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"Time and Position", Cosmic Principle, and Delights in Heaven: Examining the View of Shengsi 生死 (Life and Death) in the Study of Yijing

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Abstract

The problem of *shengsi* 生死 (life and death) is one of the most fundamental and intractable questions of human existence, yet remarkably little systematic work has been done on the *Yijing*'s own conception of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) as an integrated philosophical and religious problem. Drawing on the *Yijing* text, the later commentaries, and conceptual analysis, this study seeks to fill this gap by investigating the *Yijing*'s conception of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) in its three basic structural perspectives: "time and position" (*shi wei* 時位), the cosmological alternation of *yin* and *yang*, and the existential posture of "delighting in Heaven" (*le tian* 樂天). The first perspective shows that *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) are situational states depending on one's circumstance within changing configurations of time and position. The second perspective lifts this situational awareness to the level of cosmic principle: *sheng* 生 (life) being the union of *yin* and *yang*, *si* 死 (death) as their separation, both of which are necessary phases in the endless process of cosmic generation. The third perspective traces the process by which this cosmological understanding was internalized. It leads to an existential attitude of "delights in Heaven and knows his own fate and what Heaven bestows" (*le tian zhi ming* 樂天知命), a condition in which the fear of *si* 死 (death) is overcome by acceptance. In this case, the meaning of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) is fulfilled in the realization and accomplishment of one's "will" (*zhi* 志) and "nature" (*xing* 性) endowed by Heaven. The study concludes that the *Yijing* offers a philosophical and religious vision in which *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) are not opposed and separated, but integrated as complementary phases of a single, ongoing process of cosmic and human realization. It speaks to the perennial human question of how finite beings, conscious of their mortality, can find meaning and fulfilment in a world of constant change.

Keywords: *Yijing*; *shengsi* (life and death); time and position; *yin-yang*; cosmology

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1. Introduction

The problem of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death)[1] is one of the most fundamental and intractable problems of human existence and has been dealt with in practically all philosophical and religious traditions. The *Yijing* 周易 (*Book of Changes*, *I Ching*, *Zhouyi*)[2] is a venerable and venerable part of the Chinese intellectual legacy. It is simultaneously the oldest of the Chinese classics, a manual of divination, a cosmological treatise, and a wellspring of profound philosophical and religious understanding. Although the *Yijing*'s position about

sheng 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) as a discrete philosophical matter is of fundamental importance, remarkably little systematic work has been done on this subject[3]. This study fills this hole by examining the *Yijing*'s conception of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) through the lens of its three core structural perspectives: "time and position" (*shi wei* 時位), the cosmological alternation of *yin* 陰 and *yang* 陽, and the existential stance of "delighting in Heaven" (*le tian* 樂天)[4]. It argues that the *Yijing* does not conceive of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) as abstract metaphysical categories or as a problem of the immortality of the soul, but as states of beings that are subject to change in specific situations, as reflection of the cosmic principles of *yin-yang* alternation, and ultimately as the basis for a distinct form of existential self-realization and transcendence.

Scholarship on the *Yijing*'s view of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death), both in Chinese and Western academic contexts, has been extensive yet fragmented. While numerous studies have addressed related themes, such as the philosophy of *sheng* 生 (life, generation) and "ceaseless *sheng*" (*shengsheng* 生生), the Confucian and Daoist views of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death), and the thought of individual Song–Ming Neo-Confucian philosophers. Few have treated the *Yijing*'s own conception of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) as an integrated philosophical problem in its own right. Moreover, the existing scholarship has tended to approach the question either through the lens of later philosophical traditions (especially Song–Ming Neo-Confucianism) or through comparative frameworks that impose external categories onto the *Yijing*'s internal thought. The result is that the distinctive structure of the *Yijing*'s thought on *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death): its grounding in the divinatory framework of "time and position", its cosmological elaboration in the *Yizhuan* 易傳 of *yin-yang* interaction, and its existential ideal of "delighting in Heaven", has not been adequately recognized or theorized.

In Chinese scholarship, research on the related themes to the *Yijing*'s view of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) can be broadly categorized into several strands. The first strand addresses the *Yijing*'s own concept of *sheng* 生 (life, generation) as a philosophical category of life and generation onto different perspectives. For example, Nie Zhenbin 聂振斌 (Nie 2023), Yu Hongwei 于宏偉 (Yu 2026), Liao Liying 廖力瑩and Ming Qing明清 (Liao and Ming 2025), Huang Yushun 黃玉順 (Huang 2023), Zhang Chunxiang 張春香 (C. Zhang 2010), Xiong Youlin 熊友林and Zou Jianbo鄒劍波 (Xiong and Zou 2007), Zeng Yuming 曾譽銘 (Zeng 2005), Liu Ying 劉穎 (Y. Liu 2023) have examined *sheng* 生 (life) from various angles, including metaphysical, exegetical, cosmological, and aesthetic. Yet, their focus remains predominantly on *sheng* 生 (life) alone, leaving the question of *si* 死 (death) and its systematic integration with *sheng* 生 (life) within the *Yijing*'s own framework of "time and position", cosmology, and existential transcendence largely unaddressed.

The second strand situates the *Yijing*'s thought within the broader context of Chinese philosophy, especially in relation to Confucianism and Daoism. Scholars such as Fei Yanying 費艷穎and Cao Guangyu 曹廣宇 (Fei and Cao 2015), Guo Rongjun 郭榮君 (R. Guo 2012), Guo Lubing 郭魯兵 (L. Guo 2008), Li Jian 李建 (J. Li 2009), Xiao Yan 肖雁 (Xiao 2019), Wang Yuxiao 王雨蕭 (Y. Wang 2023), Wang Shiwei 王世巍 (S. Wang 2016), and Zhao Chuan 趙川 (Zhao et al. 2026) have examined the *Yijing* alongside Confucian and Daoist views of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death), highlighting its ethical dimensions, its humanistic turn from theocentric to worldly concerns, and its continuity with the broader Chinese philosophical tradition. Collectively, these studies have effectively illuminated the *Yijing*'s place within the larger landscape of Chinese thought of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death). However, they tend to treat the *Yijing* as one source among many within a unified Confucian or Daoist framework, thereby obscuring what is distinctive about the *Yijing*'s own internal thought regarding its grounding of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) in the divinatory categories of "time and position", its cosmological elaboration through the alternation of *yin* and *yang*,

and its existential ideal of "delighting in Heaven" (*le tian* 樂天), rather than analyzing these features as a coherent philosophical structure in their own right.

The third strand involves later developments in the *Yijing* Commentary tradition, especially in Song–Ming Neo-Confucianism, where the subject of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) was again brought to the fore in reaction to Buddhist and Daoist objections. Scholars including Xie Chuanling 謝川嶺 (Xie 2025), Feng Bing 馮兵and Li Yadong李亞東 (Feng and Li 2020), Sheng Ning 盛寧 (Sheng 2023), Liu Linna 劉琳娜 (L. Liu 2016), Wu Genyou 吳根友 and Fu Zixuan付子軒 (Wu and Fu 2024), and Zhang Bo 張波 (B. Zhang 2009) have studied the perspectives of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) under later scholars such as Zhu Xi 朱熹, Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤, Zhang Zai 張載, Wang Yangming 王陽明, Liu Zongzhou 劉宗周, and Wang Fuzhi 王夫之, to explore how these scholars confronted the question of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) in their larger metaphysical and ethical frameworks. These studies have substantially advanced our understanding of the systematic treatment of Neo-Confucianism of the fundamental question of existence, sometimes in interaction with or in opposition to Buddhist and Daoist alternatives. But their main interest is in the philosophical systems of later thinkers, not in the *Yijing* itself, and they tend to read the *Yijing*'s conception of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) through the interpretive lens of these later traditions, thus obscuring the distinctive structure of the *Yijing*'s own thought.

Despite the richness of these contributions, a significant gap remains. Chinese scholarship has generated excellent studies on the philosophy of *sheng* 生 (life) in the *Yijing*, on the broader Confucian and Daoist ideas on *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death), and on the thinking of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) of later scholars. But these studies tend to work within the interpretive frameworks of their subfields, rather than to ask what the *Yijing*'s own structure of thought has to contribute to the understanding of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) as a single problem. The *Yijing*'s distinctive thought of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death), rooted in the divinatory categories of "time and position," raising *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) to the level of a cosmic principle by means of the alternation of *yin* and *yang*, and finally transforming *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) into the state of "delighting in Heaven," has not been studied systematically as an integrated whole.

In Western scholarship, direct engagement with the *Yijing*'s view of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) is relatively sparse, and existing studies tend to approach the question through the lenses of comparative philosophy, cosmology, or practical application, rather than examining the text's internal flow. For instance, in his dissertation *Time and Creativity in the "Yijing"* (Chang 1999), Wonsuk Chang argues that "change and time are the ultimate facts of the world" and that "every being is in the middle of self-realizing process", but he does not explore how this cosmological time relates to individual *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) as existential concerns. In a subsequent piece (Chang 2009), he refines the notion of time as a "spiral trajectory", but, again, he falls short of a systematic discussion of *si* 死 (death). Song (2014) examines the Confucian sacred canopy in the *Yijing*, noting that "*shengsheng* 生生 (ceaseless *sheng*, ceaseless generation and regeneration) is understood as ceaseless creative advance into novelty", and parses its four possible meanings. While it remains focused on the single concept of *shengsheng* rather than on the full range of the *Yijing*'s discourse on *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death), including its situational determination by "time and position" and its existential resolution in "delighting in Heaven". Warren Shibles treats the *Yijing* as a "metaphorical method of insight" into death, suggesting that the text offers a way of reframing our understanding of mortality (Shibles 1999). Yet, Shibles only employs the *Yijing* merely as a metaphorical device for reframing death, without engaging its internal structure of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) in the *Yijing*.

Beyond Shibles, several major Western scholars of the *Yijing* have engaged with themes adjacent to *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death), such as fate, change, and human finitude.

Yet none of them has comprehensively explored the interwoven structure of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) inside the *Yijing* itself. In his extensive historical analyses of the *Yijing*, Richard J. Smith has traced the development of major interpretive terms and approaches related to *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) in the *Yijing* exegesis, especially certain terms that address the related issues of "knowing fate" (*zhi ming* 知命) and "establishing fate" (*li ming* 立命). However, his book does not provide a systematic philosophical examination of how the *Yijing* itself conceives of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) as interrelated events (Smith 2013).

Hon Tze-ki has investigated the philosophy of divination in the *Xici*, arguing that the text offers an understanding of human finitude due to the limits of our cognitive abilities, and has also analyzed how the *Yijing*'s warnings about calamity and decay direct attention to "the dark side of human existence and things such as disease, deformation, degeneration, and death". While Hon acknowledges the *Yijing*'s engagement with human finitude and mortality, his focus remains on the epistemology of divination and the human fear of uncertainty, rather than on a systematic analysis of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) as cosmological and existential phase (Hon 2019, 2024, 2025). Lo Yuet Keung stresses the *Yijing*'s preoccupation with "the fluidity of existence" and its awareness of "enduring human qualities that reflect the virtues of heaven and earth", but his comparative approach is mainly based on process philosophy and *Huayan* Buddhism (Lo 2025). He does not examine the *Yijing*'s internal structure on *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death). Roger T. Ames has developed what he calls "zoetology as first philosophy" based on the *Yijing*'s emphasis on *sheng* 生 (life and generation). This cosmology is based on *sheng* 生 (life) itself as the main force behind change (Ames 2024). Ames's framework is helpful for understanding the process-oriented worldview of the *Yijing* and its emphasis on "becomings" rather than "beings," but it does not comprehensively address how the *Yijing* conceives of *si* 死 (death) as an integral part of this cosmology of ceaseless life and generation.

Besides these specific works, Western research on the *Yijing* has generally contributed greatly to the knowledge of the *Yijing*'s cosmology, divinatory approach and comparative philosophical potential. But these works have a basic limitation on the specific question of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death): they either treat *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) as subordinate themes within larger metaphysical frameworks such as time, change, process, or as practical concerns to be reframed rather than philosophically analyzed. No sufficient research has yet made of the *Yijing*'s own internal discourse on *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) a central object of investigation in its own right. This restriction is not only a Western phenomenon. Nor have Chinese studies been able to recognize the *Yijing*'s unique structure, whether by focusing on *sheng* 生 (life) and neglecting *si* 死 (death), by reading the text through the later spectacles and commentaries, or by reducing its vision to a general philosophy of "ceaseless generation".

