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Use of the I Ching in the Analytic Setting

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For many Westerners an introduction to Chinese culture comes through the use of the *I Ching*. This profound book, a compendium of wisdom extending back to the roots of one of the planet's most ancient cultures, has become an important companion for many in the West, including myself. Use of the *I Ching* challenges the reigning scientific paradigms in Western culture and brings a dimension to the Jungian psychoanalytic process that is sympathetic to the deepest and truest spirit of Jungian psychology.

In Jungian terms, one could say the *I Ching* is a book that emerged out of the archetypal depths of the human psyche and the psychoid dimensions of the Self. The origins of dreams and the genesis of hexagrams in response to questions addressed to the *I Ching* are grounded in the same source. The Chinese ideogram for the sage, "the ear listening to the Inner King," describes the process and goal of Jungian psychology.

Scientists are giving ecological perspectives more credibility, where patterns of relationships are central. Psychoneuroimmunology research and the statistical verifications of the power of prayer and belief blur the distinctions between mind and matter. Our outlook on life, the way we perceive the world, and our ability to reflect and see meaning in experiences have been shown to affect our health and physical well being. Dreams, particular psychological approaches, certain spiritual practices, and the *I Ching* address these issues at deep and subtle psychogenic levels where mind and matter meet (1).

Analysts are in a good position to notice synchronistic events because we work with dreams at an archetypal level. Synchronistic events are usually related to archetypal events like birth, death, strong love relationships, and jealousy. Circumstantial evidence that synchronicities occur prompted me to develop an experiment to statistically test the possibility. This was part of my thesis (1983) at the Jung Institute in Zurich entitled "Synchronicity Experiments with the *I Ching* and Their Relevance to the Theory of Evolution."

Synchronicity convinced Jung there was an element of the psyche outside time and space: space and time are relative to the psyche (3). Incorporating the concept of synchronicity into his theoretical system late in his life led Jung to substantially reformulate his concepts of archetypes and the collective unconscious, putting them on a transcendent basis. Jung thought of archetypes as forms of existence without time and space, with the archetype per se being a "just so" ordering principle, an imperceptible structural element giving order to ideas and completely integrated with physical reality (4). Archetypes have a psychoid nature, meaning they have both a psychic and a physical dimension: psychic and physical are two sides of the same coin (5). An analogy in physics would be light, which behaves as a particle and a wave; matter (particles) and field somehow being two sides of the same phenomena...

...The Chinese philosopher Wang Fu Ch'i (1619-1692) hypothesized an imperceptible, all embracing, psychophysical continuum similar to Jung's concept of the psychoid archetype and the unus mundus of the alchemists (11). This is an essential element of an indigenous world view (12) and is integral to Chinese Taoism and Buddhist philosophy where "all things stand in immediate relationship with each other and with the whole" (13). Nuclear physicist David Bohm describes the world as unfolding "in a flowing stream of manifestation from a deeper holographic process, the implicate order...[which] itself is whole, and the cosmos as it unfolds is whole...in the sense that each part is connected with each other part, indeed each part enfolds, or implicitly contains each other part" (14)...

...Let us examine the appropriateness and manner of using the *I Ching* in a psychoanalytic setting. Jung became so experienced at using the *I Ching* personally and with analysands that he could

predict what hexagrams he would get (15)...Given the criticism of people like Richard Noll and his dismissive association of the *I Ching* with “New Age fluff,” (16) a careful examination of the topic is in order.

I have a Ph.D. in the sciences (Entomology, U.C. Berkeley) and I am a licensed mental health worker, yet I am completely comfortable with telling people that I use the *I Ching* in my analytic practice. It is not my belief, but my experience, that it works in a profound and helpful manner. I use it in two ways. The first in an intensive, three-hour consultation with someone who comes for one session with a particular problem. I spend an hour trying to discern what the issue is and attempt to get to the most basic, appropriate question to put to the *I Ching*. Knowing what question to ask is an important part of the therapeutic process—it is half the battle as some say. If I feel the person wants to use the *I Ching* to short circuit a thoughtful, soul-searching wrestling with an issue, or has not gathered enough information, I discourage consulting the *I Ching*. This process of formulating the question reduces an issue to a manageable size. Phrasing the question in eight words or less forces one to be clear and succinct about the real issue.

