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REFLECTIONS ON TIME AND RELATED IDEAS IN THE *YIJING*

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Introduction

The following is a reflection on important terms and concepts that constitute the cosmology of the *Yijing*: *ji*, *tian*, *yin-yang*, and the correlative aspects of temporality.¹ Admittedly, these are familiar terms from the *Yijing* as well as other philosophical texts of ancient China, but I argue here that we should revise some of the commonly accepted interpretations of them. Interpretations of these terms must take proper consideration of the pervasiveness of temporality and process in the ancient Chinese worldview. Without adequate reflection on temporality and process, such cardinal terms may be misconstrued as atemporal and substance-oriented, which would be alien to the sensibilities of East Asian traditions. Thus, I will attempt to gauge the adequacy of the prominent existing interpretations of these terms and ideas while giving my own account of how such interpretations may be revised in order to help recognize the role of temporality and process. In addition, I propose that my interpretations accord best with a conception of time as a spiral trajectory, as opposed to either the cyclic or linear conceptions of time usually considered dominant in the *Yijing* and ancient Chinese philosophy.

General Attitudes toward Time and Change in the East and West

The eminent Chinese philosopher Tang Junyi identifies twelve characteristics of Chinese natural cosmology in one of his discussions.² In doing so, he provides an insightful comparison between philosophical assumptions in the Chinese and Indo-European traditions. He observes that Indian and Greek philosophers consider change and time to be unreal, and thus pursue a timeless and eternal reality in their philosophical endeavors. In addition to their pursuit of an atemporal reality, they assume that there is no necessary connection between time and things. For example, Isaac Newton, the founder of modern physics, claims that in the absence of things, time would still exist. This claim is not an invention of Newton's but an expression of the enduring Platonic tradition, which holds that reality exists beyond temporal boundaries.

However, in the Chinese philosophical tradition, time is assumed to pervade everything. Time is not denied; instead philosophical discourse gives great importance to time. It is not derivative of matter but is matter's fundamental aspect. Ancient Chinese philosophers see that things are always provisional and conclude

that transformation is time itself. They understand time as the primary aspect of changing, myriad events.

The primacy of time entails that process and change are of real importance. While standing by a river, Confucius expresses his insights into the ever-changing nature of things and events: "What passes away is, perhaps, like this. Day and night it never lets up."³ And in the *Yijing*, we read passages that emphasize a process-oriented view of the world: "The heavens and earth fill and empty, and seasons wax and wane. How much more so human beings? The gods and spirits?"⁴ "The exemplary person takes heed of the alternation of increase and decrease, fullness and emptiness; for it is the course of heaven."⁵ "The *Dao* of the *Changes* is forever changing—alteration, movement without rest, flowing through the six empty places. Rising and sinking without fixed law, firm and yielding transform each other. They cannot be confined within a rule; it is only change that is at work here."⁶

For Chinese philosophers, since change and time are fundamental aspects of things and events, there is no external agency, final substance, or governing principle to regulate change and time. *Dao*, *tian*, or *taiji* may appear to express external agency, but in fact they do not. Every event and being is in the middle of a self-realizing, self-creating process. This is a one-world theory in the sense that each being and event is particularistic and directly constitutes the world; there are no mediating categories. That is, there are no imposing prototypes according to which a unique being could be considered merely a representative member of a larger genus. To some degree, events and beings are free to create themselves.

In this philosophical tradition, creativity does not come from the single action of a prime agent but is a continuously self-realizing process unfolding over the course of time. The timely achievement of events and the appropriately timed fulfillment of meaning in personal or social experiences become major philosophical interests. The term *shi*,⁷ rendered into "right time," "timeliness," or "availing oneself to the gathered momentum," is pervasive in the philosophical discourse of the *Yijing*: the exemplary person is creatively active throughout the day, and with evening one takes care. These activities are timely responses "when moment requires proper actions," and they are "in step with the moment."⁸ The exemplary person fosters his or her character and labors at his or her task in order to respond at the right time.⁹ In accord with the moment, one consummates oneself as one mounts toward heaven on six dragons.¹⁰ The *kun* receives *qian* into itself and acts in its own time.¹¹ One who succeeds hits upon the right time for his work.¹² By achieving prevalence and through the practice of constancy, one stays free of blame: "So it is the right moment of Following that prevails in the world."¹³ The former kings brought about prosperity because they nurtured things "in harmony with the time."¹⁴ Alternating changes, such as being full and being empty, or increasing and decreasing, take place in tandem with each moment.¹⁵ If one misses the crucial moment, misfortune is brought out.¹⁶ Timeliness is compared with discharging the arrow and hitting the mark by using the accumulated artistry in one's own person. The exemplary person lays up a store of the instrument in his own person and "waits for the proper moment and then acts."¹⁷

