

The Hexagram Statement

The hexagram statement is the first textual material that one encounters in examining any hexagram. According to tradition, whereas the hexagrams themselves were created by the early culture hero Baoxi shi 包犧氏, better known as Fuxi 伏羲, the hexagram statements were composed by King Wen of Zhou 周文王 (r. 1099/1057–1050 BCE), the nominal founder of the Zhou dynasty. This same tradition goes on to credit the Duke of Zhou 周公, one of the sons of King Wen, with the composition of the six line statements of each hexagram text. These will be the topic of the next chapter, but it is worth mentioning at the outset that Chinese tradition has always attributed these two different parts of the hexagram text to two different authors. For the most part, they display very different forms, and also seem to have played very different roles both in the creation of the text and also in its subsequent use. Therefore, I will examine these two different types of statements, hexagram statements and line statements, separately in this and the following chapter.

1 The Hexagram Statement of *Qian* Hexagram

For the most part, the hexagram statements are quite formulaic, that of *Qian* 乾 ☰ “Vigorous” hexagram, the first hexagram in the received sequence, being the best known example of these formulas. While some other hexagram statements contain different formulas, and a few hexagram statements are formally similar to line statements, so that an analysis of *Qian* hexagram’s hexagram statement will not suffice to explain all hexagram statements, it is certainly the case that unless one understands the hexagram statement of *Qian* it will not be possible to understand any hexagram statement. Thus we start at the beginning. The text of this one hexagram statement reads in its entirety:

乾元亨利貞
Qian yuan heng li zhen

As noted above in Chapter Seven, the first word of this statement is simply the name of the hexagram, seemingly added as a tag at the head of the entire hexagram text, not to be read together with the words that follow it. Therefore, given the conventions that I employ in the translations offered in this book, I trans-

late it as: “*Qian* ‘Vigorous’.” As also noted in Chapter Five above, the following four characters, *yuan* 元, *heng* 亨, *li* 利 and *zhen* 貞, are at the heart of one of the most important debates in the history of *Yijing* exegesis, and thus are certainly deserving of extended consideration here. These four characters are found in exactly the same order, though with some other words before or after, in five other hexagrams.¹ Elsewhere, *yuan* 元 and *heng* 亨 occur together without *li* 利 and *zhen* 貞 three times,² while *heng* 亨 occurs by itself twenty-seven times (as well as once modified by the word *guang* 光 “radiant” and twice modified by the word *xiao* 小 “little”) in hexagram statements. Indeed, *heng* would seem to be the single most conspicuous marker of hexagram statements.³ *Li* 利 and *zhen* 貞 occur together without 元亨 twelve times. At least one of the four words occurs in fifty of the sixty-four hexagram statements. Before going on to offer a translation, or even to punctuate the Chinese text (which is a first step along the way to understanding it), it will be useful first to explore how this hexagram statement has been interpreted historically.

2 Past Interpretations of *Yuan Heng Li Zhen*

Ostensibly the earliest interpretation of the statement is found—in almost identical terms—in both the *Wenyan zhuan* 文言傳 *Commentary on the Words and Phrases*, one of the canonical “Ten Wings” (*Shi yi* 十翼) of the *Yijing*, the authorship of which is attributed to Confucius, and also in the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 *Zuo Tradition*, one of the commentaries to the *Chunqiu* 春秋 *Spring and Autumn* annals.⁴ The comment in the *Wenyan zhuan* comes at the very beginning of the commentary:

- 1 The other five hexagram statements in which the formula *yuan heng li zhen* 元亨利貞 occur are *Zhun* 屯 ䷂ “Sprouting” (#3), *Sui* 隨 ䷐ “Following” (#17), *Lin* 臨 ䷒ “Looking Down” (#19), *Wuwang* 无妄 ䷘ “Without Folly” (#25), and *Ge* 革 ䷰ “Rebellion” (#49). The formula also appears, though interrupted by other words between *li* 利 and *zhen* 貞, in *Kun* 坤 ䷁ “Compliant” (#2).
- 2 These occurrences are in *Dayou* 大有 ䷍ “Greatly Having” (#14), *Gu* 蠱 ䷑ “Pestilence” (#18), and *Sheng* 升 ䷭ “Ascending” (#46).
- 3 It should also be noted that it occurs by itself four times in line statements (the First Six and Six in the Second lines of *Pi* 否 ䷋ “Negation” [#12], the Top Nine line of *Dachu* 大畜 ䷙ “Greater Livestock” [#26], 6 and the Six in the Fourth line of *Jie* 節 ䷻ “Moderation” [#60]), as well as four occurrences in line statements of the received text in which it is almost certainly a mistake for the cognate word *xiang* 享 “to offer” (the Nine in the Third line of *Dayou* 大有 ䷍ “Greatly Having” [#14], the Top Six line of *Sui* 隨 ䷐ “Following” (#17), the Six in the Fourth line of *Sheng* 升 ䷭ “Ascending” [#46], and the Nine in the Second line of *Kun* 困 ䷮ “Bound” [47]).
- 4 The passage in the *Zuo zhuan* actually comments on the hexagram statement of *Sui* 隨

元者，善之長也。亨者，嘉之會也。利者，義之和也。貞者，事之幹也。君子體仁足以長人，嘉會足以合禮，利物足以和義，貞固足以幹事。君子行此四德者，故大曰：『乾：元、亨、利、貞。』

Yuan is the leader of goodnesses. *Heng* is the gathering of enjoyments. *Li* is the harmony of proprieties. *Zhen* is the trunk of affairs. The gentleman's embodiment of humanity is sufficient to lead others; enjoyments being gathered is sufficient to conjoin ritual; benefitting things is sufficient to harmonize proprieties; and affirmed sturdiness is sufficient to stiffen affairs. The gentleman practices these four virtues, and therefore it says: *Qian*: Prime, Receipt, Benefit, Affirmed.

The passage in the *Zuo zhuan* is embedded within a longer story about one Mu Jiang 母姜 (d. 564 BCE), one of the more notorious women of ancient China. As examined in Chapter Five above (account #5.5), the passage comes in the year of her death (ninth year of Duke Xiang of Lu 魯襄公 [r. 572–542 BCE]; i.e., 564 BCE), and recounts a divination made years earlier. She had been the wife of Duke Xuan of Lu 魯宣公 (r. 608–591 BCE) and mother of his son Duke Cheng 魯成公 (r. 590–573 BCE), against whom she subsequently conspired in favor of her lover Shusun Qiaoru 叔孫僑如, for which reason she was then put into prison. At the time that Mu Jiang was first imprisoned, a diviner had sought to convince her that a divination performed on her behalf meant that she would get out of prison. She rejected this prognostication, offering her own interpretation of the hexagram statement of *Sui* 隨 ䷐ “Following” hexagram (#17),⁵ which coincidentally shares the same main four words as that of *Qian* hexagram.

䷐ “Following” (#17) hexagram, which however is almost identical to that of *Qian* hexagram, the sole difference (other than the different hexagram names) being the term *wu jiu* 无咎 “without trouble” after “*yuan heng li zhen*.”

5 As noted above in Chapter Five, the prognostication of this divination seems to have involved some subterfuge. The initial result, not specified as using the *Zhou Changes*, was pronounced as the “eight of *Gen* ䷳ ‘Stilling’” (*Gen zhi ba* 艮 ䷳ 至八). The scribe performing the divination suggested that this points instead to the hexagram *Sui* 隨 ䷐ “Following”: “This is called *Gen* ䷳ ‘Stilling’s’ *Sui* ䷐ ‘Following’” (*shi wei Gen zhi Sui* 是謂艮 ䷳ 之 隨 ䷐). There is no convincing explanation of why this should be so. The hexagram pictures for *Gen* ䷳ and *Sui* ䷐ differ by five lines, the only similar line being the broken line in the second position. As we have seen in Chapter Five, in the *Zuo zhuan* milfoil divination using the *Zhou Changes* was almost always expressed as the same sort of “Hexagram¹ *zhi* 之 Hexagram²” formula, but in this formula the two hexagrams invariably differ by just a single line. That this divination would result in five changing lines is extraordinarily improbable, at least according to the traditional understanding of how sortilege divination was performed. According to this understanding of milfoil divination, the chances of obtaining a moving yin line (i.e., a 6) are 1/16, while the chances of getting a moving yang line (i.e., 9) are 3/16. Since the hexagram

穆姜薨於東宮。始往而筮之，遇艮☶之八。史曰：「是謂艮☶之隨☱。隨，其出也。君必速出！」姜曰：「亡！是於《周易》曰：『隨，元、亨、利、貞，無咎。』元，體之長也；亨，嘉之會也；利，義之和也；貞，事之幹也。體仁足以長人，嘉德足以合禮，利物足以和義，貞固足以幹事。然，故不可誣也。是以雖隨無咎，今我婦人，而與於亂。固在下位，而有不仁，不可謂元。不靖國家，不可謂亨。作而害身，不可謂利。棄位而姤，不可謂貞。有四德者，隨而無咎。我皆無之，豈隨也哉？我則取惡，能無咎乎？必死於此，弗得出矣。」

