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Yin-Yang Mode and the Ancient Oriental Thoughts of Eco-Aesthetics

1. The Relationship between *Zhouyi* and Aesthetics

The close relationship between *Zhouyi* (Also called *I Ching* or *Yi King*) and aesthetics was pointed out by Zong Baihua. He pointed out that *Zhouyi* “as an important canon of Confucianism, contains valuable aesthetic thoughts.” (Zong, 1987:332)¹. According to Zong, what *Zhouyi* stressed is that the true beauty comes from the radiance of the object itself, and this kind of beauty is an aesthetic ideal in ancient China, which is an internal masculine beauty, independent of external adornment.

This aesthetic ideal is also found in the Hexagram “*Bi*”(贲), which is made up of the inside Trigram “*Li*” (离) and the outside Trigram “*Gen*”(艮). Its symbol is fire at the foot of the mountain. According to Heng Gao, “‘*Li*’ is a *Yin*-Trigram, which represents fire and the docile, and ‘*Gen*’ is a *Yang*-Trigram, which symbolizes mountain and the virile.”² Therefore, in *Tuan*’s treatise on the Hexagram “*Bi*”, it reads:

(We see) the weak line coming and ornamenting the strong lines (of the lower trigram), and hence (it is said that ornament) should have free course. On the other hand, the strong line above ornaments the weak ones (of the upper trigram), and hence (it is said) that ‘there will be little advantage, if (ornament) be allowed to advance (and take the lead).’³

¹ Baihua Zong (宗白华), *Art Atmosphere «艺术»* (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 1987), p. 332.

² Heng Gao(高亨), *The Morden Comments on the Great Appendix of Zhouyi 《周易大传今注》* (Jinan: Qilu Press, 1979), pp.226-227.

³ James Legge (trans.), *The Yi King, The Texts of Confucianism, The Sacred Books of China Part II* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1882), p.104.

In the meantime, because “*Li*” represents elegance and intelligence and “*Gen*” represents arrest, there is a saying: “Elegance and intelligence (denoted by the lower trigram) regulated by the arrest...”⁴ Thus, the regulation of arresting elegance and intelligence, as well as the interlacement of the docile and the virile, is a principle of *Yi* that comes from the images of the Trigrams and Hexagrams.

As for the image of fire at the foot of the mountain, Zong Baihua interpreted it as “The silhouettes of the vegetation on the mountain are clear-cut in the illumination of the night fire, which is a vision of beauty” (Zong, 1987:332)⁵. Then, what kind of beauty is conveyed in the light of such an aesthetic vision? Zong elucidates it in a way of literary aesthetics.

Zong holds that in the Treatise on the Symbols of the Hexagram “*Bi*”, “The superior man, in accordance with this (representation of the Hexagram), throws a brilliancy around his various processes of government, but does not dare (in a similar way) to decide cases of criminal litigation”⁶, which means that “the aesthetic sense may help the governors keep with good governance, but it cannot help with decisions cases of criminal litigation. This demonstrates the value and the limitations of beauty and arts (ornamentation) in social activities.”⁷ This kind of explanation is somewhat farfetched, for it, to a large extent, deviates from the original meaning and the explanation for the Hexagram “*Bi*”. Why can aesthetic sense help the governors keep good governance while and at the same time cannot be employed to help with decisions on cases of criminal litigation? In this respect, Zong did not discuss it further, so we might as well say that the view “the value and the limitations of beauty and arts in social activities”, can only be considered his own understanding, and cannot be proved directly in the Judgement on the Hexagram. As we can see from the *Tuan*’s treatise on

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.231.

⁵ Baihua Zong (宗白华), *Art Atmosphere* 《艺术》 (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 1987), p. 332.

⁶ James Legge (trans.), *The Yi King, The Texts of Confucianism, The Sacred Books of China Part II* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1882), p.294.

⁷ Baihua Zong (宗白华), *Art Atmosphere* 《艺境》 (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 1987), p.333.

the Hexagram “*Bi*”, the meaning of the words focuses on enlightening and influencing the world, instead of discussing literature and arts.

