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## **The Image of the World in the *Yijing* 易经 – an Attempt to Identify the Intellectual Context Proper to Chinese Philosophy<sup>1</sup>**

### Abstract

Before we think about reality, before we talk about it or remain silent, first we have some of the most basic images. What do philosophers brought up in the given culture have in mind when they use the term 'reality'? In this article I attempt to identify and elaborate the intellectual context proper to Chinese (especially Confucian and Daoist) philosophical culture, by presenting its most general features. How deep must we probe to find the internal network of sense that is the basis of Confucian, and Daoist images of reality? What we are looking for can be found by trying to think in a context that is broader than the merely linguistic context. This broader context is that provided by philosophical understanding of the terms: 'world,' 'individual being,' 'thing,' 'truth,' 'wisdom.'

### Key words

Confucianism, Daoism, images of world, ways of thinking of Chinese philosophy, thing, truth, world.

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<sup>1</sup> The more elaborate version of such investigation was presented by me in the book entitled *Filozoficzne podstawy sztuki kręgu konfucjańskiego. Źródła klasyczne okresu przedhanowskiego* (*The Philosophical Basis of the Confucian Art. Classical Sources Pre-Han Period.*)

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'Is it possible to be a Confucian without being East Asian, as so many philosophers have been Platonists without being Greek?' Robert C. Neville asks provocatively in his book, *Boston Confucianism. Portable Tradition in the Late-Modern World*. The problem of the extent to which Confucianism is connected with a given nation and of how strongly it is rooted in East Asian culture can be reformulated as follows: Someone who was not born in the Far East and did not grow up there can certainly read about Confucianism, Taoism, or Buddhism, but he will never understand what he has read sufficiently to be able to philosophize like a real Confucian, Taoist, or Buddhist.

Neville notes that western philosophy is not tied to a particular nation or culture:

Very few American philosophers have a Greek ethnic heritage, and few have a working knowledge of the classical Greek language. Yet nearly every American philosopher identifies herself or himself as a Platonist or an Aristotelian. And every American philosopher without exception who holds a Ph.D. in the field can discuss ideas attributed to Plato and Aristotle. Plato and Aristotle are world philosophers to Westerners who are not Greek; they are also world philosophers in the curricula of the most contemporary philosophical academies in East Asia and India. Now the Chinese philosophies should also be world philosophies in all philosophic academies [...]. (Neville 2000: xxii)

The following two questions arise: Can Chinese philosophy become universal, one among many modern areas of university research, taught with profit in all academic institutions? And what is necessary for philosophers who see themselves as representatives of western culture be able to use effectively in their own research concepts, ideas, and modes of reasoning found in Chinese philosophy?

However, before turning to these questions perhaps we should first consider the following question, which Neville does not formulate explicitly: What is the basis of the universality of the philosophy of the ancient Greeks? The answer is relatively simple. It is the universality of the rules of thinking marked out by logical correctness, in which references to a particular cultural context and to a particular nation are – or at least should be – practically insignificant. The reasoning of the ancient Greeks was based on the rules of logic, which were not and could not be defined or determined either by the language (classical Greek) or by the concrete experience of one thinker. Anyone can understand the law of the excluded middle and use it correctly independently of the language he uses and of

the tradition which shaped him. We may ask whether in Chinese philosophy there is also such a basis of reasoning that is universally available to any thinking person.

At first glance it might appear that there is not. Confucianism, as well as Taoism and Buddhism, places less emphasis on logic and more on immediate local experience in shaping human convictions. This in turn is clearly connected with a given concrete culture and with how our surroundings have taught us to behave in the world of our daily affairs and hence it does not seem to have universal scope and character.

However, if we consider Chinese thought from a broader and more general perspective, a universal context does indeed come to light. If we examine the reasoning schemes used by Chinese thinkers and if we look at the most general contexts within which, even according to them, their views must be considered, a consistent and entirely understandable system of concepts emerges. It is a system that is diametrically opposed to the Platonic or Aristotelian schemes, but it is equally clear and understandable. A systematic attempt first of all to understand the semantic context proper to Chinese philosophy and next to consider concrete philosophical conceptions will prevent us from being overwhelmed by the initially mysterious character of the basic claims of Chinese philosophy. Such a possible mistaken first impression is due not to the fact that they are irrational and purposely illogical, or that the philosophers themselves are interested only in unreflectively experiencing the world, but rather to the fact that when we study Confucian or Taoist texts, we continue to be guided by the semantic context of western philosophy, which refers to a different basic interpretational model.

We should therefore begin our attempt to understand the philosophical foundations of Chinese culture by trying to adopt a perspective that will allow us to evaluate rationally the difference between the two basic contexts. This will enable us during the present inquiry to suspend the unreflectively adopted context in situations in which logic itself tells us that it should not be assumed. This is precisely what I attempt to do in this work: to identify and elaborate the intellectual context proper to Chinese philosophy, presenting its most general features and content.

