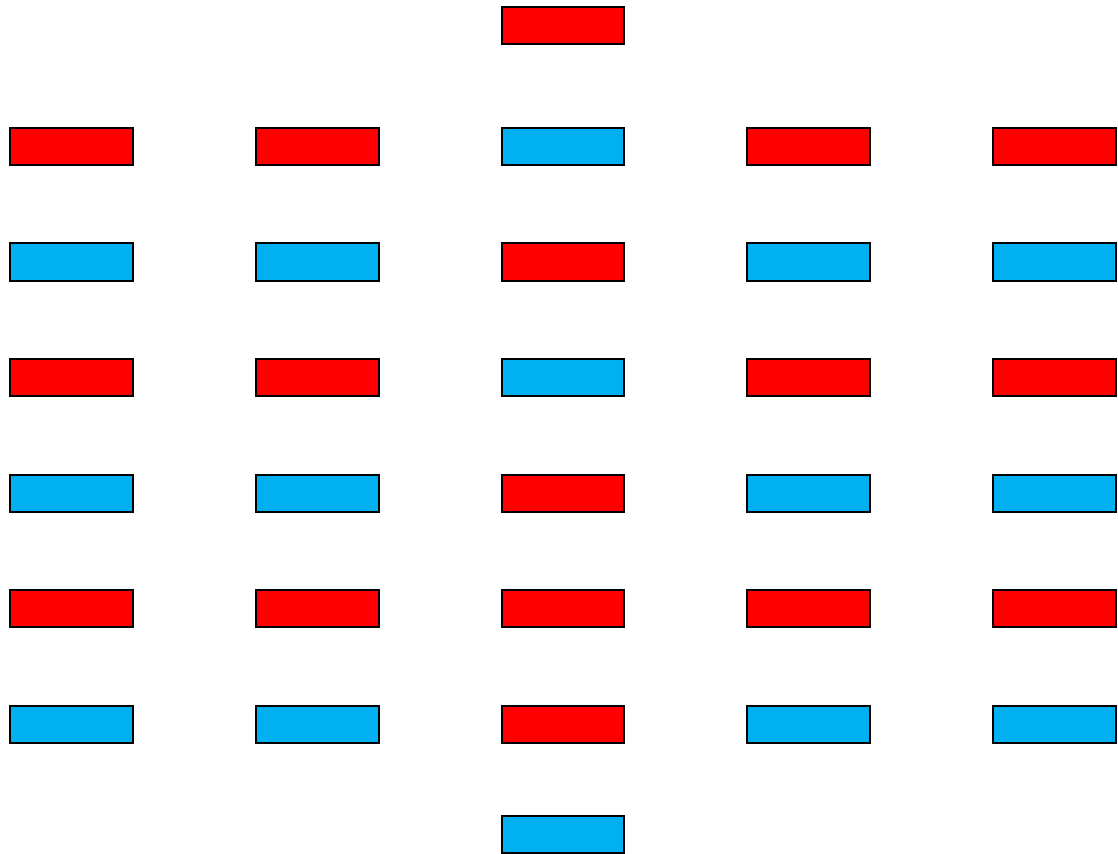# THE HIDDEN PATTERN

In the classical sequence of the I Ching

Gert Gritter

Introduction

In December 2010 I noticed there was a pattern hidden in the traditional King Wen sequence (KWS) of the I Ching. As is known by everyone who is familiar with the I Ching, the KWS links a fixed number to every individual hexagram. With this number all 64 hexagrams and their pertaining texts can be easily found in this classical Chinese book of wisdom.

At first I thought my 'discovery' - if such it was - was no more than a something 'nice to know'. As time passed, however, I kept on examining the pattern and I saw more and more interesting features and possibilities.

At present I am convinced that the person of persons who designed the now 'unhidden' pattern, probably somewhere deep in the past, created a work of genius and art. So I very much want to share it with other interested people. It is my highest hope that I Ching scholars and adepts will find use for it and that they may derive new insights from it.