This study addresses this gap by studying the view of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) in the *Yijing* as an integrated system. Its primary object is the thought of the *Yijing* itself. Later commentators are drawn upon not as authorities whose agreement would establish the meaning of the text, but as witnesses to a continuous tradition of reading the *Yijing*. In this sense, the argument proceeds from the text to the commentary rather than from the commentary to the text. This is not to say the later commentaries are treated as holding a single homogeneous understanding of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death). It is rather to say that each articulates, within his own framework, a reading that the *Yijing* text itself makes possible, and that the differences among them are acknowledged. The connections drawn are at the level of the interpretation of the *Yijing*, not claims of philosophical identity. This study is thereby organized around three related questions. First, what are the implications of the *Yijing*'s divinatory framework of "time and position" (*shi wei* 時位) for its view of

sheng 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death)? The study contends that *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) in the *Yijing* are not abstract notions but descriptions of the states of beings in specific situations: whether one advances or retreats, whether one flourishes or withers, depends on one's position and the time match with one's acts. This is quite different from the western tradition which starts by asking, "What is *sheng* 生 (life)?" or "What is *si* 死 (death)?" The *Yijing* starts by asking, "How does *sheng* 生 (life) or *si* 死 (death) manifest itself in this particular time and position?"

Second, how does the *Yijing* raise this situational knowledge to the level of a cosmic principle? This study finds out the *Yijing* understands life and death in terms of the cosmological framework of the alternation of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death), with *sheng* 生 (life) being the union of *yin* and *yang*, *si* 死 (death) being the separation of *yin* and *yang*. In this cosmological reading, *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) ceases to be personal and becomes an expression of the cosmic process of transformation. But, importantly, this does not make the person an instance of universal rule; rather, it gives the foundation for viewing individual *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) as participation in the continual generation, in terms of *shengsheng* 生生 (ceaseless *sheng*) of the cosmos.

Third, how does this cosmic understanding give rise to an existential attitude of "delights in Heaven" (*le tian* 樂天) and "knows one's own fate and what Heaven bestows" (*zhi ming* 知命)? The study contends that the *Yijing* does not merely rest at the concept of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) as cosmic principle, but extends to demonstrate how this understanding might be internalized as a transcendence state. By understanding that *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) are natural stages of cosmic operation, one can "delight in Heaven" and "know one's own fate and what Heaven bestows" and therefore overcome the fear of death and find inner peace. It is not a quietistic withdrawal from the world, but an active orientation, which allows one to "puts his life at stake (willing to lay down his very life) to realize his will" (*zhi ming sui zhi* 致命遂志), to live *sheng* 生 (life) to the fullest and, when *si* 死 (death) comes, to accept it as the inevitable completion of the *sheng* 生 (life) that has realized its purpose.

The study thus contends that the *Yijing* offers a philosophical and religious vision of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death): it provides a view that does not begin with metaphysical speculation about the nature of *sheng* 生 (life) or the immortality of the soul, but with the practical question of how to *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (die) well in specific situations. It provides a view that does not see *si* 死 (death) as the negation of *sheng* 生 (life), but as an integral phase of cosmic transformation. It provides a view that does not seek to escape *si* 死 (death), but finds in the acceptance of *si* 死 (death) the very condition for the fullest realization of *sheng* 生 (life). This perspective, founded in the texts and commentaries of the *Yijing* itself, has not yet been sufficiently appreciated in the academia. Therefore, this study attempts to fill this gap and so contribute to a richer understanding both of the *Yijing* and of the broader subject of how human beings might face the ultimate realities of life and death.

2. "Time and Position": Sheng 生 (Life) and Si 死 (Death) as the State of Beings Subject to Situational Changes

The *Yijing*'s sixty-four hexagrams are composed of six lines (*yao* 爻) and are arranged by positions and time. Each line statement describes the state at a given point in time and space. In this way, the question of life and death first appears. It does not merely serve as an abstract philosophical or religious theory, but also describes the state of affairs and beings such as the good fortune (*ji* 吉), misfortune (*xiong* 凶), regret (*hui* 悔), and humiliation (*lin* 吝) of a particular being in a particular "time and position" (*shi wei* 時位). The characters *sheng* 生 and *si* 死 and their related expressions in the *Zhouyi* proper (*Zhouyi Gujing* 周易古經)

constitute the core textual evidence for this perspective. Taking the hexagram *Guan* 觀 (Contemplation/Observation) as an example, the third line directly reads:

> "Observing my own *sheng* 生 (life), [I know when to] advance and retreat." (*guan wo sheng, jin tui* 觀我生，進退)

The *Xiangzhuan* 象傳 of the third line comments:

> "Observing my own *sheng* 生 (life), [I know when to] advance and retreat, and thus I do not stray from the *dao* 道." (*guan wo sheng, jin tui, wei shi dao ye* 觀我生，進退，未失道也)

The fifth line of the hexagram *Guan* states:

> "Observing my own *sheng* 生 (life), [being] the superior gentleman will be free from 'error with blame' (*jiu* 咎)." (*guan wo sheng, jun zi wu jiu* 觀我生，君子无咎)

The topmost line of the hexagram *Guan* states:

> "Observing the one's own *sheng* 生 (life), [being] the superior gentleman will be free from 'error with blame' (*jiu* 咎)." (*guan qi sheng, jun zi wu jiu* 觀其生，君子无咎)

Wang Bi's 王弼 reading of *sheng* 生 in the line statements of Guan 觀 as "activity and outgoing actions" (*dong chu* 動出) already shows that the *Yijing*'s discourse on *sheng* 生 is situational rather than essentialist.

As Wang Bi 王弼 directly states:

> "'Observing my own *sheng* 生 (life)' means the I observe my own *dao*. 'Observing the one's own *sheng* 生 (life)' means what the ordinary people observe… Therefore, when the superior gentleman's virtue is made apparent, he then achieves to be free from 'error with blame'. *Sheng* 生 (life) signifies activity and outgoing actions." (*guan wo sheng, zi guan qi dao zhe ye. guan qi sheng, wei min suo guan zhe ye…gu jun zi de jian, nai de wu jiu. sheng, you dong chu ye* 觀我生，自觀其道者也。觀其生，為民所觀者也……故君子德見，乃得无咎。生，猶動出也) (B. Wang 2012)

It reveals the *sheng* 生 ("life") reflects the living expression, the state and activity of existence of an individual in a certain position or time. It also provides the gateway to observe the *dao*. Back to the example of the hexagram *Guan*. Its third line is placed in the top line of the lower trigram, as annotated by Kong Yingda 孔穎達:

> "The third line occupies the extremity of the lower trigram, hence there is a time when it can advance. Moreover, it is located below the upper trigram, this is a place where it can retreat…Thus one can observe his own activities and outgoing actions. Therefore, when the time is suitable, it advances. When the time is not suitable, it retreats." (*san ju xia ti zhi ji, shi you ke jin zhi shi. you ju shang ti zhi xia, fu shi ke tui zhi di…ke yi zi guan wo zhi dong chu ye. gu shi ke ze jin, shi bu ke ze tui* 三居下體之極，是有可進之時；又居上體之下，復是可退之地……可以自觀我之動出也。故時可則進，時不可則退) (Kong 2009)

In the position of the third line of the hexagram *Guan*, it shows uncertainty between advance and retreat and needs to observe one's own life. Therefore, *sheng* 生 ("life") here reflects the living expression, the state and activity of existence of an individual to advance and retreat.

The fifth line of the hexagram *Guan* points out another situation. The fifth line is placed in the middle line of the upper trigram, which is identified as the superior position (*zun wei* 尊位) by the *Yijing*. Hence, it should function as what the sovereign is responsible for in the *Yijing*'s cosmology that benefits the ordinary people (and lines below). In other

words, the fifth line is the master position of the hexagram *Guan*, thereby it carries a leading function that transforms his great virtue of the superior gentleman into the ordinary people's life. This line of thought is interpreted by Wang Bi:

> "Dwelling in the superior position, being the master of the hexagram *Guan*, proclaiming and magnifying the great transformation (in terms of civilizing influence), thus shining over the four quarters. This represents the consummation and highest degree of the hexagram *Guan*: The superior transforms the inferior." (*ju yu zun wei, wei guan zhi zhu, xuan hong da hua, guang yu si biao, guan zhi ji zhe ye. shang zhi hua xia* 居於尊位，為觀之主，宣弘大化，光於四表，觀之極者也。上之化下) (B. Wang 2012)

Wang Bi summarizes the role of the fifth line as the consummation and highest degree of the hexagram *Guan*, which is to be the superior transforms the inferior. Kong Yingda further points out the position of the fifth line as the master of the hexagram *Guan*; it functions to transform and lead every being by the sage's great teaching and transformation (*jiaohua* 教化):

> "The fifth line [of *yang*] dwells in the superior position. It is the master of the hexagram *Guan*. All within the four seas (the whole realm) are transformed through me. If my great teaching and transformation are good, then every being under Heaven (throughout the world) will possess the mores of the superior gentleman." (*jiu wu ju zun, wei guan zhi zhu. si hai zhi nei, you wo er hua, wo jiao hua shan, ze tian xia you jun zi zhi feng* 九五居尊，為觀之主。四海之內，由我而化，我教化善，則天下有君子之風) (Kong 2009)

Both Wang Bi and Kong Yingda's annotations suggest the *sheng* 生 ("life") in the fifth line of hexagram *Guan* reflects the living expression, the state and activity of existence of "an individual in its superior position transforms his great virtue to his inferior". Accordingly, it provides the reason why the *Yijing* writes "[being] the superior gentleman will be free from 'error with blame' (*jiu* 咎)" (*jun zi wu jiu*君子无咎) right after "observing my own *sheng* 生 (life)" (*guan wo sheng* 觀我生): *sheng* in the fifth line reflects the activity of life in terms of shared virtue.

Under this circumstance, although the third line and the fifth line of the hexagram *Guan* both involve "observing my own *sheng* 生 (life)", the meanings that *sheng* 生 (life) reflects differ greatly due to the difference in position. This illustrates that the *Yijing*'s framework of thought does not limit *sheng* 生 as an abstract concept of life, but always in connection with "time and position". Thus, Zhu Xi朱熹 interprets this statement in his *Zhouyi Benyi*周易本義 (The original meaning of the *Yijing*):

> "My own *sheng* 生 (life) means that what I do and practice [in actions]. The third line, being a *yin* 陰 line in the third position, is placed above the lower trigram, and thus it has the option of either advancing or retreating." (*wo sheng, wo zhi suo xing ye. liu san, ju xia zhi shang, ke jin ke tui* 我生，我之所行也。六三，居下之上，可進可退) (Zhu 1992)

Zhu Xi's understanding of *sheng* 生 (life) is "what I do and practice". He emphasizes the actual conduct and expression of life within specific situations, rather than abstract essence of life. It confirms this supports this study's argument of *sheng* 生 (life) as the state of affairs and beings at a certain "time and position". This line of thought is further elaborated in the hexagram *Daguo* 大過 (Great Exceeding). For example, the second line of the hexagram *Daguo* states:

> "The withered poplar puts forth shoots. An old man gets a young wife. There will be no disadvantage." (*ku yang sheng ti, lao fu de qi nü qi, wu bu li* 枯楊生稊，老夫得其女妻，无不利)

While the fifth line of the hexagram *Daguo* states:

> "The withered poplar puts forth blossoms. An old woman gets a young husband. There will be no 'error with blame' (*jiu* 咎) and no praise." (*ku yang sheng hua, lao fu de shi fu, wu jiu wu yu* 枯楊生華，老婦得士夫，无咎无譽)

The second line of *Daguo* provides an "image" (*xiang* 象) of a *yang* 陽 line in a *yin* 陰position. Thereby, it is firm (*gang* 剛) but it can also be yielding (*ruo* 柔). In this case, even though it is in the situation of *Daguo* (greatly exceeding the optimum), it can still "put forth shoots". *Sheng* 生 (life) sprouts anew even in the midst of withered. Wang Bi directly comments:

> "When the old is excessive, it withers; when the young is excessive, it remains immature. But when the old shares its strength and experience with the young, the young matures; and when the young shares its vitality with the old, the withered revives. This is what is called 'mutual complementation when it is excessing' (*guo yi xiang yu* 過以相與)." (*lao guo ze ku, shao guo ze zhi. yi lao fen shao, ze zhi zhe zhang. yi zhi fen lao, ze ku zhe rong, guo yi xiang yu zhi wei ye* 老過則枯，少過則稚。以老分少，則稚者長；以稚分老，則枯者榮，過以相與之謂也) (B. Wang 2012)

The Yijing uses the "old man and the young wife" to describe the yang 陽 line in the yin 陰position in the second line of hexagram Daguo. To Wang Bi's interpretation, the reason for "the withered poplar puts forth shoots" refers to "when it is excessing, the yin and yang is in mutual complementation" (guo yi xiang yu 過以相與). Therefore, the sheng 生 (life) here reflects the life power sprouts anew in the midst of withered.

