

Article

“Simply Do Not Divine”: On the Cosmology, Moral Constraints, and Self-Transcendence of Divination in the *Yijing*

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Abstract

The phrase “simply do not divine, that is all there is to it” (*bu zhan er yi yi* 不占而已矣) attributed to Confucius in the *Analects* has long puzzled scholars in terms of understanding the *Yijing*. This study reexamines the proposition through a systematic analysis of the *Yijing*’s cosmology, moral constraints, and cultivation practices. Drawing on the *Yizhuan* (Ten Wings) and successive commentaries from Han to Song scholars, the paper argues that divination in the *Yijing* is founded on a cosmological principle: the *Yi* matches Heaven and Earth, so the hexagram and line images can mirror the order of the cosmos. However, divination is also governed by three moral constraints: *jing* 敬 (reverence), *fu* 孚 (sincerity/trust/correspondence), and *zhen* 貞 (upright steadfastness), which transform it from a technical operation into a discipline of purifying the heart/mind (*xin* 心). The core finding is that constant virtue (*heng de* 恒德) renders formal divination unnecessary: when a person cultivates constancy to the point where every action spontaneously accords with the *dao* of Heaven, the external tools of yarrow and tortoise are transcended. This state is described as “not divining yet divining” (*bu zhan er zhan* 不占而占). The *Yizhuan*’s phrase “Be *shen* 神 to grasp the ineffable and to illuminate spiritually, it is to be sought in the men (who use it)” (*shen er ming zhi, cun hu qi ren* 神而明之，存乎其人) captures the internalization process through which the practitioner embodies the cosmic order. The study concludes that Confucius’s remark is not a slogan that transforms divination into philosophy but the *Yijing*’s own highest teaching: the goal of studying change is to become a person who no longer needs to consult the *Yijing*, because every step is already in rhythm with Heaven and Earth. This interpretation clarifies the *Yijing*’s distinctive moral philosophy, which neither negates divination nor reduces it to technique, but points toward a form of self-transcendence where the bridge of divination becomes the ground on which one walks.

Keywords: *Yijing*; divination; morality; correspondence; transcendence; cosmology



Academic Editors: Solsar Kong,
Zhenyu Zeng, Qiuli Li and Lili
Zhang

Received: 1 June 2026

Revised: 21 June 2026

Accepted: 25 June 2026

Published: 2 July 2026

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1. Introduction

This study addresses a long-standing puzzle in the interpretation of the *Yijing*: why does Confucius, in the *Analects*, conclude his discussion of constancy with the seemingly paradoxical remark that one should “simply not divine”? The remark has been read in various ways. For instance, a rejection of divination as a replacement of divination with virtue, or a revelation of divination’s ultimate purpose. To resolve this puzzle, the present study offers a systematic analysis of the *Yijing*’s cosmology, moral constraints, and cultivation practices. It argues the *Yijing*’s own highest teaching: the goal of studying change is to become a person who no longer needs to consult the *Yijing*, because every step is already in rhythm with Heaven and Earth. To establish this interpretation, this section first begins

with surveying the relevant Chinese and Western scholarship, and identifying the gap that the present study aims to fill.

The phrase “simply do not divine, that is all there is to it” (*bu zhan er yi yi* 不占而已矣) comes from the *Analects*, chapter Zilu 子路¹. It was uttered by Confucius when he cited a line from the *Yijing*’s² hexagram Heng 恆 (Constancy). The text reads as follows:

“The people of the South have a saying: ‘A man without constancy (*heng* 恆) cannot be a *wuyi* 巫醫 (Iatromantis, shaman or healer).’ Good indeed! ‘If one is not constant in his virtue, he will incur disgrace.’ The Master said: ‘simply do not divine, that is all there is to it.’” (*nan ren you yan yue: ren er wu heng, bu ke yi zuo wu yi. shan fu. bu heng qi de, huo cheng zhi xiu. zi yue: bu zhan er yi yi* 南人有言曰: “人而无恒, 不可以作巫医。” 善夫! “不恒其德, 或承之羞。” 子曰: “不占而已矣”) (Yang 2017)

Confucius first repeated the saying from the people of the South, using the point that “a man without constancy cannot be a *wuyi* 巫醫” to highlight the fundamental role of constant virtue (*heng de* 恒德) in professions that require concentrated devotion. He then quoted the third line (*yao* 爻) of the hexagram Heng 恆: “If one is not constant in his virtue, he will incur disgrace” (*bu heng qi de, huo cheng zhi xiu* 不恆其德, 或承之羞)³. Confucius clearly indicated that lack of constancy in virtue will inevitably bring shame. Therefore, he concluded with “simply do not divine, that is all there is to it” (*bu zhan er yi yi* 不占而已矣). These few words touch upon the nature of divination, the relationship between the *dao* (Way) of Heaven (*tian dao* 天道) and the *dao* of humanity (*ren dao* 人道), and moral cultivation in the *Yijing*.

Throughout the history of *Yi* scholarship (*Yixue* 易學, the study of the *Yijing*), interpretations of “simply do not divine, that is all there is to it” have been numerous and contested. Some take it as Confucius’s negation of divination; others see it as replacing divination with virtue; still others understand it as revealing the ultimate purpose of divination. How we interpret this phrase directly affects our understanding of the *Yijing* and its position within the Confucian canon.

In recent decades, scholarly understanding of the *Yijing*’s nature has deepened. Consider the Chinese academia. The *Yijing* has been understood from “a book of divination” (*bu shi zhi shu* 卜筮之書) to “a book of virtue and righteousness” (*de yi zhi shu* 德義之書) and further to a “holistic system” (*quan xi xi tong* 全息系統). Li Cunshan 李存山, in his survey of the historical understanding of the *Yijing*’s nature, points out that Zhu Xi’s 朱熹 statement “the *Yi* is fundamentally a book of divination” (*Yi ben bu shi zhi shu* 易本卜筮之書) and Confucius’s “simply do not divine, that is all there is to it” represent two fundamental approaches. The former emphasizes the original function of the *Yijing*, while the latter transforms it into a book that speaks of “virtue and righteousness.” Through the interpretation of the *Yizhuan* 易傳 (Ten Wings, the commentaries), the *Yijing* became a “holistic” system that encompasses all principles under Heaven (C. Li 2001). This judgment reveals the pivotal significance of “simply do not divine, that is all there is to it” in the history of *Yi* learning.

Zhao Zhongguo 趙中國 systematically examines the various interpretations of the concept *shen* 神 (deities, spiritual, wondrous and profoundness) in the philosophical perspective of *Yi* scholarship, pointing out that “the unfathomable and inscrutable *yinyang* is called *shen*” (*yin yang bu ce zhi wei shen* 陰陽不測之謂神) provides an ontological foundation for understanding the wondrousness of divination (Zhao 2019). Therefore, the cosmology of Heaven and Earth is combined into the wondrousness of divination. Zhai Kuifeng 翟奎鳳, from the perspective of the pre-Qin “revolution of the concept of *shen*,” demonstrates that the *Yizhuan* elevated *shen* from anthropomorphic ghosts and deities (*gui shen* 鬼神) to

the dynamic force of cosmic transformation, thus laying the theoretical groundwork for moving divination to humanity (Zhai 2014).

Wu Fei 吳飛, in recent studies on “knowing the subtle incipience” (*zhi ji* 知幾) and “examining doubts” (*ji yi* 稽疑), explores the *Yijing*’s view of destiny and its theory of nature and fate (*xing ming* 性命). He points out that the *Yijing* “does not advocate fatalism, but holds that humans can secure their station in life and follow their nature by embodying the *dao* of Heaven, and can change their destiny by accumulating virtue and doing good deeds” (*bing fei zhu zhang ming ding lun, er shi ren wei ren ke yi tong guo ti ren tian dao lai an shen li ming, tong guo ji de xing shan lai gai bian ming* 並非主張命定論，而是認為人可以通過體認天道來安身立命、通過積德行善來改變命) (Wu 2024). Zhang Wenzhi 張文智 analyzes the inner connection between the *Yijing*’s thought of the *dao* of *shen* (*shen dao* 神道) and the religiosity of Confucianism, thus emphasizing that through divination. He further claims, “a person’s spirituality can connect with the virtue of the Heavenly *shen* (*tian shen* 天神, heavenly deities and spirits), and its foundation lies in the person’s reverence and sincerity (*cheng jing* 誠敬)” (*ren zhi ling xing ke yi yu tian shen zhi de xiang tong, er qi gen ben ze zai yu ren zhi cheng* 人之靈性可以與天神之德相通，而其根本則在於人之誠) (W. Zhang 2019). Yao Haitao 姚海濤 examines Xunzi’s 荀子 systematic critique of the occult arts and numerology (*shu shu* 數術), noting that “one who excels in the *Yi* does not divine” (*shan wei Yi zhe bu zhan* 善為易者不占) is in the same vein as Confucius’s “simply do not divine, that is all there is to it” (Yao 2020).