It does not mean that I completely deny the possibility and validity of interpreting *Zhouyi* in the view of literature and arts as Zong did, but do I believe that Zong’s explanation is a bit of farfetched. This does not necessarily mean that the Hexagram “*Bi*” cannot be understood from the perspective of literature and arts, as Zong’s another explanation is fairly accurate. It suggests that the Hexagram “*Bi*” includes an opposition of two kinds of beauty, viz. the beauty of magnificence and the beauty of plainness. He maintains that,

The original meaning of “*Bi*” is splendid beauty and “White *Bi*” is the plainness developing from the magnificence. Thus, Xun Shuang(荀爽, A.D.128-190, an expert of *Zhou Yi*) held that “the extreme ornamentation will go into plainness”. The colorful will become the colorless, for instance, both of landscape paintings and flower paintings develop into ink-and-wash paintings which represents the summit of arts. Hence it is believed in “The Miscellaneous Remarks on the Hexagrams of *I Ching*”(“*Za Gua*”) that “*Bi* is equivalent to the colorless”. This sentence contains an important aesthetic idea, namely, the true beauty comes from the radiance of an object.⁸

In actuality, the original meaning of “*Bi*” is ornamentation, as is shown in “The Treatise on the Orderly Sequence of the Hexagrams”(“*Xu Gua*”), “*Bi* is equivalent to ornamentation.” That is why “Confucius was unhappy after getting the Hexagram ‘*Bi*’ in a divination.” Confucius supposed that “*Bi* is not the color for orthodoxy.” (From “*Book of Han: The Garden of Stories*” [“*Shuo Yuan*”]). Confucius’ view is yet different from that in “The Miscellaneous Remarks on the Hexagrams” “*Bi* is equivalent to the colorless.” Then contradiction arises. Firstly, if “*Bi*” means ornamentation, it cannot mean the colorless, “*Xu Gua*” and “*Za Gua*” are contradictory to each other in this regard. Secondly, if “*Bi*” means the colorless, Confucius wouldn’t be unhappy. Therefore, the original meaning of “*Bi*” should be “ornamentation”, instead of “colorlessness”. Gao Heng suggested that the Chinese

⁸ *Ibid.*

character “*wu*” in the phrase “*wu-se*” (colorless) should be explained as “*Mang*”(the multicolored), thus, this meaning is equivalent to that of “ornamentation”. Hence the complete meaning of “*Bi*” is that “the multicolored contributes to ornamentation.”⁹ This explanation does make sense. Since the original meaning of “*Bi*” is the ornamentation and splendor. “White *Bi*” certainly means going into plainness, pureness and the original color. The expression “White *Bi*” comes from the sentence for the sixth Nine of the Hexagram “*Bi*”, “one with white as his (only) ornament. There will be no error.” Gao Heng explained this expression, “White *Bi* is the white texture with multicolored ornamentation. Its figurative meaning is no blame for a man with the pure and innocent virtue as well as with the brilliance of literature, so there will be no error.”¹⁰

In this aspect, I think that Gao’s interpretation is not as precise as Zong’s. Now that *Bi* means ornamentation, then *Bi* should precede White *Bi*, that is, White *Bi* follows *Bi*. It is obvious that the meaning of White *Bi* is going into plainness after splendor, rather than having “white nature” before being “ornamented with multicolored patterns”, as what Gao suggested. This is presented in Confucius’ teaching that “in painting, ornamentation and color are of secondary importance compared with the ground work”, which is extracted from the following paragraph,

A disciple asked Confucius for the meaning of the following verse: “Her coquettish smiles,/ How dimpling they are;/ Her beautiful eyes, /How beaming they are; /How fairest is she/ who is simple and plain.” “In painting,” answered Confucius, “Ornamentation and color are of secondary importance compared with the ground work.” “Then art itself,” said the disciple. “is a matter of ‘secondary’ consideration?” “My friend,” replied Confucius, “You have given me an idea. Now I can talk of poetry (*The She King*) with you.”¹¹

⁹ Heng Gao(高亨), *The Morden Comments on the Great Appendix of Zhouyi* 《周易大传今注》 (Jinan: Qilu Press, 1979), p.226.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.231.