How deep must we probe to find the internal network of sense that is the basis of Confucian culture, Taoist thought, and Buddhist meditation practices? The response to the question of how deep we must probe to understand philosophical conceptions different from our own and the modes of reasoning connected with them is that we have to begin with the

category of 'world.' Logic, or more precisely inquiry which preserves the rigors of thinking imposed by it, is the most basic instrument for knowing and understanding not only a different culture, but also what is implicitly assumed by people in one's own culture, which has a definite sense for them and allows them to live in their world effectively and correctly. From among a number of possible alternative logical systems one always chooses the system that manages best within a set of tacitly accepted convictions which are assigned by the culture and which establish the meaning of the term 'world.' The answer to this question, accepted by the representatives of a given culture – very often unreflectively, as something obvious – determines the content of the most general interpretational model, which later serves as a point of reference, as the proper context in which particular conceptions and concepts are understood – conceptions like 'reality,' 'expression' and 'silence.'

In other words, the strategy for seeking sense is always the following. If people accept that the world is as it is (the intellectual context marked out by the semantic and pragmatic content of the term 'world'), then we must ask what, logically speaking, must be regarded as important and sensible, and deserves to be taken into consideration. The process of deciphering different cultures is basically nothing other than the science of reasoning within an interpretational model distinct from one's own.

The most important methodological postulate that I also assume can be called the 'contrast and complement scheme.' According to what has been said above, it is necessary to attempt to purify our considerations from unconsciously accepted references to our own culture. We must therefore make an effort to bring such assumptions to light. That is why in my investigations of what Chinese philosophers have in mind when they speak about the 'universe' I will use the view of the world which, on the one hand, is most different from the one that I am seeking, and on the other hand is commonly (though often not fully consciously) presupposed by the authors of western culture. To this end I will make use of the vision of the world that we have in Christianity. I do this not because I believe that western culture is reducible to Christian ideas; it is obviously completely unjustifiable to neglect the ancient Greeks in this context. But I do think that for explanatory purposes it is best to contrast the contents of Chinese culture with the Christian view of the world, one of whose very important elements is the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, made available through the theology of St. Thomas and St. Augustine. I also choose it because, apart from the universality with which it is accepted by western thinkers,

this view of reality is also one that very radically differs from what is presupposed in the intellectual context proper to China.

The basis of the original images that were used to understand the world in many great civilizations may be found in the so-called books of wisdom. Christian culture has Holy Scripture, the books of the Old and New Testaments, Islam has the Koran, and Hinduism possesses the Vedas. The Chinese believed that wise men of the past left the most basic indications for understanding the world in the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing* 易经). This was certainly the conviction held by the great authors of the first Chinese systems and philosophical schools. Confucius himself wrote in one of his dialogues: 'If some years were added to my life, I would give fifty to the study of the Yi, and then I might come to be without great faults.' (*Lunyu*: 7,16)

The *Book of Changes* (*Yijing* 易经) is included among the so-called classical books, denoted by the sign *jing* 经. In Chinese culture there is a tradition of singling out certain texts due to their special importance in creating the very intellectual foundations of the civilization. They contain the knowledge and wisdom of ancient thinkers, and their purpose is to be transmitted to their successors and to constitute an important point of reference for them, an inspiration in their own inquiries. Thanks to this, the ancient culture was able without interruption to influence the activity of people of subsequent historical periods as a continuously perpetuated vision of reality.

The first issue to be considered has to do with the origin of the books of wisdom of the respective cultures. Who wrote Holy Scripture and what does it contain? Who is the author of the *Book of Changes*? The differences that we encounter here turn out to be significant and fundamental.

According to Christian tradition, the Sacred Scriptures of the Old and New Testament were written by persons who in this respect acted under divine inspiration, that is, they were 'chosen by God' to transmit His wisdom to others. The revealed books do not have their source in this world and the persons who wrote them did not have to be wise themselves. What inspired them and transformed their personal fate were not their own efforts to achieve maturity as regards wisdom, but a 'divine plan.' What is striking in this image is that the emphasis is placed upon transcendence. Both the origin and the character of the knowledge that Sacred Scripture transmits is not of this world.

The *Book of Changes*, on the other hand, has a form that can be described as immanent humanism, in the original Latin sense of the term.

Both the origin and the character of the knowledge that it presents grow out of this world, out of human life in the world, out of man's remaining where he is. According to a Chinese tradition contained in the commentaries found in the collection called the *Ten Wings* (*Shiyi* 十翼), the authors of the *Book of Changes* were the wise men or sages (*sheng ren* 圣人) of early antiquity. The classical form of the sign for wisdom is the ideogram *sheng*, which ancient form consists of graphs that symbolize an ear, a mouth, and a person standing between heaven and earth. The etymology of the sign directs us to the image of a sage as a person who listens to the world and understands what takes place in the heavens and on the earth, and who speaks, that is, teaches others.

Chinese myths speak of times when communication between heaven, earth, and man took place without any difficulty. People were generally able to 'listen and understand,' because wisdom is seen here as an ordinary, natural human ability, as something that people were able to do more or less effectively. Those who regularly practiced this ability were more effective than those who did not. With time the number of those who neglected this practice grew and thus wisdom came to be a rare virtue among men. Yet it continued to belong to them naturally. That is why at a certain mythical moment the wise men of antiquity decided to help others to 'listen and understand.' And this is how the *Book of Changes* came to be. It was written by the inhabitants of the world with a view to helping its other inhabitants once again practice the natural human ability to stand amidst the world and 'listen and understand.'

