

The Judgment of Hexagram #1 Qian 乾 ☰ in the *Yijing* 易經: Reflections on Strategies of Reading the Layered Text

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This essay attempts to account for the reasons why the interpretations of the “judgment” of Hexagram #1 Qian in the *Yijing* diverged widely. In the process, it observes the layered structure of the text, discusses the meaning of the cotextuality of various layers, and reflects on strategies of reading the early Chinese classic as a text in which many perspectives and motivations are represented in its various layers. It argues further that, rather than privileging the earlier layers known as “classic” as the core text to be commented on, we should know that it would be productive to see later layers not as a mere “commentary,” but as a space of creative endeavors that contributed significantly to the formation of the tradition surrounding the classic.

The widely divergent interpretations of the “hexagram statement” (*guaci* 卦辭)—also known as the “judgment” (*tuan* 彖)—of the very first hexagram of the *Yijing* are emblematic of the formidable challenges faced when we attempt a sensible reading of the early Chinese text. The short phrase of only four syllables has been one of the focal points of scholarly attention in the long history of *Yijing* studies, but its meaning and that of the four syllables in it remain elusive. Translations by Richard Lynn—“[Qian] consists of fundamentality, prevalence, fitness, and constancy”—and Wilhelm/Baynes—“[Qian] works sublime success, furthering through perseverance”—show how interpretations can be so substantially different that it is not easy to realize that these are in fact two readings of the same passage.¹ Even if we manage to clear the semantic hurdles, there are other

¹ Lynn, trans., *Classic of Changes*, 129, and Wilhelm, trans., *I Ching*, 3.