Mu Jiang passed away in the Eastern Palace. When she first went there, she divined by milfoil about it, meeting the eight of *Gen* ☶ “Stilling.” The scribe said: “This is called *Gen* ☶ ‘Stilling’'s *Sui* ☱ ‘Following.’” ‘Following’ means getting out. Milady will certainly quickly get out. Jiang said: “Not so! In the *Zhou Changes* this says:

Following: Prime, Receipt, Benefit, Affirmed. Without trouble.⁶

‘Prime’ is the leader of the body; ‘Receipt’ is the gathering of enjoyment; ‘Benefit’ is the harmony of propriety; and ‘Affirmed’ is the trunk of endeavors. Embodying humaneness suffices to lead people, enjoying virtue suffices to join the rites, benefiting others suffices to harmonize propriety, and affirming sturdiness suffices to strengthen endeavors. Thus, there can be no deception even if in this way it is ‘Following. Without trouble.’ Now I am a woman and have taken part in disorder. Solidly in a lowly position, I was also inhumane; this cannot be said to be ‘Prime.’ Not bringing peace to the state cannot be said to be in ‘Receipt.’ Acting and harming my person cannot be said to be of ‘Benefit.’ And abandoning my position to indulge in licentiousness cannot be said to be ‘Affirmed.’ With these four virtues, one might ‘Follow’ and be ‘without trouble.’ But since I have none of them, how could I ‘Follow’? And since I have taken up evil, how could I be ‘without trouble’? I will surely die here, and will not be able to get out.”⁷

Given this canonical pedigree, this “four virtues” interpretation of the phrase *yuan heng li zhen* has been adopted in many commentaries and translations

picture of *Gen* differs from that of *Sui* by three yin lines and two yang lines, the chances of all five of these lines changing would be $(1/16^3 \times 3/16^2 =) 1/116,508$. Instead of such an improbable result, it seems to me much likelier that the diviner was using a technical trick to convince Mu Jiang of a positive result. She did not fall for the trick, rejecting it on philosophical grounds rather than on technical grounds.

6 I here translate this hexagram statement according to the interpretation given by Mu Jiang, even though I translate the same words differently elsewhere in this book.

7 *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, 4215–4216.

of the *Zhou Changes*. In the West, it is represented in the translation by James Legge (1815–1987): “*Khien* (represents) what is great and originating, penetrating, advantageous, correct and firm,” translating *yuan* 元 (translated above as “Prime”) as “great and originating,” translating *heng* 亨 (translated above as “Receipt”) as “penetrating,” translating *li* 利 (translated above as “Benefit”) as “advantageous,” and translating *zhen* 貞 (translated above as “Affirmed”) as “correct and firm.”⁸

Influential though this “four virtues” interpretation has been, it is by no means the only important interpretation, or even the only important interpretation within the canonical *Yijing* itself. The *Tuan zhuan* 彖傳 *Commentary on the Judgments*, the canonical commentary devoted to the hexagram statements, also credited to Confucius, three times glosses *yuan heng li zhen* as *da heng yi zheng* 大亨以正 “great *heng* to be upright” or “great *heng* through rectitude.”⁹ This reading obviously divides the phrase into two two-word compounds, *yuan heng* 元亨 and *li zhen* 利貞, with *yuan* 元 glossed as *da* 大 “great” and *li* 利 as *yi* 以 “to use to.” *Zhen* 貞 is glossed paranomastically as *zheng* 正 “upright; rectitude,” as is common in early Chinese commentarial literature. *Heng* 亨 seems never to be explained explicitly by the *Tuan zhuan*, but other occurrences of *yuan heng* 元亨 are also glossed *da heng* 大亨, so it is clear that at least this commentary read the two words together, with *yuan* understood as an adjective. This interpretation has also been adopted by many commentators and translators, represented most influentially in the Chinese tradition by Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200). In his commentary *Zhou Yi ben yi* 周易本義 *Basic Meaning of the Zhou Changes*, Zhu Xi provided the following comment on this line of *Qian* hexagram:

文王以為乾道大通而至正。故於筮得此卦，而六爻皆不變者，言其占當得大通，而必利在正面，然後可以保其終也。

King Wen considered the way of *Qian* to be greatly penetrating and of the highest rectitude. Therefore, in milfoil divination, meeting with this hexagram, with all six of the lines unchanging, one says of its prognostication that you should get “great penetration,” and then certainly “benefit will reside in being upright,” and only then can one protect the end.¹⁰

8 Legge, *The Yi King*, 57.

9 This formulation is found in the comments to *Lin* 臨 “Looking Down” (#19), *Wuwang* 无妄 “Without Folly” (#25) and *Ge* 革 “Rebellion” (#49).

10 Zhu Xi, *Zhou Yi benyi*, 30.

This interpretation has also been quite influential in the West, best known through the work of Richard Wilhelm (1873–1930), who translated *Qian yuan heng li zhen* into German as “*Das Schöpferische wirkt erhabenes Gelingen, fördernd durch Beharrlichkeit*,”¹¹ in which “*Schöpferische*” (“creative”) represents Wilhelm’s translation of the hexagram name *Qian*. This translation has become better known throughout the West by way of the translation of it into English by Cary F. Baynes (1883–1977): “The Creative works sublime success, Furthering through perseverance.”¹² “Sublime success” is an aesthetic rendering of *yuan heng* 元亨, while “furthering through perseverance” is a somewhat more literal translation of *li zhen* 利貞.

With the rise of what is called “New Changes Studies” (*Xin Yi xue* 新易學) in the twentieth century, a third interpretation was added to these two dominant interpretations of *yuan heng li zhen*. This was pioneered in particular by Gao Heng 高亨 (1900–1986) in his book *Zhou Yi gu jing jin zhu* 周易古經今注 *New Notes on the Ancient Classic Zhou Changes*. Arguing that the *Zhou Changes* grew out of a divination context more or less similar to that of Shang turtle-shell divination but also thoroughly imbedded within the Zhou dynasty ritual culture, he explained this hexagram statement in the following terms:

元，大也。亨即享字。古人舉行大享之祭，曾筮遇此卦，故記之曰元亨。利貞猶言利占也。筮遇此卦，舉事有利，故曰利貞。

Yuan means “great.” *Heng* is none other than the character *xiang* “to offer.” When the ancients performed the sacrifice of great offering, they divined and met with this hexagram and therefore noted it saying “Great offering.” *Li zhen* is the same as saying “beneficial prognostication.” In divining when they met with this hexagram, the affair they were to perform was beneficial and therefore they said *li zhen*.¹³

Gao’s interpretation is more or less grammatically similar to Zhu Xi’s and the *Tuan zhuan*’s, in that the four characters are divided into two two-character compounds, with *yuan* 元 interpreted as an adjective “great” modifying the word *heng* 亨. However, the resemblance ends there. Gao insists that the character *heng* 亨 “is none other than” (*ji* 即) the word *xiang* 享 “to offer.” Also different is his interpretation of both the word *zhen* 貞, and also the relationship between it and the word *li* 利. Whereas throughout most of the history of *Yijing* exegesis, *zhen* 貞 was glossed as *zheng* 正 “upright; rectitude,” Gao Heng

11 Wilhelm, *I Ging*, 1.

12 Wilhelm, *The I Ching*, 4.

13 Gao Heng, *Zhou Yi gu jing jin zhu*, 1.

insisted that in the context of divination it had a special meaning, which he rendered as “prognostication” (*zhan* 占). Gao’s interpretation of the word *li* 利 was also quite different from any of the traditional commentaries. *Li* normally means “benefit,” either as a noun or a verb; both the *Tuan zhuan* and Zhu Xi had treated it as a verb complement meaning something like “beneficial to do or be” something. By contrast, Gao Heng interpreted it as an adjective, meaning a “beneficial prognostication.” This interpretation too has been influential, though perhaps more so in the West than in China. Richard Kunst, who followed Gao Heng in much of his interpretation on the *Zhou Changes*, gave this as “Grand treat, favorable determination,”¹⁴ while Richard Rutt, whose translation is otherwise eclectic, offers “Supreme offering; favourable augury.”¹⁵

My own reading of the *Zhou Changes* is usually identified with the “New Changes Studies.” Nevertheless, I would argue that while Gao Heng (and thus Kunst and Rutt’s) sense that this crucial phrase should be interpreted within the context of divination is certainly correct, their understanding of both the grammar and semantics of the phrase are also almost certainly mistaken. Much preferable, at least grammatically, is the reading of the *Tuan zhuan* and Zhu Xi. Demonstration of this will require us to consider each of the four words individually, with emphasis being given to *heng* 亨 and *zhen* 貞.

3 *Yuan* 元

The word *yuan* 元 originally meant “head” or “chief” (whence the *Tuan zhuan* gloss for it as *da* 大 “great”), but early on came more commonly to mean “first” or “prime,” as in *yuan nian* 元年 “first year.” It is often ambiguous as to which of these two related meanings is intended. Richard Kunst notes disagreement about the meaning of the term *yuan si* 元祀 in the “Luo gao” 洛誥 “Announcement at Luo” and “Jiu gao” 酒誥 “Announcement Regarding Liquor” chapters of the *Shang shu* 尚書 *Exalted Scriptures*: whereas the canonical pseudo-Kong Anguo 孔安國 commentary glosses *yuan* as “great” (*da* 大), such modern scholars as Sun Xingyan 孫星衍 (1753–1818), Yu Yue 俞樾 (1821–1907), and Bernhard Karlgren (1889–1978) have all argued that it should mean “original sacrifice” or “originator’s sacrifice.”¹⁶

In the received text of the *Zhou Changes*, *yuan* occurs twenty-seven times, thirteen times in hexagram statements and fourteen times in line statements.

