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New Evidence for the Indo-European Origins of the *Yi Jing* Trigram Names

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New Evidence for the Indo-European Origins
of the *Yi Jing* Trigram Names

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a reconsideration of a topic I first presented in “The Names of the *Yi Jing* Trigrams: An Inquiry into Their Linguistic Origins” (*Sino-Platonic Papers* no. 161, September 2005). In that paper I proposed that the names of the eight trigrams were of Indo-European (IE) origin. The present paper reaffirms that view but updates some important points and presents new material to support the hypothesis. The central claims of this paper are that the trigram name *qian* 乾 (reconstructed ancient sound **kan/*gjan*), meaning “originator/begetter of all things, Heaven,” was originally the Proto-Indo-European (PIE) etymon *genater* “begetter, father” or an IE reflex, and the trigram name **kun* 坤 “mother of all things and receptor of Heaven, Earth” was originally PIE etymon **g^uéna* “wife, queen, woman” or an IE reflex. The Old Chinese pair **kan/*gjan* 乾 “originator of all things, Heaven” and **kun* 坤 “mother of all things, receptor of Heaven, Earth” resembles the PIE pair *genater* “begetter, father” and **g^uéna* “wife, queen, woman” in sound and meaning.

Furthermore, this paper proposes that the *Yi Jing* terms *gua* 卦 “*Yi Jing* diagram(s)” and *yao* 爻 “line/lines of the *Yi Jing* diagram” were also originally Indo-European words.

Keywords: *Yi Jing*, divination, trigram names, hexagrams, *gua* 卦, *yao* 爻, Proto-Indo-European and Indo-European correspondences

CONTENTS

Introduction	vii
Abbreviations	xii
I. The Eight Trigram Names: Their Definitions	3
A. Definitions in the <i>Chunqiu Zuo Zhuan</i> and the <i>Guoyu</i>	3
B. Definitions in the <i>Shuo Gua</i> 說卦 commentary	5
C. Definitions in the <i>Tuan Commentary</i> and the <i>Xiang Commentary</i>	10
D. Candidates for primary meanings of the eight trigrams	17
E. Proposed earliest meanings of trigrams <i>qian</i> and <i>kun</i>	19
F. Proposed earliest meaning of trigram name <i>li</i> 離	20
G. Proposed earliest meaning of trigram name <i>kan</i> 坎	20
H. Proposed earliest meanings of the eight trigram names	21
II. Chinese Transcription of Foreign Words	23
A. Disadvantage of a syllabary vs. an alphabet	23
B. Abbreviation	24
III. The Eight Trigram Names: Correspondences between the Old Chinese and PIE and/or IE	27
Summary of correspondences of trigram names with PIE/IE	31
IV. More PIE/IE Correspondences: <i>gua</i> 卦 and <i>yao</i> 爻	35
A. <i>Gua</i> 卦 “ <i>Yi Jing</i> diagram”	35
B. <i>Yao</i> 爻 “lines of the <i>Yi Jing</i> diagram”	37
V. Conclusion	39
Acknowledgments	40

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to add new considerations to the case for the proposal that the names of the *Yi Jing* trigrams were originally Indo-European (IE) words. It does this by following the method, pioneered by Victor H. Mair,¹ of proposing correspondences in sound-and-meaning between a given Old Chinese word and a Proto-Indo-European (PIE) etymon and/or its IE reflexes.

I shall begin by giving a brief explanation of why I have revised some of the points made in my previous paper (2005) on the *Yi Jing* trigram names. First, my hypothesis on *Yi Jing* trigram names *gan* 乾 and *kun* 坤 has largely, though not completely, changed from that of the previous paper. In that paper I matched *Yi Jing gan* 乾 **gjian*/**kaan* “heaven, father, creative force” with PIE **genater* “begetter, father” and its reflexes, including Greek *geneter* “creator, father,” as in this paper. But at the same time, I also matched it with PIE *(s)*kai* and its reflexes, including Latin *caelum* “sky.” Likewise I matched *Yi Jing kun* 坤 **kun*/**k-hlun* “mother of all things, receptor of Heaven, Earth” with IE words for “woman” and “land.”

My new position on *gan* 乾 and *kun* 坤, presented in this paper, came about when I was doing research on the name Zeus for my 2005 paper on the Yellow Emperor.² I found that the name Jupiter came from Proto-Indo-European **dyeu-ph₂ter* “Sky-Father.” This led me to the PIE and IE concept of Sky-Father and Earth-Mother and to the realization that *Yi Jing gan* 乾 “father, begetter, Heaven” and *kun* 坤 “consort/receptor of Heaven, mother of all things, Earth” fit the PIE and IE concept of Sky-Father and Earth-Mother perfectly, together with sound-correspondences. Thus I arrived at the hypothesis, presented in this paper, that *Yi Jing gan* 乾 did not stand for two separate entities, “father/begetter” and “Heaven,” but for one entity, “Sky-Father,” and that *kun* 坤 likewise stood for one entity, Earth-Mother. Although I came to this hypothesis in 2005, I did not have time until now to write this paper.

Furthermore, my new findings have led to the revision of my previous hypothesis on the term *gua* 卦 “*Yi Jing* diagram,” namely, that it corresponded in sound-and-meaning to Welsh *rhes* “row, rank, series.” This paper provides the new evidence and my new hypothesis on *gua* 卦.

¹ See, e.g., Victor H. Mair, “Tracks of the Tao, Semantics of Zen,” *Sino-Platonic Papers* no. 23, April 1991.

² See Julie Lee Wei, “Huangdi and Huntun (the Yellow Emperor and Wonton): A New Hypothesis on Some Figures in Chinese Mythology,” *Sino-Platonic Papers* no. 163, Oct. 2005.

Also revised is the hypothesis on the term *yi* 易 **leg/leegs* “change” (as in *Yi Jing* 易經, “Classic of Changes”) held in my 2005 paper on trigram names. However, because of the new evidence in the present paper further supporting the hypothesis of European origins for the trigram names, I still retain my statement, in another 2005 paper, “Shang and Zhou: An Inquiry into the Linguistic Origin of Two Dynastic Names,”³ that *yi* 易 **leg/*leegs* represents a sound-and-meaning correspondence with Greek *lego* (λεγω) “lay in order, arrange; speak, say; declare (of oracles).” ((Wikt, Lid). This suggests that *yi* 易 **leg/*leegs* was originally an IE word, a cognate of Greek *lego*. One such cognate is Germanic *lekja* “(obsolete) one who cures by incantation,” from PIE **leg* -“gather together, collect” (Pok 658). However, the term *yi* 易 is outside the scope of the present paper.

Finally, I have revised my earlier position on trigram name *li* 離 “fire (lightning), sun” because, whereas the reconstruction **ljar* for *li* 離 was used in the 2005 trigrams paper, I now use the reconstruction **rai* for *li* 離. This reconstruction was not available to me in 2005. It was published in Axel Schuessler’s 2007 book (Sch-2). **Rai* is a much better fit for a sound-and-meaning correspondence between the Old Chinese and PIE/IE.

Proto-Indo-European (PIE) is the theorized common ancestor of the Indo-European language family. PIE is hypothesized to have been spoken as a single language from 4500 to 2500 BCE.⁴ All Indo-European languages descended from this single prehistoric language, reconstructed Proto-Indo-European.⁵ Written evidence of Indo-European languages appeared during the Bronze Age in the form of Mycenaean Greek and the Anatolian languages Hittite and Luwian. The oldest IE records are isolated Hittite words and names.⁶

There are eight *Yi Jing* trigrams. The trigrams and their names are:

- ☰ 乾 *qian*
- ☷ 坤 *kun*

³ See Julie Lee Wei, “Shang and Zhou: An Inquiry into the Linguistic Origin of Two Dynastic Names,” *Sino-Platonic Papers* no. 164, Oct. 2005, p. 27.

⁴ Wikipedia, s.v. “Proto-Indo-European language.”

⁵ Wikipedia, s.v. “Indo-European languages.”

⁶ Wikipedia, s.v. “Indo-European languages.”

- ☳ 震 *zhen*
- ☴ 巽 *xun*
- ☲ 離 *li*
- ☵ 坎 *kan*
- ☶ 艮 *gen*
- ☱ 兌 *dui*

The trigrams are made up of two kinds of lines: a broken line and a solid line. There are eight possible three-line combinations of the broken line and the solid line.

When a trigram is placed above another trigram, the resulting six-line diagram is called a hexagram. There are sixty-four possible combinations of trigrams that can be used to make hexagrams. The sixty-four hexagrams are the subject of the *Yi Jing* (also spelled *I Ching* and translated as the "*Book of Changes*" or "*Classic of Changes*"). When a hexagram is composed of two identical trigrams, the hexagram has the name of the trigram. Thus,

Trigram	Hexagram
☰	☰☰
<i>qian</i> 乾	<i>qian</i> 乾

Where this is not the case, the hexagram has a name that does not include the name of either trigram.

