to suit an officially approved standard.

THE RECEIVED VERSION

The so-called received version has been handed down in the imperial libraries at least since the Han dynasty and was made publicly available by order of Emperor Kang Xi in 1715. The overall recognizable meaning, the contextual framework and the structure that can be discovered in the received version and also the almost verbatim citations from the Zhou Yi which can be found in the Zuo Zhuan have convinced me that this is the most original version. I have based my translation entirely on it—I have only changed one single character in H9 line 4. There is, at this time, no evidence to prove the original order of the hexagrams. But a different sequence would have had no practical impact because the hexagrams were located in the text with the yarrow sticks on the basis of the hexagram lines—not the number in the sequence. My translation follows the hexagram order of the received version.

The received version consists of 4933 characters² and it has 784 unique characters. The details of the text will be explained in the respective chapters and the glossary.

THE MAWANGDUI VERSION

A silk copy of the Zhou Yi was found in the Han dynasty tomb of Li Cang who died in 168 BCE. The tomb was located in the village Mawangdui in Changsha in the Hunan province. Edward L. Shaughnessy provides a further description and a translation in *I Ching—The Classic of Change*. Finding this relatively well preserved copy naturally caused great excitement. However, approximately 7% of the text was lost,³ only 31 hexagram titles were identical with the received version and just 29 lines of the total 450 were identical. When corrected for missing parts of the text in the Mawangdui version there are only about 1100⁴ characters which are the same as the received version’s 4033 characters (excluding line numbers which are mostly the same). A large portion

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² Including the 772 characters used for the line numbering.
³ Based on a count of the missing characters in the Chinese text in Edward L. Shaughnessy’s *I Ching—The Classic of Change*.
⁴ This number is of course not the exact one for the whole of the Mawangdui text since about 7% of the text is missing. But I would assume that the percentage of different characters would be the same among the missing characters, since the different characters are evenly distributed throughout the hexagrams.
The nature of early Classical Chinese is such that it is often necessary to read sentences in a broader context in order to reveal the precise meaning. When I began the present translation, I soon realized that it was not possible to make a coherent, meaningful translation of the Zhou Yi without a broader context than that which is provided when only seeing each line as a self-contained unit. Therefore, my way of translating has been to clarify the meaning step-by-step. I did so by searching for any parts in the text that could be more easily understood and then I translated these parts as well as possible. This helped create a partial framework that provided an overview which made it possible to translate even more parts. This way the structure and context was gradually revealed, just like building the dome of a cathedral; a dome of meaning where the bricks held each other in place and yet none of them could hold alone without the others.

The Zhou Yi is not a text with a linear story like a novel but consists of 450\(^1\) short “scenes” or proverb-like lines. The themes of the lines are very different and can even be contradictory within the same hexagram.\(^2\)

However, there is certainly a logical development through the sequence of the 64 hexagrams and there are quite obvious relations when the hexagrams are seen as 32 pairs. There is also a gradual development within each hexagram and there are connections between the so-called “changing lines” and the following hexagrams. Gradually seeing these internal developments and connections appear provided the necessary structural and contextual framework necessary to make a meaningful translation.

There are basically two different methods of obtaining a divination answer with the methods that we know of today. They are explained in detail in the chapter ‘The Yarrow Sticks Method’.

The first method is the one used in the records of the Zuo Zhuan and Guo Yu (see the chapter ‘Divinations Recorded in the Zuo Zhuan and Guo Yu’). The divination answers produced with this method are simple to interpret because only one line is obtained without considering a following hexagram—one line comprises the whole answer.

\(^1\) 64x7 lines +2 extra in H1 and H2=450.

\(^2\) Examples of contradicting lines in the same hexagrams: H3 line 2-4. H6 line 2-5, H8 line 3-2, H8 line 2-4, H14 line 0-4, H14 line 2-4, H17 line 2-3, H23 line 3-6, H25 line 1-6, H27 line 5-6, H29 line 4-6, H34 line 3-4, H60 line 1-2.
The second method is the yarrow sticks method described in the Attached Remarks of the Yi Jing. This method can produce a single hexagram where only the title line is the answer or it can produce a hexagram consisting of one up to six “changing” lines. In this case the combination of lines is always followed by a second hexagram where only the title line is considered. If a divination answer is obtained with the method of multiple lines then the lines must obviously be intended to be connected into little “stories”—stories of increasing length the more lines that the divination yields. And there must be a connection between the combined line statements and the following hexagram. I say it is obvious because I can hardly imagine that a divination answer with, for example, four lines changing to a following hexagram was supposed to be viewed as five different answers to that particular single question.

