

THE WORD ZHEN 貞 IN THE *BOOK OF CHANGES*: DECONSTRUCTION APPROACH

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The article focuses mainly on linguistic aspects, paying special attention to meanings of the word ZHEN 貞. The research is based on the text version and commentary by Wang Bi 王弼 (226-249) from Wei Dynasty, classical Ten Wings (Shi yi 十翼) commentaries from the 1st mil. BC, works by scholars from Han, Tang, Song and Qing Dynasties (2nd cent. BC until 17th cent. AD), as well as translations by Western sinologists.

In the first part of the article, the semantic approach is applied, in order to trace origins and existing definitions of the term ZHEN. In the second part, a creative deconstruction approach will be used to analyze the entire text, revealing atypical meanings within various schemes: 1) in the layer of hexagram succession chain and judgments, 2) in relationships of lines, 3) in problematic and inauspicious situations where the word is mentioned.

SPECIFICS OF CLASSICAL CHINESE LANGUAGE

In China the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing* 易經) or *Changes of Zhou* (*Zhouyi* 周易)¹ is called the head of *Five Classics* (*Wu jing zhi shou* 五經之首) and can be regarded as the oldest written document that was first recorded in the 2nd mil. BC. Over time, the text was supplemented with comments by scholars and philosophers, and in the 3rd cent. BC. it had already become the primary source of Chinese life wisdom. In the course of time, *Zhouyi* became a separate branch of science, known as “Studies about Changes” (*Yi xue* 易學). The book is also widely known in Western countries and has been translated into many foreign languages (English, German, Russian, French etc.).

In Classical Chinese language, especially regarding the oldest texts, every character reveals many layers of associations. Therefore, in order to explain all possible meanings of a Chinese character in Indo-European languages, one needs not

only several phrases, but sometimes even several sentences. One and the same Chinese character can imply not only different meanings, but also refer to different word classes and word forms. This trait is particularly characteristic for hexagram names, judgments and line words of *Zhouyi*. Depending on contextual situation, field of application and reader's understanding, there can be various ways of the explanation.

In ancient times, before the creation of the writing, rulers and nobles used trigrams and hexagrams for oracle prophecies. It was not until the period of Chinese classical philosophy (starting from the 7th cent. BC, when Confucius and other brilliant thinkers emerged) *Zhouyi* was transformed into a universal doctrine of wisdom. It could be used for inquiries about personal growth, family matters, relationships in society, or career, furthermore it was widely used in philosophy, literature, astrology, numerology, medicine, martial arts, nowadays also in mathematics, physics, business, economics, politics, and other fields.

Since the divination practice and the text of *Zhouyi* evolved alongside with the Chinese script, meanings of a single sign were abstract, descriptive and multiple, just like ancient drawings, indicating a whole set of symbols within a single image. Modern dictionaries enlist even up to one hundred thousand Chinese characters, but at the beginning of Zhou Dynasty (when *Zhouyi* was first written down), there were, perhaps, only around one thousand characters, so that each of them had to cover a very wide range of meanings. Limited realities and necessities of primitive men were gradually supplemented with new ideas and new inventions, therefore the meaning of each character became more complex. The first substantial content changes of the book took place in the commentaries of *Ten Wings* which were composed according to ideals of Confucian morality and ethics, but later hexagram schemes and concepts were adapted to needs of various science disciplines, and scholars offered a broad scope of different interpretations.

In terms of space and time, the beginning phase of *Zhouyi* and the modern Western society are separated almost by four thousand years and tens thousands of kilometers, not to mention differences in mentality and world views. Grammar and morphology of Indo-European languages are completely different from that of the old Chinese. There were originally no syntactic signs in the text of *Zhouyi*. There were no parts of speech, no declinations, no conjugations, no gender or distinction, no singular and plural forms. Modes of verbs were not clearly indicated, with exception, perhaps, of the modal particle *yong* 用 (use, need, have to) which could indicate a necessity or imperative. These and other features of Old and Classical Chinese were retained in Chinese literary language up to the beginning of the 20th century, when the modernization of the written language according to Western models began.

SEMANTICS OF ZHEN

This article will mainly focus on one of the most important and most often used judgment words *ZHEN* 貞 which appears in the text one hundred eleven times² (out of the total 5016 characters), usually showing the result of the divination or giving advice, such as how to evaluate the situation, how to act. The pictogram contains two

radicals: 貝 *a shell – ancient symbol of money* and 卜 *lines that appeared on oracle bones – divination process*. Hence the explanation was derived – to pay the prophet, in order to perform the divination (Xu Shen, 2002 206, 412). However, Chinese archeologists have found out that on oracle bones this character appeared in another form as 鼎 *a cauldron* – a sacrificial vessel where results of prophecies were engraved. The radical 卜 was added to the top of 鼎, indicating the divination process, only later on a separate character 貞 evolved (Hou Naifeng 2009, 002).

Taking into account different grammatical and lexical forms that could have been implied in this symbol, the original pictogram may also have had the following meanings: *asking the oracle, advisable to do divination, divination as a process, auspicious divination* etc. The payment for such kind of service had to be adequate, and the question had to be relevant and sincere. This is the reason why later, within the context of Confucian morality and ethics the meaning of the character was associated with the homonym ZHEN 真 (true, real, direct). In Daoist philosophy this concept indicates truth, reality, primordial state, as well as attainment of perfection and realization of truth (Shi 'zhen' zi 2013). These two characters may have a common origin, for similarities can be observed also in their graphical structure 貞 and 真 (Zhao Yizhi 2014).