The earliest layer of the *Yi Jing*, which is its core, is called the *Zhou Yi* 周易 "Changes of Zhou," *Zhou* being the name of the Zhou dynasty. It was used as a divination manual. Each of the hexagrams is a result of divination by cleromancy, or casting lots. In the divination manual, each hexagram represents a divination or prognostication. Each line of a hexagram is also a prognostication, a divine sign, omen, or portent. The received text of the *Zhou Yi* contains all sixty-four possible hexagrams, along with the hexagram's name, a short hexagram statement, and six line-statements for each line of the hexagram.

As a divination or prognostication, each line of the hexagram is read as a divine sign, an omen, or a portent, and each hexagram consists of the meeting, congruence, coincidence, or intersection of the six lines or omens in that hexagram. In other words, a line or omen in a hexagram does not stand alone but is related to the other lines or omens in that hexagram.

Scholars differ as to the dating of the *Zhou Yi*. Professor Edward L. Shaughnessy, after making a linguistic analysis of the language of the *Zhou Yi*, concluded that the text in its present form dates to the last quarter of the ninth century BCE, during the Early, or Western, Zhou dynasty.⁷ The language of the *Zhou Yi*, which is Old Chinese, is accepted as having been used in the period 1046 to 771 BCE.⁸ In addition to the earliest layer, the *Zhou Yi*, the *Yi Jing* includes ten commentaries called the Ten Wings. The Ten Wings were written much later, in a language that was a predecessor to Middle Chinese,⁹ the language used during the sixth through tenth centuries CE.¹⁰

Little is known about the authorship or dating of the Ten Wings (十翼 *shiyi*). They are commentaries on the hexagrams, hexagram statements, and line statements, often explaining them with symbolic, moralistic, and philosophical interpretations. Arguably the most important of the Ten Wings is the Great Commentary (*Dazhuan* 大傳) or *Xici* 繫辭, which dates to roughly 300 BCE.¹¹ “The Great Commentary describes the *Yi Jing* as a microcosm of the universe and a symbolic description of the processes of change. By partaking in the spiritual experience of the *Yi Jing*, the Great Commentary states, the individual can understand the deeper patterns of the universe.”¹²

This paper is not concerned with divination aspects of the *Yi Jing* or with its moral and philosophic content. It focuses on the names of the trigrams and argues that the names were originally

⁷ Wikipedia, s.v. “I Ching” (also “Yi Jing”).

⁸ Wikipedia, s.v. “Chinese Language.”

⁹ Richard Rutt, *The Book of Changes (Zhouyi): A Bronze Age Document* (Richmond, Surrey, U.K.: Curzon, 1996), p. 39. Cited in Wikipedia, s.v. “I Ching.”

¹⁰ Wikipedia, s.v. “Chinese language.”

¹¹ Wikipedia, s.v. “I Ching.”

¹² Richard J. Smith, *Fathoming the Cosmos and Ordering the World: The Yijing (I Ching, or Classic of Changes) and Its Evolution in China* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), p. 27. Cited in Wikipedia, s.v. “I Ching.”

Indo-European (IE) words by showing that there are sound-and-meaning correspondences between the trigram names and IE words. As mentioned previously, this will be done by comparing the trigram names to PIE etyma and their IE reflexes with similar sounds-and-meanings.

Each trigram name, however, has acquired multiple meanings. For example, the trigram name *xun* 巽 can mean “wind” and “royal decrees.” Which meaning should we use to compare with an IE word? Should we use the meaning “wind” to compare with IE words for “wind,” or should we use the word “decree” to compare with IE words for “decree”? Since we are speaking of the origins of the trigram names, we need to look for the earliest or primary meaning of the trigram name.

Thus, before the trigram names are compared with PIE etyma and IE reflexes, the primary and presumably earliest meaning of each trigram must be determined. This will be done in Section I of this paper, “The Eight Trigram names: Their Definitions.” Once the earliest and primary meaning of each trigram is determined, then the trigram name can be compared with a PIE etymon and IE reflexes having similar sounds and meanings. This is done in Section III, “The Eight Trigram Names: Correspondences between the Old Chinese and Proto-Indo-European (PIE) and Indo-European (IE).” The correspondences will be the basis for the hypothesis that the Chinese names were originally IE words. Some of the material on correspondences presented here has appeared previously in my aforementioned paper on the trigram names (*Sino-Platonic Papers* no. 161, September 2005).

Before Section III, comparing the Old Chinese names of *Yi Jing* trigrams with PIE and IE, however, Section II, “Chinese Transcription of Foreign Words,” is included to remind us of the constraints under which Chinese transcribers worked to transcribe a foreign word. This will help us judge whether the trigram names do indeed resemble PIE etyma or their IE reflexes in sound as claimed. For example, the modern Chinese Mandarin transcription of the name “Beatles” is “披頭 *pitou*.” If one didn’t know Chinese, one might well wonder whether “披頭 *pitou*” is a transcription intended to represent “Beatles.” But if one knew Chinese, one could look at the transcription differently.

Finally, in Section IV, this paper will consider the *Yi Jing* terms *gua* 卦 “*Yi Jing* diagram” and *yao* 爻 “line/lines of the *Yi Jing* diagram.” It will propose that these words also correspond to PIE etyma and/or their IE reflexes.

ABBREVIATIONS

- Aut Autenrieth, Georg. *A Homeric Dictionary for Schools and Colleges*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1891.
- B&S Baxter, William H., and Laurent Sagart. *Old Chinese: A New Reconstruction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Bax Baxter, William H. *A Handbook of Old Chinese Phonology*. Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1992.
- BB Baidu Baike. Online <https://baike.baidu.com/item/译/4685735>.
- CQZZ *Chunqiu Zuo Zhuan*.
- DTch Adams, Douglas Q. *A Dictionary of Tocharian B*. Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 1999.
- DWL *The Dictionary of the Welsh Language (Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru)*. Cardiff: University of Wales, 1967–2002.
- GY *Guoyu* (book). Chinese Text Project, online.
- Legge-1 Legge, James, trans. *Yi Jing*, Chinese Text Project (online at <https://ctext.org>).
- Legge-2 Legge, James, trans. *The Chinese Classics*, vol. V, *The Ch'un Ts'ew with the Tso Chuen* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1872).
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- Pok Pokorny, Julius. *Indogermanisches Etymologisches Woerterbuch*. Tuebingen and Basel: A. Francke Verlag, 1959.
- Sag Sagart, Laurent. *The Roots of Old Chinese*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1999.
- Sch-1 Schuessler, Axel. *A Dictionary of Early Zhou Chinese*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1987.
- Sch-2 Schuessler, Axel. *ABC Etymological Dictionary of Old Chinese*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007.

- Sloc Slocum, Jonathan, ed. University of Texas at Austin Indo-European Lexicon: Pokorny PIE Data (online <https://lrc.la.utexas.edu/lex>).
- Wikt Wiktionary (online).
- Xu Xu Zhongshu 徐中舒, et al. *Jiaguwen Zidian* 甲骨文字典 *Dictionary of Oracle Bone Characters*. Chengdu: Sichuan Publishing Co., 1988.
- ZZ Zheng-Zhang Shangfang 郑张尚芳. *Old Chinese Phonology* 上古音系. Shanghai: Shanghai Educational Publishing House, 2003.

NEW EVIDENCE FOR THE INDO-EUROPEAN ORIGINS OF THE *YI JING* TRIGRAM NAMES

I. THE EIGHT TRIGRAM NAMES: THEIR DEFINITIONS

This paper regards the primary meaning of a trigram name as the denotation; the derivative, associative, or figurative meanings of the name are considered connotations.

A. DEFINITIONS IN THE *CHUNQIU ZUO ZHUAN* AND THE *GUOYU*

The earliest texts in which the hexagrams appear and the meanings of the trigram names are given, are the *Chunqiu Zuo Zhuan* (CQZZ) 春秋左傳 and the *Guo Yu* (GY) 國語.

