

易經 Yìjīng (Classic of Changes) / I Ching / Yi King / 周易 Zhōu Yì / Book of Changes / Book of Mutations

Notes mainly taken from: La symbolique chinoise, Jean Marolleau (1978)

First and foremost, the principles associated with Chinese symbolism emerged out of the diligent observation of nature, astronomy, agriculture, and society, with statistics and experimentations made possible and relevant due to the sheer size and variety of the population and the need to maintain social balance and order. They were intended for practical use, and so were in essence utilitarian – rather than the basis of developed myths and story-telling as in for example the Greek mythology or the Bible. As a corollary, this utilitarian drive helps explain China's technological advance in ancient times.

Building on the archetypes of the ambivalent couple (Yin and Yang), order, and rhythm, the **Yijing** evolved into a coherent framework which gradually became a cornerstone of Chinese thought.

Zhou Yi (Changes of the Zhou), the core text of the Yijing, was originally a divination manual, originating from the Western Zhou period (1000–750 BC).

Over the course of the Warring States and early imperial periods (500–200 BC), a series of philosophical commentaries known as zhuan (傳) and referred to as the **Ten Wings** (Shí Yì 十翼) were formulated in order to interpret the meaning of the Zhou Yi, which resulted in a profound philosophical work that explores the dynamic balance of the universe, human ethics, and the principles of change (yì 易).

The oracular component of the Yijing, sometimes crudely assumed to be about predicting the future, merely consists of assessing the current energy balance and dynamics/changes of the consulting individual. It does so by expressing the ambivalence of the present state and choices, in light of the fact that past, present and future are interlinked. Its goal is to act on the psyche and the behaviour; as a prescriptive tool, it expresses a potential that may or may not be actualised depending on the subject's will. As a therapeutic tool, it influences the psychosomatic state so as to uplift mental well-being.

Since divinatory interpretations were initially performed and transmitted orally without the written texts formalising the techniques, there is no absolute consensus.

Similarly, acupuncture (whose remedial effects have been scientifically evidenced for certain conditions) focuses on the dynamic energy balance in the body (vs. psyche for Yijing).

Philosophical Depth

Beyond its use in divination, the Yijing developed an ontology with both monist and differential characteristics, insofar as all entities are viewed as derived from differentiated forms of qì 气/氣, the energy-substance.

Revolving around the concept of perpetual transformation (bian 變), it conveys that harmony arises from adapting to life's cyclical shifts.

Its concepts and principles deeply influenced Confucianism, which composed ethical commentaries like the Ten Wings, and Taoism/Daoism, which embraced its emphasis on aligning with nature's flow.

While Taoism serves as an internal spiritual compass for being and finding inner peace, the I Ching acts as an external strategist for acting and making decisions.

In turn, when Buddhism developed into Chan in China and later Zen in Japan, it absorbed Taoist concepts like wu wei (non-action / effortless action) and naturalness.

In Tibetan and Vajrayana Buddhism, the Yin and Yang symbol appears artistically to represent the non-dual union of wisdom and compassionate action.

Yin and Yang, as well as the Yijing, also inspired various mystical / esoteric traditions drawing on the occult.

Overall, a philosophical syncretism occurred in East Asia as Buddhist scholars used the Yin and Yang framework, which aligns with their understanding of cyclicity and impermanence, to explain concepts like emptiness or the idea that extremes transform into one another.

Principles

Yin and Yang govern the space-time architecture of the universe, which is the realm of rhythms.

We can only perceive the “earthy” manifestations of a “heavenly” intelligence.

As the Book of Changes, the Yijing concerns itself with differences and their corollaries, mutations. Causality, knowledge ultimately do not matter; know-how does. Emphasis is placed on observing contrasts and variations of shape, later classified and ordered by means of the Yin and Yang symbols.

Yin and Yang are not the fruits of rationality, or science, but a knowledge-diluting wisdom. They represent the cause of all causes, the transcending simplicity: the difference. As such, the Yin and Yang couple represents the essential material of all architectures – the potential – as well as the engine of all actualised changes (tropisms, attraction, etc.); it is the basis of the existence and evolution of all things.