The *Yijing's* intense concern about timeliness or taking advantage of gained momentum is quite different from the Greek attitude toward temporality. Parmenides posits an eternal being—intelligible, perfect, immutable, and immovable—as the sole reality that reason can realize. Change, motion, and time are discarded as unreal. Plato also regards the forms as atemporal, while the changing objects of conventional reality, bound in time, are derived from the forms. Consequently, time does not become thematic in the dialogues of Plato because he considers it derivative. It is a mere epiphenomenon of spatial variability, while spatial variation itself is derived from prior stability. For Plato, Being, in its self-sameness, is atemporal, whereas becoming is variable and temporal. Thus, time is not a substance or a substrate but is incidental to cosmic motion and is second to space. In the *Timaeus*, Plato articulates how the sensible and moving cosmos was made by a divine craftsman, Demiourgos, copying from an intelligible, eternal prototype—a pattern at rest. In order to produce a cosmos as much like the original as possible, the god placed within the unmoving cosmic spatial structure a copy of a “movable image of eternity”—“God made of the eternal, abiding in unity, an image going according to number, and this is what we have given the name ‘time.’”¹⁸ Time is a mere medium in which the life of the atemporal divine model is imaged through its association with motion.¹⁹

Contrasting views over temporality in China and Greece do not stop here. In the Chinese philosophical tradition, time is not separate from things and events, nor is it separate from space. Tang Junyi observes that time, space, and matter are inseparable in the natural cosmology of Chinese philosophy. In the classical Western tradition, however, time moves forward while space stands still. For Plato, time is a numerical progression, a returning cycle of regularity in which eternal spatial structure is imaged. Thus, time is secondary to space. For Newton, space is distinguished from time. Time and space are categories of being that are independent of and unaffected by the objects or events that they contain.

This monolithic Western view is in sharp contrast to the Chinese understanding of the relationships among things, space, and time. In classical Chinese, the term *yuzhou* 宇宙 is equivalent to the English “world” and “cosmos,” and this term helps explain the interrelated conceptions of time and space in the Chinese tradition. *Yuzhou*, which literally means “space-time,” depicts space and time as inseparably related. Spatial perception is concurrent with temporal change. For example, east is spring, south is summer, west is autumn, and north is winter, as seen in the table of correspondences among the five phases completed in the Han period. In this table, space-time is explicitly linked with planets, colors, smells, fluids, emotions, and the orifices of things.

Things and events in time-space are always perceived from the standpoint of a unique beholder. In this approach, participatory perception is not an obstacle to objective knowledge but a prerequisite and basis for the development of mature knowledge. Seekers of knowledge have no recourse to a presumed objective truth but must negotiate to find the appropriate position from which to understand a given situation.

Reflections on the Notions of Ji, Tian, Correlative Thinking, and Yin-yang in the Yijing

The philosophy in the *Yijing* explicitly shows how the overall process of being works. This process of being in the *Yijing* is significantly temporal. Humans in any situation must be keenly aware of what appropriate action, in a given time-position, will maximize potency. This position is in temporal tension between past and future: it indicates what one has achieved in the past, as well as one's possibility for gaining higher ground in the future.

The hexagrams in the *Yijing* are composed of six different lines of *yin* and *yang*, which indicate the temporal position in a certain situation. The hexagram as a whole presents an image of the overall situation, while each line indicates temporal progression and expresses different features in reference to the past and future. This may be likened to an evolutionary process, because it is not teleological; things and events emerge from undifferentiated situations through interactions with their environment. In the following, I will reflect on some cardinal notions that constitute this evolutionary process in terms of temporality in the *Yijing*.

Incipient Movement (Ji 幾)

According to the "Xici Zhuan," the first line is where one will find the initial movement in a situation, and it is a clue to any future change. It is a symbol of the initial movement that a person must spot in order to understand the direction of change and the environment of the future. The *Yijing* mentions this activity as "what has enabled the sages to reach the depth and to grasp the initial movement (*ji*) of the things."²⁰ According to the *Modern Chinese Compendium*, *ji* denotes multiple alternative meanings: imminent, premonitory, augural, suggestion, clue, matrix, due time, anticipating, hoping, near, and almost.