Consider Western academia of sinology and philosophy, the *Yijing* has also been studied from multiple angles, yet the specific question of why Confucius said “simply do not divine” has rarely been taken as a center argument. Richard J. Smith’s *Fathoming the Cosmos and Ordering the World* (Smith 2008) remains the most comprehensive historical survey in English, tracing the *Yijing* from its divinatory origins through its philosophical elaboration, but it does not attempt to theorize the phrase “simply do not divine, that is all there is to it” as a cosmological–moral threshold. Joseph A. Adler, in his translation of Zhu Xi’s *Original Meaning of the Yijing* (Adler 2019) and his concise *The Yijing: A Guide* (Adler 2022), has clarified the Neo-Confucian position that the *Yijing* is “fundamentally a book of divination” while also serving moral cultivation, yet he does not systematically analyze the moral constraints in between and analyze the elements in divination as a unified framework. Chung-ying Cheng’s *The Primary Way: Philosophy of Yijing* (Cheng 2020) and *The Philosophy of Change* (Cheng 2023) richly articulate the ontological and ethical dimensions of change, but his focus remains on the metaphysics of *yin–yang* and virtue, rather than on the concrete question of when and why a person can stop divining. A more directly relevant study is Sharon Small’s “Between Divination and Cultivation” (Small 2025), which argues that the *Yizhuan* shares core cosmological assumptions with Huang-Lao 黃老 (Daoism) texts and places self-cultivation at the center of divination. However, she does not examine the moral constraints as independent variables and answer the questions by the perspectives from the *Yijing*. Bent Nielsen’s *A Companion to Yi Jing Numerology and Cosmology* (Nielsen 2003) provides invaluable technical detail on the image-number tradition, but it only provides a reference work without introducing the transcendence of divination. Tze-ki Hon, in several articles on the *Xici*, has explored the “philosophy of divination” and the idea of *shen*, yet he does not link this to Confucius’s remark about not divining (Hon 2005, 2019). What emerges is a clear gap: While Western studies have touched upon aspects of this issue, none has integrated cosmology (the *Yi* matches Heaven and Earth), moral constraints (*jing*, *fu*, *zhen*), and self-transcendence (not divining yet divining) into a single framework centered on Confucius’s remark. This paper aims to fill that gap.

The foregoing survey of Chinese and Western scholarship shows that existing research has laid important groundwork. However, a systematic and comprehensive expla-

nation of why Confucius would declare that one “simply do not divine” remains lacking, especially one that integrates cosmology, moral constraints, and self-transcendence into a unified framework centered on his remark. Chinese scholarship has illuminated the cosmological ground of divination, the concept of *shen* 神, knowing the subtle incipience (*zhi ji* 知幾), and the critique of divination as a kind of occult arts, but these insights remain fragmented. Western sinologists and philosophers have offered historical surveys, ontological frameworks, and conceptual analyses, yet none has taken the phrase “simply do not divine, that is all there is to it” as the organizing thread for a comprehensive, in-depth account of how divination, morality, and cosmology cohere. What neither tradition has adequately explained is this: if the *Yijing* is originally a book of divination, why would its highest teaching endorsed by Confucius declare that one should simply *not* divine? Consequently, two fundamental questions remain unanswered. First, what is the deep nature of divination in the *Yijing*? Is it merely a technique for predicting fortune that later transformed into moral cultivation, or does it point to something deeper? Second, how do the three dimensions: divination, moral constraints and the cosmology of Heaven and Earth cohere into a unified, internally consistent system within the *Yijing*? This indicates that a systematic analysis of the detailed and in-depth relationships between divination, cosmology, and moral constraints in the *Yijing* from a dedicated perspective remains to be done.

The present study directly addresses these two questions. It argues that the nature of divination is not only to divine but also a practical discipline of purifying the heart/mind (*xin* 心) to resonate with Heaven and Earth. Furthermore, it demonstrates that moral constraints and cosmology are not separate add-ons but are intrinsically integrated: the cosmology of the *Yijing* makes divination possible, while the moral constraints transform it from a technical operation into a spiritual practice. Together, they form a circularly reinforced system in which constant virtue (*heng de* 恆德) ultimately renders formal divination unnecessary: not by negating it, but by transcending it into the state of “not divining yet divining.”

This study, building on existing research, begins with an analysis of the cosmological foundation in the *Yijing* that makes divination possible. It then examines the moral constraints formed by *jing* 敬 (reverence), *fu* 孚 (sincerity/trust/correspondence)⁴, and *zhen* 貞 (upright steadfastness). Finally, it elucidates the connection between “be *shen* to grasp the ineffable and to illuminate spiritually, it is to be sought in the men (who use it)” (*shen er ming zhi, cun hu qi ren* 神而明之，存乎其人) and “*shan wei Yi zhe bu zhan*” 善為易者不占. Therefore, it reveals the profound meaning of “one who excels in the *Yi* does not divine” (*shan wei Yi zhe bu zhan* 善為易者不占): divination is not the end of the *Yijing*; the true *dao* of the *Yi* lies in a person’s embodying the *dao* of Heaven, cultivating virtue, and ultimately achieving the state of “harmonizing with Heaven and Earth in virtue” (*yu tian di he qi de* 與天地合其德).

2. The Cosmological Foundation of Divination: The *Yi* 易 Matches Heaven and Earth

To understand the in-depth meaning of “simply do not divine, that is all there is to it,” we must first refer to the cosmological foundation that makes divination possible. The reason the *Yijing* can serve as a book of divination is fundamentally that it presupposes a cosmology of “the *Yi* matches Heaven and Earth” (*Yi yu tian di zhun* 易與天地准). As the *Xici* 繫辭 states:

“The *Yi* matches Heaven and Earth, therefore it can comprehensively encompass the *dao* of Heaven and Earth. Looking up, we observe the patterns of Heaven; looking down, we examine the principles of Earth. Therefore, we know the causes of the hidden and the manifest. Tracing things back to their origin and

following them to their end, we know the theories of life and death.” (*yi yu tian di zhun, gu neng mi lun tian di zhi dao. 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* 易與天地准，故能彌綸天地之道。仰以觀于天文，俯以察於地理，是故知幽明之故。原始反終，故知死生之說).

“The Yi matches Heaven and Earth” means that all the elements in the *Yijing*, including the hexagrams (*gua* 卦), lines (*yao* 爻) images and numbers, all correspond to the patterns of Heaven and Earth. Kong Yingda 孔穎達, in his *Zhouyi Zhengyi* 周易正義 (*Correct Meaning of the Yijing*), comments: “It means that when the sages composed the Yi, they made it match Heaven and Earth... Thus, all his actions and deeds do not go against Heaven and Earth, and are able to harmonize with Heaven and Earth” (*yan sheng ren zuo yi, yu tian di xiang zhun... suo wei suo zuo, gu bu wei yu tian di, neng yu tian di he ye* 言聖人作易，與天地相準...所為所作，故不違於天地，能與天地合也) (Kong 1990). This interpretation reveals the fundamental nature of the *Yijing* as a book: it is not a symbolic system arbitrarily constructed by the sages but was created by the sages through observing Heaven and Earth and imitating their *dao*. The order of Heaven and Earth is manifested through the alternative waxing and waning of *yin* 陰 and *yang* 陽 forces, the succession of the four seasons, and the movement of the sun, moon, and stars, appearing as an orderly and traceable cosmic order. In this case, a person’s good or bad fortune is not determined by some unknown, strong sense of supernatural power. Instead, it refers to the natural result of whether that person’s actions accord with the *dao* of Heaven and Earth. Therefore, divination is effective not because it can pry hidden, arbitrary information from ghosts and deities, but because the hexagram and line symbolic system on which it relies is itself a symbolic presentation of the *dao* of Heaven.

This cosmological presupposition is further elaborated in the *Xici*’s discussion of the virtues of the yarrow stalks (*shi* 蓍) and the trigrams/hexagrams (*gua* 卦):

“The virtue of the yarrow stalks is round [smooth] and *shen*-like; the virtue of the hexagrams is square [regular] and wise; the meaning of the six lines is presented through change. The sages use this to purify their hearts/minds (*xin* 心), withdraw and conceal themselves in secrecy, and share good fortune and misfortune with the people. Being *shen*-like, it knows the future; being wise, it stores the past. Who can attain this?” (*shi zhi de yuan er shen, gua zhi de fang yi zhi, liu yao zhi yi yi yi gong. sheng ren yi ci xi xin, tui cang yu mi, ji xiong yu min tong huan. shen yi zhi lai, zhi yi cang wang, qi shu neng yu yu ci zai* 蓍之德圓而神，卦之德方以知，六爻之義易以貢。聖人以此洗心，退藏於密，吉凶與民同患。神以知來，知以藏往，其孰能與於此哉).

Han Kangbo 韓康伯 comments: “The round moves without exhaustion; the square stops and has divisions. It says the yarrow, being round, images *shen*, and the hexagrams, being square, image wisdom” (*yuan zhe yun er bu qiong, fang zhe zhi er you fen. yan shi yi yuan xiang shen, gua yi fang xiang zhi ye* 圓者運而不窮，方者止而有分。言蓍以圓象神，卦以方象知也) (Wang and Han 1989). The “round and *shen*-like” of the yarrow symbolizes the round, transformative, unfathomable changes in the *dao* of Heaven; the “square and wise” of the hexagram images symbolizes the knowable and classifiable patterns of earthly things. Divination uses this symbolic system to bring the matter being asked about into the order of the *dao* of Heaven, thus producing a judgment of good or bad fortune. Kong Yingda further explains:

“*Shen* knows the future, for the future has no fixed direction; wisdom stores the past, for the past has constancy. Things having regularity are like the square, which has unchanging points and principles. Therefore, numerical configura-

tions in divinations having no constant form are like the circle, which is boundless and endless. The yarrow's change and adaptation are inexhaustible and boundless, this refers to the image of *shen*. The hexagram's array of lines is ordered and arranged with fixed divisions, this refers to the image of wisdom. Wisdom can recognize the words and deeds of the past; *shen* can anticipate events to come. Thus the yarrow symbolizes *shen* through the circle, and the hexagram symbolizes wisdom through the square." (*shen yi zhi lai, shi lai wu fang ye. zhi yi cang wang, shi wang you chang ye. wu ji you chang, you fang zhi you zhi. shu wu heng ti, you yuan zhi bu qiong. gu shi zhi bian tong ze wu qiong, shen zhi xiang ye. gua lie yao fen you ding ti, zhi zhi xiang ye. zhi ke yi shi qian yan wang xing, shen ke yi ni zhi jiang lai zhi shi, gu shi yi yuan xiang shen, gua yi fang xiang zhi ye* 神以知來，是來無方也；知以藏往，是往有常也。物既有常，猶方之有止；數無恆體，猶圓之不窮。故著之變通則無窮，神之象也；卦列爻分有定體，知之象也。知可以識前言往行，神可以逆知將來之事，故著以圓象神，卦以方象知也). (Kong 1990)

Here "round" (*yuan* 圓) and "square" (*fang* 方) are not descriptions of physical shape but conceptual generalizations of two cosmological understandings. The *dao* of Heaven, as revealed by *shen*, knows the future precisely because the future has no fixed direction (*lai wu fang* 來無方). It is round, transformative, inexhaustible, and boundless, and beyond the grasp of ordinary thinking. The *dao* of Earth, as revealed by wisdom (*zhi* 知), stores the past because the past has regularity (*wang you chang* 往有常); it is square, ordered, and has fixed and unchanging points and principles (*you zhi* 有止), such that its specific things and phenomena can be classified and recognized. The *Yijing* employs both yarrow and hexagrams so that the "round and *shen*-like" nature of the yarrow, with its endless change and adaptation, simulates the wondrousness of Heaven. As for the "square and wise" nature of the hexagrams, with its ordered, regular principles, it organizes all the patterns and things in the physical level from Earth. In this way, a symbolic channel of communication between Heaven and humanity is established.

Crucially, this cosmological presupposition does not contain any implication of a personal conception of the divine or personal god. Take *shen* 神, the meaning of divine-beings, gods, deities, and spirits in Chinese as an illustration. The *Shuogua* 說卦 clearly defines the meaning of *shen* as "*shen* is that by which things are made wonderfully and is spoken of" (*shen ye zhe, miao wan wu er wei yan* 神也者，妙萬物而為言). While Kong Yingda explains *shen* as follows:

"The operation of the *shen* naturally takes the utmost of change and transformation as its name. As for the saying 'it refers to the marvelous accomplishment of all things and made things wonderfully and to be spoken of' the word 'marvelous and wonderful' (*miao* 妙) means subtle and mysterious. The physical forms of the myriad things have changing images that can be sought, but *shen* is expressed as being more subtle than the myriad things, meaning that it cannot be sought after." (*shen zhi shi wei, zi jiang bian hua zhi ji yi wei ming ye. yun miao wan wu er wei yan zhe, miao wei wei miao ye. wan wu zhi ti, you bian xiang ke xun, shen ze wei miao yu wan wu er wei yan ye, wei bu ke xun qiu ye* 神之施為，自將變化之極以為名也。云“妙萬物而為言”者，妙謂微妙也。萬物之體，有變象可尋，神則微妙於萬物而為言也，謂不可尋求也) (Kong 1990)

Zhang Zai 張載, in his *Zhengmeng* 正蒙 (*Correcting Youthful Ignorance*), defines *shen* as "What is called *shen* is the unfathomableness of Heaven" (*tian zhi bu ce wei shen* 天之不測謂神) (Z. Zhang 1985). He further explains that "*qi* contains *yin* and *yang*; their gradual unfolding and extension is called transformation (*hua* 化); their unification, which is unfathomable, is called *shen*" (*qi you yin yang, tui xing you jian wei hua, he yi bu ce wei shen* 氣有陰陽，推行有漸為化，合一不測為神) (Z. Zhang 1985). Zhang defines *shen* as the unfath-

omableness of Heaven and simply the unfathomableness, which joins Kong's thought to explain *shen* through the cosmological foundation.

This kind of view that regards *shen* as the marvelous, wonderful, subtle, unfathomable change in the cosmological foundation or principle is generally shared across the studies of the *Yijing*. Therefore, it reveals that *shen* in the *Yijing*'s cosmological view does not focus on a transcendent sovereign with will, but a name for the unfathomable and wonderful operation of the generative function of the cosmos (Heaven and Earth). The *Xici* also points out "the unfathomable and inscrutable *yinyang* is called *shen*" (*yin yang bu ce zhi wei shen* 陰陽不測之謂神). It defines *shen* from the perspective of function rather than substance. Han Kangbo comments: "*Shen* is the utmost of change and transformation. It is what makes all things wondrous and is spoken of. It cannot be grasped by shape" (*shen ye zhe, bian hua zhi ji, miao wan wu er wei yan, bu ke yi xing ji zhe* 神也者，變化之極，妙萬物而為言，不可以形詰者) (Wang and Han 1989). Since *shen* cannot be grasped by shape, image, or concept, it refers to the cosmological foundation that functions in the world instead of exact divine-being. Moreover, since change and transformation cannot be grasped by shape, image, or concept, divination cannot obtain certain answers by praying to some personal conceptions of the divine or deities. What divination relies on is the inherent, imitable, and symbolizable order of the cosmos.

From this cosmological understanding, we can understand the first perspective of the meaning of "simply do not divine, that is all there is to it." This cosmological framework implies that in principle, if a person were to fully embody the *dao* of Heaven and Earth, the need for divination would logically disappear. However, whether this is actually achievable depends on moral cultivation. This will be discussed in the next section. If a person can, through long-term cultivation and embodiment, make his actions completely in accord with the *dao* of Heaven and Earth, then he can know the consequences of his actions without needing divination, because those consequences are already implied in the fundamental premise of whether they accord with the *dao* of Heaven. It offers a profound discussion in the study of *Yijing*.

Although different scholars extend this view differently in various discussions, the view "without needing divination" is generally shared among scholars. For example, Zhu Xi 朱熹⁵ mentions "If a person can already see or perceive the principle (*dao*) with complete clarity, then he no longer needs to practice divination." (*ren ruo neng jian de dao li yi shi fen fen ming, ze yi bu xu geng bu* 人若能見得道理已十分分明，則亦不須更卜) (J. Li 1986). Cheng Yi 程頤 states "The principles of fortune and misfortune, of waxing and waning, and the way of advancing and retreating, of preservation and perishing, are all fully set forth in the words (of the hexagrams and lines). By examining these words and investigating the hexagrams, thus put in practice, one can understand change; the images and divination are both contained therein" (*ji xiong xiao zhang zhi li, jin tui cun wang zhi dao bei yu ci, tui ci kao gua ke yi zhi bian, xiang yu zhan zai qi zhong yi* 吉凶消長之理、進退存亡之道備於辭，推辭考卦可以知變，象與占在其中矣) (X. Wang 2011). Wang Fuzhi 王夫之, in his *Zhouyi Neizhuan* 周易內傳 (Inner Commentary on the *Yijing*), offers "The superior person takes divination as a means of learning, and without waiting for the act of divination, fortune and misfortune are already determined" (*jun zi yi zhan wei xue, er bu dai zhan er ji xiong yi jue yi* 君子以占為學，而不待占而吉凶已決矣) (F. Wang 1996). These discussions directly point to the cosmological basis of "simply do not divine, that is all there is to it": the *dao* of Heaven and Earth is objective, recognizable, and it can be followed and realized. If a person can embody and follow the *dao* of Heaven and Earth, then good fortune and misfortune are self-evident. This is entirely consistent with the logic of Confucius's "simply do not divine, that is all there is to it."

Then, what is the necessity of divination as a method of “examining doubts” (*ji yi* 稽疑)? The answer lies precisely in the fact that not everyone can constantly embody and follow the *dao* of Heaven and Earth. The *Xici* says: “Human deliberations and ghostly deliberations, the common people share in the ability” (*ren mou gui mou, bai xing yu yu neng* 人謀鬼謀，百姓與能). The sages established divination precisely to provide ordinary people, who cannot directly embody the *dao* of Heaven, with a procedurally standardized way to “inquire into the *dao* of Heaven.” Divination acts as a mediator between Heaven and humanity: it transforms a person’s doubts into hexagram and line symbols through a standardized symbolic system, and then transforms the *dao* of Heaven symbolized by those hexagram and line symbols into judgments of good fortune, misfortune, regret, and shame. This process is effective because it is guaranteed by the cosmology of “the *Yi* matches Heaven and Earth.” However, this mediating function is not always necessary. When a person, through long-term study and cultivation, reaches the state of “matching Heaven and Earth in virtue, matching the sun and moon in brightness, matching the four seasons in order, and matching ghosts and deities in good fortune and misfortune” (*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* 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) as stated in the *Wenyan* 文言, then the mediator becomes superfluous. This helps to understand Confucius’s description of his own state at age seventy: “Follow what my heart/mind (*xin* 心) desired without overstepping the proper boundaries” (*cong xin suo yu, bu yu ju* 從心所欲，不逾矩) (Yang 2017). In that state, a person’s heart/mind (*xin* 心) has become one accord with the *dao* of Heaven, and every arising of desire does not require external reference because it is already within the boundaries, within the unfolding of the order of Heaven and Earth. This is the cosmological meaning of “not divining” (*bu zhan* 不占): not the abolition of divination, but its transcendence.