14 Kunst, “The Original *Yijing*,” 369–380.

15 Rutt, *The Book of Changes (Zhouyi)*, 224.

16 Kunst, “The Original *Yijing*,” 199.

Ten of the thirteen occurrences in hexagram statements come before the word *heng* 亨, as in the case of *Qian* hexagram under discussion here. In two of the other three cases, it comes before the word *ji* 吉 “auspicious”;¹⁷ the compound *yuan ji* 元吉 also comprises twelve of the fourteen occurrences of the word *yuan* in line statements.¹⁸ In the compound *yuan ji*, *yuan* is almost universally understood to be a modifier, the compound meaning something like “greatly auspicious” or “prime auspiciousness.” Thus, it seems certain that in the parallel formula in hexagram statements, *yuan heng* 元亨, *yuan* should also be a modifier, meaning either “great” or “prime.” The choice between these two meanings is less certain. My translation as “prime” is informed by my own understanding of the way that milfoil divination with the *Zhou Changes* was conducted, at least in Spring and Autumn times, an understanding that is admittedly speculative. However, in addition to that reconstruction of the divination procedure, there is also some linguistic evidence within the *Zhou Changes* themselves in support of reading *yuan* 元 as “first” or “prime.” In two of the three occurrences of the word in which it does not modify either *heng* 亨 or *ji* 吉,¹⁹ it is paired with the word *yong* 永 “eternal” or “long-term.”

比 ䷇：吉。原筮元；永貞无咎。不寧方來。后夫凶。

Bi “Allying” (#8): Auspicious. Original milfoil divination: Prime. Affirming about the long-term: Without trouble. An unpeaceful country coming. For a latter man: Ominous.

17 The one exceptional usage in a hexagram statement is with *Bi* 比 ䷇ “Allying” (#8). There are different ways to punctuate the phrase in which *yuan* appears. As discussed in Chapter Five above (pp. 262–263 nn. 52, 55), a good argument can be made that the phrase is corrupt. The interpretation offered there is:

比：吉。原筮元永貞无咎。不寧方來；后夫凶。

Bi “Allying”: Auspicious. Original milfoil divination: Prime. Affirming about the long-term: Without trouble. An unpeaceful country coming. For a latter man: Ominous.

18 The two exceptional occurrences of *yuan* in the line statements are:

睽 ䷥九四：睽孤，遇元夫，交孚。厲。无咎。

Kui “Cross-eyed” (#38): Nine in the Fourth: Looking cross-eyed at an orphan: Meeting a prime husband, exchanging captives. Dangerous. Without trouble.

萃 ䷬九五：萃有位。无咎。匪孚。元永貞。悔亡。

Cui “Collected” (#45): Nine in the Fifth: Collecting has positions. Without trouble. Untrustworthy. Prime affirming about the long-term. Regret gone.

19 In the third occurrence, in the Nine in the Fourth line of *Kui* 睽 “Cross-eyed” (#38), it seems to mean “chief” or “great,” or perhaps as a compound “headman.”

九四：睽孤，遇元夫，交孚。厲。无咎。

Nine in the Fourth: Looking cross-eyed at an orphan: Meeting a prime husband, exchanging captives. Dangerous. Without trouble.

萃九五：萃有位。无咎。匪孚。元永貞。悔亡。

Cui “Collected” (#45): Nine in the Fifth: Collecting has positions. Without trouble. Untrustworthy. Prime affirming about the long-term. Regret gone.

It is likely that both of these statements are corrupt to some extent.²⁰ Nevertheless, the contrast with *yong* 永 “long-term” does suggest that *yuan* 元 should mean something like “preliminary” or, as I translate it, “prime.”

4 Heng 亨

Heng 亨 is one of the most characteristic words of the *Zhou Changes*; indeed, it occurs in Chinese literature almost uniquely in conjunction with the *Zhou Changes*. Dictionaries routinely treat the word as cognate with, or even interchangeable with, *xiang* 享 “to offer; to enjoy,” both words deriving from the single original character 亨. This character is in turn more or less interchangeable with *xiang* 饗 “to feast, to offer; to receive, to enjoy.” The character 亨 was written either 亨 or 亨 in Seal Script, the latter form said to be a pictograph of a covered container with food inside it. The original form of 饗 is even more pictographic: 饗, depicting two kneeling figures facing each other over a pot of grain, producing the character 鄉.

Some early Chinese texts use these two (or more) characters indiscriminately, while others are careful to differentiate their uses. For instance, the *Zhou li* 周禮 *Rites of Zhou* uses *xiang* 亨 (i.e., 亨) for “to offer,” and *xiang* 饗 for “to feast,” while the *Yi li* 儀禮 *Ceremonies and Rites* uses *xiang* 亨 for “to feast,” and *xiang* 饗 for “to receive, to enjoy.” On the other hand, the *Li ji* 禮記 *Record of Rites* uses only *xiang* 饗 for all of these meanings, while the *Zuo zhuan*, uses only *xiang* 亨. The *Shi jing* 詩經 *Classic of Poetry* clearly differentiates the different meanings, the differentiation being important for our understanding of the meaning of *heng* 亨 in the *Zhou Changes*. The *Shi jing* consistently uses *xiang* 亨 for offerings to the spirits, and *xiang* 饗 for the spirits’ receipt of the offerings. For instance, the poems “Thorny Bramble” 楚茨 (*Chu ci*; Mao 209) and “We

20 Gao Heng, *Zhou Yi gu jing jin zhu*, 29–30, argues that in the hexagram statement for *Bi* “Allying” hexagram, *yuan* 元 should have been followed by *heng* 亨, as is customary in hexagram statements. This is a reasonable suggestion, but it should be noted that the Shanghai Museum manuscript, the earliest extant text of the *Zhou Changes*, reads the same as the received text (except for the added word *ji* 吉 “auspicious” between *yong zhen* 永貞 “affirming about the long-term” and *wu jiu* 无咎 “without trouble”).

Offer” 我將 (*Wo jiang*; Mao 273) both differentiate these two meanings. The first two stanzas of “Thorny Bramble” describe the process of ancestral sacrifice, the first stanza describing the offering, the second the result. The two stanzas end with the following lines (the words *xiang* 享 “to offer” and *xiang* 饗 “to receive” in bold for emphasis):

以為酒食，以**享**以祀，
以妥以侑，以介景福！
To make into wine and food,
With which **to offer**, to sacrifice,
To bring comfort, to bring blessings,
To strengthen imposing fortune.

先祖是皇，神保是饗，
孝孫有慶，報以介福，
萬壽無疆！
The ancestors these are august,
Spirit Protectors these **receive**.
Filial grandsons celebrate,
Requited with sturdy fortune,
Myriad long-life without end.²¹

The poem “We Offer” of the *Zhou Song* 周頌 *Zhou Hymns*, the oldest section of the *Shi jing*, includes a further use of the word *xiang* 饗 “to receive,” providing an excellent contrast to its earlier use of *xiang* 享 “to offer.” The poem reads in its entirety (the words *xiang* 享 and *xiang* 饗 and their respective translations again in bold):

我將我**享**，維羊維牛，維天其右之！
儀式刑文王之典，日靖四方。伊嘏文王！
既右饗之。我其夙夜，畏天之威。于時保之！
We sacrifice, we **offer**,
It is sheep, it is oxen,
May it be Heaven to have them!
Properly formed were King Wen’s standards,
Daily pacifying the four quarters.

21 It is a coincidence that this stanza also includes the character 亨, in the phrase “*huo bo huo peng*” 或剝或亨 “And now paring, and now boiling.” However, as my Romanization and translation here indicate, this 亨 is almost certainly to be read as *peng* 烹 “to boil.”

He is blessed, King Wen.
 Having blessed and received them,
 May we morning and evening
 Fear Heaven's awe
 And Protect them in this!

Within the *Zhou Changes* itself, the word *heng* 亨 occurs predominantly in hexagram statements (forty of forty-seven occurrences). Ten of these forty occurrences of the word *heng* in hexagram statements follow immediately after the word *yuan* 元, as in the case of *Qian* hexagram. In two occurrences, it follows the word *xiao* 小 “little,” and in one case it follows *guang* 光 “bright.” In its other twenty-seven occurrences, *heng* occurs by itself, without any apparent syntactic connection with other words. Of the seven occurrences in line statements, four occur in contexts similar to that of the hexagram statements (i.e., either in the phrase *yuan heng* or just *heng* by itself). However, in three cases, the graph appears where we would expect a verb meaning “to offer” or “to sacrifice”:

大有九三：公用亨于天子。小人弗克。
Dayou “Greatly Having” (#14): Nine in the Third: A duke herewith offering to the Son of Heaven. A petty person is not capable of it.

隨上六：拘系之。乃從維之。王用亨于西山。
Sui “Following” (#17): Top Six: Arresting and tying them, and then further trussing them. The king herewith offers on the western mountain.