The CQZZ and GY contain the oldest descriptions of divination using the *Zhou Yi*. The two books describe more than twenty divinations conducted by soothsayers for royal families between 671 and 487 BCE.¹³

Table 1. Meanings of the trigrams given in CQZZ

Trigram Name	English	Source
<i>qian</i> 乾	Heaven	
<i>kun</i> 坤	Earth	
<i>xun</i> 巽	wind	Legge-2, Book III, “Duke Chwang 莊公,” in James Legge’s English translation of <i>The Ch’un Ts’ew, with the Tso Chuen</i> , p. 103
<i>gen</i> 艮	hill, mountain	Legge-2, Book V, “Duke Xi 僖公,” p. 167
<i>zhen</i> 震 (辰 <i>chen</i>)	thunder	Legge-2, Book V, “Duke Xi 僖公,” p. 169
<i>li</i> 離	fire	Legge-2, Book V, “Duke Xi 僖公,” p. 169
<i>dui</i> 兌	marsh	(澤) Legge-2, Book V, “Duke Xi 僖公,” p. 195
<i>kan</i> 坎	water	Legge-2, Book VII, “Duke Seuen 宣公,” p. 317

¹³ Wikipedia, s.v. “I Ching.”

Putting them in the order that we have used above, the trigram names, with meanings, given in the CQZZ are:

- *Qian* 乾 “Heaven”
- *Kun* 坤 “Earth”
- *Zhen* 震 (*chen* 辰) “thunder”
- *Xun* 巽 “wind”
- *Li* 離 “fire”
- *Kan* 坎 “water”
- *Gen* 艮 “hill, mountain”
- *Dui* 兌 “marsh”

A computer search of the *Guoyu* (GY) gives these meanings for the trigram names *kun*, *zhen*, and *kan*:

坤，土也。

Kun is earth [soil].

震，雷也，車也。坎，勞也，水也，眾也。¹⁴

Zhen is thunder, is chariot. *Kan* is labor, is water, is multitude.

Thus we have definitions of trigrams in the GY:

- *Kun* 坤 “earth [soil]”
- *Zhen* 震 “thunder,” “chariot”
- *Kan* 坎 “labor,” “water,” “multitude”

¹⁴ From *Guo Yu*, Book IV, chapter 4, “Discourses of Jin” [*Jin Yu* 晉語].

We notice here that all the eight trigram names in CQZZ are elements of the natural world: Heaven, Earth, thunder, wind, fire, water, hill, marsh.

The meanings of trigram names in the GY retain elements of the natural world, namely, earth (*kun*), thunder (*zhen*), and water (*kan*). But they also introduce elements from the human world: chariot (*zhen*), labor (*kan*), multitude (*kan*).

This paper proposes that the meanings from the human world are derivative meanings. "Chariot" is a derivative of "thunder" for trigram *zhen*; it is an interpretation of "thunder." Thunder moves and makes a noise, as does a chariot. It is proposed here that thunder is the primary meaning of *zhen*, and chariot a derivative meaning, a connotation of thunder.

Likewise it is proposed that "labor" and "multitude" are derivative meanings of *kan* and that the prior meaning is "water." Water is interpreted as a metaphor. For example, the multitude, the people, are like water, which can lift or sink a ship. The people can lift the ruler, or they can sink him. Water is also like labor or work in that drops of water over time can wear away stone, as labor, over time, achieves a result. These are some of the metaphorical interpretations of water: they are derivative meanings.

B. DEFINITIONS IN THE SHUO GUA 說卦 COMMENTARY

Now let us look at how the proposed primary or prior meanings of the trigram names can generate a host of other meanings or interpretations. A later text, the Shuo Gua 說卦 (Remarks on the Trigrams) appendix of the *Yi Jing*, was composed during the period from circa 475 BCE (the beginning of the Warring States period) to circa 300 BCE.

In the Shuo Gua, one can see how a trigram name can generate a host of interpretations or meanings. The following are quoted from the Shuo Gua. (I have added the names of the trigram names in square brackets.)

天地定位，山澤通氣，雷風相薄，水火不相射，八卦相錯。(Chapter III, "Shuo Gua," *Yi Jing*)

(The symbols of) heaven [*qian* 乾] and earth [*kun* 坤] received their determinate positions; (those for) mountains [*gen* 艮] and collections of water 澤 [*dui* 兌]

interchanged their influences; (those for) thunder [*zhen* 震] and wind [*xun* 巽] excited each other the more; and (those for) water [*kan* 坎] and fire [*li* 離] did each other no harm. (Then) among these eight symbols there was a mutual communication. (Shuo Gua, chapter III, *The I Ching*, translated by James Legge, p. 424. Note that Legge translates 澤 as “collections of water.” Schuessler’s *A Dictionary of Early Zhou Chinese* defines 澤 as “marsh.”)

Here (above) in the Shuo Gua, we again have the eight trigrams representing elements of the natural world.

- *Qian* “Heaven”
- *Kun* “Earth”
- *Gen* “mountains”
- *Dui* “collections of water 澤” [Legge’s translation. He also elsewhere translates 澤 as a “collection of water.” A 澤 is a marsh.]
- *Zhen* “thunder”
- *Xun* “wind”
- *Kan* “water”
- *Li* “fire”

These meanings of the eight trigrams are the same as those in the CQZZ, the earliest text in which the meanings of the trigrams appear.

But in the Shuo Gua we also have a proliferation of other meanings.

For *qian* 乾

乾為天，為圜，為君，為父，為玉，為金，為寒，為冰，為大赤，為老馬，
為瘠馬，為駁馬，為木果。

Qian [乾] suggests the idea of heaven; of a circle; of a ruler; of a father; of jade; of metal; of cold; of ice; of deep red; of a good horse; of an old horse; of a thin horse; of a piebald horse; and of the fruit of trees.

For *kun* 坤

坤為地，為母，為布，為釜，為吝嗇，為均，為子母牛，為大輿，為文為眾，為柄，其於地也為黑。

Kun [坤] suggests the idea of the earth; of a mother; of cloth; of a caldron; of parsimony; of a turning lathe; of a young heifer; of a large wagon; of what is variegated; of a multitude; and of a handle and support. Among soils it denotes what is black.

For *zhen* 震

震為雷，為龍，為玄黃，為旉，為大塗，為長子，為決躁，為蒼筤竹，為萑葦。

Zhen [震] suggests the idea of thunder; of the dragon; of (the union of) the azure and the yellow; of development; of a great highway; of the eldest son; of decision and vehemence; of bright young bamboos; of sedges and rushes....

For *xun* 巽

巽為木，為風，為長女，為繩直，為工，為白，為長，為高，為進退，為不果，為臭。

Xun suggests the idea of wood; of wind; of the oldest daughter; of a plumb-line; of a carpenter's square; of being white; of being long; of being lofty; of advancing and receding; of want of decision; and of strong scents.

For *kan* 坎

坎為水，為溝瀆，為隱伏，為矯輮，為弓輪。其於人也，為加憂，為心病，為耳痛，為血卦，為赤。

Kan suggests the idea of water; of channels and ditches (for draining and irrigation); of being hidden and lying concealed; of being now straight, and now crooked; of a bow, and of a wheel. As referring to man, it suggests the idea of an increase of anxiety; of distress of mind; of pain in the ears — it is the trigram of the blood; it suggests the idea of what is red.

For *li* 離

離為火，為日，為電，為中女，為甲冑，為戈兵。其於人也，為大腹。為乾卦，為鱉，為蟹，為羸，為蚌，為龜。

Li suggests the emblem of fire; of the sun; of lightning; of the second daughter; of buff-coat and helmet; of spear and sword. Referred to men, it suggests the large belly. It is the trigram of dryness. It suggests the emblem of a turtle; of a crab; of a spiral univalve; of the mussel; and of the tortoise.

For *gen* 艮

艮為山，為徑路，為小石，為門闕，為果蓏，為闈寺，為指，為狗，為鼠，為黔喙之屬。

Gen [艮] suggests the emblem of a mountain; of a by-path; of a small rock; of a gateway; of the fruits of trees and creeping plants; of a porter or a eunuch; of the (ring) finger; of the dog; of the rat; of birds with powerful bills.

For *dui* 兌

兌為澤，為少女，為巫，為口舌，為毀折，為附決。其於地也，為剛鹵。為妾，為羊。

Dui [兌] suggests the emblem of a low-lying collection of water 澤; of the youngest daughter; of a sorceress; of the mouth and tongue; of the decay and putting down (of things in harvest); of the removal (of fruits) hanging (from the stems or branches); among soils, of what is strong and salt; of a concubine; and of a sheep.¹⁵

From the above we see that the Shuo Gua gives a proliferation of meanings for the eight trigram names. The passages above do not include all the entries in the Shuo Gua that assign meanings to the trigram names. The ones quoted here show that, amidst the proliferation of meanings, the Shuo Gua still retains prominently the meanings given in the CQZZ; that is, they are all elements of nature.

- *Qian* "Heaven"
- *Kun* "Earth"
- *Zhen* "thunder"

¹⁵ From *The I Ching* [Legge-1], translated by James Legge, "Remarks on the Trigrams" [Shuo Gua 說卦], chapter XI, pp. 430–432.