The next issue will be the problem of origin of the world. In the Revealed Books of Christianity, as they have been interpreted philosophically by St. Augustine and St. Thomas, the world as a whole, that is, all that exists, was created by God (*creatio*), by His unconditioned Will – something that St. Augustine underlines – and because God is Goodness, Truth, and Life. God exists from Himself eternally, that is, in an atemporal reality, and by virtue of His creative power the world is dependent in its temporal existence on the Creator (*creatio continua*). The world is ineluctably not divine, but it comes from God, who created it from nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*). God's perfection transcends (*transcendere*) the world, which is full of defects and imperfections. As can be seen, in their philosophical reflections the Fathers of the Church focused especially upon the question of the source of the existence of the world. The answer to this question becomes the foundation of their knowledge about reality and the source of further logical consequences, which, however, do not go beyond the content of Revelation.

What do Chinese philosophers understand by the 'world'? An illustrious historian of Chinese philosophical thought, Fung Yu-lan answers this question as follows:

What the philosophers call the universe is *the totality of all that is*. It is equivalent to what the ancient Chinese philosopher, Hui Shih, called 'The Great One', which is defined as 'that which has nothing beyond'. So everyone and everything must be considered part of the universe. (Fung 1976: 2)

Let us consider the basic logical consequences of these definitions. We have here two important characteristic features of the category of 'world.'

First of all, the world is all that there is. However, the emphasis here is placed not upon the world's existence itself, on its source or its perfection, but on the fact that regardless of how it exists – whether of itself or due to some other cause, whether in a perfect manner or full of imperfection – the world and the things in it constitute a *whole*.

In Chinese mythology there are no original Chinese myths about the creation of the world. Mieczysław J. Künstler – one of the most important Polish experts on the topic – notes that

basically all that we can do is to say that there are myths that refer to the earliest times and we can try to find a precise connection between these myths and human memory that reaches back to the Neolithic period. In these myths [...] two cycles of stories can be distinguished: those which taught people how to live in the world and those that saved the world from catastrophe. [...] What is missing in these myths? Above all there is no story about the origin of man and no legend about the origin of families or peoples. There are also no myths containing reminiscences of migrations and no cosmogonic myths. The only cosmogonic myth, which we know about from a certain short textual fragment, is the myth about Pang, who was born inside a great egg, grew within it, until he broke it in a way that caused its heavier parts began to fall downwards and its lighter parts began to float upwards, thus originating the heavens and the earth. The antiquity of this myth, however, is very dubious. (Künstler 1994: 10)

And here Professor Künstler ends his exposition with the following conclusion:

the absence of myths about the origin of man is difficult to explain. One can only make the general claim that issues concerning the origin of man and the Cosmos did not interest people in those times. This is very interesting and worth bearing in mind. (Künstler 1994:10)

Many Western scholars have called attention to this fact and underlined its peculiarity. At the beginnings of Chinese civilization we find images of wise men of the past. Their activity in the mythical period gave the world its structure. In a text from the third century, when the first reference to Pang appeared, we read:

The heavens and the earth were in a state of chaos, similar to the chicken egg from which Pang was born. After eighteen thousand years the heavens and the earth separated from one another. The heavens became bright and clear, the earth became dark and obscure. Pang was in the middle and was transformed nine times a day. He became a spirit in the heavens and a holy sage on the earth. (Künstler 2001: 57)

What is also striking in this legend is the fact that not only the 'coming to be' of the heavens and the earth is connected with the activity of the sage Pang, but also his earlier overcoming of the primitive darkness of the chaos. Wanting to escape the egg of the primitive chaos, he struck the darkness with his axe, the egg cracked and there appeared light, and the heavens and the earth separated from one another even more. The myth itself is late, but it agrees with the image found in the *Book of Changes* and in commentaries to it.

Since the *Book of Changes* places emphasis on the world as a whole beyond which there is nothing (see point 4), then from a logical point of view the sources of light can be either in it or outside of it. Both of these possibilities appear in various contexts of Chinese philosophy. In the first case we have a vision of the world which, as a cosmic egg, matures and 'grows' by itself, and in this way achieves its present form. In the second case there is nothing beyond the world as the entirety of that which is, but this 'nothing' is understood as a completion of that which is. Something and nothing, being and nonbeing constitute a pair of contraries, that is, they continually accompany one another and one continually constitutes the source of being for the other. Since they are treated as a pair of contraries, the relation between them is always mutual. In both cases there is no reference to anything transcendent, as in the Christian image of the world, where the sources of the light are in the eternal presence of God, who transcends the existence of the world.