¹¹ Hongming Ku(辜鸿铭) (trans.), *The Discourses and Sayings of Confucius* 《英译〈论语〉》 (Kunming: Yunnan People’s Press, 2011), p.33.

This paragraph is quoted from *The Analects of Confucius: Ba Yi*, as we all know. Yet there are always different explanations. The key difference focuses on the meaning of the sentence “in painting, ornamentation and color are of secondary importance compared with the ground work”, where, which is the first: plainness exists before painting or plainness follows painting. In his book *Translation and Comments of the Analects of Confucius (Lun Yu Yi Zhu)*, Yang Bojun (1909-1992) explained it as “in painting, ornamentation and color are of secondary importance compared with the ground work”, which means “The ground work precedes ornamentation and color.”¹² But Zheng Xuan(郑玄, A.D.127-200, a Confucian master in Han Dynasty) commented it in a different way,

The painting is equivalent to ornamentation. In painting we always prepare colors at first, and then we distribute the plainness among the colors to have the ornamentation completed. It indicates that even if a beautiful woman has pretty appearances and nice nature, she is not perfect without the cultivation of rites.¹³

If we consider the meaning of the quotation above as a whole, it is clear that these words primarily discuss the relationship between plainness and splendor. The beauty in a pretty woman of “Her coquettish smiles, How dimpling they are; Her beautiful eyes, How beaming they are” is a natural quality without any ornament. Therefore, there is “How fairest is she who is simple and plain”. This “fairness” is “plain and simple”, that is, “fairness going into plainness”. Just like painting, different colors should be used firstly, but the finished painting should be plain instead of dazzle. Only in this way can we say it is an excellent painting. It is also like the “Ceremonies”, what Confucius emphasized are plain and moderate rites, but not the unnecessary and over-elaborate formalities.

From the discussion above we can see that the complete meaning for “White *Bi*” should be “going into plainness from splendor”, which

¹² Bojun Yang(杨伯峻), *Annotation and Translation of the Analects of Confucius* 《论语译注》(Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1980), p.25.

¹³ Yuan Ruan(阮元), *Shi San Jing Zhu Shu II* 《十三经注疏》(下)(Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1980), p. 2466.

final effects can return into “Whiteness”, from “the multicolored figures with the plain ground”. That is a higher realm. It shows that the natural and internal beauty is held in high esteem in ancient Chinese society. And they are all surely about the literature and arts. In this regard, obviously, it is reasonable that Zong Baihua makes an interpretation for the Hexagram “*Bi*” from the perspective of literary Aesthetics and Arts.

2. Limitations of Understanding *Zhouyi* from the Perspectives of Literary Aesthetics

Liu Xie (刘勰, A.D.465-520) quoted and discussed *Zhouyi* many times in his book *Dragon-Carving and the Literary Mind (Wenxin Diaolong)*, a literary criticism book of ancient Chinese literature and arts, which indicates that *Zhouyi* is indeed relevant to literature. For example, there are the words in the chapter of Feeling and Art (*Qing Cai* 《情采》) “That is why a man once wore a coarse linen coat over brocade in order to avoid gaudiness. The image of the hexagram ‘grace’ (*‘Bi’*) in *Zhouyi* traces its source to plain white: It values the natural color.”¹⁴ And also in another chapter of “Venerating the Sages” (*Zheng Sheng* 《征圣》), there is a sentence, “those (writing) lucidity, (can be likened) to the Hexagram ‘fire’ (*‘Li’*).”¹⁵ All these can prove that studying *Zhouyi* from the point of view of literary aesthetics is feasible.