The line “If one is not constant in his virtue, he will incur disgrace” (*bu heng qi de, huo cheng zhi xiu* 不恒其德，或承之) from the hexagram *Heng* 恆 is precisely an opposite illustration of the above state. The character *heng* 恒 (constancy) contains a special cosmological meaning in the *Yijing*. The *Tuanzhu* 彖傳 of *Heng* says the following:

“The *dao* of Heaven and Earth constantly exists and never stops. ‘It is beneficial to go somewhere’ means that when one ends, another begins. The sun and moon, attaining the *dao* of Heaven, can shine for a long time. The four seasons, transforming and changing, can complete things for a long time. The sages, being endured in their *dao*, transform the world.” (*tian di zhi dao, heng jiu er bu yi ye. li you you wang, zhong ze you shi ye. ri yue de tian er neng jiu zhao, si shi bian hua er neng jiu cheng, sheng ren jiu yu qi dao er tian xia hua cheng* 天地之道，恒久而不已也。利有攸往，終則有始也。日月得天而能久照，四時變化而能久成，聖人久于其道而天下化成).

Heaven and Earth can constantly exist and never stop because their operations follow an inner order. The sun and moon can shine for a long time, and the four seasons can complete things for a long time, all because they are *heng* (constant) under the *dao* of Heaven. Similarly, if a person can be *heng* in his virtue, that is persistently following the order of the *dao* of Heaven. Then, his actions will resonate with Heaven and Earth. If he is not *heng* (not constant) in his virtue, then his actions depart from the track of the *dao* of Heaven and will inevitably incur disgrace. Kong Yingda comments: “If virtue exists without *heng* (constancy), and falls into self-contradiction, then humiliation will be borne as a consequence” (*de ji wu heng, zi xiang wei cuo, ze wei xiu ru cheng zhi* 德既無恆，自相違錯，則為羞辱承之) (Kong 1990). Cheng Yi also says: “One who is in a place where *heng* (constancy) is required but does not remain constant is a person lacking *heng*. If his virtue is not *heng*, then disgrace or humiliation may befall him.” (*yu heng chu er bu chu, bu heng zhi ren ye. qi*

de bu heng, ze xiu ru huo cheng zhi yi 於恆處而不處，不恆之人也。其德不恆，則羞辱或承之矣) (X. Wang 2011). For a similar reason, Confucius quotes this line and concludes “simply do not divine, that is all there is to it” (*bu zhan er yi yi* 不占而已矣). The message Confucius conveys states that if a person can be *heng* (constant) in his virtue, then the consequences of good or bad fortune are already evident and there is no need to inquire through divination. This view does not negate divination. Rather, it realizes the ultimate concern of divination, that is to make human actions accord with the *dao* of Heaven, in a more fundamental way.

The cosmological foundation thus shows that divination is a way of realization of the *dao*. However, it does not yet explain how a person can actually reach the state where divination becomes unnecessary. That requires an investigation of moral constraints and the internalization of the *dao*. This refers to the task of Sections 3 and 4 respectively.

3. The Moral Constraints of Divination: The Unity of *jing* 敬, *fu* 孚, and *zhen* 貞

“Simply do not divine, that is all there is to it” (*bu zhan er yi yi* 不占而已矣) reveals that in the *Yijing*, the ultimate concern of divination lies in the practitioner’s becoming one accord with the *dao* of Heaven through moral cultivation. At the practical level, the reason divination can become a way for “the sages to establish their teachings through the *dao* of *shen*” (*sheng ren yi shen dao she jiao* 聖人以神道設教) depends on a complete set of moral constraints. This section examines the moral constraints formed by *jing* 敬 (reverence), *fu* 孚 (sincerity/trust/correspondence), and *zhen* 貞 (upright steadfastness). These three concepts define the normative prerequisites of divinatory practice, ensuring that divination does not degenerate into a purely technical operation but becomes a spiritual practice of cultivating virtue.

Jing 敬 demonstrates a moral prerequisite for divination. The *Yizhuan* clearly states, “The sages, through this, fasted and purified themselves, thereby enlight and making their virtue bright through *shen*” (*sheng ren yi ci zhai jie, yi shen ming qi de* 聖人以此齋戒，以神明其德). “Fasting and purifying” (*zhai jie* 齋戒) means the reverent attitude before divination: cleansing body and mind, setting aside distracting thoughts, and facing the matter with a reverent and sincere heart. Kong Yingda comments: “The sages, through the divination of the *Yi*, wash and purify the hearts/minds of the myriad things” (*sheng ren yi ci yi zhi bu shi, xi dang wan wu zhi xin* 聖人以此易之卜筮，洗蕩萬物之心) (Kong 1990). Kong believes that the fundamental purpose of divination is to “wash and purify” the human heart/mind. Through the standardized procedures of divination, it removes the heart/mind’s doubts and evil thoughts, allowing the heart/mind to return to its natural state of clarity. This theory of “washing the heart/mind” (*xi xin* 洗心) profoundly reveals the moral meaning of divination: it is not about pleasing a deity to obtain information through ritual operations, but about purifying the diviner’s heart/mind through the ritual itself. Zhang Wenzhi, in his analysis of the *Yijing*’s thought of the *dao* of *shen*, also points out that the *shen* of the *Yijing* does not refer to a personal conception of the divine, gods and deities. Its generation of all things depends on the interaction of *yin* and *yang* of the *dao* of Heaven. In this case, Zhang claims that “a person’s spirituality can connect with the virtue of the heavenly spirits, and its foundation lies in the person’s reverence and sincerity” (*ren zhi ling xing ke yi yu tian shen zhi de xiang tong, er qi gen ben ze zai yu ren zhi cheng* 人之靈性可以與天神之德相通，而其根本則在於人之誠) (W. Zhang 2019) through divination. The terms “reverence and sincerity” (*cheng jing* 誠敬) used by Zhang (which includes *jing*) are precisely the core of the moral constraints of divination.

Chapter Quli 曲禮 in the *Liji* 禮記 (*Book of Rites*) provides a more specific expression: “Divination (*bu shi* 卜筮) was that by which the ancient sage kings made the people trust the seasons, revere ghosts and deities, and fear the laws and orders... It was that by which they

made the people resolve doubts and settle hesitations” (*shi zhe, xian sheng wang zhi suo yi shi min xin shi ri, jing gui shen, wei fa ling ye...suo yi shi min jue xian yi, ding you yu ye* 筮者，先聖王之所以使民信時日、敬鬼神、畏法令也……所以使民決嫌疑、定猶與也). And further: “I rely on great tortoise for regular true responses, I rely on great yarrow for regular true responses” (*jia er tai gui you chang, jia er tai shi you chang* 假爾泰龜有常，假爾泰筮有常). (Hu and Zhang 2017). Here, the term “lasting regularity” (*you chang* 有常) is related to the “constant virtue” (*heng de* 恒德) emphasized in the hexagram *Heng*. Therefore, it indicates the reason divination is effective is not only because the tortoise and yarrow are regarded as “spiritual and wondrous things” (*shen wu* 神物), but also because the entire process of divination requires the practitioner to maintain an attitude of *jing* (reverence) and morality. If one is careless and heedless about divination, with a playful heart/mind, then divination loses its authenticity in connecting with the *dao* of Heaven.

As a result, the *Yijing* employs *fu* 孚 (sincerity/trust/correspondence) as the elemental concept that runs through the entire divinatory practice. *Fu* appears frequently in the *Zhouyi* proper (*Zhouyi gujing* 周易古經), such as in hexagram *Kan* 坎: “Having sincerity and correspondence, the heart/mind is unobstructed and clear” (*you fu wei xin heng* 有孚維心亨), in hexagram *Yi* 益: “Having sincerity and correspondence, a gracious heart/mind to make benefit” (*you fu hui xin* 有孚惠心), and in hexagram *Sui* 隨: “Having sincerity and correspondence, being on the *dao*” (*you fu zai dao* 有孚在道). All these instances of *fu* point to a common core meaning: the effectiveness of divination lies not in the technical proficiency of the divinatory method, but in the inner sincerity and trust, and the correspondence to Heavenly *dao* of the practitioner. In the context of divination, *fu* appears first as trust (*xin* 信) in the *Yijing* itself: trust that the hexagram and line images and numbers can reflect the order of the *dao* of Heaven, and that the standardization of divinatory procedures can yield reliable answers. But a deeper level of *fu* is sincere faith in the *dao* of Heaven, reverence and obedience to the cosmic order. The *Yijing* employs *fu* 孚 to allow human activities to correspond to Heaven and Earth.

Cheng Yi’s interpretation of *fu* is especially insightful. In his commentary on hexagram *Kan* 坎, he focuses on the phrase “Being *fu*, one’s heart/mind attains fluency and understanding, becomes unobstructed, and finds its way through” (*you fu wei xin heng* 有孚維心亨) in the hexagram statement. Cheng Yi notes that the solid *yang* line in the trigram *Kan* represents inner firmness and sincerity, which is the root of “*fu*” (孚). He explains, “The solid *yang* is in the center, indicating that there is *fu* and trust within. ‘one’s heart/mind attains fluency and understanding, becomes unobstructed, and finds its way through’ (*wei xin heng* 維心亨) means that when one’s heart/mind is sincere and undivided, it can become clear and unobstructed, thus finds its way through. With utmost sincerity and trust, one can make its way through metal and stone, tread upon water and fire. How could any difficulty or danger not be overcome?” (*yang shi zai zhong, wei zhong you fu xin. wei xin heng, wei qi xin cheng yi, gu neng heng tong. zhi cheng ke yi tong jin shi, dao shui huo, he xian nan zhi bu ke heng ye?* 陽實在中，為中有孚信。維心亨，維其心誠一故能亨通。至誠可以通金石，蹈水火，何險難之不可亨也) (X. Wang 2011). By interpreting *heng* (亨) as the unobstructed clarity of the heart/mind (*xin heng* 心亨) that arises from sincerity and singleness of purpose, Cheng Yi directly links *fu* to the inner state of the practitioner. Cheng Yi emphasizes sincerity, trust, and the singleness of purpose. These qualities allow a person to get through even the hardest situations. For Cheng Yi, *fu* is not a mere technique for securing favorable outcomes, but an existential state of the heart/mind that aligns the practitioner with the transformative processes of Heaven and Earth. From this perspective, *fu* indicates that a sincere heart/mind allows the diviner to connect with Heaven and Earth, and Heaven and Earth will respond with sincerity to such a heart/mind.

