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An Analysis of the Levels of Resonance in the Xian Hexagram

I. Introduction

The Book of Changes 易經 is divided into two parts. The first part begins with the Qian 乾 and Kun 坤 hexagrams, symbolising Heaven and Earth, using the way of nature to illuminate human affairs. The second part begins with the Xian 咸 and Heng 恆 hexagrams, symbolising the way of husband and wife, revealing the constants of human relationships. Among these, the Xian hexagram takes ‘resonance’ as its core connotation. The line statements of this hexagram use different parts of the human body to metaphorically represent six different states of ‘resonance,’ yet none of these is its ideal state. Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130 – 1200) pointed out: ‘Although this hexagram takes resonance as its chief meaning, all six lines are suited to stillness, not to movement.’¹ It is evident that the focus of resonance lies not in external seeking, rash action, or sycophancy. Also, the Chinese character used in the names of the hexagrams is not the character ‘感’, but instead employs the character 咸 to express that the highest state of resonance is one without deliberate intention.

What is resonance without intention? How is it attained? What kind of mutual responsiveness does this hexagram advocate? This presentation will analyse the hexagram statement of Xian and the interpretations found in the Commentaries on the Yi 易傳, and explore the underlying logic of the different types of resonance mentioned in the Xian hexagram.

II. Analysis of the Levels of Resonance

Within Hexagram Xian, three types of resonance are advocated: the resonance between man and woman, the resonance of the noble person 君子, and the resonance of the sage. The first type represents the most fundamental form of resonance and is directly expressed in the hexagram text itself. The second and third types are further developments and sublimations elaborated through the commentaries in the Ten Wings. The line statements and the commentarial texts repeatedly employ these forms of resonance to unfold the principles of responsive attunement.

¹ Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Zhou Yi Ben Yi* 周易本義, (Beijing: Chung Hwa Book Company, 2019), p.129.

1. Resonance Between Man and Woman

The Shuo Gua Zhuan (Treatise on the Trigrams) 說卦傳 states:

“Gen 艮 shows a third application (of Kun to Qian), resulting in getting (the third of) its male (or undivided lines), and hence is called ‘the youngest son.’ Dui 兌 shows a third application (of Qian to Kun), resulting in getting (the third of) its female (or divided lines), and hence is called ‘the youngest daughter.’”

「艮，三索而得男，故謂之少男。兌，三索而得女，故謂之少女。」²

Accordingly, in the Xian hexagram, the upper trigram is Dui, representing the youngest daughter; the lower trigram is Gen, representing the youngest son. The hexagram statement says: ‘Xian. Success. To take a maiden to wife brings good fortune.’³ 咸，亨，利貞，取女吉。⁴ Resonating through the correct Way 正道 is the path to penetration and success. It uses the primary human relationship of husband and wife to explain further, illustrating how the mutual resonance between man and woman can accord with the correct Way. Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1107) commented: ‘Gen 艮 embodies sincerity and firmness; (its virtue) ‘stillness’ implies honest earnestness. The will of the young man is sincere and firm and thus goes downward to engage; the heart of the young woman is pleased and thus responds upward... The man first moves with sincerity to resonate, and the woman is gladdened and responds’ 艮體篤實，止為誠慤之義，男志篤實以下交，女心說而上應.....男先以誠感，女說而應也。

⁵ Here, the resonance between male and female arises because the young man abides in rectitude and thereby evokes a corresponding response in the young woman, who in turn responds joyfully in accordance with the proper way.

From the arrangement of the trigrams and line positions, although the young man is typically the active party, he occupies the lower position, which does not necessarily indicate passivity but may rather signify a state of stillness and self-possession. The young woman, though generally responsive in nature, is placed above, symbolising an active responsiveness. The young man bears no mind to outward seeking; instead, through the virtue inherent in his own character, he resonates with a young woman of like nature. The two resonate through

² Huang Chung-tian 黃忠天: *Zhou Yi Cheng Zhuan* 周易程傳 (Gaoxiong: Liwen Publishing Group, 2017), P.603.

³ Richard Wilhelm: *The I Ching or Book of Changes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), p.515.

⁴ Huang Chung-tian 黃忠天: *Zhou Yi Cheng Zhuan* 周易程傳, P.271.