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1. The chessboard pattern

The 64 hexagrams of the Yijing[1] are usually presented in a classical order: the so-called King Wen Sequence (KWS). Each hexagram has its own number, corresponding to its position in the KWS. They are usually represented in a 8x8 matrix or 'chessboard' pattern: eight rows horizontally and eight rows vertically.
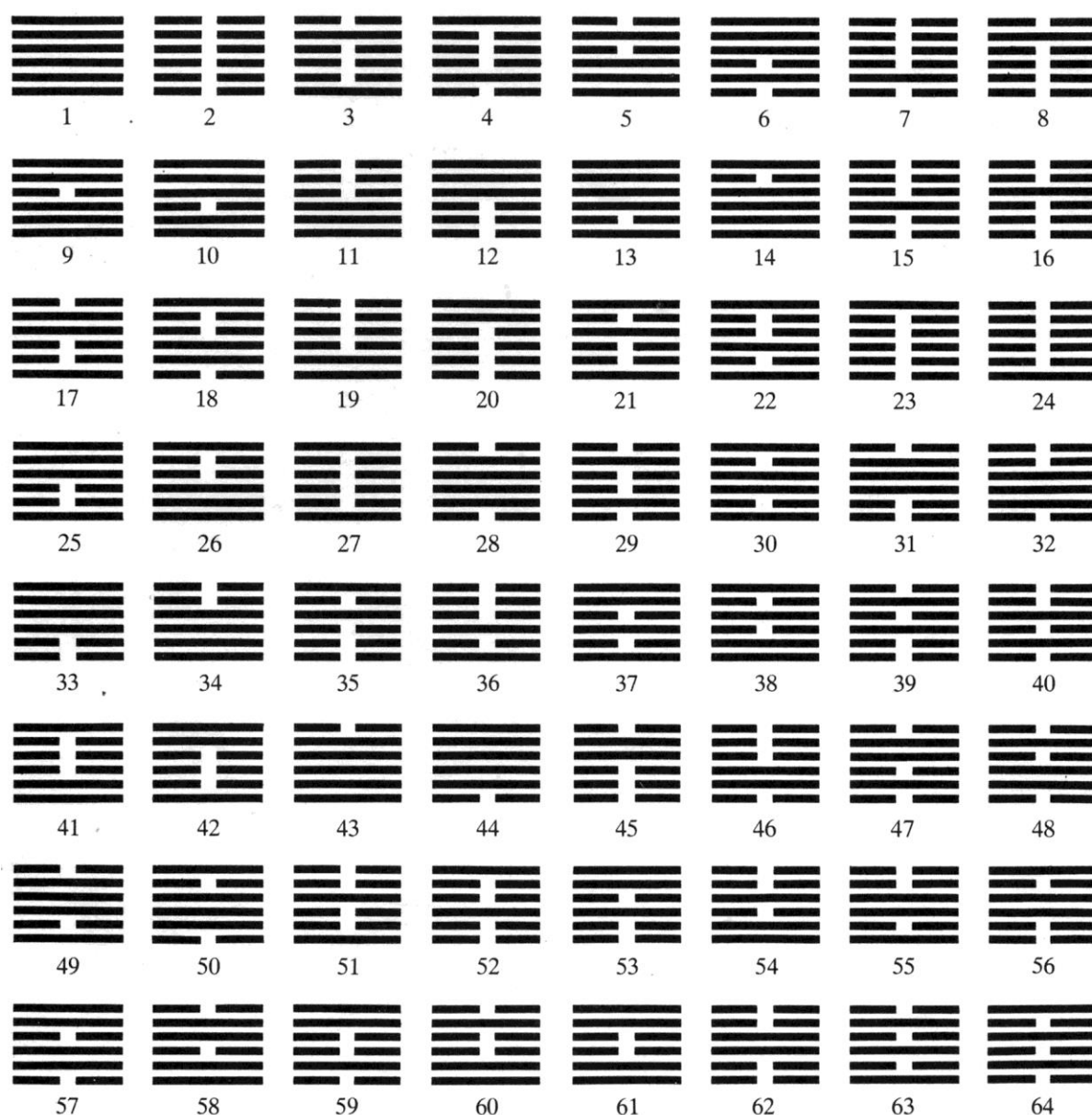

Pairs

The sequence of the hexagrams is not arbitrary. A main feature of the KWS is that the hexagrams are linked in pairs. These pairs are formed according to two principles: inversion and opposition[2]. In 56 out of 64 cases, the second hexagram of the pair is the reverse of the first. HX3 and HX4 are the first hexagrams in the KWS that are paired in this way:

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[1] Further on in this article 'I Ching' is spelled in the modern way as 'Yijing'.
[2] The Chinese terms are *pangtong* (opposition) en *fandui* (inversion).

3   4
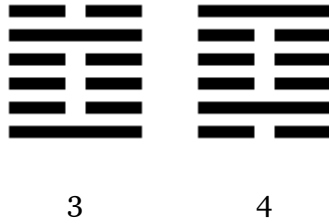
However, in eight cases the principle of inversion cannot be applied. HX1-2, HX27-28, HX29-30 and HX61-62 are symmetrical. If they are reversed, they remain the same and consequently there is no inversion partner. In these cases the other principle, that of opposition, is used: they are paired to their 'opposite'. On the position of each yang (straight) line in the one hexagram, a yin (broken) line can be found in the other hexagram, and vice versa. These special eight hexagrams, each one next to its opposition partner, are shown below:

1   2   27   28

29   30   61   62
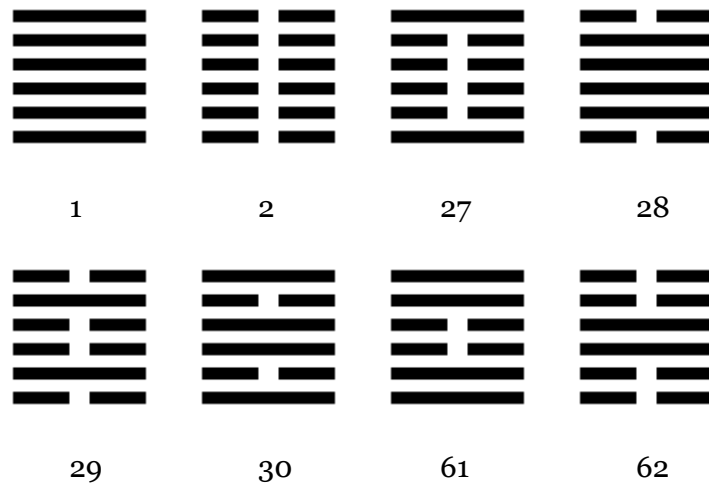
Two canons
Another feature of the KWS is that the hexagrams are traditionally divided in two sections. The first 30 hexagrams form the 'Upper Canon', the remaining 34 hexagrams the 'Lower Canon'.

Although the hexagrams are often shown in the chessboard pattern, this display is far from perfect. It does not acknowledge the existence of the two canons, to name one thing. HX29-30 (the last pair of the Upper Canon) and HX31-32 (the first of the Lower Canon) are 'lost' on the left side of the fourth row from the top (the squares e5, f5, g5 and h5 of a chessboard).

2. An alternative pattern

Wouldn't there be a pattern imaginable that is better suited to present the hexagrams in the KWS? Preferably a pattern that takes into account the existence of the two canons and gives important hexagrams a 'strategic' position?

It would be logical to expect special pairs at the first and last position of both canons. This turns out to be the case: the Upper Canon begins with HX 1-2 and finishes with HX 29-30, while the Lower Canon begins with HX 31-32 and finishes with HX 63-64. These four pairs are noteworthy. The first two pairs are composed of identical trigrams, the second pairs of opposing trigrams (this will be explained further on).

It seems worthwhile to identify all other hexagrams with the same characteristics. Each hexagram is a combination of two trigrams on top of each other. There are eight different trigrams:

| Heaven | Earth | Water | Fire | | Thunder | Wind | Mountain | Lake |

Identical trigrams
Eight hexagrams are composed of two identical trigrams:

|			
1	2	29	30
51	52	57	58
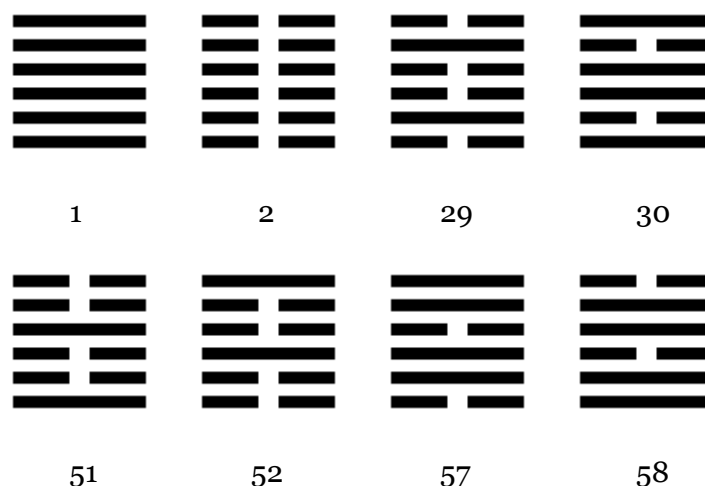
HX 1-2 and HX 29-30 open and close the Upper Canon, as previously said, but both other pairs (HX 51-52 and HX 57-58) deserve our attention as well.

Opposing trigrams
Eight other hexagrams are composed of two opposing trigrams[3]. Each yin (broken) line of the lower trigram corresponds with a yang (straight) line in the upper trigram (and vice versa):

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[3] This follows the well-known Earlier Heaven arrangement of the bagua, where on all eight points two trigrams that oppose each other are placed at the opposite sides of the Taiji circle (e.g. the trigram of Heaven at the top and that of Earth below):

11   12   31   32

41   42   63   64
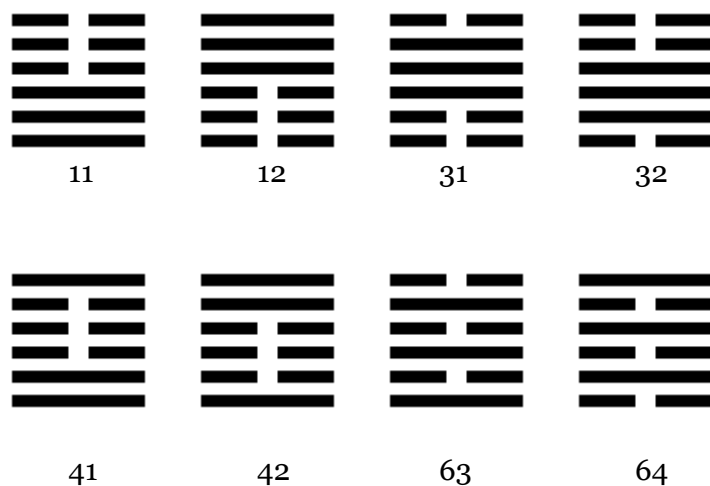
HX 31-32 and HX 63-64 begin and finish the Upper Canon, as previously said, but both other pairs (HX 11-12 and HX 41-42) deserve our attention as well.