The mythical image of the 'separation of heaven and earth' in the *Book of Changes* has the philosophical form of naming (*wei* 谓). In the *Great Commentary* the symbol *wei* 谓 appears in all fragments that refer to cosmogonic issues. The appearance of distinctions, both the most primitive,

such as that between brightness and obscurity, as well those that are more important for defining a civilization and its cultural circle, is expressed by the following formula: 'the wise men discovered and named.' Nobody is interested in the source of the existence of these things; instead, everyone is interested in the 'naming.' It is as if precisely this moment determined the *form* (*xing* 形) of every concrete, individual entity. Anything that has come to be through a continuous process of change manifests itself as what it is for the first time, that is, is distinguished by its form from the undifferentiated whole of the world, once a sage calls (*wei* 谓) it by name (*ming* 名).

It is clear that formally, i.e. as regards structure, what in the Christian image of the world is seen as the creation of the world as a whole and of its particular elements by God is seen here as naming, which differentiates the undifferentiated whole of the world and distinguishes what is named from that whole. Therefore, it is seen primarily as a civilizational process. In the Christian image we find an ontological view of the creation of things which only later, once they already exist, are named by Adam. In Sacred Scripture there is an image of God who in Paradise presents the various creatures to Adam, the first human being created by him, and has him give each of them its own name.

In the *Book of Changes*, however, instead of an ontological vision we find a semiotic model, and in particular a pragmatic one, because it refers not to creation and existence, but to names and naming (*ming* 名, *wei* 谓), and hence it refers to a socially defined convention for distinguishing certain things, events, and situations whose useful function in culture, tradition, and language is deemed worthy of being repeated and fixed. The ontological relation of creating the world and all of its elements' corresponds to the pragmatic relation between a sign and its user. The creation of the elements of the world, in turn, corresponds to the vision of establishing stable cultural models that can be used by people in their everyday lives, cultural models created by people (sages) for people – models which in this way become part of the uniform whole of the world, which thus differentiates itself, and this whole is what is referred to by the term 'largest.'

The whole that is the world is the largest (*zhi da* 至大) logically possible whole, that is, something beyond which there cannot be anything else (*wu wai* 无外). This is how it is defined in the writings of the ancient logical school. According to Feng Youlan, a very good expression of what is meant by 'largest' and 'smallest' may be found in the logical writings of Hui Shi 惠施 (approx. 370–310 B.C.), one of the founders of the an-

cient School of Names (*Mingjia* 名家). The Taoist Zhuangzi 庄子 (approx. 369–286 B.C.) cites him when he writes that, considering the essence of things, Hui Shi 惠施 said:

The largest magnitude beyond which there is nothing I call the great one. The smallest magnitude inside of which nothing is to be found I call the small one. (*Zhida wuwei, wei zhi dayi. Zhixiao wuwei, wei zhi xiaoyi.* 至大无外, 谓之大一; 至小无内, 谓之小一.) (Czuang Tsu 1953: 340)

Let us note that we find here another important difference between the Chinese and the Christian image of the world. In Christianity not only is the term ‘greatest’ not used with reference to the universe, but as ‘created’ it is defined in reference to what is beyond it – to the existence of God, who transcends everything. At the beginning of Chinese culture, however, we find an image of the universe as the ‘largest unit,’ as ‘heaven, earth, and ten thousand things’ (*tian di wan wu* 天地万物), that is everything. The existence of everything supplements the nonexistence of nothing outside of this greatest whole.

However, let us return once again to the naming that is the source of diversity within the world as this greatest whole. In order to reconstruct the understanding of the contents of the *Book of Changes*, which is so important for Chinese civilization, let us turn to the classical Confucian commentaries called the *Ten Wings* (*Shiyi* 十翼), since it is important to determine the intellectual context that characterizes precisely this cultural circle. Of course, we could examine the contents of this classical book from a more general perspective and try to find in it a merely formal scheme of reasoning carried out in a completely different conceptual system. However, we are particularly interested in the concrete interpretation that will give us the fundamental model underlying the reasoning that guided the activities of the *wenren* (文人), that is, the circle of educated persons in China from antiquity through modern times.

From this perspective we see that the first distinctions were made by sages, who were also the authors of the *Book of Changes* itself. They distinguished heaven and earth as what is above and below and defined them, respectively, as *Qian* and *Kun* (天尊地卑, 乾坤定矣. 1/1.1) *Qian* 乾 and *Kun* 坤 became the names of the first two of the eight trigrams (*bagua* 八卦) of the *Book of Changes*. Etymologically, the sign 乾 refers to the image of morning fog hovering close to the earth and beginning to lift. In a moment, a new day will begin, the sun will rise, and its rays will embrace everything with their benevolent influence. The sign 坤, in turn, is an im-

age of the earth, which receives a grain. Everything springs from the earth bathed by the heat of the sun.

In the *Great Commentary* these images there have been supplemented by additional images that expand the field of associations called to mind by this basic pair of names in the *Book of Changes*, heaven (*Qian* 乾) and earth (*Kun* 坤). During all the centuries in which a culture of educated people (*wenren* 文人) existed in China, these associations were not only known by everyone, but were considered to be obvious. Let us, therefore, examine some of them. The ancient authors of the commentaries presented *Qian* 乾 as the way to fullness proper to what is masculine, and *Kun* 坤 as the way along which maturity is achieved by what is feminine (乾道成男, 坤道成女 1/I.4).