The fifth line of the hexagram *Daguo* provides an "image" (*xiang* 象) of a *yang* 陽 line in a *yang* position. When it is in the situation of the *Daguo* (greatly exceeding the optimum), this will be regarded as "excessively too strong". Therefore, even it "puts forth blossoms", it will not go beyond "no 'error with blame' (*jiu* 咎) and no praise". The *Xiangzhuan* directly describes the *sheng* 生 (life) in the fifth line of the hexagram *Daguo* as:

> "A withered poplar putting forth blossoms: how could such a thing be long lasting?" (*ku yang sheng hua, he ke jiu ye* 枯楊生華，何可久也)

Even the *sheng* 生 (life) in the fifth line can put forth blossoms, the *Yijing* does not consider it is a long lasting and true life power. Kong Yingda has deeply explained what is meant by "how could such a thing be long lasting" in the *Yijing*:

> "A withered and dried-up poplar having been rescued, only just manages to produce blossoms. How can it last long? It will soon inevitably decline and wither away." (*ku gao zhi yang, bei zheng cai de sheng hua, he ke zhang jiu? xun dang shuai luo ye* 枯槁之楊，被拯纔得生華，何可長久？尋當衰落也) (Kong 2009)

This suggests the *sheng* 生 (life) in the fifth line reflects the expression, state and activity that are coming to inevitably wither. As Kong Yingda further points out:

> "It merely causes the withered poplar to produce blossoms, but it cannot make it put forth new shoots." (*shi ku yang sheng hua er yi, bu neng sheng ti ye* 使枯楊生華而已，不能生稊也) (Kong 2009)

There indicates a huge difference in between the *sheng* 生 (life) in the two lines of the hexagram *Daguo*. A shoot is a delicate sprout, with the promise of growth. As for the a flower (*hua* 華) in full flush of bloom, after flush comes decline. This disparity between

these two lines shows the basic attitude of the *Yijing* to *sheng* 生 (life): *sheng* 生 (life) itself does not necessarily represent an absolute good. What matters the meaning of *sheng* is whether it is situated in an appropriate and fitting "time and position" or not. Nevertheless, the meaning of *si* 死 (death) in the *Yijing* is also subject to the state of affairs and beings, "time and position". The character *si* 死 (death) in the *Yijing* are directly associated with situations in specific times and positions. For instance, The fourth line of the hexagram *Li* 離 (Clinging/ Brilliant/ Fire) reads:

> "Its coming is sudden, as if it flames up, as if it is like to *si* 死 (dead), as if it is abandoned" (*tu ru qi lai ru, fen ru, si ru, qi ru* 突如其來如，焚如，死如，棄如)
>
> Wang Bi remarks:
>
> "Being at the moment when the *dao* of brightness begins to change, from darkness it begins to dawn, from being submerged it begins to emerge, therefore it is called 'its coming is sudden'…treading in a position that is not its own, desiring to advance its intensity, to scorch the one above, its fate will certainly not come to completion, therefore it is called 'if it is like to *si* 死 (dead)'" (*chu yu ming dao shi bian zhi ji, hun er shi xiao, mei er shi chu, gu yue tu ru qi lai ru…lü fei qi wei, yu jin qi sheng, yi yan qi shang, ming bi bu zhong, gu yue si ru* 處於明道始變之際，昏而始曉，沒而始出，故曰突如其來如……履非其位，欲進其盛，以炎其上，命必不終，故曰死如) (B. Wang 2012)
>
> Kong Yingda supplements this line of view:
>
> "The fourth line is at the point of initial change. The third is the beginning of darkness; the fourth is the beginning of dawn. The third is already submerged; the fourth is just emerging: it comes suddenly." (*si chu shi bian zhi ji, san wei shi hun, si wei shi xiao. san wei yi mei, si wei shi chu, tu ran er zhi* 四處始變之際，三為始昏，四為始曉。三為已沒，四為始出，突然而至) (Kong 2009)

The *si* 死 (death) in this line does not reflect a problem of life, nor a direct description of death. Instead, it reveals an "image" (*xiang* 象): one is in the awkward line position of being "brightness not yet fully assimilated". One wants to be bright but is not able to shine greatly. One wants to advance but cannot do so correctly. Hence, one suffers from bad fortune described as burning-like and it is to like *si* 死 (dead). The *si* 死 (death) does not mean the process of death here. Rather, it describes that the position and situation in the fourth line of the hexagram *Li* is extremely dangerous, as Wang Bi described in terms of "fate will certainly not come to completion".

The topmost line of the hexagram *Feng* 豐 (Abundance/Fullness) also states:

> "Though his house is grand, his household is shrouded in obscurity. Peering and peeping through the doorway, he finds it utterly empty and deserted. For three years no one appears. There is misfortune." (*feng qi wu, bu qi jia, kui qi hu, qu qi wu ren, san sui bu di, xiong* 豐其屋，蔀其家，闚其戶，闃其无人，三歲不覿，凶)

Though this line does not explicitly mention *si* 死 (death), the desolate image of "utterly empty and deserted" and "for three years no one appears" already implies the analogy of disappearance and cessation of life in a specific situation. However, it does not mean a simple description of the process of death here. As annotated by Cheng Yi 程頤:

> "He who undertakes the responsibility of great abundance, lies in being timely but not in the proper position. In the case of the topmost line of *yin* here, nothing about its situation is appropriate. Its misfortune is thus evident." (*dang feng da zhi ren, zai hu de shi er bu dang wei, ru shang liu zhe, chu wu yi dang, qi xiong ke zhi* 當豐大之任，在乎得時而不當位，如上六者，處无一當，其凶可知) (Cheng 2018)

The desolate image mentioned by the topmost line of the hexagram *Feng* does not directly discuss the cessation of life or disappearance of beings. Instead, it points out a misfortune situation in an inappropriate "time and position". Cheng Yi explains the image of "emptiness of people" with "not in the proper position", which reveals once again the fundamental logic of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) of the *Yijing*: *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) does not limit to the life and death of beings, nor an arrangement of fate. It is determined by the "time and position" in which they are situated.

Building on this argument, a great number of the hexagram and line statements in the *Yijing* that apply the concepts but do not explicitly use the characters *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) are all discussing the existence, demise, fortune, and misfortune of life in specific times and positions. For instance, the topmost line of the hexagram *Qian* 乾 (Heaven) states[5]:

> "The dragon that soars too high and exceeds the proper limit, it will regret its excess." (*kang long you hui* 亢龍有悔)
>
> *Wenyan* 文言 explains it as:
>
> "Noble but without a proper position. Positioned high but without the people (subjects). The worthy are beneath him, yet he has no one to assist him. This is why any action he takes will lead to regret." (*gui er wu wei, gao er wu min, xian ren zai xia wei er wu fu, shi yi dong er you hui ye* 貴而无位，高而无民，賢人在下位而无輔，是以動而有悔也)

The "regret" of the dragon that soars too high and exceeds the proper limit points out a condition of *si* 死 (death): at the extreme of position, in peril, at the height of flourishing, on the verge of decline, which reveals the judgement of the *Yijing* upon the state of demise when reaching reverse at their extreme. Likewise, the topmost line of the hexagram *Kun* 坤 (Earth) states[6]:

> "The dragon fights in the open field (the dragon of Heaven and Earth), its blood is black and yellow (the colors of Heaven and Earth)." (*long zhan yu ye, qi xue xuan huang* 龍戰于野，其血玄黃)

The topmost line of the hexagram *Kun* depicts an ending extreme scenario (*si* 死 in the sense) of *yin* at its peak clashing with *yang*. Moreover, the hexagram *Fu* 復 (Returning) states:

> "To revolve and return to the *dao*, for seven days there will be a return." (*fan fu qi dao, qi ri lai fu* 反復其道，七日來復)

The hexagram *Fu* has one line of *yang* born under the five lines of *yin*. It describes the life's re-sprouting after its extreme decline. These hexagram and line statements present the different states of existence of life in specific times and positions: life or death, good fortune or misfortune. This precisely points to the fundamental concern of the *Yijing* as a book of divination.

Under this circumstance, it implies the core meanings of this perspective: *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) are not primarily the abstract question of beings and the "nature", it points out the questions depends on human agency and situations. Whether a person lives or dies, meets good fortune or misfortune, depends largely on what "time and position" they are in and how they respond to the time and position. The sixty-four hexagrams and three hundred and eighty-four lines of the *Yijing* essentially provide the summarized possible life situations. When one acts right according to the proper time and proper position, even a withered poplar can put forth shoots. When one acts without corresponding to the proper time and proper position, even the grand and spacious house will be empty of people. As the *Xici* 繫辭 says:

> "Change is ceaseless and never settles, it circulates throughout the six void places (the lines). The upper and lower positions are not permanent or fixed, the firm and the yielding interchange with each other. There is no fixed norm or constant rule to be held to, it only adapts to change." (*bian dong bu ju, zhou liu liu xu, shang xia wu chang, gang rou xiang yi, bu ke wei dian yao, wei bian suo shi* 變動不居，周流六虛，上下无常，剛柔相易，不可為典要，唯變所適)

Life and death, good fortune and misfortune of life are constantly changing with the shifts in time and position. There is no eternal life, nor straightly defined death. Everything depends on the specific circumstances of "adapting to change". This approach, which places the question of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) within time and positions, is fundamentally different from the path of Western traditions that discuss life and death from the perspective such as "the immortality of the soul" or "the nature of life". It does not begin by defining "what *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) is", or "what defines the nature of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death)". Yet, it begins the question by observing "how *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) manifests within certain position and time". This unique approach provides the *Yijing* with the internal logic to further elevate 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) to the level of cosmic principles, which will be discussed in the next section.

3. The Union and Separation of Yin 陰 and Yang 陽: Sheng 生 (Life) and Si 死 (Death) as the Cosmological Principle

The first perspective of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) understands *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) as the state of affairs and beings in a particular "time and position" (*shi wei* 時位). The second perspective of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) deepens the discussion of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) into the fundamental law of cosmic change. The *Yizhuan* made a crucial contribution to summarize the phenomenon of life and death, fortune and misfortune scattered throughout the sixty-four hexagrams and three hundred and eighty-four lines, to the universal principle of "the waxing and waning for the alternation and interplay of *yin* and *yang*" (*yin yang xiao zhang* 陰陽消長) and the aggregation and dispersion of the invisible vital force (*qi* 氣). In this sense, *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) are necessary links in the great process of cosmic transformation in the *Yijing*.

The *Xici* directly states:

> "Looking up, he observes the patterns of Heaven. Looking down, he examines the principles and configurations of Earth. In this way he comes to know the causes of the dark and the light and the reasons behind the hidden and the manifest. Tracing origins and turning back to endings, thus he knows the doctrine and meaning of *si* 死 (death) and *sheng* 生 (life). The refined essence of *qi* constitutes things, the roaming souls bring about change. Thus, he comes to know the true nature and conditions of spirits and deities." (*yang yi guan yu tian wen, fu yi cha yu di li, shi gu zhi you ming zhi gu. yuan shi fan zhong, gu zhi si sheng zhi shuo. jing qi wei wu, you hun wei bian, shi gu zhi gui shen zhi qing zhuang* 仰以觀於天文，俯以察於地理，是故知幽明之故。原始反終，故知死生之說。精氣為物，遊魂為變，是故知鬼神之情狀)

This passage centrally embodies the core structure of the *Yizhuan*'s view of *sheng* 生 and *si* 死:

(1) The sages, by looking up and looking down (observation of the myriad things in between Heaven and Earth), know the causes of the hidden and manifest.

(2) The sages, by tracing origins and returning to ends, know the doctrine and meaning of *si* 死 (death) and *sheng* 生 (life).

(3) The sages find out the refined essence of *qi* constitutes things, the roaming souls bring about change, therefore he comes to know the true nature and conditions of spirits and deities.