升上六：拘系之。乃從維之。王用亨于西山。
Sheng “Ascending” (#46): Six in the Fourth: The king herewith makes offering on Forked Mountain. Auspicious. Without trouble.

These three occurrences of *heng* 亨 in the line statements of the *Zhou Changes* are paralleled by three occurrences of the graph *xiang* 享, all clearly in the sense “to offer”:

損 ䷨：有孚。元吉。无咎。可貞。利有攸往。曷之用。二簋可用享。
Sun “Decreasing” (#41): There is trust. Prime auspiciousness. Without trouble. One can affirm. Beneficial to have somewhere to go. What is it to use? Two tureens can be used to make offering.

益六二：或益之十朋之龜弗克違。永貞吉。王用享于帝。吉。
Yi “Increasing” (#42): Six in the Second: Now increasing it, Ten double

strands of turtle-shells cannot be disobeyed. Affirming about permanence: Auspicious. The king herewith makes offering to Di. Auspicious.

困九二：困于酒食。朱紱方來。利用享祀。征凶。无咎。

Kun “Bound” (#47): Nine in the Second: Bound in wine and food: The Red-Kneepads country comes. Beneficial herewith to offer and sacrifice. Campaigning: Ominous. Without trouble.

It is the parallel between the uses of *heng* 亨 and *xiang* 享 in the sense of “to offer” that was the principal evidence for Gao Heng, followed by Richard Kunst and Richard Rutt in English, to argue that the word *heng* 亨 should have the same meaning in its forty occurrences in hexagram statements. Thus, for *heng* 亨 itself, they would say that on the occasion of “an offering” or “sacrifice,” a divination would be performed; the two characters *yuan heng* 元亨 would refer to the occasion of “a great sacrifice.”

Although this argument seems to be reasonable, early manuscripts of the *Zhou Changes* show that the two different senses “to offer” and “to receive, to enjoy” were, in fact, clearly differentiated. In the Mawangdui 馬王堆 manuscript, *heng* 亨 is consistently written as 亨, while the three cases of *xiang* 享 are all written as 芳. It is significant that in the Nine in the Third line of *Dayou* “Greatly Having” and the Top Six line of *Sui* “Following,” i.e., where the received text writes *heng* 亨 in the apparent sense of “to make offering,” the graph is also written in the manuscript as 芳.²² The Shanghai Museum manuscript, although quite fragmentary, reflects the same differentiation: whereas the manuscript consistently writes the *heng* of the received text as 亨, it writes the character in the Top Six line of *Sui* “Following” as 享 (all three of the places in which the received text writes *xiang* 享 are missing due to breaks in the text).

However the word *heng* or *xiang* may have been written during the earliest stage of the *Changes*'s writing—亨，享，亨，鄉 or 饗—I feel certain that the form given in the Shanghai Museum manuscript points toward the original meaning of the word in the context of the earliest *Changes* divination. *Xiang* 鄉, a pictograph of two kneeling figures facing each other over a pot of grain, is cognate with the word *xiang* 饗, which, as we have seen, means both “to offer” and “to receive” or “to enjoy.” A special feature of the Chinese language is that many words involving the give and take of communications between two persons or two parties were originally expressed with a single word. Thus, both

²² The Six in the Fourth line of *Sheng* 升 “Ascending,” the only other case in which the received text uses *heng* as a verb meaning “to make offering,” is missing from the Mawangdui manuscript due to a break in the silk.

“to give” and “to take” were written as *shou* 受 (“to give” was later differentiated in writing as *shou* 授), “to buy” and “to sell” were both written as *mai* 買 (“to sell” was later differentiated as *mai* 賣), while *jie* 借 is still used for both “to lend” and “to borrow,” and *ming* 明 can mean either “to explain” or “to understand.” Even the word family deriving from *you* 有 “to have” seems to display this feature: the word *you* 侑 means “to give offering (to the spirits)” while the word *you* 祐 means “to receive blessings (from the spirits)”; in Shang oracle-bone inscriptions, both of these senses, as well as that of *you* “to have,” could be written simply as *you* 又. The word family that includes both *heng* 亨 and *xiang* 饗 reveals this same sense of bi-directional communication.

As we have seen in Chapters Three and Four above, in ancient China the word *xiang* 饗 appeared formulaically at the end of prayers (including divinatory prayers): *shang xiang* 尚饗 “would that (the spirit-world) receive (our prayer).” For instance, the “Shao lao kuishi li” 少牢饋食禮 “Rites of the Minor Sacrifice and Food Offerings” chapter of the *Yi li* gives the following description of a divination about presenting the annual sacrifice to the ancestors (*shang xiang* 尚饗 and its translation “would that it be received” is emphasized in bold):

日用丁、己，筮旬有一日。筮於廟門之外。主人朝服，西面于門東。史朝服，左執筮，右抽上鞞，兼與筮執之，東面受命于主人。主人曰：「孝孫某，來日丁亥，用薦歲事于皇祖伯某，以某妃配某氏。尚饗！」史曰：「諾！」西面于門西，抽下鞞，左執筮，右兼執鞞以擊筮，遂述命，曰：「假爾大筮有常。孝孫某，來日丁亥，用薦歲事于皇祖伯某，以某妃配某氏。尚饗！」乃釋鞞，立筮。卦者在左坐，卦以木。卒筮，乃書卦于木，示主人，乃退占。吉，則史鞞筮，史兼執筮與卦以告于主人：「占曰『從』。」

Using either day *ding* or *ji*, one divines by milfoil about eleven days hence. The milfoil divination takes place outside of the temple gate. The Host wearing court clothing faces west on the eastern side of the gate. The Scribe, wearing court clothing, holds the milfoil in his left hand and with his right hand draws out the upper quiver, and puts it together with the milfoil to hold; facing east he receives the command from the Host. The Host says: “Filial grandson So-and-so on the coming day *dinghai* will herewith present the annual service to august Grandfather So-and-so and to Consort So-and-so; **would that it be received.**” The Scribe says: “Approved.” Facing west on the western side of the gate, he draws out the lower quiver, and with his left hand holding the milfoil, and with his right hand combining and holding the quiver strikes the milfoil, thereupon pronouncing the command, saying: “Approaching you great milfoil in the

standard way: ‘Filial Grandson so-and-so on the coming day *dinghai* will herewith present the annual service to August Grandfather So-and-so and to Consort So-and-so; **would that it be received.**’ Then putting down the quiver he sets up the milfoil. The Hexagapher kneeling to his left draws the hexagram on a wooden board. Finishing the divination, then he draws the hexagram on the wooden board. Showing it to the host, then they step back to prognosticate. If it is auspicious, then the Scribe quivers the milfoil, then the Scribe holds the milfoil and hexagram together to announce to the Host: “The prognostication says ‘Approved.’”

Similarly, the “Shi yu li” 士虞禮 “Rites of the Sire Relaxing [the Ancestors]” includes the following description of an offering made to pacify the soul of a newly deceased parent:

死三日而殯，三月而葬，遂卒哭。將旦而祔，則薦。卒辭曰：「哀子某，來日某，隕祔爾于爾皇祖某甫。尚饗！」女子，曰：「皇祖妣某氏」。婦，曰：「孫婦于皇祖姑某氏」。其他辭，一也。饗辭曰：「哀子某，圭為而哀薦之。饗！」

On the third day after the death one encoffins, on the third month one buries, and then one completes the wailing. The next day at dawn, the spirit tablet is placed and then the offering is made. The final statement says: “The mourning son so-and-so, on the coming day such-and-such will raise your tablet up together with your august ancestor so-and-so; **would that it be received.**” For a daughter, one says: “August ancestress Madame so-and-so.” For a wife, one says: “The descendant wife of august ancestress Madame so-and-so.” All of the other statements are as one. The **receipt statement** says: “Mourning son so-and-so acting purely has mournfully sacrificed to him. **It is received!**”

The “receipt statement” (*xiang ci* 饗辭) is the announcement that the sacrifice has been successfully received by the ancestor in question, similar to the “prognostication” (*zhan* 占) in the preceding description of a divination: *zhan yue* “*cong*” 占曰『從』 “the prognostication says: ‘Approved.’”

The same format for a divination is found in a description of a turtle-shell divination in the “Geng Zhu” 耕柱 chapter of the *Mozi* 墨子. This passage has also already been examined in Chapter Three above (account #3.14). Nevertheless, it is worth revisiting here in the context of our discussion of *heng* 亨 and *xiang* 饗, even though some of its most important information is hidden by variant characters. I here include only the initial context and the divination charge and the first part of the prognostication. The passage, including the ora-

cle that follows the first part of the prognostication, will be taken up yet again in Chapter Nine on the line statements of the *Changes*. I again highlight the relevant words, both in the Chinese text and in the translation.