Therefore, the hexagram lines seem originally to have been created in a way that makes them able to join together in an integrated, intentional and logical way. I assume that the lines were meant to be considered as arguments, or images, to explain the situation inquired about, and that the following hexagram was a sort of conclusion like: “Because ... and because ... you should ....”

A multiple line answer will, of course, be more complicated to understand the more lines that are involved.

However, the idea that the six lines of each hexagram can connect into logical connections with a combined message is, in fact, only a theory based on my personal understanding of the text. Although I believe the connections to be there on all six levels, I can only give clear and easily comprehensible examples of the more simple connections with one or two changing lines. If all the connections should be written down for the levels of all six lines and recreated with other words as a help to the reader, it would be extremely complicated.

It could perhaps be done with the first level of one single changing line. In that case, only the connection between the 384 single lines and the following hexagram should be explained. This I have, in fact, almost already done because my own interpretation of all single lines is written below the translation of each hexagram line. It is then fairly easy for the reader to see the connection to the following hexagram. I have, however, for clarification of this idea, added several examples below.

A single changing line is simple to connect to the message of the following hexagram. But connecting from two to six hexagram lines into one single combined message and then connecting it to the following hexagram is, of course, more complicated—the complexity increases rapid...
TRIGRAMS AND HEXAGRAMS

Ever since ancient times, the Chinese have had a love of using systems of numbers to describe the world and its creation. One well-known example is in the Dao De Jing chapter 42 where it is said:

道生一。一生二。二生三。三生萬物

“Dao gives birth to one. One gives birth to two. Two gives birth to three and three gives birth to all the myriads of things”.

Assuming as I do, that the Zhou Yi was written by a single author as a divination manual, I do not think it unreasonable to view the text basically as a way of dividing our life in the world into 64 large parts which can be further divided into 384 hexagram lines. The total number of possible line combinations is 41601 which represent 萬物 “the ten thousand things”. Then, by using a system of calculations one of these combinations is randomly chosen as the answer to the situation that is being inquired about.

The images representing each of the 64 verses of the Zhou Yi are all made up of six broken or unbroken lines and are therefore called hexagrams. A trigram is a unit of three broken or unbroken lines and two trigrams combined constitutes a hexagram. Traditionally the eight trigrams have the same names as the hexagrams in which two identical trigrams are doubled: 1, 2, 29, 30, 51, 52, 57 and 58. There are eight possible trigram combinations and 64 possible hexagram combinations.

Trigrams are more often than not associated with the Zhou Yi, but they are, in fact, mentioned nowhere in the core text itself and are not used in the calculations.

Both trigrams and hexagrams are in Chinese called gua 卦. The earliest texts

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1 The total number of possible line combinations is 4096 (64X64), but the title line of each of the 64 hexagrams must also be added because each of them comprises a total divination answer if there are no changing lines.
where the character 卦 is found are from the Warring states period. 卦 occurs in the Poems of Chu 楚辭, the Rites of Zhou 周禮 and the Zuo Zhuan 左轉, which all date from the Warring States period, but 卦 does not occur in the Shi Jing and has, to my knowledge, never been found on bronzes. 卦 consists of 卜 which means “to divine”, and of 二 one on top of the other thus forming 占 which is the character for an elongated jade tablet. It is difficult to see how this should have any relevance to divination. However, 占 has always consisted of six lines, and although others may regard卦 as radical and phonetic I believe the meaning could be “divination with six lines”. Yao 爻 is the character for the lines of a hexagram. 爻 was also used in older times on bronzes and oracle bones and usually looked like 六.

There have been theories and legends about the origin of the trigrams and hexagrams, but no conclusive evidence has ever been found about this question in either archaeological material or historical texts. However, very old signs have been found which could likely be the precursor for both the trigrams and hexagrams. The oldest of these signs are simple lines and angles incised on artefacts of wood and antler horn from the Neolithic Period dated to be 6-8000 years old. The most interesting thing is that they nearly always appear in groups of three or six. The signs look exactly like 1, 6 and 8 do in oracle bone script, but because the Chinese numbers 1-4 were written with straight lines in ancient times the straight lines could theoretically be representing the numbers from 1-4. This is naturally difficult to be certain about. It is, however, certain that the similar signs found on pottery, bones and bronzes from the late Shang- and Zhou dynasties were digits because similar numbers have been found in verifiable context. They looked exactly the same and were also written in groups of three or six. Therefore it is an actual possibility that the neolithic signs were also numbers, but we are still in the dark as to their precise use and meaning.

