

A Brief Review of “On Five Senses of Yi (Change/Creativity) and the Onto-Cosmological World of Yi” by Professor Chung-ying Cheng.¹

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Professor Chung-ying Cheng’s work is an attempt to penetrate deeply into the mystery of the nature of change and, through an enhanced understanding of that nature, to come to an understanding of how a human being can play a productive and harmonious role in a world of change. To this end, he works with two distinct but related hierarchies of ideas: in the first instance he explores five senses of the word *yi*, change; and in the second instance he explores five overlapping orders of being, and their relationship to the forms of change.

Five Senses of Change

Professor Cheng sites the Han dynasty scholar Zheng Xuan as articulating three distinct senses of change. These are:

1. *buyi*: literally meaning “non-change”, and translated so by Cheng.
2. *bianyiyi*: literally meaning “becoming different change” and translated by Cheng directly as “change”.
3. *jianyi*: literally meaning “simple change” and translated by Cheng as “simplicity”.

In his commentary on Chapter 1 of the *Dazhuan*, Wilhelm also describes three distinct forms of change.² Although no source is given, it is not unreasonable to assume that Wilhelm is also following Zheng Xuan here. However, Wilhelm interprets the forms of change as: (i) non-change; (ii) cyclic change, which always returns to its starting point; and (iii) linear change, which always moves on, with no return. The latter could be *bianyiyi*, constantly becoming different, and the former *jianyi*, simplicity ensuring that the seed of its origin always manifests in the change.

Non-change, the form common to both Cheng and Wilhelm, should be seen as the background, the frame of reference against which all other forms of change are to be perceived. Clearly, without such a static reference point, reliable representations of change are not possible. As such, non-change is the source from which all other

¹ Professor Cheng’s paper was presented as an invited paper at *The Second International Conference on I-Ching (Yijing) Studies and Contemporary Civilization*, Tainan, Taiwan, November 27–30, 2005. The paper was published on pp17–35 of the conference proceedings. This response is based on the English language abstract for the paper published in the Proceedings, plus an additional English handout on the material provided by Professor Cheng at the conference, and further personal communication with Professor Cheng subsequent to the conference. This review was first published in the *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, Volume 33 Number 2, June 2006, published by Blackwell Publishing, Inc.

² Richard Wilhelm, *I Ching or Book of Changes*. Published by Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1983. His remarks on the forms of change appear on pp280–281.

forms of change emerge. Cheng says "the power of non-change in change ... is what makes changes possible."

Bianyi is the power of change expressed in the separation of *yin* and *yang*; this is change as a spontaneous "world-making force". Cheng sees this form of change as carrying intrinsic order. Thus, such change does not create chaos, but always acts in accordance with the underlying principles of cosmic organisation, creating and preserving an ongoing order. It is because the changes of *bianyi* create and preserve order, that *jianyi*, simplicity in change, becomes a necessary property. Cheng describes the transition from *buyi* to *bianyi* as governed by "the principle of primary co-origination". That is, *yin* and *yang* arise together, not separately; this is "*wuji* generates *taiji*". Cheng suggests that *jianyi* ensures that the result of change always embodies "a primordial holistic order of being". Thus, regardless of how complex the changes manifest in the world become, the original simplicity of the primary division into *yin* and *yang* remains within the forms. It is because of this conservation of form within change that Cheng says divination, logic, science and technology all become possible.

Cheng's work takes the original forms of change suggested by Zheng Xuan and develops them within a coherent, more comprehensive picture, which seeks to provide a systematic explanation for all forms of change. To further this aim, he adds two further senses of *yi*, which he describes as:

4. *jiaoyi*: literally meaning "trade", and translated by Cheng as "exchange".
5. *heyi*: literally meaning "harmonious change", and translated by Cheng as "harmonization".

Exchange can only arise once there are separate energies, systems, or entities within the world. In its simplest form, of course, this is the case as soon as *yin* and *yang* separate. However, as more complex systems develop as the natural result of the evolutionary unfolding of *bianyi*, exchange of form and energy between those developing systems becomes ever more important in maintaining a sustainable economy. Indeed, the exchange itself contributes to the development of the systems. In this sense, *jiaoyi*, exchange in its great variety of forms, becomes the dominant experience of conscious beings as they act and interact in the world.³

Cheng describes the final form of change, harmonization, as a fundamental teleological principle within all of this activity. That is, Cheng sees the ultimate goal and purpose of change as the development of ever-richer patterns of harmonious interaction between all the aspects of the world. For Cheng, this principle is the explanation of the apparent ongoing sustainable development of the natural world. If we think of this in evolutionary terms, this would suggest a different perspective on the maxim "survival of the fittest", with fitness being less about *competitive*

³ Note that Cheng sees Wilhelm's two senses of active change, cyclic and linear, as particular patterns, which manifest and arise from the overlapping interaction of *bianyi* and *jiaoyi*, change and exchange, in the world.

advantage over other species, and more about harmonious integration with the whole natural system itself.