In the judgment of Hexagram 1 (*qian* 乾) there are four characters (four words)³, the last of them is ZHEN. In this hexagram, all lines are unbroken (*yang*) and signify the bright, powerful, active and creative force of the heaven. In the commentary *Wen yan* 文言⁴ these words are associated with “four virtues” (*si de* 四德) where ZHEN means “persistence, necessary for completing the work”⁵ (*Yi Jing Yuan Wen* 2011). Zixia, the disciple of Confucius, in his commentary *Zi xia zhuan* 子夏傳 explains ZHEN as *zheng* 正 meaning – correctness, honesty, truthfulness⁶ (Wang Bi 1979). Wang Bi, a philosopher of Wei state, claims that ZHEN in the first hexagram means “trust” in all kinds of relationships⁷ (Wang Bi 1979). But the researcher of Tang Dynasty Li Dingzuo 李鼎祚 reckons that it is related to “knowledge” that helps to act effectively⁸ (Li Dingzuo 2011). Cheng Yi 程頤, a Neo-Confucian thinker from Song Dynasty, in his commentary (*Cheng shi yi zhuan* 程氏易傳) defines ZHEN as “fulfillment or storehouse of all things”⁹ (*Han Dian* 2015).

Hexagram 2 (*kun* 坤) has six broken (*yin*) lines that symbolize the mild, weak, receptive and passive energy of the earth. ZHEN appears both in the beginning and in the end of the judgment. At first, there are the same four words as in Hexagram 1, only ZHEN is separated from others by the phrase “female horse (mare)” (*pin ma* 牝馬). At the end of the text, there is a phrase that contains altogether three words: “peace” (*an* 安), ZHEN and “auspicious” (*ji* 吉). It is possible to conclude that, in this hexagram, ZHEN brings peace and happiness in combination with feminine virtues, such as virginity and chastity. In several other classic sources, the word has a similar explanation. In *Documents of Zhou* (*Zhou shu* 周書: *Shi fa* 諡法) it is said that ZHEN means “innocent and pure, preserving the chastity”¹⁰. In *Records of Historian* by Sima Qian (*Shi ji* 史記: *Jia dan lie zhuan* 甲單列傳) it is said that “a woman with ZHEN does not change two men”¹¹ which means that after the death of her husband she

remains faithful to the deceased and never marries again. (*Han Dian* 2015).

From these two examples it can be inferred that *ZHEN* can relate to such good qualities as persistence, honesty, wisdom, trust, loyalty, as well as to specifically feminine virtues, such as chastity and virginity. There are indeed many places in the text where *ZHEN* is understood in this way and is mentioned together with words “strong man” (*zhang ren* 丈人), “gentle man” (*jun zi* 君子) or “wife” (*fu* 婦), “woman” (*nv* 女). However, in some cases, *ZHEN* also appears with other persons, for example, “younger son” (*di zi* 弟子), “hermit” (*you ren* 幽人), “servant boy” (*tong pu* 童僕) or “warrior” (*wu ren* 武人).

It is peculiar that in Hexagram 1, where *ZHEN* indicates a positive and creative development it appears only once. But in Hexagram 2, it is mentioned five times, obviously relating to a problematic situation, the influence of evil forces or the feminine weakness. It is quite clear that it cannot always have the traditional meaning of divination process, auspiciousness, righteousness etc. In Hexagram 2, *ZHEN* sounds rather like a reminder or warning in the case of danger or calamity. Furthermore, in Hexagram 9, Line 6 in one phrase there are three words – “woman, *ZHEN*, danger” (*nv zhen li* 婦貞厲) that could hardly imply a positive result. But Hexagram 32, Line 5 says: “*ZHEN*. Wife, auspicious. Husband, inauspicious.” (*Zhen. Nv ren ji. Fu zi xiong.* 貞。婦人吉。夫子凶。)

In order to better understand these and other cases when *ZHEN* is not explainable in any of the traditionally conveyed meanings, the author proposes a creative deconstruction of the text by summing up similar phrases in new schemes. Text fragments with *ZHEN* will be analyzed from three aspects: 1) in relation to hexagram names, 2) depending on the hierarchical position in hexagram lines, 3) singling out the most typical cases where *ZHEN* is not advisable, not possible or where it is associated with negative conditions (difficulties, misery, misfortune, illness etc.).

DECONSTRUCTION APPROACH

The wide range of meanings for the word *ZHEN* attracted my special attention already at the beginning of *Zhouyi* research, when translation of hexagram judgments and line words into Latvian language was being done. Analyzing the text in the traditional sequence, the use of this word seemed chaotic and ambiguous. Even after repeated readings and after the comparison of several Chinese commentaries and Western translations, it was impossible to find out logical clues for a comprehensive explanation. For this reason, it was decided to transform the text with the help of the creative deconstruction approach, i.e., revising the text by selecting and assembling only those fragments, where this concept is mentioned, not attracting any information from outside. Thus it became possible to disclose hidden meanings of this word that were often opposed to traditional ones.