The first was associated with the knowledge of great beginnings and with ease in directing one's own activities insofar as that knowledge permitted; the second was associated with the attainment of fullness by things and matters which were once begun and with the simplicity by which such fullness is attained (乾知大始, 坤作成物 1/I.5 乾以易知, 坤以簡能 1/I.6). The sages associated the former with symbolic images (*xiang* 象) and the latter with forms (*xing* 形). Let us consider this distinction in more detail.

The sages gave the name 'image' (*xiang* 象) to whatever appears as a visible sign (of something which should be connected with it by virtue of convention and the tradition that reinforces the convention). They gave the name 'instrument' (*qi* 器), that is, something that has a fixed used (*yong* 用), to whatever already has a given form (*xing* 形). They gave the name 'rule' (*fa* 法) to the activity itself of fixing a definite use (見乃謂之象; 形乃謂之器; 制而用之, 謂之法 1/XI.4).

In order to make it easier for readers to understand the vision of the unity of heaven and earth, the authors of the commentaries to the *Book of Changes* used the following image: 'They called the closing of a door *Qian* and its opening *Kun*. Opening and closing once they called change. Opening and closing back and forth forever they called passing.' (闔戶謂之坤; 闢戶謂之乾; 一闔一闢謂之變; 往來不窮謂之通. 1/XI.4) One member of the pair can be understood only in reference to the other. We are dealing here with an ancient image that was intended to make it easier to understand the concept of contraries or pairs of contraries (*liangyi* 兩儀) found in the subsequent passage of the text:

Therefore [the *Book of Changes*] contains the Great Beginning/End (*taiji* 太極), which gives birth to the Pair of Contraries (*liangyi* 兩儀), which in turn gives birth

to the Four Images (*sixiang* 四象), and they give birth to the Eight Trigrams (*bagua* 八卦). The Eight Trigrams help define what is useful and what is not useful (*jixiong* 吉凶), and this gives birth to the great field of activity (1./XI.5–6).

The ancient Chinese diagram that presents the contraries is the figure of a continuous and an interrupted line ---/ - -. These will later receive the names of *yang* 阳 and *yin* 阴, respectively. At this point in our investigation of the basic senses connected with the category of 'world' by the creators of Chinese civilization we encounter the following important feature. The 'world,' that is, the whole beyond which there is nothing, is differentiated. Through the activity of naming, various parts are distinguished in it. It turns out that everything that is a part of the world in this way has a complement somewhere. Nothing is without a pair. This may be found in the fragment already cited by us above: 'Therefore [the *Book of Changes*] contains the Great Beginning/End (*taiji* 太极), which gives birth to the Pair of Contraries (*liangyi* 两仪).'

The beginning and end of every distinction in the *Book of Changes* is a definition of something precisely as such, having a definite name and hence its own form, that is, a culturally established used. However, the attempt to understand the meaning of such a name will never have the character of a search for an essence or *eidōs*. Why? Because the authors of the *Book of Changes* assumed that names appear in pairs, which have a complementary character rather than exclusive one.

Let us consider this a bit more closely, since a correct interpretation of the intention behind this will allow us to understand correctly the context within which the statements of Chinese thinkers take on sense. In trying to understand the meaning of words expressed in the context of the image of the world assumed in Christianity, we unreflectively assume that names appear in pairs of contradictory concepts, and hence that they have an exclusive character (following the thought of Parmenides and the Platonic-Aristotelian interpretation of Revelation formulated by St. Augustine and St. Thomas). An example of such an important term is the category of 'being.' What does this term mean? It means 'everything that exists.' We do not need to refer to the concept of 'nonbeing' to understand what 'being' means. And what about 'nonbeing'? It means 'everything that does not exist.' And again, here too we understand its meaning without reference to the other member of the pair. This is because the pair of categories 'being' and 'nonbeing' is a pair of contradictories, not contraries. Their meanings exclude rather than complement one another. Something

either exists or it does not exist. According to the principle of the excluded middle we cannot say of anything that it both exists and does not exist without falling into contradiction. Either one or the other is true.

However, in the case of the *yin/yang* pair the situation is completely different. If we try to establish what the term 'continuous line' means without referring to the other member of the pair, the term 'discontinuous line,' we will see that it is impossible to understand the meaning of 'continuity' without reference to 'discontinuity.' Another example taken from the *Book of Changes* is 'opening/closing' a door. One can open only what earlier was closed, just as it is not possible to close what was not earlier opened. Closing constantly passes into opening, and opening into closing. Their meanings complement one another. It is not possible to understand the meaning of only one member of the pair, as was the case with the terms 'being' and 'nonbeing.' Either we understand both members, opening and closing, or we cannot understand either of them, for they constitute a pair of contraries. That is, according to the laws of logic their senses complement, but do not exclude, one another. We can see this in the numerous examples of pairs of contraries found in the *Book of Changes*: continuous/discontinuous, heaven/earth, light/dark, masculine/feminine, movement/rest, influence/reception of influence (activity/passivity), what is above/what is below, day/night, etc.