The discovery

The image below shows the 8 pairs of 16 hexagrams that are composed of identical or opposing trigrams in yellow. In the chessboard pattern there is nothing remarkable about it.

1 2	3 4	5 6	7 8
9 10	**11 12**	13 14	15 16
17 18	19 20	21 22	23 24
25 26	27 28	**29 30**	**31 32**
33 34	35 36	37 38	39 40
41 42	43 44	45 46	47 48
49 50	**51 52**	53 54	55 56
57 58	59 60	61 62	**63 64**

However, this changes when the 16 special hexagram pairs are centrally placed in a vertical column, one above the other. This results in a pattern of 32 blocks, each containing 1 hexagram pair.

The upper half consists of 30 hexagrams (15 blocks), while the lower half consists of 34 hexagrams (17 blocks), corresponding with the numbers of the Upper and Lower Canon.

```
                              1    2

3    4       5    6                              7    8       9    10

                             11   12

13   14      15   16                             17   18      19   20



21   22      23   24                             25   26      27   28



                             29  30

                             31   32


33   34      35   36                             37   38      39   40

                             41   42

43  44       45   46                             47   48      49  50

                             51   52

53   54      55   56         57   58      59  60      61   62

                             63  64
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Symmetry

As in the chessboard pattern before, the special hexagrams are yellow. However, now they turn out to form the middle column of a new pattern, which is striking because of its symmetry. The left half is the mirror image of the other half. It is highly improbable that a pattern like this would present itself by coincidence.

4. Complementarity

The new pattern will be referred to as 'the Grid'. For the sake of clarity it is represented 'empty' (i.e. without hexagrams). The 15 blocks of the Upper Canon are blue, the 17 blocks of the Lower Cannon red.
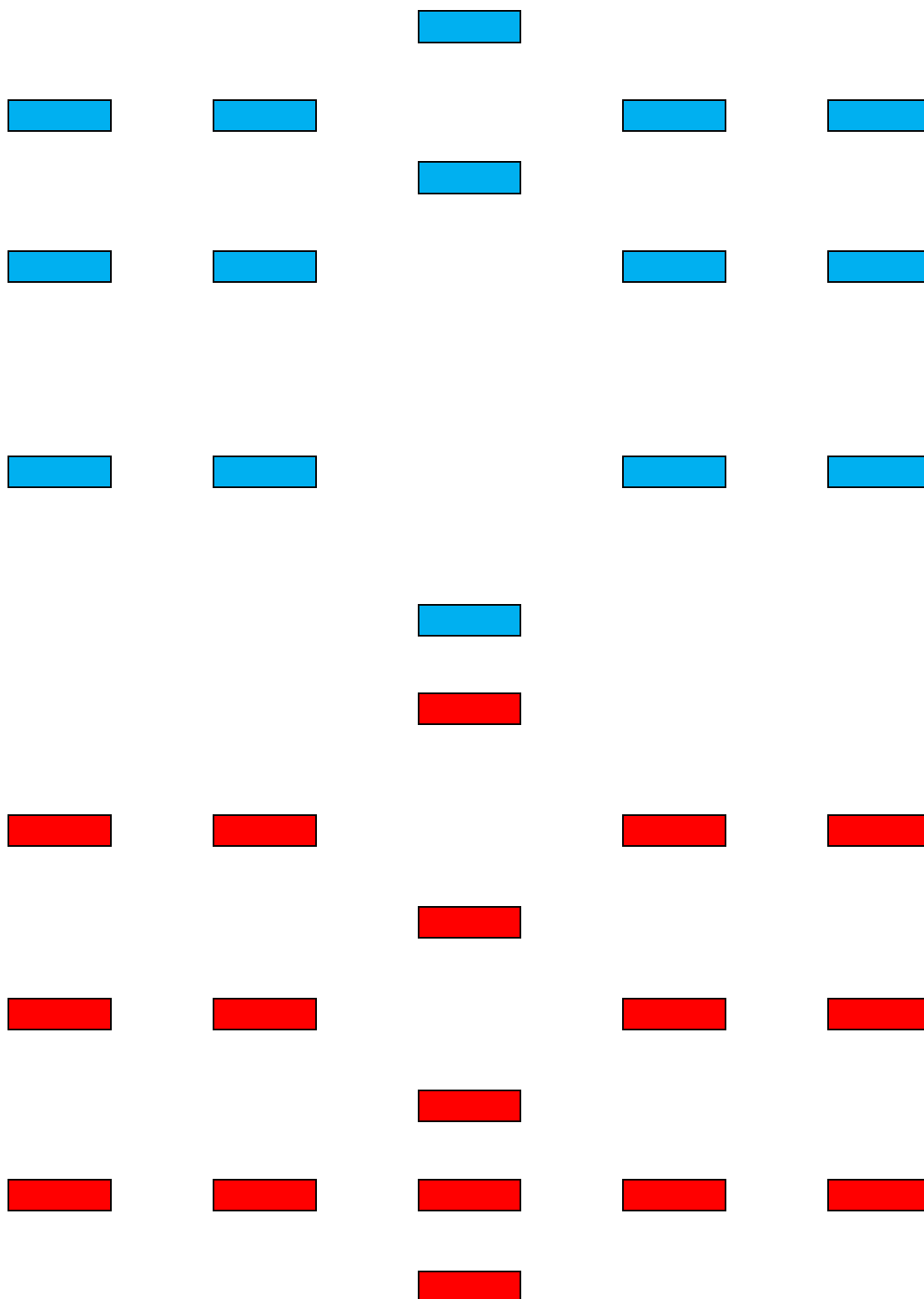
This is helpful in showing a fascinating characteristic of the Grid, which is its complementarity: the upper and lower half make a perfect fit, like two pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, a key in a lock, or a hand in a glove!
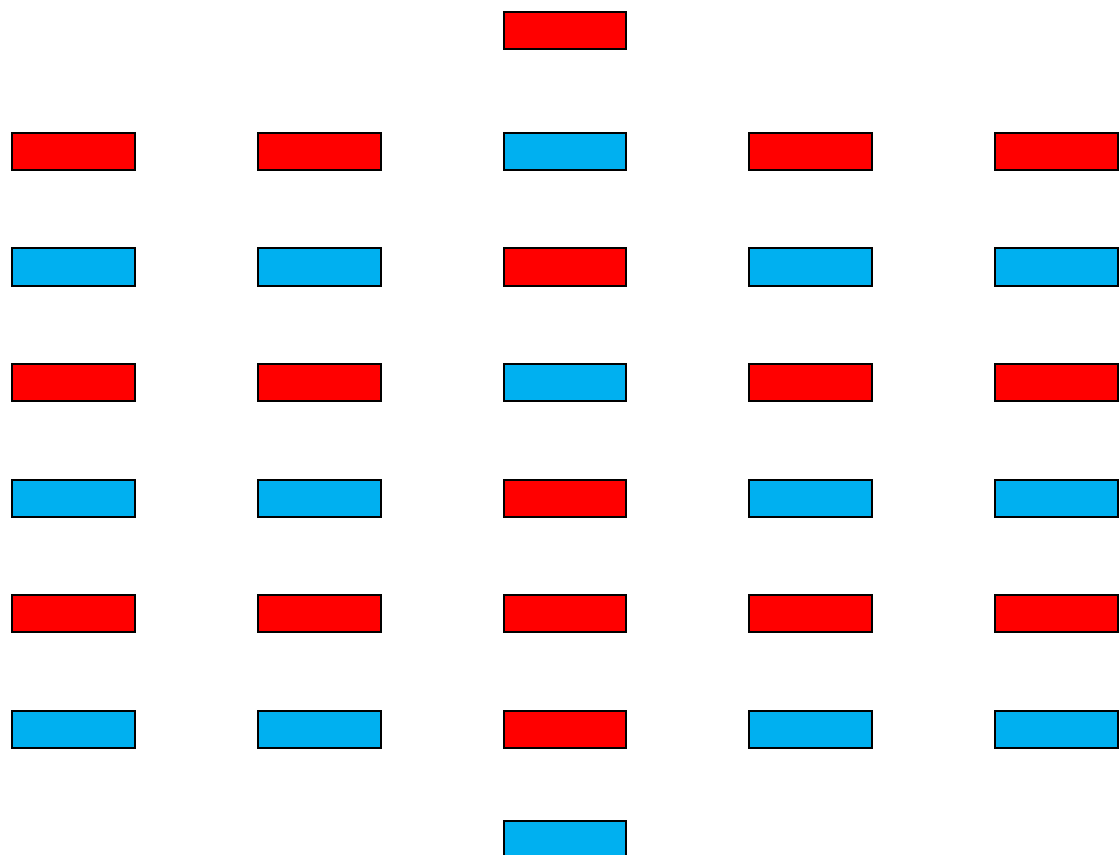

Yin and yang

This complementarity has a direct reference to the concepts of yin and yang, having a prominent position in the Yijing. The Lower Canon (red, 17 hexagram pairs) is yang, the Upper Canon (blue, 15 hexagram pairs) is yin. Together they form a whole, which is in line with the philosophy of yin and yang: opposing values that supplement each other at the same time and in doing so form a unity.

Why is the Upper Canon 'yin' and its counterpart 'yang'? The Yijing differentiates between old yang and young yang, which have the odd number values of respectively 9 and 7. It also differentiates between old yin and young yin, which have the even number values of respectively 6 and 8. The Grid includes 5 groups of blocks, having the following number of hexagram pairs: 6, 8, 9, 7 and a 'leftover' of 2 (see image on next page).