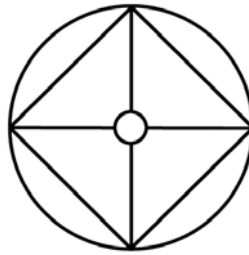


Figure 1: Cheng's Five Senses of Yi

Cheng then uses a simple and elegant diagram to show the relationships between these different forms of change (see Figure 1 above). Non-change (*buyi*) is the centre of the figure. As the root of all other forms of change, this is the logical place for it to appear. Basic change itself (*bianyiyi*) is then taken as the vertical axis in the diagram, and exchange (*jiaoyi*) as the horizontal axis. Further, as “co-origination” governs the creation of the first axis, the transition from *buyi* to *bianyiyi*, so the transition from *bianyiyi* to *jiaoyi*, the creation of the second axis, is governed by “the principle of interactive production”. Thus, separate things are produced by the interaction of the forces of *yin* and *yang*, and then, once separate they interact with each other through exchange. Therefore, the basic form of change and its experience by beings through exchange in the world create the space in which Cheng's extended theory of change can unfold. The two remaining forms of change are then added as unifying perimeters to the figure. *Jianyiyi*, simplicity, unites the extremes of change and exchange, ensuring that however complex these manifestations become, the original source of change remains at their heart. *Heyi*, harmonization, then encircles everything, providing the guiding principle of the cosmos.

A simple functional picture can help here. *Buyi*, non-change, is the identity function it leaves everything unaltered. *Bianyiyi* is a simple function that acts on a situation to transform it into something else. *Jiaoyi* is a more complex function that acts on two (or more) situations, or beings, simultaneously and transforms each of them. Then, *Jianyiyi* is a principle at work in the function of *bianyiyi*, ensuring the conservation of form. Similarly, *heyi* is a principle at work in the function of *jiaoyi*, ensuring the exchange is harmonious. These principles could be seen as embodied directly in the definitions of the functions of *bianyiyi* and *jiaoyi*, or they could be seen as higher order functions that act on *bianyiyi* and *jiaoyi* to ensure the necessary results.

Five Orders of Being

In parallel with the five senses of change, Cheng develops a theory of mind and human nature which uses five orders of being. These orders are correlated with the five senses of change. I shall begin by listing the orders of being, before looking at each in more detail.

1. *benti shiji*: literally “root substance world”, which Cheng describes as the world of onto-cosmological reality. This corresponds to *buyi* (non-change).
2. *xingxiang shiji*: literally “related shapes world”, which Cheng describes as the world of changing forms. This corresponds to *bianyiyi* (change).

3. *fuhao shiji*: literally "symbol world", which Cheng calls the world of symbolic forms. This corresponds to *jianyi* (simplicity).
4. *xinling shiji*: literally "heart/mind world", which Cheng calls the world of mind and heart. This corresponds to *jiaoyi* (exchange).
5. *xinwei shiji*: literally "behaviour/action world", which Cheng describes as the world of action and interaction, corresponding to *heyi* (harmonization).

Cheng describes the world of onto-cosmological reality as the point of convergence between the human mind and cosmic change. Thus, this theory suggests that consciousness has direct access to the fundamental nature of reality. Just as *buyi* is the root of the other forms of change, this order can be seen as both the root and combination of the other orders. Cheng says that this is the order of pure creativity – it is beyond (or beneath) sense perception, but it is the origin of our experience of both nature and value.

The world of changing forms is where we perceive the changes inherent in natural phenomena. Cheng says that this realm engages us on many levels: our imagination, intuition, and understanding are all "invoked and challenged" at this level, where our perception of these forms is through schemes and categories. This order expresses the principle of actuality.

The world of symbolic forms is the source from which we project our meaning and purpose. Cheng says that the symbolic reference is initially onto the world of onto-cosmological reality, but when we interpret those references it is as phenomena in the world of changing forms or as intentions in the world of heart and mind. This is the world where we construct our language and civilization – as such, it is the origin of culture.

The world of heart and mind is not just the world of individual minds, but also of the world of "common mindings". This is where values and norms are shared by our community, and where the individual language originating in the world of symbolic reference comes into interaction with others through "symbolic transactions"; hence exchange is the form of change most active here. Cheng believes that if we are to achieve world peace, then it will be largely through creative interaction at this level of being. Of course, the reverse is also possible. This order expresses the principle of consciousness.

Cheng describes the world of action and interaction as "the world in which we act as free agents of change". This is where we create or resolve conflicts, and where the interactions of the heart and mind become manifest. As such, if we are to be successful, this world must be governed by the principle of harmonious change. This order expresses the principle of action.