To help the person link the answer from the *I Ching* to particulars in his or her life and to know more precisely how the *I Ching* is addressing a situation, I must get a sense of the issues and circumstances involved. This process is similar to linking dream images to waking life situations, and I always ask for recent dreams that may be relevant to the issue. Hopefully, the analyst has the advantage of some objectivity in the process.

I then show the person how to use the yarrow stalk method of consulting the *I Ching*, and he or she proceeds to cast a hexagram. This takes about an hour. The yarrow stalk method is therapeutic in and of itself: it involves a sense of ritual and reassuring repetition, of participating in something very ancient. It is a hands-on process accompanied by the gentle sound of rustling sticks. The process requires just enough concentration to inhibit too intense a concentration on one's question--a little like focusing on breathing during meditation. Once one is familiar with using the yarrow, it takes about fifteen minutes to cast a hexagram. During this time, one should focus on the question or clear one's mind to be open to the

answer. If you don't have fifteen minutes to cast a hexagram, you shouldn't be asking a question: either your question is too trivial, you haven't wrestled with the question long enough, or you're not centered enough to be receptive to the answer.

I spend the third hour going through the answer with the person. I use three translations that I find to be a good working combination. I begin with the most difficult, the Wilhelm/Baynes translation. It uses many symbols and images (17), and, as an analyst, I appreciate that a message conveyed in this manner has great impact, but it takes some explaining to the uninitiated. Wilhelm uses many metaphors, symbols and analogies associated with weather, seasons, agricultural practices and other natural phenomena. This important ecopsychological dimension of the *I Ching* helps cultivate a symbolic manner of relating to the natural environment (18).

As one becomes more familiar with the structural elements within the *I Ching*—how comments are based on a line's position in the hexagram, within a trigram, its correspondences with other lines, etc.--one gets closer to describing interactions of the basic energies of life and the natural world. In certain situations, the only connection I can make between the person's question and the answer from the *I Ching* is at the purely structural level as described in part III of Wilhelm. In such cases, every verbal description has a metaphoric base that cannot be related to the issue being addressed. Only by going close to the most basic level of the hexagram, like the numerical base of computers and not the words used to program computers, can one "feel" an individual's situation being adequately described. The connection of lines to the "real world" is hinted at by a dream I had. As I looked at different elements in the environment in my dream, particular combinations of yin and yang lines would form and blend into that element, hinting that there are given, "just so" metaphoric and symbolic connections between totally abstract yin and yang combinations and objects in the "real" world.

The second text I use is the *I Ching Workbook* by R. L. Wing (19). Most people find Wing easier to work with: he is more direct than Wilhelm and uses few metaphoric and symbolic references. In a different description of the same material, certain aspects may be brought to the fore that are only hinted at in other translations, aspects that make an answer come alive for the questioner.

The third translation is Carol Anthony's *A Guide to the I Ching* third edition (20). This book is intended to compliment Wilhelm, though many use only her text. She is more psychological in her descriptions, talking about "anxieties" and "fears" instead of "inferior people" for example. But sometimes I feel she is trying to be too Eastern; too opposed to any type of action or disinclined to attribute a problem to anything outside of one's own psyche.

Since only very important issues should be addressed to the *I Ching*, and then only after one has wrestled with the issue for some time, I treat an answer as if it were a Big Dream. I photocopy answers from the three texts so the person can re-read them and underline parts that are particularly relevant. I encourage the person to re-visit the answer at various intervals of time and to journal and perhaps meditate or do an active imagination. Also consider if dreams relate to the answer—both past dreams and dreams received after the consultation.

I use the same basic approach when I'm working with an analysand. Once the person knows how to consult the *I Ching*, we may discuss a question to ask between sessions. Usually the person will review the answer with me at our next meeting. Generally, if the analytic process is proceeding well with dreams showing an evolution in the analysand's psyche, there is no need to consult the *I Ching*. There are situations, however, where using the *I Ching* can become an important aspect of the analytic work.

The *I Ching* can be helpful in choosing an analyst to work with. When I was choosing an analyst in Zurich, I got names from several people and learned as much as I could about each. I then asked the *I Ching* about working with each analyst. The lower trigram was the same in all three answers, while the upper trigrams varied, hinting that the lower trigram represented me and the upper trigram the analyst in question. The particularly positive hexagram I got about one analyst and the positive dreams I had about her helped me decide to work with her, which turned out to be a good choice. Now, when a person consults the *I Ching* about a relationship issue, I consider how the trigrams may represent each partner.