- *Xun* “wind”
- *Kan* “water”
- *Li* “fire”
- *Gen* “mountains”
- *Dui* “marsh”

C. DEFINITIONS IN THE TUAN COMMENTARY AND THE XIANG COMMENTARY

Continuing the search for the primary and earliest meaning of each trigram name, I here quote relevant sentences from the Tuan commentary 彖傳 and the Xiang commentary 象傳, without including the added moral and philosophical interpretations, except when the interpretation is necessary to give sense to a sentence. I here go through the trigram names one by one. They are placed side by side with the hexagram because the Tuan and Xiang commentaries define the trigram only as a part of the hexagram bearing its name. The quotations from the Tuan and Xiang commentaries are followed by James Legge’s English translation.¹⁶ I then give a brief summary of the meanings of the trigram name given by the Tuan and Xiang commentaries.

Qian 乾

Trigram	Hexagram
☰	☰
<i>qian</i> 乾	<i>qian</i> 乾

¹⁶ The quotations from the Tuan and Xiang commentaries as well as James Legge’s translations are from the *Yi Jing*, Chinese Text Project (online).

Tuan commentary:

大哉乾元，萬物資生，乃統天。

Vast is the “great and originating (power)” indicated by *Qian*! All things owe to it their beginning: — it contains all the meaning belonging to (the name) heaven. — Legge

Xiang commentary:

天行健，君子以自強不息。

Heaven, in its motion, (gives the idea of) strength. — Legge

Summary: Since Heaven has the meaning of *qian* 乾, origin or begetter of all things, Heaven is the origin or begetter of all things. Heaven is father of all things while *qun* 坤 (the next trigram, below), is mother of all things, Earth. *Qun*, Earth, is consort/wife of Heaven since *qun* is the obedient receptor of Heaven (see below, trigram *qun* 坤). Therefore I compare *Yi Jing qian* with PIE **gen-* “beget” (Pok 373), PIE *genater* “begetter, father” (Pok 374, bottom) and Latin *genitor* “parent, begetter, procreator, creator, sire” (Lew). The notion of Heaven as begetter, procreator, originator, is embedded in the PIE notion of Sky (Heaven)-Father and Earth-Mother. More on this below.

Kun 坤

Trigram	Hexagram
☷	☷☷
<i>kun</i> 坤	<i>kun</i> 坤

Tuan commentary:

至哉坤元，萬物資生，乃順承天。

Complete is the great and originating (capacity) indicated by Kun! All things owe to it their birth; — it receives obediently the influences of Heaven. — Legge

Xiang commentary:

地勢坤。

The (capacity and sustaining) power of the earth is what is denoted by *Kun*. — Legge

Summary: *Kun* gives birth to all things and is the obedient receptor of Heaven. Earth likewise has this power and capacity. Therefore, Earth gives birth to all things and is the receptor of Heaven. Earth is thus consort/wife of Heaven and mother of all things. *Kun* 坤 is thus Wife-Mother-Earth to *qian*/**kan* 乾, Father-Heaven. *Kun* also reflects the PIE notion of Earth-Mother, which is not to say that the notions of Heaven-Father and Earth-Mother did not already exist in China. We do not know whether Sinitic or PIE culture was the first to have this notion. It is only asserted here that the notion of Heaven (Sky)-Father and Earth-Mother existed in PIE culture and was continued in IE culture.¹⁷

Zhen 震

Trigram	Hexagram
☳	☳☳
<i>zhen</i> 震	<i>zhen</i> 震

¹⁷ See Wikipedia, s.v. “Proto-Indo-European Mythology, sections 4.2.1 “Sky Father” and 4.3.1 “Earth Mother.” The PIE pairing of Sky-Father and Earth-Mother was continued in Indo-European mythology. Examples are Dyaus Pitr (Sky-Father) and Prithvi Mata (Earth-Mother) in the *Rig-Veda*, and Ouranos (Sky) and Gaia (Earth) in Greek mythology.

Tuan commentary:

震來虩虩，恐致福也。

Zhen gives the intimation of ease and development. — Legge

Xiang commentary:

洊雷，震。

(The trigram representing) thunder; being repeated, forms *Zhen*. — Legge

Summary: The Tuan commentary gives a didactic reading of the trigram name *zhen*. It does not define *zhen*. The Xiang commentary defines *zhen* as “thunder.”

Xun 巽

Trigram	Hexagram
☴	☴
<i>xun</i> 巽	<i>xun</i> 巽

Tuan commentary:

重巽以申命。

The double *xun* shows how, in accordance with it, [governmental] orders are reiterated.

—Legge

Xiang commentary:

隨風，巽。

[Two trigrams representing] wind, following each other, form *Xun*. — Legge

Summary: *Xun* denotes wind.

Li 離

Trigram	Hexagram
☲	☲☲
<i>li</i> 離	<i>li</i> 離

Tuan commentary:

。。。重明以麗乎正。

...The double brightness [of the two trigrams] adheres to what is correct, and the result is the transforming and perfecting of all under the sky. — Legge



Xiang commentary:

明兩作離。

[The trigram for] brightness, repeated, forms *Li*. — Legge

Summary: *Li* denotes brightness.

Kan 坎

Trigram	Hexagram
	
<i>kan</i> 坎	<i>kan</i> 坎

Tuan commentary:

習坎，重險也。

Kan repeated shows us one defile succeeding another. — Legge

Xiang commentary:

水洊至，習坎。習坎入坎，失道凶也。

[The representation of] water flowing on continuously forms the repeated *Kan*. In the double defile, he enters a cavern within it — he has missed the (proper) way, and there will be evil. — Legge

Summary: *Kan* denotes defile (steep-sided, narrow, gorge). Water is a connotation because water collects and flows in defiles.

Gen 艮

Trigram	Hexagram
☶	☶☶
<i>gen</i> 艮	<i>gen</i> 艮

Tuan commentary:

艮，止也。

Gen denotes stopping or resting. — Legge

Xiang commentary:

兼山，艮。

[Two trigrams representing] a mountain, one over the other, form *Gen*. — Legge

Summary: *Gen* denotes hill or mountain (Chinese has the same word, *shan*, for hill or mountain). A mountain is an obstruction; hence stopping is a connotation of mountain.

Dui 兌

Trigram	Hexagram
☱	☱☱
<i>dui</i> 兌	<i>dui</i> 兌

Tuan commentary:

兌，說也。

Dui has the meaning of pleased satisfaction. — Legge

Xiang commentary:

麗澤，兌。

[Two symbols representing] the waters of a marsh, one over the other, form *Dui*. —
Legge

Summary: The Tuan commentary reads *dui* 兌 *lots as a pun for 說 *lot/*lots (B&S), which is an alternate character for 悅 *lot (Sch-2) "satisfaction, gladness." *Dui* 兌 denotes a marsh 澤 but the Tuan commentary shows it had the same sound as 悅 *lot "satisfaction, gladness."

D. CANDIDATES FOR PRIMARY MEANINGS OF THE EIGHT TRIGRAMS

Based on the preceding examination of the meanings of the trigram names, we can compare the meanings that persisted from their earliest appearance in texts, from the *Chunqiu Zuo Zhuan* and the *Guoyu*, down to the Shuo Gua commentary, and the Tuan and Xiang commentaries:

Table 2. Comparison of persistent meanings

	<i>Chunqiu</i> <i>Zuozhuan</i>	Shuo Gua	Tuan and Xiang commentaries	<i>Guoyu</i>
<i>qian</i> 乾	<i>qian</i> “heaven”	<i>qian</i> “heaven,” [“ruler,” “father”]	<i>qian</i> “[originator, begetter, of all things,] heaven” ¹⁸	
<i>kun</i> 坤	<i>kun</i> “earth”	<i>kun</i> “earth [mother]”	<i>kun</i> “[mother of all things,] [receptor of heaven,] earth” ¹⁹	
<i>zhen</i> 震	<i>zhen</i> “thunder”	<i>zhen</i> “thunder”	<i>zhen</i> “thunder”	<i>zhen</i> “thunder”
<i>xun</i> 巽	<i>xun</i> “wind”	<i>xun</i> “wind”	<i>xun</i> “wind”	
<i>li</i> 離	<i>li</i> “fire”	<i>li</i> “fire,” [“sun,” “lightning”]	<i>li</i> [“brightness, shining brightly” (明)] ²⁰	
<i>kan</i> 坎	<i>kan</i> “water”	<i>kan</i> “water”	<i>kan</i> “[defile (steep-sided, narrow, gorge)]” ²¹	<i>kan</i> “water”
<i>gen</i> 艮	<i>gen</i> “hill, mountain”	<i>gen</i> “hill, mountain”	<i>gen</i> “hill, mountain”	
<i>dui</i> 兌	<i>dui</i> “marsh” (澤)	<i>dui</i> “marsh” (澤) ²²	<i>dui</i> “marsh” (澤)	

¹⁸ The meaning assigned to *qian*, “Heaven,” persists through the centuries, though Shuo Gua adds “ruler,” “father,” and the Tuan commentary adds “originator of all things.”