Although these old signs consist of digits and not broken or unbroken lines, as it became the custom later in history, it seems reasonable to assume that they are related to the trigrams and hexagrams because there are nearly always three or six in each group of digits. With the knowledge we have about the use of the Zhou Yi in later periods, it could be natural to regard them as divination symbols. However, there are no cases of any part of a divination text like

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\(^2\) Niu Qingbo 牛清波, p. 60-62.

\(^3\) If the straight lines were grouped in two, three or four instead of being read one by one like they could be in later times, they could theoretically be representing the numbers 1, 2, 3 and 4.
Bronze Ding with trigram numbers 7-5-8 in the lower left corner of the text (史斿父鼎 Zhang Zhenglang #22). Exhibited at the Imperial Palace Museum, Beijing. (Rubbing from Luo Zhenyu chapter 3, p. 18).
Divinations recorded in the Zuo Zhuan and Guo Yu

Twenty two cases of Zhou Yi divinations were recorded in the two historical works the Chun Qiu Zuo Zhuan 春秋左转 and the Guo Yu 国语. The divination records in the Zuo Zhuan were stated to be written in accounts from between 672 BCE and 488 BCE and the three accounts from the Guo Yu between 637 BCE and 606 BCE.

For many years, there has been an on-going discussion about the authenticity and reliability of the Zuo Zhuan. The core of the problem was that if the Zuo Zhuan was written after the book burning in the Qin dynasty in 213 BCE there would probably not have been adequate source material left and the Zuo Zhuan would then to some extend have been written on the basis of hearsay and maybe even fiction. Bernhard Karlgren concluded in his 65 pages article about the authenticity of the Zuo Zhuan that “It is later than the year 468 and in any case anterior to 213 BC, probably to be dated between 468 and 300 BC.”¹

And in fact he was right: A bamboo version of parts of the Zuo Zhuan bought from a foreign collector was in 2009 acquired by Zhejiang University who published a book about the discovery in 2012. The find consisted of 160 bamboo strips of approximately one chi 尺 which was 23 cm in the Zhou dynasty. The strips have been carbon-14 tested to be from approximately 340 BCE—only 130 years after the last accounts recorded in it.²

This means that the Zuo Zhuan seems to be a much more reliable historical source than previously assumed. But even if we accept the text as genuine there are still many questions to ask: How much can we rely on the historical information given and for what purpose was it written?

For the purpose of investigating the Zhou Yi this highly complicated discussion is, in fact, of lesser importance. The divination records were in any case very likely written on the basis of the knowledge of the Zhou Yi which people had at the time when the Zuo Zhuan or its sources were written. This is of great importance because the Zuo Zhuan is without doubt still the earliest source for understanding the Zhou Yi that we have. But the credibility of the information given in the Zuo Zhuan has increased tremendously after the publication of the Zhejiang Museum version.

¹ Bernhard Karlgren: On the Authenticity and Nature of the Tso Chuan, p. 65.
² Cao Jinyan: Zhejiang daxue cang zhanguo chujian 2012.
In the Shanghai Museum version of the Zhou Yi the unbroken lines are drawn straight and horizontal — and the open lines are drawn like 八. In the Zhejiang museum Zuo Zhuan the hexagram lines are drawn with unbroken and broken straight horizontal lines like — and – –. In one example of a divination record from the Zhou Yi in the Zhejiang version there are characters missing, the first hexagram drawing is wrong and the other turned upside down. But it is still not difficult to see that it is the story of the lady Mu Jiang (See example 11 below). The yarrow method 筮 is mentioned in most of the records in the Zuo Zhuan as the way the hexagrams and lines were produced. However, a few of the divination cases are simply citations or just a reference to the Zhou Yi, or maybe even to another divination method:

Case no. 9 does not mention the Zhou Yi directly (筮之…其卦遇) but is only referring to hexagram 24 復 and cites a text that seem unrelated to the Zhou Yi. Case no. 13 is merely a reference to the Zhou Yi (周易) without an actual citation. Case no. 18 mentions the Yi (易卦) and three hexagram names (雷, 乾 and 大壯) but no citation. Guo Yu case no. 3 does not mention the Zhou Yi directly (筮之也，遇) but is referring to two hexagrams (乾之否). The citation, or interpretation, seems unrelated to the Zhou Yi.