Besides the aspects of literature and arts on the certain Hexagram “*Bi*” and “*Li*” are discussed in *Dragon-Carving and the Literary Mind*, the relationship between literature and *Zhouyi* is more worth studying. In the first chapter “Tracing the Origin to the *Dao*” (“*Yuan Dao*” 《原道》), Liu Xie said,

Now when the blue color parted from the yellow, and the round shape from the square, heaven and earth came into being. Like two interfolding jade mirrors, the sun and the moon reflect the images of heaven, while streams and mountains are interwoven into earthly patterns like gorgeous damask. They are manifestations of *Dao*.¹⁶

¹⁴ Guobin Yang(杨国斌) (trans.), *Dragon-Carving and the Literary Mind II* 《文心雕龙》(下)(Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2003), p.28.

¹⁵ Guobin Yang(杨国斌) (trans.), *Dragon-Carving and the Literary Mind I* 《文心雕龙》(上)(Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2003), p.17.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.3.

According to Liu Xie, the “manifestations of *Dao*”, is quite similar to the “the ornamental figures of heaven” in *Zhouyi*. What is discussed about the Hexagram “*Bi*” in *Zhouyi* is “the docile and the virile intertwined into the ornamental figures of heaven”, while Liu Xie discussed this Hexagram in further details, that is, varying from the colors blue and yellow, to the shapes round and square to the sun and the moon, to streams and mountains. *Dragon-Carving and the Literary Mind* discusses about the Two Modes (两仪) and the Three Powers (三才) as *Zhouyi* does, which also indicates that *Zhouyi* is the former’s origin.

After discussing “the ornamentation of heaven”, Liu Xie talked about the ornamentation of human society,

Language originated in *Taiji*, the Great Primal Beginning. In the beginning, divine order revealed the hexagrams of the *Book of Changes*. Pao-xi drew the eight trigrams of the *Book of Changes*, to which Confucius appended commentaries known as the ‘Ten Wings.’ Further, to interpret the *Qian* (Heaven) and *Kun* (Earth) hexagrams, Confucius wrote the ‘Patterns of Words.’ Are not word patterns the mind of heaven and earth! ¹⁷

The close relationship between literature and *Zhouyi* is clearly unveiled in this paragraph. It can be seen that *Zhouyi* can be interpreted from the perspective of literature or of literary aesthetics according to Liu Xie. However, we need notice the fact that the issues of literary aesthetics discussed in the chapter “*Yuan Dao*”, is different from what Zong discusses. The aesthetics in *Zhouyi* discussed by Zong is about particular aspects, and what “*Yuan Dao*” mentions is about a general principle. We can generalize the principle as “contemplation as looking up and survey as looking down”, which is an important principle in ancient Chinese aesthetic thought and a thought that *Zhouyi* emphasizes on.

“Contemplation as looking up and survey as looking down” can be seen as a special aesthetic mode of ancient Chinese. Yet this kind of aesthetic mode is connected with the ancient Chinese ecological holism. It can be seen as some general principle, in which the aesthetic thought

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.7.

as “harmony between man and nature” is revealed in it. The purpose for Contemplation as looking up and survey as looking down lies in the unity of heaven and earth, and of nature and culture. Discussing from nature to humanity, and proving the rationality of humanity ornamentations through the ornamentations of heaven, are some kind of speech pattern, some kind of arguing logic, and some kind of thinking mode specific to ancient Chinese. It shows a harmonious relationship between man and nature”, which is a thought of ecological holism of ancient Chinese.

Returning to Zong’s interpretation of *Zhouyi*’s aesthetics, as we have pointed out above, of his three explanations for the Hexagram “*Bi*”, only the third one is persuasive, and the other two are somewhat farfetched. Still Zong contributes a lot to the study of *Zhouyi*’s aesthetics, in view of the fact that he uncovers the aesthetic thoughts embedded in *Zhouyi*, illuminates the relationship between *Zhouyi* and aesthetics, and interprets some hexagrams of *Zhouyi* from the angle of literary aesthetics. Therefore, his research is valuable. Yet in my opinion, there are many restraints in interpreting *Zhouyi* from the perspective of literary aesthetics, for some parts of the book can be explained from that angle, while others cannot. Should we then conclude that this means a failure of aesthetic interpretation of *Zhouyi*? Not in my point of view. If we cannot explain it from the angle of literary aesthetics, we can do it from the perspective of ecological aesthetics.