⁵ Huang Chung-tian 黃忠天: *Zhou Yi Cheng Zhuan* 周易程傳, P.271.

rectitude and thus unite to fulfil the virtue proper to husband and wife. So the marriage results in good fortune. By citing this single relationship, the principle of resonance may be extended to all relationships.

2. Resonance of the Noble Man

The interpretation of the resonance of the sage and noble man in this hexagram has a very clear hierarchy. In each case, it first speaks of the resonance of Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things of nature, and then extends this to the moral cultivation of the sage and noble man. The introduction of natural resonance here is not merely to explain the Principle of Heaven 天理, but is intended to advocate emulating the Principle of Heaven. That is, the sage emulates the character of Heaven and Earth, and thus is in virtuous harmony with Heaven and Earth and nature. Therefore, here, natural resonance is classified together with the resonance of the sage.

The images contained within the Xian hexagram, comprising the trigrams Dui and Gen, are respectively ‘Lake’ and ‘Mountain’. *The Xiang Zhuan* 象傳 says: “‘A lake on the mountain: the image of resonance. Thus the noble people encourage people to approach him by his readiness to receive them.’⁶ 山上有澤，咸。君子以虛受人。⁷

Here, it can be understood as what Confucius called: ‘No foregone conclusions, no arbitrary predeterminations, no obstinacy, and no egoism.’ 毋意、毋必、毋固、毋我。⁸ *The Xiang Zhuan* uses the resonance of mountain and lake to illustrate the resonance of the noble person. Wang Fuzhi (1619–1692) 王夫之 annotated: ‘The mountain is supremely high, yet above it there is a lake – it does not rely on its height. The noble people, whose virtue is abundant within themselves, receive others with an empty mind; thus, there is nothing in the world they cannot resonate with and penetrate.’ 山至高也，而上有澤，不恃高也。君子德厚於己，而受人心虛，則天下無感而不通矣。⁹ The mountain’s substance is solid, yet it possesses an attitude of containment and humility; therefore, the mountain can bear the lake upon it, and the lake in turn nourishes the mountain. Based on these natural characteristics, Wang Fuzhi summarised two reasons why the noble man can achieve ‘no resonance they do not penetrate’ 無感不通: first, internally possessing stable self-cultivation; second, externally having a humble and accommodating state of mind.

⁶ Richard Wilhelm: *The I Ching or Book of Changes*, p.516.

⁷ Huang Chung-tian 黃忠天: *Zhou Yi Cheng Zhuan* 周易程傳, P.273.

⁸ Zhu Xi 朱熹: *Xi Shu Zhang Ju Ji Zhu* 四書章句集注 (Taibei: World Journal Bookstore, 1956), P.116.

⁹ Wang Fuzhi 王夫之: *Zhou Yi Nei Zhuan* 周易內傳 (Beijing: Jiuzhou Press, 2010), p.141.

3. Resonance of the Sage

The Treatise on the Judgments 彖傳 says: ‘Heaven and earth exert their influences, and all things take shape and come into being. The sages influence the minds of humans, and the world attains harmony and peace. If we contemplate the outgoing influences, we can know the nature of heaven and earth and all beings.’¹⁰ 天地感而萬物化生，聖人感人心而天下和平，觀其所感，而天地萬物之情可見矣。

The *Tuan zhuan* first presents the resonance of Heaven and Earth, which is the source of the creation of all things. The principle of the mutual resonance of Heaven and Earth can be understood through the Qian and Kun hexagrams. The Qian origin, belonging to the Yang force, does not use strength to strive for precedence, but rather covers the myriad things from above, providing the energy for growth. As the Wenyan 文言 (Commentary on the Words of the Text) of Qian says: ‘what is called the penetrating 亨 is the assemblage of excellences.’ 亨者，嘉之會也。¹¹ The virtue of the Qian origin facilitates the gathering of Heaven and the myriad things. The Kun origin resonates with it, providing the substance for the growth of the myriad things, jointly achieving the state of ‘the union of the great harmony’ 保合大和, which is precisely the state displayed by the Tai 泰 hexagram: ‘Heaven and earth commune, and the myriad things are penetrated; above and below commune, and their wills are the same.’ 天地交而萬物通也，上下交而其志同也。¹²

The Tuan zhuan transitions via the principle of how the mutual resonance of Heaven and Earth leads to the natural flourishing growth of the myriad things, to the resonance of the sage – the highest state of ‘unconscious resonance’ in this hexagram. Wang Fuzhi here distinguishes two types of ‘non-mind resonance’ to aid our discernment:

As for the ‘unintentional resonance’ in the Hexagram *Xian*, there are movements that immediately evoke response—this is the shallow emotional responsiveness of those who deal in artificial sentiment, which the noble person does not accept. Yet Heaven and Earth do at times produce life through seeming accident, and sages at times transform the world through broad responsiveness. When the Way is vast and without anxiety, then at the slightest stirring, there is no choosing according to moment or position.