This three-layered structure forms a progressively complete framework to explain all the cosmic phenomena through the changes of *yin* and *yang*. The key to comprehending the *Yizhuan*'s view of *sheng* 生 and *si* 死 refers to the line "tracing origins and turning back to endings, thus he knows the doctrine and meaning of *si* 死 (death) and *sheng* 生 (life)" (*yuan shi fan zhong, gu zhi si sheng zhi shuo* 原始反終，故知死生之說). "Tracing origins" (*yuan shi* 原始) means to study the start of things, while "returning to ends" (*fan zhong* 反終) means to contemplate the finish of things. The sage, by considering the whole process of things from the beginning to the finish, can understand the cosmic principles of *sheng* 生 and *si* 死. As Han Kangbo 韓康伯 notes:

> "What is called 'the hidden and the manifest' refers to the phenomena of the formed and the formless. As for *si* 死 (death) and *sheng* 生 (life), they refer to the numbers (the ordered patterns) of ending and origins.'" (*you ming zhe, you xing wu xing zhi xiang. si sheng zhe, zhong shi zhi shu ye* 幽明者，有形无形之象。死生者，終始之數也) (B. Wang 2012)

Han Kangbo points out the *si* 死 (death) and *sheng* 生 (life) in the *Yijing* means the "numbers of ending and origins". It is not limited to the life and death of a specific individual, but the universal "principle" and "number" by which all life proceeds from origins to the endings. Kong Yingda further explains:

> "By employing the *dao* of the *Yi* 易, one looks upward and downward in observation, knows the hidden of the formless and the manifest of the formed, as well as the principles and the causes of things." (*yi yong yi dao, yang guan fu cha, zhi wu xing zhi you, you xing zhi ming, yi li shi gu ye* 以用易道，仰觀俯察，知无形之幽，有形之明，義理事故也) (Kong 2009)

and

> "By employing the principles of the *Yi* 易, one traces to the source and exhausting the origins of the affairs and things, and turns back to examine their final ends. From the origin to the end, for fortune and misfortune, these are all completely encompassed. On this account, one knows the numbers and patterns of *si* 死 (death) and *sheng* 生 (life)." (*yong yi li, yuan qiong shi wu zhi chu shi, fan fu shi wu zhi zhong mo, shi zhong ji xiong, jie xi bao luo, yi ci zhi gu, zhi si sheng zhi shu ye* 用易理，原窮事物之初始，反復事物之終末，始終吉凶，皆悉包羅，以此之故，知死生之數也) (Kong 2009)

Kong Yingda's commentary emphasizes the *Yijing*'s way of "employing the *dao* and the principle of the *Yi*" to understand the hidden and manifest, the origins and the endings, and the *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death). This reveals the fundamental method of the *Yizhuan*: the *Yijing* does not directly depending on common experience to understand the nature of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death). Instead, it understands the nature of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) through the cosmic principles of the alternative interchange of *yin* and *yang*, which are contained in the *Yijing* itself. Cheng Yi's explanation is considerably more succinct:

> "Tracing the origin is enough to know its end. Turning back from the end is enough to know its origin. The doctrine of *si* 死 (death) and *sheng* 生 (life) is simply this (and no more). Therefore, taking spring as the beginning and tracing it forward, there must be winter. Taking winter as the end and tracing it backward, there must be spring. *Si* 死 (death) and *sheng* 生 (life), they are probably of a similar kind and goes in this cycle." (*yuan shi ze zu yi zhi qi zhong, fan zhong*

> *ze zu yi zhi qi shi, si sheng zhi shuo ru shi er yi yi. gu yi chun wei shi er yuan zhi, qi bi you dong. yi dong wei zhong er fan zhi, qi bi you chun. si sheng zhe, qi yu shi lei ye* 原始則足以知其終，反終則足以知其始，死生之說如是而已矣。故以春為始而原之，其必有冬。以冬為終而反之，其必有春。死生者，其與是類也) (Cheng and Cheng 2004)

Cheng Yi, by means of the analogy of the four seasons, integrates *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) into the cosmic order of cyclical endings and beginnings. Just as spring must turn into winter and winter into spring, so must *sheng* turn into *si* 死 (death) and *si* 死 (death) into *sheng*. This is the inevitable law of cosmic operation. Hu Bingwen 胡炳文 also writes:

> "The *Yijing* are simply *yin* and *yang*. The hidden and the manifest, *si* 死 (death) and *sheng* 生 (life), spirits and deities are all transformations of *yin* and *yang*, they are the *dao* of Heaven and Earth." (*yi zhe, yin yang er yi, you ming si sheng gui shen jie yin yang zhi bian, tian di zhi dao ye* 易者，陰陽而已，幽明死生鬼神皆陰陽之變，天地之道也) (Hu 2014)

The phrase "are all transformations of *yin* and *yang*" interprets the *Yizhuan*'s view on *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death): *sheng* and *si* are specific expressions of the cosmic change of *yin* and *yang* in the field of life[7]. Based on this line of thought, the *Jiujia Yi* 九家易 (*Nine Schools of the Yijing*) states

> "*Yin* and *yang* intermingle and unite: this is the origin of things. *Yin* and *yang* separate: this is the end of things. When [*yin* and *yang*] united, there is *sheng* 生 (life). When [*yin* and *yang*] separated, there is *si* 死 (death). Therefore, by tracing the origin and reaching the end, one thus understands the doctrine of *si* 死 (death) and *sheng* 生 (life). The time of union is the hexagram *Tai* 泰 (Peace), and it corresponds to spring. The time of separation is the hexagram *Pi* 否 (Standstill), and it corresponds to autumn." (*yin yang jiao he, wu zhi shi ye. yin yang fen li, wu zhi zhong ye. he ze sheng, li ze si. gu yuan shi ji zhong, gu zhi si sheng zhi shuo yi. jiao he tai shi, chun ye. fen li fou shi, qiu ye* 陰陽交合，物之始也。陰陽分離，物之終也。合則生，離則死。故原始及終，故知死生之說矣。交合泰時，春也。分離否時，秋也) (D. Li 2011)

This statement unifies "the origin" and *sheng* 生 (life) in the "union" of *yin* and *yang*, and unifies "the end" and *si* 死 (death) in the "separation" of *yin* and *yang*. By this sense, *sheng* 生 (life) is nothing but the union of *yin* and *yang*, and *si* 死 (death) is nothing but the separation of *yin* and *yang*. The phrase "when [*yin* and *yang*] united, there is *sheng* 生 (life). When [*yin* and *yang*] separated, there is *si* 死 (death)" provides a concise summary of the *Yijing* studies in the Han dynasty regarding the nature of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death). Spring refers to the time of *Tai* 泰, when *yin* and *yang* unite and all things grow. Autumn refers to the time of *Pi* 否, when *yin* and *yang* separate and all things wither. Similarly, *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) are not two completely separate domains, but different stages of the same process of *yin* and *yang* change. This suggests the *Yijing* does not simply regard *si* 死 (death) as the opposite or termination of *sheng* 生 (life), but rather understands *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) within the framework of the cycle of "ending and originates" (*zhongshi* 終始). The *Tuanzhuan* 彖傳 of the hexagram *Qian* states:

> "The Great Brilliance (*da ming* 大明) illuminates the ends and origins, the six positions (line positions) are completed in their time, and [the sage] rides on the six dragons to govern Heaven." (*da ming zhong shi, liu wei shi cheng, shi cheng liu long yi yu tian* 大明終始，六位時成，時乘六龍以御天)

The phrase "the Great Brilliance illuminates the ends and origins" (大明終始 *da ming zhong shi*) means a thorough understanding of the cycle in which endings give rise to new beginnings, and beginnings inevitably lead to ends. It embodies the cycle in which "ending then originates", as directly indicated multiple times by the *Yijing*, such as:

> "It is that by which the myriad things and all beings are brought to completion (end), yet they are brought to the origin and initiates them anew." (*wan wu zhi suo cheng zhong er suo cheng shi ye* 萬物之所成終而所成始也)
>
> and
>
> "It is advantageous to proceed, ending accordingly gives rise to the origin to newly begin." (*li you you wang, zhong ze you shi ye*利有攸往，終則有始也)
>
> and
>
> "Ending accordingly gives rise to the origin to newly begin, this is the course of Heaven." (*zhong ze you shi, tian xing ye* 終則有始，天行也)

When examining *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) from this perspective, *si* 死 (death) serves as the preparation for new *sheng* 生 (life). In this cycle, *si* 死 (death), like the closing of the door, is not merely the cessation of *sheng* 生 (life), but the necessary condition of its renewal; as the *Xici* says, "Closing the door is called *Kun*; opening the door is called *Qian*" (*he hu wei zhi kun, pi hu wei zhi qian*闔戶謂之坤，辟戶謂之乾)[8]. It reveals that the *Yijing* does not think *si* 死 (death) an absolute terminus, but rather the prerequisite for a new beginning. Just as the bleakness of winter nurtures the vitality of spring, so too does the stillness of *si* 死 (death) contain within it the potential for new *sheng* 生 (life). The *Xici* declares:

> "The great virtue of Heaven and Earth is called *sheng* 生 (life, generation)." (*tian di zhi da de yue sheng* 天地之大德曰生)
>
> and
>
> "*Shengsheng* 生生 (the ceaseless *sheng* 生) is called *Yi* 易." (*sheng sheng zhi wei yi* 生生之謂易)

This suggests *sheng* 生 (life) is not only the great virtue of Heaven and Earth, but also the very nature of the *Yijing* itself. Heaven and Earth regard *sheng* as their greatest virtue, and the cosmos takes the ceaseless *sheng*生 (life) as its most fundamental principle. Within this framework, the *si* 死 (death) of an individual does not constitute a negation of *sheng* 生 (life). The *si* 死 (death) of one thing is precisely the condition for the life of another, the end of one life is exactly the prerequisite for the unfolding of a new life. If one can grasp this principle, then individual death ceases to be a terrifying void and becomes instead a natural and necessary link within the great transformative process of the cosmos's ceaseless generation.

After the phrase "tracing origins and turning back to endings, thus he knows the doctrine and meaning of *si* 死 (death) and *sheng* 生 (life)" (*yuan shi fan zhong, gu zhi si sheng zhi shuo* 原始反終，故知死生之說), the *Xici* goes on:

> "The refined essence of *qi* constitutes things, the roaming souls bring about change. Thus, he comes to know the true nature and conditions of spirits and deities." (*jing qi wei wu, you hun wei bian, shi gu zhi gui shen zhi qing zhuang*精氣為物，遊魂為變，是故知鬼神之情狀)
>
> Kong Yingda explains:
>
> "'The refined essence of *qi* constitutes things' means that the refined and spiritual *qi* of *yin* and *yang* accumulates in dense intermingling to form all things. 'The roaming souls bring about change' means that once things have accumulated

> and reached their extreme, they scatter. At the moment of scattering, the floating essence (roaming souls) leave the physical forms and effect changes, so that *sheng* 生 (life) changes into *si* 死 (death), completion changes into ruin, or even before *si* 死 (death), they may transform into different kinds. Therefore, 'to know the true nature and conditions of spirits and deities' means that by exhausting the principles of the *Yijing* and fully comprehending the transformations of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death), one thereby knows the inner and outer nature and conditions of spirits and deities." (*jing qi wei wu zhe, wei yin yang jing ling zhi qi, yin yun ji ju er wei wan wu ye. you hun wei bian zhe, wu ji ji ju, ji ze fen san, jiang san zhi shi, fu you jing hun, qu li wu xing, er wei gai bian, ze sheng bian wei si, cheng bian wei bai, huo wei si zhi jian, bian wei yi lei ye. shi gu zhi gui shen zhi qing zhuang zhe, neng qiong yi li, jin sheng si bian hua, yi ci zhi gu, neng zhi gui shen zhi nei wai qing zhuang ye* 精氣為物者，謂陰陽精靈之氣，氤氳積聚而為萬物也。遊魂為變者，物既積聚，極則分散，將散之時，浮遊精魂，去離物形，而為改變，則生變為死，成變為敗，或未死之間，變為異類也。是故知鬼神之情狀者，能窮易理，盡生死變化，以此之故，能知鬼神之內外情狀也) (Kong 2009)

The *Yijing* defines things (including beings) as "the refined essence of *qi*". Kong Yingda further interprets "things" as accumulation of *qi*, and "the roaming souls bring about change" as dispersion of *qi*. This sees *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) as the two ways (*yin* and *yang*) of *qi*'s aggregation and dispersion: the accumulation of *qi* means *sheng* 生 (life), the dispersion of *qi* means *si* 死 (death). This is in the same line of thinking as the *JiuJia Yi*'s statement of "when [*yin* and *yang*] united, there is *sheng* 生 (life). When [*yin* and *yang*] separated, there is *si* 死 (death)" (D. Li 2011). Kong Yingda further particularly emphasizes that "by thoroughly mastering the principle of aggregation and dispersal, one knows the true nature and conditions of spirits and deities" (*ji ju san zhi li, ze zhi gui shen zhi qing zhuang ye*極聚散之理，則知鬼神之情狀也) (Kong 2009), points out the *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) and the spirits and deities (*gui shen* 鬼神)[9] shares the same nature: both refer to the manifestations of the aggregation and dispersion of *qi*.