The citations from the Zhou Yi given in the Zuo Zhuan are nearly all identical with the received version of the Zhou Yi, there are only two exceptions: One is an insignificant difference of a plant name in case 11. The other, case 5, also has small differences, but with no significant impact in meaning. It seems that a few characters were just added later in an attempt to clarify the meaning. There are only two short citations from the Zhou Yi in the Guo Yu and they are also identical with the received version.

This reveals a clear picture showing that the received version was the general version in use between 672 BCE and 488 BCE. This is extremely valuable in order to determine the right approach for a translation. I have underlined the citations from the Zhou Yi in the extracts from the Zuo Zhuan below.

The first excavated version of the Zhou Yi with line numbers is the Shanghai Museum bamboo text from the 4th century BCE. There is no line numbering mentioned in the divination records in neither the Zuo Zhuan nor the Guo Yu. However, this does not necessarily mean that the Zhou Yi had no numbering in this period.

---PREVIEW SECTION END---

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3 Cao Jinyan: Zhejiang daxue cang zhanguo chuqian, p. 6, strip 19-21.
The yarrow sticks method

The many hexagrams and trigrams that have been found on bones and bronzes from the late Shang and early Zhou periods were without doubt divination symbols and the hexagrams were likely produced with yarrow sticks. However, it is not clear exactly how they were produced or why it was yarrow that was used. The method could, in fact, have been performed with any type of thin sticks. The character for yarrow 蓍 is not known on oracle bones or bronzes. The oldest text where 蓍 can be found seems to be the poem 下泉 in the Shi Jing (K153) where nothing is mentioned about divination. However, yarrow stalk divination is mentioned in the Li Ji as a virtue of the ancient kings:

The kings of old handled the yarrow stalks and the tortoise-shell, they arranged the sacrifices, gave offerings of silk for the burials, prayed solemnly, and set up statutes and standards. In this way the country came to have ceremonies.¹

The first known description of the yarrow sticks method is given in the Attached Remarks 繫辭 of the received version of the Yi Jing. The Attached Remarks was also found in the Mawangdui silk version of the Yi Jing—which is from before 168 BCE—but the description of the yarrow sticks method was not included. The symbolism found in the description of the yarrow sticks method indicates that it could have been written in the Han period.² This, however, does not exclude the possibility that the method was invented much earlier. The well-known, and simpler, coin method is not as old as the yarrow method, but dates back at least to the 7th century CE.³

Today, a convenient table is used to find the hexagram numbers. It is unlikely that the diviners of the Zhou dynasty used such a table. But if the hexagram images were drawn before each hexagram text, it would not have been difficult to browse through the scroll to find the right hexagram.

Both the coin and yarrow method make it possible to browse through the scroll to find the right hexagram.

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¹ 礼记–礼运:故先王秉蓍龜,列祭祀,瘗缯,宣祝嘏辞說,設制度,故國有禮...
² The connection made in the description between the practical operations and 大衍之數 number of abundance, 閏 intercalary month and 天數 and 地數 the numbers of Heaven and Earth would seem to be typical for the Han period.
³ Bent Nielsen, p.121-122; Huo Zhu Lin Fa.
Translation of the Zhou Yi

With comments and
detailed glossary containing 800 words
48 - 井 The Well

井改邑不改井无喪无得徃来井井汔至亦未繘井羸其瓶凶
The Well. It is bad if the village is renewed, but the well is not renewed. Without [thinking about] what they can lose or gain, [people just] come and go to the well. But the well can dry up even to the point where you cannot quite [reach down] to draw water from the well, [and prolonged use] will wear out its bucket.

初六：井泥不食舊井无禽
Beginning 6: The well is muddy and the water can’t be drunk. At an old well there are not even birds.

九二：井谷射鲋甕敝漏
Second 9: You can shoot carps in the pool of the well. The jug is worn and it leaks.

九三：井渫不食為我心惻可用汲王明並受其福
Third 9: The well is being cleaned up and so, [meanwhile], the water can’t be drunk. This is distressful for us, but drawing water can [accelerate the clearing]. If the King explains about this and stands side by side [with the people while this is done], he will receive their good will.

六四：井甃无咎
Fourth 6: The well is being tiled, so it will be in perfect order.

九五：井冽寒泉食
Fifth 9: The well is cool like an ice cold spring to drink from.

上六：井收勿幕有孚元吉
Top 6: The well can be drawn from, so don’t cover it, then there will be confidence that this is a good well—through and through.