巫馬子謂子墨子曰：鬼神孰與聖人明智。子墨子曰：鬼神之明智於聖人猶聰耳明目之與聾瞽也。昔者夏后開使蜚廉折金於山川而陶鑄之於昆吾。是使翁難雉乙卜於白若之龜曰：“鼎成三足而方，不炊而自烹，不舉而自臧，不遷而自行，以祭於昆吾之虛；上鄉”。乙又言兆之由曰：“饗矣”。

Magician Mazi addressed Master Mozi saying, “Who is more intelligent, the ghosts and spirits or the sages?” Master Mozi said, “The intelligence of the ghosts and spirits vis-à-vis that of the sages is just like those with perceptive ears and bright eyes vis-à-vis the deaf and blind. In antiquity, Qi, the lord of Xia sent Fei Lian to dig metal out of the hills and streams, and to cast a caldron at Kunwu. This one sent Wengnan Zhi Yi to divine about it with the turtle White Approval, saying: ‘The caldron will be complete with three legs and will yet be square, will not roast and yet will cook of its own, will not be raised up and yet will store itself, and will not be transferred and yet will move on its own, in order to sacrifice on the mound of Kunwu; **would that it be received.**’ Yi then spoke of the crack’s oracle, saying: “**Received indeed.**”²³

The ending of the divination prayer, here translated as “would that it be received,” is written in the Chinese text as *shang xiang* 上鄉, essentially meaningless in this context.

However, already in the eighteenth century, Bi Yuan 畢沅 (1730–1797) indicated his suspicion that this should be read as 尚饗, a suggestion later accepted and elaborated upon by Sun Yirang 孫詒讓 (1848–1908).²⁴ I think there is no question that they are correct in this emendation. The diviner then pronounces the prognostication, saying *xiang yi* 饗矣 “It is Received indeed.”

When Wengnan Zhi Yi begins his prognostication with the word *xiang* 饗, it is also almost certainly the same word as the *heng* 亨 of the *Changes*. This

23 Sun Yirang, *Mozi xian gu*, 42226. Bi Yuan's emendations to the 1445 Ming-dynasty *Dao zang* 道藏 or Daoist canon text of the *Mozi* (this passage is found in *Mozi* 墨子 [*Daozang* ed.], 11.9a–b) are based on medieval quotations of the passage, all of which he copiously cites.

24 Bi Yuan 畢沅, *Mozi* (Sibu beiyao ed.), 11.8b. Sun Yirang, *Mozi xian gu*, 42226 specifically differentiates this “command to the turtle” (*ming gui zhi ci* 命龜之辭), from the “prognostication” (*zhan ci* 占辭) below.

passage shows well how it is to be understood: it is the announcement of the diviner that the wish expressed in the divination has been “received” and “enjoyed” by the spirits, thereby also constituting the divination’s response. In the hexagram statements of the *Changes*, the first two words *yuan heng* 元亨 announce the “initial receipt” of the spirits’ favor, and this is why Richard Wilhelm’s translation as “success” points in the right direction.²⁵

There is still earlier evidence for this use of *xiang* 饗 as a sort of prognostication indicating that communication with the ancestors had been successful. Indeed, some of the evidence goes back almost to the beginning of Chinese literary history. Shang oracle-bone inscriptions associated with the He 何 Diviner Group, the so-called Period III during the reigns of the Shang kings Lin Xin 廩辛 (r. c. 1150–1140 BCE) and Kang Ding 康丁 (r. c. 1040–1030 BCE), display a feature not seen in other Shang oracle-bone inscriptions: the formulaic use of the character *xiang* 鄉 as a sort of prognostication. Several examples of this usage are visible in the single oracle bone *Jiaguwen heji* 甲骨文合集 #27456, illustrated in Figure 8.1 on the following page.

The inscriptions running up the right-hand side of the ox plastron are divinations concerning offerings made to ancestors of the Shang king. The first two of these (reading from the bottom to to the top, as indicated by the day dates), read:

壬子卜何貞：翌癸丑其侑妣癸。鄉（《合集》27456）
Crack-making on *renzi* (day 49), He affirming: “On the next day *guichou* (day 50), we will make offering to Ancestress Gui.” Received²⁶

癸巳卜何貞：翌甲午登于父甲。鄉（《合集》27456）
Crack-making on *guisi* (day 30), He affirming: “On the next day *jiawu* (day 31), we will lift up to Father Jia.” Received²⁷

As Song Zhenhao 宋鎮豪 notes in his discussion of this feature, *xiang* 鄉 here has to be read separate from the “charges” of the divination (i.e., the proposals to perform offerings to Ancestress Gui and Father Jia), and indicates the spir-

25 In the *Changes* commentarial tradition, *heng* is routinely glossed as *tong* 通 “to penetrate, to communicate,” which, as noted here, Richard Wilhelm rendered as “success.” Although this translation would seem to be only very loosely related to the meaning of “communicate,” as I will try to show below, it does point in the right direction.

26 Guo Moruo 郭沫若, ed.-in-chief, Hu Houxuan 胡厚宣, ed., *Jiaguwen heji* 甲骨文合集 (13 vols., Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1978–1982), #27456.1.

27 Guo Moruo, *Jiaguwen heji*, #27456.2.

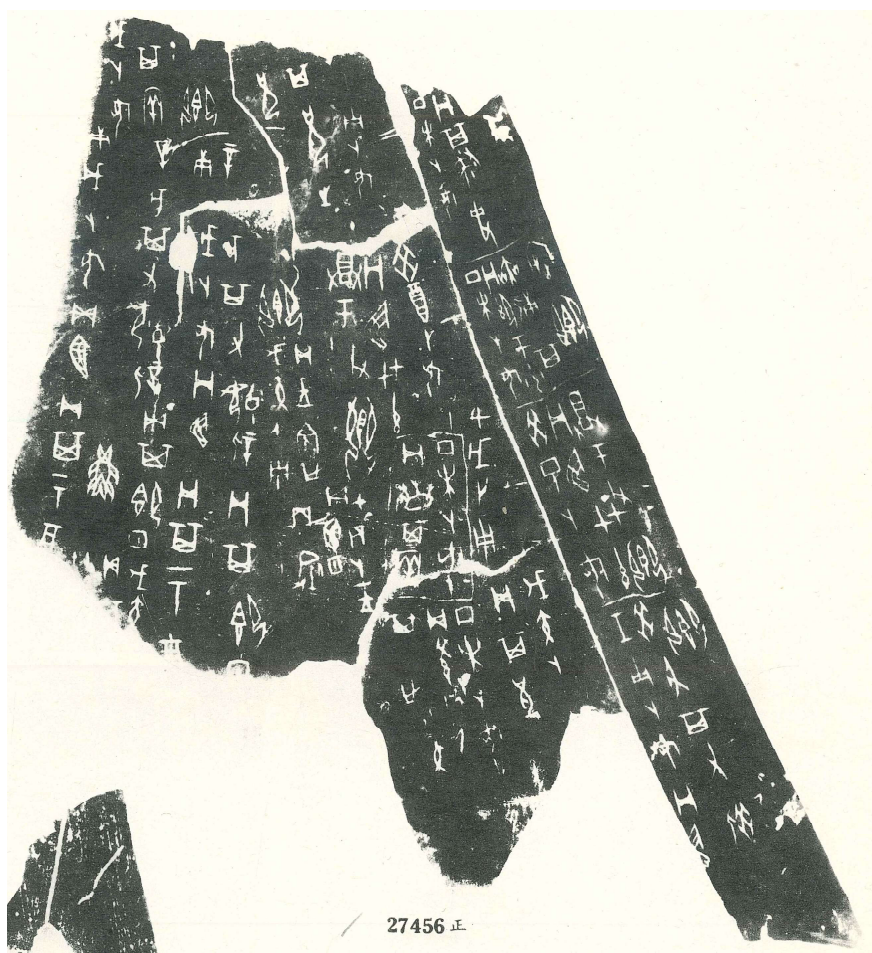


FIGURE 8.1 Shang oracle-bone inscription *Heji* #27456 illustrating use of word *xiang* 鄉; from Guo Moruo 郭沫若 Ed.-in-chief, *Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan Lishi yanjiusuo* ed., *Jiaguwen heji* 甲骨文合集, 13 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1978–1982), #27456

its' acceptance of the proposed sacrifice.²⁸ Proof that *xiang* 鄉 here is not to be read together with the divination charge can be seen in the following two contemporary inscriptions, in which the character is physically separated from the charge, in the second case actually being written on the opposite side from the charge's direction of writing.

28 Song Zhenhao 宋鎮豪, *Xia Shang shehui shenghuoshi (Zengdingben)* 夏商社會生活史 (增訂本) (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui jexue chubanshe, 2005), 487.

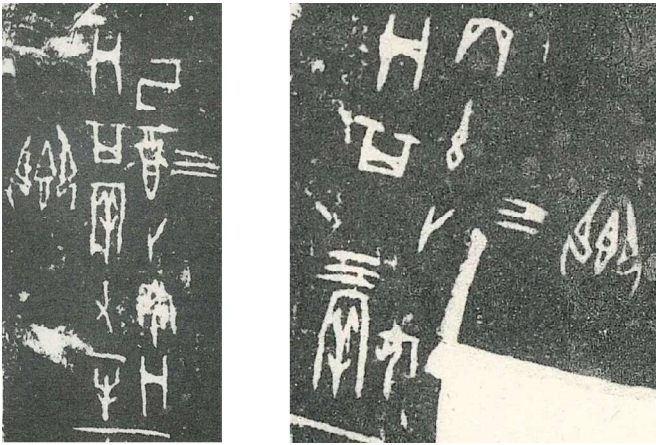


FIGURE 8.2 Shang oracle-bone inscriptions *Heji* #27138 and #27321 illustrating use of word *xiang* 鄉; from Guo Moruo 郭沫若 Ed.-in-chief, *Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan Lishi yanjiusuo* ed., *Jiaguwen heji* 甲骨文合集, 13 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1978–1982); left: #27138, right: #27321

己酉卜何貞貞其牢又一牛 鄉 《合集》 27138

Crack-making on *jiyou* (day 46), He affirming affirming (*sic*): “Let it be a penned ox and also an ox.” **Received**

丙午卜何貞其三牢三 鄉 《合集》 27321

Crack-making on *bingwu* (day 43), He affirming: “Let it be three penned oxen.” Three **Received**

Of course, *xiang* 鄉 here is but the protograph for the *xiang* 饗 seen in the *Yi li*.