From the very beginnings, the Studies about Changes was based on the practical application, with trigrams, hexagrams and lines explained in different combinations. The text version and schemes, we today are familiar with, are basically an artificial work, a creation by many generations of scholars over several thousand years. In

prehistoric times, the legendary emperor Fuxi 伏羲 invented graphemes of broken and unbroken lines (later known as *yin* and *yang*), 8 trigrams and 64 hexagrams. King Wen (*Wen Wang* 文王, the founder of Zhou Dynasty) according to the legend, but probably not personally by himself, assigned each hexagram a name and wrote 64 judgments. Later, Duke of Zhou (*Zhou Gong* 周公), one of his sons, added words to each of lines (supposedly on the basis of the vocabulary of folklore and oracle divination words used at that period). Nowadays, no one knows exactly how the original text looked like and what it meant when it was created.

Further, the commentaries of so called *Ten Wings* appeared, they were written during five hundred years after the basic text. These commentaries are usually added and published together with the primary text, but in fact they represent a completely different world view – the philosophy of Confucian morality (absent during early Zhou times). Still, several hundred years later, Daoist philosopher Wang Bi from Wei State composed an unorthodox, but fundamental commentary that was used to interpret contents of *Zhouyi* in all subsequent dynasties, including modern China. It is obvious that the text has evolved over several epochs and has been influenced and supplemented by many different thinkers. During each period it was restructured and various graphical schemes were created, including the actualities of the given era. So this book has never ever been a monolithic literary work: it does not stem from a definite time, from one or several known authors, it does not express a definite point of view.

The natural deconstruction process had taken place already before it was written down for the first time. There were different combinations of lines, trigrams, hexagrams (and perhaps also other sets of graphic signs used for divination and interpreting worldly phenomena) even before the text came into existence. Classical *Ten Wings* commentaries have been composed by many unknown authors, and they refer to different aspects of *Zhouyi*: some explain only first two hexagrams, others trace back the hexagram sequence, still others focus only on hexagram judgments. Later (especially in Han and Song Dynasties) there were thinkers who invented their own trigram and hexagram schemes, in order to find new explanations.

Nowadays, in the West, parallels are being sought with binary systems, physics and mathematical formulas. There are so many different expositions from psychological or religious (e.g. Christian) point of view. These researches have brought quite a new light upon the Studies about Changes, still they can be considered as rather subjective interpretations. Due to this disconnection with the primordial historical background, Chinese scholars already have drawn parallels with deconstruction method (Qian Tingting 2014). However, they have forgotten their own past, when the Confucians and the Daoists applied their philosophy to this ancient text and did actually the same kind of deconstruction.

Jacques Derrida, French philosopher and founder of deconstruction theory, in his treatise *Of Grammatology* (1976, 158) describes his approach of research, “There is nothing outside of the text.” This type of analyses corresponds the given article. It focuses directly on the written text, implementing a close reading technique, but not engaging in other details outside the text, and not aiming at a definite, absolutely

accurate conclusion (Turner 2018).

This article employs the “creative deconstruction” approach because the purpose is not to criticize or deny the tradition, but to discover new interpretations on the already existent semantic background. “Deconstruction always strives to be rather productive than reproductive, to read otherwise, to revise traditional texts, to uncover what has been hidden by the tradition [...], to let events evolve and grow into new happenings” (Kalniņa 2013, 120). New layers of the word *ZHEN* will be sought mainly focusing on present, instantaneous experience of the text.

Chinese characters are symbols that create endless series of associations, and their meaning in Classical texts (especially *Zhouyi*) had not been exhausted at the time of writing. “Removed from their original context, they have become a sign of countless future reading contexts” (Kalniņa 2013, 127). Meanings of these ancient characters have changed constantly over the time, and this transformation process (even in Modern Chinese language) is not coming to an end. Paul de Man, one of the founders of the deconstruction theory, warns that during the deconstruction of the text, different layers and statements may collide with each other and make the text message contradictory (McQuillan 2001, 23). Exactly this case is applicable to *Zhouyi*, but as a positive feature: there has never been a monolith meaning here, from the very beginning every sentence (every phrase, even one word) could show one independent situation (just like the real life) and the more contradictions readers discover, the better they can conceive the heterogeneity of their own mind and actions. The graphic scheme of trigrams and hexagrams, on the contrary, is all-inclusive, perfectly systematic and complete, but this is not a linguistic issue and therefore will not be expounded here.

NAMES AND JUDGMENTS OF HEXAGRAMS

Sequence and arrangement of hexagrams in practical applications (divination, martial arts, medicine, astrology, etc.) can vary, depending on the method used. Usually one or two hexagrams are chosen to describe a situation or to answer a question. Words of hexagrams and lines contain two thinkable layers: 1) descriptions of specific situations and happenings, often in rhythmic form with picturesque comparisons (just like folk songs), and 2) judgments with words of divination and suggestions on how to deal with the situation (Huang Yushun 1995). But in the traditionally inherited text of *Zhouyi* there is a fixed chain of 64 hexagrams (or chapters). Each chapter includes one hexagram graph, hexagram name and judgment, as well as words of six lines.