Moreover, when the *Book of Changes* refers to the motion of contraries, when one member of a pair constantly passes into and replaces the other (closing a door passes into opening it, and vice versa) we give priority to the concrete semantic contexts of the relation rather than of the things. Let us consider the following interesting situation. Etymologically, the *yang* 阳 symbol refers to a situation in which the sun shines on one slope of a mountain, while the *yin* 阴 symbol refers to the complementary situation, in which the other slope is at the same time in darkness. However, in its apparent journey through the firmament, after a certain time the sun illuminates the slope that was earlier in darkness and at the same time the slope that was earlier illuminated begins to be enveloped in darkness. 'illuminated slope,' but rather two relations: 'darkening' and 'illumination.'

These relations constitute a certain bipolar whole, in which each pole can be properly understood only when the meaning that complements it is known. Between these poles there exists a constant, unavoidable tension, which causes the motion of change-passing (*bian* 变) of one member of the pair of contraries into the other. However, let us note that in this case, logically speaking, the issue of whether my knowledge is one-sided

or whether it embraces the whole truth (by taking a stance in the middle and always having in view both complementary concepts) is much more important than the issue of truth or falsity. In the image of the world presupposed in the *Book of Changes*, the issue of truth and falsity is not treated as an important relation at all. Why?

In order to be able to doubt whether what we know or have in mind corresponds to reality (the classical Aristotelian definition of truth is *adequatio rei et intellectus*, correspondence between a thing and our representation of it in the mind) we must assume that things existed first (created by God) and that later man, standing before them, began to name them (as Adam did for the first time in paradise). And thus we must assume the existence of a reality prior to language, prior to concepts, that exists before we think about it.

In the case of the *Book of Changes* its authors were of course aware of the fact that something like this is logically admissible and later philosophers will study this possibility. However, assuming the 'existence' of such a reality, they understood that it could not consist of things, relations, or anything definite, because each such term refers to a linguistic reality. Therefore, it cannot indicate anything beyond linguistic reality. Such a conviction was very strongly emphasized by Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist thinkers. All of them philosophized in the 'intellectual context' marked out by the semiotic, not the ontological, character of reality. As we have already said, in the *Book of Changes* the existence of something precisely as such, named and distinguished in a definite way (*wei* 謂) is considered not in the context of the creation of things by God, but only in reference to a culturally valid and stable way of distinguishing between the definite and the indefinite that has its source in the history of a culture (and hence also of a language). Thus, the problem of the true representation to oneself in the mind of something that exists before the creators of a civilization become aware of it would necessarily be an attempt to think about something indefinite. Logically there cannot be any object of consciousness, and in particular there can be no problem of the adequacy (truth) of an image of something in the mind, because what is indefinite simply cannot be understood as 'something.'

Therefore, the problem of *adequatio rei et intellectus* cannot be philosophically fundamental, but can only be of practical importance for the circumstances of everyday life: 'Am I correct in thinking that the soup standing on the table is my favorite tomato soup?' All definitions have the conventional character of 'naming,' that is, of distinguishing a given form as precisely such and what is important, or more properly, what is most

important is the accompanying issue of the greater of lesser utility of such a distinction for human life.

This also includes the logical conclusion of defining the world as that 'beyond which there is nothing,' that is, defining it as the 'greatest whole.' All Chinese thinkers philosophize with the awareness that it is somewhat paradoxical to try to go outside the world of human cognitive activity. Hence those who are attracted by such a possibility, such as Taoists and Buddhists, create a philosophy of paradoxes, while others, such as Confucians, believe that knowing the world from the point of view of a participant in the world is the best solution to epistemological problems.

The next important issue is the problem of change and stability. In the *Book of Changes* it is assumed that the only thing that does not change is the constant changeability of everything that is part of the whole of the world. The world consists of contraries which constantly pass into one another: the illuminated into the obscure, life into death, acting (heaven, *qian* 乾) into being acted upon (earth, *kun* 坤), etc. This is one aspect of what change is. It is the ceaseless movement of contraries within a bipolar whole constituted by each pair of contraries.

In the *Book of Changes* we encounter still another important aspect of the changeability of the world as a whole and of each of its concrete parts. This intellectual context refers us to the concept of 'change' rendered by the sign *yi* 易 that appears in the title of the book.

When 'closing' passes into 'opening' we have a specific kind of change (*bian* 变), namely the passing (*tong* 通) of one member of a pair of contraries into the other. However, it is also possible to have a change in which something undergoes a process of maturation in which there is first an initial form (a seed in the case of a plant – for example, an acorn), then a young form (a seedling), next an adult form (a plant that produces fruit and seeds), and finally a fully mature form (an old, majestic oak). Such a change is signified by the term *yi* 易 and here our attention is directed not to the bipolar whole, but to the cycle of changes that characterize life in all of its manifestations. When we look at something living (*qi* 气) we are aware of the maturation and of the possibility of identifying the developmental phases of a given cycle. The majority of living beings in the world are not born fully formed. On the contrary, they need a more or less lengthy period of time in order to develop the possibilities that potentially inhere in the seed. Time, measured by the passage of the organism through subsequent phases of development, is required to bring to completion what was initiated at the moment of fertilization. Not only

time, but also luck is required, because in this process of attaining fullness maturity is merely possible, not necessary.

