

## 4.4 Applying a Buddhist Interpretation to an I Ching Reading

Ouyi Zhi-xu 藕益智旭 (1599 – 1655), one of the four great Buddhist masters of the Ming dynasty, was an I Ching scholar who applied Pure Land Mahayana Buddhism to I Ching interpretation.<sup>1</sup> We'll be exploring the field of a hexagram (i.e., the implications of each of the six lines, one by one) through a Mahayana Buddhist perspective to impart the thematic wisdom of that hexagram.

The method of divination for this practicum will be an adaptation of the Rice Grains Methods, which will be covered in Chapter 7. You'll need about a bowl full of uncooked rice grains or small dry beans, such as mung (or green) beans, lentils, peas, or adzuki red beans. Dry, uncooked quinoa would also work. You will also need a clean spoon.

An optional initiating step is to press your palms together in a prayer mudra and recite Amitofuo (*cn.* 阿彌陀佛, *kr.* 아미타불, *jp.* あみだぶつ Amidabutsu, *vt.* A Di Đà Phật) before starting the divination, per Mahayana tradition.



To start, scoop up a spoonful of the uncooked grains or beans. As you do so, focus on the question you're seeking an answer to, with insight that will facilitate your success and yet keep you aligned with your spiritual path.

Count the number of grains or beans in that spoonful.

Total count:

Divide that total count by 8.

Total Count:

÷ 8 =

Quotient:









Remainder:

<sup>1</sup> Chih-hsu Ou-i. *The Buddhist I Ching*. Translated by Thomas Cleary. (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1987; Beverly Foulks McGuire. *Living Karma: The Religious Practices of Ouyi Zhixu*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).













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Sharing my own reading to demonstrate, before commencing the divination, I recited the sacred name Amitofuo and asked for divine insight on how best to navigate my career path at this particular juncture point of my life. I started with about half a teacup full of dried uncooked mung beans and used a regular kitchen spoon. My first spoonful total count yielded 221 beans.

If your total count divides evenly into 8 with no remainder, then your lower trigram assignment is 8, Earth. Otherwise, after the long division, note the remainder, which should be a value between 1 and 7. The remainder number will correspond with one of the eight trigrams, as follows:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
							
Qián HEAVEN	Duì LAKE	Lí FIRE	Zhèn THUNDER	Xùn WIND	Kǎn WATER	Gěnn MOUNTAIN	Kūn EARTH

For my reading  $221 \div 8$  equals a quotient of 27 and a remainder of 5. The trigram assigned to the number 5 is Wind, which is my lower trigram result.

		HEXAGRAM	HEXAGRAM
Upper Trigram (second count)	Line 6		
	Line 5		
	Line 4		 
Lower Trigram (first count)	Line 3		
	Line 2		
	Line 1	 	 

Set that spoonful of counted grains aside. Scoop up another spoonful of grains and proceed with the counting process again. Divide the total count of this second spoonful by 8.

Total count:			
Total Count:	$\div 8 =$	Quotient:	Remainder:

Again, if the total count divides evenly, then your upper trigram is Earth. Otherwise, note the remainder number's trigram correspondence.

For my own reading, the second spoonful's total count was 133 beans.

$133 \div 8$  equals a quotient of 16 and a remainder of 5 again, so again my trigram result is Wind. Wind over Wind is Hexagram 57.

Upper Trigram:	Line 6:	Hexagram:
	Line 5:	
	Line 4:	
Lower Trigram:	Line 3:	
	Line 2:	
	Line 1:	

Read both “The Oracle” summary section of your hexagram result and the subsequent translations (in bold font) and annotations/commentary (regular font). This is the Oracle’s thesis response to your question, expressed such as to impart the advice and insight you need. Copy down three highlights from this text that resonates with you, or does *not* resonate with you and you want to dig deeper into:

**Point #1:**

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**Point #2:**

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**Point #3:**

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Free-write your impressions from the Oracle message in the space below.

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## BUDDHIST INTERPRETATION OF THE HEXAGRAM LINES NARRATIVE:

You will now free-write a Buddhist narrative arc of the six lines from your hexagram result. In this exercise, we'll be applying a Buddhist interpretation to an I Ching reading. Each Line of a hexagram reveals one key principle in Buddhist spirituality and the six Lines linked together form a narrative arc of the Buddhist's path.