First of all, the word *ZHEN* will be explored in the context of hexagram judgments, on the one hand, referring to meanings and relationships as given by the classical commentary “Sequence of Hexagrams” (*Xu gua 序卦*), on the other hand, analyzing *ZHEN* in the text of hexagram judgments. *ZHEN* appears in 38 hexagram judgments, and only 26 hexagram judgments do not mention it. First two and last two hexagrams are given as analyses example here.

Hexagram 1: Heaven (*qian 乾*)¹² depicts the beginning of the universe, the active force (heaven, sun etc.). Here, *ZHEN* indicates firmness, rigor, integrity and

efficiency in the creation process.¹³

Hexagram 2: Earth (*kun* 坤) shows the opposite – weak, dark, cold, passive, receiving (earth, moon).¹⁴ Heaven and earth like husband and wife together create all things and beings of the world (and between them the human world arises). Here, *ZHEN* is associated with feminine qualities (following in the back, turning to the west, where the moon rises, hiding its beauty, behaving cautiously), only then it is possible to achieve peace and happiness.

Hexagram 62: Small Excesses (*xiao guo* 小過) recommends people to focus on daily things without planning great things. In these circumstances, *ZHEN* is an innate virtue, self-restraint. A person has to be humble and frugal, and to make a compromise.¹⁵

Hexagram 63: After Completion (*ji ji* 既濟) shows perfection and happiness, however, even here a man must continue his efforts, *ZHEN* urges to thoroughness, rigor and self-confidence. Even in times of peace and prosperity, wise people think about the future development and possible complications.¹⁶

It can be concluded that *ZHEN* is to be encountered in almost any kind of situation, would it be an auspicious case or a time where forces of darkness dominate. For the most part, the word relates to a positive development that should be continued. This may apply both to masculine and feminine characteristics, but in most cases gender is not specified. In some hexagram judgments, *ZHEN* characterizes and gives advice regarding some difficulties and problematic issues (e.g. urging one not to be too stubborn in some matters or not to continue further like before).

It follows that *ZHEN* can have various degrees, greater or lesser strength, as well as different effects under different circumstances. In one situation it is auspicious, but in another it may be unwanted. For example, rigidity and self-confidence are mostly good qualities, but if someone is too confident, imposes his will on others with force, and tries to achieve goals without consideration about the outbalancing of power and influence zones, this kind of persistence may fail and bring misfortune.

WORDS OF LINES

Different effects of *ZHEN* in different situations can be very clearly observed in relations to definite lines of hexagrams. Looking at the text in the traditional sequence of lines, no special differences in the meaning of *ZHEN* could be found out. A general comparison of unbroken (*yang*) lines and broken (*yin*) lines does not give any clues, either. However, the use of this word differs greatly in relation to the hierarchical positions of lines. The most typical cases are listed in the table (in the end of the article).

Hexagram line positions can be considered as a development process or a time progression where the first three lines 1-3 (i.e. the lower trigram) form the basis, beginning phase, relating to spiritual or personal issues, or to lower and weaker forces. But lines 4-6 (i.e. the upper trigram) show the final phase of the action, they may also characterize the situation outside (society, country, world, and universe). In Studies about Changes it is said that odd number line positions (1, 3, 5) are suitable for *yang*

energy, and even numbers (2, 4, 6) – for *yin* energy. Besides, lines gain strength and develop from the bottom to top of the hexagram – the 1st is the lowest and the weakest, the 5th depicts the culmination, but the line in the 6th position already inclines to excess. The table clearly shows that connotations of *ZHEN* vary from one position to another. In some positions it is more favorable for *yin* (weak, gentle, small, feminine etc.), and in others – for *yang* (strong, hard, large, masculine etc.).

Line 1 is the very beginning of the development, here it is good to be cautious and self-restrained, and therefore, *ZHEN* appears in *yin* lines more often. Overall, this phase of the development process is highly auspicious. *ZHEN* is related to misfortune just one case.

Line 2 is in the middle of the lower trigram. Here, it is also preferable to acquire *yin* characteristics and behavior, which is why *ZHEN* appears in *yin* lines that much as seven times. However, the lower center position is also beneficial for the *yang* counterpart, where *ZHEN* is mentioned in positive phrases four times. In Line 2 it points to humility, modesty, stabilizing of inner virtues, fundamental planning, and trusting powerful and wise ones.

With Line 3 problematic circumstances set in. The lower trigram has reached culmination or even excess, besides, the next line is going to be a change from the inner (small, private) development of the lower trigram to a quite another scope of outer matters (big, global) in the upper trigram. This is originally a position for the *yang* force (odd number), but an excessive persistence, self-assertion, hardness and too much power in this phase are inauspicious (in *yang* lines negative words related to *ZHEN* appear seven times). One must not exceed limits, but be very cautious, in order to prepare for coming changes.

Line 4 still points out to a difficult situation. Here, *ZHEN* appears with inauspicious words 4 times. However, it is the beginning of a real action, and therefore, characteristics of *yang* force (such as determination, righteousness, perseverance, firmness etc.) bring a fairly good result.

