

二十

I'd had my first taste
but I yearned to see more
Taiwan and Hong Kong were
too far from the core
sacred mountains awaited
great cities and art
next time I'd try harder
to get to the heart



Chapter 20 – I-Ching Metaphor

It was the end of the summer of 1970. A good friend had written me a letter saying that she was going to have to beg out of our open ended and barely planned adventure to hitchhike to Mexico and live there in the Fall. She had thrown the coins and the I Ching had responded. Like many college students in the '60's, I had also read the I Ching and somehow her choice made perfect sense to me. That was cool! The Vietnam War draft lottery had taken place on December 1, 1969 and my number was 256. I went back to the University of Montana and enrolled in the U of M's first ever Chinese Language class.

The earliest of China's "classics" and the source for much of what is observed and practiced in many Chinese temples today is the I Ching, (易經 Yì Jīng) aka The Book of Changes. Much of the I Ching dates to the beginning of the Zhou Dynasty (1000 BCE) and parts may predate the Zhou by hundreds of years. It is a book of cosmology and divination. The most basic of the building blocks of the I Ching are the two lines. They are the solid line (—) representing the yang (陽 yáng) and the broken line (---) representing the yin (陰 yīn). The yin is represented by the dark and the feminine. Other attributes and characteristics of yin include earth, receptive, water, and the negative. The yang is represented by the light and the masculine. Other attributes and characteristics of yang include sky, active, fire, and the positive. An interesting observation is that there is a bit of yin in all of yang and a bit of yang in every yin. There are only 8 possible ways that these two lines can be put together in groups of three, and those eight trigrams often appear in a symbol called the Ba Gua (八卦 bā guà) or the 8 Trigrams.




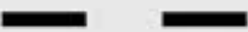
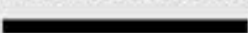
The 8 trigrams in the Ba Gua surround the symbol for Yin and Yang. Each of the trigrams have a name representing 8 forces of nature. These are Heaven or sky (creativity), lake or marsh, fire, mountain, thunder, wind, water, and earth (receptivity.)

Some people believe that the 64 hexagrams of the I Ching were created by Fúxī (伏羲), a legendary emperor who is said to have lived for nearly over 100 years from 2850 BCE to 2737 BCE.

By combining two sets from these 8 trigrams, there are 64 possible hexagrams. Each of these hexagrams has a number and a name. Each hexagram also has a description. After that description, each of the lines has an explanation.

The text of the 64 trigrams is said to have been composed by King Wen (文王 Wénwáng) in the 11th century BCE. The verses were then interpreted by priests and scholars capable of understanding the text. Although most Chinese have heard of the I Ching, the vast majority have never read it.

I thought of the I Ching on my plane ride back to America in 1975. My knowledge and understanding of the I Ching was similar to my understanding of China. It was like recognizing the individual pieces on a chess board and having a basic understanding of how each piece is moved, but having very little experience at actually playing the game. I thought about the frog at the bottom of the well (井底之蛙 jǐng dǐ zhī wā) and how I had changed the direction of my life from to living in Mexico to living in China as the result of the throw of some coins and an interpretation of words written in an ancient Chinese book called the I Ching. I recognized that there was a world called “China” outside of my “American well” and I yearned to know more.

COIN COMBOS	NUMBER	LINE
3 Heads	9	
2 Heads, 1 Tail	8	
1 Head, 2 Tails	7	
3 Tails	6	