As an analyst, I have used the *I Ching* to help decide whether

to take on an analysand I have doubts about. On occasion, when I'm in a particularly difficult situation with an analysand, I have even suggested the analysand ask a question about our therapeutic relationship. The answer becomes good material to work with. The *I Ching* should not replace analytic work, but supplement and augment it.

Because Jungians work so intensively with symbolism and imagery, we may notice strong correlations between dream imagery associated with a particular problem and images in the answers from the *I Ching*. A clear example that also illustrates how the *I Ching* can facilitate a good start is the case of a male in his early 30s who was just beginning analysis. He smoked marijuana, getting stoned every two or three weeks, believing this facilitated psychological insight and personal development. He dreamt before his fourth session of a doctor his age and a nurse involved with the delivery of a baby on the top floor of a high-rise hospital building. The baby was born dead. The doctor told the nurse he suspected this happened because he was stoned during the delivery.

The dream was easy to interpret and the message was clear. "Getting high" is a term used for smoking marijuana, which produces a soaring feeling. The high-rise hospital building and the doctor's confession represent the effects of marijuana. Symbolic of new beginnings, babies represent potential development. People often dream of having babies or getting pregnant at the beginning of the analytic process, or when it really starts to move. The dream clearly indicated that smoking marijuana was counter-productive to this man's development. Still, it was difficult for him to give up smoking because he enjoyed it immensely. I suggested he consult the *I Ching* and ask about smoking marijuana. He got hexagram 12, Standstill (Stagnation), with no changing lines. In this hexagram, the three upper yang lines move upward while three lower yin lines move downward. Wilhelm's commentary says, "Heaven and earth are out of communion and all things are benumbed. What is above has no relation to what is below" (p. 52). "Getting high" clearly relates to the upper trigram: people may "get high" to soar above depressive feelings, here represented by the lower "heavy" trigram.

The analysand understood the connection between the hexagram and the dream. He got enough of a jolt to believe that

smoking marijuana was harmful to the analytic work. He decided to stop smoking for four months; saying "four months" rather than "forever" which seemed more possible to accomplish. He succeeded in breaking a habit that is more seductive and psychologically damaging than many realize.

It is a powerful experience when such synchronistic events happen; when the outer seems to reflect in a meaningful way our psychological situation. One feels "seen" by something much bigger than oneself, an experience not to be overlooked by those interested in object relations and self-psychology theories.

Time is often spent in analytic hours discussing relationship issues at work, with a spouse, a family member, or a close friend. These provide excellent questions to put to the *I Ching* after they have been thoroughly discussed and analyzed. The analyst is disadvantaged in hearing only one side of a relationship story. The *I Ching* may reinforce or contradict the analysand's perspective. One can often formulate several different hypotheses about a particular issue, so I like to defer to the *I Ching* to see which hypothesis it supports. I do not entirely abide by the *I Ching*'s counsel to regard its answers "to be accepted as a key for resolution of doubts and a basis for decision" (hexagram 4, Youthful Folly, p. 21), but I do consider the *I Ching*'s input to be valuable. The *I Ching* usually has the effect of crystallizing disparate elements into a convincing position on an issue.

One might be indignant about perceived injuries suffered in a relationship and want to force a showdown. It would give one pause to get hexagram 34, The Power of the Great, with a changing line in the third place: "Making a boast of power leads to entanglements, just as a goat entangles its horns when it butts against a hedge...an inferior man revels in power when he comes in possession of it...The superior man...is conscious at all times of the danger of pushing ahead regardless of circumstances, and therefore renounces in good time the empty display of force" (p. 135).