Line 5 is usually seen as “the king” of the hexagram, it is in the upper trigram and also in its center. This is a *yang* number, and the high position is really appropriate for an active, strong and wise person, so *ZHEN* quite often shows a positive effect in *yang* lines (three times). This is not a place for dark, weak, passive and evil forces, so in *yin* lines *ZHEN* amounts to the greatest negative result (appearing 5 times with negative words). Still, there may be exceptions when *ZHEN* brings fortune for small ones, but misfortune for big ones; when it is auspicious for women, but inauspicious for men. This means that sometimes it is advisable even for leaders to cultivate feminine tenderness, to compromise, to act mildly and to approach weaker and lower ones. Besides, it is not impossible to have a woman or a youngster as a leader, as well.

In Line 6 *ZHEN* is already predominantly associated with excessive power or selfishness, it appears 4 times in negative connotations in *yang* lines. Here, restraint, reflection and moderation according to *yin* features are recommended (good prediction two times).

In general, six levels of broken and unbroken lines reveal functions and connotations of *ZHEN* very precisely. Even more, *ZHEN* also characterizes relations of lines and problematic of different circumstances, in meantime, giving advice on

how to behave in the particular stage of development and how to treat others in the particular situation. Another important subtext that we can observe here are interchange of functions of two opposites – *yin* and *yang* that lead to deeper levels of understanding the reality, delivering much more meanings than only two traditional translations of *ZHEN* – masculine righteousness and feminine virginity.

Chinese traditional commentaries by Confucian scholars mainly interpret *ZHEN* as a positive feature for a man (ruler, father, husband). But, as seen above, *Zhouyi* lists numerous cases (even in the leading 5th position) where it is right to be mild and yielding like *yin*, not straightforward and hard like *yang*. In *Zhouyi* both opposites only take up different positions, they differ regarding force and functions, but neither one of them is less important or less worthy than the other. In the practical application there is no specific order of hexagrams, they are in absolute balance. Confucian scholars in their commentaries of *Ten Wings* explain that Hexagram *qian* with unbroken lines comes first and Hexagram *kun* – second. Still, in practical application the sequence of hexagrams is not definitely fixed. This leads us to a suspicion that Confucian scholars in their commentaries of *Ten Wings* used ancient line schemes of *Zhouyi* for their own needs, adapting them to Confucian patriarchal social system, where the mild and weak being of the female was disdained and suppressed.

It is worth to mention that the word *yin* comes also as first in the usually used word pair of *yin-yang* opposites. Wang Li, a researcher of Classical Chinese language, has also observed that Chinese civilization can be best represented as Yin Culture. He gives an example, that more personal names are related with *yin* than with *yang* (Wang Li 2002, 3). From ancient times the Chinese have been using the lunar calendar, and in folk-believes (many of them are surely older than any other Chinese religious tradition) they adore the Moon Goddess (Chang 'E), but not the scorching sun.¹⁷


PROBLEMATIC RELATIONS WITH OTHER WORDS

Looking at the *ZHEN* in phrases together with other words, one can observe two types of connotations – positive and negative:

- 1) Relation with luck, peace, positive development (positive):
 - possible, *ZHEN* (*ke zhen* 可貞)
 - advantage, to reside, *ZHEN* (*li ju zhen* 利居貞)
 - *ZHEN*, auspicious (*zhen ji* 貞吉)¹⁸
 - advantage, lasting, *ZHEN* (*li yong zhen* 利永貞)
 - beginning, lasting, *ZHEN* (*yuan yong zhen* 元永貞)
 - peace, *ZHEN*, auspicious (*an zhen ji* 安貞吉) etc.
- 2) Relation with difficulties, bad luck, misery (negative):
 - *ZHEN*, inauspicious (*zhen xiong* 貞凶)
 - *ZHEN*, misery (*zhen lin* 貞吝)
 - *ZHEN*, danger (*zhen li* 貞厲)

- *ZHEN*, illness (*zhen ji* 貞疾)
- difficulties, *ZHEN* (*jian zhen* 艱貞)
- not possible, *ZHEN* (*bu ke zhen* 不可貞) etc.

Generally speaking, *ZHEN* refers to something desirable – good qualities or happiness. In these cases, traditional Confucian and Daoist interpretations reveal the meaning quite accurately. However, there are not a small number of expressions which relate *ZHEN* to difficulties or to what is not desirable. In order to clarify meaning of these fragments, the author paid special attention to such problematic situations. Below there is one example of a detailed analyses. For other hexagrams only summarized conclusions will be given.

 In Hexagram 3, Line 5 the meaning of *ZHEN* becomes ambiguous. It is not auspicious for everybody, and there are special preconditions. Line words say: small *ZHEN* auspicious, big *ZHEN* inauspicious (*xiao ZHEN ji, da ZHEN xiong* 小貞吉, 大貞凶). Different commentaries and translations¹⁹ explain this phrase as follows:

- “Image commentary” (*Xiang zhuan* 象傳),²⁰ “It is not the time for action, yet.” (*Yi Jing Yuan Wen* 2011)
- Wang Bi,²¹ “For actions of small ones it is auspicious. For works of great men – inauspicious.” (Wang Bi 1979)
- Li Dingzuo,²² “It is advisable to look for the partner (wife) in Line 4, not to aspire for the distant goal in Line 2.”²³ (Li Dingzuo 2011)
- Li Guangdi,²⁴ “Possible small things. Big things not possible.” (Li Guangdi, 2011)
- Tang Yi,²⁵ “Small rain²⁶ brings good luck, big – bad luck.” (Tang Yi 2013)
- James Legge,²⁷ “With firmness and correctness there will be good fortune in small things; (even) with them in great things there will be evil.” (Legge 2010)
- Richard Wilhelm,²⁸ “Small persistence brings good luck, big – bad luck.” (Wilhelm, 1986, 38)
- Julian K. Shchutsky,²⁹ “Firmness in the small things – good luck. Firmness in big things – bad luck.” (Щуцкий 2008, 615)
- Geoffrey Redmond (2017, 78), “For minor matters divination auspicious; for major ones, ominous.”
- From *Translations of different Western scholars* (DeKorne 2017):
Rudolf Ritsema, “The small, Trial: significant. The great, Trial: pitfall.”
Edward L. Shaughnessy, “Little determination is auspicious, great determination is inauspicious.”
Vu Chung, “Conditions suitable for limited progress but detrimental for great undertakings.”

As to the word *ZHEN* itself, there is an abundance of translation versions – things, harvest, rain, undertakings, determination, persistence, firmness, trial, matters, persons,

plans etc. However, the literally meaning is perhaps not as important as the main message of line words. And it is quite clear that grand plans, mighty efforts and big works are not recommended at this point of time. As one can see, Line 5 is unbroken *yang*, it has a trait to a very vigorous and powerful action. However, all around there are broken lines (symbol of the small, weak and evil force). The name of the Hexagram is “sprouting” also means that it is still beginning, therefore the small and the weak one has more potential.

Hexagram 9, Line 6: wife *ZHEN* danger 婦貞厲 (*nv zhen li*). Actions and virtues of *yin* are nearly complete and perfect here, therefore a further development in this direction is unnecessary and dangerous. Mean and small men influence the upper ones, wife dominates over husband, it is a dangerous, unnatural situation. A strong man should not rely on feminine qualities, should not trust small people.

Hexagram 10, Line 5: *ZHEN* danger 貞厲 (*zhen li*). The central position in the upper hexagram gives a mistaken impression of absolute stability, so there is a risk of being too dominant and self-confident. No matter how good and right the action may seem, it is advisable not to overdose with straightforwardness and strictness. It is better to observe carefully and to act vigilantly depending on the given situation.

Hexagram 11, line 3: difficulties *ZHEN* 艱貞 (*jian zhen*). One should not only insist on his righteousness, but should take into account principles of well-balanced exchange. With good and excellent plans in mind, one should always consider possible complications in the future implementation process.

Hexagram 11, Line 6: *ZHEN* misery 貞吝 (*zhen lin*). Peace is followed by war, prosperity – by destruction (and vice versa), it is a natural process. In this case, firmness, insistence on maintaining *status quo*, and self-confidence bring only bad consequences. Good times are coming to an end, and one has to accept the fact that evil forces will dominate for some time.

Hexagram 16, Line 5: *ZHEN* illness 貞疾 (*zhen ji*). The broken *yin* line is in dominant position, besides it is higher than the unbroken *yang*, so this place (and also the odd number 5) is inappropriate for *yin* (for a weak, dark or young person), and a longer stay here is not recommended. There is a tendency to involve in too many joys and delights, to rely on strong subordinates. All these factors are unnatural and cause problems (diseases).

Hexagram 18, Line 2: not possible *ZHEN* 不可貞 (*bu ke zhen*). If a mother made a mistake or evil, the son, despite all principles of justice and integrity, must act with caution and restraint, not accusing his own mother. The same goes for a smart and powerful subordinate (employee) who has noticed the leader's mistakes and shortcomings. In such a situation it is not advisable to deal with force and to declare the truth straight away.

Hexagram 62, Line 4: don't use lasting *ZHEN* 勿用永貞 (*wu yong yong zhen*). Under these circumstances there is a tendency for the weak, gentle and passive energy to prevail, symbolizing dangerous or unknown situation. So it is not advisable to implement one's own ideas straightforward, with self-assurance and power. Too fast and self-confident action can lead to danger. Besides, it is not good for an active, strong and creative person to stay in such a place for a long time.

- *Wu yong yong zhen.* 勿用永貞。Not necessary a lasting persistence.
- *Wu yong. Yong zhen.* 勿用。永貞。Don't handle. Lasting persistence.
- *Sang qi tong pu. Zhen li.* 喪其童僕。貞厲。Lose own servant boy. Confidence in danger (*or*: confidence in spite of danger, confidence is dangerous).
- *Sang qi tong pu zhen. Li.* 喪其童僕貞。厲。Lose own servant boy's trust. Danger.
- *Zhen ji.* 貞疾。Confidence in illness (*or*: confidence is illness).
- *Zhen. Ji.* 貞。疾。Confidence. Illness.
- *Fu zhen li.* 婦貞厲。Wife's virtues are dangerous.
- *Fu. Zhen. Li.* 婦。貞。厲。Wife. Confidence. Danger.
- *Fu. Zhen li.* 婦。貞厲。Wife. Confidence in danger.

In the selected text fragments above, the word *ZHEN* was intentionally given in transcription, without an exact translation, because a literal translation of the word is very problematic. It depends highly on the given situation and also upon other words, mentioned in the phrase. Moreover, in Zhou Dynasty there were no syntactic marks, all characters were written one after another. Only later, Chinese scholars added dots for separating ideas, phrases or sentences. Content interpretations can vary greatly depending on the division of characters.

