

Living with forces of the universe

I-Ching is intended to bring accord with destiny and to reveal the nature of things. Those who have studied this great oracle laud it as the book of wisdom, writes YEANG SOO CHING

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DID NOT GO AFTER I-CHING. IT CAME to me,” says a smiling Dr S.N. Goh, principal of the International Institute of Tao Studies, Malaysia. An image of divinity comes to me. But if even the slightest hint of religion has pervaded my thoughts, it is quickly dispelled by Goh.

Tao studies, of which I-Ching is a part, has nothing to do with religion. The study of Tao is to equip people with the tools of philosophy, to enable them to live harmoniously with nature and to improve life materially as well as spiritually,” says the 55-year-old Goh.

She offers me some longevity tea, the aroma of which is very calming. She then proceeds to educate me in the study of Tao – Lao-tze, Chuang-tze and the five skills of San (longevity), Yi (medicine), Min (fate), Pu (oracle) and Siang (appearance).

These skills are derived from ancient books that were the exclusive property of the emperors and valuable records handed down through the ages.

The I-Ching or Book of

Changes forms the oracle part of Tao studies. It is one of the world's oldest books, going back more than 4,000 years to pre-Confucian times. It has been used as an oracle, as a stimulus to creativity and intuition, and as a focus for meditation.

“The Book of Changes is about the natural phenomena of the universe. It is about changes, both visible and invisible,” says Goh.

“It is about material and non-material things. Some may define this as mysticism, if they see the universe as mystical. I-Ching relates to the oracle, feng shui and fate theory. It's also a philosophy and contains beautiful phrases.”

Goh grew up in an environment where I-Ching was the order of the day. Her late father, Roch Goh, was the founder of the

Association for I-Ching Studies in Singapore and he greatly influenced her in her work on Tao.

The Chinese character for I-Ching represents the yin and yang classics. The upper part of “I” means sun (yang element) and the lower part means moon (yin element). “Ching” means text or classics.

In Chinese thought, the entire system of life is determined by two forces: yin and yang. These are opposites, for example, light-dark, male-female, hot-cold, and their opposition creates a union of extremes. In doing so, they give rise to the forces which roll through the cycle of events.

It is written in the I-Ching: “The family who accumulates kindness will definitely reap credit balance. The family who practises wickedness will definitely suffer misfortune. One should accumulate more yin kindness which has not been made known to

people, or at least some yang kindness that is known.”

Goh hastens to inform that I-Ching cannot make decisions for you. It can only give you information that will help you make your decision.

“Of course, its way of giving you information is not the normal approach. Various methods are used, like coins, cards, red seeds, yarrow stalks and rice.”

“But this is not to say there is a mysterious power involved. It is an oracle, and if you are sincere when asking your question, and calm your mind before doing it, the answers will be accurate.”

There is a ritual to comply with before consulting the I-Ching, according to her. Mind calming and hand washing are prerequisites. The session has to be conducted in a clean and quiet environment, and amid Tao aroma.

The aroma comes from a blend of 28 kinds of herbs, which has been formulated by Tao masters who have accumulated a lot of good deeds.

While I-Ching reading is non-religious, it can create yang chi to dispel spirits which are deemed yin chi, she says.

So what is the difference between a fortune-teller and an I-Ching practitioner? “It very much depends on how much knowledge both have. Where I-Ching is concerned, is the practitioner merely interested in the philosophy part, or is he more knowledgeable about the oracle aspect?”

“You know, anyone can buy a book on I-Ching and do his own reading, but the question is whether he can correctly interpret it. It is best to consult the experts who have studied I-Ching for years.”

In Goh's case, she has been studying I-Ching for 15 years, but only in the last five years has she been applying the knowledge, both in work and family life. She holds a Master's degree in economics, and is the general manager of a manufacturing company. She also has a PhD in traditional medical science from the United States, in a US-China collaborative programme.

“I've been using the principles of Tao studies in my business, for my family and also to help people.”

“Based on the results, I can say it works. If it didn't, I wouldn't be advocating it. I've always been a sceptical person, and as a Science student in school, I was more attuned to facts.”

