The ancient Chinese book of wisdom, *The I Ching or Book of Changes*, is primarily a set of 64 six-lined configurations called hexagrams, that have, for at least 5000 years, been consulted as an oracle.

The hexagrams of the *I Ching* came from an ancient Chinese way of looking at the Cosmos as the invisible origin and counterpart of all visible things. Both the invisible and the visible make up the Cosmic whole. To understand the Cosmic Way, we must look beyond its outer aspects to its guiding inner principles. As Lao Tzu wrote: “So, as ever hidden, we should look at its inner essence: As always manifest, we should look at its outer aspects.”

The ancient Chinese, like the ancient Greek Pythagoras, saw numbers as mirroring the order of the universe. The number one represented the undifferentiated whole that was called *T'ai Chi*. Within this whole existed two primary forces called the *Creative* and the *Receptive*, symbolized by the numbers one and two, that by interacting with each other, brought about the creation of all things. The ancients imagined that everything that existed in the material world existed first in image form (an image that persons with psychic abilities could intercept just prior to their emergence). The emergence of the image into reality was made possible by the action of the Re-
ceptive force, which ‘received’ the image and nurtured it into being. Lao Tzu expressed this idea when he described the creation of things in terms of the interaction of the primary numbers one and two: “Tao gave birth to One, One gave birth to Two, Two gave birth to Three, Three gave birth to all the myriad things.” (Tao Teh Ching, Verse 42).

The Creative and Receptive forces were observed to act as polar and paired complements, such as odd and even numbers, positive-negative energies, the male and the female, light and dark, cold and hot, and so on. The straight and divided lines of the hexagrams symbolized these pairs respectively. In their 64 different orderings, they were said to be capable of mirroring everything in the Cosmos. In time, the two forces of the Creative and the Receptive came to be called Yang and Yin.

In addition to being associated with image and idea, the Creative (Yang) was associated with the Sun and the outgoing light energy, and so it was also called the Heaven/Cosmic energy. The Receptive (Yin) was associated with the Earth as bringing the material into existence, and therefore also with nurturing; its energy was seen as passive, but also absorbing and ingoing. Yang was seen as positive and Yin as negative, not in terms of good and bad, but as in physics, where positive and negative energies are evident at the opposite ends of a magnet. The power of the Sun, with its heat and warmth, were seen to be received by the Earth, which, with its dark soil, acts as a ‘womb’ that nurtures and brings forth all the things that grow upon it. The Creative came to be seen therefore, as the primordial father of all things while The Receptive came to be seen as the primordial mother of all things. They were symbolized in the prototypical star-pair, Fu Shi and Noo Kua, a constellation in the sky that pictured them with intertwined mermaid tails.

Unlike our Western tendency to see polarities as opposites and even as destructive to each other (as in the case of fire and water), the ancient Chinese saw all polarities as complementary and interactive, and as essential to the functioning of the whole. Fire and water, when brought into a complementary relationship, as happens when we put water in a vessel over a fire, was seen to produce energy. Movement and stillness, when brought into a complementary relationship, such as when one puts up a mast and sail to catch the wind, results in a beneficial effect. Observing the complementar-
ity of polarities led to this early form of the science of physics. Having viewed numbers as sacred because of their ability to mirror the unity of nature, it was natural that the Chinese should see the chance development of either a *Yang* or *Yin* number as representing a sort of yes or no answer given by the Cosmos. From this primitive ability to obtain a yes or no answer through numbers, the more complex system of the hexagram oracle was built. The tossing of a coin to develop a yes or no answer is a very ancient custom even in our own culture, but we tend to forget this because the use of chance was historically associated with heresy and punished; it was also discredited by science as superstition. The Chinese, however, had a great respect for chance, seeing in it a way of putting their questions to the invisible Cosmic Consciousness. The single yes and no lines of Yang and Yin developed, in time, into a three-lined trigram oracle system that had eight possible combinations of yang and yin lines.\(^1\) The hexagram oracle developed when it was later observed that by casting six lines by chance means (tossing coins, or manipulating yarrow stalks to get yang and yin lines), two trigrams could interact with each to give much more sophisticated answers. It was possible to have 64 possible combinations of these lines, and each hexagram was seen to have a theme. This theme was derived from observing the way the trigrams reacted with each other, and also from considering the way the lines within the hexagrams affected each other. Thus developed the oracle we know today as *The I Ching or Book of Changes*. Since its inception, it has been consulted by some means of chance, particularly by the tossing of coins and the manipulation of yarrow stalks. (See Chapter 8.)

The Chinese saw the interaction of the Yang and Yin energies to be the ‘engine’ that drives the Universe. Their interaction was seen to drive the rotation of the seasons: The yang energy, manifested in the light of the sun, increases each month after the winter solstice to the summer solstice; at this point, in which Yang reaches its limit, and can no longer advance, the Yin force begins to advance, continuing to its maximum point at the winter solstice. Then the mounting of the Yang force begins as the sun once more ascends into the sky. Yang and Yin were thus seen as partners in the engine of change, each having its time of increase and decrease, each indispensable to

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\(^1\) For a more thorough discussion of this, see Chapter 9 of this book.
the other and to the balance of the whole. That is also why they are seen to be two halves of a whole in the famous Yin/Yang circle.

The hexagrams range in their patterns from the primary hexagrams of *The Creative (Heaven)* and *The Receptive (Earth)*, in which the lines of the former are all Yang and those of the latter are all Yin, to all their possible combinations in the other hexagrams. These two hexagrams, being pure Yang and pure Yin, symbolize the two primal powers of the Creative and the Receptive. The two hexagrams are seen as dynamically arousing each other, and also as giving rise to all the other hexagrams.

Each of the hexagrams are seen to have themes that describe a particular dynamic that is to be observed in the way the positive and negative energies flow through the six lines of the hexagram structure. The names of the hexagrams reflect these dynamics by active words such as ‘holding together’ rather than ‘to hold together’, and ‘following’ rather than ‘to follow’, and ‘gathering together’ rather than ‘to gather together’.

The way the lines were seen to move within the hexagram reflected, in the view of the ancients, the way action, or change, moves in the existential world. By observing this activity, the person consulting the oracle could observe the way things moved in time, from their seed forms to their full development. A person could see his whole situation reflected in the hexagram he developed by chance means. By perceiving the seed elements in his situation reflected in the hexagram, he could act, through its counsel, to bring his responses into harmony with the way the Cosmos works, to beneficially influence the outcome of his situation. Eventually, the situations depicted in the hexagrams, and the counsel given to bring the seeker’s attitude into harmony with the laws of the Cosmos, were written down to become the book of wisdom we now know as *The I Ching or Book of Changes*. 