For example:

Words in *Zhouyi* are closely linked to each other, and their meanings are interdependent, in meantime they also depend on the situation represented by hexagram schemes. Meaning of the word is never fully present to us, as it would be if meanings were the same as ideas or intentions. Derrida expresses this idea by saying that meaning is created by the “play” of differences between words – a play that is “limitless,” “infinite,” and “indefinite” (Duignan 2010, 329).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In *Zhouyi* the word *ZHEN* has a very broad and multilayered usage; the basic text (even with the help of Classical commentaries) does not reveal the exact meaning of the word in every place. “Meaning cannot be regarded as fixed or static, but is constantly evolving. It arises from the constant process of negotiation between competing concepts. Rather than pursuing the truth of a natural origin, what deconstruction requires is the interrogation of these competing interpretations that combine to produce meaning” (Turner 2018). The *Book of Changes* talks about changes and is changing itself, as well. It urges readers to keep in mind several options of the truth, to analyze opposites in cycles of constant change and to prepare for new challenges.

This research reveals definite, relative and indefinite meanings of the word *ZHEN*. The semantic analyses results in the definite meanings, such as: to pay the prophet, to ask the oracle; an advise to perform the divination; a divination process, an

auspicious divination etc.

Within the context of Confucian morality and ethics one can discover relative meanings that depend on the context. The character can be associated with male and female qualities: correctness, honesty, persistence on the one hand and innocence, purity, virginity, chastity on the other. There might be a change of the meaning if the text relates to a man or to a woman, to a small or a great person. Persistence, innocence and other qualities may bring positive results in one case, but negative – in other.

However, all these definite and relative meanings do not cover the whole sense expressed by the word *ZHEN*. Therefore, a creative deconstruction of the hexagram lines was applied. It resulted in an indefinite, but a very practical and clear indication of the concept. It was discovered to have an utterly important relation to the kind of lines (broken or unbroken) as well as to the positioning in lines as in an evolving process. In the first and in the second line, where all plans are still basic and in preparation, *ZHEN* is usually linked to positive judgments, however, in lines three and four, where circumstances get complicated and where there is a change, *ZHEN* is mostly linked to negative judgments and express a kind of warning. In meantime, indications of *ZHEN* change also in dependence of *yin* or *yang* lines (as can be observed in the table, attached in the end of the article).

Zhouyi is not a polished, monolithic treatise, but a constantly changing scheme where contradictions are found in every sentence, all the time, it is contributing to the emergence of infinite new meanings and interpretations. For a linguistic researcher it is definitely a valuable experience, to discover the internal meaning itself, not dependent on external factors. Derrida described this as finding “the tensions, the contradictions, the heterogeneity within their own corpus” (Wolfreys 1998, 10).

The *Studies About Changes* always encourages people to discover new solutions, assuring that at every deadlock there is not only one, but even two or three ways leading out. Characters, their meanings and schemes of *Zhouyi* have been evolving for thousands of years, and now, they have built the bases for Chinese vocabulary and daily expressions. Now when the book has reached Western society and many translations have been done, meanings of words continue to change even more intensely, adapting to actual realities and to the mentality of Western people.

Words exist “through [their] functioning within a classification and therefore within a system of differences” (Derrida 1976, 109). And this differentiation means that they never remain static, but evolve constantly. The real value of *Zhouyi* consists in the factor that the reader can unfold new opportunities, integrating words into new chains and correlations.

NOTES

1. This name refers to the text which was supposed to be written in the early Zhou Dynasty (12th -11th century BC), i.e. the basic text (hexagram names, judgments and line words), not including commentaries. The analyses of the given article focuses on the basic text, therefore further the name “*Zhouyi*” will be used.

2. In Chinese numerology, this number symbolizes the culmination of the creative *yang* energy.

3. 元亨利貞。These and all other quotes from “Zhouyi” are taken from “Yi jing yuan wen” (2011). The English translation is done by the author of the article, if not indicated otherwise.

4. This is one of *Ten Wings* commentaries, written by Confucian scholars in 1st mil. BC. It gives explanations for the first two hexagrams.

5. 貞固足以幹事。

6. 元，始也。亨，通也。利，和也。貞，正也。

7. 元則仁也，亨則禮也，利則義也，貞則信也。

8. 言君法五常 [...] 仁義禮智信 [...] 貞為事幹，以配於智。

9. 貞者，萬物之成，萬物之收藏。

10. 清白守節曰貞。

11. 貞女不更二夫。

12. More about the names of hexagrams see in “Yijing Hexagram Names and Core Meanings,” Hatcher (2011).

13. The translation of this hexagram judgment by James Legge: *Qian* represents “what is great and originating, penetrating, advantageous, correct and firm.” *ZHEN* implies the meaning “correct and firm” (Legge 2010).

14. The translation of this hexagram judgment by James Legge: *Kun* (represents) “what is great and originating, penetrating, advantageous, correct and having the firmness of a mare. When the superior man (here intended) has to make any movement, if he takes the initiative, he will go astray; if he follows, he will find his (proper) lord. The advantageousness will be seen in his getting friends in the south-west, and losing friends in the north-east. If he rests in correctness and firmness, there will be good fortune” (Legge 2010). *ZHEN* implies the meaning “firmness of a mare.”