We can for instance take this sentence “(The trigram representing) a mountain and that for fire under it form *Bi*. The superior man, in accordance with this, throws a brilliancy around his various processes of government, but does not dare (in a similar way) to decide cases of criminal litigation.” Since it does not discuss literary issues directly, we cannot interpret it from a perspective of literary aesthetics, but it can be interpreted in a way of ecological aesthetics. Firstly, the image of a mountain and the fire at the foot of it demonstrates a beautiful natural phenomenon, which certainly belongs to the ecological beauty of nature. Secondly, the meaning of the expression “but does not dare (in a similar way) to decide cases of criminal litigation” about the good deeds of the superior man, is part of the ecological beauty of human society. Lastly, as this paragraph indicates that we should always show

respect for myriad things in our social activities and cannot always do whatever harmful to the natural world. Such an attitude is just what we should hold to ecologically environmental protection nowadays. The saying in the Hexagram “*Jie*” of *Zhouyi* “Heaven and earth observe their regular terms, and we have the four seasons complete. (If rulers) frame their measures according to (the due) regulations, the resources (of the state) suffer no injury, and the people receive no hurt”¹⁸ also reflects the idea. Consequently, all of these can be understood and interpreted from the point of view of ecological aesthetics. Even if the parts in *Zhouyi* explainable from the perspective of literary aesthetics can also be explained from that of ecological aesthetics. For example, the “White *Bi*” we have discussed above, which is the beauty of plainness coming from that of magnificence, is both of artistic and ecological beauty. Is it not the plain and natural beauty that is pursued by ecological aesthetics? Hence, this kind of beauty of literature and arts can be understood by virtue of ecological beauty. For literary issues are always connected with the affairs of society and even events of heaven and earth in the Pre-Qin canons, and this kind of idea is a tradition of culture and ideology in ancient China. The tradition, as we put it today, is a thought of ecological holism, which can be summarized in the view of the *Yin-Yang* mode.

According to Liu Xi-zai, “The ‘patterns’ (*wen*) follow the rules and principles of heaven and earth, whose way can be held by *Yin* and *Yang*, and by the weak and the strong.”¹⁹ Zong (1987) pointed out that,

The state characteristics reflected in Chinese painting is based on the fundamental philosophy of Chinese people, and it is exactly the universal view of *I Ching*: everything is produced from the Two Life Forces (*Qi*) *Yin* and *Yang*, all of them can be called a kind of ‘accumulation of life force’ (*‘Qi Ji’*), as Chuang-tzu said,

¹⁸ James Legge (trans.), *The Yi King, The Texts of Confucianism, The Sacred Books of China Part II* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1882), p.262.

¹⁹ Zhongyu Xu(徐中玉) & Huarong Xiao(肖华荣), *Comments on Arts by LIU Xi-zai* 《刘熙载论艺六种》 (Chengdu: Bashu Press, 1990), p.47.

sky is the accumulated life force) for everything is created from the life force of heaven and earth.²⁰

According to the two quotations above, we can see when Liu Xizai talks about literature (*wen*) and Zong about paintings, both of them relate the literary issues with the affairs of the universe, and view the thought of *Yin* and *Yang* as the fundament of literature and arts. It is suggested that the ultimate issues of Chinese literature and arts can be clarified by the thought of two modes of *Yin* and *Yang* due to their close relationship.