Zhen 貞 (upright steadfastness) refers to the fundamental moral principle of divination. The character *zhen* appears with high frequency in the ancient *Zhouyi* proper, and its semantic range is exceptionally rich. As the *Shuowen Jiezi* 說文解字 defines, the original meaning of *zhen* is “to divine” (*bu wen* 卜問) (Duan 2018). However, in the *Yijing*, *zhen* already extends to meanings such as “upright,” “firm,” “perseverance,” and “rectitude.” For example, the hexagram statement of *Qian* 乾 states “origin, unobstructed, beneficial, upright steadfastness” (*yuan, heng, li, zhen* 元亨利貞). The *Wenyan* explains *zhen* as “the achievement stem of affairs” (*shi zhi gan* 事之幹) and “being *zhen* as upright, rectitude and firm is sufficient to manage affairs” (*zhen gu zu yi gan shi* 貞固足以幹事). In the *Yijing*, there are many cases of “*zhen ji*” 貞吉 (upright steadfastness in the face of good fortune), “*zhen xiong*” 貞凶 (upright steadfastness to deal with misfortune), “*zhen lin*” 貞吝 (upright steadfastness to deal with humiliation), and “*zhen li*” 貞厲 (upright steadfastness to deal with danger). This reveals an important moral presupposition of the *Yijing*: We should keep on being *zhen*. For those who divine with an upright and steadfast heart/mind, who follow and uphold the *dao* of Heaven, although good or bad fortune is not entirely predictable, the chance of good fortune is always greatest.

The *Xici* states that “*zhen* refers to the mainstay of affairs” (*zhen zhe shi zhi gan* 貞者事之幹). This already indicates that *zhen* is not a passive state of “holding firm” but an active, ordering principle that runs through action from beginning to end. Kong Yingda in his *Zhouyi Zhengyi* explains this passage: “It means that the superior man can be firm and upright, thereby enabling things to attain their completion through *Qian* 乾 and bringing all affairs to a successful issue. This is the way he models himself on the *zhen* of Heaven” (*yan jun zi neng jian gu zhen zheng, ling wu de cheng, shi shi jie qian ji. ci fa tian zhi zhen ye* 言君子能堅固貞正，令物得成，使事皆乾濟，此法天之貞也) (Kong 1990). For Kong, *zhen* is not passive “holding firm” but an activity of bringing things to completion. Cheng Yi explains the cosmological function of *zhen* from the standpoint of the four virtues: “Origin is the beginning of the myriad things; Unobstructed is their growth; Benefit is their flourishing; *zhen* (upright steadfastness) is their completion” (*yuan zhe wan wu zhi shi, heng zhe wan wu zhi chang, li zhe wan wu zhi sui, zhen zhe wan wu zhi cheng* 元者萬物之始，亨者萬物之長，利者萬物之遂，貞者萬物之成) (X. Wang 2011). Here Cheng explicitly identifies *zhen* as the culminating phase that brings each thing to its proper completion. This active, consummating character of *zhen* is confirmed by Kong Yingda’s further discussion of the four virtues: “Furthermore, by acting with firm integrity (*zhen*), one causes all things to achieve their proper alignment, and that is called *zhen* in terms of constancy” (*you dang yi zhen gu gan shi, shi wu ge de qi zheng er wei zhen ye* 又當以貞固幹事，使物各得其正而為貞也) (Kong 1990). This gains support from the *Yijing*’s text. The *Wenyan* itself clarifies the humanity dimension of *zhen*: “The superior man, practicing these four virtues, acts in accordance with them. Therefore, it is said, ‘*Qian, Yuan, Heng, Li, Zhen*’” (*jun zi xing ci si de zhe, gu yue: Qian, yuan, heng, li, zhen* 君子行此四德者，故曰：乾，元亨利貞). *Zhen* is the virtue that, when realized in a person, brings all affairs to completion and all things to their proper uprightness.

In the context of divination, *zhen* means that the practitioner must face the result of divination with an upright and incorrupt heart/mind, accept it calmly and naturally, and act according to the *dao* regardless of the result. If the result is good fortune, one should not become arrogant; if misfortune, one should not become dejected. Although achieving in accordance with *dao* usually returns in a good fortune, the *Yijing* employs the in-depth meaning of *zhen* to transcend the anxiety over gain or loss and takes “uprightness” itself as the ultimate standard. This also provides an interpretation of Confucius’s “simply do not divine, that is all there is to it” (*bu zhan er yi yi* 不占而已矣). When a person has already attained and achieved *zhen*, his actions naturally accord with the *dao* of Heaven. In this

case, good or bad fortune is no longer a matter of anxiety. Divination, as a means to *zhen*, naturally becomes unnecessary once *zhen* has been realized.

Among *jing*, *fu*, and *zhen*, they constitute the complete moral constraints of divination, from “form” to “core”, and from “core” to “purpose.” *Jing* refers to the starting constraint for divination: without reverence, divination degenerates into a careless, technical activity. *Fu* refers to the core that runs through divination: without sincerity and correspondence, divination loses its authenticity in connecting with the *dao* of Heaven. *Zhen* refers to the concern and purpose of divination: without upright steadfastness, all the preparatory work of divination lacks ultimate direction. The final goal of divination is to achieve a better future and gain further benefits in accordance with Heaven and Earth. When a practitioner truly achieves all the three moral constraints *jing*, *fu*, and *zhen*, his actions already accord with the *dao* of Heaven, and whether he divines or not does not affect the rightness of his actions.

On the basis of moral constraints, the *Yijing* derived the concept of “virtue and righteousness” (*de yi* 德義) from the divination acts. The silk manuscript *Yao* 要 (Essentials) records Confucius as saying: “As for the *Yi*, I put aside its divination and prayer; I observe its virtue and righteousness” (*yi, wo fu qi zhu bo yi, wo guan qi de yi er ye* 易，我後其祝卜矣，我觀其德義耳也) (Chen and Liao 1993). Confucius does not deny that the *Yijing* can be used for divination, but he emphasizes that the fundamental purpose of the study of the *Yi* is to be in accord with the *dao* of Heaven, with achieves as by “virtue and righteousness.” Divination and prayer are techniques; virtue and righteousness are the way to realize the *dao*. For a person who has already become one with the *dao* of Heaven, there is no need to dwell on technical divination, because his entire life is a practice of virtue and righteousness, and obtains good fortune. In this sense, “simply do not divine, that is all there is to it” does not reject divination technique but transcends it.

4. Not Divining Yet Divining: From the *dao* of Heaven to the *dao* of Humanity

Having established the cosmological ground for divination and its ethical constraints, a deeper question remains: if divination already provides a reliable bridge between human and the cosmological Heaven and Earth, why did Confucius still propose “simply do not divine, that is all there is to it”? The answer lies in constant virtue (*heng de* 恒德). The reason constant virtue can enable a person to “not divine” is fundamentally that constant virtue is itself the embodiment and internalization of the order of the *dao* of Heaven. As stated by the *Tuanzhuan*,

“The *dao* of Heaven and Earth constantly exists and never stops. ‘It is beneficial to go somewhere’ means that when one ends, another begins. The sun and moon, attaining the *dao* of Heaven, can shine for a long time. The four seasons, transforming and changing, can complete things for a long time. The sages, being endured in their *dao*, transform the world. Observe what is *heng* (kept constant), and the condition of Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things can be seen” (*tian di zhi dao, heng jiu er bu yi ye. li you you wang, zhong ze you shi ye. ri yue de tian er neng jiu zhao, si shi bian hua er neng jiu cheng, sheng ren jiu yu qi dao er tian xia hua cheng. guan qi suo heng, er tian di wan wu zhi qing ke jian yi* 天地之道，恒久而不已也。利有攸往，終則有始也。日月得天而能久照，四時變化而能久成，聖人久于其道而天下化成。觀其所恆，而天地萬物之情可見矣).

Here “the condition of Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things” (*tian di wan wu zhi qing* 天地萬物之情) means the true state and pattern of operation of Heaven, Earth, and all things. Heaven and Earth can be constantly existing, operating and never stop because their operations follow an inner order of *dao*. The reason the sages can “be endured in their *dao* and transform the world” (*jiu yu qi dao er tian xia hua cheng* 久於其道而天下化

成) is that the sages imitate the *heng* (constancy) of Heaven and Earth. From this we can infer that when a person is constant in his virtue, he is essentially realizing the *dao* of humanity to imitate the *dao* of Heaven. When a person's virtue resonates with the constancy of Heaven and Earth, his actions already contain within themselves the judgment of good or bad fortune. If they agree with the *dao* of Heaven, they are good; if they go against it, they are bad. This judgment does not need external verification through divination, because it is already contained in the consideration of whether the action accords with the *dao* of Heaven.