Glossary

井 Jing3. K819a: A well, a system of fields belonging to one village. Graph is a drawing of a well-curb.
改 Gai3. K936a: Change. HYDCD: Change, alter, replace, correct, put right,
modify, revise, afresh, renew, amend. Occurs only in H48 and H49. Several scholars\(^1\) have translated 井改邑不改 something like: “A city can be moved but a well can’t be moved”. But in H42 line 4 遷 clearly means “to move” or “relocate”. In this context I assume that 改 means “renew” or “amend”.

邑 Yi4. K683a: City, town. HYDCD: General reference to any settlement from village to capital. In H6, H8, H15, H25, H35, H43, H46 and H48. A large city in this period would probably have several wells, and although 井 can be plural, the image of the hexagram seems to me to be a village and one well.

喪 Sang4. K705a: Mourning, burial, to lose, destroy. HYDCD: Mourning, burial, to lose, destroy, use up, deplete.

汔 Qi4. K517j: Water drying up. HYDCD: Dry up, run dry, finished. Also in H64.

至 Zhi4. K413a: Arrive, come to, highest point, utmost, adequate, suitable.

亦 Yi4. K800a: Armpit, besides, also, particle, ample. HYDCD: Armpit, besides, also, yet, still, just like, already, only, merely, all, if, form word with no independent meaning, after all, same as 以.

未 Wei4. K531a: Cyclical character, not yet.


泥 Ni2. K563d: Mud, mire, impede, obstructed, moistened by dew.

舊 Jiu4. K1067c: Old (not new), ancient, for a long time, long ago.

射 She4. K807a: Shoot with bow.

鮒 Fu4. HYDCD: Crucian carp.

谷 Gu3. K1202a: Valley. HYDCD: Valley, the deep of a well.

甕 Weng4. K1184p: Earthen jar. HYDCD: Also written 瓮, amphora-like pottery jar to draw water. Please see discussion below.

敝 Bi4. K341a: Worn out, to damage, ruin. HYDCD: Worn out, to damage, ruin.

漏 Lou4. K120a: To leak.

渫 Xie4. K339l: Cleanse, leak. HYDCD: Clear up (example from line 3), spread out, let out, leak.

Because the water lies so deep it is not possible to dredge or leak a normal well.

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\(^{1}\) Legge, Da Liu, Pearson, Blofeld, Wilhelm.
in order to clean it, so I rule out the meaning “leak”. I assume 滁 is “to clean the well of mud and sand”. It must have been done with a basket operated by someone being hoist down the well.

惻 Ce4. K906e: To pity, pained. HYDCD: Sympathize with, have compassion for, distressed or grieved (based on line 3 in this hexagram).


明 Ming2. K760a: Light, bright, intelligent, enlightenment, discernment, eyesight, seeing, perception, (making clear:) agreement, contract.


The common people do not bless a king, and the king does not “receive their happiness”; therefore I translate 福 as “good will” instead of “happiness” to make the point clear that they are happy with their king.


寒 Han2. K143a: Cold.

泉 Quan2. K237a: Spring, source.

收 Shou1. K1103a: Catch, take, collect, receive, apprehend, take and remove, settle up, retire, harvest.

幕 Mu4. K802o: Baldachin, tent, covering.

The title line of this hexagram presents several problems:

1. Concerning the meaning of 改 in the first line: 井改邑不改井 I think the meaning “renewed” fits much better than “changed” because the well does in fact change, as can be seen in the lines of the hexagram where it is ruined, cleaned and built up again.

2. The statement 无喪无得 seems to mean that a well does not deplete or increase its water level. This is, of course, wrong. The level of all wells rise and fall. Furthermore, 无喪无得 is contradicted by 井汔 which undoubtedly means “the well dries up”. Therefore, I suspect 无喪无得 to be an expression meaning “indifferently” or “carelessly”; that people come and go to draw water without thinking about possible damage to the well, and also without taking good care of it. “Indifferently” or “carelessly” are not supported in the dictionaries, and I have not found any other examples like it in early texts. I still believe, however, that it is supported by the very obvious context of the six lines.

3. In the title line 瓶 is the character for the “well bucket”. But in line 2 the character
is 頂. Both can be right, and it is not possible to determine if one of them is a mistake, but it would have been logical to assume they were the same.

4. The material of the well-bucket was likely earthenware. But earthenware was of course vulnerable and could not become “old and shabby” or “weak” like the dictionary says for 羌; if an earthenware bucket broke it was unusable immediately, whereas a wooden bucket could become old and shabby or get cracks from drying up. But according to HYDCD it was earthenware. However, in this context I still believe 羌 means “worn”: 贅其瓶 “[prolonged use] will wear out its bucket”.