“But as I grow older, I know there are many things beyond my control. Since I can't

use the normal skills I learnt in school, I have turned to Tao studies, and I get my answers.”

She studied under Professor Li Heng Li, the Taiwan-based president of Tao Studies International Fund. In Malaysia, there is the Association for I-Ching Studies.

Courses in Tao studies are also conducted by Goh and her team of counsellors.

“Starting in December, the public can attend counselling sessions on the I-Ching oracle as well as other aspects of Tao studies, such as numerology,” says Goh.

“The sessions will be held every Sunday afternoon, and the cost will be minimal, because it's a service we're doing. The money goes back to the institute for the promotion of Tao studies.”

The institute is also in the process of setting up a formal college to be registered in the United States, to offer degree courses in Tao studies. Initially, this can be pursued through distance learning, and eventually a campus will be set up in China.

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What is the I-Ching?

IN *The Fortune-Teller's I-Ching* by Kwok Man Ho, Martin Palmer and Joanne O'Brien, the origins of the I-Ching lie with Fu Hsi, the primordial bringer of the gifts of civilisation to the Chinese.

He is credited with having invented the Chinese calendar, writing, civil administrative system and many other essentials of civilised life.

However, it is for his discovery of the eight trigrams (Fu Kuo) that he is held in great reverence in China.

A trigram is a block of three parallel straight lines, each line being either complete (unbroken) or broken.

By using all the possible permutations of these two types of line in a set of three, the eight trigrams are arrived at. The I-Ching originally consisted of the 64 hexagrams, which was done by simply putting the trigrams in pairs in all the possible combinations.

Consulting the I-Ching was by using yarrow stalks, thought in themselves to have magical powers. The use of yarrow stalks for divination purposes goes way back to Chinese history.

In the ancient I-Ching system, 50 yarrow sticks were used in a complicated process of division and sub-division until a number was finally obtained which indicated either a yin (broken) line or a yang (unbroken) line.

After six lines had been obtained, the hexagram that is derived is looked up in the book for interpretation.

In current Chinese use, the system has been simplified to 12 sticks. These are marked, six with a yang line and six with a yin line. These are held in the hand, and after prayers, six are drawn from the 12, revealing the hexagram.

In the main, the Chinese use the I-

Ching for quiet meditation and reflection. If a copy (usually wrapped in yellow) is in the home, it is only asked direct questions at times of great difficulty or moments of great change.

It is regarded as the most important oracle, to be consulted only in times of crisis. Most often it is used as a book of general wisdom, in order to understand the ways of the world better.

If a question is to be put to it, the hands have to be washed first before touching it, incense has to be offered, and the mind has to be calm.

It is then read in much the same way as a Christian would read the Bible or a Muslim the Quran.

The philosophy

THE basic idea that lies behind the I-Ching, say the authors, is putting yourself in touch with the essence of the universe through the use of chance.

By allowing random chance to rule in the use of coins or sticks, you are able to open yourself to the flow of the universe and to be guided not by some divine figure but by the inevitable forces which roll through the cycle of events.

What the I-Ching tells you is how, following the pattern you have established for yourself, you will fare if you go along this line.

It also gives suggestions as to what steps may be taken to enable you to realign yourself with the deeper pattern against which you may have been running.

But the advice is one which “forth tells” rather than “foretells”.

It tells you about yourself, which will then give you an idea of how you will go if you continue along the path you are now on. But it does not tell you what is going to happen. To misunderstand this is to misunderstand the entire I-Ching.

As C.G. Jung (1875-1961) once said of the I-Ching: “The I-Ching does not offer itself with proofs and results; it does not vaunt itself, nor is it easy to approach.”

“It offers neither facts nor power, but for lovers of self-knowledge, of wisdom... it seems to be the right book.”

It is the great achievement of the I-Ching that a reaction that makes sense arises out of a technique seemingly excluding sense...”



INTERESTING
DEVICE: Goh
with the 64
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used in the
I-Ching oracle

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