¹⁹ The meaning of “Earth” persists, though Shuo Gua adds “mother,” and the Tuan and Xiang commentaries add “mother of all things” and “receptor of Heaven.”

²⁰ The meaning “brightness” is consistent with “fire” and does not contradict it. “Sun” and “lightning” are also consistent with “brightness” and do not contradict it. More on this below.

²¹ Again, “defile” is consistent with water as water flows through it. More on this below.

²² Legge translates 澤 as “collections of water” and “low-lying collection of water.” Schuessler’s *Dictionary of Early Zhou Chinese* defines 澤 as “marsh.” See Sch-1.

In Table 2, above, the square brackets show the words (meanings) that are in one or two texts but not in the majority of other texts for the same trigram. Despite these words, the meanings in these different texts remained remarkably stable through centuries. In trigram *li*, even though “brightness” is not the same word as “fire,” “sun,” and “lightning,” it is common to all three, and can represent all three. (More of this below.)

E. PROPOSED EARLIEST MEANINGS OF TRIGRAMS *QIAN* AND *KUN*

It is proposed here that “begetter, father of all things, Heaven” was the original meaning of the trigram *qian*. It is also proposed that *qian*/**gjan*/**kan* 乾 was originally the PIE word **genater* “begetter, father” (Pok 374, bottom of page) or an IE reflex, from root PIE **gen-* “beget.” (Pok 373). And it is proposed that “receptor [consort, wife] of Heaven, Earth” was the original meaning of *kun*/**kun* 坤, and that **kun* was originally the PIE word **g^uena* “wife, queen, woman” (Pok 473, Sloc) or an IE reflex. This means that Old Chinese *qian* and *kun* were, respectively, transcriptions of the abbreviation **gen-* for PIE **genater* or an IE reflex, and the abbreviation *g^uen-* for PIE **g^uena* or an IE reflex. The reason for these proposals is the similarities in sound-and-meaning between the Old Chinese and the PIE/IE, as well as similarities in sound-and-meaning between other trigram names and PIE/IE etyma, as will be discussed below.

The question of abbreviation will also be discussed further below.

It is proposed that these earlier meanings for *qian* and *kun* preceded the appearance of the trigrams in the *Chunqiu Zuo Zhuan* (CCZZ). There is evidence that the trigrams are much older than the CCZZ. Although the word 卦 “hexagram” does not appear in the Oracle Bone inscriptions, which are much earlier than the CCZZ, the divination word *yao* 爻 “lines of a trigram/hexagram” does appear in Oracle Bone inscriptions.²³ There, *yao* 爻 means “divine” or “[perform a] divination [on].” In other words, *yao* 爻 was both a noun and a verb. (More on this below.)

One could point out: “But the meaning ‘begetter, father of all things,’ for *qian* does not appear in the CCZZ or *Guoyu* or *Shuo Gua*, though it appears in the Tuan commentary.” That does not

²³ A sentence in Oracle Bone inscriptions reads: 「爻馬，亡（無）疾。」 (“Divined horse, no illness.”) In 漢語多功能字庫 (*Multi-function Chinese Character Database*) [1], 香港中文大學 (Chinese University of Hong Kong), 2014–, cited in References of “爻 Wiktionary.”

necessarily mean that *qian* was not understood as “father of all things, Heaven.” It is assumed in this paper that the author or authors of the trigrams already knew the PIE concept of “Heaven-Father” (Sky-Father) and “Earth-Mother.” This does not preclude the fact that the ancient Sinitic people may already have had the concept too. It only asserts that PIE had the concept.

One may also ask, “Why is ‘wife’ matched with ‘begetter, father, of all things, Heaven?’”

“If there was the concept of Heaven-Father and Earth-Mother, why wasn’t ‘father of all things’ matched with the word ‘mother?’” The answer here is that the notion of wife precedes that of mother. The mother must be the “receptor” (wife) of the father before she can be a mother. Therefore, the word “wife” is more basic than the word “mother” in connecting Heaven to Earth. The word “wife” relates Heaven-Father to Earth-Mother. It is proposed here that *kun* (PIE **g^uena* “wife, queen”) was interpreted or understood as meaning “wife of the originator (begetter, father) of all things,” and thus “mother of all things, Earth.”

F. PROPOSED EARLIEST MEANING OF TRIGRAM NAME *LI* 離

It is proposed here that the earliest meaning of the trigram *li* was “brightness, shining brightly” as defined in the Xiang commentary, and that this could have produced the secondary meanings “fire,” “sun,” “lightning.” Brightness is common to all three. We have examples in PIE in which the etyma for “brightness” produced the word for “sun.”

They are PIE **ghlou-* “glow, shine” (Pok 432) and PIE **gher-/ghre* (Pok 443).

**Ghlou-* “shine” developed into, among other reflexes, Old Icelandic *himingloua* “sun.” PIE **ghre-* “shine” developed into, among other reflexes, Gaelic *ghrian* “sun” (from **ghreina*, in turn from **ghrei*) (Pok 442).

G. PROPOSED EARLIEST MEANING OF TRIGRAM NAME *KAN* 坎

It is proposed that the earliest meaning of the trigram name *kan* 坎 was that given in the Xiang commentary, namely, “defile (steep-sided narrow gorge).” This is consistent with the meaning “water,” which occurs in the CQZZ, *Guoyu*, and the Shuo Gua commentary, as water flows in a defile. More on this below.

H. PROPOSED EARLIEST MEANINGS OF THE EIGHT TRIGRAM NAMES

Following the previous discussion, this paper will then treat the meanings below as the earliest and primary meanings of the eight trigram names:

- *Qian* “begetter, father, of all things, Heaven”
- *Kun* “wife [receptor of Heaven], mother of all things, Earth”
- *Zhen* “thunder”
- *Xun* “wind”
- *Li* “brightness, shining brightly”
- *Kan* “defile (steep-sided, narrow gorge)”
- *Gen* “hill, mountain”
- *Dui* “marsh”

It can be seen here that the trigrams come in pairs where each pair consists of opposites or complements or both. Thus:

- *Qian* “begetter” and *kun* “receptor (wife),” male and female, are opposites and complements.
- *Zhen* “thunder” and *xun* “wind” are complements.
- *Li* “brightness” and *kan* “defile” are opposites in that a defile tends to be dark because the steep sides block out much of the sun.

This idea of brightness and darkness is also expressed in Shuo Gua when it says:

坎為水，為溝瀆，為隱伏。

Kan suggests the idea of water; of channels and ditches (for draining and irrigation); of being hidden and lying concealed. — Legge

“Hidden and concealed” suggest darkness, the opposite of brightness.

- *Gen* “mountain” and *dui* “marsh” are opposites, one high, one low.

These meanings persisted, with slight variations, through centuries, from their first appearance in the CQZZ down to the *Yi Jing* commentaries. Thus we will treat them as the earliest and primary meanings of the eight trigram names.

Before we compare the primary meanings of the trigram names with PIE etyma and IE reflexes, let us first look at the constraints under which the Chinese transcriber transcribes foreign words.

II. CHINESE TRANSCRIPTION OF FOREIGN WORDS

A. DISADVANTAGE OF A SYLLABARY VS. AN ALPHABET

As linguists know, the Chinese script does not have an alphabet, only a syllabary. The transcriber thus cannot spell out foreign names with consonants and vowels but can only choose a Chinese syllable in the syllabary, which is a list of all the syllables that one can utter in the Chinese topolect (regional Chinese speech, sometimes called a Chinese dialect) in which the foreign words are transcribed.

Table 3. Examples of foreign words transcribed into Mandarin today

Foreign word	Chinese transcription (romanized)
toast	<i>tusi</i>
pound	<i>bang</i>
Cornwall	<i>Kangwo</i>
Roosevelt	<i>Losifu</i>

One can see the discrepancy between a foreign word and its Chinese transcription. Because the Chinese script lacks an alphabet, the transcriber can only supply what is available—a Chinese syllable or syllables to represent a foreign word. Even if Chinese had an alphabet, the transcribed sound might be different from the original sound because different languages might have different consonants and vowels.

B. ABBREVIATION

As do perhaps all languages, Chinese frequently abbreviates words.