Zhang Zai 張載provides a thorough interpretation on this line of view. As he states:

> "The *Yijing* says, 'tracing origins and turning back to endings, thus he knows the doctrine and meaning of *si* 死 (death) and *sheng* 生 (life)' (*yuan shi fan zhong, gu zhi si sheng zhi shuo* 原始反終，故知死生之說). This means that by tracing the origins one knows *sheng* 生 (life), then by seeking its end one knows that *si* 死 (death) is certain. This is why the Master Confucius responded directly to Zilu's 子路 question without any concealment." (*yi wei yuan shi fan zhong gu zhi si sheng zhi shuo zhe, wei yuan shi er zhi sheng, ze qiu qi zhong er zhi si bi yi, ci fu zi suo yi zhi ji lu zhi wen er bu yin ye* 易謂"原始反終故知死生之說"者，謂原始而知生，則求其終而知死必矣，此夫子所以直季路之問而不隱也) (Z. Zhang 2000)

and

> "Having Fully realize and exhaust one's nature, in *sheng* 生 (life) there is nothing gained, and in *si* 死 (death) nothing lost." (*jin xing ran hou zhi sheng wu suo de ze si wu suo sang* 盡性然後知生无所得則死无所喪) (Z. Zhang 2000)

Zhang Zai, based on the view *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) as the aggregation and dispersion of *qi*, points out that *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) reflect the natural states of being that all will certainly experience. There is nothing mysterious about the state. Since *sheng* and *si* are just the aggregation and dispersion of *qi*, *sheng* 生 (life) gains nothing from the void, and *si* 死 (death) loses nothing. For this reason, one can encounter *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) with an unruffled mind, free of attachment and anxiety. Hu Guang 胡廣quotes Zhang Zai's point of view and says:

> "The refined essence of *qi* is from non-being to being. Wandering souls are from being to non-being. From non-being to being refers to the conditions of the deities (*shen* 神). From being to non-being is the conditions of the spirits (*gui* 鬼, ghosts). From non-being to being, therefore it becomes manifest as things, that is the visible form of the deities. From being to non-being, therefore it is hidden and transformed into the form of spirits." (*jing qi zhe, zi wu er you. you hun zhe, zi you er wu. zi wu er you, shen zhi qing ye. zi you er wu, gui zhi qing ye. zi wu er you, gu xian er wei wu, shen zhi zhuang ye. zi you er wu, gu yin er, wei bian gui zhi zhuang ye* 精氣者，自无而有。遊魂者，自有而无。自无而有，神之情也。自有而无，鬼之情也。自无而有，故顯而為物，神之狀也。自有而无，故隱而，為變鬼之狀也) (Hu et al. 2024)

Zhang Zai defines *sheng* 生 (life) as "coming from non-being into being" and *si* 死 (death) as "going from being into non-being". Thereby, he further indicates the nature of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) refer to the transformation of *qi* between "being" and "non-being". This transformation is not mysterious or unknowable, but a universal law of the operation of the cosmos.

Based on this line of thought, Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 further explains:

> "Origin and ending are not the same case as 'being' and 'non-being' do. The origin means the start of aggregation [of *qi*]: daily it increases, and *sheng* 生 (life) becomes flourishing gradually. The ending means the completion of aggregation [of *qi*]: when its quantity (number) is full, it daily recedes and rests in obscurity. Without being, there is no way to begin and originate. On the other hand, if the end merely results in non-being, it cannot be called an end. The very source from which something originates (begins) is the same source to which it returns at its end." (*shi zhong, fei you wu zhi wei ye. shi zhe ju zhi shi, ri zeng er sheng yi sheng, zhong zhe ju zhi zhong, shu ying ze ri tui er xi yu you. fei you ze wu yi shi, zhong er wu ze yi bu wei zhi zhong yi, suo zi shi zhe ji suo zi zhong* 始終，非有无之謂也；始者聚之始，日增而生以盛，終者聚之終，數盈則日退而息於幽。非有則无以始，終而無則亦不謂之終矣，所自始者即所自終) (F. Wang 2011)

Wang Fuzhi contends that "Origin and ending are not the same case as 'being' and 'non-being' do". Origin and ending, *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death), are not in the same way how the unity of the opposites pair "being" and "non-being" are used. Instead, they both refer to distinct stages of "aggregation". *Sheng* 生 (life) does not generate from void (without *qi*), and *si* 死 (death) does not go back to absolute nothing (without *qi*). This interpretation shows a difference to the Buddhist framework of "reincarnation" and the Daoist framework of "being and non-being mutually generates each other" (*you wu xiang sheng*有无相生). It establishes a unique view of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) within the *Yijing*'s cosmology[10]: *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) are just the aggregation and dispersion of *yin* and *yang* [*qi*]. This is directly elaborated by Zhu Xi:

> "The *Yijing* are nothing but *yin* and *yang*. The hidden and the manifest, *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death), spirits and deities: all these mentioned are nothing but transformations of *yin* and *yang*, and this constitutes the *dao* of Heaven and Earth." (*yi zhe, yin yang er yi. you ming, si sheng, gui shen, jie yin yang zhi bian, tian di zhi dao ye* 易者，陰陽而已。幽明、死生、鬼神，皆陰陽之變，天地之道也) (Zhu 1992)

Zhu Xi further claims:

> "The refined essence of *qi* of *yin* and *yang* aggregate and form into things, this is the manifestation of the *shen* 神 (deities). The *hun* 魂 (the soul of

> *yang*) wanders and the *po* 魄 (the soul of *yin*) descends, they disperse and become change. this is the return of the spirits (*gui* 鬼)" (*yin jing yang qi, ju er cheng wu, shen zhi shen ye. hun you po jiang, san er wei bian, gui zhi gui ye* 陰精陽氣，聚而成物，神之伸也。魂游魄降，散而為變，鬼之歸也) (Zhu 1992)

Zhu Xi interprets the hidden and the manifest, *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death), spirits and deities as the transformations of *yin* and *yang* that constitutes the *dao* of Heaven and Earth and the *Yijing*'s cosmology. Therefore, *sheng* and *si*, spirits and deities, are merely two directions of the same process of the transformation of *yin* and *yang*. Drawing on Zhu Xi's line of view, Hu Bingwen states:

> "These so-called the hidden and the manifest, *si* 死 (death) and *sheng* 生 (life), spirits and deities are none other than what is meant by *yin* and *yang*." (*ci suo wei you ming si sheng gui shen ji yin yang zhi wei ye* 此所謂幽明死生鬼神即陰陽之謂也) (Hu et al. 2024)

Zhu Xi and Hu Bingwen's statements unify the hidden and manifest, *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death), spirits and deities under the cosmology of the change of *yin* and *yang*, revealing *sheng* and *si* as the necessary manifestations of *yin* and *yang* change in the realm of life. This line of thought reveals an important intellectual innovation of the *Yijing*: the *Yizhuan* no longer considers *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) only as happenings of human lives, but also as the universal rule of cosmic change. The birth of a person is just the temporary aggregation of *qi* by the union of *yin* and *yang*, the death of an individual is just the dissipation of *qi* by the separation of *yin* and *yang*. They refer to specific realizations of this universal principle. As the *Xici* says explicitly:

> "*Shengsheng* 生生 (the ceaseless *sheng* 生) is called *Yi* 易." (*sheng sheng zhi wei yi* 生生之謂易)

Beyond *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death), the *Yijing*'s cosmos regards *shengsheng* 生生 (the ceaseless *sheng*, which includes the cycle of *sheng* and *si*) as its most essential premise. In this theory, the death of an individual is not the negation of *sheng* 生 (life), since the flow of *shengsheng* 生生 does not halt. In this cosmology, the *si* 死 (death) of one thing provides the condition for the *sheng* 生 (life) of another; the end of one life is the basis for the unfolding of a new life. As Kong Yingda argues:

> "*Shengsheng* 生生 refers to a statement of unceasing continuity. *Yin* and *yang* transform and interchange, the later *sheng* 生 (life) follows the previous one, so that all things are constantly generated, this is called the *Yi*. The *sheng* before and after undergo transformation and alteration." (*sheng sheng, bu jue zhi ci. yin yang bian zhuan, hou sheng ci yu qian sheng, shi wan wu heng sheng, wei zhi yi ye. qian hou zhi sheng, bian hua gai yi* 生生，不絕之辭。陰陽變轉，後生次於前生，是萬物恒生，謂之易也。前後之生，變化改易) (Kong 2009)

Differing from *sheng* 生 as the aggregation of *yin* and *yang* [*qi*], the term *shengsheng* 生生 points out the whole picture of unceasing continuity in the *Yijing*'s cosmology. With this understanding, *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) do not happen once and then finish. Instead, *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) happen in cycle again and again without end, with *si* 死 (death) providing newly *sheng* 生 (life) and *sheng* 生 (life) indicating a certain result of *si* 死 (death). This incessant generation and regeneration of things in between *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) is called the *Yi*. Therefore, *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) are not only used to describe the life and things of beings, but the state of all things, phenomenon and affairs subject to time and position. Han Kangbo comments:

> "Through the alternation and interchange of *yin* and *yang*, the process of transformation and generation of all beings is realized." (*yin yang zhuan yi, yi cheng hua sheng* 陰陽轉易，以成化生) (B. Wang 2012)

In the immense stream of the *shengsheng* 生生 (the ceaseless *sheng*) of the *Yijing*'s cosmos, individual *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) is only a change in the form of *yin* and *yang*. Xun Shuang 荀爽 also says:

> "*Yin* and *yang* mutually interchange, and in turn gives *sheng* 生 (life) to each other. (mutual generation)" (*yin yang xiang yi, zhuan xiang sheng ye* 陰陽相易，轉相生也) (D. Li 2011)

Between *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death), there is not a split but a transformation in between; there is not opposition but continuation. For if one can understand and comprehend this principle, individual *si* 死 (death) is no longer a scary nothingness, but a natural and inevitable link in the great process of continuing cosmic existence. This section has not tried to show that the *Yijing* regards *sheng* 生 and *si* 死 as belonging together; that is a presupposition of the text's cosmological worldview. What it has tried to show is how the text itself speaks of *sheng* 生 and *si* 死, what the difference is between *sheng* 生 and *sheng sheng* 生生, and how *gui shen* 鬼神 belongs to the same account. These points prepare the ground for the stance discussed in the next section, since it is only when *sheng* 生 and *si* 死 are understood as phases of a single process that "delighting in Heaven" becomes a coherent posture rather than a resigned acceptance of an external fate. In this respect, the cosmological reading of this section is not an end in itself but the middle term of the study's three-perspective structure.

4. "Delighting in Heaven" (Le Tian 樂天): Sheng 生 (Life) and Si 死 (Death) as the Settling in the Fate and Transmuting the Boundaries in Between Life and Death

The first perspective reveals that *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) refer to the state of existence of beings in different situations subject to time and position; the second perspective discusses the nature of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) by the universal principle of cosmic change. This section discusses the third perspective of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) in the *Yijing*: when human beings understand and comprehend the state and nature of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si*, they transform *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) into a spiritual state in which they can find settlement and transcendence. This points to a state that is neither limited to a subjective experience nor regarding to a merely mystical union, but the internalization of the cosmological principle in the mode of human existence. That is to say, to the *Yijing*'s thought, it does not only do so with regard to "knowing" the principle of *sheng* and *si*, but also "settling" in the fate of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si*, and "transmuting" the boundaries in between *sheng* 生 (life) and *si*.

The *Xici* continues after explaining "tracing origins and turning back to endings, thus he knows the doctrine and meaning of *si* 死 (death) and *sheng* 生 (life)" (*yuan shi fan zhong, gu zhi si sheng zhi shuo* 原始反終，故知死生之說):

> "He is akin to Heaven and Earth, therefore he does not go against them or violate their course. His wisdom embraces all things, and his *dao* benefits and sustains the entire world, therefore he does not overstep its bounds. He acts flexibly (move sideways) without straying from the right course. He delights in Heaven and knows his own fate and what Heaven bestows, therefore he is free from anxiety and without sorrow. He is at ease in his position (planted in the ground) and devoted to humaneness (*ren* 仁, benevolence), therefore he is able to love." (*yu tian di xiang si, gu bu wei. zhi zhou hu wan wu, er dao ji tian xia, gu bu*

> *guo. pang xing er bu liu, le tian zhi ming, gu bu you. an tu dun hu ren, gu neng ai* 與天地相似，故不違。知周乎萬物，而道濟天下，故不過。旁行而不流，樂天知命，故不憂。安土敦乎仁，故能愛)

The phrase "he delights in Heaven and knows his own fate and what Heaven bestows, therefore he is free from anxiety and without sorrow." (*le tian zhi ming, gu bu you* 樂天知命，故不憂) provides the most concise expression of the *Yizhuan*'s statement regarding *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death). Han Kangbo comments:

> "One's virtue matches and unites with Heaven and Earth in harmony, therefore it is called 'akin'…One complies with the transforming influence of Heaven, therefore it is called 'delights'." (*de he tian di, gu yue xiang si…shun tian zhi hua, gu yue le ye* 德合天地，故曰相似…順天之化，故曰樂也) (B. Wang 2012)

Han Kangbo employs "to comply with the transforming influence of Heaven" (*shun tian zhi hua* 順天之化) to explain "delights" (*le* 樂). "Delights" (*le* 樂) in "to comply with" reveals the sage is not passively submitting to Heaven's mandate, but actively conforming to the operation and changes of the *dao* of Heaven. Kong Yingda further elaborates:

> "To comply with Heaven and carry out its transforming influence, this refers to delights in Heaven. To recognize the origin and end of all things, this is to know one's own nature and destiny (*xingming* 性命). By following the constant order of the *dao* of Heaven, and understanding the full course (from origin to the end) of one's nature and destiny, one accords with the principle of naturalness (*ziran* 自然), therefore one is free from anxiety and without sorrow." (*shun tian shi hua, shi huan le yu tian. shi wu shi zhong, shi zi zhi xing ming. shun tian dao zhi chang shu, zhi xing ming zhi shi zhong, ren zi ran zhi li, gu bu you ye* 順天施化，是歡樂於天；識物始終，是自知性命。順天道之常數，知性命之始終，任自然之理，故不憂也) (Kong 2009)

In the explanation of "delights in Heaven and knows his own fate and what Heaven bestows" (*le tian zhi ming* 樂天知命), Kong Yingda employs two statements:

(1) "To comply with the transforming influence of Heaven" (*shun tian zhi hua* 順天之化);
(2) "To recognize the origin and end of all things" (*shi wu shi zhong* 識物始終); that is, to understand the inevitable process of all things from the origin to the end.