15. The translation of this hexagram judgment by James Legge: *Xiao guo* indicates that “there will be progress and attainment. But it will be advantageous to be firm and correct. (What the name denotes) may be done in small affairs, but not in great affairs. (It is like) the notes that come down from a bird on the wing;—to descend is better than to ascend. There will (in this way) be great good fortune” (Legge 2010). *ZHEN* implies the meaning “to be firm and correct.”

16. The translation of this hexagram judgment by James Legge: *Ji ji* “intimates progress and success in small matters. There will be advantage in being firm and correct. There has been good fortune in the beginning; there may be disorder in the end” (Legge 2010). *ZHEN* implies the meaning “being firm and correct.”

17. According to a folk legend, once upon a time 10 suns appeared in the sky, it was so hot that the hero Houyi shot down nine of them. For this deed he was presented the immortality nectar by gods. However, it came in hands of his wife Chang E who secretly drank it and became so light that she flew to the moon where she became the Moon Goddess. She is especially adored in autumn, when there is full moon, for people believe that she can grant good harvest, wealth, happiness and consolidation of each family. This is called Mid-Autumn Festival.

18. This phrase can be encountered most often, 35 times in the whole text.

19. Sources are listed chronologically, starting from earliest Chinese commentaries and ending up with recent Western translations.

20. This is one of *Ten Wings* commentaries, written by Confucian scholars in 1st mil. BC. It gives explanations for each line.

21. Wang Bi (3rd century).

22. Li Dingzuo (8th century)

23. According to the Studies about Changes, broken *yin* and unbroken *yang* lines as opposites have natural magnetic force, especially, if they are correlating in lower and upper trigrams, i.e., Line 1 and 4, Line 2 and 5, Line 3 and 6. However, in this case it is not recommended to look for the correlate, because it is too far.

24. Li Guangdi (1642-1718).

25. 20th century scholar.

26. The upper trigram symbolizes water or rain.

27. 1815-1897.

28. 1873–1930.





29. Юлиан К. Щуцкий (1897-1938).



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Table

Position	ZHEN in hexagram judgments and line words, relations to other words and to yin and yang lines	Summary of positive and negative results
Line 6 	<p>POSITIVE</p> <p>吉 auspicious (1x yang, 1x yin)</p> <p>利 advantage (1x yin)</p> <p>NEGATIVE</p> <p>厲 danger (1x yang)</p> <p>吝 misery (1x yang, 1x yin)</p> <p>凶 inauspicious (2x yang, 1x yin)</p>	<p>POSITIVE</p> <p>2x yin</p> <p>1x yang</p> <p>NEGATIVE</p> <p>4x yang</p> <p>2x yin</p>
Line 5 	<p>POSITIVE</p> <p>吉 auspicious (2x yang, 2x yin)</p> <p>可 possible (1x yang)</p> <p>DIFFERENT</p> <p>小貞吉, 大貞凶 small – good, big – bad (1x yang)</p> <p>女人吉, 夫子凶 woman – good, man – bad (1x yin)</p> <p>NEGATIVE</p> <p>疾 illness (1x yin)</p> <p>厲 danger (1x yang, 3x yin)</p> <p>凶 inauspicious (1x yin)</p>	<p>POSITIVE</p> <p>3x yang</p> <p>2x yin</p> <p>DIFFERENT</p> <p>1x yang</p> <p>1x yin</p> <p>NEGATIVE</p> <p>5x yin</p> <p>1x yang</p>
Line 4 	<p>POSITIVE</p> <p>吉 auspicious (4x yang, 1x yin)</p> <p>可 possible (1x yang)</p> <p>NEGATIVE</p> <p>勿用 don't use (1x yang)</p> <p>艱 difficulties (1x yang)</p> <p>厲 danger (1x yang)</p> <p>凶 inauspicious (1x yang)</p>	<p>POSITIVE</p> <p>5x yang</p> <p>1x yin</p> <p>NEGATIVE</p> <p>4x yang</p>
Line 3 	<p>POSITIVE</p> <p>吉 auspicious (1x yang)</p> <p>利 advantage (1x yin)</p> <p>可 possible (1x yin)</p> <p>NEGATIVE</p> <p>艱 difficulties (2x yang)</p> <p>不可 not possible (1x yang)</p> <p>厲 danger (3x yang, 1x yin)</p> <p>吝 misery (1x yang)</p>	<p>POSITIVE</p> <p>2x yin</p> <p>1x yang</p> <p>NEGATIVE</p> <p>7x yang</p> <p>2x yin</p>

		凶 inauspicious (1x yin)	
Line 2		POSITIVE	POSITIVE
		吉 auspicious (3x yang, 6x yin)	7x yin
		利 advantage (1x yang, 1x yin)	4x yang
		NEGATIVE	NEGATIVE
		不可 not possible (1x yang)	2x yang
		吝 misery (1x yang)	1x yin
		凶 inauspicious (1x yin)	
Line 1		POSITIVE	POSITIVE
		吉 auspicious (2x yang, 4x yin)	6x yin
		利 advantage (1x yang, 2x yin)	3x yang
		NEGATIVE	NEGATIVE
		凶 inauspicious (2x yin)	2x yin

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