Ji, an augural sign hard to recognize, is expected to magnify itself in the course of the evolutionary process. Han Kangbai, a commentator on the *Yijing* in the Han period, describes *ji* as a pattern to which we can give neither name nor shape. Accordingly, initial movement is the first thread of an interweaving following movement. But the exemplary person is capable of grasping its minute meaning and taking bold action in advance, so as to manipulate it. This person is not only timely, decisive, and solid, but also consummate. We read:

The master said: To know the initial movements, that is consummate indeed! . . . The initial movement is the first beginning of movement, the first trace of good fortune (or misfortune) that shows itself. The exemplary person perceives the initial movement and immediately takes action. He does not wait even a whole day. In the *Yijing*, it is said: "Firm as a rock. Not a whole day. Perseverance brings good fortune." Firm as a rock, what need of a whole day? The judgment can be known. The exemplary person knows what is hidden will be what is apparent. He also knows what is weak will be strong. Hence myriad people look up to him.²¹

Many different expressions of *ji* are used in the *Yijing* and all play a pivotal role in the evolutionary process. The following passage is another example of this worldview.

A house that heaps good upon good is sure to have an abundance of blessings. A house that heaps evil upon evil is sure to have an abundance of ills. Where a servant murders his master, where a son murders his father, the cause does not lie between the morning and evening of the day. It took a long time for things to go so far. It came about because things that should have been stopped were not stopped soon enough. In the *Yijing*, it is said: "When there is hoarfrost underfoot, solid ice is not far off." This shows how far things go when they are allowed to run on.²²

Initial movement is not deterministic and does not bring reversible results. The accumulation of minute signs brings about sweeping consequences as their force is magnified over time.

For Aristotle, the unmoved mover, or primary cause that enables all things to move, is an atemporal substance, but *ji* as the beginning of a temporal process is an undifferentiated clue woven into and magnified by the complex process of things and events. According to the *Yijing*, tiny changes in the present can bring about magnificent consequences in the future. It is invisible, unheard, and graspable only by attentive sensibility rather than abstract thinking. *Ji* does not initiate the logically reversible process of causation, but the temporally irreversible process of magnification. One will conform oneself to this propensity in order to maximize one's potential. For the same reason, to understand the process initiated by *ji* as teleological is misleading because the process is indeterminate. Depending on the capabilities of the exemplary person, the process can either flourish or be thwarted.

Tian, Yin-yang, and Correlative Thinking

In the *Yijing*, expressions like *tian*, *tiandi*, *tianxia*, *tianli*, *tiandao*, *tianming*, *qian*, and *qiankun* were used to designate heaven. Many expressions used to designate heaven in the *Yijing* are not discrete terms but paired compounds such as *tiandi* 天地 and *qiankun* 乾坤, implying that a single term would not constitute a self-sufficient entity. Nevertheless, some interpreters tried to relate *tian* with God or heaven in the Judeo-Christian tradition. For example, James Legge, the first professor of sinology at Oxford University and a Scottish Congregationalist, translated *tian* as "Heaven" with a capital "H," which is enough to evoke the notion of God in the minds of Western readers. However, it is questionable whether heaven in the *Yijing* plays a transcendental role, as it does in the Christian Bible, because the Confucian heaven is not atemporal. Instead, Confucian notions of heaven are irreducibly process-oriented and temporal. *Tian* permeates the ten thousand things (*wanwu* 萬物), attaining self-realization with creativity. Whereas Heaven or God in the West is a transcendental reality independent of space and time, *tian* is not transcendental in this sense. It generates the ten thousand things and transmits its creativity to the self-realizing of the ten thousand things, but there is no significant chasm between *tian* and *wanwu*. All events and all things including *tian* and *wanwu* are processual: the creator and the created, the one and the many, mutually entail each other. This may be one reason why the Confucian tradition commonly uses compound terms such as *tiandi* and *qiankun* in emphasizing interdependence or correlativity.

