

The Living I Ching Inside Me



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America is the land of opportunity – a quote that in some form or another everyone has heard. Growing up, children in this country are told if they want to be a player in the NFL, they can do this. If they want to be CEO of a multinational investing firm, they can do that. Though lofty, these goals are completely attainable if one is willing to put in the work to get there. The process to make it to that level of success in western culture is structured and relatively predictable. A CEO would go through college, complete internships, and gain work experience, much like any other growing adolescent. The point here is not that every person must go through the same trials to achieve their goals, it is that American culture has a subconscious structure to it that all in some way or another come to understand. For every end, there is a path leading to it that is visible and makes sense. At the most basic level, Americans perceive the world in a completely different way than eastern civilizations.

The Living I Ching, or “book of change,” does much to describe the way life works. Nowhere does it preach “internships, work, school, etc.” The book provides a way of thinking, something intangible that each reader must understand for themselves. It is a hard concept to describe, as the knowledge gathered from the I Ching is different for every person. This is in sharp contrast to Americans, who learn that there is a right and wrong answer to every question. For example, if a soccer player makes a mistake, his teammates will often say “that’s unlucky,” but if the play was good then it is “well done” and “great work.” There is a common good and a common bad even in sports. If the I Ching had commentary on soccer, it would not describe one play as good and one as bad. It would provide useful strategy of how to deal with the constantly changing ebb and flows of the game. This information is not specific in word, but it becomes more useful and acute once it is read and understood. Inferring the teachings of the I Ching at an individual level is a kind of creativity that Americans do not exhibit. “The Chinese understood

the whole of life as the proper field of creativity, not just ceramics, music, books and paintings, but also drinking tea and archery.” This makes the book much more personal, as the knowledge comes from how the reader interprets and not the specifics of what is written.

The Yijing can be a tool of immense use to anyone, as its teachings can apply to every facet of life. “The I Ching is more than a book to be understood. It is a tool invented by the Chinese to help a person reach their creative state by proper alignment of their inner and outer attitude.” So, the I Ching provides a bases of knowledge upon which each individual will build with creativity. Instead of “how do I do this” the I Ching provides "What should my attitude be towards ... such and such an action.”

Recently, the class discussed the prevalent use of mantras among athletes and successful people today. Runners are good examples because their sport involves – to some – constant pain and they need repetitive motivation to keep going and win. “Do or do not, there is no try” (Yoda, http://www.freewebs.com/dg12/runners_quotes.htm). Each runner must find his or her own mantra that speaks to them personally. For me, mantras must provide reasoning for enduring pain to achieve as much as possible. Another who is not an athlete may find completely different mantras motivating, something that speaks to their creative or intellectual side.

Over the last few months my life has changed immensely. I am doing things that I would not have done freshman year, I am more concerned about my progress and more dedicated to my goals. When pondering what subject I wanted to discuss for my consultation, I tried to incorporate the current state of my life and where I wanted to go. I find that achieving smaller, occasional goals is a good way to keep on track. However, it is not good enough to be content with just achieving a few steps of progress and then relaxing. There has to be an insatiable want

to continue to grow, achieve, and set new and loftier goals than before. Like running a marathon, this process seems never ending. It may be daunting, but years (or miles) down the road there will be so much more to take pride in than if I had been satisfied with the state of my life. “I’ve never been beaten by the guy behind me” speaks volumes to this cause (http://www.freewebs.com/dg12/runners_quotes.htm).

More specifically, I have been actively improving my study and work habits. Upon arrival at college, I was thrust into a completely different atmosphere than I had ever been used to before. In grade school, there are always people looking after you to ensure success in and out of the classroom. College does not share that sympathy. Many agree that people mature years and years in only a semester or two’s time away at school. Now, if I do poorly in class, it does not just reflect upon my work ethic. The repercussions will be felt years down the road when I am attempting to acquire a job in the working world. The breaking point was a second semester of poor effort, both athletically and academically. I noticed that the negative chi from this brought me down socially as well, a sign that everything in life is inter-connected. Possibly the most famous philosopher of all time, “Confucius is purported to have said that by following the counsels of the book, and studying it continuously, a person could attain creative awareness in every situation” (<http://www.ichingwisdom.com/i-ching/fractals-evolution-and-the-i-ching/>). When events unfold opposite of how one would want, the problem does not lie in specifics. The problem begins at the most basic of values, and the I Ching provides insight how to identify, and ultimately alter one’s outlook so the negative turns to positive.

To counteract the negative chi that was occurring in my life freshman year, I began to critique every little thing I did. Confucius also commented that “when it is obvious that the goals cannot be reached, don’t adjust the goals, adjust the action steps”

(<http://www.wakeupcloud.com/77-great-quotes/>). At any given point I would have several to-do lists on my phone keeping track of chores. I created a calendar online that chronicles everything I'm doing each day of the week. I continuously make sure all my homework is completed a full day ahead of when it is due. The results of this lifestyle change are yet to be seen – I have only begun doing them several months ago. Hopefully, soon, positive impacts will be visible to me and those that I interact with. Since this is the prevailing theme in my life right now, I considered my consultation based on this.