而咸之無心，一動而即應，此淺人情偽相感之情，君子之所弗取也。然而天地有

¹⁰ Richard Wilhelm: *The I Ching or Book of Changes*, p.516.

¹¹ Huang Chung-tian 黃忠天: *Zhou Yi Cheng Zhuan* 周易程傳, P.9.

¹² Huang Chung-tian 黃忠天: *Zhou Yi Cheng Zhuan* 周易程傳, P.106.

偶然之施生，聖人有泛應之功化，道大而無憂，則幾甫動而無擇於時位。¹³

The ‘unintentional resonance’ esteemed in this hexagram is not blind resonance, still less is it accommodating others out of hypocritical or utilitarian motives; this is the ‘unconsciousness’ of shallow men. If all six lines of this hexagram were to act rashly seeking their resonance, they would belong to this type of shallow unconsciousness. Rather, the sage’s ‘unconsciousness’ is the absence of a deliberate mind; it does not pursue resonance. But the sage accords with the Way of Heaven, and thus is in virtuous harmony with Heaven and Earth; therefore, his inner mind is central and correct 中正, and ultimately he will naturally resonate with the correct Way and thus transform people’s hearts.

The Xi Ci Zhuan 繫辭傳 provides a detailed discussion specifically on the line ‘They come and go in confusion, (and then) your friends and companions will follow the dictates of your thoughts’ 憧憧往來，朋從爾思 from the fourth line (Nine in the fourth place) of Xian. Since this fourth line corresponds precisely to the ‘resonance of the heart/mind’, not only does the line statement offer an admonition, but the *Xi Ci Zhuan* also uses this to articulate the highest state of ‘unconscious resonance’:

The Master said: ‘In all (the processes taking place) under heaven, what is there of thinking? what is there of anxious scheming? They all come to the same (successful) issue, though by different paths; there is one result, though there might be a hundred anxious schemes. What is there of thinking? what is there of anxious scheming?’

子曰：「天下何思何慮？天下同歸而殊塗，一致而百慮，天下何思何慮？」

The sun goes and the moon comes; the moon goes and the sun comes; the sun and moon thus take the place each of the other, and their shining is the result. The cold goes and the heat comes; the heat goes and the cold comes; it is by this mutual succession of the cold and heat that the year is completed. That which goes becomes less and less, and that which comes waxes more and more; it is by the influence on each other of this contraction and expansion that the advantages (of the different conditions) are produced.’

「日往則月來，月往則日來，日月相推而明生焉。寒往則暑來，暑往則寒來，寒暑相推而歲成焉。往者屈也，來者信也，屈信相感而利生焉。」

When the looper coils itself up, it thereby straightens itself again; when worms and snakes go into the state of hibernation, they thereby keep themselves alive. (So), When we minutely investigate the nature and reasons (of things), till we have entered into the inscrutable and spirit-like in them, we attain to the largest practical application of them;

¹³ Wang Fuzhi 王夫之: *Zhou Yi Nei Zhuan* 周易內傳, p.140.

when that application becomes the quickest and readiest, and all personal restfulness is secured, our virtue is thereby exalted. Going beyond this, we reach a point which it is hardly possible to know. We have thoroughly comprehended the inscrutable and spirit-like, and know the processes of transformation; this is the fullness of virtue.'

「尺蠖之屈，以求信也。龍蛇之蟄，以存身也。精義入神，以致用也。利用安身，以崇德也。過此以往，未之或知也。窮神知化，德之盛也。精義入神，以致用也。利用安身，以崇德也。過此以往，未之或知也。窮神知化，德之盛也。」¹⁴

This passage can be viewed in three levels. The first level distinguishes the resonance of shallow men from that of the sage. If one takes 'indecisive will' 憧憧 as resonance, then the response will be very narrow. Therefore, Confucius advocates following the great Way of nature, discarding the thoughts and calculations of personal selfishness.