Finally, there is also evidence for this use of *xiang* 饗 in the “Gu ming” 顧命 “Retrospective Command” chapter of the *Shang shu* 尚書, which almost certainly dates to the Western Zhou period (and perhaps to the early Western Zhou period). The passage records a series of rituals performed in conjunction with the installation of King Kang of Zhou (r. 1005/03–978 BCE) after the death of his father King Cheng (r. 1042/35–1006 BCE).

太保、太史、太宗皆麻冕彤裳。太保承介圭，上宗奉鬯、瑁，由阼階。太史秉書，由賓階。御王冊命。曰：“皇后憑玉几，道揚末命，命汝嗣訓，臨君周邦；率循大卞，變和天下，用荅揚文武之光訓。”王再拜，興。荅曰：“眇眇予末小子，其能而亂四方，以敬忌天威。”乃受同、瑁。王三宿，三祭，三咤。上宗曰：“饗”。

The Grand Protector, the Grand Scribe and the Grand Templar all dressed in hemp cap and black robes. The Grand Protector accepted the great tessera, and ascended the ancestral temple from the main stairs holding aloft the chalice and jade-piece. The Grand Scribe clutching the document, ascended from the side stairs, leading the king with the written command, saying: “The august sovereign leaning on his jade armrest spoke his final command, commanding you with the succession instruction, to oversee lordship of the Zhou country, to follow the great patterns, and to harmonize all under heaven, thereby responding to the bright instruction of [Kings] Wen and Wu.” The king bowed twice, and arose, responding saying: “Shortsighted though I am as the surviving young child, may I be able to rule over the four quarters in order to respectfully revere Heaven’s awe.” Then he received the chalice and jade-piece. The king thrice advanced, thrice sacrificed, and thrice poured out [the wine]. The High Templar said: “**Received.**”

Here too *xiang* 饗 is an announcement that the spirits had accepted the king’s sacrifice. It is the same word written in the Shanghai Museum manuscript of the *Zhou Changes* as *xiang* 鄉 corresponding to what is written in the received text of the *Zhou Changes* as *heng* 亨. I think there can be no question that Gao Heng’s “New Changes Studies” interpretation of *heng* 亨 as *xiang* 享 “to offer, to sacrifice,” misinterprets the function of *heng* 亨 in the hexagram statements.

In the *Zhou Changes*, it should be understood as a sort of prognostication, indicating that the spirits had received—and in receiving, had approved—the communication of the charge of the divination. That the term appears overwhelmingly in hexagram statements, and often appears in the expression *yuan heng* 元亨 “prime receipt,” suggests to me that this was an initial prognostication, authorizing further deliberation in the matter. Evidence for this two-step procedure in divination has already been examined in Chapter Four above with respect to the Warring States divination records from the state of Chu. There we have seen that in these divinations, the charge to the milfoil produced a result in the form of either two hexagrams or four trigrams, the prognostication of which is almost invariably that “The long-term affirmation” (*heng zhen* 恒貞) is “auspicious” (*ji* 吉), but there is “a little worry” (*shao you you* 少有憂) in one respect or another. This “worry” prompted a second-stage divination to propitiate the problem. It was this second divination that produced the definitive prognostication, invariably also “auspicious” (*ji* 吉), but without the qualification of the first prognostication. The type of milfoil divination recorded on the Baoshan bamboo strips is almost certainly not the same as that done using the *Zhou Changes*. However, it is likely to have employed similar methods or at least

a similar understanding of how divination proceeded. The occurrence of the word *heng* 亨 in the hexagram statements of the *Zhou Changes* is an important indication of that divination process.

5 *Li* 利

The word *li* 利 is one of the most common words in the *Zhou Changes*, occurring 119 times. A “conjoined meaning” character (*huiyizi* 會意字) composed of a “stalk of grain” (禾) and a knife (刂, i.e., 刀), *li* seems originally to have meant “sharp.” However, it soon took on the sense of “benefit, favorable,” in which sense it is used throughout all Chinese literature, even though some philosophers regarded the word negatively, akin to pejorative senses of “profit.” In the *Zhou Changes*, *li* introduces many formulaic phrases that are understood to be advice to the user or reader:

- (*bu*) *li you you wang* (不)利有攸往 “(not) beneficial to have somewhere to go” (12×)²⁹
li she da chuan 利涉大川 “beneficial to ford a great river” (10×)³⁰
li jian da ren 利見大人 “beneficial to see a great person” (7×)
li jian hou 利建侯 “beneficial to establish a lord” (3×)
li yu kou 利禦寇 “beneficial to drive off bandits” (2×)

There are also seventeen similar phrases of advice that occur only once. The following is but a sampling of these phrases.

- li yong xing ren* 利用刑人 “beneficial to use a punished person”
li yong qin fa 利用侵伐 “beneficial herewith to invade and attack”
li yong xing shi zheng bang 利用行師征邦 “beneficial herewith to set in motion an army and campaign against a country”³¹
li yong xiang si 利用享祀 “beneficial herewith to offer and sacrifice”

These phrases all share the same grammatical structure, in which *li* functions as a predicate-complement followed by a main verb. Two other formulas in which *li* occurs frequently also show it to function as a predicate:

29 Nine of twelve occurrences of this phrase are found in hexagram statements.

30 Eight of ten occurrences of this phrase are found in hexagram statements.

31 This is the reading of the Shanghai Museum manuscript. The received text reads *yi guo* 邑國 “city and kingdom” instead of *bang* 邦 “country.”

wu you li 无攸利 “nothing for which it benefits” (10×)

wu bu li 无不利 “nothing not beneficial” (13×)

The negative *bu* 不 always negates verbs, while *you* 攸 is the standard pre-verbal object substitute of early archaic Chinese, which later came to be replaced by the word *suo* 所. In both of these expressions, *li* must be understood as a verb; i.e., “it benefits to do something; beneficial to do something.” Thus, in all of these uses, *li* is understood by everyone to mean something like “it benefits to do something.”³²

These phrases of advice for which it is beneficial (or not beneficial) to do something are also seen in other types of divination texts from ancient China. As just one example, consider the following passage from the *Shuihudi* 睡虎地 *Ri Shu* 日書 *Day Book*.

害日，利以除凶厲，敝不祥。祭門行，吉。以祭，最眾必亂者。
陰日，利以家室。祭祀、嫁子、娶婦、入材，大吉。以見君上，數
達，毋咎。
達日，利以行師出征、見人。以祭，上下皆吉。生子，男吉，女必出
於邦。

On Harmful days, it is beneficial to remove inauspiciousness and danger, and to dispel what is not lucky; sacrificing and moving gates will be auspicious; sacrificing in great number will certainly be disorderly.

On Shady days, it is beneficial to marry and start a household; sacrificial offerings, marrying a son, taking a wife, and contributing resources will be greatly auspicious; in seeing the lord or superiors, if you reach them several times, there will be no trouble.

On Reaching days, it is beneficial to set the army in motion and go out on campaign and to see others; in sacrificing, the high and low will all be auspicious; in giving birth to children, males will be auspicious, while females will certainly leave the country.

These “beneficial to” phrases are very reminiscent of the *Zhou Changes*, though they regularly transform the archaic *li yong* 利用 “beneficial herewith” of the *Changes* to the more modern *li yi* 利以 “beneficial to use.”

32 James Legge routinely translates these phrases as “It will be advantageous to” do something. Richard Wilhelm gives “fördernd,” which is in turn translated as “furthers” in the Cary F. Baynes English version. Richard Kunst translates them as “favorable” to do something.

Easy though these phrases of advice are to understand, there is one other type of phrase in which *li* 利 frequently appears in the *Zhou Changes*, the interpretation of which has been more problematic, especially for scholars associated with the “New *Changes* Studies.” These are phrases in which *li* 利 is followed, whether immediately or not, by *zhen* 貞. The simple *li zhen* 利貞 occurs 21 times, of which 18 are in hexagram statements and only three in line statements. In addition to these, there are also two cases of *xiao li zhen* 小利貞, both of them also in hexagram statements, as well as 11 occurrences of the following phrases in which one or two characters are interposed between *li* 利 and *zhen* 貞.

- li yong zhen* 利永貞 (2×), *yong* 永 meaning “long-term”
- li ju zhen* 利居貞 (2×), *ju* 居 meaning “to reside”
- li junzi zhen* 利君子貞 (2×), *junzi* 君子 meaning “lord’s son”
- li nü zhen* 利女貞 (2×), *nü* 女 meaning “woman”
- li jian zhen* 利艱貞 (3×), *jian* 艱 meaning “difficulty”

There are also four occurrences in which *zhen* 貞 is preceded by the possessive particle *zhi* 之 which usually indicates a relationship between two nouns.