One may feel strongly in the right, but getting hexagram 6, Conflict, informs that being right is not sufficient for resolution of a problem:

Conflict develops when one feels himself to be in the right and runs into opposition...If a man is entangled in a conflict, his only salvation lies in being so clear-headed and inwardly strong that he is always ready to come to terms by meeting the opponent halfway. To carry on the conflict to the bitter end has evil effects even when one is right, because the enmity is then perpetuated. It is important to see the great man, that is, an impartial man whose authority is great enough to terminate the conflict amicably or assure a just decision. (pp. 28-29)

The *I Ching* often advises one to engage the issue at hand but not say exactly what to do in that process—a task for therapy. It often suggests one “see the great Man,” which in relationship issues can be interpreted as seeing a marriage counselor. The challenge to be “clear minded” is facilitated by therapy, and the therapist may also help bolster the analysand’s “inner strength” to deal with the situation. Two quite different approaches to relationship problems are suggested within hexagram 21, Biting Through. The fourth line says: “There are great obstacles to overcome, powerful opponents are to be punished. Though this is arduous, the effort succeeds. But it is necessary to be hard as metal and straight as an arrow to surmount the difficulties. If one knows these difficulties and remains persevering, he attains good fortune.” Contrast this with a changing top line which refers “to a man who is incorrigible...He is deaf to warnings. This obstinacy leads to misfortune.” (p. 89)

The *I Ching* can facilitate the development of a psychological perspective on relationships. One deeply wounded person usually marries another deeply wounded person and their ways of dealing with the wounds compliments the partner in the early stages of the relationship. As the years go by, the complement of assertiveness, for example, from one partner may become dominance. When working with the dominated spouse, it can be made clear that his partner is the latest example of a dominator in his life: if he divorced he would likely find another partner or life situation to be dominated by. Making it clear that the spouse is not the main source of oppression may overwhelm the analysand. Not every analysis can help a person transform under intense learning situations. I use an analogy from the martial arts: proof that one is centered and grounded (in good relationship with the Self) lies in how well one can battle a deadly opponent. The life-and-death nature of most difficult struggles

necessitates being focused and centered. Usually the *I Ching* counsels not to disengage. The *I Ching*'s perspective and advice can help maintain an alchemical container in which deep transformation is possible. It can help one persevere long after the ego is ready to jump ship and move on.

The *I Ching* can also be helpful when working with someone feeling lost, confused, depressed or disoriented. Getting hexagrams like 47, Oppression (Exhaustion); 28, Preponderance of the Great; 36, Darkening of the Light or 51; or The Arousing (Shock, Thunder) provide a reassuring sense that a difficult situation is acknowledged and understood by a transcendent source. The *I Ching* offers guidance that enables one to learn valuable life and spiritual lessons from every experience. This helps the troubled analyst muster up the courage to go into the darkness and seriously engage the forces within. It is difficult to accept that some situations cannot be changed, or that nothing can be done right now and one simply has to endure, persevere, survive, and wait for a better time. Ecclesiastes states, "For everything there is a season." The *I Ching* often describes a situation as being a valuable lesson in endurance and perseverance so one feels one is doing something worthwhile just to get through it! Typical is a statement in hexagram 39, Obstruction: "An obstruction that lasts only for a time is useful for self-development. This is the value of adversity." (pp. 151-152) When unable to affect an outer situation, the *I Ching* often counsels to go into oneself, to examine and strengthen one's character and abide one's time--a period of inner refinement.

It is appropriate to use the *I Ching* for the major life issues dealt with in analysis—job choices, career changes, moving, spiritual paths, etc. For example, a woman wrestling with a difficult divorce situation was shown how to use the *I Ching*. That night she dreamt: "I'm in some village and feeling disoriented. Someone gave me a roadmap." The *I Ching*'s answers are like the first crystal to form in a supernatant solution—subsequently everything quickly crystallizes. Even difficult, negative answers are useful as grist for the analytic mill, best illustrated by the title and content of hexagram 18, Work on What has Been Spoiled (Decay).

Psychoanalytic training is a particularly difficult and tricky process and the *I Ching* can be helpful. A trainee has to plunge deeply

into his or her unconscious, while being exposed to, and evaluated by, others who assess the trainee's psychological development, stability, and suitability for being an analyst. When I trained in Zurich, a trainee could be asked to leave at any time without explanation. Much is at stake, for a trainee makes a considerable investment of ego and a lot of time and energy to train. Ugly, messy situations can develop and hard feelings may be generated on both sides. It may feel as if one's very soul and sanity are at stake (21). I have helped several trainees use the *I Ching* for dealing with these situations, and helped analysts who are at odds with Jungian "institutions." The *I Ching* can offer insight and moral support which can enable an individual to stand up to an unjust policy or an entire institution.

