Chinese cycles of time - In the cycle of silence

A method of looking at time originated in Ancient China. It draws upon the 8 trigrams of the Chinese compass (Ba Gua), from which 9 subsequent and recurring cycles of time are derived.

Text: Angela Paap    Image: J.L.G via Pixabay CCO
Differences of opinion are normal. It is also normal to thrash them out, whether it is speaking in parliament, writing articles to a newspaper or other media, or discussing them in a café, place of work, or even at the kitchen table. Lately though, discourse seems to have dropped out of fashion. People talk less with each other, but more about each other. People express their opinion to like-minded people, form so-called “small groups of like-minded individuals”, and all too often relish in exaggerating and polarising their particular opinion. Of course there are the ones who invoke moderation and dialogue, but they don’t seem to find many attentive ears that will listen. Why is that?

Each period of time has its own qualities, problems, chances and tasks. Western astrologers observe the positions of the sun and the planets in relation to one another, and form their conclusions from this. There is, however, a method of approach which originated in Ancient China and is not much known to us; it draws upon the 8 trigrams of the Chinese compass (Ba Gua), from which 9 subsequent and recurring cycles of time are derived. Each of them lasts for 20 years. These 9 cycles of time are based upon the 8 cardinal points and the midpoint. The cardinal points are reflected in the course of the sun (periods of time within the day) and during the course of the year (seasons, sowing seeds and reaping the harvest). These cardinal points can also be viewed as family members, elements, parts of the body and frames of mind. The individual lines denoting Yin and Yang on the trigram are also interpreted in this context.

Let’s view recent history and our time in light of this.

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The Qian cycle

The 20 years from 1964 to 1984 were under the sign of the Qian cycle, which is represented by the heavens, northwest hemisphere, by the Father, and by the element metal. The trigram consists of 3 “strong” Yang strokes and represents Father, Power, Support but also Authority. This period of time was the peak stage of the Cold War, in which the world was divided between the spheres of interest and spheres of alliance of 2 super powers (!). That is the dominating theme of Qian. It’s about power and authority, but it’s also about loss of authority. Within this particular time frame, the social change movement in 1968 did not happen without reason, as long-standing powers of authority started to be questioned and attacked: Liberation (from
paternalism), Equality (Women’s Movement – as liberation from patriarchy) and Free Love (= liberation from traditional “fatherly” morals which were perceived as constricting) all became dominant themes. Fears of a 3rd world war breaking out and the rejection of the looming arms buildup produced a powerful peace movement. This too was in resonance with the Qian/metal element, which can be a dominating power as well as being a weapon.

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The Dui cycle

The years 1984 to 2004 quickly brought about a dramatic change. These years were under the sign of Dui, which is symbolic of a lake, of the West, of the youngest daughter, of cheerfulness, of discussion, of communication and, once again, of the element metal. When seen from below, the sign Dui consists of 2 “strong” Yang strokes and finishes at the top with a “soft” broken Yin stroke. The Cold War ended, the USA and the Soviet Union began to approach one another; the result of this thaw was the German Reunification.

Even the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union started to crumble, after it became clear that solidarity could no longer be maintained by methods of violence. Openness (Glasnost) and communication came to the fore. Digital possibilities of communication were becoming increasingly important all over the world – the commercial phase of the internet started in 1990; mobile phones and soon after smartphones offered ways of communication that were independent of the locations of transmitter and receiver. Collectively, each and every innovation of communication technology gave us the illusion of boundless access to knowledge, or – so to speak – to an increasingly accessible collective consciousness – and it is no surprise that today we store our data in a cloud.

The fact that a lake is related to the element metal may initially surprise the reader. But the calm lake is as smooth as a mirror – and the heavens, the divine powers are reflected in that. Ultimately, the illusion of unlimited communication and connection to all people and access to all volumes of knowledge is a reflection of an enlightened state of consciousness. The years 1984-2004 represented also a time period of an overflowing hedonism, of parties and of the use of ‘recreational’ drugs.[1] All this occurred in the sign of cheerfulness, possibly also as a reaction to the falling away of previous limitations and intimidation.
The Gen cycle

This phase was superseded in 2004 by the current cycle Gen / mountain. The mountain is symbolic of the north east, the youngest son, shoulder and nape of neck, retreat (→ to the mountain), silence, meditation, earnestness as well as it being symbolic of obstinacy and numbness, comprising the element Earth. When seen from below, Gen consists of 2 “soft” Yin strokes and finishes at the top with a “strong” Yang stroke. Thus the energy of this trigram can be lived in two complementary ways.

One can retreat to “one’s mountain”, distance oneself from the world, and refuse all change - indeed refuse all communication. The image of the nape of the neck and the tenacity associated with it speak the same language. The trigram Gen with its Yang stroke above can also be seen, however, as the development of an energy and clarity in the sphere of the spirit of man that must be brought to fruition by body and soul. Both of the lower Yin strokes are ambiguous here. Either they are weak and cannot react to the impulse (this speaks for inertia, * an attitude one adopts where one does not act against better knowledge) or they, the Yin strokes, become a flexible tool of the spirit and allow those things looming “from above” to happen. The aspect of letting go of all old concepts and thoughts is also part of Gen – a challenge which people may feel they are faced with. Consequently, a turning towards spiritual values – which are represented by Gen – would be the beginning of a transformation – in which body and soul follow the spiritual values which were acquired during the “silence on the mountain”. Both are possible - it is up to each individual as to how he or she reacts to the quality of time.

The Li cycle

We will be working hard on Gen until 2024, then the Li cycle will begin. Li stands for fire, the South, the middle daughter, fame, revelation and recognition, the Eye. It has the element of fire within it and is also known as “the adhering element”. Visually, the Trigram Li consists of 2 “strong” Yang strokes, and in the middle there is a “soft” Yin stroke. That is the picture of the eye. Nobody can accurately say in advance just how this time quality will express itself. A main theme will be the disclosure of everything which has been prepared “on the mountain”. Will this result in a densification, or a return to the Spirit, which we will allow to help us overcome our egoism and fixation to
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