From the perspective of moral cultivation (*gongfu* 工夫), “simply do not divine, that is all there is to it” also involves the subtle relationship between the subtle incipience (*ji* 幾) and divination. *Ji* means an extremely profound concept in the *Yizhuan*. The *Xici* says: “To know the subtle incipience (*ji*), is that not *shen*-like!... The subtle incipience is the subtle movement of things, the first foreshadowing of good fortune” (*zhi ji qi shen hu.....ji zhe, dong zhi wei, ji zhi xian jian zhe ye* 知幾其神乎!幾者，動之微，吉之先見者也). *Ji* refers to the moment when a thing's change has not yet fully manifested but has begun to show signs. It is the most critical point for grasping the direction of change. To be able to foresee good or bad fortune at the level of *ji* is the state of *shen*. Here, the *Xici* provides the fundamental reason why “one who knows the *Yi* does not divine”: it is because such a person can “see the subtle incipience and act, without waiting for a whole day” (*jian ji er zuo, bu si zhong ri* 見幾而作，不俟終日). Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤 offers an insightful explanation: “To send forth and give off subtle where it cannot be seen, and to fill and pervade everywhere without being exhausted, is called *shen*” (*fa wei bu ke jian, chong zhou bu ke qiong, zhi wei shen* 發微不可見，充周不可窮，之謂神) (Zhou 2000). He links “send forth and give off subtle” (*fa wei* 發微) with *ji*, and “filling and pervading everywhere without being exhausted” (*chong zhou bu ke qiong* 充周不可窮) with the *dao* of Heaven and Earth symbolized by divination. Zhou points out the relationship between “knowing the subtle incipience” (*zhi ji* 知幾) and divination: Knowing the subtle incipience is the requirement for divination to be meaningful instead of a result of divination. If a person cannot know the subtle incipience, he will only seek divination after matters have fully manifested; such a divination result, though still instructive, comes after the fact and it is of little significance. In the *Yijing*, the goal of divination and moral cultivation is to “exhaustively fathom *shen* and understand transformation” (*qiong shen zhi hua* 窮神知化). Without subtle incipience, a person is not able to foresee good or bad fortune at the level of *ji* and thus cannot exhaustively fathom *shen*. On the other hand, a sage who can know the subtle incipience does not need the intermediate step of divination, because he has already perceived the whole picture of the situation when the *ji* first moved.

The *Xici* also says: “The *Yi* is mindless (without the intended work of heart/mind, *wusi* 无思), and effortless in action (without goal-oriented action, *wuwei* 无為). It is tranquil, still and unmoving. Yet when responded to, it thoroughly comprehends everything and penetrates all the principles in the world” (*yi, wu si ye, wu wei ye, ji ran bu dong, gan er sui tong tian xia zhi gu* 易，无思也，无為也，寂然不動，感而遂通天下之故). This statement reveals the fundamental characteristic of the *dao* of Heaven as simulated by divination: the *dao* of Heaven itself is without intended thought and without goal-oriented action, it generates and creates everything naturally, and comprehends everything and penetrates all the principles. The sages composed the *Yi* and established divination precisely so that people, in a state of *wusi* and *wuwei*, could feel, resonate with Heaven and Earth, and thereby comprehend everything and be in correspondence with the world. Confucius's thought of “simply do not divine, that is all there is to it” (*bu zhan er yi yi* 不占而已矣) is precisely a description and daily manifestation of this state of “feeling, resonating, comprehending and corresponding” (*ganton* 感通). When a person's moral cultivation reaches its peak, with-

out using yarrow or tortoise divination, he can still *gantong* with the operation of the *dao* of Heaven in his daily activities. This state is described in the *Zhongyong* 中庸 (*Doctrine of the Mean*) as “effortlessly hitting the mark, attaining without intended thinking, and being in the mean (the middle way) of the *dao* with ease” (*bu mian er zhong, bu si er de, cong rong zhong dao* 不勉而中，不思而得，從容中道) (Hu and Zhang 2017). “Without effort” and “without intended thinking” are precisely the state of *wusi* and *wuwei*. “Being in the mean of the *dao*” is corresponded to the state of acting in accord with the *dao* of Heaven. This is fully consistent with Confucius’s description of his state at age seventy in the *Analepts*: “Follow what my heart desired without overstepping the boundaries” (*cong xin suo yu, bu yu ju* 從心所欲，不逾矩) (Yang 2017). From this perspective, the “not divining” (*bu zhan* 不占) in “simply do not divine, that is all there is to it” (*bu zhan er yi yi* 不占而已矣) is not a negation of divination, but the highest affirmation of divination’s function: Divination is established precisely everywhere in daily life; people can achieve divination in every action; thus, the classical form and format of divination is not emphasized. As the *Xici* stated: “The one-by-one alternation of *yin* and *yang* is called the *dao*. That which continues it is goodness (*shan* 善); that which completes it is nature (*xing* 性). The people of *ren* 仁 (benevolence) see it and calls it *ren*; the people of *zhi* 知 (wisdom) see it and calls it wisdom. The common people, employing it daily, do not know it” (*yi yin yi yang zhi wei dao, ji zhi zhe shan ye, cheng zhi zhe xing ye. ren zhe jian zhi wei zhi ren, zhi zhe jian zhi wei zhi zhi. bai xing ri yong er bu zhi* 一陰一陽之謂道，繼之者善也，成之者性也。仁者見之謂之仁，知者見之謂之知。百姓日用而不知). The *dao*, as the one-by-one alternation and interaction of *yin* and *yang*, is manifested and functions all around the world. Therefore, even common people can employ the *dao* daily but do not know it. Divination as an act aims to embody the *dao* of Heaven; it is not to find a *dao* that is out of one’s daily life, or hidden in distant mysteries. Instead, the *dao* of Heaven operates in the rising and setting of the sun, in the turning of the seasons, in the relations between ruler and minister, father and son, husband and wife. If a person cultivates constant virtue to the point where every action spontaneously flows from this *dao*, then every action becomes a form of divination. He no longer needs to burn the tortoise shell or manipulate the yarrow stalks, because his entire life is already a continuous inquiry into Heaven and a continuous reception of its response. This is the highest state of divination: “not divining yet divining” (*bu zhan er zhan* 不占而占). In this state, the practitioner’s entire life is already a continuous act of “inquiring into Heaven” (what divination does) and receiving its response without delay.

What does this state look like in practice? The *Yijing* itself gives a clue. The *Xiangzhuan* 象傳 of hexagram Xian 咸 directly indicates that “The sage “feels, resonates, and influences” (*gan* 感) the hearts/minds (*xin* 心) of people, and the world becomes in harmony” (*sheng ren gan ren xin er tian xia ping* 聖人感人心而天下平). The sage does not issue commands or enforce laws by force. He simply acts with such authenticity and resonance with Heaven and Earth that the hearts/minds of others are naturally moved. In this state, the sage does not divine about whether his action will succeed or fail. He acts because the action is what the *dao* of Heaven calls for at that moment. The success or failure is not his primary concern, because he knows that to act in accordance with the *dao* is already good fortune in itself. This is the deepest meaning of “not divining yet divining.” It does not mean that divination is abandoned, but that the boundary between “divining” and “acting” dissolves. Every act, every word spoken to another person, every response to a changing situation becomes a living divination—an unmediated correspondence with Heaven and Earth.

Confucius’s “simply do not divine, that is all there is to it” (*bu zhan er yi yi* 不占而已矣) therefore does not say “divination is useless.” It reveals the thought that when you have truly achieved constant virtue, there is nothing else left to do but not to divine. Because you have already entered the state of “not divining yet divining.” The bridge of formal

divination has become the ground on which you walk. And that ground is nothing other than the ordinary, everyday way of living in accord with Heaven and Earth.

5. The Self-Transcendence and Existential State of *Yijing* Divination

The previous section argued that constant virtue renders divination unnecessary and introduced the state of “not divining yet divining” (*bu zhan er zhan* 不占而占). But this claim raises a further question. What inner transformation makes this state possible?

The *Yizhuan*’s phrase “Be *shen* to grasp the ineffable and to illuminate spiritually, it is to be sought in the men (who use it)” (*shen er ming zhi, cun hu qi ren* 神而明之，存乎其人) provides the key. The transition from the moral constraints discussed in Section 3 to the state of internalization described here is neither automatic nor immediate but unfolds through sustained practice of the three norms. *Jing* (reverence) clears the heart/mind of distractions and impurities, bringing the practitioner into a state of focused attentiveness. *Fu* (sincerity and correspondence) deepens this process by establishing an authentic channel of resonance between the practitioner’s inner state and the transformative processes of Heaven and Earth. *Zhen* (upright steadfastness) then ensures that the heart/mind does not stray from the *dao* of Heaven once this resonance is established. Thus, through the combined force of *jing*, *fu*, and *zhen*, the external system of hexagrams and lines becomes internalized as the practitioner’s own heart/mind, and formal divination is transcended. This section argues that “Be *shen* to grasp the ineffable and to illuminate spiritually” (*shen er ming zhi* 神而明之) does not refer to a mystical intuition but the process by which the external system of hexagrams and lines becomes internalized into the practitioner’s own heart/mind (*xin*). Once this internalization is complete, the practitioner is no longer a “user” of the divinatory tool but an “embodiment” of the *Yi*’s *dao*. This shift from “use” to “embodiment” reveals the *Yijing*’s distinctive form of self-transcendence.

