

Concepts of Change proliferated in the highly analytical late 04c.

The Five Elements were a late idea.²⁶ They were early associated with the older five directions (the cardinal four plus the center), five colors, five notes of the scale, and five planets. From the five planets they probably took their name Wǔ Syíng 五行, “the Five Walkers.” Besides simply defining a five-part group, they were also thought of as an endlessly recurring cycle,²⁷ in which each stage “destroyed” the preceding one:

water > fire > metal > wood > earth²⁸

The Yì with its system of 64 hexagrams envisioned a wilder kind of change. If emphasized lines in a hexagram are changed to their opposite, the resulting hexagram gives the outcome. Any one hexagram might therefore conceivably become *any of the others*. This was attractive to small states, which could never catch up with their rivals except by some sudden and discontinuous leap.

Here is how the DJ writers applied changing-hexagram analysis to the question of whether Jìn should have supported Jǐng against Sùng in 0486:

3:67 (DJ 12/9:6, c0318). Jàu Yāng of Jìn divined [by the bone method] about going to the aid of Jǐng . . . [three interpreters commented on the result; all advised against doing so]. Yáng Hǔ divined by the stalk method with the Jōu Yì. He obtained hexagram Tàì 泰 going to Syw̄ 需. He said, Sùng just now is in a fortunate position; it may not be engaged . . .

Tài “The Great” is auspicious, but here it gets bogged down in Syw̄ “Delay.”

The Seasonal Cycle was another paradigm of change for the ruler:

3:68 (GZ 7:14-15, c0323). He should model himself on Heaven by extending benevolence to all, and imitate Earth by being impartial. He should make a third with the sun and moon; a fifth with the four seasons.

One way for a ruler to imitate Heaven was to take charge of the traditional seasonal activities of planting and harvesting:

3:69 (DJ 10/25:3b, excerpt, c0320). There are duties of government and the administrative services . . . in accordance with the four seasons.

Later, detailed work schedules appeared. Seasonality was essential:

3:70 (GZ 8, excerpt, c0310). In spring, if the winter schedule is followed, there will be chill; if the autumn schedule is followed, there will be thunder; if the summer schedule is followed, there will be stunting.

²⁶The original number, probably of Indian origin, seems to have been six; they appear in DJ 6/7:8 (c0358) as water, fire, metal, wood, earth, and grain. Similarly, the four elements of Empedocles (05c) are identical with a related Indian set of four.

²⁷Also translated as “Five Phases,” to emphasize their cyclical-succession aspect.

²⁸This is the “destructive” sequence as given in DJ 6/7:8; other authorities differ. The “generative” sequence is usually given as wood > fire > earth > metal > water.

In the twelve days when the aura (chì 氣) of earth is emerging, give warning about spring tasks. In [the next twelve days], begin ploughing. In [the next], make distributions. In [the next], repair gates and doorways. In [the next], bring males and females together. In the twelve days including the Chīng-míng festival, issue prohibitions . . .

The number eight is honored in this season. The ruler wears green²⁹ clothing, tastes sour flavors, listens to music in the jywé 角 mode . . .

All this met with healthy disbelief on the part of some practical men:

Sūndž Bīngfǎ 孫子兵法 “The Art of War of Master Sūn” or Sūn Bìn, the victor of Mǎ-líng (0343). Compiled c0360-c0305, with an addendum (Sūndž 13) in c0262; later attributed to a mythical 06c general. The first of the early Chinese military texts. Translations by Giles and Sawyer.

3:71 (Sūndž 6, excerpt, c0320). So the Five Elements have no constant conquest order, the Four Seasons have no constant duration, Night and Day may be short or long, and the Moon waxes and wanes.

That is, the Five Elements have *no* constant order, and thus no predictive value.

Dzōu Yěn 騶衍 of Chí (c0347-c0276) was the leading figure of the Jì-syà theoreticians. His career, which shifted from Chí to Ngwèi to Jàu to Yěn,³⁰ suggests knowledge of a secret, albeit fallible, method. It may have been a theory of astral/terrestrial correspondences, which maps the constellations onto the states, so that an event in a constellation portends an event in that state.³¹

The possessor of such a system might be invited by any ambitious state, but then dismissed if a major event turned out badly. Dzōu Yěn’s career moves can be mapped onto events in just that way. In 0295, Ngwèi was attacked by Chí, in 0294 it fought a drawn battle, in 0293 it suffered a great defeat. This might have led to an invitation to Dzōu Yěn in 0293. He may have lost prestige in Ngwèi after another defeat, with loss of territory, in 0290. A move to Jàu (which had lost a battle to Chí in 0289) may have occurred in that year. Jàu then enjoyed several years of calm; a joint action with Yěn against Chí in 0284 was successful. The King of Yěn came to Jàu in 0283, and may have hired Dzōu Yěn away in that year. That King died in 0279, and Dzōu Yěn ended his days in Yěn, in the house the King had built for him. One book he wrote in Yěn was *The Master of the Cycles*; it may have dealt with the Five Phases theory. It is with that theory that he has chiefly been associated in later times.

²⁹Chīng 青 covers colors from light green to dark blue; we translate by context.

³⁰For these details we follow SJ 47, which seems to derive from a genuine tradition.

³¹The system includes Wú (conquered in 0468), but not Jvng (conquered in 0376). The roster is: Hán, Sùng, Yěn, Wú, Ywè, Chí, Wèi, Lǚ, Jàu, Ngwèi, Chí, Jōu, Chǔ.