- li pin ma zhi zhen* 利牝馬之貞, *pin ma* 牝馬 meaning “female horse”
- li yu buxi zhi zhen* 利于不息之貞, *buxi* 不息 meaning “unending”
- li you ren zhi zhen* 利幽人之貞, *you ren* 幽人 meaning “somber person”
- li wu ren zhi zhen* 利武人之貞, *wu ren* 武人 meaning “martial person”

For traditional interpreters of the *Zhou Changes*, it is a simple matter to read these phrases parallel to the other phrases in which *li* occurs, typically understanding *zhen* 貞 to be a verb meaning “to be upright,” or in some contexts used as a noun meaning “rectitude”: “it is beneficial to be upright,” “it is beneficial to be upright for the long-term,” “it is beneficial to be upright in residence,” “it is beneficial for a woman to be upright,” “it is beneficial to be upright in difficulty,” “it is beneficial for a mare’s rectitude,” “it is beneficial for unceasing rectitude,” “it is beneficial for a somber person’s rectitude,” and “it is beneficial for a martial person’s rectitude.”

However, beginning with Gao Heng in 1947, it has become prevalent among “New *Changes* Scholars” to understand *li* 利 in these contexts not as a pre-verbal complement, but rather as an adjective modifying *zhen* 貞 understood as a noun: “a beneficial affirmation.” To understand the implications of this, it is necessary now to turn to the final word of *Qian* hexagram’s hexagram statement: *zhen* 貞.

6 *Zhen* 貞

Richard Kunst has said of the word *zhen* 貞 in the *Zhou Changes*:

No other single word in the *Yijing* is as critical as *zhen* to an understanding of the primitive meaning of the whole text, and no other word played a more important role in the Confucian moral reinterpretation of the original *Yijing* during the latter half of the first millennium BCE. Fortunately, in the late twentieth century we are in the enviable position of having more of the primary sources of pre-Imperial China at our disposal than any previous generation since at least the Warring States period itself. I refer, of course, to the precious original documents of E[arly] O[ld] C[hinese], the oracle bone and bronze inscriptions, and to the other original documents on bamboo and silk unearthed in recent decades.³³

As Kunst went on to specify, it was the discovery of the Shang oracle-bone inscriptions, in particular, that suggested new avenues of interpretation to scholars of the *Zhou Changes*. In the oracle-bone inscriptions, the character that was eventually identified as *zhen* 貞 appears in the overwhelming majority of inscriptions. It usually appears in the straight-lined form 貞, but occasionally is drawn as 貞, which is obviously the pictograph of a “caldron” (i.e., *ding* 鼎). That *zhen* 貞 and *ding* 鼎 should be related is not immediately obvious either from the modern Chinese pronunciations or from the forms of the characters, but in fact they are part of the same word family and these two words were originally interchangeable. Both words were originally pronounced something like **tieng*. Using 鼎 to write the word *zhen* 貞 is known in Chinese as a “loan word” (*jiajiezi* 假借字), which is essentially the same as a rebus writing, taking the form of one word for which a character exists to write another word with the same pronunciation. Later the two words were differentiated by the addition of the “[turtle-shell] divination” component to *zhen* 貞, which was then written as 貞. It was only subsequently in the course of various script reforms that the component 鼎 came to be simplified as the more or less graphically similar *bei* 貝 “cowrie.” Thus, there are excellent paleographic and syntactic reasons to identify the oracle-bone inscriptional 貞 with *zhen* 貞.

In the oracle-bone inscriptions, *zhen* 貞 most frequently appears in conjunction with another character that also has to do with divination: *bu* 卜. 卜 is a pictograph of a crack in a turtle-shell or ox bone, the sort of pyromantic

33 Kunst, “The Original *Yijing*,” 200–201.

divination associated with the Shang oracle-bone inscriptions. The distinction between these two words can be seen in the inscription discussed above with respect to the word *heng* 亨:

王子卜何貞：翌癸丑其侑妣癸。鄉

Crack-making on *renzi* (day 49), He **affirmed**: “On the next day *guichou* (day 50), we will make offering to Ancestress Gui.” Received³⁴

The word *bu* 卜 follows the indication of the day on which the divination was performed, and refers to the crack-making that was done on that day. Then comes the name of the divination official presiding, in this case someone named He 何, who announced the “charge” (*ming* 命) to the turtle; the verb controlling this charge is *zhen* 貞.

By late in the Shang dynasty, turtle-shell divination had become much reduced in scope from what it had been in earlier times, for the most part concentrated on just weekly divinations intended to ensure that the coming ten-day week would have no misfortune. These occasionally, though not always contained a “prognostication” by the king, announced by the word *zhan* 占:

癸丑王卜貞：旬亡禍。王占曰：吉。

On *guichou* (day 50), the king **made cracks** and **affirmed**: “The week will have no misfortune.” The king **prognosticated** and said: “Auspicious.”³⁵

These three words, *bu* 卜, *zhen* 貞 and *zhan* 占, are far and away the most common words used in Shang oracle-bone inscriptions concerning the different aspects of the divination rite. Although *bu* 卜 and *zhen* 貞 are sometimes used seemingly interchangeably,³⁶ *zhan* 占 is always reserved for the “prognostication,” usually announced by the king. It will be important to keep these differences in mind as we turn to the use of *zhen* 貞 in the *Zhou Changes*.

In the *Zhou Changes*, the word *zhen* 貞 occurs 111 times, the fourth most common word in the text. It occurs primarily in one of two patterns. The first pattern is when *zhen* 貞 follows *li* 利. As noted above in the discussion of *li* 利, the phrase *li zhen* occurs 21 times, as well as two other occurrences in which the

34 Guo Moruo, *Jiaguwen heji*, #27456.1.

35 Guo Moruo, *Jiaguwen heji*, #39393.

36 However, Adam Craig Schwartz, *The Oracle Bone Inscriptions from Huayuanzhuang East: Translated with an Introduction and Commentary* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2019), 81 n. 20, makes a strong case that even in cases where the two words seem to be used interchangeably, in fact *bu* 卜 and *zhen* 貞 were strictly differentiated.

modifier *xiao* 小 “little” comes before *li* 利; in addition, there are also 16 phrases in which another word or words comes between *li* 利 and *zhen* 貞, as in:

- li yong zhen* 利永貞 (2×), *yong* 永 meaning “long-term”
li ju zhen 利居貞 (2×), *ju* 居 meaning “to reside”
li junzi zhen 利君子貞 (2×), *junzi* 君子 meaning “lord’s son”
li nü zhen 利女貞 (2×), *nü* 女 meaning “woman”
li jian zhen 利艱貞 (3×), *jian* 艱 meaning “difficulty”
li pin ma zhi zhen 利牝馬之貞, *pin ma* 牝馬 meaning “female horse”
li yu buxi zhi zhen 利于不息之貞, *buxi* 不息 meaning “unending”
li you ren zhi zhen 利幽人之貞, *you ren* 幽人 meaning “somber person”
li wu ren zhi zhen 利武人之貞, *wu ren* 武人 meaning “martial person”

In addition to these uses following *li* 利, there is also one occurrence of *wu yong yong zhen* 勿用永貞 “do not herewith do long-term *zhen*,” and six cases of *ke zhen* 可貞 “can *zhen*” or *bu ke zhen* 不可貞 “cannot *zhen*,” which all seem to follow the same grammar in which *zhen* 貞 should be understood as a verb.

The second predominant pattern in the use of *zhen* 貞 is when it is followed by one of the following technical prognostication terms: *ji* 吉 “auspicious” (38×), *xiong* 凶 “ominous” (10×), *li* 厲 “dangerous” (8×), *lin* 吝 “stinted” (4×), *wu jiu* 无咎 “without trouble” (2×), *hui wang* 悔亡 “regret gone” (1×). There is also one case of *zhen ji* 貞疾 “*zhen* sickness” and one case of *nüzi zhen bu zi* 女子貞不字 “girl *zhen* not pregnant,” which also seem to be prognostications.

In traditional *Yijing* exegesis, *zhen* 貞 is routinely glossed paronomastically as *zheng* 正 “upright; rectitude.” This gloss makes excellent sense of both of the predominant patterns in which *zhen* occurs in the *Zhou Changes*. The *li zhen* 利貞 pattern is understood as “it is beneficial to be upright” or, as found in the Wilhelm/Baynes translation “furthering through perseverance.” The *zhen ji* 貞吉 pattern gives “to be upright is auspicious” or “rectitude is auspicious.” True, the juxtaposition of *zhen* 貞 and *xiong* 凶 “ominous” presents a challenge to this line of interpretation, but there are certainly circumstances under which “to be upright is ominous” would make sense.