5. I have translated 亦 as “even”: “The well can dry up even to the point where…”.

6. Please note that I have moved 凶 “It is bad” to the beginning of the rather long statement.

There could be many arguments for different translations of the title line. But in all other translations that I have seen, the meaning of the title line is isolated from the message of the hexagram as a whole. The context of this translation of the title line is in harmony with the combined theme of the seven lines.

The general theme of the hexagram is clearly about the importance of maintenance. Line 1 and 2 are describing the consequences of neglecting maintenance, line 3 and 4 are describing the process of maintenance and line 5 and 6 are describing the good results.
Translation of the Zhou Yi

The original core of the I Ching

With interpretations of all 450 lines

Please note that the translator’s own interpretations are added below each line of translation in cursive script.
The Well. It is bad if the village is renewed, but the well is neglected and not re-
newed. Without thinking about what they can lose or gain, people just come and
go to the well. But the well can dry up even to the point where you cannot quite
reach down to draw water from the well, and prolonged use will wear out its buck-
et.

Water can only be drawn if the well is in good working order and the water is clean
and within reach. It is important to maintain it.

Beginning 6: The well is muddy and the water can’t be drunk. At an old well there
are not even birds.

The well is in a very bad condition and no one can use it.

Second 9: You can shoot carps in the pool of the well. The jug is worn and it leaks.

The well is in bad condition—only fish can use it.

Third 9: The well is being cleaned up and so, meanwhile, the water can’t be drunk.
This is distressful for us, but drawing water can accelerate the clearing. If the King
explains about this and stands side by side with the people while this is done, he
will receive their good will.

A better condition of the well is underway; we must wait and support the process.

Fourth 6: The well is being tiled, so it will be in perfect order.

A better condition of the well is underway; this will make it solid and accessible.

Fifth 9: The well is cool like an ice cold spring to drink from.

The well is now in a good useful condition.

Top 6: The well can be drawn from, so don’t cover it, then there will be confidence
that this is a good well—through and through.

The well is now in a good useful condition. Show people that it is available.
There is abundance and things go well. So that the king is resting and does not worry is quite appropriate, even in the middle of the day.

Don't worry, when all is well.

Beginning 9: Visiting a lord of equal rank, even if you stay a whole week, it is not a mistake. Go on; you will be held in high esteem.

You can't benefit from interaction if you worry that you are being inconvenient.

Second 6: The abundance is screening off. Like during a solar eclipse where you can see the Big Dipper at midday. If you go ahead but become doubtful, have inner confidence and send it forward envisaging a good outcome.

When the goal is obscured, being free of doubt and visualizing a good result will light up the way ahead.

Third 9: The abundance is obscuring. At midday there is a haze so you break your right arm, but it is not your fault.

Obscurity causes accidents, but don't blame yourself because you couldn't see clearly.

Fourth 9: The abundance is screening off. Like during a solar eclipse where you can see the Big Dipper at midday. You meet your unenlightened chief, and this is good.

A little light can still shine through the obscurity.

Fifth 6: Things will turn out good, brilliance will come with reward and recognition.

Don't worry, if there is nothing to worry about.

Top 6: Abundance to a degree where the luxury of your house is screening off the outside world. It is bad if you peer into the house and it is quiet with no people, and there has been no one visiting for a long time.

Abundance can be a pretext for inaction.
64 - Not Yet Crossed

Having not yet crossed things are still going well. A small fox is crossing dry-shod but getting its tail wet. There is no beneficial goal.

Don’t cross if you can’t make it completely, things are still good on this side.

Beginning 6: It is regrettable if the small fox gets its tail wet.

To be a success, things must be done completely.

Second 9: To drag the wheels will ensure a correct and good crossing.

It takes effort to reach the goal.

Third 6: It will go badly if the campaign is commenced before everyone having crossed the great river; it will be beneficial to finish the crossing first.

Wait until you are completely ready.

Fourth 9: Correct things for the better then regret will vanish. Use great power when attacking the devil’s land. It may take three years, but then you will have the reward of a greater country.

A great accomplishment takes a long time, but the reward is great.

Fifth 6: If you have corrected things so that all is good there will be no regrets. The wise person can inspire with his inner confidence so things turn out good.

A person who has great inner confidence can inspire others to keep going.

Top 9: To drink wine is no mistake if retaining confidence, but in getting drunk the confidence will be lost.

If you lose confidence, you can’t reach people.