If *tian* is not God as the Creator of the universe or the prime mover who determines the movement of things, then what is *tian* responsible for? In the Confucian tradition, *tian* as immanent force expresses the ineluctability of situations. The different configurations of *tian* provide a context for the actualization of the ten thousand things and events, including the self-realization of humans. In the *Yi-jing*, the configuration of the initial pairs, heaven high and earth low, is the key to the movements of *dao*, the fulfillment of the natural tendencies of things and events:

With heaven and earth having their dispositions determined, the changes ensue within them. *Dao* fulfills and sustains the natural tendencies of things and events. This is the gate whereby the appropriateness of *dao* operates.²³

To be sure, *tian* is an indispensable factor for human life in Confucianism. Confucians assume that all things are temporal such that *tian* and humans mutually benefit each other. *Tian* provides the natural and cultural context for human growth, and in turn it is altered and augmented through human flourishing.

Frederick W. Mote argues that genuine Chinese cosmogony is an organic process, meaning that all parts of the entire cosmos belong to one organic whole and that they all interact as participants in one spontaneously self-generating life process. He writes: "By mid-Zhou times there had occurred a development clearly reflected in the early works such as the *Book of Changes*: The concept of *tian*, called heaven or nature, which had been an anthropomorphic concept of a deified ancestor a millennium earlier, had become an abstract conception of cosmic function."²⁴ Mote is right to point out the organic cosmology and its development in the Zhou period, but perhaps he is not so right to use the term "abstract concept" when explaining the notion of heaven. Heaven is not abstracted from concrete things; rather it is as temporal as the ten thousand things and events.

In *Disputers of the Tao*, A. C. Graham recognizes correlative thinking in the works of pre-Qin philosophers, but he concludes:

We may note also that in both China and the West the persistence of correlative schematising in the sciences has nothing to do with the level of sophistication of thought in other fields. . . . As for China, throughout the classical period correlative schematising belongs only to professions such as diviners and physicians; the philosophers from Confucius and Han Fei do not engage in it at all.²⁵

Furthermore, Benjamin I. Schwartz, in his *The World of Thought in Ancient China*, observes:

[Correlative cosmology] is, in fact, considered by some to be a primordial and quintessential expression of the 'Chinese Mind.' Any reader of Marcel Granet might indeed regard it as the central stream of the entire Chinese 'structure of thought.' Others have discerned in it something like the expression of the Chinese Jungian 'collective subconsciousness.' The fact of its comparatively late emergence as a total outlook in the texts available to us is, of course, no proof that it may not indeed represent a truly archaic level of culture.²⁶

Schwartz, like Graham, refuses to accept any evidence of correlative cosmology in the earlier texts: "The fact is that neither the oracle bones, the bronze vessel, nor any of the earliest texts we have seemed to provide strong evidence of correlative cosmology. . . . When we turn to the *Book of Poetry* and those sections of the *Book of Documents* generally regarded as pre-Confucian, we find again no evidence of correlative cosmology."²⁷ To the extent that *yin-yang* or correlative thinking is not an atemporal structure of thought of the sort one finds in Carl Jung, Schwartz is accurate. But my understanding is that *yin-yang* thinking gradually flowered through the Shang and Zhou periods, and its origin may date even farther back.

The problem is that both Graham and Schwartz define correlative thinking too narrowly. They focus on systemized correspondences between processes and classes of things in the natural realm and the human realm, but they pay no attention to correlative thinking in terms of particular things and events. They do not see the use of *yin* and *yang* in the *Shijing* as an example of correlative thinking, because, in the *Shijing*, *yin* and *yang* refer to concrete phenomena such as shadow and light, or the shady and sunny slopes of hills. In this respect, their mistaken definition of correlative thinking as an "abstract principle of duality" prevents them from recognizing its early emergence.

Schwartz also claims that Confucius is ignorant of natural cosmology and thus lacks correlative thinking. But correlative thinking does not necessarily need an explicit cosmology. It can be produced from understanding immediate experience in terms of foci and fields in time-space with cosmological implications. Even without an explicit cosmological scheme, we can find abundant examples of correlative thinking in Confucian and pre-Confucian texts. As for the *Yijing*, Schwartz and Graham deal with this text in the same manner. Though admitting that there are ideas of correlativity in the old part of this text, they do not recognize this as evidence of correlative thinking.