The phrase "To recognize the origin and end of all things" (*shi wu shi zhong* 識物始終) here directly echoes the *Xici*'s "tracing origins and turning back to endings, thus he knows the doctrine and meaning of *si* 死 (death) and *sheng* 生 (life)" (*yuan shi fan zhong, gu zhi si sheng zhi shuo* 原始反終，故知死生之說). Since the sages can "trace origins and turn back to the ends", they can "recognize the origin and end of all things". Since the sages can "recognize the origin and end of all things", they can "know one's own nature and destiny (*xingming* 性命)" (*zi zhi xing ming*自知性命). Since the sages can "know one's own nature and destiny (*xingming* 性命)", they can proceed to act accords with the principle of naturalness (*ziran* 自然); therefore, they are free from anxiety and without sorrow regarding *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death). In this case, it reveals that the so-called "delights in Heaven and knows his own fate and what Heaven bestows" (*le tian zhi ming* 樂天知命) in the *Yijing*, in terms of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death), does not mean passively accepting fate. Rather, it refers to one deeply understanding the principle of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death), and to no longer shake one's inner tranquility. Zhu Xi comments on this line:

> "Having delighted in the principle of Heaven, and also knowing the mandate or fate that Heaven bestows, therefore one is able to be free from anxiety and without sorrow." (*ji le tian li, er you zhi tian ming, gu neng wu you* 既樂天理，而又知天命，故能無憂) (Zhu 1992)

When one deeply understanding the principle of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death), and be "delighted" in the principle of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death), he can "comply with the transformation of Heaven and Earth" (*shun tian zhi hua* 順天之化), thus acting in correspondence to the *dao* of Heaven. In this case, he achieved the state of "delights in Heaven and knows his own fate and what Heaven bestows" (*le tian zhi ming* 樂天知命). This indicates, through a profound comprehension of the cosmic principle in the *Yijing*, that a person can transcend the fear of *si* 死 (death) and attain inner tranquility and freedom. As Kong Yingda states previously:

> "By following the constant order of the *dao* of Heaven, and understanding the full course (from origin to the end) of one's nature and destiny, one accords with the principle of naturalness (*ziran* 自然)" (*shun tian dao zhi chang shu, zhi xing ming zhi shi zhong, ren zi ran zhi li* 順天道之常數，知性命之始終，任自然之理) (Kong 2009)

Here, "from origin to the end" refers to from *sheng* 生 (life) to *si* 死 (death), and from *si* 死 (death) to *sheng* 生 (life). The "constant order" (*chang shu* 常數) refers to the certain cosmic principle. When a person truly comprehends the principle of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) by "tracing origins and turning back to endings" (*yuan shi fan zhong*原始反終), and internalizes it as the wisdom of their own life, *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) are no longer a terrifying unknown but a natural matter that can be faced with equanimity.

Yet the state of "delights in Heaven and knows his own fate and what Heaven bestows" (*le tian zhi ming* 樂天知命) is not meant to remain a detached transcend insight. Its true test lies in whether it can be sustained in the most trying moments of human existence. The *Yijing* does not present this state as a quietistic retreat from the world, but as a practical orientation that must be enacted when one is pressed by adversity. It is precisely at the juncture of *sheng* 生 (life) to *si* 死 (death), especially personal life and death, that the principle of "delights in Heaven and knows his own fate and what Heaven bestows" reveals its full force, and its worth, not as passive resignation, but as active composure. The hexagram *Kun2* 困 (Trapping) offers a paradigmatic case of such a trial. It portrays a person caught in extreme difficulty, and, more importantly, it shows how a superior gentleman (*junzi* 君子), by holding fast to what is right, can maintain his inner ground and ultimately transcend the limits imposed by fortune and misfortune, *sheng* 生 (life) to *si* 死 (death).

This indicates the state of "delights in Heaven and knows his own fate and what Heaven bestows" (*le tian zhi ming* 樂天知命) is realized through practice in reality and responding to situations, including *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death). Take the hexagram *Kun2* 困 as an example. The hexagram *Kun2* consists of the lower trigram *Kan* 坎 (water, danger) and the higher trigram *Dui* 兌 (lake, joy). It provides an "image" (*xiang* 象) of "being in danger yet joyful"; thereby the *Tuanzhuan* indicates:

> "The hexagram *Kun2* signifies that the strong (*yang*) is overshadowed thereby obscured (by the weak). [It is] perilous, yet joyful. Despite being in hardship, one does not lose that which brings his smooth progress. This is this not the mark of the superior gentleman alone! Perseverance brings good fortune to the great person, because the firm [lines] occupy the central positions. Words are not in correspondence (believed between right people), to rely on eloquence leads to exhaustion." (*kun, gang yan ye. xian yi shuo, kun er bu shi qi suo heng, qi wei jun zi hu? zhen da ren ji, yi gang zhong ye. you yan bu xin, shang kou nai qiong ye* 困，剛掩也。險以說，困而不失其所亨，其唯君子乎？貞大人吉，以剛中也。有言不信，尚口乃窮也)

"Despite being in hardship, one does not lose that which brings his smooth progress" reveals the reason for the hexagram *Kun2* 困 "being in danger yet joyful". This indicates

that, even in the situation of adversity and hardship, one can still keep the characteristics that bring his smooth progress, thus joyfully facing the danger. This point of view is directly interpreted by Kong Yingda:

> "When a gentleman encounters hardship and adversity, he accepts and settle in what he meets with composure. Even though he lives in a perilous and difficult age (time), he does not lose his joyful and free heart/mind (*xin* 心)." (*jun zi yu kun, an qi suo yu, sui ju xian kun zhi shi, bu shi chang shuo zhi xin*君子遇困，安其所遇，雖居險困之世，不失暢說之心) (Kong 2009)

"Even though he lives in a perilous and difficult age (time), he does not lose his joyful and free heart/mind (*xin* 心)" provides a tangible expression of "delights in Heaven and knows his own fate and what Heaven bestows" (*le tian zhi ming* 樂天知命) in a hard time and position. The joyful and free heart/mind (*xin* 心) of human beings refers to the characteristic that can bring one's smooth progress in face of adversity and hardship. It delights in Heaven; hence one knows his own fate and what Heaven bestows. This reveals that when facing *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death), the ideal state refers to one who does not lose his joyful and free heart/mind (*xin* 心), and accordingly delights in Heaven. By this sense, the *Xiangzhuan* of hexagram *Kun2* 困 claims:

> "The superior gentleman puts his life at stake (willing to lay down his very life) to realize his will." (*jun zi yi zhi ming sui zhi* 君子以致命遂志)

"Puts his life at stake (willing to lay down his very life) to realize his will" (*zhi ming sui zhi* 致命遂志) take to its utmost the wisdom of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) found in the hexagram *Kun2*. "Puts his life at stake (willing to lay down his very life)" (*zhi ming* 致命) is not to treat life lightly or to forsake life, but to entrust one's life to the *ming* 命 (the fate and what Heaven bestows) one ought to follow. "To realize one's will" (*sui zhi* 遂志) is to complete the ultimate direction and destination of life in this act of entrustment. This points out that, in the *Yijing*'s thought, the value of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) do not depend on the duration of existence, but whether life has achieved its ultimate meanings (in terms of will) at the end. As Cheng Yi states:

> "A superior gentleman, in times of adversity and destitution, if he has already exhausted all his precautions and deliberations yet still cannot avoid [the situation]. Then, it is [his] fate and what Heaven bestows. He should commit his life, drive it to the extremity, in order to fulfill his aspiration and will, knowing that this is the rightful course of fate and what Heaven bestows." (*jun zi dang kun qiong zhi shi, ji jin qi fang lü zhi dao, er bu de mian, ze ming ye. dang tui zhi qi ming, yi sui qi zhi, zhi ming zhi dang ran ye* 君子當困窮之時，既盡其防慮之道，而不得免，則命也。當推致其命，以遂其志，知命之當然也) (Cheng 2018)

In Cheng Yi's view, "exhausted all his precautions and deliberations" (*ji jin qi fang lü zhi dao* 既盡其防慮之道) is the prerequisite for "putting his life at stake (willing to lay down his very life)" (*zhi ming* 致命). The superior gentleman does not hasten *si* 死 (death). Yet, after exhausting all human effort, if adversity and *si* 死 (death) are still unavoidable, he accepts it with calm, and in that acceptance completes his will.

This further points to a deeper question: since *si* 死 (death) is the unavoidable conclusion of an individual, how should one give meaning to this inevitable end? The *Yijing*'s argument is that the meaning of *si* 死 (death) does not reside in *si* 死 (death), but in the "will" (*zhi* 志) to which life was directed before *si* 死 (death). In the *Tuanzhuan* of the hexagram *Gen* 艮 (Keeping Still, Mountain), it is said:

> "*Gen* denotes stopping. When it is time to stop, stop. When it is time to advance or act, advance or act. Therefore, the movement and stillness are not out of their proper time, and its *dao* is bright." (*gen, zhi ye. shi zhi ze zhi, shi xing ze xing, dong jing bu shi qi shi, qi dao guang ming* 艮，止也。時止則止，時行則行，動靜不失其時，其道光明)

This provides a nuanced guide to the "will" at the intersection of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death), even as it talks of "stopping" and "advancing or acting". "When it is time to stop, stop" signifies that when it is time to stop, when life reaches its end, the superior gentleman may stop at the correct time, without forcing an unreasonable continuance of life. "When it is time to advance or act, advance or act" signifies that when life is going on, the man is pushing ahead, not wasting the "will" that being should have. The *Xiangzhuan* of the hexagram *Gen* even says:

> "The superior gentleman, in accordance with this, does not allow the work manifested through his heart/mind to go beyond his own proper position." (*jun zi yi si bu chu qi wei* 君子以思不出其位)

The phrase "does not go beyond his own proper position" (*bu chu qi wei* 不出其位) provides an insight to interpret "to put his life at stake (willing to lay down his very life) to realize his will" (*zhi ming sui zhi* 致命遂志) in the *Yijing*: the reason the "will" can be realized refers to how the superior gentleman, throughout his life, is able to work in his proper position and fulfill his proper roles, neither overstepping his position in reckless pursuit nor losing his position in idleness. When this "proper position" has been filled to the brim, this "proper role" done to the brim, then one can "stop when it's time to stop" and go without remorse when *si* 死 (death) arrives.

This points out that the "will" of human beings in the *Yijing* is not an unachievable goal; instead, it inspires one to accomplish all the proper roles, acts and functions in correspondence to time and position. As the *Tuanzhuan* of the hexagram *Jiaren* 家人 (Family) says:

> "The proper positions of male and female, it refers the great proper meaning of Heaven and Earth… The father works as a father, the son works as a son, the elder brother works as a elder brother, the younger brother works as a younger brother, the husband works as a husband, the wife works as a wife, the *dao* of the family is thus set in order." (*nan nü zheng, tian di zhi da yi ye …fu fu, zi zi, xiong xiong, di di, fu fu, fu fu, er jia dao zheng* 男女正，天地之大義也…父父，子子，兄兄，弟弟，夫夫，婦婦，而家道正)

The above statement indicates that when everyone accomplishes their proper roles, acts and functions, it refers to the *dao* set in order. Extending this principle, when every person, during their lifetime, completes their roles and functions according to proper position and time: this is the realization of "realize the will" (*sui zhi* 遂志) in everyday human affairs. When a person has exhausted their efforts within their own proper time and position, such that "fathers and sons each attain their proper role", then they have already attained the great proper meaning of Heaven and Earth. In this case, their *si* 死 (death) is no longer an incomplete rupture, but a natural departure following the fulfilment of "will".