However, scholars have also long noted that the *Shuo wen jie zi* 說文解字 *Explaining Pictographs and Analyzing Compound Graphs*, China’s earliest dictionary, gives a different meaning for *zhen* 貞: “*bu wen ye*” 卜問也 “to inquire by crack-making.” Since tradition has also always held that the *Zhou Changes* began as a divination text, it would seem to make sense that this meaning be applied to the uses of *zhen* 貞 in the text. Moreover, this definition is consistent with other usage in the Chinese classics. For instance, in the “Luo gao” 洛誥

“Announcement at Luo” chapter of the *Shang shu*, the Duke of Zhou is reported to have performed several turtle-shell divinations concerning the siting of the new city to be built along the Luo 洛 River, and then to have sent the maps and turtle shell back to King Cheng in the Zhou capital. The king responded to these by saying:

公既定宅，佯來，來，視予卜，休恆吉。我二人共貞。

The duke having determined the siting sent them back, showing me the turtle-shell cracks: success, long-term auspicious. We two men have jointly *zhen*.³⁷

The *Zuo zhuan*, for the seventeenth year of Duke Ai 哀 (478 BCE), contains a lengthy narrative of multiple divinations, including the following sentence:

衛侯貞卜，其繇曰：如魚窺尾，衡流而方羊。裔焉大國，滅之將亡。闔門塞竇，乃自後踰。

The Lord of Wei *zhen* the turtle-shell crack-making, its oracle saying:

Like a fish with reddened tail, Floating cross-current and hesitating.

Bordering on a great country, Extinguishing it, it will be gone.

With gates shut and holes blocked, Then from the back crossing over.³⁸

It is clear in both of these examples that *zhen* 貞 has to do with divination.

With the discovery of the Shang oracle-bone inscriptions, with their formulaic use of *zhen* 貞 in the prefaces of most inscriptions, it became clear too that the *zhen* 貞 of the *Zhou Changes* almost certainly also had to do with divination. However, it is important to explore how *zhen* is used in the oracle-bone inscriptions to understand what it may have meant in the *Zhou Changes*. In Chapter Two above, I have discussed at some length the view that divination is not an act of questioning, as the *Shuo wen jie zi* definition would suggest—and as many modern scholars have assumed, but rather is act of prayer or a statement of intent. In this regard, the connection between *zhen* 貞 and *ding* 鼎 “caldron” is an important consideration. These two words are part of a larger word family that includes also *zheng* 正, “upright, correct,” which as we have seen is the traditional gloss for *zhen* 貞 in the *Yijing* tradition, and many other words as well: *zheng* 政 “government,” *zheng* 征 “punitive military campaign,”

37 *Shang shu zhengyi*, 455.

38 *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, 4733.

zheng 證 “confirm,” *ding* 丁 “nail” (the original pictographic form of a character now written 釘), *ding* 定 “settled, definite,” and *ding* 訂 “to correct a text,” among others. All of these words share a sense of being upright or firmly settled. As a divinatory term, *zhen* 貞 introduces the statement of intent, what the person performing the divination hoped would happen; it can perhaps best be translated as “to affirm” or “to determine.”

From the two Shang oracle-bone inscriptions examined above, we can learn two other things about *zhen* 貞 and the two other important divination terms *bu* 卜 and *zhan* 占 (in bold in the following inscriptions).

王子卜何貞：翌癸丑其侑妣癸。鄉

Crack-making on renzi (day 49), He **affirmed**: “On the next day *guichou* (day 50), we will make offering to Ancestress Gui.” Received³⁹

癸丑王卜貞：旬亡禍。王占曰：吉。

On *guichou* (day 50), the king **made cracks** and **affirmed**: “The week will have no misfortune.” The king **prognosticated** and said: “Auspicious.”⁴⁰

First, *zhen* is used in the inscriptions (as well as in the “Luo gao” and *Zuo zhuan* quotations) as a verb, introducing the topic of the divination. Second, it is strictly differentiated from the word *zhan* 占, which refers exclusively to the prognostication. This distinction between *zhen* 貞 and *zhan* 占 continued without change throughout the Zhou dynasty, as can be seen in the Baoshan record of milfoil divination also examined above.

大司馬悼懼將楚邦之師以救鄱之歲，荆夷之月，己卯之日，陳乙以共命為左尹庖貞：「出入侍王，自荆夷之月以就集歲之荆夷之月盡集歲，躬身尚毋有咎」。一六六八六六 一六六一一六 占之：「恒貞吉，少有憂于宮室。以其故敬之。舉禱宮行一白犬、酉、飮，由攻敘于宮室」。五生占之曰：「吉」。

In the year that the Great Supervisor of the Horse Dao Hua led the army of the Chu country to relieve Fu, in the Jingyi month, on the day *jimao*, Chen Yi used the Proffered Command to **affirm** on behalf of Commander of the Left Tuo: “Coming out and going in to serve the king, from the Jingyi month all the way until the next Jingyi month throughout the entire year, would that his person not have any trouble.” 1-6-6-8-6-6 1-6-6-1-1-6 He

39 Guo Moruo, *Jiaguwen heji*, #27456.1.

40 Guo Moruo, *Jiaguwen heji*, #39393.

prognosticated it: “The long-term **affirmation** is auspicious, but there is a little worry in the palace chamber. For this reason they propitiated it, raising up prayers in the palace, moving one white dog and ale to drink; may this dispel the trouble in the palace chamber.” Wu Sheng **prognosticated** it, saying: “Auspicious.”⁴¹

It is important to note this distinction because of the influence that Gao Heng’s interpretation has had within the “New *Changes* Studies.” As noted above, in his 1947 book *Zhou Yi gu jing jin zhu*, Gao explained the hexagram statement *yuan heng li zhen* 元亨利貞 in the following way:

元，大也。亨即享字。古人舉行大享之祭，曾筮遇此卦，故記之曰元亨。利貞猶言利占也。筮遇此卦，舉事有利，故曰利貞。

Yuan means “great.” *Heng* is none other than the character *xiang* “to offer.” When the ancients performed the sacrifice of great offering, they divined and met with this hexagram and therefore noted it saying “Great offering.” *Li zhen* is the same as saying “beneficial prognostication.” In divining when they met with this hexagram, the affair they were to perform was beneficial and therefore they said *li zhen*.⁴²

Moreover, throughout the book, he consistently equated *li zhen* 利貞 with *zhen ji* 貞吉, the first understood as a “beneficial prognostication” and the second as “prognostication: auspicious.”

In my 1983 doctoral dissertation “The Composition of the *Zhouyi*,” I suggested a different interpretation of the term *li zhen* 利貞. Since the word *zhen* 貞 is strictly differentiated from the word *zhan* 占 “to prognosticate,” *li zhen* 利貞 cannot mean a “beneficial prognostication.” Moreover, since in all of its other many uses in the *Zhou Changes* the word *li* 利 is invariably a verbal complement, meaning “it is beneficial to do” something, and since *zhen* 貞 is used as a verb in the oracle-bone inscriptions (and also in all other divination records),⁴³ the only interpretation that adheres rigorously to the grammar would be “it is beneficial to *zhen*,” i.e., “it is beneficial to affirm” or “it is beneficial to divine.” I am not insensitive to the spirited criticism of this interpre-

41 Hubei sheng Jing-Sha tielu kaogudui, *Baoshan Chu jian*, 35 (#228–229).

42 Gao Heng, *Zhou Yi gu jing jin zhu*, 1.

43 I of course realize that verbs, including *zhen* 貞, can be used in Chinese as nouns, as in the case of “*heng zhen*” 恆貞 “long-term affirmation,” in the Baoshan divination record quoted just above, but this does not seem to me to mitigate the force of this grammatical analysis.

tation put forward by Kunst: if the *Zhou Changes* is a manual of divination, and the hexagram statements are the result of a divination, advice that it is beneficial to divine would be essentially a matter of putting the cart before the horse. One would have to perform divination to be told to perform divination.⁴⁴ And yet, this is what the grammar of the hexagram statement would seem to require.

In Chapter Four above, I demonstrated that Zhou-dynasty divination regularly featured a two-step process, which produced first a “long-term affirmation” (*heng zhen* 恆貞) and then a further specification that resulted in a second prognostication. In Chapter Five, I further suggested that divination with the *Zhou Changes* was a two-stage process, the first stage resulting in one of the sixty-four hexagrams (and also its hexagram statement), and the second stage resulting in one of that hexagram’s six line statements. While this remains but an hypothesis that has not gained much acceptance from other scholars of the *Zhou Changes*, I am confident that neither the traditional interpretation of *li zhen* 利貞 as “beneficial to be upright” nor Gao Heng’s interpretation of a “beneficial prognostication” properly understands the original meaning of this important phrase. Rather, it should be read as a complement plus verb meaning something like “beneficial to affirm.” Combined with the reading of *yuan heng* 元亨 as “prime receipt” demonstrated above, I believe this sense of *li zhen* is crucial for understanding the role that the hexagram statement played in early *Zhou Changes* divinations.

7 Other Hexagram Statements

Paradigmatic though the hexagram statement of *Qian* hexagram’s hexagram statement has been regarded throughout the millennia of the *Yijing* interpretations, there are of course sixty-three other hexagram statements, which come in all lengths and include different elements. The longest hexagram statement, that of *Kun* 坤 ䷁ “Compliant” (#2), is twenty-nine characters long (not including the hexagram name *Kun* itself), longer even than any single line statement, while the shortest statements are only two characters long (again excluding the hexagram name itself).

坤 ䷁：元亨。利牝馬之貞。君子有攸往，先迷后得主。利西南得朋，東北喪朋。安貞吉。

44 Kunst, “The Original *Yijing*,” 378–380.