The *I Ching* is invaluable in framing issues and showing what is going on at a deep, holistic level. Its framing and guidance enables one to be fully in the moment—a goal in Eastern religions and in depth psychology. It feels like one is getting advice from a kindly, wise person who has your well-being in mind.

One's personal issue is presented in the *I Ching* in a metaphoric, symbolic and archetypal framework—a very Jungian process. When one appreciates that the *I Ching* has been used by millions of people for millennia for a multitude of situations, one begins to see how personal issues are unique and personal experiences of cosmic themes. A powerful way of doing this is to link dream images to hexagram images, metaphors, and structural descriptions of the hexagrams. A combination of dream work and working with hexagrams gives one a sense of how dream images and associations express archetypal themes. An archetype is like a crystal, each facet illustrating how the archetype would look were it presented here as a political situation, there as a military tactic, elsewhere as a weather formation, etc. Wilhelm's translation in particular helps to cultivate an archetypal sense. As mentioned earlier, the *I Ching*'s agricultural, weather and seasonal analogies can help develop an ecopsychological perspective, a symbolic way of relating to our environment, and the cultivation of a sense of place.

Are there reasons for not using the *I Ching* in the analytic setting? Naturally, this would be so if the analyst is not familiar with the *I Ching* and does not have a personal connection with it. I would hope the analyst would find some other symbolic, oracular system.

The *I Ching* may seem too strange for many analysts, thereby undermining their trust in the analyst if its use was suggested. To others it may seem un-Christian. The most common danger is that it is used too soon, and not intelligently. Use of the *I Ching* is counterproductive if it short-circuits self-exploration and the development of personally meaningful ways of relating to the unconscious. Jung used the *I Ching* less in later life, saying he preferred to walk in the dark and see if the waters of the unconscious would support him. Bear in mind the advice given in hexagram 4, Youthful Folly: "If mistrustful or unintelligent questioning is kept up, it serves only to annoy the teacher. He does well to ignore it in silence, just as the oracle gives one answer only and refuses to be tempted by questions implying doubt." (p. 21)

China has given the West has been given a precious gift in the form of the *I Ching*. The world view and wisdom of the *I Ching* mirrors essential elements of Jungian theory and practice. A fruitful exchange between Jungians and Chinese scholars could serve as a synergistic cross-pollination between two cultures, using the *I Ching* as the bridge for a mutual consideration of some of humankind's most profound questions.

Notes and References

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Noll on the Internet asked why Jungian analysts "don't speak out in public about the activities of your colleagues that you find so repugnant? You certainly do so in private, and even to me. 'Well, I don't do astrology in my practice, it's THOSE people'—that kind of thing...Are you so 'tolerant' of your colleagues' 'individuality' that you allow explicit religious promises, New Age mysticism and divinatory practices (aura reading, I Ching, astrology) to be done in the name of 'Jungian analysis'? And so where does it leave the rest of you—the so-called 'serious analysts' with MDs and Ph.D.s in clinical psychology or MSW's in psychiatric social work, etc.—who wish to maintain a professional identity SEPARATE from your New Age colleagues? It's about time the public has a clear account of what you all believe, why you believe it, and why you are not a New Age religion." Matthew W. Clapp, 06:57 PM 11/23/97, JungNet: December.

17. Richard Wilhelm, 1967, *The I Ching or Book of Changes*, 3rd ed., Cary F. Baynes trans., Princeton University Press: Princeton.

All hexagram titles and references used in this article are from the Wilhelm/Baynes translation. Hereafter only page numbers from this book will be listed in the text.

An ostracized sage from the old school, Lau Nai Suan, introduced Wilhelm to Chinese yoga, philosophy, and the psychology of the *I Ching*. He collaborated with Wilhelm in making his excellent translation. Jung began using the *I Ching* in 1919 and met Richard Wilhelm a few years later, who became a friend. He praised Wilhelm's openness and "miracle of empathy...which enabled him to make the intellectual treasure of China accessible to Europe." (C. G. Jung, 1965, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, Aniela Jaffe ed., Vintage Books: New York, p. 375)

Jung stated: “One must have a far-reaching psychological understanding in order to enjoy the *I Ching* to advantage.” (*C. G. Jung Letters, Vol. 1, 1906-1950*, Gerhard A. Adler ed., Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ, p.139)

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