Yin-yang 陰陽 as Source Metaphor

In the discussion above, I analyzed *ji* as the initiation of a process of magnification. This process can be described as a movement of contrasting polarities. In the *Yijing*, contrasting forces are expressed by motifs of continuity and discontinuity that allow beings to appreciate the past and anticipate the future. The *Yijing* depicts contrasting forces through a variety of terms relevant to different situations: rest (*jing* 靜) and movement (*dong* 動), softness (*rou* 柔) and firmness (*gang* 剛), within form (*qi* 器) and above form (*dao* 道), receptivity (*kun* 坤) and creativity (*qian* 乾), completion (*zheng* 終) and beginning (*shi* 始), simplicity (*jian* 簡) and easiness (*yi* 易), progression (*jin* 進) and regression (*tui* 退), darkness (*yu* 幽) and brightness (*ming* 明), ghosts or dissemination (*gui* 鬼) and spirits or stretching (*shen* 神), wisdom (*zhi* 智) and benevolence (*ren* 仁), cold (*han* 寒) and hot (*shu* 暑), hidden (*cang* 藏) and disclosing (*xian* 顯), and enlarging life (*dasheng* 大生) and broadening life (*guangsheng* 廣生). The *Yijing* is fortified with a variety of concentrated images related to contrasting aspects of *yin* and *yang*.

Yin and *yang*, shady and sunny, are two aspects of one event, suggesting that contrasting forces are interdependent. We see that *yin* and *yang* are not abstract categories by which particular things are classified. They are expressive ways of interrelating foci within contextual fields, in terms of relations among concrete events engaged in the process of change. *Yin* and *yang*, derived from vivid images of sun and shade, imply mutual entailment and interdependency.

However, some interpreters conceive of *yin* and *yang* as atemporal categories that classify all phenomena of the world into two different abstractions. Schwartz, tracing *yin-yang* theory in the Han period, refers to *yin* and *yang* as the “abstract principle of duality”²⁸ and “abstract entities.”²⁹ He writes that *yin-yang* thinking expresses “specific correlative interactions between processes and classes of things in the natural realm and in the human realm.”³⁰ When pointing out that concrete *yin-yang* concepts in early China gradually came to be abstract principles in the Han period, he seems to take the development from concrete things to abstract concepts as a model for universal intellectual development. However, it is legitimate to ask whether this Western model of development can be applied to non-Western philosophies. If it cannot, then we must question the assumption that *yin* and *yang* developed from concrete things to an abstract conceptual framework.

For me, it seems viable to understand *yin* and *yang* as sources of metaphor that extend to interrelated events and experiences in time-space. Depending on imagery and qualitative understanding, *yin* and *yang* extend themselves to target areas, but still connote the sense of the original metaphor. As this metaphoric source is aptly applied to a greater variety of experiences, these experiences can be grouped together on the basis of family-like resemblances. This way of grouping events and things into familial categories based on metaphors should be distinguished from the way of grouping things based on abstract principles. One primary feature of metaphor grouping is that it is irreducibly extended through time and space without losing vivid concreteness. Therefore, the understanding of *yin* and *yang* becomes closely linked to temporally situated events.

Trajectory of Time: Circular or Linear

Derk Bodde, while discussing which pattern of time—linear or cyclic—dominated traditional China, directs attention to an important passage and hexagram in the *Yijing*. According to Bodde, they demonstrate that a cyclical concept of time dominated traditional China. He tells us that the idea of time oscillating between two poles or moving in recurring cycles was widespread in early and later China:

‘One yin (then) one yang: this is called the Tao,’ as stated in the *Yijing*. Concerning what happens when its sixty-four hexagrams reach their ends: ‘Things cannot be used up.’ Therefore it (the 63rd hexagram) is followed by ‘Unfinished’ (*Wei chi*, the 64th), with which ends (one cycle only to be followed by another).³¹

Let us examine the above-quoted hexagram 64. Alternately translated as “Ferrying Incomplete” (*Wei Ji* 未濟), as the last of the sixty-four hexagrams it provides us with

an image of the conditions prior to great transformation. In its judgment we read: "The little fox, after nearly completing the crossing, gets his tail in the water." It is an indication of something incomplete in the present, but this incompleteness is open to possibilities for further change. The erroneous deed becomes an auspicious sign for the future. The "Ferrying Incomplete" hexagram implies that the time of order and completion in the previous hexagram has ended. "Ferrying Incomplete" means that one has to begin a new phase of work. Though the fox fails to cross the stream and one needs to be careful and deliberate in one's effort, in the end one can encounter the auspicious sign. In the Commentary, in the *yang* at the top, one reads: "There is drinking of wine in genuine confidence. No blame. But if one wets his head, he loses it, in truth."³² While the same situation of head wetting in the previous "Ferrying Complete" hexagram 63 implies a dangerous situation, in this hexagram the same sentence denotes an avoidable danger. Though the first line of the hexagram "Ferrying Incomplete" begins with the fox's failure—wetting its tail just before completing the crossing—it ends with the possibility of avoiding danger. As Legge mentions, some may wish that the *Yijing* had concluded with the "Ferrying Complete" hexagram, leaving us with a picture of human affairs brought to good order. However, that would not be in harmony with the process-oriented philosophy of the *Yijing*. The "Ferrying Incomplete" hexagram signifies a new commencement and is actually more auspicious than a process completed. The "Ferrying Incomplete" hexagram provides us with an image of cyclic change as well as the emergence of novel change. Bodde's claim that cyclic time dominates the *Yijing* seems to be one-sided.