Table 4. Examples of abbreviation (romanized) today

Foreign word	Transcription	Abbreviated transcription
England	<i>Yinggelan</i>	<i>Ying</i>
America	<i>Yamelijia</i>	<i>Mei</i>
Israel	<i>Yiselie</i>	<i>Yi</i>
Palestine	<i>Balesitan</i>	<i>Ba</i>
Israeli-Palestinian		<i>Yi-Ba</i> (as in “ <i>Yi-Ba</i> War” for Israeli-Palestinian War)
San Francisco		<i>Sanfan Shi</i> (“San Fan City”)
Switzerland		<i>Ruishi</i> (also pronounced <i>sui shi</i>)
ounce	<i>angsi</i>	<i>ang</i>
bus	<i>bashi</i>	<i>ba</i> (e.g., “The <i>ba</i> is late.”)
hamburger		<i>hanbao</i>
bodhisattva		<i>pusa</i>
Buddha	<i>Fotu</i>	<i>fo</i>
Buddhism	<i>Fojiao</i> (“ <i>fo</i> religion”)	
Jesus	<i>Yesu</i>	<i>ye</i>
Christ	<i>Jidu</i> (from Cantonese <i>geidou</i> , probably from Portuguese <i>Christo</i>)	
Christianity	<i>Jidujiao</i> (“ <i>Jidu</i> religion”)	<i>Yejiao</i> (“ <i>Ye</i> religion,” <i>Ye</i> from Latin <i>Jesu</i>)

Table 5. Ancient (Old Chinese) abbreviations of foreign words²⁴

Foreign word	Transcription	Abbreviation
<i>maguš</i> “magus” ²⁵		* <i>m^yag</i> 巫
<i>magi</i>	* <i>ma^ygeeg</i> 巫覡 (ZZSF491, 229)	* <i>ma</i> 巫
Saka, Sacae		* <i>sək(h)</i> 塞 [Sch-2]
Buddha		* <i>bud</i> 佛 [ZZ 321]
Arsacid		* <i>?an</i> (Sch-2) * <i>sid</i> (Li, Sch-1) 安西

**m^yag* 巫 “maguš” appears in Oracle Bone inscriptions (Xu 496). The Oracle Bone script spans circa 1250–770 BCE, from the Shang dynasty to the Western (Early) Zhou dynasty. No other abbreviation of a foreign word can be offered here for texts earlier than the *Chunqiu Zuo Zhuan*, as there is almost no research on foreign words in Old Chinese of that period.

Although I present only a few Old Chinese abbreviations of foreign words here, we can assume that abbreviation of foreign words in ancient times was no different from medieval and modern times, because abbreviation is such a widespread phenomenon in languages all over the world.

We therefore propose that the trigram names *qian* and *kun* and a few others were abbreviations of PIE or IE etyma because of similarities in sound-and-meaning.

Because the Chinese transcriber did not have an alphabet to use, the words that this paper proposes to be transcriptions of PIE etyma or reflexes will have sound discrepancies with the foreign words being transcribed. And even if Old Chinese did have an alphabet, the transcribed word may not have precisely the same sound as the foreign word because different languages can have different vowels and consonants. Furthermore, a monosyllabic trigram name may well have been an abbreviation of a multi-syllabic PIE or IE word. If a foreign word like “Palestine” can be abbreviated to “*Ba*” (see Table 4), or the word “America” abbreviated to “*Mei*” today, and with “bodhisattva” abbreviated to “*pusa*” and

²⁴ Old Chinese spans c. 1250–221 BCE, according to Baxter and Sagart (B&S, 2).

²⁵ See Victor H. Mair, “Old Sinitic **M^yag*, Old Persian *maguš*, and English ‘Magician,’” *Early China*, vol. 15 (1990), pp. 27–47. Also online.

“Buddha” abbreviated to “*Fo*” in medieval Chinese (and still used today), there is no reason why the transcriber of the ninth century BCE or earlier could not have abbreviated a word like PIE **genater* “begetter, father” to Old Chinese trigram name **kan* 乾²⁶ “begetter, father” — understood in the context of the trigrams as “father (originator) of all things, Heaven” — and consistent with the PIE concept of Sky-Father and Earth-Mother.

²⁶ Regarding PIE **gen-* transcribed as Old Chinese **kan*: we have today “ken” in “Kennedy” transcribed as “*gan*” in Chinese (Mandarin) “*gannaidi*.”

III. THE EIGHT TRIGRAM NAMES: CORRESPONDENCES BETWEEN THE OLD CHINESE AND PIE AND/OR IE

Having determined the primary and earliest meaning of each trigram, and having considered the constraints of the Chinese transcriber, as well as abbreviation, we now proceed to compare the trigram names with PIE/IE etyma or words that are similar in sound-and-meaning.

As can be seen below, historical phonologists who reconstruct the sounds of Old Chinese have produced reconstructions that often do not agree with one another. Which reconstruction should one use in a comparison with a PIE etymon or IE reflex having similar sound-and-meaning? Let me give one example of my approach to this problem. As an illustration, let us look at the reconstructions for the trigram name *dui* 兌 “marsh”:

dui 兌 **lot*/**lots* (ZZSF), **duadh* (Li), **lot* (B&S) “marsh.”

PIE **lat*- “marsh” (Pok 654).

Because Old Chinese **lot* “marsh” is closest to PIE **lat*- “marsh,” **lot* will be chosen for comparison with PIE **lat*- “marsh” and its reflexes. This approach will be followed in the sound-and-meaning comparisons. Below are the comparisons of trigrams with PIE/IE.

Trigram 乾 *qian*

- *qian* 乾 **gjan* (Li) / **kan* (Sch-2) / **kaan* (ZZSF 327) “begetter, father, of all things, Heaven.”

PIE/IE

- PIE **gen*-, “beget” (Pok 373), abbreviation and root of PIE **genater* “begetter, father”; Old Indic *janitar* (Pok 374, bottom of page); Welsh *genni* “be born” (Pok 374); Greek *geneter* (γενετηρ) “procreator, father”; Latin *genitor* “procreator” (Pok 374), “begetter, parent, father, creator, sire” (Lew); Old Irish *gein* “give birth,” Old English *cænnan*, *cynnann* “beget”; Old Frisian *kanna* “beget”; Old Saxon *kennian* “beget” (Wikt. **gen*-).

Trigram 坤 *kun*

- *kun* 坤 **kun* / **kuun* (ZZ 393) / **k-hlun* > *khwon* (Sag) “wife (receptor), mother of all things, Earth.”

PIE/IE

- PIE **g^uen-*, abbreviation of PIE **g^uena*, “wife, queen, woman” (Sloc, Pok 473).
- Greek *gune* (γυνή, from **g^uuna*) “woman”; Old Indic *gna* (from **guna*) “goddess” (i.e., god’s wife); divine female”; Anglo-Saxon *cwene* “woman, wife”; Old Saxon *quan* “queen, wife, woman”; Old English *cwen* “queen, wife, woman”; Old Norse *kona* “queen, wife, woman”; Gothic *quens* “wife” (from **g^uénto-s*) (Sloc); Old Irish *ben* (from **guena*) (Pok 473).

Notes:

- As receptor [wife] of 乾 *gan* / **gjan* / **kan* “originator/ procreator, of all things, Heaven,” 坤 *kun* is then the divine wife and queen. Thus trigram *kun* “wife,” “divine wife,” corresponds to PIE **g^uena* “wife, queen,” and its reflexes, Old Saxon *quan* “queen, wife, woman,” etc., in sound-and-meaning.
- It is proposed that trigram name *kun* represents an abbreviation, **g^uen-*, of PIE **g^uena*, or an IE reflex.)

Trigram 震 *zhen*

- *Zhen* 震 **tjuuns* (ZZSF) / **tjienh* (Li, in Sch-1, 824) / **təns* (Sch-1) “thunder.”

PIE/IE

- PIE *(*s*)*ten-* “to thunder, drone, groan.”
- Vedic *tanyati* “it thunders,” *tanyatus* “a thundering”; Gaelic *tairneanach*, Welsh *taran*, Old High German *donar* “thunder” (Sloc; Pok 1021).

Trigram 巽 *xun*

- *Xun* 巽 **sqhuuns* (ZZ 510), **suns* (Sch-2) “wind.”

PIE/IE

- PIE **h₂weh₂ento-* / **uē-nto-s* “wind” (DTch 505, *yente*; Pok 82).
- Hittite *hwant-*, Latin *ventus*, Gothic *winds* “wind”; Welsh *gwynt* (from Celtic *ue-ntos*) “wind” (Pok); Proto-Tocharian **w'ente* “wind” (DTch 505).

Note:

- *Yi Jing* **sqhuuns* “wind” seems closest in sound to PIE **h₂weh₂ento-* / **uē-nto-s* “wind” and Hittite *hwant-* “wind.” This may be because older forms of IE words for wind were not recorded in many IE languages because their scripts had not yet been invented in the later ninth century BCE, when the *Yi Jing* is judged to have taken its present form.