The *Xici* lists “Be *shen* to grasp the ineffable and to illuminate spiritually, it is to be sought in the men (who use it)” (*shen er ming zhi, cun hu qi ren* 神而明之，存乎其人) alongside “Be transforming to adapt, it belong to the changes” (*hua er cai zhi, cun hu bian* 化而裁之，存乎變) and “Be promoting and pushing forward to carry it into practice, this depends on *tong* 通 (penetration, throughout)” (*tui er xing zhi, cun hu tong* 推而行之，存乎通). The latter two still rely on the manipulation of hexagram and line contents. One transforms and adapts according to the changes; one extends and practices the *Yi*’s principles in affairs. Both involve operations on the *Yijing*’s text. “Be *shen* to grasp the ineffable and to illuminate spiritually” (*shen er ming zhi* 神而明之) shifts the center from the text to the person. Kong Yingda explains: “It says that a person’s ability to be *shen*-like regarding this *dao* of the *Yi* and to make it manifest, this depends on that person himself” (*yan ren neng shen ci yi dao er xian ming zhi zhe, cun zai yu qi ren* 言人能神此易道而顯明之者，存在於其人) (Kong 1990). The phrase “to be *shen*-like regarding this *dao* of the *Yi*” (*shen ci yi dao*) uses *shen* as a verb. It suggests the practitioner does not merely understand the *dao* but also actively makes it “profound, inscrutable and wondrous” (*shen*-like) through his own being. Han Kangbo’s commentary sharpens this point: “To embody *shen* and to illuminate spiritually, without relying on images, therefore it is said to be sought in the men (who use it)” (*ti shen er ming zhi, bu jia yu xiang, gu cun hu qi ren* 體神而明之，不假於象，故存乎其人) (Wang and Han 1989). “Without relying on images” (*bu jia yu xiang* 不假於象) does not mean that hexagram images are useless. It means that the cosmic order that those images carry has been internalized into the practitioner’s heart/mind.

How does this internalization happen? The answer lies in the three ethical constraints discussed earlier: *jing* (reverence), *fu* (sincerity/correspondence), and *zhen* (upright steadfastness). *Jing* focuses the heart/mind. *Fu* opens it to resonance with Heaven and Earth. *Zhen* keeps it from straying. Through sustained practice, the practitioner’s heart/mind

gradually shifts from “seeking outward” to “abiding inward.” Divination is no longer a technical operation performed whenever doubt arises. It becomes a spontaneous state of the heart/mind (*xin* 心). As pointed out by the phrase “to grasp the subtle meanings, master the essential principles, and reach the state of *shen*, this is for the sake of application in action, and put *shen* into practice” (*jing yi ru shen, yi zhi yong ye* 精義入神，以致用也) in the *Xici*, the person who has internalized the principle does not need to consult the *Yijing* when facing a new situation. They can grasp the subtle meanings and master the “profound, inscrutable and wondrous”; the correct response arises naturally from within.

This brings us to the first dimension of self-transcendence: the practitioner transcends reliance on external tools. The yarrow and tortoise, the hexagram images and line statements, are bridges that connect human doubt to the *dao* of Heaven. But when the practitioner’s heart/mind has become one with that *dao*, the bridge is no longer necessary. This does not mean the practitioner becomes omniscient. It means that when facing a choice, he does not need an external authority to tell him good or bad fortunes. His judgment comes from his own insight into the situation that resonates with Heaven and Earth, and that insight is itself the fruit of long cultivation. Zhang Zai 張載 describes this state in his *Zhengmeng* 正蒙 as “having grasped the subtle meanings and entered into *shen*, this is the utmost of pre-preparation” (*jing yi ru shen, yu zhi zhi ye* 精義入神，豫之至也) (Z. Zhang 1985). Pre-preparation (*yu* 豫) means that the wisdom is already stored within before the situation arrives. This is not memorization of hexagram statements. It is the transformation of the heart/mind itself into a living hexagram.

The second dimension of self-transcendence is more profound: the practitioner transcends the subject–object distinction. In ordinary divination, there is a subject (the diviner) and an object (the *dao* of Heaven as revealed through the hexagrams). In the state of “be *shen* to grasp the ineffable and to illuminate spiritually” (*shen er ming zhi* 神而明之), this distinction collapses. The practitioner no longer stands outside the *dao* and asks about it. He stands within the *dao* and acts from it. Asking and answering become one. The *Xici* describes the *Yi* itself as “mindless (without the intended work of heart/mind, *wusi* 无思), and effortless in action (without goal-oriented action, *wuwei* 无為). It is tranquil, still and unmoving. Yet when responded to, it thoroughly comprehends everything and penetrates all the principles in the world” (*yi, wu si ye, wu wei ye, ji ran bu dong, gan er sui tong tian xia zhi gu* 易，无思也，无為也，寂然不動，感而遂通天下之故). This is a description of the *dao* of Heaven. But the practitioner who has reached “be *shen* to grasp the ineffable and to illuminate spiritually” mirrors this state. His heart/mind is no longer cluttered with calculations and deliberations. It simply resonates with the situation, and the resonance itself produces the appropriate action. Wang Fuzhi comments on the phrase “exhaustively fathom *shen* and understand transformation” (*qiong shen zhi hua* 窮神知化) in the *Yijing*: “To exhaust one’s heart/mind and thought to fathom *shen* and understand transformation, then at the moment something becomes visible, one knows where it must ultimately return. Thus within the manifest there is inherent the principle of the hidden” (*jin xin si yi qiong shen zhi hua, ze fang qi ke jian er zhi qi bi you suo gui wang, ze ming zhi zhong ju you zhi li* 盡心思以窮神知化，則方其可見而知其必有所歸往，則明之中具幽之理) (F. Wang 1996). The person who sees the hidden within the manifest does not need to divine because he already grasps the inner logic of how things unfold. The obscure principle is not somewhere else; it is right there in what is already visible.

The third dimension of self-transcendence concerns the practitioner’s relation to the world. When a person reaches the state of “not divining yet divining,” he does not withdraw from everyday life. On the contrary, his actions become more finely attuned to actual circumstances. The *Xici* says that such a person “can respond ideally to every situation (*ke yu chou zuo* 可與酬酢) and can assist the *shen* (*ke yu you shen* 可與祐神).” “Responding

ideally" originally referred to the host-guest responses at a banquet, extended to mean the ability to handle all human affairs with ease and appropriateness. "Assisting the *shen*" means participating in the work of creation and generation for Heaven and Earth. Self-transcendence, therefore, is not self-enclosure but self-expansion. It reveals an expansion so thorough that the practitioner's actions become part of the cosmic process itself. The *Wenyan* of hexagram *Qian* says the great man "matching and harmonizing Heaven and Earth in virtue, matching and harmonizing the sun and moon in brightness, matching and harmonizing the four seasons in order, and matching and harmonizing ghosts and deities in good fortune and misfortune" (*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* 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). The word "matching and harmonizing" (*he*) does not mean mere resemblance. It means convergence, unity through the great balance and harmony. The great person's virtue is not like Heaven and Earth's virtue; it is the manifestation of that virtue in a human life. His actions do not merely follow the four seasons; they are themselves the unfolding of the four seasons' order.

Now we can understand the full meaning of Confucius's "simply do not divine, that is all there is to it" (*bu zhan er yi yi* 不占而已矣). Confucius does not reject divination. On the other hand, he is pointing to its ultimate goal of divination: to bring the practitioner to a state where divination is no longer needed. In that state, the form of divination is absent, but the essence of divination is present in every action. Every action is an inquiry into Heaven, and every action is Heaven's response. This reveals the *Yijing*'s self-transcendence. The practitioner does not leave the *Yi* behind; the *Yi* becomes internalized. The tools of divination are transcended, but the spirit of divination, including reverence for Heaven, resonance with the myriad things, in correspondence to the upright *dao*, all becomes a living form of life. This form of life is precisely what the *Yizhuan* calls "exhaustively fathom *shen* and understand transformation" (*qiong shen zhi hua* 窮神知化) as "the abundance and fullness of virtue" (*de zhi sheng ye* 德之盛也). Therefore, Xunzi states "one who excels in the *Yi* does not divine" (*shan wei Yi zhe bu zhan* 善為易者不占).

6. Conclusions

This study began with Confucius's puzzling remark: "simply do not divine, that is all there is to it." The remark has often been read as the turn of divination into humanity and philosophies by Confucius. But a closer reading of the *Yijing* shows otherwise.

We have argued that divination in the *Yijing* rests on a clear cosmology: the *Yi* matches Heaven and Earth. Because the hexagram and line images mirror the order of the cosmos, divination can serve as a bridge between human doubt and the *dao* of Heaven. But this bridge is not meant to be used forever. The *Yijing* also imposes moral constraints on divination—*jing*, *fu*, and *zhen*. These constraints turn divination from a technical operation into a discipline for purifying the heart/mind.

The heart of the argument lies in constant virtue (*heng de*). When a person cultivates constancy to the point where every action spontaneously accords with the *dao* of Heaven, the formal need for yarrow and tortoise disappears. This is not the abandonment of divination but its transcendence. The practitioner reaches the state of "not divining yet divining" (*bu zhan er zhan*): no longer relying on external tools, yet every act is already a living inquiry into Heaven.

The *Yizhuan*'s phrase "be *shen* to grasp the ineffable and to illuminate spiritually, it is to be sought in the men (who use it)" (*shen er ming zhi, cun hu qi ren* 神而明之，存乎其人) captures the inner transformation that makes this state possible. Through long cultivation, the practitioner internalizes the cosmic order. The external hexagram images become an internal resonance. This internalization unfolds in three dimensions of self-

transcendence: transcending reliance on tools, transcending the subject–object distinction in divination, and transcending the boundary between self and world. At the highest stage, the practitioner’s actions are not merely *like* the *dao* of Heaven; they *are* the unfolding of that *dao*. This is what the *Wenyan* calls “matching and harmonizing Heaven and Earth in virtue” (*yu tian di he qi de, yu ri yue he qi ming* 與天地合其德).