Joseph Needham appears to be in opposition to the position taken by Derk Bodde. In his essays "Attitudes toward Time and Change as Compared with Europe"³³ and "Time and History in China and the West,"³⁴ Needham categorizes civilizations based on two concepts of time. One is the cyclic and regressive time seen in the Greek tradition, and the other is the linear and progressive time seen in the Christian tradition. He is aware that the *philosophia parennis* of Chinese culture is an organic naturalism that invariably accepts the reality and importance of time. Thus, he strongly disagrees with the view that traditional Chinese culture was static and stagnant. He concludes that in spite of all that the Chinese knew about celestial and terrestrial cycles, a linear concept of time dominated the thought of Confucian scholars and Daoist peasant-farmers alike. According to Needham, the Chinese concept of time was progressive, cumulative, and objective—more like the Iranian or Judeo-Christian concepts of time than the Indo-Hellenic cyclic concept.³⁵ While I agree with him that time and change are important to Chinese culture, especially in the *Yijing*, I do not feel it appropriate to use terms like linear, teleological, and Judeo-Christian in reference to the notion of time in the Chinese tradition.³⁶ Needham's use of these terms seems to be an attempt to overwrite *Yijing* cosmology with Western categories.

In the *Yijing*, the patterns of changing things and events are alternating phases of *yin* and *yang* as progressing and retreating and stretching and returning, showing both continuous phases as well as discontinuous breakthroughs when novel events

emerge. This is very different from the Indo-Hellenic, Iranian, or Judeo-Christian traditions. According to Needham, the Judeo-Christian idea of time is that of a "continuous linear redemptive time-process, the plan of redemption. . . . The world-process is a divine drama enacted on a single stage, with no repeat performance."³⁷ However, in the *Yijing* it is impossible to find any Judeo-Christian ideas such as teleological design, linear ascension toward a final goal, the end of the world, or a dichotomy between the atemporal and temporal. Time in the *Yijing* is a fundamental aspect of perpetual change, expressed in terms of *yin* and *yang*, without any final destination. Teleology is a particularly improper notion upon which to base an understanding of time in the Chinese tradition, which presupposes no static end to the processes of life.

Some scholars claim that the cyclic notion of time in the *Yijing* is anachronistic. They argue that the cyclic notion of time as seen in Confucius' respect for Zhou culture had a great effect on Chinese philosophies as a whole; thus the past became the ground for moral behavior, social institutions, and exemplary rituals in the present. In Daoist literature, primitive societies prior to the rise of civilization were often portrayed as desirable. Then followed the insistence that Chinese society was static, stagnant, and anachronistic.

However, time is understood as both continuous and discontinuous in the *Yijing*. To put it another way, time is discontinuous, nonlinear, asymmetrical, and novel as much as it is continuous, cumulative, and cyclic. Regarding this point, the "Xici Zhuan" in the *Yijing* says: "When one change had run its course, they altered. Through their alternation they achieved penetration. Through penetration they achieve sustainability" (易窮則變，變則通，通則久).³⁸ This passage may explain either the alternation of the lines 爻變 or the alternation of the hexagrams 卦變. When the environment represented by a certain line or hexagram comes to an end, it becomes another situation symbolized by another line or hexagram. Alternation (*bian* 變) in the passage refers to the fundamental transformation of a situation occurring at a culminating point in its ongoing process (*yi* 易). At least four levels of this evolutionary process are identified: cumulative change (易), emergent change caused by cumulative change (變), penetration (通), and achieved sustainability (久). The passage can be interpreted to mean that when cumulative and constant change reaches a peak, novelty emerges, or, in other words, a discontinuous element disrupts continuous change. In the *Yijing*, the rise of discontinuity out of cumulative changes is often expressed as spiritual (*shen* 神), or as an unexpected change that cannot be fathomed by *yin* and *yang* (*yinyang buce* 陰陽不測). This notion denies mere repetition of changes. Creating novelty is inherent in efficacy and is the essence of change. We read: "It is because the *dao* brings renewal day after day that we refer to it here as 'great efficacy.' In its capacity to produce and reproduce we call it change. . . . What the *yin* and *yang* do not allow us to plumb we call 'spirituality.'"³⁹ Thus, to describe time in the *Yijing* as cyclic ignores the equally crucial discontinuous aspect of it.