The divination method selected for this exercise yields a locked hexagram with no changing lines. Thus, we are going to read all six lines as a narrative arc, a field for us to scry into, explore, and navigate.

Line 1     **Exemplify beneficence.** Ideal or potential; formulating a conception or set of standards to apply to the situation at hand; setting or fine-tuning intentions; defining purpose. Know your purpose before you start the journey.

Read the Line 1 text from the hexagram entry and reflect on how the Line text divined is giving you revealing the true purpose. How does Line 1 express your objective, perhaps even an objective you weren't previously conscious of?

Reading the I Ching through a Buddhist lens, Line 1 of the hexagram always imparts moral or ethical instructions. What is the moral or ethical instruction the Oracle is conveying to you at this time, to help you navigate your situation? Take a moment to free-write in a journal and reflect on the message.

[illegible]

Line 2     **Be disciplined in your methods.** Intellectual understanding of ideal or potential; establishing a strategic plan for self-discipline. Focus on the plan of action. Think through exactly what needs to be done before you do anything.

Read the Line 2 text from the hexagram entry and reflect on how the Line text divined is giving you practical, common sense advice on what to do next to achieve success.

Line 2 of the hexagram gives you practical advice. This is an actionable next step to get you to where you want to go with regard to the matter inquired about. Read the

Second Line of your hexagram entry and take note of what constructive prescription is being offered. Take note of what you can do immediately following this divination to move toward success and achievement of your objective.

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Line 3     **Be persistent and resilient; persevere.** Meditation on ideal or potential, initiation of action; developing a process for negotiating and navigating the situation at hand. Execution is always harder than planning; this is the arduous path of walking what has been mapped out. The destination is always a little farther than we think it is. Be patient with yourself, and with the process.

Read the Line 3 text from the hexagram entry and reflect on how the Line text divined might reveal your potential, or how this expresses the exalted, idealized version of you.

Line 3 offers prophetic advisement on some of the challenges (or good auspices) along the current path in the long-term. This is what to expect or what could come your way. These are future possibilities assessed by the Oracle at this time based on your present accounting of karma. Line 3 is often a premonition of a reckoning, the effect that comes after events you've caused, regardless of your intentionality.

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- Line 4     **Show fortitude.** Catalyst and first light of realization; effects of the action initiated; thematic energy of the situation at hand; vibrational frequency of the situation. If you are assured that your purpose is righteous, your plan is rationale and reasonable, and you have shown virtuous dedication, then at this time, be resolved and confident. Do not let anyone challenge your strength or cause your conviction to waver. Show that your position is defensible.

Read the Line 4 text from the hexagram entry and reflect on how the Line text divined is communicating to you the virtue, skill, attribute, or core strength you most need right now.

Also, Line 4 forecasts what comes after the events prognosticated in Line 3, continuing the calculation and accounting of karmic factors at play. This line can also offer spiritual advice on how to change those karmic factors and thus change the course of fate. Pay attention to whether your fourth line tells you to stay the course (and how to stay the course) or change course.

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- Line 5     **Results of the process; realization.** Achieving realization; greater comprehension; deeper understanding of the situation at hand and its implications. This is causing what had been conceptualized, designed, or planned to become materialized. The results of your process. Coming into perceptible existence; appearing. That which had been ideal becomes corporeal.

Read the Line 5 text from the hexagram entry and reflect on how the Line text divined induces or validates an important personal realization.

Line 5 is climactic. Meditate on the divinatory message given here. Be patient and take your time reflecting on what the Oracle wants you to realize about the situation you've inquired about. The fifth line is the key to fully understanding the situation, why it's happening, what's happening, and how to be fully empowered so that you navigate it with success. However cryptic the message may initially seem, motivate yourself to analytically and intuitively process this message.

Read the Line 6 text from the hexagram entry and reflect on how the Line text divined might reveal “the true nature of the thing.”

[illegible]

To conclude the reading, I clasp my hands in a prayer mudra and recite Amitofuo in closing. Alternatively, you can simply clasp your hands in gratitude and whisper a heartfelt thanks to the universe for sharing these words of wisdom.