Information is generated by a stimulus, underpinned by a difference of some sort. Between stimulus and reaction, an energy transfer occurs, characterised by a relationship between Yin and Yang.

Information is encoded in binary (Yin and Yang), using bichromism (two colours, black and white) or broken and continuous lines, and transducible into bigrams, trigrams and hexagrams (having a senary structure, with 6 base-2 elements), which represent the form. The polygramic symbolism, through its complete catalogue, exposes the canonical forms of concrete manifestations of the difference.

The world at every scale is interpreted by means of the form or shape, which is all-encompassing, and does not care for either numerics or discourse. The form dissolves dualisms by substituting an essence to the variety of existentials.

Yin and Yang are considered in terms of bipolarised energy waves subject to undulatory motion, in a holistic universe where everything is intertwined (in contrast with the reductionist approach and atomic conception of ancient Greece and earlier Mediterranean West) and their interference visibly manifests as corpuscles.

Each and every phenomenon can be interpreted as a composition of cyclical phenomena – no matter whether the phenomenon in question is reversible or not, local or general.

Thoughts about Yin and Yang have been influenced by sexual considerations (genders, social order, drive, impulse, rhythm, dialectical metonymy, etc.).

The concept of ambivalence permeates Yin and Yang, which entails the core principles of interdependence, mutual containment, and dynamic transformation – illustrated in the famous Taijitu / T'ai Ki symbol.

There is a strict dependency of all the parts to the harmony of the whole. Zhuangzi 莊子 famously declared: “take a leaf off a tree, and the whole universe will be affected” .

The apparent disorder might be governed by an invisible order; randomness may obey hidden determinisms.

Everything has a centre, a void, where infinite potentialities are concentrated. 0 and infinite are undistinguishable. The void cannot be described as it excludes any differentiation, and so any knowledge. Its

vacuity represents an undifferentiated state that exists before the emergence of the Yin and Yang duality, where everything starts and ends to re-start again.

Zhuangzi 莊子 distinguishes between small knowledge (xiao zhi) and great knowledge (da zhi). The former is limited, rigid, and relies on artificial distinctions; the latter transcends fixed perspectives to embrace the fluid spontaneity of the Dao. Small intelligence differentiates; great intelligence encompasses.

An inner state of vacuity/void can be achieved through meditative silence (not discursive speech nor thought), conducive to a state of grace, to ecstasy. The silence is a way to prevent any arbitrary duality, and also to leave the ambient harmony undisturbed. Rationality, differences get transcended – knowledge gives way to wisdom. In this state of non-feeling and non-action, perspective mutates, the form prevails, and mental vacuity shifts to plentifulness, leading to illumination and effortless action.

Ancient Greece cultivated differences/duality, and knowledge, and searched for purpose/ends (teleology), striving to prevail upon beings and matter through domination and extroversion. Two fundamental, rigid principles of Western logic are identity and non-contradiction.

China transcended differences to focus on the cyclic evolution of things, and strived towards harmony, through adaptation and introversion. It highlights the agility of ambivalence and complementarity.

The Chinese symbolism is comfortable with doubt, and opposes dogmatic tendencies; the radicalism of logic of the West, its pursuit of axiomatic truth, and its partial drive towards theism, is tempered by ambivalent pragmatism, and naturalism.

Life abides by an all-encompassing order, an elementary/fundamental logic. It may be accessible to a human spirit that is in a state of mental vacuity as a native truth, free from any social or cultural constraint, upstream of any cognitive activity – therefore presenting itself as raw data, as forms.

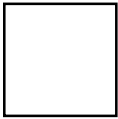
Modern Relevance

The I Ching is studied worldwide not only for spiritual guidance but also for its insights into leadership, psychology, and systems theory. Carl Jung praised its synchronicity principle, and physicists like Niels Bohr drew parallels between its binary logic and quantum theory.