The Upper Canon includes both 'yin' groups (6 + 8) plus one half of the leftover group (1), making a total of 15 (or 30 hexagrams). The Lower Canon includes both 'yang' groups (7 + 9) plus the other half of the leftover group (1), together 17 (or 34 hexagrams). This can be better visualized when the Grid is turned a quarter.

old yin (6)	young yin (8)	old yang (9)	young yang (7)
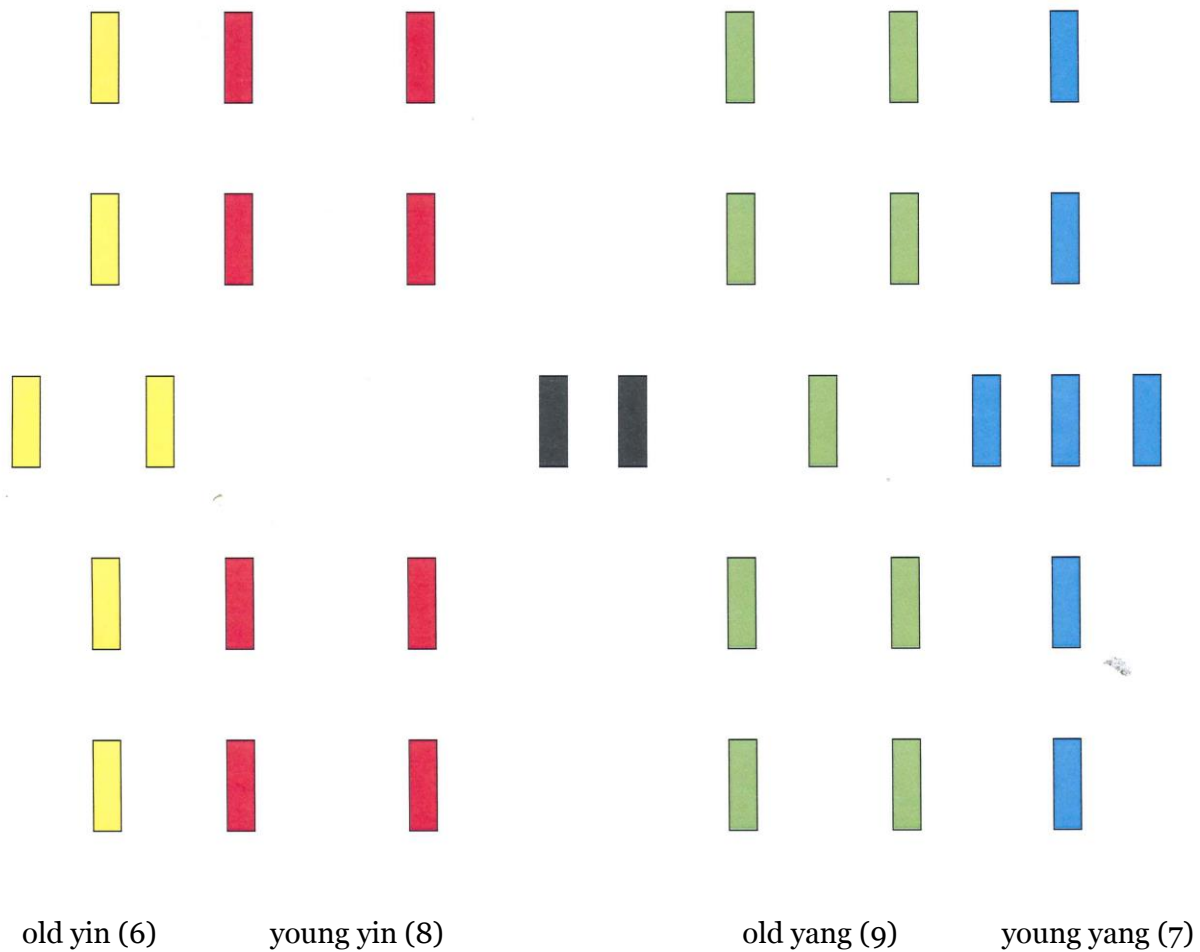
Both yin groups are on the left side, forming most of the Upper Canon, which consequently can be characterized as yin. The reverse applies to both yang groups.

It is interesting to note the near-symmetry of both sides, when an imaginary vertical axis is projected between both black blocks: the line between the Upper and the Lower Canon. The yellow group (6 blocks) and the blue group (7 blocks) are almost the same, but for the blue group having one extra block in the middle: the difference between yin (even) and yang (odd). The same applies to the red and green groups. (The black group of 2 blocks can be ignored in this narrative.)

When the Grid is 'closed', old yin (6) and old yang (9) form a unity of 15. The same applies to young yin (8) and young yang (7), forming a unity of 15 as well. (See next page.)

old yin (6)   15   old yang (9)

young yin (8)   15   young yang (7)

11
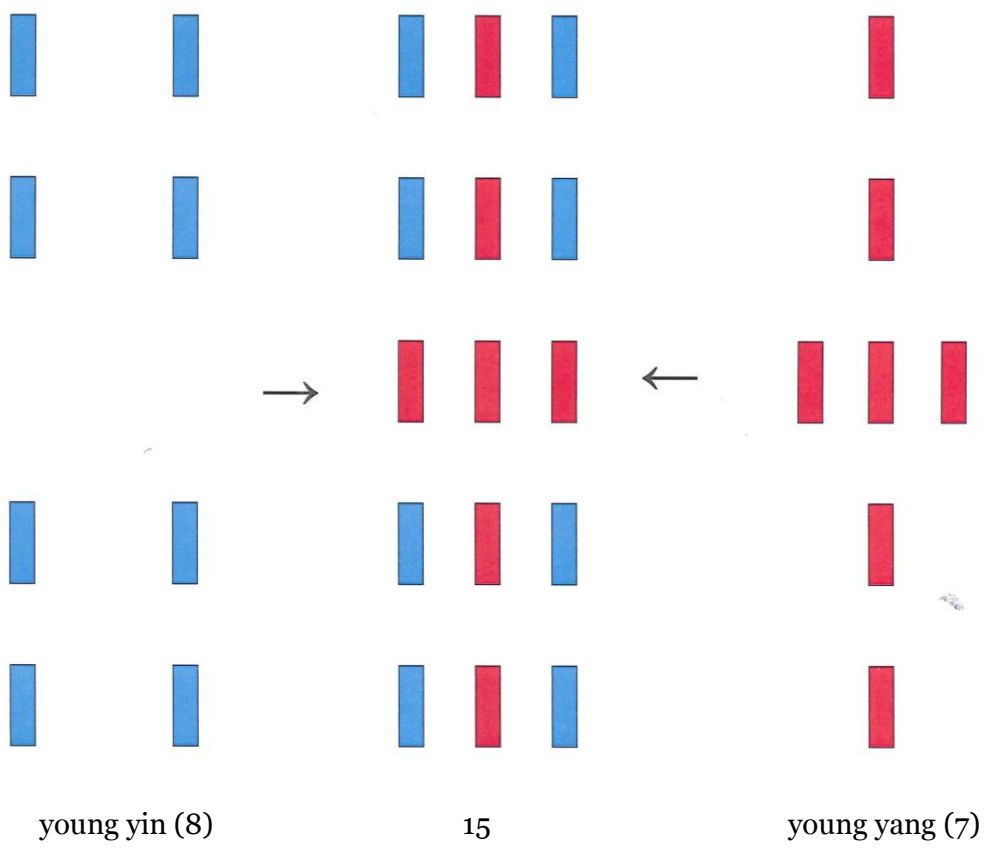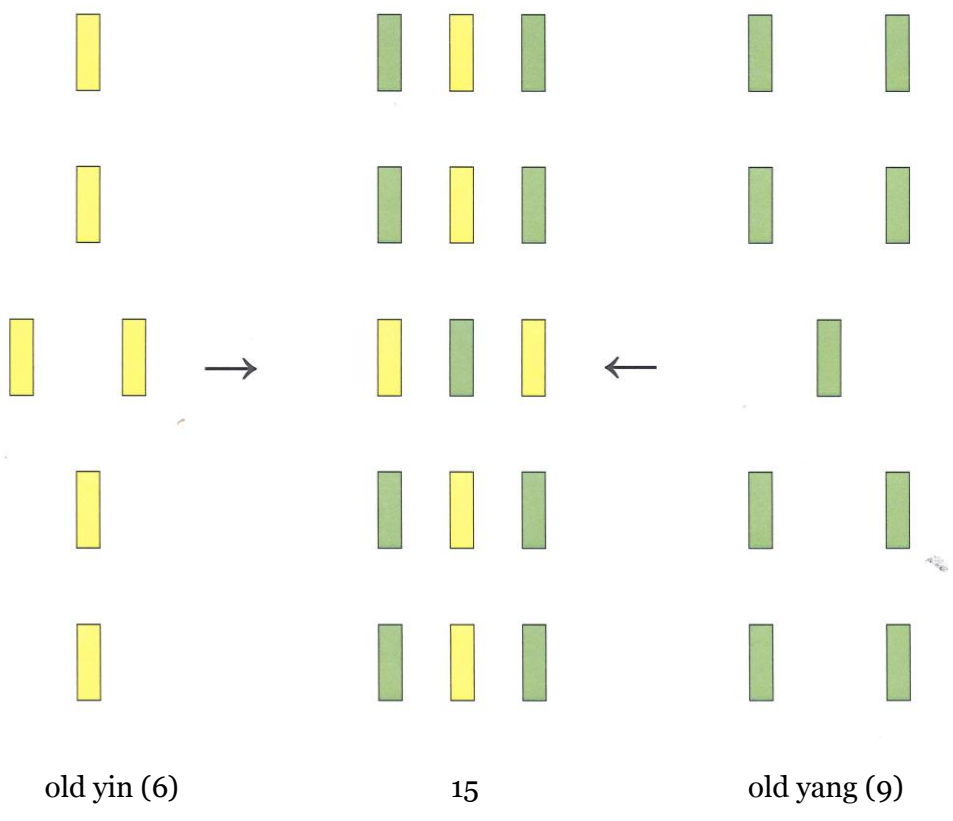
5. Symbolism of numbers

Central to the Grid are some interesting numerical facts, which may be relevant to understanding it. Please keep in mind that each block of the Grid contains 2 hexagrams, totaling 2 x 6 = 12 lines, like block HX 3-4:

Below is an image of the closed Grid in which the yang blocks are white and the yin blocks black. There are two more blocks in grey, one at the top and one at the bottom.
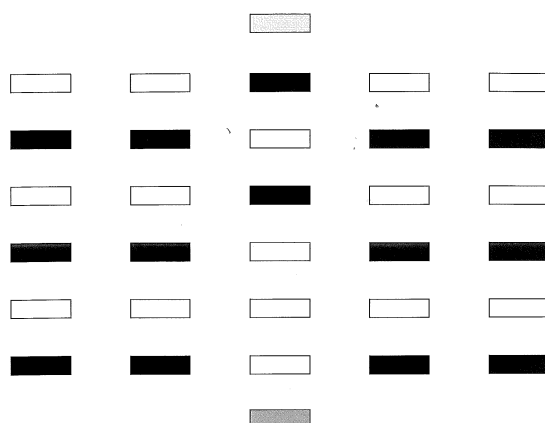
Without the grey blocks there is a pattern of 30 units: 6 horizontal rows with 5 blocks each or 5 vertical columns with 6 blocks each. The total sum is 30 x 12 = 360 hexagram lines. (The Yijing – which naturally also applies to the Grid – includes 384 lines[4], when all blocks are taken into account).

It is worthwhile to focus on the number of 360, which is important in ancient Chinese philosophy and culture, as are its components 72, 60, 30, 12, 6, 3, 2. There are several references to the Chinese ways of keeping and marking time.

- 360 is the symbolical number of days in a year.
- 360 is the sum of 144 (the number of the moon) and 216 (the number of the sun).
- Each horizontal row includes 5 x 12 = 60 lines, being the number of days in 2 months.
- Each vertical column includes 6 x 12 = 72 lines, being the number of days of the 5 seasons.
- The number of blocks of the Grid (apart from both grey ones at the top and bottom) is 30, being the average number of days in 1 month.
- Each block includes 12 hexagram lines, being the number of 'hours' in a day according to ancient Chinese timekeeping (in which 1 'hour' lasted 120 'modern' minutes).

In short, it may be the Grid has references to the lunar (yin) and solar (yang) cycles: it could be showing 'the woof and warp' of the cloth of time.