Under this circumstance, when human beings accomplish the state of "delights in Heaven and knows his own fate and what Heaven bestows" (*le tian zhi ming* 樂天知命), they realize the meaning beyond personal life and death. That is, the "will" of beings, which comes from the fate what Heaven bestows. By this sense, the concern *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) drives deepen into pursuing and fulfilling the fate and what Heaven bestows instead of personal life and death. Human beings, by attaining their fate and

what Heaven bestows, achieve unity and resonance with Heaven and Earth in harmony. As *Wenyan* states:

> "His virtue matches by harmony with that of Heaven and Earth. His brightness is in illuminates together and matches by harmony with the sun and moon. His order is the one matches by harmony with the four seasons. His good fortune and misfortune match by harmony with that of spirits and deities. If he acts before Heaven, Heaven does not oppose him. If he acts after Heaven, he follows its proper time." (*yu tian di he qi de, yu ri yue he qi ming, yu si shi he qi xu, yu gui shen he qi ji xiong, xian tian er tian fu wei, hou tian er feng tian shi* 與天地合其德，與日月合其明，與四時合其序，與鬼神合其吉凶，先天而天弗違，後天而奉天時)

Since human beings can match in harmony (*he* 合) with Heaven and Earth, the settlement of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) is no longer an externally imposed cognition, but an internal, natural state. As Zhang Zai points out:

> "While alive, I comply with the proper course of affairs (from Heaven). At death I repose in tranquility and peace." (*cun, wu shun shi. mo, wu ning ye* 存，吾順事。沒，吾寧也) (Z. Zhang 2000)

Zhang Zai unites *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) with "comply with the proper course of affairs" (*shun shi* 順事) and "repose in tranquility and peace" (*ning* 寧). To his interpretation, *sheng* 生 (life) is the unfolding of "complying with the proper course of affairs" (*shun shi* 順事), and *si* 死 (death) refers to the consummation of "reposing in tranquility and peace" (*ning* 寧). It is worth noting that Zhang Zai's use of the word "affairs" (*shi* 事) has a deeper meaning here. The "affairs" in "comply with the proper course of affairs" do not refer to ordinary affairs, but the affairs that fulfills one's own "will" and accomplishes the meaning of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) corresponding to Heaven and Earth. When a person is able to "comply with the proper course of affairs" throughout his lifetime, his acts matched by harmony (*he* 合) with Heaven and Earth, he unifies his personal "will" with the *dao* of Heaven and Earth. The *sheng* 生 (life) of the human being, at the moment when this "will" and the *dao* of Heaven and Earth are unified, is not a *sheng* 生 (life) apart from Heaven and Earth, but a tangible embodiment of the virtue of Heaven and Earth, as in the statement "his virtue matches by harmony with that of Heaven and Earth". If *si* 死 (death) happens at this moment, *si* 死 (death) is not a failure of *sheng* 生 (life), but its completion. Since the affairs that ought to be complied with has been complied with the proper course, and the "will" that ought to be realized has been accomplished, what ought to be matched with Heaven and Earth in virtue has been matched in harmony. This suggests that the *si* 死 (death) of the body cannot erase the completion of one's own "will". Once one's "will" is complete and united with Heaven and Earth in harmony, *si* 死 (death) is no longer the end of personal life, but the final mark of the personal life's integration into the great transformation of Heaven and Earth's *shengsheng* 生生 (the ceaseless *sheng* 生).

In this condition, the human being has no longer before him a foreign, external Heaven and Earth, but he himself is the carrier and manifester of the *dao* of Heaven and Earth. This refers to the state of "the unity and resonance of Heaven and Humanity in one by harmony" (*tian ren he yi* 天人合一). As the *Yijing* points out:

> "The succession and alternation of *yin* and *yang* [one by one] is called the *dao*. That which continues and develops is goodness. That which completes and fulfills it is the 'nature' (*xing* 性)." (*yi yin yi yang zhi wei dao, ji zhi zhe shan ye, cheng zhi zhe xing ye* 一陰一陽之謂道，繼之者善也，成之者性也)

and

> "Harmonizing and complying with the *dao* and its virtues, and regulating [affairs] by the principles of righteousness (the proper meanings). Exhausting and completely comprehending the principles of things, fully realizing and developing his own 'nature', and thereby reaches his fate and what Heaven bestows." (*he shun yu dao de er li yu yi, qiong li jin xing yi zhi yu ming* 和順於道德而理於義，窮理盡性以至於命)

The *Zhongyong* 中庸 also describes the same line of thought:

> "What Heaven has endowed is called 'nature'. Following this 'nature' is called the *dao*. To cultivate the *dao* is called teaching [of the sage]. The *dao* refers to nothing that can be departed for so much as an instant. If it could be departed it would not be the *dao*." (*tian ming zhi wei xing, shuai xing zhi wei dao, xiu dao zhi wei jiao. dao ye zhe, bu ke xu yu li ye, ke li fei dao ye* 天命之謂性，率性之謂道，修道之謂教。道也者，不可須臾離也，可離非道也) (Chen and Xu 2015)

The Heavenly mandate (*tianming* 天命), endowed as "fate and what Heaven bestows" (*ming* 命), descends to become "nature" (*xing* 性). When a person can follow this "nature" in action, he is practicing and realizing the *dao* of Heaven. When it comes to the question of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death), this means: the "nature" of the individual is what Heaven and Earth bestow and is realized in human life. During one's life, the human being, through fully realizing and developing his own "nature", reaches his fate and what Heaven bestows. This is called "delights in Heaven and knows his own fate and what Heaven bestows". Therefore, *sheng* 生 (life) refers to the natural unfolding of the "nature" given to the individual by Heaven, and that human *si* 死 (death) refers to the natural dispersion and return to the cosmos of the individual after one's "nature" has completed all its accomplishments. The *Xici* says:

> "To fully realize one's 'nature', and to preserve and maintain it constantly. It is the gateway to the *dao* and its righteousness (proper meanings)" (*cheng xing cun cun, dao yi zhi men* 成性存存，道義之門)

"To fully realize one's 'nature'" (*cheng xing* 成性) means realizing and accomplishing this "nature" endowed by Heaven, not losing it. "To preserve and maintain it constantly" (*cun cun* 存存) implies nourishing and maintaining this "nature" so that it might last. When a person can "fully realize one's 'nature' and to preserve and maintain it constantly", he can find the gateway to attain the *dao*. Hence, all his deeds in *sheng* 生 (life) are expressions of the *dao* and its righteousness (proper meanings), and his *si* 死 (death) is only a natural phenomenon after the fulfilment. In this state, human beings are not also finite individuals in between Heaven and Earth, but also the self-realization of the *dao* of Heaven and Earth. *Sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) are no longer issues to be decided, but the natural rhythm of life merging into the great transformation of Heaven and Earth, like the alternation of the four seasons and the turning of day and night, natural, without anxiety or fear. The *si* 死 (death) provides another origin for *sheng* 生 (life), and the *sheng* 生 (life) naturally turns into *si* 死 (death). It is not that one ignores the fact of *si* 死 (death), but the final settling of in the fate of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death).

5. Conclusions

This study has examined the *Yijing*'s view of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) through three interrelated perspectives[11]: "time and position", the cosmological alternation of *yin* and *yang*, and the transcendence state of "delighting in Heaven". The main argument has been that the *Yijing* does not regard *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) as abstract metaphysical categories or as a question of the immortality of the soul, but as conditions of beings subject

to change in particular positions and time, a reflection of cosmic principles, and finally as a basis for a specific mode of existential self-realization and transcendence. In contrast to the Western philosophical tradition that generally begins with questioning "what is *sheng* 生 (life)?" or "what is *si* 死 (death)?", the *Yijing* begins with the pragmatic question: "How does *sheng* 生 (life) or *si* 死 (death) manifest itself in this particular time and position?". What makes the *Yijing*'s approach to the ultimate concerns of human existence different and specific is this basic shift in focus, from essence to situation, from definition to expression.

The significance of the three-perspective structure is that it has the power to synthesize the practical, the cosmological and the existential into a congruent totality. The first perspective points out that *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) are not abstract essences but conditions defined by one's situationality within the shifting configurations of time and position. The second view takes this situational insight and makes it into a cosmic concept. *Sheng* 生 (life) is the union of *yin* and *yang*; *si* 死 (death) is their separation. Both are vital phases in the ongoing process of cosmic generation. The third perspective shows how this cosmological understanding, when internalized in human being, produces an existential attitude of "delighting in Heaven and knowing one's fate and what Heaven bestows". It provides a condition in which the fear of *si* 死 (death) is vanquished not through denial but through acceptance, and in which the meaning of *sheng* 生 (life) is completed precisely in the willingness to lay down one's life for the sake of one's will. These three perspectives together make up a philosophical worldview in which *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) do not oppose one another nor are divorced from one another, but are incorporated as complementary phases within a single, continuous process of cosmic and human realization. Thus, the *Yijing* provides a unique solution to the problem of human mortality: not in the hope of an afterlife or the assurance of the soul's immortality, but in the understanding that individual *si* 死 (death) is not the negation of *sheng* 生 (life). It refers to the natural consummation of *sheng* 生 (life); thereby, the meaning of *sheng* 生 (life) is not in its duration, but in its fulfilment of "will" in accordance with the *dao* of Heaven.

The *Yijing*'s conception of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) is demonstrated to be rooted in its own cosmology of divination in time and position, developed by its *yin-yang* cosmology, and fulfilled by its existential ideal of delighting in Heaven. This study reveals the *Yijing* as providing a philosophical and religious vision of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) that is simultaneously practical, cosmic, and deeply personal. This is a vision that starts not from speculative metaphysics but from the concrete question of how to *sheng* 生 (live) and *si* 死 (die) well in particular situations. This is a vision that does not see *si* 死 (death) as the negation of *sheng* 生 (life) but as an integral phase of cosmic transformation. This is a vision that does not try to escape *si* 死 (death) but finds in its acceptance the very condition for the fullest realization of *sheng* 生 (life). In this regard, the *Yijing*'s philosophy on *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) speaks not only to the problems of ancient Chinese civilizations but to the perennial human conundrum of how finite beings, cognizant of their mortality, can find meaning and fulfilment in a world of perpetual change. Its lasting value is its insistence that the ultimate realities of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) are not problems to be solved by metaphysical speculation but challenges that call for practical wisdom, cosmic understanding and existential courage: a wisdom that is as relevant today as when the *Yijing* was first composed.

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Notes

[1] In this study, the terms *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) are used with their Chinese characters and English glosses to preserve the philosophical richness that a simple translation might obscure. The terms *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death) are retained in pinyin with both Chinese and English, and each occurrence of *sheng* and *si* is accompanied by the character and translation to highlight the distinctive conceptual framework of the *Yijing*'s discourse on *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death). It is essential to point out the character *si* 死appears only sparingly in the received text of the *Yijing*. In the *Zhouyi* proper (*Zhouyi Gujing* 周易古經) it occurs in the fourth line of the hexagram *Li* 離: "its coming is sudden, as if it flames up, as if it is like to si 死 (dead), as if it is abandoned" (*tu ru qi lai ru, fen ru, si ru, qi ru* 突如其來如，焚如，死如，棄如). In the *Yizhuan*, it appears in the *Xici*'s passages such as "tracing origins and turning back to endings, thus he knows the doctrine and meaning of *si* 死 (death) and *sheng* 生 (life)" (*yuan shi fan zhong, gu zhi si sheng zhi shuo* 原始反終，故知死生之說) as well as in a few other places. The interpretation of *si* 死 in this study therefore does not rest on a frequency count but on the way the *Yijing* speak about under the broader Chinese tradition. Therefore, *si* 死is not limited to one of death or annihilation, but also includes the meanings of exhaustion and dispersal. The *Baihu tong* 白虎通 defines death as "it is to speak of the drying up or dissolving of water" [*si2* 澌, meaning ending up of things or a process], it means the exhaustion of the refined *qi*" (*si zhi yan si, jing qi qiong ye* 死之言澌，精氣窮也) (Hanyu Da Cidian Bianzuanchu 2005). The *Shiming* 釋名 says that "*si* 死means dried up or dissolved, as ice melts and dissolves away" (*si zhe, si ye, ruo bing shi si ran jin ye* 死者，澌也，若冰釋澌然盡也) (Hanyu Da Cidian Bianzuanchu 2005). *Zhuangzi* 莊子 states that "*sheng* 生 (life) [in human beings] is the gathering of qi; when it gathers there is life, when it scatters there is *si* 死" (*ren zhi sheng, qi zhi ju ye; ju ze wei sheng, san ze wei si* 人之生，氣之聚也；聚則為生，散則為死) (Zhuangzi 2015). The *Guan Yinzi* 關尹子 says that "life and death are but the gathering and scattering of a single qi" (*sheng si zhe, yi qi ju san er* 生死者，一氣聚散耳) (L. Zhang 2023). These examples show that under the broader classic Chinese tradition, *si* 死 is not limited to one of death or annihilation, but also includes the meanings of exhaustion and dispersal. It provides the ground for the *Xici* to speak of "the refined essence of qi" and "the roaming souls" beyond the meaning of death. In the *Yijing*, *si* 死 therefore also means the dispersal and returning of *qi*, the point at which a phase of gathering has run its course, together with the meaning of the endings (not limited to beings, can be the end of positions, times or affairs). It provides the ground for the topmost line of *Kun* 坤, where the character *si* 死does not appear, can be read as a statement about death, since the *Xiangzhuan* 象傳itself says that "the *dao* is exhausted" (*qi dao qiong ye* 其道窮也) and Kong Yingda and Cheng Yi both gloss the line as the point at which *yin* and *yang* contend and deplete each other.