On the other hand, interpreting *Zhouyi* merely from the perspective of literature and arts is not enough because of the rich aesthetic connotations in *Zhouyi*. Not only the existences of literature and arts but also the existence of the universe can be illuminated in the aspect of the thought of the *Yin-Yang* mode. Not only the literary aesthetics but also the life aesthetics can be used to interpret the aesthetic thought in *Zhouyi*. As Liu Gangji points out in his book *The Aesthetics of Zhouyi*, "In terms of aesthetics, the idea of the life aesthetics is dominant in *Zhouyi*, and this is the most important characteristics and the most significant contributions of *Zhouyi*."²¹ An internal logic can be seen in the study of the aesthetics of *Zhouyi* from the literary aesthetics to the life aesthetics, and this is our insight into the thought of the aesthetics of *Zhouyi*. Still we shall move forward to the aspect of ecological aesthetics from that of life aesthetics, in order to understand and illuminate the thought of the aesthetics of *Zhouyi* comprehensively and precisely.

We have to admit that life is exactly the key aesthetic category which *Zhouyi* focuses on, yet it is different from that of modern Western life aesthetics interpretation. The life that *Zhouyi* focuses on is not only the individual life will of human being, but also it is of ecological holism. To be more specific, the individual life of human is put into the dimension of the complete universal view that is composed of the mineral and the organic, animals and plants, nature and society,

²⁰ Baihua Zong(宗白华), *Art Atmosphere* 《艺境》 (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 1987), p.118.

²¹ Gangji Liu(刘纲纪), *The Aesthetics of Zhouyi* 《周易美学》 (Wuhan: Wuhan University Press, 2006), p. 69.

ornamentation of heaven and of human, as to be surveyed in *Zhouyi*. It is not the life, but the relationships among the lives, which conclude the origins of producing lives, the reasons and grounds of the growth and development of lives, and mutual generation and restriction among them, construct the whole frame and core of *Zhouyi*. The “life” in *Zhouyi* is more the universe life as a whole being than the individual life, more ecology than life. As Zeng figures out, “The lives in *Zhouyi* conclude ‘myriad things’ (‘*Wan Wu*’) on the Earth. Either the organic or the mineral originates in *Qian* and *Kun*, *Yin* and *Yang*, Heaven and Earth, and thus is vital.”²² This is different from the modern Western philosophy and aesthetics of life theories that confine the lives to organic matter, plant and animal, and especially human. This kind of western philosophy and aesthetics in certain respects remains anthropocentric. As for the life theory in *Zhouyi*, it is more ecological. Hence, we can conclude that, in comparison with life aesthetics, ecological aesthetics is closer to the natural spirit of the aesthetics of *Zhouyi*.

Does this in any way mean that the aesthetics of *Zhouyi* reflects eco-centrism of non-human? considering this, only the ecological holism that unites naturalism and humanism, instead of anthropocentrism or eco-centrism, can approach the real spirit of the aesthetics of *Zhouyi* comprehensively. In *Zhouyi*, the “Explanation of the Words and Sentences” on the Hexagram “*Qian*” there is a saying,

The great man is he who is in harmony, in his attributes, with heaven and earth; in his brightness, with the sun and moon; in his orderly procedure, with the four seasons; and in his relation to what is fortunate and what is calamitous, in harmony with the spirit-like operations (of Providence). He may precede Heaven, and Heaven will not act in opposition to him; he may follow Heaven, but will act (only) as Heaven at the time would do.²³

It is exactly the ecological holism that was illuminated in this text, which means: Human being shall attribute to heaven and earth

²² Fanren Zeng(曾繁仁), *Comments on Ecological Ontological Aesthetics* 《生态存在论美学论稿》(Changchun: Jilin Press, 2009), p.187.