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[4] It is interesting to mention the fact that 384 - the total number of hexagram lines (64x6) - is about the number of days made up by 13 lunar months (13 x 29.5 = 383.5).

Conclusion

The Grid is an effective way to present the hexagrams in the King Wen Sequence. As it is directly derived from the KWS, it has advantages over the often used chessboard pattern. The Grid makes evident the formation of the hexagrams in pairs, the yin and yang numbers, and both Canons. A prominent place in the center is given to 16 special hexagrams with identical or opposing trigrams.

The Grid's figurative features are noteworthy. It allows the Upper and Lower Canon to close in or open like a flower. Moreover, every Canon can be divided in symbolic groups, showing the numerical values of old yin, young yin, old yang and young yang: respectively 6, 8, 7 and 9 (as shown in the figure, starting top left clockwise).
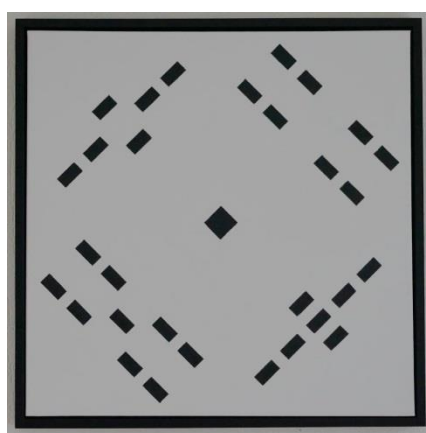
Unfortunately, a lot remains unknown about the Grid. In the literature (including the Internet), the author has not been able to find any reference to it. However, it is still possible that this is a discovery - or rather a 'rediscovery' – of something that was designed many, many centuries ago. At what point in time? That is no way of knowing, but it must go back at least to the time when the KWS came into being, but possibly even earlier.

What is the Grid? What it was used for? What is the relationship to the Yijing? Only further study could give more information about the history of the Grid - and therefore also of the Yijing itself. If only for that reason it would be worthwhile.