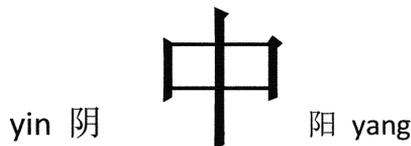
It is interesting that precisely this process of attaining fullness, characteristic of living beings, became the archetypical image used in Chinese civilization to understand every particular part of the whole of the world. Thus, the intellectual curiosity of its thinkers will always be focused on seeking answers to questions about these two kinds of change, *tong* 通 and *yi* 易.

The above scheme can obviously be used to try to understand those things which in Chinese culture are take to be living beings (*qi* 气), such as concrete plants (an oak) or animals (a lizard). Yet it can also be applied to other realities, such as the elements (wind, rain), political entities (a principality), virtues (prudence, courage), or finally man himself. In all of these cases Chinese thinkers will seek answers to the same two questions:

1. What sense complements the sense of what I am studying? (a *tong* 通 type of change)
2. What is the developmental cycle that is characteristic of what I am studying? This is a question not only about the characteristic developmental phases, but also about the source of the process of change (where it is rooted) and its characteristic fullness, maturity, or perfection. (*yi* 易 type of change)

If we were to try to present these two questions in the form of a diagram, they could take on the following form. The first part of diagram presents a bipolar (-, --) whole consisting of a pair of opposites, and the motion of change is indicated by a vector. The second part of diagram presents a bipolar whole, together with a graphic symbol that depicts the source of the process of change and the fullness toward which the process leads.

perfection, fullnes



beginning, source, 'roots'

Let us note how different the above is from the western way of seeking the identity of something. Since the times of the ancient Greeks, since the philosophy of Plato, everyone (and Christianity has not changed anything in this respect) when we ask about the identity of anything we are always asking about the essence or *eidos* of some individual thing. In asking what something is we seek something that is unchangeable, eternal, one. We seek an eidetic definition. Chinese thinkers are interested in change itself. That is why they ask about the cycle of change. What is of interest to us in this same cognitive context is the stable substrate of change – what is unchangeable in change – because this is what is most important to us. Chinese thinkers are interested in the uninterrupted persistence of constantly changing individual beings.

Yet there is one more feature of thinking about changeability that is characteristic of the authors of the *Book of Changes*. Etymologically, the sign *yi* 易 signifies a lizard, and not just any lizard, but a chameleon, which adapts the color of its skin to that of its immediate surroundings. How does this metaphor apply to the image of the world presented in the *Book of Changes*? The pair of opposites concepts ‘above’ and ‘below’ (*shang/xia* 上/下) are used to introduce a vision of cosmic hierarchy, in which subsequent levels are defined with respect to one another in the following manner. Each part of the whole of the world occupies a definite place in the hierarchy of cosmic levels. As definite, that is, as named and distinguished from the whole, it is on the one hand a part of the level above it and on the other hand it is itself a whole that consists of parts on the level below it. Furthermore, this is the case on every level. In order to be oneself it is necessary, like a chameleon, to have knowledge about one’s immediate surroundings. One must be able to answer the following question: What is the whole of which I am a part (*shang* 上 ‘above’) and what parts do I, as a whole, consist of (*xia* 下 ‘below’)?

Let us try to illustrate this by means of an example. We will use a contemporary example taken from western science, because it is intended to be illustrative to someone other than the reader assumed by the ancient authors of the *Book of Changes*. In contemporary western science, when we describe the human body, for example, we make use of a hierarchic system. The following functional levels can be distinguished in any human body. The cells of the body occupy a concrete place on the level of the tissues (‘above’). Their construction (‘below’) and functions are specified depending on the tissue that they are parts of. Thus, for example, the cells that constitute muscle tissue differ in structure, development, and

in the way in which they mature and attain fullness from the cells that constitute nerve tissue. If concrete cells, which themselves are wholes of a higher order in relation to the organelles out of which they are made, 'know their place' in the hierarchy of the organism and realize their development, that is, if they mature in accord with their immediate surroundings, adapting to them through harmonious and mutually interconnected changes, the result is the healthy development of the whole organism. If, however, as happens in the case of cells whose course of development is cancerous, growth takes place without reference to their environment, as if they 'did not know their place in the hierarchy,' then the result of such development in detachment from the immediate surroundings is the illness of the whole organism.

All of the formal features of such a hierarchical structure may be found in the image of the world contained in the *Book of Changes*. The hierarchical character of reality is seen here as a network of systems of mutual connections, in which concrete parts combine into structures of a higher order and are in turn also described as wholes that consist of structures of a lower order. Two general part-whole relations will be important and within a particular whole it will be a relation between a given part and other parts. These two relations are local in the literal sense of the term. The pair of concepts 'above' and 'below' is precisely what constitutes the locality of these mutual relations.

Let us note that the image that emerges in our first attempts to develop the most basic description of anything is not that of a hierarchy in the form of a pyramid or a ladder of beings. The authors of the *Book of Changes* do not focus only on identifying subsequent levels of perfection, as happens in the Christian image, but they specify a general dependence: whatever we distinguish as something and as definite becomes itself once we properly identify the appropriate 'above' and 'below' (in the later terminology of the philosophical schools this will be specified by the pair of concepts *shang/xia* 上/下) occupied by it in the reality of the cosmic whole.