²³ James Legge (trans.), *The Yi King, The Texts of Confucianism, The Sacred Books of China Part II* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1882), p.417.

and everything, shall proceed with the four seasons, and shall not act in opposition to the order of nature. Because only in compliance with nature can human exist in better circumstance. This view is in accordance with what we advocate today that “human is part of nature, and nature is the foundation of human lives, thus protecting the natural environment is protecting human being”

3. Ways of Understanding *Zhouyi* from Perspective of Eco-Aesthetics

Zhouyi can be further interpreted in the way of ecological aesthetics, for its ecological wisdom is some kind of aesthetic intelligence and of wisdom of ecological aesthetics. According to Zeng Fanren, the ecological aesthetic connotations of *Zhouyi* include the following aspects:

First, it describes arts and aesthetic as a living way for ancient Chinese. In “*Xi Ci*” of *Zhouyi*, the whole progress of the ancient Chinese divination is presented, such as producing a hexagram, commenting on appended judgments, accommodating allegories to circumstances, and beating drums, dancing, playing wizardries. Arts and aesthetic actions are included in this progress, or, in other words, because of the arts and aesthetic actions contained in the divination, the divination becomes an aesthetic activity itself. This kind of divining rites, in which aesthetic actions are included or aesthetic actions are characterized, is a basic way of ancient Chinese to seek for a better life, and also is a reflection of thoughts of ecological aesthetic holisim.

Second, it represents a fundamental form of Chinese classical aesthetics, in which “great harmony is preserved in union” and “the beauty of weakness and softness is combined”. The sentence, Zeng suggests that the “great harmony” in the *Tuan*’s treatise on the Hexagram “*Qian*” is a situation of the “harmony between heaven and human” and an “equilibrium and harmony existing in perfection” in which all of *Qian* and *Kun*, *Yin* and *Yang*, Humaneness and Righteousness are in their proper position.²⁴ This is not only the most cardinal form of ancient

²⁴ Fanren Zeng(曾繁仁), *Comments on Ecological Ontological Aesthetics* 《生态存在论美学论稿》(Changchun: Jilin Press, 2009), p.190.

Chinese aesthetics, but is also the highest aesthetic pursuit of ancient China. The beauty of the virile and of the docile undoubtedly derives from this fundamental form of aesthetics and the highest aesthetic pursuit in ancient China.

Third, it represents the “poetic thinking mode” of the idea that “the symbols are built to make complete sense” in ancient China. In “*Xi Ci II*”, the expression goes: “Therefore, what we call the *Yi* is (a collection of) emblematic lines. They are styled emblematic as being resemblances.”²⁵ Zeng explains it in this way: the symbols of hexagrams are essential in *Zhouyi*, since the images showed in them are used to voice the principles of “*Yi*”. Zeng points out that, “All of the symbols in *Zhouyi* use ornamentations of heaven and earth as metaphors for ornamentation of human, in other words, the metaphor is symbols of nature, and the target is symbols of humanity.”²⁶ It is related with the two rhetorical techniques in classical Chinese poetics, “*Bi Xing*” – explicit comparisons and implied comparisons. Hence, as we put it, *Zhouyi* illuminates the “poetic thinking mode” which is also a thought of ecological holism.

Fourth, it praises the healthy beauty of life, as is showed in “*Tai*”, “*Da Zhuang*” and other hexagrams. For instance, the Trigram “*Qian*” below and the Trigram “*Kun*” above composes of the Hexagram “*Tai*”. As the *Qian-Yang* rises from the lower towards the upper and the *Kun-Yin* descends from the upper towards the lower, it represents the communication between *Yin* and *Yang*, thus heaven, earth, and all things get their fairness, and every life remains vigorous. All of these are praises for the healthy and virile beauty of ecology in the universe as well as in all things.

At last, it expresses the plain hope for and pursuit of wonderful homeland and happy life in ancient China. Zeng considers that goodness, excellence, harmony and faculty in the “Explanation of the Words and Sentences” (“*Wen Yan*”), on the Hexagram “*Qian*” are all the representations of successes and beautiful life, and are appeals to an

²⁵ James Legge (trans.), *The Yi King, The Texts of Confucianism, The Sacred Books of China Part II* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1882), p.386.

²⁶ Fanren Zeng(曾繁仁), *Comments on Ecological Ontological Aesthetics* 《生态存在论美学论稿》 (Changchun: Jilin Press, 2009), p.191.

ecological aesthetic situation of harmony between human and nature, and human society.