The second level begins to interpret the concrete manifestations of the natural Way. Using the four natural images of the sun and moon alternating, cold and heat pushing each other, the inchworm's contraction and extension, and the dragon or snake's hibernation, it illustrates the naturalness of the resonant penetration of the myriad things.

The third level returns to the individual's self-cultivation, correlating the principle of movement, rest, contraction, and extension in mutual resonance. By engaging in resonance in this manner, one can reach the highest state of resonance. Here it can be seen that the degree of resonant penetration is inversely proportional to selfishness: the smaller the proportion of selfishness, the higher and broader the level of penetration; the larger the proportion of selfishness, the narrower the range of things resonated with. Therefore, it advocates unconscious resonance: with an intentional mind, companions follow your thoughts; without an intentional mind, there is nothing you do not resonate with and penetrate. This passage also clearly demonstrates a kind of relationship between Heaven and humanity, namely the levels of observing Heaven, knowing Heaven, modelling oneself on Heaven, and responding in accordance with Heaven.

III. Seeking Inwardly and Resonant Penetration

The resonant penetration mentioned in this hexagram, through observing the Way of Heaven, allows one to understand that resonance is a source of creation, possessing immense energy: Heaven and Earth resonate and the myriad things are produced; man and woman resonate and the husband-wife relationship is formed. And according to the principle that what one gains is what one resonates with – that is, resonating with the correct Way elicits a response from the

¹⁴ <https://ctext.org/book-of-changes/xi-ci-xia> [accessed 8 October 2025].

correct Way, and vice versa – this regularity also manifests a kind of causal relationship. Since ‘Stimulus’ 感 and ‘response’ 應 are closely linked, it is extremely crucial to maintain correctness at the very initial stage of ‘stimulus’. As Wang Fuzhi emphasised:

‘The subtle impulses of the contraction and expansion, and the transformations of the genuine and artificial, in Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things – do not neglect these, at the moment of the initial stirring of the impulse, as having no connection with the divine principle.’

天地万物屈伸之几、情偽之變，在乍動之几，勿忽為無關於神理。¹⁵

Therefore, one must carefully perceive that every minute begins to pave the way for the future response. Furthermore, since resonant penetration lies within oneself, one should seek it inwardly. As Mencius said:

‘When we seek, we get them; when we neglect, we lose them; this showing that seeking is advantageous to getting, the seeking is within ourselves. But when the seeking is according to the proper course, and the getting is only as appointed, this showing that the seeking is not advantageous to getting, the seeking is without us.’

求則得之，舍則失之，是求有益於得也，求在我者也。求之有道，得之有命，是求無益於得也，求在外者也。¹⁶

Seeking from within naturally produces an outward resonance, just as cold and heat resonate within the cosmos: when cold departs, heat arrives; it is not that the two deliberately seek outwardly for the seasons to change. The noble man, through continuously engaging in inward self-cultivation, can thereby penetrate outwardly. Sustaining this cycle between inner and outer, he can gradually enter the state of the sage and attain the unconscious resonance of the unity of Heaven and humanity 天人合一. No longer needing to deliberately seek outwardly or inwardly, he naturally acts according to the correct Way and transforms the world.

IV. Conclusion

In summary, through the analysis of the three types of resonance, this presentation has shown the deep logic of resonance in the Xian hexagram. Its core wisdom lies in revealing that resonance according to the proper way depends not on skillfully seeking external techniques, but originates from the inner cultivation of the subject, namely the virtues of Centrality and Correctness and humanity.

¹⁵ Wang Fuzhi 王夫之: *Zhou Yi Nei Zhuan* 周易內傳, p.141.

¹⁶ Zhu Xi 朱熹: *Xi Shu Zhang Ju Ji Zhu* 四書章句集注, P.392.

From the sincerity and stillness in the resonance between man and woman, to the self-emptying openness of the noble person, and finally to the shared virtue of Heaven and Earth in the sage, the path of resonance is one of continuous inner cultivation. When one transcends selfish desires and reaches the state Wang Fuzhi called “the Way being great and without anxiety,” resonance is no longer deliberate but becomes a natural expression of inner virtue, responding effortlessly to all things. And the *Xian* hexagram teaches that the depth and purity of resonance depend on a single thought — when the heart stays upright and centred, harmony with all things naturally follows.

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