Biophysical and psychological models that contain principles of the Yijing have emerged:

- Universal characteristic/language based on binary numbers; algebra of concepts built on the three conceptual operations of containment, conjunction and negation (Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz) – later inspired Boolean algebra (George Boole)
- Complementarity of mind and matter, monism, in dual-aspect theory (Baruch Spinoza; Wolfgang Pauli and Carl Jung), and neutral monism (Ernst Mach, William James, and Bertrand Russell)
- Continuum of space and time (Hermann Minkowski)
- Equivalence of energy and mass, and relativity (Albert Einstein)
- Complementarity of joint properties (such as a quantum object's position and momentum, or space-time coordination and causality), wave-particle duality (Niels Bohr)
- Uncertainty of position and momentum of a particle (Werner Heisenberg)
- Incompleteness of any consistent formal axiomatic system (Kurt Gödel)
- Synchronicity of events non causally connected (Wolfgang Pauli and Carl Jung)
- Theory of archetypes, the universal patterns of thought of the collective unconscious (Carl Jung)
- Dynamic logic of the contradictory, T-state, theory of three matters (Stéphane Lupasco)
- Differential ontology, which treats difference as the primary, constitutive force of reality (Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Derrida)
- Process unicity in of morphogenesis of natural phenomena, human beings and societies (René Thom)
- Polygrams (their discovery or visual impact): entoptic patterns, phosphenes (Carl Jung, Umit Sayin, Michael Winkelman, etc.) / shape power theory (Dan A. Davidson)
- Conformal Cyclic Cosmology (Roger Penrose)

SYMBOLS

	Yin	Yang
	--	—
	Black	White
	Earth	Heaven, sky
	Space	Time
	Square	Circle
	Even numbers	Odd numbers
	2, 4, 6, 8, 10	1, 3, 5, 7, 9
	Passive, submissive	Active, assertive
	Supportive, empathic	Creative, constructive
	Female	Male

The Zhou Yi is built around 64 symbolic hexagrams (gua 卦), each composed of six lines (yáo 爻) stacked from bottom to top, some broken -- (yin 陰) and others unbroken — (yang 陽).

A hexagram is formed by stacking two trigrams, with the lower trigram representing the internal or initial state and the upper trigram representing the external or resultant state.

A hexagram can also be seen as formed from three of the four bigrams (si xiang) occupying the positions of Heaven, Man, and Earth (the three powers, san cai 三才) when read from top to bottom. Sometimes the san cai are also correlated with constituent trigrams, so Heaven is the third and sixth line, Earth the first and fourth line, Man the second and fifth line.

These hexagrams derive from combinations of eight foundational trigrams (ba gua 八卦), which embody natural forces, human virtues, or cosmic qualities:

- 坤 Kūn (☷): Earth, Receptive, Devoted
- 艮 Gěnn (☶): Mountain, Stillness, Resting
- 坎 Kǎn (☵): Water, Danger, Flowing
- 巽 Xún (☴): Wind, Gentle, Penetrating, Wood
- 震 Zhèn (☳): Thunder, Arousing, Movement
- 離 Lí (☲): Fire, Clinging, Light
- 兌 Duì (☱): Lake, Joyous, Openness
- 乾 Qián (☰): Heaven, Creative, Strong





KING WEN SEQUENCE

The hexagrams of the Yijing can be arranged in an order known as the King Wen sequence (King Wen of Zhou, c. 11th C BCE), also known as the "received" or "classical" sequence because it is the oldest surviving arrangement of the hexagrams.

The 64 hexagrams are grouped into 32 pairs. For 28 of the pairs, the second hexagram is created by turning the first upside down (i.e. 180° rotation). The exception to this rule is for the 8 symmetrical hexagrams that are the same after rotation (1 & 2, 27 & 28, 29 & 30, 61 & 62). Partners for these are given by inverting each line: solid becomes broken and broken becomes solid (indicated with icons in the table).