It should be mentioned that Zeng's analysis about the eco-aesthetic connotations of *Zhouyi* is original and specific. It is demonstrated that some new connotations which we ignore can be revealed from the angle of ecological aesthetics. And once again it shows that reading *Zhouyi* from the perspective of ecological aesthetics is feasible. Of course, it does not necessarily mean that all of the connotations mentioned by Zeng have totally covered the ecological aesthetics of *Zhouyi*, further studies are still necessary.

In effect, thoughts about eco-aesthetics of *Zhouyi* are rich. Zeng puts it frankly, "As an ancient ecological wisdom, 'Creating Life is equivalent to *Yi*' is a 'poetic thinking mode' itself, which contains plentiful aesthetic connotations."²⁷ The above five connotations are only part of the eco-aesthetics of *Zhouyi*. The "poetic thinking mode" showed in *Zhouyi*, as he puts it, is opposite to the logical thinking aesthetics represented in classical Western aesthetics (especially that of Hegel); the ecological ontological aesthetics, as he defines it, is contrary to the Western epistemological aesthetics in which subject-object dichotomy is the primary thinking mode. Indeed, both of "poetic thinking mode" and "ecological ontology" are used to reveal the special theoretical form and spiritual substance of ancient Chinese aesthetics, to uncover the specific connotation of ecological holism contained in the aesthetics of *Zhouyi*. This kind of interpretation is profound, but it is only part of the reading of ecological aesthetics of *Zhouyi* instead of the final interpretation. To interpret comprehensively the thoughts of ecological aesthetics of *Zhouyi*, more efforts are still needed. For example, interpretation of the eco-aesthetic thought of *Zhouyi* from the angle of the mode of *Yin* and *Yang* is an interesting topic. *Yin* and *Yang*, the most essential elements in *Zhouyi*, together makes up of *Tai Ji*, and produce the eight trigrams. In "*Xi Ci I*" of *Zhouyi* the saying goes,

Therefore in (the system of) the *Yi* there is the Grand Terminus, which produced the two elementary Forms. Those two Forms produced the Four Emblematic

²⁷ Fanren Zeng(曾繁仁), *Comments on Ecological Ontological Aesthetics* 《生态存在论美学论稿》(Changchun: Jilin Press, 2009), p.189.

Symbols, which again produced the eight Trigrams. The eight trigrams served to determine the good and evil (issues of events), and from this determination was produced the (successful prosecution of the) great business (of life).²⁸

Yin and *Yang* are the mediate between Tai Ji and Eight Trigrams; thus, their importance is self-evident. Meanwhile, the two modes of *Yin* and *Yang* is a key to unveil the secrets of aesthetics of *Zhouyi*. For the study on the aesthetics of *Zhouyi*, there are different perspectives available, such as literary aesthetics, life aesthetics, ecological aesthetics, etc. Yet all of these views should face the holistic thoughts of aesthetics of *Zhouyi*, and the importance of the two modes of *Yin* and *Yang* in their formation. Only in this way, can we make further discussions about different interpretations of the aesthetics of *Zhouyi*. And all of the connotations of ecological aesthetics of *Zhouyi* we have talked about above can be interpreted from the perspective of the two modes of *Yin* and *Yang*.

We have discussed three aesthetic interpretations of *Zhouyi* above, that is, the ones from the perspectives of literary aesthetics, life aesthetics and ecological aesthetics. They have different interpretive views, different starting points, different emphases, and different issues, and, thus, they can be used to disclose different aspects of the aesthetic thoughts of *Zhouyi*. Comparatively speaking, the perspective of ecological aesthetics is maybe closer to the spiritual substance of *Zhouyi* aesthetics. Further, literary aesthetics and life aesthetics are included in ecological aesthetics. In other words, the interpretations of literary aesthetics, or of life aesthetics, can both be raised in the aspect of ecological aesthetics.

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²⁸ James Legge (trans.), *The Yi King, The Texts of Confucianism, The Sacred Books of China Part II* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1882), p.373.