

# How to interpret changing lines

Changing lines are the most important aspect of an interpretation, because these are the points of change into the second hexagram. (When no lines change it usually indicates that the situation will stay the same for a while.) Sometimes the lines contradict what the judgment says, and if you attempt to interpret without realising just how important the lines are for providing the ultimate flavour to the interpretation then you may well misinterpret. I use my own adaptation of Zhu Xi's rules, which he published in 1186 in the fourth chapter of his 'Introduction to the study of the Changes', or Yixue qi meng. See Joseph Adler's translation of this text. My method is the same as that described by Zhu Xi, except for when three lines change:

## **1 line changes**

this is your answer, take it to be the answer in preference to a contradictory judgment (the lines always take precedence over the judgment if there is contradiction)

## **2 lines change**

uppermost line of the two is most important

## **3 change**

middle most important (for Zhu Xi's original method for three changing lines)

## **4 change**

go over to the second hexagram and take the lowermost of the two lines that have not changed from the first hexagram (example below)

## **5 change**

in the second hexagram take the line that hasn't come from a change in the first hexagram (example below)

## **6 change**

the first hexagram's situation is entirely past or on the brink of change, the second hexagram is more important, take the judgment (hexagrams 1 and 2 have an extra line that is intended to be read when all six lines change)

Read all the lines that change, going upwards in the hexagram, but lay the emphasis as above, even though when four and five lines change you are emphasising a line in the second hexagram. When that many lines change the emphasis has clearly shifted to the second hexagram. When I say read all the lines that change, that's because it will give familiarity with the content of the book in actual situations and because it is a good habit in the beginning. But after you have been consulting the oracle for many years you'll probably just read where the emphasis is. (When you've used the Book of Changes a long time, you'll have it all virtually memorised and will have a good overview of all the hexagrams and will go to the emphasised text essentially to remind yourself, or you may even be so familiar with the text that you have no need to take the book off the shelf, the words already in your mind just looking at the hexagram and changing lines that you have drawn on the paper.)

If no lines change you can read the governing ruling line, if there are two then take the uppermost. But if the judgment and the ruling line contradict each other, consider asking a rephrased question, unless you have an intuitive sense of the meaning. Bear in mind when reading the governing ruler of an unchanging hexagram that this is only a likely potential for change, it is not actually a changing line. To leave an unmoving hexagram it has to be done through the lines, so the governor could be used to focus your attention on where change may be created.

These rules remove contradictory messages by guiding you to a single prognostication out of the variations on the theme. For example, in hexagram 60 in the first line not going out the door to the courtyard is without error, but in the second line not going out the gate of the courtyard is disastrous. A matter of timing. If you had those two lines changing then applying the above rules would tell you to lay emphasis on the second line. Change moves upwards in a hexagram, that's why the uppermost of a two-line change is more important. In the example quoted, the first line shows where you are, you have not yet left the courtyard and that has been fine, but now the second line has been reached, and it is time to leave, carrying on as before will not serve you though it has been fine up until now.

A good example of a contradictory and ambiguous hexagram is 54. The judgment is negative, but the fifth line is extremely positive. If you received hexagram 54 with the fifth line changing you would disregard the ominous judgment.

To ensure that the four- and five-line changes are clear, an example of each. If you receive hexagram 1 changing in the first four places, you would look at the fifth line of hexagram 20 and regard that as the answer to your question. If you receive hexagram 1 with all but the third line changing, you would look at the third line of hexagram 15.

These rules are to an extent arbitrary, but I have found them to work well in practice.

## **Zhu Xi's three-line change**

Zhu Xi doesn't use the line statements at all for three lines changing but rather the judgment of both hexagrams. He then provides a set of 32 charts that you need to consult to decide whether to emphasise the judgment of the first or the second hexagram.

I have never liked this method. First, because it requires the use of extraneous materials in the form of these 32 charts. Second, because I do not think it is justifiable to ignore what the lines say when three change, which surely reflect the dynamic of the change better than a kind of balancing act between the two hexagram judgments.

That said, if you wish to apply Zhu Xi's original rule for a three-line change but do not have the charts handy (they are included in Adler's book), then you may be interested to know that Ed Hacker discovered a much simpler rule that has the same effect as Zhu Xi's 32 charts but does not require them. Namely, when three lines change, if the bottom line of the hexagram is among those changing then the first hexagram's judgment should take precedence over the second. If not, you stress the second hexagram's judgment over the first. There is no rationale for this beyond the fact that it just happens to give the same result as Zhu Xi's charts.

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