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

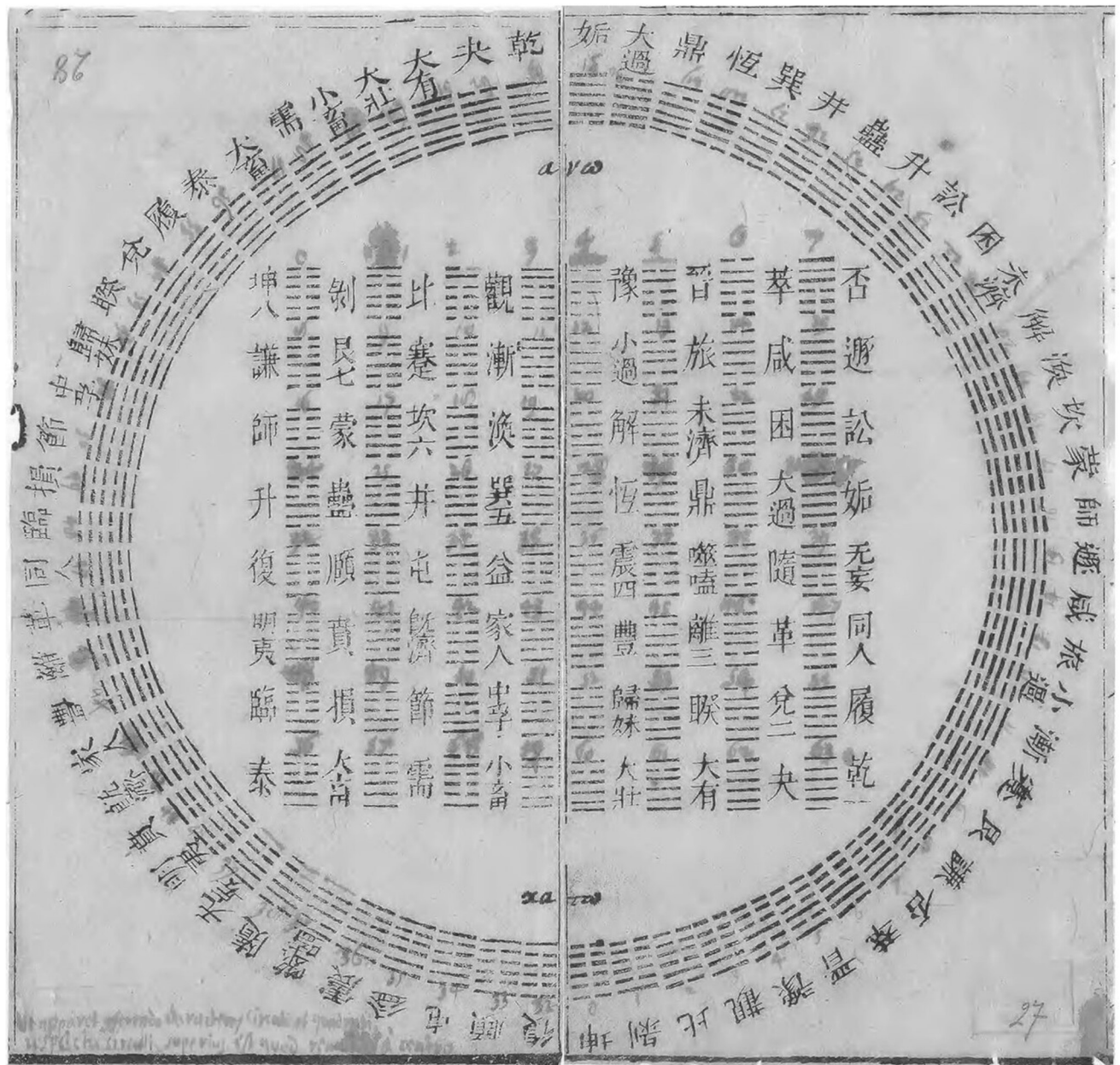
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_Wen_sequence

FU XI (FOU-HI) SEQUENCE

Although attributed to the mythical sage-emperor Fu Xi, this sequence was actually systematized by the Song dynasty cosmologist and philosopher Shao Yong (1011–1077).