Trigram 離 *li*

- *Li* 離 **rai* (Sch-2), **rel* (ZZSF 398), **ljar* (Li) “brilliance,” “shine bright.”

PIE/IE

- PIE **gher-*, **ghere-* **ghre-* “beam, shine, shimmer” (Sloc, Pok 441). [*gh-* stands for the velar fricative /ɣ/ .].
- Old Irish *grian* “sun” (from **ghreina*) (Pok 442); Gaelic *ghrian* “sun” (Google Gaelic–English dictionary); Old Icelandic *gryian* “sunrise” (Pok 442).

Note:

- Here it is proposed that trigram *li* 離 **rai* “brightness, shine brightly” corresponds to PIE **ghre-* “beam, shine” and **ghreina* [> Old Irish *grian* “sun”] (Pok 442); and **rai* “shine” may be an abbreviation for a cognate of Proto-Celtic **ghreina*. Proto-Celtic is generally dated c. 1200–900 BCE.

Trigram 坎 *kan*

- *Kan* 坎 **khooms* / **khoomʔ* (ZZSF 441), **khəmx* (Li), **khəmʔ* (Sch-2) “defile (steep-sided narrow gorge).”

PIE/IE

- PIE **keu-*, *keuə* “to bend” (Pok 588).
- Welsh *cwm* “deep narrow valley, coomb” (DWL 640); Breton *komb* “comb”; Old High German *chumph* “comb, basin”; Old French *combe* “coomb” (Pok 588, Sloc).

Trigram 艮 *gen*

- *Gen* 艮 **kūuuns* (ZZ 331) “hill(s),” mountain(s),” **kəns* (Sch-2).

PIE/IE

- PIE **kel-*, **kela-* “to tower, rise high,” **kln-is* “hill” (Pok 544).
- Lettish *kalns* “mountain” (Pok 544); Lithuanian *kalnas* “mountain” (see English–Lithuanian dictionary online through Google); Greek *kolonos* “hill”; Latin *collis* “hill”; Anglo-Saxon *hyll* “hill.” (Pok 544).

Note:

- Trigram *gen* 艮 **kūuuns* “hill, mountain” is close to Lettish *kalns* and Lithuanian *kalnas* “mountain” in sound and meaning. Old Chinese **kūuuns* is missing an *-l-* because there is no Old Chinese syllable with the ending *-ln(a)s*. Similarly, the Chinese (Mandarin) transcription of “Cornwall” is *kangwo*, missing an *-r-* and an *-l*.

Trigram 兑 *dui*

- *Dui* 兑 **l'oods* (ZZ 307)/**lot/l'lots* (ZZ), **lot/lots* (B&S), **duadh* (Li) “澤 swamp, marsh; pool (confluence of water)” (BB); “pool, moist, damp” (WT 澤).

Note:

- *Ze* 澤 “swamp, pool” is the definition given above in the Tuan commentary. Note also that the Tuan commentary reads *dui* 兑 as 說 “glad” and 說 “glad” is an alternate character for 悅 “glad.” 說 and 悅 both have sounds **lots/*lot* (ZZ and B&S and Sch-2); thus 兑 has the sound **lots/*lot*, and **lot* “marsh, swamp” corresponds with PIE *lat-* “swamp” in sound and meaning.

PIE/IE

- PIE **lat-* “wet, damp; swamp, pool” (Pok 654, Sloc).
- Middle Irish *laith* “swamp”; Old Welsh *llat* “mud, mire” (Pok 654); Welsh *llaid* “mud, mire, ... slime, ?swamp, slough, quagmire...” (DWL 2090).

Note:

- Old Chinese trigram name **lot* “marsh” corresponds to PIE **lat-* “swamp,” Old Welsh *llat* “mud, mire” and Welsh *llaid* “mud, slough, quagmire...” in sound and meaning. Marsh, swamp, slough, and quagmire mean the same thing.

SUMMARY OF CORRESPONDENCES OF TRIGRAM NAMES WITH PIE/IE

Below is a summary of the sound-and-meaning correspondences:

qian 乾

- **gjan/*kan* “originator/begetter of all things, Heaven”

PIE

- **gen-* “beget, generate”;

PIE

- *genəter* “begetter, father.”

Note:

- It is proposed that *qian* 乾 **gjan/*kan* “originator/begetter” is an abbreviation of PIE **genəter* “begetter, father” or an IE reflex.

kun 坤

- **kun/*khuun* “Wife [receptor] of originator/ begetter; mother of all things, Earth.”

PIE

- **g^wéna* “wife, queen, woman.”

Note:

- It is proposed that **kun* represents PIE *g^wén-*, an abbreviation of PIE *g^wéna* or an IE reflex.

zhen 震

- **tjienh* “thunder.”

PIE

- *(*s*)*ten-* “to thunder.”

Vedic

- *tanyatus* “a thundering.”

Old High German

- *donar* “thunder.”

xun 巽

- **sqhuuns* “wind.”

PIE

- **h₂weh₁ento-* / **uē-nto-s* “wind.”

Hittite

- *hwant-*.

Latin

- *ventus*.

Welsh

- *gwynt* "wind."

li 離

- **rai* "brilliance, shine brightly."

PIE

- **ghre-* "beam, shine" [**gh-* stands for a velar fricative /ɣ/].

kan 坎

- **khoomʔ* "defile (steep-sided, narrow gorge)."

PIE

- **keu-* "to bend."

Welsh

- *cwm* "deep, narrow, valley; coomb."

Breton

- *komb* "coomb."

gen 艮

- **kuuuns* "hill, mountain."

PIE

- **kln-is* "hill."

Lettish

- *kalns* "mountain,"

Lithuanian

- *kalnas* “mountain.”

dui 兑

- **lot* “marsh.”

PIE

- **lat-* “swamp, pool.”

Middle Irish

- **laith* “swamp.”

Old Welsh

- *llat* “mud, mire.”

Welsh

- **llaid* “mire, slough, quagmire.”

Given that the ancient transcriber could not transcribe foreign words with consonants and vowels but had to use existing Old Chinese syllables in the Old Chinese syllabary, these Old Chinese-PIE/IE correspondences would seem to be remarkably similar in sound-and-meaning.

It should also be remembered that the Old Chinese syllabary was not the same as the present-day Chinese syllabary, regardless of topolect, because sounds have changed over time. For an example, take the word *xun* 巽 **sqhuuns* “wind.” **sqhuuns* is not a syllable in the present-day Chinese syllabary. But it and similar syllables did exist in Old Chinese: *xun* 巽 **sqhuuns*, *xuan* 選 **sqhons*, *sun* 簞 **sqhun?* (ZZ 510).

IV. MORE PIE /IE CORRESPONDENCES: *GUA* 卦 AND *YAO* 爻

Two additional *Yi Jing* terms will be examined. They are *gua* 卦 “*Yi Jing* diagram(s)” and *yao* 爻 “line/lines of the *Yi Jing* diagram.” I suggest that they were also originally Indo-European words.

A. *GUA* 卦 “*YI JING* DIAGRAM”

It is proposed here that the *Yi Jing* term *gua* 卦 /**k^w*rees “*Yi Jing* diagram” was originally an IE reflex of PIE etymon **k^u*er- “to make, form,” whose reflexes include Lithuanian *kēras* (m., plural *kerai*) “divination, sorcery, enchantment, spell” and Ancient Greek *teras* (τέρας) “divine sign, omen, portent” (Pok 641–642; Wikit *kēras* and τέρας). Here are the Old Chinese reconstructions for *gua* 卦 “*Yi Jing* diagram,” compared with PIE etymon **k^u*er- “to make, form,” together with its reflexes:

- *Gua* 卦 /*[*k*]^w*re-s* / (B&S 339) “*Yi Jing* diagrams”
- *Gua* 卦 **k^w*rees (ZZSF) “*Yi Jing* diagrams”
- PIE **k^u*er- “to make, form” (Pok 641)
- Lithuanian *kēras* “divination, sorcery,” from PIE **k^u*er- (Pok 642; Wikit *kēras*)
- Ancient Greek *teras* (τέρας) “divine sign, omen, portent” (Pok 642; Wikit τέρας; Aut; Lid)

Lithuanian is a Balto-Slavic language that has retained many very old words in their ancient forms. Lithuanian *kēras* “divination” comes from Proto-Balto-Slavic **ker-*, from Proto-Indo-European **k^u*er- (source: Wikit “*kēras*”).

In the development from PIE, Proto-Balto-Slavic labiovelar stops lost their labialization and merged with the plain velars.²⁷ Thus **k^u*er- became **ker-*, and PIE **k^u*eras would have become *keras* in Lithuanian.