In his Whiteheadian critique of Masao Abe's Zen Buddhist interpretation of the symmetric and reversible nature of time, John Berthrong begins by acknowledging

that the question of time is a critical topic that backgrounds and foregrounds comparative philosophical conversations among Christians, Buddhists, and Neo-Confucians. Especially for Christians, time is the arena of salvation, because it includes the story of divine history. For Neo-Confucians, time is related to cultivating the heart-mind for the perfection of the self and for service to others. For Buddhists, it is the locus of compassionate action. In terms of a Whiteheadian response to Abe's Zen claim concerning the reversibility of time, Berthrong responds that "First, and most obvious, is the statement that what is settled and in the past conditions and limits the potential for what will happen in the future. It does not mean that the future actual entities will lack creativity. In short, the past is settled but the future is open. This is one of the defining characteristics of time for Whitehead."⁴⁰

For Whitehead, relations are basically one-way relations and not directionless or symmetrical. Whitehead's directionality of temporal relations implies that time is an aspect of decisions and choices—the arrow of value informing all things and events. Berthrong points out that Sung-Ming Neo-Confucians were of the opinion that the Buddhist "empty mind" did not indicate ultimate reality.

According to Berthrong, throughout the history of Chinese philosophy, Confucians and Buddhists continuously debated whether the real, plural world existed. Revolving around the importance of the individual heart-mind, Buddhists were led to the notion of an all-inclusive heart-mind. Confucians as well as Whiteheadians share common philosophical grounds for arguing for the existence of the plural world against Zen Buddhists. Berthrong thinks that the Song Neo-Confucians of the Zhu Xi school (1130–1200) would also agree with Whitehead and Harthshorne about the one-way nature of time's flow.⁴¹

Berthrong successfully illuminates important issues concerning time among Whiteheadians, Confucians, and Buddhists. I find plausible his claim that the concept of asymmetrical time shared by Whiteheadian and Confucian philosophy is closely related to real pluralism and freedom for individuals. The Confucian notion of time presented in the *Yijing* would certainly be congruent with the importance of cherishing real pluralism, in the sense that the ten thousand things and events are real constituents of the world and the creative freedom that permits the emergence of novelty. But Berthrong could have advanced one step further had he explained that the Confucian attitude toward asymmetrical time could be traced back to the *Yijing*, one of the cardinal classics in the Song period. For Korean Neo-Confucians in the Joseon period as well as Song Neo-Confucians, the *Yijing* played a primary role in endorsing the creativity and temporal reality of the ten thousand things and the importance of making conscious efforts to nurture creative forces. For many Korean Neo-Confucians, the *Yijing* served as a valuable resource for emphasizing the creative advance of the ten thousand things against the closed notion of karma and causality in Buddhist doctrines.⁴²

The notion of *shen* 神 as spirituality or human clairvoyance is cognate with its homophone *shen* 伸 signifying to prolong or to extend. *Shen* seems to mean the emergence of something new as a consequence of cumulative changes. It signifies not only an extension of the past but also the emergence of novelty. In this sense,

time in the *Yijing* is asymmetric, creative, and irreversible, as much as cyclic, cumulative, and preserving. If there is a proper term to describe it, time in the *Yijing* can be thought of as advancing in a spiral motion. Time in the *Yijing* may serve a conservative purpose—namely, restoring the past. But it also serves the creative purpose of producing novelty. These two aspects of time do not contradict each other. Many passages in the *Yijing*, if not all, express that what restores the past simultaneously involves some element of novel creation. The process begins from its incipient movement and finally reaches the point where creative novelty emerges. This evolutionary process is that of an advancing spiral, which ever produces novelty while simultaneously returning again and again to the nascent sources.