The diagram given in Cheng's original conference paper (p34) suggests two possible ways that the orders of being can be interrelated. The first is a simple, overlapping linear order, beginning with *benti* and progressing to *xinwei*. The second links the orders of being into an overlapping cyclical arrangement, where *xinwei* connects back to *benti*. Given the geometric complexity of the forms of change discussed earlier, and the proposed correlation between the forms of change and the worlds of being,

such a simple arrangement seems out of place. Cheng has subsequently clarified this with the diagram shown in Figure 2.

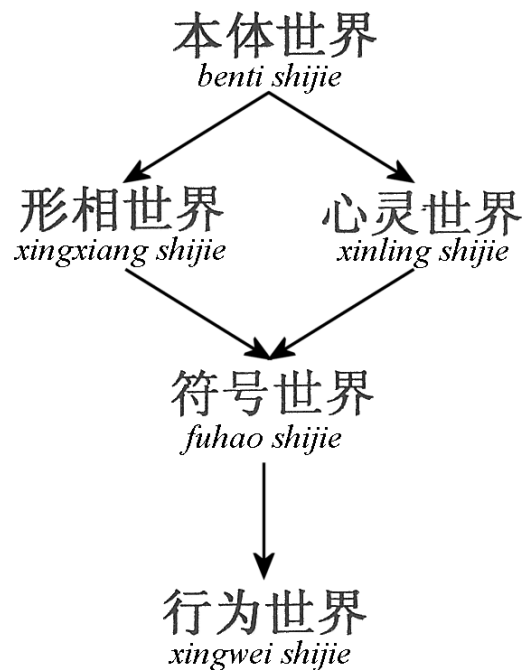


Figure 2: Cheng's Five Worlds of Being

Here we can see that the root from which all the other orders of being arise is indeed *benti*, the most fundamental world of Cheng's onto-cosmological reality. In turn, this gives rise simultaneously to both worlds of *xingxiang* (changing forms) and *xinling* (heart/mind). That is, the physical and mental aspects of the human arise together to form a complete being. Here we can see the principle of "co-origination" at work again. Only once we have developed language and symbolic forms, does the *fuhao* order (symbolic form) come into being, reuniting the changing forms with the mind. The final order of *xingwei* (human action) arises from the combination of changing forms and heart/mind mediated through symbolic reference.

Conclusions

Metaphysics, according to Russell,⁴ is "the attempt to conceive the world as a whole through thought." Cheng's work is an ambitious attempt to do just this: by weaving together the impersonal forces of change with the levels of being, he seeks to create a theory which encompasses the full range of experience. The term "onto-cosmological" is used extensively by Cheng: the nature of being, and our embedding into the broader cosmological context, is the domain of his theory.

In Cheng's theory, the five senses of change all ultimately arise from non-change, and interact to create the complete pattern of transformation and interaction in the world. Similarly, the five orders of being are all ultimately grounded in the world of onto-cosmological reality, the root substance of everything; the arising orders of being then

⁴ Bertrand Russell, *Mysticism and Logic*, page 20. First published in 1917. Republished in 2004 by Routledge, London.

interact through reference and interpretation to create the complete structure of our human nature. Further, there are correspondences hypothesized between the forms of change and the levels of being.

It is interesting to explore what kinds of constraints naturally arise from the structure of the theory, and how those constraints relate to the limitations we experience in our world. For example, as a start, the world of action only connects to the world of consciousness *via* the world of symbolic reference, so what limits does this impose on the relationship between consciousness and action? It gives all conscious action symbolic significance. Or, as the symbolic world corresponds to the form of simplicity in change, what does this say about the possible forms of the symbolic structures that we might construct? It means that the reference of terms always retains a traceable connection to their original forms, regardless of the transformations they undergo. Note that this constraint is implicit in two of Boole's principles for valid symbolic reasoning.⁵

By constructing this theory, Professor Cheng aims to provide a framework in which we can explore the deep questions of the origin and nature of change, and of our relationship, as human beings, both to change in ourselves and to the world of change at large. This framework may then facilitate a description of how human beings can act in the world, and how those acts may contribute positively or negatively to the overall harmony of the world.

Chinese Glossary

The Chinese characters given in this glossary are scanned directly from Cheng's paper. Only those terms central to Cheng's theory are given entries.

benti shijie	本体世界	jiaoyi	变易
bianyi	变易	xingxiang shijie	形相世界
buyi	不易	xinling shijie	心灵世界
fuhao shijie	符号世界	xingwei shijie	行为世界
heyi	和易	Zheng Xuan	郑玄
jianyi	简易		

⁵ Boole, George. *An Investigation of the Laws of Thought on which are Founded the Mathematical Theories of Logic and Probabilities*, page 49. Originally published in 1854, republished in 1958, by Dover, New York.