This sequence is an arrangement of the 64 hexagrams in both a circle and a square, in strict binary numerical order (relative to the values of their six lines, from bottom to top), ranging from pure yin (Kun, 000000) to pure yang (Qian, 111111) – it is also known as the binary sequence.

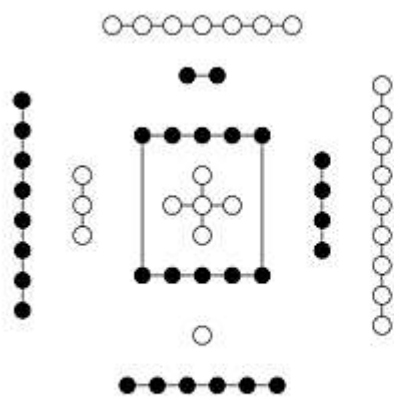
Trigram Pairings: the 64 hexagrams fill an 8x8 grid where the upper trigram determines the column and the lower trigram determines the row, systematically exhausting all trigram combinations.



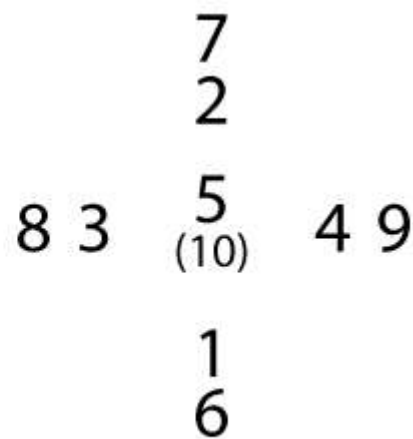
ANCIENT DIAGRAMS

https://baharna.com/iching/articles/river_trigrams.html

The **Hetu** / Ho T'ou, or River Diagram, is supposed to have first appeared as a pattern on the back of a dragon-horse that emerged from the Yellow River and appeared to the ancient sage-king Fu Xi (Fou-Hi). According to legend, Fu Xi was the first king of China and lived ca. 2000 BC.

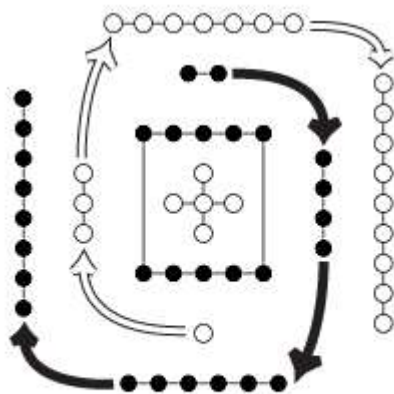


Hetu Map



Hetu Numbers

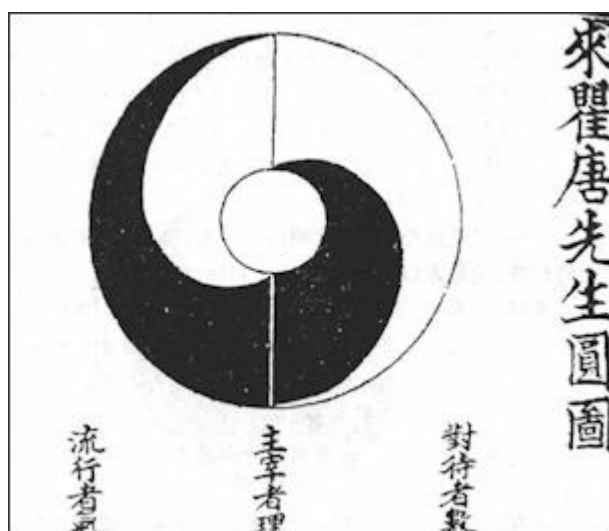
The groups of white dots numbered 1, 3, 7, and 9 form a sort of clockwise spiral, and similarly, the black dots numbered 2, 4, 6, and 8 form a clockwise spiral. These two combined spirals bear some resemblance to the Taijitu (Diagram of the Supreme Polarity) / T'ai Ki, also known as the Yin Yang symbol, though the Taijitu was not invented until Song Dynasty times, by philosopher Zhou Dunyi (1017–1073 AD).



