

"What we know, but don't know we know, influences us more than we know." (Dörte Hinrichs)

Consulting the I Ching today: a philosophical and cosmological model of the universe

The I Ching, or "Book of Changes", is a universal philosophical system whose origins date back over 3,500 years to ancient China. Introduced to Europe and the USA in the early 20th century with Richard Wilhelm's translation and the work of C.G. Jung, the I Ching has since fascinated both those seeking "experimental spirituality" and a certain scientific community open to new paradigms.

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Even today, the origin and structure of the I Ching remain something of a mystery. Yet there are remarkable parallels between the I Ching's concepts and those of quantum physics, arousing the interest of multidisciplinary researchers. The radical questioning that is necessary to accept some of its revolutionary discoveries offers interesting perspectives for validating this intellectual creation, which can be seen as a precursor to the theoretical physics models devised by human intelligence.

The I Ching is often perceived in the West as an oracle book. During a consultation, coins or stalks of yarrow are manipulated to generate a hexagram, a figure made up of six lines symbolizing the Yin-Yang configuration of the moment. This hexagram provides an answer to a formulated question, with reference to the forces influencing the current situation. For a Cartesian mind, the role attributed to chance in this method may seem highly problematic, prompting one to discredit it a priori without any further critical examination.

In fact, consulting the I Ching is like channeling one's own intuition - a form of immediate knowledge that emerges without the support of logical reasoning. Recognizing the role of intuition in accessing information about reality implies a paradigm shift. Intuition is subtly involved in the development of any new, apparently rigorously rational, knowledge, guiding scientific reasoning towards fruitful insights. Rationality orders this flow of information, but it is intuition that is its creative ferment. How intuition transforms itself into information usable by the human mind remains a great mystery that can be experienced on a daily basis, if we have a certain affinity for it.

Conventional drawing techniques, such as coins or yarrow stalks, serve exclusively to divert the consultant's

mental attention and permit intuitive elements to slip into his or her cognitive network. This allows the hexagrams to manifest themselves through the arithmetical artifice of counting the Yin or Yang elements of the chosen drawing technique. The I Ching thus translates the subtle information of an informational field, presupposedly omnipresent in the universe as well as the gravitational field, into an intelligible language, offering an intuitive approach that complements the usual rational perception of reality.

The I Ching is a powerful tool for exploring the interconnections of the universe, linking the collective unconscious and the field of possibilities to our conscious mind. While we cannot claim to fully understand its mechanisms, we do know how to use it to enrich our lives. Other cultures see intuition as the fragmentary expression of a higher order, unintelligible by rational logic alone, based on causality and the logic of the excluded third. The two driving forces of our Western civilization.

An I Ching session is comparable to a quantum physics phenomenon.

Science long ago abandoned its mechanistic worldview and the paradigm of strict causality. The discoveries of quantum mechanics in the early 20th century were both a sensation and an overturning of the familiar worldview shared by scientists.

Physicists such as Max Planck, Max Born, Werner Heisenberg, Wolfgang Pauli, Erwin Schrödinger, to name but a few, developed the model of quantum mechanics (QM), which describes the strange peculiarities of the physical laws that prevail in the subatomic domain, such as : the quantization of energy, which lets it appear in the form of small packets; Heisenberg's uncertainty relation, which prohibits simultaneous measurements of certain physical

quantities, whereas the Newtonian model allows this; the duality of the corpuscular and ondulatory nature of matter, which is simultaneously confined to an exactly determined area of space and deployed like a wave throughout space. For our intelligence, these objects are defined by particularities that are often incompatible with each other, but experimental evidence imposes itself and overrides our prejudices concerning the true structure of reality.

They have established an experimentally well-tested method of telling the story of how this subatomic world works, without understanding why it is the way it seems to be. All this has raised new questions about the real significance of the interaction between human consciousness and the act of measuring what happens during experiments in the realm of elementary particles such as electrons, protons, neutrons or photons. Nevertheless, QM is present in every corner of our daily lives, for example in electronic devices, which are essential in our information society. Although fundamentally misunderstood in its deepest essence, physicists know very well how to use it.

A surprising property of QM is its wavefunction concept. This concept states that a quantum system is described by the superposition of all possible observable states, also states that in a classical representation would be contradictory. Until a measurement is made, all the different states coexist, each endowed with a probability of realization. This measurement is in fact the interpretation of an interaction, of the quantum system univocally described by its wave function, with a macroscopic instrument. ¹As soon as an observer takes note of the decided interaction, only one state of the wave function remains, and all other states spontaneously disappear. The wave function collapses instantaneously. It's tempting to see a similarity here with an I Ching session. As long as the hexagram has not been selected, supposedly by chance, all hexagrams are possible. After the "draw", only one hexagram remains to fix the entire configuration between the consultant's questioning and the semantic content of the observed hexagram. What surprises the I Ching novice, or enchants the experienced practitioner, is the relevance of the hexagram's meaning in illuminating the ins and outs of the theme that preoccupies the consultant.

The principle of synchronicity and the I Ching

¹ The well-known example of Schrödinger's cat

²In the 1930s, Nobel Prize-winning physicist Wolfgang Pauli and Carl Gustav Jung, founder of analytical psychology, formulated the principle of synchronicity. It can be seen as an extension of the principle of causality. It postulates that a causal chain is not the only way to link two events, but that they can be linked by their capacity to create meaning. A synchronicity links, without involving a causal chain, a certain mental process within the observer with a material object in the external physical world, and this link generates meaning for the observer. A meaningful coincidence. In a I Ching session, the question that preoccupies the consultant stimulates an inner psychic process. The manipulation of coins or yarrow stalks, a random process, links this psychic state to a hexagram, a synchronicity has been induced or provoked.

Where does this astonishing congruence between the hexagram's meaning and the consultant's concern come from? How is it possible for this system to provide such precise information, unavailable through rational inquiry, to considerably improve understanding of the theme under consideration? This question remains unanswered.

Physical engineers know how to develop practical commercial applications by exploiting the mysterious properties of QM, without really understanding them. Similarly, we can use the I Ching without really knowing why its symbolic and semantic system has such fantastic potential for giving the questioner access to information, not accessible to the rational approach, that informs decision-making in an uncertain environment.

Conclusion

The I Ching is not an oracle in the sense of clairvoyance or interpretation of the future. To consult the I Ching is to assess the adequacy of the consultant's intentions with the dispositions of the environment in which he or she is evolving at the time of the consultation. The I Ching indicates paths to follow or avoid, just as a GPS shows different route options to reach a destination. The driver decides, according to his preferences, which one to choose, being warned of the consequences of his choice.

Studying and working with the I Ching, as a model for a holistic vision of the universe, provides not only a coherent theoretical framework, but also opportunities to experimentally test its validity. Its 64 hexagrams

² Jung, C. G.; Pauli, Wolfgang; Pauli, Wolfgang (1952):

encompass the psyche of the universe as well as its material aspects, and provide the basis for an experimental spirituality.

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