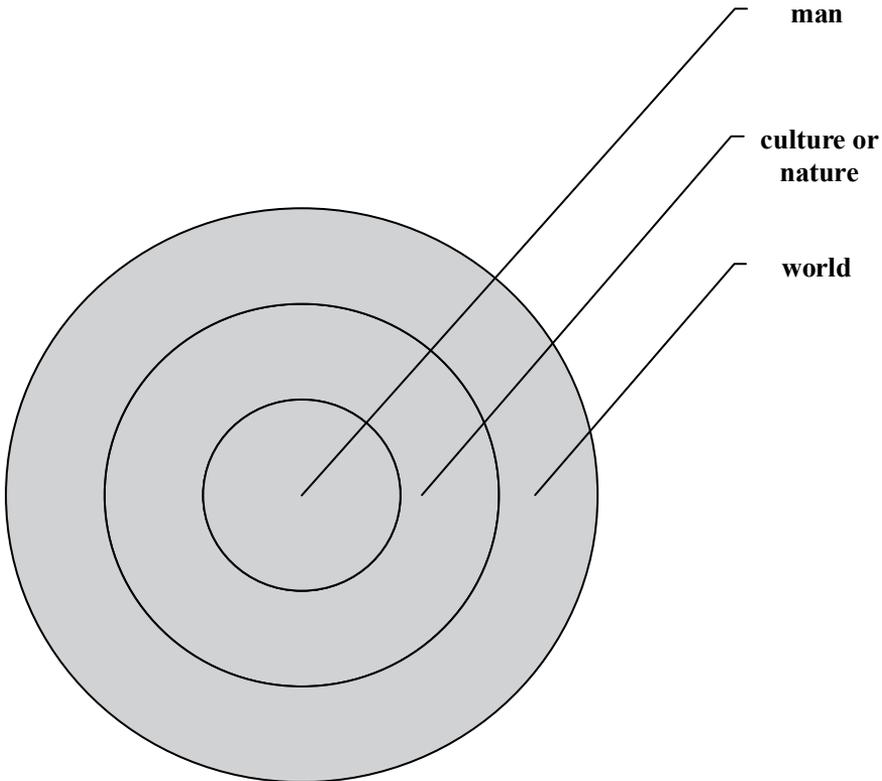
In the thought of Chinese philosophers the following two questions are the formal counterpart of the most important question of western philosophy, namely, the question about the essence of what I wish to know:

1. Is what I wish to know a part of some whole?
2. What are its parts when it is taken as a whole?

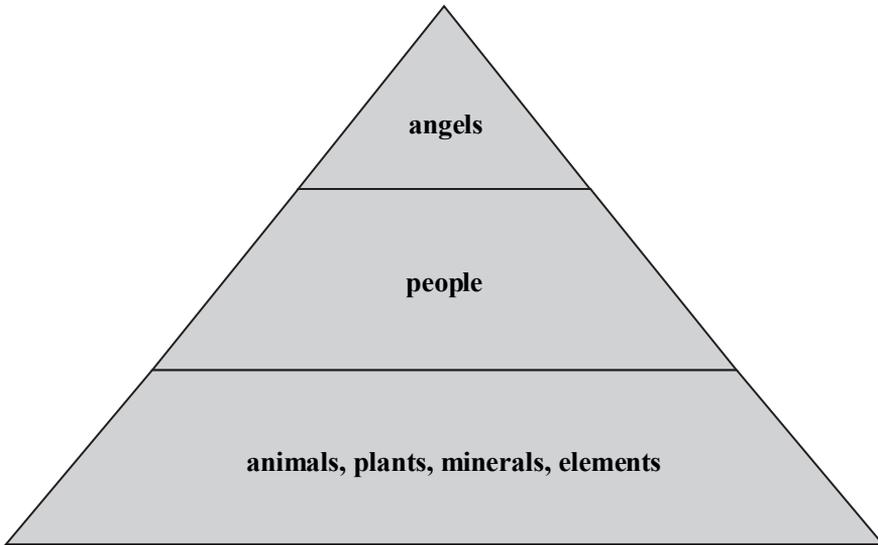
The answer to these two questions constitutes and directs the activity that determines the reality of the local network of connections, the reality

of the system of systems, the reality of the 'dwelt-in dweller,' as the poet Wisława Szymborska once very suggestively described this kind of hierarchy in one of her poems.

The following diagrams illustrate these dependencies. The first illustrates the Chinese image; it is a diagram representing the parts and the whole. It is a system of concentric circles, in which the smallest circle corresponds to the level of a concrete particular element of a given whole, and subsequent circles represent the relation of parts that are contained by the immediately higher wholes of which the lower circle is a part.



The second diagram illustrates the Christian image. It presents a hierarchy in the form of a 'pyramid of beings,' a pyramid of perfection in being:



I hope that this brief description of the proper domain for Chinese philosophy allow us more easily interpret classical Chinese books in search of the particular vision of reality, and the form of expression.

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