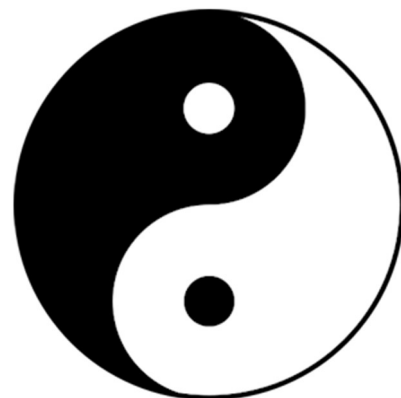
Hetu Spirals

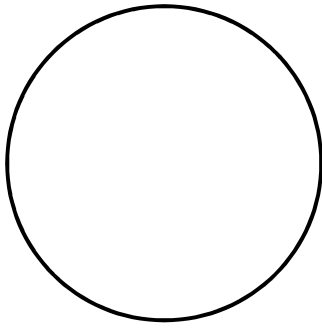


Taijitu



Laishi Taijitu



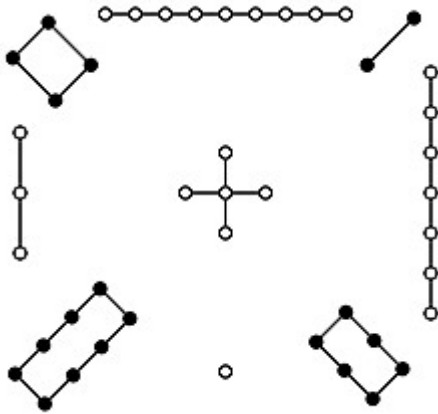


T'ai Ki in its purest vacuity – inexpressible

Fusion of Yin and Yang

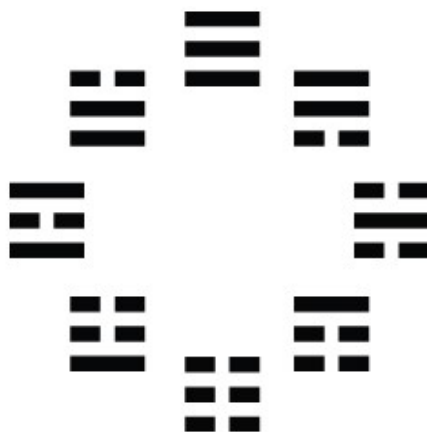
Existence and transformation of the Ten Thousand Things (萬物 wanwu)

Legend ascribes the origin of the **Luoshu** / Lo Chou, or Lo River Writing/Inscription, to a turtle that appeared to the Sage King Yu on the banks of the Lo River.

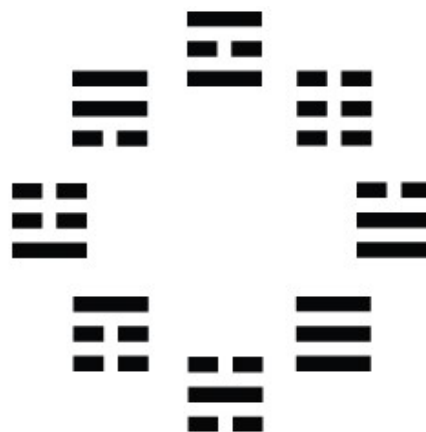


4	9	2
3	5	7
8	1	6

There are two particular cyclic arrangements of the eight trigrams, called the Before Heaven arrangement (Xiantiantu), attributed to Fu Xi (Fou-Hi), and the After Heaven arrangement (Houtiantu), attributed to King Wen:



Before Heaven



After Heaven