The *Yijing* thus offers a distinctive moral philosophy. It does not deny divination’s usefulness, especially for those still on the path. But it points beyond divination to a life where the bridge is no longer needed because the traveler has already reached the other shore. Confucius’s “simply do not divine” is not a divination-to-philosophy slogan. It is the *Yijing*’s own highest teaching: the goal of studying *Yi* is to become a person who no longer needs to consult the book of changes, because every step they take is already in perfect rhythm with Heaven and Earth.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, X.L. and F.W.; methodology, X.L.; software, F.W.; validation, F.W.; formal analysis, X.L.; investigation, X.L.; resources, X.L.; writing—original draft preparation, X.L. and F.W.; writing—review and editing, X.L. and F.W.; project administration, F.W. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research was funded by National Social Science Foundation of China [grant number: 21BZX070].

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Notes

- ¹ Some scholars, including P.J. Ivanhoe and Edward Slingerland, have suggested that certain passages in the *Analects* may reflect later editorial additions or interpretive reconstructions of Confucius’s thought rather than his actual words. However, such claims remain speculative and lack conclusive textual evidence. There is no direct manuscript evidence to suggest that the passage in question is inauthentic, and the traditional view that it preserves Confucius’s teaching continues to be the mainstream position in the field. Thus, this argument is not very credible or acceptable. Moreover, this paper does not engage the question of historical authenticity. Its focus is instead on the philosophical function of this proposition as it appears within the *Analects* and, more importantly, as it is developed and interpreted within the *Yizhuan* and the subsequent *Yijing* commentarial tradition. The argument proceeds on the basis that regardless of whether these words were spoken by the historical Confucius or represent a later formulation, their significance within the tradition remains unchanged.
- ² The textual scope of this investigation requires clarification at the outset. The term *Yijing* as deployed here does not denote a single, monolithic scripture. Instead, it encompasses two historical layers: the foundational divinatory stratum, conventionally referred to as the *Zhouyi* proper (*Zhouyi gujing* 周易古經), and the appended exegetical writings known as the *Yizhuan* 易傳 (commonly rendered as the Ten Wings). In keeping with the thematic orientation of this Special Issue, we treat the *Yijing* as a synthetic whole in which the earlier core and its later commentarial expansions are understood to constitute a unified textual and philosophical entity.
- ³ The present study adopts the methodologies of textual interpretation and textual analysis. It proceeds through deep research and analysis of primary sources, the *Yijing* itself (both the *Zhouyi* proper and the *Yizhuan*) and the major commentarial works from scholars. It also engages with secondary scholarship in both Chinese and English to situate its argument within the broader field, identifying gaps that the study aims to fill. Several methodological considerations govern our use of Chinese source materials. Three factors shape the way we present textual evidence. First, a substantial portion of the literature sources upon which this analysis depends exists only in Chinese. Second, wherever English translations are available, they are predominantly sense-based rather than literal and thus cannot convey the precise semantic value of individual Chinese graphs examined in our argument. Consequently, our procedure is as follows: we initially consult existing English versions. Whenever those versions produce ambiguity or analytical friction in the explanation of a given term, we provide our own English rendering of the original passage. All Chinese keywords are retained in their original character form alongside an English gloss, and the full Chinese source sentence is appended immediately after each English translation. Unless a different source is explicitly identified, every

English rendering of the *Yijing* or any other classical Chinese text in this article is the authors' own. For repeated quotations drawn from the *Yijing*, the underlying Chinese text follows a single edition (Guo 2006), and this reference will not be reiterated after each occurrence.

4 The term *fu* 孚 in the *Yijing* carries a rich semantic field that includes inner sincerity, interpersonal trust, and the resonant correspondence between human action and the cosmic order of Heaven and Earth. Precisely because no single English word can adequately render its full meaning, we employ these three terms: *sincerity*, *trust*, and *correspondence* in conjunction, each capturing a distinct but overlapping dimension. While we translate it primarily as “sincerity” throughout this study for conciseness and consistency, the reader should bear in mind that the word also entails “trust” and, crucially, a “correspondence” that aligns the practitioner with the *dao*. This correspondence is not merely metaphorical but ontological: a sincere heart/mind (*xin* 心) naturally resonates with the transformative processes of Heaven and Earth, making divination effective and cultivation possible.

5 The citations from Cheng Yi 程頤 and Zhu Xi 朱熹 in the main text require a brief clarification, since they might be read as inviting a comparison between the two scholars' views on the nature of the *Yijing*. The present paper does not aim to compare their interpretive frameworks. It cites them only to illustrate that the idea of transcending formal divination through clear perception of the *dao* appears in different strands of the *Yijing* tradition. To clarify the scope of the paper more clearly, we offer the following clarifications.

The paper's discussion of divination always treats it as integrated with cosmic change. Divination in the *Yijing* is grounded in the cosmology that the *Yi* matches Heaven and Earth, and moral cultivation transforms it into a practice of self-transcendence. This framework does not depend on the debates or interpretations made by Cheng Yi or Zhu Xi. Instead, the citations from Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi are used as supporting evidence for a broader interpretive claim, not as the subject of the argument itself. Cheng Yi's own writings explicitly acknowledge the divinatory function of the *Yijing*. In the preface to his *Yichuan Yizhuan*, he states: “The *Yi* has the four ways of the sage: in speaking, one values its words; in acting, one values its changes; in making implements, one values its images; in divining by the milfoil and tortoise, one values its prognostication” (*Yi you sheng ren zhi dao si yan: yi yan zhe shang qi ci, yi dong zhe shang qi bian, yi zhi qi zhe shang qi xiang, yi bu shi zhe shang qi zhan* 易有聖人之道四焉：以言者，尚其辭；以動者，尚其變；以制器者，尚其象；以卜筮者，尚其占) (X. Wang 2011). He further states: “The principles of fortune and misfortune, of waxing and waning, and the way of advancing and retreating, of preservation and perishing, are all fully set forth in the words. By examining these words and investigating the hexagrams, thus put in practice, one can understand change; the images and divination are both contained therein” (*Ji xiong xiao zhang zhi li, jin tui cun wang zhi dao bei yu ci, tui ci kao gua ke yi zhi bian, xiang yu zhan zai qi zhong yi* 吉凶消長之理、進退存亡之道備於辭，推辭考卦可以知變，象與占在其中矣) (X. Wang 2011). Cheng also remarks: “Nowadays when people divine by the milfoil, the milfoil is in the hand, the matter is in the future, good and ill fortune are in the books and tablets—in the end these three must coincide” (*Ru jin ren bu shi, shi zai shou, shi zai wei lai, ji xiong zai shu ce, qi zu san zhe bi he yi* 如今人卜筮，蓍在手，事在未来，吉凶在書策，其卒三者必合矣) (Cheng and Cheng 2020). These passages show that Cheng Yi not only acknowledged divination but also reflected on its logic. Therefore, when Zhu Xi comments that “Master Cheng only spoke of its principles and did not see that its original intention was for divination” (*Cheng xiansheng zhi shuo de li, que bu jian dang chu ben shi bu shi zhi yi* 程先生只說得理，卻不見當初本是卜筮之意) (J. Li 1986), this should be regarded to Zhu Xi's own assessment of Cheng Yi, not a statement made by Cheng Yi about himself. It is cited in the main text not as an authoritative verdict on Cheng Yi's thought, but as evidence that even within the Neo-Confucian tradition there existed a recognition that the *Yijing*'s “original intention” was divinatory. Moreover, the phrase “its original intention was for divination” (*ben shi bu shi zhi yi* 本是卜筮之意) provides a claim about the *Yijing*'s original primary function in its purpose, not a claim that Cheng Yi rejected divination altogether. Similarly, when Zhu Xi says that Cheng Yi's explanation is “too precise” and that he “treats it as a matter of practice and not as a matter of divination” (*ba zuo yi jian zuo shi kan, bu ba zuo bu shi kan* 把作一件做事看，不把作卜筮看) (J. Li 1986), the point is that Cheng Yi's interpretive emphasis falls on the practical and ethical application of the *Yijing*'s principles in human affairs, rather than on the procedural mechanics of divination. This is a difference in interpretative emphasis, not a wholesale rejection of divination's place in the *Yijing*.

Read from a broader perspective, what distinguishes Cheng Yi's approach is not a denial of divination but a particular emphasis on the human side of the divinatory process. He is concerned with how the principles revealed through the *Yijing* can be internalized and acted upon in human life. This is entirely consistent with the present study's central argument: that divination in the *Yijing* is not a mere technical operation but a discipline that transforms the practitioner, and that the ultimate purpose of divination is to bring the practitioner to a state where formal divination is transcended. The citations from Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi, therefore, serve to support this broader interpretive claim rather than to initiate a separate discussion of Cheng and Zhu's interpretations. There may well be differences between Zhu Xi's view and Confucius's remark “simply do not divine”, but this paper does not explore that question. We cite Zhu Xi only to illustrate that the idea of transcending formal divination is present in the tradition, not to compare his interpretation with Confucius' viewpoint. As noted in the main text, Zhu Xi himself states that when a person can already see the principle (*dao*) clearly, he no longer needs to practice divination. This does not resolve the possible differences between the two, but it does show that Zhu Xi's emphasis on the divinatory origin of the *Yijing* does not prevent him from acknowledging that divination may be transcended. Our argument remains focused on the *Yijing* itself

and on the internal logic that leads from cosmology to moral constraints to self-transcendence, without entering a comparative study of Zhu Xi's and Confucius's respective positions.

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