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A BRIEF NOTE ON THE TWO-PART DIVISION OF THE RECEIVED ORDER OF THE HEXAGRAMS IN THE *ZHOUYI*

The received order of the hexagrams in the *Zhouyi* is divided into two unequal parts. The first part contains thirty hexagrams and the second contains thirty-four. The purpose of this note is to suggest a simple solution for this asymmetrical division.

The suggested solutions to this unequal division seem to fall into two categories: (1) the hexagrams were originally evenly divided into two parts, but a mistake occurred that resulted in an uneven division, and (2) the uneven division hides a deeper symmetry. Richard Rutt falls into the first category. He states that at the time the sixty-four hexagrams were divided into two parts, the Chinese wrote on bamboo slats that were bound together by cords. He theorizes that the "fraying of the cords might lead to jumbled slats, which could explain . . . the unequal length of the two parts. . . ."[1] Alfred Huang falls into the second category. In a manner too complex to present in detail, he attempts to show that the received order has been structured in terms of yin and yang, the meanings, attributes, and familial aspects of the trigrams, and so forth, to provide a "hidden balance" of yin and yang throughout the order and between the two unequal halves. As a result of this approach, based on traditional philosophical concerns, he believes that the book has been divided unequally in order to demonstrate this "hidden balance". The authors of this article believe there is too much "special pleading" in Huang's approach to be convincing.[2]

The suggestion offered in this note is that, at the time the two-part division was made, there was a way of "writing the hexagrams" such that the hexagrams were equally divided, using eighteen in each part. These thirty-six hexagrams represented the sixty-four hexagrams in the received order. Such a compact way of writing the sixty-four hexagrams is found in the *Zhouyi Tushi Dadian* (Encylopedia of *Zhouyi* Diagrams).[3] The original is from the *Zhouyi Qimeng Yizhuan* by Hu Yigui (b. 1247).

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The table (which "reads" from right to left, beginning with *qian* at upper right) contains two lines with eighteen hexagrams on each line. The hexagrams are not numbered, but labeled by their names. If the inverse of a hexagram differs from the original, then its name is written *upside down* above it, indicating that one should turn the hexagram upside down to read the name of its inverse. In this way, one figure represents both the hexagrams in an invertible pair. There are fifty-six hexagrams that may be represented as invertible pairs, and these may thus be condensed to twenty-eight hexagram-figures, their inverses being named when the table is turned upside down. There are eight hexagrams that are not invertible in this way. In such cases, they are paired by opposites. These pairs are 1/2, 27/28, 29/30, and 61/62. All eight of these hexagrams have to occur individually in the table, since their inverses are identical to their originals. When one looks at the above table, thirty-six hexagrams are represented; turning the table upside down reveals twenty-eight more hexagrams (36 + 28 = 64). However, it will be noted that there is an uneven distribution of these opposite or non-invertible pairs: three pairs appear in the top line of the table, and only one in the lower line. As a result, the top line of the table represents hexagrams 1–30, as they appear in the received edition of the *Zhouyi* text, while the lower line represents hexagrams 31–64.

Our hypothesis is that the current division of the *Zhouyi* text resulted from just such an exercise as that represented by Hu Yigui's tabulation. The eighteen hexagrams in the upper row (and their different inverses) became part one of the received order, and similarly the lower row became part two. Thus, there are eighteen hexagram figures (compact version) in each part—symmetry has been restored. It is also interesting to note that the number thirty-six (the number of hexagram figures in the compact version) is a square, as is sixty-four.[4]

We might speculate that writing on bamboo slats may have been a motive for seeking compactness. However, knowing the Chinese penchant for speculative manipulation of the hexagrams from at least as early as the Han dynasty, it seems just as likely that we need look no further than a "philosophical" diagram such as that of Hu Yigui for the origin of text's current division.

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Endnotes

1. Richard Rutt: *Zhouyi: The Book of Changes* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1996), p. 105.
2. Alfred Huang: *The Numerology of the I Ching: A Sourcebook of Symbols, Structures, and Traditional Wisdom* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2000), Chapter 6, pp. 57–84.
3. *Zhouyi Tushi Dadian* [Encylopedia of *Zhouyi* Diagrams] (Beijing: Zhonguo gongren chubanshe, 1994), Vol. 1, p. 601.
4. We should point out that Alfred Huang (*op. cit.*, p. 63) is also aware that the two divisions of the book can each be represented by eighteen hexagrams, although he seems unaware of Hu Yigui's tabulation. However, Huang draws an opposite conclusion to the hypothesis presented here. He believes that *because* the received order is divided into unequal parts according to his theoretical explanation, *so*, as a result, the unequal parts can each be represented by eighteen hexagrams.

Chinese Glossary

Hu Yigui	胡一桂	*Zhouyi Qimeng Yizhuan*	《周易啟蒙翼傳》
Qian	乾	Zhouyi Tushi Dadian	《周易圖釋大典》
Zhouyi	《周易》		