Notes

- 1 – In this article, “*Yijing*” refers to a complete text composed of many different layers: original parts such as the hexagrams and line statements, as well as commentaries like the ten wings. It must be seen as a composite product that has considerable philosophical consistency.
- 2 – Tang Junyi, “Zhongguo zhexue zhong ziran yuzhouguan zhi tezhi” 中國哲學中自然宇宙觀的特質 (The distinct features of natural cosmology in Chinese philosophy), in *Zhong-Xi zhexue sixiang zhi bijiao lunwenji* 中西哲學思想之比較論文集 (Collected essays on the comparison between Chinese and Western philosophical thought) (Taipei: Xuesheng Shuju, 1988).
- 3 – *Lunyu* 9:17. Translations from the *Lunyu* are my own, but I consulted various English versions, including D. C. Lau, *Confucius: The Analects* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1983); Edward Slingerland, *Confucius Analects: With Selections from Traditional Commentaries* (Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 2003); and Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont, Jr., *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998).
- 4 – *Yijing*, Hexagram 55, *Feng*, Tuan Zhuan (Great commentary). For translations from the *Yijing*, I consulted Richard Wilhelm and Cary F. Baynes, *The I Ching or Book of Changes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), and Richard John Lynn, *The Classic of Changes: A New Translation of the “I Ching” as Interpreted by Wang Bi* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), while making my own translations and modifications.
- 5 – Hexagram 23, *Bo*, Tuan Zhuan.
- 6 – Xici Zhuan (Commentary on the appended judgments) 2:8.
- 7 – Paronomastically, the term *shi* 時 as “time” is closely related with *shi* 勢 as “propensity.” In the *Yijing*, *shi* as time signifies exploring accumulated momentum or taking advantage of propensity.
- 8 – Hexagram 1, *Qian*, Wenyan Zhuan (Commentary on words of the text), *Yang* in the third line.

- 9 – Ibid., *Yang* in the fourth line.
- 10 – Hexagram 1, *Qian*, Wenyan Zhuan.
- 11 – Hexagram 2, *Kun*, the Hexagram as a whole.
- 12 – Hexagram 4, *Meng*, Tuan Zhuan.
- 13 – Hexagram 17, *Sui*, Tuan Zhuan.
- 14 – Hexagram 25, *Wu Wang*, Xiang (The image).
- 15 – Hexagram 41, *Sun*, Tuan Zhuan.
- 16 – Hexagram 60, *Jie*, *Yang* in the second line.
- 17 – Xici Zhuan 2 : 5.
- 18 – Plato, *Plato's Cosmology: The Timaeus of Plato*, trans. F. M. Cornford (Indiana: Hackett Publishing company, 1997), p. 37.
- 19 – Ibid., p. 101.
- 20 – *Yijing*, Xici Zhuan 1 : 20.
- 21 – Xici Zhuan 2 : 5.
- 22 – Ibid., Hexagram 2 *Kun*, Wenyan Zhuan.
- 23 – Ibid., Xici Zhuan 1 : 7.
- 24 – Frederick W. Mote, *Intellectual Foundation of China* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1989), pp. 15, 18.
- 25 – A. C. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao* (La Salle: Open Court, 1989), p. 319.
- 26 – Benjamin I. Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 351.
- 27 – Ibid., p. 352.
- 28 – Ibid.
- 29 – Ibid., p. 369.
- 30 – Ibid., p. 355.
- 31 – Derk Bodde, *Chinese Thought, Society, and Science* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1991), p. 123.
- 32 – Hexagram 64, *Wei Ji*, *Yang* at the top.
- 33 – Joseph Needham, *Science in Traditional China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 108–131.
- 34 – Joseph Needham, *Time and Eastern Man* (Glasgow: The University Press, 1965), pp. 45–52.
- 35 – Needham, *Science in Traditional China*, pp. 118, 131.
- 36 – Ibid., p. 110.

- 37 – Needham, *Time and Eastern Man*, p. 47.
- 38 – Ibid., Xici Zhuan 2 : 2.
- 39 – Ibid., Xici Zhuan 1 : 5.
- 40 – John Berthrong, “The Trouble with Time,” *Process Studies* 23 (2) (Summer 1994), p. 143.
- 41 – Ibid., p. 144.
- 42 – Chong Dojeon, a Neo-Confucian of the Joseon period, might be the most adamant in insisting that Confucianism distinctively advocates notions of the emergence of novelty compared to Buddhist notions of eternal cycles. See his writing *Bulssi japbyeon* 佛氏雜辨 (Criticism on Buddhist doctrines).