[2] This study adopts the term *Yijing* to refer to the whole classic, following the usage of this Special Issue, and does not use alternative translations such as *I Ching*, *Zhouyi*, or *Book of Changes*. The *Yijing* is made up of the ancient core *Zhouyi* proper (*Zhouyi Gujing* 周易古經) and the Confucian commentary *Yizhuan* 易傳 (*the Ten Wings*). In line with this volume, we treat the *Yijing* as an integrated whole but use *Zhouyi* proper and *Yizhuan* respectively when distinguishing the two layers. All citations of the *Yijing* in this study are from the latest edition annotated by Yang Tiancai 楊天才 (Yang 2022).

[3] The methodological stance of this study requires clarification. Its primary object is the study of the *Yijing* itself, therefore it is not simply limited to the *Yijing* text itself. The later commentators such as Wang Bi 王弼, Kong Yingda 孔穎達, Cheng Yi 程頤, Zhu Xi 朱熹, and Zhang Zai 張載, are separated by considerable historical distance and belong to significantly different philosophical traditions. Simply speaking, Wang Bi and Han Kangbo's thought is influenced by the Daoist-oriented *xuanxue* 玄學 movement, Kong Yingda's thought is influenced by the Han-Tang commentarial tradition, Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi's thought is influenced by principle-orientated Neo-Confucianism, and Zhang Zai proposed a distinctive philosophy of *qi* 氣 in Neo-Confucianism. This is not to say that they are treated as holding a single homogeneous understanding of *sheng* 生 and *si* 死 (life and death). It is rather to say that they are read together at the level of the interpretation of the *Yijing* (in the subject of the *Yijing* studies [*Yixue* 易學]), and that their differences are acknowledged rather than flattened. To take the most important example, the interpretation of the *Xici*'s "the refined essence of qi constitutes things, the roaming souls bring about change" (*jing qi wei wu, you hun wei bian* 精氣為物，游魂為變) runs through the Han, Tang, and Song commentaries, but it does so in different philosophical registers. The *Jiujia Yi* 九家易 and Kong Yingda read it in terms of the refined and spiritual *qi* of *yin* and *yang* gathering and dispersing. Zhang Zai reads it in terms of the transformation of *qi* between being and non-being within his doctrines of the great void (*taixu* 太虛) and the unity of *qi*. Zhu Xi reads it in terms of the extension and return of *yin* and *yang* within his cosmology of principle (*li* 理) and *qi*. These are not the same doctrine, and they are not presented as such. What they share is the reading of the *Xici* passage as a statement about qi, and the taking of this statement as the ground of the doctrine of *sheng* 生 and *si* 死. The procedure adopted here is therefore the *Yijing* text-centered rather than commentator-centered. The textual basis of each of the three perspectives

is first established from the *Yijing* itself, and the commentators are then introduced as witnesses to a continuous tradition of reading the *Yijing* in a certain way. The connections drawn among them are connections at the level of the interpretation of the *Yijing*, not claims of philosophical identity. The study thus distinguishes between what is already presupposed within the *Yijing* tradition, such as the continuity of *sheng* 生 and *si* 死 and the cosmology of ceaseless generation, and what is offered here as an interpretive contribution, namely the systematic reconstruction of the three perspectives of time and position, cosmological alternation, and delighting in Heaven as a single integrated structure for understanding *sheng* 生 and *si* 死.

4 This "transcendence state" is not intended in a mystical or purely experiential sense. In the *Yijing*, "delighting in Heaven and knowing one's fate and what Heaven bestows" (*le tian zhi ming* 樂天知命) is at once an epistemological deepening and an ontological transformation of the mode of being. It is epistemological because it follows from "tracing origins and turning back to endings" (*yuan shi fan zhong* 原始反終), through which one knows *sheng* 生 and *si* 死 as the aggregation and dispersion of *yin* and *yang* and is therefore no longer anxious before them. It is ontological because this knowledge is not left as theory but is internalized as a transformed way of dwelling in time and position: one "complies with the transforming influence of Heaven" (*shun tian zhi hua* 順天之化), settles in one's fate, and "puts his life at stake to realize his will" (*zhi ming sui zhi* 致命遂志). This perspective thus does not abandon the cosmological ontology of the second. On the other hand, it realizes that ontology in human existence. The transcendence involved is not escape from the world or union with a divine beyond, but the freedom that arises when one's will, nature, and fate accord with the ceaseless generation of Heaven and Earth.

5 This reading does not claim that the text is describing biological death. The "regret" of the soaring dragon is a condition of extremity within time and position, and its bearing on *si* 死 lies in the fact that, in the *Yijing*, the exhaustion of one's proper time and position is the point at which the activity of life can no longer be sustained. The *Wenyan*'s gloss "Noble but without a proper position. Positioned high but without the people (subjects). The worthy are beneath him, yet he has no one to assist him. This is why any action he takes will lead to regret." (*gui er wu wei, gao er wu min, xian ren zai xia wei er wu fu, shi yi dong er you hui ye* 貴而无位，高而无民，賢人在下位而无輔，是以動而有悔也) identifies this condition of isolation and extremity. Cheng Yi, commenting on the *Qian* hexagram, describes the topmost line as the point at which "the *yang* has reached its extreme and is about to decline" (Cheng 2018), which is the same sense of exhaustion and ending that the *Xici* gives to *si* 死. The line is therefore adduced not as an explicit statement about death but as evidence that the *Yijing*'s situational logic includes conditions that the commentarial tradition reads as the running of a phase to its end.

6 The topmost line of the hexagram *Kun* states: "The dragon fights in the open field; its blood is black and yellow" (*long zhan yu ye, qi xue xuan huang* 龍戰于野，其血玄黃). This is not an explicit statement about death, and it would be misleading to present it as such. The line describes the extremity of *yin*, the point at which the *yin*, having accumulated to its utmost, contends with the *yang* and brings both to the point of exhaustion. Kong Yingda glosses the *Xiangzhuan*'s "the *dao* is exhausted" (*qi dao qiong ye* 其道窮也) as the condition in which "yin and yang contend and injure each other" (*yin yang xiang shang* 陰陽相傷) (Kong 2009), so that the image of blood black and yellow is an image of mutual depletion. Cheng Yi reads the line as the moment at which "the yin has reached its extreme and contends with the yang" and the Zhu Xi tradition treats it as the point at which the interaction of *yin* and *yang* has run its course. Within the *Yijing*'s account of time and position, this is the extremity at which the flourishing of one phase turns into its exhaustion. *Si* 死, understood as the dispersal and returning of qi, is the name for this threshold. The line is therefore read here not as a direct description of dying but as a statement of the condition: the exhaustion of the *dao* at the extreme of a phase, that the *Yijing* and its commentators consistently associate with the boundary between *sheng* 生 and *si* 死.

7 It should be noted that the textual basis for the cosmological reading of *sheng* 生 and *si* 死 is the *Xici* passage on "tracing origins and turning back to endings" and its continuation on "the refined essence of *qi*" and "the roaming souls". This Han dynasty reading is an interpretation of the *Xici*'s "tracing origins and turning back to endings", and it should be read as such. It is not a paraphrase of the *Zhouyi* proper, whose line statements speak of fortune and misfortune, advance and retreat, rather than of the cosmological unity and separation of *yin* and *yang*. The value of the *Jiujia Yi*'s formulation for the present argument is that it makes explicit what the *Xici*'s account of *sheng* 生 and *si* 死 presupposes: *si* 死 is the separation of what *sheng* 生 had united, the dispersal of what had gathered, and not the annihilation of a substance.

8 This passage from the *Xici* is important for understanding the constructive role of *yin* and death in the *Yijing*'s cosmology of "ceaseless sheng" (*shengsheng* 生生). The full sentence reads: "Closing the door is called *Kun*; opening the door is called *Qian*. One closing and one opening are called change; ceaseless coming and going is called penetration" (*he hu wei zhi kun, pi hu wei zhi qian, yi he yi pi wei zhi bian, wang lai bu qiong wei zhi tong*闔戶謂之坤，辟戶謂之乾，一闔一闢謂之變，往來不窮謂之通). *Kun* 坤 refers to the purely *yin*, the yielding, the dark, the storing, and the closing; *Qian* 乾 refers to the purely the yang, the firm, the bright, the initiating, and the opening. In the cycle of generation, closing is not the opposite of opening but its precondition. Without the closing that gathers, stores, and returns, there can be no opening that initiates, grows, and brings forth. Death, as the separation of *yin* and *yang* and the dispersion of *qi*, belongs to this closing phase. It is therefore not a simple negation of life, nor a void into which life falls, but the necessary moment in which the prior generation is completed and the condition for the next generation is prepared. In this sense, *yin* and death are constructive within the ceaseless generation of the cosmos. The point is not to glorify death, but to show that the *Yijing*'s "ceaseless sheng" (*shengsheng* 生生) would not be ceaseless if death did

not have this storing and returning function. This note thus supplements the main text without displacing its central focus on the three-level structure of *sheng* 生 and *si* 死.

[9] The concept of spirits and deities (*gui shen* 鬼神) and the phrase "the roaming souls bring about change" (*you hun wei bian* 遊魂為變) in the *Xici* are not a separate religious domain but point to to the same cosmological view of *sheng* 生 (life) and *si* 死 (death). In the *Yijing*, *shen* 神, besides the meaning of divines and deities, it also means the extending, *yang*, and life-oriented aspect of *qi*. Similarly, *gui* 鬼 carries the meanings of the returning, *yin*, and death-oriented aspect. Zhang Zai states: "The refined essence of qi is from non-being to being; the roaming souls are from being to non-being. From non-being to being refers to the conditions of the deities; from being to non-being is the conditions of the spirits" (精氣者，自无而有；游魂者，自有而无。自无而有，神之情也；自有而无，鬼之情也) (He 1987). Zhu Xi likewise says: "The essence of *yin* and *qi* of *yang* gather and form things, this is the extension of shen; the hun wanders and the po descends, they disperse and become change, this is the return of gui" (陰精陽氣，聚而成物，神之伸也；魂游魄降，散而為變，鬼之歸也) (Zhu 1992). *Gui shen* 鬼神 is therefore the articulation of aggregation and dispersion in the register of the divines. Within the three-perspective framework of this study, *gui shen* appears at each perspective. At the perspective of time and position, it is present in divination, sacrifice, and the ritual response to fortune and misfortune, where one must accord with the proper time and position of the spirits. At the cosmological perspective, it is the very movement of *yin* and *yang* in their gathering and dispersing, and thus the ground of the doctrine of *sheng* 生 and *si* 死. At the perspective of delighting in Heaven, the understanding that *gui shen* are transformations of *qi* that removes fear and superstition, and enables and allows one to "know the true nature and conditions of spirits and deities" (*zhi gui shen zhi qing zhuang* 知鬼神之情狀) without anxiety, so that sacrifice and remembrance of the dead become expressions of filial and humane feeling rather than attempts to appease external powers. The transcendence involved is not the immortality of a soul but the integration of one's life and death into the ceaseless generation of Heaven and Earth. This note thus supplements the main text without displacing its central focus on the three-perspective structure of *sheng* 生 and *si* 死.

[10] The understanding of *sheng* 生 and *si* 死 as belonging to a single process is a presupposition of the *Yijing*'s cosmological worldview rather than a finding of this study. It is already present in the *Xici*'s "tracing origins and turning back to endings" (*yuan shi fan zhong* 原始反終), in the *Jiujia Yi*'s "when [yin and yang] unite, there is sheng 生; when they separate, there is si 死" (*he ze sheng, li ze si* 合則生，離則死), in Cheng Yi's comparison of *sheng* 生 and si 死 to the four seasons, and in Zhang Zai's "in *sheng* 生 there is nothing gained, and in si 死 nothing lost" (*jin xing ran hou zhi sheng wu suo de ze si wu suo sang* 盡性然後知生无所得則死无所喪). This study does not claim these as original discoveries. Its contribution lies in fourth points. First, it sets out the way the text itself speaks of *sheng* 生 and *si* 死, namely as the union and gathering of *yin* and *yang* on the one hand and their separation and dispersal on the other, and shows that this way of speaking is established by the *Xici*'s "refined essence of qi" and "roaming souls" passages. Second, it distinguishes *sheng* 生from *sheng sheng* 生生, and argues that this distinction is what makes the belonging-together of *sheng* 生 and *si* 死 intelligible, since the subject of ceaseless generation is the process itself and not the individual life. Third, it brings *gui shen* 鬼神 into the same account, showing that the hidden and the manifest, *sheng* 生 and *si* 死, and the spirits and deities are spoken of as transformations of *yin* and *yang* rather than as separate domains. Fourth, it argues that Section 3 serves a double function within the study: it is both an account of the cosmological dimension of sheng 生 and si 死 and the middle term between the situational reading of Section 2 and the existential reading of Section 4.

[11] What this study offers is not a new doctrine of *sheng* 生 and *si* 死, but a systematic reconstruction of how the *Yijing*'s understanding of them is articulated at three perspectives and how those perspectives form an integrated structure. The contribution lies in the three-perspective framework itself: time and position, the cosmological alternation of *yin* and *yang*, and delighting in Heaven.

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