Do I currently have the right mindset for my academic, athletic, and social life, and will benefits from this be seen soon in the future?

This question may seem a bit vague and generic. Still, it is governing the way I have lived my life the last several months and it would be calming to know I am headed in the correct direction. Upon completing the consultation, I found the results more than applicable to my situation. The first hexagram was number 12: Clogging (Stagnation). 12 represents the heaven, above, pulling away from the earth, below. This hexagram details the rise of conflict, such as “Nothing to do but fold one’s hands to the approaching storms” (Ming-Dao, 134). Also, I found it interesting that this hexagram is associated with the seventh lunar month, August, in which I have my birthday. The I Ching goes on to characterize clogging as “stoppage of the events that have been moving so well” and “heaven pulling away from earth, we see that interaction has ceased and isolation has begun” (Ming-Dao, 136). Both correspond very accurately to my life previous the last several months. Academics were in the decline, athletics were not going well, and socially I was more depressed and less inclined to be around other people. Already, I felt the

I Ching had done a good job identifying the problems I had encountered, and the next hexagram offered confidence that the future was bright.

Next, I continue from hexagram 12 (Clogging) and move into hexagram 35 (Advancing). Without even gathering information on hexagram 35 I know it will provide some relevant knowledge in response to my question. The goal currently, and in the future, is to continue improving as a student, as an athlete, and as a person. As said before, this process is without end and the satisfaction comes with the acknowledgement of one's self progress. A quote I feel especially pertinent, "Reins tugging in my callused hands, I hold the stallion, as my prince ascends the marble stairs alone. The king and court await him at the top" (Ming-Dao 226). This very short story describes "callused hands." Calluses are signs of struggle and of strength. They show that a man has endured much. In today's world, calluses can be seen on the hands of people who are in the weight room often, as the constant gripping of dumbbells roughens their palms. It is likely that they are also very strong, as calluses would only develop after repeated, long term overuse. Also, the story describes how a "king and court await him at the top," suggesting that through hard work and perseverance, a man can rise up to the very top of whatever they do. This speaks directly to me, as the character in that story received his reward for hard work. Hopefully I can do the same.

Hexagram 35 also identifies with fire above, and earth below. More specifically, "fire above the earth: the sun rising" (Ming-Dao 226). To me, there is nothing more uplifting than a rising sun. On my worst days I take solace in the fact that regardless of how poorly I may do on a test, or if social relationships are on rocky ground, tomorrow is a new day. Likewise, 2011 is a new year, and with each rising sun comes another opportunity to achieve something great. The I

Ching provides a useful statement about the future, “You have to have all the right qualities if the powerful are to employ you” (Ming-Dao 228). The book is noting that though one can be fortunate or lucky to get a very good job, this only occurred because they possessed everything required to be considered.

But, as much as the I Ching preaches rising sun in advancement, with each rising sun comes a waning one, too. So, it is important that one can adapt to these changes as they will inevitably come. True success comes when one can see the fortunate times and take advantage of them, but also predict the troubled times and react appropriately to endure them. A very famous martial artist and motivational human being, Bruce Lee, once said “Don’t get set into one form, adapt it and build your own, and let it grow, be like water. Empty your mind, be formless, shapeless — like water. Now you put water in a cup, it becomes the cup; You put water into a bottle it becomes the bottle; You put it in a teapot it becomes the teapot. Water can flow or it can crash. Be water, my friend” (<http://tivate.com/quotes/adaptable-quote-bruce-lee>). The knowledge I have gained from this quote confirms the prior claim. To be like water, one must be willing to take shape to any situation, embrace it, and not be confined to any given occurrence, good or bad.

I am not only content, but also more upbeat after performing this consultation with the I Ching. It spoke to me directly and the information I gathered from the book provided me with relevant teachings for my current situation. I particularly enjoyed how it moved from the clogging hexagram to advancement. For me, that is very satisfying to read. Still, I know that if I am to actually put word to action I need to continue the course I have begun. The advancement hexagram does not stipulate progress for some time, then reverting back to stagnation.

Advancement is a solid, always occurring and unstoppable force that those who embrace it will not relinquish it for anything.

Regardless of the hexagrams I received, the I Ching is a great text for finding answers unlike that in a math or physics book. I can complete my homework with the latter, but there are intangibles in life that are not discussed in common American studies. The I Ching provides a wealth of knowledge for everyone who is interested enough to take a look. What makes it such a special and unparalleled work is that the knowledge garnered is specific to each person. I drew different lessons from it than my friends did – yet we all are more intelligent from it. The genius of the I Ching is not in its content, but its methods. A special lesson is taught and answers are found within one's self, not the book, to be produced in the real world.