As for Ancient Greek *teras* (τέρας) “divine sign, omen”: PIE and Mycenaean labiovelars changed to plain stops (labials, dentals, and velars) in the later Greek dialects: for instance, PIE **k^w* became /p/or /t/ in Attic: Attic Greek ποῦ /pô:/ “where?,” Latin *quō*; Attic Greek τίς /tís/, Latin *quis* “who?”²⁸ Thus PIE

²⁷ Wikipedia, s.v. “Proto-Balto-Slavic Language.”

²⁸ Wikipedia, s.v. “Ancient Greek Language.”

and Mycenaean k^u *er-* would have become *ter-* in Attic Greek, and PIE or Mycenaean $*k^u$ *eras* would have become $*teras$ in Attic Greek. The dates for Ancient Greek are:

- Mycenaean Greek (c. 1400–1200 BCE)
- Dark Ages (c. 1200–800 BCE)
- Archaic period (c. 800–500 BCE)
- Classical period (c. 500–300 BCE)

The date for the Old Chinese of the *Yi Jing* would be the late ninth century BCE, which would fall in the Dark Ages of the Ancient Greek language, following the Mycenaean Greek period.

Thus we have to compare Old Chinese 卦 $**k^wrees/$ $/*[k]^{w\check{r}}re-s$ with the precursors of Lithuanian *keras* and Ancient Greek *téras* (τέρας), before the sound changes. But at this juncture, let us first ask, “What is the meaning of the *gua* 卦 *Yi Jing* diagram? What is this diagram?” The answer would be: “It is a hexagram.” And what is a hexagram? The answer: “It is a divination, a divine sign, an omen, a portent.” Of course, this was the understanding in ancient times, although the hexagram is still understood as divination, omen, and portent among many *Yi Jing* devotees in the present day. With this in mind, let us compare once more the Old Chinese and PIE/IE words before the aforementioned PIE/IE sound-changes. Thus:

- Gua 卦 $*[k]^{w\check{r}}re-s$ (B&S) “a hexagram, i.e., a divination, a sign, an omen, a portent”
- Gua 卦 $*k^wrees$ (ZZ) “a hexagram, i.e., a divination, a sign, an omen, a portent”
- PIE $*k^u$ *eras* (> Lithuanian *keras* “divination”)
- PIE $*k^u$ *eras* (> Classical Greek *teras* “a sign, omen, portent”)

Clearly, *Yi Jing* 卦 *gua*/ $*k^wrees$ has a decided sound-and-meaning resemblance to PIE /Pre-Dark Ages Greek and pre-Proto-Balto-Slavic $*k^u$ *eras* “divination,” “divine sign, omen,” even though the Chinese transcriber could only transcribe a foreign word with a Chinese syllable and not with consonants and vowels. Like PIE/IE $*k^u$ *eras*, the *Yi Jing* *gua* 卦 $*k^wrees$ “*Yi Jing* diagram” is indeed divination as well as a divine sign, omen, or portent. The conclusion then is that the *Yi Jing* term 卦 *gua*/ $*k^wrees$ was originally an IE word.

The word *gua* 卦 appears in *Chunqiu Zuo Zhuan* with the meaning of “a divination.” The

Shuowen 說文 dictionary (circa 100 CE) says: “卦, 筮也.” (“*Gua* means divination by using stalks.”) These are examples of *gua* as a noun. In the *Shiji* 史記 (*Records of the Grand Historian*, circa 94 BCE), however, it is also used as a verb “to divine,” as in the “Biography of Li Si 李斯列傳” where (the king) summoned the Great Diviner and ordered him to “divine [*gua* 卦] it” (乃召太卜，令卦之。²⁹) On the other hand, Chinese is very terse, and “divine it 卦之” can also mean “[perform] divination [on] it,” i.e., “divination it” or “hexagram it,” where a noun is used as a verb. Using a noun as a verb appears in many languages. In Chinese, for example, there is *hua* “drawing” and *hua* “to draw.” In English, there is “chart” (noun) and “chart” (verb).

B. YAO 爻 “LINES OF THE YI JING DIAGRAM”

It is here proposed that *yao* 爻 **graaw* was originally an IE reflex of the PIE etymon **ghreu-* “collapse (German *zusammenstuerzen*), fall on something (German *stuerzen auf etwas*)” (Pok 460). My conjecture is that “fall on something” also meant “meet, collide, coincide, converge,” as in the dictionary meaning of German *zusammenfallen* “collapse, collide, converge, coincide.” This notion of “falling on something” as meaning “meeting, coinciding” is also shown in Latin *congruo, -ere*, “meet, coincide,” also a reflex of PIE **ghreu-*, **ghru-* “fall on something” (Pok 460). This would indicate that the *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* dictionary’s definition of 爻 *yao*/**graaw* as meaning 交 *jiao*/**[k]^hraw* / **kreew* “meet, cross, intersect” was correct. This is also supported by the graph 爻, which shows lines meeting and intersecting. PIE **gh-* (representing the velar fricative /x/) in PIE **ghreu-* “fall on something” is close in sound to the velar plosive /k/ in **[k]^hraw* / **kreew* 交 “meet,” and the uvular plosive /g/ in **graaw* 爻 “line/lines of the *Yi Jing* diagram.” Thus **graaw* 爻 “cross, meet,” **[k]^hraw* / **kreew* 交 “cross, meet,” and PIE **ghreu-* “fall on something (i.e., meet, coincide)” are also close in sound and meaning. Thus we have the following correspondences in sound-and-meaning:

- PIE **ghreu-* “fall on something (i.e., meet, coincide with)”
- OC *jiao* 交 **[k]^hraw* (B&S 345) / **kreew* (ZZ 372) (“meet, cross, intersect”)
- *Yi Jing yao* 爻 *graaw* (ZZ 518) “meet, cross, intersect”

²⁹ Wiktionary 卦: s.v. 《史記·李斯列傳》:「二世驚，自以為惑，乃召太卜，令卦之。」

From the above comparisons, then, the conclusion here is that the *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* was correct, and furthermore, that *yao*/**Graaw* 爻 “line/lines of the *Yi Jing* diagram” is a reflex of PIE **ghreu-* “fall on something (i.e., meet, coincide with)” and refers to the meeting, coincidence, and intersection of lines, or divinations (signs, omens) in the *Yi Jing* diagram.

We must still consider the appearance of *yao* 爻 in the Oracle Bone script, mentioned earlier.³⁰ The sentence where it occurs says: “「爻馬，亡（無）疾。」” (“Divined [爻] horse, no illness”). *Yao* 爻 here is a verb “to divine.” Let me explain. As we have seen, *yao* 爻 has the meaning “line, lines of a trigram or hexagram.” But each line is a divination, and so are three or six lines divinations. Thus *yao* 爻 can also mean trigram or hexagram; it can also mean a divination or divination, since a trigram or a hexagram is a divination. But *yao* 爻, as the graph shows and as I have proposed, means “meet(ing), coincide(nce)” or conjunction of divinations (lines). In Chinese 交 “meet, intersect” can be both verb and noun. Thus the trigram or hexagram can also mean “meeting(s)/conjunction(s)” (of signs, omens, portents in a trigram or hexagram). Thus to *yao* 爻 (divine) a horse means “to conjunction a horse” or in the elliptical way of Chinese, mean “(perform a) conjunction (i.e. divination) (on) a horse.” Similarly as we have mentioned above, *gua* 卦 “a divination, a hexagram” can function as the verb “divine,” meaning “(perform) divination (on) something.”

³⁰ See above, fn. 23.

V. CONCLUSION

I hope that this discussion has advanced the proposal that the names of the eight *Yi Jing* trigram names have sound-and-meaning correspondences with PIE and/or IE etyma and are of IE origin. In many cases the correspondences are between Old Chinese and IE but not PIE. This suggests that the trigram names were originally IE words, not PIE words. But the correspondences here cannot show what IE language the original trigram names were in, cannot show whether the IE words they represented, as is proposed here, belonged to a Proto-Indo-Aryan language or to Proto-Celtic, or to any other early IE language.

The sound-and-meaning correspondences presented here between the Old Chinese of the trigram names and IE words show that most of the correspondences are with Germanic words (for seven trigram names) and with Celtic words (for seven trigram names). The Germanic correspondences are with all trigram names except *dui* "marsh/ swamp." The Celtic correspondences are with all the trigram names except *gen* "mountain." This may simply mean that corresponding words in the other IE languages have died out or undergone sound changes.

Although the proposal that the trigram names were originally IE words cannot here determine to what IE language they belong, this paper may lend support to the idea that there were Indo-Europeans in the Yellow River valley region during the Shang and Zhou dynasties.

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